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«REGIONALISATION» OR «REGIONALISM»
THE TERMS OF DEBATE STILL IN PROGRESS

Introduction. – The policy of territorial reorganization that Emperor Augustus launched during his reign invites us once more to reflect on the significance given to us by the word “region”, and consequently on the nature and the functions that have been conferred to them. This also calls for a contemplation on their historical roots, development process and to take note of their various manifestations.

The existence of the regions, as already mentioned, can be traced back to the Augustan period, when between 28 and 18 BC, the *princeps* had to oversee to the reorganization of the empire, following a long period of civil wars, manifesting itself into provinces and regions. Reasoning upon the thought process that brought about the creation of such territorial entities, one must recognize, in line with the thoughts of Lucio Gambi, that we are facing a proper territorial “invention”. “Constructions” or “inventions”, the regions of Italy, including those which were historically described by Biondo Flavio and Leonardo Alberti, identified between the 15th century and the middle of the 16th, were interpreted as “tools” to historically illustrate a very diverse and heterogeneous nation, as the Italian peninsula is and always has been. The regions, being expressly “invented” by the humanists that seem to resolve themselves precisely into a mere geographical and historical fiction, by which they are individuated by easily identifiable physical elements, are but a method to narrate the Italian multiform territorial reality: «They are spaces that move with the times, subservient to a continual mutation, (dissected) and altered through the ages» (Michetti, 2013, p. XXIV). Such a “creation” can be compared to the process of “regionalisation” inspired by Gambi, where though, the political element is, in effect absent, leaving only the cultural element to dominate its discourse.

It is necessary, therefore, to clarify two key problematic points around which the regional debate has revolved around, to understand where the most “mature” definition of the region can be effectively traced: in the concept of “regionalisation” or in “regionalism”. Regionalisation is meant to be as «the operation in which the State serves to give an institutional organic structure and uniformity to the human complexes that form it». Regionalism is «the recognition of marked areas of a homogeneity, or rather a particular form of cohesion and order for that which concerns, in the main, economic structures and cultural heritage: areas which exist in many cases, with their distinct individuality before a regionalisation» (Gambi, 1977a, 2007). This is to say that «regionalisation remains an initiative from the top, that only dilutes and renders more soft the (idea of) the centralized state. And regionalism cannot be confused with it» (Gambi, 1999, pp. 157-158).

The concept of the region has, not without some difficulty, always tried to assert itself, shifting between these two “meanings”. It has been a common thread that has tied the regionalist project of Augustus with, at the same time, a newly unified Italy and later to the postwar Republic, and which constitutes the backbone of the debates and discussions that have continued to revolve around the issue of regionalism. This has been a political and institutional debate that has involved Italian society since the aftermath of unification, which, in other respects, has run parallel to another

debate, which was certainly a more marginal one started by scholars of geography, and a historiographical argument that from Mommsen to the modern day has been understood to favor, both a “centralist” vision and an “autonomist” setting of regionalisation of the Augustan territorial reorganization. This is a discourse that therefore hinges on the idea of the Augustan reign understood differently by ancient historians: on the one hand to believe that the regional concept of Augustus reflected a political and administrative purpose, and on the other, to maintain that their main function was exclusively connected to furnishing statistics and data for the census. In the same spirit, from the unification of Italy till now there has been a prodigious exchange of ideas, including within the field of geography, - as pointed out - that has helped to establish, for better or worse, the current regional framework of the country.

These arguments present an opportunity to reflect on the distinction between “regionalisation” and “regionalism”, which were, in fact, manifested in the different histories of political constructs - as we are reminded once again by Gambi - «that have alternated in the space that now forms the Italian State» (Gambi, 1977a, 2008). In particular, it is interesting to understand whether the Augustan regions can be considered a tribute to regionalism or rather to regionalisation. One could also ask if the same categories can be attributed to the idea of the region that was perfected between the Italian unification and the first years of the postwar republic.

This, however, does not limit us to effectively make a comparison between the evolution of the Roman regional system and that of “United” and later “Republican” Italy because, borrowing the words of Umberto Laffi (2007), it might be too much of a stretch, and especially foolish to compare such distant histories with one another, but rather to try to capture those elements of discontinuity and continuity, which can be inferred from the various political and historiographical positions that steadily became animated around the problem. In other words, the issue has its roots at the time of the establishment of the regions, of which the first formal recognition – recalled by Leandro Polverini – dates back to the territorial division of Italy adopted by Augustus (Polverini, 1998, p. 24), to find it debated in the post-Italian unification aftermath. To be correct, we should remember the words of Massimo Pallottino, who said that it was in the period of pre-Roman Italy that you can rediscover the «regional vocation of our country» (Pallottino, 1984, p. 6).

