

## ARTICLES / SAGGI

### LITERATURE, POLITICS, AND COFFEE-HOUSES IN PADUA DURING THE “RISORGIMENTO”: THE “STABILIMENTO PEDROCCHI”

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#### **Sommario**

*L'articolo prende in esame le vicende del Caffè Pedrocchi, uno dei principali caffè letterari italiani e uno dei centri del turismo padovano. L'articolo intende mostrare come la vicenda della creazione del caffè, nel 1831, sia legata all'emergenza dei moti risorgimentali italiani, e in particolare veneti, e come vi sia un rapporto forte tra la borghesia, il corpo studentesco, e gli ideatori dello spazio pubblico, rapporto legato alla comune provenienza sociale e all'idea di liberare la Venetia dalla presenza asburgica. L'articolo vuole portare all'attenzione del pubblico i caffè come luoghi di sociabilità ottocentesca di prim'ordine, dove molte azioni politiche venivano concepiti, e molti autori creavano le loro opere, in vista dell'unificazione italiana.*

Strolling along Padova's main street, which forms an almost direct line from the train station to Prato della Valle, the late 18<sup>th</sup> century circus that defines the southern boundary of the city, tourists and locals alike

invariably stop to contemplate a sort of neo-classical temple. Decorated with four fierce bronze lions which more resemble panthers or other wild cats rather than the celebrated “Leone di San Marco”, the square structure, with three main entrances, one lateral entrance, two open patios, as well as some “oriental” features, has since 1831, been the home of one of the most celebrated European “cafés”, the Stabilimento Pedrocchi<sup>1</sup>.

It is far from being a dead monument. Its current manager, the young and energetic Federico Menetto, has transformed a decaying local glory into a glamorous meeting-point of Italian and international celebrities. Sponsored by Porsche Inc., jazz evenings are just one of the attractions, along with book launches, political conferences, and other cultural events. Recent additions include a “Museo del Risorgimento e dell’età contemporanea” (2004) on the upper floor – the “piano nobile” – and last but not least a restaurant which offers select local and international cuisine<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Literature on the Pedrocchi is vast. A complete introduction is provided by Paolo Possamai, *Caffè Pedrocchi* (Milano: Skira, 2000); also useful, as a general introduction, Luigi Gaudenzio, *Il Caffè Pedrocchi* (Padova: Lions, 1965); the social-political context of the Pedrocchi is widely reconstructed in Barbara Mazza, ed., *Il Caffè Pedrocchi in Padova. Un luogo per la società civile* (Padova: Signum, 1984); the most complete work on the Pedrocchi is Lionello Puppi’s, *Il Caffè Pedrocchi di Padova* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1980), with a comprehensive bibliography to date (121-125); further information can be found in Barbara Mazza, Lionello Puppi, ed., *Guida storica al Caffè Pedrocchi di Padova*, (Padova: MP, 1984); a very short though useful introduction is by Elio Franzin, Maria Rosa Augento, *Il Caffè Pedrocchi tra Padova e Europa* (Padova: Libreria Padovana, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> The museum offers a comprehensive overview of Paduan history from the Risorgimento to WWII. However, as is often the case, there is a pervasive “patriotic” aura in this rooms, sustained by the misconception that Italian history forms a line of continuity from the Risorgimento to the end of the Fascist regime. In fact, the Fascist regime was nothing but a continuation of the progressively authoritarian and centralized Italian politics that followed the unification of 1861. There is no real continuity between the two “liberations”, from foreign powers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and from Fascism in the 20<sup>th</sup>. That said, there are many interesting objects in this museum. They include a mighty sculpture of a young “balilla” (by Paolo Boldrin) coins and memorabilia; some movies from the Imperial War Museum of London.

The history of the Pedrocchi – which is recorded in the works of many scholars – provides ample space for multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research. First and foremost, architectural history, for its complex intertwining of several styles in all the phases of the construction, re-constructions, refurbishments, as well as enlargements of its premises. Then, local and urban history, the history of the Veneto and of the Risorgimento as well as literary and cultural history. The Pedrocchi can be regarded as an invaluable asset of the city together with Giotto's cycle of frescoes at the Scrovegni Chapel, the Basilica of Saint Anthony, and the Botanic Gardens of the second oldest Italian University, founded in 1222<sup>3</sup>.

