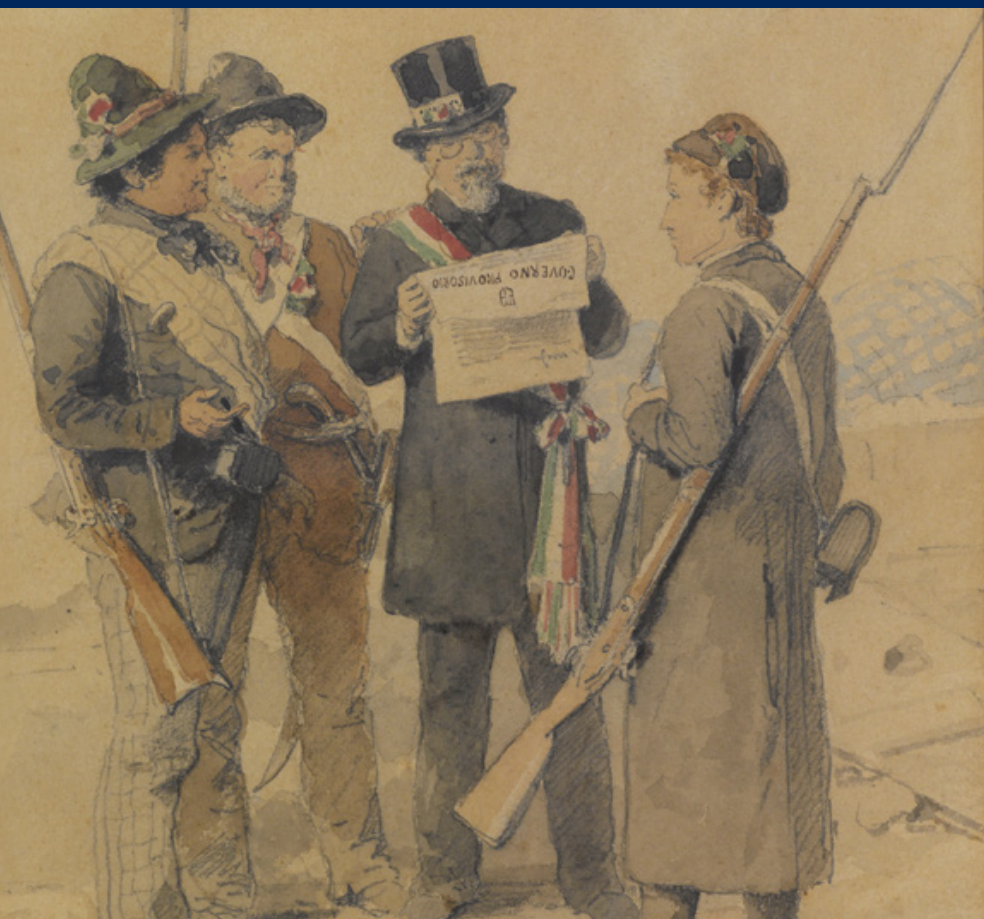


Giulia Delogu, Alessandro Bonvini,
Cecilia Carnino, Daniele Di Bartolomeo (eds.)

Governing Consensus

The Political Use of Knowledge in Italy



VIELLA

Governing Consensus

The Political Use of Knowledge in Italy

edited by

*Giulia Delogu, Alessandro Bonvini,
Cecilia Carnino and Daniele Di Bartolomeo*

viella

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GIACOMO GIRARDI

The Construction of Memory: Napoleon's Lives and Italy's History During the Restoration*

1. *Writing lives*

The long 19th century was heavily marked by the myth of Napoleon. The black legend of Bonaparte that had originated and enjoyed enduring success in England, Germany, Spain and even France itself¹ did not last very long in Italy, at least not at the literary level. It was soon replaced by a morbid-like curiosity toward the life, personality, romantic entanglements and weaknesses of the Emperor. Whether the product of myth or legend,² Napoleon became a phenomenon in Italy – in literature and poetry, art and music, and in the military and political arena. His image was carefully honed to appeal to the bourgeoisie and populace, conservatives and revolutionaries, and men and women, young and old alike.³ The myth of Napoleon first burst onto the scene between 1820 and 1821, in conjunction with two pivotal moments: the Emperor's death, and the outbreak of multiple revolutionary uprisings.⁴ Political events and historical tradition had become intertwined many years prior, following Napoleon's double exile when the first biographies about him began to circulate. Upon his death, Napoleon became the person about whom the greatest number of biographies would be written in the entire 19th century, outpacing the most renowned heroes

* My thanks to Alessandra Balzani for her translation of this chapter.

1. Jean Tulard, *L'anti-Napoléon: la légende noire de l'Empereur*, Paris, Gallimard, 2013 (orig. Paris, Juillard, 1965).

2. On the "myth", read Luigi Mascilli Migliorini, *Il mito dell'eroe. Italia e Francia nell'età della Restaurazione*, Naples, Guida, 2003 (orig. 1984), and Sylvain Pagé, *Le mythe napoléonien. De Las Cases à Victor Hugo*, Paris, CNRS, 2013. On the "legend", see Sudhir Hazareesingh, *The Legend of Napoleon*, London, Granta Books, 2004, and *La légende napoléonienne*, under the direction of Jacques-Olivier Boudon, Paris, SPM, 2022.

3. In Arianna Arisi Rota, *Il cappello dell'imperatore. Storia, memoria e mito di Napoleone Bonaparte attraverso due secoli di storia dei suoi oggetti*, Rome, Donzelli, 2022, Arisi Rota discusses the topic of a veritable Napoleon-mania that spread between the 19th and 20th centuries. On the enduring power of visual and material culture in the making of Napoleonic memory, see *Napoleonic Objects and Their Afterlives: Art, Culture and Heritage, 1821-Present*, ed. by Matilda Greig and Nicole Cochrane, London, Bloomsbury, 2025.

