

Italy's Public Memory of its Main Anti-fascist Martyr: Giacomo Matteotti in the Public Space One Century After his Murder



The memory of Giacomo Matteotti is still very present in the public space in Italy, whether in street names or commemorative plaques such as this one in Lecce, on the Piazzetta Sigismondo Castromediano. The plaque, created by the local branch of the Socialist Party, dates from May 1944.

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Camilla Zucchi

Ph.D. candidate in Digital Public History
University of Salerno

10th June 1924: the socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti was murdered by a fascist group. After his famous speech in the Parliament, where he denounced Mussolini's regime machinations, he was kidnapped, killed and his body hidden for two months. Even though previous cases of opposition to the regime took to the other murders such as the one of Don Minzoni, the name of Giacomo Matteotti became soon a symbol of resistance. A standardized photo of his face, the place of his kidnapping, and some of his supposed last words were sacralised. His end caused friction even within the fascist government, while the strong emotional support of the people, who went to the famous Arnaldo da Brescia embankment in Rome, where Matteotti was kidnapped, was strongly prevented by the fascists. Matteotti was able to start the anti-fascist mythopoiesis, to shape it, at the very moment when the parallel fascist mythopoiesis was getting stronger. His myth got so widespread that he became the prototype of the anti-fascist martyr: even the communist Palmiro Togliatti had to admit it in 1928. During the Resistance war, 19 years after his murder, some partisan formations took on his name. Following the way of his myth, after the liberation in 1945, how was he honoured in the public sphere? Who is Giacomo Matteotti today, besides being the name of many squares and streets? What is said about him now on the web, in particular on *Wikipedia*, *ChatGPT* and *Bard* (now named *Gemini*) and social media? Where are most of the places named after him? How did Italy's capital, Rome, honour him? What is and what was the public and the political use of his story? Thanks to digital tools and analysis, a profile of who Giacomo Matteotti is today can be reconstructed. The history of the present time can help historians explain what Matteotti's myth means in the *public* sphere and, in particular, in public place(s).

Keywords: Anti-fascism, Public memory, Toponymy, Matteotti Giacomo, Digital history, Italy, Fascism, Mussolini

Giacomo Matteotti between the public
and the virtual space: some reflections
on his myth along the century

The murder and the following events until the end of
World War II

Many historiographic works, between the ones dedicated to the birth of Fascism regime¹ and others to his figure of the opponent² among many³, have spoken about Giacomo Matteotti and his murder: they all agree in viewing this episode as the turning point of the Fascist dictatorship. While some historiographical contributions put more emphasis on the immediate political implications, others, published after the cultural, spatial and mnemonic turn, speak about Matteotti's murder, from different points

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1. Donatello Aramini, *La "rivoluzione nazionale". I nazionalisti, il fascismo e la fine dello Stato liberale*, Rome, Sapienza University Press, 2023, p. 199–216. Emilio Gentile, *Storia del fascismo*, Rome–Bari, Laterza, 2022, p. 483–486. Marco Bresciani, "Diventare anti-fascisti: incertezze, dilemmi, contraddizioni di fronte al fascismo", in Giulia Albanese (ed.), *Il fascismo italiano. Storia e interpretazioni*, Rome, Carocci, 2021, p. 281–308. Giovanni Borgognone, *Come nasce una dittatura. L'Italia del delitto Matteotti*, Rome–Bari, Laterza, 2012. Roberta Suzzi Valli, "Il culto dei martiri fascisti", in Oliver Janz and Lutz Klinkhammer (eds.), *La morte per la patria*, Rome, Donzelli, 2008, p. 102–117. Salvatore Lupo, *Il fascismo. La politica in un regime totalitario*, Rome, Donzelli, 2005, p. 187–197. Pierre Milza, *Mussolini*, Rome, Carocci, 2000, p. 362–375. Adrian Lyttelton, *La conquista del potere. Il fascismo dal 1919 al 1929*, Rome–Bari, Laterza, 1974, p. 381–431. Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista. La conquista del potere (1921–1925)*, Turin, Giulio Einaudi Publisher, 1966, p. 619–730.
 2. John Foot, *Fratture d'Italia*, Milan, Rizzoli, 2009, p. 104–111. Claudio Fracassi, *Matteotti e Mussolini: 1924. Il delitto del Lungotevere*, Milan, Mursia, 2004. Stefano Caretti, "Matteotti", in Mario Isnenghi (ed.), *I luoghi della memoria. Personaggi e date dell'Italia unita*, Rome–Bari, Laterza, 1997, p. 189–205. Idem, *Matteotti. Il mito*, Pisa, Nistri–Lischi, 1994. Mauro Canali, *Il delitto Matteotti: affarismo e politica nel primo governo Mussolini*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1997. Giuseppe Rossini, *Il delitto Matteotti tra il Viminale e l'Aventino*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1966.
 3. Simona Colarizi, *La resistenza lunga. Storia dell'antifascismo 1919–1945*, Rome–Bari, Laterza, 2023 [Kindle Edition].

of view focusing on his myth and his power⁴. Taking many aspects, such as material or immaterial culture, visual culture or the political rhetoric and related commemorations into account and analysing the influence of his name and the meaning of his death over the long term, some papers cover the period of the Italy's First Republic, others reach the new millennium, with a focus on public spaces and debate as well.

At the beginning, the Matteotti *affaire* caused Mussolini a lot of troubles in his most difficult year as Prime Minister⁵, including the secession of the Aventine Hill carried by the anti-fascists and the belated resignation of his Minister of Education Alessandro Casati⁶. Afterwards, it turned into an irreversible match point.

Mussolini's famous speech of the 3rd January 1925, when he declared himself politically, morally and historically responsible for the assassination, even if not materially, was the beginning of the Fascist totalitarianism and the end of the collaboration with the liberal minority. After the Aventinian protest and the Mussolini's repeated extraneousness to the crime, attempts to normalise Fascism through political action led Benedetto Croce and Alessandro Casati to vote confidence in his second government, despite some doubts: Count Casati's accepted the Ministry due to his friendship with Croce and Giovanni Gentile, his liberal commitment to a school reform and the contemporary situation, in his opinion lacking in political alternatives⁷. His six months as Minister can be considered both as a way of reassuring the King after the protest by some

4. Amy King, "A Martyr for the Resistance and the New Republic: The Uses of Giacomo Matteotti's Memory, 1943 to 1947", *Italian Studies*, vol. 78, n° 4, 2023. Enzo Bellettato, *Matteotti nella memoria cantata. Tra storia e cantastorie*, Rovigo, Minelliana, 2020. Stefano Caretti, *Il delitto Matteotti. Storia e memoria*, Manduria-Bari-Rome, Lacaita Publisher, 2004. Valentino Zaghi, "'Con Matteotti si mangiava': simboli e valori nella genesi di un mito popolare", *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, vol. 19, 1990, p. 432-446.

5. Stefano Caretti, *Il delitto Matteotti. Storia e memoria*, Manduria-Bari-Rome, Lacaita Publisher, 2004, p. 79.

6. Federico Mazzei, "Per una rilettura della collaborazione liberale al governo Mussolini: Alessandro Casati Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione nella svolta del 1924", *Rivista Storica Italiana*, vol. 130, n° 1, 2018, p. 164-209. Cfr. *infra*.

7. Federico Mazzei, "Per una rilettura della collaborazione liberale al governo Mussolini: Alessandro Casati Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione nella svolta del 1924", *Rivista Storica Italiana*, vol. 130, n° 1, 2018, p. 174-175. This behaviour is the continuation of an attitude that had already matured in the aftermath of the March on Rome cfr. Giovanni Sabbatucci, "'Fascismo è liberalismo'. I liberali italiani dopo la marcia su Roma", *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica*, vol. 1, 2013, p. 171-185.

parliamentarians known as the Aventine secession⁸ and as the swan song of the attempted normalisation, carried out by the Liberals. They were soon betrayed by some moderate nationalist and fascist Ministers who had agreed to open the crisis between the end of 1924 and the beginning of 1925: they backtracked later⁹. The effort of “normalization” led by Casati failed officially with the coup of the 3rd January 1925, giving him the opportunity to join Croce’s liberal anti-fascist ranks¹⁰.

Before Matteotti, the squadron groups made many victims, 123¹¹, but they weren’t as famous and annoying as the socialist deputy, even if one of them, the priest Giovanni Minzoni, should have moved deep empathy especially by the Church. Lots of elements contributed to making the socialist the prototype of the anti-fascist martyr: his moral rectitude, his long-lasting political commitment, his national fame and, last but not least, his last words in Parliament, which were a denunciation of fascist violence during the elections and appeared as his *requiem*. “Myself, I have made my speech. Now you are preparing the funeral speech for me”¹²: aware of the consequences, he showed contempt for the danger. It was the 30th May: after eleven days, he disappeared. The killers, mostly coming from the “Arditi”, were members of the police of the Fascist Party, known as *Ceka*¹³, and their names were Amerigo Dumini, Albino Volpi, Giuseppe Viola, Augusto Malacria and Amleto Poveromo, helped by the Austrian Otto Thierschald, who previously had to stalk Matteotti¹⁴. The chief was Amerigo Dumini, known for his

8. Ariane Landuyt, *Le sinistre e l’Aventino*, Milano, Angeli, 1973. Emilio Gentile, *Storia del fascismo*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2022, p. 484.