In order to synthetically appraise the meaning and context of the Pedrocchi, origins and historical developments, we have to take into account several new trends in social and political historiography, as well as local antiquarian works<sup>4</sup>.

Recent international scholarship on the very concept of “sociability”, the Latin “sociabilitas” or “socialites” and the Italian “socialità” or “sociabilità”, has rekindled studies on cafés and other meeting places, which played a part in the history of several European countries, from Britain to France, from Germany to Hungary. If we remain within an Eastern European setting – Padua is closer to Budapest than to London – the Caffé Pedrocchi can be regarded as a parallel of the Gerbeaud (1858) in the Hungarian capital, of the “Caffé degli Specchi” in Trieste, as well as a “follower” of the Florian in Venice, one of the oldest meeting places of its kind in Europe. It is still active as a goldmine in Piazza San Marco,

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<sup>3</sup> See, for a short overview, its beautiful website: [www.caffepedrocchi.it](http://www.caffepedrocchi.it).

<sup>4</sup> There are no substantial works in English on Padua during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Among the most recent scholarship in Italian, see Giulio Monteleone, *Padova tra Rivoluzione e Restaurazione 1789-1815* (Padova: Programma, 1997); Maria Fiorenza Coppari, ed., *Padova nell'Ottocento* (Roma: Editalia, 1994); the chapter on the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the substantial Angelo Ventura, *Padova* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1989); an important contemporary chronicle of Padua is Andrea Gloria (1821-1911), *Cronaca di Padova dal 10 dicembre 1849 al 2 giugno 1867*, ed. by Giuseppe Toffanin (Trieste: Lint, 1977).

probably the place where you can drink the most expensive “cappuccino” on earth, without any complaints whatsoever, given its extraordinary internal and external setting<sup>5</sup>.

In the history of Padua, the foundation of the Pedrocchi, which occurred in 1831, in the aftermath of the “Carboneria” and of the upheavals of 1830, followed just one year after that of a very important learned society, the “Gabinetto di Lettura”, whose 160 founding members were active in the secret anti-Austrian propaganda and patriotic action. From 1405 Padua became part of Venice. In 1797, with the end of the thousand-year history of the free Repubblica di San Marco, Padua, along with Venice, was ceded by Napoleon to the Habsburg Empire; after the tormented Napoleonic years (1800-1814) Padua was again under the Hapsburgs, who created the “Lombardy-Veneto” province, lasting until 1866, when the whole region was “annexed” to the newly created Italian Kingdom (1861) under the Savoy dynasty. In order to understand the role which Padua and, in particular, the Pedrocchi coffee house, played in the decades of the Risorgimento (1797-1870), we have first to define the peculiar “identity” of Padua vis-a-vis Venice and the Venetian republic. Padua is a centre of education since the creation of the university (1222), one of the oldest universities still existing in the world after Bologna, Oxford, Cambridge and La Sorbonne. At the same time, Padua became one of the most important places of worship in Europe, thanks to Saint Anthony (who lived and died there in 1231), around the same time as the creation of the “Universitas”. These two factors, and Padua’s strong economy entirely related to farming – unlike its Venetian rulers – contributed, over the centuries, to form its peculiar city identity, and differentiate Padua – the “nursery of the arts” according to the well-known lines of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* – not only from

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<sup>5</sup> On the culture of the coffeehouse see now Markman Ellis, *The Coffeehouse. A Cultural History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2005). Unfortunately Ellis does not deal with the Pedrocchi, but only on the Venetian coffeehouses: Florian and Quadri. See pages 82-83; 215-216. This is the most comprehensive work on the culture of the coffeehouse to date, though centered mainly on London and England.

Venice, but also from the rest of today's Veneto region, and from the rest of the Venetian empire until 1797. However, learning and worship hardly found harmony historically. From the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century until now, Padua has been living, to quote J.W. Goethe, with "zwei Seelen in einer Brust", two souls in one single heart. Most recently, a third soul, the industrial-capitalist, has grown, since the 1970s, and is constantly competing, or at least trying to find harmony with, the other two<sup>6</sup>.

