Manufacturing Middle Ages

Entangled History of Medievalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe

Edited by

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BRILL

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MEDIEVALISM AND ITS ALTERNATIVES IN NATIONAL DISCOURSES

'MEDIEVAL' IDENTITIES IN ITALY: NATIONAL, REGIONAL, LOCAL

Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri*

Italy, like many other European nations and the United States, has an intense fascination with the Middle Ages, and the attraction is by no means new. The entire Italian Ottocento was characterized by a keen interest in the medieval period, one revived in different ways in our own era. Medievalism was ingrained in nineteenth-century Italian politics, society, and tastes. Ideas about the Middle Ages were formed and disseminated through novels, patriotic songs, poetry, paintings, etchings, and architecture; the scenery, costumes, and arias of operas; *tableaux vivants*; and even collectable picture-cards. Nineteenth-century notions of the Middle Ages also forged forms and contents for future generations—images of fairy-tale castles and kings, lute-strumming troubadours, ladies with conical hats and their errant knights—whose powers of persuasion were so profound that they came to constitute what Benedetto Croce described as a true "religion of the Middle Ages."[1]

The phenomenon was so prominent that by the 1970s it had become the subject of significant historiographic literature. Since then, a sizeable number of Italian historians have written on the theme, enough for the study of medievalism in Italy—and not only—to have become a virtual branch of historiography unto itself, a place of privileged encounter between scholars of the Middle Ages and scholars of contemporary culture. Today, Italian studies of medievalism tend to take one of two forms. The first consists of a comparative history of ideas, a variety of analysis that scrutinizes both period historical literature and a wide variety of other cultural evidence, be it archaeological, philological, literary, ethnographic, pictorial, architectural, philosophical, or cinematographic. Inquiries of this kind seek to produce a history of historical thought in a very

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[1] Benedetto Croce, *History of Europe in the Nineteenth Century*, translated from the Italian by Henry Furst (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1933), 49 (orig. edit. Bari: Laterza, 1931, reprinted in Benedetto Croce, *Filosofia, Poesia, Storia. Pagine tratte da tutte le opere a cura dell'autore* [Milano: Adelphi, 1996], p. 1306).

broad sense.[2] The second kind of study, whose ties to the first are obvious, has been defined as a "historiography of perception," meaning an attempt at recovering popular perceptions of the Middle Ages in post-medieval eras—perceptions that can then be juxtaposed with what professional historians have to say about the Middle Ages.[3] Studies of this sort function on the premise that the practice of history would be incomplete if it did not include common perceptions of the Middle Ages in its purview, since those perceptions obviously belong to the course of history. Whether fictions, falsehoods, or invented traditions, common perceptions—ideas widely shared within a society—can contribute greatly to the formation of the overall idea of a historical period. Historians help to determine those shared ideas and are in turn influenced by them, so much so that the common perceptions in question sometimes have a direct impact upon what comes to be considered historical fact. These circumstances, in other words, affect the work produced by historians of the Middle Ages, even though historians are accustomed to reasoning principally on the basis of sources produced during the medieval millennium itself. The same historians have a strong card to play nonetheless, since they are well positioned to juxtapose the Middle Ages that emerge from primary sources with societal perceptions of the Middle Ages in post-medieval eras. Skilled in forging comparisons and acutely aware of the kinds of issues at hand, professional historians are singularly well equipped to recognize differences, contradictions, distortions, and inventions and to interpret their meanings in historical terms.

In Italy, as elsewhere, it is a well-established historical tenet that the nineteenth century was the era when common perceptions of the medieval

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[2] One book merits particular mention: *Arti e storia nel medioevo*, ed. by Enrico Castelnuovo and Giuseppe Sergi. IV. *Il medioevo al passato e al presente* (Torino: Einaudi, 2004). A joint effort on the part of many scholars, it tackles the phenomenon of medievalism in its many manifestations, from political history to the history of art, music, and other cultural phenomena, with a prevailing but not exclusive focus on Italy.

[3] Although currently dormant, the journal *Quaderni medievali* (founded in 1976) for a few decades included a column of essays focusing on ideas of the Middle Ages held by people who were not professional historians of the era. The column was titled "L'altro medioevo" ("The Other Middle Ages") and dealt with "the Middle Ages belonging to non-specialists, the common culture, and the mass-media; the mechanisms that produced and transmitted a specular and deformed image." ("Il medioevo dei non specialisti, della cultura comune e dei mass media; i meccanisimi di produzione e di trasmissione di una immagine speculare e deformata.") For "perceptional historiography," see Giuseppe Sergi, *L'idea di medioevo. Fra storia e senso comune* (Roma: Donzelli, 1999, 2005²), 9. See also Antonio Brusa, "Un prontuario degli stereotipi sul medioevo," *Cartable de Clio* 5 (2004); *Medioevo e luoghi comuni*, ed. by Flavia Marostica (Napoli: Tecnodid, 2004).

past were invented and framed.[4] Studies of nineteenth-century construc-
tions of politics and identities based on the Middle Ages are consequently
rather numerous. Far less common are studies concerning the ways in
which the Middle Ages have been utilized politically from the twentieth
century to the present.[5]

One name suffices to illustrate the relevance of medievalism in nineteenth-
century Italy: Giuseppe Verdi. The vast majority of Verdi's works are set
in the Middle Ages. Those that most concern us were composed almost
exclusively in the 1840s and 1850s. They include lesser-known works, such
as *Oberto Conte di San Bonifacio* (1839), *I Lombardi alla Prima Crociata*
(1843), *Giovanna d'Arco* (1845), *Attila* (1846), *La Battaglia di Legnano* (1848),
Les Vêpres Siciliennes (1855), as well as some of the composer's absolute
masterpieces: *Macbeth* (1847), *Il Trovatore* (1853), *Simon Boccanegra* (1857),
and, from a later period, *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893). If we further
broaden our purview to include early sixteenth-century themes, the list
of operas grows considerably. Verdi's arias were sung by Italians of all
stripes, from nobles to emigrants to patriots, who wrote "Viva VERDI!" on
walls and shouted the phrase in theatres, using the composer's surname
as an acrostic for "Vittorio Emanuele Re d'Italia" (Victor Emmanuel, King
of Italy). The opera *La Battaglia di Legnano* was composed in the fateful
year of 1848, Spring of Nations, and was performed in Rome just a few

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[4] Among the most important studies are *Italia e Germania. Immagini, modelli, miti
fra due popoli dell'Ottocento: il medioevo*, ed. by Reinhard Elze and Pierangelo Schiera
(Bologna: il Mulino, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1988); and *Studi medievali e immag-
ine del medioevo tra Ottocento e Novecento*, in *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il
medio evo* 100 (1995–1996). A related book by Bordone has an evocative title, *The Mirror
of Shalott*: Renato Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott. L'invenzione del medioevo nella cultura
dell'Ottocento* (Napoli: Liguori, 1993). In it we find the metaphor of the sad story, narrated
by Tennyson, of the Lady of Shalott, who could see the world only through a deforming
mirror, i.e. a fictitious image of the Middle Ages. A more recent study is *Medioevo reale,
medioevo immaginario. Confronti e percorsi culturali tra regioni d'Europa. Atti del convegno
Torino 26 e 27 maggio 2000*, ed. by Daniele Lupo Jalla, Paolo Denicolai, Elisa Pagnucco, Gra-
ziella Rovino (Torino: Città di Torino, 2002). Cf. also Paolo Golinelli, *Medioevo romantico.
Poesie e miti all'origine della nostra identità* (Milano: Ugo Mursia Editore, 2011).

[5] See, in particular, *Il sogno del Medioevo. Il revival del Medioevo nelle culture contem-
poranee. Relazioni e comunicazioni del Convegno, San Gimignano, 11–12 novembre 1983*, in
Quaderni medievali 21 (1986); Renato Bordone, "Medioevo oggi," in *Lo spazio letterario del
Medioevo*. 1. *Il Medioevo latino*, ed. by Guglielmo Cavallo, Claudio Leonardi, Enrico Mene-
stò, IV: *L'attualizzazione del testo* (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1997), 261–99; Tommaso di Car-
pegna Falconieri, *Medioevo militante. La politica di oggi alle prese con barbari e crociati*
(Torino: Einaudi, 2011).

days before the proclamation of the Roman Republic.[6] Chivalry, romantic love, cities, the bourgeoisie, a nation, revolution, parliamentary representation and the constitution, a people in arms fighting against the foreign oppressor—these were the sentiments of the Italian Risorgimento, and Giuseppe Verdi was one of its chief symbolic representatives.