9. Federico Mazzei, “Per una rilettura della collaborazione liberale al governo Mussolini: Alessandro Casati Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione nella svolta del 1924”, *Rivista Storica Italiana*, vol. 130, n° 1, 2018, p. 198-200. Donatello Aramini, *La “rivoluzione nazionale”. I nazionalisti, il fascismo e la fine dello Stato liberale*, Rome, Sapienza University Press, 2023, p. 214-215.

10. Giovanni Borgognone, *Come nasce una dittatura. L’Italia del delitto Matteotti*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2012, p. 226.

11. Cf. Giacomo Matteotti, *Un anno di dominazione fascista*, Bologna, Arnaldo Forni Editore, 1924. This small volume was translated into French, English and German: see Stefano Caretti, *Il delitto Matteotti. Storia e memoria*, Manduria-Bari-Rome, Lacaita Publisher, 2004, p. 143-144.

12. The translation is mine.

13. The name *Ceka* was taken from the police established in Russia by Lenin in 1917. Giovanni Borgognone, *Come nasce una dittatura. L’Italia del delitto Matteotti*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2012, p. 69.

14. Giovanni Borgognone, *Come nasce una dittatura. L’Italia del delitto Matteotti*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2012, p. 4-8. Mauro Canali, *Il delitto Matteotti*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1997, p. 307.

ferocity and already indicted for other murders and his role as leader of the *Ceka*. The police chief Emilio De Bono was also involved¹⁵. The trial was summary and hurried; it lasted only eight days in March 1926 and was moved from Rome to Chieti¹⁶: a member of the defense counsel for the defendants was Roberto Farinacci, who at that time was the National Secretary of the Fascist Party¹⁷.

Immediately after the 10th June, Italy was divided in two: one part cared about Matteotti's destiny, the other one supported Mussolini and the fascist decisions¹⁸. In this sense, his death united the whole political opposition. Before his body was found on the 16th August in a pinewood in a small town next to Rome, private and collective commemorations were increasingly taking on the tones of a religious tribute¹⁹: already on the 15th June, the newspaper *L'Unità* quoted "on the basis of faithful witnesses" a part of Albino Volpi's confession, that reported how the socialist repeated during his martyrdom "Kill me but you will never kill the idea that is in me"²⁰. Those words sound similar to the ones pronounced by religious martyrs and were reused and considered true "even if they were not reality" by Filippo Turati in his commemorative speech on the 27th June 1924²¹. In the myth, the plausible becomes reality, because it is trusted anyway. Not only allies and party companions, but also ordinary people went to the abduction site, Arnaldo da

15. Mauro Canali, *Il delitto Matteotti*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1997, p. 307. Simona Colarizi, *La resistenza lunga. Storia dell'antifascismo 1919-1945*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2023 [Kindle Edition], p. 81. For the analytical filing of the case file against senator Emilio De Bono: <https://urly.it/3-722> (last accessed 13th December 2023).

16. Stefano Caretti, *Il delitto Matteotti. Storia e memoria*, Manduria-Bari-Rome, Lacaita Publisher, 2004, p. 97-114.

17. Giovanni Borgognone, *Come nasce una dittatura. L'Italia del delitto Matteotti*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2012, p. 240-249. Stefano Caretti, "Matteotti", in Mario Isnenghi (ed.), *I luoghi della memoria. Personaggi e date dell'Italia unita*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1997, p. 196-197. See also Giuliano Capececlatro, *La banda del Viminale. Passione e morte di Giacomo Matteotti nelle carte del processo*, Milan, Il Saggiatore, 2004.

18. Sergio Luzzatto, *Il corpo del duce*, Turin, Einaudi, 2019, p. 7-10.

19. Sergio Luzzatto, *Il corpo del duce*, Turin, Einaudi, 2019, p. 7-10. Stefano Caretti, "Matteotti", in Mario Isnenghi (ed.), *I luoghi della memoria. Personaggi e date dell'Italia unita*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1997, p. 194-196.

20. "L'eroismo di Matteotti nella confessione del Volpi", *L'Unità*, 15th June 1924 (translation is mine). Those words over time have stabilised as if they had actually been said by him cfr. *infra*.

21. Filippo Turati, "La commemorazione di Giacomo Matteotti del 27 giugno 1924" <https://urly.it/3-723> (translation is mine) (last accessed 10th December 2023).

Brescia embankment, to bring flowers or to say a prayer²². Opposition newspapers aided this religious mythopoiesis, which, with the tightening of the regime, became clandestine: no less powerful²³. Due to the evocative power of the only Matteotti's name, the government, which had been paying a special attention to the rites and the symbols through the whole period of the regime²⁴ and in June 1944 as well²⁵, was forced to stop commemorative meetings²⁶. That dangerous tension led to the murder of the deputy Armando Casalini in September 1924 to avenge Matteotti: the occasion to consecrate him as another martyr of fascist ideals²⁷. As well as the fascists had the archetype of their martyr in the Florentine Giovanni Berta²⁸, who died in 1921 and was remembered in place names and songs, and on many occasions, even in the Fascist Revolution Exhibition²⁹, the anti-fascists were building their own parallel reference pantheon, where the socialist stood out.

22. Stefano Caretti, *Il delitto Matteotti. Storia e memoria*, Manduria-Bari-Rome, Lacaita Publisher, 2004, p. 65-69.

23. Valentino Zaghi, "Con Matteotti si mangiava": simboli e valori nella genesi di un mito popolare", *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, vol. 19, 1990, p. 432-446. Stefano Caretti, *Il delitto Matteotti. Storia e memoria*, Manduria-Bari-Rome, Lacaita Publisher, 2004. Stefano Caretti, "Matteotti", in Mario Isnenghi (ed.), *I luoghi della memoria. Personaggi e date dell'Italia unita*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1997.

24. Emilio Gentile, *Il culto del littorio. La sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1993.

25. Stefano Caretti, *Il delitto Matteotti. Storia e memoria*, Manduria-Bari-Rome, Lacaita Publisher, 2004, p. 93.

26. Stefano Caretti, *Il delitto Matteotti. Storia e memoria*, Manduria-Bari-Rome, Lacaita Publisher, 2004, p. 69-72, p. 77-94. Stefano Caretti, "Matteotti", in Mario Isnenghi (ed.), *I luoghi della memoria. Personaggi e date dell'Italia unita*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1997, p. 195-196.

27. Roberto Mancini, *Il martire necessario. Guerra e sacrificio nell'Italia contemporanea*, Pisa, Pacini Publisher, 2015, p. 177-183. Giovanni Borgognone, *Come nasce una dittatura. L'Italia del delitto Matteotti*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2012, p. 148-150. John Foot, *Fratture d'Italia*, Milan, Rizzoli, 2009, p. 107-108. Roberta Suzzi Valli, "Il culto dei martiri fascisti", in Oliver Janz and Lutz Klinkhammer (eds.), *La morte per la patria*, Rome, Donzelli, 2008, p. 110. Cfr. Benito Mussolini, "Al deputato Roberto Farinacci", *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 13th September 1925, XII.

28. Roberta Suzzi Valli, "Il culto dei martiri fascisti", in Oliver Janz and Lutz Klinkhammer (eds.), *La morte per la patria*, Rome, Donzelli, 2008, p. 102-107. Cfr. Benito Mussolini, "Si continua", *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 2nd March 1921, VIII.

29. Archivio Centrale dello Stato (hereafter ACS), Partito Nazionale Fascista, Direttorio Nazionale, Servizi Vari (1925-1943), series 1, envelope 659, Corrispondenza anno XII, Federazione dei Fasci di Combattimento di Firenze, Raccomandata al fascista Giulio Ginnasi 22.5.1934.

As briefly mentioned above, the speech of the 3rd January was a belated answer to the one by Matteotti on the 30th May: Mussolini, after having long denied his hand behind the crime, finally he self-denounced, declaring the true totalitarian nature of Fascism³⁰. The expression “two-faced duce” used by the historian Simona Colarizi really fits the description of Benito Mussolini, who alternately wore or undressed the black shirt depending on the contingent political objectives³¹: that was his behaviour in relation to Matteotti's *affaire* as well.

