

**Images of Royalty  
in the Nineteenth  
and Twentieth  
Centuries.**

**Tradition  
and Modernity  
in Italy, Portugal  
and Spain**

**Pierangelo Gentile  
Leonardo Mineo  
Miguel Metelo de Seixas  
Isabel Corrêa da Silva  
(eds.)**

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## Using, Reusing and Removing Statues of the Kings of the House of Savoy in the Squares of Italy

Pierangelo Gentile

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During the second half of the nineteenth century Italy was filled with monuments to the “fathers of the fatherland” who had founded the Italian state through the Risorgimento. This act was not only a work of celebration, but also the beginning of a secular religion that saw the liberal ruling class engaged in the creation of a shared national code designed to smooth out political differences. After the death of Victor Emmanuel II, the likeness of the first king of Italy, rendered in bronze and marble, fully responded to Crispi’s theory that «the monarchy unites us, the republic would divide us». But the presentation of the Savoy king’s public image was nothing new; it had a long history behind it. This essay traces the origins of this phenomenon, one which changed over time and continued beyond liberal and Fascist Italy. Even today, the image of the king of Italy is not neutral.

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### 1. What history for the monuments?

First moment. 10pm, 14 March 2020. In a Turin deserted due to the Covid-19 lockdown, a handful of citizens moved furtively around the intersection of Corso Vittorio Emanuele II and Corso Galileo Ferraris. There, in the former pa-



rade ground, the mighty monument topped by the figure of the first king of Italy has stood since 1899<sup>1</sup> (fig. 1). This was no ordinary evening. Not only because of the restrictions imposed by the government, but also because it was the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Victor Emmanuel II. Even though the spread of the disease had disrupted a whole series of events planned to commemorate the occasion, the City of Turin decided, in consideration of the approaching 17 March, the «day of national unity, of the Constitution, of the anthem and of the flag» established by law no. 222 of 23 November 2012, to illuminate the columns of the elevated base with a huge Italian tricolour<sup>2</sup>.

Second moment. Afternoon, 6 June 2020. After a sit-in protest in Piazza Castello against the killing of the African-American George Floyd by members of the Minneapolis Police Department, demonstrators paraded through the streets of central Turin until they reached the city hall. There a cluster of young antagonists split off from the main group and smeared the square with spray paint: in addition to vandalising columns and flower boxes with the words «Fuck Trump» and «Antifa», they also targeted the monument to Victor Emmanuel II situated under the colonnade of the city hall<sup>3</sup> (fig. 2). The Five Star Movement (M5S) city councillor Andrea Russi and the district councillor of the Democratic Party (PD) Gianvito Pontrandolfo both spoke about the episode. The former, while considering it acceptable to «express opposition to gratuitous violence», lamented that some of the protestors had «had the smart idea of soiling the walls and statues of the Civic Palace, thus subjecting the public cultural heritage, and therefore the community, to another form of equally shameful and deplorable violence». The other, responding to Russi, was

1. The monument was created by the sculptor Pietro Costa between 1879 and 1899. <https://www.museotorino.it/view/s/98fe4a9364e649e2bb7a9fcc33ce7037>. Except where otherwise stated the websites were accessed on 29 March 2022.

2. M. Quirico, *Un tricolore luminoso per l'Unità d'Italia e Vittorio Emanuele II*, «CittàAgorà. Periodico del Consiglio comunale di Torino», 17 March 2020, <http://www.comune.torino.it/cittagora/in-evidenza/un-tricolore-luminoso-per-lunita-ditalia-e-vittorio-emanuele-ii.html>.

3. The task was entrusted to Vincenzo Vela in a contract dated 2 November 1861. In autumn 1863 the monument was completed, and it was put in position in January 1866. <http://www.museotorino.it/view/s/48a20af49b914dcca2441346dd139b5b>

more indulgent: «I don't much agree. The monument can be cleaned, and in any case, it is not alive. George Floyd, on the other hand, was a human being»<sup>4</sup>. The act, in either case, was immediately claimed by the «Kollettivo studenti autorganizzati», which, in a Facebook post, dismissed the criticism without mincing words: «when the city council of Turin is indignant about a spray-job on the statue of a shitty colonialist, we reply that this statue is not our cultural heritage»<sup>5</sup>. And so, for budding anarchists Turin was the same as Bristol, where Black Lives Matter protestors toppled the bronze statue of Edward Colston (1636 – 1721), an African slave trader<sup>6</sup>.

Third moment. 26 June 2020, Turin. A demonstration organised by the feminist movement «NonUnadiMeno» targeted the statue dedicated to the Green Count, Amadeus VI of Savoy (1334 – 1383)<sup>7</sup> (fig. 3). On the gate protecting the group of sculptures that depicts the Savoyard Crusader hurling his sword at a defenceless Turk, they placed a banner, later removed by the police, which said: «Amadeus VI of Savoy, crusader, rapist, coloniser. Against your history of domination and violence we write our history of struggle and sisterhood. Not one woman left behind»<sup>8</sup>. This episode – which echoed a similar one that had taken place a few days earlier in Milan, once again connected to the Black Lives Matter movement (the statue of Indro Montanelli,

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4. Torino, Palazzo di Città imbrattato con scritte contro Trump e la polizia durante la manifestazione, «Finestre sull'arte. Rivista on-line d'arte antica e contemporanea», 9 June 2020. <https://www.finestresullarte.info/attualita/torino-palazzo-citta-imbrattato-dopo-manifestazione>.

