

## 2 The unification of Italy 1796–1848

### Timeline

- 1789** French Revolution begins; new ideas of liberty and progress
- 1792 Apr:** French Revolutionary Wars begin; Italy becomes a battleground between France and Austria
- 1796 Mar:** Napoleon leads French army and defeats Piedmont and Austria
- 1797 Oct:** Peace of Campo Formio
- 1802 Jan:** Republic of Italy established by France
- 1804 Dec:** Napoleon becomes emperor; Italy is part of his empire
- 1805 Mar:** Kingdom of Italy established
- 1806 Mar:** Kingdom of Naples set up
- 1814 Apr:** Napoleon abdicates; Congress of Vienna discusses peace settlement
- 1815 Jun:** Treaty of Vienna; Austria dominates Italy
- 1820–21** a series of revolts across Italy – all fail
- 1831 Jul:** Young Italy republican movement founded by Giuseppe Mazzini
- 1846 Jun:** election of Pope Pius IX raises hopes of a united Italy
- 1848 Jan:** revolt in Sicily
- Mar:** revolts in Milan and Venice
- May:** invasion of Lombardy by Piedmont
- Jul:** Battle of Custoza – Austria defeats Piedmont under Carlo Alberto
- 1849 Apr:** French troops sent to Rome to protect the pope
- Mar:** Battle of Novara; abdication of Carlo Alberto; Vittorio Emanuele II becomes king of Piedmont
- Jun:** defeat of Roman Republic
- Aug:** defeat of Venetian Republic

### Key questions

- What was Italy like before 1796?
- What impact did the French Revolution and Napoleon have on Italy?
- Why was there unrest in Italy between 1815 and 1848?
- Why did the 1848 revolutions fail and how important were they?

### The Unification and Consolidation of Germany and Italy 1815–90

This chapter explains the disunity in Italy before 1815 and briefly outlines the impact of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars in creating a more unified Italian nation. There was increasing interest in the creation of this ‘new Italy’, and the hope that greater unity would result in a moral regeneration. This idealism was particularly associated with the writer and political agitator Giuseppe Mazzini, who inspired many young Italians. However, Italy’s rulers had little interest in a new state. Austria was the dominant power after 1815, and its strong armies were a barrier to Italian nationalism. The leading Italian state was Piedmont, and some nationalists saw their greatest hopes in a movement led by this northern kingdom. For a while, it even seemed that Pope Pius IX might lead a more unified Italy. However, the revolts of 1848 proved this was not to be. The king of Piedmont was an unenthusiastic nationalist and Austria defeated his armies, while the pope turned strongly against national unity. Italian nationalists led daring revolts, but by 1849 they were defeated and the Austrians and the old rulers were back in control.

## Overview

- There was little sense of being ‘Italian’ in 1796, since regional loyalties, laws, dialects and customs were more important than national ideals.
- The French Revolution and France’s subsequent invasions and control brought greater political unity to Italy. Napoleon Bonaparte forced Italians to live in new states with a new type of government and new laws. Italian nationalism was a consequence of this unpopular French rule.
- Some Italians were inspired to work towards increased unity after 1815, when the old order was restored and Italy once again fell under foreign control – this time by Austria.
- Some Italian nationalists formed secret societies and were idealistic writers and agitators. The most important of these was Giuseppe Mazzini.
- Piedmont was the strongest of the Italian states and there were hopes that it might lead Italy towards unification. In the 1840s, some nationalists looked to the papacy to take charge of a new Italy.
- However, Italian nationalists were a minority. When revolution broke out on a large scale in 1848, it failed because there was too much disunity in Italy and Austria was too powerful.

## What was Italy like before 1796?

### Italy on the eve of the Napoleonic era

Before 1796, 'Italy' was a concept rather than a country. Contemporaries referred to Italy in a similar way that we might refer to the 'Arab world' or 'the West'. It was made up of many different states with different traditions, languages and levels of economic and social development. The Austrian statesman Clemens von Metternich described Italy in 1847 as 'a geographical expression'. The different states and regions had little in common. There was no official language; no common form of government; no education system; no standard currency, weights and measures or even time measurement. There were economic barriers; difficulties in crossing frontiers; poor communications; and barriers to travel, such as mountain ranges. There was only a distant tradition of Italian unity that dated from Roman times.

*A map of Italy in 1749*



### The Unification and Consolidation of Germany and Italy 1815–90

#### **Piedmont-Savoy or the Kingdom of Sardinia**

The Italian state of Piedmont-Savoy developed as its rulers – the dukes of Savoy and kings of Sardinia – acquired new lands. Savoy was occupied by France in 1792 and its people considered themselves to be French. It was separated by mountains from Piedmont, which was viewed as Italian. This divided state also included the island of Sardinia, which had a dialect and culture of its own. The capital of Piedmont-Savoy was Turin (Torino).