Apart from the Aventinian secession, reactions to this tragic event from the anti-fascist front were many and varied and the publishing initiatives by colleagues were numerous as well. It is worth mentioning the pamphlet *Matteotti*³² published immediately in 1924 by the anti-fascist intellectual, Piero Gobetti, a future martyr. Looking at the cover of Gobetti's volume, a motto in ancient Greek stands out under the title: ΤΙ ΜΟΙ ΣΥΝ ΔΟΥΛΟΙΣΙΝ (τί μοι σὺν δουλῶϊσιν;). The translation is: what have I to do with the servants?³³ The *sententia*, used by the 19th century Italian poet Vittorio Alfieri, is present in all Gobetti's published works and is a symbol of the strenuous opposition to the regime, embodied by him and Matteotti. The deputy's human and political commitment is described in detail in a *climax* that culminates in the last paragraph: *The death volunteer*³⁴, where Gobetti acknowledged that his comrade was “[...] already in legend.”³⁵ On the first anniversary of his death, a pamphlet, edited by the Central Committee of the oppositions, entitled *Giacomo Matteotti on the First Anniversary of his Martyrdom*, was printed in Rome and circulated: it included contributions by important and politically aligned intellectuals such as Piero Gobetti, Luigi Salvatorelli, Filippo Turati, Giovanni Amendola and Luigi Einaudi and others³⁶. In March 1926, the socialist Pietro Nenni was directly imprisoned for his

30. This speech is so popular that it had an its own Italian Wikipedia page: <https://urly.it/3-726> (last accessed 27th November 2023).

31. Simona Colarizi, *La resistenza lunga. Storia dell'antifascismo 1919-1945*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2023 [Kindle Edition], p. 82

32. Piero Gobetti, *Matteotti*, Turin, Piero Gobetti Publisher, 1924.

33. Piero Gobetti, *Matteotti*, Turin, Piero Gobetti Publisher, 1924, frontcover (the translation is mine).

34. Piero Gobetti, *Matteotti*, Turin, Piero Gobetti Publisher, 1924, p. 33 (the translation is mine).

35. Piero Gobetti, *Matteotti*, Turin, Piero Gobetti Publisher, 1924, p. 34 (the translation is mine).

36. Comitato centrale delle opposizioni (ed.), *Giacomo Matteotti nel I° Anniversario del suo martirio*, Sala Bolognese, Arnaldo Forni publisher, 1976 [first edition: 1925].

pamphlet *Matteotti's assassination and the regime's trial*³⁷. The authors of those works were all at the forefront of the fight against Fascism, which became tougher and mostly clandestine after January 1925.



Matteotti's birthplace in Fratta Polesine.

Source: Giuseppe Tamburrano, *Giacomo Matteotti. Storia di un doppio assassinio* (2004). Wikimedia Commons

Parallel to the rise of Fascism, the early 1920s were particularly troubled for the left-wing parties: the first major split in 1921 between the reformist socialist group and the maximalist socialist group was followed

37. Italian title: *L'assassinio di Matteotti ed il processo al regime*. See Stefano Caretti, *Il delitto Matteotti. Storia e memoria*, Manduria-Bari-Rome, Lacaitha Publisher, 2004, p. 165-166.

by the one in October 1922, from which Matteotti's United Socialist Party originated, a few days before the March on Rome. This fragmentation due to ideological-political reasons facilitated Mussolini's assertion, nevertheless Matteotti's death managed to compact the anti-fascist front. An indication of this is the recognition given to the martyr by the Italian Communist Party in the clandestine newspaper *Lo Stato Operaio* through the words of its secretary Palmiro Togliatti: "Matteotti, *the greatest martyr of anti-fascism* in the popular consciousness, was not a communist."³⁸, while, more or less six years later, the other anti-fascist Carlo Rosselli, who joined the Socialist Party after his martyrdom in June 1924, said: "Matteotti became *the symbol of anti-fascism and anti-fascist heroism*. At any meeting, saying his name, the audience stands up or claps hands. Matteotti Committees, Matteotti Funds, Matteotti Circles, Matteotti Houses. Matteotti, like the shadow of Banco, accompanies Mussolini. And Mussolini knows it."³⁹ It was the collective imagination that was affected for reasons such as the manner of the crime, the chronology and the symbolic recognition. The feeling was shared in many parts of Italy, not just in Matteotti's birthplace. Of course, during the twenty years of the Fascist period, there were more acute moments where the myth seemed to cool down: between 1924 and 1931 it did not diminish, the mythopoiesis spread; it faded until 1936 and rose again definitively in 1943⁴⁰. The absence of demonstrations, however, should not let think that Matteotti's name did not circulate clandestinely: the return indicates the vitality of his myth, which continued to make its way secretly. It was not uncommon to find words such as "apostle", "martyr", even "god" juxtaposed to the deputy, or images or leaflets accompanied by aphorisms attributed to him *post mortem*, usually connected to the moment immediately before the last breath⁴¹, or clandestine editions of his writings⁴². The collective unconsciousness, which stayed away from

38. Ercoli, alias Palmiro Togliatti, "Osservazioni sulla politica del nostro Partito", *Lo Stato Operaio*, June 1928, p. 328, <https://urly.it/3-728> (last accessed 3rd December 2023) (the translation and the italics are mine).

39. Carlo Rosselli, "Eroe tutto prosa", in *Almanacco Socialista 1934*, Paris, Italian Socialist Party, 1933 (the translation and the italics are mine).

40. John Foot, *Fratture d'Italia*, Milan, Rizzoli, 2009, p. 111-114. Valentino Zaghi, "'Con Matteotti si mangiava': simboli e valori nella genesi di un mito popolare", *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, vol. 19, 1990, p. 435-436. Cfr. *infra*.

41. Stefano Caretti, "Matteotti", in Mario Isnenghi (ed.), *I luoghi della memoria. Personaggi e date dell'Italia unita*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1997, p. 196-197. Cfr. *supra*.

42. Valentino Zaghi, "'Con Matteotti si mangiava': simboli e valori nella genesi di un mito popolare", *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, vol. 19, 1990, p. 436-439.

the palaces where ideological diatribes and political divorces took place, built an ideal transnational pantheon of freedom martyrs where there was a place for Matteotti, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Sacco and Vanzetti all together⁴³. Even before the Resistance, despite the strong censorship and control by the regime, songs dedicated to him appeared as the first thematic core of the opposition during the *ventennio*⁴⁴, to which the fascists promptly responded with their own⁴⁵. Among the numerous songs, Matteotti is the protagonist of some very famous⁴⁶: a first layer is identified in these four *The murder of Giacomo Matteotti*⁴⁷, *Matteotti's Song*⁴⁸, *Unlucky Matteotti*⁴⁹, *In Rome he was kidnapped* as known as *Hymn to Matteotti* too⁵⁰. In both the songs *The murder of Giacomo Matteotti* and *Unlucky Matteotti*, the words attributed to him the moment immediately before the death returned, in spite of some slight variations: this recursive element helped to check the evolution and the different shapes of his myth. The remediation from newspapers to popular songs did not change the content: it means that the power of his figure as martyr was strictly related to those words. Moreover, before the Italian Resistance, the great Civil War in Spain, a test case of the Second World War, saw the creation of a Matteotti battalion, joined by Carlo Rosselli as well, with its own song *Himno del batallón Mateotti*⁵¹ [*sic*] ([Himno del Batallón Mateotti \(youtube.com\)](#)), yet another proof of the name's ability to shape and

43. Valentino Zaghi, “‘Con Matteotti si mangiava’: simboli e valori nella genesi di un mito popolare”, *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, vol. 19, 1990, p. 442–443.

44. Antonio Virgilio Savona and Michele L. Straniero, *Canti della Resistenza italiana*, Milan, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1985, p. 9.

45. John Foot, *Fratture d'Italia*, Milan, Rizzoli, 2009, p. 108–109. Stefano Caretti, *Il delitto Matteotti. Storia e memoria*, Manduria–Bari–Rome, Lacaita Publisher, 2004, p. 172–173.

46. See Enzo Bellettato, *Matteotti nella memoria cantata. Tra storia e cantastorie*, Rovigo, Minelliana, 2020.

47. Enzo Bellettato, *Matteotti nella memoria cantata. Tra storia e cantastorie*, Rovigo, Minelliana, 2020, p. 33–40. Antonio Virgilio Savona and Michele L. Straniero, *Canti della Resistenza italiana*, Milan, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1985, p. 54–55.

48. Enzo Bellettato, *Matteotti nella memoria cantata. Tra storia e cantastorie*, Rovigo, Minelliana, 2020, p. 25–32. Antonio Virgilio Savona and Michele L. Straniero, *Canti della Resistenza italiana*, Milan, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1985, p. 94–96.

49. Enzo Bellettato, *Matteotti nella memoria cantata. Tra storia e cantastorie*, Rovigo, Minelliana, 2020, p. 47–57. Antonio Virgilio Savona and Michele L. Straniero, *Canti della Resistenza italiana*, Milan, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1985, p. 350–351.

