



HAL
open science

Representing the early republic(s) abroad: Mazzei's ambassadorship to Europe between parallel diplomacy and propaganda

Francesca Genesio

► To cite this version:

Francesca Genesio. Representing the early republic(s) abroad: Mazzei's ambassadorship to Europe between parallel diplomacy and propaganda. *Projet 1776-2026, Épopées révolutionnaires: Mémoires révolutionnaires dans l'histoire et l'historiographie du monde atlantique (1730-1830).*, Oct 2021, Aix-en-Provence, France. hal-03594457

HAL Id: hal-03594457

<https://amu.hal.science/hal-03594457>

Submitted on 2 Mar 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Representing the early republic(s) abroad: Mazzei's ambassadorship to Europe between parallel diplomacy and propaganda.

Francesca Genesisio, Aix Marseille Univ, LERMA, Aix-en-Provence, France.

Philip Mazzei's story is largely one of high hopes and unfulfilled aspirations. Viewed retrospectively, his greatest contribution to the American revolutionary cause somewhat frustratingly appears to have been one of dedicated propaganda, often involving both literal and figurative "translations" or reinterpretations of American events for European audiences whom, as he believed, had been misled in their visions of America by inaccurate renditions of the nation's revolutionary memory - to refer to the title of today's seminar¹.

Born in 1730 in Poggio a Caiano, a small village some 20 kilometers north-west of Florence, Mazzei – whom casual observers often and somewhat inaccurately refer to as an Italian version of Thomas Paine - moved from London, where he had resided since 1756, to Virginia in 1773, with the intention of setting up a business and introducing the cultivation of Tuscan crops such as grapevines and olives into the colony. Upon frequenting the local political

¹ The idea of presenting Mazzei as a propagandist is well-established. Most scholars having dedicated some time to Mazzei have come to similar conclusions, expressed in different ways. In his book *Les Révolutions (1770-1799)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), Jacques Godechot refers to Mazzei as one of the important European propagandists who, like La Fayette and Kosciuszko, participated in the War of Independence, later returning to Europe to advocate the American cause. In her 1965 publication *Tra riformismo illuminato e dispotismo napoleonico: esperienze del « cittadino americano » Filippo Mazzei* (Ed. di Storia e Letteratura, 1965) p. 31, Sara Tognetti Burigana described Mazzei as "...savio organizzatore d'una intensa campagna di propaganda in favore degli Stati Uniti d'America," which can be translated as "...knowledgeable organizer of an intense propaganda campaign in favor of the United States of America." Similarly, in the introduction to her monumental edition of Mazzei's selected writings, Margherita Marchione writes, "Propaganda written from different points of view was an important part of the prerevolutionary debate, and Mazzei's participation cannot be ignored." She later adds, "Throughout the war and the peace negotiations Mazzei was a propagandist and a pamphleteer, and his exposition and translation of American ideals for a wide European readership was a contributing factor to the success of the American cause". *Philip Mazzei: Selected Writings and Correspondence*, ed. Margherita Marchione, vol.1 (Prato: Edizioni del Palazzo, 1983) xx-xxii. See also and especially Edoardo Tortarolo, *Illuminismo e rivoluzioni biografia politica di Filippo Mazzei* (Milano: F. Angeli, 1986); and Edoardo Tortarolo, "Filippo Mazzei e la costruzione della memoria rivoluzionaria," in Renato Pasta (ed.), *Agli Albori delle Democrazie Moderne: Filippo Mazzei 1730-1816* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2018) 3-20.

elites, however, Mazzei's enthusiasm for agriculture quickly gave way to an even greater enthusiasm for the American cause, which resonated deeply with his own beliefs in freedom and equality – nurtured since early youth – and which he embraced wholeheartedly, attempting to be of use as best he could for the better part of his mature life. More than anything else, Mazzei hoped he could one day occupy a diplomatic position, using his linguistic, cultural and networking skills to mediate between American and European interests on behalf of the Young Republic. Jefferson demonstrated awareness of his abilities early on and in 1778 recommended the Florentine to John Hancock, in a letter in which he enthusiastically proposed that Mazzei be sent to Europe as an under-cover agent to negotiate a loan from either the Grand Duchy of Tuscany or the Republic of Genoa on account of Congress: "One of the gentlemen of whom I spoke above (Mr. Mazzei) is I think more likely to negotiate this matter to our advantage than perhaps a native alone," he wrote, continuing,

