

Managing the Army, governing the State: the Italian military élite in national politics, 1882-1915

Dirigir el ejército, gobernar el estado: la élite militar italiana en la política nacional, 1882-1915

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Abstract: According to several contemporary witnesses, and many nowadays historians, one of the key instruments used by the Italian social and political élite of the 19th century to secure the national unification (and the monarchy as the leading institution of the newborn state) was the army. What few of them has noted, however, is that the army and the military who controlled it were more than an instrument: they were an essential part of the Italian national élite, capable of influencing the nation-building process itself. The Italian army officers, and specifically the general staff ones, attended university-level military academies where social sciences were taught along with general history, human geography and foreign languages. They travelled the world and confronted themselves with fellow officers from different social, political and cultural contexts. They took part in politics and local administration, as well as in economical enterprises. Above all, they were well aware of the role the army was supposed to hold in the institutional and symbolic panorama of unified Italy and pre-war Europe. And they wrote about all of this.

The research project is grounded on two main sources. On one hand, the quantitative analysis of the careers and the biographies of 250 general staff officers who attained specific roles of great responsibility and relative autonomy from 1882 to 1915. On the other hand, correspondence, diaries, unpublished memoirs found in several private and family archives – in other words, those unofficial, unseen writings that we think could be more telling than the formal ones in revealing the military personal beliefs and cultural affiliations and influences. Crossing the quantitative and qualitative outputs, we can explore in depth *the influence of military in the conception of politics, education, nationalization processes or social relationships* in a case study, the Italian one, that is either peculiar and well integrated in the wider *belle époque* European context.

Keywords: nationalization process, officer corps, élite, military, culture

Resumen: Según varios testigos de época y muchos historiadores de la actualidad, uno de los instrumentos clave utilizados por la élite social y política italiana del siglo XIX a la hora de lograr la unificación nacional (y la monarquía como institución al mando del estado recién nacido) fue el ejército. Sin embargo, lo que pocos de ellos han visto es que el ejército y los militares que controlaron dicho proceso fueron más que un mero instrumento: ambos fueron una parte esencial de la élite nacional italiana, capaces de influenciar el proceso de construcción nacional en sí mismo. Los oficiales del ejército italiano, y especialmente los miembros del estado mayor, se formaron en academias militares con un nivel de educación universitario donde se enseñaban ciencias sociales junto con historia general, geografía humana y lenguas extranjeras. Éstos viajaron por el mundo y lidiaron con colegas de diferentes orígenes sociales, políticos y culturales. Tomaron parte en la política y en la administración local, así como también en empresas económicas. Sobre todo, fueron bien conscientes del papel que se suponía que el ejército debía ostentar en el panorama institucional y simbólico de la Italia unificada y la Europa de preguerra, de ahí que escribieran sobre todas estas cuestiones.

Este proyecto de investigación está basado en dos fuentes fundamentales. Por un lado el análisis cuantitativo de las carreras y las biografías de 250 generales del estado mayor que ostentaron papeles específicos de gran responsabilidad y relativa autonomía desde 1882 a 1915. Por otro lado, correspondencia, diarios y memorias inéditas encontradas en varios archivos privados y familiares –en otras palabras, aquellos escritos no oficiales nunca vistos que pensamos que podrían ser más reveladores que aquellos formales a la hora de revelar el pensamiento del personal militar y sus influencias o filiaciones culturales. Cruzando los resultados cuantitativos y cualitativos podemos explorar en profundidad la influencia de los militares en la concepción de la política, la educación, los procesos de nacionalización y las relaciones sociales en un caso de estudio, el italiano, que es peculiar y que al mismo tiempo se encuentra bien integrado en el contexto europeo más amplio de la belle époque.

Palabras clave: proceso de nacionalización, cuerpo de oficiales, élite, militares, cultura

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According to several contemporary witnesses, and many nowadays historians, one of the key instruments used by the Italian social and political élite of the 19th century to secure the national unification (and the monarchy as the leading institution of the newborn state) was the army.¹ However, few had noticed that the army and the military who controlled it were more than an instrument: they were an essential part of the Italian national élite, debating about and participating in national and local politics.

We chose to explore that field through the correspondences entertained by these officers who were members of the Italian military élite of the time.² Army corps commanders, Chiefs of the General Staff, War Ministers, but also military attaches, chiefs of the War Minister divisions and General Staff bureaux: what we found examining the writings, and the career paths, of these men renders an image of Italian officers in Liberal Italy very different from the bureaucrats or jingoist technicians many military historiography have portrayed so far.³ Along with this has gone the supposition –largely the result of the unavailability of the kind of sources the author has so strikingly found– that the army was dominated by Piedmontese generals

¹ Cf. John GOOCH: *Army, state and society in Italy*, New York, St. Martin's, 1989; Piero DEL NEGRO, Nicola LABANCA, and Alessandra STADERINI: *Militarizzazione e nazionalizzazione nella storia d'Italia*, Milan, Unicopli, 2005; Marco ROVINELLO: “«Giuro di essere fedele al Re ed a' suoi reali successori». Disciplina militare, civilizzazione e nazionalizzazione nell'Italia liberale”, *Storica*, 49 (2011).

² We define as military élite member every officer who filled a concretely influential role inside the military institution for a significant amount of time (at least one year). During our PhD research we determined ten roles which present the characters of autonomy and effectiveness we searched for. Between 1882 and 1915, our research time limits, and according to the Italian military yearbook (*Annuario Militare del Regno d'Italia*), 247 officers filled these roles. We built up a prosopographic database using as sources two biographical encyclopaedias (*Enciclopedia Militare Italiana* and the still uncomplete *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*), and several wedding publications, obituaries, commemorative articles found in the catalogues of the Italian National Library of Florence. Then, we found some private and family archives that enabled us to see from the inside the military élite debates. We hope that a full version of our work will be published as soon as possible. Meanwhile, for a nearly exhaustive overview of our secondary sources, Cf. Nicola LABANCA: *Storie di guerre ed eserciti. Gli studi italiani di storia militare negli ultimi venticinque anni*, Milan, Unicopli, 2011.

