

A Prophet of Divine Wisdom?—Giambattista Vico and the Construction of the Pythagorean Myth

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Abstract

In the nineteenth century, the reception of Giambattista Vico's writings came along with nationalist interpretations of his *Scienza Nuova* as an 'Italian Science'. This tendency was based upon an increased examination of the role that the philosopher Pythagoras and his Italian school of Croton played in Vico's hierarchical conception of the ancient Greek and Italian civilizations. Writers, archaeologists and historians used the *New Science* as a metonymic reference work for their own nationalist concepts by updating the Pythagorean myth in accordance with relevant narratives of exclusive genealogies concerning an ancient Italian wisdom. These narratives follow tendencies in Vico's own writings that were quoted strategically and mixed with further interpretations of the *Scienza Nuova* as reliable testimonial for a glorious Italian history. A theological poet characterized by deeper insight into the secrets of nature and some parts of the divine providence, Pythagoras gains his special position in Vico's general conception of knowledge.

Keywords

Pythagoras – Cuoco – Mazzoldi – prophet – Pythagorean myth – Italian nationalism

Myths can be studied from two complementary perspectives: on the one hand, they represent humanity's early symbolical currencies, in the sense suggested by Ernst Cassirer,¹ on the other hand, they can be questioned with regard

¹ Ernst Cassirer, *The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms*. The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, vol. 4, 4 vols., ed. John Michael Krois and Donald Phillip Verene, trans. John Michael Krois

to their significance for the construction of (national) identities. During the nineteenth century, the foundation of a myth supported collective identities built through genealogical claims, in many cases in the quest for the origins of languages, nations and races,² unlike the bourgeois and individual everydayness of myths produced by the cultural industry of the twentieth century and cogently analysed by Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Roland Barthes.³ This foundation was crucial as epistemological support for political issues that had to be convincing in a positivistic sense, without metaphysical references to dynastical or theological doctrines.

In this context, I would like to demonstrate how the elaboration of the so-called Pythagorean myth and its relation to a supposed ancient wisdom of an Italic sect of Pythagorean disciples, as founders of something like a nation-like community on Italian soil, has been developed 'scientifically' by using Giambattista Vico's (1668–1744) writings. The reception of Vico's early writings, and in a very particular way his *Scienza Nuova*, testify to the nationalistic concern to define scholarly traditions created on Italian ground, in order to reconcile these traditions with the demands of elevated scientific standards of the present, for the sake of a modern Italy.⁴ It could be revealing to follow a tendency of historical reception that opposes a philological or sematological

(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 88: "In this context it finally becomes fully clear to us why the oldest form of language in which human historical consciousness can be expressed can be no other than the language of myth."

- 2 See, for example, Stephanie Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) for the process of national identity in Britain. For the case of Indian mythology during the period of British India, see Thomas L. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2004), 42–98. For the general construction of the Aryan paradigm and its systematic discussion by means of comparative linguistics and mythology, see Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge [MASS]: Harvard University Press, 2002), and Dorothy M. Figueira, *Aryans, Jews and Brahmins: Theorizing Authority through Myths of Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 27–49.
- 3 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies: The Complete Edition. In a New Translation* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2012); Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 35: "Odysseus is already a nostalgic stylization of what can no longer be celebrated; and the hero of the adventures turns out to be the prototype of the bourgeois individual [...]."
- 4 Fabrizio De Donno, "Routes to Modernity: Orientalism and Mediterraneanism in Italian Culture, 1810–1910," *California Italian Studies* 1/1 (2010): 12, accessed September 19, 2015, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/92o8o9th>. For this myth and its racist implications, see Markus Alexander Lenz, *Genie und Blut: Rassedenken in der italienischen Philologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Paderborn: Fink, 2014), 80–101.

approach to Vico with his predominance as an archaeological analyst of a universal history.⁵ Such a history was not a *storia ideal eterna*, but rather a revelatory background of facts and discursive monuments in the Foucauldian sense, interpretable as narrative entities. These narratives would become comparable if the historian eliminated their lingual nature and retraced them to commonly accepted sources of texts, serving as accounts of the past. Nonetheless, according to some of Vico's interpreters, which we will examine on the following pages, this science would call itself neither archeology nor textual philology, but rather "history" or "history proper". Michel Foucault describes this process in his *Archeology of Knowledge*:

There was a time when archaeology, as a discipline devoted to silent monuments, inert traces, objects without context, and things left by the past, aspired to the condition of history, and attained meaning only through the restitution of a historical discourse; it might be said that [...] in our time history aspires to the condition of archaeology, to the intrinsic description of the monument.⁶

The luring, colorful and epic language of Vico's attempt to order and understand historical processes turned some of his nineteenth-century readers into archaeologists, who deliberately left behind thoughts on the semantic nature of these 'facts': new myths arose out of the ambivalent aura of a scholarly fragmented personality, whose authority was used to turn historical descriptions into contemporary truths. Thus, on the one hand, the *Scienza Nuova* served as a toehold to open Italian culture—conceived nationally—towards other concepts of universal dynamics of civilization apart from Greek-Roman antiquity, as we can comprehend using the example of the Oriental Studies in Italy, inaugurated by Michele Amari during the second half of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, this essay aims to disclose an alternative panorama of some confused and confusing biographical and intellectual placements of the *Scienza Nuova* into the context of Vico's own earlier writings, in favour

5 Jürgen Trabant describes the late discovery of Vico as a theorist of language and signs after having conceived his writings mainly as important contributions to the theory of history and law. Jürgen Trabant, *Neue Wissenschaft von alten Zeichen: Vicos Sematologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), 148 and 194–221. Unfortunately, the chapter about the German reception of Vico is missing in the English translation. Cf. Jürgen Trabant, *Vico's New Science of Ancient Signs: A study of sematology*, trans. Sean Ward (New York: Routledge History of Linguistics, 2004), xiii.

6 Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. Alan M. Sheridan Smith (Oxford [UK]: Routledge Classics, 2002), 8.

of nineteenth-century nationalist attempts at historiography that concern the figure of Pythagoras as a central allegory for inherited wisdom and early civilization on Italian ground. In many cases, this allegorical construction became one substantial argument that backed the foundations of a politically and epistemologically autochthonous Italian identity, combined with the authority of the *Scienza Nuova*.

However, not only the *magnum opus* but also Vico's earlier writings, which were "found in backpacks of Risorgimento rebels",⁷ *De Constantia iurisprudentis* from 1721, and especially the *Liber metaphysicus* and its first and only volume *De antiquissima Italorum sapientia ex linguae latinae originibus eruenda* from 1710, should be taken into account whenever we discuss the myths and narratives that surround the ideological rise of a future Italian nation.⁸ This broad perspective is important, since the nationalist myth of Pythagoras and his divine knowledge does not appear in such a distinct way in *Scienza Nuova* itself, but in Vico's earlier writings mentioned above. The nineteenth-century interpreters of Vico had to follow an asymmetric reading strategy to discuss Italy's fame based on a recognized philosophical authority. They preserved this authority of a major work in the history of Italian philosophy and mixed its content with other works of a philosopher who was not a proto-nationalist in the sense of some nineteenth-century's defenders of nation-states. Vico's ideas were never limited to one nation but interwoven with the universal notion of a history of humankind. This makes it even more important to understand how Vico could be interpreted in a nationalistic sense.