He possesses first rate ability, is pretty well acquainted with the European courts, and particularly those abovementioned, is a native of Tuscany with good connections and I have certain proofs of the Grand Duke's personal regard for him. He has been a zealous whig from the beginning and I think may be relied on perfectly in point of integrity. He is very sanguine in his expectations of the services he could render us on this occasion and would undertake it on a very moderate appointment.²

Much to the Florentine's regret, however, the official appointment on behalf of Congress he so desired, never came. (And this was actually the first and last time that Jefferson recommended him for such a position). The closest he got was an incursion into parallel diplomacy under Virginian sponsorship during the War of Independence. Naturalized Virginian in 1774, Mazzei was sent to Europe in 1779 to negotiate a "Loan of Gold and Silver to the Commonwealth of Virginia" for the purpose of "reducing the quantity of paper circulation and

² Thomas Jefferson, "Thomas Jefferson to John Hancock", Albemarle in Virginia, 19 October 1778, doc n. 67 of *Philip Mazzei: Selected Writings and Correspondence*, ed. Margherita Marchione, Vol.1, (Prato: Edizioni del Palazzo, 1983) p. 137. Mazzei was never handed a congressional diplomatic commission, but later undertook this journey to Europe on account of Virginia, as we shall see.

for carrying on the war against Great Britain”³. His principal targets remained the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the Republic of Genova, where he hoped he could find both money and support. The commission, signed by then Governor Patrick Henry, was seconded by another document granting Mazzei authority as the state’s commercial agent in Europe, with a mandate to establish trading relations between Virginia and those European countries whose support he would manage to secure.

Mazzei’s mission was a failure. Once in Europe, he quickly realized that his diplomatic credentials did not have the official status he had hoped for. Franklin, who had been representing the New Nation in Paris since 1776 and who was then acting as Minister Plenipotentiary, met the news of Mazzei’s Virginian appointment with cold hostility, fearing that individual states’ diplomatic initiatives would lead to a fragmentation of the United States’ bargaining powers in Europe and complaining - as Mazzei wrote Jefferson in April 1780 - that “so many people had come to Europe from every State on that kind of business, that they had ruined our credit, and made the money-men shy of us.”⁴

Franklin’s refusal to second Mazzei’s mission in Europe was not his only problem. Having been captured at sea by British privateers upon setting sail from York Town in the summer of 1779, Mazzei had thrown all his official papers overboard to conceal the true nature of his journey. Despite sending multiple letters to Virginia asking for a copy of his credentials, these only reached him in August 1781, only months before he was formally recalled, in January 1782.⁵ While transatlantic communication was extremely difficult and uncertain at the time, Mazzei had begun suspecting Franklin of willfully retaining his correspondence in order to thwart his unilateral diplomatic endeavors. While Margherita Marchione, one of the most established scholars of Mazzei - having spent a large part of her career collecting and editing Mazzei’s writings and correspondence - advances that Mazzei’s

³ Filippo Mazzei, “Instructions as agent for Virginia”, 22 April 1779, document 74 in Margherita Marchione, *Philip Mazzei: Selected Writings and Correspondence*, ed. Margherita Marchione, vol.1 (Prato: Edizioni del Palazzo, 1983) 144 and 147.

⁴ These are Mazzei’s words, relating Franklin’s reaction to the news of Mazzei’s appointment in a Letter to Thomas Jefferson, dated Paris, 21 April 1780, document 97 in Marchione vol 1., 218.