5. C. Palazzo, «Torino come Bristol»: imbrattata la statua di Vittorio Emanuele II «un colonialista», «La Repubblica-Torino», 11 June 2020. [https://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/06/08/news/torino\\_sul\\_web\\_appare\\_una\\_lista\\_obiettivi\\_antirazzisti\\_dopo\\_le\\_proteste\\_per\\_la\\_morte\\_di\\_george\\_floyd-258728010/#:~:text=%22Torino%20come%20Bristol%22.,Colston%2C%20antico%20mercante%20di%20schiavi.&text=Un%20post%20in%20cui%20si,frase%20%22Torino%20come%20Bristol%22](https://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/06/08/news/torino_sul_web_appare_una_lista_obiettivi_antirazzisti_dopo_le_proteste_per_la_morte_di_george_floyd-258728010/#:~:text=%22Torino%20come%20Bristol%22.,Colston%2C%20antico%20mercante%20di%20schiavi.&text=Un%20post%20in%20cui%20si,frase%20%22Torino%20come%20Bristol%22).

6. A Bristol la folla abbatte la statua di Edward Colston, trafficante di schiavi inglese, «La Repubblica», 8 June 2020. [https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2020/06/08/news/a\\_bristol\\_la\\_folla\\_abbatte\\_la\\_statua\\_di\\_edward\\_colston\\_trafficante\\_di\\_schiavi\\_inglese-258681198/](https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2020/06/08/news/a_bristol_la_folla_abbatte_la_statua_di_edward_colston_trafficante_di_schiavi_inglese-258681198/).

7. The sculptural group, commissioned by Charles Albert to Pelagio Palagi, was inaugurated in 1853. [http://www.comune.torino.it/papum/user.php?context=opere&submitAction=dettaglio&ID\\_opera=M009](http://www.comune.torino.it/papum/user.php?context=opere&submitAction=dettaglio&ID_opera=M009).

8. D. Petrizzelli, *Manifesto sulla statua del Conte Verde: «crociato e stupratore»*, «Torino Today», 29 June 2020. <https://www.torinotoday.it/attualita/manifesto-statua-amedeo-vi-conte-verde-palazzo-citta.html>.

“racist and rapist” was daubed in red paint<sup>9</sup>) – gave rise to a counter-protest: on 2 July, thirty or so members of «Aliud-Destra identitaria» group and the Fratelli d’Italia political party gathered to display a banner that read: «Nobody touches our history». Enrico Forzese, of Fratelli d’Italia, declared: «After the disgraceful attack on the memorial to Amadeus VI, the Green Count, carried out by feminists and community centres, we have decided to physically take the field in defence of our historical memory». He continued: «Apart from the nonsense said about him, we wanted to reiterate a cardinal principle: history is not subject to trial. And we have nothing to apologise for or to kneel for. The only white privilege of our ancestors was to build civilisation, to fight wars relentlessly so as to establish a peaceful order, to record in prose or verse the deeds of saints and heroes, as well as to die in coal mines. We have an entire history that the whole world would vaunt or boast about»<sup>10</sup>. In short, the Crusades and the 1956 Marcinelle mining disaster were part of a single history, a single source of pride.

These three news stories from Turin, focused on the House of Savoy’s “statue-mania”, perfectly reflect what David Dean called the «glocal» (global-local) horizon of study: arguments about monuments are markers of history in the public sphere, phenomena that traverse continents. Monuments become «victims» not only of drastic events, such as wars and revolutions, but may also have their legitimacy eroded by changes in political cultures. What was celebrated in one moment can become an embarrassment in another<sup>11</sup>.

The point, therefore, is to place oneself within a historical narrative. But how many Italians, willingly or not, still understand the “Sabaudian” narrative, or are at least aware of being partly the product of such a narrative? To be sure,

9. D. Maida, *Statua di Indro Montanelli imbrattata a Milano. Tutte le volte che la scultura ha creato dissensi*, in «Artribune», 14 June 2020. <https://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/arte-contemporanea/2020/06/statua-di-indro-montanelli-imbrattata-a-milano-tutte-le-volte-che-la-scultura-ha-creato-dissensi/>.

10. *La statua del Conte Verde a Torino è diventata terreno di scontro, Aliud risponde a NonUnaDiMeno*, «Quotidiano piemontese», 3 July 2020. <https://www.quotidianopiemontese.it/2020/07/03/la-statua-del-conte-verde-a-torino-e-diventata-terreno-di-scontro-aliud-risponde-a-nonunadimeno/?cn-reloaded=1>.

11. D. Dean, *Fallen Monuments: An Introduction*, «International Public History», I (2018), no. 2, pp. 1-6. <https://www.degruyter.com/view/journals/iph/1/2/article-20180010.xml>. See also L. Parola, *Giù i monumenti*, Einaudi, Torino 2022.

the problem lies in part in the fact that so much history has passed under the bridge, and in part in the many “trials” calling for the removal of statues, in which the House of Savoy has often appeared as the defendant. Italy is a republic since 1946. It is a country that was defeated and brought low by the Second World War after twenty years of a dictatorship condoned by the monarchy. A monarchy irreparably disgraced for not preventing the Fascist seizure of power and the destruction of the liberal state, for contributing to the regime’s wars, for signing off racial laws and for endorsing the alliance with Hitler.

Even the Italian origin story is on trial: since the end of the last century the Risorgimento has been subjected to continuous revisionism not from academic circles but from the great wave of social media posts that tend to lay the blame on the dynastic-moderate solution that emerged with unification, while the values of the Resistance, after having been linked to the nineteenth century as a mythical «second Risorgimento», have progressively broken free over the years, becoming a re-founding myth in their own right.

The 17 March – the day on which Victor Emmanuel II, claiming the Crown of Italy for himself and his descendants, in effect sanctioned the unification of the peninsula – took its place in the republican national calendar very timidly, and even then only by force of law<sup>12</sup>. These are all factors that bring into play the visible «public history» recounted by the late nineteenth-century monuments to the «fathers of the fatherland» (Cavour, Garibaldi, Mazzini, Victor Emmanuel II), with which the country is crammed, and which served to cement the nation and to pacify apparently irreconcilable souls, such as the moderates and the democrats<sup>13</sup>.