Padua is still torn between these souls. She has been the cradle of extreme-left movements and thinkers (including Antonio Negri); yet the Catholic Church keeps here some of its bastions, including newspapers and publishing houses, all centred upon Saint Anthony – The Saint, *Il Santo* par excellence. Not surprisingly, Cardinal Angelo Scola has recently established a major School of Theology, open to the laity as well as the religious, which is called the Facoltà Teologica del Triveneto. All this serves to explain the role, far from marginal, played by the Caffè Pedrocchi, from its foundation in 1831 until the unification of Italy in 1870<sup>7</sup>.

The "Stabilimento Pedrocchi" ("Pedrocchi's Establishment") has a great, and still partially secret, history, whose peaks are between the year of its foundation, 1831, and 1866 when Lombardy-Veneto illegally<sup>8</sup> became part of the newly created Kingdom of Italy, thus bringing to its

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<sup>6</sup> A survey on history of Padua is provided by Camillo Semenzato, *Padova: ritratto di una città millenaria* (Padova: Programma, 1996); English translation, *Fair Padua, Nursery of the Arts* (Padova: Programma, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> This role was immediately understood by contemporaries. See for instance D.C. Pedrocchi, *Il caffè Pedrocchi. Raccolte pubblicate in occasione del cinquantesimo anniversario*, Padova, 1881.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance Franco Beggato, *1866. La Grande Truffa* (Venezia: Editoria Universitaria, 2006).

end the Italian “Risorgimento” in Northern Italy. Rome, in fact, became the last piece of the Italian jigsaw only four years later<sup>9</sup>.

Literature and politics are the keynotes of the first phase of the Café’s life, 1831-1866. In order to assess the political significance of the Pedrocchi in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is necessary to understand the formation of “café culture” in 18<sup>th</sup> century Venice. This phenomenon – comparable to the same one in 18<sup>th</sup> century London, as it has been described by John Brewer<sup>10</sup> – is closely related to the new role then played by the bourgeoisie in a declining aristocratic and guild-driven society. This phenomenon represents a fascinating chapter in the “coffee-cycle”, which includes production, consumption, trading, and cultural echoes of a particular community. First in Venice, beginning in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, then in Padua, coffee-shops opened and their popularity grew throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. There were around 77 coffee-shops and cafés, certainly of minor import in Padua in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is striking if one looks at the local population which was around 35,000. Coffee, as a new commodity, was itself a product of a new social class, the “middle class” (“borghesia”), which could find little, if any, space in the upper rungs of the Venetian social ladder traditionally occupied by old as well as new nobility<sup>11</sup>.

What we perceive in late eighteenth century Venice is a new “coffee-culture” that comprises meeting places as well as a leisure destination. It has some precise features. First of all, it is a lay culture, oriented towards pleasure and leisure. Even the features of the “Stabilimento Pedrocchi”, which was built by the architect Jappelli and inaugurated in 1831 with the

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<sup>9</sup> On the Risorgimento, the best survey to date is Alberto M. Banti, *Il Risorgimento Italiano* (Roma: Laterza, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> See John Brewer, *The Pleasure of Imagination, English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago-London, University of Chicago Press, 2000), *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> See Lionello Puppi, *Il Caffè Pedrocchi in Padova*: 13-20.

neo-gothic addition of 1837 (the “Pedrocchino”), we immediately perceive something of a “lay temple”. There are no references whatsoever to Catholicism, no crosses or other symbols. It is a triumph of freemasonry ideals: toleration, “deistic” or “civic” religion (Rousseau and his Italian counterpart, Gaetano Filangieri), or in any case vague religiosity, and stern individualism. The reference to Egypt and its oldest religion is far from casual. Among those scientists who took part in Napoleon’s expedition in Egypt there was an enthusiastic Paduan traveller and archaeologist, Giovanni Battista Belzoni (1778-1823), who made very important discoveries while accompanying Napoleon<sup>12</sup>.