⁵ January 31st 1782 was the date at which Mazzei’s recall was formally decided, but the Florentine only received notice of it the following September. “From Benjamin Harrison”, Virginia, in Council, 31 January 1782, in ed. Marchione, *Selected Writings*, vol 1. P. 331-2. Mazzei only received this letter seven months later, at the very end of August 1782, while he was still in Florence.

credentials may, in fact, have been retained by Bancroft, Franklin's secretary and a British spy, the matter was enough to ruin the relations between the two men for good.⁶

Irrespective of the unlucky circumstances of the loss of his papers, historians have noted that it is unlikely that Mazzei's mission could have succeeded anyway⁷. Peter Leopold, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, was an anglophile (or actually, as Mazzei later explained to King Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski, more of an "ineffable gallophobe") and remained hermetic to Mazzei's relentless lobbying and insistent letters (of which there were 11 in total)⁸. In Genoa, the likelihood of his obtaining a loan was just as slight owing to the stringent, below-market-rate negotiation margins that Virginia's mandate allowed for⁹. Prior to Mazzei's arrival, Franklin had already tried raising money in Genoa on behalf of Congress at an interest rate of 6% and failed. Mazzei's Virginian commission only allowed him to offer 5%.¹⁰ The Florentine complained about this situation several times in his letters, explaining that investors in Genoa had recently made important capital placements in France and England, "tempted by the advantageous annuities of France, and the high interest given by the other".¹¹ Implicit in this statement was the idea that money could indeed be found, if only the borrowers would show themselves willing to pay adequate interest for it. He also emphasized the unhealthy competition existing between Congress and individual states in securing loans, somewhat impudently building a case for a conversion of his Virginian mandate into a national one by stating that investors in Genoa would be more inclined to negotiate with an Italian-speaking Congressional agent than with either the Italian representative of a single state or

⁶ Marchione, *Selected Writings*, 171.

⁷ Marchione, 171-2.

⁸ This notwithstanding the Grand Duke's alleged acknowledgement that Mazzei had "predicted all that has come to pass" in matters regarding British and American relations. Mazzei uses this quote several times in his letters, flaunting the accuracy of his political judgment. The quote originally appears in "Notes for a Newspaper article", composed in 1780, recorded in Marchione, vol. 1, 247. See letter to SA 13 October 1788 for explanation of Peter Leopold's Anglomania, which was actually more of a "gallophobia".

⁹ See: "Letter to Jefferson", Paris, 21 April 1780, in Marchione, vol.1, 218-20; "Letter to John Adams", dated Florence, October 20, 1780, in Marchione, vol. 1, 264-5; "Letter to Thomas Jefferson", Florence, 20 October 178, in Marchione, vol 1., 248-9 and "Letter to Jefferson" dated Paris, 21 April 1780, in Marchione, vol 1., 218-220.

¹⁰ "Letter to Jefferson", Paris, 21 April 1780, in Marchione, vol.1, 218-20.

¹¹ "Letter to John Adams", dated Florence, October 20, 1780, in Marchione, vol. 1, 264-5.

with English speaking congressional diplomats lacking knowledge both of the Italian language and of its culture. Needless to say, this attempt came to no avail.

Stranded in Europe with no official mandate, no news from Virginia and no support, all the Florentine could do was endeavor to be of service otherwise. Unable to “represent” or stand for his adopted country diplomatically, Mazzei undertook to “represent” it ideologically, using his growing network and writing skills to paint and promote positive images of America’s struggle for independence in Europe. In other words, Mazzei’s abortive incursion into parallel **diplomacy** turned into an arguably more successful **self-commissioned** ambassadorship of interpretative propaganda.¹²

Mazzei wrote several propagandistic essays and short pamphlets while in Europe between 1779 and 1783¹³. His troublesome time as an agent for Virginia, however, was not the first occasion he had seized to build support for the American cause. Nor would it be his last. His first stay in Virginia, between 1773 and 1779 had coincided with the build-up to the war. Caught up in the revolutionary fervor of his immediate environment, which included figures such as Jefferson, Madison, Washington, Mason, Page, Henry, Bannister, Blair and the Randolphs among others, Mazzei had contributed numerous essays, letters and newspaper articles promoting American independence and expressing his criticism and disavowal of everything British: from claims to sovereignty over the colonies, to affirmations of the superiority of their constitution.

Mazzei’s propaganda during this first phase of the war looked both inwards and outwards, trying to mobilize support for the cause both domestically and abroad. In words very similar to Thomas Paine’s, as early as 1774, he had emphasized the need to make revolutionary principles intelligible to the common man, claiming, “Practitioners of fine writing will forgive me. They need no one to write for them. I write for people who, endowed

¹² c/f note 1.