³ Cf. Giorgio ROCHAT and Giulio MASSOBRIO: *Breve storia dell'Esercito Italiano dal 1861 al 1943*, Turin, Einaudi, 1978; John WHITTAM: *The politics of the Italian army*, Croom Helm, 1977; Paolo LANGELLA: *Cultura e vita dell'ufficiale italiano (1878-1911)*, in *Esercito e città dall'Unità agli Anni Trenta* (2 voll.), conference proceedings Perouse-Rome, 1989.

who were of a very conservative and avowedly monarchist caste of mind.⁴ That view has already been challenged in some respects: for example it has been argued that the army did not like the public order role, regarded it as an unwelcome diversion of energy, effort and money, but nevertheless carried it out dutifully.⁵ The following paragraphs will try to widen and enlighten the grey areas that still linger around the social and figure of XIX Century Italian Army officers, and their connection with politics.

Parliament and national government

It is a fact that 139 officers out of the 247 that formed the Italian military élite between 1882 and 1915 did not sit in a representative Chamber, determining a majority of “disengaged” military, but 98 others did. In other words, the 44% of the Italian military élite was either a Parliament member, a senator, or sometimes even both, which is not a negligible percentage. Furthermore, if more than half the senators did not afford an election campaign in spite of being nominated for relevant professional performances, 43 officers decided to take the chance to be elected to the representative Chamber undertaking an actual political career. Lastly, it must be considered that some of the 139 officers who did not enter the Parliament actually tried to, sometimes more than once and in different electoral districts, without succeeding. Taking into account these failures, which often involved the same intensity of political activity performed in a successful campaign, would certainly raise the percentage of the military élite members involved in national politics above 44%.

We wrote that 43 officers undertook an actual political career because the majority among them had his first campaign way before becoming general, or even member of the élite. Out of 43 Parliament members, 23 became so as majors, lieutenant colonels or colonels, while 28 were under 50 years old the first time they entered the Chamber.

Menabrea	1848	Verres (C)	C-DX	Sar	39	lieutcol	x
Durando Giacomo	1848	Mondovì (C)	C-DX	Vol	41	colonel	x
Thaon di Revel Genova	1857	Cassino	DX	Sar	40	lieutcol	x
Cosenz	1860	Como	DX	Gar	40	general	x
Longo	1861	Napoli	SX	Gar	43	general	
Torre	1861	Benevento (C)	C-DX	Gar	46	colonel	

⁴ Cf. Piero PIERI: *Storia militare del Risorgimento*, Turin, Einaudi, 1962; Massimo MAZZETTI: “Dagli eserciti preunitari all'Esercito Italiano”, *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, LIX (1972).

⁵ Cf. Hubert HEYRIES, «L'armée italienne et le maintien de l'ordre dans les villes, de 1871 à 1915, d'après les attachés militaires français», *Guerre de rue, guerre dans la rue, Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, avril-juin 2002/206; Giuseppe CONTI, *"Fare gli italiani". Esercito permanente e "nazione armata" nell'Italia liberale*, Unicopli, Milan 2012.

Pianell	1867	Napoli	DX	DS	49	general	x
Bertolé-Viale	1867	Crescentino (C)	C-DX	Sar	38	general	x
Asinari di San Marzano	1870	Nizza Monferrato (C)	DX	Sar	40	colonel	x
Ricotti-Magnani	1870	Novara (C)	DX	Sar	48	general	x
Veroggio	1874	Castel S. Giovanni		Sar	46	colonel	
Pasi	1874	Forlì (C)	DX	Vol	55	general	
Corvetto	1874	Cagli	C-DX	Sar	44	lieutcol	x
Marselli	1874	Pescina	C	DS	42	major	
Gandolfi	1874	Carpi (C)	SX	Modena	39	major	x
Mocenni	1874	Siena (C)	DX	GrTosc	37	lieutcol	x
Morra di Lavriano	1874	Carmagnola (C)	DX	Sar	44	colonel	x
Primerano	1876	Città di Castello	SX	DS	47	colonel	x
Geymet	1876	Bricherasio (C)	C-SX	Sar	45	lieutcol	
Dezza	1876	Codogno (C)	DX	Gar	46	general	
Sani	1876	Rovigo (C)	C-SX	Gar	43	general	x
Baratieri	1876	Breno (C)	SX	Gar	35	major	
Mattei	1880	Venezia	DX	Sar	55	general	
Pelloux Luigi	1880	Livorno	SX	Sar	41	colonel	si
Di Lenina	1880	Tolmezzo (C)	DX	Vol	42	lieutcol	
Pozzolini	1880	Firenze (C)	DX	Vol	46	colonel	
Menotti	1882	Modena (C)	DX	Vol	55	general	x
Ricci	1882	Belluno	DX	Vol	50	general	
Villani	1882	Firenze (C)	C	GrTosc	55	general	
Mirri	1886	Imola (C)	DX	Gar	52	general	
Rolandi	1886	Genova (C)	SX	Sar	59	general	x
Adami	1886	Cuneo (C)	C-SX	Sar	52	colonel	
Strani	1890	Monteleone Calabro (C)			44	lieutcol	

Afan de Rivera	1890	Napoli (C)	C-DX	DS	48	colonel	x
Dal Verme	1890	Pavia (C)	C-DX	Vol	52	colonel	x
Carenzi	1890	Pisa	C-SX	Vol	53	general	x
Grandi	1892	Senigallia (C)	SX		43	tencol	x
Masi	1892	Lugo (C)	C-DX		39	tencol	
Bogliolo	1895	Nizza Monferrato (C)	SX	Sar	58	general	
Pistoja	1900	Casalmaggiore (C)	C-SX	Vol	62	general	
Spingardi	1904	Anagni	C-SX		59	general	x
Mazzitelli	1904	Teano (C)	C-SX		59	general	
Mirabelli	1909	Teano (C)	C		59	general	x

Chart 1: Parliament members: year of election (first time), district (C=home district), political positioning (C=center, DX=right wing, SX=left wing), pre-unitary experience, age, military rank, late government role (x=yes).

In the chart above we can pinpoint several other traits that characterised the contingent of officers who got involved in parliamentary works. Apparently, the pre-unitary experience plays a great role when it comes to getting some officers to the political career. The groups that became minorities into the military after 1861, for instance the Garibaldini, are definitely over-represented into the Chamber. Former Armata Sarda officers are indeed only 14 out of 43, a rough 30% that contrasts sharply with the more than 50% of their weight into the élite ranks. On the contrary, the Garibaldini represents the 19% of the Parliament and the 8% of the élite members. Also the officers who came from the others pre-unitary armies of the Peninsula are more present in Parliament than they are in the ranks. At least for the Garibaldini and for the officers who belonged to “loser” pre-unitary states, being elected has all the hallmarks of a self-legitimation strategy.