But as for the Savoy family, perhaps it pays to start from

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12. See S. Montaldo, *La risacca neoborbonica. Origini, flussi e riflussi*, «Passato e Presente», 36 (2018), no. 105, pp. 19-48; A. Portelli (ed.), *Calendario civile. Per una memoria laica, popolare e democratica degli italiani*, Donzelli, Rome 2017; L. Falsini, *La storia contesa. L'uso politico del passato nell'Italia contemporanea*, Donzelli, Rome 2020; M. Baioni, *Vedere per credere. Il racconto museale dell'Italia unita*, Viella, Rome 2020; P. Gentile, *17 marzo 1861. La monarchia alla prova dell'Unità*, in A. Merlotti (ed.), *Studi da Venaria*, Centro Studi Piemontesi, Turin 2021, pp. 153-162.

13. F. Albano, *Cento anni di padri della patria 1848-1948*, Comitato di Torino dell'Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento italiano-Carocci, Turin-Rome 2017; A. Possieri, *All'ombra degli eroi: Italia e padri della patria*, in G. Belardelli (ed.), *L'Italia immaginata. Iconografia di una nazione*, Marsilio, Venice 2020, pp. 151-179.

farther back and to end later, rather than limit oneself to the peak season of “statue-mania”. After all, monuments are instrumental: they provide grounds for describing forms of political sociability and experiences of war, they aid the implementation of mass politics, they serve as places of remembrance, and they assist in the creation of nation-states<sup>14</sup>. In other words, they are much more than contingent. And Savoy history is a «public history» that is pre-unification and post-Republic. As demonstrated by the cases mentioned, monuments recount a contextualised story that is open to being re-contextualised.

## 2. From Piedmont to Italy: The meanings of marble and bronze

The year 1861 thus becomes the demarcation of three different interpretations of the public material representation of the Savoy. Before that date, the monuments responded to a need to celebrate the dynasty, serving an internal purpose (the prince’s homage to the lineage) and an external one (the community’s homage to the prince). After unification and until 1900 they responded to a political need to “nationalise” the ruling house; and from 1900 to the fall of the monarchy, in addition to the celebratory residues, the statuary became one of the new mass phenomena that forged contemporary Italy.

As regards celebrating the prince, if we were to go in search of possibly the earliest example of an effigy of the Savoy sovereign located not in a church or Royal Palace but in a public space, we would find it in Amadeus of Castellamonte’s unrealised baroque project to redevelop the current Piazza Carlina in Turin. There was to be a hexagonal space with a large fountain and a statue of Duke Charles Emmanuel II at its centre<sup>15</sup>.

But if instead we were to seek the oldest *surviving* example of a statue of the prince in a public square we would

14. C. Brice, *Perché studiare (ancora) la monumentalità pubblica*, in M. Tesoro (ed.) *La memoria in piazza. Monumenti risorgimentali nelle città lombarde tra identità locale e nazionale*, Effigie Edizioni, Milan, 2012, pp. 11-12; C. Brice, *Monarchie et identité nationale en Italie (1861-1900)*, EHHSS, Paris 2010, pp. 233-250.

15. M. Carassi, G. Gritella (ed.), *Il Re e l'Architetto. Viaggio in una città perduta e ritrovata*, Hapax, Turin 2013, p. 141.

have to leave Piedmont and go to Sardinia. There, in Carloforte on the island of San Pietro, stands the monument dedicated to Charles Emmanuel III, the king who not only founded the town but in 1738 also repopulated the small island with Genoese colonists originally from Pegli, who had previously colonised Tabarka, a small island off the coast of Tunisia. The monument recalls a specific episode that reverberated around Europe in 1741, namely the King of Sardinia's determined attempt to liberate the 840 former citizens of Tabarka enslaved by the Bey of Tunisia. The negotiations finally ended in 1753 with an exchange of prisoners<sup>16</sup>.

The Carlofortini naturally wanted to pay homage to their liberator but could do so only with an «ad memoriam» monument inaugurated thirteen years after his death in 1773, during the reign of his son, Victor Amadeus III. The prince, portrayed in the classical style of Roman statuary, was put in position on 16 July 1786. However, tradition has it that when the French attacked Sardinia in 1793, the Carlofortini hurriedly hid the statue by burying it, and when one of the prince's arms remained exposed, they decided to break it off. This is why the monument is incomplete and known by the name *Pittaneddu*, the nickname of a mythical one-armed local character<sup>17</sup>. The monument is part of the community's identity, as the municipality's official website makes clear: under the title «280th anniversary of the foundation» it states that the «statue of Charles Emmanuel III, which greets all those who disembark on the island, is the monument that best summarises the history of the population»<sup>18</sup>.

This is quite different to what is happening in other parts of Sardinia, where the presence of the Savoy is the cause of embarrassment and unease<sup>19</sup>. In Cagliari, the famous statue

16. G. Puggioni, *La colonia di Carloforte nelle sue vicende storiche*, «Genus», 23 (1967), no. 1-2, pp. 69-72.

17. [http://www.isoladisani Pietro.org/storia/004\\_01.htm](http://www.isoladisani Pietro.org/storia/004_01.htm); <http://www.hieracon.it/Storia/A08-statua.php>.

18. <https://www.comune.carloforte.su.it/it/page/280-mo-anniversario-fondazione-carloforte>.

19. M. Pignotti, *Desabaudizzare la Sardegna. Uso e abuso dei luoghi della memoria sarda*, «Passato e presente», 40 (2022), no. 115, pp. 201-214.

of Charles Felix<sup>20</sup> – often enthusiastically «decorated» by the local football fans, usually to celebrate escaping relegation rather than winning championships – has ended up at the centre of heated controversy. This has recently been stoked by Francesco Casula, the author of an eloquently titled «revisionist» book on the Savoy<sup>21</sup> and the driving force of the «let's move the statue of Charles Felix: an opportunity to study the history of Sardinia» campaign<sup>22</sup>. Thus the statue erected to celebrate the Savoy who built the road linking the two ends of the island (the present-day SS 131), and who Casula has labelled «one of the worst, most bloodthirsty and lazy viceroys»<sup>23</sup>, has not only been disowned – with the Deputation of the History of Sardinia being accused of «working to protect the history of Savoy and not that of Sardinia and the Sardinian people» – but in the wake of the global debate on statues, has even been put on trial in a dramatisation staged in the council hall of the Viceroy's Palace<sup>24</sup>.

