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Battisti as Geographer

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Cesare Battisti, journalist from the Italian region of Trentino, deputy from Socialist Party in Vienna, leader of the Irredentism and volunteer for the Italian Army, was a great Italian and a great geographer too.

Battisti revealed himself among the students of Giovanni Marinelli as the most sensitive one in catching the newest geographical currents of thoughts, which were in development across Europe during the last part of the XIX century; while he was registered to several universities, passing from Vienna to Graz, Turin and Florence, he used to verify continuously his empiric researches about Trentino with the most updated theories.

His archive, so rich in studies and research projects for the years 1896-1900, holds on to three very crowded notebooks about Human Geography ¹, coming from the lectures of Marinelli, and which constituted Battisti's ground for continuative confrontations with the scholars from the Transalpine Region. During the same years he started working together with Renato Biasutti on the publishing of the avanguardist review «La Cultura Geografica» («*The Cultural Geography*»); in the mean time he also held a thick correspondance with the geographer Giovanni Battista Trener, with whom set the scientific studies magazine «Tridentum», so named since the first title «Venezia Trentina» («*Trentinian Venice*») was defeated by Austrian police.

Due to his avanguardist nature, Cesare Battisti used to comfortably move within the field of Social Sciences; the correspondance with Assunto Mori and Arcangelo Ghisleri and the dialogue with the other young students of Marinelli – such as Giovanni De Agostini- showed Battisti's predisposition to the interdisciplinary approach. He started the translation of the Friedrich Ratzel's fundamental publication *Politische Geographie*, of which he left us two hundred pages written with forceful and clear style ².

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¹ The three notebooks, kept at ABT together with the other university notes, have the following numbering: nr. 11, of 22 hand written pages, containing the notes about eight lectures of "Human Geography" from November 24th to December 17th 1897; nr. 17, about the development of Human Geography as autonomous science; nr. 20, with seven undated lectures, 33 hand written pages, about the effects of latitude on humankind.

² Friedrich RATZEL *Politische Geographie*, M. Incherth und Leipzig Oldenbourg, 1897. About F. Yuki, geographer and professor in Munich (1876-1886) and Lipzig (1896-1904) see: Gunter BUTTMANN, *Friedrich Ratzel; Leben und Werk eines deutschen Geographen 1844-1904*, Stuttgart, 1977.

About the relevance of Ratzel's work also Otto Hintze agreed: this, within a review, underlined its value as historian and State scientists: « In der Tat ist es ebenso ein Buch für Historiker und Staatswissenschaftler, ja ich habe den Eindruck, daß sein Inhalt, zum großm Teil wenigstem, sich noch

Confronting the edition date of Ratzel's work (1897) with the letters Battisti wrote his fiancée, where he mentions the activity of translation he was carrying out at those days (1899), and the continuous reference to the scientific research of the German scientists made by Battisti in the notes from the lectures of Giovanni Marinelli kept at the Battisti Archive, it is possible to guess how quickly the most updated statements from the German Science used to be taken in and debated by the Florentine school of Giovanni Marinelli and Pasquale Villari.

It is necessary to underline that, after little less than one hundred years, still the work of Ratzel never has been translated into Italian. Battisti didn't finish his translation, because of his choice to settle in Trento from the spring 1900, where he got involved into a very intensive activity within Politics, publishing and scientific popularization through the review «Tridentum»; all these activities led him to give up his academic work which, between the years '97 and '98, awarded him with brilliant goals, such as the prize-giving and publication of his graduation thesis, the funding of the review «La Cultura Geografica» («*The Geographic Culture*»), the precious contribution to the III Italian Geographic Congress, until the constant production of original researches about his region Trentino. After Battisti's withdrawal from the academic world, the popularization of the main German geographer's works didn't find in Italy enthusiastic supporters. As Ernesto Sestan used to suggest, this fact would probably deserve more attention, investigating how much was been influenced by the simplifications which aimed to show Ratzel's geographic politics as forerunner of the "living space" theory - notoriously a strong point of the National Socialism -.

The time in which an open scientific debate was possible before the national socialist pushes prevailed is surely too short, roughly corresponding to the second half of the '800, and this justifies the objections of those who foresee huge difficulties toward any proposal of re-opening that topic; but it will be only by walking down this way that it will be possible to give a just consideration to the activity of those who, like Battisti, worked in a field of interactions between the Italian and German scientific world. The very thick correspondence between Battisti and Trener testimony also the existence of a happy and profitable exchange between the school of Florence of Marinelli and the Viennese one of Albert Penck, not by chance happened during the same period of the interest of Battisti toward Ratzel's work.

Talking about the main work of Battisti, «Il Trentino» published in 1898, it is necessary to underline how the monography of Battisti received very flattering comments and reviews, as in Italy like in Germany. Many among the Italian geographers who met him in his capacity of very active secretary for the third Italian Geographic Congress – Filippo de Magistris will remind him in this role with touching words in July 1916- welcomed with enthusiasm his book. In the extensive review published by Gennaro Mondaini to «Rivista Italiana di Sociologia» («*Italian review of Sociology*»)- about which the extract kept in Battisti's archive carries the author's inscription «To Cesare Battisti dearest friend»- it is pointed out how in the chapter about the distribution of population made according to the altitude it is shown «more than anywhere else his (Battisti's) brilliant and smart mind. Geographer and sociologist merged together to give us a remarkable page of Human Geography». And it is here where, touching on a supposed limit of Battisti's work, Mondaini contributes even more to exalt Battisti's figure, recalling Ratzel's and Auerbach's studies on the relevance of historic analysis as tool of understanding for the anthropo-geographic datum about the expansion and contraction of races, and complaining about the lack of this kind of research in Battisti's work about Trentino and Tyrol: «The accurate study of this ethnic movement, such as the author would have been able to carry out, would have made the erudite and conscientious work of Battisti about Trentino even more full». With intent Battisti then and later didn't want to face the issue that Mondaini explicitly recalls, which is the expansion of Italian race

besser in ein System der Staatslehre einfügen würde als in den Rahmen dieser neuen Disziplin der allgemeinen politischen Geographie ».

to the North: he just studied his Trentino, taking note of what was the anthropic datum given by history. This is how he starts his essay about Trentino: «Not all the region included between the limits of the physical Italy coincides with the borders of the linguistic Italy. The differences between the two Italies do not consist in small ramifications, but large territories on the southern side of the Alps, occupied by not-Italian populations». After a brief historical excursus about the forming of this Italian region, he concludes: «So described, the historical region of Trentino almost perfectly coincides with the current political borders toward the Italian Kingdom and with the administrative ones toward Tyrol, which enclose that extension of the land bureaucratically called Territory of I.K. Lieutenancy Section of Trento, or Italian Southern Tyrol, and which, coherently with the historical tradition, we define with the name of Trentino». These and only these are going to be the anthropo-geographic terms Battisti will refer to during all his scholar activity. Whoever seeks in his papers any scientific argument which tries to justify the expansion of the Italian element to the detriment of the German and Tyrolese one, would waste his time. The ideal of the Europe of Peoples belonging to Mazzini's school of thought, was achievable in Battisti's mind just through a balanced development of nationalities, small or big, and this certainty rose primarily from his scientific research.