The 45% of all the military élite members became second lieutenant after 1861, and consequently did not have a militant pre-unitary experience, but only 6 of them entered the Chamber. This fact, apparently in line with what Labanca and Del Negro wrote about the progressive disaffection between Italian officers and politics,⁶ might also have a different interpretation. Among the six we find only one officer comes from the territory of the old Kingdom of Sardinia (Spingardi), while the other five are from Romagna region (Masi), Marche (Grandi), both former territories of the Papal State, and three from the South (Strani from Calabria, Mazzitelli and Mirabelli from Naples). The geography of disaffection seems therefore very dis-

⁶ Nicola LABANCA: *Militari deputati e deputati militari*, in Roberto CAFORIO, Piero DEL NEGRO (eds.), *Ufficiali e Società, interpretazioni e modelli*, Milan, Unicopli, 1988.

proportionate. In other words, the ones who abandon the Parliament at the beginning of the 20th Century are Piedmontese officers, much more than the military élite in its entirety.

Where did the officers who entered the Parliament decide to campaign? 30 out of 43 did it in their home district, where they had family and social networks, and often their properties or estates. On the other hand, only 13 officers took a chance in districts that were far from their hometown. Therefore, we can conclude that many officers conceived the role of Parliament member not only as a national issue, but also as a way to maintain, renew or gain power, respectability and social distinction on a local scale – just as many of the Italian “notables” of the time did.

Once they had made their way to the Parliament, officers entered one of the political line-ups which dominated Liberal Italy political life. In fact only two of them (Veroggio and Strani) did not show a clear political positioning, while all the others 41 sided with either Sinistra Storica (liberal left), the pro-government Center or, most of them, Destra Storica (liberal right). However, it might be hasty to conclude that the majority of the military élite members who got into the Parliament were right-handed. General Mirri for instance, a former Garibaldino who entered the Chamber in 1886 sitting on the right side, became in the 1890s a strenuous supporter of Francesco Crispi, leader of the Sinistra Storica. General Pelloux, on the other hand, was a leading “leftist” exponent through all the 1880s, becoming also minister in the first Giolitti cabinet, but ended up leading the so-called bourgeoisie Putsch in the final years of the Century. In conclusion, to evaluate officers political penchants as an aggregate is far from being easy or clarifying, not least because Liberal Italy political structure was very different from her two-parties British model.

More important is to note that the members of the military élite never assembled an homogeneous “military party” inside the Parliament. They never seated all on the same side (left or right as it was), they participated in some governments but not in others (carrying out political-based choices). Finally, it can be clearly seen from their mutual correspondence that they had different ideas about military issues, as well as about national and international politics.

Leaving aside for a moment the Parliament members, let's turn to the 90 officers who became senators.

The aggregate tells us that military senators mirrored the larger military élite way more than their colleagues in the Chamber. While in the latter we had a 30% of former Kingdom of Sardinia officers, in the Senate we find a 52% that lines up with the élite average. Also the percentages of former volunteers and Garibaldini are the same in the Senate and in the élite. Looking at this fact from another point of view, we can say that the alleged predilection of the Savoy for Piedmontese officers and generals does not emerge in any way, as the latter were not over-represented in the upper house.

We saw that after the turn of the Century, the Piedmontese élite members in the lower house were abruptly reduced to one. Looking at the Senate, on the contrary, we do not find

any change in the number of Piedmontese officers before and after the year 1900. Only in the last five years (1911-15) they fell to a 20% from their usual 50%. On one hand, thus, the Senate mirrors the persistence of Piedmont weight into the military élite, but on the other hand it signals its decay in the years that preceded the World War.

Once examined the numbers, we must interrogate ourselves about how military élite members fulfilled their role of parliamentary spokesmen. Among the lower house members, 18 out of 43 took part in some parliamentary committee works, while 15 others presented at least one law proposal. If we accept that the Senate was way less politically active than the lower chamber was, we would expect that the military senators did not perform such high levels of participation. On the contrary, 43 senators out of 90 took part in a committee works, and 23 others presented at least one law proposal. Fair enough, among them we find many war ministers who presented big quantities of law proposals: 108 Luigi Pelloux, 88 Spingardi, 77 Ricotti, 58 Zupelli, 48 Menabrea, 47 Bertolé-Viale, 37 Viganò and 36 Emilio Ferrero. Still, we find also two laws signed by generals Pistoja and Baratieri, and one by general Giuseppe Di Lenna. Moreover, being an active member of the Parliament was a very highly regarded quality among the colleagues, both inside the military institution and the Parliament itself. General Francesco Mazza defines the colleague Luchino Dal Verme as «eminent» among all the Parliament members:

Ed io me ne compiaccio non soltanto come amico e compatriota tuo, ma anche come militare, perché l'esercito non può augurarsi di meglio che veder gli uomini del tuo stampo acquistare credito ed influenza in Parlamento.⁷

44 senators fulfilled a government role, and 23 out of 43 members of the lower house did it as well: especially the latter fact signals that a candidature to the Parliament could be the first step of a career as brilliant as the military one, or even more. Furthermore, some officers assumed key roles not only at the head of the War Ministry, but also in other important government bodies. The Foreign Ministry is led, among others, by three military élite members (Durando, Menabrea, Nicolis Di Robilant), and there is plenty of officers in the ranks of the diplomatic corps. The same general Menabrea and his colleague Afan de Rivera managed the Ministry of Public Works, while in the same department Giuseppe di Lenna was inspector-general of the railways network for ten years (1885-95). General Ottone Tournon collaborated with the Postal and Telegraph Service Ministry to build the Italian telegraphic network in the 1870s.

To be nominated at the head of a ministry was indeed a risky business. An outstanding military career could be done in a few days, as happened to general Mocenni who was ruthlessly dismissed from either the War Ministry and his military command after the Adua disas-

⁷ Dal Verme private archive (Torre degli Alberi, Italy; from now on: DVA), Mazza to Dal Verme, 22/02/1893.

ter. The physical and mental health of an officer could also be undermined by the 10, 12 or even 14 hours of work per day that the role of War Minister entailed. General Govone suffered a serious mental breakdown during the Porta Pia crisis that eventually led to his death, and his colleague Bernardino Milon died of a heart attack at 52 in 1881. General Afan de Rivera, under-secretary at the War Ministry in 1896, defined the amount of daily work he had to face there as a «death warrant».⁸

Lastly, to live in Rome sometimes was too much of an effort for the budget of some officers. Even the Chief of the General Staff Domenico Primerano, after resigning in the summer of 1896, is forced to get relocated in his daughter's house to be able to remain in Rome.⁹

A candidate's *Manifesto*

In the winter of 1894, general Luigi Majnoni d'Intignano, an aristocrat from the little town of Erba in Lombardy, ran for the second time to become his district representative in the lower house. General Majnoni's is one of these cases where an officer participates in a campaign without succeeding, and more than once: in fact he ran for the Erba seat twice (1880 and 1894), but he was always beaten by another local “notable”. Despite his bad luck, Majnoni's case gives us an insight into which strategies an officer could adopt during an election campaign, as well as into his political ideas.

