

Gibbon all'italiana
The Italian Restoration Edition of
The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

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Translation, betrayal, manipulation

Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics, and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way.

ANDRÉ LEFEVERE, *Translation, Rewriting, & the Manipulation of Literary Fame*.¹

In the early 1990s, prominent translation studies theorists began to impose a rethinking of the relationship between source works and their translations. They identified the many processes of betrayal and manipulation adopted by mediators over the years in order to adapt texts to the public they intended to address. As highlighted by André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett in particular, in addition to the many strategies used by the translators themselves, there are also those – sometimes overlapping – adopted by the patrons of the cultural world: as publishers, academics, scholars, critics and reviewers.

Therefore, whilst we can no longer consider a published translation to be merely a naïve transfer of an original work from one language to another, we should, however, continue to contextualise manipulation strategies in their cultural sphere and historical and political framework. What seems less important, is knowing the various mediators' level of language knowledge given that strictly linguistic issues seem to be of secondary importance. As the field of translation studies indicates, translated books should be considered to all effects an integral part of national cultures. This points to a broader and more problematic approach to the cultural history of modern nations which will inform this article.²

¹ ANDRÉ LEFEVERE, *Translation, Rewriting, & the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London: Routledge, 1992), VII.

² SUSAN BASSNETT and ANDRÉ LEFEVERE, eds *Constructing Cultures: Essays in Literary Translation* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 1998).

This article will seek to retrace the events surrounding the translation and publishing history of the Italian version of a very unusual work: *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon. So deeply imbued with scepticism, even before it reached the Italian peninsula Gibbon's great work had already been singled out – both in his homeland and abroad – as a scandalous and dangerous composition.³ A relatively short period of time separated the conclusion of the original edition from the first Italian translation that appeared in Pisa, between 1794 and 1796, written by an 'anonymous' hand, behind which was the notorious figure of Monsignor Angelo Fabroni.⁴

When Gibbon's first Italian translation appeared, the era of 'beautiful and unfaithful' translations, which had been the pride of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literature,⁵ already seemed a distant memory. However, there was certainly some manipulation in the edition of the first eight volumes that another Pisan publisher printed between 1795 and 1799. What the readers in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany were offered then was a Gibbon that had been brutally censored, rebuked and corrected, and unwillingly returned to orthodoxy – moreover, to strictly observant Catholic orthodoxy.⁶ There seemed to be a desire to offer it as a proof of the errors incurred by scepticism when not accompanied or corrected by vigilant Roman theology.

However, if that was the operation conducted in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, how radically would *Decline and Fall* need to be corrected twenty years later, in the middle of the Restoration and in the Lombardy of 1821–24, troubled as it was by conspiracies and anti-revolutionary ideas? Moreover, what intervention would be made in the face not only of errors linked to the faith of the censors, but also Gibbon's addition of a clear nostalgia for republican forms and mixed governments, accompanied by an anti-tyrannical verve?

Yet, the 13 volumes of *Decline and Fall*, which in Italian had become *Storia della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*⁷ and appeared in Milan from 1820 to 1824 published by Nicolò Bettoni, included the entire original work, without abridgements or semantic distortions. This time even the name of the translator was known: the prolific but at

³ DAVID WOMERSLEY, *Religious Scepticism: Contemporary Responses to Gibbon* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1997).

⁴ An ultra-moderate Jansenist, Fabroni (1732–1803) owed his fame primarily to the creation of the Pisan *Giornale de' Letterati*. See Ugo Baldini, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* s.v. 'Fabroni, Angelo' (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1994), 44. The story behind this translation was dealt with in 1962 by Salvatore Rotta, who hypothesised that Fabroni was the only Pisan translator. See Salvatore ROTTA, 'Il viaggio di Gibbon in Italia,' *Rivista storica italiana*, 74 (1962), 325–55, in part. 334–35.

⁵ ROGER CHARTIER, *Le migrazioni di testi. Scrivere e tradurre nel XVI e XVII secolo* (Rome: Carocci, 2020).

⁶ In this sense, we will come across different arguments from the ones used by the first Anglican critics rediscovered by Womersley.

⁷ EDWARD GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano tradotta dall'inglese di Edoardo Gibbon* (Milan: Bettoni, 1820–1824), 13 vols.

the same time controversial Davide Bertolotti.⁸ His work was limited to volumes IX to XVI, as the first eight were merely the re-edition of the aforementioned Pisan edition achieved in 1799.

As stated, the entire translation was faithful. Yet Nicolò Bettoni was certainly neither a revolutionary nor a non-believer, at least not in 1820 and was not seeking to stir up a scandal.⁹ Thus, in order to appreciate the Bettoni's handling of Gibbon, we must once again take heed of the warnings issued by translation studies that linguistic faithfulness is not tantamount to ideological solidarity.

In the paragraphs that follow, I will briefly cover the most scandalous sections of *Decline and Fall*, as read by a Catholic public. Indeed, the focus of my studies is the only complete Italian version of *Decline and Fall* that would see the light in pre-Unification Italy. Neither the Pisan translator first, nor Davide Bertolotti later, removed any of the irony that coursed through the original. I will then carry out a detailed study of this publishing operation, undoubtedly sensitive to the sirens of the market, in which extraordinary innovation and a conservative attitude managed to co-exist, at length and apparently unhindered, throughout the most troubled years of the early Restoration in Milan.

The many 'errors' of a masterpiece of historiography

The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire certainly requires no introduction, given that, just like its author Edward Gibbon, it has been the focus of extremely prolific international historiographical debate.¹⁰ However it may be useful to recall or,

⁸ On Bertolotti and other professional translators from Milan, the pages of MARINO BERENGO, *Intelletuali e librai nella Milano della Restaurazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), still apply. See also Giovanni Ponte, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, s.v. 'Bertolotti, Davide' (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1967), vol. 9.

⁹ On N. Bettoni see FRANCESCO BARBERI, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, s.v. 'Bettoni, Nicolò' (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1967), vol. 9.