Perhaps the reception of Vico's *Scienza Nuova* during the Italian *Risorgimento* and its meaning for the Pythagorean Myth as a narrative that favored the construction of an Italian identity could help to discover not only epistemological but also general philosophical and political parallels between other historiographers and their receptions within the context of later nationalisms and national myths, given that Vico seems to use his complex conception of wisdom and knowledge for an almost metaphysical exception within the otherwise regular processes that characterize his respective 'immanent' concepts of universalizing historiography. Reading Vico's statements about Pythagoras, we find a philosopher who became a 'theological poet' with qualities of a secular prophet, elevated by divine providence and his own intellectual skills above the average human knowledge.

7 Mark Lilla, *G. B. Vico: The Making of an Anti-Modern* (Cambridge [MASS]: Harvard University Press, 1993), 2.

8 Antonio Verri, *Cicli storici e rivoluzioni: Da Vico a Rousseau* (Galatina: Congedo, 1990), 129 and 138.

1 Genealogies of Italian Knowledge: Pythagoras, Vico and the *Scienza Nuova*

From the very beginning of its reception during the Risorgimento the *Scienza Nuova* was a *Scienza Italiana*, or rather *Scienza Latina*, an argument against Kantianism as a notably German speculation “that remains in the clouds” (*che sta fra le nuvole*), and that would impertinently ignore French sensationalism.⁹ The economist, jurist and progressive admirer of the French Enlightenment, Gian Domenico Romagnosi (1761–1835), who was born in Salsomaggiore and spent much of his life in Milan, inaugurated this reception among other scholars.¹⁰ Romagnosi’s *Esposizione storico-critica del Kantismo* from 1828 clarifies that any successful ‘Italian’ tradition of philosophy would have to remain on the secure intellectual basis of Étienne Bonnot de Condillac and Antoine Destutt de Tracy.¹¹ According to Romagnosi, this epistemological background would be appropriate to guide the reception and reading of Giambattista Vico’s writings, as he demands in the twenty-ninth chapter of his *Suprema Economia dell’Umano Sapere* (Supreme Economy of Human Knowledge), in citing the Neapolitan philosopher as an example of “a philosophy of positive human knowledge” (*di una filosofia del sapere umano positivo*).¹² Nonetheless, it remains questionable whether Vico’s reception by an Italian readership of the nineteenth century and Romagnosi’s advice can be perceived as paradigmatic interpretations of a philosopher, philologist, historian and jurist who has proved himself a critical but also differentiated reader of Descartes in his early writings. Vico’s interpreters of all philosophical colours, ranging from Benedetto Croce (1866–1952) at the end of the century to Gian Domenico Romagnosi, Vincenzo Gioberti (1801–1852) and Carlo Cattaneo (1801–1869) at its beginnings, tended to sustain the contemporary opposition of idealism and materialism in a rather exclusive way. This opposition served as a central

9 Gian Domenico Romagnosi, “Esposizione storico-critica del Kantismo,” in *Collezione degli scritti sulla dottrina della Ragione del professore G. D. Romagnosi. Parte seconda* (Prato: Guasti, 1835), 178.

10 Francesco Brancato, *Vico nel Risorgimento* (Palermo: Flaccovio, 1969), 139–40. Paola Gambarota emphasizes the importance of Vico for the construction of an Italian national genealogy in terms of language, whereas this essay wants to provide an impression concerning how this genealogy was not only based upon a ‘linguistic’-nationalist lecture of Vico’s writings, but also on concepts of rather ‘material’ progeny, of bloodlines and inherited cultural achievements. Cf. Paola Gambarota, *Irresistible Signs: The Genius of Language and Italian National Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 126.

11 Romagnosi, “Esposizione”, 195 and 200.

12 Gian Domenico Romagnosi, “Suprema Economia dell’Umano Sapere”, in *Collezione degli scritti sulla dottrina della Ragione del professore G. D. Romagnosi*, 165.

discursive precondition beneath the important variability that characterizes the epistemological and ontological concepts of Vico's texts, their common objects of interest.¹³ In this context, within the universal frame of the divine providence that structures the back and forth of the *mondo civile*, the knowledge about humans produced by humans was a result of the long-time observation of cultural 'agents' such as customs, languages and especially laws. The scientific effort of this observation can also be understood as a call to an exclusive insight into God's wisdom. This new science should provide a knowledge that does not completely abolish its "Platonic pattern" regarding an order of nature and history that comprises its rise and fall during phases of civilization and barbarism, which were pre-established by divine invention and divine rules.¹⁴ This platonic pattern remained, even after Cartesian mathematics and physics lost their former metaphysical status in the Aristotelian sense, as soon as Vico disclosed them as man-made sciences.¹⁵

Prominent historical references for this pattern in Vico's oeuvre are the figure and legendary prestige of Pythagoras of Samos, who died in Metaponto, i.e. on Italian soil, in the sixth century BCE.¹⁶ His first scholars and their supposed self-organization as a religious and scientific community in ancient Calabria inspired different lines of reception, which led to speculation about the relation between the far-traveling Pythagoras and his doctrines of numeric harmony. These theorems were not only expressions of order but helped to

13 Benedetto Croce, *The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*, trans. R. G. Collingwood (London: Howard Latimer, 1913); Giulio Bonafede, "Presenza di Vico in Gioberti," *Nuovi quaderni del meridione* VI (1968): 206–37.

14 Pietro Piovani, "Vico without Hegel," in *Giambattista Vico: An international Symposium*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden V. White (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), 116. Regarding some Pythagorean and Platonic paradigms in Vico's epistemological system, see Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York: Random House, 2012), 39–42 and 149–50; cf. in this context Werner Stark, "Giambattista Vico's Sociology of Knowledge," in *Giambattista Vico: An international Symposium*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden V. White (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969).

15 Piovani, "Vico without Hegel," 118.

16 A useful philological compendium as well as a first systematic collection of Pythagorean sources is part of Thomas Stanley's "The History of Philosophy" from 1687. Thomas Stanley, *Pythagoras: His Life and Teaching, a Compendium of Classical Sources. Preface by Manly P. Hall. Introduction by Henry L. Drake*, ed. James Wassermann and J. Daniel Gunther (Lake Worth [FL]: Ibis Press, 2010). As general introductions to one of the most enigmatic figures and its scholars as part of this history, see Leonid Zhmud, *Pythagoras and the Early Pythagoreans*, trans. Kevin Windle and Rosh Ireland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), and Christoph Riedweg, *Pythagoras: His Life, Teaching, and Influence*, trans. Steven Rendall (Ithaca [NY]: Cornell University Press, 2005).

order nature. It is common knowledge that even without any writings passed down by the philosopher himself, Pythagorean references inspired a complex theoretical and textual nexus, pervading the history of ideas and fluctuating between Aristotelean, Platonic and other attempts to establish philosophical systems directly and solely based upon the authority of Pythagorean sources and themes. Mathematical relations between the musical scales and modes, far-reaching disputes concerning shape and position of the Earth, as well as the mathematical Platonism exemplified by the bodies of the geometrical archetypes could be cited as the most prominent ‘tangible’ examples of the philosopher’s paradigmatic impact. They reflect a somewhat ambivalent point of reference between proto-empiricism and the abstract eternity of human ratio.¹⁷ However, these references to Pythagoras also concerned the social and cultural conditions that facilitated the emergence of these eternal ideas in the first place.

