Lay saints, remains, relics and mourning in Venice after Italian Resurgence (June 1867)

Abstract:

In this paper I examine the transferal to Venice of the remains of the Bandiera brothers from the south of Italy and of the Belfiore martyrs from Mantua, as well as their subsequent funerals, celebrated in Venice in 1867. It highlights the central role of the remains as relics, physical evidence of an heritage with the political objective of instilling a national identity. The Italian Risorgimento (1796 – 1861) produced a geographically united country, but Italy remained deeply divided in social, economic and political terms. Patriotic martyrdom was sacralized in the 19th and 20th centuries as a means of legitimizing the affirmation of nationalism and replacing traditional religion with a national religion. Mourning and funerals became important occasions for the celebration and construction of a national memory, especially in an civic calendar free of festivities and thus fertile ground for ideological investment by major institutions and by the various political factions. The relics of patriots became very important in this process. Borrowing a concept of the sacred from the Catholic religion, they readily earned a place in a country used to devotional customs.

Keywords: *Devotion, Martyrs, Memory, Mourning, Relics, Remains.*