¹³ Examples of such works include 1780 – “Memorandum on the United States to the Count de Vergennes” (1780), “Reasons why the American States cannot be accused of having rebelled” (1781), “Reflections tending to predict the outcome of the present war” (1781), “Argument proposing to show by what means France could derive the greatest and most permanent benefits from the current American Revolution” (1781), “History of the Beginning, Progress and End of Paper Money in the United States” (1782), “Riflessioni su i mali provenienti dalla questua, e su I mezzi d’evitargli” (1782 published in 1799). This list is non-exhaustive.

with good common sense, did not acquire book learning¹⁴." Similar articles and letters, along with translations of official documents such as the *Declaration of Independence*, were written for foreign audiences, mostly Italian, and sent to popular newspapers like *Notizie del Mondo* and *Gazzetta Universale* for publication¹⁵.

It wasn't until the late 1780s, however, that Mazzei's engagement as a propagandist reached its full maturity. Having returned to Europe under unclear circumstances in 1785 after a short stay in Virginia, Mazzei found himself in Paris, largely out of money, almost begging for a diplomatic posting, and spending his time among the liberal intellectuals and aristocrats of the time, first among whom were Jefferson, Lafayette, Condorcet, La Rochefoucauld and du Pont de Nemours. This third phase of propaganda corresponds with the writing of his *Recherches historiques et politiques sur les Etats Unis d'Amérique Septentrionale*¹⁶ which he undertook between 1785 and 1788, upon realizing that Europeans only had a superficial understanding of American society and institutions and were being presented with what he considered to be erroneous accounts of both the revolution and of the nation's colonial history.

The *Recherches*, written in Italian, translated into French by Louis-Joseph Faure with occasional contributions by the Condorcets and published in 1788, had originally started as a minor project aimed at rejecting Mably's interpretation of recent American history and politics in his *Observations sur le gouvernement et les loix des Etats-Unis d'Amérique (Observations on the Government and Laws of the United States of America)* (1784). The refutation had been the subject of a shorter, satirical paper which in his *Memoires* Mazzei recalls having written to amuse his friends. Referring to Mably's *Observations*, he writes,

Although I despised his monograph, I bought it to please Short,
who wished for me to confute it; but when I read it, I thought it didn't

¹⁴ Filippo Mazzei, "Fragments published on the principles of the American Revolution by a Citizen of Virginia," 1774-1775, document 40 in Margherita Marchione, *Philip Mazzei: Selected Writings and Correspondence*, ed. Margherita Marchione, vol.1 (Prato: Edizioni del Palazzo, 1983) 68.

¹⁵ Mazzei would continue to circulate key documents in like manner throughout his life. In 1786, for example, he sent a copy of Virginia's Act for Religious Toleration to his friend Cosimo Mari, in Pisa, for diffusion and publication. "Letter From Cosimo Mari", Pisa 13 October 1786, in Marchione, vol 1., p. 536.

¹⁶ Filippo Mazzei, *Recherches Historiques et Politiques sur les Etats-Unis de l'Amérique septentrionale* (Paris : Froullé, 1788).

deserve such consideration; so I determined to write down a few observations in a style that would amuse my friends. I wrote a dozen or so and read them to Marmontel, who was amused; but he said that the work required serious confutation because the Abbot was reputed trustworthy. Of this I had trouble persuading myself.¹⁷

Encouraged by Morellet and by other members of his entourage including Jefferson, Mazzei set out to write a more formal refutation of Mably's work, extending his project to include a rebuttal of what Raynal had written about North America in his *Histoire des deux Indes*¹⁸. Mazzei did not think of Mably and Raynal in the same way but considered them both very dangerous in terms of their opinion-shaping capacities in Europe. To Mazzei, Raynal was "a wilful lyer"¹⁹, "untrue and partial" while Mably was dismissed as "good natured and uninformed"²⁰. In a letter to John Adams dated October 29, 1785, he specified, "The first is an Angloman, and the second has written for the mere sake of writing, probably in his dottage, without knowing what he was about"²¹. While Mazzei claimed that "National honor" had been his first motivation in undertaking "the confutation of the mistakes, follies, indiscretions, and falsities of certain writers", and that he was writing "as a historian", however, it is quite clear that what the adoptive Virginian was defending in his *Recherches* was a specific (re?)interpretation of the American revolutionary narrative influenced by his own beliefs, and