First of all the general, who is also a local “notable” given the fact that he is the son of a former city mayor, and that he owns several villas and estates in the district, gathers a committee which includes several other important people from the province to support his nomination. Among them we can find aristocrats (marchese Crivelli, conte Sormani Andreani, conte Turati, noble Parravicini), professionals (lawyers, doctors, notaries and engineers), fellow officers, a senator (Giuseppe Gadda).¹⁰ Given the limited suffrage effective in 1880, the first time Majnoni ran for the seat a list like that would have been enough to guarantee a chance of winning, but since the 1882 law more than doubled the potential electors the general had to implement other tools.

Beyond some populist leaflets distributed by his supporters in the countryside,¹¹ which were themselves truly modern propaganda, Majnoni was forced to take the field in person, writing a political *Manifesto*. In this document, dated 10th december 1894, the Lombard general makes a profession of faith in liberal conservatism:

⁸ “Una condanna di morte bella e buona”, DVA, Afan to Dal Verme, 2/10/1896.

⁹ Sismondo private archive (Rome, Italy; from now on SA), Primerano to Sismondo, 10/08/1896.

¹⁰ Majnoni private archive (Erba, Italy; from now on MA), 160, 15, *Lettere, programma, discorsi, documenti e giornali relativi alla candidatura nel collegio di Erba*, 1894.

¹¹ MA, 160, 15.

Sarò per quel governo che, rispettando la libertà dei cittadini, non pieghi a che questo si cambi in licenza, e che svolgendo la sua azione nell'orbita delle leggi, mantenga l'ordine. L'ordine nella libertà è l'indice più sicuro della natura civile di un popolo.

Assicurato l'ordine, pacificati gli animi delle provincie, che sobillate dal miraggio di un avvenire impossibile, inconsciamente tentarono di disfare l'opera a prezzo di tanto sangue e di tanti sacrifici edificata, voterò per quel governo che garantirà la sicurezza dei cittadini nella persona e negli averi, per quel governo che senza debolezze e senza arroganze tenga alta all'estero la nostra dignità, che con opportuni trattati favorisca le nostre industrie, e con leggi adatte aiuti lo sviluppo dell'agricoltura, precipua base della ricchezza nazionale; per qual governo che, pur rispettando la libertà di coscienza, non ostacoli la religione dei nostri padri, che la giustizia non asservi alla politica, e ne mantenga la sovrana indipendenza. Appoggerò quindi le leggi intente ad affidare all'iniziativa privata la soluzione degli importanti problemi che riflettono la viabilità, le industrie, i traffici per terra e per mare, lo sviluppo delle colonie.¹²

Despite his conservative ideas about agriculture and «liberty through order», general Majnoni expresses some truly liberal positions as administrative decentralization and infrastructure privatisation, which are far from being shared by the theoretically liberal Italian establishment of the time. Then it comes a sample of emblematic XIX Century paternalism, although its tone is far from being typical: clearly aware of the challenge represented by socialist movements, the general declares himself to be an advocate of some very substantial social laws:

Avranno l'incondizionato mio appoggio: le leggi sociali dirette ad aiutare gli sforzi e a mitigare le sofferenze dei diseredati dalla fortuna, le leggi protettrici dell'infanzia, quelle sul lavoro dei fanciulli, e quelle infine che mirino a confortare di un aiuto, che li sostenga nell'ultima fase della battaglia, coloro che spesero tutte le forze nell'accrescere la ricchezza nazionale con l'onesto lavoro.¹³

Finally, the candidate's military program, which surprises for its clarity and independence:

Come soldato è mio obbligo parlarvi dell'esercito. [...] per quanto sia intenso l'amore che [gli] porto, ne approvo le economie nell'interesse generale della nazione, e non respingo l'ipotesi che siano ancora possibili, anche dopo quelle recentemente concretate; esse dovranno cercarsi nel medesimo indirizzo di quelle. È compito del tecnico conciliare la riduzione nelle spese con le esigenze della difesa del paese. In un tempo, che l'amor di patria mi fa sperare non lontano, quando le provvide leggi sull'istruzione preannunziate dalla parola del Re, avranno portato i loro frutti, e che l'educazione civile abbia concorso a formare il soldato, si potrà, senza tremare per le sorti della nazione, fruire dei benefici del sistema territoriale, sviluppare maggiormente il tiro a segno, e ridurre alla più semplice espressione la forza armata permanente, che tanto, ma necessariamente

¹² MA, 160, 15, *Manifesto elettorale di Luigi Majnoni*, 10/12/1894.

¹³ Idem.

te, pesa sul bilancio dello stato. A codeste leggi intente a favorire l'istruzione popolare e l'educazione delle masse io darò sempre il mio appoggio, cercando che i maestri, quasi ignoti benemeriti fattori della moderna civiltà, abbiano insieme alle soddisfazioni morali più equo compenso alle loro fatiche.¹⁴

Luigi Majnoni is quite obviously an admirer of the concept of armed nation, of the German-shaped territorial recruitment system, and is an advocate of the creation of a powerful militia to place side by side with the regular army: that is the opposite of the official doctrine of the time about what the Italian Royal Army should be.¹⁵

General Majnoni could also modulate his *Manifesto* according to the kind of audience he was supposed to meet. For instance, when he speaks in front of the workmen of a factory located in the village of Ponte Lambro, he insists on the social aspects of his *Manifesto*.