#### **Lombardy**

The province of Lombardy, the former duchy of Milan, lay to the east of Piedmont and was ruled by Austria. It had an impressive capital in Milan and an efficient administration. Its citizens were well educated, and benefited from fair taxes and a legal system based on the principle of equal rights for all.

#### **The Republics of Venice and Genoa**

These were two self-governing states. They were ruled by heads of state, called doges, who were elected by the upper classes. Venice had colonies along the Adriatic coast and was one of the great cities of Europe. Genoa was a major trading centre.

#### **Modena and Parma**

These were small states ruled by dukes and duchesses and allied to the ruling family of Austria, the **Habsburgs**.

**The Habsburgs** The Habsburg family was one of the key ruling houses of Europe. They had been Holy Roman Emperors since the 15th century. The empire was a great area of land in central Europe. Although its emperors were in theory elected by certain key bishops and princes, in practice the rulers of Austria – the Habsburg family – were always chosen, from the late 15th century through to the abolition of the Holy Roman empire in 1806 under Napoleon. After 1806, the Habsburg family ruled the Austrian empire – which included lands in Italy – from their capital, Vienna. The Austrian empire was defeated in Italy in 1860 and in Germany in 1866, and became known as the Austro-Hungarian empire from 1867 until its demise after the First World War, when it was broken up into separate states.

#### **Tuscany**

The Grand Duchy of Tuscany, with its capital Florence, was ruled by a Habsburg relative of the Austrians.

## The Papal States

This was the name given to great areas of central Italy that were ruled directly by the pope in Rome.

## The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies

The southern part of Italy was called the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies because of the union of the island of Sicily with the large southern state of Naples, under a ruling family of Spanish origin. Naples was one of Europe's biggest cities, with a population of 300,000.

### Activity

Test yourself – on a blank map of Italy, make sure you can identify the following: Turin; Venice; Rome; Naples; Sicily; Piedmont; the Papal States; Lombardy.

This knowledge is essential if you are to understand how the different parts of Italy came together.

## The political situation in Italy

- There were three republics – Genoa, Venice and Lucca – but these were oligarchies (states in which decisions were made only by the wealthy).
- Piedmont was an absolute monarchy – that is, the word of the king was law. The Papal States were ruled as an absolute monarchy (with the pope as absolute ruler), as were Naples and Sicily.
- The smaller duchies, such as Parma, had no political freedom.
- Austria, ruling Lombardy directly, was a major influence on other areas through alliances and family connections.

## The economic situation in Italy

In many areas, there was little trade between regions or even between cities and their agricultural lands. Many rural areas simply grew enough food to live on. The northern agricultural lands were fertile and there was some investment and development in these areas. Piedmont and Lombardy were among the few regions of 18th century Europe to introduce modern farming techniques, such as drainage and crop rotation. Elsewhere, agricultural practices had changed little over the centuries. Outside the fertile Lombard plains, farmland was often of inferior quality. There were extensive marshes that were hazardous and difficult to cultivate, and those who lived in the mountain areas were poor.

### The Unification and Consolidation of Germany and Italy 1815–90

Trade for the urban markets was limited because of poor communications. Travel was difficult – carriages encountered substandard roads and the threat of bandits was common. In most rural areas, there was no real cash economy. Many people lived in shanty towns and caves, unable to read or write. They had a low life expectancy and survived on a diet of polenta (a thick mush made from cornmeal) rather than bread. Industrial development was also limited. The landowners invested little in manufacturing, and the main industry was silk. There was some trade and a history of commercial finance, but much of Italy was economically backward.

## Culture and society

Italy was famous for its cities. Culturally, Italian art, music and architecture were very influential across Europe. The villas of the architect Andrea Palladio were widely copied, and Italian opera was a major artistic export. However, these cultural achievements did not bind the Italian states together very much.

Italian literature was written in a dialect used by the educated classes of Tuscany. However, by the late 18th century there was some doubt whether this dialect would survive, as educated Italians mostly communicated in French. Across the Italian states, there were various regional dialects that made communication difficult between people from different areas. Those living in remote areas were cut off, not only by poor roads and lack of transport, but by speaking in a little-known local language. People from the more developed regions rarely, if ever, visited the south of the country.

### Activity

As a class, produce a series of wall charts for a museum exhibition on Italy in the 18th century. Describe the political, economic, cultural, architectural and geographical Italy that visitors would have seen or read about in their journeys in the late 18th century.