The “lay” character of the cafés is clearly linked to the efforts of the new class, the bourgeoisie, to define its own identity in opposition to that of the nobility, the clergy and the “common people”. The café is a temple of republican values, as they were shared by a number of members of this new class. Almost everywhere, in 19<sup>th</sup> century Italian leading culture, from Napoleon to Cavour, including the enlightened among the Risorgimento “losers”, Carlo Cattaneo, there is some disregard or disrespect towards the Catholic Church. It is right on this point that the particular, somewhat perverse form of Italian “liberalismo” emerges, as an anti-Catholic, pro-republican, rather conservative stream of thought, falsely cosmopolitan (in fact, very parochial), with nothing to share with Lockean and American classical-liberal, nowadays labelled “libertarian”, thought. Within the Pedrocchi establishment there existed also a certain rivalry with the Catholic Church, which is evident even in the “profane” interiors as well as in its exteriors, and the building and its decorations appears as an attempt at secularization and to create new lay values<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> On Belzoni see the short entry in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*; more extensively, see Stanley Mayes, *The Great Belzoni: The Circus Strongman Who Discovered Egypt's Ancient Treasures* (London-New York: Tauris, 2003; originally published 1959). See also G.B. Belzoni, *Narrative of the Operations and Recent Discoveries...*, ed. by Alberto Siliotti, translated by Richard Pierce (London: British Museum, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> On 19<sup>th</sup> century secularization see now the most valuable Michael Burleigh, *Earthly Powers: Religion and Power in Europe from the Enlightenment to the First World War* (London: Harper

This “perversion” or mockery of Catholic buildings can be perceived in the extreme neo-classical and occasionally oriental style of the “Stabilimento Pedrocchi”. The three entrances, each one equally important and solemn, with neoclassical columns and giant cats, which serve both as a warning and as a decoration are in sharp contrast with the single main entrance of a Catholic Church. Everywhere there are ironies and imitations of a “sacred space”. At the same time, even those giant cats, still the object of admiration by tourists today resemble only slightly the Lion of Saint Mark. The ideals of freedom cherished by the local Paduan patriots did not immediately recall the original freedom of Venice, which was an oligarchy and certainly not a republican democracy of the kind idealized by the Italian heirs of the Giacobins and of Napoleon. At the same time, the glorious freedom of Venice – apart from her not-so-politically-correct form of government – had to be taken into account somehow by the potential builders of a new and democratic Italian state, at least in Padua.

The “Stabilimento Pedrocchi” is a building with very few, if any, reference points in its architectural and interior-design aspects. Its originality was immediately perceived by the local population. Situated next to the Piazza delle Biade (a local big en plein air market of several, mainly agricultural, commodities), and right in front of the old Palazzo del Bo, in the very centre of the old city – a centre occasionally ruined and impoverished, both socially and architecturally – the café has, since the beginning, looked for an unholy ally in the Università di Padova, as mentioned above, one of the oldest universities in the world and the second oldest (1222) in Italy, after Bologna.

Both students and professors were among the “patriots” who met in the several rooms of the café to plot against the Hapsburgs. Both students (in

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Collins, 2005). On Italy, *passim*. Alas, in an otherwise extremely reliable book, Burleigh affirms that Italy passed from “democracy to Fascism”. Unfortunately, the Italian Kingdom before and under Fascism was far from being some sort of democracy. Burleigh echoes this in Anthony Burgess’, *Earthly Powers* (London: Hutchinson, 1980).



a substantial number) and professors (the majority) belonged to the ever-growing anti-Austrian bourgeoisie which made Padua one of the main centres of “patriotic” action from 1800 to 1866. The fact that the Università di Padova was the only one in the Veneto region and cosmopolitan by history and vocation, made the Pedrocchi a place of free talks and readings, a highly enjoyable meeting place for young people, a hub of patriotic and political discourse. At its origins, there is evidence of the business sense of Mr Pedrocchi, and the genius of Giuseppe Jappelli (1783-1852), the architect who designed the complex. The fact that the two men got along very well can be regarded as the reason for the immediate success of the café. Antonio Pedrocchi belonged to a family already in business for two generations. The café was already active, in much more humble premises, during the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup>, when it was visited by Stendhal, who actually did not see the splendid building by Jappelli. The construction of the building began in 1826 and was completed in 1831<sup>14</sup>. Given its complexity and size, this is no small achievement.