4. Maria Pia Casalena, *Biografie. La scrittura delle vite in Italia tra politica, società e cultura (1796-1915)*, Milan, Bruno Mondadori, 2012, p. 15.

of Italy. To place this into perspective, between 1861 and 1915 the Italian hero par excellence, Giuseppe Garibaldi, was the subject of 68 biographies, a notable number, yet one that pales in comparison to the 250 biographies written about Napoleon in the same period.⁵ Even the political sphere rapidly embraced the Emperor, inserting him into the roster of Italian greats and transforming him into a true role-model. Thus, his persona entered into both the clandestine and government “laboratories” as a figure to be contemplated with admiration or to be avoided at all costs. At the end of the 19th century, Francesco Crispi – who was the most influential politician in the country at the time – stated that Napoleon embodied the best qualities of the “Italian mind”, alongside Enrico Dandolo, Galileo Galilei, Christopher Columbus and Eugene of Savoy.⁶ Crispi also declared that the Emperor was the only one who could compare with Garibaldi. During the twenty-year run of Fascism, it was Mussolini’s turn to engage with Bonaparte’s legacy, appropriating his image to identify him as a predecessor of the Italian Duce’s political and military genius.⁷

In the world of publishing, texts about the life and adventures of the Emperor achieved extraordinary success and continued for several years after his death, mirroring the public’s interest in biographies as well as important political, social and cultural matters. The popularity of books about Napoleon coincided with the flourishing of “the writing of lives”, which became so prominent in the 19th century that between 1815 and 1861 some 2,500 biographies were published.⁸ Moreover, between the 18th and 19th centuries the perception of biography underwent a transformation, becoming an active tool for shaping debates on contemporary politics. While today, the biographical approach enjoys diminished esteem among Italian historians who, with few exceptions, tend to relegate it to a secondary role,⁹ in the 19th century the opposite was true; biographies held sway over other genres, and their authors were often regarded more as political actors than as historians.

5. The numbers regarding Garibaldi can be found in *ibid.*, p. 26, while the numbers related to Napoleon were calculated by the author of this essay.

6. Christopher Duggan, *Creare la nazione. Vita di Francesco Crispi*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2000, pp. 490-491. See also the English version, *Francesco Crispi 1818-1901: From Nation to Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002.

7. Alessandro Campi, *L'ombra lunga di Napoleone. Da Mussolini a Berlusconi*, Venice, Marsilio, 2007, p. 19; Luigi Mascilli Migliorini, “Napoleone e il racconto storico dell’Italia unita”, in *Da Brumaio ai Cento giorni. Cultura di governo e dissenso politico nell’Europa di Bonaparte*, ed. by Antonino De Francesco, Milan, Guerini e Associati, 2007, pp. 29-38, esp. pp. 37-38.

8. Casalena, *Biografie*, p. 13.

9. Though it is difficult to summarise the research on this topic, information may be gleaned from *Biografia e storiografia*, ed. by Alceo Riosa, Milan, Angeli, 1983; Regina Pozzi, Gabriele Turi, Giuseppe Pignatelli, Luisa Passerini, “La biografia: un genere storiografico in trasformazione”, *Contemporanea*, 2 (1999), pp. 287-306. On the international front, see: “AHR Roundtable: Historians and Biography”, *The American Historical Review*, 114/3 (2009), pp. 573-661, and Melanie Nolan, *Biography: An Historiography*, Basingstoke, Routledge, 2023.

This was not a new phenomenon, as in the 18th century several biographies of great men were published to public acclaim in response to similar objectives. One notable example is Voltaire's highly influential *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, through which the author wanted "to set before posterity not only the portrait of one man's actions but that of the spirit of mankind in general, in the most enlightened of all ages".¹⁰ It is true, however, that the genre of biography had not been favoured at the end of the ancien régime. In Milan, the capital of Italian publishing, biographies of some famous French revolutionary leaders such as Robespierre and Toussaint Louverture began to appear as early as 1796,¹¹ together with the biographies of the so-called Legitimist martyrs of the Revolution, like the young Louis XVII.¹² However, judging from the number of volumes published and their cultural impact, nothing particularly significant had appeared.¹³ The Restoration brought forth a renewed interest in biographies, influenced by two major factors: first, a staggering demand for more history books that was nourished by a more highly-educated audience than in previous years, thanks to the Napoleonic reforms; and second, the new need to assimilate, through the lives of the past, the innovations and cultural-political transformations that were in full swing. It is within this context that biographies evolved from mere historical narrative to a source of knowledge at the ready for those who looked to the past as a means of orienting their decisions in the present.

2. The phases of the myth

Italy's interest in Napoleon was keen from the very beginning, heightened by the Emperor's exile on Elba, an island only a few miles off the Tuscan coast. Different phases marked the spread of the myth with respect to its characteristics and the personalities involved. The first phase could already be detected in 1814, when the first pamphlets dedicated to Napoleon began to circulate. Several of them were written by foreign authors and quickly translated into Italian, such as Chateaubriand's text on Bonaparte and the Bourbons or the *Historie du 18 brumaire et de Bonaparte* (*History of the 18th Brumaire and of Bonaparte*), written by French monarchist journalist Jean-Pierre Gallais, which rapidly achieved third-edition status,¹⁴ or British notary Lewis Goldsmith's *The Secret History of the Bonaparte's*

10. *The Works of Voltaire: A Contemporary Version*, William F. Fleming, New York, E. R. DuMont, 1901, 21 vols, vol. XII, part. I, "Introduction".