Ottenuto il pareggio, bisognerà non solo renderlo stabile, ma pensare a diminuire le imposte; prime fra tutte quelle che pesano sulle classi meno abbienti, come sarebbero le imposte sul sale, sulla farina, sui coloniali etc. etc. poi quelle che gravitano sulla terra e sulla industria, perché l'agricoltore e l'industriale messi alle strette dalla gravità dei tributi non possono pensare ad aumentare i redditi mediante l'arte e quindi anche i salari dei lavoratori. [...] Per questo però si devono fare fin d'ora delle leggi proprie, che si sogliono chiamare sociali. [...] p. e. quelle sull'igiene che tendono a migliorare le abitazioni, quelle che mirano a costituire le società di mutuo soccorso. Poi le leggi protettrici dell'infanzia [...] Con l'istruzione diffusa e con il concorso di buone leggi sociali ogni lavoratore intelligente sarà in grado di crearsi uno stato economico soddisfacente.¹⁶

National and local politics, and the role of military

In order to success on bringing home a political campaign, officers had to interact with press and public opinion – an interaction that they knew how to take advantage of. In 1886 general, writer and philosopher Niccola Marselli writes to his pupil Sismondo:

Contribuisci dunque tu pure, portando, tu che ne hai portate tante, un'altra pietra al nostro edificio col procurare che un giornale autorevole di Torino pubblichi un tuo bell'articolo.¹⁷

General Perrucchetti is more explicit when in 1900 recalls to his interlocutor the share he had in making the Parliament approve some laws, through his constant work as contributor for the prestigious *Corriere della Sera*.¹⁸ In another letter, he suggests to Dal Verme to publish

¹⁴ MA, 160, 15, *Manifesto elettorale di Luigi Majnoni*, 10/12/1894.

¹⁵ Cf. John GOOCH: *op. cit.*

¹⁶ MA, 160, 15, *Discorso agli operai di Ponte*.

¹⁷ MA, Marselli to Majnoni, 23/01/1886.

¹⁸ DVA, Perrucchetti to Dal Verme, 26/06/1900.

some articles «nella Nuova Antologia ed in qualche altro periodico molto diffuso»¹⁹ if he wants to efficiently support his own ideas. Leone Pelloux reveals that the powerful director of the newspaper *La Stampa* in person asked Dal Verme to become a regular contributor:

Frassati colse l'occasione per pregarmi di offrirti le colonne della *Stampa* allo scopo di mettere in chiaro le condizioni reali dell'Esercito, al giorno d'oggi, e dei provvedimenti che ti sembrerebbero più urgenti ed indispensabili. Egli ti lascerebbe naturalmente piena libertà d'apprezzamenti [...] Egli mostra, giustamente, di aver grande fiducia nella tua competenza, e nelle tue qualità di scrittore.²⁰

General Majnoni was definitely not the only military élite member who had unconventional ideas about military institutions and national politics. Issues like these were indeed object of a continuous debate inside the institution. During a February 1909 meeting of the *Consiglio dell'Esercito*, the supreme army advisory council that included the designated army commanders, the Chief of the General Staff and the War Minister, the main topic is

if the army organisation is conceived to attain a precise goal, namely to beat an external enemy, and therefore the military budget has to be consequent, or if the budget has to be decided by the Parliament from the start, and the army organisation has to be planned according to the available means.²¹

The subsequent discussion signals clearly that at the top of the military institution there was a debating élite, well aware of the military-political dynamics of preparing a conflict. Beyond that matter, officers questioned almost every aspect of their institution, of the state they served, and of the society they lived in. General Ugo Brusati, the all-powerful King Victor Emmanuel III first aide-de-camp, is convinced for instance that not abolishing the one-year volunteering law²² had more political and social reasons than technical ones:

Il legislatore non sembra abbia profondamente sentito la necessità di proclamare la reale effettiva uguaglianza di tutti i cittadini di fronte al dovere e all'onore di servire, in qualità di soldato, il proprio paese. Il privilegio, ingiustificato, si è infiltrato nel progetto [...] E così noi, appartenenti alle classi più elevate, facciamo del vero e proprio antimilitarismo, trovando modo di scaricare l'onere del servizio militare sulle classi meno abbienti. Ciò non può, ciò non deve essere. [...] È poi veramente [nauseante] per non dir peggio, la disposizione che concerne il volontariato di un anno che non si ha il coraggio di abolire, per permettere a coloro che non possedendo sufficiente

¹⁹ DVA, Perrucchetti to Dal Verme, 12/05/1901.

²⁰ DVA, Leone Pelloux to Dal Verme, 24/02 [1907].

²¹ MA, 172, 1, *Questioni sottoposte al consiglio dell'esercito - febbraio 1909*.

²² The law allowed students, but actually every wealthy youngster, to avoid regular military service by paying a special tax and serving a year as NCOs or junior officers; in Brusati's words, «Si conserva il privilegio del volontariato di un anno, per gli ignoranti che hanno le borse ben fornite», DVA, Brusati to Dal Verme, 29/05/1907.

grado di istruzione per essere compresi nella [esenzione] di cui dianzi ho detto, hanno tuttavia quattrini sufficienti per pagare la prescritta tassa di volontariato.²³

Brusati is not the only military élite member who blames the Italian ruling class he belongs to. After the 1898 crisis, general Afan de Rivera writes to his friend Dal Verme that in his opinion the wealthy had to «make sacrifices» in order to smooth the imminent class conflict.²⁴ While repressing the Lunigiana uprisings of 1894, general Nicola Heutsch sponsors the creation of a «cassa invalidità per i lavoratori del marmo», that is to say a welfare instrument meant to appease the population. Also the general and War Minister Stanislao Mocenni writes about the fable patriotism shown by Italian upper classes, especially when compared with European ones:

Con l'ultima tua mi informi che sei stato a Brighton a vedere il treno armato per la difesa delle coste, il quale al governo inglese costa nulla essendo stato formato completamente a spese di società e di privati, esempio che vorresti veder imitato anche in Italia. [Mocenni è d'accordo ma] è vano in Italia sperare, almeno per ora, e in tempo di pace, di poterlo costituire con elargizioni private sia perché, a differenza degli inglesi, gli italiani non sono così grandemente compresi della importanza dei mezzi di difesa nazionale, sia perché la ricchezza è qui più limitata e anche assai più frazionata che non in Inghilterra.²⁵

Even the ruthless colonial governor, general Baldassarre Orero, besides his hatred for the «quiet life of *travetti* [bureaucrats] and ministers», shows how much he comprehends the complexity of political action:

Io so bene che tutte queste cose a te sembreranno voli pindarici di un bollente Achille e che [guasteranno] il quieto vivere di travetti e ministri. E per verità anche senza accusarli di testa piccina capisco che i ministri con un bilancio in disavanzo, con un malessere agrario ed economico sul paese, con una camera composta di tanti deputati che stanno dietro una siepe per avere un pretesto di saltar addosso al ministero, capisco dico che non hanno bisogno di un comandante superiore che venga a crescere loro le difficoltà in mezzo alle quali già si trovano.²⁶

On a more local scale as well, officers are perfectly conscious that sometimes political reasons may overcome more valid ones. In the summer of 1882, young staff officer Luchino Dal Verme asks his superior, general Leone Pelloux, why one of the artillery batteries of his division must be transferred from Brescia (the unit's natural seat) to the nearby town of Ber-

²³ DVA, Brusati to Dal Verme, 17/07/1907.

