

**Marcella Sutcliffe Pellegrino.** *Victorian Radicals and Italian Democrats.* Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society in partnership with Boydell & Brewer, 2014. 264 pp. \$90.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-86193-322-8.



**Reviewed by** Deborah A. Kaye

**Published on** H-Italy (August, 2015)

**Commissioned by** Matteo Pretelli (University of Naples "L'Orientale")

Few political exiles influenced British radicals and democrats in the 1830s-60s as the Italian republican Giuseppe Mazzini. Evident primarily in the pages of newspapers and periodicals, Mazzini's popularity with social reformers, artisans, as well as Oxford dons is the focus of a new book by Marcella Pellegrino Sutcliffe. Writing and researching from a transnational perspective on the history of both British ideas about Mazzini and Mazzini's influence in Britain, Pellegrino Sutcliffe conveys to us the enormous value in engaging in the developing field of transnational history. Indeed, as the author reminds us, understanding the nature of Victorian-era "Mazzinians" reveals key tensions between the official Risorgimento narrative proffered by British political elites and the narrative of the popular Risorgimento that resonated among ordinary Britons. Moreover, by focusing on provincial sources, in particular from the industrial North, Pellegrino Sutcliffe's work offers a fresh new perspective to challenge more traditional London-centered approaches on Mazzini's influence.

Mazzini's emergence as an important figure in both the national and provincial press was a result of the "letter-opening affair" in which the British government spied on Mazzini's mail. In the overwhelming denunciation of the affair in the provincial press creating "a moral uproar," Pellegrino Sutcliffe sees evidence of Mazzini's popularity in the North (p. 43). The response of editors such as George Jacob Holyoake of Birmingham's *Northern Star* to the affair boosted Mazzini's popularity among British radicals. This book reveals to us a wide variety of Mazzini's supporters in Britain and we marvel at the diversity. Among others disseminating the "essence of Mazzini's civil religion," Aurelio Saffi, the Oxford don makes an appearance as a key supporter who provided another base for Victorian Mazzinians (p. 88).

From the reaction to the establishment and defeat of the Roman Republic in 1849, key events in Risorgimento history move Pellegrino Sutcliffe's narrative along. Concerned with how the Roman Republic episode affected attitudes toward

Mazzini and the diehard Victorians who supported him, her excellent insights to varied responses in the British press reveal the dynamics of Mazzini's growing base of support in conservative Protestant circles. Other chapters reveal that key events in Risorgimento history did not always play to Mazzini's popularity abroad, but rather detracted from it. This is apparent from reactions to Pisacane affair, an aborted attempt at insurrection that raised suspicion in British circles against Mazzini (p. 84). Nevertheless, Victorian Mazzinians remained steadfast in their support of their hero Mazzini. After Italian unification, Victorian Mazzinians could be still be counted on as recruits for clandestine activities. By the time of Mazzini's death in 1872, his memory had become a preoccupation of his circle of followers in England. The last chapter of Pellegrino Sutcliffe's monograph follows the late nineteenth-century culture of co-operative tourism to Italy, revealing an interesting aspect of Anglo-Italian transnational exchange in their support of Mazzini ideals and his civic republicanism.

Pellegrino Sutcliffe's argument that Mazzinian ideals contributed in part to the British affinity for Italy offers us a unique perspective on British cultural history and it is for this reason that her work deserves our attention. It is, however, regrettable that she did not integrate her research into the liberal problematic of the post-Napoleonic period in European and Italian history.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-italy>

**Citation:** Deborah A. Kaye. Review of Pellegrino, Marcella Sutcliffe. *Victorian Radicals and Italian Democrats*. H-Italy, H-Net Reviews. August, 2015.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=44826>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.