Italian medievalisms since Verdi's century have taken many different and multifaceted forms, and it would be unfair to reduce their complexities, which grew more diverse over time, across space, and among social groups. The Middle Ages of the Restoration were not those of 1848, nor were they those of the newly unified Italy. Meanwhile, up to our own time, the Middle Ages have been interpreted instrumentally in every possible way, including in reactionary, revolutionary, patriotic, and papalist terms, becoming so polyvalent that, in Renato Bordone's words, they have come to constitute a "great repertoire of ambiguously versatile metaphors."[7]

Given these formidable complexities, I would like to limit myself to a few considerations, by concentrating on certain well-known events, texts, and monuments. My aim is to illustrate the themes and problems that nineteenth-century Italians faced and which rendered their political receptions of medievalism peculiar.

It is useful, however, to begin in our own time. On February 9, 2009, the mayor of Rome conferred honorary citizenship on the Dalai Lama. China warned of possible damage to its ties with Italy. The Italian Foreign Office Minister answered that the Italian national government is external to such decisions, given that in Italy city governments act in complete autonomy. His answer was perhaps not comprehensible in the People's Republic of China, but for our purposes it introduces a key theme: the relationship between local realities and the Italian state. The Dalai Lama is now an honorary citizen of Rome, but, significantly, he is not an honorary citizen of Italy.

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[6] Franco Cardini, "Federico Barbarossa e il romanticismo italiano," in *Italia e Germania. Immagini, modelli, miti*, 83–126, at 112–4; Renato Bordone, "Il medioevo nell'immaginario dell'Ottocento italiano," *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo* 100 (1995–1996): 109–49, at p. 110; Franco Onorati, "Verdi indossa il cimiero. Un'opera sul tamburo: *La battaglia di Legnano* in prima esecuzione a Roma (27 gennaio 1849)," in *Strenna dei Romanisti* (Roma: Editrice Roma Amor, 2009), 499–516. See also Christopher Duggan, *The Force of Destiny. A History of Italy since 1796* (London: Lane/Penguin Books, 2007), 153–4, 177–8. It may be useful to recall that Duggan's book, which is the most recent synthesis of Italian history in the last two centuries, takes its title from a celebrated opera by Verdi.

[7] "Gran repertorio di metafore ambiguamente polivalenti" (Bordone, "Il medioevo nell'immaginario dell'Ottocento italiano," 115). Bordone, too, points to the contradictory nature of Italian appraisals of the Middle Ages, e.g. at p. 128.

This contemporary example points to one of Italy's fundamental characteristics—namely, the existence of two overlapping entities, national and local. Understanding the physiognomy of Italian national identity, including its perceived frailties and the heated debate that continues to surround them, requires an acute awareness of a particular dualism, the bifurcation between the Italian nation, on the one hand, and what we might call *piccole patrie* (small homelands), on the other.[8] If it is true—and it is—that each of us possesses not one but many superimposed and intersecting cultural identities, then in the Italian peninsula the mixture of ingredients consists of a massive portion of localism and a minor portion of nationalism. The discrepancy between national identity and regional and local identities is fundamental to deciphering, among other things, the contemporary phenomenon of the Lega Nord, or Northern League, a political party that would like to see Italy transformed into a federation of states. To that end, the Lega has completely inverted a patriotic myth dearly beloved of the Risorgimento, one of the principal mythomoteurs of the unification of the Italian state: the story of the Lombard communes united in a league against the emperor.[9]

The breach between the national and the regional/local also permits us to grasp how a small, independent republic, San Marino, a sort of relic of the medieval free communes, can still exist on the Italian peninsula. Never more than partly reducible to a unity, the national and the local in

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[8] Pertinent works include Giuseppe Galasso, *L'Italia come problema storiografico* (Torino: Utet, 1979); Umberto Levra, *Fare gli Italiani. Memoria e celebrazione del Risorgimento* (Torino: Comitato di Torino per la storia del Risorgimento italiano, 1992); Emilio Gentile, *La grande Italia. Ascesa e declino del mito della nazione nel ventesimo secolo* (Milano: Mondadori, 1997); Ernesto Galli della Loggia, *L'identità italiana* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1998); *Gli italiani e il tricolore. Patriottismo, identità nazionale e fratture sociali lungo due secoli di storia*, ed. by Fiorenza Tarozzi and Giorgio Vecchio (Bologna: il Mulino, 1999); Alberto M. Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento: parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell'Italia unita* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000); *Making and Remaking Italy. The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento*, ed. by Albert Russell Ascoli and Kristyna von Henneberg (Oxford: Berg, 2001); *Immagini della nazione nell'Italia del Risorgimento*, ed. by Alberto M. Banti and Roberto Bizzocchi (Roma: Carocci, 2002); Erminia Irace, *Itale glorie* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2003); Duggan, *The Force of Destiny*; Silvana Patriarca, *Italianità. La costruzione del carattere nazionale* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010).

[9] Raffaele Iorio, "Il giuramento di Pontida," *Quaderni medievali* 30 (1990): 207–11; Stefano Cavazza, "L'invenzione della tradizione e la Lega lombarda," *Iter-percorsi di ricerca* 8 (1994): 197–214; Ernst Voltmer, *Il carroccio* (Torino: Einaudi, 1994), 24–31; Carpegna Falconieri, *Medioevo militante*, 247–49. The film *Barbarossa* premiered in October 2009. Directed by Renzo Martinelli, with Raz Degan and Rutger Hauer, it was produced by RAI (i.e. Italian state television) and strongly encouraged by the Lega Nord. See Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, "Barbarossa e la Lega Nord. A proposito di un film, delle storie e della Storia," *Quaderni storici* 132 (2009), 859–78.

Italy are the two poles upon which I will concentrate in the coming pages, first through a brief discussion of how the Middle Ages were used in constructing the Italian nation, and then via a look at the *piccole patrie*, and especially at the ways in which single political entities, from communes to regional states, built strong identities for themselves by "rediscovering" their medieval heritages.

In any study of our subject matter, the relationship between the Middle Ages and the origin of nations is one of the most important consideration. The principal Western nations have encountered few obstacles to envisioning the Middle Ages as the era when their nationhood was formed, having built theories that, in their respective periods, were both historically plausible and capable of meeting then-current political needs.

Maximum success in this endeavor was achieved by France and England, where two great theories, "the theory of conquest" and "the theory of progressive identity between state and nation," existed side-by-side. For nineteenth-century thinkers in both countries, the Middle Ages began when their free, proud peoples brought down what was left of the by-then decrepit and corrupt Roman Empire. The Middle Ages continued, moreover, when those same peoples, having become the French and the English, founded their respective national kingdoms, a notion that led many historians to believe that state and nation were already practically synonymous in the Middle Ages, with the exclusion, of course, of the Bretons, Provençals, Basques and Catalans, Scots and Irish. It followed logically that the state resulted from the joint effort of crown and people. The Visigoths in Spain were excluded from this model, given their defeat by the Arabs, although the evocative strength of the Reconquista and the attainment of a united kingdom at the end of the Middle Ages nevertheless made it possible to think of Spanish history in a comparable way. Germany, on the other hand, did not have a united state, as the Empire could not be considered a unity. It did have its primeval heroes, however: the Germans, a conquering and victorious people imbued with praiseworthy qualities that made them simultaneously similar to Rousseau's noble savages and to Tacitus' Germans. Here the theory of race—and in particular, of the superior, pure, and civilizing Germanic race—reached its high tide.

In Italy, too, the Middle Ages were used as an imaginary setting for an explanation of the origins of the nation, as hundreds of examples attest. The Middle Ages of the Risorgimento are a veritable reservoir of medieval political events advanced as symbols of the country's liberation. We need

only recall the Battle of Legnano against Frederick I Barbarossa (1176), which in the nineteenth century was metaphorically merged with the fight against the emperor of Austria; or the Sicilian Vespers, the bloody uprising against the Angevin rulers (1282); or the Challenge of Barletta (1503), a famous tournament between thirteen Italian knights and thirteen French knights in which the Italians were victorious.[10] This is the general picture. In its refashioning of the Middle Ages in service of contemporary politics, Ottocento Italy was very much like other countries. At the same time, its path in the process was a more winding one, due to the fact that its fascination with the Middle Ages was initially imported in part from Germany, France, and England and because the peninsula's complex history could not easily be subjected to ideological simplification.

