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Banner With the Lion of St. Mark (banner) Italy, Venice, 1675.
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Secret History. An Early Survey

BY VIRGILIO ILARI

*To think bad is to sin,
but sometimes you guess*

The 12th edition of *La storia in piazza held on* March 30-April 2, 2023 in the Palazzo Ducale in Genoa, with 15 thousand attendees was dedicated to *secret history*, defending this literary genre from the “discredit usually poured against so-called conspiracy,” as a “search for the deep and almost never visible causes of historical events” and also quoting Ronald Syme¹. Among the 58 speeches were those of Luciano Canfora (Catilina), Giusto Traina (Julius Caesar’s last hours), Tommaso Braccini (Procopius), Barbara Frale (Templars), Franco Cardini (Fidel Castro and the CIA), Miguel Gotor and Massimo Mastrogregori (Moro Case) and Andrea Purgatori (Emanuela Orlandi).

1 The Unpublished Writings of Procopius

Secret history appears 10.7 million times on google, including 617 thousand in the title of a book. Adding up the Spanish, French, Italian, German and Russian equivalents brings the total to 12.5 million. Not counting synonyms and equivalents such as shadow or hidden. The total also includes references to modern editions of a work allegedly written in 550 or 557 A.D. by Procopius of Caesarea,

1 The concept recurs in Syme regarding the discrepancy between the Livyan narrative of Marcus Licinius Brutus’ campaign in Thrace and that transposed by Dion Cassius (on p. 73 of “Livy and Augustus,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 1959, pp. 27-87: “secret policy, scandal, anecdote and depreciation of the governments”) and in the cursory judgment on Cicero’s *de consiliis suis* as “secret history” (“Sallust and Bestia,” in *Approaching the Roman Revolution: Papers on Republican History*, ed. by Federico Santangelo, Oxford, 2016, pp. 132, 179). L. Canfora, *Catiline. A missed revolution*, Gius. Laterza & Sons, 2023.

in which the secretary of Belisarius and official historian of the urban policy of the Eastern Roman Empire and the wars against the Persians, Vandals and Goths demolished the glorious image of the emperor he himself incensed, painting him here as a demon destroyer of the empire with corruption, taxes, confiscations from senators and wars of conquest, and collecting episodes and backstories showing Justinian ignorant, bloodthirsty, vicious, thieving and Belisarius cowardly, weak and succumbing to his adulterous wife and unrestrainedly lustful Empress Theodora, moreover a former actress and prostitute².

By 550 Theodora had died, and perhaps the author of the pamphlet imagined a political change imminent that would allow its publication. But Belisarius and Justinian outlived Procopius, who died in 560, by a lustre. The libel thus appeared posthumously, it is not known when or where, and if there was any doubt about Procopius' actual authorship and the reliability of the accusations. In fact, the earliest record that has come down to us is from the 10th century, in a Byzantine encyclopedia (*Suidae Lexicon*, p. 889 Bekker) where it is mentioned among Procopius' works as "the so-called *Inediti (Anékdota)*, i.e., the ninth book of the deeds" of Justinian, described as "invective and comedy" (*psógos kai kômôdia*) against the emperor and his wife.

This brief quotation was for the next six centuries also the only known record of the *Anékdota* in the West. Generations of bibliophiles and humanists chased in vain for news of Byzantine incunabula of the work that had reached the West (one allegedly owned by the tenebrous Catherine de Medici), until two manuscripts (*Vat. Gr.* 16 and 1001), albeit deficient, were discovered by the First Keeper of the Vatican Library, the Ancona Greek scholar Nicolò Alemanni (1583-1626), who collated them, obtaining a single text and, with the patronage of Cardinal Scipione Corbelluzzi, pro-rector of the Library, already in 1620 prepared for the press, anticipating a similar initiative underway in Leiden, a critical edition of Procopius' libel, accompanied by the Latin translation and an acrimonious verification of the historical verisimilitude of the accusations made by the author against the imperial couple.

Alemanni's text, however, was not published until 1623, and printed in Lyon by Jean Juilleron, albeit at the expense of the Roman bookseller Andrea Brogiotti,

2 See on this point Hans-Georg Beck, *The Historian and His Victim: Theodora and Procopius*, Laterza, 1988.

a family member of the Barberini family and thus of the newly elected Pope Urban VIII. As Sabina Brevaglieri explains³, other works of particular philological or scientific importance produced by the curial circle were also published abroad, either because of the flooding of the Vatican Typography or to broaden their circulation. In the case of the *Anékdota*, the delay in publication and the decision to place it under the authority of the Most Christian King Louis XIII indicate rather a political caution, to distance the curia and the pontiff from that embarrassing desecration of the last great Roman emperor, moreover the creator of the *Corpus iuris civilis*, the foundation of modern jurisprudence and particularly revered by the dogmatic current (the *mos Italicus*). Caution more than justified, because the publication indeed aroused recurrent indignities and bitter challenges to the authenticity and veracity of the libel⁴.

