

Nuova Rivista Storica

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Abstracts

ALESSANDRO GUERRA, L'esperienza associativa nell'Italia del triennio (1796-1799)

Following the French revolutionary model, the activists of the popular Societies were the protagonists of the heroic moment of the Italian jacobin movement, as already Delio Cantimori had realized. Indeed in Italy, upon Bonaparte's Army's arrival, the most resolute patriots had formed political clubs called "Società popolari", partly subsuming existing associative forms that were clandestinely active. The novelty of the "Triennio" was the attempt to give political representation to people hitherto excluded from formal politics. Matteo Galdi had already underlined that the activists' political behavior was being fought against both by the French authorities and the new moderate government that had come to power. After having closed the clubs, the French authorized the patriots to open "Constitutional Circles", in the hope of limiting the radicalism of the popular masses. However, soon enough, the government had to face a new hotbed of political extremism. The popular Societies challenged the legitimate government to coexist with a form of popular assembly, whereas this government was not anchored in popular legitimacy and did not draw its legitimacy from representation. Furthermore, the popular Societies competed with the government in claiming to represent the general will. The Societies, with ramifications on the entire national territory, were the first form enabling citizens to understand the mechanisms of the democracy through participation and activism. They formed a way to unite the politics from the bottom, in order to upset the dominant powers that had quickly regrouped around the old principle of exclusion, as shown by the imposition of formal equality in place of substantial equality, both in public discourse and in representation. As Albert Mathiez put it, the Societies were elementary organisms of the revolutionary people that embodied democracy in action, community structures where the word of the government was transformed into public spirit. It is really the specific pedagogic function that allowed the popular Societies to convert their multiplicity in unanimism, with which to go beyond the limits of the delegation and reinvent themselves as an original laboratory turning *people* into *citizens*.