

## The Napoleon Series

### Verona 1796-1797: Popular Rejection and Subtractive Curtailments of Monetary Economics in the Chronicled Memorial of Valentino Alberti

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#### Introduction

The tumultuous years of the first Italian campaign of 1796-1797, and the imposed military occupation by French-Republican troops in the *Stato Veneto*<sup>1</sup>, proved a shocking time for the *Domini di Terraferma*'s<sup>2</sup> constituted order.

To soothe that period of austerities and social turmoil, the eastern *Venetiae* populations were doing their utmost in duty and bravery, to protect their families, and the homeland, against the largely aggressive military expansionism, and conquering ambitions of a transalpine power: Directorial France.

The despotic French-Republican units, which had invaded through the Austrian Lombardy, reached the peak of strategic irreversibility, and the Venetians became more determined and warlike in their attitude toward the outrages of the foreign hordes.

By then not a young nation<sup>3</sup>, Venice had fought numerous conflicted emergencies over the centuries; however, in her time of annoying decadence (XVIIIth century), the spirit of the past glories had not affected the heritage and the popular will to stand in arms and fight any major threat.

In his newly composed seminal dissertation, the author has delved deeper into an almost neglected historical period and provides a translated selection of one handwritten diary compiled by an innkeeper of the town of Verona.

Selected excerpts of this private writing illustrate life conditions under the French invading forces for the ordinary, non-military person.

Most postmodern history publications do not give the discriminating strategy analyst any insight into the day-to-day life of an occupied territory.

It is through the captivating pages of Valentino Alberti's narrative that late modern historians learn of the probity and devotion of this Venetian citizen as he lived and served under the French regime, and how the troops took advantage of his private status and economic difficulties caused instead by their own execrable, dishonourable excesses.

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<sup>1</sup> *Id est*, Veneto State.

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, mainland dominions. They were variously named «*Stato da tera*» (mainland State).

<sup>3</sup> Defending against enemy hosts dated previously almost to the time of Attila (406-453 A.D.) the Hun invading the Northern plains of the *Venetia*, in the Vth century of the Christian era.

Sometimes contemporary researchers can only consider and evaluate the true picture after much time has passed.

Events, decisions and battles which were fought two hundred or more years ago, such as the strenuous confrontation against General Bonaparte's conquering efforts in the Venetian territories, now from the modern perspective of study appear to have been fought on the grounds of excellent social reasons: the safeguard of the Governmental institutions, the protection of the popular identity, and the primary preservation of the civic liberties.

Any inspired precautionary wisdom was notably oriented against foreign arms invasion and abuses of authority and position in arbitrary or capricious exercises of power (*i.e.*, violent military acts).

But most grievous was the social frame that the writings depicted of the differences in the uneducated, uncouth French soldiers and the hospitality, social accomplishments and religious fervour of the residents of Verona.

One question could be formulated: why was there such a wide difference in two peoples?

Undeniably the answer is that the collapse of the 1789 French Revolutionary convulsions, the secularism and suppression of religion, and lack of education and *esprit de finesse*<sup>4</sup>, made the French soldiers unfeeling, brutal, and to connive in continued abuses of power.

This is the reason why they intentionally failed to respect the private and moral dignity of the *popolo*<sup>5</sup> Veronese.

One remarkable diary entry depicts the French troops' attempt to assault the *struttura conventuale*<sup>6</sup> of the Holy Spirit, a reprehensible episode which happened in March 1797.

When events got out of hand, the church bells were rung and the citizens responded; even the lower classes in the countryside (the peasants) reacted with urgency to defend their city against further ravages by the French occupation forces.

In August 1796, the desecration of the church of Saint Eufemia had taken place; the nuns and clergy had to remove all statues, the Eucharist and everything of value to prevent the theft of sacred articles.

This history narrative is important because it illustrates what inevitably has happened in most wars since the beginning of the human race: the victors impressing their will upon the vanquished.

Under the trying circumstances of the military regime, Alberti's diary reflected the difference in social standing, training, and education between the Venetian citizens and the post-revolutionary French army, and how the obnoxious mistreatments of the citizens which lived

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<sup>4</sup> *I.e.*, properly taught manners.

<sup>5</sup> *I.e.*, people.

<sup>6</sup> *I.e.*, monasterial complex. A building or residence consecrated to dedicated religious life.

in the neighborhood and in the urban aggregation of Verona caused the fiercest resistance to the invader.