2 *Historia Arcana as reason of state*

The importance of this *editio princeps*, however, also lies in the Latin title - *Arcana Historia*⁵ - that Alemanni gave to the *Anékdota*, and which was also retained by the second edition (Helmstedt, 1654) edited by Johann Eichel in controversy with Alemanni's commentary⁶ and by the third (Paris 1663), amended by the Jesuit theologian Claude Maltret with the collation of two more complete manuscripts found in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana⁷. In qualifying the booklet as a *Historia*, Alemanni was simply following the interpretation of the *Suda*, where it is considered precisely an appendix ("ninth book") of the deeds. But the novelty

3 S. Brevaglieri, "Publishing and Culture in Rome in the First Three Decades of the Seventeenth Century," in Antonella Romano (dir.), *Rome et la science moderne entre Renaissance et Lumières*, Publications de l'École française de Rome, 2009, pp. 257-310.

4 Cf. the *Imperatoris Iustiniani defensio adversvs Alemannum*, Londini excudebat H. Stansbeivs, 1626, by Sir Thomas Ryves (1683-1752), royal advocate, republished by Eichel in 1654 (*Imperatoris Iustiniani Defensio Adversus Alemannum, author Thoma Rivio, I. C., curante Johanne Eichelio*, Helmstadi, typis Henningi Mulleri, 1654).

5 *Procopii Caesariensis Anékdota. Arcana Historia, qui est liber nonus Historiarum. Ex Bibliotheca Vaticana Nicolaus Alemannus protulit. Latine reddidit, Notis illustravit.*

6 Johann Eichel (1621-88), *Anekdotia seu Historia arcana Procopii Caesariensis, Nicolao Alemanno defensore primum ex Biblioth. Vaticana prolata; nunc ... testimoniis falsitatis convicta a Ioanne Eichelio*, Helmstadi, typis Henningi Mulleri acad. typ., 1654.

7 Claude Maltret S. J. (1621-73), *Prokopiou Kaisaréios Anékdota - Procopii Caesariensis arcana historia, qui est liber nonus historiarum etc*, Parisiis, e typographia regia, 1663.

lay in the adjective, which Alemanni most likely took from *De arcanis rerum publicarum* (1605) by German jurist and political scientist Arnold Klapmeier (1574-1604)⁸.

Arcana first points out that the “ninth book” was not an “unpublished sequel” to the first eight, but a true counter-history, locked in a safe (*ark*) for future memory. *Ark*, *arcane*, *archive* have in fact the same root as *arx* (stronghold) and somehow evoke the idea of an extreme resistance, underground, against the destruction of memory. *Arcane*, however, has “mysterious,” “ministerial” overtones. “The difference between *arcane* and *secret*,” wrote Egidius Forcellini in the first edition of his *Totius latinitatis lexikon* (1771, I, p. 305), “is the same as that between *conceal* and *hide*. For *arcana*, being closed, are hidden by definition; *secrets*, on the other hand, are things in themselves overt removed or concealed in order to hide them. After all, *arcana* almost always have in them something sacred, religious and horrendous; *secrets*, on the other hand, have nothing of the sort, but are such because they are not shared.” In the famous expressions of Tacitus (*arcana/um imperii; dominationis: Ann.*, 2, 36; 59; *Hist.*, 1, 4) and in Giambattista Vico’s *historia arcana*⁹ - taken up in the title of Pietro de Francisci’s well-known treatise on Roman constitutional history (1947/48) - *arcane* rather evokes the intuition of a structure¹⁰, of an iron logic of power, which is experienced only by governing, without ever being able to really penetrate it.

The tacit lending from Klapmeier indicates that Alemanni intended to credit the *Anékdota* with a philosophical and ethical purpose. Not, as Voltaire later saw it, “a satire dictated by vengeance”¹¹ of a member of the high aristocracy opportunistically forced to serve and incense the oligarchic kleptocracy established by the *basileus legibus solutus*, with his populist court of dwarfs and dancers, but an *insider’s* heroic investigation of what was then called “reason of state” and today we would call the structural “duplicity” of politics, fatally determined by the dual

8 *De arcanis rerum publicarum: libri sex ad ... senatum reipublicae Bremensis*, Bremae, J. Wessellii, 1605.

9 Primo Troili, *Vico and arcane history*, Rome, Gremese, 1987, pp. 74 ff. Vico: *arcana jurisprudentiae Romane historia (de nostri temporis studiorum ratione); regis persona maxime arcana (De constantia jurisprudentis,); imperiorum arcana (ibidem, II, XXII)*.

10 Hence Marx’s appreciation of Vico (Letter of April 28, 1862 to Lassalle; Troilo, *op. cit.*, p. 76).

11 Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV*, in *Œuvres complètes*, éd. Garnier, Paris, 1878, p. 421.



Portrait of Isaac d'Israeli (1766-1848) by Martin Archer Shee, based on an 1804 pencil sketch by John Downman,, National Trust Collection, 429021. Wikimedia Commons.

nature, physical and mystical, of the “king’s body”¹² (hence the lynching, even posthumous and media, of the con-sacred, the dis-sacration of the physical body in the name of the mystical body). An almost “Catonian” reading, then, of Pro-

¹² Sergio Bertelli, *The Body of Three. Sacredness and power in medieval and modern Europe*, Florence, Ponte Alle Grazie, 1995.

copius, evoking the famous, as well as equally unfounded, Foscolian lesson of the Florentine secretary as “that great one who, tempering the scepter to the ruler, of allor unburdens him and to the people reveals of what tears he drips, and of what blood” (*Sepolcri*, vv. 154-158)¹³.