¹⁰ For many years, studies of Gibbon included a set of prominent titles. However, others have recently been added, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. I shall point out just the main studies from different phases of the historiographical history at the basis of my research: GIUSEPPE GIARRIZZO, *Edward Gibbon e la cultura europea del Settecento* (Naples: Istituto italiano per gli studi storici, 1954); ARNALDO MOMIGLIANO, 'Gibbon's Contribution to Historical Method,' *Historia* 2 (1954), 450–63; EDWARD JAMES OLIVER, *Gibbon and Rome* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1958); MICHEL BARIDON, 'Edward Gibbon en Italie,' *Etudes Anglaises* 15 (1962), 131–37; ARNALDO MOMIGLIANO, 'Edward Gibbon dentro e fuori la cultura italiana,' *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e filosofia*, s. III vol. VI (1976), 78–95; JOHN W. BURROW, *Gibbon* (Oxford: OUP, 1985); Roy Porter, *Edward Gibbon: Making History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1988); PATRICIA CRADDOCK, *Edward Gibbon, Luminous Historian* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); JOHN G.A. POCOCK, *The Enlightenment of Edward Gibbon* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999); CHARLOTTE ROBERTS, *Edward Gibbon and the Shape of History* (Oxford: OUP, 2014); *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Gibbon* (Cambridge: CUP, 2018). Particularly useful is the study by DAVID WOMERSLEY, *Gibbon and the Watchmen of the Holy City: The Historian and His Reputation, 1776-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

in the very least, briefly outline the themes and interpretations that would have been most unacceptable in Italy during the Restoration.

As we will see, what most upset the censors were the work's theological deviations, starting with Chapters XV and XVI, which for many years would remain notorious and almost unsurpassed examples of non-adherence to Christian orthodoxy.¹¹ Indeed, the theme was the spread of Christianity and, in Chapter XVI in particular, the dissemination of its Church. Just a few chapters later, Gibbon indulged in measured adulation of Julian the Apostate and went so far as to state that the anti-Christian persecutions had been exaggerated. Furthermore, when he examined the reasons for the 'fortunes' of Christianity in the Roman-Barbarian West, he basically reduced all of the points of conversion and faith to the level of the most intuitive superstition and popular credulity. He was not kind towards many of the early saints and martyrs, insinuated suspicion regarding the material greed that accompanied apostolic fervour and, above all, cast considerable doubt on the good faith of many council decisions, to the point of challenging the authority of the four canonical Gospels.¹²

Basically, Gibbon often vastly exceeded the criticism of Catholic doctrine made by Protestant theologians. He sometimes went so far as to express radical scepticism, which he backed up with a series of carefully examined sources. He was not too indulgent with late imperial paganism either: it was undoubtedly still a cult that did not recognise hierarchies or frontiers, yet in the third century AD it too showed signs of corruption and decline.

We have already mentioned the anti-tyrannical nature of the first part of *Decline and Fall*. However, we should add that the emperor most heavily criticised by Gibbon was not strictly a tyrant. Constantine was instead responsible for moving the capital to the East, anticipating the supreme guilt of Theodosius – in other words, the enforced conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity. In a balanced and well-thought-out analysis, he treated Diocletian a little better, although the golden era of the Antonines had, by then, passed forever. Basically, Gibbon not 'only' criticised religious fanaticism and the ecclesiastical authorities, in *Decline and Fall* he also presented a complex political and state ideal that was unequivocally rooted in classical and Renaissance republicanism, adapted to a progressive interpretation of the post-revolutionary British model.¹³ On closer inspection, political prejudice was no less important than religious criticism. Equally clear was the focus on contemporary Europe, judged using the parameter of conciliation between political freedom and religious emancipation.

¹¹ JOHN G.A. POCOCK, 'Gibbon and the Invention of Gibbon. Chapters 15 and 16 Reconsidered,' *History of European Ideas*, 35 (2009), 209–16.

¹² DAVID WOOTTON, 'Narrative, Irony and Faith in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*,' *History and Theory* 33 (1994), 77–106.

¹³ EDOARDO TORTAROLO, 'Gibbon e la libertà naturale: è possibile trasformare la libertà naturale in libertà politica?,' in *Ragione e immaginazione. Edward Gibbon e la storiografia europea del Settecento*, ed. Girolamo Imbruglia (Naples: Liguori, 1996), 190–214.

Rather than appeasing the repulsion felt by reactionary and orthodox readers, one of the elements that instead made it even worse was the irony with which Gibbon laced his work. In the first instance, it was focused on rituals, dogmas and miracles. It was often introduced by a phrase, comment or digression; at other times, it was a feature of the entire narrative and the concatenation of themes. If the aim was to make the work more 'acceptable', the irony could have been eliminated, but page after page would have had to be cut out of the original, leaving entire chapters incomplete.

The reception of *Decline and Fall* in Europe was surprising. Even during the late eighteenth century, Gibbon was censored, cut, rewritten and ultimately even 're-Christianised'. In the following century, he would instead be adopted as a benchmark author in certain highly conservative Protestant apocalyptic currents.¹⁴ Numerous comments and annotations were written with the aim of reworking the text to make it comply with the orthodoxy of one church or another; suffice it to think of the work completed by Henry Hart Milman in 1845 that would accompany almost every 'popular' edition of *Decline and Fall* in Britain for over a century.

Even before its translation during the 1790s, in Italy too, Gibbon's work was immediately censored and criticised, a trend which continued throughout the nineteenth century. Likewise, the anti-tyrannical declamations, thoughts on republican virtues and preference for a mixed government and political liberalism remained constant. Others took it upon themselves to defuse the situation and show that *Decline and Fall* was merely a brilliant work but strewn with 'errors' – at least as far as Christianity, Catholicism, Rome and the Pope were concerned. In Italy too, Gibbon was 're-Christianised', but not by means of brutal cuts or complete rewriting. Initially, in late eighteenth-century Pisa, this was done by opposing different authorities and then in 1823–24 Milan, by appending a series of historical and theological notes ultimately designed to refute the entire text.

'Biblioteca storica di tutte le nazioni'

In 1818, Nicolò Bettoni (1770–1842) disseminated a prospectus in the Milan area of what would be the first series of books on modern international historiography.¹⁵ The name chosen for the series was the 'Biblioteca storica di tutte le nazioni' (Historical Library of All Nations), and one of the inaugural titles was no less than *Universal History*, by the Swiss-born Johannes von Müller.

A conservative and at times even nostalgic feudalism, siding with reactionary oligarchies and hostile to enterprising bourgeois, von Müller's peers already held him

¹⁴ STEPHEN D. SNOBELEN, 'A Further Irony: Apocalyptic Readings of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*,' *Canadian Journal of History* 33 (1998), 387–407.

