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Cover Page Footnote
This article was borne out of research conducted for Nora Gietz’ PhD (University of Warwick, 2013), which was generously funded by the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, the Deutsches Studienzentrum Venedig, and the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation. She completed her BA at the University of Oxford (2007) and MA at the University of Warwick (2009).

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Tracing Paintings in Napoleonic Italy: Archival Records and the Spatial and Contextual Displacement of Artworks

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Abstract
Using a Venetian case study from the Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy, this article demonstrates how archival research enables us to trace the spatial life of artworks. The Revolutionary and Napoleonic policy of the suppression of religious corporations, followed by the appropriation of their patrimony, as well as the widespread looting of artworks, led to the centralisation of patrimony in newly established museums in the capitals of the Empire and its satellite kingdoms. This made the geographical and contextual displacement, transnationalisation, and change in the value of artworks inevitable.

Résumé
En se servant d’une étude de cas Vénitien du Royaume napoléonien d’Italie, cet article démontre comment la recherche dans les archives nous permet de tracer la vie spatiale des œuvres d’art. La pratique révolutionnaire et napoléonienne de répression des corporations religieuses, suivie de l’appropriation de leur patrimoine, ainsi que le pillage généralisé des œuvres d’art, a conduit à la centralisation du patrimoine dans les nouveaux musées établis dans les capitales de l’Empire et de ses royaumes satellites. D’où l’inéluctabilité du déplacement géographique et contextuel, la transnationalisation et la modification de la valeur des œuvres.

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Using a Venetian case study from the Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy, this article studies the spatial life of artworks during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period in European history (c.1794-1814) and beyond. This period, a historical watershed characterised by profound political and cultural upheaval, is still engraved in the European collective memory also because of the systematic plunder and dislocation of the cultural property of the nations conquered by the French.

Despite the largest process of restitution in modern times, observed and commented upon by the educated public across Europe, after Napoleon’s defeat in 1815 innumerable artworks and other objects had perished, while countless others were never returned to their place of origin, and are scattered around museums and private collections all over the world today. Indeed, according to Yann Potin, it was such an incisive experience that it changed cultural geography on the continent forever, that anyone studying this period must automatically adopt a transnational, not merely a comparative, approach. Wars being fought for two decades, the period was one of intense mobility, the great armies and navies of most European nations chasing and fighting each other across the entire continent and the seas surrounding it. The rational acquisition of knowledge pursued by Enlightenment thinkers and scientists had triggered a desire for a total understanding, mapping, and documenting of global geography from the late seventeenth century onwards. Consequently, every inch of the territories conquered by the French across Europe, and even beyond to Egypt, had to be recorded, and measured. In forging his empire, Napoleon, himself a child of the Enlightenment and Revolution, knew very well that the exertion of political and administrative power was equal to the control of space and the people in it. Distances needed to be overcome and boundaries, whether national or natural, abolished. Communication and ease of transportation were paramount, as epitomised in the ever-increasing networks of roads beyond the French borders and across obstacles such as the Alps, as well as the vast telegraph system and rapid postal service. The Empire was administered in an often oppressive manner by a class of bureaucrats, who were in charge of areas which were not their home, causing increasing tensions between these representatives of French rule and the local populations. This inner-European cultural and political imperialism, as Napoleonic rule has been termed by Michael Broers, together with the appropriation, rationalisation, and unification of space, foreshadowed what Europeans would do in other parts of the world a few decades later.

This study is divided into three main parts in order to approach the spatial aspects of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic cultural policy of appropriation.

First, the policies of mobility around 1800 are explored. From early on in the Revolutionary Wars, artworks, books, manuscripts, scientific objects, and even exotic animals from countries, which had been brought under French control, were ‘liberated’ in the name of the Revolution and centralised in Paris, the new home of all memory and culture. Commissioners followed closely behind the conquering army in order to select and remove patrimony to be sent to Paris, as was the case with Bonaparte’s successful Italian campaign of 1796-98. The arrival of these shipments were cause for exuberant celebrations, the most famous

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of which took place in the summer of 1798 in order to welcome the Third Convoy and its invaluable cargo from Italy and Egypt to Paris.

For Italy and Venice, these appropriations often descended into outright looting, and were considerably accelerated during the Napoleonic Empire after 1805, when policies of the suppression of religious corporations left innumerable artworks homeless. These were destined either to be displayed in national museums, or sold off for profit in order to contribute financially to the continuing war effort.

Secondly, a case study from the Napoleonic Italian Kingdom serves as an example of why the Louvre in Paris or Brera in Milan, not to speak of museums all across Europe and the world, in particular the United States, today are full of displaced artworks of the Venetian School originating from ecclesiastical buildings or confraternities in Venice and the territories of the former Venetian Republic.

A group of documents in the Venetian state archives trace eight paintings from Treviso and its province to Milan, the capital of the satellite kingdom. They had been selected for the Brera, and were moved from Treviso to Venice by boat, where they were loaded onto carts and transported to Milan. However, they arrived at their destination seriously damaged. On a small scale, this microcosmic case study demonstrates the conditions of the mobility of patrimony, the logistic and administrative challenges faced by the people in charge of the dislocation of artworks everywhere.