3 Secret History as the proto-liberal unraveling of state secrecy

Opposed to the *arcantum* are the *de consiliis suis* notes jotted down by Cicero or the personal *secretas cogitationes intra se* (Curtius Rufus, X, 8, 9) that Gabriel Naudé wanted to “fish” out of ancient history¹⁴. Even trivial *secretum*, the result of legal or discretionary secrecy that limits and governs public or private knowledge, sharing, and trading of certain facts, evaluations, or techniques¹⁵. Intentional or not, it was therefore a turning point that in the first French (1669)¹⁶ and English (1674)¹⁷ translations of the *Anékdota*, both conducted on the third Latin edition (Maltret, 1663) “arcane” was rendered as “secret”¹⁸.

According to Rebecca Bullard, these translations, both of which appeared in pre-revolutionary socio-political contexts, transformed Procopius’ libel into the

13 Daniela Shalom Vagata, “In the Sign of Literature: Ugo Foscolo’s Interpretation of Machiavelli,” *Italianistica: Journal of Italian Literature*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2015, pp. 89-108.

14 Gabriel Naudé, *Syntagma de studio militari*, Romae, 1637, p. 59 (*Secretas cogitationes et imperatoria arcana expiscare*).

15 Riccardo Orestano, “Delle tipologie del segreto e della loro sociologia nell’esperienza romana,” in *Studi in onore di Cesare Sanfilippo*, Milan, Giuffrè, 1985, VI, pp. 571-629: Id., “Della ‘semantica’ del segreto nell’esperienza romana,” in *Studies in honor of Arnaldo Biscardi*, Giuffrè, Milan, 1987, VI, pp. 9-16. Massimo Brutti, *Arcana imperii. On the genealogy of secrecy*, in L. Forni, T. Vettor (eds.), *Security and freedom in times of global terrorism*, G. Giappichelli Editore, Turin, 2017, Marco Traverso, “Arcana imperii,” *Zapruder*, 7, 2005, pp. 7-25. Mariavittoria Catanzariti, “The Democracy of Secrets,” *Politics of Law*, 2008, 2, pp. 239-286; Ead., “New *arcana imperii*,” *SSRN*, 2010. Alessandro Strozzi, “In Praise of the Secret,” *Pandora* magazine, June 14, 2020.

16 *Histoire secrète de Procope de Cesarée*, traduite par L. de M., à Paris, Chez Guillaume de Luyne, 1669.

17 *The secret history of the court of the Emperor Justinian written by Procopius ...* London, Printed for John Barksdale, 1674.

18 *Histoire secrète de Procope de Cesarée*, traduite par L. de M., à Paris, Chez Guillaume de Luyne, 1669; *The Secret History of the Court of the Emperor Justinian written by Procopius of Caesarea: faithfully rendered into English*, London: Printed for John Barksdale, 1674. Abbie Weinberg, “The Secret History (of a publication),” Folger Shakespeare Library, *The Collation*, December 8, 2015.

archetype and canon of “whig secret history”¹⁹ and into a characteristic expression of proto-modern liberalism²⁰, incentivized to counter the culture of secrecy and secrecy²¹ rooted in the *cavalier*²² and *domestic canon*²³ through what Bullard calls precisely the “politics of disclosure” (*disclosure*). By contrast, he prescind from the Procopean canon Peter Lake, who anticipates the contestation of secrecy to the Elizabethan age, seeing it as an expression of the “public sphere” created by the Protestant Reformation, the Puritan sect, Catholic reaction and the growing role of parliament as a sounding board²⁴. Moreover, balanced by a sharp surge in the rate of political secrecy brought about by the Catholic conspiracy²⁵ supported by France and Spain and the secret services created by Sir Francis Walsingham²⁶ and