¹⁵ NICOLÒ BETTONI, *Biblioteca storica di tutti i tempi e di tutte le nazioni ai colti italiani* (Padua: Bettoni, 1818). Among the few appreciations reserved for Bettoni, we should mention PIERO BARBÈRA, *Niccolò Bettoni: avventure d'un editore* (Florence: Barbèra, 1892).

to be one of the rediscoverers of the Middle Ages.¹⁶ Reputable on a political and religious level, Johannes von Müller also stood out for his beautiful style and ability to draw on sources. Müller was the author best suited to inaugurate a series that, just like its publisher, sought to prove that its books were modern yet still compliant with the political and religious agenda.

Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* followed in the list proposed by Nicolò Bettoni. It was presented as the first in a series of titles dedicated to the best of English and Scottish historiography. Indeed, the series was also to include the *History of Britain* by David Hume and the *History of America* by William Robertson.

This, in itself, was quite significant in the early 1820s. While Milan had already established itself as the Italian capital of translations and soon afterwards would experience the phenomenon that was Walter Scott, the fact remained that most Italian translations tended to be of French works or translations of translations into French. In terms of xenophilia, Bettoni was certainly not one of the most enterprising publishers in Lombardy; in fact, up until then, most of his titles had been translations of Greek and Latin classics into vernacular. Nevertheless, at the time, history could prove profitable, if not as much as novels, at least more than vernacular translations or minor Italian literature. Indeed, the most dynamic Neapolitan typographers had already begun to realise this. Whilst guilty of counterfeiting fiction novels published in Milan, in the field of historiography they proved to be more original, and as early as 1819 the first volumes of the 'Bellezze della Storia' (The Wonders of History) series went into print in Naples.

With good reason, therefore, Bettoni sought to guarantee himself a market that was fuelled by a new hunger for history in Milan and the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia. This demand focused on the Middle Ages and national histories, in particular. In that respect, *Decline and Fall* was not the most congenial title and although the eight volumes by the Pisan translator were ready, the entire post-imperial part that focused primarily on the Italian peninsula, and especially the Lombard and French north, had yet to be translated. After all, Gibbon had been one of the first to promote Muratori's great work. Of course, certain inferences and excesses needed to be amended, but it was still a work of undisputed repute.

Before and during the Gibbon operation, Bettoni could rely on the well-founded certainty of having a catalogue that was reputable for the less indulgent. Not only did the vernacular not offend anyone, but the remainder of the 'Biblioteca storica di tutte le nazioni' could help guarantee the publisher's conformism too. Although the series on British authors could be deemed compromising, Bettoni had after all begun with von Müller and at the same time he was also publishing a number of edifying works for children and adults, mainly by French counter-revolutionaries.

¹⁶ DORIS and PETER WALSER-WILHELM, and MARIANNE BERLINGER KONQUI, eds, *Geschichtsschreibung zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts im Umkreis Johannes von Müllers und des Groupe de Coppet* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004).

If we look at the historiographical supply available in Milan and the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia in general when Bettoni launched his series, we can say, without hesitation, that such supply was fairly meagre. Anti-revolutionary typographers from the provinces of Lombardy, such as Gian Battista Orcesi, had introduced both the more prominent and minor writings of authors such as the anti-Napoleonic Michaud with his *History of the Crusades*. The two most important titles of the limited number imported to Milan between 1815 and 1820 were undoubtedly *A History of the Italian Republics* by Simonde de Sismondi and *The Life and Pontificate of Leo the Tenth* by Roscoe (published the same year in Pisa was his even better-known work, *The Life of Lorenzo de' Medici: Called the Magnificent*). In the meantime, the publication had begun of the first volumes of Ségur's *Universal History*, which would continue at irregular intervals for a long period of time. This catalogue of translations really amounted to very little if we compare it not only to the considerable number of titles in the medical and scientific field, but also to the dozens of famous travel stories Sonzogno had begun to specialise in and even the much later explosion of the historical novel genre.¹⁷ Quite rightly, Nicolò Bettoni saw a gap for which there was diversified demand.

Indeed, Bettoni focused on multi-volumes works, releasing the individual books at more or less regular intervals. Together with Gibbon, Hume and Robertson, he also published Salaberry and Villemain from France. His catalogue also included the first volumes of the immense *History of the French* by Sismondi, one of the most anti-clerical and anti-tyrannical reviews of the long history of Italy's neighbour, *History of the Swiss* by Paul-Henri Mallet, far removed from the feudal nostalgia of von Müller, and the work of William Coxe, the historian of the Habsburgs. When his activities ceased in 1841, Bettoni could rightly claim to be a pioneer of translated history books.

Some of the titles were extraordinarily reassuring, whilst others were quite problematic and required some intervention. Of all those listed, *Decline and Fall* was perhaps the most controversial, especially in the role of inaugural book of the British series.

In actual fact, in issuing the thirteen volumes of the complete Italian version of *Decline and Fall*, Nicolò Bettoni was publishing at least four different works; two were wholly unaltered reproductions of the Pisan second edition interrupted in 1799, whilst the other two were directly from the Milanese theologian-censors of the early 1820s. In addition, Chapter XVI was followed by Nicola Spedalieri's well-known *Refutation Essay* of Chapters XV and XVI. Furthermore, a series of anonymous letters addressed to two British Catholic priests were included at various points up to the end of the Italian volume VIII. Bettoni took these materials from the second Pisan edition, and the six original volumes that completed the work and that were basically by Davide Bertolotti were no less significant. It was merely that the strategy had changed; there

¹⁷ MARIA PIA CASALENA, 'Nascita di una capitale transnazionale: le traduzioni nella Milano dell'Ottocento,' in *Stranieri all'ombra del duce. Le traduzioni durante il fascismo*, ed. Anna Ferrando (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2019), 37–51.

were now precise annotations full of theological, historical, moral and even rhetorical amendments and corrections, followed in turn by a general assessment of the errors of the last five volumes. The Pisan materials and Milanese annotations amounted to dozens of pages which ultimately entirely demolished the part of *Decline and Fall* dedicated to Christianity and its role in the Western and Eastern Roman world.

Bettoni offered some kind of justification for this sort of intervention in the introduction to the 13-volume series. He chose not to do so personally, preferring instead to entrust this task to the translator Bertolotti.

I present you, dear Reader, the *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* written by Edward Gibbon and here fully and faithfully translated from the *original English* language into Italian. Not a single idea or important word has been removed from it, changed or added. [...]

My work consists in two parts: one concerns the amendment of volumes of this work already available in Italian in the Pisan publications of Monsignor Fabbroni, the other focuses on the remaining volumes, translated into our language by myself for the first time.

