

On the Political Value of Philology: Ernesto Monaci and the Study of Dialects between the 19th and 20th Centuries in Italy

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1. Introduction

Ernesto Monaci (1844-1918) was an Italian Romance philologist, paleographer, linguist, dialectologist, and one of the protagonists of the post-unification cultural debate.¹ After studying law in Rome, he turned away from a legal career in favor of the study of Romance philology, which was flourishing in Italy under German influence at that time: it was in Germany that philology began to emerge as a modern science at the beginning of the nineteenth century, gradually specializing in ever narrower areas of knowledge (Germanic, Romance, etc.) and adopting increasingly scientific and refined methods of investigation. In particular, the season of Romance philology began when Friedrich Diez (1794-1876), today considered the father of the discipline, opened up a hitherto unexplored field of research with the publication of his *Grammatik der romanischen Sprachen* (1836-1843) and his *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der romanischen Sprachen* (1853), pioneering the extension of the comparative approach to the study of Neo-Latin languages in a book that would set the standard for the rest of Europe in the following decades.²

In Italy, the seeds of German philology had encouraged the development of philological studies within what is now known as the *Scuola storica italiana* (Italian Historical School), to which Monaci himself belonged. This critical movement, which developed from the

1870s and survived for at least fifty years, had an avowedly positivist tendency; indeed, it was animated by the need to study literary texts as historical documents, with particular emphasis on the objective analysis of languages from a diachronic perspective and on the editing of ancient texts. Following the German example, the aim of those scholars was to give the literary disciplines the dignity of a science.³ For this reason, they responded to the aesthetic approach prevalent in the Romantic period by studying reliable and documentable data (especially in the field of linguistics and textual criticism) and by avoiding judgments based on aesthetic or philosophical aspects.⁴

Monaci and most of the romance philologists of his generation were first and foremost medievalists: they saw the Middle Ages as the founding moment of the various national consciousnesses and paid particular attention to it in order to investigate the origins of Western civilization. As a result, most of Monaci's scholarly production is devoted to medieval Romance languages and literatures: his main research interests include early Italian poetry, with a focus on the Sicilian poetic school of the thirteenth century, the history of medieval theatre, Ibero-Romance and Gallo-Roman literatures, with a special emphasis on Provençal lyric poetry, and palaeography.⁵

The interest of Romance philologists in the Middle Ages was shared across Europe and, in most cases, could not be described as entirely neutral: the myth of origin had been used by many European states as an ideological weapon for the construction of a supposedly shared national consciousness since the Middle Ages⁶ (and often, with manifestly competitive intent, to demonstrate an atavistic cultural superiority on the international stage).⁷

Monaci himself was aware of the great potential of philological studies for the construction of a national myth, and he put his expertise at the service of the cultural policy of Italy, which (after unification) was trying to reconstruct the pieces of its literary history and to achieve full linguistic maturity for a unifying standard language. The philologist's civic commitment manifested itself above all in the linguistic issues of

contemporary Italy: in the 1910s, at the end of his career as a professor at the University of Rome, he devoted much energy to the question of the spread of the Italian language at national level, which was one of the most burning issues facing the newly formed Kingdom of Italy. The scholar never produced major linguistic studies in modern languages; the most he did in this field was to provide some editions of medieval texts with a grammatical overview, but even here he never carried out directly any important research into the language of usage.⁸ Nevertheless, he took an active part in the debate on the best strategy for teaching Italian to the dialect-speaking and illiterate masses, making a theoretical contribution of considerable importance.

The aim of this paper is to examine some aspects of Monaci's thought on the political value of dialectological studies in the Italian linguistic context between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We will first try to provide some general coordinates of the linguistic context of the newly unified Italy, and then move on to a more detailed analysis of Monaci's publications on strategies for the diffusion of the Italian language in a globally dialect-speaking country. Finally, we will examine some of his private writings, which offer interesting methodological reflections.

