

Brigands, Social Bandits, Freedom Fighters: the Portrayal of anti-Napoleonic Rebels in the Historiography of Napoleonic Italy

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The insurrection that erupted in the Piacentino in early December 1805 was, by all accounts, a spontaneous movement, born of myriad frustrations with French impositions. Throughout that summer, forced enrolment in National Guard units destined for Prince Eugène's reserve camp in Bologna pushed people over the edge. Villagers called each other to rebellion by sounding church bells (*campana a martella*), organized themselves into a makeshift army, attacked French gendarmes and issued precise lists of grievances that local community leaders transmitted to French administrators. French rulers, beginning with current Administrator General Moreau de Saint-Méry (who swiftly lost his job for not being able to prevent the disturbances) classified the rebellion as a criminal act organized and carried out by brigands. This event was not an isolated case: anti-French popular rebellions occurred almost every month all over the territory during the first Italian campaign (1796 – 1799) and then more sporadically during the second occupation. French authorities treated each episode required as a criminal act that disturbed public order and required vigorous police response.¹ The blame fell on the shoulders of a variety of lawbreakers designated by the official term brigands. The discourse of brigandage, the foundation of the policy of criminalizing anti-French revolts, is an unavoidable point of debate in the historiography of Napoleonic Italy whenever popular rebellions come under discussion. The rich body of studies dedicated to the Napoleonic period in Italy reflects general trajectories in historical thought, intertwined with the way concepts like progress, modernization, state formation, or freedom have been theorized from the early nineteenth century onwards.

The focal point of all historiography, the common thread that runs through multiple, often divergent theoretical assumptions, is the historical function of Napoleonic occupation as steppingstone to the *Risorgimento*, Italy's unification in a modern state. Within this overall perspective, popular resistance to Napoleonic rule is intrinsically linked with resistance to modernizing processes, which in turn connects to parallel debates on the popular appeal – or lack thereof – of revolutionary movements in the Italian peninsula.² The rebels themselves are therefore

portrayed in light of each school of thought's verdict on modernizing processes. Let me summarize the main directions:

1. Modernization

From the beginning of the French incursions in Italy, a select group that contemporaries labeled *giacobini* sought to put the disruption of French occupation to good use. Such activists saw in the French imposed state structures an unexpected opportunity to throw overboard current absolutist regimes with their onerous built-in, if time sanctioned iniquities, and modernize the entire peninsula. Since *giacobini* who had lived through the events penned most of the early narratives, modernization stands at the foundation of theories on the historical significance of the Napoleonic occupation in Italy. These are passionate accounts, full of details that combine faith in the possibilities opened by the French system with frustration over the exploitative nature of the Napoleonic administration. The focus though remains on the two great political achievements that followed the French era: unification and the establishment of modern institutions throughout the peninsula.³ The entire Napoleonic period comes across as a means to a political end, an outlook that left little analytical energy for pondering the implications of anti-French popular rebellions, which occurred mostly in rural areas, far from the sites of political decision-making. These early accounts opened the way for the master narrative that emerged in late 19th century, with the Napoleonic period examined through the lenses of the *Risorgimento* itself understood as a historical necessity. The emphasis on political structures, legal frameworks, history of ideas and the evolution of national consciousness, much under the influence of Benedetto Croce's historicism, treated the Napoleonic period as a preparatory phase for the Risorgimento.⁴ A few landmark monographs: Vittorio Fiorini and Francesco Lemmi, *Il Periodo Napoleonico 1799-1814* (1900); Francesco Lemmi, *L'Età Napoleonica* (1906). Lemmi straightforwardly defined the Napoleonic period as springboard for the Risorgimento in *Le origini del risorgimento italiano* (1789-1815). Later studies inspired by Lemmi's intellectual framework: G. Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia Moderna*, vol. I "Le origini del Risorgimento" (Milano, 1956); Carlo Capra, *L'Età rivoluzionaria e napoleonica in Italia* (Torino, 1978) and Carlo Zaghi, especially *L'Italia di Napoleone* (Torino, 1986)⁵.