[...] I must now add one other thing. The scepticism of Edward Gibbon on religious matters has attracted considerable and intense censorship. His main critics include Nicola Spedalieri, famous author of “*Diritti dell’Uomo*” and a worthy rival for such an illustrious historian and philosopher. To calm the minds and offer, as others have said, an antidote to the poison, at the end of Chapter 16 I have added the Compendium of the Refutation of Gibbon, written by the apologist of the Roman Church. The three *letters addressed to Mr. Foothead and Mr. Kirk, English Catholics*, will follow Chapter 25 and hence, allay the fears of the most servile.

I could have included many erudite notes, relying for this purpose on the work of several prominent foreigners. But those by the Author are already so abundant I deemed it inopportune to bury the text under more notes and limited my intervention to appending very few brief annotations that you will find printed in Italics. For these alone can I be expected to be accountable.¹⁸

Davide Bertolotti was taking too much credit; of course, it would not have been very strategic to present a work while admitting that half of it was not original. Furthermore, in another excerpt he claimed to have corrected many errors in the Pisan translation, almost certainly meaning linguistic errors. Yet, the text of the Italian version of the first eight volumes appeared extremely uniform, following the English original literally, whereas the volumes by Piedmont-born Bertolotti suggested a certain reliance on the French versions. Nevertheless, regardless of the linguistic details, the later Pisan edition had already presented Spedalieri’s brief essay and other contentious material, as was indeed stated in the page that Bettoni’s edition proposed again at the end of the eighth volume:

¹⁸ GIBBON, ‘Avvertimento,’ in *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell’Impero romano*, I, V–VIII.

The Reader will undoubtedly have admired far-reaching and profound erudition in this work and an incisive and energetic style and in its Author a mind capable of great things. We therefore wish him long life and leisure in his old age; however, at the same time, we also urge him to be more respectful of the divine religion of Jesus Christ and the illustrious Champions that supported it [...]. It will always harm the fame of a writer who often speaks of a religion, whose only fear is not being understood, to show that indeed, he does not understand it and moreover, that he does not recognise this. If this can be said of Mr Gibbon, it is because of the many annotations, either separate or in the form of a letter, we made in the previous eight volumes and individually, in the solid refutation [...] by Mr. Abbate Niccola Spedalieri, who is also responsible for the Essay we included in the third tome.¹⁹

Theology and historiography

Nicola Spedalieri's *Refutation* dated back to 1784. The Pisan publisher had succeeded in gleaning a comprehensive summary from it, placing it precisely where Gibbon attributed to Christianity some of the responsibility for the fall of the Roman Empire. Doubtless more famous for his essay on human rights, Spedalieri had nevertheless been one of the earliest critics of *Decline and Fall*, brilliantly providing the 'modern' and 'Italian' response²⁰ to the bad cosmopolitan teachings represented by the British historian.

In proposing the topic of the chapter, despite the ambiguity with which Christian opinion is explained and the claims he [Gibbon] makes of *respecting the primary reason for the rapid progress of the Christian Church*, he induces the reader sufficiently to realise that he intends to prove that nothing in this event is seen as supernatural, but is entirely due to *natural causes*. If this were true, religion would be stripped of the virtuous proof, that in favour of its divine origin is gathered by the way in which it established itself and the speed with which it spread. He leaves no stone unturned to demolish this proof; although we shall make very little effort to support it. / However, our analysis is not important for this reason *alone*. Aversion for the supernatural has again led the Author to deny the miracles of the early centuries, those by the Apostles, those by Jesus Christ and other miracles in general, and to even exercise his biting sarcasm against the mysteries and morality of the Revealed Religion [...].²¹

Spedalieri had not withdrawn from this challenge, deciding to organise his *Refutation* dialectically and to demolish Gibbon on the plane of logic, before doing so on the terrain of faith. Therefore, the southern Italian philosopher identified the theses and challenged them using the weapons of Roman theology to demonstrate, firstly, their many contradictions and unfoundedness. Spedalieri was fully aware that the most serious accusation Gibbon had made against the early Christians was that they had first

¹⁹ GIBBON, 'Avvertimento', 197–98.

²⁰ GIUSEPPE CIMBALI, 'Nicola Spedalieri e le sue apologie del Cristianesimo', *Rassegna Nazionale* 8 (1886), 3–31 and 229–58.

²¹ GIBBON, 'Saggio di confutazione de' due capi XV e XVI dell'Istoria di Edoardo Gibbon spettanti all'esame del Cristianesimo. Compendio di un'opera di Niccola Spedalieri,' in *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, III, 114–233: 117–18.

weakened and ultimately extinguished the civil and military power of the Romans. Although Gibbon only openly claimed this in another chapter, Spedalieri identified the tainted core of the entire work as Chapters XV and XVI and many of the objections he made in 1784 would resurface in the later appendices and notes to Bettoni's edition.

Moving from Jerusalem to Rome, the Author marvels that Christians, as Gibbon stated, were so horrified by any sign of national cult. [...] The Author teases on the devil, as if without his intervention Idolatry were not the most heinous of all sins. *Demons were creators, patrons and objects of Idolatry* as they tempted men against the precept of honouring God, as every day they tempt them with other duties. / All that was missing in the history of the overindulgences of the human spirit was to make a panegyric of Idolatry. The Author filled the empty space: however, his eulogy can only be appreciated by those whose ideas and longings end in the senses. *Superstition always appeared under the guise of pleasure and often of virtue* and we know what pleasure it delivered in triumph. Virtue and sensual pleasure form a newly invented complex idea.²²

Despite remaining faithful to dialectic rigour, Spedalieri did not hesitate to attack Gibbon even on more strictly historical ground. In so doing, he prepared the ground for the work of the author of the Milanese addenda 30 years later. He necessarily concluded that Gibbon's sin was not 'only' that of heterodoxy – or the preferred term of the time, 'scepticism' – what is more, he was not even a very good historian.

The Author having believed he had proved that Christianity was indebted in its establishment and progress to purely natural causes put it – as he says – into a *historical framework*, but really it is imaginary and has the aim of confirming his intent. In so doing, falsifying the testimony of Chrysostom and abusing of an extract by Origen and another by Eusebius, he makes an ideal calculation of the number of Christians in a single place and then is even in the habit of deducing general conjectures. He then criticises the ancient writers, both Gentiles and Christians who, with a single voice despite having different objectives, were astounded by the spread of the Gospels; and troubles himself in particular, with an extract from Pliny with such vain efforts that he succeeded in achieving nothing more than revealing that clear spirit of bias he sought to conceal.²³

Naturally, Spedalieri did not address the considerations on the government, institutions, army and politics that the author had sown in the first 14 chapters. What he sought to defend was the Christian Empire that had been the cradle of the throne of the Pope of Rome and the theatre of the most genuine interpretation of the Gospels.