¹⁷ My translation from the original Italian, "Quantunque io disprezzassi la sua cesura la comprai per aderire al desiderio di Short, il quale desiderava che io la confutassi; ma quando l'ebbi letta, credei che non lo meritasse; onde mi determinai a farvi delle osservazioni in uno stile da farne ridere gli amici. Ne feci una dozzina, le lessi a Marmontel, ed ei ne rise; ma disse, che bisognava confutarlo seriamente, perché l'abate era creduto. Io non me ne potevo persuadere." In Filippo Mazzei, *Memorie della vita e delle peregrinazioni del Fiorentino Filippo Mazzei*, ed. Alberto Aquarone (Milano: Marzorati, 1970) 303.

¹⁸ Filippo Mazzei, "Letter to James Madison," dated Paris, 14 August 1786, in Marchione, 530. Mazzei writes, "Abbé Raynal had for a long time been getting on my nerves, and Abbé de Mably's Observations on our governments made my blood boil as soon as I saw it and heard it had made a bad impression. It was easy to see that the source of the evil was the author's fame, which had led most people, who do not like to take the trouble of thinking, to take his dreams as axioms. Some confutations of his insolent and stupid booklet that I wrote for the press moved several worthy persons to wish that Europe would be undeceived more effectively than through that medium. The little I had done had led M. de Marmontel, Abbé Morellet, and other luminaries to believe that I could do the rest."

¹⁹ See for example Mazzei's "Letter to John Adams", dated Amsterdam, 23 January 1786, in Marchione, vol 1., 513.

²⁰ Filippo Mazzei, "Letter To John Adams", Paris, 29 October 1785, in Marchione, vol 1., 502.

²¹ Ibid.

very much in line with the political identity of the Americanophile – and later “*Américaniste*” circles he associated with in Paris.²² Paraphrasing Joyce Appleby one could define the “*Américanistes*” as a group of French progressives who instrumentalized what they perceived as “the American example” to serve as an alternative to the English model in the context of the late 1780s’ debate on how to reform institutions in France²³. As far as Mazzei is concerned, this leads to us to make several observations.

Beyond being staunchly pro-American, Mazzei – like Condorcet, La Rochefoucauld and the others - was profoundly anti-British. Disappointment with the British constitution, which promised liberty but fell short of delivering on its expectations had grown on Mazzei since his London years. The Wilkes incident in 1769²⁴ had appeared to him as the final confirmation of the inadequacy of a system which could tyrannically dismiss a popularly elected representative, effectively denying constituents their fundamental rights to sovereign suffrage²⁵. The contents of his *Recherches* reflected such positions. While it is doubtful that he was a genuine theoretician, Mazzei was nonetheless a skillful writer, benefiting from the support of a network of abler and more prominent individuals who assisted him in his endeavor, providing him with ample political and historical material to be used in his demonstration. Jefferson, for example, who had invested significant time and effort in attempting to correct Dêmeunier’s entry on North America in the *Encyclopédie Méthodique*,

²² For a discussion of *américaniste* vs. *anglomane* debates in the late 1780S, see Joyce Appleby “America as a Model for Radical French reformers in 1789,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2, (Apr., 1971) 267-268.

²³ Appleby, 269.

²⁴ Wilkes, a member of parliament and journalist, openly supportive of the American cause, was known for his radical ideas, often expressed in satirical form. His opposition to the King and to the political establishment manifested itself in a particularly mocking article he had written and published in *The North Briton* against Lord Bute, former Prime Minister and personal favorite both of George III’s and of his mother’s. Jailed for sedition and excluded from parliament, he was promptly reelected in the county of Middlesex, once freed. To Mazzei’s and many other people’s dismay, when parliament was called into session, it again declared Wilkes’ election null and void, depriving the Middlesex voters of their chosen deputy. According to Mazzei, the tyrannical dismissal was akin to delving “a fatal blow to the solid and sacrosanct fundamental law of a free country, which is the people’s perfect freedom to choose their representatives.”

