

Return to order and material culture. Missing objects, anti-republican narratives and police practices in Rome after 1849

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Abstract

The main sources for this paper are previously unexplored police records kept at the state archives in Rome, which contains nearly 1,800 files from the days immediately following the fall of the Republic in July 1849 until the summer of 1850, a few months after the restoration of the papal government (Pius IX fled Rome in November 1848 and returned in April 1850). These records were produced by a commission that had been rapidly established to conduct police investigations into material goods seized from their owners during the Republic, sometimes by official acts of requisition, sometimes in illegal or violent expropriations by republican agents or supporters. The commission sat at the Palazzo Madama and three times per week received complaints, petitions, lists of missing objects and reports on suspicious persons and sites that needed checking.

Thousands of everyday objects, many of them trivial (crockery, trinkets, mattresses, coaches, etc.), some of them precious (sacred or collectors' items), assumed an unexpected political value, and transformed their former owners into victims of the Republic, recognised by the restored authorities. Various individuals and groups took advantage of the opportunity these lost objects gave them to declare their accusation against the Republic and to confirm their fidelity to the papal government.

My paper will discuss their political strategies and imagery, by analysing the stories – true or invented, but always extremely detailed – they told

the commission about the circumstances in which their goods disappeared, along with the alleged culprits, from Mazzini, Garibaldi and the people's leader Ciceruacchio to other actors of democratic politics – members of the Constituent Assembly, civil guards, volunteers, republican preachers, and women engaged in the public space.

Author information

Alessio Petrizzo is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Padua, where he teaches Contemporary history. He holds a PhD from the University of Florence and has since worked at the Universities of Padua, Lausanne (within the Swiss Government Excellence Scholarship Programme), and at the IAS Collegium de Lyon. His research focuses on the politicization processes in 19th-century Europe using an approach that draws on historical anthropology, visual studies and material culture, media history, as well as the history of the body. Among his recent works, the exhibition and the catalogue *Icone politiche. Celebrità e nuovi media al tempo del Risorgimento* (Mantova 2018; with G.L. Fruci and C. Bertolotti).

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Wednesday, 23 June - Session 13 - **10,30-12,00 CET (Webex)** - Panel – *The political life of things. Material culture and politics in Risorgimento Italy*

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