We have begun with the Savoy of the eighteenth century and the Restoration, but we have found no public material testaments to Victor Amadeus III, nor to Charles Emmanuel IV, other than the bust on his funeral monument in the church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale in Rome. As for Victor Emmanuel I, who in 1815 reclaimed his mainland states from the French, we can instead point to a statue now positioned in front of the church of Gran Madre di Dio. This monument has a tormented history: commissioned by Charles Albert and completed much later (after the end of absolutism in 1849) it was kept in storage at the Royal

20. The statue was chosen in 1827 by the Stamenti (parliament) di Sardegna, and cast in bronze in 1833 by Andrea Galassi. The work was only placed in Piazza Yenne in 1860. See G. Spano, *Guida della città e dintorni di Cagliari*, Timon, Cagliari 1861, pp. 187-188.

21. F. Casula, *Carlo Felice e i tiranni sabaudi*, Grafica del Parteolla, Dolianova 2016. The front cover depicts the portrait of Giorgio Des Geneys (placed on top of the ruins of a nuraghe, an ancient Sardinian megalithic structure) that until October 2019 was labelled in the Wikipedia entry on Charles Felix as a portrait of the king.

22. <https://www.change.org/p/spostiamo-la-statua-di-carlo-felice-un-pretesto-per-studiare-la-storia-della-sardegna>.

23. E. Lobina, *Carlo Felice e i tiranni sabaudi, la Sardegna degli uomini con meno diritti degli altri*, «Il Fatto quotidiano», 5 April 2017. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2017/04/05/carlo-felice-e-i-tiranni-sabaudi-la-sardegna-degli-uomini-con-meno-diritti-degli-altri/3495706/>.

24. <https://www.vistanet.it/cagliari/2020/08/26/in-scena-processo-alla-statua-di-carlo-felice-per-riflettere-sulla-sua-rimozione/>.

Palace of Genoa until 1885, when at last it was placed on the plinth where it now stands, at the bottom of the staircase of the Church of the Gran Madre di Dio<sup>25</sup>.

Charles Felix was instead the first sovereign to whom public statues were dedicated during his lifetime, a phenomenon that mainly has to do with the “bucolic province” of a sovereign who always harboured a visceral hatred towards the capital, tainted by the riots of 1821. We have already noted the statue in Cagliari but, in this “amphibious” kingdom crossed by the Alps, two other communities expressed their gratitude to the sovereign for the works he had carried out: Bonneville, in Savoy, which in 1826 placed a statue of Charles Felix atop a 44-metre column in order to thank the munificent monarch who had supported measures to shore up the Arve river<sup>26</sup>, and Nice, which in 1828, through its Chamber of Commerce, decided to eternalise the king for having maintained the city’s free port status<sup>27</sup>.

But it was during the reign of Charles Albert that numerous statues were built by the prince to honour his lineage or for the community to honour the monarch. Historiography has determined how Charles Albert used dynastic history for not only artistic but also political ends<sup>28</sup>. This was a history that, through the work of Luigi Cibrario, gradually shifted its axis from the «incredible» genealogy to the Saxon Beroldo to that of Duke Otto-William of Burgundy, the son and grandson of the Italian kings Adalbert and Berengar II, who was confirmed as the father of Humbert the White-Handed in a manoeuvre aimed at rooting the family’s origins in Italy<sup>29</sup>. The national and romantic myth was thus welded to family glories, from the Green Count statue

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25. *Cittadini di pietra. La storia di Torino riletta nei suoi monumenti*, Città di Torino, Turin 1992, p. 88.

26. <http://www.histoire-passy-montblanc.fr/nos-dossiers/geographie-physique/hydrologic/la-riviere-arve-a-passy/la-colonne-charles-felix-a-bonneville/>.

27. R. Cleyet-Michaud *et al.* (dir.), 1388. *La dédition de Nice à la Savoie. Actes du colloque International de Nice (septembre 1988)*, Publications de la Sorbonne, Paris 1990, pp. 460-461. In 1851, with the abolition of the free ports, the people of Nice broke the fingers of the hand of the prince pointing towards the port.

28. G.P. Romagnani, *Storiografia e politica culturale nel Piemonte di Carlo Alberto*, Deputazione Subalpina di Storia Patria, Turin 1985.

29. A. Merlotti, *Morte (e resurrezione) di Beroldo. Le origini sassoni dei Savoia nella storiografia del Risorgimento*, in M. Bellabarba, A. Merlotti (eds.) *Stato sabaudo e Sacro Romano Impero*, il Mulino, Bologna 2014, pp. 135-163; Id. *Storia e leggenda: origini e antichità di una dinastia*,



in Piazza Palazzo di Città to that of the *Caval' d bròns* (bronze horse) of Piazza San Carlo. Amadeus VI and Emmanuel Philibert acted as historical cases in point<sup>30</sup>, the first as a medieval knight founder of the Order of the Annunciation, a point of reference for the neo-Guelf crusade (against the Austrians, no longer against the Turks), and the second as a warrior duke who restored the Savoy states and was a pillar of stability and strength for the kingdom in the national and international contexts.

Local communities also celebrated «the prince»: on 4 November 1837, the birthday of Charles Albert, the city of Novara inaugurated a statue to Charles Emmanuel III, who had cleaned and drained the city's sewer<sup>31</sup>. And on 20 May 1843, Casale Monferrato unveiled an equestrian statue to the ruling prince who had restored the local senate, with Charles Albert represented as the Marcus Aurelius of the Capitoline Hill<sup>32</sup>.