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- 19 Rebecca Bullard, *The Politics of Disclosure. 1674-1725: Secret History Narratives*, Pickering & Chatto 2009; Routledge, 2015. Ead, and Rachel Carnell, (Eds.), *The Secret History in Literature, 1660-1820* Cambridge U. P., 2017.
- 20 Annabel Patterson, *Early Modern Liberalism*, Yale, Cambridge U. P., 1997.
- 21 Clive Ponting (1946-2020), *Secrecy in Britain*, Oxford U P. 1990; David Vincent, *The Culture of Secrecy in Britain 1832-1998*, Oxford U. P. 1998.
- 22 Lois Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing. Royalist Literature 1641-1660*, Cambridge, 1989.
- 23 Mike McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity; Public, Private, and the Division of the Knowledge*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins U. P. 2005.
- 24 Peter Lake, *Bad Queen Bess? Libels, Secret Historians, and the Policy of Publicity in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, Oxford U. P., 2016. Brian Cowan, “The History of Secret Histories,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Vol. 81 No 1 Spring 2018 pp. 121-151 (p. 139).
- 25 John Bossy, *Giordano Bruno and the Embassy Affair*, New Haven & London, Yale U. P., 1991. Paul E.J. Hammer, “An Elizabethan Spy Who Came in from the Cold: The Return of Anthony Standen to England in 1593,” *Historical Research*, 65, 1992, pp. 277-95. Mitchell Leimon and Geoffrey Parker, “Treason and Plot in Elizabethan Diplomacy: The “Fame of Sir Edward Stafford” Reconsidered,” *English Historical Review*, 111, 1996, pp. 134-158. John Bossy, *Under the Molehill: An Elizabethan Spy Story*, New Haven & London, Yale U. P., 2001. Robyn Adams, “A Spy on the Payroll? William Herle and the Mid-Elizabethan Polity,” *Historical Research*, 82, 2009, pp. 1-15. Patrick H. Martin, *Elizabethan Espionage: Plotters and Spies in the Struggle between Catholicism and the Crown*, Jefferson, NC, McFarland, 2016 (rec. Robert E. Scully, *Journal of Jesuit Studies*, 2017, 4, pp. 320-312).
- 26 Alan Haynes, *Walsingham: Elizabethan Spymaster & Statesman*, Stroud, Glos., Sutton, 2004; Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Her Majesty's Spymaster: Elizabeth I, Sir Francis Walsingham, and the Birth of Modern Espionage*, New York, Viking, 2005. Robert Hutchinson, *Elizabeth's Spy Master: Francis Walsingham and the Secret War that Saved England*, London, Phoenix, 2006. Stephen Alford, “Some Elizabethan Spies in

also very active under Charles II²⁷.

Long neglected because it was difficult to classify and considered unreliable or irrelevant, since 2005²⁸ the *body of secret history* produced in ancien-regime Europe has been the subject of several important contributions. Drawing an initial balance in 2018, Richard Cowan pointed out the differences between the two different approaches, that of literary historians such as Ballard & Carnell and Robert Darnton²⁹ (interested in authorship, canon, genre) and that of political historians such as Burke and Lake (interested in the content, ideology and “pathology” of the anecdotal method about the regime of evidence and the question of veracity)³⁰. However, we are still far from an exhaustive census of the *corpus*, which cannot be reconstructed by title alone. The one proposed by Peter Burke (2012) listed 72 titles published between 1658 and 1725³¹, but English books alone whose title contains the phrase *secret history* published in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries number more than four hundred³².

In fact, Burke’s list does not include earlier works—such as John Barclay’s

the Office of Sir Francis Walsingham,” in R Adams and R. Cox (Eds), *Diplomacy and Early Modern Culture. Early Modern Literature in History*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2011, pp. 46-62. Id., *The Watchers: A Secret History of the Reign of Elizabeth I*, New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012.

- 27 Alan Marshall, *Intelligence and Espionage in the Reign of Charles II, 1660-1685*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History, Cambridge U. P., 1994.
- 28 Eve Tavor Bennett, “Secret History or Talebearing Inside and Outside of the Secretoire,” *Huntington Literary Quarterly*, vol. 68, Nos 1 & 2, 2005, pp. 375-295.
- 29 Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime and the Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, New York, 1995 (transl. it. V. H. Beonio Brocchieri, *Forbidden Books. Pornography, Satire and Utopia at the Origin of the French Revolution*, Il Saggiatore, Milan, 2019); Id., *The Devil in the Holy Water or the Art of Slander from Louis XIV to Napoleon*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. Cited in Cowan, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-9.
- 30 Cowan, *op. cit.* pp. 122 ff.
- 31 Peter Burke, “Publicizing the Private. The Rising of “Secret History,”” in Christian J. Emden and David Midgley (Eds.), *Changing Perceptions of the Public Sphere*, Berghahn Books, 2012, pp. 57-72 (Appendix, pp. 67-69). Id., *Secret History and Historical Consciousness: From Renaissance to Romanticism* Brighton, UK Edward Everett Root, 2016. Id., *A Social History of the Knowledge: II: From the Encyclopédie to Wikipedia*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012.
- 32 According to the English Short Title Catalogue (ESC), *cited* in Cowan, *op. cit.*, p. 124 nt 10.

(1582-1621) *Icon Animorum* (1614)³³, *The King's Cabinet Opened* (1645) or *The Queen's Closet Opened* (1655)³⁴ -nor the famous *Account of the growth of popery and arbitrary government* (1677) by Andrew Marvel (1621-78)³⁵. And among the Italians he mentions only the *Arcani svelati di tutti i prencipi d'Italia* (1668) by the libertine polygraph Gregorio Leti (1630-1701) and the *Memorie recondite* (1677) by the mathematician and historian Vittorio Siri (1608-85), excluding other celebrated "adventurers of the pen"³⁶ such as the Piedmontese Giovanni Battista Fassola (1648-1713), author of chronicles of French military campaigns and one of the main sources (only partially edited between 1908 and 1925) for the anecdotal history of the Versailles court³⁷, and the Genoese Gian Paolo Marana (1642-93), a conspirator in the service of the Sun King and the main forerunner of Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*³⁸, whose *Turkish Explorer (L'Espion di Grand Seigneur*, Paris, Barbin, 1684-86), was translated and plagiarized anonymously in England (1687-94) and then continued by eighteenth-century apocrypha keeping the label *Turkish Spy*³⁹.