²⁴ DVA, Afan to Dal Verme, s.d. [after 1898].

²⁵ DVA, Mocenni to Dal Verme, 28/08/1894.

²⁶ DVA, Orero to Dal Verme, 22/02/1890.

gamo. General Pelloux answers in a way that reminds of similar correspondences between French generals of l'*Armée Nouvelle* as gathered by J. F. Chanet:²⁷

Non conviene dimenticare però che Bergamo ha fatto delle spese per avere la batteria; ma distaccandovi uno squadrone in vece di una batteria, il municipio non avrà motivo di lagnarsi.²⁸

Thirty years later, general Pistoja wrote to the by-now general and member of Parliament Dal Verme about which colleagues invite to a meeting regarding the planning of a new railway that crosses their districts, located in southern Lombardy. Both officers are friends and colleagues of the representative of another Lombard town, colonel Marazzi, and are poles apart with the socialist Cremona representative Leonida Bissolati. And yet:

...ti dirò che pel Marazzi puoi farne a meno. Egli rappresenta Crema che è alle porte di Milano, e con Milano divide ogni [...] interesse. Non così Bissolati. La Genova-Piacenza-Cremona-Brennero traversa la più gran parte del suo collegio.²⁹

Ideology, ideas and stances

Generally speaking, the ideology of the Italian military élite is characterised by a penchant for order, lead from above, above all conservation of the state and society originated from the victorious side of the Risorgimento – the monarchical one. A model which had two strenuous enemies: anarco-socialists, the *reds*, and these Catholics who were Papal State nostalgics, the *blacks*. Different as they were from each other, these categories were equally hated by the most part of Italian officers.³⁰ However, even here in this apparently monolithic scheme it is possible to find some cracks. General Albertone for instance, writes in 1911 that he hopes that a quick establishment of the universal suffrage law might inspire a radical change in Liberal Italy's blocked political system:

Non attendo miracoli dal S.U. [universal suffrage], ma se non altro da questo sasso nel pantano puzzolente, voglio sperare che rospi e serpi, almeno per qualche tempo sentiranno paura e si terranno nascosti. [...] Se dal S.U. venissero fuori un 200 sovversivi e un centinaio di sinceri clericali! Forse questo sarebbe l'inizio di un lieto avvenire per l'Italia!³¹

²⁷ Cf. Jean-François CHANET, *Vers l'armée nouvelle; république conservatrice et réforme militaire 1871-1879*, PUR, Rennes, 2005.

²⁸ DVA, Leone Pelloux to Dal Verme, 9/06/1892.

²⁹ DVA, Pistoja to Dal Verme, 16/01/1907.

³⁰ "Se gl'intransigenti neri e rossi non si ravvedono si demoliranno più sollecitamente", SA, Primerano to Sismondo, 20/09/1894.

³¹ SA, Albertone to Sismondo, 17/04/1911.

Beyond the frustration of old general Albertone, which mirrors a certain anti-politic behaviour that was widespread in pre-1914 Italy, it must be said that the relation between the military élite and the red or black extremes is not as linear as it could be thought. In June 1903, general Ettore Pedotti, former commander of the Scuola di Guerra and fresh War Minister, does not liquidate the socialist ideas about how to reform the Army as anything but heresy. Moreover, he asks a colleague the full text of a socialist representative speech about the issue, because:

parmi, da qualche brano riportato dai giornali, che dovrebbe essere molto interessante. Potresti tu aver l'amabilità di procurarmene un esemplare e spedirmelo?³²

Some years before his 1911 tirade, general Albertone tells to an astonished colleague that he himself had been on the verge of being a socialist candidate:

Notizia strabiliante! Mi è stata offerta dai Socialisti di Siena la candidatura pel collegio di Montalcino, con garanzia di riuscita. Ho risposto che “desidero con tutta l'anima il miglioramento economico e morale del proletariato, degli umili e che a tale miglioramento dedico le mie poche forze”, ma che tale scopo lo ritengo conseguibile colle istituzioni che ci reggono, alle quali dobbiamo di essere italiani dopo secoli di feroce, umiliante servaggio. Non mi hanno più risposto!³³

What is really surprising here, is that Albertone's tone is far from being indignant, or delegitimising towards the *reds*.

Another military élite member who demonstrates to be in the same dialogue mood is general Tullo Masi, the son of a Garibaldino town mayor in the truly *red* region of Romagna. When he finally dies, shortly before the outbreak of the World War, both his republican and socialist compatriots, even the political leaders, publicly affirm their grief. Furthermore, while serving at the General Staff Command in Rome, colonel Cavaciocchi writes in a report on recruitment that people defined as subversive are indeed «not dangerous at all, and generally speaking very good soldiers».³⁴ Lastly, among general Dal Verme correspondents there is the socialist leader Filippo Turati himself.

The behaviour that military élite members have towards the other extreme, the black one, is even more variegated. In their private life, most of them were after all sincere Catholics, but many others were agnostics, when not atheists. General Albertone defines himself as a «free thinker»,³⁵ but as we have seen, he wishes a Catholic delegation to enter into the Parliament. Afan de Rivera remains a bit more sceptical, writing that if it is true, in his opinion, that a potential Catholic party could be an improvement for the Italian political life, then it is «sad that

³² DVA, Pedotti to Dal Verme, 05/06/1903.

³³ SA, Albertone to Sismondo, s.d. [1900-1905].

³⁴ Italian General Staff Historical Archive [AUSSME], G25 (studi tecnici), Cavaciocchi, “Le Truppe”.

³⁵ SA, Albertone to Sismondo, 30/12/1909.

it has to be said by us, the anti-clericals».³⁶ Old Risorgimento war horse general Cialdini writes characteristically that he has «as a rule to get my business in order with Santa Madre Chiesa, but much more with the War Ministry»,³⁷ determining a clear order of priorities between life and afterlife instances.

