

# FARAḤ ANṬŪN'S NAḤḌAH AS A MOVEMENT TOWARDS AN IDEAL ONENESS IN THE ARAB WORLD: ITALIAN CULTURE AS A NEGLECTED SOURCE OF INSPIRATION?

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*While the massive and direct influence of French culture on Farah Anṭūn has been taken for granted and fairly, albeit insufficiently, investigated, far less attention has been paid to the influence played by other Western cultures and civilizations. Students of the Arab thinker know that he wrote about outstanding British, Russian, and German figures, and that he deeply investigated the civilization of the United States, reporting extensively on it during his long stay in the country. However, these stimuli that strongly affected him both as a man and as an intellectual deserve further scrutiny, as so do other catalysts that have been fairly overlooked to date, such as Italian culture. With no claim of being exhaustive, this paper investigates the hypothesis concerning an Italian source of inspiration for Farah Anṭūn's intellectual, socio-political, and strictly literary activity, as well as provide theories on the channels through which it was received. In particular, it aims to provide hypothesis about the meeting between the intellectual universes of Anṭūn and the famous Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), who lived in a crucial period for the Kingdom of Naples, an epoch in many ways similar to that in which Anṭūn lived in the Ottoman Empire.*

## *Introductory Remarks*

Farah Anṭūn was one of the most prominent Arab thinkers and is recognized as such throughout the entire Arab world. Nevertheless, not very much is truly known about his activities and interests; indeed, Anṭūn's journalistic experience, his literary and non-literary production, and his sources of inspiration deserve further in-depth analysis. In the studies that have focused on him, a special emphasis has always and rightly been placed on the key role played by French culture in his education and intellectual development<sup>1</sup>. After all, in

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<sup>1</sup> D.M. Reid, *The Odyssey of Farah Anṭūn. A Syrian Christian's Quest for Secularism*, Bibliotheca Islamica, Minneapolis (MN)-Chicago (IL) 1975, *passim*; M. Avino, *L'Occidente nella cultura araba dal 1876 al 1935*, Presentazione di I. Camera d'Afflitto, Jouvence, Roma 2002, pp. 229-236; P. Viviani, *Un maestro del Novecento arabo. Farah Anṭūn*, Presentazione di I. Camera d'Afflitto, Jouvence, Roma 2004, Chap. 2, in particular; Ead., *Rielaborazioni culturali "francofone" in un adattamento arabo del dramma Richard Darlington di Alexandre Dumas père*, in

his works, Anṭūn clearly reveals the extent to which he is indebted to France and its civilization, which helped him achieve a sound understanding of unity, and especially how vital it would have been for Ottoman society. More importantly, ever since his adolescence, he had experiences that clearly revealed that unity could be achieved even in a profoundly disjointed reality in which socio-political conflict, as well as religious division, fanaticism, intolerance, and class inequality, were dominant; even where there was not much space left to cultivate true knowledge, true wisdom.

Faraḥ Anṭūn's readers may, for instance, glean from a very enlightening article published in 1906<sup>2</sup> that between 1886 and 1890 Anṭūn studied at the Greek-Orthodox School of Kaftayn, in the Lebanese Province of Tripoli, that specialized in teaching Arabic language and literature<sup>3</sup>. Both as a pre-adolescent and adolescent, Faraḥ was strongly influenced by a peculiar kind of «*aṭar adabī*» that, as he wrote, was «a cultural education that has never abandoned me, while probably forging my thoughts throughout my life»<sup>4</sup>. He revealed that he used the phrase *aṭar adabī* to refer to the extremely characteristic religious environment at the school. Indeed, the school was attended by Muslim and Christian students, who lived together, each mutually and sincerely respectful of the other's faith, thus following the example of their teachers and school administrators, who also came from different religious communities. Thus, not only did Anṭūn have the chance to acquire precious values at the school, the foremost of which was tolerance<sup>5</sup>, but also to concretely experience them. Most importantly, he learned how to put them into practice, by observing, imitating, and emulating the adult members of the special community in which he was living. It proved to be an ideal microcosm preconfiguring what would hopefully become a similar model macrocosm in the days to come: the new Ottoman society dreamt about by him and others. While one of the major aims of what Anṭūn would, years later, label «*al-tarbiyah al-ṣaḥīḥah*» or “the true education” was to instill the concepts of homeland and patriotism in the soul and mind of the people in his own society<sup>6</sup>, it was at Kaftayn that he had begun to understand the true meaning of these two values. The objective was to eliminate an absolutely pernicious scourge that was devastating society: namely, the division amongst its members. Furthermore, his cultural education certainly had a close connection with the teachings

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C. Saggiomo; G. Benelli (a cura di), *Un coup de dés 3*. Quaderni di cultura francese, francofona e magrebina del Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche “Jean Monnet” Seconda Università di Napoli, vol. 3, ESI, Napoli 2015, pp. 219-232.

<sup>2</sup> Faraḥ Anṭūn, *Madrasah muḥtaliḥah*, in “*al-Ġāmi‘ah*”, V, 2 (15 yūliyū 1906), pp. 81-83.

<sup>3</sup> See also, in this issue, A. Monaco, *The Reception of Greek Classics and Mythology in Faraḥ Anṭūn and “al-Ġāmi‘ah”*, pp. 89-112.