Thirdly, and finally, the effects of the mobility of artworks are analysed. On the one hand, these obviously are the physical displacement of the paintings in the case study, which, again, are used as a tangible example for a much wider phenomenon. For some of them, their spatial life even continued, being moved again decades after their arrival in Milan, while all of them suffered an unsurprising degradation of their condition, having been damaged in transit.

On the other hand, these effects of mobility go beyond the merely physical and, rather, point towards profound contextual displacements and changes in value. Having been commissioned by ecclesiastical and other religious authorities to adorn churches and glorify God and the saints depicted in them, artworks lost their pious meaning, and became vehicles for the construction of national patrimony and the didactic education of the public in museums. At the same time, items, which had previously been almost impossible to come by on the open market, were all of a sudden so readily available that they barely sold.

The Policy of Mobility

Already at the beginning of the Revolutionary Wars, after the initial successes of the War of the First Coalition in 1794, the appropriation of artworks in the conquered lands became part of French foreign policy. Over the next two decades, innumerable artworks, scientific objects, libraries, and archives were systematically brought to Paris from the Low Countries, the German and Italian states, Egypt, as well as Spain. This plunder was sometimes sanctioned by peace treaties between France and the defeated states, at other times it was outright illegitimate looting. The justification for, and reasoning behind, it was that it happened in the name of the French Revolution, following its ideals of ‘republicanism, anti-clericalism, and successful aggressive war’, as Cecil Gould has affirmed.7

After the Revolutionaries had liberated themselves from their own despotic regime, the objective in the Revolutionary Wars was equally to free the people of Europe from their oppressive rulers. Art and literature were declared the ‘friends of liberty’ and the cultural heritage of Europe needed to be set free.8 Paris, the capital of the Revolution, was chosen as the true home of European culture and memory, and was to become the most beautiful

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8 Potin, ‘Kunstbeute und Archivraub’, 93.
and significant city in the world, as it was declared the natural heir of Ancient Rome.

For this, the Louvre Palace, having been named the Musée Central des Arts in 1793, was turned into a huge central storage space for all the objects and knowledge arriving in the capital. It was renamed in Musée Napoléon during Napoleon’s Consulate in 1803. Later, during the Napoleonic Empire, the widespread suppression of diocesan churches, monasteries, and convents all across the conquered European lands, as had happened in France before, led to countless artworks, reliquaries, and other liturgical furnishings becoming homeless. These were either brought to the Louvre, or local and regional galleries, or melted down or sold off for profit, the proceeds going to the state and towards the continuing war effort.9

The successful invasion of northern Italy in 1796, which was followed by the conquest and annexation of Piedmont, Lombardy, and the territories of the Venetian Republic by the first half of 1797, was particularly triumphant for commander-in-chief Napoleon Bonaparte. He had been more than aware of the invaluable treasures to be found all across the Italian peninsula right from the beginning, and understood all too well the great propagandistic value in bringing the most famous artworks, ‘liberated’ in the name of the Revolution, to Paris.

Bonaparte therefore ordered specialists to be sent into Italy by the Commission Temporaire des Arts as early as the spring of 1796. The group of delegates was composed of artists and scientists, and they were responsible for ‘amassing paintings, masterpieces as well as other ancient monuments, in the conquered lands which are judged to be worthy of being sent to Paris’.10 In order to do so, they travelled on the heels of Bonaparte’s army invading northern Italy from west to east: as soon as a new town had been taken by the military, the experts would go in, select, and confiscate the most precious items to be found there. In early 1798 even Rome was taken by the French.

The objects looted during the Italian campaigns between 1796 and 1798 played the central role in one of the greatest propaganda coups and logistical feats of the entire period: the so-called Third Convoy, which brought a total of forty-five cases filled with antiques, sculptures, and paintings from Venice, Central Italy, and Rome, to Paris. The difficult journey – the carts were pulled across Italy by water buffalo and oxen, then loaded onto a ship at Leghorn, brought to Marseilles by sea, before continuing up the Rhône to Paris – was delayed several times because of war, bad weather, or shortages of funds, the French obviously not wanting to expose its priceless cargo to unnecessary dangers.

The convoy’s arrival in Paris in the summer of 1798 was viewed as the culmination of Bonaparte’s victorious Italian campaigns, and a huge public festival was organised for the occasion, the Festival of Liberty on 27 July 1798, which marked the fourth anniversary of the end of the Reign of Terror. At their entrance into Paris the carts, which were divided into the three sections of Natural History, Books and Manuscripts, and Fine Arts, were decorated with oak garlands and tricolores, and accompanied by exotic animals and plants taken from Southern Europe and Egypt. Music bands were playing, cavalry and politicians marching alongside them, and each cart had a description of what it contained displayed on its exterior. These trophies were paraded around Paris before they were installed in the Louvre or on other Parisian monuments in order to proclaim the victory of the Revolutionary ideals of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity all across Europe.