2. Political unification and linguistic particularism: the challenge of a new country

In Italy, the question of building a national identity had become particularly urgent since the unification, which began in 1861, with the present-day borders of the country being established only after 1918. Among the major challenges of the time, the new-born kingdom had to deal with two crucial issues: first, a strong sense of nationhood had to be instilled in people from very different communities now united under one flag; second, the national literary language (until then known only by a small minority of citizens) was to be disseminated within a globally dialect-speaking country.⁹ The two problems were closely linked: linguistic particularism, which affected the entire national territory (where numerous and diverse dialects were the mother tongue of almost all citizens), hindered the perception of Italy as a cohesive nation, both from

inside and outside. Moreover, the problem of a lack of knowledge of the national language was exacerbated by the illiteracy rate of the Italian population.¹⁰ Linguistic fragmentation and the lack of basic education were thus two social problems of enormous proportions, and the question of education animated the cultural debate of the time.¹¹

Monaci took an active part in this debate. Inspired by the spirit of Romanticism, he foresaw the potential of the nascent field of dialectology as an instrument for spreading knowledge about the standard national language. His theory was that the most effective way to teach Italian to communities of dialect speakers was to move from the known (their local dialect) to the unknown (the standard language). So, in the scholar's view, after decades of unsuccessful language policies, the state should have proposed a didactic approach aimed at promoting the use of dialect in learning Italian. However, Monaci's was a minority view: with a few important exceptions, the attitude of the institutions toward dialects was, if not open hostility, at least one of total disinterest, and as a result dialectology was not considered a valid tool for teaching Italian.¹²

To get an idea of Monaci's public position on the problem of the relationship between the national language and the dialect, one might start with an article that appeared in the journal *Nuova Antologia* in 1909.¹³ In this article, Monaci notes a worrying fact: Italian emigrants in America are the only ones who, far from their homeland, do not recognize themselves as belonging to the same nation, but continue to live in separate communities (in such a way that the same regional communities that existed in Italy are reconstituted abroad, without one interacting with the other). The reason for this, according to Monaci, is the non-reciprocal intelligibility between migrants from different areas of Italy. As a result,

[...] while for other peoples emigration becomes an extension of the homeland, with transplanted offshoots abroad that link the New World to the Old and give the homeland vitality and dignity; for the Italian people, on the contrary, emigration is reduced to a constant impoverishment. (Monaci, *Ancora di dialetti*, 610)

As these words indicate, in Monaci's view linguistic cohesion was an indispensable prerequisite for the development of a common national sentiment and thus for the consolidation of the nation's power and credibility on the international stage. In contrast, linguistic fragmentation and the absence of a common ideal of nationhood led to provincialism and isolation, and the situation in Italy was a clear demonstration of this.

Since there seemed to be no short-term solution, Monaci suggested that the problem of the scarce diffusion of a common language should be seen as a social problem affecting entire strata of society. His reproach to the intellectual class of his time, in fact, was that for too long they had considered the question of language only from a literary point of view. Instead, he writes, "the real question is that of the speakers, not of the writers. Here the subject ceases to be literary and becomes social" (611). Indeed, until then, efforts had been made to create tools, such as dialect vocabularies, which could be useful to writers but useless to most people. In other words, the philologist was essentially questioning the lack of foresight on the part of the Italian intellectual class, which was incapable of understanding the true nature of the problem. What was urgently required was a school that could focus on the needs of the students, on their linguistic heritage and cultural background. For this to happen, however, teachers and institutions had to shed their long-held prejudices against local dialects and begin to see them as expressions of a profound cultural and even educational wealth. In fact, Monaci started from the assumption that dialects, like the language that has become the standard for historical reasons, are languages derived from Latin, each with its own physiognomy and, above all, each an expression of a precise cultural context. By then, modern dialectology had shown that there were no internal reasons for dialects to be considered inferior, but that these reasons were to be found in historical-political causes. This conviction, now universally accepted, was not taken for granted at the time, and Monaci's ideas met with much resistance, as will be seen in the following pages.

3. Monaci's *manuali*: "publications in defence of the language"

In the 1910s, Monaci returned with greater vigor to the theories he had formulated years earlier on the value of dialectological studies and the importance of dialects in teaching Italian. In the meantime, the issue of dialects was made dramatically topical by the experience of the First World War and Italy's claims to annex territories disputed with the Austro-Hungarian Empire (also from a linguistic and cultural point of view): it was at this time that the philological debate on the nature of the Ladin dialects became heated and turned into an ideological battleground.¹⁴

The political and ideological implications of the debate were clear. On the one hand, Austrians tried to prove that the Ladin dialects (spoken in parts of S. Tyrol, Trentino, and Belluno) were a Romance language foreign to the Italian dialectal set (in order to legitimately consider the borderlands as part of the Habsburg Empire). On the other hand, the Italian front attempted to prove the Italian character of those dialects to give a solid scientific basis to their claims to annex those territories.