The Italian historian Paolo Casini traces the different myths and narratives that have evolved around Pythagoras and his School of Croton—as an Italic sect—in his fundamental study on *Ancient Italian Wisdom: Chronicle of a Myth*.¹⁸ He follows the complex and tense relations between Platonic and Aristotelian concepts that dominated the re-emergence of pre-Socratic Pythagoras in Europe from the thirteenth century onwards, as well as the survival of his prestige after the Copernican Turn. Indeed, such relations determined the reception of the supposed doctrines of the master and his Calabrian scholars by Francesco Petrarca, the Italian Humanistic circle of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, by German and English scholars such as Johannes Reuchlin, Francis Bacon, Robert Fludd and John Dee. In many cases, the philosopher served as an allegory, if not already as a mythical character who embodies the absent yet accessible nature of an elaborated superior knowledge

17 From a modern perspective, it would be delusive to speak of ‘empiricism’ since it was the quest for a “cosmological hypothesis”—and later the Aristotelean order of things—that guided most of the later Pythagorean philosophers like Aristoxenos, rather than the paradigmatic use of experimental arrangements, see Paul Feyerabend, *Problems of Empiricism: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Cambridge [UK]: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 190; Sophie Gibson, “The Influence of Aristotle in Aristoxenus’ Harmonic Science,” in *Aristoxenus of Tarantum and The Birth of Musicology* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 23–38. However, Plato reproached the Pythagoreans, “(Archytas above all) for excessive empiricism”, see Zhmud, *Pythagoras*, 299–300. Especially the case of Pythagoras’ theorem on the triangle is an issue of debate regarding the division between mathematical and physical existence. Cf. Hans Hahn, *Empiricism, Logic, and Mathematics: Philosophical Papers*, ed. Brian McGuinness (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980), 129.

18 Paolo Casini, *L’antica sapienza italiana. Cronistoria di un mito* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998).

that had to be reconstructed but also corrected.¹⁹ Beside these philosophical and philological speculations, we can perceive another discourse that is related to the *genius loci* of the Pythagorean ideas. Since the time of Cicero, it was also a political projection of antiquity that dominated reflections on the Greek philosopher as a benchmark for the current status of civilization. In Cicero's case, it was Roman politics that should be emphasized as an autochthonous achievement in comparison to Greece. Later, in the context of the Neapolitan court, but already with the literary topos that had been diffused by the traveling Bolognese Dominican Leandro Alberti (1479–1552), the notion of *Calabria felix* emerged to condition and accompany the speculations on the origin, development and institution of Mediterranean-Pythagorean wisdom in a propagandistic and compensatory mirror of the tense social present.²⁰

During the late seventeenth century, Naples offered a complex scenery for the epistemological and religious struggles between progressive *Novatori* (reformers) like Giuseppe Valletta and his *Accademia degli Investiganti*, Leonardo di Capua (1617–1695) or Francesco D'Andrea (1625–1698) and conservatives like Domenico d'Aulisio (1649–1717) and the Jesuit Giovanni Battista De Benedictis (1622–1706) as critics of Cartesianism and experimental physics. Pythagoras was situated by both sides within an explicitly Italian environment that defined the ancient knowledge of Magna Grecia as Mediterranean knowledge, born from an autochthonous background of an ideal natural environment.²¹ As Paolo Casini explains by quoting Vico's *Vita di Giambattista Vico scritta da se medesimo* and the reports of his encounters with prominent personalities of Naples' intellectual elite, the young philosopher declared himself a partisan of D'Aulisio's Neoplatonic interpretation of the Pythagorean numeric wisdom.²²

Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that this patriotic Neoplatonism, which was related to the supposed scientific splendour of Magna Grecia, contained germs of an idealism that was much more inclined towards material and relativistic explanations than one would initially

19 Casini, *L'antica sapienza*, 9–15.

20 Casini, *L'antica sapienza*, 150–55. Alberti used this notion in his *Descrittione di tutta Italia, nella quale si contiene il sito di essa, l'origine et le Signorie delle Città et delle Castella* from 1550, changing the ancient trope of *Campania felix* into *Calabria felix*. See also Giovanna Ceserani, *Italy's Lost Greece: Magna Grecia and the Making of Modern Archeology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 27. For Alberti's idealization of "Calabria's natural qualities" as an example for the "complex interplay between the ancient and the modern in Renaissance humanist culture", see Ceserani, *Italy's Lost Greece*, 26–32.

21 Casini, *L'antica sapienza*, 178ff.

22 Casini, *L'antica sapienza*, 182–83.

perceive when understanding Pythagoras as a universalizing standard for explicable harmony. As we shall see, according to Vico, the Pythagorean wisdom was a collective and pre-established knowledge upon which Pythagoras could rely, retraceable etymologically in ancient Italic languages cultivated by an ancient Italic people whose origins are still to be found. Traces of civilization that seduced some of Vico's contemporaries like Mario Guarnacci (1701–1785) or the later-born Luigi Lanzi (1732–1810) into speculation concerning the identity of this tribe, as soon as Giovanni Battista Gelli (1498–1563) and Pierfrancesco Giambullari (1495–1555) transformed the Etruscans linguistically into ancestors of the modern Italians or Tuscans, respectively, in the sixteenth century.²³ Next to the Ionians, for the early Vico they became a collective translator of wisdom and spirit, possibly originating from ancient Egypt, but in any case older than that of the Greek civilizers. Their presence would have held immense importance for the development of Pythagoras' circle of adepts—the “secta italica”²⁴ in Magna Grecia—which could be conceived as a collective genius that paralleled and favoured the institution and divulging of a mostly mathematical wisdom that had been utterly exclusive, even in its collective constitution. In *De antiquissima*, Vico states:

Of learned peoples from whom they could have borrowed these phrases, I find two: The Ionians and the Etruscans. There is no need to say much about Ionian culture, since an Italian school of philosophy—and every learned and outstanding one at that—flourished among the Ionians. Moreover, the Etruscans' doctrine of magnificent sacred rites, a subject in which they excelled, proves that they were a very erudite people.²⁵

23 Mario Guarnacci, *Origini Italiche, O Siano Memorie Istorio-Etrusche Sopra L'Antichissimo Regno D'Italia E Sopra I di Lei Primi Abitatori*, 3 vols. (Lucca: Venturini, 1767); Luigi Lanzi, *Saggio di lingua etrusca e di altre antiche d'Italia per servire alla storia de' popoli, delle lingue, e delle belle arti, tomo I, contiene i preliminari, e il trattato degli alfabeti e lingue degl'Itali antichi* (Rome: Pagliarini, 1789); Domenico Santamaria, *Bernardino Biondelli e la linguistica preascoliana* (Rome: Cadmo, 1981), fn. 90; Lenz, *Genie und Blut*, 92, fn. 168; Casini, *L'antica sapienza*, 202 and 212–17.

24 Casini describes Vico's indecisiveness when it comes to the 'Etruscan scheme', as it appears only sporadically in his writings after 1725 and seemed to have lost his importance compared to other focusses that govern the storia ideal eternal. Cf. Casini, *L'antica sapienza*, 193–96.