One of Spedalieri's priorities was to reiterate the verity of the Tridentine faith and, above all, to defend the cult of miracles. It was necessary to defend it immediately because, when turning his focus to the Barbarian centuries, Gibbon announced he was going to take his ironic treatment of the exploitation of popular credulity even further.

²² GIBBON, 'Saggio di confutazione de' due capi XV e XVI dell'Istoria di Edoardo Gibbon,' 129–30.

²³ GIBBON, 'Saggio di confutazione de' due capi XV e XVI dell'Istoria di Edoardo Gibbon,' 171.

Being committed [Gibbon] to proving that the miracles attributed to the ancient Church were illusions or deceptions, trying thereafter to seriously prove that *deceptions and illusions helped to convince the Infidels* would have been tantamount to contradicting himself. / So, we must consider as laughable the fact that the Gentiles would renounce their own religion and enter the Church, persecuted by the principle of mere *curiosity*. It would be a new moral principle to cause a change of heart and move it from libertinism to the extreme of a pure and austere life. [...] At that time, the Romans were too illuminated [...] Now, having joined the Church too easily, how could they remain there were their expectations not met? If there were no miracles performed, the Proselytes could not find any. Who enchanted them? [...] / It would be puerile to wish to persevere in such palpable absurdity: let us rather look at what the efforts of the adversary really focus on. He did not want miracles of any kind or at any time: he attacked the miracles of the early centuries, those of the Apostles and Jesus Christ and in general, any event that was not in the order of nature. [...] / [...] let us be allowed to reflect on the fact and say that, if the Gentiles came to the faith in droves, this is clear proof of the verity of the miracles that were said to have taken place.²⁴

The next 15 chapters of *Decline and Fall* were interspersed with three *Anonymous Letters* addressed to two English Catholic priests. Set out as a sort of diary, the three letters focused on and attacked precise points and topics which were particularly inherent to the history of the Christian Church. Although the comments used were of a more specifically historiographical nature compared to Spedalieri, they still concluded that Gibbon was an unreliable historian. Focusing primarily on chapters XVII to XXXII, the interlocutors involved in these *Letters* found themselves having to verify and dispute several references not only to religious, but also political and civil history. These included the chapters on Julian the Apostate,²⁵ Constantine and Theodosius, as well as events surrounding the first councils, including the definitive formation of the dogmas of Catholicism.²⁶ The two recipients, Mr Foothead and Mr Kirk, were presented as deacons about to be ordained as priests in their homeland: hence, they were two authorities, who, in the England of 1822–23, also represented a community that had been driven to the margins of the government and institutions so dear to Edward Gibbon. The *Test Acts* had not yet been abolished so, in their homeland, Foothead and Kirk were not too far from the proselytes of the early centuries of the Christian era. By addressing them, rather than having his criticism then issue directly from the authority of the Roman Papacy, the anonymous author also managed to show the truths and triumphs of a Church that was still suffering, even more so after the violence of the Great Revolution. However, as such, he also succeeded in the

²⁴ GIBBON, 'Saggio di confutazione de' due capi XV e XVI dell'Istoria di Edoardo Gibbon,' 139–43.

²⁵ GLEN W. BOWERSOCK, 'Gibbon and Julian,' in *Gibbon et Rome à la lumière de l'historiographie moderne* (Geneva: Droz, 1977), 191–217.

²⁶ GIBBON, 'Riflessioni d'ignoto autore sopra i capitoli XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV e XXV della Storia della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano di Edoardo Gibbon divise in tre lettere dirette ai Sigg. Foothead e Kirk cattolici Inglesi,' in *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, V, 113–70.

enterprise of exonerating England – bastion of the anti-French reaction – from what thus became Gibbon's specific mistake due to his overly passionate reading of Voltaire.

I think I see in Mr. Gibbon a writer who is, in truth, elegant and erudite, but who at times disgracefully contradicts himself and at others does not question certain facts of Ecclesiastical History that whilst they may not be entirely false, are at least doubtful or undefined; on the contrary, he denies and refutes those that have been authenticated and are more certain. This is always done with the aim of damaging and demoralizing Catholicism and always demonstrating an unspeakable disdain for the Holy Fathers, faithful depositaries and tireless supporters of those venerable dogmas he hardly knows and yet disfigures.²⁷

The first letter concentrated in particular on the figure of Julian the Apostate and even more so on the affirmation that the Christians had taken the anti-Christian persecutions out of perspective. In many respects, Gibbon admired the young emperor, but he also considered him to be overly concerned with philosophy. While he had not given in to admiration without exception, in the words of the anonymous author, however, it seemed that in the pages of *Decline and Fall* Julian the Apostate had become the hero *par excellence* – an even more serious fact after the dreadful treatment of Constantine.

You can already imagine that he [Julian the Apostate] would be the hero for Mr. Gibbon and basically, that is the case. The virtues of Julian, he says, were inimitable and his throne was the seat of reason, of virtue and perhaps of vanity; vanity that our very same Critic, forgetting the perhaps, calls excessive. [...] I shall only ask Mr. Gibbon firstly, did Julian constantly or at least often *remember that fundamental maxim of Aristotle, that real virtue is found equidistant from opposite vices*? Now, he will reply *that the nature of Julian was to rarely remember*. Therefore, his throne was not the seat of reason and virtue and so Mr. Gibbon has contradicted himself. I ask you secondly, are injustice, ingratitude, dishonesty and frivolity reasonable and virtuous?²⁸

In the third letter, the judgement was even clearer, refuting many of Gibbon's thesis concerning the 'internal' reasons for the crisis of paganism. Thus, Gibbon did not limit himself to defending 'idolaters' and defaming Christians and Catholics. Gibbon was an advocate of idolatry, a pagan out of time. Once again, religion and politics were mixed in the letter addressed to the two English priests. By even wishing to see the Roman Senate at work at the time of Theodosius, the British historian was careless, if not indeed at fault.

I believe that Mr. Gibbon demanded that, before promulgating any penal law against the rites of Paganism, the Caesars should let the Senate decree which cult should form the religion of the Romans. Well, Theodosius, whom he attempts to make more odious

²⁷ GIBBON, 'Riflessioni d'ignoto autore sopra i capitoli XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV e XXV della Storia della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano di Edoardo Gibbon divise in tre lettere dirette ai Sigg. Foothead e Kirk cattolici Inglesi,' in *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, V, 113–70: 115.