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9 General studies of Revolutionary and Napoleonic art plunder, the origins of the Louvre museum, and the restitution of the artworks and archives after 1815, are: Gould, Trophies of Conquest; A. McClellan, Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999); Miles, Art as Plunder, 319-48; P. Wescher, Kunstraub unter Napoleon (Berlin: Mann, 1976).
10 McClellan, Inventing the Louvre, 116-23; Gould, Trophies of Conquest, 43-47; Wescher, Kunstraub unter Napoleon, 57.
The propagandist value of this event can be recognised best in the description attached to the cart of the Horses of Saint Mark from Venice, which were the only items taken out of their packaging and brought into Paris visible to all, as can be seen in the print by Pierre-Gabriel Berthault (Fig. 1): ‘Horses transported from Corinth to Rome, and from Rome to Constantinople to Venice, and from Venice to France. They are finally on free soil.’\textsuperscript{11} This influx of ‘liberated’ artworks and monuments into Paris – overcoming incredible logistical challenges such as distances and warfare – did not stop until 1814, Napoleon declaring as late as 1810 that all historical and political archives of the conquered states should be centralised in the Empire’s capital. Twelve thousand boxes from the Vatican, its entire archive, were moved to Paris in 1811.\textsuperscript{12}

Contemporary lists and inventories compiled by government officials and hired experts itemising artworks, books and manuscripts, as well as other objects selected to be moved, survive in European archives. Galleries, museums, and private collections in Europe and the wider world, namely the United States, are full of European, mainly Italian, religious artworks whose dissemination was so greatly accelerated and intensified by the Napoleonic suppressions which inundated the art market. Scholars coming across these traces need to use their imaginative, inductive, and comparative skills to try and piece the whole story together – an almost impossible task. The only hope is that those cases encountered which have enough evidence surviving, can stand in for, and be representative of, what was happening on such an inconceivably large scale.

\textsuperscript{11}McClellan, Inventing the Louvre, 121-23.
\textsuperscript{12}Potin, ‘Kunstbete und Archivraub’, 97.
An arresting case uncovered in the state archives of Venice documents an episode of the removal and transportation of artworks across space to a didactic, enlightened museum – in this case the Brera galleries in Milan, the capital of the Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy – going horribly wrong.

Venice had capitulated to the invading French army under Bonaparte in May 1797, causing the fall of the thousand-year old Venetian Republic. A short-lived municipality based on the Directory in France was established, as well as in the other cities in its former territories, according to a peace treaty, which promised, amongst other clauses, twenty paintings and five hundred books and manuscripts to the French.

A member of the Commission Temporaire des Arts, the chemist Claude-Louis Berthollet, arrived in Venice only a month after the end of the Republic in order to claim and select the items promised in the peace treaty. The librarian of the Marciana library, Jacopo Morelli, and the former keeper of the Republic’s public paintings, Pietro Edwards, were assigned to assist Berthollet in choosing, removing, and transporting manuscripts and paintings.

The pictures selected very much reflect the contemporary taste, the list featuring mainly works by the highly appreciated ‘triumvirate’ of Venetian painting, Titian, Tintoretto, and Paolo Veronese, while at the same time fulfilling a didactic aim in including authors such as Giovanni Bellini, Il Pordenone, Leandro Bassano, and Paris Bordon, who were less popular at the time, in order to have as complete a selection of Venetian art as possible. Equally, the contemporary neoclassical predilection may be gleaned from the fact that some of the potential number of paintings, books, and manuscripts were exchanged for an ancient cameo and bas-relief, as well as a more recent classicising bust.

The two logistically most difficult canvasses to remove and transport because of their monumental size were Veronese’s Feast in the House of Levi (1573) from the convent of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, as well as his Wedding at Cana (1563) from the monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore. However, both enormous feast scenes by Veronese and all other items selected in Venice in 1797 safely arrived in Paris with the Third Convoy in the summer of 1798, which also included objects looted illegally such as the Horses of Saint Mark. This plunder – not in accordance with the initial peace between Bonaparte and Venice – was perpetrated by the French military during the last three months of their occupation of Venice after the city and its former territories had been allocated to Austria in the Treaty of Campoformio in October 1797.13

After the Battle of Austerlitz in December 1805, Venice was returned to French – by now imperial – rule in January 1806. It remained part of Napoleon’s Regno d’Italia with capital in Milan until Napoleon was exiled to Elba in 1814 (Map 1). During this time Venice’s artistic patrimony was affected the most by the religious policies applied to the satellite kingdom by the French.

After the Revolution had been particularly harsh on the Catholic Church, essentially outlawing it in France, Napoleon slowly started reintroducing it during his Consulate from 1799. A Concordat with Pope Pius VII in 1801 recognised Catholicism as the religion of the vast majority of the French population, as well as insisting on the importance of the parish system in organising society, even if bishops and parish priests were from now on appointed by secular power.