<sup>4</sup> Faraḥ Anṭūn, *Madrasah muḥtaliḥah*, cit., p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Faraḥ Anṭūn, *al-Iḥā' wa 'l-ḥurriyyah. Sabab tasmiyyat al-Ġāmi‘ah al-'Uṭmāniyyah*, in “*al-Ġāmi‘ah al-'Uṭmāniyyah*”, I, 3 (15 nīsān 1899), pp. 33-35.

learned at the school, and not solely in terms of how they were imparted, in that peculiar *milieu*. The subjects that Anṭūn studied were linked, on the one hand, to Arab-Islamic and Turkish cultural heritage and, on the other, to European tradition. As he pointed out, French and English were taught at Kaftayn. He opted for the former and read in that language «what someone else would not have read in one hundred years»<sup>7</sup>. Thus, his education was based on these two fundamental cultural pillars: the Arab-Ottoman and the French.

While the massive and direct influence of French culture on Anṭūn has been taken for granted and fairly, albeit insufficiently, investigated, far less attention has been paid to the influence played by other Western cultures and civilizations. Students of the thinker know that he wrote about outstanding British, Russian, and German figures<sup>8</sup>, and that he deeply investigated the civilization of the United States, reporting extensively on it during his long stay in the country<sup>9</sup>. However, these stimuli that strongly affected him both as a man and as an intellectual deserve further scrutiny, as so do other catalysts that have been fairly overlooked to date, such as Italian culture. To my knowledge, his interest in Italy has neither been studied nor pointed to, in either Arab or Western sources, with the exception of a short contribution published in 2013 introducing an article of his published in “al-Ġāmi‘ah” on January 1, 1900: *Ṭalāṭ mudun taḥt al-ramād* (Three Cities under the Dust)<sup>10</sup>. Suffice it to say, in these introductory remarks, that the passion that Anṭūn revealed in this article suggests that the Arab intellectual must have been far more knowledgeable about Italian cultural heritage and politics, in all its forms, than openly asserted, at least in this article which seems to be the first he devoted to Italy in his journal.

With no claim of being exhaustive, this paper investigates the hypothesis concerning an Italian source of inspiration for Farah Anṭūn’s intellectual,

<sup>7</sup> Farah Anṭūn, *Madrasah muḥtaliḥah*, cit., p. 83.

<sup>8</sup> M. Avino, *L’Occidente nella cultura araba dal 1876 al 1935*, cit., pp. 229-236; P. Viviani, *Un maestro del Novecento arabo. Farah Anṭūn*, cit., *passim*.

<sup>9</sup> P. Viviani, *Farah Anṭūn e l’America*, in *Scritti in onore di Clelia Sarnelli Cerqua (volume monografico di Studi Magrebini, vol. XXVI, 1998-2002)*, a cura di C. Baffioni, Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”, Napoli 2004, pp. 269-291, available at: [http://sebinaol.unior.it/sebina/repository/catalogazione/documenti/Studi%20Magrebini\\_XXVI%20\(1998-2002\).pdf](http://sebinaol.unior.it/sebina/repository/catalogazione/documenti/Studi%20Magrebini_XXVI%20(1998-2002).pdf) (last accessed 30 September 2024).

<sup>10</sup> Farah Anṭūn, *Ṭalāṭ mudun taḥt al-ramād*, in “al-Ġāmi‘ah”, I, 20 (I yanāyir 1900), pp. 463-467; P. Viviani, *Riflessioni e suggestioni attraverso le parole di letterati arabi su Pompei e una “Piccola Pompei” araba*, in Hussein Mahmoud; Naglaa Waly (a cura di), *V Convegno sulla cultura italiana nel mondo. La cultura italiana in Egitto e negli altri Paesi del Mediterraneo prima e dopo la Primavera Araba. In collaborazione con l’Associazione Flaiano e i Premi Internazionali Flaiano di Letteratura, Teatro, Cinema e Televisione*, Istituto Italiano di Cultura del Cairo e MUST University, Il Cairo 2013, pp. 46-57.

socio-political, and strictly literary activity, as well as provide theories on the channels through which it was received.

*The History and Reforms of the Kingdom of Naples in the Eighteenth Century as an Example for Farah Antūn's Ottoman Society*

### *I. Encounters*

The publication of Farīdah 'Aṭīyyah's (1867-1917) renowned translation of *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), a novel by Edward-Bulwer Lytton (1803-1873), provided Anṭūn with the opportunity to inform his readers about the archaeological findings at Pompeii, Stabiae, and Herculaneum, the three famous cities near Naples that had remained buried under a thick blanket of dust and earth since 79 d.C. after the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. In particular, he reminded his audience about how and when Herculaneum was discovered in the villages of Resina, which had grown on the ruins of the ancient site, and Portici. This, Anṭūn wrote, happened in 1719<sup>11</sup>. In reality, the event had taken place ten years earlier, in 1709, as amply recorded in a wide variety of sources<sup>12</sup>. This particular about the erroneous date provided by Anṭūn was not emphasized in the above-mentioned article from 2013. It should, however, attract the attention of scholars. Although the indication of 1719 might be considered a simple misprint<sup>13</sup>, the mistake may well betray a different situation. Certainly, the story of the three ancient Roman cities offers decisive testimony. It indicates that entities, structures, and communities can be awakened from eternal slumber and revived. Anṭūn's focus on the discovery of the ruins of Herculaneum, Pompeii, and Stabiae unraveled something relevant that could serve as a guide for the Ottoman world, and especially its Arab members<sup>14</sup>, both Muslims and Christians from all religious communities, at the eve

<sup>11</sup> Farah Anṭūn, *Ṭalāṭ mudun taḥt al-ramād*, cit., p. 464.