Beyond this, we concern ourselves with the significant moments, both for the definition and the affirmation of the regions, and for the debate and what it has brought forth.

A long historiographical line. – In order to understand this reasoning, it is important to understand the importance given to the original territorial division, the one established by Augustus, which divided the territory into eleven regional parts. It is essential to ponder its original intention, including, ultimately, its real purpose. From this point, there are different historiographic hypotheses that have been expressed alternatively from the 1850s onwards in merit of the significance given by those statements, with a special emphasis on the construction of the relationship between central powers and local autonomies.

As noted, the terms of this debate were established by Theodor Mommsen on one side and Joachim Marquardt on the other. From this we can include the recent works of Gianfranco Tibiletti and Francesco de Martino. According to the Marquardt and De Martino point of view, the regions were designed to serve a practical purpose, and thus, wouldn't have been able to have anything other than an administrative character «otherwise it couldn't have even been possible to comprehend the political merit of the reform» (De Martino, 1975, p. 248). The thesis, therefore, validates the idea that with the start of the Augustan reign, «broad citizen autonomy (even if conserved in part) vis-a-

vis the central government (should) have been welcomed with extreme caution and limited to the administrative sphere of the commune and certain jurisdictional activities, while not only obviously for political ends, but also for the central powers themselves, whose judicial power and administration in general would be strengthened and extended compared to the Republican period» (*ibidem*, p. 250). On this basis, the hypothesis that the only purpose of the regions was to draw up a list of cities that shared common ethnic, linguistic and dialectical characteristics is considered unacceptable (*ibidem*, p. 245).

The alternative is represented by the historiographical line that joins the reading of Theodor Mommsen to that of Gianfranco Tibiletti which ties the purpose of the Augustan territorial reorganization solely to the census. In other words, the regions only represented the ability to “enumerate” the cities; a sort of statistical list that provided data for the census. Taken from real and proper territorial constituencies identified on the basis of geographical, linguistic and ethnic indicators, lists were formulated of the cities in alphabetical order. Essentially, the existence of the regions rested on a statistical foundation, a method to populate the census. In this way, it was possible to count on «a description that respected in some way the historical, ethnic, linguistic and cultural origins of the various areas of Roman Italy» (Zaccaria, 2010). Following this reasoning, the goal of Augustus would have been amenable to the regionalism of Gambi, attempting to «respect the identity» of areas with common peculiarities, and, above all, to maintain peripheral autonomy intact as much as possible, therefore, not having the intention of imposing a political or administrative regionalisation of the peninsula.

On the basis of this, the constitutional order of Roman Italy should have remained unaltered compared to the preceding republican period, remaining firm in the hands of the Senate and Magistrates. Therefore, it becomes appropriate to reintroduce the rhetorical query of De Martino, if it is indeed possible to maintain that the *princeps* exercised no power whatsoever. Regarding effective military, political and administrative and judicial powers, the controversy between the two scholars, De Martino and Tibiletti is revived, who, having examined the same sources, propose completely contrasting interpretations: one of the belief that, even having admitted to «the republican principle of broad citizen autonomy», the central powers were certainly strengthened, being able to benefit from a series of «legal and political limitations» (of citizen autonomy) (De Martino, 1975, pp. 256 and 260); and the other upholding the certainty of a total and unconditional autonomy of the cities. Whether one shares the belief that the institution of the Augustan regions was only the beginning of a process of greater centralization or if one accepts the contrary, meaning that it represented nothing more than a «tribute of Augustus to the local history and local traditions of the villages of Italy, [...] of a reality which was very much alive» (Tibiletti, 1978, p. 918), the previously mentioned Umberto Laffi (2007) shifts the focus on the difference that existed between the fulfillment of a plan of government and that of constitutional power. Even if difficult to separate, if one considers that the constitutional order changed noticeably with the advent of the reign, to the point that, the emperor could have freely imposed restrictions on citizen autonomy and, if at the same time, one retains that at the governmental level municipal autonomy was conserved, as regards to jurisdiction and administration, it is possible to recognize two different paths that are not necessarily juxtaposed. Of course it is still the foundation of the regions that constituted a novelty, that Laffi mainly interprets as an affirmation of a «political and propagandistic plan», which as its objective, was to disseminate an image of an Italy of united characteristics, of which the territorial-regionalist plot was traced on a ethnic or cultural basis, to underline the essential role that the singular communities had in conferring homogeneity to the peninsula. It wanted to be, in other terms, a tribute to that which we

can define 'regionalism', «as an advocate of unity» (Laffi, 2007, pp. 116-117). It is only later that such a "creation" had been reinterpreted in administrative terms.

