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Articulating Britishness: Cultural Mediators and the Development of the British Institute of Florence

1 Introduction

Throughout the early twentieth century, the perpetuated mythologisation of a "golden ring" of Anglo-Florence encouraged residents and visitors, native and foreign, to respectively internalise or impose the imagined idea of a cohesive Anglo-Florentine community (Artom Treves 1956). This chapter focuses upon the establishment of the British Institute of Florence (henceforth, BRI) as a site that was, and remains, a product of and contributor towards a physical and conceptual manifestation of localised attempts to articulate a coherent British identity. Previous scholarship relating to the BRI has presented British residents in Florence as uniformly affected by the toils of war and later fascism in Italy, and as homogenous in their attitude towards cultural activities (Loong 2012; Richet 2018, 40). However, this oversimplification of attitudes and relations has served to blur the lines of difference between the variously patriotic, belligerent, and imperialist motivations of Britons towards the BRI. Furthermore, following from Whitling's (2019) reassessment of foreign academies' trivial and often hagiographical histories, analysis of the BRI in this chapter counters Loong's claim that war had shattered the internationalist ideal among Britons in Florence. Instead, it serves to highlight the presence of progressive internationalism among key local figures, female and male, who stood in opposition to imperialist and chauvinist influences. Moreover, the development of the BRI between the years 1917–1922 represents a period accented by local and individual competition rather than a rigid institutional framework. Although political ideologies and personal rivalries bubbled thinly under the surface and could be viewed as inhibitive, a deeper examination nonetheless reveals how conflict and negotiation during those years instead helped to shape and test the constitutional structure of the BRI, crucial during subsequent periods of radical political and cultural polarisation (Colacicco 2018, 7).

Before discussing the establishment of the institute we need to look at the factors and actors that facilitated and generated support for the broad conception of an institute. The first section of the chapter looks at the years immediately prior to the BRI's establishment, to show how despite a local desire towards collaboration and a supporting network of intellectual Italian and British residents, the creation

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and success of such a space remained far from assured. Instead, local support did not rally behind a universally accepted vision. It was not simply a matter of achieving financial security, but of also overcoming differing ideological convictions connected to sensitive contemporary issues, from gender, relating to the roles of women in society, to religion and political convictions, each fuelled by a cocktail of perceived urgency, obligation, and patriotism, sparked into life upon the outbreak of the First World War (Sluga 2016, 63–82). The second section of this chapter seeks to highlight how certain actors nonetheless came together, bound by a shared belief in the value of the project, in spite of different visions for the BRI. This illustrates how, whilst this contestation kept the BRI in a precarious state of existence over its initial years, it also encouraged the development of an organisational structure which would improve accountability and impartiality ahead of a period in which the institute would face unparalleled challenges in maintaining and fostering relations with an increasingly authoritarian state.

Consequently, this chapter's analysis of the BRI's early conceptualisation, reveals what Irving (2021) identified as a "broader range of power dynamics," as cultural mediators utilised their privileged and networked social agency across various spheres of influence to further their specific vision of its development. This included the engagement of non-state actors with government officials, observed also by Taylor (1981, 10–20), and co-opted towards state funded activities, allowing this case study to contribute towards the 'complicated and diverse' understanding of cultural diplomacy and policy articulated by Clarke (2020, 5–6). Following from Meylaerts (2020, 55), it is apparent that the development of the BRI from a small Anglo-Italian library to an internationally recognised space for cultural exchange and education was not a uniform process of administration and correspondence, but rather one which was negotiated through consensus among concerned actors. This chapter therefore emphasises the complex locally contested origins of the BRI and recognises the crucial role this played in defining the phenomenology of an Anglo-Florentine society (Meylaerts 2020, 58; Bhabha 1994, 1–2); a process which has been obscured by the subsequent reification of a cohesive Anglo-Florentine Britishness. Furthermore, understanding this process and its key actors provides a nuanced view of this hugely significant institution, acknowledged by Rex A. Leeper, founder of the British Council, as the blueprint for subsequent British institutes (The National Archives, TNA from now on, FO 431/1, *Memorandum on Cultural Propaganda*, 18th June 1934, 20–22). The formation of the BRI, contested in its purpose and position within both Florence and the British imperial world, forms but one snapshot of a broader continual process of negotiation in between polarising attempts to define community, culture, and self-identity. As such, it should be simultaneously understood as a key influence upon

British state propaganda and cultural projection into the 21st century, and representative of the overlapping processes of mediation and translation that underlie the internal phenomenon of cultural and national identities (Clarke 2020, 8).

2 The Landscape of Florence: 1914–1916

In many ways the BRI was a product of its immediate urban environment, shown below to have been influenced in part by Italian and British political ideas and social trends, as well as by the pre-existing model of a French cultural institute in Florence, the first of its kind. By 1907 the permanent population of Britons in Florence had already swelled to twice that of the German and French (TNA, FO 881/8919, *Report by Mr. Wellesley on his Tour of Inspection of Consular Posts in Italy*, 13; UCLA, No. viii, 11th July 1918). Yet Britain was the only nation of these without a cultural institutional presence. Held up as the cradle of the renaissance Florence was, at least symbolically, a key site of European civilisation among the colonising nations that sought to be recognised as its cultural successor (Clarke 2020, 9). Moreover, as home to British intellectuals such as Violet Paget (a.k.a. Vernon Lee), contemplative of *Genius Loci* and their place within it (Lee 1907, 7), the lack of a defined space for Britons and Italians to explore and develop cultural, political and economic bonds was a stark absence. This was only to be exacerbated as wider demand for English-language literature in the city continued to grow (Desideri 2010, 71). Prior to the BRI's establishment in 1917, it was acknowledged that there had been informal talk of the need for an Anglo-Italian library for almost ten years (TNA, FO 395/99, 234333). Considering that successive meetings and committees had attempted but failed to agree on how to proceed with any project, this section seeks to illustrate how in the years before 1917 an alignment of social and political factors across London and Florence helped to heighten awareness of the potential value of a British cultural space in the city.