It was then the myth of the «magnanimous and martyr» king, created ad hoc, that eternalised the one who had granted the Statute and lost his crown in the first war of independence, a myth, however, that remained anchored to a Savoy-centric tradition: although the equestrian monument was forged in Turin in 1861, the year of unification<sup>33</sup>, it took another four decades before the monument to the melancholy, exiled Charles Albert was erected in the public gardens beside the Quirinal Palace, ostensibly to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Albertine Statute, albeit with two years of delay, in 1900. This was thanks to the celebrations committee, which when facing bankruptcy was rescued by Umberto I, who settled its debts from his private funds<sup>34</sup>.

in F. Porticelli et al. (eds.) *Piemonte bonnes nouvelles*, Centro Studi Piemontesi, Turin 2016, pp. 1-4.

30. S. Cavicchioli, *Scolpire il principe. Carlo Marochetti e l'identità nazionale nell'Europa dell'Ottocento*, in M.G. Castello, E. Belligni (eds.), *La fabbrica e la storia. Fonti della storia e cultura di massa*, Franco Angeli, Milan 2016, pp. 133-166.

31. *Monumenti inaugurati in Novara il giorno onomastico di S.M. il Re Carlo Alberto, 4 novembre 1837*, Artaria, Novara 1837.

32. G. Mazza, M.P. Soffiantino, *Il monumento a Carlo Alberto di Casale Monferrato*, in S. Montaldo (ed.), *Il Risorgimento nell'Astigiano, nel Monferrato, nelle Langhe*, Fondazione CRAsti, Asti 2010, pp. 110-113.

33. E. Gianasso, *Il monumento a Carlo Alberto a Torino*, «Studi Piemontesi», 40 (2011), no. 2, pp. 501-506.

34. *Rassegna dei lavori pubblici e delle strade ferrate*, 2 (1909), no. 30, p. 480.

The turn of the century marked the decline of the “monument-mania” that had helped the Historic Left to spread a new religion, by dint of the elevation onto pedestals – the new, secular altars – of the fathers of the fatherland. Lording it over everyone was Garibaldi, a model for Crispi and his associates; but since Cavour (who died too early and was not a “father” for the Left) and Mazzini (too strongly identified with republicanism) were both sidelined, it was Victor Emmanuel II, at the moment of his death, who was identified as the unifying force of the nation<sup>35</sup>.

Hundreds of initiatives were taken throughout the peninsula to name streets and squares after the first king of Italy. But dozens of municipalities went further, choosing to memorialise the Great King in a more observable form. Rome had pride of place, for, having acquired the monarch’s body, inhumed in the Pantheon, it was to host the national monument, the Vittoriano<sup>36</sup>. Even so, from north to south, east to west, after 9 January 1878 a race began to acquire a “memory” of the king who had founded Italy. Some cities did so very quickly, others took decades. Monza, seat of a royal residence, won the race, being the first to inaugurate the *re de sass* (king of stone) in the presence of Umberto I and Margherita, on 16 September 1878<sup>37</sup>.

Other towns and cities, even important ones, found themselves bogged down in budget difficulties, competitions and appeals, second thoughts, alterations to the work and endless disputes with the artists<sup>38</sup>. Hence in Milan it was not until the 25th anniversary of the Battle of Solferino and San Martino, in 1896, that there took place in Piazza Duomo the unveiling of the work of two artists, Barzaghi and

35. U. Levra, *Fare gli italiani. Memoria e celebrazione del Risorgimento*, Comitato di Torino dell’Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento italiano, Turin 1992, pp. 1-172; P. Gentile, *L’invenzione del Re d’Italia: all’origine del mito di Vittorio Emanuele II*, in P. Pressenda, P. Sereno (eds.), *Saperi per la nazione. Storia e geografia nella costruzione dell’Italia unita*, Olschki, Florence 2017, pp. 1-33.

36. C. Brice, *Il Vittoriano. Monumentalità pubblica e politica a Roma*, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano, Rome 2015.

37. «L’illustrazione italiana», 15 September 1878, a. V, no. 37, pp. 161-162.

38. M. Savorra, *La monumentomania e i concorsi artistici nell’Italia unita*, in F. Mangone, M.G. Tampieri (eds.), *Architettare l’Unità. Architettura e istituzioni nelle città della nuova Italia 1861-1911*, Paparo, Naples 2011, pp. 351-363.

Rosa, who had by then passed away<sup>39</sup>. Meanwhile in Turin, Italy's first capital and the "cradle" of the *Gentleman King*, the twentieth anniversary of Victor Emmanuel's death had come and gone by the time a monument was inaugurated; this had received an extraordinary personal contribution of one million lire from Umberto I as compensation for not having his father buried in the royal crypt of the Basilica of Superga, alongside his forebears<sup>40</sup>. As to the Vittoriano, whose problematic construction on the slopes of the Capitoline did not conclude until 1911 (twenty-six years after the laying of the first stone!), when it was inaugurated by Victor Emmanuel III on the fiftieth anniversary of unification and on the eve of the Italo-Turkish War in Libya, the ceremony took place in an Italy that had changed profoundly since its foundation<sup>41</sup>.

In the twentieth century the dynasty changed. The process of nationalising the monarchy had undergone significant acceleration under the reign of Umberto I and Margherita<sup>42</sup>, as well as suffering a violent setback with the regicide of 29 July 1900. Victor Emmanuel III now had to take on the challenge of a country being propelled towards modernity and mass society<sup>43</sup>. There was still time to celebrate in the old style, however, with grandiose classical equestrian monuments dedicated to Umberto I, from Asti to Catania via Bari. But other representations took hold. In Naples, the statue of the hieratic and proud *Good King* (Umberto wears the coat of an infantry general, with his hand resting on the hilt of his sword), recalls in the sorrowful figures in its bas-relief the 1883 Casamicciola earthquake and the cholera epidemic of 1884<sup>44</sup>. In Turin, alongside the Superga basilica, a symbolic monument portrays Umberto I in the form of an eagle struck by an arrow in the company

39. E. Colombo, *Milano. Il padre della patria in faccia al Duomo*, in *La memoria in piazza* cit., pp. 95-110.

40. Vittorio Emanuele II. *Un monumento restituito alla città*, Consulta per la Valorizzazione dei Beni Artistici e Culturali di Torino, Turin, 2001, contributions by U. Levra, P.L. Bassignana, C. Ghibaudi; R. Varvelli, *Il re che vola*, «Torino storia», 4 (2019), no. 39, pp. 30-35.