Seen in the conceptual rear-view mirror of the Risorgimento, the many rebellions that punctuated the Napoleonic period take the form of predictable growing pains for a country about to enter its mature phase. The rebels themselves occupy a fluid space between brigandage in the criminal sense the French understood it, fanaticism induced by the clergy's oversized influence on country folk, and discomfort with the economic and social pressures caused by a painful but necessary transition. In the same vein, the religious overtones of many rebellions receive little attention, as no more than one component of a generalized fear of modernity the Church fanned for its own reasons. Historians acknowledge that rebel leaders secured quasi-mythical reputations, often imbued with an aura of defenders of the faith, hence of cultural identity against foreign intruders, but hurry to cut such claims down to sociological size. Fiorini and Lemmi explained the

sympathy rebels enjoyed wherever they went by the inability of rulers to assure social stability and a sense of justice for all – the kind of promises that the Risorgimento sought to fulfill.⁶ Zaghi, whose work included findings from investigations in social history, dismissed as political opportunism the French blanket allegations of brigandage but made a point of demystifying anti-French insurgents as well. Rebel leaders, Zaghi concluded after thorough examination of police records, were a motley crew of vagabonds, deserters, dissatisfied peasants and yes, petty criminals (*quasi tutti a mezza tacca, violenti e sanguinari*).⁷

2. Crisis.

The history of the Napoleonic period expanded considerably during the 1960s and 1970s, a move largely prompted by the interest non-Italian and non-French scholars began to take in Napoleonic Italy. There was a great trailblazer in the person of British historian Stuart Woolf who placed at the center of the investigation changes in administrative, economic, and social structures to understand how the integration of Europe – much of Europe – functioned as a single centralized state.⁸ Napoleon himself barely made an appearance in Woolf's prodigious work and remained hidden in wave after wave of studies that bypassed biography and military topics to concentrate instead on economic systems, fiscal policies, social disruptions and administrative innovations. Steven Englund inspiringly opened his detailed review of the many historians who contributed to this body of scholarship:

Their collective work qualifies as nothing less than a scholarly renaissance in terms of quantity, quality, and novelty of approach. (...) they have so decisively redirected the river of Napoleonic scholarship that it no longer bypasses places named society, culture, administration, economy, education, all of which are now, thanks to them, known to be as important as the older, more familiar ports of call (constitution, civil code, conscription, high politics, etc.).⁹

Outstanding in-depth regional studies came to enrich this innovative stream and brought to light the myriad ways in which local politics and cultural systems interfaced with, and modified, the universalizing claims of French imperial administrations. Turning to the Italian peninsula, pressure to break with the past met with resistance or not, in different ways in different places. Ultimately, the scholarly consensus held that no corner of Italy emerged unchanged from the Napoleonic experience. Hence, the shift in focus from intellectual and political history to social, administrative and economic history did not modify the basic understanding of the Napoleonic domination in Italy as a period of transition to modernity. The salient point is that, as one excellent recent historiography review concluded: important changes in methodology have cast much needed light on the functioning of the Napoleonic Empire in Italy but 'questions of historical interpretations have remained basically the same.'¹⁰

The gist of these studies is that each region of Italy, in its own way, was a society in crisis, rife with internal contradictions, for which the French occupation offered a way out. The word ‘crisis’ tends to come frequently under the pen of historians who put under the microscope processes that ceased to work, inadequate institutions, and out of touch leadership. These are big picture investigations, where popular rebellions take their place among the many manifestations of the general crisis. An excellent example of this approach is the volume *Folle Controrivoluzione. Le insorgenze popolari nell’Italia giacobina e Napoleonica*. A cura di Anna Maria Rao (Roma: Carocci, 1999).¹¹ Each contribution looks at a popular revolt in a particular region, each underscoring local tensions, leadership failures and countless particularities adding up to widespread discontent.¹² Anna Maria Rao’s nuanced preface repeatedly calls the reader’s attention to the local character of these movements and stresses that rising against French occupiers provided a vehicle for expressing manifold deeper grievances and unease with a world losing its familiar contours. The rebels themselves come into view as complicated, flawed, and decidedly non-heroic individuals, representatives of vulnerable popular classes who, not finding an outlet for multi-layered despair resorted occasionally to criminal activity – thus giving some credence to French claims of rampant brigandage. None of the contributors to this volume deems cultural anxiety or religious fervor sufficiently strong motivators for rebellion; instead, they claim that religion and customs provided familiar forms of discourse for channeling social and political discontent. The only unifying trait Rao identified in insurgencies is the uniform fear they struck in the hearts of the upper classes all over Italy, which subsequently generated the frightful myth of a violent, out of control people.¹³