33 Matthew Growhoski, *The Secret History of a Secret War: John Barclay, his Satiricon and the Politicization of Literary Scholarship in Early Modern Europe 1582-1621*, PhD Diss., Princeton U. P., 2015.

34 Cited in Cowan, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

35 Marvel, *An Account of the growth of popery and arbitrary government, in England more particularly, from the long prorogation of November, 1675, ending the 15th of February, 1676, till the last meeting of Parliament, the 16th of July, 1677*, Amsterdam 1677. Annabel Patterson, "Marvell and Secret History," in Warren Chesnaik and Marton Dzelzainis (Eds.), *Marvell and Liberty*, Houndmills, 1999. Quoted in Cowan, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-29.

36 Luigi Fassò, *Seventeenth-century adventurers of the pen: Gregorio Leti, Giovanni Gerolamo Arconati Lamberti, Tomaso Tomasi, Bernardo Guasconi*, Florence, Le Monnier, 1923.

37 Angelo Torre, "Fassola (First Visconti), Giovanni Battista," *Biographical Dictionary of Italians*, 45, 1995.

38 Angela Gatto, *L'héritage des Lettres persanes : exotisme et roman épistolaire en France (1721-1810)*, thesis, Ca' Foscari University, 2020

39 Carlo Alberto Giroto, "Marana, Gian Paolo," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 69, 2007. Lucio Villari, *On the Trails of the "Turkish Explorer"*, Milan, Rizzoli, 1992. Aleksandra Porada, "Giovanni Paolo Marana, Turkish Spy and the Police of Louis XIV: the Fear of Being Secretly Observed by Trained Agents in Early Modern Europe," *Other Modernity*, Unimi, No. 11, May 2014, pp. 96-120.

4 *Coloring, humanizing or degrading: the opposing literary and political uses of anecdote*

The term ‘anecdotes’, as a synonym for secret and unpublished truth, until then considered marginal compared to history, frequently recurs in the two historical novels by the Savoyard abbot César Vichard de Saint-Réal (1639-1692), the *Dom Carlos* (1672) and the *Conjuration des Espagnols contre la République de Venise* (1674).

“Saint-Réal then discriminated between the historian, interested in describing the noble character in the exercise of his civil or warrior authority, and the writer, intent on surprising him in his private life, to deliver him to the understanding complicity of the readers stripped of the signs of social distinction that they differentiated him from ordinary people. The latter had the discretion to choose, order and interpret the facts and there is no need to ask which role the Frenchman had chosen for himself”⁴⁰

However it was a slightly later book to add *anecdote* as a third editorial marker, used especially in France as an alternative to *histoire secrète*. *Les Anecdotes de Florence ou Histoire secrète de la Maison de Médicis* (1685) by the Limousin Antoine de Varillas – conducted on the records of the Bibliothèque Royale, escaping Colbert’s control – were used in Pierre Bayle’s *Dictionnaire historique*⁴¹. *Anecdotes* was then used especially in the first half of the 18th century⁴², beginning with the *Anecdotes du ministère du cardinal de Richelieu et du Règne de Louis XIII* (1717) and the *Anecdotes du ministère du comte duc d’Olivarés* (1722) posthumously published from the manuscripts of Vittorio Siri (1608-1685), who had preferred to speak of *Memoirs Recondite*. Other examples are the seven volumes of *Anecdotes sur l’état de la religion dans la Chine. Ou Relation de m. le cardinal de Tournon patriarche d’Antioche, visiteur apostolique* (1733), or the *Anecdotes ou lettres secrettes sur divers sujets de littérature et de politique* (1734) by the polygraph Antoine-Augustin Bruzen de La Martinière (1662-1746).

“Anecdote” quintessentially qualifies the kind of information of which secret history is composed, creating a literary genre doubly opposed to historiog-

40 Denise Aricò, “Carlo XII di Svezia tra Voltaire e Algarotti”, *Intersezioni*, XXXII, n. 2, 2012, p. 197 (89-210).

41 Cowan, *op. cit.*, p. 126, nt 11, referring to Jacob Soll, *The Information Master: Jean Baptiste Colbert’s Secret State Intelligence System*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2008.

42 But it was also used in the 19th century, see *Storia arcana ed aneddotica d’Italia raccontata dai veneti ambasciatori* (1855) by Fabio Mutinelli, director of the Venice Archives.

raphy: first, because it privileges and divulges materials deemed by the historian to be negligible and unworthy bagatelle, and also because it builds on them a representation of facts and characters more “true to the truth.”⁴³ It is because of its anecdotal character that the secret history becomes involved in the French debate for or against the novel (*roman*) and its relationship with history⁴⁴. In this regard, Pierre Bayle’s judgment on Varillas stands out, moving from admiration to disapproval⁴⁵.



43 Philippe Hourcade, “Problématique de l’anecdote dans l’historiographie à l’âge classique,” *Littératures classiques*, n° 30, printemps 1997 (*L’histoire au XVIIe siècle*), pp. 75-82.