This is a revealing and eye-opening diary; it would be a profitable cultural addition to read the entire work in a properly rendered English translation.

That is the reason why the study of history and researching primary sources is so relevant, to learn the truth of what actually happened because eye witnesses are no longer available to shed light on events and people.

## Historical background

On June 1, 1796, the French-Republican army divisions of the *armée d'Italie* detrimentally invaded the territories of the *Serenissima Repubblica di San Marco*<sup>7</sup>.

Paradoxically, contained in the austere expression of consolidated political conformity and non-belligerency, the «*Stato Veneto*»<sup>8</sup> had defended a compromise of declared neutrality<sup>9</sup> between the contending powers: the French Executive Directory<sup>10</sup> and the Empire of the Habsburgs.

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<sup>7</sup> *I.e.*, Most Serene Republic of Saint Mark.

<sup>8</sup> *I.e.*, Venetian State.

<sup>9</sup> In case of declared hostilities and war resolution against post-revolutionary France, the Saint Mark Republic could not rely on the prompt support of regular field troops, and was equally deprived of major strongholds and heavy artillery parks. Pertaining the feasibility of active field operations, the *cernide* (*i.e.*, the rural militias) were instead destabilized of their original efficiency and strategic role; further, their tactical proficiency was not functional at all in a scheme of longer range geo-strategic applications. It seemed a strident paradox, and quite a limitative choice, that the Senatorial Oligarchy had to take correct decisions acting on the principle of neutrality between the contending Powers of France and the Empire of the Habsburgs. In the frame of the above mentioned political troubles, a profitable executive disposition was to urgently provide strong defensive assets to the walled towns, and that meant to cover in arms the fortified emplacements. However, on the reverse of this pre-determined preference, it had not been taken into account the defence of the mainland provinces, which would have been shamefully abandoned to the rapacious excesses and pillaging of the enemy hosts. Essentially, this political dichotomy was a misleading effort. Two addresses (political options) were to represent a damaging division: *in primis*, the unarmed neutrality adopted as an irrevocable necessity by the Venetian government; second, the character of armed neutrality so much advocated by the influential and bombastic patrician Pesaro. Worst of all, the maxims of declared neutrality meant abandoning the territories on land to the military avalanche of the foreign contenders, while most adequate dispositions to ensure the defence of the *Terra Ferma Veneta* (*i.e.*, Venetian mainland towns) had to be taken.

<sup>10</sup> The Directoire Exécutif (*i.e.*, Executive Directory) was the supreme magistracy of the French Republic. Holder of the executive power, in accordance to the constitution of the year III (5 fructidor = 22 August 1795), the Directory was a five-man standing committee whose members were elected in the assemblies on October 30, 1795: Paul-François-Jean-Nicolas de Barras (1755-1829; service date: 2 November 1795-10 November 1799); Louis-Marie de La Révellière-Lépeaux (1753-1824; service date: 2 November 1795-18 June 1799); Charles-Louis-François-Honoré Letourneur (1751-1817;

To overcome the prudential limits of the senatorial Oligarchy<sup>11</sup> and the probity of the Venetian diplomatic behaviourism, a *casus bellis*<sup>12</sup> was intentionally devised by an unscrupulous General of Corsican extraction: Napoleon Bonaparte.

Used to mendacious forgeries, the *Général en Chef*<sup>13</sup> claimed a felonious pretext: the right of asylum offered by the Most Serene Republic to the count of Lille<sup>14</sup>, the pretender to the

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service date: 2 November 1795-26 May 1797); Jean-François Reubell (1747-1807; service date: 2 November 1795-19 May 1799); and Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1748-1836), substituted by Lazare-Nicolas-Marguerite Carnot (1753-1823; service date: 4 November 1795-5 September 1797). In France, it held the executive functions from November 2, 1795, until November 10, 1799, and it was superseded by General Bonaparte's coup d'Etat on 18 Brumaire An VIII (9 November 1799). *Vide*: Guyot, Raymond, *Documents biographiques sur J. F. Reubell, membre du Directoire exécutif (1747-1807)*, Paris, Nancy, Berger Levrault, 1911; Henry, Pierre-François, *Histoire du Directoire Exécutif de la République Française depuis son installation jusqu' au Dix-Huit Brumaire inclusivement, suivie de pièces justificatives*, chez F. Buisson 1801; La Révellière-Lépeaux, Louis-Marie, de, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux, membre du Directoire exécutif de la République française et de l' Institut national, publiés par son fils sur le manuscrit autographe de l' auteur et suivis des pièces justificatives et de correspondances inédites*, Plon, s.d., 1895; Normand, F., *Barras (1755-1829) député à la convention, membre du directoire exécutif*, Les Contemporains N. 915, 24 avril 1910 ; Vergnet, Paul, *Mémoires de Barras*, Présentées par Paul Vergnet, Paris, Editions Littéraires et Artistiques, 1946.