3. Post-colonial perspectives

Any student of Napoleonic Italy has met with – and likely contemplated in awe – the work of Michael Broers starting with *The Napoleonic Empire in Italy: Cultural imperialism in a European context?* (2004) which brought a change in historical interpretation. As the title suggests, Broers builds on colonial theory, more precisely on studies of European expansion in Africa and Asia, to tease out parallels between Napoleonic policies and the drive towards assimilation and integration typical for nineteenth century imperialism. In this perspective, France plays the part of dominant power foisting change on Italy by technological and bureaucratic means – much like European imperialism reshaped African and Asian countries for so long. Without being discarded, the modernization theory takes something of a beating here (and loses all sense of optimism). Rather than focusing on the crisis of the old regime in different regions of Italy, Broers trains the spotlight on the inner contradictions of the Napoleonic administration with its host of dysfunctions that in turn produced disruptions and frustrations on the ground. Annie Jourdan has pointed out that the change in focus opened the door to reconsidering the French occupation in terms of trauma inflicted on unsuspecting local *administrés*.¹⁴

When mentioning rebellions, Broers evaluates the various strategies imperial law and order institutions employed to tackle unrest, mainly to underscore how poorly the French understood the

mindset of populations they wished to bring under a common legal system. Like the historians who preceded him, Broers gives a quick nod to popular narratives that imbue anti-French rebels with the aura of freedom fighters sometimes tinged with cultural and religious self-righteousness.¹⁵ He too warns against the temptation of glamourizing rebels as benign Robin Hoods fighting the authorities and does point to the brutality of smugglers, transhumance herd minders and assorted bandits who too often fought the French for opportunistic and trivial reasons, not lofty ideas of national liberation.¹⁶ Yet, unlike his predecessors, he cannot resist adding a few brushes of fondly evoked social banditry to the general picture: ‘Ordinary men got their moment in the sun, however swiftly it was eclipsed by the shadow of the gallows. For a moment they were free, masterless men, and they had before them the timeless example of how to act accordingly.’¹⁷ Broers’ main interest though is on French responses to upheavals that challenged the French system, not that much on the rebels themselves. Alexander Grab and Alan Forrest’s work on conscription has brought much-needed nuance to the structural motivations fueling popular insurgencies. For Italy, Alexander Grab has shown how the intrusive and culturally alien conscription stirred fierce resistance occasionally spilling into criminal activities – or what the French interpreted as such, but here too the emphasis stays on French strategies and policies.¹⁸

In the meantime, in Italy, a group of historians began to question all modernization narratives on popular rebellions, old and new. At first glance, these historians seem intellectually affiliated with the post-colonial thesis, but they acknowledge more affinity with the revisionist turn in French history, famously pioneered by François Furet and Denis Richet. In a sweeping conceptual break with past historiography approaches to the French Revolution, Furet and Richet invited historians to examine past facts and processes on their own terms, not in terms of avenues history provided for unavoidable, preset modernization stages.¹⁹ In similar frame of mind, historians clustered around the *Istituto Storico dell’Insorgenza e per l’Identità Nazionale*, located in Milan, reject the notion that the Risorgimento was a historical necessity catalyzed by the Napoleonic period. Instead, they view pre-Napoleonic social structures and cultural assumptions in different regions of Italy, including surviving feudal compacts or patterns of deference in legal systems, as legitimate entities with their own intrinsic coherence and their own historical path – which did not have to lead to the Risorgimento. More precisely, this interpretation acknowledges the link between the Napoleonic regime and the Risorgimento but posits that the entire sequence brutally altered Italy’s course, with the complicity of local Italian modernizers.