Joel Issah Fineman (1947-1989), “The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction,” in Harold Veese (Ed.), *The New Historicism*, London and New York, Routledge, 1989, pp. 49-76. Lionel Gossman, “Anecdote And History,” *History and Theory*, vol. 42, 2003, No. 2, pp. 143-168. April London, “Secret History and Anecdote,” in Rebecca Bullard and Rachel Carnell (Eds), *The Secret History in the Long Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge U. P. 2017, pp. 174-187.

44 Camille Esmein, «Polémique et réflexion sur le genre romanesque au XVIIe siècle la fortune du débat pour ou contre le roman», *Littérature classique*, 59, 2006, pp. 223-235. Frank Grenier, «La confrontation de l’histoire et du roman Fancan, Sorel, Lenglet-Dufresnoy», *Dix-septième siècle*, N, 239, 2008/2, pp. 311-338.

45 Claudine Poulouin, «Pierre Bayle face à l’histoire anecdotique de Varillas: de l’admiration à la réprobation», in Carole Dornier, Claudine Poulouin (dir.), *L’Histoire en*

But also the fact that one of the most convinced supporters of the superiority of history over the novel, such as Nicolas Lenglet Dufresnoy (1674-1755), has classified his retelling of a fourteenth-century conspiracy at the court of Naples as a secret history⁴⁶.

The intent is not necessarily revolutionary: on the contrary, it can humanize and bring great historical figures closer to the public, as in the *Anecdotes du règne de Louis XIV* and *sur le czar Pierre le Grand* collected by Voltaire since 1748: "It is not permitted today," writes Voltaire, official historian of the Kingdom, "to imitate Plutarch, much less Procopius," that is, to uncritically collect unverified rumors and testimonies. "The most useful and valuable anecdotes," he adds, "are the secret writings left by great princes, when the candor of their souls is manifested at such times."⁴⁷ Moreover, as the literary scholar and bibliophile Isaac D'Israeli (1766-1848), father of the future Victorian premier, later argued, anecdotes are "the most agreeable part of history," and secret history is the rebalancing "complementary to public history." While the latter is "a narrative more plausible than accurate," the former turns us into contemporaries of the events narrated: with the advantage, as posterity, of already knowing their outcome.⁴⁸

*miettes. Anecdotes et témoignages dans l'écriture de l'histoire (XVI^e-XIX^e siècle), Else-
neur, n° 19, Presses universitaires de Caen, 2004, pp. 157-74.*

46 *La Catanoise, ou histoire secrète des mouvemens arrivéz au royaume de Naples, sous la reine Jeanne I*, A Paris, chez Pierre Gandouin, 1731. This case, narrated by Giovanni Boccaccio in his *de casibus virorum illustrium*, had been remembered in 1617, together with that of Sejanus, by Pierre Matthieu (1563-1621), following the similar sudden fall of the Concini-Galigai couple, powerful councilors of the Queen Mother of France Maria de' Medici. See Denise Aricò, «Dall' 'Histoire tragique' all' 'Histoire secrète': Il *De casibus virorum illustrium* di Boccaccio ne *La Catanoise* de Nicolas Lenglet Dufresnoy (1731)», in *Studi sul Boccaccio*, XXXVI, 2008, pp. 117-153.

47 Voltaire, *op. and loc. cit.*, nt. 1. Cowan, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

48 D'Israeli, *Dissertation on Anecdotes*, 1793, Id., «The Sources of Secret History», *A Second Series of Curiosities of Literature*, 2nd ed. corrected, London, John Murray, 1824, III, pp. 209-237. «The True Sources of Secret History», in Id., *Curiosities of Literature*, London, Richard Bentley, 1838, III, pp. 121-125. April London, «Isaac D'Israeli and Literary History: Opinion, Anecdote, and Secret History in the Early Nineteenth Century», *Poetics Today*, vol. 26, No. 3, September, 2005, pp. 351-386. Andrzej Diniejko, «Isaac D'Israeli (1766-1848): A Biographical Sketch», *The Victorian Web*, December 3, 2016. Cowan, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-129. Sean Gaston, «Isaac D'Israeli, Rousseau and the Invention of the Literary Character», Brunei University, 2013.

The anecdotal scripting of English history in the Globe Theater sparked the audience's enthusiasm precisely because it unmediated, or, according to D'Israeli, *abolished, distance*. Not, however, only the temporal one, as in *St. Crispin Speech*; but also and especially the social one, as in *Richard the Third*. Indeed, the primary appeal of anecdote lies in *lowering by revealing* or *revealing by degrading*. And the secondary one in providing materials to be combined in "dietrology based on the paralogical assemblage of disparate episodes."⁴⁹ Mosaic tiles, rather than puzzle tiles, because the technique is not inductive, but deductive: it is not the tiles that make up the design, but the design that chooses the congruent tiles. Anecdotal revelation thus consists of a lowering that in turn demonstrates a petition of principle.