<sup>11</sup> On June 11, 1796, two high determined personalities, Tomà Mocenigo Soranzo and Alvise Mocenigo asked the Senate to vote a motion which had to compel the government to propose an armed neutrality – arming the *Terra Ferma*, and fortifying the places. This inspired propositional attitude was entirely rejected by the great majority of the senatorial college: in favour, 160 heads; opposition, 53. The aged members of the senate were only preoccupied not to present to General Bonaparte occasions of political attrite and rupture.

<sup>12</sup> Ancient Latin expression. Its proper literal meaning is unequivocal: “An act, or event that provokes or is used to justify warfare applications”.

<sup>13</sup> *I.e.*, commander-in-chief.

<sup>14</sup> Disguised under this nominal identity, the Count of Provence had reached Verona on May 25, 1794. And he was kindly gusted in the *Casino di delizie* (near Porta Nuova, and the Capuchin Friars) of Count Giambattista Gazzola. After having left the court of his father-in-law (Vittorio Amedeo III of Sardinia) at Torino, the Emperor of Austria did not grant him permission to reach the emigrants in Baden. On account of the present prohibition, he sojourned a couple of years at Verona (up to the 20 April 1796), with the distinctive title of Count of Lille, and kept going a little court apparatus mostly composed of exiles. The French government did not hesitate to make a lot of complaints with the Venetian representative in Paris, and the same instructions were equally sent to the French representative in Venice thus growing always more pressing to attain their anti-aristocratic aims. In 1796, the Venetian Senate voted the expulsion of the illustrious aristocrat; considering this steadily affirmed resolution as a direct affront to his family, he promptly requested the cancellation of the Bourbons name from the *Albo d'oro* (*i.e.*, Golden Register) of the Venetian nobility, and to have the armour offered by Henry III to Venice returned. In 1814, thanks to the Allied Powers and good supporting offices of Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, he was enthroned in France – on direct application of the principle of legitimacy.

throne of France, Louis of Bourbon (Louis-Stanislaw-Xavier, Versailles, November 17, 1755 - Paris, September 16, 1824), eighteenth of his name.

General André Massena's divisional units were imparted orders by the daring generalissimo to pass through the jurisdictional limitations, invading the territories of the *Dominante*<sup>15</sup>, and to promptly occupy the ramparted-town of Verona, a strategically built location on the Adige River which could withstand most modern dynamics of artillery siegecraft.

For centuries, the stronghold had been part of the political establishment of a major European potentate, the *Repubblica Marciana*<sup>16</sup>.

The invading French army ushered through the town's gates with cannon shots, and in the surrounding country the constituted order of the Venetian people and the legitimate governmental institutions were imposed heavily on the power of arms.

The armed invasion subjected Verona to her ultimate feverish convulsion of political and social surviving.

The villainous overthrow of the constituted power, and the infringement of the popular sovereignty, were reversed by increasing outbursts of violence.

However difficult were the operative contingencies against regular Venetian troops (worth mentioning is the battle of San Massimo, and Santa Lucia, on April 20, 1797)<sup>17</sup>, the ascendancy was rapidly gained, and it soon turned into overwhelming military occupation.

Seemingly animated by the pseudo-libertarian revolutionary predicaments and theorematic postulations of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*<sup>18</sup>, 12,000 field equivalences were sent to garrison the strategically positioned Venetian territories in the west.

The very essence of foreign power (Directorial France, and her osmotic military hostilities) notably implemented the final collapse of a nation, and the wrecking of geo-strategies in southern European Countries.

### **The Ambivalence of Military Conquest: Vexations of the People's Identity**

How social inter-actions really turned out in their vicious recrudescence, can easily be traced back through the enthralling *stesura diaristica*<sup>19</sup> written by Valentino Alberti; a most humble

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<sup>15</sup> *I.e.*, Venice.