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 played a crucial role in shaping British political perceptions towards the necessity of propaganda in neutral and allied nations (Taylor 1981, 8–10). However, whilst the British were still debating how best to oversee and execute propaganda (Taylor 1981, 9), in Florence initial support for a British institute came instead from a Frenchman, Julien Luchaire. Concerned that the political elite in Tuscany were more favourable towards Germany – a commonly held view at the time – the absence of a British cultural centre served to exacerbate Luchaire's fears that a breakdown of inter-governmental as well as personal relations was inevitable between Italy

and the Entente Cordiale (TNA, FO 800/66, *George Mounsey, Rome, to Theophilus Russell* [Diplomatic Secretary to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs], 1st November 1915). Consequently, Luchaire, as founder and director of the Institut Français de Florence, offered his support towards the creation of a British counterpart in the hope that the two institutions could present a collaborative force for improving cultural relations.

The overlapping engagement of Italian, French and British individuals in this mesh of pre-existing institutions and voluntary organisations decisively contributed towards effective collaboration in Florence. The interweaved compositions and support for the BRI from groups such as the Leonardo Society afforded continued support towards the perceived importance of coordinating a transnational intellectual effort between Britain and Italy (ACGV, Or.1.1185.2).

2.1 The "Aristocracy of the Mind": Intellectual Collaboration and Activism

In the opening decades of the twentieth century, the international and cosmopolitan flare of Florence came of age. Where the search for arcadia in Tuscany had created a "véritable topos symbolique" for many grand tour visitors, instead, modernist cultural movements and political ideology spread across the city (Renard 2010, 153–159). Florence gained renewed intellectual allure as the moral and cultural capital of Italy (Caruso 2018, 39). It was due to this that Julien Luchaire had chosen the city as the seat of this new type of French institution, the Institut Français de Florence (IFF), officially inaugurated in 1908. Under the auspices of the University of Grenoble, Luchaire pioneered a focus upon cultural interests, promoting transnational intellectual cooperation. As notable avant-garde figures engaged with Luchaire and the IFF, the presence and potential of a supportive intellectual network in Florence was realised (Renard 2010, 154–159; Richet 2018, 37; Luchaire 1965, 141–189).

Although Luchaire's vision for the IFF was fundamentally built around academic and cultural pursuits, its political potential had always existed in the background (Grange 2010, 3). As an increasingly influential 'intellectual consulate in Italy', in receipt of 30,000 francs annually from the French government, it is not surprising that Luchaire found himself having to 'put on a propagandist's habit' from 1914 (Grange 2010, 11; Renard 2010, 154–160). Attempting to sow disapproval towards Germany among Italians, Luchaire, along with Belgian Jules Destrée, began to promote awareness of German atrocities in Belgium through printed material. At the same time Luchaire hoped to promote positive Franco-Italian relations by producing a lecture tour across Italy. Following from

this, Destrée further independently liaised with British Foreign Office officials, collaborating with prominent British resident, Mary Augusta Ward (a.k.a. Mrs Humphry Ward), with whom he helped to produce, *England's Effort* (1916), for which "very full materials were supplied by Wellington House [the Foreign Office propaganda department]" (TNA, CAB 24/3/2, 4–5). The outbreak of war had highlighted the necessity and political value of nationally-bound institutions such as the IFF in Florence, both for intellectual networks and for governments. Having moved from via San Gallo to its permanent and more prominent home on Piazza Ognissanti, the IFF and Luchaire were keen to support the establishment of a British counterpart with which to collaborate against pro-German sentiment in Italy.

When, in a 1917 Piedmont edition of *Avanti!* Antonio Gramsci called for socialists to create and support new cultural institutions, "[that] would deal a fierce blow to the dogmatic and intolerant mentality created by Catholics and Jesuit education," sympathetic Florentine contemporaries were already well positioned to follow through with this directive. Reflective of this atmosphere and the innovative example of the IFF, the key figures behind the Anglo-Florentine proposal were a heterogeneous mix of both Italian interventionist intellectuals and British residents. Egalitarian and academic concerns broadly coalesced around the hope that a British library would serve to end the drought of English literature available in Italy, which had been otherwise restricted by German-controlled distribution agencies over the course of the war (Waterfield 1961, 167; TNA, FO 395/99, 234333). Meanwhile, enthusiastic Marxist and liberal contemporaries in Florentine diplomatic and academic circles, such as Gaetano Salvemini, Guido Ferrando, and later Marion Cave, sought to encourage a transnational institutional presence as a counterpoint to conservative and nationalist movements (Richet 2018). It was clear from all parties that, whatever their reasoning, a British institute was seen as having a specific and significant purpose within the city and for wider cultural, political or economic ties between these nations.

Supportive Italians like Salvemini were well recognised and respected scholars, as well as social and political figures across Italy (*Times*, 14th July 1925). Their awareness of the "structural limits" of Liberal Italy, which had been encouraged by Gramscian and Mazzinian belief in the "self-inflicted" denigration of the Italian character, should not be underestimated as a factor in their support for closer ties to Britain and its empire (Marcuzzi 2020, 20–22). Moreover, favourable intellectual attitudes towards Britain loosely formed around its support for Italian unification in 1861 and the subsequent development of considerable commercial ties. From this emerged a unique perception of Britain in Italy as a special partner, with closely related liberal values and shared interests (Marcuzzi 2020, 15). Engaged in political, cultural and civic societies and commissions such

as the Società Leonardo da Vinci (Leonardo Society), the Accademia della Crusca, Società Dantesca Italiana (SDI, not to be confused with the Dante Alighieri Society), the Italian Red Cross, and the Commissione Esecutiva per l'Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Dante (Executive Commission for the National Edition of Dante's Works) these intellectual actors were essential to the successful and lasting establishment of a truly multilateral organisation. In the "remarkably unique melting pot" of Florence, the recurring influence of actors would prove to be a catalyst for both coordination and friction over academic approaches to shared social and political interests (Tellini 2018, 82).