41. C. Brice, *Il Vittoriano* cit.

42. See C.M. Fiorentino, *La corte dei Savoia (1849-1900)*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2008.

43. P. Gentile, *Vittorio Emanuele III*, Corriere della Sera, Milan 2018.

44. «Illustrazione popolare. Giornale per le famiglie», 41 (1910), no. 49, p. 776.

of an Allebroge, the legendary progenitor of the Piedmontese<sup>45</sup>. But the true image of Umberto I was funereal, linked to his tragic fate, eternalised in the expiatory chapel built in Monza on the exact spot where Gaetano Bresci had fired the fatal bullets<sup>46</sup>.

If Victor Emmanuel III reached the height of his myth as a *Soldier King*<sup>47</sup>, after the First World War he was also a victim in a process of “desaubadisation”: from the burial of the unknown soldier at the Vittoriano with the creation of the Altare della Patria, which shifted attention from the first king of Italy to the last of the infantrymen, symbol of new mass ceremonies<sup>48</sup>, to the pervasive Fascist liturgy that – heedless of the scrawny king – focused on the body of the vigorous (though undermined by various ailments) Duce and absorbed the ritualism of the monarchy<sup>49</sup>. The only surviving monument, which is nevertheless significant, is that erected on the seafront of Reggio Calabria, on the spot where Victor Emmanuel III landed on 30 July 1900 as king of Italy after the assassination of his father. Erected in 1932, the monument, on which the image of Athena Promachos stands out, was moved in 2001 to the centre of a new arena by mayor Italo Falcomatà, a historian and former communist militant. And while Falcomatà turned the statue away from the sea to make it face the city (in order to protect it from “its” true enemies)<sup>50</sup>, his successor Giuseppe Scopelliti, of the right-wing Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) later rededicated the space to Francesco (Ciccio) Franco, the right-wing trade unionist who in 1970 led a series of bloody riots in the city<sup>51</sup>.

This episode introduces us to the incidents of removal

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45. *Cittadini di pietra* cit., pp. 232-238.

46. P. Gentile, *Morte e apoteosi. Regolare i destini politici della nazione da Carlo Alberto a Umberto I*, in P. Cozzo, F. Motta (eds.), *Regolare la politica. Norme, liturgie, rappresentazioni del potere tra tardo antico ed età contemporanea*, Viella, Rome 2016, pp. 285-290.

47. E. Signori, *La Grande guerra e la monarchia italiana: il mito del “re soldato”*, in M. Tesoro (ed.), *Monarchia, tradizione, identità nazionale. Germania, Giappone e Italia tra Ottocento e Novecento*, Bruno Mondadori, Milan 2004, pp. 183-213.

48. B. Tobia, *Ealtare della patria*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2011.

49. P. Colombo, *La monarchia fascista*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2010.

50. *Il Sindaco Falcomatà: «finalmente libera la statua della Dea Athena, tornerà a difendere la città e a vigilare sul nostro futuro»*, article on the website of the City of Reggio Calabria: <http://www.reggiocal.it/on-line/Home/Amministrazione/Sindaco/articolo108688.html>.

51. <http://www.chieracostui.com/costui/docs/search/schedaoltre.asp?ID=19024>.

and reinterpretation that struck the House of Savoy after the 2 June referendum, which ushered in the republic. We should not overlook, however, the significant parenthesis, in the north, of the Italian Social Republic (RSI), which wanted to cleanse the public squares of all monarchical symbols<sup>52</sup>. The fury of the republican fascists did not limit itself to erasing the names of the kings and queens from streets and squares. In Novara, on 28 September 1944, after the detonation of a bomb in a barracks that killed thirteen RSI soldiers, the Fascists carried out a determined assault on Savoy monuments: they destroyed the bust of Ferdinand, Duke of Genoa, decapitated the equestrian statue of Victor Emmanuel II, dragging the head of the *Great King* with a rope amid singing and shouting, and while they did not succeed in defacing the statue of Charles Emmanuel III because it was situated too high up (though the intimidated inhabitants of the square were ordered to fetch a ladder), they wrecked the monument to Umberto I and vandalised that of Charles Albert<sup>53</sup>. In Bologna, the Fascists acted with more restraint: in 1944 they moved Victor Emmanuel II from Piazza Maggiore (then called Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, but promptly renamed «della Repubblica») to the Giardini Margherita, where it can still be found<sup>54</sup>.

Without a doubt, following the referendum the republicans worked hard at renaming streets and squares, and this was lamented by Benedetto Croce who, entering Turin by car, noted with «painful wonder» that the Piazza Emanuele Filiberto had been renamed Piazza della Repubblica<sup>55</sup>. It was of course more difficult to get rid of monuments, but nevertheless there was no lack of purges: in Crema, for example, the statue of Victor Emmanuel II was destroyed on 11 June 1946 in a bomb attack, and the same fate befell Victor Emmanuel II in Parma, which was blown up on 5 July 1946<sup>56</sup>. After the war, in Ferrara, the statue to the *Gen-*

52. M. Ridolfi, M. Tesoro, *Monarchia e Repubblica. Istituzioni, culture e rappresentazioni in Italia (1848-1948)*, Bruno Mondadori, Milan 2011, pp. 143-149.

53. P. Fornara, *Passeggiando per la nostra Novara*, «Resistenza unita», July-August 1974, pp. 2-3.

54. See <https://www.storiaememoriadibologna.it/monumento-a-vittorio-emanuele-ii-1195-opera>.

55. B. Croce, *Scritti e discorsi politici (1943-1947)*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1963, p. 338.

56. <https://www.anpiparma.it/it/il-monumento-al-partigiano>.