Monaci's most important contribution to this debate was the initiative to promote manuals for schools based on the from-dialect-to-language teaching method. The series was programmatically entitled *Lingua e dialetto. Pubblicazioni in difesa della lingua* (Language and dialect. Publications in defense of the language), and the first two volumes, dedicated to the dialect of Valsugana (by Angelico Prati) and the dialect of Gorizia (by Carlo Vignoli) were published in 1917.¹⁵ The project, which was supposed to continue with the publication of several more issues (each devoted to a different Italian dialect and written by promising young philologists), came to a halt the following year, with Monaci's death.¹⁶ The two volumes, which the elderly philologist entrusted to two young scholars, fully embodied the ideals of the master (who, not surprisingly, wrote the prefaces). In fact, according to Monaci's instructions, they had to be divided into three parts: first, a comparative grammar, which compared the dialect with Italian in all its grammatical structures; second, a selection of dialect texts, for translation practice into Italian; third, a small glossary.¹⁷

In 1918, Monaci published an essay entitled *Pe' nostri manualetti. Avvertimenti* (Instructions for our manuals). This is a very interesting publication, as it certainly is the most complete and articulate expression of Monaci's ideas on the method of teaching Italian from the dialects. This short essay, published after the first two issues of the series *Lingua e dialetto*, is conceived as a sort of *vademecum* for the realization of the subsequent issues: it is legitimate to think that Monaci, feeling that he was lacking in strength, wanted to leave clear indications for those who would continue the project after him. But the *Avvertimenti* are also much more than just that: the essay is, in fact, a veritable intellectual manifesto in which the elderly scholar declares the urgency of rethinking the methodological approach hitherto adopted in the teaching of Italian, pushing to give a central role to dialects, especially in border areas.

Taking the first two issues as examples (the ones by Angelico Prati and Carlo Vignoli), Monaci reiterates the importance of the tripartite division of the manuals into a contrastive grammar, a collection of dialect texts, and a glossary. Of the three sections, however, he attributes the greatest value to the second. According to him, in fact,

[...] in schools, theory generally prevails over practice, and it seems more necessary, even for small children, to pile up rules rather than to teach them by example. This is a manifestation of what can be called the Italian disease: theorising, refining everything, wasting time on abstractions, and then not having enough for practical applications. (Monaci, *Avvertimenti* 33)

Instead, Monaci warns that

[...] it is only in texts that we see vocabulary and grammar in action together, and it is mainly there that the child learns to use the language effortlessly, even with pleasure, and that the teaching of grammar penetrates his mind better through reading and translation than through the mere and abstract exposition of rules. [...] (34)

Monaci gives some interesting hints as to what should be preferred when compiling such dialect anthologies:

Texts of local origin should always be chosen, even if they are not in dialect. Modern texts should be preferred, but ancient ones should not be completely neglected; the artistic production should alternate with the production gathered from the oral tradition, captured by the voice of the people, making sure to choose what best reflects the soul of the village, its passions, its ideals (36).

Here Monaci proposes that, in addition to the artistic production, anthologies should also include texts of popular origin, which were passed down orally over generations: the invitation to his successors is then to collect materials directly from the voice of the people, romantically considered as the repository of a local culture to be valorized and rediscovered.

The attempt to reconstruct Monaci's method for the constitution of the textual *corpora* on which the contrastive grammars were to be based is complex, since it is not possible to deduce from his writings any precise methodological indications in this respect. However, it may be useful to examine the two publications by Angelico Prati and Carlo Vignoli mentioned above, which must have reflected the intentions of the elderly professor.

Carlo Vignoli, talking about the sources he used for his manual, writes:

About the language of Gorizia, I have tried to collect what is on the lips of the people, because the people must be served by this little manual, which comes from both spoken and written sources. The latter are Ascoli's *Saggi ladini*, Pirona's *Vocabolario del friulano*, Zorutti's and di Colloredo's poems and, above all, Favetti's, which I studied and followed, especially for their spelling, because they were written in the Gorizian dialect [...]. My oral sources were the distinguished lawyer Dr Raimondo Luzzato and his noble wife, both from Gorizia, who for

many months patiently answered my questions, not only because of their innate kindness, but also because of their affection for the city to which their souls, though far away, were attached. (6-7)