50. Enzo Bellettato, *Matteotti nella memoria cantata. Tra storia e cantastorie*, Rovigo, Minelliana, 2020, p. 41–46.

51. Enzo Bellettato, *Matteotti nella memoria cantata. Tra storia e cantastorie*, Rovigo, Minelliana, 2020, p. 139–145.

assemble an European opposition's identity against all authoritarianisms⁵². It can be deduced that the proper name "Matteotti" was synonymous with resistance against a reactionary dictatorship, while the word "fascism" had become commonly used outside Italy to indicate the exact opposite, i. e. a repressive, dictatorial regime. Some verses of the song:

"Bold, brave lions, / warriors like the good Cid, / in Castellón they gathered / to beat *fascism*; / and they looked for a worthy name / to encourage them / and the *name of Matteotti* / sounded appropriate and distinguished."⁵³

Following the fall of the Fascist regime on 25th July 1943⁵⁴, his long-hidden images, the often hushed songs, his name timidly pronounced, exploded into irrepressible joy. Monuments, plaques, gravestones referring to Fascism and fascists were destroyed and Matteotti's name was spat out everywhere⁵⁵. But, as Claudio Pavone wrote: "The lack of coincidence between the overthrow of Mussolini and the armistice created the feeling that, if the war was not over, neither was Fascism."⁵⁶ Soon, anti-fascist front would have had to arm itself: when the need for armed resistance became unavoidable after the 8th September, together with Mazzini, Garibaldi and Mameli brigades, the Matteotti formations

52. Valentino Zaghi, "Giacomo Matteotti: dall'impegno politico al mito popolare", in Enzo Bellettato, *Matteotti nella memoria cantata. Tra storia e cantastorie*, Rovigo, Minelliana, 2020, p. 222. Stefano Caretti, *Il delitto Matteotti. Storia e memoria*, Manduria-Bari-Rome, Lacaita Publisher, 2004, p. 158. Valentino Zaghi, "'Con Matteotti si mangiava': simboli e valori nella genesi di un mito popolare", *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, vol. 19, 1990, p. 432.

53. Translation and the italics are mine. The original text in Spanish is: "Audaces, bravos leones, / guerreros como el buen Cid, / en Castellón se agruparon / para al fascismo batir; / y un nombre digno buscaron / que les sirviera de alienta / y el nombre de Mateotti [sic] / sonó oportuno y señero. [...]" in Enzo Bellettato, *Matteotti nella memoria cantata. Tra storia e cantastorie*, Rovigo, Minelliana, 2020, p. 144.

54. About the "carnavalesque" situation in Italy after the 25th July '43 see: Piero Cavallo, *Italiani in guerra. Sentimenti e immagini dal 1940 al 1943*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2020, p. 458-481. Guri Schwarz, *Tu mi devi seppellir. Riti funebri e culto nazionale alle origini della Repubblica*, Turin, Utet, 2010, p. 39-40.

55. Stefano Caretti, *Il delitto Matteotti. Storia e memoria*, Manduria-Bari-Rome, Lacaita Publisher, 2004, p. 190-196. John Foot, *Fratture d'Italia*, Milan, Rizzoli, 2009, p. 111-114.

56. Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità della Resistenza*, Turin, Bollati Boringhieri Publisher, 1991, p. 7.

were formed as well, symbolizing true and right patriotism⁵⁷. In a newly liberated Rome, the 20th anniversary of the murder was commemorated on the 10th June 1944 by a large crowd who spontaneously changed the name of the Littorio Bridge in Matteotti Bridge⁵⁸, because it was the closest to the embankment where he was kidnapped. He was a symbol, the strongest one: the Rome's Toponymy Commission took note of this and ratified the change in September 1944⁵⁹, while the Municipal Council made it official on February 1945⁶⁰. In his home place, Fratta Polesine, there was obviously the most well-attended ceremony of all, by people from all over Northern Italy and a few allied soldiers: thus, the march from his house to his grave looked like the *via crucis* more than ever⁶¹.

His memory in the *public* sphere after 1945

The liberation from Nazi-fascist occupation in 1945 started the process that the historian John Foot called “matteottisation”⁶². Every city began to have a street or square named after him to such an extent that today Giacomo Matteotti is estimated to be firmly among the most common names in toponymy⁶³. In June 1945, especially on the 10th, anniversary of the kidnapping and the murder, and in the following days, the prefects sent telegrams to the Minister of the Interior to

57. Amy King, “A Martyr for the Resistance and the New Republic: The Uses of Giacomo Matteotti’s Memory, 1943 to 1947”, *Italian Studies*, vol. 78, n° 4, 2023, p. 8. Valentino Zaghi, “‘Con Matteotti si mangiava’: simboli e valori nella genesi di un mito popolare”, *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, vol. 19, 1990, p. 432. Marco Brunazzi and Agostino Conti (eds.), *Le formazioni Matteotti nella lotta di liberazione*, Cuneo, L’Arciere Editions, 1987, in particular Agostino Conti, “Origini delle formazioni Matteotti nella guerra di Liberazione”, p. 45–67.

58. Stefano Caretti, *Il delitto Matteotti. Storia e memoria*, Manduria-Bari-Rome, Lacaita Publisher, 2004, p. 197–199. Cfr. *infra*.

59. “I ‘circenses’ di Bonomi per gli affamati romani”, *Corriere della Sera*, 9th–10th September 1944, <https://urly.it/3-72d> (last accessed 5th December 2023).

60. “Deliberazione n. 14. Denominazioni stradali e revisione di denominazioni esistenti”, *Deliberazioni del Sindaco e della Giunta municipale anno 1945, bimestre gennaio-febbraio*, Roma, Centenari Typography, 1945, p. 200–209.

61. Amy King, “A Martyr for the Resistance and the New Republic: The Uses of Giacomo Matteotti’s Memory, 1943 to 1947”, *Italian Studies*, vol. 78, n° 4, 2023, p. 11.

62. John Foot, *Fratture d’Italia*, Milan, Rizzoli, 2009, p. 108–109.

63. John Foot, *Fratture d’Italia*, Milan, Rizzoli, 2009, p. 108–109. Stefano Caretti, *Il delitto Matteotti. Storia e memoria*, Manduria-Bari-Rome, Lacaita Publisher, 2004, p. 207.

reassure that the commemorations had peacefully taken place: these were officiated by the Socialists and sometimes other left-wing politicians, i.e. Communists or members of the Action Party, and often included, in addition to memorial speeches, the unveiling of a dedication in the form of a street plaque or a gravestone⁶⁴. Thanks to digital tools which analyse data, freely and voluntarily entered by more than 11 million users on **OpenStreetMap**⁶⁵, it is possible to trace and map the frequency of the martyr's name within our cities. As the "matteottisation" happened immediately after the end of World War II, indeed not only the activity of purging fascist names from squares and streets was more intense than ever during those years, but also the need to re-establish even in this way a pantheon of references for the newborn religion of the homeland was urgent⁶⁶. It could be a reason why in most cases the places named after him are located in the centre of cities: a man ready to sacrifice himself, murdered by a regime, has taken his rightful place, he has established himself in the street plaques of the entire country in place of the sympathisers of those who killed him. To use the concept introduced by Sarah Gensburger and Jenny Würstenberg, "classically, de-commemoration is carried out to *adjust the symbolic landscape after a regime change*."⁶⁷ The geo-referenced map, I drew with the data from OpenStreetMap, available at the following link <http://u.osmfr.org/m/972276/> shows the normal and obvious tendency of the name to be more present where there are more densely populated cities, with a distinct propensity for the north-central area of the country, which was the real theater of the civil war in the years 1943-1945: the Pò Valley, the provinces of Florence and Bologna, Rome, Naples and Lecce. Having

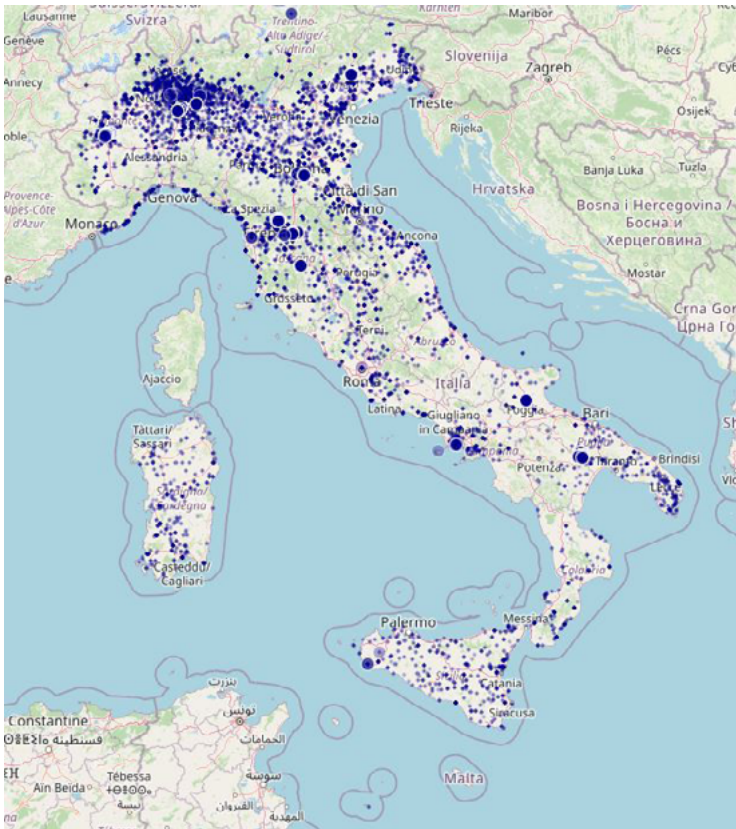
64. ACS, Ministero dell'Interno, Gabinetto 1944-1945, series 90, envelope 7620: Commemorazione di Matteotti Giacomo. This envelope includes telegrams from the prefectures of Viterbo, Salerno, Palermo, Brindisi, Matera, Benevento, Siena, L'Aquila, Ragusa, Cosenza, Caltanissetta, Reggio Calabria.