In order to understand the Pedrocchi “project”, it is worth examining its several internal spaces. The main room, the “Sala Grande”, is a large space divided into three sections that can be directly accessed from the main entrances. The “Sala Grande” is still the heart of the “Stabilimento” and was intended as a location for meeting and drinking. It is and was a very comfortable space, with soft lights and seats, a place where one of the most typically Italian arts, that of “conversazione”, could be easily practised. The “civile conversazione” is a typical aspect of Italian Renaissance culture – with its theorizers, from Castiglione to Stefano Guazzo – and was widely evident in the “salon” culture of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and then in the “café” culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Champions of manners

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<sup>14</sup> On Jappelli see Giuliana Baldan Zenoni-Politeo, *Il giardino dei sentimenti. Giuseppe Jappelli architetto del paesaggio* (Milano: Guerini, 1997); Barbara Mazza, *Jappelli e Padova* (Padova: Liviana, 1978). A comprehensive scientific investigation on Jappelli, with several references to the Pedrocchi, in Giuliana Mazzi, ed., *Giuseppe Jappelli e il suo tempo* (Padova: Liviana, 1982).

and conversation such as Guazzo, Castiglione and Della Casa, played their part in the widespread, albeit often superficial, rediscovery of the classics in Renaissance Italy. Certainly, they were the topic of discussion in the bourgeois circles all over Italy and were put forward as examples of “Italian style” all over Europe<sup>15</sup>.

A closer look at the “Sala Grande” of the Pedrocchi gives us a glance at a typical 19<sup>th</sup> century mix of influences and ideas. There is a substantial presence of Egyptian motifs, due to the fact that one of the most eminent Egyptologists who travelled with Napoleon in Egypt was, as mentioned above, Giovanni Battista Belzoni, who was considered a local celebrity, probably the most notable one.

Apart from the Egyptian, there is a multiplicity of decorative elements, which considered together create the impression of a Biedermeier design. Almost every element carries a symbolic meaning. Large maps of the terrestrial globe (2.75 m x 4.45 m) clearly indicate that the “bourgeois momentum” was overwhelming. It is worth remembering that one of the most splendid rooms of the Palazzo Ducale in Venice is devoted to maps of the world, and this was a truly aristocratic building. The new upper-middle class clearly wished to imitate aristocratic behaviour. A thorough comparison between the Venetian Ducal Palace and the Pedrocchi might indeed reveal many other similarities<sup>16</sup>.

Apart from the “Sala Grande”, there are many other rooms with a strong symbolic meaning. For instance: “la borsa”, the “stock-market” – a room devoted to business and business-related talks – the “sala da bigliardo”, where one of the most sociable games of the times – billiards – was regularly played. Other smaller rooms, were devoted to private

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<sup>15</sup> See for instance Eugenio Camerini (1811-1875), *L'eco italiano fiore del parlar familiare e della civile conversazione in Italia*, Leipzig, 1857.

<sup>16</sup> Among the ever flourishing literature on mapmaking in the Renaissance – when the Palazzo Ducale maps were depicted – see Francesca Fiorani, *The Marvel of Maps: Art, Cartography, and Politics in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

conversations, business and smoking (the “fumoir”), to musical performances and other artistic activities. We might easily assume that gambling, legal and/or illegal, was leisurely undertaken in those rooms.

It is clear that the Pedrocchi, in the minds of the businessman as well as in that of the architect who created it, has to be considered a “microcosm”. A place of “civile conversazione”, of celebrations of the arts and crafts, of sheer pleasure in coffee drinking, and later dining. A place where the self-aware members of a new social elite met and, inevitably, plotted against the foreign power, Austria, which at that time ruled over Padua and the Lombardy-Veneto region until 1866. A “Ducal Palace for the bourgeoisie”, the Pedrocchi had its ups and downs during its long history<sup>17</sup>.

The peak of its political as well as social significance within the walls of ancient Padua, can be regarded as the period from its foundation (1831) until the 1848 upheavals. In particular, one month before the Milan uprising, known as the “Cinque giornate” or five days (17-22 March 1848), on 8 February 1848 a small uprising, quelled by the Austrian police, took place in Padua. The Pedrocchi was the scene of one shooting: a bullet hole is still visible in one of its rooms. Students were the protagonists of that unfortunate revolt, still remembered today. Patriotic riots continued until June of that year<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> In conversations with elderly Paduans, we can glean that in 2006, the Pedrocchi is in one of the most glittering phases of its life, following almost a century of decay. Paduans are very proud of the Pedrocchi, and young people, given a fair pricing policy, convene often in these rooms.