The reference to Ascoli's studies and dialect vocabularies¹⁸ is not surprising, since they represented indispensable tools for the grammar section and the glossary. Most interesting, however, is what the author says about the sources for the anthology. His mentor's warning to use texts from the local literary tradition, together with examples from the living voice of the people, is fully respected here, and the nature of the sources Vignoli chooses is indicative of a precise attitude. In fact, the recourse to vernacular poetry (which inevitably acts as a filter on the dialect and provides a variety refined by literary use) is linked to Vignoli's choice of speakers belonging to the bourgeoisie as an oral source,¹⁹ since both choices underline the intention to provide the learner a prestigious variety of dialect. Prati, on the other hand, merely informs the reader that he himself wrote the texts of the anthological section in the dialect of Agnedo, his hometown. Indeed, the anthology does not contain examples taken from the live voices of pure dialect speakers, but filtered by a scholar with precise linguistic and dialectological skills. In this way, Vignoli and Prati try to provide carefully selected linguistic models in their handbooks, always with an eye to both the literary tradition and the dialect spoken in specific social contexts.

But let us return to Monaci's guidelines in his *Avvertimenti*. Given what has been said about the linguistic situation in border areas, it is not surprising that the philologist's proposal for manuals based on a contrastive approach was recommended for these regions in particular. There, using Monaci's approach was considered necessary because of the differences between the local dialects and Italian, which were greater than in other regions, as well as the mistrust of these communities toward the kingdom that was trying to annex them. Quoting the author:

In the lands for which we are now fighting, behind the army must be the school, whose first task is to teach the national

language; and since this teaching encounters difficulties and obstacles of a purely local nature in the Alpine area, it is there that our Society [the Società Filologica Romana, through which Monaci promoted the publication of manuals] could be of some service. Angelico Prati's *Confronti fra l'italiano e il parlare della Valsugana* [Comparisons between Italian and the dialect from Valsugana] was the first essay on the method through which we intended to carry out our work. This essay, which took the local dialect as its point of departure to teach the language, was received as well as we could have hoped for. Others immediately set out to follow this example: one of them, Carlo Vignoli, has already published his work for the schools of Gorizia and the surrounding area, and a similar one is being prepared for the schools of Trentino. [...] (*Avvertimenti* 5-6)

As already mentioned, the volume dedicated to the dialects of Trentino (as well as all the others envisaged) never saw the light of day. What is clear, however, is that Monaci's insistence on the importance of teaching Italian in the border areas takes on a very specific ideological value: it is no longer just a matter of proposing a didactic model for teaching the language to all the citizens of the kingdom (as he had done years earlier in the pages of the *Nuova Antologia*), but also and above all of ensuring that the territories for which Italy was fighting were able to participate in a shared national sentiment. A social question (the question of literacy and education for the masses) is thus combined with a political question (the linguistic issue of the border areas). Nevertheless, the aim of spreading a national language throughout the country was still very much alive. To quote Monaci again:

[...] if our intention today is to focus on the border regions, we do not think that the same should not be done elsewhere. We are being encouraged to extend the application of the method we are proposing to the whole of Italy, and we would like to do so. (5)

Some particular observations on Monaci's handbooks can be made at this point:

- 1) The contribution of dialectological studies (in particular those of Graziadio Isaia Ascoli) was fundamental in providing the basis for the proper grammatical section of the manuals (an element that marks the full maturity of dialectological studies, capable of providing a valid basis for a project such as this);
- 2) For the anthology section, the idea was to provide examples from the local literary tradition and, with regard to oral sources, from speakers belonging to the bourgeois class (and thus speaking a variety of dialect purified of its more vernacular features);
- 3) The desire to educate, above all, speakers from delicate linguistic backgrounds, where the work of teaching Italian had to go hand in hand with that of integrating into the national cultural landscape, was paramount.

Although Monaci's positions were part of a fruitful debate, they never fully took hold: on the contrary, many of his teachings went unheeded and the didactic approach he advocated was never fully realized. Only Giuseppe Lombardo Radice (1879-1938), a pedagogue and philosopher, succeeded in carrying out a school reform (between 1922 and 1924) that owed much to Monaci's educational model.²⁰ But in the years that followed, the fascist regime did not hesitate to dismantle this educational reform: the linguistic purism advocated by fascism sanctioned the definitive defeat of an approach that sought to enhance the country's linguistic richness. A normative-grammatical approach therefore prevailed, to the detriment of what even today seems to be a missed opportunity.