13 The Feast in the House of Levi has since been restituted to Venice and is displayed in the Galleria dell’Accademia, whereas the Wedding at Cana remains at the Louvre in Paris to this day. N. Gietz, The Effects of Revolutionary and Napoleonic Policy on the Artistic Patrimony of Venice (1797 and 1806-14) (PhD thesis: University of Warwick, 2013), 46-57.
However, Enlightenment suspicions about the regular clergy not being useful to society, and not contributing to the greater good, persisted. It was soon clear that there would be no place for orders not involved in education or assistance to the elderly and sick in France and the European territories under its control.

In 1803, the Concordat was extended to the then Italian Republic, causing the suppression of regular orders and communities, and was reinforced for the Regno d’Italia in 1805. It was activated for Venice and its former territories when they were added to the satellite kingdom in 1806. Confraternities and some of the regular orders were abolished in Venice on 28 July 1806, closing 17 male and 19 female houses, while the 1808 diocesan reform reduced the parishes in the city drastically from seventy to thirty.

The decree for general suppression of 25 April 1810 left a further 500 monks and friars, as well as just over 1,000 nuns and sisters, homeless in Venice. The same applied to Padua and Treviso, the closest cities on the mainland of the Veneto, and their cultural property was often considered together with that of Venice, as well as catalogued by the same experts.

The patrimony of these dissolved religious institutions was appropriated by the state and allocated to the Demanio, the body responsible for state property in the Napoleonic Italian Kingdom. They housed thousands of religious artworks, liturgical furnishings, and monuments which

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14 The relationship between the Empire and Papacy deteriorated rapidly after Pius VII was arrested in 1809, and under Napoleonic rule relations were never recovered to a pre-Revolution level. On the religious policies and their background see: M. Broers, The Politics of Religion in Napoleonic Italy. The War Against God 1801-1814 (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); Gietz, The Effects of Revolutionary and Napoleonic Policy on the Artistic Patrimony of Venice, 75-76, 86-90.

15 Ibid., 56, 97-98.
suddenly became homeless when the buildings themselves were either destined for demolition after the economic value of the building materials such as marble had been achieved, or reassigned to a different use such as hospitals or military barracks. Owing to their fragility, particularly in the humid Venetian climate, paintings were considered a priority immediately.

Here, as in 1797, Pietro Edwards was put in charge, and he catalogued almost thirteen thousand paintings in suppressed institutions between 1806 and 1811. Edwards and his assistants moved the paintings into deposits, which were often housed in formerly religious buildings and where they were divided into different categories. Two delegates from Milan, Ignazio Fumagalli and Andrea Appiani, had the right of first refusal in selecting paintings for the Brera galleries in the capital, while Edwards, as ‘Delegato alla scelta degli oggetti di Belle Arti per la Corona’ (‘Delegate for the Selection of Fine Art Objects for the Crown’) chose artworks for the Accademia galleries in Venice, and other museums and palaces in the Kingdom and Empire.

The remaining paintings, which were not selected for preservation in galleries or other buildings and possibly amounted to as much as ninety percent of the total number of pictures, were destined for sale in order to create profit for the state. These public auctions and private transactions had limited success in Venice and its mainland owing to the inundation of the European art market with sacred paintings from the widespread suppressions of religious institutions all across the continent, the incessant warfare of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era only adding to the bad economic climate.16

The selecting, moving, and potentially selling of artworks continued all the way through 1814 and was never actually completed, not only because of the end of Napoleonic rule, but also because of the sheer quantity of objects, which made it impossible to deal with them all and led to countless artworks perishing.17

The Conditions of Mobility

A case uncovered in the Venetian state archives demonstrates the risks taken by the Napoleonic regime in moving artistic patrimony selected for preservation in public museums across the Regno d’Italia, from Venice to Milan (Map 1). A microcosmic study like this may also be representative of the vast numbers of artworks which were moved over much greater distances under enormous logistical challenges during the period, the Third Convoy discussed above being the most famous example.

On 16 February 1811, the Director of the Demanio in Treviso informed the Intendente di Finanza in Venice that paintings chosen by delegates Ignazio Fumagalli and Andrea Appiani had been packed in two cases and sent on their way to the ‘gallerie Reali’ of the Brera in Milan. Case A contained a Last Supper by Paolo Veronese from the church of San Teonisto in Treviso, and an altarpiece showing Saint John the Baptist by Cima da Conegliano from a confraternity in San Giovanni Battista in Oderzo.

Case B carried an altarpiece of Saint Theonistus by Palma il Giovane, another of Saint Juliana by Carletto Caliari, son of Veronese, and a third by Paolo Veronese (all from San Teonisto in Treviso), a painting by Paris Bordon from the church of San Paolo in Treviso, and two paintings by Cima da Conegliano from Santa Maria Mater Domini in Conegliano.18 From letters sent by the Finanze on 28 February it transpires that the paintings had arrived in Venice from Treviso by boat and were to travel by land to the Interior Ministry in Milan. Two men working for the logistics company

16 For the Demanio, the cataloguing, selecting, removing, valuing, and selling of artworks, see: Gietz, The Effects of Revolutionary and Napoleonic Policy on the Artistic Patrimony of Venice, 91–118.