<sup>18</sup> Padua was involved in many ways in the events of 1848, the year of the creation of an ephemeral republic in Venice, under Daniele Manin. On the Paduan involvement, see the contemporary accounts: Francesco Colombo, *Avvenimenti successi in Padova nei giorni 6, 7, 8 Febbraio 1848*, Venice, 1848; Enrico Nestore Legnazzi, *L'otto febbraio a Padova* (Padova: Drucker, 1892); Domenico Legrenzi, *Cinque giorni nel mese di giugno 1848 in Padova: cronachetta*, Padova, 1848. On the Republic of Venice of 1848, see Jonathan Keates, *The Siege of Venice* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2005).

After that date, there was a long period of decadence, therefore we can say that its role in the events leading to the 1866 Savoy conquest of Lombardy-Veneto was marginal. The Pedrocchi could reunite, within its premises, not only members of the growing new middle class, professionals, tradesmen and students full of patriotic fire, but also old aristocrats and artists without any clear social standing. Among them, there was also the painter Ippolito Caffi, a true man of the Risorgimento<sup>19</sup>.

It is interesting to note that one of the highest points in the life of the Pedrocchi was the IV Meeting of the Italian Scientists, la “Quarta riunione degli scienziati italiani”, which was held in Padua in 1842. This was a triumph of the growing positivism in Italy: the meeting that brought to the public the most advanced research conducted in Italy at that time in several fields, had a strong historical meaning, because the University of Padova was still considered one of the most important Italian universities. Even if Italy was not a unified political entity yet, the meeting of the “Italian scientists” carried a powerful political meaning. Science, along with culture, literature, history etc., was also a strong unifying element calling for an eventual political unification. Obviously, not all the scientists were patriots, but these meetings were considered important “patriotic” events by those who believed that the unification of Italy was close<sup>20</sup>.

As a matter of fact, several of the “patriots” who gave life to the abortive 1848 revolution and became members of the local provisional government created in those days, met “regularly” at the Pedrocchi. After the failure of 1848, in 1856 at the upper level of the Pedrocchi, some local aristocrats and bourgeois created the “Società del Casino”, which was officially a free meeting place for literary discussions. Unofficially,

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<sup>19</sup> On Caffi see Annalisa Scarpa, ed., *Ippolito Caffi. Luci del Mediterraneo* (Milano: Skira, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> On this meeting see Giuseppe Solitro, *La quarta riunione degli scienziati italiani a Padova nel settembre 1842* (Padova: Seminario, 1942); Ignazio Cantù, *Sulla quarta riunione degli scienziati italiani in Padova* (Milano: Pirola, 1842).

however, it was a hub of patriots aimed at underpinning Savoy's attempts, eventually successful, to unify Italy and get rid of the Hapsburgs<sup>21</sup>.

The fact that the Pedrocchi was, since its very beginning in 1831, aimed at being much more than a café, was clearly stated in a document written in 1881. This document is the history of the first half century of the life of the café, written by Antonio Pedrocchi's heir, Cappellato Pedrocchi. According to Cappellato Pedrocchi, it was clearly Antonio's aim to create a learned society – pretty much along the model of the 18<sup>th</sup> century academies – with an added “plus”, involving leisure and relaxation. Furthermore, Cappellato Pedrocchi states that Antonio, as a Baconian, understood the relation between “sapere” and “potere”, knowledge and power. According to Pedrocchi, the café had to be a free place (in comparison with the more rigid university and other institutionalised academies) meant for the exchange of goods as well as of ideas, a place where the local elite could meet “selected” foreign visitors in order to enhance science and knowledge. This was pretty much an Enlightenment project, which comes as no surprise in the age of early Positivism. Here is also a clearly stated political nuance, which eventually might have changed the original “learned” direction of the Pedrocchi. It had to be “Istituto sociale di patria rigenerazione”, a social institution for national *regeneration* (a key-word not only during the French revolution, but also during the process of Italian unification), that is something well beyond its original learning-trading purpose<sup>22</sup>.