Not only do these historians ignore all and any cautious recommendations against glamourizing social banditry, their essays invest folklore images of anti-Napoleonic rebels with timeless cultural and religious meaning.²⁰ Indeed, unlike practically all previous scholars who point to regional differences and various local circumstances, these historians see strong cultural and religious connections between all popular mutinies. The rebels therefore come to represent a culturally unified Italian people rising – regardless of local socio-economic factors – to defend its culture, its religion, its way of life and its history against foreign intruders who not only had no business being there, but ruined entire regions for exploitative goals.

Obviously Napoleon and his administrators get no credit for introducing important legal principles such as equality before the law, or for awakening Italian national consciousness, or for any other niceties that colored the Napoleonic era in earlier studies – not even for the administrative efforts which prompted a few words of praise even from Broers. This goes much further than the post-colonial thesis since the stated goal is to right a historical, or rather a historiography, wrong. Asking, rhetorically, who were these men who dared to fight with ‘rifles against cannons and pitchforks against rifles’ Massimo Viglione vowed to save Italian anonymous heroes from the *damnatio memoriae* of all past historical narratives.²¹ In another volume, tellingly titled *La Vandeea Italiana*, Viglione made a point of listing all insurrections and, as far as he was able, the name of insurgents beginning with the leaders whom the French executed according to the policy of making examples. The concluding chapter declares somberly: “We dedicate this book to all the martyrs and heroes of the Italian counter-revolution, of the anti-*giacobin* insurrection.”²²

The favored interpretative tool here, the binomial resistance/collaboration, obviously casts the entire Napoleonic period in unrelieved negative light. Insurgents, rebels, bandits, and brigands all morph together into a mighty band of valiant freedom fighters. Cooperative local officials, many of whom typically enjoy the honorable status of forerunners of the Risorgimento spirit in mainstream accounts, are recast in the part of traitors to the Italian people and enforcers of a damaging system whose much-vaunted benefits were not worth the wages of pain in national humiliation and cultural quasi-extinction (these studies’ opinion not mine). Antonino De Francesco concluded in a historiography review, that the relatively new discourse of occupation/resistance/collaboration often proceeds from a revisionist, if not outright revanchist ideological angle that sheds scant light on the historical dynamics of the time.²³ Even so, and while this is not by any means the new mainstream, this line of analysis is strong enough to induce almost all new monographs of Napoleonic Italy to interrogate the merits of modernization theses and the transformational nature of the Risorgimento itself. John Davis’s observation that the task of soberly assessing the significance of rebels ‘is not made easier by the heavy doses of romanticism with which the figure of the brigand has been colored’ is relevant to this point.²⁴ Recent research typically weaves together thorough examination of changes at the institutional level with nuanced approaches to religious and cultural motivations driving active resistance to Napoleonic rule. The imposing collective work *Italia Napoleonica: Dizionario Critico* (2011), edited by Luigi Mascilli Migliorini, strives to achieve methodological balance. The selection of articles combines sociological, political, and intellectual history perspectives, in line with modernization narratives, with cultural approaches that underscore popular anxieties in the face of foreign occupation.

4. A case study

To illustrate the interpretative difficulties encountered when trying to read archival sources through the lenses of different historiography assumptions, I will offer an example from my own research.

One of the characters most celebrated as a hero of cultural resistance was Giuseppe Bussandri, nicknamed *Mozetta* for his habit of wearing his hair in little ponytail held by a bow, the presumed leader of the Piacentino insurrection (December 1805 – May 1806). His name figures in all contemporaneous official accounts, and later in all studies, on the Piacentino insurrection, the only person consistently named as the mastermind, the general even, of the rebels. His name moved from report to report, and later on from one retelling to another, ultimately taking on a life of its own: in local popular narratives, Bussandri comes across as a spontaneous chieftain, risen from the masses aggrieved by French hassles. In 1976, the Parmense poet Luigi Vicini felt inspired to compose, in dialect, an ode to ‘General Mosseta’'s glory. Massimo Viglione elevated Bussandri's standing when he included him on the list of “heroes and martyrs.” A careful perusal of archival documents paints a more complicated picture.