25 Giambattista Vico, *On the most ancient wisdom of the Italians: unearthed from the origins of the Latin language: including the disputation with the Giornale de' letterati d'Italia*, trans. L. M. Palmer (Ithaca [NY]: Cornell University Press, 1988), 39. “Nationes autem doctas, a quibus eas accipere possent, duas invenio, Iones et Hetruscos. De Ionum doctrina non est ut multis doceam: cum in iis Italica philosophorum secta, et quidem doctissima praestantissimaque floruerit. Hetruscos autem eruditissimam gentem fuisse, magnificorum

Vico did not long rely on this Etrurian paradigm of a genealogy of knowledge that reached from Egypt to Etruria, from Etruria to Rome and from Rome to Magna Grecia. Rather, he intertwined it with the superiority of the Ionian wisdom on the occasion of two answers that he gave to the anonymous critic who reproached him regarding his lack of scientific method in *De antiquissima*.²⁶ Until 1725, Vico insisted upon the Etruscan origin of ancient Italic wisdom and its Pythagorean traces as one of the “very presuppositions of his ‘own metaphysics’” against Aristotle and Descartes, which simultaneously brought the advantage of an exclusively Italian metaphysical invention.²⁷ Therefore, we cannot deny the peculiar and quite ambivalent character of this ‘collective metaphysics’ when following this genealogical claim in its semantic details.

As we have seen, the wisdom that Pythagoras found among the inhabitants of the land he visited was quite natural to this land, owing to the socially and tribally confined nature of its population, whether of Etruscan or Ionian origin. This tribal focus gains an almost ethnological character when we follow Vico’s assertion that not only Pythagoras but also the Italian inhabitants who seemed to be perfectly ‘fit’ for the development of wisdom have borne the special ‘abstract’ nature of this knowledge almost in their physical condition, which would have produced great mathematical abilities. In *De Constantia iurisprudentis* from 1721, we read:

And because Pythagoras found Italy very erudite, he rather wanted to stay here. Therefore, one can say that he did not establish an Italic sect, but that he improved the already founded community: because it is the nature of things that demands this. That is to say, Pythagoras did not teach that the world would be made up of *water*, like Thales did, the first sage of Greece who flourished not more than hundred years before Pythagoras; neither of *omoiomereia*, as did Anaxagoras, the teacher of Socrates; neither of *atoms*, as did Democritus, Plato’s contemporary, and all corporal philosophers, but of *numbers* which are somehow more abstract than *lines*: what reminds us that the Italic geniuses [lat. orig.: *ingenium*]

doctrina sacrorum, qua praestabat, confirmat.” Giambattista Vico, *Le orazioni inaugurali. Il de itaorum sapientia e le polemiche*, ed. Giovanni Gentile and Fausto Nicolini (Bari: Laterza, 1914), 126.

26 Vico, *On the most ancient wisdom*, 113–86; Vico, *Le orazioni inaugurali*, 201–86. It is regarded as very likely that the Cartesian Bernardo Trevisano (1652–1720) was the critical reviewer who contributed to the *Giornale de’ Letterati*. Cf. Barbara Ann Naddeo, *Vico and Naples: The Urban Origins of Modern Social Theory* (Ithaca and London [NY]: Cornell University Press, 2011), 89; Casini, *L’antica sapienza*, 193.

27 “i presupposti stessi della ‘metafisica propria’”. Casini, *L’antica sapienza*, 189.

were much more refined than the Greek, and their senses [lat. orig.: *sensus*] purer: from where Plato could have established his *eternal ideas as principles of things*; and because of this supremeness of Italic eruditeness the same Plato, in his *Timaeus*, calls his Greeks ignorant of antiquity.²⁸

The Latin “*ingenium*” in its plural form and combined with the notion “*sensus*” contains a broad spectrum of meanings, including biological materiality as much as the immateriality of human consciousness, as well as the hint towards the “nature of things” that would determine Pythagoras’ lucky encounter. This combination of notions established a setting that is quite fitting for anthropological speculations that notice a collective spirit within the individuals of a naturally connected community. In the nineteenth-century’s reception of Vico, we can find all these lexical and narrative germs exploited for whole systems of ethnic myths favouring a young nation. For example, Vico’s mention of Plato and his *Timaeus* would let imagination run wild and bring the inhabitants of sunken Atlantis back into reach of a possible ancestry, as Angelo Mazzoldi’s colourful speculations demonstrate.²⁹

However, let us now take a look at the *magnum opus* and the traces of the Pythagorean myth, as well as the ancient Italians that can be found there. Following Casini, we can state that the Etruscans disappeared from Vico’s philosophical timeline at the time of the *Scienza Nuova*. Nonetheless, is Casini also correct in his thesis that the universality of historical processes, based upon Vico’s interpretation and recuperation of biblical narratives, as well as the focus on mythical characters and primitive poetry, came to “substitute” for the “ancient rational wisdom” of the Italians, and with it, also replaced hierarchies concerning the non-simultaneous nature of civilization regarding a particular pagan nation?³⁰

28 “Cumque Pythagoras Italiam doctissimam invenisset, heic permanere maluit. Quare non sectam is Italicam fundasse, sed fundatam excoluisse dicendum est: quod ipsa rerum natura id flagitat. Non enim Pythagoras Mundum ex *aqua*, ut primo Graeciae sapienti Thaleti, qui centum ferme non ultra annis ante Pythagoram floruit; neque *μοιομερεία*, ut Anaxagorae, Socratis praeceptor; neque *atomis*, ut Democrito, Platonis *σύγχρονο*, omnibus corpulentis Philosophis; sed *numeris*, qui quodammodo sunt *lineis* abstractiores, constare docuit: quod monet ingenia Italica multo Graecis subactiora, et sensibus depuriora fuisse: unde Plato fortasse *rerum principia ideas ipsarum aeternas* statuit; et ab hac Italicae doctrinae praestantia idem Plato in *Timaeo* suos Graecos antiquitatis ignaros notat.” Giambattista Vico, *Il Diritto universale: Parte seconda 'De constantia iurisprudentis'*. Giambattista Vico: Opere, vol. 2, ed. Fausto Nicolini (Bari: Laterza, 1936), 398. Translation by the author.