<sup>12</sup> Ch. Grell, *Herculaneum et Pompéi dans les récits des voyageurs français du XVIIIe siècle*, Publications du Centre Jean Bérard, Naples 1982, p. 45, available at: <https://books.openedition.org/pcjb/233> (last accessed 20 November 2024). See also, for instance, the volume *Storia degli scavi di Ercolano ricomposta su documenti superstiti da Michele Ruggiero, Architetto e Direttore degli scavi e monumenti del Regno*, Tipografia dell'Accademia Reale delle Scienze diretta da Michele de Rubertis, MLDCCCLXXXV.

<sup>13</sup> Actually, it must be remarked that 79 d.C. is also written as 97 d.C. Farah Anṭūn, *Ṭalāṭ mudun taḥt al-ramād*, cit., p. 467.

<sup>14</sup> It is noteworthy that in September 1899 his journal's title underwent a fundamental change: from "al-Ġāmi'ah al-'Uṭmāniyyah" (The Ottoman League/Pan-Ottomanism) to "al-Ġāmi'ah" (The League). Following a problem of censorship, he wrote years later, it was nonsensical to retain the adjective "Ottoman" that held a specific political meaning hinting to specific similar end. Subsequently, the league might have interpreted issues in accordance with more than one perspective, from

of a new century and, hopefully, a new era, following a seemingly endless sleep. Thus, with this article published on January 1, 1900, Anṭūn wished to alert his readers to the fact that revivals were possible. A striking example was provided by a country, Italy, and specifically the area of Naples, where significant reforms led to an impressive resurgence during a very difficult but crucial period of its history. All this took place in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the same decades as the astonishing archaeological discoveries made at Herculaneum, Pompeii, and Stabiae. Thus, the unearthing of these cities, and especially the first, could be viewed as a symbol for the revival of the Arab-Ottoman world. This seems to have been the message that Anṭūn wished to convey, by resorting to a blend of elements that masterly and dexterously connect figures and facts of paramount importance to the history of Naples. Indeed, he provided his readers with an enigma to decipher: Herculaneum-antiquities-resurgence-1719. And this reminds us of a key Neapolitan personality, the world-wide celebrated jurist, academic, and philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1744). So, how can the elements “Herculaneum-antiquities-resurgence-1719” be linked to Vico’s life and work? An answer will be provided in the conclusions to this paper. For now, suffice it to say that Vico’s influence would affect many prominent intellectuals throughout Europe during the Enlightenment, the Romantic Period, and beyond<sup>15</sup>. In fact, Vico was also seen by Italian patriots as a precursor<sup>16</sup> to the Italian national *Risorgimento* movement<sup>17</sup>.

In *Ṭalāt mudun taḥt al-ramād*, Faraḥ Anṭūn effectively addressed elements that were closely linked to Italian nationalist symbolism of the *Risorgimento*: esoteric doctrines and especially Freemasonry<sup>18</sup>. In masonry, the volcano<sup>19</sup> may symbolize inner research and self-discovery and, along with the cities

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the local to the universal, and was perhaps linked to the stances of the Enlightenment. Faraḥ Anṭūn, *Kitāb maftūḥ ilā ūṭūfatḥū Rašīd Bak wālī Bayrūt qabl<sup>m</sup> wa wālī Brūṣaḥ al-ān*, in “al-Ġāmi‘ah”, IV, 6-7-8 (1903), p. 333.

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.giambattistavico.it/riviste> (last accessed 30 November 2024).

<sup>16</sup> See p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> There is no complete agreement among scholars regarding the chronology of this fundamental period in Italian history that coincides with the development of a united Italian nation-state. However, researchers usually identify its beginning with Napoleon’s First Italian Campaign (1796-1797). The bibliography is of course very vast. See, e.g., A.M. Banti, *Il Risorgimento italiano*, Laterza Editori, Roma-Bari 2008; Id., *The Nation of the Risorgimento Kinship, Sanctity, and Honour in the Origins of Unified Italy*, Routledge, Abingdon-New York 2020.

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, G.M. Cazzaniga (a cura di), *La Massoneria, Storia d’Italia. Annali 21*, Giulio Einaudi Editore, Torino 2006, pp. 545-633 (various articles).

<sup>19</sup> P. Viviani, *Giuseppe Verdi and Aida in the Egyptian Press: An Article Published in 1913*, in “al-Karmil”, 40-41 (2019-2020), pp. 203-224, available at: [https://alkarmil.haifa.ac.il/images/old/Viviani\\_al\\_Karmil\\_2019\\_2020\\_offprint\\_.pdf](https://alkarmil.haifa.ac.il/images/old/Viviani_al_Karmil_2019_2020_offprint_.pdf) (last accessed 25 November 2024).