Without entering into the merit of this complex situation, being surely more the competence of a historian rather than a geographer, of a representation of «an Italy of little countries» with a certain autonomy and liberty (*ibidem*) - to an Italy of "passionate cities", with a predominance of particular interests (Tibiletti, 1978) and, on the other hand, a form of control planned by a central authority, it is interesting to note that only in 1947 were legislative powers and administrative functions assigned to the regions, that in fact were, in reality, only exercised from 1970. "Only from that moment can it be said that the regions of Italy started to «serve something»" (Laffi, 2007, p. 113).

The regional question between politics and geographic culture. – the terms of the debate, which not by coincidence resurfaced around the 1960s and 1970s when the regions adhered to a definitive implementation plan, as already mentioned, lead us directly to the disparity of positions that have characterized the problem of 'regionality' after 1860, the solution was seen as a «regionalisation analogous to the Napoleonic type [...]» (Gambi, 1977a, 2008). There was no 'political-administrative' intention in the first regional organization of the country: rather it had to do with the 14 'compartments' designed in 1864 by Pietro Maestri, the director of the central statistics council in the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce in the neonatal unitary state, «that had no other functions» if not «to serve as a foundation for aggregation and presentation of data of the first statistics of the Kingdom» (Laffi, 2007, p.113). Such an affirmation is intended to highlight the deep divide triggered from this moment between the existing institution of "useless" statistical compartments and the inability to facilitate the creation of "constitutional regions" (Gambi, 1964).

Logically, therefore, Pasquale Coppola sustains that the regional dimension, revived many times in history, was frequently "sidestepped", because «the problem with a mature reading of the Italian narrative in a regional context had long been dogged by a borrowed point of view [...] in which the scale used to interpret the theme of territorial identity could not avoid corresponding to the dimension of the unitary (and indivisible) state» (Coppola, 1997, p. 12). This constituted a problem in the measure in which the breadth of the state exercised a "shadow effect" towards the local realities (of an intermediate scale), even in the representations made by scholars of the territory, which effectively corresponded with what happened in the geographic dimension (*ibidem*). This weight of the unitary state practically flattened the natural dimension of the region, already peppered with irredentist aspirations – apart from some exceptions – of Italian geography that was still missing ideas for a critical reflection on the subject of regions (*ibidem*, p. 15).

Apart from the brief interludes of the Ministers of the Interior of the Kingdom Luigi Carlo Farini (1860) and Marco Minghetti (1861), who were orientated towards a "discreetly autonomous" (Gambi, 1977a) regionalisation policy, there was an uncertainty, both from a political and scientific level, of anyone who had the intention to keep alive the interest on the regional reform of the State. The few and sparse isolated figures who still pushed for reform nevertheless opened the path to what would be a real and proper awareness, which would only manifest itself in the years after the implementation of the Italian regional plan. This would happen when it became apparent that the regions were never imagined in their final form for which they were created nor considering territorial, social or economic realities that they were destined to oversee (Treves, 2004, p. 243).

A renewed leap can be found between the first and second postwar periods, but once more Italian geography was unprepared for the opportunity, because notwithstanding the new regionalist

definition of geographic possibility, in Italy the positivist lesson anchored to physical elements of the territory continued to prevail as the only valid criteria for identification in the regional dimension. Between the 8th and 10th Italian Geographic Congress there was still a geography infused with nationalism. It is enough to reflect on the circumstances of the 10th Congress, held in 1927, where attention was given solely to a study dedicated to the provinces of Italy, *La circoscrizione politico-amministrativa del Regno d'Italia*, being completely silent on the regional question. «The territory identifies itself in the State, the Commune and in the Province», to be an integrative part. Rather, it is in the province that «the territorial element appears more defined and characterized than in the Commune or the State» (Fabbri, 1927, pp. V-VI).