On the frontline in the battle against the *black* extreme there are, not surprisingly indeed, the former Garibaldini. Perhaps, their particularly violent anti-clerical behaviour may be explained as a side-effect of their abjuration of the democratic instances of the Risorgimento at the time of entering the Royal Army. In other words, having renounced to the greatest part of their juvenile ideology, anti-clericalism became even more pivotal to their particular identity and self-perception. General Giuseppe Mirri starts in 1886 a diatribe with the *Comizio Anticlericale* of Bologna, that was an association of local anti-clerical notables. Mirri accuses his fellow citizens of being all talk and no action, underlining his own different nature, that is to say, a still wild Garibaldino who thinks that:

Colle armi da palco-scenico non si vincono battaglie. Non basta che i liberali si mostrino uniti, bisogna che lo siano di fatto sempre e costantemente: ed è con questo solo mezzo che credo si possa combattere con buon successo il clericalismo invadente nemico dichiarato della patria della libertà e del progresso.³⁸

Also general Tullo Masi shares this behaviour, even if he was not a Garibaldino himself –but his father was. When in 1913 he is the liberal candidate in the Lugo district, and the Catholics electoral committees decide to vote him according to the nation-level Gentiloni Pact, the general publicly refuses their support. Gentiloni himself goes several times to Lugo to convince Masi to sign the Pact, but the old general does not back out. In the end Masi gain his election without any Catholic support, receiving the local socialists' plaudit. After all, until the arrival of Luigi Cadorna at the Supreme Command in 1914, the Italian Royal Army is strictly secular.³⁹ Moreover, among the military élite ranks there were many generals who were overtly Jews, two of which (Ottolenghi and Viganò) became even War Ministers: a truly peculiar situation, in the age of the many *affaires Dreyfus* the whole Europe was studded with.

Many historians argued that monarchy was indeed the centre of gravity of the Italian officer corps ideology.⁴⁰ However, in military élite members correspondences, there are a lot of negative comments about their sovereigns. In 1887 the military attaché in Berlin, Luchino Del

³⁶ DVA, Afan to Dal Verme, 12/04/1904.

³⁷ Orero-Del Re private archive (Arona, Italy), Cialdini to Orero, 03/06 [1885].

³⁸ Mirri Archive, Imola Public Library, Mirri to the president of the *Comizio Anticlericale*, 17/09/1886.

³⁹ Cf. Vincenzo CACIULLI, *Gli ufficiali dell'esercito italiano dall'Unità alla Grande Guerra*, unpublished PhD thesis, tutor Giorgio Rochat, Turin, 1993.

⁴⁰ Cf. Massimo DE LEONARDIS, «Monarchia, famiglia reale e forze armate», in *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, anno LXXXVI [1999], 2; Lucio CEVA, «Monarchia e militari dal risorgimento alla Grande Guerra (1848-1915)», in *Nuova Antologia*, n. 2197, 1996; Filippo MAZZONIS, *La monarchia e il Risorgimento*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2003.

Mayno, writes that King Umberto I «non deve sapere dove dar di capo» (approximately «is in a quandary», but in a rather disrespectful way) about managing his own reign.⁴¹ General Leone Pelloux's thought about the Crown's honours is best summarized by this line:

Vedrai dal bollettino una certa nomina a grand'ufficiale della corona, nomina la quale dà un giusto concetto del conto nel quale si tengono e si devono tenere simili onorificenze.⁴²

Achille Afan de Rivera is even more harsh when he writes about the young Victor Emmanuel III foreign policy:

Tu dai la colpa a Prinetti, a Morra, a Zanardelli e Morin della bella figura che ora abbiamo fatto, e non difendo nessuno di questi signori, ma tu non ignori che la politica con la Russia è opera personale del Re il quale al riguardo è suggestionato dal suocero e dalla moglie. Io fui e resto sinceramente monarchico, ma ti confesso che la politica interna ed estera del nostro Re mi fa paura! [...] E se ciò piace al Re, non piace alla grande maggioranza del Paese.⁴³

Officers opinions about the Kingdom of Italy's foreign policy are not unanimous after all. Even if the only high officer who publicly disowned Italy's triplicistic policy was general Asinari di Bernezzo, swiftly deposed from his command, his ideas were shared at least by Afan de Rivera and Dal Verme:

Come te sono anch'io irredento e quindi non avevi bisogno di confessarmi che nel fondo del tuo cuore desideri lo sfacelo della vecchia monarchia austriaca.⁴⁴

Also the old general Perrucchetti can be counted among the sceptics, as in 1901 he writes that:

siamo ben lontani dall'avervi [sulle Alpi] fatto ciò che fanno non solo i francesi, ma gli stessi svizzeri, e gli alleati austriaci i quali durando la triplice [costruirono] ciò che di più solido [a sbarrare] i loro passi alpini di frontiera.⁴⁵

The same general Perrucchetti, who some years before was among the founders of the Alpini corps, thinks that:

Una buona politica [è tale quando] non isoli il paese e non lo esponga a coalizioni ed a minacce colossali (contro le quali nessun mezzo potrebbe mai bastare).⁴⁶

⁴¹ MA, "correspondence 1887", 28/02/1887.

⁴² MA, "correspondence 1887", 16/02 [1887].

⁴³ DVA, Afan to Dal Verme, 22/10/1903.

⁴⁴ DVA, Afan to Dal Verme, 22/10/1903.

⁴⁵ DVA, Perrucchetti to Dal Verme, 12/05/1901.

As we can see, he detaches himself from the adventurism of Francesco Crispi. Even general Ricotti-Magnani, who due to his 1870s reforms can be considered the father of the modern Italian Royal Army, is convinced that the latest thing the country needs is to participate in a European war.⁴⁷

A last issue about which is interesting to see military élite members stances is the maintain of public order through military means, a thing that happened frequently in Liberal Italy when politics stepped aside as it was unable to put a brake on social conflict. One may think that generals who considered law-and-order the best policy were glad to become *Commissari Straordinari* substituting for civilian prefects. On the contrary, even a stubborn conservative as general Leone Pelloux writes, shortly after the defeat of Adua, how much he despises to be in charge of public order in Sicily:

Con una soluzione, anche solo provvisoria, in Africa e col ritorno di una parte almeno delle truppe io sono convinto che le cose cambieranno d'aspetto anche in Italia. Per conto mio, come puoi credere, non vedo l'ora di potermi dedicare nuovamente ad occupazioni più prettamente militari.⁴⁸

After the fall of Francesco Crispi and the turbulent last years of the 19th Century, with the rise of the moderate Giovanni Giolitti the involvement of military in public order become less frequent – or at least, less apparent.⁴⁹ However Luigi Cadorna, in the summer of 1910 still an army corps commander, defines «mortifying» the improper use that the prefect does of his men. In Cadorna's words it can be seen that, even when humanitarian or ethical considerations are not involved at all, generals are strongly contrary to the public order service imposed by the government.