There were ultimately many reasons why the idea of the Middle Ages as the era of the Italian nation's birth did not work. Italians, in the first place, have often considered themselves direct descendants of the ancient Romans. Italy's classical heritage has a weight that competes with its medieval legacy. Nineteenth-century Italians could not fully accept the positive qualities of the (mainly Germanic) populations who conquered the peninsula at the end of the Roman Empire, since the original inhabitants, the Romans, had been defeated well before the Middle Ages. This notion alone is sufficient reason for rejecting the Middle Ages as the founding era of Italian civilization. Italians have never ceased to call both the Franks and the Goths "barbarians," betraying a negative idea of the Middle Ages that belongs not only to the Enlightenment but to the Renaissance, as well, and the Renaissance as the antithesis of the Middle Ages is a cultural conception forged in Italy.

One conquering people was nevertheless extremely significant in the history of medieval Italy: the Longobards. Creators of a kingdom that lasted two hundred years and which would become the *Regnum Italiae* within the Empire, the Longobards, who gave their name to the region of Lombardy, were and still are considered by some to have been the ancestors of the Italians. A difficult and complex issue discussed with special fervor in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the Longobard question essentially arose from the fact that the Longobards, like the Romans, were ultimately defeated by history and, in their specific case, by the Franks; Manzoni's *Adelchi* (1822) brought the story of their demise

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[10] Giuliano Procacci, *La disfida di Barletta. Tra storia e romanzo* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2001).

into Italian theaters.[11] That Italy had been born from the union of two defeated peoples was politically uncomfortable to affirm, and so for Italy, the theory of conquest simply did not work.[12]

The presence of the pope and his States on Italian soil posed a third colossal problem, with a double historiographic and political consequence. The positive value of the Middle Ages could be affirmed by reconnecting that era to the traditions of the Roman Church and its legitimate presence in Italy. The Middle Ages in question here are different ones—not those of the Enlightenment but rather the traditional, Christian Middle Ages created and transmitted by Muratori, Novalis and Chateaubriand and ultimately leading to the political ideas of Vincenzo Gioberti, advocate of "Neoguelfismo." This particular medievalist tendency produced the fundamental historical contributions of Cesare Balbo, Carlo Troya, Alessandro Manzoni, and Giovan Pietro Vieusseux, the so-called "Catholic Liberals," who considered the medieval papacy the only creator of order, unity, and independence in Italy, in the face of particularisms and external enemies.

This same idea took on a far more reactionary and radical inflection among those who believed that Italy should not in fact be united, due to the weight of the single institutional realities involved and their respective senses of belonging. Even these fiercest conservatives, among them many aristocrats of the pre-unification states, expressed their feeling of separateness by means of a neo-Gothic and Romantic Middle Ages, but absolutely not via a Middle Ages of the Risorgimento.

One other possible critique involved the Roman Church and the medieval heritage that it represented, according to a theory proposed by Machiavelli, who saw the Papal States as the main cause of the secular political division of the Italian peninsula. Machiavelli's critique was an elegant base from which one might then proceed to a broader, Enlightenment-derived condemnation of religion. Cola di Rienzo constitutes the perfect

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[11] Alessandro Manzoni, *Adelchi*, critical edition, ed. by Isabella Becherucci (Firenze: presso l'Accademia della Crusca, 1998).

[12] Giorgio Falco, "La questione longobarda e la moderna storiografia italiana," in *Atti del primo congresso di studi longobardi* (Spoleto: presso l'Accademia Spoletina, 1952), 153–66; Enrico Artifoni, "Ideologia e memoria locale nella storiografia italiana sui longobardi," in *Il futuro dei Longobardi e la costruzione dell'Europa di Carlo Magno, Saggi*, ed. by Carlo Bertelli and Gian Pietro Brogiolo (Milano: Skira, 2000), 219–27; S. Gasparri, "I germani immaginari e la realtà del Regno. Cinquant'anni di studi sui longobardi," in *Atti del XVI congresso internazionale di studi sull'alto medioevo* (Spoleto: CISAM, 2003), I, 3–28; Simonetta Soldani, "Il medioevo del Risorgimento nello specchio della Nazione," in *Il medioevo al passato e al presente*, 149–86: 154–63.

hero of such a discourse, given that he was considered an anti-clericalist, a forerunner of the united Italy, a revolutionary hero who tried to free the populace from papist oppression, a predecessor of Simon Bolivar and Giuseppe Garibaldi.[13] That Cola di Rienzo is the protagonist of a play by Engels and of Wagner's famous opera *Rienzi* comes as no surprise.[14] The fact is that in Italy an individual of liberal upbringing could be enchanted by the charming *medioevo* of knights and damsels and, at the same time, condemn the grim, ultraconservative Middle Ages of the papacy, a conflict that has yet to be resolved.

If the papacy posed a major impediment to reconsidering the Middle Ages with a clear eye, the second state formed during the Middle Ages and still in existence in the nineteenth century, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, presented equal difficulties. Once again, the realm in question was a nation destined for defeat. Michele Amari's *Guerra del Vespro Siciliano* (War of the Sicilian Vespers) is especially revealing. In the first edition (1842), Amari saw Sicilians as the heroic, patriotic protagonists of the founding event of what would become the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. This Sicilian nationalist vision involved an internal dialectic between insular Sicily and Naples, the capital of the other of the two Sicilies, meaning the south of Italy; for Amari, a Palermitan, "continental" Italians were foreigners. Remarkably, in further editions, Amari, who had embraced the cause of unity when the southern Kingdom ended in 1860, transformed the War of the Sicilian Vespers into a story of national heroism valid for all of Italy.[15]

Another, parallel problem—one considerably easier to summarize— derived from the fact that it was simply not possible to think of a united Italy during the Middle Ages, not even under the German guise of the Empire. There simply had been no united state. Thus, inventing one in retrospect was impossible.

In summary, the historical weight of the Romans, the Longobards, the papacy, and Sicily, together with the absence of a united state in the Middle Ages, furnished Italy with a scenario completely different from that of

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[13] Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, *Cola di Rienzo* (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2002), 217–59; *Cola di Rienzo. Dalla storia al mito*, ed. by Gabriele Scalessa (Roma: Il Cubo, 2009), 79–327.

[14] Italo Michele Battafarano, *Cola di Rienzo. Mito e rivoluzione nei drammi di Engels, Gaillard, Mosen e Wagner. Con la ristampa del testo di Friedrich Engels Cola di Rienzi (1841)* (Trento: Dipartimento di studi letterari, linguistici e filologici, 2006).

[15] Michele Amari, *La Guerra del Vespro Siciliano o un periodo delle istorie siciliane del secolo XIII* (Capolago: Tip. Elvetica, 1842).

any other Western country; and yet he who seeks shall find—or at least pretend to find. Unable to rely on instruments of conceptual simplification, such as the theory of conquest or the identity between state and nation, Italy traced its path back to the Middle Ages via two other broad and readily negotiable routes. The first of these two avenues belonged to a centuries-old tradition that was strongly rekindled in the nineteenth century. Founded on the concept that the Italian nation existed many centuries before the Italian state, it envisioned the Italian state as a simple but necessary consequence of the nation's conversion into an institution. The Italian nation, in its turn, was presented primarily as a cultural fact, defined almost exclusively by its artistic and linguistic uniformity—the "Italian glories" celebrated in Ugo Foscolo's *Sepulchres* (1807).[16] Giotto and Cimabue, Petrarch, Boccaccio and above all Dante, father of the country, represent Italians, according to this way of thinking, because they themselves already *were* Italians. One could rightly say that in the Middle Ages, starting with Dante, a single nation already existed: "*il bel paese dove il sì suona*" ("the fair land where the 'Sì' doth sound").[17] That Dante considered the Empire the best of institutional forms and wrote the treatise *De Monarchia* created no impediments; those considerations were of minor importance. If nineteenth-century Italians were not very certain of their own identity, that, too, was a trifling matter, notwithstanding the post-unification axiom generally attributed to Massimo d'Azeglio, "Now that we have made Italy, we must make the Italians,"[18] a thought entirely contrary to the long-cultivated idea that the birth of the Italian nation preceded that of the state.

Based on a linguistic unity typical only of certain elite elements of Italian society, Dante's nation was presented as synonymous with the entire populace, whose native languages, in reality, consisted of a vast number of regional and local dialects. The idea nevertheless worked well because people were in love with the Middle Ages. Everyone sang Verdi. Many knew Dante by heart.