4. An intellectual legacy for his students

We have seen how, for Monaci, the dialect is "the best vehicle for facilitating the learning of the language and for instilling in the people the feeling of the homeland" (*Avvertimenti* 40), as well as "an ethnic element whose value is such that its loss would lead to the castration of the people"

(40-41). As proof of the importance he attached to this matter, in 1918 he dedicated his last university course to Italian dialectology, with a particular focus—once again—on border areas.²¹ The title of the course was *La filologia romanza alla vigilia di un'era nuova: il fatto, il da farsi. Dialettologia italiana delle zone di confine* (“Romance philology on the eve of a new era: what has been done, what needs to be done. Italian dialectology of border areas”).²² It was divided into two parts: the introduction contained a reflection on the state of Romance studies in those years, while the second part focused on the study of the Italian dialects of the border areas.

The introduction is no less interesting than the rest of the course, as Monaci offers important reflections on some challenges of his time. As in the *Avvertimenti*, published in the same year, it seems that the elderly professor wanted to give his students some pointers on the path they should follow. In this intellectual legacy, in fact, Monaci highlighted the many achievements of the previous decades and what remained to be done, entrusting his students with the task of continuing the work begun by the philologists of his generation.

Although the documents relating to this university course suffer from a certain degree of fragmentation, it is still possible to reconstruct the philologist's overall thesis. A general crisis characterizes the cultural context of those years, and Monaci's assessment of the state of philological studies is essentially negative. In fact, he notes a progressive loss of the importance of philology and a general stagnation of humanistic studies: after the period of prosperity that had characterized the second half of the nineteenth century, they now seemed to be struggling to find new energy and motivation to move forward. A preserved note reads:

Since the beginning of the present war, our studies, as well as others, have come to a standstill, and if in the past it was possible to begin our courses each year by talking about the progress made in the previous months, this is no longer the case. [...] This great movement of studies, which was the greatest glory of the 19th century, has now

completed its parabola. Even before the war, there were many signs of its decline. Had the war not broken out, this state of agony might have been prolonged for who knows how long. But the outbreak of war cut everything short at once. That glorious period is now closed forever. When peace returns, we will find ourselves, or at least you will find yourselves, at the beginning of a new era, and the school must now prepare for that era.

In the context of the world conflict, which had drawn young people away from academic research and aggravated the symptoms of an already strongly felt crisis, Monaci noted the gradual inability of philology to find new sensitive subjects to study.²³ He explained the reasons for this climate of stagnation in another note:

The decadence alluded to in the previous paragraph could not be more manifest if we consider certain symptoms. I would like to point some of them out. Lack of new initiatives. Waste of energy in redoing, without any improvements, what has already been done. Childish efforts to show off one's personality. [...] Degeneration of criticism into denigration, vituperation, vaniloquence, and its impotence to rebuild what it demolishes.

If philology had been "the greatest glory of the 19th century," that season seemed long gone, and the future of the discipline was looked at with apprehension. It is therefore not surprising that the linguistic situation of the territories disputed between Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, at the time one of the most controversial topics of philological studies at the international level, is the central theme of Monaci's last university course. The aim was obviously to free the debate on Ladin dialects from what he considered to be Austrian ideological influences.²⁴ At the same time, he wanted to call on the new generations to show the same civic commitment in the field of academic research that many of their contemporaries had shown at the front. In fact, another paper states:

[...] I would like to talk about Italian dialectology, its latest advances, and other ways in which it can be applied.

Up to now, science has only worked for itself. Now the time has come for science to work for the nation; and I say this not only because it is the duty of every citizen to contribute as much as he can where it is needed, but above all because, among the needs of the moment, there is one for which philology has a duty to provide.

Monaci's concern was to provide his students with the appropriate tools to deal with the enemy's attack in this parallel conflict, which was being fought not on the battlefield but in the scientific realm. As an example, we cite a paper that seems to refer to practical exercises that students were supposed to carry out:

Practical exercises

Each dialect essay should be accompanied by:

A. A historical outline of the county, or at least some statistical data: is it a people of farmers? shepherds? fishermen? merchants? etc.?