that accidentally and almost surprisingly emerged from the dust and ashes that surrounded Naples at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it hints at a complex set of closely interwoven elements that reveal much about Anṭūn's interests and goals. First of all, he most probably was a Freemason, as may be inferred from some of the elements present in his works, such as those pinpointed and discussed in Luc-Willy Deheuevel's highly illuminating analysis of the first volume of Anṭūn's trilogy: i.e., the novel entitled *al-Dīn wa 'l-'ilm wa 'l-māl aw al-Mudun al-ṭalāṭ* (Religion, Science and Money, or The Three Cities, 1903)<sup>20</sup>. It should be noted that the subtitle of this work of fiction is, perhaps not so curiously, very similar to the title of Anṭūn's article on the Neapolitan cities destroyed by Mount Vesuvius. Moreover, the novel ends with nature's revolt against human inequality, stubbornness, and selfishness, something that can even take place in a socio-political community originally based on principles of justice and egalitarianism. The inhabitants of these fictitious cities share the same fate as the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah in *Le feu du ciel* (1829) by Victor Hugo (1802-1885)<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, their expressions of helpless awe as they attempt to escape God's rage resembles the harmless and terrified countenance of the victims of nature described by Anṭūn both in the mentioned article and novel. Partly as a consequence of his almost certain affiliation and partly due to his education and personal background, Anṭūn always had a keen interest in history, science, education, the suffering of humans, and how law functions in society. Indeed, in *Ṭalāṭ mudun taḥt al-ramād*, he depicted how people are often suddenly annihilated by nature and its rules. In turn, the latter are emblemized by Mount Vesuvius. Its eruption and destructive power demonstrate the extent to which the rules of nature are harsh and indifferent to mankind and its destiny. However, Anṭūn also remarks that they are fair<sup>22</sup>. The author does not explain this comment, but we may conclude that the laws of nature do not differentiate amongst different strata of the population (and this is a basic principle of the masonic vision) as happens with other types of rules, notwithstanding the fact that the ultimate goal of law should be justice.

As already mentioned, Faraḥ Anṭūn seemed to be more knowledgeable about the Italian and Neapolitan situation than he was ready to disclose. And the same can be said about other topics. So, how did he learn about the *Risor-*

<sup>20</sup> L.-W. Deheuevel, *Le livre des troies cités de Faraḥ Anṭūn : une utopie au cœur de la littérature arabe moderne*, in "Arabica", XLVI, 3-5 (1999), pp. 424 ff. See, in this issue, Lamia El Sherif, *Religione e Stato tra Faraḥ Anṭūn e Ibn Rušd in al-Dīn wa 'l-'ilm wa 'l-māl aw al-Mudun al-ṭalāṭ (1903)*, pp. 113-130.

<sup>21</sup> V. Hugo, *Le feu du ciel*, in Id., *Les Orientales*, J. Hetzel & Cie-Maison Quantin, Paris 1829 (quatorzième édition); P. Viviani, "al-Zuhūr" (*Les Fleurs, 1910-1913*) *et la littérature occidentale*, in "La rivista di Arablīt", XIII, 25 (giugno 2023), pp. 17-19, available at: <http://larivistadiarablīt.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/7-20-Viviani-16.06.23.pdf> (last accessed 19 November 2024).

<sup>22</sup> Faraḥ Anṭūn, *Ṭalāṭ mudun taḥt al-ramād*, cit., p. 467.

*gimento*, Freemasonry, and the history of the Neapolitan area? He may have accrued knowledge in many different ways, both at home in Greater Syria, Lebanon more specifically, and in his land of adoption.

In Egypt, he joined a great number of cultural associations<sup>23</sup>. We may assume that he had contacts with circles of intellectuals and political activists who were part of both the Italian political movement and the Masonic brotherhood. Indeed, by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Italians had long established flourishing colonies, entering French lodges or creating their own, mainly, but not solely, in Cairo and Alexandria. The latter was Anṭūn's base between 1899 and 1905. The colonies included political expatriates (or their descendants) many of whom were from the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and in particular from its peninsular portion, the Kingdom of Naples<sup>24</sup>. Moreover, Italian Freemasons certainly supported Arabs in their nationalistic stances<sup>25</sup>. As an example, amongst the lodges founded in Alexandria as a direct emanation of the Grand Orient of Italy<sup>26</sup>, there was one named *Nuova Pompeia* (1873)<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, it is interesting that *al-Qānūn al-asāsī li 'l-Šarq al-Akbar al-miṣrī* (The Fundamental Regulation of the Grand Orient of Egypt, 1902)<sup>28</sup> was published by Maṭba'at al-Muqtataf, namely the publishing house associated with the journal "al-Muqtataf" with which Anṭūn not only collaborated

<sup>23</sup> P. Viviani, *Un maestro del Novecento arabo. Farah Anṭūn*, cit., p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> There are various books on the Italian colonies in Egypt. Here, I will only mention L.A. Balboni, *Gl'Italiani nella civiltà egiziana del secolo XIX<sup>o</sup>: storia-biografie-monografie*, Con prefazione del Dott. Comm. Federico Bonola Bey, Segretario Generale della Società Geografica Khediviale, I, tipo-lit. V. Penasson, A.V. Horn Succ., Alessandria d'Egitto 1906, and A. Sammarco, *Gli italiani in Egitto: Il contributo italiano alla formazione dell'Egitto moderno*, Edizioni del fascio, Alessandria d'Egitto, 1937. On Sammarco, see the recent S. Mattei, *Al servizio di due paesi: sulle tracce di Angelo Sammarco (1883-1948), storico dell'Egitto moderno*, in "Oriente Moderno", CIII (2023), pp. 322-356. See also P. Viviani, *L'Egitto di naturalisti, patrioti e religiosi italiani: Figari Bey, Balboni e Monsignor Dalfi*, in "La rivista di Arablit", IV, 7-8 (dicembre 2014), pp. 117-133, available at: <https://larivistadiarablit.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/117-133-Viviani.pdf> (last accessed 22 November 2024). On Italian lodges in the Arab-Ottoman world and Turkey, see, for instance, B. De Poli, *Il mito dell'Oriente e l'espansione massonica italiana nel Levante*, in G.M. Cazzaniga (a cura di), *La Massoneria, Storia d'Italia. Annali 21*, cit., pp. 634-654; Ead., *La massoneria in Egitto. I miti, gli immaginari, la storia*, Jouvence, Milano 2018.