²⁸ GIBBON, 'Riflessioni d'ignoto autore sopra i capitoli XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV e XXV,' 120–21.

than any other, as if the government of Rome were still on the foot it was on when the licence of the Bacchanals was solemnly prescribed, granted the Senate such a decision. And those honourable ranks decided it should be the cult of JESUS CHRIST. Such a beautiful and noble act and even more glorious for Theodosius as it was not necessary, should have been applauded by a real historian; but the malicious need to be coherent must always add *fatto pulcherrimo atque justissimo imposturae calumniam*. So it is that we expect from Mr. Gibbon the *freedom of those votes* granted by Theodosius for *affectation*, indeed *removed from the hopes and fears inspired by his presence*.²⁹

It seems rather peculiar that the only extensively political refutations were addressed specifically to English subjects. Taking up the baton from the same writer of these letters, the theologian-censor of the Milanese edition would limit himself to recalling, only occasionally and in a fairly concise manner, that the duty of every Catholic is obedience to the legitimate sovereign and government. However, the opportunities for those *reminders* were very few and they never gave rise to specific discussion. As mentioned above, Gibbon's work was basically able to be published on the Italian peninsula at the cost of significant interventions on the historical-religious sections, whilst its examination of political aspirations went almost untouched.

Basically, the *Refutation* by Spedalieri and the three *Letters* to the Englishmen could have been missed by readers of either of the two versions. Around 1820–24, non-English- or French-speaking readers who wished to read Gibbon would certainly make no mistake as to the different points of view held by the author and Spedalieri. Those wordy materials could easily be ignored. This is what Nicolò Bettoni and the censors close to him must have thought when deciding how to present the continuation to the work. A different kind of intervention on the many hundreds of pages translated by Bertolotti was required. This intervention was more precise, more detailed and more far-reaching. It was necessary to disrupt the reading of the faithfully translated text by adding new notes at every turn and making them sufficiently easy to detect to ensure they would immediately stand out.

In books IX to XIII of the Bettoni edition there are over 150 notes written by N.N. Most of these are fairly short, some a little longer and others are up to three or four pages long; some are even critical notes about the notes written by Gibbon. At the end of the work, about halfway through volume XIII, ten more pages of footnotes refer back to and further expand on some of the author's more controversial sections or supposed errors. Together, these notes amount to the same number of pages as the critical materials of the first volume. Written entirely in italics and separate from the rest of the text, they could not easily be ignored, also because they were, on the whole, so clear and conclusive that they provided comprehensive analysis in just a few

²⁹ GIBBON, 'Riflessioni d'ignoto autore sopra i capitoli XXIX, XXX e XXXI della Storia della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano di Edoardo Gibbon divise in tre lettere dirette ai Sigg. Foothead e Kirk Inglesi cattolici,' in *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, VI, 232–71: 249–50.

sentences. Indeed, N.N. came across as a theologian and he undoubtedly had an understanding of the exigencies of episcopal and papal censorship.

In writing the notes to the final five volumes of the great work by Edward Gibbon we have mainly aimed, by developing and describing the dogmatic content and ecclesiastical history, to make the things he said on dogmatic or other important issues innocuous and to provide the reader with strong and concise sections that could make a strong impression were they not educated in the Holy Scriptures or ecclesiastic and civil history. Moreover, we did not set out to, nor do we claim to have purged Gibbon's work of everything the good believer cannot accept. The undertaking and difficult execution of a complete refutation would have almost doubled the volumes of the work; a serious drawback. We trust our work shall not be disagreeable to the learned and shall be useful and pleasing to those who are not.³⁰

From volumes IX to XIII of the Bettoni edition there was still room, more than once, to correct Gibbon's approach. More specifically, the Milanese censor focused on recalling and validating the Tridentine Catholic orthodoxy. This was even at the cost of refuting entire chapters and, as a result, rejecting every single point of solidarity towards all of the text's novation. As mentioned above, this extended to the political field, although only insofar as strictly necessary. In conclusion, I perceive a strong censorship also from the 'theologians' of Restoration-era Lombardy-Veneto, who specifically focused on every suspicion of spiritual or civil heterodoxy and on eliminating, in a 'balanced' but equally firm manner, the many vestiges of revolutionary religious vandalism remaining in the text. Nevertheless, if what bothered the Pisan publishers about *Decline and Fall* was its anti-Christian or neo-pagan spirit, thirty years later, in Milan they inveighed primarily against Gibbon's diffused incredulity, scepticism and presumed agnosticism, mainly shown through an irony now considered veritable iconoclastic sarcasm. Furthermore, this time, the chapters dealt with the Catholic cult and some of its foundations, which were still clearly functioning in the early nineteenth century.

With regard to heresies, the clarifications were mainly clear-cut and concise, unless it proved necessary to correct entire paragraphs. For example, when Gibbon theorised a certain natural tendency of Christian theology to lead to discord, N.N. immediately reacted:

Discord was introduced amongst the followers of Christ because many of them, in other words, the first heretics, drifted away from the righteous belief of the New Testament, from where the terms Orthodox and Heterodox, Catholic and Heretic came. The decisions of the general councils determining Orthodoxy, in other words the system of correct judgements around the divinity of Jesus Christ, did not disagree amongst each other and explaining righteously and fully the Gospel, established the dogmas that people were to believe as different and incorrect opinions emerged, such as the heresies

³⁰ GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, XIII, 353.

by certain bishops and priests even assembled in clandestine meetings known as *Conciliabules*, to distinguish them from legitimate and Orthodox councils.³¹

And when Gibbon found the cult of Mary ridiculous:

Having been decided by the Councils as legitimate interpreters of the Old and New Testament, that (as we saw) the Word Jesus Christ, humanized by the same substance as God the Father, was born of the Virgin Mary not by the hand of man, but by the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity, and thus clearly that Mary was the Mother of God, the Latins or in other words, Western Christians, were not superstitious as not all Catholics are today, if they believed and still believe in a separate cult worshipping this marvellous Virgin [...]. The cult of the Virgin Mary is not therefore, a superstitious act that is not established and approved by the Councils, that is, by the Church. At least, the expression used by the Author, *elevated almost to the rank of a Goddess* is extremely unfortunate [...].³²

However, even the Milanese censor-theologians had learnt the lesson of the pastoral most sensitive to the reformed and the illuminist criticisms. They had to concede that some of their attacks were indeed valid. It was, therefore, a matter of admitting that certain things had happened, while nevertheless refuting how Gibbon derived from this a general mocking condemnation of the entire Roman theological and ecclesiastical set-up.