French authorities learned about Bussandri's activities from a report by the commissioner of the commune of Pellegrino, Lazzaro Cornazzani. He designated Giuseppe Busandri, resident of the village Scipione, as the mastermind of the revolt in a letter dated 11 January.²⁵ In the report, Cornazzani cited an intercepted letter signed “Il Generale del Campo G.B.” sent by courier on 1 January 1806 from the rebel camp in Val di Tolla to the militia captain Della Tana. According to Cornazzani, the letter announced a third victory over the enemy (i.e. French troops) and enjoined the captain to ring the bells and summon his troops in support of insurgents who were chasing the “perfidious French.” On the strength of the commissioner's word, Bussandri soon acquired a reputation for haughty defiance and – for the French – rabble-rousing. Authorities classified him as a dangerous brigand, to be captured and tried by one of the special military commissions set up to deal with anti-government rebellions. Yet, many respectable citizens, men with responsibilities at the local level, took the time to try to dispel this image and change the French commanders' minds.

On 16 January 1806 – two weeks after the events reported by Cornazzani – Captain Cornini from Scipione informed Administrator General Moreau de Saint -Méry that Giuseppe Bussandri had turned himself in to him, Captain Cornini, that very day. Bussandri had the rank of sergeant in the militia of Scipione, so he approached his immediate superior to seek to explain his case: the accusations against him were simply untrue, Bussandri affirmed, because he had left the village before the troubles started and returned after Viceroy Eugene issued a message of pardon to all who repented. In a long exculpatory letter to Moreau, Cornini used this instance both to speak in Bussandri's favor and to defend himself against previous accusations of duplicitous conduct.²⁶ Without saying so, the captain in fact confirmed that the divide between obedient residents and rebels shifted with the events, for he based his initiative on his interpretation of Viceroy Eugene's decree.²⁷ Believing in the prince's magnanimity, Cornini wrote, so many people turned themselves in that to his mind, since Bussandri had surrendered in good faith, he too must benefit from the prince's pardon. A week later, Pietro Carancini, commissioner of the commune of Gallinela, submitted a character testimony of sorts: Bussandri was the nephew of one of the sharecroppers in the village, a trustworthy man named Bussandri Vincenzo, who had approached the commissioner three times to asks for a letter of good behavior for Giuseppe. Carancini had conferred with Captain

Cornini on how to deal with this situation, since the presumed rebel's uncle was guaranteeing upon his word that Giuseppe Bussandri was not a ringleader; at most, his involvement was a moment of youthful recklessness. On 9 February, Carancini made another move on Bussandri's behalf, in a letter insisting that he had voluntarily laid down arms. Bussandri kept claiming his innocence and maintained he was not among the first, not even among the second group of rebels, Carancini wrote. Moreover, Carancini was prepared to present Governor Junot (who ruled Parma as of 26 January) with a written defense, on condition Bussandri would remain in hiding for the time being (presumably, he was laying low in Scipione or Gallinella). Concurrently, Bussandri had obtained a *buonissimo attestato* from Lieutenant Romani of Vigoleno, the deputy commander of his *terzo*, and would surely be able to obtain other such certificates seeing that he was the son of 'good parents' and had never given anybody cause to believe he had fallen into 'bad habits.'²⁸

It was all to no avail. The Military Commission found Giuseppe Bussandri guilty of having acted as 'leader of the rebellion and first instigator of the insurrection' on 1 April 1806. He was shot the next day, in accordance with the special court's directive of executing confirmed guilty persons within 24 hours. Remarkably, maybe to balance out the harshness of his conviction, in the same session the Military Commission pronounced 15 not-guilty verdicts. These were the last defendants charged with insurrection crimes; as of 1 April 1806, all were free to go. Bussandri's was the last execution and marked the official end to the military repression. His posthumous career of brave rebel leader and defender of the faith is much more inspiring than the image that materializes from the archives: a man on the run and almost accidental rebel, contrite and frightened, pulling all possible strings to save his life.