<sup>25</sup> B. De Poli, *Il mito dell'Oriente e l'espansione massonica italiana nel Levante*, cit., p. 638.

<sup>26</sup> See footnote n. 18.

<sup>27</sup> B. De Poli, *Il mito dell'Oriente e l'espansione massonica italiana nel Levante*, cit., p. 642.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 639.

from Lebanon, but continued to do so also in Egypt, before creating his own journal<sup>29</sup>.

Antūn might have already come into contact with these realities in Lebanon, thanks to his encounters and readings. His father, Ilyās, was a lumber merchant who managed a family firm that had commercial ties with Anatolia and Syria<sup>30</sup>. As merchants and businessmen, Levantine Christians would have been informed about how the capitulations operated, as these were of utmost importance to their very subsistence. In particular, official commercial relations between the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the Sublime Porte were established in 1740 and, as Mehmet Demiryürek remarked, «this capitulation seems to us to be the first *ahdname* providing similar privileges for both a European nation and the subjects of the Ottoman bilaterally, except for the Venetian capitulation of 1718»<sup>31</sup>. Interestingly enough, in the 1740 document, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was also referred to as «the Kingdom of Italy»<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, archives reveal that Greek-Orthodox Arabs often served as dragomans in the Neapolitan/Italian embassy in 18<sup>th</sup> century Istanbul<sup>33</sup>.

## II. Readings

In terms of Farah Antūn's readings, we can imagine him poring over the travelogues written by French travellers who had visited Resina and nearby Portici<sup>34</sup>, obtaining information about the wonderful treasure that had remained buried for long centuries, and about Naples both before and after the advent of the "Bourbons of Naples". Likewise, he may have read about the Neapolitan cultural *milieu* that had already flourished before the Bourbon period and strongly influenced the new kingdom's choices, as well as about the European Enlightenment and various 19<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals.

<sup>29</sup> P. Viviani, *Un maestro del Novecento arabo. Farah Antūn*, cit., p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> D.M. Reid, *Farah Antūn: The Life and Times of a Syrian Christian Journalist in Egypt*, Princeton University, Princeton 1969, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> M. Demiryürek, *The Legal Foundations of the Commercial Relations between The Ottomans and Neapolitans*, in "Bilig", 69 (Spring 2014), p. 54. See also A. Falchetta, «Ad utilità del commercio de' due Regni». *L'orizzonte morale dei mercanti greco-ottomani nel Regno di Napoli (XVIII secolo)*, in B. Salvemini (a cura di), *Alla ricerca del «negoziante patriota». Moralità mercantili e commercio attivo nel Settecento*, in "Storia economica", XIX, 2 (2016), pp. 561-585, available at: <https://www.storiaeconomica.it/pdf/2016.2.561.pdf> (last accessed 29 November 2024).

<sup>32</sup> M. Demiryürek, *The Legal Foundations of the Commercial Relations between The Ottomans and Neapolitans*, cit., p. 56.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64 ff.

<sup>34</sup> This village, which was next to Resina, is also mentioned in Farah Antūn, *Ṭalāḡ mudun taḥt al-ramād*, cit., p. 467.



At this point, we must shift to a different time and place; we will return, immediately thereafter, to Vico's days.

Alexandre Dumas père (1802-1870) familiarized a very young Anṭūn with the French Revolution of 1789 and with the masonic universe, too<sup>35</sup>. In the introduction to his own translation of Dumas' novels *Ange Pitou* (1851) and *La Comtesse de Charny* (1852-1853), the Arab intellectual recalled how much he had always been influenced by this work and the revolution<sup>36</sup>. What is most relevant here, however, is Anṭūn's remark that he also read very well-known books such as the *Histoire de la Révolution française* (1823-1827) by Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877) and parts of Thomas Carlyle's (1795-1881) *The French Revolution: A History* (1837). He likewise studied the *Histoire de la Révolution française* (1847-1856) by Jules Michelet (1798-1874), one of the most important French historians and historiographers. Most importantly, from 1827, Michelet had also been the first and most famous translator of Vico into French, extensively divulging Vico's thought throughout the francophone world<sup>37</sup>. In his *Introduction to the Histoire de la Révolution française*, Michelet interestingly wrote: «*Quand je fis mon Vico*<sup>38</sup>, un de mes concurrents m'aïda, en me fournissant un livre rare»<sup>39</sup>. Anṭūn certainly read Michelet's work avidly and we can imagine him focusing on this sentence by the French intellectual, wondering who Vico was, before moving on to Michelet's *Les Principes de la philosophie de l'histoire, traduits de la Scienza nuova et précédés d'un discours sur le système et la vie de l'auteur*, namely his version (or interpretation) of Vico's masterpiece<sup>40</sup>. This translation reappeared eight years later in *Œuvres choisies de Vico*, which included a good number of the Neapolitan philosopher's works translated into French and abstracts from Vico's works in their original language, Latin. Michelet's *Œuvres*

<sup>35</sup> Farah Anṭūn, *al-Māsūniyyah wa ġaraḍuhā. Malzamat al-riwāyah fi hādā al-ġuz' al-ṣafḥah 71 wa 76*, in "al-Ġāmi'ah, III, 6 (yanāyir 1902), pp. 411-412.