11. *Storia della vita e congiura di Massimiliano Robespierre*, Milan, Agnelli, 1802; *Vita privata politica e militare di Toussaint-Louverture, scritta da un uomo del suo colore*, Milan, Stamperia italiana e francese in S. Zeno n. 534, 1802.

12. *Storia della vita, prigionia, patimenti, e morte del piccolo Delfino di Francia sotto il nome di Luigi XVII*, Milan, Carlo Vismara ditta di Pietro Agnelli, 1800.

13. *Tra Rivoluzione e Risorgimento. Repertorio delle opere stampate a Milano (1796-1848)*, ed. by Francesco Dendena, Giacomo Girardi and Emilio Scaramuzza, Rome, Officina Libreria, 2024.

14. Milan, Destefanis, 1814; Milan, Sonzogno and company, 1814; Venice, Fracasso, 1814.

Cabinet and the Court of Saint-Cloud, a manifesto against Bonapartism.¹⁵ The year 1814 also saw the publication of *Bonapartiana*, a biographical collection of questionable anecdotes about Napoleon¹⁶ and the *Brevissima narrazione della vita di Napoleone Bonaparte* (*A Very Brief Account of the Life of Napoleon Bonaparte*), authored by a certain Illevir, a seemingly Latin name that was in all likelihood Italian, since it appears to be an anagram of the surname Rivelli.¹⁷ Additional publications in 1814 included *Memorie segrete sulla vita pubblica e privata non che sul carattere personale di Napoleone Bonaparte* (*Secret Memories of the Public and Private Life and the Personal Character of Napoleon Bonaparte*) and *Vita di Napoleone Bonaparte compilata sulle opere pubblicate durante il suo impero* (*Life of Napoleon Bonaparte Based on What Was Published During His Empire*).¹⁸ These texts were often written to mark a special occasion, albeit in a clumsy and confusing manner, and were rich in details that straddled reality and fantasy. Together, they can be taken as an indication of how writers at the time were trying to recount the life of Napoleon to provide readers with an overall narrative of life that would only be fully achieved following his death.

In 1821, the news of Napoleon's death spread throughout Europe,¹⁹ kickstarting the second phase of the elaboration of the Napoleonic myth. This period has been widely studied, even in recent years, and is traditionally viewed as the period of the myth's origin. Lore about the Emperor was rife, thanks to the distribution of translations of texts such as *Manoscritto venuto da S. Elena* (*Manuscript Transmitted from Saint Helena*), which first appeared in Italian with the false imprint of Constantinople. It was later printed again in Naples between 1820 and 1821.²⁰ These were the years of the odes written by the likes of Lord Byron, Alessandro Manzoni, Pietro Custodi and others. Often distributed clandestinely, they created the myth that would become a "central theme in the cultural and artistic life of the Romantic period" in only a few short years.²¹

In the early 1820s, the most successful biography of Napoleon, which focused on the Russian Campaign, was authored by Philippe-Paul de Ségur. It was finally printed in Florence, at Prato, by two publishers in Livorno in

15. Italy, 1814.

16. Verona, Pietro Bisesti, 1814.

17. Florence, Alessandri e figli, 1814; Lodi, Pallavicini, 1814; Bologna, Tip. de' Franceschi, 1814.

18. Padua, Bettoni, 1814; Milan, Silvestri, 1814.

19. Thierry Lentz, *Bonaparte n'est plus! Le monde apprend la mort de Napoléon. Juillet-septembre 1821*, Paris, Perrin, 2019; Vittorio Criscuolo, *Ei fu. La morte di Napoleone*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2021, p. 81-103.

20. Constantinople [i.e. Mendrisio], presso Meemud-bey [i.e. Landi], 1817; Naples, Tipografia del Giornale Enciclopedico, 1820, and Naples, Agnello Nobile, 1820.

21. Criscuolo, *Ei fu*, pp. 139-173; Matteo Palumbo, "*Ei fu*". *Vita letteraria di Napoleone da Foscolo a Gadda*, Rome, Salerno Editrice, 2021. See also Gianluca Albergoni, "L'ombra di Napoleone. Stendhal e il gruppo del Conciliatore", *Revue Stendhal, Milanese*, 2 (2021), pp. 229-271. This article centers on the political and cultural conflict that took place in Milan after the fall of Napoleon, particularly within high society circles, and foregrounds the figure of Stendhal and his *Vie de Napoléon*.

1825.²² It was then that a new trend took hold: publishing responses to books. The new practice provoked a fiery public debate about the now-legendary Emperor. In 1825 Gaspard Gougoud, who self-exiled to Saint Helena with Napoleon, published *Examen critique de l'ouvrage de M. le comte P. de Ségur* (*Critical Examination of Count P. de Ségur's Work*).²³ The climax of responses was reached in 1827, with the beginning of a third phase, that of a truly militant political history. The publication of Walter Scott's *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* achieved unparalleled success, despite the many critiques.²⁴ It was an incredibly important political manifesto, between fiction and historical reconstruction, and became the first in Europe to shape the black legend of Napoleon. Several counter-responses appeared in the wake of Scott's text, some more critical than others, evolving alongside memoirs and accounts of the protagonists of Napoleon's exile, from Emmanuel de Las Cases to François Carlo Antonmarchi. The main response to Scott was penned by none other than Louis Bonaparte,²⁵ but authors such as the liberal Leonard Gallois,²⁶ the Orleanist Jean-Baptiste Capefigue,²⁷ the military man Antoine-Henri Jomini,²⁸ the republican supporter of Bonaparte Laurence de l'Ardèche²⁹ and the public official Jacques Norvins³⁰ were translated in the same period.

22. Philippe-Paul de Ségur, *Istoria di Napoleone e della Grande Armata nell'anno 1812 del generale conte di Segur*, Florence, Ducci, 1825, 2 vols; Prato, Vestri, 1825; Livorno, Pozzolini, 1825; Livorno, Vignozzi, 1825.