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[16] Ugo Foscolo, *Poesie e carmi: Poesie, Dei Sepolcri, Poesie postume, Le Grazie*, ed. by Francesco Pagliai, Gianfranco Folena, Mario Scotti (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1985) (Edizione nazionale delle opere di Ugo Foscolo, vol. I). On this subject, see especially Irace, *Itale glorie*.

[17] *Inf.* XXXIII, 80. It merits mention, in passing, that the current Italian two-euro coin bears an image of Dante's profile as painted by Raphael.

[18] On the origin of this expression, see the introduction of *Fare gli italiani. Scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea*, ed. by Simonetta Soldani and Gabriele Turi (Bologna: il Mulino, 1993).

The common nineteenth-century conception was, then, that the Italian nation originated in the Middle Ages and that, dominated by foreigners and ever suffering, it remained unfree, disunited and without a state, like various countries of central-eastern Europe, especially Poland. Contemporaries perceived Italy and Poland as having similar destinies. The Italian national anthem mentions Poland, while Poland took the military march of the Polish Legion (1797) as its national anthem.[19]

The second Italian path toward a nineteenth-century Middle Ages—specifically, the role played by the *piccole patrie* (small homelands)—is of equal interest.[20] Well before the Ottocento, during the *ancien régime*, the *piccole patrie* had developed proud local identities. In the Middle Ages and sometimes also during the modern era, cities in central and northern Italy were not only economic centers but political centers, as well.[21] Some Italian historians have written about what Signorotto calls "multiple identity perceptions in the Peninsula."[22] By that they mean feelings of belonging created principally by the ruling classes, especially by the urban nobility, but also current among the lower classes due to their close relationships with local institutions of the Church and religious traditions.[23]

Sometimes these civic identities found their ideal origins in the Middle Ages, but apart from the cases of Florence and a few other cities, the Middle Ages were not the main consideration. Rather, municipal origins and feelings of belonging were found far away, in the *antiquitates*, following the common principle that *nobilitas* is *vetustas*. Generally, the myths

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[19] Piotr Stefan Wandycz, *Il prezzo della libertà. Storia dell'Europa centro-orientale dal medioevo a oggi* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2001), 199, 214 (orig. edition: *The Price of Freedom. A History of East Central Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[20] Ilaria Porciani, "Identità locale-identità nazionale: la costruzione di una doppia appartenenza," in *Centralismo e federalismo tra Otto e Novecento. Italia e Germania a confronto*, ed. by O. Janz, P. Schiera, H. Siegriest (Bologna: il Mulino, 1997), 141–82; Stefano Cavazza, *Piccole patrie. Feste popolari tra regione e nazione durante il Fascismo* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1997).

[21] Among the most recent syntheses is Mario Ascheri, *Le città-stato* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2006).

[22] Gianvittorio Signorotto, "Interessi, 'identità' e sentimento nazionale nell'Italia di antico regime," in *Studi in memoria di Cesare Mozzarelli* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2008), I, 399–420: 400.

[23] Cesare Mozzarelli, "Stato, patriziato e organizzazione della società nell'Italia moderna," *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico di Trento* 2 (1976): 421–512; Bandino Giacomo Zenobi, *Le ben regolate città: modelli politici nel governo delle periferie pontificie in età moderna* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1994); Irace, *Itale glorie*; Luca Baccelli, Sergio Bertelli, Giuliano Milani, "Le città-stato e l'identità italiana," *Archivio storico italiano* 166 (2008), 321–32.

of Antiquity, on the one hand, and of the Middle Ages, on the other, were both present and important in the creation of civic identities. Often, the origin of the *urbs*, meaning the built city, was perceived as Roman or pre-Roman, while the origin of the *civitas*, the living city of the citizen, was regarded as medieval.

The identities of regional states existed on another, broader level: Piedmont, Lombardy, the Republic of Venice, Tuscany, the Papal States, continental southern Italy, Sicily. Their perceived identities were, and still are, weaker than civic identities and were particularly present in the court system, the armed services, and administrative offices. Today, some regions of Italy, for example Sicily and Sardinia, still have strong identities, while others, the Marches for example, have none all, and as always the nineteenth-century's Middle Ages contributed to the construction of these identities. A notable instance spread in Sicily over the course of the Ottocento, the Opera dei Pupi, a popular marionette show in which puppeteer-storytellers portrayed the deeds of Charlemagne and his noble paladins against the Saracens, as well as the adventures of Guerin Meschino and other characters, in a cycle of consecutive spectacles that lasted for more than a year. Some puppeteers, who were often illiterate, knew Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*, Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*, and reworkings of the *Chanson de Roland* by heart.[24] Widespread at the end of the nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth, this sort of performance still forms a strong element of Sicilian identity—in 2001, UNESCO declared the Teatro dell'Opera dei Pupi a Masterwork of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Although the Teatro dei Pupi's themes are clearly medieval, its roots do not strech back to the Middle Ages. On the contrary, it was a nineteenth-century creation and, by the end of the century, had already been studied ethnographically by the anthropologist Giuseppe Pitrè.[25]

The Marches offer a diametrically opposed case. Of this region—one of the few whose name designates it as perfectly "medieval" (the Marches were the southern border of the Empire)—we have a unified perception

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[24] The Arthurian legends, on the other hand, were almost never performed.

[25] Giuseppe Pitrè, *Spettacoli e feste popolari siciliane* (Palermo: L. Pedone Lauriel, 1881) (Biblioteca delle tradizioni popolari siciliane, n. 12); Giuseppe Pitrè, *Usi e costumi, credenze e pregiudizi*, vol. I (Palermo: L. Pedone Lauriel, 1889) (Biblioteca, n. 14), 121–341: "Le tradizioni cavalleresche popolari." The *Biblioteca delle tradizioni popolari siciliane* was published between 1871 and 1913.

essentially determined by the nineteenth century, by the landscape, and by Leopardi.[26] The present geopolitical divisions do not correspond to the medieval ones, and the idea of *marchigianità* (Marchigian identity) is only a few decades old. Administrators of the Marches recently created a slogan to promote tourism: the Marches are "Italy in one region," which is the same as saying, "If you haven't enough time to visit Italy at large, then come here." The subtext—certainly not intended by the administrators— is: "Our region has no identified personality." In continental Italy, in short, one often makes the leap from civic to national identity, while bypassing any attachment to regional identity.[27]

In order to understand how the medieval *piccole patrie* assumed a supreme protagonist's role in the political construction of Italian identity we must turn to the *Antiquitates Italicae Medii Aevi* of Ludovico Antonio Muratori, published between 1738 and 1743. The most important *erudito* of the Italian Settecento, Muratori was also the first to establish "a long-lived, reciprocal relation between liberty and 'republican forms.'"[28] At least as influential, and perhaps more so, were the volumes of the *Histoire des Républiques Italiennes* by the Swiss scholar Jean-Charles Léonard Simonde de Sismondi, first published between 1807 and 1809 and subsequently re-edited many times. Beginning with a historical consideration of the Helvetic confederation but transferring the concept to Italy, Sismondi formulated the principle that municipal freedom represented the maximum expression of the progress of the individual and of civilization. Italy, as we know, is a land of cities, which during the Middle Ages really did possess their own very proud identities. Sismondi's ideas, translated and revived in many different ways, consequently found fertile ground in Italy. One did not speak of a nation, or not only, but rather of the fascinating and lively world that had been the glory of Italian life for centuries: the experience of local freedom obtained through the institution of the communes. Italy had finally found a political theory perfectly in accordance with its own historical realities, both of the Middle Ages and of the nineteenth century. The founding of the communes meant freedom, the issuing of

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[26] Giorgio Mangani, *Fare le Marche. L'identità regionale fra tradizione e progetto* (Ancona: Il Lavoro editoriale, 1998).

[27] Porciani, "Identità locale," 164; Cavazza, *Piccole patrie*, 20.