²⁵ Considering the parliament’s actions as an arbitrary modification of constitutional safeguards, Mazzei commented in his *Memoires*, “There is no constitution, and it has no stable basis, if men elected to exercise ordinary legislative functions for a given time, can claim the right to cancel, or alter a fundamental law.” Filippo Mazzei, *Memorie della vita e delle peregrinazioni del Fiorentino Filippo Mazzei*, ed. Alberto Aquarone (Milano: Marzorati, 1970) 192. The theme of the need to separate ordinary legislative from constitutive powers is a recurrent one in Mazzei’s writings.

and who had originally intended to refute Raynal himself, made all his notes available to Mazzei, consistently offering advice and guidance, as did the Condorcets and his other friends²⁶.

It is therefore unsurprising that Mazzei's *Recherches* are not very original in terms of their content. In addition to the two books dedicated to the confutation of Mably and Raynal, Mazzei produced two other volumes, respectively retracing the history of the American Colonies and institutions up to the Revolution and discussing a selection of prominent issues relative to contemporary American society. Behind Mazzei's words and choice of subjects, one can perceive a chorus of "Americanophile" voices, both American and French, generally faithful to the spirit of 1776, favorable to the establishment of free trade, opposing the format of the new Constitution of 1787 and rejecting the Montesquieuan or even the Polybian trope of checks-and-balances as a model for liberty and constitutional reform. Mazzei's interpretation of the American Revolution borrows from previous writings by Jefferson and Franklin, as Edoardo Tortarolo repeatedly points out in his extensive work on Mazzei²⁷. His final manuscript includes several references to Paine²⁸, and to Turgot²⁹, as well as four essays by Condorcet in support of unicameralism³⁰, which Mazzei eulogizes in a letter to Madison by writing,

²⁶ See Edoardo Tortarolo, « La réception de l'Histoire des deux Indes aux Etats-unis » in Lüsebrink, Hans-Jürgen et Manfred Tietz, *Lectures de Raynal, l'Histoire des deux Indes en Europe et en Amérique au XVIIIe siècle – Actes du Colloque de Wolfenbüttel*, in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford : The Voltaire Foundation, 1991) 305-328.

²⁷ See Edoardo Tortarolo, *Illuminismo e rivoluzioni biografia politica di Filippo Mazzei* (Milano: F. Angeli, 1986) 64. Mazzei was especially influenced by Jefferson's *Summary View of the Rights of British America* (1774); but also by Franklin's Testimony to the British Parliament. In his *Recherches*, vol.4, 72, Mazzei includes an excerpt of Franklin's "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America" (1782).

²⁸ Notably to Paine's "Letter to Raynal", parts of which are quoted in the *Recherches*, Vol 3. 30 and more extensively in chapters IX and X of the same volume. Mazzei also quotes from Paine's « Epistle to the Quakers » in *Recherches*, vol. 3, 67-71.

²⁹ Mazzei reprints Turgot's « Réflexions rédigées à l'occasion du Mémoire sur la manière dont la France et l'Espagne doivent envisager les suites de la querelle entre la Grande-Bretagne et ses colonies » in full, *Recherches*, vol. 3, 217-282. He also openly eulogizes Turgot's economic doctrines in the Appendix to vol. 4, 224, « Les écrivains françois ont été les premiers à développer ces vérités, et un des hommes les plus grands et les plus vertueux qui ayent honoré l'espèce humaine, les a démontrées avec une clarté admirable. »

³⁰ Condorcet's *Four Letters* appear at the end of Vol. 1 of the *Recherches*, but it is worth noting that his voice is heard several times throughout the work. The Marquis' *Réflexions sur l'esclavage des nègres* (1781), are quoted extensively in Mazzei's chapter on slavery in *Recherches*, Vol. 4, 127-139.

I had forgotten to tell you that at the end of my book you will see four well-reasoned letters of the Marquis de Condorcet which he sent me in which he mathematically upholds a unicameral legislature. I too am of the opinion that it may be retained and put on such a footing as to remove perhaps altogether the dangers feared.³¹

The “dangers” which Mazzei “feared” were the division of society into different bodies, leading to the emergence of a privileged aristocracy like in Britain.³² These were dangers that Madison didn’t share, having supported bicameralism and a more hierarchical vision of society from the very beginning of the Convention³³.