5 *Anti-Jesuitism, anti-Jacobinism, and anti-Semitism as matrices of conspiracyism*

The anecdotal process of discovery is the basis of investigative journalism, circumstantial trials, secret police (yesterday *haute police*, today *intelligence-led policing* as opposed to *evidence-based policing*), dystopian elite paranoia, and opposing right-wing and left-wing populist conspiracies,⁵⁰ united by the erroneous implication (*furtive fallacy*) that: (a) nothing happens by chance; (b) reality is always concealed for filthy criminal interests; (c) the queen proof is the lack of evidence; (d) and is well supplanted by the psychosocial profiling of the perpetrators and the concordance of the clues with the theorem or mosaic.⁵¹ While proving the red herring are not only refutations and devious revisionism but also victim satires such as *Die Geschichte des Abderiten* (1774) by Christoph Martin Wieland (1733-1813), precisely a notorious "enlightened." Privileged source of anecdotes is the denunciation, preferably self-accusatory, of the deep throat, the repentant or dissident, e.g. *War is A Racket* (1935)⁵² or the *Monita privata Societatis Iesu*

49 Filippo Ronconi, «L'Histoire secrète de Procope, 'rapport Justinien' ou Justinian-Leaks?», *Écrire l'histoire*, 17, | 2017

50 Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: from Bryan to F. D. R.*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1955. Id., *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, 1964. Michael Butter and Peter Knight (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*, Routledge, 2020.

51 Jeffrey M. Bale, «Political paranoia v. political realism: on distinguishing between bogus conspiracy theories and genuine conspiratorial politics,» *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 41, No. 1, February 2007, pp. 45-60.

52 By the overdecorated Marine General Smedley D. Butler on the interests of multinatio-

(allegedly Notobirgae, 1612), later known as *Secreta Monita*, archetypal anti-Jesuit conspiracy, not only Protestant or libertine but also Catholic⁵³.

The paradoxical effect of the abuse of paranoid or simply aprioristic diatribes and conspiracies is to hinder, by deporting or discrediting, the judicial or historiographical ascertainment of the real conspiracies⁵⁴, and, more generally, the very progress of historical knowledge, which requires the incessant revision of themes, approaches and judgments⁵⁵. This, however, does not detract from the documentary usefulness of anecdotal collection. Perhaps the most emblematic case is the *Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire du Jacobinisme* by Abbot Augustin Barruel (1741-1820), a scrupulous and invaluable collection of documents for social and cultural history in the Europe of Enlightenment and Revolution, regardless of the judgment on the revolution as a conspiracy of the “enlightened.” The conspiratorial explanation of events at once grandiose and counterintuitive is natural from the perspective of contemporaries seeking meaning and development. And not only of critics such as Edmund Burke⁵⁶ and opponents such as the theologian August von Starck (1741-1816), Kant’s countryman and fellow student, or the Scotsman John Robinson (1739-1805)⁵⁷, but also of protagonists

nal corporations in the American Banana Wars (V. Ilari, “Patriotism prepaid,” in *Future Wars*, SISM Notebook 2016, pp. 411-432.

53 Moreover, it pre-dates 1614. See subsequently, e.g., *Pyrotechnica Loyolana, Ignatian Fire-Works* (1667), *Les secrets des Jésuites* (1669), *The Cabinet of the Jesuits secrets opened* (1679), *A true narrative and discovery of several very remarkable passages relating to the horrid Popish plot* (1679) etc. Geoffrey Cubitt, *The Jesuit Myth Conspiracy Theory and Politics in Nineteenth-Century France*, Clarendon Press, 1993.

54 Published in Krakow in 1614 by the former Polish Jesuit Hieronim Zahorowski, who was expelled in 1613, Paolo Sarpi is assumed to have authored them instead (Luigi Lazzarini, “Falsifications. Sarpi Poland and the Jesuits,” *Proceedings of the Polish Academy*, V, 2016, pp. 64-84). Sabina Pavone, *Le astuzie dei gesuiti*, Rome, Salerno Editrice, 2000. Cowan, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-37.

55 Murray Rothbard (1926-1995), “Revisionism and Libertarianism,” *The Libertarian Forum*, February 1976, pp. 3-6. Jeff Riggensbach, *Why American History Is Not What They Say: An Introduction to Revisionism*, Auburn, Alabama, 2009 (Ludwig von Mises Institute). James M. Banner Jr, *The Ever-Changing Past: Why All History Is Revisionist History*, Yale U. P., 1976. George C. Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution. Marxism and Revisionism*, Verso, 1987. Barbara Krasner (Ed.), *Historical Revisionism. Current Controversies*, New York, Greenhaven Publishing LLC., 2019.

56 *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 1790 (quoted in Cowan, *op. cit.*, p. 151).

57 Robinson, *Proofs of a Conspiracy: Against All the Religions and Governments of Eu-*

and supporters such as François-Xavier Pagès de Vixouze (1745-1802)⁵⁸, in an era of ideological warfare, secret police, espionage plotting, propaganda, double agents, and *secret history*, such as *Histoire secrète du cabinet de Napoléon et de la cour de Saint Cloud* (1810)⁵⁹ by Lewis Goldsmith (17963-1846), a Portuguese Jew originally of republican sentiments, who in 1801 had denounced British secret plans to dismember France⁶⁰.