Angiolo Orvieto and the Leonardo Society's early ideas towards a British version of the IFF were heralded by British residents Herbert Trench and Lina Waterfield. However, the Society's significance and influence as one of several key venues can only be appreciated within the wider context of this intellectual network. In 1916, President of the Leonardo Society, Orvieto, was a member of the SDI, alongside fellow Leonardo members Pio Rajna and Guido Biagi (Annuario Toscano 1916, 6–7). Based in the church of Orsanmichele, "i più bei nomi della cultura e della politica italiana," featuring Isidoro Del Lungo, Guido Mazzoni and Pasquale Villari had founded the SDI as an immediately significant national cultural organisation (Garulli 2016, 72). Overlapping aims and membership of the SDI and the Dante Alighieri Society as a "semi-official purveyor of cultural propaganda" underlines the importance of Florence, more specifically Dante and Tuscan dialect, in the then ongoing construction of *italianità* (Bosworth 1979, 48–52). More significant still was the role of the *Accademia della Crusca*, founded 1583, which worked until 1923 to codify and preserve the Italian language, sifting out those "parole e locuzioni antiquate, straniere, corrotte e incerte della nostra lingua" (*Storia dell'Accademia* 2011). In 1916, the Crusca's committee, based in the Palazzo Mediceo Riccardi, consisted of Del Lungo as President alongside two future presidents in Rajna and Mazzoni, as well as Villari and Biagi (Annuario Toscano 1916, 3, 5, 37). The recurring presence of these actors (including also Ugo Ojetti, Aldo Sorani and Arturo Linaker) in numerous commissions, as well as in the wider intellectual social network that existed between them, formed an influential "aristocracy of the mind" (Richet 2018, 43–67; Hughes-Hallett 2013). With influence across the highest levels of local and national political office, as well as being the chief arbiters of cultural identity, the authority they held cannot be overstated.

Although it was ultimately Orvieto (as the Italian propagandist most closely aligned with the local British operations) to whom credit for the concept of the BRI's would be given, this prevailing atmosphere of pro-Entente, and specifically anglophile, feeling within the aristocracy of the mind was also essential to the Italian support afforded to Lina Waterfield and Edward Hutton as actors

engaged in the early foundation of the project. As suggested, of the many writers and politicians within this network during the war, Biagi and Orvieto most prominently engaged in political and social activism in Florence. Due to his position as a member of the Accademia della Crusca, Biagi was approached by Waterfield, a British resident, with a short piece she had written called *Perché Siamo in Guerra*. Despite Biagi declaring Waterfield's work as "Too British," he nonetheless saw the value in it, as Waterfield recalled:

> He made some alterations and turned the whole thing into terse Tuscan, each phrase like a cannon shot. He gave it to the mayor of Florence, but without betraying my share in it, and soon it was on all the walls and eventually it spread throughout Italy.
>
> (Waterfield 1961, 163)

Just as Luchaire had moved towards the role of French propagandist, Biagi's crucial translation, supporting Waterfield's independent efforts, catalysed Waterfield's deeper engagement with Florentine propaganda production and British Foreign Office agents in Italy (Waterfield 1961, 163–164; TNA, FO 395/98, 21st January 1917). The perceived success of Waterfield's work was such that she commenced working under Angiolo Orvieto at the propaganda bureau, Assistenza e Resistenza (Assistance and Resistance), in offices above the church of Orsanmichele. They focused on producing leaflets and postcards to warn of the effects of Bolshevism in Russia, to counter Austro-German criticism of the Entente, and to maintain popular support in Italy for the war. Orvieto's efforts to acquire and disseminate material had been aided by friendly British contacts in Florence, such as Janet Ross (Lina Waterfield's aunt), who was able to acquire copies of the British report "The Horrors of Wittenberg," which she handed on to Orvieto (ACGV, Or.1.2057, 1–7; ACGV, Or.1.2253.1). Meanwhile, Biagi's continued involvement with pro-Entente propaganda saw him work further with Foreign Office propaganda agent Edward Hutton, using covert British funding to facilitate the local printing and distribution of manifesti such as those of Waterfield and the British Italian League (Henceforth BIL; TNA, FO 395/98, 9274). Contrary to the IFF and Luchaire, however, the simultaneous development of propaganda agents and a British institute in Florence would become a significant point of contention as local actors sought to maintain a clear distinction between cultural diplomacy and government-funded propaganda.

3 The Convergence of Policy and Public Interest: War and Identity

In the case of the BRI's establishment, the existence of isolated local support had proved insufficient in the years prior to 1916, whilst local British diplomatic figures complained of feeling "so out of touch with everything going on in the world" (TNA, FO 800/66, 1st May 1916). Consequently, more than two years of private committee meetings, similar to those held by the Leonardo Society, came to nothing. Instead, it was determined that the proposed scheme could only succeed with significant government support (TNA, FO 395/99, 2nd December 1917). Fortunately for those British and Italian figures, Ambassador Rennell Rodd and the British embassy in Rome continued to push for greater coordination and communication with central government and the Foreign Office. Concerns submitted by the embassy throughout 1915 and 1916, warned that popular feeling in Italy was much less anti-German than it was against the neighbouring Austrians (TNA, FO 800/66, 1st November 1915). However, it was not until Italian entry into the war, and the apparent ambivalence of the Italian public, that British government officials reactively accepted the need to directly address the strength of German influence in Italy. Even though Rodd had stood alone in his Italophile position, it became inescapably clear for British officials in London that more resources had to be provided to local actors' initiatives if Britain had any chance of fomenting positive associations with Britishness and overturning the dissension and suspicion being sowed against them (Waterfield 1961, 165; TNA, FO 800/66, 1st May 1916, 20th May 1916).