B. A description and possibly a photograph of the local costume.

C. A musical notation of the way the language is spoken or sung. (See note 22)

From the philologist's point of view, it was essential to give as detailed a picture as possible of the dialect. Again, Monaci's words are poor in methodological indications. In fact, he merely sets out the general guidelines for the fieldwork that his students were to carry out, without providing any more detailed information on the essential elements of linguistic research: should the linguistic research be carried out on a selected social category, as the scholar had suggested in the case of the handbooks, or on a wider and, inevitably, more representative sample of the local linguistic reality? As already mentioned, there is a lack of precise indications in this regard, but it is interesting to note that Monaci suggested here an approach that could be defined today as proto-sociolinguistic: in

addition to the work of collecting linguistic data (aimed at the study of the various dialects), Monaci proposed here that the researcher should also have considered other aspects: the socio-economic context of the area in which the survey was carried out; the set of local traditions and customs; the phonetic characteristics of the dialect (with particular attention also to the oral folkloric heritage of the various communities, to which Monaci seemed to refer when he talked about singing).

On the importance of studying folklore, Monaci returned in another note:

One of the greatest and most novel achievements of modern philology in the last century has been the study of popular literature, which in previous centuries had been neglected or treated with almost contempt. Since Herder onwards, this contempt has turned into a special cult, which has led to the discovery in almost every people of a vein of poetry that is more sincere and therefore also more meaningful than that which usually animates art literature.²⁵ Literary history has begun to make use of this new material, but it is the Nordic literatures that have benefited most. In Romance literature, this material was only studied for the medieval period. For the modern age it remained inactive and formed a separate branch of literary history, the folklore. (See note 22)

Those words show how, for Monaci, the study of the living language of a given territory is inextricably linked to the study of local literary traditions. With regard to living languages, therefore, the scholar behaves as a philologist, always looking to literature (not only of the present, but also of past centuries) as the key to interpreting a given civilization: the study of literary traditions, when closely linked to the study of languages, is (in this view) a mirror *par excellence* of a society, as it provides a profound understanding of the history of a people's culture and, consequently, a full recognition of its boundaries—especially in the face of enemy attacks.

5. Concluding remarks

As we have seen, academic research in the field of dialectology represented, for Monaci, a valuable tool at the service of the national community. The collection of information on the various Italian dialects, in fact, could have had a decisive impact on the fate of the country's cultural life. Certainly, there had been many achievements in the field of dialectology during these decades: "Science, thanks mainly to dialectology, has succeeded in reconstructing the history of language and its evolution, in recognizing in the organism of dialect a regularity and a perfection of structure that is in no way inferior to that of literary language" (Monaci, *Avvertimenti* 16-17).

However, dialectology had not run its course, and it was precisely in this period of crisis that it should have shown its strength. For this reason, Monaci leaves his legacy to future generations, always reminding them of their responsibilities. Both the *Avvertimenti* and his last university course, in fact, provide an important opportunity to reflect on the importance of the new generations in continuing the work begun in those years. Again, in his last course, he writes: "If, until yesterday, we could welcome foreign collaboration in our studies and even more or less enjoy it, from now on it would be a humiliation for us to allow ourselves to be anticipated by others in what we are obliged to do." In our eyes, this is the warning of a scholar who was a child of his time, concerned that any scientific progress should both shed new light on philological studies and serve the nation. At the same time, however, Monaci's words reveal a passion and dedication that are not diminished by age, and a civic commitment that remains steadfast to the end (in the passage just quoted, Monaci speaks of the work that awaits the new generations as a moral obligation). It is first and foremost an incitement to have an impact on reality and to make scientific research responsive to the needs of a community. Just as he had devoted a great deal of energy to what, in the rhetoric of the time, was the linguistic defense of national frontiers, so his invitation to those who would succeed him was always to consider the civic value of philological activity. He hoped for this all the more at what he called "the eve of a new era": imagining the

imminent end of the war and the definitive annexation by Italy of the lands for which it had fought for years, Monaci saw in the near future the beginning of a new season of comparative philological studies in Italy. In a country that was at last united and that offered new challenges to scholars, he was ready to give way to the new generations, convinced that they would be able to benefit from the many achievements of the previous decades in a renewed Italy.

Notes

* This essay is the result of the cooperation between Samuele Autorino (Sapienza Università di Roma) and Susanna Casacchia (Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata), who participated in the project of digitalization of Ernesto Monaci's personal Archive. The first two paragraphs ("Introduction" and "Political unification and linguistic particularism: the challenge of a new country") have been written by Casacchia, while the paragraphs following are by Autorino. All the translations within the article are by the authors.