Upon reading Mazzei’s *Recherches*, John Adams reacted indignantly to Condorcet’s *Four Letters*, immediately interpreting them as a way for the French philosopher and mathematician to get back at him for his refutation of Turgot in *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*. On an intertitle page preceding the first of the “Bourgeois” letters in his copy of the *Recherches*, Adams voiced/expressed his frustration by noting,

The following four letters were written by the Marquis of Condorcet, a Man of Science, but little acquainted with history: ignorant, totally ignorant of all Writings on the science of Government, with very little knowledge of the Human Heart, and still less of the World. The Letters themselves are a Demonstration of all this. They are plainly written as an answer to my *Defence*: but it is plain he had not read it. His enthusiasm for Turgot provoked him to write an answer to

More subtly, the chapters on General Washington (vol 4, 115-126) and on the *Society of Cincinnati* (Vol 4, 102-114) were respectively translated by Condorcet and by his wife Sophie, who had shown dissatisfaction with the quality of Faure’s work. See also Mazzei, *Memorie*, 307.

³¹ Mazzei, “Letter To James Madison”, Paris 14 August 1786 in Marchione, Vol 1, 532.

³² On the subject of constitutional debates opposing Turgot and Adams, I found Will Slauter’s paper “Constructive Misreadings: Adams, Turgot and the American State Constitutions”, *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, Vol. 105, No. 1 (March 2011) 33-67, particularly interesting.

³³ See “Letter from James Madison”, New York, 8 October 1788, in Marchione, Vol. 2, 46-7.

my Book without reading it: it should be recollected that he has written a *Life of Turgot*, and that that life is a Historical Panegyric³⁴.

Adams' irritated reaction to the publication of Condorcet's 4 letters in Mazzei's book illustrates the extent to which the Florentine's work and ideology were engrained in the debate that opposed "Turgotists" and "Montesquieuists"; "Americanists" (Jefferson, Condorcet, du Pont de Nemours, La Rochefoucauld, Lafayette...) and "Anglomans" (De Lolme, Adams, Raynal...). Seen in this light, the *Recherches* appear as less of a testimony of intellectual originality and historical accuracy than as a contributive platform for organized propaganda; a tool for expressing collectively concerted political opinion in a discussion that was no longer uniquely about America, but also increasingly about France. In other words, in the *Recherches*, the experience of the American Revolution was being edited and translated in a way that could also serve the cause of late 1780s French progressive reformists³⁵. Both Antonello Gerbi and Manuela Albertone have evocatively referred to Mazzei's *Recherches* as a "war machine" – "*una macchina da guerra*" – with Gerbi specifying, "In short the whole Americanophile coterie joins the work, as if collaborating on the construction of some massive weapon of war."³⁶

The group that Mazzei frequented while writing his *Recherches* was largely the same one he joined in the creation of the *Society of 1789* in 1790, testifying to his participative interest in French revolutionary events. Similarly, following the publication of the *Recherches*, Mazzei cooperated with Condorcet, du Pont de Nemours and Gallois to publish a heavily annotated French translation of John Stevens' *Observations on Government: Including some*

³⁴ See Adams' handwritten annotations in cited edition of the *Recherches*, Vol. 1, 266.

³⁵ See also Manuela Albertone, "Pensiero economico e azione politica nell'età della rivoluzione americana", in Renato Pasta ed. *Agli albori delle democrazie moderne: Filippo Mazzei (1730-1816)* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2018) 37-58. P. 54 is particularly relevant as Albertone describes the conception and writing of the *Recherches* as a "war machine"; "*una macchina da guerra*". The same expression also appears in Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: History of a Polemic (1750-1900)* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973) 271. "In short the whole Americanophile coterie joins the work, as if collaborating on the construction of some massive weapon of war."

³⁶ See also Manuela Albertone, "Pensiero economico e azione politica nell'età della rivoluzione americana", in Renato Pasta ed. *Agli albori delle democrazie moderne: Filippo Mazzei (1730-1816)* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2018) 37-58. P. 54 is particularly relevant as Albertone describes the conception and writing of the *Recherches* as a "war machine"; "*una macchina da guerra*". The same expression also appears in Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: History of a Polemic (1750-1900)* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), p. 271.