<sup>16</sup> *I.e.*, Saint Mark Republic.

<sup>17</sup> At the pugnaciously fought conflict of San Massimo, mobile Venetian equivalences on ground counted the following military deployment: 500 Italians, 400 *oltremarini* (*i.e.*, *Schiavoni*, or Slavonians of Dalmatian extraction), 250 Dragoons, and Croats, plus an artillery support of eight pieces. On account of the heroic deeds of the Venetians, this fiercely-disputed encounter set a standard of duty on the line of honour and determination in action.

<sup>18</sup> *I.e.*, liberty, equality, fraternity.

<sup>19</sup> The consonant definition of this narrative is that of *diario*, *i.e.*, diary.

inn-keeper of the *Tre Corone*<sup>20</sup> inn, in *corte Mòlon*<sup>21</sup>, who left one of the most appealing coeval records of those events of misery and moral ineptitude.

Reading through his vivid reminiscences, there can be traced quite a number of abuses of power related to the economic intemperances and unrepentant haughtiness of the invading French military, who exceedingly imposed their will beyond the limits of decency and mind's fleeting evanescences.

The private writings of Valentino Alberti are a valuable literary addition (and remarkable history source) for better understanding the social life, the conflicted tide of the Napoleonic war emergencies, as well as the turn in politics which happened at Verona between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It is a convulsive page of history, lived in first person; and, in a renewed horizon of hopes, consumed by the heart of daily experience.

## **Documentary Evidence: Supports of Research**

### **August 1796**

*25 August 1796 – «Two French soldiers came to pay me reverence and they have well drunk and eaten on me for 19 soldi. Then farewell, all paid!»<sup>22</sup>.*

The reverence is a denotative word to remark the respect – and the trick had been conceived by the soldiers before entering the inn.

They graced the innkeeper through honeyed words and exhortatory, monitorial attitudes.

As they entered, the French equally left the place, a fairly stringent connotation of military authority and imposed necessity to “show” reverence to the foreign occupier.

Especially good was the farewell, and, between friends (conquerors) all was paid by the lesser brother.

### **September 1796**

*20 September – «Five others have drunk for soldi 15 and then away. Go in peace, that your sin is only venial! Three soldi each! It is known that they had no world»<sup>23</sup>.*

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<sup>20</sup> I.e., Three Crowns.

<sup>21</sup> Nowadays *corte Melone* – at Verona.

<sup>22</sup> Primary Italian text source: *25 Agosto 1796 – «Due militari francesi mi vennero a riverire e mi han bevuto e mangiato per 19 soldi. Poi addio, tutto pagato!».*

<sup>23</sup> Primary Italian text: *20 Settembre – «Cinque altri han bevuto per soldi 15 e poi via. Andate in pace, che il vostro peccato è solamente veniale! Tre soldi a testa! Si conosce che non avevano mondo».*

The usual drinking time of the victors, at the generous expense of the people (*id est*, the innkeeper).

The post-revolutionary attitudes are largely based on the lacking essence of respect and moral attitudes, a neo-paganism of free will.

The innkeeper, a devout believer in the Catholic faith, in the observance of God's holy Commandments considered through a spiritual analysis that the French have not respected the necessity to pay the drink – and according to his own values, this meant an abuse to the seventh Divine Commandment: «Thou shalt not steal».

His spirit was not disheartened, and Valentino gave his pardon: «*Go in peace*».

The peace of the soul, of a cleaned soul, is opposed to the dishonesty.

It is not a sarcasm: «[...] *they had no world*», implies the fact that the innkeeper had well understood that the soldiers had not received the pillars of education (social, and religious), which were the customary habits of good people.

The uncivilized “soldiers” did not even belong to themselves, because they did not even know the meaning of the word respect.

Therefore, is this full evidence of how could they respect the others?

*21 September – «Eight soldiers ate at dinner a turkey for the value, with the bread and the wine, of Troni 12:5, and then very gently left». «Three soldiers, eaten tastily, and then for Troni 9,9: Good friend, all paid!»<sup>24</sup>.*

Dinner time, and marvellous eating: a turkey.

A gourmet meeting, to taste the delicious *cuisine à la Venetienne*<sup>25</sup>.

Palatable appetite.

Other soldiers: «*Good friend, all paid!*» – that is a straight compliment: you are a good friend “of us conquerors”, we appreciated, and because of this “shared friendship” it is you that have to honour and pay the good friends.

