War or Peace: the Grand Orient of Italy and World War I
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The present paper focuses on the Grand Orient of Italy, the most important Italian obedience and its attitude towards the Great War. Since 1911, Freemasonry was under attack by several political forces: Socialist party, nationalists and Catholics. All of them criticized its pillars, but the key question was: how can an institution be universal and, at the same time, defend the national interest? Weakened by all this blame, the first reaction in the face the Austrian military intervention in Serbia was very ambiguous: in July 1914, Grand Master Ettore Ferrari claimed peace being the first and foremost ideal for every Freemason, but he also remarked that Italy couldn’t neglect to defend its own interests.

In September, the Grand Orient of Italy stated publicly its support for entering the war alongside the Allies: after the conquest of Belgium, the fight against the “barbarians”, as it was called it, was now a moral obligation. So, starting the Autumn, the Italian Freemasonry acted as coordination centre for the democratic interventionist parties.

Right after Italy entered the war (May 1915), the federal council decided to change his focus and course of action, inviting all the Freemasons to help with the “inner front”, containing the pacifists, especially the socialist ones: going against the rightful aims of the country (liberating the Italian territories still under Austrian domain), was unacceptable. Another field of action was the support for the soldiers their families: the Grand Orient of Italy not only helped the Red Cross, but also funded new local organisations.