Animadversions on Mr. Adams's Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America: and on M. De Lolme's Constitution of England, by a Farmer of New Jersey in 1789. While the title of the pamphlet still focused on America, the French edition of John Stevens' work – modified as it was by the extensive footnotes that the members of the French editorial team had added – was clearly aimed at promoting unicameralist reform in France, taking the ideological slant behind the *Recherches* one big step further.³⁷ Mazzei's ambassadorship of propaganda had visibly transitioned into a new phase. Beyond wishing to correct erroneous perceptions of the American experiment abroad, Mazzei was now endeavoring to re-create and export a specific – and in many ways contestable – version of the Revolution's institutional testament to politically effervescent France.³⁸ In doing so, he was departing from American realities of the late 1780s. Having idealized the democratic spirit of 1776, Mazzei had grown out of touch with the events and debates that had led to the drafting of the Constitution of 1787. This, he found lacking in many ways, fearing an exaggerated concentration of powers and a return to British-inspired bicameralism: "How could you assent to various articles of the proposed constitution which prepare lethal lightnings for poor liberty?" the Florentine wrote to Madison from Paris on February 4th, 1788, adding "I hope you are not infected with the malady, alas! Epidemic, of balance and counterpoise in government matters." "Nay," he concluded, "your chimerical balance is no balance at all!"³⁹

Madison's answer to Mazzei, penned in New York in October 1788, expresses annoyance at the Florentine's insinuations:

You ask me why I agreed to the Constitution proposed by the Convention of Philadelphia? I answer, because I thought it safe to the liberties of the people, and the best that could be obtained from the

³⁷ Appleby, 277.

³⁸ This statement needs to be qualified as Mazzei did not believe the republican model could be transposed to France. What he thought could be transposed were the intellectual aspects of a moderate revolution, to be enacted by enlightened elites such as the ones that had guided the revolution in America. For a discussion of this, see Tortarolo, *Illuminismo e Rivoluzioni* (1983), as well as "Filippo Mazzei e la Costruzione della Memoria Rivoluzionaria" (2018).

³⁹ Mazzei, "To James Madison," Paris, 4 February 1788, in ed. Marchione, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 9. PT. By Livingston, Mazzei most certainly meant Stevens, whose pamphlet Madison had recently sent him, and which he would soon participate in translating for French readers.

jarring interests of States, and the miscellaneous opinions of Politicians; and because experience has proved that the real danger to America and to liberty lies in the defect of energy and stability in the present establishments of the United States. Had you been a member of the assembly, and been impressed with the truths which our situation discloses, you would have concurred in the necessity which was felt by the other members. In your closet in Paris and with the evils resulting from too much Government all over Europe fully in your view, it is natural for you to run into criticisms dictated by an extreme on that side. Perhaps in your situation I should think & feel as you do. In mine I am sure you would think & feel as I do.⁴⁰

Madison was implying that Mazzei had been absent from America for too long, and that changes in revolutionary realities were escaping him. “Are we ever to see you again in America?” he asked at the very end of his letter, just before closing, “Here or else-where, God bless you.”⁴¹

From the standpoint of Madison’s domestic experience of the American revolution and its aftermath, Mazzei had become too radical. From Mazzei’s point of view, the spirit of 1776 had been betrayed, and the constitution of 1787 appeared as something of a counterrevolution. America, which an overzealous and infatuated Mazzei had almost come to perceive as a hopeful embodiment/personification of *Lady Liberty*, had partly reneged itself/herself, leading the Florentine to seek ideological comfort on other revolutionary shores, where he hoped the spirit of the original American struggle could be transplanted and revived in all its “reasoned” but enlightened moderation.

If a handover there ever was, whether actual or attempted, between the American and French revolutionary spaces at decade’s end in the 1780s – which is a claim that is itself disputable, and has in fact been disputed many times - then Mazzei was one of the

⁴⁰ James Madison, “From James Madison,” New York, 8 October 1788, in ed. Marchine, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 46.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

movement's dispatch riders, both physically and ideologically traveling on the crest of overlapping avant-gardist waves, trying hard to avoid having to publicly acknowledge their troughs. As such, the reverberation of the American revolutionary movement that Mazzei contributively attempted to carry over into France – albeit imperfectly given the different circumstances – was in the late 1780s but an echo of American events that had already passed, but which – Mazzei must have hoped – could still be useful in inspiring future reform, their ideological guiding light being comparable to that of a star, whose physical existence is no longer certain when earthly observers use it to navigate their vessels.