We can briefly look at some examples. In volume IX, when Gibbon exposed the crimes of certain prominent bishops, the reply was: 'N.N.: There was no need to manifest such unpleasant things to the faithful: we know that there were and there will be sinful Bishops, the court of Penitence has been created for them too.'³³ Then, a little later, when Gibbon narrated the rebellions of some sects: 'N.N.: Such were the cries of a troop of rioting and insurrectionary monks, disapproved by real Christians that love peace and that are obedient to their sovereigns.'³⁴ And in response to the historian's apparent justification of the right to resistance when speaking of the heresy of the Paulicians: 'N.N. We remind the reader that rebellion is always an act that deserves punishment not triumph.'³⁵

Lastly, when Gibbon openly condemns the policy of indulgences at the time of the First Crusade:

N.N.: The ill of those times, which involved lay people and ecclesiasts equally, and the errors of the very discipline they intended to remedy, have already been described at length by historians. The progress of civilization, the system of laws, the notions of real public good and good philosophy, which began and has grown slowly but steadily following the cultivation of literature and the arts, that disposed and elevated souls,

³¹ GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, IX, 5–6.

³² GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, IX, 112.

³³ GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, IX, 64.

³⁴ GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, IX, 74.

³⁵ GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, XI, 25.

would lead us to an exceedingly superior state, hence we look back with compassion on those past centuries, in which we had a false sense of indulgence.³⁶

As has become clear, the theologians decided to make a deal with modern historiography and its monuments from Protestant (and even sceptic) Europe. There could be no denying what had been documented; rather, a recommendation was made by faithful Catholics to interpret it correctly. It was not a matter of reason, but a question of good sense strewn with reverence. Thus, the new European historiography that began in the eighteenth century in a Protestant land was able to gain right of citizenship in restored, absolutist and Catholic countries without having to either totally reject or betray or cut the text.

I have skipped volume X, which was entirely consecrated to the first chapters on Mohammed and Islam. It is, however, a privileged vantage point for measuring the strategies of N.N. given that, as we know, Gibbon had attributed considerable recognition to the Mohammedan revolution,³⁷ basically comparing Islam to other monotheisms and commenting, on several occasions, on the 'goodness' of the first Islamic civilization.³⁸ As with Julian the Apostate, while the historian had not abandoned himself to boundless uncritical admiration, in some parts he could appear more inclined towards Mohammedan theology than towards the Catholic orthodoxy.

According to N.N., Islam was clearly one of the many forms of 'deism'.³⁹ Therefore, Gibbon was mistaken on everything. Yet, on the whole, the volume aroused very few, short comments, almost as if it were simply a matter of thwarting contagion from Gibbon's exoticism. Here they are, in order:

Mohammed's flag is not sacred for the Christian reader; this adjective is poorly applied to the flag of the fortunate leader of enthusiasts who, with their weapons, spread their religion rapidly in many vast regions of Asia and Africa.⁴⁰

The Latin Church believes, as revealed, that Mary conceived by the hand of the Holy Spirit, it also believes that she was immaculate in her conception and does not need to take this latter belief from the book of Mohammed, known as the Koran; if the Immaculate Conception is indicated in it, this can only be even more in favour of this belief.⁴¹

[...] nor does Jesus Christ need that fawning respect Mohammed professed towards him and even less does it matter to Christians that Muslims venerated Jerusalem.⁴²

³⁶ GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, XI, 286.

³⁷ ROLANDO MINUTI, 'La cultura illuministica e l'Islam,' in *Alterità. Esperienze e percorsi nell'Europa moderna*, ed. Lucia Felici (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2014), 87–99.

³⁸ BERNARD LEWIS, 'Gibbon on Muhammad,' *Daedalus* 105 (1976), 89–101.

³⁹ GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, X, 115.

⁴⁰ GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, X, 20.

⁴¹ GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, X, 59.

⁴² GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, X, 212.

The fanaticism of Muslims, that made them victorious and propagators of their religion, should not be compared nor confused with the zeal that fuelled Christians to defend the Holy Sepulchre.⁴³

It is true that, basically, orthodox does not mean other than a man of righteous opinions; it is true that Mohammedan Arabs believed their religious opinion was such and that it was therefore, orthodox for them; however, according to our theology, the word orthodox can only be used to describe Catholics and it is poorly applied to Mohammedans.⁴⁴

However, what seemed most to irk N.N., even in a work full of errors, was precisely Gibbon's style: in other words, his widespread derision of the things sacred to Catholicism. I offer three examples, concerning very delicate arguments which are, respectively, the thesis of the Council of Chalcedon, the dogma-mystery of Transubstantiation and the miracles attributed to the Holy Sepulchre.

Extremely serious and respectable matters should never be treated with rhetorical figures that enclose a trick; we must handle them with theological reason.⁴⁵

Instead of curiosity (it being Transubstantiation) it should have been called a serious consideration of the theologians, still with the aim of explaining the mysterious extracts of the Gospel, to remove the apparent objections, that could present themselves and to show believers the reasons for credibility, in order to hold firm the faith.⁴⁶

Since Jesus Christ, who performed many miracles as we know from the Gospels, could operate this too, the expression *pious fraud* should not have been used.⁴⁷

Despite tackling the causes of the terrible decline of Rome and presenting a vindication of Italian secular humanism, including Lorenzo Valla, which N.N. would certainly not have liked, the final chapters of *Decline and Fall* did not contain a single note.

As mentioned, there were 150 notes in five volumes. The style had changed considerably compared to both Spedalieri and the sender of the three letters: it was much simpler and more direct and tending, in a word, towards the 'popular' rather than the erudite. Undoubtedly, the Milan edition of Gibbon offered a precious essay on the behaviour of Lombard-Veneto theologian-censors in the early Restoration and their ability to mediate between authority and imposed modernity, a skill that recent studies have proven was possessed by some censors of the other 'directly' Habsburgian state of the Italian peninsula, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany.⁴⁸

The most radical readers could enjoy Gibbon in the original language or in French. Soon after, around the mid-1830s, translations would literally explode onto

⁴³ GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, X, 213.

⁴⁴ GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, X, 247.

⁴⁵ GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, IX, 65.

⁴⁶ GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, IX, 253.