In the final days of 1947, we come closer to the promulgation of the republican constitution that, with article 131, sanctions «the existing scheme of the regional constituencies, [...]» (Laffi, 2007, p.115). In that moment, in face of the overwhelming indifference to the regional debate on the part of public opinion, the geography shows a greater sensitivity towards the “category”, especially in virtue of the notion of the region that Aldo Sestini proposed in occasion of the Italian Geographic Congress in Bologna of 1947, defending it «as a geographic base of the structure of the State». In that context the Tuscan geographer denounces the total senselessness of the “regional cut-out” introduced by Maestri, reminding that, because of an exasperated geographic descriptivism, «there has almost always been a complacency to lay the choreography of Italy in a frame of division into compartments, devised only for statistical and descriptive ends, shortly after the unification» (Sestini, 1947, p. 128). While his is a region that results from an integration between environmental and anthropologic elements, it should not be forgotten that now the region is changing its conferred scientific paradigm and that it is transforming into the resulting imprint left by man on the natural environment. It should be advised, therefore, the necessity to revisit the regional divisions for the lack of adherence to their perimeters «of territorial localization of collective interests», the only thing that can legitimize «the institution of a regionalist structure of the State» (*ibidem*). It is only to the regions still defined as anthropogeographic – «a territory that results from an organic association of small natural regions, in order to promote and sustain cultural, economic, social and political relationships, eventually, among its various parts. A region marked by its diversity» - that could correspond to such a localization (*ibidem*, p.142). The hope of Sestini (p.132) is one of catering to a territorial subdivision founded on the principal of regional autonomy. There is, nevertheless, much to go before the geography realizes the opportunity to adhere to the political dimension of autonomy (*ibidem*) and to propose considerations capable of taking on the importance of «dynamic attributions» to the concept of the region, allowing for the coexistence and interaction of the «categories of space and time» (Bonora, 1983, p.105). And, at the same time, before the formation of a collective political and civil consciousness aware of the problem. The reflection of Sestini, in fact, doesn't find adequate representation in either the politics of that time nor in the discipline, the latter still lingering on traditional schemes focused principally on the physical factors of regionalism, behind which the majority of followers of geography entrenched themselves in, therefore avoiding any involvement on the plain of political confrontation. With equal indifference, the majority of Italian geographers avoided having themselves be involved with, at least until the beginning of the 1960s, a new operational perspective that focused on the link between the region and planning that finally intended to move the reasoning to a level of social and economic transformations, surpassing the «limits of rigidity of spatial determinations» (Bonora, 1984, p.104). It is evident that planning implies a rethinking of regionalism and the more innovative among the geographers «proceeded to

revise the concept of the region by paying attention to the objectives that the plan needs to respond to» (*ibidem*, p.141).

Step by step the region becomes a magnet attracting energy and generating force fields. In this rift many scholars and geographers can be found who are not necessarily imbued with functionalism, among all the figure of Lucio Gambi stands out, who shows a consistent attention to the necessity of a territorial reorganization. His idea of the region – which is also shared by Francesco Compagna and later Calogero Muscarà - can be traced back to the urban phenomenon. «An idea isn't enough anymore, such as the regionalism of fifty years ago, based on heterogeneous environmental characteristics integrated with economic cohesion or a homogeneous culture, but rather on definite schemes based on relationships that link the chain, or rather to say the urban makeup [...], which are expressed in a plexus of knots or urban centers, related to each other by a network of roads, animated by continuous flux» (Gambi, 1977a). It is the functional regions that are the result of 'quintessentially human' elements, by means of which it is possible to comply with one of the more significant roles attributed to the region, that being their planning function. «Regional planning [...] cannot be exercised [...] if not in relation to environmental vocations and to human structures that present conditions that are at least solid and functional in their potential» (Gambi, 1964, p.178). In other words, between the 1950s and 1960s we witness a rethinking of the concept of the region, finally demonstrating a greater dynamism within the discipline. «The geographers sense the urgency to reformulate according to updated paradigms a notion (of the region) premised on planning» (Bonora, 1983, p.151).

In order to return to the framework from which we began, the geographic discourse in this case would go towards regionalism: it is in fact the recognition of the manifold fragmentation of Italian territory and of the «mobility of territorial visions that give a cohesion to itself» (Coppola, 1997). Politics, from its part, is late, not intervening in a significant manner in an Italy, that to the eyes of Gambi, still showing itself to be divided into formal and functional regions.