Not surprisingly then, in his 1891 will, Cappellato Pedrocchi nominated as heirs to his café Padua City Council, a public entity representative of all Paduans. The only obligation on the City Council

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<sup>21</sup> “Società del Casino”, meaning “Casino club”, was a common name for patriotic societies all over Italy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some of them, such as that of Como (1821), are still in existence. On the Società del Casino Pedrocchi see Bruno Brunelli, *La Società del Casino Pedrocchi 1856-1956*, Padova, 1956.

<sup>22</sup> D.C. Pedrocchi, *Il Caffè Pedrocchi. Memorie edite e inedite*, Padova, 1881.

was to keep alive and well functioning as it was, this complex in perpetuity. As it is always, or almost always, the case in Italy when a private property of some importance is donated to public institutions, the destiny of the Pedrocchi has been dark for a long period of time, from 1891 until 1998, with alternate phases of restructuring and of overwhelming neglect and decay. Only in the past 10 years the Pedrocchi has been brought back to its past splendour and is now one of the highlights of Padua, as mentioned earlier, crowded by locals and tourists alike. In the course of its long life the Pedrocchi was praised and described by authors ranging from Stendhal, (who visited the old complex, later replaced by the 1831 Jappelli building) George Sand, Théophile Gautier, Eleonora Duse, Tommaso Marinetti, and Gabriele D'Annunzio among others. Its impact on the life of the city has been equally important but with long blanks, from 1831 until now. When Antonio Pedrocchi died, in 1852, not only the local guild of the “caffettieri”, but also a great part of the population, hailed him as a celebrity and benefactor. His funeral attracted crowds and the suspicion of the Austrian police. The Pedrocchi wanted to be at the very centre of the city and not just in the physical sense. Indeed, one of the slogans of its founders and patrons was that of “centralization”, i.e. to be at the “centre” of the city’s “unofficial” intellectual life, more or less competing with the university and especially with the Church institutions, which were in a rather decadent phase in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Pedrocchi published its own newspaper and gazettes, with an uncertain readership and clandestine distribution<sup>23</sup>. Occasionally, the Pedrocchi acted also as a pioneer in urban history. For instance, in 1857 it was the first Paduan building to get gas lighting, replacing candles which were still in use almost everywhere in Italy. A harbinger of “progress”, the Pedrocchi was always an open and “democratic” mirror of changing

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<sup>23</sup> The journal, called “Il Caffè Pedrocchi”, was published as a weekly magazine from 1846 to 1848. There is a recent reprint (Milano: Atesa, 2000). There has been no major survey/analysis of this publication. See Giulio Cristofanelli, *Dei giornali padovani anteriori al 1856, e specialmente del Giornale euganeo e del Caffè Pedrocchi* (Padova: Gallina, 1905).

Italian society. It comes as no surprise then, that the gloomiest page in its history was after the end of WWII in 1949, when an ignorant and incompetent administration allowed destruction and misconceived attempts at general restructuring. This ended only in 1998, with the intelligent restructuring project lead by architect Umberto Riva<sup>24</sup>.

However, the Pedrocchi is now very much alive. This is important, as it indicates that there is a local, historical memory which is far from dead<sup>25</sup>. Unfortunately, other contemporary institutions such as the “Gabinetto di Lettura” (a learned society created by 160 Paduan noblemen and bourgeois just one year before the Pedrocchi in 1830) with parallel hidden patriotic aims and open learned aims, is in a situation of disarray and its immense archival and literary patrimony in danger.

(Boston University/Università dell’Insubria)

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<sup>24</sup> Umberto Riva, born in Milan in 1928, is one of the most important Italian architects. In 2003 he won the Golden Medal for Architecture at the Triennale di Milano.

<sup>25</sup> Although the literature on the Pedrocchi, whose most important contribution is that by Lionello Puppi, is quite rich, there are still several archival documents, as well as literary figures related to the Pedrocchi, that are worthy of further investigation. For example, a member of the Pedrocchi family, Cristoforo, in 1802 published in Venice a now extremely rare work on trade and economics, the *Lettere amichevoli che trattano di politica economica d’arti, e di commercio*, which so far has not been investigated.