3.1 1917: Edward Hutton and Lina Waterfield: Competing Agency, Conflicting Agendas

As merging local and governmental concerns gained momentum, 1917 saw proposals for an 'Anglo-Italian Institute', including offices, reading rooms and libraries reach the British Foreign Office, sent by propagandists both in Florence and Milan. Further discussions considered the possibility of sites in Rome and Naples, although with no local impetus (TNA, FO 395/97, 7th March 1917). The proposed projects naturally drew comparisons to the work of Luchaire, having been directly inspired by the IFF, and were met with great interest. From the perspective of the British Foreign Office, in early 1917 Edward Hutton was their key liaison in Florence. Locally however his role was less significant as the wider propaganda activities of Orvieto, and Waterfield operated more broadly

across an influential and intellectual Anglo-Italian social network. As conflict in the working relationship between Hutton and Waterfield worsened across 1917, doubts over Hutton's suitability in Florence reached London with increasing volume. Critique from Florence regarding the usefulness of his work as a mediator had amplified a pre-existing awareness of the "slight snags" that came with his character. In July 1917 officials considered the possible amalgamation of his role with other projects, to be brought under central coordination (TNA, FO 395/97, 13th August 1917). Waterfield continued otherwise as she had before, harmonising her work with that of Orvieto and his Assistenza e Resistenza, seeking to provide humanitarian aid and cultural exchange.

In August 1917, Hutton and Waterfield collaborated on the proposed development of "an unofficial Italian Committee in Italy with branches throughout the different provinces, to advise on general matters of propaganda." Significantly, they agreed that "this committee might have as its nucleus the chief British residents but should be mainly composed of sympathetic Italians" (TNA, FO 395/97, 5th July 1917). At the same time, they also spoke of reviving Orvieto's idea for a library as a complementary project. Following a constructive meeting with Romeo Gallenga Stuart (the newly appointed Italian undersecretary of overseas propaganda) and General Mola (Italian Military Attaché at the Embassy in London), Hutton and Waterfield were optimistic that any Florentine organisation would be supported by Italian diplomatic agents in London (TNA, FO 395/99, 18th September 1917). Buoyed by the positive response, Waterfield took the opportunity of an invitation to a House of Lords committee meeting (on the issue of book distribution in Italy) to raise awareness and support for the library project.

Following this, Waterfield wrote excitedly to Orvieto, having seemingly acquired from Gallenga Stuart funds for the propaganda committee (ACGV, Or. Waterfield.21). Meanwhile Hutton informed John Buchan, author and Director of Information at the Wellington House, of this new "Institution" even though at this point it remained unclear what form this would come to take. In hastily setting out his bold and yet quite unspecific view of the institute, Hutton attempted to position himself as central to the direction of the project (TNA, FO 395/99, 192494). However, by November 1st, at odds with Hutton, Waterfield's vision for the library changed, preferring rather that it would be "run according to the advice of my Italian friends" (ACGV, Or.Waterfield.22). Despite good standing with officials in London throughout Autumn 1917, this was the beginning of the end for Hutton's local utility. Following the spectacular collapse of the Isonzo line to Austro-German forces at the Battle of Caporetto, Italy shifted on to the back foot militarily and diplomatically (Marcuzzi 2020, 207). As entente forces rallied to prevent total Italian capitulation, a subsequent influx of refugees in Florence re-emphasised for Waterfield and Orvieto the need to

abandon abrasive, belligerent propaganda. Hutton's Florentine fate was sealed: the library project and Hutton's propaganda offices could no longer co-exist.

In response to movements against him, Hutton sought to use his contact with the Foreign Office to stem the flow of information between Florence and London. In a move against Waterfield's committee, Hutton delayed forwarding a proposal for the Anglo-Latin library to Buchan at Wellington House. Instead, he sent his own alternative version. In it Hutton announced that he had rented "in the Piazza Purcellai [Rucellai]," and would be opening "a circolo or club, society, institute, which I am calling: Circolo del Fronte Unico" (TNA, FO 395/98, 221994). Against local interests, Hutton's proposal was primarily a propaganda centre, complete with press bureau, obscured from the public view by the thin veil of a library and lecture room. In sending his own proposal, Hutton, previously mocked in Whitehall for acting like "a mediaeval conspirator" attempted to utilise his self-perceived position as a key intermediary in order to exert influence and control over the project (TNA, FO 395/98, 150838). In fact, Hutton referenced only one Italian colleague (Aldo Sevani [Sorani]) as a future lecturer and made no mention of Waterfield, Orvieto, or the Leonardo Society more widely, as a crucial body of actors. Had Hutton been able to gain recognition for his proposal from Buchan and the Foreign Office, he would have asserted himself as their leading agent in Italy. Furthermore, the institute project would have been open for him to shape as he saw fit, with emphasis upon the continuation of printed literature, reviews and pamphlets (TNA, FO 395/98, 221994).