17 For the deposits housing decaying paintings from the Veneto belonging to the Demanio into the 1850s, see: A. M. Spiazzi, ‘Dipinti demaniali di Venezia e del Veneto nella prima metà del secolo XIX’, in Bollettino d’Arte, Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 20 (1980), 69-122.

18 ASV, Demanio, Fascicolo 1, Busta 328, 11/9, Direttore del Demanio di Treviso to Intendente di Finanza di Venezia, Treviso, 11 February 1811, No. 681.
Soresi, Pasini and Cattaneo, were to bring the paintings to the capital.\(^{19}\)

However, the paintings arrived in Milan with severe water damage less than a month later. The Intendente di Finanza informed his superior, the Prefect of the Montenapoleone in Milan, that he had told Pasini and Cattaneo they should have repaired possible damages to the crates immediately themselves before even starting for Milan and that the Finanze would have reimbursed any expenditure.

Delegate Pietro Ghedini was now employed to resolve the developing argument and establish whose fault the damage had been.\(^{20}\) Ghedini, in turn, hired the lawyer Antonio Bernardini when Pasini and Cattaneo continued to deny that the cases could have flooded on their watch.\(^{21}\) Bernardini, after some research, decided that it had to have been the fault of Pasini and Cattaneo, as the cases had been inspected and deemed in good condition after coming off the boat in Venice.\(^{22}\)

Pietro Federigo, the legal advisor working for the logistics company, replied to this that it could never be proven when exactly the damage had happened and that, most likely, it was not the fault of the two men transporting the paintings to Milan.\(^{23}\) After having weighed up all the possibilities and statements from each of the sides, Ghedini decided that it had to have been Pasini and Cattaneo’s fault. Apparently, the two logistics workers had even confirmed that the two cases containing the paintings appeared in good condition when they were handed over by boat captain Innocente Torzo, who had brought the paintings from Treviso to Venice.\(^{24}\)

On 5 August 1811 a meeting took place in Venice between a representative of the Prefecture, Cavaliere Combi, the Intendente di Finanza, delegate Pietro Ghedini, and Pasini and Cattaneo themselves in order to try to solve the conflict amicably. The two men accused of negligence repeated their standard argument that it could never be proven when and how the water damage occurred because they only ever saw the cases closed. However, this did not hold up as proof of their innocence and they were asked to pay 270.17 lire in damages which was said to be much less than the actual harm caused. In settlement, Cattaneo offered to pay a mere 67.54 lire. In the end, the agreed amount to be paid in fines was 135.85 lire.\(^{25}\)

This serves as an interesting example of the type of things which could, and evidently did, go wrong in such large-scale operations, and how not only the practical, but also the bureaucratic challenges faced were dealt with by the officials of the Napoleonic government. Furthermore, it reveals stories possibly untold thus far. An incident of water damage such as this may also explain the condition and appearance certain displaced artworks are in today. These documents in the Venetian state archives thus serve as an invaluable trace enabling us to piece the paintings’ full life together.

\(^{19}\) ASV, Demanio, Fascicolo 1, Busta 328, 11/9, Finanze to Pasini and Cattaneo; Finanze to Interior Ministry, Milan; Finanze to Direttore del Demanio di Treviso, Venice, 28 February 1811.

\(^{20}\) ASV, Demanio, Fascicolo 1, Busta 328, 11/9, Finanze to Prefetto del Montenapoleone, Venice, 6 April 1811; Finanze to Pietro Ghedini, Venice, 6 April 1811, No. 9135/1541.

\(^{21}\) ASV, Demanio, Fascicolo 1, Busta 328, 11/9, Pietro Ghedini to Intendente di Finanza, Venice, 24 April 1811.

\(^{22}\) ASV, Demanio, Fascicolo 1, Busta 328, 11/9, ‘Minuta dal Legale Bernardini’, undated.

\(^{23}\) ASV, Demanio, Fascicolo 1, Busta 328, 11/9, Pietro Federigo to Intendente di Finanza, undated.

\(^{24}\) ASV, Demanio, Fascicolo 1, Busta 328, 11/9, Pietro Ghedini to Intendente di Finanza, Venice, 4 June 1811.

\(^{25}\) For comparison, a day labourer earned about 2 lire a day in the period. ASV, Demanio, Fascicolo 1, Busta 328, 11/9, ‘Processo Verbale’, Venice, 5 August 1811.
The Effects of Mobility

Displacement and Physical Degradation

The eight paintings in the case study originated in churches in Oderzo, Conegliano, and Treviso. They were grouped together and packed into two crates in Treviso some time before February 1811, then travelled to Venice by boat, most likely along the Sile river and into the lagoon, and were then transported to Milan, probably by boat to Fusina, the mainland gateway to Venice, no bridge connecting the city and its terraferma at the time, and from there by land to the capital. Mapping their journey (Maps 2 and 3), this study will now look at the paintings individually, piecing various traces together in order to identify them, and understand whether their spatial life ended in Milan or continued elsewhere.