23. Gaspard Gourgaud, *Napoleone e la grande armata in Russia ossia Esame critico dell'opera del sig. conte di Segur*, Italy, 1825, 2 vols.

24. Walter Scott, *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*, Edinburgh, Cadell, Longman's, 1827, 9 vols. The French translation: *Vie de Napoléon Buonaparte*, Paris, Treuttel & Würtz, 1827, 9 vols. The Italian translation: *Vita di Napoleone Buonaparte [...] prima versione italiana dall'inglese di Vittorio Pecchioli*, Florence, tipografia Coen & co., 1827-1828, 20 vols. There are other Tuscan editions, and one from Lugano. Despite its wide distribution, the text received a cold reception in France and in Anglophone countries, so much so that in 1834 Henry Lee wrote: "The general impression, that an impartial and accurate biography of the Emperor Napoleone does not exist, and that Sir Walter Scott, in his *Life of Napoleone Bonaparte* did injustice to his subject, rises an endeavour to supply that defect and repair that injustice". In Henry Lee, *The Life of the Emperor Napoleon*, London, Thomas and William Boone, 1832, vol. I, p. III.

25. Luigi Bonaparte, *Risposta a sir Walter Scott sulla vita di Napoleone*, Florence, Coen, 1829; Livorno, Vignozzi, 1829; Lugano, Veladini, 1829.

26. Leonard-Charles Gallois, *Storia di Napoleone compilata sulle di lui proprie memorie*, Lugano, Ruggia, 1828, 2 vols.

27. Jean Baptiste Capefigue, *L'Europa durante il consolato e l'impero di Napoleone*, Florence, Galileiana, 1840-1845, 10 vols, and Milan, Turati, 1840-1844, 3 vols.

28. Antoine-Henry Jomini, *Vita politica e militare di Napoleone raccontata da lui medesimo al Tribunale di Cesare, Alessandro e Federigo*, Livorno, Vignozzi, 1829, 4 vols; Livorno, at Bertani, Antonelli e C., 1829-1830, 12 vols; Florence, presso Celli & Ronchi, 1829, 12 vols.

29. Paul-Mathieu Laurent, *Storia di Napoleone, illustrata da Orazio Vernet, voltata in italiano da Antonio Lissoni e da esso cresciuta delle imprese militari delle soldatesche italiane*, Turin, per Alessandro Fontana, 1839.

30. Jacques Norvins, *Storia di Napoleone, del sig. di Norvins, prima edizione italiana con note e tavole*, Bastia, presso i fratelli Fabiani, 1833.

3. *Biography and memory: Jacques Norvins and Laurent de l'Ardèche*

Two of the main biographies that contributed to the diffusion of the Napoleonic myth came out during the third phase. Destined to achieve wide circulation that extended even beyond the borders of France were Jacques Norvins' *Histoire de Napoléon* (*History of Napoleon*) and Laurent de l'Ardèche's *Histoire de l'Empereur Napoléon* (*History of the Emperor Napoleon*).³¹ The incredible success of these works stands in stark contrast to the relative neglect they have received from modern scholars, who have analysed the myth primarily from other perspectives, privileging the masterpieces of European literature, memoirs and the historiography of the second half of the 19th century.³² On the other hand, the analysis of works such as those by Norvins and Laurent de l'Ardèche allows us not only to trace the success of the biographical genre, but also to observe the renewal of historical knowledge, which goes hand in hand with references to contemporaneity.³³ The two personalities presented here, a high-ranking conservative official and a democrat with Sansimonian sympathies, bore witness to how the myth circulated along widely divergent tracks that might never intersect, despite their common aim, which was that of proposing to contemporary politics a new order and way of managing consensus.

The *Histoire de Napoléon* by Jacques Norvins was published in 1827-1828 as a response to the critical biography written by Walter Scott and stands as a celebration of Napoleon's role in the history of France and Europe. Norvins himself recalled reading about the publication of Walter Scott's biography of Napoleon in the newspaper, noting that Scott had been unfairly critical of the French even in 1822.³⁴ Norvins wanted to provide a response as rich in detail as Scott's more recent outrageous attack on the memory of Napoleon and the pride of the French.

Norvins had been one of the most loyal followers of Napoleon. Born in 1769 into a wealthy family with ties in finance, he had left France in 1792 only to return five years later, ending up in jail. He was freed by Bonaparte thanks to the intervention of Madame de Staël, after which he embarked on a high-profile career in French public institutions that culminated in 1810 with his nomination as Director General of the Police of the former Papal States. Together with the biography by Ardèche, Norvins' *Histoire de Napoléon* is the most famous text of Napoleonic propaganda relayed through historical narrative, and was capable of reaching a vast audience thanks to its many foldout plates of engravings, battle maps and illustrations created by incredibly talented artists such as Raffet and Vernet. The second and third editions appeared in 1829, followed by the

31. Paris, Dupont, 1827, 4 vols; Paris, Dubochet et C^e, 1839.

32. Mascilli Migliorini, *Il mito dell'eroe*.

33. On this topic, from the perspective of historical repetition, see the works by Daniele Di Bartolomeo, *Le due repubbliche. Pensare la Rivoluzione nella Francia del 1848*, Rome, Viella, 2024, and, in collaboration with Francesco Benigno, *Napoleone deve morire. L'idea di ripetizione storica nella Rivoluzione francese*, Rome, Salerno Editrice, 2020.