Ora, io suppongo che non le sarà [disturbo] di conoscere cosa accade nel mio corpo d'armata, nel quale, noti bene, non vi è un presidio attorno al quale si possa eseguire l'istruzione tattica. [...] Orbene, avendo dovuto spedire nientemeno che 51 compagnie nella lontana Romagna, i tiri collettivi sono un gran parte andati a monte, il campo della brigata Bergamo è sfumato, ed i due campi di divisione li ho dovuti ridurre (per far qualche cosa) ad un campo di brigata a Ceva, formando dei regg.ti di fanteria di marcia con unità prese qua e là fra i disponibili. Non so cosa accada negli altri corpi d'armata, ma, avendo io dovuto mandar truppe in Romagna fin da Savona, suppongo che avranno sconvolto anche il III, V, VII ed VIII corpo (oltre al VI, ben inteso) che son più vicini, ossia almeno 1/3 e forse la metà dell'esercito! Il ministro disse alla Camera che è un utopia il credere di poter rinunciare al concorso dell'esercito nel servizio di P.S. Sarà

⁴⁶ DVA, Perrucchetti to Dal Verme, 12/05/1901.

⁴⁷ MA, "correspondence 1887", 07/03/1887.

⁴⁸ DVA, Leone Pelloux to Dal Verme, 31/03/1896.

⁴⁹ Cf. Hubert HEYRIES, «L'armée italienne et le maintien de l'ordre dans les villes, de 1871 à 1915, d'après les attachés militaires français», in *Guerre de rue, guerre dans la rue, Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, avril-juin 2002/206, pp. 11-28.

[...], ma io soggiungo che è più grossa utopia il credere che con questi sistemi si possa mai avere un esercito istruito e pronto alla guerra!⁵⁰

A conclusion: from dissociation to integration.

Sentiments of delusion and disillusion, like the ones expressed by Cadorna's letter, became more and more frequent by the time Europe approached the World War. Like in the surrounding Italian society, also into the military élite anti-parliamentarian impulses took the stage. Still, anti-parliamentarian behaviours were already present as soon as 1887, when general Morra di Lavriano defines the Parliament «that august and clownish assembly».⁵¹ In a more ironic way, also general Sironi describes the lower house as «a Calvary» to any man of good will.⁵² General Perrucchetti is way more serious when he compares the Army, perceived as good, to civil society as evil:

Povero Petrarca! Se l'antico valore negli italici cor non è ancor morto... purtroppo gli altri lamenti di Petrarca sono i lamenti d'oggi. Basta, caro mio, seguitiamo a fare il nostro dovere e confortiamoci del buon esempio che dà l'esercito nostro – malgrado i pessimi che dà il paese.⁵³

Albertone keeps the same tone when he wishes his colleague Sismondo to never get in touch with the «Montecitorio's lue» (syphilis).⁵⁴ Sometimes though, it is precisely the Army to be signalled as responsible for some of the problems that troubles society. General Bava-Beccaris, the man who fired on the 1898 demonstrations in Milan, thinks for instance that the African defeats are the first fuel to the extremes' electoral successes.⁵⁵ Some years later, when the first civilian War Minister takes office, he deepens his vision, which presents some aspects in common with Ugo Brusati's one:

Noi scontiamo sempre il fio delle nostre disfatte. E poi l'Italia si è imbastita più per abilità diplomatica che per virtù militare propria [...] Le classi elevate, tutti quelli che possiedono qualche cosa, considerano l'esercito come un peso necessario per la loro conservazione, delle loro persone e dei loro averi, ma non ne capiscono la sua missione, gli altri che sono poi i più numerosi lo vorrebbero sopprimere. E così esso trascina una vita magra, stentata, priva di prestigio e di fiducia nel suo avvenire.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ DVA, Cadorna to Dal Verme, 09/07/1910.

⁵¹ DVA, Morra to Dal Verme, 14/02/1887.

⁵² DVA, Sironi to Dal Verme, 28/08/1887.

⁵³ DVA, Perrucchetti to Dal Verme, 18/05/1898.

⁵⁴ SA, Albertone to Sismondo, s.d. [before 1893].

⁵⁵ DVA, Bava to Dal Verme, 25/01/1902.

⁵⁶ DVA, Brusati to Dal Verme, 02/08/1906.

So, the most ruthless of all the Italian generals apparently has more class self-consciousness than many liberal politicians. And even the reputation of military representatives for being War Minister's yes-men has to be got into perspective, as it is a fact that general Morra shows in the Parliament hall only to harshly attack the War Minister himself:

D'altra parte se io prendo la parola alla Camera, cosa che mi arriva men che raramente, egli è perché sento che c'è qualche cosa da proporre che ritengo utile e che nessuno proporrà, oppure perché provo il bisogno ineluttabile di manifestare la mia opinione scostante da quella del Ministero.⁵⁷

However, the behaviour that seems to be predominant among military élite members is a participative one, that is testified not only by the mere numbers, or by the vitality of the debate, but also by the pride the officers display when writing about their own capability to be good politicians. As an anonymous cavalry colonel remarks to the candidate Majnoni in 1880,

Chi ti avversò con lo stolto argomento che nulla delle cose pubbliche possa sapere un soldato fu un tal Veronelli, segretario comunale. In Roma, non erano tutti soldati i senatori? In Inghilterra non sono stati per 2/3 soldati all'ultima elezione?⁵⁸

In conclusion, contrary to what much of the historiography on that subject wrote, Italian military élite members were well integrated, and actively participating, in national politics. Not only they entered representative assemblies, proposing and debating law proposals, and sometimes taking a stand even against their “own” War Minister. They also took advantage of the press and knew how to influence the public debate they were involved in. When campaigning, high officers behaved like full politicians, expressing their own vision of politics and society, often in contrast with current ones. After all, they were fully part of the “notable” oligarchy which ruled the country.

Still, the evidence for the new claims made about the higher reaches of the officer corps is indicative but not yet conclusive. The evidence presented here suggests that the military elite were a more important contributor to national politics than has so far been recognised. Their role and influence needs further reassessment. However, we can say with some confidence that their views on national and military policy were by no means as uniformly conservative as is all too easily supposed. Further work will show exactly what influence the elite exercised on specific issues and will open the way to a re-evaluation of the *mentalité* of the Italian officer corps in the troubled decades prior to the world war.

⁵⁷ DVA, Morra to Dal Verme, 14/02/1887.

⁵⁸ DVA, anonymous officer to Dal Verme, 13/05/1880.