The Last Supper by Paolo Veronese, in ‘cassa A’ may have been catalogued wrongly by the Napoleonic delegates, as it is very likely to have been the Wedding at Cana (c.1580) – with similar feast iconography – by Veronese which is mentioned in the refectory of the convent of San Teonisto (suppressed in 1810) by Carlo Ridolfi. According to Detlev von Hadeln, the later editor of Ridolfi’s volumes, it was in the Brera in 1914. This Wedding at Cana, attributed to Veronese’s workshop today, was moved to Rome in 1926, where it has decorated one of the halls of Palazzo Montecitorio, the seat of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, ever since (Maps 1 and 2).

The second painting in case A was the altarpiece by Cima da Conegliano representing Saint John the Baptist from a confraternity in the eponymous church in Oderzo in the province of Treviso (suppressed in 1806). Cima’s catalogue raisonné by Peter Humfrey includes an altarpiece featuring the Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints Sebastian, John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene and Roch, and Kneeling Confraternity Members (1486-88) (Fig. 2; Map 2) with the same provenance and now in the galleries of the Brera in Milan.

Referring to the catalogues of the Brera by former directors Francesco Malaguzzi Valeri and Ettore Modigliani, Peter Humfrey notes that the painting was moved to the Brera in 1811, when it was also transferred from panel onto canvas, and that the sky and architecture were completely repainted in 1851. Furthermore, a fifteen centimetre strip was cut off from the lower edge of the painting in order to fit it into its new frame. The original form may have in fact been arched which could imply that an upper edge had also been cut off.

26 C. Ridolfi, Le Meraviglie dell’arte ovvero le vite degli illustri pittori veneti e dello stato, ed. D. von Hadeln, 2 vols. (1648; Berlin: G. Groote’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1914), vol. 1, 316-17. F. Malaguzzi Valeri, Catalogo della R. Pinacoteca di Brera (Bergamo: Istituto italiano d’arti grafiche, 1908), 57 (cat. no. 120), mentions a Wedding at Cana by a follower of Veronese from San Teonisto, Treviso, which arrived in the galleries in March 1811, the same date as the other paintings in the shipment. T. Pignatti, Veronese, 2 vols. (Venice: Alberti Edizioni d’Arte, 1976), vol. 1, ‘Opere perdute’, 246, features only one lost Last Supper by the artist, which is a copy of the Santa Sofia version.

Figure 2. Cima da Conegliano, Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints Sebastian, John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene and Roch, and Kneeling Confraternity Members, c.1486-88, oil on canvas, transferred from panel, 301x211 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan (formerly: Scuola di San Giovanni Battista, Duomo, Oderzo). With the Permission of the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo – SBSAE di Milano.
The condition is described as poor, the paint surface being abraded and overpainted. The signature ‘pinxit 149...’ probably is not authentic, as no date whatsoever could be found in infrared lighting. All of this implies bad attempts at restoring the painting having been undertaken in the nineteenth century. This, in turn, strongly suggests that the painting arrived in Milan in a terrible condition. Indeed, looking at the painting up close in the Brera today, even in the frame, a relatively wide edge of five centimetres or so is just painted black, meaning that the painting is in yet another frame or that it in fact was cut too much, not fitting the new frame completely. The physically degrading effects of its physical displacement in 1811 are thus still clearly visible today.

Of the five paintings in case B, the first to be mentioned in the inventory of the paintings to travel to Milan is an altarpiece of San Theonistus by Palma il Giovane, originally in the eponymous church in Treviso. Ridolfi describes this painting more closely, observing that it shows the saint ‘beheaded with companions’. This description, and Stefania Mason Rinaldi’s catalogue of the artist, confirm that this painting is the Martyrdom of San Theonistus and Deacons Tabra and Tabratha (1603-04) by Palma which is in the church of San Vincenzo Martire in Brusuglio near Varese today. This painting’s journey was thus not concluded when it arrived in Milan in 1811, but moved again in 1847 (Map 3).

Also in case B was a painting depicting Saint Juliana by Veronese’s son, Carletto Caliari, from the same church. Ridolfi includes a Martyrdom of Saint Juliana by Carletto in San Teonisto in his life of Veronese’s ‘heirs’, which was thought to be lost by von Hadeln. However, the picture galleries of the Castello Sforzesco in Milan have a Martyrdom of Saint Juliana (c.1595) by Carletto Caliari on display today, which is almost certainly the one from Treviso (Map 3).

The third painting listed in case B was an altarpiece by Paolo Veronese also from San Teonisto, which is not described further in the documents relating to the episode. Apart from the Wedding at Cana already mentioned above, Ridolfi only describes ‘a painting of the extinct Saviour’ in the church or convent complex, which would be a Crucifixion or Pietà scene. Von Hadeln, in one of his footnotes to Ridolfi, speculates that this may have been a Crucifixion by Veronese in the convent.