29 Lenz, *Genie und Blut*, 82–100; Casini, *L'antica sapienza*, 269–73.

30 Casini, *L'antica sapienza*, 195.

This may be true for an 'evolutional' reading of Vico's texts, which, from this point of view, are 'progressing' towards Universalist axioms. It is hardly true for their reception in nineteenth century Italy, as it was possible to maintain the myth of the ancient wisdom by relying on some of Vico's own statements. Pythagoras would soon be transformed into a symbolic figure, one of the *theological poets*, the first sages of the Greek world; however, despite this universal categorization of Pythagorean teachings, the first edition of the *Scienza Nuova* from 1725 leaves no doubt concerning the chronological hierarchy of wisdom in geographical terms: Italy appears as the older sister of Greek civilization. Indeed, this position would be attested by the ancient myths, with Ulysses and Achilles representing the individualized characters of primitive tribes that were governed by meagre austerity related to the brutally applied laws of marriage, before the *heptà sophoí*, the Seven Sages of Greece, arose.³¹ Compared to this dark past, Italy's coasts were already enlightened by the transforming and sublimating techniques of music, sensual luxury and metaphorical narration. Her culture transcended brute physical violence in favour of symbolical rule, represented by female allegories like the Sirens and the sorceress Circe. It was here that Pythagoras could find the perfect setting for his abstract and metaphysical teaching:

This is the reason that we find the antiquity of *the regions of the Italian Maremma* much more *advanced* than the *Greek* ones; because at times of the Trojan war it was here that *Ulysses* found at the coasts of the sea the *Circes* who by means of sensual delights transformed men into pigs; and the *Sirens* who allured by means of the melody of their chant the passengers, and killed them; which are the last customs of the nations: while *Greece* still was severe with its *Achilles*, who didn't want to have wives, albeit great queens, because they were foreigners; severe with the *Ulysses*, who hang the *Proci*. This demonstrates that *the wisdom of Italy is by far older than the wisdom of this Greece*: because while here, *Pythagoras* taught the most secluded metaphysical, mathematical, physical truths concerning the system of the world (we'd like now with the *common chronologers* to make him a *contemporary of King Numa*), in this Greece,

31 According to Socrates' account in Plato's *Protagoras*: Cleobolus of Lindos, Solon of Athens, Chilon of Sparta, Bias of Priene, Thales of Miletus, Pittacus of Mytilene and Periander of Corinth.

the *Seven Sages* had still to emerge, who started about one hundred years after this time [...].³²

Between the “Porci”, i.e. the pigs of the ‘Italian’ sorceress Circe from Terracina, and the suiters of Ulysses’ loyal wife Penelope, the “Proci”, who were killed by the returned husband, there is the separation of a voyage from an already civilized Italy back to the barbarisms of Ithaca. There, the law of marriage justified slaughter and manly furor, as exemplified by the unmarried and merciless Achilles.

Nonetheless, let us focus on the exact location of this civilized Italy, given that the tone ruling the *Scienza Nuova* of 1744 is somewhat different and does not make Italy’s civilization dependent on a single geographical spot. In the first and third editions, Italy as a whole does not seem to appear as the cradle of civilization. Rather, the legendary second King of Rome, Romulus’s successor Numa Pompilius, and with him Rome, were too far away from Magna Grecia for the eternal city to have been able to receive knowledge by a Greek preceptor named Pythagoras—an opinion Vico shared with Livy.³³ In addition, the nature of Pythagorean knowledge is defined in terms of chronology as a rather late and universal phenomenon. In this sense, the Pythagorean doctrines do not represent a “ripost[a] verità metafisic[a]”,³⁴ a “secluded metaphysical truth”, but rather a quite material consistency of a secular and commonly spread cultural achievement, as a direct result of the cultivation of the soil:

[...] for the first human justice was administered by the heroes to men in the first agrarian law above mentioned; and men first became aware

32 “Quindi si ritrova l’antichità delle maremme d’Italia molto più avanzata di quelle di Grecia; perché a’ tempi della guerra troiana qui truova *Ulisse* a’ lidi del mare le *Circi* che co’ piaceri de’ sensi cangiano gli uomini in porci; e le *Sirene* che con la melodia del canto allettano i passeggeri e gli uccidono; che son gli ultimi costumi delle nazioni: mentre la *Grecia* era ancor severa con gli *Achilli*, che non vogliono mogli, quantunque grandi regine, perché straniere; severa con gli *Ulissi*, che impiccano i *Proci*. Perciò si dimostra che *l’sapere d’Italia è assai più antico del sapere di essa Grecia*: perché, mentre qui *Pittagora* insegna le più riposte verità metafisiche, matematiche, fisiche intorno al sistema mondano (ci piace ora, co’ *volgari Cronologi*, porlo a’ tempi di *Numa*), in essa *Grecia* ancora avevano a provenire i *sette Sappienti*, che incominciarono da cento anni dopo [...]” Giambattista Vico, *La Scienza Nuova prima, con la polemica contro gli “Atti degli eruditi” di Lipsia*, ed. Fausto Nicolini (Bari: Laterza, 1931), 138 [240]. Translation by the author.

33 Vico, *La Scienza Nuova prima*, 61 [83], 64 [86]; Giambattista Vico, *La Scienza Nuova seconda, giusta l’edizione del 1744 con le varianti dell’edizione del 1730*, ed. Fausto Nicolini (Bari: Laterza, 1928), vol. 1, 2 vols., 371–72 [763].

34 Vico, *La Scienza Nuova prima*, 138 [240].

of weight, then of measure, and only very slowly of number, in which reason finally came to rest; so that Pythagoras put the essence of the human soul in numbers because he knew of nothing more abstracted from bodies.³⁵

Nonetheless, this universalizing statement still does not affect the concept of exclusivity concerning the autochthonous nature of Italian wisdom in the *Second Scienza*, even if this wisdom had no relations with ancient Rome and her early kings. Pythagoras himself loses his status as a philosopher, although for Italy he becomes even more: in Vico's historiographical setting of the *Scienza Nuova seconda*, he was one of the *Theological Poets*, a political legislator and founder of a nation: "preso per poeta teologo, e fondatore di nazione."³⁶ Moreover, as a founder of a nation, the philosopher remains an autochthonous teacher, given that he and Plato developed their mythical wisdom as happy revelations within the Divine Providence, albeit without help from the biblical revelation as a genealogy that had its geographical basis in the Holy Land. Vico agrees with Lactantius that Pythagoras was not a disciple of the Prophet Isaiah.³⁷ Regarding the relation between *De constantia* and the *Scienza Nuova*, one could confirm what Alain Pons declares for *De universi iuris uno principio (Il diritto universale)* from 1721:

One can see better with regard to the *Scienza Nuova* than to the *Diritto Universale* the points where Vico differs most from the Judeo-Christian view of history. According to him, Christianity reserves eternity for God, temporality being the condition of human creatures [...].³⁸

35 Giambattista Vico, "Poetic Wisdom," in *The New Science of Giambattista Vico. Unabridged Translation of the Third Edition (1744) with the addition of "Practic of New Science"*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca [NY]: Cornell University Press, 1984), Book II, [Section VIII], 270: "[...] perché il primo giusto umano fu ministrato dagli Eroi agli uomini con la prima Legge Agraria, ch'abbiamo sopra veduto; perocché gli uomini sentirono prima il peso, poi la misura, assai tardi il numero; nel quale finalmente si fermò la ragione: tanto che Pittagora, non intendendo cosa più astratta da' corpi, pose l'essenza del anima umana ne' numeri." Vico, *La Scienza Nuova seconda*, 1: 346 [713].

36 Vico, *La Scienza Nuova seconda*, 1: 292 [615].

37 Vico, *La Scienza Nuova seconda*, 1: 44 [54], 60 [94].

38 "On voit mieux dans la *Scienza Nuova* que dans le *Diritto universale* les points sur lesquels Vico s'écarte le plus de la vision judéo-chrétienne de l'histoire. Le christianisme, pour s'en tenir à lui, réserve à Dieu l'éternité, la temporalité étant l'état des créatures humaines [...]." Alain Pons, "'Histoire idéale éternelle' et 'histoire universelle' chez Vico," *Noesis* 8 (2015): 30, accessed September 24, 2015, <http://noesis.revues.org/123>. Translation by the author.