65. https://urly.it/3aj_t (last accessed 12th June 2024).

66. See Maurizio Ridolfi, *Verso la public history. Fare e raccontare storia nel tempo presente*, Pisa, Pacini Publisher, 2017, p. 27-46. Maurizio Ridolfi, "Il nuovo volto delle città. La toponomastica negli anni della transizione democratica e della nascita della Repubblica", *Memoria e Ricerca*, vol. 20, n° 3, 2005, p. 147-167. Sergio Raffaelli, "I nomi delle vie", in Mario Isnenghi (ed.), *I luoghi della memoria. Simboli e miti dell'Italia unita*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1996, p. 215-242.

67. Sarah Gensburger and Jenny Würstenberg, "Introduction. Making Sense of De-Commemoration", in Sarah Gensburger and Jenny Würstenberg (eds.), *De-Commemoration. Removing Statues and Renaming Places*, New York-Oxford, Berghahn, 2023 [Kindle Edition], p. 25.

in mind the geography of Italy, it is right and safe to say that Matteotti was and is firmly part of the nation’s heritage from the past. A nation that, expunging its compromised past and remembering the greatest examples of heroism and resistance, has always chosen to portray itself as a victim rather than a follower of fascism.



Frequency of the martyr’s name within Italian cities.

Link: <http://u.osmfr.org/m/972276/> Source: [OpenStreetMap](#).

His myth undoubtedly contributed to the affirmation of the Socialist Party in June 1946 elections, the first after World War II, where his two sons were elected. One year later, the social-democratic split of the Socialist Party at Palazzo Barberini in Rome divided Giuseppe Saragat’s Socialist Party of Italian Workers (PSLI), then Italian Social-Democrat Party (PSDI), from Pietro Nenni’s Socialist Party (PSI) for ideological

reasons connected to the closeness to the Communist Party. Among Matteotti's children, Isabella and Giancarlo remained in the Socialist Party, while Matteo joined the split⁶⁸: that was the main reason why his memory started to be divided and claimed by the two parties. In Fratta Polesine, Matteotti's birthplace, the socialist deputy Giuseppe Romita attended the remembrance ceremony on the 9th June⁶⁹, which had a particular value in virtue of the city it took place. In a small town near Milano, Cassano d'Adda, on the same day, the anniversary was held with the deputy Paolo Treves (PSLI)⁷⁰, the same in Caltanissetta and Como, cities where the initiative was carried out by the PSLI⁷¹; while in Benevento, in Southern Italy, as in Pescara, it was even decided to hold two different ceremonies, one organised by the PSI and the other by the PSLI⁷². It was a case of a disputed common memory: the anniversaries could be the opportunities for political rallies with which criticise the actions of the government or opponents in general. What stands out is that these are not initiatives shared by the entire political framework, as if the symbol of the name Matteotti had lost its aggregative capacity: the same was in 1950⁷³. As recognised by the historian Stefano Caretti, Matteotti's memory monopoly after the split of 1947 was left to PSLI, at least until 1954, so that PSI was trying to forget the reformist experience⁷⁴. Overall, as the fascist enemy was defeated, the most important of its opponents was slowly beginning to lose its meaning and its grip on reality.

In 1956 a short eleven-minute documentary by the writer Nelo Risi highlighted not only the last moments, but it reconstructed an overview on Matteotti's entire life, mostly as a politician. Brother of the famous

68. Stefano Caretti, *Il delitto Matteotti. Storia e memoria*, Manduria-Bari-Rome, Lacaita Publisher, 2004, p. 209-210.

69. ACS, Ministero dell'Interno, Gabinetto 1947, series 18, envelope 767: Commemorazione morte Giacomo Matteotti, telegram n. 19556.

70. ACS, Ministero dell'Interno, Gabinetto 1947, series 18, envelope 767: Commemorazione morte Giacomo Matteotti, telegram n. 19603.

71. ACS, Ministero dell'Interno, Gabinetto 1947, series 18, envelope 767: Commemorazione morte Giacomo Matteotti, telegrams n. 20161, 5899.

72. ACS, Ministero dell'Interno, Gabinetto 1947, series 18, envelope 767: Commemorazione morte Giacomo Matteotti, telegrams n. 01856, 2834.

73. ACS, Ministero dell'Interno, Gabinetto 1950-52, series 60, envelope 11745: Commemorazione G. Matteotti.

74. Stefano Caretti, *Il delitto Matteotti. Storia e memoria*, Manduria-Bari-Rome, Lacaita Publisher, 2004, p. 217-219.

director Dino Risi, Nelo was more known as a writer, even if his stay in Paris in the 1940s and 1950s brought him very close to cinema⁷⁵. Back to Italy, he produced documentaries, that already showed a political and ideological commitment⁷⁶: *Matteotti's Murder (Il delitto Matteotti, 1956)*⁷⁷ and *Rosselli Brothers (I fratelli Rosselli, 1959)*. Still looking at the audiovisual sources, the film *Matteotti's Murder (Il delitto Matteotti)* by the director Florestano Vancini, who as militant filmmaker favored historical subjects in his works⁷⁸, dates back to 1973, the year before the 50th anniversary of Matteotti's death⁷⁹, and it opened the Venice Film Festival. The film starts with the words of the deputy: "Honourable Members, we hereby challenge the validity of the elections held in Italy last April"⁸⁰, and closes with Mussolini's famous speech of 3rd January 1925. It focuses not only on the murder, but on the whole affair, seen as the catalyst that led to the establishment of the regime. At the same time of Vancini's work, leaving aside the celebrations in his hometown and looking at those of national significance, in Rome it was planned to honour the socialist with a monument⁸¹, to be placed at the site of the kidnapping, on the Arnaldo da Brescia riverfront and next to the Matteotti Bridge. Commissioned to the artist Jorio Vivarelli, close to PSDI (ex PSLI) politicians⁸², the bronze monument was composed of two units, a vertical stele and a horizontal element, and it was named *The idea, the death (L'idea, la morte)*⁸³: it was inspired by the famous phrase, actually never spoken, attributed to the socialist martyr⁸⁴. It is a monument,

75. Maria Luisa Vecchi, "Nelo Risi", *Belfagor*, vol. 38, n° 4, 1983, p. 430-431.

76. Maria Luisa Vecchi, "Nelo Risi", *Belfagor*, vol. 38, n° 4, 1983, p. 430-431.

77. For more details on this documentary see: <https://urly.it/3-72h> and the Italian films database Italia Taglia <https://www.italiataglia.it/> (last accessed 15th December 2023).

78. https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florestano_Vancini (last accessed 15th December 2023).

79. [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Il_delitto_Matteotti_\(film_1973\)](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Il_delitto_Matteotti_(film_1973)) (last accessed 15th December 2023).

80. The translation is mine.

81. <https://urly.it/3-72p>; <https://urly.it/3-72q>; <https://urly.it/3-72r> (last accessed 15th December 2023).

82. "Un monumento alla libertà nel luogo dove cadde Matteotti", *Corriere della Sera*, 10th June 1974, <https://urly.it/3-72m> (last accessed 20th December 2023).