The French rush to judgment probably helped generate Bussandri's heroic aura in collective memory and popular literature, which in turn justified his elevation to martyrdom in Viglione's book cited above. Mainstream synthetic works however, including those that incorporate elements of the post-colonial thesis, contend that Bussandri was a product of the masses' frustrations with specific social and economic, not metaphysical, dysfunctions.²⁹ Remarkably, all studies of this insurrection, regardless of the chosen perspective, make very light use of the ample archival evidence that complicates the story and offers fresh insights into the actions and motivations of the individuals involved. Bussandri's changing image mainly serves to illustrate given theoretical interpretations of the Napoleonic occupation.

This case illuminates both the opportunities and the problems arising from the polemical streak of historical approaches to Napoleonic occupation in Italy. Philosophical debates on modernity underscore the larger significance of anti-Napoleonic movements, and of the people who participated in them. At the same time, overreliance on the theoretical big picture carries the risk of allowing conclusions to frame the argument, and actual events and people to fall through the cracks – incongruity between historical evidence and various historical representations in Bussandri's case is a good example. Understanding this opens new avenues for historians of anti-Napoleonic resistance. A relatively new line of research seeks to explore the agency of all social categories, in an effort to carve a median path between the teleological nature of modernization theories and the gloomy conclusions of cultural imperialism views.³⁰ This is a productive angle.

Certainly, long running debates on modernity and its discontents will continue to frame inquiries into rebellions and rebels but need not overdetermine the research. Even though the fragmented historiography of the Napoleonic period does not lead to obvious areas of consensus, it does leave much space for exploring the rebels as historical actors in all their complexity, beyond commonly vehiculated archetypes of brigands, martyrs, or ill-fated casualties of history.

Endnotes

¹ For the law and order approach to popular resistance see: John A. Davis, *Conflict and control law and order in nineteenth century Italy* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988), Alexander Grab, “State Power, Brigandage and Rural Resistance in Napoleonic Italy,” *European History Quarterly*, 25 (1995), 39 – 70. Of course, criminalizing popular rebellions was already standard policy in France: Howard G. Brown, “From Organic Society to Security State: The War on Brigandage in France, 1797–1802” *The Journal of Modern History* 69, no. 4 (December 1997): 661-665. Alan Forrest, “The Ubiquitous Brigand: The Politics and Language of Repression” in *Popular Resistance in the French wars. Patriots, Partisans and Land Pirates*. Ed. C. J. Esdaile (Houndmills, 2005) 25 – 43 (31).

² Since late eighteenth century, Italian political thinkers have debated whether educated elites, intent on spearheading revolutionary change, were condescending to, rather than guiding, the popular classes reliant on traditional cultural and religious values. Conservative tended to respond in the affirmative while Marxist theorists, most famously Antonio Gramsci, vigorously refuted this thesis and argued that interest in revolutionary change was never limited to intellectual circles. An overview of these debates in Renzo De Felice, *Il giacobinismo italiano. Note e ricerche con un saggio introduttivo di Francesco Perfetti* (Roma: Bonacci, 1990). These debates exceed the subject of this article but help contextualize the correlation between resistance to Napoleonic rule and resistance to modernizing processes in general.

³ Best known is Carlo Botta, *Storia d'Italia dal 1789 a 1814* (1824).

⁴ A good overview in David D. Roberts, *Benedetto Croce and the Uses of Historicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

⁵ Zaghi’s work pays much attention to the interface between social realities and political developments.

⁶ Vittorio Fiorini and Francesco Lemmi, *Il Periodo Napoleonico 1799-1814* (1900), 750.

⁷ Carlo Zaghi, *L'Italia di Napoleone* (Torino: UTET, 624- 626). Zaghi follows up on earlier studies, like the ones by Niccolò Rodolico, who absolved the rebels of accusations of fanaticism and random violence, while pointing to social as well as psychological motivations for taking up arms (*..l'eterna aversione del povero verso il ricco.*) As quoted in Massimo Viglione, *Le Insorgenze. Rivoluzione & Controrivoluzione in Italia, 1792 -1815* (Milano: Edizioni Ares, 1999), 91.

⁸ Stuart Woolf, *Napoleon’s integration of Europe* (London and New York, 1991).

⁹ Steven Englund, “Monstre sacré: the question of cultural imperialism and the Napoleonic empire” in *The Historical Journal*, 51, 1 (2008): 215–250 (217-218).