In the statement quoted earlier, it is exactly the same logic of progress that makes the unfolding of this knowledge quite universal and more trivial due to the common laws that govern cultural progress. Here, Vico guarantees the Greek and Italian autochthony not only by the 'geographical' separation of processes when knowledge is passed within a secluded tribal society, but also by the special and exclusive nature that constitutes this wisdom. It represents an individual and almost divine 'intention' of God's truths based upon a "most sublime human science" and not a 'natural revelation' of a collective nature:

[...]; for in all nations of the world the priests kept such doctrine secret even from their own plebs, whence indeed it was everywhere called sacred doctrine, for sacred is as much as to say secret. And from this there emerges a most luminous proof of the truth of the Christian religion: that Pythagoras and Plato, by virtue of a most sublime human science, had exalted themselves to some extent to the knowledge of the divine truths which the Hebrews had been taught by the true God; and on the other hand there arises a weighty confutation of the errors of recent mythologists, who believe that the fables are sacred stories corrupted by the gentile nations and especially the Greeks.³⁹

Myths contain knowledge of a very secular nature, of a practical kind that is applicable to techniques and practices of civilization, and that could be profaned to the common people. But they are also doctrines of individuals who raised themselves a little bit (*alquanto*) to the "knowledge of the divine truths" (*la cognizione delle divine verità*), as proof for the value of man in the eyes of the Divine Providence, or God. With this assertion, Pythagoras was put into the historical position of priests and prophets, as far as they share their intimate relation to God in the form of secret/sacred dogmatic knowledge with their followers. Compared with Vico's own assertions in his *De Constantia iurisprudentis*, where Pythagoras' fellow Calabrians were a chosen community of equal genius, this statement is quite a paradox and contributes an aporetic

39 Vico, "Establishment of Principles. XXXIV," in *The New Science* (1984), Book 1, 49. "[...] in tutte le nazioni del mondo i Sacerdoti custodivano arcana al volgo delle loro medesime plebi; ond' ella ha avuto appo tutte il nome di 'sagra', ch'è tanto dire, quanto 'segreta'. E ne risulta una pruova più luminosa per la verità della cristiana religione, che Pittagora, che Platone in forza di umana sublimissima scienza si fussero alquanto alzati alla cognizione delle divine verità, delle quali gli ebrei erano stati addottrinati dal vero Dio: ed al contrario ne nasce una grave confutazione dell'errore de' Mitologi ultimi, i quali credono che le favole siano storie sagre corrotte dalle nazioni gentili, e sopra tutti da' Greci." Vico, *La Scienza Nuova seconda*, 1: 61 [95].

religious *and* anthropological connotation to this ‘individual’ Pythagoras, if one would combine it with Vico’s speculations about the sophisticated nature of the Pythagorean adepts of Italy. Pythagoras’ numerical concept of nature is no exception in the course of human knowledge and would be rather explicable by historical analysis.

Nonetheless, its “most sublime” development and application by some chosen individuals who—differently than the Hebrews—discovered it independently from God’s revelation and simply by their own strength and virtue, could also be conceived as strong proof for the hierarchy of a tradition that has been fixed in the course of history as superior by divine providence. Be this as it may, when Vico died in 1744, the setting for collective narratives of identity was built. It would be exploited as soon as the national idea of a unified Italy gained power during and after the Napoleonic kingdom, when the Restoration left the small Italian intellectual and political elite quite discontent with their state of dependency from Austria, France and the House of Bourbon.

2 Interpretation and Mythology of Vico: the Pythagorean Myth according to Vincenzo Cuoco and Angelo Mazzoldi

Earlier in the eighteenth century, the studies on ancient Etruria—the “Etruscheria”—had already attained some prestige and were also combined with the Pythagorean Myth.⁴⁰ However, this happened without recurrence to Vico’s speculations. Not only Mario Guarnacci but also the historic Scipione Maffei (1675–1755) and the early archaeologist Filippo Buonarroti (1661–1733) seemed to ignore his writings while developing their methodical and theoretical approaches to the monuments of the ancient Etruscans.⁴¹ The situation changed at the dawn of the nineteenth century, as an amplified interest in a wider array of languages made their relations and genealogical course a topic of historical examination.⁴² In Italy, methodologically differing scholars

40 In earlier times, this relation only existed in a very ‘fugitive’ way; see Casini, *L’antica sapienza*, 201. For the Pythagorean myth as “magna pars” of the genealogical speculations concerning the ancient Etruscans, see Casini, *L’antica sapienza*, 197–206.

41 Casini, *L’antica sapienza*, 216.

42 For a more detailed analysis of the methodical novelties of the nineteenth century and a relativized approach to the “Golden Legend” concerning the rise of comparative linguistics at its beginnings due to the ‘recent discovery’ of similarities between Sanskrit and some European languages by Sir William Jones, see Sylvain Auroux, *L’hégémonie du comparatisme, Histoire des idées linguistiques*, ed. Sylvain Auroux, vol. 3, 3 vols. (Sprimont: Mardaga, 2000), 7–21; Jürgen Trabant, *Mithridates im Paradies: Kleine Geschichte des Sprachdenkens* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2003), 229–38.

like Lorenzo Herváz, Nicolas Wiseman, Bernardino Biondelli and Domenico Comparetti paved the way for a modern Italian comparative philology.⁴³ In many statements they demanded a strictly defined epistemological opposition between archaeology and philology, with the latter initially struggling to find its place within the scenery of historical sciences, which still heavily relied on the exam of 'material' antiquities.⁴⁴ Moreover, the figure of Giambattista Vico reappeared as an important guarantee for knowledge 'made in Italy'. Focusing on the first half of the nineteenth century, the following examples aim to show how the figure of the philosopher and his 'authority' regarding the Pythagorean myth became a scholarly 'deus ex machina' for epistemological positions of all colours and without any esteem for theoretical and chronological shifts within the contents of his writings.

In the *Scienza Nuova* from 1744, where philosophy examines philology under the guiding and clarifying light of the "ideal eternal history" (*storia ideal eterna*), Vico defines philology as "the doctrine of all the institutions that depend on human choice, for example, all histories of the languages, customs, and deeds of peoples in war and peace".⁴⁵ However, the character of this "storia ideal eterna" in its details remained an issue of debate, including the 'philosophy of philology': for some of Vico's interpreters, the authority of his philological or sematological knowledge was only the promising pretext for a mythological thinking that could be extricated from earlier writings published by the man from Naples. Not only did Vico assume the role of a prominent yardstick for the future of an Italian philosophy between Germany and France, as Gian Domenico Romagnosi's and Carlo Cattaneo's examples could prove;⁴⁶ beyond this, his philology was also deliberately conceived as suspended from textual and semiotic characters of tradition. Taken literally, it was almost seen as opposed to that philology methodically reflected by Vico, the philologist, who studied different epochs of mankind in their interdependency with different eras of languages as factors, causes and rules of processes that lead man out of the "wide forest of the world" (*gran selva della terra*).⁴⁷ The author

43 Claudio Marazzini, *Storia e coscienza della lingua in Italia dall'umanesimo al romanticismo* (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1989), 178–81; Trabant, *Mithridates*, 233–35.