34. Norvins, *Storia di Napoleone*, vol. I, pp. VI-VII.

fourth in 1833. The twenty-first – and last – edition came out posthumously in 1868, as Norvins had died in 1854. The Spanish translation of his *Histoire* came out in Paris in 1827 and was published again in Barcelona in 1833. German translations followed in Leipzig (1839) and Stuttgart (1841), but the text was never translated into English. The Italian translation process was very surprising, as it started in 1833 in Bastia (Corsica), where the Fabiani brothers published the first Italian translation. In 1834 it was printed by Pedone and Muratori in Palermo, while in 1839 the complete edition in one volume was released by the Swiss Tipografia Elvetica in Capolago, alongside the second edition of the Bastia translation. In 1845, it was printed by Pilloni in Florence, and in 1852 various Milanese editions started to circulate, which dominated the literary market throughout the second half of the 19th century under the aegis of Sonzogno, who put out five more editions between 1893 and 1910, with notes and additions by Palmiro Premoli.

Laurent de l'Ardèche published his biography of Napoleon in a different political context, with the first edition coming out in 1839.³⁵ The house of Bourbon had fallen almost ten years prior, and Louis Philippe I sat on the throne of France. The new monarch had a brand new approach to Napoleon and his legacy compared with previous rulers. He completed the Arc de Triomphe, restored the statue of the Emperor standing out against the sky atop the Vendôme column, and ensured that Napoleon's remains would return to Paris. Once again, Napoleon's status went from usurper to symbol of redemption for France. In this propitious climate, Laurent de l'Ardèche seized the moment to write a biography of the Emperor. He was a man of many talents: journalist, lawyer and writer. He was already known for his Saint-Simonianism and left-leaning republican sympathies. In 1828, he wrote in defence of Robespierre, highlighting that he was a deeply intelligent and uncompromising patriot.³⁶ From Robespierre to Napoleon was but a short step, and de l'Ardèche followed the idealised narrative of *Le Mémorial de Saint'Hélène* (*The Memorial of Saint Helena*) in his biography of the Emperor, whom he depicted as a universal hero, champion of the legacy of the French Revolution. His text was very successful, appearing in translation in Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Italy. In 1839, the Turinese publisher Fontana released a successful edition that included the same illustrations as the French one, translated and edited by Antonio Lissoni.³⁷

Translating in those years did not simply entail a good rendition of the source text in Italian³⁸ but included the addition of several appendices such as notes, introductions and previously unreleased texts that had the function of integrating

35. Nathalie Coilly, "Le journal de Laurent de l'Ardèche", *Revue de la BNF*, 31/1 (2009), pp. 56-65.

36. The text was printed under a pseudonym: *Réfutation de l'histoire de France de l'abbé de Montgaillard, publiée par M. Uranelt de Leuze*, Paris, Delaforest, 1828.

37. Laurent, *Storia di Napoleone*.

38. Maria Pia Casalena, *Tradurre nell'Italia del Risorgimento. Le culture straniere e le idee di nazione*, Rome, Carocci, 2021.

what was missing in the source text.³⁹ And so, through the figure of Napoleon, the Italian translators, who in many cases had directly experienced the revolutionary and Napoleonic era, found themselves actively engaging in politics through their translations in the Restoration period. Such was the case for some of the translators who are discussed in the following pages, though so many more would be worthy of consideration, beginning with Bartolomeo Bertolini, a figure Antonio Trampus recently studied.⁴⁰ Bertolini, a Napoleonic veteran of the Russian campaign, tried his hand at a true “redetermination of memory” in the Trieste of the Restoration, mixing reality with invention and creating a vivid narrative of that glorious period. His writing enjoyed overwhelming success, resonating beyond the mid-19th century, and was even lauded by Alessandro Manzoni. In 1864, Bertolini dedicated a book of his memoirs to King Victor Emmanuel II, who recognised the gesture as a confirmation of the perpetuation of the myth of Napoleon beyond the traditional timeframe of the Risorgimento. His success continued into the 20th century thanks to the publishing house Mondadori, which printed a new edition of his account of the Russian campaign in 1940, destined to reverberate with what Italian soldiers would soon be experiencing on the gelid Russian steppes.⁴¹

4. *The missing publication of Giacomo Breganze*

Among the most significant translations of Napoleon’s biographies, let us mention *Note e supplementi (Notes and Appendices)* by Giacomo Breganze.⁴² In the 1820s, he edited the translation of *Histoire de Napoléon* by Jacques Norvins, adding a section dedicated to the history of Italy. Although Breganze was a lesser-known intellectual, his unpublished work represents a committed translation in the shape of a political reflection and analysis of Norvins’ text. Born to a wealthy family of Vicenza in 1773, he graduated in Padua and in 1797 entered the local democratic government, inspired by the French revolutionary movement. He became one of the party’s most radical members and moved to Milan after the Treaty of Campo Formio, where he connected with Ugo Foscolo and Melchiorre Gioia. The three of them founded *Il Monitore Italiano*, a political journal that attracted many staunch patriots and that would be directed by Breganze himself. Despite his scepticism toward Napoleon and French politics – considered too

39. Cecilia Carnino, “Traduzioni e saperi di governo nell’Italia napoleonica. Testi e peritesti”, and Stefano Poggi, “Educare al *Code Napoléon*. Manuali e traduzioni giuridiche nell’Italia napoleonica”, both found in *Il Risorgimento*, 71/2 (2024), pp. 33-54 and pp. 77-95.

40. Antonio Trampus, “I veterani napoleonici e la risemantizzazione della memoria tra Otto e Novecento. Il ‘militare’ e l’opera di Bartolomeo Bertolini attraverso Manzoni e il fascismo”, in *Il “militare” nelle Italie di Napoleone. Società, cultura, istituzioni*, ed. by Paola Bianchi, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2024, pp. 109-119.