¹⁰ Anna Maria Rao, “Old and New Trends in Historiography,” in *Napoleon’s Empire. European Politics in Global Perspective*. Ute Plannert editor (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 84 – 100 (86). The most influential monographs centered on Italy, part of this historiography shift, are: Livio Antonielli, *I Prefetti dell’Italia Napoleonica: Repubblica e Regno d’Italia* (1983). Pasquale Villani, *Italia Napoleonica* (1973). J.A.Davis *Italy in the Nineteenth Century, 1796 – 1900* (2000) and *Conflict and Control: Law and Order in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (1988) [although his conclusions differ often from this new mainstream, especially in his work on Naples, *Naples and Napoleon* (2006)]. Alexander Grab, *Napoleon and the Transformation of Europe* (2003).

¹¹ A similar collected volume of conference papers actually has the word “crisis” in the title: *Le insorgenze popolari nell’Italia napoleonica: Crisi dell’antico regime e alternative di costruzione del nuovo ordine sociale : atti del convegno di Milano* (Milano: Ares, 1999).

¹² Here is a typical explanation: “In Italy, we see ... a series of peasant movements circumscribed in space and time, culminating in a real urban revolt (Verona) with repercussions in the countryside, in the context of a general agrarian

crisis, compounded by the war economy.” Gian Paolo Romagnani, ‘Dalle « Pasque Veronesi ai moti agrari del Piemonte » in *Folle controrivoluzionarie*, 104 – 122 (118).

¹³ Similar reflections, extended to the entire empire, resulted in the collective work *Popular Resistance in the French Wars. Patriots, Partisans and Land Pirates*, with chapters dedicated to particular cases of rebellion and resistance. The volume provided an impressive survey of revolts but recommended more research, because a typology of anti-Napoleonic resistance was not yet emerging from existing scholarship. Charles Esdaile, “Popular Resistance in Napoleonic Europe: Issues and Perspectives” in *Popular Resistance in the French Wars. Patriots, Partisans and Land Pirates*. Charles J. Esdaile ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 201-224. Recent work has shown that the more in-depth the investigation, the more it appears that the modes and intensity of popular resistance to Napoleonic impositions depended heavily on local factors and differed from place to place.

¹⁴ Commenting on studies that consider the entire Napoleonic occupation in Europe a form of total war, Annie Jourdain pointed that “Napoleonic legacy appears to consist mainly of continuing trauma for people caught in these conflicts.” Annie Jourdain, ‘France, Western Europe and the Atlantic World. European Politics in Global Perspective’ in *Napoleon’s Empire. European Politics in Global Perspective*. Ute Plannert editor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 21 – 38 (26). For trauma as a category for historical interpretation, see Ronen Steinberg, *The Afterlives of The Terror: Facing The Legacies Of Mass Violence In Postrevolutionary France* (Cornell U Press, 2020).

¹⁵ For a recent overview of the relevant literature, see Enzo Ciconte, *Banditi e Briganti. Rivolta continua dal cinquecento all’ottocento* (Milani: Rubbetino, 2011). See also Jacopo Gelli, *Banditi, briganti e brigantesse nell’ottocento* (1931).

¹⁶ Michael Broers, *Napoleon’s Other War. Bandits, Rebels and their Pursuers in the Age of Revolutions* (Oxfordshire: Peter Lang Oxford, 2010) especially chapter one ‘The Way Things Were: Bandits before the French Revolution), one-18.

¹⁷ Broers, *Napoleon’s Other War*, 198. Eric Hobsbawm has immortalized the “social bandit” type in *Primitive Rebels* (1959) and *Bandits* (1969).

¹⁸ Works on conscription emphasize the sense of alienation people felt in the face of unfamiliar policies that upended their sense of normalcy. Rebellions and insurgencies, in this view, are part of the complex fabric of a large, multi-ethnic state with universalizing ambitions. Alexander Grab, “State Power, Brigandage and Rural Resistance in Napoleonic Italy,” *European History Quarterly*, 25 (1995), 39 – 70 and “Army, State, and Society: Conscription and Desertion in Napoleonic Italy (1802-1814),” *The Journal of Modern History* Vol. 67, No. 1 (Mar., 1995): 25-54. Analysis pertaining to France but relevant to the Italian case: Alan Forrest, *Conscripts and Deserters: The Army and French Society during the Revolution and Empire* (Oxford, 1989).

