

Republican veterans of 1848: celebration and memory of the Venetian Revolution

Public memory is strictly connected to the celebrations of political ceremonies that commemorate the sacrifice of those who fought in wars for their country. In every age, the memory of martyrs and veterans is the fulcrum of a historical identity, that brings together every single individual and the community: the memory of the sacrifice and the legacy of former soldiers create national identification and aggregation. This process develops in two directions: the Italian State ensures influence over the veterans with the creation of the “Central Roman Comitium of Veterans” then spread throughout the national territory in subcommittees, but the veterans themselves make a significant contribution to the dissemination of the role they played during the wars of independence through the publication of their memoirs. Unlike other European states, Italy achieved its national unity in 1861 and therefore only began, in the second half of the Nineteenth century, to provide assistance to its veterans and to assign them a role: it is a very different case from France where, in the Seventeenth century, Les Invalides was the grandiose symbol of the relationship between the King – or the State – and his war veterans.

This proposal aims to analyse the memory’s construction process of the veterans who participate in the “international war” for the defence of Venice during 1848-49. When Venice rebelled against the Austrians by creating an independent State, volunteers arrived from all over Italy – Neapolitans played a leading role – but French, Germans, British, Poles also participated in the “Venetian Spring of Nation”. What was the veterans’ role during and after the unification of Italy? What was the impact of their experience during the Revolution in the new society? How should their memoirs be read? By reading their diaries and private correspondence, it will be possible to examine single cases to answer these questions, in a comparative study.

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