In the withheld proposal, later received by Buchan, the co-signatories, consisting of the Florentine aristocracy of the mind, did not wish in any way for the institute to interact with Hutton's propaganda (TNA, FO 395/99, 234333). Hutton's unsubtle and solitary manner was juxtaposed with the coordinated efforts of Waterfield, Orvieto and Biagi, highlighting his unsuitability among local actors.[1] In addition, it was reaffirmed in this proposal that credit for "[the idea] originated some years ago with Commendatore Orvieto, but which the public-spirited energy of Mrs Waterfield has now revived" (TNA, FO 395/175, 2228). In contrast to Hutton's outline for an institute, this proposal criticised Hutton's contribution throughout 1917 with most Hutton's local acquaintances having adjudged him as inferior to his "assistant" Lina Waterfield (TNA, FO 395/98, 98786; TNA, FO 395/98, 217349). Given his popularity and praise as a

1 TNA, FO 395/175, 2228, Thorold to Buchan, 22nd December 1917, "[Waterfield] has enlisted the services of practically all the Professors & men of Letters who are favourable to the Entente in Florence. Anything in which she interests herself is sure of support from the best Italian element in the place."

prolific travel writer on Italy, this verdict was certainly difficult for Hutton to accept, if indeed he ever did. Herbert Trench's assertion that "[. . .] Waterfield is the only real 'liaison officer' between English residents of the higher class here and cultivated Italians" did little to dampen Hutton's self-confidence, later promoting himself as "the one Englishman who really knows somethings of the Italian people" (TNA, FO 395/275, 1st May 1919).

Trench's indications that Hutton was not to be considered as an effective agent were directly addressed in a subsequent letter five days later. For Trench, Hutton was neither literate in Italian nor a good leader. Ultimately, the Foreign Office's positive perception of Hutton's contributions in Italy (aided by their general disinterest in the topic), proved insufficient to insulate him from frustration felt by those working with and around him (Rodd 1925, 370; 505). As other local actors reached consensus over the role of the future institute, Hutton remained an awkward figure. Having viewed himself as the foremost propagandist and British expert on Italy, Hutton struggled to accept a diminished position under Waterfield. Hutton opted instead to immediately disassociate himself from the BRI project in any professional capacity (Waterfield 1961, 168–169). In withdrawing his direct involvement with the library, Hutton also demanded that Waterfield provide a full reimbursement of the considerable funds he had lent the project. With the future of the project existentially threatened by Hutton's ultimatum, Waterfield offered a scathing assessment of Hutton's legacy, emphasising to Buchan the harmful way in which Hutton had gone behind her back in attempts to implement his "jingo ideas," alienating Waterfield and other local supporters of the library (TNA, FO 395/175, 2227). Furthermore, she emphasised how it was instead her friend, Commendatore Casardi, as owner and director of Haskard's Anglo-Italian bank in Florence, who was able to advance her the necessary funds. Confirmation came from Buchan at Wellington House the day after the official opening of the library that Hutton, although still respected for his knowledge of Italy and its people, was deemed "no longer suitable in Florence" and would be kept at a distance from the management of the institute (British Institute of Florence Archives [BRI], WAT.I.G.90, f. 4).

Waterfield's ability to mobilise the financial, social and political support of her contacts mitigated the threatening actions of Hutton in comparison to the wider complexities and vulnerability of the project. The subsequent inclusion of this episode in her memoirs allowed Waterfield to put on public record Hutton's withdrawal and obstructiveness whilst others had worked tirelessly to set up a "very delicate piece of machinery at a critical moment" (TNA, FO 395/175, 2227). The specific intention to denounce the role of Hutton in the foundation of the BRI was not a slight born of Waterfield's lingering resentment, but rather aimed at challenging Hutton's continued self-promotion of his essential role. A

narrative later continued in London, where, as a member of the BRI's council, he boldly claimed that he "set up the British Institute" (BRI, WAT.I.E.3, 25th Jan. 1921).

Within this Anglo-Florentine context, Waterfield was representative of "[t]he generation of women who came of age during the Great War" identified by Belzer (2010, 2). In pursuit of her selfless aims, Waterfield was ready to call upon her "oasis of friendships," including the likes of Eleonora Duse, Marion Cave and Ray Strachey, each a vivid local or national example of a wider movement "away from older models of womanhood [towards a new balance of] independence and family" (TNA, FO 395/175, 23109). With Hutton removed from the Florentine scene and his involvement in the BRI project marginalised, albeit with his wider reputation intact, it was clear that the development of the BRI project over 1917 had been due to the sincere and considerable efforts of Waterfield as a humanitarian, influenced by her intellectual friends and fellow propagandists (TNA, FO 395/175, 2228). Subsequently, John Buchan showed no uncertainty in requesting that Waterfield become the new "official representative in Tuscany," powerfully direct in affirming: "I want you to take his place" (BRI, WAT.I.G.90, f. 4).

3.2 1918–1919: Support for a British Institute in Post-War Florence?

With a physical locus, supply of books, furnishings, and funding, from January 1918 the BRI's future was ensured for the short remainder of the war (Waterfield 1961, 170). Official recognition of Waterfield's role, taking over as a British propaganda agent, had been a necessary adjustment away from the likes of Hutton who, carried away in their own self-importance, "[became] diletante [sic] and useless, and in some cases actually harmful." (TNA, FO 395/175, 63274). However, as a result, the BRI needed a new leading figure, one that would not upset the "extreme sensitiveness of the Tuscan mind towards even the appearance of being financed by H.M.G. [Her Majesty's Government]." It was unanimously agreed in Florence that whilst Waterfield's secretarial role remained invaluable to the BRI alongside her propaganda work, "there should be a man [. . .] to take charge of the management of the Institute & to represent it in the eyes of Italians." (TNA, FO 395/175, 35257). Consequently, the BRI appointed its first Honorary Director Arthur Spender to oversee the urgent development of the Institute's educational facilities and resources (ACGV, Or.1.2253, No. 4, No. 6). Furthermore, in a move which more clearly delineated the BRI from wider propaganda concerns, responsibility for overseeing the BRI was taken from Algar Thorold as Director of Propaganda in

Italy, and instead transferred to John Buchan as Department Chief in London (TNA, FO 395/175, 13876 and FO 395/175, 23870; ACGV, Or.Waterfield.26).