¹⁹ François Furet and Denis Richet recommended considering the French revolution as a historical event in its own right rather than the prelude for the modern era of political alignments and subsequent party politics. The seminal work for the revisionist turn was their *Révolution Française* (1965) followed by numerous essays emphasizing institutional continuities rather than cleavages between the Old Regime and the French Revolution up to the Napoleonic era.

²⁰ Noted historians representing this direction are Sandro Petrucci, Massimo Viglione, Oscar Sanguinetti. Antonio Spinosa, *Napoleone Il flagello d’Italia. Le invasioni, i saccheggi, gli inganni* (2004) (*Napoleon The scourge of Italy. The invasions, the devastations, the rackets*) has stirred much debate.

²¹ Massimo Viglione, *Le insorgenze. Rivoluzione e Controrivoluzione in Italia 1792 – 1815*, 109.

²² Massimo Viglione, *La Vandeeia Italiana. Le insorgenze controrivoluzionarie dalle origini al 1814* (Milan: effedieffe, 1995), 310.

²³ Antonino De Francesco, « Il significato delle insorgenze nella cultura politica italiana » in *Le insorgenze popolari nell’Italia Napoleonica. Crisi dell’Antico Regime e alternative di costruzione del nuovo ordine sociale*. Various authors (Milan: Ares, 2001), 31–44. The historians in question reject the revisionist moniker, claiming instead to recover a segment of national memory that most academic Italian studies ignore, regardless of the methodological approach.

²⁴ John A. Davis, *Conflict and Control: Law and Order in Nineteenth-Century Italy*, 72. Recent studies on the Piacentino rebellion in collective memory: Gustavo Buratti, ‘I Montanari contro Napoleone: una resistenza da rivendicare’ in *Banditi e ribelli dimenticati. Storie di irriducibili al future che viene*. A cura di Corrado Mornese e Gustavo Buratti (Milano: Lampi di Stampa, 2006), 235 – 250 (249-250). Buratti’s essay offers a comprehensive account of Bussandri’s valiant image in local popular writings. Bussandri as heroic leader motivated by faith is mentioned in Santino Cavaciuti, “L’Insorgenza del 1805-1806 nell’alta Val d’Arda nel quadro delle generali

insorgenze italiane anti-napoleoniche.” *Quaderni della Valtolla* (2006): 17-17 (https://quadernivaltolla.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/1_insorgenza-del-1805.pdf. Accessed 30 August 2017) and in F.M. Agnoli, *Guida introduttiva alle Insorgenze Contro-Rivoluzionarie in Italia durante il dominio napoleonico (1796- 1815)* (Milano: Mimep, 1996), 25.

²⁵ Notizie del Commessario del Pellegrino, Pellegrino 11 January 1806. *Mss. Parm. 543*, fos 155-156.

²⁶ Captain Cornini to Moreau de Saint-Méry, Scipione 16 January 1806. *Mss. Parm. 543*, fos 115-116. There were indeed several complaints against Cornini for being difficult and uncooperative while officers were trying to recruit members of the militia for National Guard units.

²⁷ On 6 January, the viceroy issued a decree promising blanket amnesty (a general pardon) to all rebels who turned in their weapons, gave up the fight, and went home.

²⁸ Pietro Carancini to Moreau de Saint-Méry, Gallinella 24 January and 9 February, BP *Mss.Parm.543*, fos 202 and 249, respectively.

²⁹ In Michael Broers’s words, the Piacentino insurrection was “the last stand of the Old Regime” and disrupted familiar routines. *The Napoleonic Empire in Italy 1796 – 1814. Cultural Imperialism in an European Context?* (2005), 80.

³⁰ Representative for this methodology is Antonino de Francesco, *Politica, statualità e nazione nella penisola tra due rivoluzioni 1796 – 1821* (2011).