83. Some photos of the monument on Google Maps: <https://g.co/kgs/5WG3gN> (last accessed 20th December 2023).

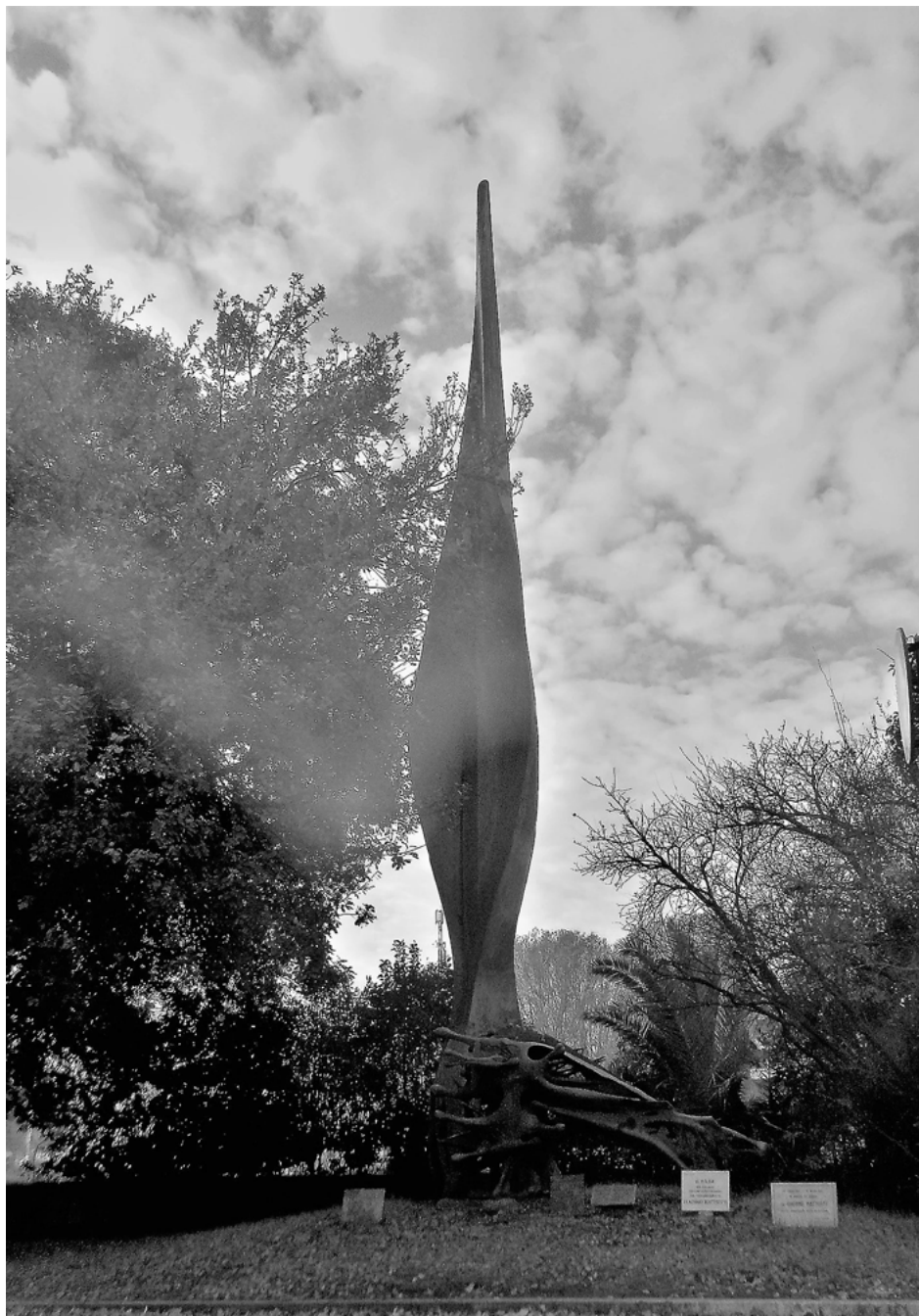
84. "Monumento a Giacomo Matteotti", *Soprintendenza Capitolina ai beni culturali*, <https://urly.it/3-72s> (last accessed 20th December 2023).

not a statue, precisely because it is abstract and “wants to signify the maceration and physical destruction”⁸⁵. The work was carried out on the initiative of the Social Democratic Party (PSDI) and financed with its members' subscription⁸⁶. The 50th anniversary commemoration that accompanied the unveiling of the sculpture was solemn and took place in the presence of Head of State Giovanni Leone, of the politicians Pietro Nenni and Giorgio Amendola, and his sons Giammatteo and Carlo. The official speech was entrusted to the most distinguished of PSDI politicians, such as the previous Head of State Giuseppe Saragat⁸⁷. Its location, however, mixed with changing cultural, social and political sensibilities has made it, in fact, invisible. Near the sculptural group, there is no panel explaining what it is meant to represent: there are only plaques added to mark specific anniversaries. The oldest one commemorates the unveiling of the statue on 10th June 1974 by the PSDI; then another one, again by the PSDI on the 80th anniversary of the assassination; another, added for the 75th anniversary without specifying who made it, recites the famous phrase attributed to him; finally, the last one, also unsigned, commemorates the 87th anniversary.

85. “Monumento a Giacomo Matteotti”, *Soprintendenza Capitolina ai beni culturali*, <https://urly.it/3-72s> (last accessed 20th December 2023).

86. “Il monumento a Giacomo Matteotti”, *Corriere della Sera*, 4th June 1974, <https://urly.it/3-72x> (last accessed 20th December 2023).

87. “Un monumento alla libertà nel luogo dove cadde Matteotti”, *Corriere della Sera*, 10th June 1974, <https://urly.it/3-72a> (last accessed 20th December 2023).



Monument to Giacomo Matteotti. *The idea, the death*, by Jorio Vivarelli.
Source: Wikimedia Commons

Matteotti's public memory from physical to virtual space

From those years onwards, l'“accélération de l'histoire”⁸⁸, due to multiple factors, such as political, cultural and social ones, including the profiling imposition of the new regime of historicity of presentism⁸⁹, in its latest declination of updatism nowadays⁹⁰, has gradually not only eroded the symbolic value of past heroic figures, but has also compromised their evocative capacity, emptying their commemorations of meaning⁹¹. In a new scene dominated by victims and remembrance always remedied only in relation to the present⁹², the space for Matteotti and his role as *exemplum* has drastically shrunk, especially if, at the same time, the increasingly marked crisis of the anti-fascist paradigm is taken into account. *Ça va sans dire*, the main martyr of anti-fascism was finding a lesser *raison d'être* in a nation that was shifting its references from anti-fascism paradigm to anti-anti-fascism on with the crisis of the First Republic, the end of the old parties and the entry of those nostalgic for Fascism into the governmental structure during 1992–1994⁹³. A dangerous consequence of the anti-anti-fascism paradigm

88. Those are the very first words of the first volume of *Lieux de mémoire* by Pierre Nora, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1997, p. 23.

89. François Hartog, *Regimi di storicità. Presentismo ed esperienze del tempo*, Palermo, Sellerio, 2007.

90. Mateus H. F. Pereira and Valdei Araujo, ✉ “Updatism: Gumbrecht's Broad Present, Hartog's Presentism and Beyond”, *Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea: Miraggi e realtà: spazi e tempi della storia*, vol. 43, n° 3, 2020.

91. Jean-Michel Chaumont, “Du culte des héros à la concurrence des victimes”, *Criminologie*, vol. 33, n° 1, 2000, p. 167–183.

92. Some bibliographical references about a huge topic: Marcello Ravveduto, “Il paradigma vittimario della repubblica: storia, memoria e media”, *Ricerche storiche*, vol. 52, n° 3, 2022, p. 7–25. Adriano Prosperi, *Un tempo senza storia*, Turin, Einaudi, 2021. Luca Falsini, *La storia contesa. L'uso politico del passato nell'Italia contemporanea*, Roma, Donzelli, 2020. Pierre Nora, *Présent, nation, mémoire*, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 2011. Giovanni De Luna, *La Repubblica del dolore. Le memorie di un'Italia divisa*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 2011. Aleida Assmann, “Transformations between History and Memory”, *Social Research*, vol. 54, n° 1, 2008, p. 49–72. Stefano Pivato, *Vuoti di memoria. Usi e abusi della storia nella vita pubblica italiana*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2007. Tony Judt, *Dopoguerra. Come è cambiata l'Europa dal 1945 a oggi*, Milano, Mondadori, 2007. Enzo Traverso, *Il passato: istruzioni per l'uso. Storia, memoria, politica*, Verona, Ombre Corte, 2006.

93. Filippo Focardi and Bruno Groppo (eds.), *L'Europa e le sue memorie. Politiche e culture del ricordo dopo il 1989*, Rome, Viella, 2013. Filippo Focardi and Bruno Groppo (eds.), *La guerra della memoria: la Resistenza nel dibattito politico italiano dal 1945 a oggi*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2005. Sergio Luzzatto, *La crisi dell'antifascismo*, Einaudi, Torino, 2004.

was, among many, the political tendency to re-evaluate and relativise the fascist past. This aspect was recorded in toponymy as well, when numerous initiatives were taken in this direction between the 1990s and the early years of the new millennium⁹⁴. The climate did not spare even Matteotti as the most important anti-fascist symbol: for example, in a small town in Tuscany, Tavernelle Val di Pesa near Florence, in 1998, a citizen's petition called for Matteotti square to be renamed after a marquis, a well-known supporter of squadrists⁹⁵.

Presentism and the growing victim paradigm were strictly connected and they both were influenced by the increasing trend of Shoah crimes' remembrance and the related witnesses, movies, fictions, books and interviews. Memory thus, was no longer a private matter, but imposed itself as an imperative, a civic duty. The "memory boom" and the crisis of the parties that had dominated the Italian political scene from the post-war period onwards were indicators of the need for a new civil religion, marked by a generically anti-totalitarian climate and the remembrance of all victims. This generalised condemnation of all totalitarianisms led an exponent of the newly-born party, heir of the neo-fascist MSI party, Gianfranco Fini, and an important member of the PCI, President of the Chamber of Deputies, Luciano Violante, to similar considerations, though coming from totally different premises, between 1995 and 1996. From this point of view, the fallen of Salò had to be understood as much as the others, because they both were moved by an ideal: only by healing this gap through the effort of understanding, Italy could be ready for national pacification⁹⁶. By making an analogy of the two sides, fascists and anti-fascists, they became comparable to each other: thus, the only possible shared feeling was the pity, which, in fact, was dominating the media scene and is usually felt towards the victims. There was no more space for the martyrs of freedom in the age of victims: an example could be the memory laws, the first, voted in 2000, dedicated to Holocaust victims, the second, approved in 2004, to the victims of the Foibe⁹⁷.