It is to Barruel's credit that he did not endorse the thesis of Jacobinism as a Jewish conspiracy, suggested to him by the letter signed by (Captain?) Giovanni

rope, Carried On In The Secret Meetings of Freemasons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies Philadelphia, Dobson, 1798. Mike Jay, "Darkness Over All. John Robison and the Birth of the Illuminati Conspiracy," *The Public Domain Review*, April 2, 2014. Daniele Di Bartolomeo, "Historical Models of Conspiracy in the French Revolution (1789-96)," *Magallánica, Revista de Historia Moderna*, 3/6 (Dossier), Enero-Junio 2017, pp. 144-165. Gordon Fraser, "Conspiracy, Pornography, Democracy: The Recurrent Aesthetics of the American Illuminati," *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 54, Issue 2, May 2020, pp. 273-294.

58 *Histoire secrète de la Révolution française, 1796-1801*, Paris, Dentu, 1802. *Anti-Revolutionary Thoughts of a Revolutionary Writer: From the Secret History of the Revolution of France*, by Monsieur François Pagès, Creative Media Partners, LLC, 2018. Philippe Bourdin (dir.), *La Révolution, 1789-1871: écriture d'une histoire immédiate*, Presses Univ Blaise Pascal, 2008: Id (dir.), *Les noblesses françaises dans l'Europe de la Révolution*, Actes du colloque international de Vizille (10-12 septembre 2008), Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010; 2019.

59 Goldsmith, *Histoire secrète du cabinet de Napoléon et de la cour de Saint-Cloud*, à Londres, Harper le jeune, 1810: 1814 à Londres et à Paris, 2 vols.; *Secret History of Bonaparte's Diplomacy*, 1812; transl. it. *Secret History of the Cabinet of Napoleon Bonaparte and of the Court of Saint Cloud and Appendix ... col Carattere degli individui che la compongono*, Italy 1814. *Les Mille et Une Calomnies ou extraites des correspondances privées insérées dans les journaux anglais et allemands pendant le ministère de M. le Duc Decazes*, Paris, Dentu, 1823, III, pp. 125 ff. James Duffy, *The United Irishmen: Their Lives and Times, with Several Additional Memoirs, and Authentic Documents, Heretofore Unpublished, the Whole Matter Newly Arranged and Revised*, 1860, III, pp. 294-296.

60 Goldsmith, *The Crimes of Cabinets, or a Review of the Plans and Aggressions for Annihilating the Liberties of France and the Dismemberment of her Territories with illustrative anecdotes Military and Political*, London, Taylor, 1801. moved in 1803 to Paris as interpreter and editor of a biweekly review in English of British affairs (*The Argus*). Possibly a double agent, dismissed by Talleyrand, he repaired to London in 1809. Released from prison after brief detention, he founded the *Anti-Gallican Monitor* and the *Anti-Corsican Chronicle*. Condemned by the government for promoting a subscription for a bounty on Napoleon, in 1815 he argued for his trial

Battista Simonini that had been sent to him on August 1, 1806 from Florence⁶¹, now famous thanks to Umberto Eco's *Prague Cemetery*⁶². In 1921 it was conclusively (as in vain) proved that the fake *Protocols of the Elder Saviors of Zion* fabricated by the Czarist Okhrana in 1897 were a crude adaptation in an anti-Semitic key of a booklet by Maurice Joly (1829-78) against Napoleon III⁶³, perhaps in turn inspired by Machiavelli's dream that he would rather converse in hell with strong heads than yawn with boredom in paradise⁶⁴.

And we like to close this brief introduction by mentioning that the recent discovery of the original prototype of the *Protocols* in the archives of St. Petersburg was the subject of a study meeting held on November 16, 2021 at the local Italian Cultural Institute directed by Paola Cioni⁶⁵.

61 Reinhard Markner, "Captain Giovanni Battista Simonini An Italian Anti-Semite," in Marina Ciccari, Nicoletta Marcialis, Giorgio Ziffer (ed.), *Kesarevo Kesarju. Writings in honor of Cesare G. De Michelis*, Florence U. P., 2014, pp. 311-319. Claus Oberhauser, "Simonini's letter: the 19th century text that influenced anti-Semitic conspiracy theories about the Illuminati," *The Conversation*, March 31, 2020.

62 Mark Medley, "Fascinated by stupidity: Umberto Eco conspires in The Prague Cemetery," *National Post*, November 18, 2011.

63 Joly, *Dialogue aux enfers entre Machiavel et Montesquieu, ou la politique de Machiavel au XIXe siècle*, Brussels, Mertens et Fils, 1864.

64 Anton Francesco Doni, *Doni's Inferni, Academico Pellegrino: libro secondo de' Mondi*, 1544) Maria Cristina Frigorilli, "Orienting oneself in the 'things of the world': the 'sententious' Machiavelli of Anton Francesco Doni and Francesco Sansovino," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 188, 2011, 623, pp. 321-365. Pasquale Terracciano, "Politics in Hell. Rereading Machiavelli's dream," *Renaissance*, 2016, pp. 23-51. Lavinia Spalanca, "The Power of the Word. The Hells of Anton Francesco Doni," *DNA - Di Nulla Academia. Journal of Field Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2021, pp. 29-39.

65 *The Protocols of the Elder Sages of Zion, A New Discovery*, online at the MAECI website.



A Smart Macaroni, Caricature from "Martial Macaroni", in Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection. Courtesy by Brown University (see West, «The Darly Macaroni Prints and the Politics of "Private Man.»», *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 25.2 [2001], pp.170-1.

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