¹ For an accurate portrait of Ernesto Monaci's life, work, and contribution to the Italian intellectual scene in the post-unification period, see Salvadori et al.; Ruggieri "Ernesto Monaci romanista"; Antonelli and Punzi; and Antonelli. Regarding recent contributions related to Monaci see Casacchia, "Ernesto Monaci."

² On the leading role of the German school in the field of philological studies in the nineteenth century, see Rapisarda.

³ For a good understanding of the assumptions on which the *Scuola storica* was based and its aims since its appearance, see Villari, which is considered as the manifesto of the movement.

⁴ For a more detailed look at the *Scuola storica* and its relationship to earlier Romantic criticism, see Ruggieri, Dionisotti, and Lucchini.

⁵ For the scholar's complete bibliography, see Salvadori 189-210.

⁶ On the construction of a national myth and the role of nineteenth-century philology, see Berger et al.; Gumbrecht; Bloch and Nichols; Thiesse; and Van Hulle and Leerssen.

⁷ Consider, for example, the case of the *Chanson de Roland*, which appeared in numerous critical editions in the nineteenth century, and which became the subject of a highly politicized readings by critics of the time (on this topic, see Di Vanna).

⁸ See, for example, his *Crestomazia italiana dei primi secoli*, a collection of medieval texts from the Italo-Romance area for scholastic use, in which the author writes a concise grammatical overview for each text.

⁹ Tullio De Mauro first attempted to make some estimates of the level of knowledge of Italian at the time of the unification: taking into account those who had completed higher education (in addition to all the speakers in the Tuscan and Roman areas, who were “naturally” predisposed to understand Italian), he puts the number of Italians who could speak (but not necessarily write) the Italian language at about 2.5% of the population (43). More optimistic are the estimations proposed by Arrigo Castellani, who, including speakers from the whole of central Italy, estimates that about 10% of the population knew Italian (see Castellani). In any case, both estimations show that Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century was characterized by an immense linguistic gap.

¹⁰ Tullio de Mauro also notes that at the time of unification, the illiteracy rate in Italy was 75%, with peaks of over 80% in the southern regions and 90% in Sardinia. In general, however, even in the regions where the illiteracy rate was lowest (such as Piedmont, Lombardy, and Liguria), it never fell below 50% (De Mauro 95).

¹¹ The debate developed around the positions of two important figures: Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873), Italian poet and writer, author of *I promessi sposi*, and Graziadio Isaia Ascoli (1829-1907), considered the father of modern Italian dialectology. Both scholars were convinced of the centrality of the school in the project of spreading the Italian language, but, starting from very different ideological assumptions, they proposed two different strategies. Manzoni, in 1868, at the request of the Minister of Education, Emilio Broglio, wrote a *Relazione dell'unità della lingua e dei mezzi di diffonderla* (Report on the unity of the language and the means

of disseminating it), in which he set out his ideas: the linguistic model to which the whole of Italy should conform was the contemporary Florentine spoken by the middle classes. He therefore called for the school to be entrusted with the task of spreading the Florentine standard, using teachers trained in Tuscany and a new vocabulary that would provide a Florentine equivalent for every dialect term. A few years later, Graziadio Isaia Ascoli reacted to Manzoni's theories in the pages of the *Proemio* (1973) of the first issue of his journal *Archivio Glottologico Italiano* (one of the most important journals in the field of glottology and dialectology since its foundation). Ascoli agreed with Manzoni that the linguistic question was one of the most urgent problems facing the country, but he did not believe in the merits of a method that envisaged the imposition from above of a linguistic variety—contemporary Florentine—so distant from the one that had been the norm for centuries in the literary field. Instead, the Italian glottologist proposed a long-term strategy: a common national language would only be possible with the consolidation of a common culture at the various political-institutional levels (economic, administrative, cultural). About dialects, Ascoli stressed the value of bilingualism, which is an inherent part of Italian culture, and entrusted schools with the task of teaching future generations the Italian language through a comparative approach, starting from the dialect (on the controversy between Manzoni and Ascoli, see Castellani). In the ensuing debate, the various positions roughly conformed to either the Manzonian or the Ascoli's proposal.

¹² For a detailed reconstruction of the debate around the issue of teaching Italian after the Unification of Italy, see Gensini, *Breve Storia*.