Like Waterfield, Arthur Spender was selected as a figure who could maintain ties both to the British government through Algar Thorold, as well as with Orvieto and the Florentine intellectual network. With this strong local committee, effective collaboration in Florence allowed the BRI to plan for further expansion (BRI, I.D.128, ff. 8–9). Meanwhile, Waterfield and Thorold could focus on developing their respective propaganda aims, enhancing the British Foreign Office liaison role vacated by Hutton, and working towards greater control of Florentine press (TNA, FO 395/175, 8092). Based out of the Hotel Baglioni, Waterfield continued to coordinate with Italian propagandists, Orvieto and Gallenga Stuart, whilst remaining distinct from the BRI project (ACGV, Or. 1.Waterfield.30).

The institute under Spender was reaffirmed in its role as a learning centre for Italians, but it was shown to have greater considerations also for its English audience. Alongside the articles of the BRI's new journal, *La Vita Britannica*, the commencement of lectures and seminars allowed the BRI to bring to the forefront topics outside of the usual awareness of 'Anglo-Florentine' residents and passing visitors. For the first time, as a unique space within the multinational community of the city, the BRI's potential towards the mediation and translation of knowledge and experience was utilised (ACGV, Or.1.2253, No. 7).

However, the presence of the BRI and its *La Vita Britannica* journal were not wholly positive for transnational collaboration in Florence. Contrary to local support, Spender, as the journal editor, appeared to spurn Luchaire and local French cordiality in his first volume with inclusion of an article by Gaetano Salvemini (1918) titled "Le origini dell'alleanza italo-inglese" (The origins of the Anglo-Italian alliance). Specifically, Salvemini cited French Italo-phobic arrogance and anti-English bias as the "migliore ausiliaria della influenza tedesca in Italia". In this moment, Spender signalled his intention to promote a bilateral Anglo-Italian relationship, ahead of and even in opposition to a multinational network within which the "aspirazioni di egemonia della Francia" could otherwise be exerted; a tension in Florence and Italy that Salvemini claimed had shown itself over the course of the war.

Spring of 1918 saw the movement of the BRI to larger premises at Via dei Conti, 18. Yet this failed to provide greater security for the project as the prospect of the war's conclusion brought new uncertainty, with talk of budgetary restrictions from the Treasury department reaching Florence (BRI, I.D.128, ff. 8–9). Likewise, unresolved local concerns for the BRI's continuation were exacerbated by increasing socio-political tension as wider fears of Bolshevik sentiment spread across Europe. In Italy, defeat at Caporetto had given impetus to further political polarisation and disaffection, encouraged by prominent irredentists like Gabriele

D'Annunzio, and leading to demonstrations and violent clashes in major cities including Florence (Foot 2009, 33–35). However, these tensions and their accompanying debates were crucial in defining the precise purpose and direction of the BRI in the immediate post-war years. As Ballantyne similarly identified, through conflict and opposition the institutional purpose and social identity of the BRI would be clarified (2012, 263–264). Backed by the belief that British cultural influence might counter the incivility of extremist doctrines, it was through these external and internal processes that a more resilient institute emerged into the interwar period.

The effectiveness of the BRI's wartime work in providing English language education, gaining "Italian friendships" and helping to retain British prestige, had not gone unnoticed by Foreign Office officials (TNA, FO 395/274, 00211). The closeness of the BRI project to Wellington House and the embassy in Rome through its various engagement with diplomatic and private agents, ensured that a decision had been made prior to December 20th 1918 to allow for the short-term continuation of the financial support which Buchan had organised at the beginning of the year (TNA, FO 395/274, 210180).

Despite this modest support, as public awareness of the BRI grew in Britain and Italy, so too did the knowledge that it could "never be self-supporting." Correspondence celebrating this exceptional institute was dampened by fears for its longer-term security (TNA, FO 395/274, 00211). Indeed, any relief that had been felt in December 1918 was short-lived, with Director Spender reporting an urgent need for funds "to meet outstanding liabilities" as early as February 22nd, 1919 (TNA, FO 395/275, 00827). The need to acquire new funding streams, whether public or private, became critical over the course of 1919 as Geoffrey Young, a visitor to the BRI, recorded that "shifting changes" – the Wellington House Propaganda Bureau had controversially become the Ministry of Information, and dissolved altogether in January 1919 – had since left them "without a penny" (BRI, I.D.128, ff. 8–9).

3.3 1920–1922: Towards an Independent British Institute: Private Fundraising and Royal Charter Recognition

With Waterfield and Thorold employed in official propaganda roles, the retired Rennell Rodd reluctantly accepted duty of care for the institute which he had encouraged during his years as Ambassador to Italy (Rodd 1925, 311). Although responsibility may have fallen at Rodd's feet, "the burden of fighting for its maintenance" was not his alone. Instead, Janet Trevelyan, daughter of prominent Anglo-Florentine author and social activist Mary Augusta Ward, helped

consolidate the BRI's structure through the development of an application for a Royal Charter, whilst helping to promote awareness of the BRI.[2] Trevelyan's position as Honorary Secretary of the British Italian League (BIL), based in London, brought her into contact with resident fascist figures including Luigi Villari, Antonio Cippico and Harold Goad (Richet 2012, 128). Importantly, Trevelyan transcended political partisanship. Her focus upon cultural and educational exchanges was well-suited to Waterfield and Thorold's BRI, especially as cordial relations with Benito Mussolini became a vital consideration for benefactors and BRI council members (TNA, BW 40/2, IT/2/1). Positive relations with the early fascist government, based upon mutual educational ambitions, instead facilitated the wider recognition of the BRI as a leading language centre (BRI, I.D.105, f. 4).

