

## The Documenti della guerra santa d'Italia

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After the revolution of 1848 the Tipografia Elvetica became the main publisher of the democratic account of the war. Carlo Cattaneo, who had settled in Ticino after the Austrian return to Milan, entered into daily relations with Repetti from April 1849.<sup>1</sup> Under his direction the firm published the *Documenti della guerra santa d'Italia* (1849–1851), a series of twenty-eight volumes of memoirs, reports and documents on the war of 1848 and 1849, and the *Archivio triennale delle cose d'Italia* (1850–1855), a documentary history running from the election of Pius IX in 1847 to the fall of Venice in 1849, of which two volumes appeared at Capolago in September 1850 and in 1851 and a third, early in 1855, at Chieri in Piedmont.<sup>2</sup> Cattaneo planned the *Archivio* on a much larger scale. The collection of documents he assembled for it is one of the main sources for the history of 1848.<sup>3</sup>

The firm also published *Le carte segrete e atti ufficiali della polizia austriaca in Italia* (1851–1852), three volumes of documents on the Austrian police from 1814 to 1848, selected from some 8,000 documents that had reached the firm by various routes. The series runs to 22 March 1848, the day on which Radetzky's troops evacuated Milan at the end of the Five Days.<sup>4</sup> This publication struck at the heart of the Austrian system, because it exposed the names of informers and the methods of surveillance. It also illustrates a recurring pattern of this chapter: a document carried across the frontier at the moment of revolution became, in Ticino, an instrument of political struggle that the government in Milan could not suppress.

### 1 The case of Luigi Dottesio and the end of Capolago

The price of this trade was paid by the carriers. Luigi Dottesio of Como, a Mazzinian and the principal agent of the Elvetica in Lombardy, was arrested on 12 January 1851 at Maslianico near Como, "in uscita dal Ticino, con carte dell'Elvetica", as he was leaving Ticino with papers of the press.<sup>5</sup>

His notebooks revealed his contacts with conspirators in Lombardy and Venetia. He was tried by an Austrian court martial and hanged in Venice on 11 October 1851.<sup>6</sup> Martinola speaks of the "silenzio di Capolago", the silence in which the press had worked at the height of its political activity before Dottesio's arrest. When the Austrian authorities intensified their controls after the execution, the press lost its distribution network.<sup>7</sup>

The Dizionario storico della Svizzera identifies a second cause of decline: the greater freedom of the press on the other side of the frontier. Repetti opened a branch in Turin, the Libreria Patria, and transferred the activity to Piedmont, where the Statuto Albertino of 1848 now protected the press. He dissolved the company on 26 March 1853.<sup>8</sup> The failed Mazzinian rising in Milan of 6 February 1853, prepared in Lugano, and the Austrian reprisals described below completed the end of the Elvetica.<sup>9</sup> Its history thus traces the arc of the whole refuge. Ticino mattered as a printing centre for as long as Italy had no free press of its own. Its importance declined as soon as an Italian state offered the same freedom at home.

Essentials. Between 1823 and 1853 the presses of Lugano and Capolago printed for an Italian market that the censorship of Austria, Piedmont and the Papal States closed to free publication. The Tipografia Elvetica of Capolago (1830–1853) published more than 350 titles, among them Cattaneo's *Documenti della guerra santa d'Italia* and the *Carte segrete* of the Austrian police. Books reached Lombardy through the networks of smugglers and messengers that had long carried goods across the border. The execution of the Elvetica's agent Luigi Dottesio in 1851 and the new press freedom in Piedmont after 1848 ended the role of Ticino as Italy's printing house.

## 2 Notes

1. Martinola, "La tipografia Elvetica di Capolago" (above). ↩
2. Agliati, "Tipografia elvetica" (above), for the titles and years of the two series; Martinola, "La tipografia Elvetica di Capolago" (above), for the twenty-eight volumes of the Documenti and the third volume of the Archivio triennale published at Chieri. Viganò, introduction (above), also mentions the twenty-eight volumes (1849–1852) in his account of Ciani's press; the attribution of the series to the Elvetica follows the DSS and Martinola. Martinola describes the Archivio as running "dal '47, anno dell'elezione di Pio IX, [...] fino alla caduta di Venezia nel '49"; Sestan, "Cattaneo, Carlo" (above), dates the first volume to September 1850 and the third, printed "in una tipografia di Chieri", to early 1855. ↩

3. Archivio di Stato di Palermo, Inventario n. 139 (above), on Cattaneo's collection of documents for the Archivio triennale. ↩
4. Martinola, "La tipografia Elvetica di Capolago" (above), for the three volumes and the 8,000 documents; Viganò, introduction (above), for the years 1851–1852 and the full title ("dal 4 giugno 1814 al 22 marzo 1848"); Viganò speaks of "sette volumi", Martinola of three. Martinola says only that the firm "era venuta in possesso per vie diverse" of the papers. On the evacuation of Milan on 22 March 1848 see Alexander Grab, "Five Days of Milan", in James Chastain (ed.), *Encyclopedia of 1848 Revolutions* (Ohio University), <https://sites.ohio.edu/chastain/ip/milanfiv.htm> (consulted 4 October 2026). ↩
5. Viganò, introduction (above). ↩
6. Viganò, introduction (above): Dottesio was "impiccato a Venezia l'11 ottobre dell'anno stesso"; Agliati, "Tipografia elvetica" (above), on the execution of 1851 and the increased surveillance it caused; Martinola, "La tipografia Elvetica di Capolago" (above), on the notebooks. ↩
7. Martinola, "La tipografia Elvetica di Capolago" (above). ↩
8. Agliati, "Tipografia elvetica" (above), on the Libreria Patria in Turin and the cessation of activity in 1853; Viganò, introduction (above), on the dissolution of 26 March 1853 and the transfer to Piedmont. ↩
9. Martinola, "La tipografia Elvetica di Capolago" (above), who states that after the rising of 6 February 1853, prepared from Lugano, Austria forced Switzerland to expel refugees and to close the Elvetica. ↩

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