[28] Massimo Vallerani, "Il comune come mito politico. Immagini e modelli tra Otto e Novecento," in *Il Medioevo al passato e al presente*, 187–206: 187.

laws autonomous from oppressive, centralized imperial power.[29] Their founding also signified the triumph of the political theory of progress, understood as the constant perfectibility of the people's capacity to be represented politically. In Italy this principle could well be given a local turn. The free election of magistrates and the ability to issue laws were to Italy what the medieval Estates-General, the Magna Charta and Parliament, and the Cortes were to the great Western nations, respectively France, England, and Spain. Emphasizing the cities, furthermore, evoked at once the reconquest of Italy's Latinity (in contrast to Germanism), and the rise of a social class, that of the merchants, which the nineteenth-century middle class had no difficulty considering its own direct medieval antecedent. In short, envisioning medieval Italy as the Italy of the communes—proud, independent, rich, Latin, bourgeois, avant-garde and thus superior to other places while, nevertheless, awaiting liberation from the foreign oppressor—was the perfect solution. It was from this medieval Italy that the Ottocento drew its image of the Lombard League as the occasion when, for the first time, Italians joined together to fight, with the Oath of Pontida (1167) and the Battle of Legnano (1176).[30]

At this point, we need to consider the phases into which the Italian Ottocento can be divided with respect to separate identities, local and national, and the extent to which the uses of the Middle Ages were significant. Two different phases are clearly discernible: a first phase between the French invasion of 1796 and the unification of Italy; and a second spanning the years between Italian unification and 1911, a year that marked not

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[29] See Nicolangelo D'Acunto, "Il mito dei comuni nella storiografia del Risorgimento," in *Le radici del Risorgimento. Atti del XX Convegno del Centro di studi Avellaniti* (Fonte Avellana: s.n., 1997), 243–64; Carlotta Sorba, "Il mito dei comuni e le patrie cittadine," in *Almanacco della Repubblica. Storia d'Italia attraverso le tradizioni, le istituzioni e le simbologie repubblicane*, ed. by M. Ridolfi (Milano: B. Mondadori, 2003), 119–30; Soldani, "Il medioevo del Risorgimento nello specchio della Nazione," 163–73; Vallerani, "Il comune come mito politico;" Jens Petersen, "L'Italia e la sua varietà. Il principio della città come modello esplicativo della storia nazionale," in *Centralismo e federalismo tra Otto e Novecento*, 327–46.

[30] The image is first attested in the pages dedicated to these events by Sismondi, in the poetry of Giovanni Berchet, and finally in Luigi Tosti's *Storia della Lega lombarda illustrata con note e documenti* (Montecassino: pe' tipi di Monte Cassino, 1848). In addition to the studies cited in the preceding footnote, see Ernesto Sestan, "Legnano nella storiografia romantica," in Ernesto Sestan, *Scritti vari*, vol. III: *Storiografia dell'Otto e Novecento*, ed. by Giuliano Pinto (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1991), 221–40; Mario Fubini, "La Lega lombarda nella letteratura dell'Ottocento," in *Popolo e Stato nell'età di Federico Barbarossa. Alessandria e la Lega lombarda* (Torino: Deputazione Subalpina di storia patria, 1970), 399–420; Piero Brunello, "Pontida," in *Luoghi della memoria. Strutture ed eventi dell'Italia unita*, ed. by Mario Isnenghi (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1997), 15–28; Voltmer, *Il carroccio*, 13–21.

only the fiftieth anniversary of unification but also the inauguration of the monument to Victor Emmanuel in Rome, the Italo-Turkish War, and the affirmation of a strong Italian nationalism that would later lead to war and then to Fascism.

Over the course of the period beginning with the French invasion of 1796 and ending with the revolution of 1848, the conviction that Italy should become a unitary state grew stronger. The dream was this: if Italy were to obtain unity and independence, the ancient nation long defined by its culture could at long last coincide with the state. This dream was also a common theme among protagonists of the Risorgimento, but the possible ways of achieving it were myriad.

For a long time, the most promising political solution was federalist, an option that grew out of a consciousness of the strong weight of local identities. A simple *reductio ad unum* was considered impossible for two reasons, one of them administrative—the regional states were still alive—and the other cultural, deriving from the fact that, beginning with Sismondi, it became common to envision the roots of the Italian nation in the glorious communes of the Middle Ages.

The supporters of federalism could make comparisons with the Swiss model and the German Zollverein of 1843; the customs union of the German states, in particular, contributed greatly to diffusing the federalist idea. For a while in Italy, the federalist solution prevailed and led to an attempt at forming a customs league in 1847 between the Kingdom of Sardinia, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, and the Papal States. By placing regional and national identities on the same level, the idea of the Italian nation could be married, in a federal sense, to the idea of a unitary state.

Many architects of public opinion solved the local-national problem in this manner.[31] They included Carlo Cattaneo and Vincenzo Gioberti, both of whom promoted federalist ideas, albeit substantially different ones born of fundamentally incomparable cultural assumptions. Secular-minded and republican, Cattaneo was a rigorous promoter of federalism who viewed Italy's plethora of highly varied cities as a source of abundance, rather than decadence.[32] Catholic and papalist, Gioberti, on the other hand, not only expressed national sentiments—the title of his *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani* (The Moral and Civil Supremacy of the

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[31] Marco Meriggi, "Centralismo e federalismo in Italia. Le aspettative preunitarie," in *Centralismo e federalismo tra Otto e Novecento*, 49–64.

[32] Carlo Cattaneo, "La città considerata come principio ideale delle istorie italiane," *Il Crepuscolo* IX (1858), fasc. 42, 44, 50, 52.

Italians) of 1843 is telling; he also proposed a practical means of federal union, suggesting that the pope, Pius IX, become leader *super partes* of all Italians. Both Gioberti and Pellegrino Rossi, author of Gioacchino Murat's *Rimini Proclamation* to the Italians (1815) promoted a solution called Neo-Guelphism, whose name makes its ties to the Middle Ages clear. The word "Guelph" evokes the medieval papacy as a unifier of Italy via the Guelph League and at the same time identifies the Ghibellines—that is, the Austrians—as the enemy. The Middle Ages are thereby presented as a symbol and a solution for the present, following a familiar rule.

The federalist idea also inspired radical exponents, such as Mazzini, but it was shattered after the murder of Pellegrino Rossi, who was papal prime minister. The pope refused to enter the anti-Austrian coalition, and a fragile Roman Republic followed in 1849. After this period, we still find important traces of federalist thought, but they faded when the Piedmont came to the fore, uniting Italy in 1860 following a series of annexations.[33]

The myth of the communes constitutes yet another aspect of the Middle Ages that can be considered a locus of formation of the Italian nation. As already mentioned, beginning with Sismondi's *Histoire des Républiques Italiennes*, medieval communes were considered historical (if, for us, they are mythical) places of freedom, independence, wealth, and the birth of the bourgeoisie and, thus, of the Italian middle class. In addition to the emblematic cases, previously noted, of the Oath of Pontida and the Battle of Legnano, I would like to mention two other interesting cases, those of

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[33] The federalist idea—dear to the Lega Nord party—together with a consequent re-evaluation of the nineteenth-century thinkers who proposed it have come to the fore again recently on the occasion of preparations for the celebration of the 150th anniversary of Italian Unification (1861–2011). The pertinent government website is located at: http://www .italiaunita150.it/ (accessed 12 March 2012). The official document outlining the program by Sandro Bondi, Italian Minister for Cultural Heritage and Activities, has been harshly contested by authoritative Italian historians. See especially Paolo Conti, "Cattaneo-Gioberti coppia federalista. No degli storici," *Corriere della Sera*, 13 September 2009, p. 6. The same document was examined by the Comitato dei Garanti, the committee responsible for monitoring programs associated with the celebrations and presided over by the former President of the Republic, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi (*Considerazioni in merito alle linee programmatiche del Governo per la celebrazione dei 150 anni dell'Unità d'Italia*, 5 October 2009, published at the website http://www.italiaunita150.it/media/73635/05.10.2009%20-%20 abstract.pdf, accessed 12 March 2012). The committee explicitly underlined the necessity of affirming a shared idea of national unity, in contradistinction to the general inspiring principle of Bondi's document, which is instead identifiable in the "polycentric concept of Italian history" ("concetto policentrico della storia italiana"). According to the committee, "It is necessary to maintain a just equilibrium between this accent on polycentrism and the reasons of unity" ("È necessario mantenere un giusto equilibrio fra questo accento sul policentrismo e le ragioni dell'unità"): see especially 4 and 26.