Again, the document written by the Napoleonic delegates does not specify where the individual paintings had been displayed in their place of origin. Terisio Pignatti’s catalogue does not include a Crucifixion with provenance San Teonisto in Treviso, but it does mention two paintings of the Crucified Christ by Veronese, an autograph one now in Hungary, and an attributed work in the Draper Collection in Miami, without their original provenance, implying that the spatial life of this painting, too, may have continued after its arrival in Milan (Map 3).

Apart from these works from San Teonisto, case B also transported a painting by Paris Bordon from the church of San Paolo in Treviso (suppressed in 1810) to Milan. Ridolfi does not describe a work by Bordon in the church. However, Malaguzzi Valeri notes that Bordon’s The Virgin Presenting Saint Dominic to Christ (1555-60), now in the Brera, originally came from San Paolo in Treviso (Map 3). Although it has not been transferred to canvas like the Cima altarpiece from Oderzo, this painting also looks damaged upon close examination today, a relatively wide edge around the image having been painted black, perhaps to cover up loss of paint owing to water damage.

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29 Humfrey, Cima da Conegliano, 121; Valeri, Catalogo della R. Pinacoteca di Brera, 94.
32 Ridolfi, Le Meraviglie dell’arte ovvero le vite degli illustri pittori veneti e dello stato, vol. 1, 356.
33 ‘un quadro l’Estinto Salvatore’: Ridolfi, Le Meraviglie dell’arte ovvero le vite degli illustri pittori veneti e dello stato, vol. 1, 316-17.
34 Pignatti, Veronese, cat. nos. 266, A381.
35 Ridolfi, Le Meraviglie dell’arte ovvero le vite degli illustri pittori veneti e dello stato, vol. 1, 397.
36 Valeri, Catalogo della R. Pinacoteca di Brera, 45-46 (no. 103), says it arrived at the Brera on 14 March 1811, having suffered during transit, possibly owing to water damage.
The last two paintings of this group are by Cima from the church of Santa Maria Mater Domini in the artist’s hometown of Conegliano (suppressed in 1810). Again, they can both be traced using Humfrey’s monograph of the artist. They are Cima’s *Saint Peter Enthroned with Saints John the Baptist and Paul* (1516) and a *Virgin and Child* (c.1510), both of which are in the Brera today (Map 3).  

Malaguzzi Valeri relates that the *Saint Peter* came from the church in Conegliano, suffered in transit, entered the Brera in March 1811, and was transferred from canvas onto panel shortly after. It is still in a visibly bad condition today, with a pronounced *craquelure* all across the paint surface. The *Virgin and Child*, stylistically assumed to stem from more or less the same period, is often considered a workshop piece, although Humfrey and Malaguzzi Valeri think it may in fact be autograph.  

This arresting case of the shipment from Treviso thus offers a rare glimpse into the microcosm of the transferral of objects in this period, as well as the difficulties faced. By contrast, a huge consignment equally sent from Venice to Milan in 1806 of precious objects taken from the suppressed Venetian *Scuole Grandi* evidently did not encounter any problems during transit. Lists were compiled in Venice and the consignment sent off, nothing being recorded anymore apart from a communication from the Montenapoleone of their safe arrival in the capital. The diligent contemporary documentation of the Treviso crates and ensuing court case demonstrates just how concerned the administration was to keep abreast of the constant displacement of thousands of artworks. The documented care taken in packing and transporting the Third Convoy in 1798, and the immense relief when the cases all arrived in Paris unharmed, confirm this.  

Tracing paintings is clearly problematic, as different accounts and sources need to be pieced together, but, here, it reveals just how much the widespread suppression of religious institutions and general displacement of cultural property affected artworks and their state of conservation owing to the risks taken in their transportation. It appears likely that many other such incidents occurred in Venice and other areas affected by Napoleonic policies across Europe, causing the damaging, and potential loss, of innumerable items.

**Displacement and Change in Value**

In addition to their physical decay and spatial displacement, the paintings in the case study underwent numerous symbolic transformations as well. Just like all the other countless artworks from religious corporations suppressed during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period, they had originally been created for a sacred purpose centuries prior in order to be displayed in churches, where they adorned altars and chapels, or to decorate the communal areas of monastic foundations. This context was completely abolished with the new political and social climate harrowed by the French Revolution and Napoleonic rule.

As, in an age of rationality, no emphasis was put on pious sentiments or religious meanings anymore, a new framework in, and criteria with, which to value artworks needed to be found. As with the conquest of space alluded to at the beginning of this article, or with the new concepts of secular power eliminating divine interference in political affairs, the Enlightenment provides the background also here. The frenzy for the acquisition of universal knowledge, exemplified by the *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751-1772), edited by Denis Diderot, had entered the realms of art from the late sixteenth century onwards.