<sup>36</sup> Ra'if al-Ḥūrī, *al-Fikr al-'arabī al-ḥadīth. Ātār al-Ṭawrah al-Faransawiyyah fi 'l-tawġīh al-siyāsī wa 'l-iġtimā'ī* (Modern Arab Thought. The Influence of the French Revolution on the Socio-Political Trend), Manšūrāt Wizārat al-Ṭaqāfah, Dimašq 1993, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp. 244-245. See in this issue, A. Palmegiani, *La traduzione come strumento ritrovato di rinnovamento. Una lettura del paratesto di Ta'rīḥ al-Masīh*, pp. 57-88.

<sup>37</sup> For an overview of Vico's reception in France before Michelet's translations and shortly beyond, see *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, Translated From the Italian By M.H. Fisch; Th.G. Bergin, Cornell University Press, Ithaca-London 1944, pp. 73-80.

<sup>38</sup> Italics are mine.

<sup>39</sup> J. Michelet, *Histoire de la révolution*, in *Œuvre de Jules Michelet*, t. I, Alphonse Lemerre Editeur, Paris 1888, p. 32.

<sup>40</sup> It was translated into Italian shortly afterwards as G. Vico, *Opere precedute da un discorso di Giulio Michelet sul sistema dell'Autore*, 2 voll., dalla Tipografia della Sibilla, Napoli 1834.

*choisis de Vico* also included the autobiography he wrote in 1725<sup>41</sup>. In 1844, during her exile in France, patriot Princess Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso (1808-1871) from the nobility of Lombardy published her own French translation of Vico's masterpiece with an *Introduction* that is a rather faithful version of the philosopher's autobiography<sup>42</sup>. She was supported and helped by another Italian exile, «Giuseppe Ferrari [...], profound interpreter of Giambattista Vico, [...] did not spare the princess advice for her arduous and courageously undertaken patriotic work: to spread the philosopher's, and precursor's, thought amongst the French»<sup>43</sup>. Furthermore, her literary salon was frequented by many outstanding French writers, including some of Anṭūn's top role models, such as Victor Hugo (1802-1885). Victor Hugo and Ernest Renan (1823-1892), another famously prominent figure in the Arab intellectual's universe<sup>44</sup>, were also enthusiastic about Vico's teachings. Montesquieu (1689-1744), Voltaire (1694-1778), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), thinkers of fundamental importance for Anṭūn's project, also owed much to Vico. In fact, Rousseau was nearly accused of plagiarism<sup>45</sup>.

### III. Charles of Bourbon, the “Just Despot” and Vico

The future King Charles III of Spain (r. 1759-1788) was a scion of the House of Bourbon, the son of Philip V (1683-1746) and Elisabeth Farnese (1692-1766). He ascended to the throne of Naples and Sicily as Charles VII in 1734 and ruled until 1759. Aside from being considered an “enlightened despot”, he was also seen as a “just” king<sup>46</sup> who initiated a good number of reforms,

<sup>41</sup> G. Vico, *Vita di G.B. Vico scritta da se medesimo*, in Id., *Raccolta di opuscoli scientifici e filologici*, a cura di Angelo Calogerà, appresso Cristoforo Zane, Venezia 1728.

<sup>42</sup> G. Vico, *La Science Nouvelle par Vico*, traduite par l'auteur de l'*Essai sur la formation du dogme catholique*, Librairie Jules Renouard et C. : Librairie Charpentier, Paris 1844.

<sup>43</sup> «[...] Giuseppe Ferrari [...], profondo interprete di Giambattista Vico, [che] non lesinava alla principessa consigli nell'opera ardua e patriottica da lei coraggiosamente assunta: di diffondere tra i francesi il pensiero del filosofo precursore». R. Barbiera, *La Principessa Belgiojoso, da memorie mondane inedite o rare e da archivi segreti di stato*, Nuova edizione riveduta, con appendice di documenti inediti, e ritratti, Fratelli Treves, Editori, Milano 1922, p. 100.

<sup>44</sup> See, in this issue, A. Palmegiani, *La traduzione come strumento ritrovato di rinnovamento*, cit., pp. 57-88.

<sup>45</sup> A. Verri, *Vico e Rousseau filosofi del linguaggio*, in “Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani”, IV (1974), p. 83, available at: [http://www.ispf-lab.cnr.it/system/files/ispf\\_lab/documenti/b1974\\_081\\_102.pdf](http://www.ispf-lab.cnr.it/system/files/ispf_lab/documenti/b1974_081_102.pdf) (last accessed 2 December 2024).

<sup>46</sup> The Russian Empress Catherine the Great (r. 1762-1796) defined him «just», as reported by P. d'Onofri, *Elogio estemporaneo per la gloriosa memoria di Carlo III, monarca delle Spagne e delle Indie*, stamperia di Pietro Perger, Napoli 1789, p. XLIX. See A. Spagnoletti, *Carlo di Borbone: il «novello Tito de' tempi*