Ancona and Brescia. Dozens of nineteenth-century literary works represented the siege of Ancona, a city that resisted an imperial assault in 1173.[34] If anything, the example of Brescia is even more telling. In 1849 the city revolted against the Austrian government and, after a long siege and a forceful repression, was called by the men of the Risorgimento the "Lioness of Italy." Where did they find this name? They found it in Pier delle Vigne. In 1238 Brescia, one of the cities of the Second Lombard League, fended off an imperial siege. Pier delle Vigne, Frederick II's chancellor, wrote that the city was a "roaring Lioness," a *leena rugiens*.[35] In short, we are to understand that the Brescia of 1849 is the same, proud town as it was 1238, while the Lombard League is an Italy that revolts against the emperor, who is at once Frederick II and Franz Joseph.[36]

The choice of many medieval episodes points to the same dialectic relationship between the idea of an Italian state/nation and the necessity of attributing great importance to local realities. The episodes in question all belong to the "Canon of the Risorgimento," as Alberto Banti writes, meaning that they formed part of an overall cultural production (poetry, literature, music, painting, etc.) that formed the minds and hearts of future Italians.[37] The most effective political medievalism, corresponding to the ideas of the Risorgimento, occurred between approximately 1820 and 1848. During this period, retellings and representations of specific myth-making episodes—the Oath of Pontida (1167), the Battle of Legnano (1176), the Sicilian Vespers (1282), the Challenge of Barletta (1503) and the Battle of Gavinana (1530)—circulated practically everywhere, via every means. These episodes have several features in common:

a) They are all either medieval, or they date to the first half of the sixteenth century at the latest and thus, in the latter case, to the period of the Wars of Italy, which, according to common opinion, represented the beginning of the country's decadence.

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[34] Boncompagno da Signa, *L'assedio di Ancona. Liber de Obsidione Anconae*, ed. by Paolo Garbini (Roma: Viella, 1999), 100–7.

[35] Alphonse Huillard-Bréholles, *Historia diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, V (Paris: H. Plon, 1875), 143.

[36] Paolo Grillo, "Velut leena rugiens. Brescia assediata da Federico II (luglio-ottobre 1238)," *Reti Medievali Rivista*, VIII (2007) www.rmojs.unina.it/index.php/rm/article/download/127/108 (accessed 12 March 2012); Marco Brando, *Lo strano caso di Federico II di Svevia. Un mito medievale nella cultura di massa*, prefazione di Raffaele Licinio, postfazione di Franco Cardini (Bari: Palomar, 2008), 103–7.

[37] Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento*, 45–6.

b) They identify the nation's enemies—in three cases the Empire, in two France—and in so doing create a common identity defined by a shared enmity, a "reactive identity," a concept very common in our studies.

c) They are geographically well defined, with examples from the north (Pontida and Legnano in Lombardy), the center (Gavinana in Tuscany), and the south (Palermo in Sicily, Barletta in Apulia), and symbolically represent efforts towards the nation, through oaths, battles, revolts, challenges.

Goffredo Mameli's song to Italy, written in 1847 and the national anthem since 1946, can be read in this sense. "Dall'Alpi a Sicilia ovunque è Legnano […] il suon d'ogni squilla i vespri suonò" (From the Alps to Sicily, Legnano is everywhere [...]; every tolling of a bell calls [the people] to Vespers).

Many problems were of course hidden behind this reconstruction of medieval events. An especially notable complication was the non-organic character of the chosen episodes, which were told in forms that were absolutely out of context. They could work as stereotypes, but not inside a historically developed tale.[38] Examples of Italian bravery, they were also proofs of failure, because, after all, the nation was invaded over the course of many centuries, and it remained invaded in the nineteenth century.[39]

These episodes also bore witness to Italy's internal struggles; Alessandro Manzoni's tragedy *Il conte di Carmagnola* (1816) provides the best example.[40] As a result, they also had a negative connotation, derived from any reading, even a superficial one, of communal history, with its fierce factional struggles, which in Dante found their most famous victim. The communal epic could represent, all at once, the story of a union of forces—for example, in the Lombard League—and a condemnation of a fratricidal war, either between Guelphs and Ghibellines, or among Italian condottieri who found themselves aligned along two fronts, as Ferruccio and Maramaldo did at Gavinana. Giuseppe Ferrari offered this interpretation in his *Histoire des Révolutions d'Italie ou Guelfes et Gibelins* (Paris

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[38] Ivi, 75; cfr. Salvatore Settis, *Futuro del classico* (Torino: Einaudi, 2004), 7, regarding the "decomposition of the antique into fragments decontextualized and thus all the more ready for reuse, in the most arbitrary reassemblies" ("scomposizione dell'antico in frammenti decontestualizzati, e perciò tanto più pronti al riuso, ai più arbitrati rimontaggi").

[39] On this characterizing aspect of the Italy's history, see Girolamo Arnaldi, *L'Italia e i suoi invasori* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2002).

[40] Alessandro Manzoni, *Il conte di Carmagnola*, critical edition, ed. by Giovanni Bardazzi (Milano: Fondazione Alberto e Arnoldo Mondadori, 1985).

1858), with obviously destructive results, for it bore witness to divisions, rather than unity, during the Middle Ages. The presence of two parties locked in eternal struggle is precisely the reason why medieval Italy could never have experienced the establishment of a sole monarchical power ruling over the entire nation.

Notwithstanding these various obstacles to the presentation of the Middle Ages as the bedrock of Italian national identity, episodes illustrating the Italianness of medieval Lombards or Sicilians went into the "Canon of the Risorgimento" and were maintained in the public imagination for multiple reasons. They were considered explicit allegories and anticipations of the necessary redemption of the nation—that is, its transformation into a state—and demonstrated that the Italians knew how to fight. They were also perfectly in keeping with the era's tastes.

In concluding this section, we can say that the first of the two phases of Italian political medievalism (1796–1860), characterized by federalism, Neo-Guelphism, civic glories, and medieval heroes, is by far the more important of the two. Amazingly, its ways of presenting the political Middle Ages was part of school textbooks even when I was in elementary school in the 1970s. When we spoke of the communes, we were already speaking of Italy. The wars of the Lombard League against the emperors were exactly like the nineteenth-century wars for independence. When we studied the Battle of Legnano, we would never have dreamt of using Rahevinus as a source because the only true source was the poetry of the Italian Risorgimento, the works of Prati or Berchet or Carducci.

A second, distinct phase in the history of Italian medievalism coincides with the half-century following Italian unification in 1861. The myth of the *piccole patrie* converging into one great nation became very popular, a trend amply attested by local historical commemorations, the founding of numerous local commissions of national history, and above all by the construction of an incredible number of buildings in styles evocative of the Middle Ages. A great many public edifices in central and northern Italian cities were heavily restored during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, among them the so-called Palace of King Enzo in Bologna (by Alfonso Rubbiani) and the Sforza Castle in Milan (by Luca Beltrami).[41]

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[41] *Bologna Re Enzo e il suo mito*, ed. by Anna Laura Trombetti Budriesi, Valeria Braidi, Raffaella Pini, Francesca Roversi Monaco (Bologna: Clueb, 2002); Michela Scolaro, " 'Revival' medievale e rivendicazioni nazionali: il caso di Bologna," in *Il medioevo al passato e al presente*, 521–36; *Neomedievalismi. Recuperi, evocazioni, invenzioni nelle città dell'Emilia*

Each city expressed its belongingness to the Middle Ages using the best means at its disposal. Relying on its strong traditions of art and language, Florence became a building yard of neo-Gothic palaces, while stationers' shops invented a faux-medieval "paper of Florence," which is still sold today. In Siena, where the Palio had a centuries-old tradition, knights, flag-wavers, and other participants began, for the first time, to wear medieval costumes. In Turin, where the invention of the Middle Ages was wedded to the exaltation of the Savoy family, an entire medieval district, the Borgo del Valentino (by Alfredo d'Andrade), was erected from scratch.[42] Nineteenth-century historical literature bent on celebrating the House of Savoy concurred in its efforts. No longer of French or German origin, as they had proclaimed for centuries, the Savoy were now considered Italians *ab origine*, descendants of Berengar II and Arduin, kings of Italy, who in the depths of the Middle Ages had fought against the emperors to unite Italy. As Duggan observes, from the 1870s onward, "politicians, writers and artists glorified the monarchy in speech, print and paint, trumpeting the devotion of Victor Emmanuel and his father, Carlo Alberto, to national unity and claiming that the dynasty had for centuries been committed to the Italian cause."[43]

    To identify an idea of the Middle Ages that began to be diffused in public opinion, we have to go forward to the final decades of the nineteenth

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Romagna, ed. by Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli (Bologna: Clueb, 2007); *Luca Beltrami e il restauro dei castelli, 1893–1993 [...], atti del seminario, Milano 11 Decembre 1993* (Roma: Istituto italiano dei castelli, 1997).