94. Filippo Focardi, "Ricordare il passato. Usi pubblici della storia e della memoria in Italia dopo la prima Repubblica", in Giorgio Resta and Vincenzo Zeno-Zencovich (eds.), *Riparare, Risarcire, Ricordare. Un dialogo tra storici e giuristi*, Naples, Editoriale Scientifica, 2012, p. 253.

95. "Lasciate in pace la piazza di Matteotti", *La Nazione*, 19th July 1998.

96. Raffaele Romanelli, "Retoriche di fine millennio", in Ernesto Galli Della Loggia and Loreto Di Nucci (eds.), *Due nazioni. Legittimazione e delegittimazione nella storia dell'Italia contemporanea*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003, p. 335-365.

97. Giovanni De Luna, *La Repubblica del dolore. Le memorie di un'Italia divisa*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 2011, p. 67-81.

The turn to the victims has made commemorations in honour of the heroes of the past, rituals without real popular participation. Obviously, the political crisis amplified this new scenario. Collective memory, therefore, is no longer engaged, because Matteotti's myth emotional vitality has ended its decline: he is now part of history, but history nowadays in our hypermediatic era is perceived to be far away, because it is not immediate. History as a discipline needs sources, method, and scientific ability and the technical time to elaborate a noteworthy and innovative research. Another evidence of falling interest could be the frequency reduction of "Giacomo Matteotti" bigram in the writing production, relevant in the second half of the 1980s and 1990s but very accentuated in the 2000s, as *Google Ngram Viewer* shows in the Italian books' corpus during 1920 and 2019⁹⁸.

Today, speaking of *public* memory includes not only the way our cities remember Matteotti in our places or in political, cultural or social commemorations, but also the words and the actions on the web used or done to refer to him. Unquestionably, now more than ever, the Internet is one of our shared places as well, probably the most visited and the most influential for our historical memory.

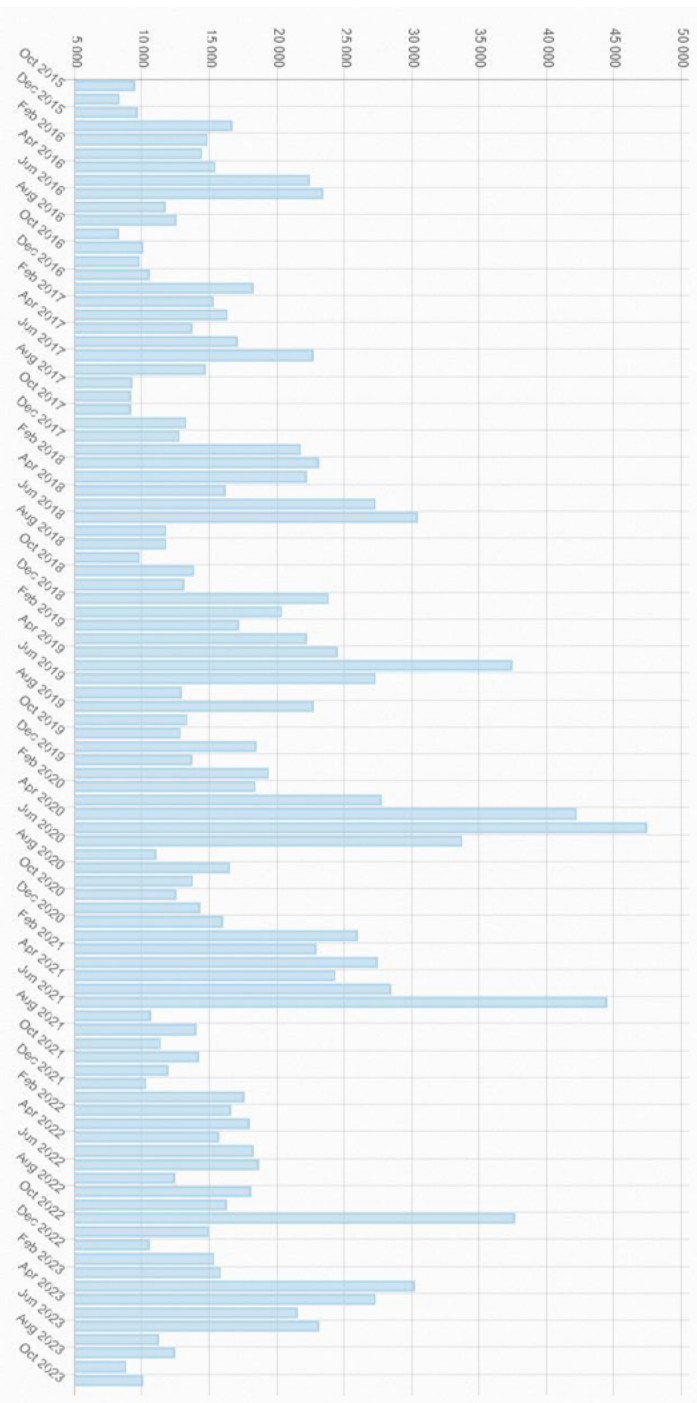
The most common and the first result when someone looks for information on search engine is the related *Wikipedia* page. Matteotti's one⁹⁹ is a member both of the bigger category "Italian Patriots"¹⁰⁰ and the smaller one "Italian Patriots in the XXth Century"¹⁰¹. Among sixteen paragraphs, only one speaks about his life, i.e. "Biography": the others are connected to his murder, the trial, Mussolini's responsibilities, alternative causes of his murder, his figure in the mass culture, anniversaries and so on. The page is quite long and enough rich in details. It is possible to have data about the views and other informations of the page from 2015 until today.

98. <https://urly.it/3-730> (last accessed 27th November 2023).

99. https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giacomo_Matteotti (last accessed 13th November 2023). About the relation between Wikipedia and history, see: Igor Pizzirusso, "Wikipedia: uno spazio per la Public History?", in Paolo Bertella Farnetti and Cecilia Dau Novelli (eds.), *La storia liberata*, Milan-Udine, Mimesis edizioni, 2020, p. 197-216. Tommaso Baldo, "Riflessioni sulla narrazione storica nelle voci di Wikipedia", *Diacronie*, vol. 29, n° 1, 2017. Miguel Gotor, "L'Isola Wikipedia. Una fonte elettronica", in Sergio Luzzatto (ed.), *Prima lezione di metodo storico*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2010, p. 183-202. Arturo Gallia, "Lo storico nella Rete", in Manfredi Merluzzi (ed.), *Ad limina. Percorsi storiografici di frontiera*, Rome, Aracne, 2008, p. 301-305.

100. https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categoria:Patrioti_italiani (last accessed 13th November 2023).

101. https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categoria:Patrioti_italiani_del_XX_secolo (last accessed 13th November 2023).



The chart produced by the software Pageviews (<https://url.it/3-732>) on the Italian Wikipedia page of Giacomo Matteotti shows the trend of searches made by users with every device since the first available date (October 2015).

Another data provided by Pageviews: Total amount of views (2015-2023): 1.746.204; Monthly average: 18.002; Changes: 640; Users as editors: 298.

The chart shows expected peaks of views, as they match with the dates of deputy's birth, of his last speech and his murder, in: May and June 2016; June 2017; May and June 2018; May 2019; May and June 2020; June 2021. During the year 2022, it should be noted that the peak was in October, when the centenary of the March on Rome occurred. This *Wikipedia* page is constantly being edited, as the charts on Pageviews about the statistics of the edits done by the users and their distribution over time report¹⁰². One reason of the attention paid to the page could be the historical role played by Matteotti: as an object of study and commemoration evoked by the mass media on some fixed occasions of the civil calendar, he is often searched for on the web and, in addition to viewing the results, inaccurate informations have been corrected or better specified¹⁰³.

It is possible to compare the view data on *Wikipedia* with the trends of *Google* searches for "Giacomo Matteotti" both as a search term on the Search Engine¹⁰⁴ and as a search term on *YouTube*, thanks to the tool *Google Trends*. As a search term, the peaks are recorded on: June 2004; May and June 2014; June 2018; June 2019; May 2020; June 2021; October 2022; June 2023, with a specific steady trend when approaching the centenary in the last four years¹⁰⁵. It can be assumed that those data exactly match with the *Wikipedia* views, I've just spoken about above: the views are caused by the media's focus on anniversaries, which prompts users to search for informations on his life. A graph drawn by *Google Trends* shows the interest by region, and it clearly demonstrates the disconnection of people's memory even in his birthplace¹⁰⁶: as Lazio is the first region, where Rome undoubtedly takes over, Veneto, Matteotti's place of origin, does not appear in the top five. As far as Umbria, Tuscany and Marche are concerned, these are three regions that have always shown left-wing tendencies from the political point of view throughout the Italian Republic, then the remembrance and the ways to commemorate him have remained stronger and more meaningful there. Last but not least, the chart on the related topics and queries to the generic "Giacomo Matteotti" confirms that it is the name of many Italian streets and squares, as already analyzed and reconstructed in the

102. <https://urly.it/3-736> (last accessed 29th November 2023).

