

A relatively unknown protagonist of the revolutionary period's ideological debate, Philip Mazzei embodies the very notion of "Citizen of the Atlantic World" as defined by contemporary French and American historians (Godechot, Baylin, Wood). Born in Poggio a Caiano, near Florence in 1730, Mazzei, a surgeon by training, set out for a life of wanderings at an early age. His journeys took him East, to modern day Turkey, before leading him to settle in London and later North America where he befriended many of the young Republic's Founding Fathers, among whom were Washington, Franklin, Adams, and Madison. His closest American friend and lifelong correspondent, however, was Thomas Jefferson, whom he remained very close to up to his death in 1816.

Having acquired Virginian citizenship in 1774, Mazzei readily engaged in the American struggle for independence, contributing to the spread of revolutionary ideology through numerous essays and speeches. Faithful to the "spirit of 1776," Mazzei ran up against the principles of some of the leading Federalists who, with the Constitution of 1787, sought to reign-in what they perceived as the excesses of Jeffersonian-style "democracy".

Beginning in 1779, Mazzei was sent to Europe on a diplomatic mission on behalf of the Virginian government. In the years that followed he traveled between Europe and America, witnessing the early events of the French Revolution. While in Paris 1788, Mazzei published his "Recherches historiques et politiques sur les Etats-Unis de l'Amérique septentrionale," in response to Mably's "Observations sur le gouvernement et les lois des Etats-Unis d'Amérique." Mazzei's "Recherches" are at the core of the present study, which proposes to review the work in the light of Jefferson's famous "Notes on the State of Virginia," analyzing the filiation links that might exist between the two and endeavoring to situate Mazzei on landscape of the ongoing 18th century debate on the supposed inferiority of the American continent.

The rare historians who have worked on Mazzei have pointed out the extent to which he embodies the spirit of the Enlightenment. While the remark remains relevant, Mazzei's life and work deserve to be revisited from the prism of a more a contemporary historiography which - to date - has all but overlooked him. Trespassing the frontiers of the different nation states and their individual histories, Mazzei's political philosophy is unambiguously grounded in the "Atlantic tradition". His contribution to the revolutionary debate needs to be examined in the light of recent studies, such as Pocock's work on the influence of Florentine republicanism on the Atlantic world.

This research project will be grounded in the study of primary sources written indifferently in English, French and Italian, and can therefore be linked to the LERMA laboratory's Program C, "L'expérience de la modernité/ XVII et XVIIIe siècles", theme 3 "Ré-écritures, adaptations littéraires, édition et traduction."