

Conflicting Narratives in Risorgimento Photography

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Italian and foreign photographers participated in the painful process of nation building, responding to opposite ideologies that either supported the rebellious struggles or stood by the local nation-states. Unlike government-based photographic commissions documenting civil wars and colonial battles - the Crimean War, the Indian “Mutiny,” the American Civil War -, these works presented a fragmented narrative and media distribution within a country in the making. Depending on their genre, Risorgimento photographs were often appropriated by the tourist market as landscape views, or by government surveillance as pictures of *briganti* represented as dangerous peasants. This paper illustrates some paradigmatic cases, reflecting on the multiple agencies and uneven distribution of these photographs. The widely circulated portrait of Garibaldi in his red shirt assumed an iconic value that was recognized globally; in contrast, Risorgimento photography resulted into a complex tapestry of conflicting narratives.