A masterful delicacy.

There is always time to learn, especially from the transalpine post-revolutionary civilization.

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<sup>24</sup> Primary Italian text: *21 detto – «Otto militari mangiarono da cena un dindio per il valor, col pane e il vino, di Troni 12:5, e poi gentilissimamente partirono». «Tre detti, pranzato saporitamente, e poi per Troni 9,9: Bon ami, tu pajè!».*

<sup>25</sup> *I.e.*, the exquisite Venetian cooking.

27 September – «Seven soldiers, envying the example of the firsts, they had dinner. and for the bill of Troni 6:10 they too escaped!»<sup>26</sup>.

The generosity of the innkeeper became a quintessential mark of distinction, especially among the foreign customers (*i.e.*, the military occupiers), and the French thought well to have themselves invited at the revered, highly regarded Venetian table.

In the “strategy conduct profiled”, a remarkable proficiency is observed: in a continued study and application of the military art, and not to frontally collide with the innkeeper, the soldiers chose a strategic withdrawal, gliding away in the open track of honourability.

## December 1796

8 December – «Five soldiers of cavalry had dinner and ran up a bill of Troni 20. At the moment to pay they have feigned to squabble and in the middle of shouting and blasphemies, have broken me four glasses, a table and one candle. Here I have done my interests! Rascals!»<sup>27</sup>.

The “generosity” of the Venetian Alberti rapidly spread in the ranks of the French, from the infantry cadres, to the cavalry squadrons.

The comedy of the imposed Franco-Republican liberties reached the zenith of its outrageous deception.

Further, there were a number of material damages, all at the expense of imposed abuses of power.

The quality of the cavalry troopers were largely aggressive, even resembling to an impious provocative attitude: the horrid blasphemies, against the religious devotion of the local population.

13 December – «Two soldiers had dinner and forgot to pay: [...] killed them»<sup>28</sup>.

At Verona, this day was dedicated to the martyred Christian virgin named Santa Lucia.

Consequentially, it was a celebrated festivity.

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<sup>26</sup> Primary Italian text: 27 detto – «Sette detti, invidiando l'esempio dei primi, cenarono: e per il conto di Troni 6:10 brusarono essi pure il pajon!».

<sup>27</sup> Primary Italian text: 8 detto – «Cinque detti di cavalleria hanno cenato e fatto un conto di Troni 20. Al momento di pagar han fatto finta di baruffar e in mezzo di siracche e sacranoni, mi hanno rotto quattro gotti, un tavolino ed una candela. Qua ho fatto i miei interessi! Bricconi!».

<sup>28</sup> Primary Italian text: 13 dicembre – «Due militari cenarono e dimenticarono di pagare: Dio li ammazzi».

With consumed traits of behaviourism, the affectionate customers largely relied on the established kindness of the innkeeper – still a feast for the poor Valentino, inside the true spirit of the military bullying.

The theft, and the usual scroungers.

The comparison with a social martyrdom is fairly denotative.

And Alberti flew into a temper losing his ordinary *aplomb*<sup>29</sup>; severe words of reproach are proffered: enough!

*18 December – «Other further eight, after a dinner of Troni 10:14 paid as above cited. Then a further two, did the same for Troni 3:10. Blessed these customers! I pray you not to make me wrong»<sup>30</sup>.*

The usual practice of payment, and the same reiterated abuses of the French.

And Alberti blessed these exemplary customers, to even avoid imperiling his own life.

The time of despondencies continued, and the innkeeper worried not to fall under any further volitional impositions of the French.

*24 December – «Twelve of cavalry have had dinner and drunk for Troni 35 and then looking at me fixed left. The bleeding appeared to me vigorous, but I have believed to use prudence because I had not the sword at my flank»<sup>31</sup>.*

Another vigorous charge home, and the consumed valour of honour.

The fixed glories of the French, and the face of the innkeeper met in silence.

The economic loss is quite strong – and with irony, Alberti claimed that this happened because he was unarmed: that meant that to the abuse of force the French strengthened the violation of the individual rights, which one had to accept to avoid major troubles and save lives.

*25 December (Christmas) – «Of all the above mentioned nevertheless the most good gentlemen were those five of cavalry that have favoured me to come to dinner this evening. Oh, what gentlemen! In the hell there are far better of them. These people have eaten and*

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<sup>29</sup> I.e., control.