Uncertainties over British government payments from early 1919 were soon alleviated following pressure from Rodd and Trevelyan (BRI, I.D.105, f. 10). In particular, Trevelyan's written request that the BRI would not be overlooked, ensured that government support continued until the end of the following year (TNA, FO 395/275, 00827). As such, 1920 would mark another significant milestone in the development of the BRI as it faced the possibility of closure. The further provision of private funding would present an opportunity to influence the autonomy of the institute (Quinn 1997, 130). In this moment, Trevelyan and Hutton would act as key mediators, working towards the implementation of an executive council between London, Rome, and Florence.

In London, the search for funding saw Edward Hutton play a significant role once more. Despite how strongly his prior actions had been perceived by Waterfield, Hutton's knowledge of Italy and utility as a writer saw him transferred directly from Florence to work for the Italian Military Attaché in London. Belittling the entire Florentine affair in 1918, then Ambassador Rennell Rodd had explained to Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour, that "quarrels among the members of this community are not infrequent." (TNA, FO 395/176, June 1st, 1918). Subsequently, through his own independent journal, the *Anglo-Italian Review*, Hutton raised awareness of the BRI's plight (Vol. IV, No. 16 1919, 268). In response, Arthur Serena, a wealthy British-Venetian, requested Hutton's guidance in donating to the BRI and in supporting cultural and educational ties between Britain and Italy (Limentani 1997, 877–892). As the task of organising Serena's legacy grew, the first formation of what would eventually become the

2 TNA, PC 8/997; BRI, I.D.113, f.2, *Stevenson to Rodd*, 4th August 1924, Trevelyan also fundraised, acquiring financial support for the BRI from Renée Courtauld, whom had been dedicated to improving women's access to education. Courtauld's support contributed to the institute's financial security over the following decades.

BRI's council came about in the form of the "Serena Endowment Committee." This body consisted of Italian academics and figures closely tied to the BIL and the BRI, with Rodd assuming the position of committee chair and Trevelyan naturally incorporating her role at the BIL, acting as Honorary Secretary of the committee (BRI, I.D.14, ff. 5–6). An immediate consequence of this committee was the confirmation of Serena's intention to provide the BRI with a donation of 500,000 lire (BRI, I.D.105, ff. 1–10).

As discussions over Serena's endowment progressed, the decision was made to formalise the committee into an incorporated society, the Serena Foundation (BRI, I.D.11, f. 8). Throughout this heavily administrative process, Serena praised Trevelyan's secretarial work, which, despite reassurances from Serena, led Hutton to believe he had been overlooked and underappreciated in his work just as in 1917 (BRI, I.D.11, ff. 1–2; BRI, HUT.I.B.35, ff. 14–15). However, his frustration with the "farcical" co-ordination of the Serena endowment and the BRI would prove to be a crucial influence upon their organisation (BRI, I.D.11, ff. 9–12). Aggrieved, Hutton singled-out the BRI director, Spender, openly questioning his capability. Acknowledging Hutton's concerns, the Serena Foundation requested an audited balance sheet for the BRI from its treasurer, Hutton's friend, Baron Charles de Cosson. In this way, the Serena Foundation, a formal body of key actors closely linked to the BRI, gained an overview of the institute's operation for the first time, narrowing the scope of the director's role. The overlapping interests of actors, particularly Rodd, Trevelyan, and Hutton, made it a crucial forerunner to the BRI Council, setting in motion the gradual installation of a systematic structure of governance and financial accountability.

Alongside the Serena Committee, Sir Walter Becker, whom through Rodd as ambassador had previously supported George Macaulay Trevelyan's Red Cross ambulance unit in Italy, expressed his interest in supporting the BRI (BRI, I.D.105, ff. 1–3). As negotiations began, Hutton's familiarity with all parties saw him travel to Florence to assist in the discussions (BRI, I.D.14, f. 6). Following from this, Hutton submitted a formal proposal to Spender in January 1921 outlining Becker's preferences regarding the general operation of the BRI and offering 75,000 lire per annum for 3 years (BRI, I.D.104, f. 2; BRI, I.D.105, f. 10). As with the Serena Foundation's audit of the BRI, Hutton's influence over Becker's proposal saw similar scepticism targeted towards the director's use of government funds in the previous year. Additionally, it cited Becker's concerns over the use of the institute as a social space for Britons, rather than for the primary goals of language education and cultural exchange which had been envisaged in 1916 (BRI, I.D.105, ff. 1–3). Accordingly, the proposal called for the autonomous authority of the director and treasurer in their respective roles. It was advised that the director should be focused on "academic and social activities" without

"interference or disturbance," whilst "absolute control" of financial and business matters would remain that of the treasurer (BRI, I.D.104, f. 2). Subsidising the movement of the BRI to larger premises at Palazzo Antinori and aware that no local committee member had directly donated money to the BRI, Becker was well-positioned to enforce the educational focus of the BRI and encourage further rigidity regarding expenditure, insisting to Trevelyan that any events serving "the Florentine Colony" should be raised from "wealthier Anglo-Florentine residents" by the director (BRI, I.D.104, f. 2; BRI, I.D.105, f. 10).