[42] Paolo Marconi, "Il Borgo medievale di Torino. Alfredo d'Andrade e il borgo medievale in Italia," in *Il medioevo al passato e al presente*, 491–520.

[43] Duggan, *The Force of Destiny*, 308–9. Regarding historical writings about the royal family, see Levra, *Fare gli Italiani* cit., 173 ff., and the case studied by Enrico Artifoni, "Scienza del sabaudismo. Prime ricerche su Ferdinando Gabotto storico del medioevo (1866–1918) e la Società storica subalpina," *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo* 100 (1995–1996): 167–91. An emblematic example is Pietro Corelli, *La stella d'Italia o nove secoli di casa Savoia* (Milano: Ripamonti, 1860–1863, 5 voll.); see in particular the preface dedicated "To the Italians" ("Agli Italiani"), vol. I, p. VI: "For nine centuries now, the Prince-caretakers of the Alps want Italy to be for the Italians. Historical documents have proven to men of ancient wisdom that the House of Savoy draws its principal origin from Berengar II and from Arduin, both kings of Italy. Berengar II, across nine centuries, extends his hand to Victor Emmanuel II. It is a sublime epic poem. It is to a purely, exclusively Italic work that I, today, consecrate all the powers of my intellect" ("Ma sono ormai nove secoli che i Principi custodi delle Alpi vogliono che l'Italia sia degli Italiani. Storici documenti hanno fatto toccar con mano a uomini di senno antico, che la Casa di Savoia trae la sua principale origine da Berengario II e da Arduino, entrambi re d'Italia. Berengario II, attraverso nove secoli, stende la mano a Vittorio Emanuele II. È una sublime epopea. È un'opera puramente, esclusivamente italica, alla quale io oggi consacro tutte le forze del mio intelletto").

century and the beginning of the twentieth. It was then, paradoxically, that the medievalism of high culture began to ebb. Over the course of the Ottocento, the secular religion of nationalism had gradually metamorphosed from a learned phenomenon into a mass movement, and medievalism, because of its persuasive links to the idea of the nation, followed at close range. That was where national identities, as well as local and regional ones, discovered their foundations, their incipits.

This process was helped along considerably by the "education" of the masses in national sentiment through the draft, mandatory schooling, and broadened suffrage, which in Italy became universal for men in 1913, with the result that an elementary patriotism emerged, but without analogous results in the form of a shared identity. If history was held to be one means of educating the populace, as it certainly was, the Middle Ages of the nation, of the Christian faith, and of heroes as recounted by professional educators, landholders, elementary-school teachers, parish priests and veterans worked well.[44] The common people, at last, were equipped with tools with which to think about and represent history, and simultaneously realized that they *had* a history, a past. Never before had such a widely diffused and pervasive model been put forth other than religion. Born in a period when all of Europe was pervaded by romantic feeling for the Middle Ages, popular literature and literature aimed at young readers received a sort of medieval imprinting. People, in sum, learned to love their country by singing patriotic songs, reciting national nursery rhymes from memory, and listening to stories that centered on medieval themes. The phenomenon reached even the semiliterate masses, who recited late medieval works that had become extremely popular, such as *Il Guerrin Meschino* and *I Reali di Francia* by Andrea da Barberino. Meanwhile, performances of the Opera dei Pupi proliferated in Sicily.[45]

Prior to the unification of Italy, nevertheless, medievalism had already passed through its most acute phase. After 1861 medievalism was still massively present both in popular culture and in its political uses. Yet it was on the verge of exhaustion. When the Savoy became the kings of Italy, it became necessary to find new elements of common identity that unified

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[44] See Duggan, *The Force of Destiny*, 274–97.

[45] Andrea da Barberino, *Il Guerrin Meschino*, edizione critica secondo l'antica vulgata fiorentina, ed. by Mauro Cursietti (Roma-Padova: Antenore, 2005); Andrea da Barberino, *I reali di Francia*, introduzione di Aurelia Roncaglia, note di Fabrizio Beggiato (Roma: Casini, 1967).

the north and the south, albeit without emphasizing localist elements. The Savoy, on the one hand, could not be seen as coming exclusively from the Piedmont; southern Italian cities, on the other, had not lived the experience of the communes, a bond that until then had explained Italian identity. The choice of capital cities for the united kingdom of Italy makes the solution to this new set of problems immediately intelligible. The first capital was Turin, Italian cradle of the royal dynasty; then came Florence, the cultural capital; and finally Rome, a move that also represented a return, for it was in Rome that a distinct Italian identity was discovered—or rather rediscovered—in *romanitas*. We need only look at the Victor Emmanuel Monument, "the most colossal and ambitious of all the national memorials constructed after 1860,"[46] that enormous block of white limestone, a grandiose assemblage of classical motifs, that encroaches upon Capitoline Hill and which Romans call "the Wedding Cake" or "the Typewriter." The Vittoriano is definitely not a medieval castle like the Borgo del Valentino in Turin, and, indeed, when we think of Rome as a capital city, we think not of medieval Rome but rather of the Rome of Augustus.

In tandem with the political uses of the Middle Ages, the problem of the relationship between core and periphery also changed when Italy became "one and indivisible" under Savoy rule. A strong centralism on the French model characterized the new Italian state. Great importance was given to the peripheral administration through the institution of prefects and provinces but, notably, not of regions. Despite the firm will to "make Italians" via compulsory schooling and military conscription, the heavy weight of local powers and identities endured.[47] The national Parliament amounted, in large part, to a juxtaposition of the needs of territorial oligarchies. Members of Parliament were elected in provincial constituencies and were generally the notables of their respective areas, who brought their own special interests and those of their electors before Parliament. What were the political uses of the Middle Ages in this situation? Three are distinguishable, and the first is still politically relevant.

Propaganda resulting from the sharp division between Liberals and Catholics, a fracture that remained strong until the first decade of the

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[46] Duggan, *The Force of Destiny*, p. 291.
[47] See, in general, *Fare gli italiani. Scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea*. On obligatory conscription, see Duggan, *The Force of Destiny*, 283–90.

twentieth century, showcased glowing examples of illustrious victims of the Roman Catholic Church, including many from the Middle Ages—Arnaldo da Brescia, Iacopone da Todi, Cola di Rienzo, Girolamo Savonarola—and others from the early modern period, such as Giordano Bruno and Galileo Galilei. The Roman Catholic Church responded with centenary celebrations for St. Francis of Assisi (in 1882) and Pope Gregory VII (in 1885).[48]

At the time, a second political use of the Middle Ages was moving toward extinction. How was it possible to continue to represent the Italian nation, which was finally unified, with medieval examples? Doing so was definitely not a simple matter. The idea was not dead; entrenched in scholastic programs, the mythomoteurs had become stereotypes and were not lost. Medieval communes and heroes were part of the national pantheon. The House of Savoy was always presented as a very ancient Italian dynasty, rooted in the medieval past. The Middle Ages persisted because they were considered a necessary part of the historical path that inevitably led to the nation, but they were no longer the main myth constitutive of national identity. The construction was weakened by its very size: Italy during the Middle Ages had never been a state, and no such state could be invented. The Italian solution thus differed greatly from those of the French and English, who had had national states since the Middle Ages. Although very different, Germany, too, had a medieval empire that could be renewed.

Meanwhile, the Italian Middle Ages were losing ground to an army of new heroes in every corner of Italy. Dante, father of the patria, and Alberto da Giussano, the first "Italian" military leader and the first speaker in a Parliament, maintained their important place but shared it with Mazzini, Cavour, Victor Emmanuel and, above all, Garibaldi.[49] Modern heroes outstripped their predecessors because the heroes from the distant past had been allegories, anticipations, figures of independence and nationhood, whereas the modern heroes genuinely were those who "made" Italy. The same held true for battles. San Martino (1859) and Porta Pia (1870) were closer than Legnano. If we want to use Aristotelian categories, the Middle

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[48] See, in general, *San Francesco d'Italia. Santità e identità nazionale*, ed. by Tommaso Caliò and Roberto Rusconi (Roma: Viella, 2011).