44 Lenz, *Genie und Blut*, 108–09 and 148–68.

45 Vico, "Idea of the Work," in *The New Science*, 6: "[...] la dottrina di tutte le cose le quali dipendono dall'umano arbitrio, come sono tutte le Storie delle Lingue, de' Costumi e de' Fatti, così della pace, come della guerra de' popoli [...]" Vico, *La Scienza Nuova seconda*, 1: 9 [7].

46 However, compared with Cuoco and Mazzoldi, their interpretation was critical rather than chauvinistic. See Lenz, *Genie und Blut*, 172–77 and 198–202.

47 Among many other passages and variations, see Vico, *La Scienza Nuova prima*, 40 [47].

and his central work became one, as a new Italy needed a new science. It was not the *Scienza Nuova* as a written text, but rather the authority of an author called Giambattista Vico who could be quoted as a guarantee for self-confident reasoning on Italian ground and who should—on a meta-level—testify the superiority of the Italian history of science by the example of Pythagoras. Nevertheless, the reader should remember that also Vico's own differing narratives concerning Pythagoras' role in Italian history in his three versions of *Scienza Nuova* and his lesser known texts rendered this presumptuous interpretation possible in the first place.

Vincenzo Cuoco (1770–1823), writer, politician, essayist and economist, born in Molise and mainly active in Naples, became famous with his *Saggio storico sulla rivoluzione napoletana del 1799* from 1801. Already in 1804, he published the first tome of an epistolary novel, an alleged Italian translation of a fictive Greek original with the telling title *Platone in Italia*. This novel was conceived as a recourse to Apuleius and Cicero yet above all represents a Romanticist approach of historical fiction against rationalist criticism to purify a Pythagorean-Italian civilization from foreign cultivations and remind his contemporaries that the Italians had once been “virtuous, powerful and happy”.⁴⁸ The manuscript is said to have been discovered in 1774 by Cuoco's grandfather in Eraclea. This can be considered a matter of course, given that “every corner of Southern Italy is rife with ancient treasures” and the land of former Magna Grecia would represent “a temple erected in the name of Pythagoras”.⁴⁹ To fortify this claim, one of the protagonists and the most important interlocutor of the novel, a certain mysterious Cleobolo, is taken as evidence for Plato's epistolary commerce with Italian partners.⁵⁰ However, having read the preface of the text, accepting Cuoco's apologies for the failure of his philological inquiry on sources and etymologies, especially in terms of matters concerning Sicily,⁵¹ the reader finds himself alone with the fact that only the material of a rediscovered text remains as a guide. Obscure, but with hints toward a direction that clearly backs the assertions of earlier speculations on Pythagorean wisdom in Italy.⁵² The focus on Vico is interesting for

48 Vincenzo Cuoco, *Platone in Italia. Traduzione dal Greco*, 3 vols. (Milan: Agnello Nobile, 1804–1806). “[...] virtuosi, potenti, felici.” Cuoco, *Platone*, 1: 2. Fulvio Tessitore, *Lo storicismo di Vincenzo Cuoco* (Naples: Morano, 1965), 34.

49 “[...] ogni angolo dell'Italia meridionale chiude tesori immensi di antichità.” Cuoco, *Platone*, 1: 1. “Tutta questa parte d'Italia è quasi un tempio elevato al nome di Pittagora [...]” Cuoco, *Platone*, 1: 157.

50 Cuoco, *Platone*, 1: 5–7.

51 Cuoco, *Platone*, 1: 10.

52 Casini, *L'antica sapienza*, 238–43.

this purpose. At first glance, especially Vico's *De antiquissima* seems to attest many assertions in the novel. A brief look at the footnotes of the text already tells about the value of this source. Nonetheless, it is not the early Vico who guarantees the quality of the present text, but rather the Vico of the *Scienza Nuova*:

In Greece, until the age of Socrates, real philosophy did not exist, because there was no philosophical language yet. The philosophy that existed was of that kind that Vico calls *poetic wisdom*, which is the philosophy of the still barbarian people. Plato's and Aristotle's influence on the language of Greek philosophy.⁵³

Of course, Plato and with him Aristotle received their wisdom while enjoying the teachings of some descendants of the first Pythagoreans. As a contemporary of Plato, Cleobolo explains: "If I had come to Italy in another time, maybe I would not have found it easy to be admitted among the Pythagoreans. At that time, they established a *school* with many grades [...]"⁵⁴ Another part of the novel,—which is entitled "Discourse of Clinia", integrates Vico's magnum opus into a footnote that only says "Scienza Nuova", without providing clearer detail and confirming by this hint that the philological thinking of Vico has already been an important part of the ideas dominating the ancient world.⁵⁵ As if he had read the *Scienza Nuova*, the interlocutor of Clinia declares:

Therefore, for the first nations the wise men were no others than the priests themselves: the science of nature was nothing but the science concerning auguries, i.e. the will of the gods; the science of man was nothing but the science of sacrifices, i.e. the ways how to dispose of the will of those gods which the common people fears.⁵⁶

53 "In Grecia fino all'età di Socrate non esisteva vera filosofia, perché non esisteva ancora linguaggio filosofico. La filosofia ch'esisteva era quella che Vico chiama *sapienza poetica*, ch'è la filosofia de' popoli ancor barbari. Influenza di Platone e di Aristotile sulla lingua della filosofia Grecia." Cuoco, *Platone*, 3: xi–xii. Translation by the author.

54 [Cleobolo:] "Se fossi venuto in Italia in altri tempi, forse non avrei trovato facile l'esser ammesso tra Pittagorici. Essi allora formavano un *collegio*, in cui i gradi eran molti [...]" Cuoco, *Platone*, 1: 70–71.

55 Cuoco, *Platone*, 1: 87, fn.

56 [Interlocutor of Clinia:] "Quindi per i primi popoli, i sapienti non eran altri che gli stessi sacerdoti: la scienza della natura non era che la scienza degli augurj, cioè della volontà degl'Idii; la scienza dell'uomo non era che la scienza de' sacrificj, cioè de'modi di propiziarsi la volontà di quegl' Iddii che il popolo temeva." Cuoco, *Platone*, 1: 87.

Aside from this rather literal inclusion of Vico's religiously turned "verum quia factum" concept of science into the footnote and under the textual shelter of the *Scienza Nuova*, Vico's earlier assertion of the finer senses that would lead the inhabitants of ancient Italy to mathematics and abstraction also reverberates in this historicized narrative. It becomes part of the plot as, for example, the Youth of Magna Italia, formerly known as Magna Grecia, seems an exception of a special kind among other generations of adolescents, their minds being spontaneously inclined towards reason and logic by benevolence of nature. A certain Ponzio demands:

Praise the gods, he said, o young people, because they awarded you the gift of minds so well formed that in that age in which all the others, hauled off by the fervours of their senses, consume all the force of their intellect with vain pleasures, in order that they then expect premature, miserable and disgraceful age, you turn your mind at those objects which can make you worthy of the respect of others and of the esteem of yourselves.⁵⁷

Despite being quite a MacPherson-like piece of Romanticist fantasy, the example of the patriotic writer Cuoco clearly shows that the nineteenth century found a renewed taste in blurring the science of myths as symbolic languages into a science of facts that could create the real science of ancient times. This science was still to be constructed as an exclusive Italian invention. In this context, the myth of Pythagoras became the myth of Giambattista Vico, genius in the science of history, on an intratextual system of references.