41. Bartolomeo Bertolini, *La campagna di Russia 1812-1815*, Milan, Mondadori, 1940.

42. This forthcoming text, which I have edited, will appear in the series “Deputazione di storia patria per le Venezie” in 2026. On Breganze, see the first chapter of Giacomo Girardi, *La patria e lo Stato: la famiglia Breganze nella storia d’Italia, 1796-1922*, Milan, Biblion, 2025, pp. 21-105.

divisive for the Italian people – Breganze's career flourished in high-profile roles within public institutions, even including a brief stint as Minister of Police in the Cisalpine Republic in 1799. He later served as General Commissioner of Police and, in 1808, he was nominated Judge of the Court of Appeals in Ancona and Brescia. Eventually, he acknowledged that French hegemony was far preferable to that of Austria, becoming a loyal supporter of Napoleon's policies and even playing an interesting role in the escape of viceroy Eugène de Beauharnais from Milan in 1814. After the fall of the Kingdom of Italy that same year, he retired from political life and opened a legal practice. He continued to write until his death in 1835.⁴³

Four out of five volumes of Breganze's manuscript include his translation of Norvins' text. The *Note e supplementi* (*Notes and Appendices*) can be found in the fourth volume, an original contribution that focuses solely on the events taking place in Italy. He began with a *Conto-reso del traduttore* (*Translator's Report*) in which he made several interesting annotations to his translation, delineating his approach to translation and his goals: being faithful to the original while intervening, nonetheless, on passages that might be difficult for an Italian audience to comprehend. His process was meticulous yet free, as he was the one to decide where to change the source text by editing out parts or omitting and correcting elements to "Italianise" the text, not only linguistically but politically, too. Thus, under the pretence of correcting and integrating Norvins' work, Breganze added his appendices to fill in the gaps concerning what had occurred in Italy.

While Norvins' biography was written in response to Scott's, Breganze's was created in response to Federico Coraccini, the mysterious author of the *Storia dell'Amministrazione del Regno d'Italia durante il dominio francese* (*History of the Administration of the Kingdom of Italy During French Rule*), published in Lugano in 1823.⁴⁴ Breganze enacted a heated attack against Coraccini, whose real name was Giuseppe Valeriani, a former Jacobin. His volume criticised Napoleon's rule in Italy, portraying the Emperor and all the political figures involved in the government in those years in a negative way. Valeriani compared the Kingdom of Italy to the pre-Napoleonic period of the peninsula, when in his opinion it was ruled by reform-minded sovereigns such as Joseph II and Leopold II and was generally characterised by good governance, such as that of the king of Naples, a sovereign with excellent qualities who ruled over extraordinary lands. These were intolerable positions for a man like Breganze, who had dedicated his political life to cultivating the principles of the French Revolution on the assumption that it could serve as the starting point for a comprehensive renewal of Italy. Although he acknowledged some merit in Valeriani's text due to its use of archival sources, Breganze considered the work to be flawed and mendacious, full of misleading passages steeped in "poison". He believed that Valeriani wanted to weave a web

43. On the "Jacobin generation" between the two centuries, see Luca Addante, *Le Colonne della Democrazia. Giacobinismo e società segrete alle radici del Risorgimento*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2024. The volume contains several references to Breganze.

44. Federico Coraccini [Giuseppe Valeriani], *Storia dell'amministrazione del Regno d'Italia durante il dominio francese*, Lugano, Veladini, 1823.

of mostly unwarranted accusations toward anyone who had held a prominent position between 1796 and 1814, thus condemning the entire Napoleonic ruling class to which Breganze had once belonged.

While we will not delve into the Valeriani controversy, we must recognise the profound meaning of Breganze's manuscript, which is rich in anecdotes and detailed analyses about important individuals, such as Francesco Melzi d'Eril – the vice-president of the Napoleonic Italian Republic –, general Alessandro Trivulzio and some French officers. He also reflected on several social, economic, cultural and political matters, providing an overview of secret societies, monetary policy and investigating Napoleon's approach toward Italy.

This last effort of the old revolutionary Breganze, which would not be published for 100 years, was discovered by his descendants at the end of the 19th century, and then again in the 1930s. Unfortunately, none of them decided to publish it.⁴⁵ Despite its manuscript form, the text remained an important point of reference for a specific type of patriotism that for a very long time would mark not only the history of his family, but in some ways, even a substantial part of Italian history between the 18th and 20th centuries. This form of patriotism was the legacy of the French Revolution – perfected or twisted depending on the circumstances of the following years – but kept alive through the tireless efforts of successive generations of biographers, and thus destined to reach the 20th century.

5. Antonio Lissoni and military pride

After 1814, on a peninsula that had been handed back over to its ancient sovereigns, it was not always easy to publish texts about Napoleon. Censors tried to prevent books from spreading ideas among the population that might be dangerous to the public order. Under the tight scrutiny of the Austrian rulers, the publishing houses in the Lombardy-Veneto area had been left behind when it came to spreading the Napoleonic myth, with the sole exception of Milan, where the works of Walter Scott, Alexandre Dumas *père*, Pierre Paganel and Louis-Vincent-Joseph le Blond de Saint-Hilaire, among others, appeared in translation.⁴⁶ Instead, the publishing houses in Tuscany and Turin, capital city of the Kingdom of Sardinia, where the publisher Fontana was active, bucked the trend. Fontana had understood that the public clamoured after texts about Napoleon and saw the potential for profit. Between 1839 and 1846, Fontana published one or more pamphlets on Napoleonic history every week, with his colleagues soon following suit.⁴⁷

45. Nicola, a nephew, published a new edition of Giacomo Breganze's pamphlet *Sulla libertà dei mari: considerazioni di Giacomo Breganze di Vicenza*, with a "Preface" and the "Author's biography", Milan, Pirotta, 1857. See Girardi, *La patria e lo Stato*, pp. 7-19.

46. Giampietro Berti, *Censura e circolazione delle idee nel Veneto della Restaurazione*, Venice, Deputazione Editrice, 1989.