In Venice, starting with Francesco Sansovino’s guidebook *Venezia: città nobilissima et singolare* (1580), various authors such as Carlo Ridolfi with his biographical *Le Meraviglie dell’arte ovvero le
vite degli illustri pittori veneti e dello stato (1648) (conceived as a Venetian response to the seminal Tuscan Vita de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori italiani (1550) by Giorgio Vasari), or Antonmaria Zanetti with Della pittura veneziana e delle opere pubbliche de’veneziani maestri (1771), all penned compendia outlining the achievements of Venetian painting.

Art critical and academic writings such as Roger de Piles’ Cours de Peinture par Principes (1708), Joshua Reynolds’ Discourses on Art (1769-90), or Luigi Lanzi’s Storia pittorica dell’Italia (1789), which, following the Vasarian model, elevated the artist to a symbol of human potential and accomplishment, thus freeing art from religious constraints, flourished throughout the eighteenth century across Europe. In fact, during the Napoleonic suppressions in the Regno d’Italia, delegates such as Appiani, Fumagalli, and Edwards were actively encouraged to use these books when making their selections.42

During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period art was thus torn from its religious context once and for all, and became a political and propagandistic vehicle for the construction of national cultural patrimony in galleries like the Louvre and Brera. These museums were created as unprecedented larger-than-life encyclopédies of culture celebrating the French victory over the ancien régime and God.

Conversely and ironically, however, as their status was thus elevated, the actual economic value of artworks rapidly decreased in the period. Before the fall of the Venetian Republic, paintings by the Venetian masters were highly coveted, the supply being so limited as most of them were locked up in religious institutions. Cases like the one of the British Consul in Venice, James Wright, buying two paintings and two organ shutters by Veronese from the nuns of San Giacomo on the island of Murano for 1,300 ducats (10,400 lire) in 1767, were so numerous that the Venetian senate eventually issued a decree prohibiting the sale of artworks to the religious orders in order to protect and keep the artistic patrimony in situ in 1773.43

The values of paintings up for sale in Venice after the Napoleonic suppressions were extremely conservative by comparison, even if considering that only the paintings of ‘lesser’ quality and by ‘lesser’ artists were offered on the open market. For example, in the summer of 1812, fifty-one paintings were sold to a Girolamo Miani for a mere 130 lire.44 Because of the sudden saturation of the art market with religious paintings after the dissolution of religious institutions, and the Venetian and European economies suffering intensely because of continuous warfare, there now was a surplus of supply for practically no demand.

Another explanation in this dramatic decrease in value may be found in the dismal conditions in which the paintings were stored and which damaged them irrevocably. This, of course, is reminiscent of the two crates carrying the eight Treviso paintings which flooded in transit. The dampness in the Venetian deposits, which were dilapidated, ancient buildings not built for the purpose, was unforgiving to the rolled-up canvasses and wooden panels, and rapidly contributed to their decline.45 In fact, in December 1807, delegate Giuseppe Baldassini showed concern for two hundred paintings stored in the former Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista as rain was entering through several holes in the roof.46

Unlike the paintings from the case study, which had to be saved with restoration as they were part of the patrimony to be centralised at the Brera, there was no hope for the thousands of paintings in storage in Venice: a vicious cycle of having to lower their prices because they were not selling.

43 ASV, Demanio, Fascicolo 1, Busta 328, 1 1/9, Baldassini to Direttore del Demanio, Venice, 8 December 1812, No. 9042.
45 ASV, Demanio, Fascicolo IV, Busta 419, IV 2/10, Baldassini to Demanio, 11 December 1807.
their condition worsening because they were not selling even at these low prices and remained in humid deposits for longer, and it becoming harder and harder to sell them because of their terrible state of repair, ensued.

The European continent became smaller than ever before in the period around 1800, which was a watershed in its history, owing to changes in philosophical and political thought, incessant Europe-wide warfare, advancements in communication technologies and transport, and the subsequent conquest of space. The artistic patrimony of the areas conquered by the French was ‘freed’ by the policies of the suppressions, and acquired a hitherto unprecedented spatial life and mobility that made its transnationalisation inevitable.

Artworks were moved across newly established political states like the Napoleonic Italian Kingdom in order to take on a political role in the legitimisation and propagation of the ideals the vast Napoleonic Empire was built on. After a millennium, Venice was reduced from capital of her own empire to a provincial city, her patrimony being removed to the new centres of power in Milan and Paris, which had been part of foreign political entities until literally the day before.

This displacement was not only inconceivable in the minds of the vanquished at the time, but also happened on such a large scale that numerous problems were encountered during the process of restitution after 1815. Both, the sheer number of objects involved and the difficulties in proving ownership, made the victors’ initial aims of complete restitution of all displaced artworks impossible to achieve. It changed European collective memory and attitudes to plunder and appropriation of patrimony forever – so much so that Venetian paintings in a museum in Milan (the two cities part of the same, independent, and united country for the past 150 years), might still appear somewhat ‘displaced’ and ‘illegitimate’ today.