Having achieved the necessary financial support and influenced by the formalisation process of the Serena Foundation, Trevelyan and Rodd initiated the application process for Royal Charter incorporation of the BRI. Summarising the work of the previous six years, the text of the charter itself focused upon Anglo-Florentine and British financial backing. In confirming the primacy of Serena and Becker's support, the charter enshrined their requirements for the institute through the continuance of "member and student fees, plus committee fundraising [to] make up supplementary funds." Additionally, however, in its preservation of a "General Library of books illustrating English and Italian culture," and by "providing opportunities for intellectual and social intercourse," as envisaged by Lina Waterfield and Angiolo Orvieto, the charter also served to reaffirm the aims which had arisen from the uniquely transnational cultural environment of Florence (BRI, Royal Charter of the British Institute of Florence, 14th May 1923). The importance of the manifold positions held by Hutton, Trevelyan and Rodd across committees, councils and leagues afforded them the possibility to also acquire and direct institutional support for the BRI. Consequently, the charter noted the support of the "Serena Foundation (Incorporated) and [. . .] the British Italian League," both of which also undoubtedly owed their success to Trevelyan.

4 Conclusion

In previous scholarship, Loong's treatment of the Anglo-Florentine identity as definite and stable has served to overlook archival evidence across institutions in Florence which demonstrates clearly the sometimes fractious, transnational, and complex realities of the quasi-colonial relationship between the supposed Anglo-Florentines and Britain. Elsewhere, the astute work of Colacicco (2018) has highlighted the role of the BRI in the 1920s and 1930s as an organised institutional space which once more saw internal and local conflict under its British fascist director. The BRI in this later period would influence the nature of

diplomatic relations, including shaping British public perception of Mussolini's Italy and, in part, the creation of the British Council in 1934. However, this chapter has sought to emphasise the initial multi-level development of the British Institute from 1917–1922, contributing towards the need for a wider analysis of the vital role that multi-level actors and institutional agents played between Britain and Italy in influencing propaganda and cultural diplomacy, revealing the development of this unique institute as both a product of, and influence upon, early conceptions and manifestations of 'cultural propaganda' among British intelligence and government.

The Anglo-Florentine community, primarily an imagined yet dominant representation of British stereotypes, was asserted and reinforced by a minority of elite British and Italian social and intellectual figures. Recurring local processes of identity construction and association led to the cultivation of a particular image of Britain and its representative culture. In this way, the creation of the BRI was both a product of, and contributor towards this sense of Anglo-Florentine Britishness through its establishment, but also through lectures and publications on preferred cultural subjects. At the periphery of British imperial influence and control, during a period in which the supposed "special relationship" between Italy and Britain came under intense scrutiny, the institute represented a concretisation of cultural difference between Italians and Britons, as perceived by key actors and benefactors (Marcuzzi 2020, 50).

Specifically, Lina Waterfield, Edward Hutton and Janet Trevelyan navigated between Italian and British socio-cultural worlds. Operating in spaces not yet overseen by governmental structures such as the British Council, they blurred the lines between private independent and state-funded ventures, coordinating various expectations for the BRI alongside other propaganda and diplomatic concerns (van Kessel 2021, 433–434). In doing so, these figures mediated between the supposed core and periphery of an intangible Britishness (Schwarz 2011, 22–23). Having "positioned themselves in contemporary debates and [. . .] intricately connected on an international level through institutional networks" these cultural mediators lobbied in London for greater financial aid, also utilising experience from local situational approaches to instruct and influence government bodies and figures on policy and best practices (Roig-Sanz and Subirana 2020, 4). As geo-political debates on war settlements began to unravel Anglo-Italian diplomatic relations, Waterfield, with Rodd and Thorold helped to ensure that the distinct value of the BRI as an educational and cultural centre would continue. Alongside the influence of private benefactors, they bridged physical and cultural gaps between core and periphery, instilling greater accountability to the BRI through its executive council of governors. This served to protect and promote

what Ménard (1995) has identified as the "stable, abstract and impersonal" institutional characteristics of the BRI, set out in its royal charter.

As seen by the appointment of a fascist sympathising director and later policy pressures exerted by the British Council, the institute remained vulnerable to shifting contemporary political and social contexts (Colacicco 2018, 5–7). Over the decades prior to the Second World War, from safeguarding against supposed attempts to create a solely British "cultural club for their own benefit," to motivating local Britons to end their boycott of the "too Italian" institute between 1937–1938, the institutional structure of the BRI, with Italian and English co-operation at its core, ensured that its governors, the British Council and Foreign Office officials necessarily continued to recognise its finely balanced transnational obligations (TNA, BW 40/2, IT/2/1, 13th August 1937; TNA, BW 40/3, *Goad to Bridge*, 14th February, 1938; TNA, BW 40/2, 237/37/37 *Ingram (on behalf of the Ambassador) to Bridge*; TNA, BW 40/2, *Trevelyan to the British Council, RE: Goad's Successor*). Consequently, the BRI as a physical space held, and continues to hold, great symbolic importance as a shared space of cultural translation and transculturation for Anglophone and Italian residents in Florence today. For resident and visiting individuals, membership and engagement with such an institution serves as a reaffirmation of one's self-identification as Anglo-Florentine. In this way, they not only acknowledge an historic 'British' cultural and social element within the fabric of the city, but endorse the idea that there is a particular value to Anglo-Florentine perspectives regarding discussions on the present shape and future development of the city.[3]

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3 Recent examples include the *Firenze Now* series, https://www.britishinstitute.it/en/library/harold-acton-library/cultural-programme-in-the-library/FIRENZE-NOW, late 2020. Hosted by the British Institute, these events have sought to contribute towards significant discussions regarding Florence's development, from how to "identify priorities for the city to build a better socio-economic future" (3rd December) and "build stronger research collaboration between the University of Florence and the international programmes?" (22nd October) to "regulatory and infrastructure changes" relating to the development of a 'greener' economy (24th September).

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