[49] Carducci exalts the figure of Alberto da Giussano in the poem *Il Parlamento*, of 1879 (Giosuè Carducci, *Della canzone di Legnano, parte prima, Il Parlamento*, in Giosuè Carducci, *Poesie*, ed. by Raffaele Sirri (Napoli: F. Rossi, 1969), 557–670. See Voltmer, *Il carroccio*, 19–20; Duggan, *The Force of Destiny*, pp. 239–40. On 1876, the septicentennnial of the Battle of Legnano, see Sestan, "Legnano nella storiografia romantica," 237–40.

Ages were the potentiality, the modern era the actuality. Here, too, we can observe a great divergence—for example, in the persons of Joan of Arc and Frederick Barbarossa, who were not allegories of their respective countries' futures. Rather, they were considered the actual protagonists of France's liberation and Germany's glory.

In Italy, therefore, we find a solution of compromise. Local feeling was able to emerge within national feeling but not on a par with it. Many instances and illustrations come to mind, for example the way in which children learned Italian cities by tying them to characters from the theater—Venice with Pantalone, Naples with Pulcinella, Bergamo with Harlequin. Specific to individual cities, these characters joined others in a metaphorical Commedia dell'Arte of the entire nation. Equally emblematic were the Royal Societies for the History of the Patria (Regie Deputazioni [or Società] di Storia Patria), many of which were formed between the 1860s and the 1880s. Then as now, these societies sought out and published local historical documents for the purpose of glorifying the nation.[50] The basic idea, in short, was to create an Italian feeling of belonging by means of local peculiarities. Only language was completely excluded from the program. Beginning with Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, Italy *was* the Italian language, with no place for dialects.

Italian medievalism of the second half of Ottocento was thus still strong, but its point of reference was not so much the nation as the nation's cities. Accordingly, a national parliament building erected in Gothic revival style, like that of Hungary (1885–1902), makes no sense in Italy. Using that style, on the other hand, for the rebuilding of public palaces and town halls, such as the Palace of King Enzo in Bologna (1905), does make sense. Why? The answer is simple. In the cities, what seem to be identity-constituting allegories are not allegories at all. There, the medieval heroes were civic heroes, who retained a strong, specific significance and continued to be the heroes of their respective *piccole patrie*. In Italy's cities the Middle Ages also still existed, then as now, on a material level. Everyone could see them in the public palaces and cathedrals.

After Italian unification, a real dichotomy emerged. The nation-state accepted the Middle Ages as part of its historical journey, and yet it sought a different symbolic pathway to express itself. Italy held to one symbolic exposition of its history—Rome—while its cities used the Gothic style

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50 Ernesto Sestan, "Origini delle società di storia patria e loro posizione nel campo della cultura e degli studi storici," in Sestan, *Scritti vari*, vol. III: *Storiografia dell'Otto e Novecento*, 107–140; Porciani, "Identità locale," 154–164.

as a characteristic means of representing themselves. With some cities, especially Florence, Siena, Arezzo, San Gimignano, Genoa, Bologna, Turin, and the cities of Umbria, this use of the Middle Ages was extremely pronounced and long-lived, continuing into the 1930s. All in all, the message seems to have been, "Italy is Rome; Italian cities are the Middle Ages." A synthesis of the ideas of 'nation' and 'Middle Ages' came about in only one place in the Italian peninsula: the diminutive Republic of San Marino. Built between 1884 and 1894, the Palazzo Pubblico of this bona fide city-state is the seat of both the local and national government, and its style is conspicuously medieval.

What we are dealing with, though, is a stereotyped Middle Ages, a formula also found, for example, in Florence, for the *piccole patrie* always narrated their medieval pasts in the same way, following a common idea of the Middle Ages that paradoxically did not correspond to their specific histories. Even particularism was resistant to representation in a particular way. The Palazzo Pubblico of San Marino is a Florentine Palazzo della Signoria in miniature, while many Italian cities' celebrations closely imitate Siena's Palio.[51]

The Vittoriano, or Victor Emmanuel Monument, in Rome is the monument that best represents our dichotomy. Begun in 1885, it was built to glorify king Victor Emmanuel II. After the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was added to it in 1921, following the First World War, it came to be called the *Altare della Patria*, the Altar of the Patria.[52] The *patria*, represented in the monument itself, is decidedly Roman, a fact made patently clear by the classical architectural vocabulary and the statue of the goddess Roma centered at the top of the first ramp of stairs, a giant, ancient warrior, with helmet and spear and supporting a winged Victory.[53] The king, Victor Emmanuel II, "the Soldier King," "Father of the Patria," is portrayed in nineteenth-century attire, and not, as his father Carlo Alberto had been represented, in the dress of a medieval knight.[54]

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[51] See Cavazza, *Piccole patrie*, 200, 205.

[52] On the monument, see Catherine Brice, *Monumentalité publique et politique à Rome. Le Vittoriano* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1998); Maria Rosaria Coppola, *Il Vittoriano* (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2008).

[53] The original plan for the monument included a statue representing Rome, but the statue itself, sculpted by Angelo Zanelli, was not installed until 1921 (Brice, *Monumentalité publique*, p. 283).

[54] On Carlo Alberto the "medieval knight", see Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott*, 77–96. A perfect homology established between king Carlo Alberto and his ancestor the Green Count ("Il Conte Verde"), Amedeo VI (Bordone, 92–5).

The base of the king's statue, however, which we are to read as the very foundation of the monarchy, is adorned with statues of fourteen Italian cities, all of them former capitals of independent states with unsurpassable political and cultural histories: Urbino, Ferrara, Genoa, Milan, Bologna, Ravenna, Pisa, Amalfi, Naples, Florence, Turin, Venice, Palermo, and Mantua.[55] Almost all of these personified cities are represented wearing medieval dress. Ravenna, for example, is dressed like the empress Theodora, while Turin is a woman in medieval armor. The vertical axis of the monument functions as a symbolic chronology. Below is Rome; above her, the medieval cities; above them all, the king of Italy.[56]

More or less contemporary with the Vittoriano, the Kyffhäuser-Denkmal (1890–1896), also known as the Barbarossa Monument, or Kaiser Wilhelm Monument, in central Germany provides an informative comparison.[57] There, we find Wilhelm I and Frederick Barbarossa, the former shown as the *renovatio* of the latter. Sleeping under the mountain, Frederick has just been awakened by Wilhelm, re-founder of the Reich. The Italian and German monuments appear to be similar in their symbolically vertical arrangement of history. In each case, the Middle Ages, the origin and foundation of the *patria*, is located beneath the modern sovereign. In Germany, however, those same Middle Ages are represented in the person of Frederick Barbarossa, while in Italy they are epitomized by the cities. The two medieval eras clearly differ from one another. The first is symmetrical with respect to its contemporary counterpart; the other is not. The first narrates an ancestral nation and empire undergoing renewal; the second represents a new kingdom arising from the felicitous union of a host of venerable cities, all of them sisters. In the German monument, furthermore, there is no personified Rome.

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[55] Sculpted, like a large portion of the ornaments of the Vittoriano, by Eugenio Maccagnani, on whom see Alessandra Imbellone, *Maccagnani, Eugenio*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 66 (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2006), 781–5. On other projects for sculptures of Italian cities for the Vittoriano, see Brice, *Monumentalité publique*, 202–6; on the base, dated 1908, Brice, p. 289. A photogallery of the city statues is located on the official website of "Presidenza della Repubblica": http://www.quirinale.it/qrnw/statico/simboli/vittoriano/Vittoriano_galleria5.htm (accessed 12 March 2012).

[56] On the monument's upper frieze the sixteen regions are also represented, two of them (Lombardy, Piedmont) in the garb of medieval warriors (Porciani, "Identità locale," 173–4; Brice, *Monumentalité publique*, 289).

[57] Concerning the monument, see Gunther Mai, *Das Kyffhäuser-Denkmal 1896–1996. Ein nationales Monument im europäischen Kontext* (Wien-Köln-Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1997).

The Middle Ages, then, were put to use in both of the historical phases that we have identified. During the first phase, they were one of the main myths for the nation to come, serving as witnesses to a glorious past and as allegories of a possible future. In the second phase, they lost their significance with respect to the nation-state and yet continued to represent local identities very well—identities understood as complements, rather than antagonists, to the construction of Italian identity, which was at once Roman and medieval.[58]

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[58] This dual symbolism of classical nation and medieval cities was also maintained during Fascism (1922–1943). On celebrations of a medieval-Renaissance flavor during this period, see Cavazza, *Piccole patrie*, 171–244; Diana Medina Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle, and Tourism in Fascist Italy* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).