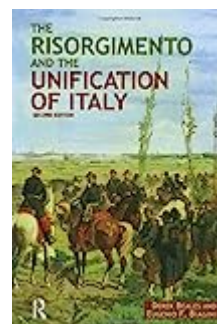




Derek Beales, Eugenio F. Biagini. *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy.* Harlow: Longman, 2002. xvi + 297 pp. \$25.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-582-36958-0.



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Fare L'Italia Anche Col Diavolo?

Derek Beales's *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy* has long been a classic introduction to the unification of Italy. The book, originally published in 1971 by Allen & Unwin in the series Historical Problems: Studies and Documents, offered students a concise overview of the complex history of the Risorgimento and its connection with Italian unification. Like all the titles in the series, the book offered students a fine series of contemporary documents, all in translation for those who could not read Italian. This primary material, which illustrated the themes treated in the main text, made up about half of the book. In conformity with the other titles in the series, Beales's essay was merely entitled "Introduction." In seven short sections Beales traced the history of the Risorgimento and its repercussions on notions of unity, starting from the period 1748-1815. He then described the developments from the Restoration to 1832, devoted considerable space to the period up to the revolutionary year of 1848, and moved to the decisive phase of unification from 1859 to 1861. In his preface Beales regretted that, in the compass of the series, he had found it impossible to illustrate the influence of the economic development of Italy on the process of unification.

Although Professor Beales's study has long been a favorite textbook in courses on nineteenth-century Italy, over the years it has become clear that, besides economic development, there were many other themes that would merit inclusion in such an introduction. The new edition, co-written with Eugenio F. Biagini, Reader in Modern British and European History at the University of Cambridge, covers a much wider range of relevant issues for the unification of Italy. New chapters have been devoted to questions such as the Italian language and the role of women in the process of unification, as well as to a series of relevant issues after 1861, such as the Venetian situation from 1862, and the problem of brigandage in the south once the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies had been annexed by the Kingdom of Sardinia. This much enforces the original project, as a complete unification of Italy had, of course, not yet been reached in 1861. Moreover, Beales's original chapters have been completely overhauled to include recent historical scholarship on the subject. The original set-up of the Historical Problems series has been maintained in this new edition. All the original primary material is reprinted, while the new topics are illustrated by further documents, which

now grow from sixteen to twenty-three. A brief chronology of events between 1748 and 1876 has also been added.

When *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy* was first published in 1971, Beales openly acknowledged his “overriding” debt to Denis Mack Smith. In the new edition (although this phrase disappears from the preface) the authors still say that Mack Smith’s influence is apparent throughout the book. He inspired its original approach, which, they maintain, is still valid. They see Mack Smith’s work, in the wake of the second World War, as justly emphasizing “the disputes and uncertainties of Italian patriots during the critical phase of unification” while avoiding misplaced “patriotic grandiloquence” (p. 6). For example, they endorse Mack Smith’s analysis that Cavour doubted not only the practicability of Garibaldi and the Thousand sailing for Sicily, but also the desirability of Garibaldi conquering the South. Beales and Biagini also emphasize what had stood central in the first edition of *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy*, namely that the early part of the Risorgimento was characterized by reform which was mostly the work of foreign rulers, and that a feeling of Italian nationality emerged only in its later stages. The authors see this as a distinctly British contribution to Italian historiography, which, since the 1980s, has increasingly been accepted by Italian historians too.

The new edition often critically reflects the findings of later generations of Italian historians. They acknowledge that modern scholars have become less nationalistic and less conditioned by Idealism, but they still disagree with many new interpretations. For example, they cannot endorse Alberto Banti’s view that commitment to the Risorgimento was an essentially generational phenomenon. Instead they doubt that any particular generation was decisive to the Risorgimento revival. Likewise, the authors have little sympathy for the recent revisionism of Roberto Martucci, whom they see as advancing a whole series of “conspiracy theories,” which argue that the whole process of unification was masterminded by Cavour, who, with Garibaldi as a puppet in his hands, controlled events from the start through the Piedmontese intelligence service. To Beales and Biagini this is hardly

more credible than the old nationalist rhetoric in Italian historiography.

Of the new chapters the ones on the Italian language and on the role of women are of particular interest. Recent Women’s Studies has had little impact on the study of the Risorgimento and its relation to Italian unification. In the chapter “Women and the Risorgimento,” the book offers interesting new insights showing that women’s political horizons were not limited to the home. One paragraph shows, through a series of Macchiaioli paintings of apparently domestic scenes, that the women depicted are fully aware of the political connotations of the work they are doing. Moreover, written sources by upper-class and bourgeois women show that they could see the unification of Italy as part of a wider agenda of liberation. As to language, the authors disagree with literary revisionists such as Tullio de Mauro. Notwithstanding widespread illiteracy, the “nineteenth century must be regarded as one of the most brilliant periods in the cultural history of modern Italy” (p. 75), they argue. Moreover, when compared to the linguistic homogeneity in other European countries, it is perfectly legitimate to speak of Italian as a national language. The authors often sympathize with the Italian situation by drawing attention to similar situations in other European countries.

The new chapters in *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy* appear to be the work of Eugenio Biagini, although the preface leaves space for some ambiguity. It attributes to Biagini not only the chapters on Venice (including the problem of brigandage) and the Italian economy, but also Beales’s re-written chapter on the revolutions of 1848-49. This seems unlikely. Again, there is no express claim of authorship for the new chapters on the Italian language and the role of women, while a non-existent eleventh chapter is referred to as written by Biagini. This confusion about authorship, however, is not indicative of the care and effort that went into writing the new edition. Beales and Biagini have produced an excellent and updated introduction to a complex period, a textbook that will appeal to new generations of British and American students on account of its clarity, completeness, and critical spirit.

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