*tleman King* was removed from the cathedral square and consigned to the local Museum of the Risorgimento and the Resistance<sup>57</sup>.

Other statues of the Great King were removed for traffic reasons. In Ascoli, the statue of Victor Emmanuel II was moved in 1961 from the central Piazza Arringo to the public gardens<sup>58</sup>. In Verbania, in 2014 the tormented *Toju* (which had been removed during the RSI, almost melted down to make a monument to the partisans, then put into storage after the war, and resited in the 1990s), was finally placed on the Intra lakefront<sup>59</sup> to make way for a roundabout; this happened despite intense protests by the monarchists and the king's great-grandson, Prince Victor Emmanuel<sup>60</sup>. In Acqui Terme, the statue of Victor Emmanuel II has seemed to wander from place to place in response to urban redevelopment or political decisions made by the municipal councils<sup>61</sup>. And in Naples, the 2010 relocation of the statue of Victor Emmanuel II from the Piazza del Municipio (made necessary by nearby works on the underground) gave rise to lively neo-Bourbon protests for the new «Teano», that is, the axis created at the end of Corso Umberto I between the Victor Emmanuel II in Piazza Bovio and the Garibaldi at the central station<sup>62</sup>.

The case of Naples, in the wake of revisionism, relates to a wider discussion that cannot be addressed here<sup>63</sup>. Limiting ourselves to the Savoy versus Bourbon question, the

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57. Anselmi: *troviamo un parco per la statua di Vittorio Emanuele II*, «La nuova Ferrara», 30 settembre 2010, <https://lanuovaferrara.gelocal.it/ferrara/cronaca/2010/09/29/news/anselmi-troviamo-un-parco-per-la-statua-di-vittorio-emanuele-ii-1.525461>.

58. G. Gagliardi, *Le piazze di Ascoli*, Silvana Editoriale, Cinisello Balsamo 1996, p. 20.

59. Intra, *il monumento a Vittorio Emanuele II*, in <http://www.ecosistemaverbano.org/scheda.html?id=8737>.

60. A. Ronzoni, *A Verbania non c'è posto per Vittorio Emanuele II. Rimossa statua del re e Casa Savoia*. [www.titolidigiornali.it](http://www.titolidigiornali.it), (accessed 8 February 2014).

61. A. Martini, *Il monumento a Vittorio Emanuele II ad Acqui Terme*, in *Il Risorgimento nell'Asstigiano* cit., pp. 192-193.

62. Press office of the Neo-Bourbon Movement, *Vittorio Emanuele a piazza Bovio per una nuova Teano. Il Parlamento delle Due Sicilie chiede chiarezza al Sindaco Iervolino e propone il trasferimento della statua a Torino!*, 10 dicembre 2010, <https://angeloForgione.com/2010/12/10/vittorio-emanuele-ii-a-piazza-bovio-per-una-nuova-teano-il-parlamento-delle-due-sicilie-chiede-chiarezza-al-sindaco-iervolino-e-propone-il-trasferimento-della-statua-a-torino/>.

63. C. Pinto, *La guerra per il Mezzogiorno. Italiani, borbonici e briganti*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2019; S. Sonetti, *L'affaire Pontelandolfo. La storia, la memoria, il mito*, Viella, Rome 2020.

teleological row of statues commissioned by Umberto I in 1889 of the founders of the various dynasties that reigned over Naples (Roger the Norman, Frederick II of Swabia, Charles I of Anjou, Alfonso I of Aragon, Charles V, Charles III of Bourbon, Joachim Murat, Victor Emmanuel II), for the façade of the Neapolitan Royal Palace, has lost its conciliatory value<sup>64</sup>. In the south, the war of the royal statues has regained momentum<sup>65</sup>, while in the centre-north the debate appears not to have aroused much emotion: in Lucca, for instance, the statues of Maria Luisa of Bourbon and of Garibaldi were restored as part of the same improvement works<sup>66</sup>. It is clear, however, that this example does not support any particular theory and does not exhaust a subject in need of further investigation of the “removals” and “substitutions” that not only took place during the key moments of 1861, 1943 and 1946 but were also intrinsic to the revolutions of the Risorgimento, with developments within the pre-unification states<sup>67</sup>.

There has also been no lack of discussions about unwelcome monuments to the first king of Italy, such as that of Genoa, which some have called to be removed due to the bombing of the city ordered by the king and carried out by La Marmora in 1849<sup>68</sup>; or that of Palermo, where a local journalist’s criticisms of the «wasteful» restoration received support from the separatists of the «Frunti Nazionali Sicilianu»<sup>69</sup>. Conversely, it is true that some statues

64. B. Tobia, *Una patria per gli italiani. Spazi, itinerari, monumenti nell'Italia unita (1870-1900)*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1998, pp. 163-167.

65. A. Forgione, *La cattiva sorte delle pregevoli statue borboniche*, «Napoli.com», 3 settembre 2009, <http://www.napoli.com/viewarticolo.php?articolo=29873>.

66. *Dopo la statua di Maria Luisa in piazza Grande, adesso si sistema quella di Garibaldi in piazza del Giglio*, 29 agosto 2016 <http://www.comune.lucca.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/16181>.

67. P.M. Delpu, *Gli attentati popolari contro i Borbone di Napoli: iconoclastia e progetti di tirannicidio (1848-1856)*, in R. De Lorenzo, R.A. Gutiérrez Lloret (eds.), *Las Monarquías de la Europa meridional ante el desafío de la modernidad (siglos XIX y XX)*, PUZ, Zaragoza 2020, pp. 189-212.

68. «Vile e infetta razza di canaglie». Rimuoviamo la statua di Vittorio Emanuele da Corvetto, [https://www.change.org/p/marco-bucci-vile-e-infetta-razza-di-canaglie-rimuoviamo-la-statua-di-vittorio-emanuele-da-corvetto?recruiter=224298226&utm\\_source=share\\_petition&utm\\_medium=facebook&utm\\_campaign=share\\_petition&recruited\\_by\\_id=ba19cdf0-abae-11e4-bc42-c9e6bb07b102](https://www.change.org/p/marco-bucci-vile-e-infetta-razza-di-canaglie-rimuoviamo-la-statua-di-vittorio-emanuele-da-corvetto?recruiter=224298226&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=share_petition&recruited_by_id=ba19cdf0-abae-11e4-bc42-c9e6bb07b102).