<sup>30</sup> Primary Italian text: *18 detto – «In otto altri, dopo una cena di Troni 10:14 pagarono come sopra. Poi due altri, fecero lo stesso per Troni 3:10. Benedetti questi avventori! Vi prego a non farmi torto».*

<sup>31</sup> Primary Italian text: *24 detto – «Dodici di cavalleria han cenato e bevuto per Troni 35 e poi guardandomi fisso fisso se ne andarono. Il salasso mi è parso gaiardo, ma ho creduto ben di usar prudenza perchè io non avevo la sabala al fianco».*

*drunk as sons of animals and then, black by the wine as polyps – this means that they were blind drunk –, have put hand to the sword and have beaten themselves breaking all the glasses, frightening the women and all, even the cats that escaped in the cellar»<sup>32</sup>.*

Christmas time, the holy Nativity of the Lord.

Another sustained cavalry engagement at the Alberti's inn.

And the usual simulation for not having to pay the bill – a time of savage disputing.

No peace, *in terris*<sup>33</sup>, for God-fearing men and women, and animals as well.

### **Political and Social Escalation: the Popular Insurrection**

In the New Year, the social discordances of the French-Republican occupation got worse, and perilously turned into an offence towards the pity and the popular sentiment.

Even the female religious houses were assaulted.

A reproachable episode happened on March 8, 1797, when the soldiers tried to storm the monastery of the Holy Spirit.

The nuns, as soon as they became aware of the oncoming danger, had the bells rung in alarm.

To the echoing sounds of the bells, the Veronese citizens ran up on the spot; and the French, dismayed at the convulsive popular reaction, thought it much wiser to leave rather than commit a sacrilegious venture.

However, unwilling to bear any longer the hard yoke of the foreign imposed domination, the Veronese people rose up in arms to defend the political liberties and centuries-long traditions of religious belief.

From 17 (Easter Monday) to 25 April 1797 began the general popular uprising which would have passed in the annals of history and in the pages of historiography with the peculiar denomination of *Pasque Veronesi*<sup>34</sup>.

It was the insurrection against Bonaparte's troops and their reiterated plunderings in the conquered Venetian territory.

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<sup>32</sup> Primary Italian text source: *25 detto (Natale)* – «*Di tutti i sopradetti però i più buoni galantuomini furono quei cinque di cavalleria che mi hanno favorito di venir a cena questa sera. Oh, che galantuomini! All'inferno ve ne son dei migliori. Costoro hanno mangiato e bevuto come ftoi d'animali e poi, negri dal vino come folpi, hanno messo mano alla sabala e si son battuti rompendo tutti i vetri, spaventando le donne e tutti, persino i gatti che scappavano in caneva*».

<sup>33</sup> *I.e.*, on earth.

<sup>34</sup> *I.e.*, Veronese Easters.

Unable to withstand the overwhelming numbers of the Venetians subjects, the French garrison units hastily retired inside the walled perimeter of «Castel Vecchio», and in the nearby strongholds of «San Felice» and «San Pietro».

From these impregnable fortified positions, the town of Verona was bombarded for some days.

The blowing winds of the insurrectional movement had equally spread through the countryside, and armed peasants flocked in swarms to support the fighting.

The insurgents were led by a distinguished personality of the local aristocracy: Count Francesco Emilei.

During the consuming strife, the *Rengo*, an old bell in the tower of the Lamberti, rang as it was rung during the dissensions of the *comuni*, in the Middle Ages.

### **Golden Visions and Sacrilegious Devastations**

The calamitous string, the uncontained display of fury and the ravages of the French invaders, had not stop from imposing on the people from the year before.

On the date of August 11, 1796, Alberti wrote:

*«They have placed the hospital in the Church of Saint Euphemia, placing all the French ill part in convent and part in church. Have brought away all, the saints, the madonnas and the Eucharist, in Saint Simonetto near, because the French ruin all [...]. But nevertheless they have done a thousand kinds of damages because they have broken the choirs, the confessionals, the pulpit, and the choir. It was only the statue of Saint Nicolas from Tolentino on its altar, and the French that wanted to destroy it; they threw one rope at the neck and many of them tried to draw it down and break it into pieces, but it was not possible to have it moved from its niche; that thing was miraculous. And one French soldier, angry for this, after many efforts to draw on earth the saint, I do not know if with the musket, with stick or else, gave it a lot of hits: but all was useless [...]. The French in that Church have done quite everything, because have broken the slabs of the graves, disturbing also the poor dead. In fact, having found one clothed with iron in one grave, with a sword on one side that he had been buried for hundreds of years, have brought away also that, and it is not known what they have done with him»<sup>35</sup>.*