However, one thing is certain: it is only in 1970, as previously stated, that, with the first regional councils, the regions acquire a political and administrative significance, in which they begin to live, using a metaphor of Luigi Einaudi, outside of statistical yearbooks (Gambi, 1964, p.180). They are the years in which the regions were 'dusted off' and it looked as if the “periphery” shouldered many of the problems that the “center” was not able to govern anymore.

The recognition of local territories will be progressively presented in the field of geographic studies, always more focused on the peripheral dimension and local cultures. The idea is one of a very significant connection existing between regionalism and localism; rather, in effect, an overlap of the two debates: one relative to political regionalism and that imposed on local cultures. The theme resumes with much rigor both in politics and in geography. It shows, therefore, a growing attention towards topics where: localism is an transformation process tried by the territorial economic system of our country. The decentralization of such a system is particularly interpreted – at the end of the 1980s – as a «reaffirmation of the historic polycentrism in the Italian context» (Salvatori, 1989, p.19). The words of Franco Salvatori help us to understand the profound belief, concurrently maturing at the heart of geography, of the necessity of an awareness of the mechanisms «of the reorganization of the Italian regional arrangement, specifically of localism and the growth of the periphery» (1989, p.25).

At the level of political debate, the question of reforming the centralized model was brought forward, without however engendering results which were adequately detailed. As Paola Bonora and Pasquale Coppola state, «the regions and the whole regionalist movement that in the 1960s had believed in a real reform of the centralized model, today complain of the limits of the current

arrangement» (Bonora and Coppola, 1997, p.442). But this is another page in the history of Italy that is being written in these recent years, considering that the necessity to revise the territorial division both in administrative and executive terms is still quite present.

Through overlapping visions, suggestions and opinions that have taken shape in the institutional and political debate and to varied geographic interpretations of the regional question, as well as, through the use of opposing theses that have livened the historiographic "Augustan" interpretation of Italy in the last century, it is possible to have an idea of how much regionalisation or regionalism have had a decisive role and how much they have actually affected the definition of the regional 'arrangement' of our peninsula in the Roman era in the beginning years of the empire, as much as in the unitary and post unitary period of modern Italy.

The delay of Italian geography, as a result of the exasperated traditionalism that has long signified it, had certainly contributed in retarding the spatial concepts of the framers of the constitution. From here, the inevitable support given to a shortsighted regionalisation towards the recognition of connections «between regions and spatiality» (Bonora, 1983, p. 8) is oblivious to autonomist instances. The parallel with the "Augustan" historiographic debate is nearly taken for granted, in the sense that it is not possible to exempt oneself from questioning the motives that had pushed the policy of Augustus to 'invent' the regions and the functions that were destined to them. This brings us back full circle to the level of contrast between autonomy and centralism that has characterized the political culture and civil society from the postwar period. And, albeit on different assumptions, such ambivalence still exists.

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«REGIONALISATION» OR «REGIONALISM»: THE TERMS OF A DEBATE STILL IN PROGRESS.

– Regionalisation has to be intended as «an operation that the government has used (in general) to give organicity and institutional uniformity to the human complex that forms it». Regionalism is the «recognition of areas marked by a homogeneity, or better by a particular form of cohesion and order for what concerns, in the first place, the economic structure and the cultural heritage: areas that exist, in many cases, with a clear individuality before a regionalisation».

With these explanations, Lucio Gambi agrees that Regionalisation and Regionalism are two terms and key concepts that emerge in a transversal way from the debates that articulate around the problem of “regionality”. A political-cultural debate that has involved the Italian Society after the Unification, in which the geographical culture of the time took part - although in a latent way, at least at the beginning - and a historiographic debate that from Mommsen onwards has intended to privilege the Augustan Regionalist project, both a "centralist" and "centralizing" vision, both an "autonomist" setting of regionalisation. A speech, hence, that hinges on the idea of Augustan *Regio*, conceived in a different way from the antiquity historians: a thing is to retain that the Regional articulation of Augusto was sustained by a political-administrative purpose, another is sustaining that it had to respond exclusively to census-statistical purposes. At the same level, from the Unity until our days, a comparison of ideas has started, also from a geographical point of view, that has contributed to establish, for better or for worse, the actual regionalistic structure of the Country.

The target of these notes is to consider the key elements of all debates – historiographical, political and institutional, geographical – on the theme amenable to the “regional issue” of the Italian peninsula.

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