69. G. Ambrosetti, *Vittorio Emanuele II? No, grazie!*, «Meridionews», 5 December 2011, <https://palermo.meridionews.it/articolo/12701/vittorio-emanuele-ii-no-grazie/>.

have been enhanced: in preparation for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations various monuments were restored, such as those of Victor Emmanuel II in Bergamo<sup>70</sup> and Pisa<sup>71</sup>, and the equestrian statue of Umberto I in Bari<sup>72</sup>.

But leaving aside the general indifference towards the figure of the king of Italy, and the few “rediscoveries” there have been not a few wars of memory. In Crema, where the aforementioned statue of Victor Emanuel II was blown up, the restoration with private money and support of a centre-right council embarrassed the successive centre-left administration, which was forced to accept the previously agreed positioning of the work in the piazza named after Aldo Moro, one of the architects of the republic<sup>73</sup>. In Bologna, where the anarchists had not forgotten Gaetano Bresci, in 2019 the Hobo collective reacted to the initiative of the entrepreneur Francesco Amante to reposition the bronze high-reliefs of Umberto I that were removed in 1943 on the facade of Palazzo d’Accursio by smearing them in red paint<sup>74</sup>. These antagonists would have cared little about the argument that took place on the day of the inauguration between the journalist and former deputy mayor of Modena, Mario Lugari, and the mayor of Bologna, Virginio Merola of the Democratic Party (PD):

Lugari: What prompted the mayor of a city that received the Gold Medal [of the Resistance] to find a new home for a statue that honours Umberto I, who was respon-

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70. *Restaurati a Bergamo i monumenti di Vittorio Emanuele II e Garibaldi*, «Cultura Italia», 10 novembre 2011, [http://www.culturaitalia.it/opencms/it/contenuti/focus/focus\\_9293.html?language=it](http://www.culturaitalia.it/opencms/it/contenuti/focus/focus_9293.html?language=it).

71. E. Piras, *Finiti i lavori in piazza Vittorio Emanuele: nuovi spazi per la città*, «PisaToday», 10 febbraio 2012, <https://www.pisatoday.it/cronaca/inaugurazione-piazza-vittorio-emanuele-pisa-11-febbraio-2012.html>.

72. *150° Italia: restaurato a Bari il monumento a Umberto I*, in «Giornale di Puglia», 2 marzo 2012, <https://www.giornaledipuglia.com/2012/02/restaurato-bari-il-monumento-umberto-i.html>.

73. A. Galvani, *Statua di Vittorio Emanuele II, interviene Livia Severgnini: «forti perplessità sul posizionamento ed il contributo economico, tuttavia l'iter era praticamente già concluso»*, «Crema on line», <https://www.cremaonline.it/articoli.php?ID=20290>. There is a substantial dossier on the history of the Crema statue: [http://www.societanazionale.it/pagine.php?page=Liv2&id\\_scheda=436&prod=Notizie](http://www.societanazionale.it/pagine.php?page=Liv2&id_scheda=436&prod=Notizie).

74. *Bologna, imbrattate le statue sull'amor patrio. Hobo rivendica l'atto*, in «La Repubblica-Bologna», 11 March 2019, [https://bologna.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/03/11/news/bologna\\_imbrattate\\_le\\_statue\\_sull\\_amor\\_patrio-221235493/](https://bologna.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/03/11/news/bologna_imbrattate_le_statue_sull_amor_patrio-221235493/).



sible for the 1898 massacre in Milan? What were you thinking of? Do you realise what you've done?

Merola: You see history in the sense that what happened in the past must be denied.

Lugari: Absolutely not, you don't know history.

Merola: You don't know history, it's time to stop removing or placing monuments on the basis of which party is in government. Shame on you!

Lugari: It is you, as the mayor, who should be ashamed. You don't know a damn thing!

Merola walks away, directing an irritated gesture towards his interlocutor<sup>75</sup>.

Thus the House of Savoy continues to divide public opinion and provoke debate. This was evident in December 2017, at the time of the secretive return to Italy of the bodies of Victor Emmanuel III and Elena of Montenegro. There was "no room" for them at the Pantheon, and the makeshift solution was to place them in a chapel in the Vicoforte Sanctuary near Mondovì, in the province of Cuneo. But while the monarchists, still grumbling, thanked the President of the Republic for the humanitarian gesture, the Italian Jewish Community expressed «concern» about an event that took place on the eve of the eightieth anniversary of the racial laws<sup>76</sup>.

75. *A Bologna torna la statua in onore di Umberto I. Un cittadino critica e Merola perde la pazienza*, «Dire. Agenzia di stampa nazionale», <https://www.dire.it/01-03-2019/303272-video-a-bologna-torna-la-statua-in-onore-di-umberto-i-un-cittadino-critica-e-merola-perde-la-pazienza/>.

76. A. Giovagnoli, *La traslazione. Né onori, né pietre: Vittorio Emanuele III e i saggi modi della pietà*, «Avvenire», 19 dicembre 2017 <https://www.avvenire.it/opinioni/pagine/vittorio-emanuele-iii-i-saggi-modi-della-piet>. P. Gentile, *Le carte dei re d'Italia tra dispersioni, epurazioni, occultamenti e (parziali) ritrovamenti*, «Passato e presente», 37 (2019), no. 106, pp. 73-89.



Fig. 1  
P. Costa,  
*Victor Emmanuel II*,  
1899, Turin



Fig. 2  
V. Vela,  
*Victor Emmanuel II*,  
1866, Turin



Fig. 3  
P. Palagi,  
*Amadeus VI, The Green Count*,  
1853, Turin