⁴⁷ GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, XII, 259.

⁴⁸ DOMENICO MARIA BRUNI, *Con regolata indifferenza, con attenzione costante. Potere politico e parola stampata nel Granducato di Toscana (1814-1847)* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2015).

the Milanese literary scene, which still heavily favoured novels and theatre or science, technology or medicine rather than modern historiography. Even on the eve of 1848, the Milanese, who were the most fortunate Italian readers, could still only choose from very few truly interesting historical titles and many of these came, paradoxically, from one of the new enemies of the liberal-national movement.

Bettoni's version would remain the only complete Italian version of *Decline and Fall* for the whole of the nineteenth century. Readers in the Reign of Italy could ignore the appendices and the notes by N.N., as undoubtedly many readers had done in the 1820s and 30s. Certainly, until 1861, the translated one was an exclusively Lombard-Veneto or perhaps Tuscan Gibbon.⁴⁹ As for Davide Bertolotti, although he translated a great deal from English and French, he never enjoyed a good reputation amongst critics in northern Italy; they even accused him of furtively translating Anglo-Saxon works from the available French versions. As I have suggested, this is probably what happened with Gibbon too.

In conclusion, neither on the strictly specialist level nor in the histories of Lombard publishing, and even less so in liberal-national commemorations, would the Gibbon-Bettoni operation or even the entire 'Biblioteca storica di tutte le nazioni' collection enjoy public recognition. Although the merits of the series are undeniable, to this day this Bettoni's operation should be examined as part of the history of translations in Italy. It was the Gibbon venture that made the works of the 'Scottish school' and then liberal French Romanticism acceptable at a time when, almost year on year, Milan was publishing the masterpieces of Chateaubriand and the apologetic and devotional works most cherished by the Jesuits, whilst in Venice, little was translated at all, and in nearby Turin, under Carlo Felice, the 'champion' of translations was an ultra-Catholic publisher – Giacinto Marietti.

Conclusions

In the last decade, in Italian historiography there has been tangible interest in the practices and strategies of the translation of foreign works. Still indebted to translation studies, these debates have tackled the specific problems of translating historiographical language and the mediation of historical knowledge and research with regard to the international standards of the discipline.⁵⁰ The useful poly-system category used by the earlier translation studies obliges us to also consider translated works as elements of national production, in literature, and both the human and social sciences.

The analysis carried out in this article considers an extremely well-known work. Its introduction to Italy took place in three stages, the latter of which has been studied

⁴⁹ A partial forgery appeared a decade later for Tipografia Lao in Palermo. Later still, in 1841, a version also appeared by a publishing house based in Lugano.

⁵⁰ See, for example, the forums: 'Storiografie a confronto: linguaggi e concetti nelle traduzioni,' *Storicamente* 11 (2015); 'Racconto, interpretazione, immaginazione. Tradurre la saggistica storica,' *Tradurre* 20 (2021).

here The early Restoration was a difficult period for politics and culture, but nevertheless seminal to the formation of historiographic science and practice, not only in Italy, but throughout Europe. In Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, we also saw the national histories of Hume, Robertson and leading French authors (re)enter the Italian peninsula in the age of Romanticism. With the practice of linguistic transfer, a scandalous masterpiece could finally creep into the folds of the common 'historical sense' that was taking hold along with national sentiment and that was the primary cause of the censors' alarm, and zeal.

Bettoni and his theologian cohorts implemented a complex strategy of incorporating and including hybrid materials and interventions, without, however, ever touching on the specifics of faithful linguistic yield. It was the same strategy implemented for other controversial modern works although, sometimes – as in the case of Stefano Ticozzi, who tackled Sismondi⁵¹ – the translators themselves were the first to intervene on the notes too. We know, from the studies that emerged on Ticozzi, who was also from Milan, that the Lombard censors usually did not tackle lengthy works consisting of many volumes, considering them to be a luxury destined to few purchasers and more often than not, rarely read in their entirety. Yet, Nicolò Bettoni initially concentrated on multi-volume works. There were no other editions of Gibbon – as there were no further editions of Robertson, Hume or von Müller or much later, of *Cours* by François Guizot – therefore, we need to assess the level of popularization achieved by the efforts of the Pisan translator and Davide Bertolotti.

The nineteenth-century Italian edition of *Decline and Fall* has proven to be suited to highlighting all the apparent paradoxes invariably linked to the work of cultural mediation in such a closed historical-political context as the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia in 1820–24. A scandalous, inaccurate, misleading and morally harmful text was allowed to get through in full respect of its spirit, or rather in the detailed precision of every single affirmation, whilst a significant number of materials and notes were entrusted with contradicting many of these points. Sometimes taken from the first books of the British edition, sometimes from the French version, nobody doubted that the translation should keep faith with the original. Even in the twentieth century, other phases in the history of books in Italy would trace fairly different outlines of the role of the translator, who not infrequently would be asked to betray, distort, cut and rewrite the original texts. This was not the case in the Milan of the Habsburgs and, from existing studies, we can presume that often this was not the case in the divided Italy of the age of the Risorgimento either.

Although certainly a minority compared to novels, opera librettos or other types of theatre pieces, and often even less common than technical-scientific works too, at least the prominent cases of translations of modern historiographical works in Italy prior to 1848 deserve to be analysed. The analysis should take account of the existence

⁵¹ MARIA IOLANDA PALAZZOLO, 'La censura e la Storia delle Repubbliche di Sismondi,' in *Sismondi e la civiltà toscana*, ed. Francesca Sofia (Florence: Olschki, 2001), 199–212.

of a North-South divide (as well as internal divisions in both the North and South), in order to reconstruct the historical culture of Italians in the 'century of history' more accurately and enthusiastically, but also in order to reconstruct the exotic elements that helped make up the common collective historical imagination of the era. Taking into account the time delays, it is possible to appreciate in greater detail how the eighteenth century and Enlightenment continued to circulate during the golden years of the Romantics.

Returning, in conclusion, to Lefevere and Bassnett, and translation studies, we should remember that every operation in the field of cultural mediation, as indeed every other cultural operation, must take into account many variables including, in the first instance, the various *patrons*. Here, we saw half-hearted Tuscan Illuminists, modern turncoat entrepreneurs of the early Restoration, a controversial translator, commentators and champions of Tridentine orthodoxy, and zealous theologian-censor-annotators at work. As well as the great historians, we also need to take these players into account every time we tackle issues surrounding the circulation and transfer of national historiographies in the contemporary world.