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<sup>35</sup> Primary Italian text source: «Hanno messo l'ospital nella Chiesa di Sant'Eufemia, mettendo tutti li ammalati francesi parte in convento e parte in Chiesa. Hanno portato via tutto, i santi, le madonne e il Santissimo, in San Simonetto vicino, perché li francesi rovinano tutto [...]. Ma non ostante, hanno fatto mille sorte di malanni perché hanno rotto le cantorie, i confessionali, il pulpito, e il coro. Era solo la statua di San Nicola da Tolentino sul suo altare, e i francesi volendola distruggere, li gettarono una soga al collo e si misero in diversi per tirarla abbasso a buttarla in pezzi, ma non fu possibile lo smoverla dal suo nicchio; la qual cosa fu miracolosa. Ed un soldato francese, arrabbiato per questo, dopo tanti sforzi per tirare in terra il santo, non so se con lo schioppo, con bastone o con altro, gli diede tanti colpi: ma tutto fu inutile [...]. I francesi in quella Chiesa hanno fatto di tutto, perché hanno spezzato fino le laste delle sepolture, disturbando anche i poveri morti. Anzi avendone trovato uno vestito di ferro in un sepolcro, con una spada da una parte che erano

The above mentioned episode speaks for itself.

It is the compendium of the desecrated attitudes towards religion, and the sacrilegious taste for hidden treasures hunting.

The miraculous interpretation is fairly denotative, and it almost signals the vigilant but reassuring presence of the Trinitarian Divinity.

God's endless Mercy, a distinct attribute of the Almighty, preserved the town, even against the most malicious and irreverent attitudes of the French. *Nicola da Tolentino*<sup>36</sup> was a famous exorcist of the Augustinian order.

Notwithstanding the ferocious repression of the Veronese Easters, the French fighting against the people's liberties and traditions still continued with renewed perfidiousness and brutality.

### **Gender Histories: Case in Investigation, the Monastery of Avesa**

Cases of compared brutality continued in the year 1801, when the French came back in the Veronese.

On January 3, 1801, Alberti reported that:

*«In the village of Avesa, – in the north of Verona – a lot of French went to the convent of the nuns and have done what they wanted of their own caprice, because they found them in bed»<sup>37</sup>.*

No comment at all.

The sorrowful circumstances of this regrettable incident notably conditioned the sensibility of good people, originating a source of uncontained moral uneasiness.

For days, this molesting event had a reverberating effect; and Alberti, with sobriety of language, on January 14, 1801, still recalled:

*«And then when the French have been in the village of Avesa, they have entered in the convent of the nuns and have done what they wanted, because they have found them in*

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*centinara e centinara di anni che era stato seppellito, hanno portato via anche quello e non si sa che cosa ne abbiano fatto».*

<sup>36</sup> Born to the century Nicola di Compagnone (Sant' Angelo in Pontano, 1245 - Tolentino, September 10, 1305).

<sup>37</sup> Primary Italian text reference: *«Nel paese di Avesa, sono andati molti Francesi nel convento delle moneghe e hanno fatto quello che hanno volesto di suo cappriccio, perché le hanno trovate in letto».*

*bed sleeping; and they have remained inside the convent for eight hours; so to think what they have done at their whim with the poor nuns»<sup>38</sup>.*

A brief observation.

The assault at the convent was a carefully planned action, as no one goes in a convent at night time, neither asking for food victuals, nor for invitation and hospitality.

Excepted these conditioning factors, what else could have pushed the soldiery to stay so many long hours in a consecrated-life building?

No answers are found in this reflection, except that the words honour, probity, respect, duty and bravery did not belong to the lifetime dictionary of those scoundrels.

## [Chronology](#)

## [Selected Bibliography and Further Reading](#)

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<sup>38</sup> Primary Italian text: «*E poi quando sono stati li Francesi al paese di Avesa, sono entrati dentro nel convento delle moneghe e hanno fatto quello che hanno voluto lori, perché le han trovate in letto che dormivano; e sono stati dentro in convento per ore otto; onde pensare quello che han fatto a suo capriccio con le povere moneghe*».