103. To see the *Wikipedia* page's history: <https://urly.it/3-737> (last accessed 29th November 2023).

104. <https://urly.it/3ak1m> (last accessed 12th June 2024).

105. <https://urly.it/3-73c> (last accessed 22nd November 2023).

106. <https://urly.it/3-73c> (last accessed 22nd November 2023).

map¹⁰⁷, and that, if someone makes a query on *Google* with this name, can do it with the intention of searching for an address as well¹⁰⁸. On *YouTube*, the situation is flat, the only peak of searches for Giacomo Matteotti is on June 2009, as the available chart shows since the first available date (8th January 2008)¹⁰⁹. The few related queries deal with Matteotti's famous speech or the film by Florestano Vancini and with Benito Mussolini as his first enemy¹¹⁰.

Not only *Wikipedia* and *Google Trends: 2023* is the year of generative AIs, which can be used as a help to study as well. That was the reason why I chose to ask them something about Giacomo Matteotti, as follows. *ChatGPT* refers to the deputy in these terms:

“Me: who was Giacomo Matteotti?”

ChatGPT: Giacomo Matteotti (1885–1924) was an Italian socialist politician and member of the Italian Parliament. He is best known for his opposition to the fascist regime led by Benito Mussolini in Italy. Matteotti was a prominent member of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and a vocal critic of the growing authoritarianism and violence associated with Mussolini's government.

In 1924, Matteotti delivered a speech in the Italian Parliament denouncing the widespread electoral fraud and violence committed by the Fascists during the recent elections. His bold and outspoken criticism made him a target of the fascist regime. Tragically, on June 10, 1924, Matteotti was kidnapped and murdered by a group of fascist thugs.

The assassination of Matteotti caused a major political scandal both in Italy and internationally. It led to increased scrutiny of Mussolini's regime and contributed to the decline of Italy's international reputation. Despite the outrage and condemnation,

107. <http://u.osmfr.org/m/972276/> (last accessed 22nd December 2023).

108. <https://urly.it/3-73d> (last accessed 22nd December 2023).

109. <https://urly.it/3-73k> (last accessed 22nd December 2023).

110. <https://urly.it/3-73k> (last accessed 22nd December 2023).

Mussolini managed to consolidate his power, and Italy moved further towards a dictatorship. The "Matteotti Crisis" marked a dark chapter in Italian history and illustrated the erosion of democratic institutions during the rise of fascism."¹¹¹



Giacomo Matteotti.
Source: Wikipedia

111. Last accessed 10th December 2023 (italics is mine).

Google Bard:

“Me: who was Giacomo Matteotti?”

Google Bard: Giacomo Matteotti was an Italian socialist politician who was assassinated by Fascists in 1924. He was born in Fratta Polesine, Italy, on May 22, 1885. He studied law at the University of Bologna and became a lawyer after graduating. He joined the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) in 1909 and was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1919.

Matteotti was a vocal critic of Fascism. He denounced the March on Rome, which brought Benito Mussolini to power, and he called for the overthrow of the Fascist regime. In May 1924, he gave a speech in the Chamber of Deputies in which he accused the Fascists of electoral fraud.

On June 10, 1924, Matteotti was kidnapped and murdered by Fascists. His body was found a few days later. The assassination of Matteotti shocked the world and led to a political crisis in Italy. The Fascists were forced to hold new elections, but they still won a majority.

Matteotti’s assassination is considered a turning point in Italian history. It marked the end of democracy in Italy and the beginning of the Fascist dictatorship.

Matteotti’s legacy is one of courage and sacrifice. He died fighting for democracy and freedom in Italy. He is remembered as a martyr to the cause of liberty.”¹¹²

112. Last accessed 10th December 2023 (italics is mine).

The *reductio ad unum*, which is clearly one aspect of the mythopoiesis, is evident¹¹³: two third of both answers are dedicated to his murder and consequent reactions inside and outside the government, without mentioning the Aventinian secession; *Google Bard*, moreover, makes two errors: it is false that “His body was found a few days later”, because it would be found more than two months later, as well as “The Fascists were forced to hold new elections”, as there was only a government reshuffle.

Looking at the social networks, *Facebook* returns results connected to toponymy or some quotes from his most famous discourses¹¹⁴, *TikTok* doesn't profile interesting results beyond pieces of film, while *Twitter / X* is full of tweets recalling initiatives for the upcoming centenary¹¹⁵. *Instagram* is more relevant, as it is possible to draw a *file rouge* one-hundred years long, stimulated by the attention in the other media. The hashtag #matteotti is contained in 5.945 posts¹¹⁶, while the longer hashtag #giacomomatteotti in 2.073¹¹⁷: the common aspect is the presence in many, in both the photos and in the captions, of the words that today everyone recognizes as said by him, even if they weren't, “Kill me but you will never kill the idea that is in me”.

This overview on some digital sources makes us reflect on the memory loss of the main Italian anti-fascist martyr. The *Google* and *Wikipedia* searches take place mostly on anniversaries, driven by the mass media attention, and his name doesn't represent a symbol anymore, but mainly many streets and squares. Matteotti, therefore, only exists in toponymy, at school and during celebrations, especially anniversaries such as 80th, 90th and 100th¹¹⁸. Also, in the context of anniversaries, the best-seller book and 2019 Strega Prize winner *The Man of the Century (L'uomo del secolo)*¹¹⁹ by Antonio Scurati deals with Mussolini's political debut in 1919 and ends, significantly, after his famous speech on the

113. In Wikipedia as well.

114. <https://urly.it/3z5r0> (last accessed 20th December 2023).

115. <https://urly.it/3z5q>; about the initiatives for the centenary, see <https://www.celebrazionimatteottiane.com/> (last accessed 20th December 2023).

116. <https://urly.it/3z0bk> (last accessed 20th December 2023).

117. <https://urly.it/3z0bn> (last accessed 20th December 2023).

118. For example, the front cover of *Il venerdì di Repubblica*, n° 1867, 29th December 2023, features Matteotti's most famous photo and, below it, his signature and an inscription: “2024, Man of the Year”. A foretaste of the flood of exhibitions, books, interviews on the subject.

119. Antonio Scurati, *L'uomo del secolo*, Milan, Bompiani, 2018.

3rd January. Matteotti's *affaire* occupies the final one hundred pages that lead the reader, in an imperceptible crescendo, to the socialist's definitive consecration as a martyr, against the fascists, such as his killers, Aldo Finzi and Michele Bianchi. Of these one hundred pages, fifteen¹²⁰ are dedicated to the five days between the 10th and 15th June 1924, describing both the reactions of the deputy's relatives, friends and colleagues, and the ostentatious indifference of the Duce, in his heart really concerned about the consequences of the murder. In the continuation of the book, *M. The Providence Man* (*M. L'uomo della provvidenza*, 2020) focused totally on the years of the regime, Matteotti echoes as a political watershed¹²¹, except for the pages dedicated to the mock trial of the assassins¹²².

Essentially, collective memory and public opinion remember him not for his role as an aggregator of the anti-fascist opposition anymore, but for the space reserved to him, even urban in Italian toponymy, in our “surévénementialisé”¹²³ society, where the press, radio, images, television and the Internet shape the general perception of past and present events. He exists, only if the media talk about him and the places have his name. In the last number of 2023 of the review *Il venerdì di Repubblica*, the martyr is named man of the year 2024 on the cover and is immediately remembered as the name of many squares and streets. But how striking is his story today? With the exception of 2024, how much is he really and meaningfully remembered? On the last page of those dedicated to the socialist in *Il venerdì di Repubblica*, the journalist's admission comes: “Remembered, but as forgotten”¹²⁴. Memory tiredness together with the anti-fascism's decline has made him nothing more than a name of the past to recall or in some fixed occasions or in historical parallels, for example when he was compared to the Russian opponent Aleksej Naval'nyi, killed by the Putin's regime, in the words said by center-left politician¹²⁵.

120. Antonio Scurati, *L'uomo del secolo*, Milan, Bompiani, 2018, p. 775-780.

121. Antonio Scurati, *M. L'uomo della provvidenza*, Milan, Bompiani, 2020, cfr. p. 9, 14, 21, 33, 47, 54, 87.

122. Antonio Scurati, *M. L'uomo della provvidenza*, Milan, Bompiani, 2020, p. 126-132.

123. Pierre Nora, *Présent, nation, mémoire*, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 2011, p. 73-75.

124. Concetto Vecchio, “Matteotti. Il caso non è chiuso”, *Il venerdì di Repubblica*, n° 1867, 29th December 2023, p. 16-23.

125. Antonio Frascilla, “Filippo Sensi: ‘La morte di Navalny è come il delitto Matteotti’”, *La Repubblica*, 19th February 2024, https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2024/02/19/news/filippo_sensi_navalny_putin-422158735/ (last accessed 25th February 2024).

We have been living since thirty years, more or less, in the age of the victims, in the age of memory, in the age of presentism: these are the reasons why the figure of Giacomo Matteotti has gradually lost his deepest meaning. He is occasionally mentioned in the media, but his decline as a symbol goes hand in hand with that of the paradigm of anti-fascism, of which, not surprisingly, he was the most outstanding martyr.

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