¹⁴ Monaci, "Ancora dei dialetti."

¹⁵ For a detailed and up-to-date reconstruction of the so-called "Ladin question," see Covino). An attempt is made here to summarize the main points of the debate. In 1873, G.I. Ascoli published his *Saggi Ladini* (*Ladin Essays*), in which he identified the area between the Oberalp Pass and the Gulf of Trieste as a specific linguistic area with numerous common morphological characteristics, independent of the surrounding dialects (including Italian) and called these languages Ladin dialects. In the years

that followed, Ascoli's theories were taken up by the Austro-German side (in opposition to the Italian side, which claimed the Italian character of these dialects): due to the positions of the Italian scholar, the correlation between Ladin and Italian dialects is gradually denied. What happened is well summed up in a few remarks by Monaci: "It is curious and instructive to see, even in the bibliography, how these efforts were followed and supported by Germany, albeit with difficulty. I am referring to the very accurate annual supplement of the "Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie." In 1877, Ladin was still included among the Italian dialects. [...] But the following year (1878) *Ladinisch* became an appendix (*Anhang*) to the Italian dialect section. This continued for the next two years. In 1881, the title *Ladinisch* was replaced with *Rhätoromanisch*, but remained as an appendix to the Italian section; This continued for nine years (1882-1890); finally, in 1891 *Rhätoromanisch* was decisively separated from *Italienisch* and regarded as a language on a par with the other Romance languages, in whose series it took its place under No. II, between Italian (No. I) and Romanian (No. III)" (Monaci, *Avvertimenti* 25-26).

¹⁶ See bibliography for Prati and Vicnoli. Both areas (the Valsugana and the province of Gorizia) were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and were among the territories claimed by Italy. Monaci's decision to open the series with two issues dedicated to the dialects of these areas does not seem neutral. To be precise, in 1922, a *Vocabolario Veneto Giuliano*, edited by Enrico Rosman, was published in the *Lingua e Dialecto* series, but it was a simple dictionary and did not correspond to Monaci's original intentions.

¹⁷ See Monaci, *Pe' nostri manuali* 33. On the activities of Monaci (and his students) during the First War War, see Casacchia, "La Grande Guerra."

¹⁸ On the appearance of important dialectal vocabularies in Italy at the time, see Aprile.

¹⁹ This choice only seems to contradict Vignoli's initial declaration of wanting to address the people (i.e., people who were completely illiterate or who had basic written means of communication, but who in any case lacked any linguistic competence in relation to the standard language). The scholar's intention here is in fact to provide a linguistic reference model that

can be used as a basis for learning Italian, and not to provide a sociolinguistic cross-section that can give an image of the language spoken in a given area.

²⁰ On the relationship between Ernesto Monaci and Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, see D'Achille.

²¹ In previous years, the scholar had dedicated other university courses to dialectology: *Per la storia letteraria dei dialetti italiani. Notizie, documenti, studi* ("For the literary history of Italian dialects. New information, documents, studies," 1906); *L'Italia dialettale e la letteratura dei dialetti italiani* ("Dialectal Italy and the literature of Italian dialects," 1907); *Dialettologia italiana: le prime fasi dei dialetti dell'Italia centrale* ("Italian dialectology: the early stages of central Italian dialects," 1912). Compared to the course held in 1918, these courses are less ideologically charged, as they do not touch on particularly sensitive issues.

²² The documents related to the course are kept in the philologist's personal archive, catalogued in 2005 by Calzolari (see Bibliography below). The location of the last course documents is: SFR, Archivio Ernesto Monaci, 1917-1918, envelope no. 39, file 1528. The text can be read at: https://archiviomonaci.seai.uniroma1.it/it/texts/Corso_1916_17.html. All subsequent citations without a bibliographic reference are from the same document file.

²³ To quote again from the papers: "The best youthful forces were largely drawn into the war zone; and even those who could not personally participate in the sacred work of defending our rights felt they lacked all strength to resume effective work."

²⁴ Note how Monaci wanted to give his argument a precise ideological connotation, right from the title of the course ("Italian dialectology of border areas"): the adjective "Italian," in fact, is used here programmatically, in opposition to the theories circulating in the Germanic area about the dialectal situation in border areas.

²⁵ The idea of popular literature as the most spontaneous and fresh expression of a nation and the reference to the theories of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) show that the Romantic spirit is still very much alive in philological studies, even in 1918.

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