47. Andrea Merlotti, "Una lunga assenza. Piemonte napoleonico e storiografia subalpina fra Otto e Novecento", in *L'esperienza napoleonica in Italia. Un bilancio storiografico*, ed. by Stefano Levati, Milan, Angeli, 2023, pp. 203-220.

In 1839, it would be Fontana who published *Storia di Napoleone* (*History of Napoleon*) by Laurent de l'Ardèche and translated by Antonio Lissoni with illustrations by Vernet.⁴⁸ Lissoni is not well known today, but at the start of the 19th century he was renowned for his prolific work as translator, writer and historian, not to mention for being the embodiment of the Napoleonic war veteran. After the Napoleonic campaigns, he had to reinvent himself and saw in literature a promising pathway to fame and money. Although his written output is negligible as far as literary quality is concerned, it is useful to analyse how it perpetuated the widespread archetype of a citizen shouldering a rifle to defend his homeland and the tenets of the revolution, taking the first steps toward the development of national awareness. A few of his volumes can be studied from this perspective, including *Gl'italiani in Catalogna* (*Italians in Catalunya*), published with the false imprint of London in 1814. Written in epistolary form, it promotes the image of Italians in arms – Lissoni himself, to be exact, described on the cover page as an “ufficiale di cavalleria italiano” (“Italian cavalry officer”). It was a polemical response to the common stereotype that Italians were not cut out for war. The Napoleonic period had shown, instead, that Italians were second to none when it came to honouring military duties, as proven by the brave soldiers involved in the Russian and Spanish campaigns. Lissoni was one of many former officers under Napoleon who started to create an Italian “military memory”, alongside other figures as Cesare de Laugier, who wrote many successful texts on the Russian and Spanish campaigns to defend the bravery of Italian soldiers.⁴⁹ Lissoni, de Laugier, Bartolomeo Bertolini, Carlo Zucchi, Giuseppe Lechi and others got to live long lives, marking the period of Risorgimento with their presence, armed with both rifle and pen. They influenced the emerging concept of the nation, which they tied directly to the Napoleonic era.

Lissoni also argued with several French authors, such as Honoré de Balzac, who was guilty of portraying Italian soldiers in a negative way in his novella *Les Marana* (*The Maranas*).⁵⁰ Lissoni's most renowned accomplishment was translating Laurent de l'Ardèche's work, and his was not a mere transposition of the popular volume into the Italian but rather an act of appropriation of the text by adding some paragraphs dedicated to the endeavours of Italian soldiers, deemed to have been neglected in the original. The myth of Napoleon went hand in hand with the awareness that part of its history belonged to Italy. Lissoni's addenda became a separate volume, titled *Compendio della storia militare italiana dal 1792 al 1815* (*Summary of Italian Military History from 1792 to 1815*), which was published at the same time as another successful biography: *Histoire populaire, anecdotique et pittoresque de Napoléon et de la Grande Armée* (*History of Napoleon and the Grande Armée: Popular, Anecdotal and Picturesque Accounts*)

48. Laurent, *Storia di Napoleone*.

49. Among his many books, see the thirteen volumes [C. De Laugier], *Fasti e vicende degl'italiani dal 1801 al 1815 o Memorie di un'uffiziale per servire alla storia militare italiana*, Florence, n.p., 1829-1838.

50. Antonio Lissoni, *Difesa dell'onore dell'armi italiane oltraggiato dal Signor di Balzac* [...], Milan, Pogliani, 1837.

by Émile Marco de Saint-Hilaire, illustrated by Jules David.⁵¹ Lissoni translated this text into Italian as well, and from the title it demonstrated an attempt to spread the myth of Napoleon not only in middle-class circles – which had been the goal of publishing the correspondence between Napoleon and Joséphine de Beauharnais⁵² – but also in lower-class circles where the cult of Napoleon had never stopped blooming. It was no coincidence that the police at the time often ran across pieces of furniture like chalk busts or simple lithographic prints depicting Bonaparte and his endeavours.⁵³

6. *Napoleon, the first soldier of Italy*

Historians and biographers of the time wanted to preserve two main elements, as demonstrated by Lissoni's case: on one hand, the idea of the Italian nation taking up arms as an index of its population finally reaching political maturity; and, on the other hand, the attempt to prove that there was an unbreakable connection between Napoleon and Italy. As we have seen, the bulk of Napoleon's biographies were published not just as translations of the French originals, but as texts that were in large part original, within which the figure of Napoleon took on a central importance in the history of Italy. If the Emperor's actions had greatly benefited Italians, it was true that, in return, Italians had contributed to the construction of his glory. It is not surprising that Italian memorialists took to writing their own works on the life of Napoleon, at the same time translating from the French while also introducing original texts.

Another case to analyse in this regard involves Marco Malagoli Vecchi from Modena. The little we know about his life comes from the publisher Gasparo Barbèra, who was his accountant for a brief period. Barbèra described Malagoli as an "excessive show-off" and a "penniless comedian".⁵⁴ Malagoli presented himself as a lover of books with a military past, a "soldier in the cavalry of the Italian army", which was useful for proving his claim of being a veteran, someone who had experienced firsthand the things he wrote about. Between 1844 and 1855, he published the *Ristretto della vita e dei fatti di Napoleone* (*Short Summary of the Life and Actions of Napoleon*) and a new translation of Norvins' biography with his original notes.⁵⁵ It was not the first time he had done something of the sort, as the Italian translation of *Napoléon et ses contemporains* (*Napoleon*

51. Turin, Fontana, 1844.

52. *Lettere di Napoleone a Giuseppina durante la prima guerra d'Italia, il Consolato e l'Impero e lettere di Giuseppina a Napoleone ed a sua figlia. Prima versione italiana di Antonio Lissoni*, Milan, per G. Truffi e comp., 1834, 2 vols.