albeit under his parents' supervision. Indeed, as Giuseppe Cirillo has underlined, «the modernisation policy for the Neapolitan State set in place by Charles of Bourbon and Ferdinand IV [...] was carried out mainly on four fronts: a) a modernisation of the State leading to a centralisation of the system with the role of the State Secretariats as well as a reduction of the functions of pre-existing royal tribunals to give more weight to the Chamber of St. Chiara (which became the new tribunal of the king). It was a time when the king's right (dispatches) prevailed in respect to that of the kingdom (pragmatics); b) a downsizing of feudal and ecclesiastical jurisdictions; c) the reform of service nobility, undergoing recruitment through the Army, and of admission into the court; d) the definitive strengthening of the sphere of administrative influence of local authorities (with an actual removal of the ranks of jurisdiction of feudal complexes), carried out by the *Regia Camera della Sommaria* (Royal Chamber of Sommaria)»<sup>47</sup>. These and other reforms also led to a fundamental revision of the university system. Indeed, the changes were considered much needed enhancements and met the requests of a part of the Neapolitan intelligentsia who had been marginalized during the previous decades, especially under the House of Habsburg's Vice-Kingdom (1707-1734)<sup>48</sup>. One of these intellectuals was Giambattista Vico, who, after having long been boycotted, was appointed *Istoriografo Regio* (Royal Historiographer) in 1735, thanks to the action of prominent personalities at Charles' court. The latter included, above all, Archbishop Celestino Galiani (b. 1681), *Cappellano Maggiore* (1732-1753), the figure who was also, traditionally, in charge of the University of Naples, and Prime Minister Bernardo Tanucci (1698-1783), who immensely appreciated Vico's culture, acumen, and works<sup>49</sup>, especially his masterpiece: *Principi di Scienza nuova d'intorno alla comune natura delle nazioni*<sup>50</sup>. From the very beginning of the reign of Charles of Bourbon, Vico and other coeval reformers viewed him as an enlightened des-

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*nostris*». *Riflessioni su un personaggio e un tridentenario*, in G. Cirillo (a cura di), *Le monarchie europee tra cerimoniali pubblici e rituali privati*, in "Mo.Do.", 1-2 (2020), pp. 153-174, available at: [https://www.rivistamodo.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/rivista-modo\\_1\\_2.pdf#page=153](https://www.rivistamodo.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/rivista-modo_1_2.pdf#page=153) (last accessed 18 November 2024). For an overview, see G. Galasso, *Il Regno di Napoli, IV, Il Mezzogiorno borbonico e napoleonico (1734-1815)*, in *Storia d'Italia*, XV/4, UTET, Torino 2007; G. Caridi, *Carlo III. Un grande re riformatore a Napoli e in Spagna*, Salerno Editrice, Roma 2014; F. Venturi (a cura di), *Illuministi italiani: Riformatori napoletani*, T. V. Ricciardi, Napoli 1962; Id., *Settecento riformatore*, 5 voll. G. Einaudi, Torino 1969-1990.

<sup>47</sup> G. Cirillo, *Emblems of Power in the Europe of the Bourbons. Semantic Research Paths on Historical Archives. Ontology edited by Francesco Moscato*, MIBACT, Roma 2018, p. 158, available at: <https://www.assoasme.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/017.pdf> (last accessed 26 November 2024).

<sup>48</sup> S. Russo; N. Guasti (a cura di), *Il Vicereame austriaco (1707-1734). Tra capitale e province*, Carocci editore, Roma 2010.

pot, as also indicated in various sources, who provided his subjects with happiness and prosperity to be achieved through trade, which alone was «the source of the abundance of countries, of their population and fertility, of the riches and happiness of the inhabitants, of the strength of the states, of the loyalty and devotion of the subjects towards the sovereigns, of the stability of the crowns, and of the glory and power of princes»<sup>51</sup>, as stated on June 10, 1739 by the Secretary of State before the King and the Neapolitan nobility. The time was ripe to decide the future of the relations between the Kingdom and the Sublime Porte. The following year, the previously mentioned bilateral capitulation was signed. In 1738, Giambattista Vico had written an *Oratio* for Charles' nuptials with Maria Amalia Walburga (1724-1760), extolling the new king and his wife. The royal couple (and their court) were paving the way for a thorough modernization in agreement with the suggestions of the cultural élite, who spurred the sovereign to increasingly count on their support and enroll juvenile forces that would be properly prepared for the change brought about by the strategic reforms. Thus, merit would be rewarded<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> N. Vescio, *Giambattista Vico e le riforme istituzionali di Carlo di Borbone/Giambattista Vico and the institutional reforms by Charles III of Bourbon*, in "Historia et ius", 18 (1 novembre 2020), pp. 1-23, available at: [http://www.historiaetius.eu/uploads/5/9/4/8/5948821/vescio\\_18.pdf](http://www.historiaetius.eu/uploads/5/9/4/8/5948821/vescio_18.pdf) (last accessed 30 November 2024).

<sup>50</sup> G. Vico, *Principi di Scienza nuova d'intorno alla comune natura delle nazioni*, Nella stamperia muziana, Napoli 1744. Famously, this work had two further editions: *Principj di una scienza nuova intorno alla natura delle nazioni, per la quale si ritrovano i principj di altro sistema del diritto naturale delle genti* (1725); *Cinque libri di Giambattista Vico de' Principj d'una scienza nuova d'intorno alla comune natura delle nazioni* (1730). See its English translation: *The New Science of Giambattista Vico, Translated from the 3rd (1744)*, edition by Th.G. Bergin; M.H. Fisch, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 1948. A bibliography of Vico in English is available at: <https://www.pdcnet.org/newvico> (last accessed 30 November 2024).

<sup>51</sup> «[...] l'origine dell'abbondanza de' Paesi, della loro Popolazione e fertilità, delle ricchezze, e della felicità degli abitanti, delle forze degli Stati, della fedeltà, e divozione de' sudditi verso de' sovrani, della stabilità delle corone, e della gloria, e potenza de' principi». See Archivio di Stato di Napoli, *Tribunali antichi, Supremo Magistrato di Commercio, Dispacci, fs. 1728, Registro delle deliberazioni prese nelle conferenze, ordinate da Sua Maestà tenersi nella Segreteria di Stato, Guerra e Marina circa il commercio, cc. 3r-11v*, 10 giugno 1739, quoted in A. Falchetta, *«Ad utilità del commercio de' due Regni». L'orizzonte morale dei mercanti greco-ottomani nel Regno di Napoli (XVIII secolo)*, cit., p. 565.