Another example of this inclination towards an archaeological Vico, the historian and playwright Angelo Mazzoldi (1799–1864),⁵⁸ constituted a source of inspiration for Vincenzo Gioberti (1801–1852), a historian and partisan of the Neoguelfi. The latter would conceive the philosopher, in his widely received *Primato morale e civile degli Italiani*, as a propaedeutic historian of Christian telos in the history of the god chosen Pelasgian people. Even if Gioberti

57 "Date lodi agli Dei, disse egli, o giovanetti, perché vi abbian fatto dono di animi tanto ben formati che in quella età in cui tutti gli altri trascinati dalle passioni de' sensi consumano tutto il vigor della mente dietro vani piaceri, onde ne aspettan poi prematura, misera e vergognosa vecchiaja, voi lo rivolgete a quegli oggetti che vi possono rendere degni di stima degli altri e della vostra." Cuoco, *Platone*, 1: 232.

58 For biographical details of this eccentric figure, see Antonio Carrannante, "Angelo Mazzoldi," in *Dizionario degli Italiani*, vol. 72 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2008), accessed September 29, 2015, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/angelo-mazzoldi_\(Dizionario_Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/angelo-mazzoldi_(Dizionario_Biografico)/).

reproached Vico for his neglecting distance to the civilizing role of the classic antiquity in favour of speculations about earlier periods of humankind.

Gioberti's source, Mazzoldi, however, was not an interpreter of Vico in the secularizing sense of Romagnosi's and Cattaneo's positivistic reception, but rather viewed the philological analysis of Vico's writings as an encounter with fragments of material nature, not as language but as texts. In his extensive essay *Delle origini italiane e della diffusione dell'incivilimento italiano all'Egitto, alla Fenicia, alla Grecia e a tutte le nazioni asiatiche poste sul Mediterraneo* (About the Italic Origins and the Diffusion of the Italian Mode of Civilization in Egypt, Phoenicia, Greece and among all the Asian Nations which are put at the Mediterranean Sea) from 1840, Giambattista Vico was taken quite seriously as a historian; imperfect, indeed, yet on the right methodological track. According to Mazzoldi, Vico was one of the greatest theorists dedicated to the history of nations and the quest for universal historical laws, although he was not a philologist, as Mazzoldi resolutely states:

Lanzi wanted to endow us with an eternal and constant history of scriptures and writings, Vico with one of the nations, but neither of them will help us to prove the primacy of one language or scripture over another without the guidance of the historical studies, their absence being the reason for the delusions of so many famous linguists who write till this day.⁵⁹

In what concerns Pythagoras, it is clear that by using this method of 'real historiography' the Greek philosopher could be quite easily integrated into an Italian narrative, albeit without the help of Giambattista Vico, given that there were other historically and philologically renounced references upon which to rely:

Pythagoras, whom the Greeks consider the founder of their philosophical schools, belongs to the Italians. Clement of Alexandria, based on the belief of Hippobotes, took him as descendant of Samos; but in contrast, Aristossanos, Teopompos and Aristarchos deemed him to be

59 "Il Lanzi vorrebbe darci una istoria perpetua e costante delle lettere come già il Vico delle nazioni; ma niuno ci condurrà giammai a stabilire la preminenza dell'una lingua o scrittura sull'altra, senza la guida degli studi istorici, alla cui mancanza si debbono ascrivere i deliri di tanti illustri linguisti che scrissero fino a' di nostri." Angelo Mazzoldi, *Delle origini italiane e della diffusione dell'incivilimento italiano all'Egitto, alla Fenicia, alla Grecia e a tutte le nazioni asiatiche poste sul Mediterraneo di Angelo Mazzoldi* (Milan: Guglielmini e Redaelli, 1840), 229.

Tuscan; and we surely agree with them, for their opinion is backed by a circumstance registered by Hermippos who can consider himself as contemporary, [...].⁶⁰

Once again, it is the *Scienza Nuova* that lends its sparkling name to far-reaching plans. It could precede the development of a new Italian Science of history that would prove the paradigm of the autochthonous nature of an early Italian knowledge, cultivated according to Mazzoldi's own scientific narrative by the descendants of ancient Atlantis. This thesis should be made traceable not by inquiries with new methods of historical comparison of languages that were recently inaugurated in Germany, but rather by archaeology and textual philology.⁶¹ Soon, Mazzoldi's colleague Aurelio Bianchi Giovini (1799–1862), who tended towards a modernized Italian philology under the guidance of the historical comparative method, following the theories of German philologist Franz Bopp, attacked him harshly. In Bianchi Giovini's polemic writings against Mazzoldi, the name of the Neapolitan philosopher Vico was deliberately omitted.

Nevertheless, even if Vico's philological 'method' could not match the new comparative standards that scholars like Bianchi Giovini demanded, he still represented an important figure for national self-esteem in scientific matters.⁶² It should have become clear, however, that some discursive 'germs' that facilitated the above-mentioned attempts to force Vico's writings altogether into a paradox and contradictory reception can even be found in some parts of his magnum opus where natural particularities and universal providence are combined in single persons, conceived as 'poets of wisdom'. In this narrative, the individual excelling nature of a historical character mingled with a collective genealogy of wisdom, engendered, or at least provoked, by the very nature of the paradigm of a *storia ideal eterna*: an eternal history that allow sufficient room for some hierarchically established episodes of superior and inferior

60 "Pittagora, tenuto dai Greci per fondatore delle loro scuole filosofiche, appartiene agli Italiani. Clemente Alessandrino, sulla fede d'Ippoboto, tenne che fosse di Samo; ma Aristossano, Teopompo ed Aristarco tennero in vece che fosse Toscano; e noi ci accostiamo sicuramente all'opinione di questi ultimi, sì perché essa è avvalorata da una circostanza notata da Ermippo, che può riguardarsi come contemporaneo [...]" Mazzoldi, *Delle origini italiane*, 113.

61 Lenz, *Genie und Blut*, 82–87.

62 Lenz, *Genie und Blut*, 90–93; see Bianchi-Giovini's two polemic writings against Angelo Mazzoldi where the name of Vico does not appear: Aurelio Bianchi Giovini, *Ultime osservazioni di A. Bianchi Giovini sopra le opinioni del Signor Angelo Mazzoldi intorno alle Origini Italiane* (Milan: Pirota, 1842), and *Sulle origini italiane di Angelo Mazzoldi. Osservazioni di A. Bianchi Giovini* (Milan: Pirota, 1841).

civilization. Pythagoras, who had access to some parts of the otherwise completely opaque divine knowledge, was the most prominent example of the discursive ease with which mythology could prove its epistemological proximity to science, whenever science itself is seen as a principle of history while still being individually revealed knowledge up to a certain point. The Greek philosopher was an eminent personification of the scientific principle and as 'poeta teologo' simultaneously its prophet. Ironically, on a meta-level, Vico himself so eloquently demonstrated this narrative of personified scientific knowledge in history, as soon as the narrator of universal historical processes became a mythical figure within the story of a still-to-be-written Italian history of science.

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