53. On this topic, from the perspective of material culture, see the first chapter in Enrico Francia, *Oggetti risorgimentali. Una storia materiale della politica nel primo Ottocento*, Rome, Carocci, 2021.

54. Gasparo Barbèra, *Memorie di un editore pubblicate dai figli*, Florence, Barbèra, 1883, pp. 41-45.

55. Marco Malagoli Vecchi, *Ristretto della vita e dei fatti di Napoleone*, Florence, a spese di G. Raggi, 1844, and Jacques Norvins, *Storia di Napoleone del Signor di Norvins nuova*

and *His Contemporaries*) by Laurent Augustin Pelletier de Chambure, published in 1836-1837, reads on the title page “popularized by M.M.V”, an acronym that can be attributed to Marco Malagoli Vecchi.⁵⁶ Like Lissoni, Malagoli had every intention of taking advantage of the success of the Napoleonic myth to gain personal benefit, both in fame and profit, which he desperately needed. The construction of the Napoleonic myth therefore followed a bumpy path from time to time, and its primary objective was not always the glorification of the Emperor.

The last scholar we will discuss came from a very different background. Giacomo Lombroso was born in 1794 and was therefore very young during the Napoleonic period. His family was Jewish, but he converted to Catholicism and worked as a merchant before turning to literature.⁵⁷ A few texts on Napoleon have emerged among the many he wrote. Lombroso wrote in an original way about the Emperor, including biographies of the generals who gained recognition between 1796 and 1815. His main project, *Gallerie (Galleries)*, emerged from this effort. It consisted of a series of biographies of prominent officials through which Lombroso drew a comprehensive history of the Napoleonic wars. In 1840 *Vite dei primarj marescialli e generali francesi, italiani, polacchi, tedeschi, russi, inglesi, prussiani e spagnuoli che ebbero parte nelle guerre napoleoniche* (*Lives of the Most Important Marshals and Generals from France, Italy, Poland, Germany, Russia, England, Prussia and Spain Who Took Part in the Napoleonic Wars*) was published, followed by a volume in 1843 dedicated to the Italian officers: *Vite dei primarj generali ed ufficiali italiani* (*Lives of the Most Important Generals and Officials of Italy*). In 1848 he published *Vite dei primarj marescialli, ammiragli e generali che si distinsero nelle guerre napoleoniche in Europa, in Africa, in Asia, in America e nei marittimi conflitti accaduti nelle varie parti del globo* (*Lives of the Most Important Marshals, Admirals and Generals Who Distinguished Themselves in the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, Africa, Asia, America and in Naval Warfare in Various Places Throughout the World*). Finally, in 1852, the capstone of these biographies was published: *Vita guerriera, politica e privata di Napoleone* (*The Life of Napoleon in War, Politics and Private Life*).⁵⁸ It was not Lombroso's first biography of Napoleon, as he had written *Vita privata di Napoleone* (*A Private Life of Napoleon*) in 1839, offering an intimate portrait rather than a celebration of Napoleon the military hero.⁵⁹ It was in fact a highly political text, celebrating

edizione italiana corredata di note e della giunta d'importanti documenti per cura del bibliofilo Marco Malagoli Vecchi, Florence, Pillori, 1845.

56. Auguste de Chambure, *Napoleone e i suoi contemporanei. Serie d'incisioni in rame rappresentanti varii tratti d'eroismo, di clemenza, di generosità, di popolarità, col testo, pubblicata da Augusto de Chambure, ed ora volgarizzata da M.M.V.*, Florence, per V. Batelli e figli, 1836, 2 vols. A second edition appeared the following year.

57. Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, *Il prezzo dell'eguaglianza. Il dibattito sull'emancipazione degli ebrei in Italia 1781-1848*, Milan, Angeli, 1998, p. 91, and Gianluca Albergoni, *I mestieri delle lettere tra istituzioni e mercato. Vivere e scrivere a Milano nella prima metà dell'Ottocento*, Milan, Angeli, 2006, p. 142.

58. All volumes were published by Borroni e Scotti in Milan, in the years 1840, 1843, 1848 and 1852.

59. Milan, Manini, 1839.

Napoleon as a hero who had saved the Revolution in France to bring order and modernity to Italy, thus promoting a new sense of national pride. Napoleon was therefore to be thanked if Italy had experienced a brief period of unity, which was subsequently destroyed by the Congress of Vienna.⁶⁰

In conclusion, during the Restoration there was no way of limiting the diffusion of the myth of Napoleon, which manifested in many different ways. Napoleon was both a literary and political hero, whose myth circulated in bookstores and private homes, becoming increasingly widespread thanks to the work of Italian translators and authors who were his contemporaries. He was perceived as the first unifier of the peninsula in the modern period, with Italians sharing his hopes and concerns. The choice of translating certain texts over others almost always coincided with how closely the political affiliations of the translator aligned with those of the source author, though at times it was simply a product of chance. In the latter case, the “Italian appendices” to the translations are even more significant, as they convey the perspective of men who dedicated themselves to the task of writing. Though motivated by a variety of ambitions and perspectives, taken together, the texts authored by Breganze, Lissoni, Malagoli Vecchi and Lombroso create an overview of how in those years the Italian process of inventing the myth of Napoleon was established through these literary works. Although long neglected by scholars, they were enormously successful as catalysts, comparable in some ways to the works of Stendhal and Manzoni in their ability to perpetuate the Napoleonic myth.⁶¹

60. Casalena, *Biografie*, pp. 239-244.

61. Matilda Greig, *Dead Men Telling Tales: Napoleonic War Veterans and the Military Memoir Industry, 1808-1914*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021.

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Governing Consensus

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