<sup>52</sup> N. Vescio, *Giambattista Vico e le riforme istituzionali di Carlo di Borbone/Giambattista Vico and the institutional reforms by Charles III of Bourbon*, cit.; G.G. Visconti, *Per l'edizione critica dell'allocuzione per le nozze regali di Carlo di Borbone con Maria Amalia di Walburga (1738)*, in "Bollettino Del Centro di Studi Vichiani", 16 (1986), pp. 243-294.

The year 1738 was of paramount importance to the history of the Kingdom of Naples. It saw the creation of a royal family that would be characterized by a true bond of love and communion of intent, based on shared interests, such as, for instance, a deep enthusiasm towards all forms of art, architecture, and antiquities. In fact, it is noteworthy that, while in the 16<sup>th</sup> century there had already been a general awareness concerning the existence of Ancient Herculaneum exactly where it was discovered in 1709, the excavations officially began only in 1738, at the behest of King Charles of Bourbon. Again, Vico's above-mentioned *Oratio* is of great interest as, amongst other things, while describing the talents of Charles and Maria Amalia, it also delineates the qualities of the ideal monarch, as illustrated in his masterpiece.

All of this could have been of great interest to Farah Anṭūn as an adolescent and young man who was taking his first steps in a long career that would lead him to present analyses and proposals to heal one of the greatest faults of the Ottomans: division. How could this be overcome? Assumedly, an answer could be provided by Giambattista Vico's experience and vision, especially if we turn to a major image or allegory in Farah Anṭūn's own vision: *al-mustabidd al-'ādil* (which perfectly translates the phrase "the just despot" used by Catherine of Russia in reference to Charles of Bourbon, as previously indicated). However, when he first used this expression, Anṭūn clearly asserted that the idea behind it came from the *ṣayh* Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849-1905)<sup>53</sup>, who sent him a letter that was published in "al-Ġāmi'ah"<sup>54</sup>. The Christian thinker enthusiastically accepted the *ṣayh*'s idea and further developed it in describing the personality and deeds of the just Caliph 'Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb (r. 634-644) in his fiction *Ūrūṣalīm al-Ġadīdah aw Faṭḥ al-'Arab Bayt al-Maqdis* (The New Jerusalem, or The Arab Conquest of Bayt al-Maqdis, 1904), the third novel in his renowned trilogy<sup>55</sup>.

### *Concluding Remarks and New Perspectives*

This article aims to provide inspiration for a much-needed thorough analysis of the meeting between the intellectual universes of Anṭūn and Vico and the common challenges they probably both had to face with, each in his own socio-political context. These intellectual universes deserve to be investigated comparatively so as to further address not only the hypothesis of an Italian

<sup>53</sup> See, for all: Muḥammad 'Amārah, *al-A'māl al-kāmilah li 'l-imām Muḥammad 'Abduh*, 3 muḡalladāt, al-Mu'assasah al-'arabiyyah li 'l-dirāsāt wa 'l-naṣr, Bayrūt 1980.

<sup>54</sup> Farah Anṭūn, *Ḥāḡatunā al-siyāsiyyah al-kubrā. Dawā'ū 'l-šarq. Ra'yū šarqiyīn kabīr*, in "al-Ġāmi'ah al-'Uṭmāniyyah", I, 4 (I māyū 1899), pp. 33-35. See also 'Umar al-Kiddī, *al-Mustabidd al-'ādil*, in "al-Wasat", al-iṭnayn 29 māyū 2023, available at: <https://alwasat.ly/news/opinions/400269?author=1> (last accessed 2 December 2024).

<sup>55</sup> This novel first appeared as an appendix to the fourth volume of "al-Ġāmi'ah" (1903-1904). The Italian edition of Anṭūn's trilogy is currently in preparation.

source of inspiration for Anṭūn's vision, but also the true extent to which the Arab man of letters delved into Vico's thought. Did Anṭūn understand Latin or Italian? Did he have colleagues, friends, or "brothers" who could have helped him read those works in their original language or could have translated them for him? It would also be of great importance to verify whether and to what extent Anṭūn followed Michelet and/or Princess of Belgiojoso's lessons. Again, it would be paramount to verify whether Anṭūn should be considered a disciple of Vico via Michelet or Princess of Belgiojoso, or a direct disciple of Vico. The main point here, however, has been to set out the connections existing between Vico and Anṭūn and consequently take the first steps along a path that might lead to new perspectives and horizons for the admirers of both intellectuals as well as for scholars studying the relationship between Italian and Arab culture in a period that was fundamental for the resurgence of peoples and nations.

This word – resurgence – brings us back to the four elements: Herculaneum-antiquities-resurgence-1719.

- Resurgence is *al-nahḍah*, and it speaks for itself.
- Herculaneum means Hercules' city. Hercules is the hero *par excellence*. Vico addresses the heroic age.
- The term "antiquities" embodies a concept and policy linked to a wide variety of levels and fields, and of primary importance in the policy inaugurated by Charles of Bourbon.
- 1719 is the year when Vico's vision changed, and a new perspective led him to his "Scienza Nuova".

On the basis of these latter elements, it is then significant to ask oneself whether Anṭūn's goal was to become a novel Vico for his Arab and Ottoman brothers at the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and to investigate under which forms he intended to do so, or may have done so in his rich and thrilling activity.