### Discussion point

Working in pairs, each person chooses one of the following roles:

- You are a tutor to a rich young man in 1788. Explain to him why Italy is an important place to know about and what he can expect on a visit there.
- You are a young, rich man who plans to visit Italy. You need to ask some questions about your forthcoming tour.

If there are things that either tutor or visitor are unsure of, stop and do some more research. When you are ready, act out the conversation for the class.

## What impact did the French Revolution and Napoleon have on Italy?

In 1789, revolution broke out in France. The French monarchy gradually lost power and was then overthrown. Initially, a constitutional monarchy was introduced, in which the king shared power with elected representatives of the people. However, in 1792 this gave way to a republic – a state without a king. In 1793, the French king Louis XVI and his queen Marie Antoinette were tried and executed. The other monarchies in Europe were shocked by this and opposed revolution, but French armies moved into Europe to spread revolutionary ideas.

The French Revolutionary Wars had a major impact on Italy. French forces invaded Savoy in 1792, in order to secure France's southern boundary. This resulted in the spread of new political ideas into Italy, with reformers in the cities giving voice to the key revolutionary ideals of 'liberty, equality and fraternity (brotherhood)'.

### Napoleon

In 1794, France's Army of Italy, which had defended France's frontiers, crossed the border at Genoa. The army was inadequately supplied, poorly paid and undisciplined. It made little progress until a young general called **Napoleon Bonaparte** took charge of it. Napoleon was able to lead the army to a swift victory over Piedmont's and Austria's troops. He then imposed his own rule on Austria in 1797, effectively redrawing the map of northern Italy. Napoleon even experimented with internal reforms in the lands he conquered.

**Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821)** Napoleon was of Italian descent. He was born in Corsica while the island was still part of Genoa, and lived there during French occupation. He trained in France as an officer, rose to be a successful artillery officer and was a commander by the age of 32. His brilliant military campaign gave France control of Italy. After a campaign in Egypt, he led a successful coup against the French revolutionary government in 1799 and became the First Consul of France. He became Emperor of France in 1804, and defeated Prussia, Russia and Austria between 1805 and 1807. Under his leadership, France dominated Europe, but Napoleon was eventually defeated by wars with Spain and Russia in 1812 and the British army and navy. He abdicated in 1814 and was exiled to the Italian island of Elba. He returned in 1815 only to be defeated again and exiled to the Atlantic island of St Helena, where he died in 1821.



**The Unification and Consolidation of Germany and Italy 1815–90****Changes in Italy as a result of the campaign of 1796–97**

Napoleon's campaign of 1796–97 resulted in various territorial changes:

- at the Treaty of Campo Formio in October 1797, the Austrians acquired Venice and gave Belgium and Lombardy to France
- the king of Naples sent an army to fight the French in 1798, but this was defeated and Naples was occupied; two new republics – the Roman Republic and the Neapolitan Republic – were established here as pro-French satellite states (states that were in theory independent but were in reality ruled by France)
- French troops occupied the Kingdom of Sardinia in December 1798.

In addition, some major elements of revolutionary France were introduced into Italy. The republics acquired a constitution (a set of rules by which a country is governed) based on the French constitution, and there were elections and major changes in law and government.

In 1798, Napoleon led an army in Egypt. He then returned to France, organised a successful coup against the French government and became First Consul of the Republic in 1799. By this time, Austrian troops had entered Italy and reversed Napoleon's gains of 1796–97. Napoleon crossed the Alps once more and inflicted a humiliating defeat on Austria at Marengo in 1800. French forces once again dominated Italy, resulting in another reorganisation of states.

Napoleon introduced radical changes to Italy between 1802 and 1810.

- In January 1802, the Republic of Italy was established. In 1805, after Napoleon took the title of Emperor of France, this became the Kingdom of Italy. The Republic's original boundaries expanded so that the kingdom controlled one-third of Italy's territory and 6.5 million inhabitants.
- Venice and its Illyrian provinces on the Adriatic also became part of the French empire.
- In 1806, following Napoleon's spectacular victories in central Europe, he sent troops into Naples and established the Kingdom of Naples. This new kingdom was not ruled by a traditional royal family but by one of Napoleon's most trusted generals, Joachim Murat.
- In addition to the two kingdoms, Napoleon annexed (brought under the control of France) several Italian territories: Piedmont became part of France in 1802, followed by Liguria (Genoa) in 1805, Tuscany in 1808, and Parma and Piacenza in 1809.



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- The Papal States were gradually broken up, and the pope was exiled in 1809 when Rome also became part of France.

A map showing French control of Italy by 1810



## The significance of the changes

The French conquest of Italy meant that disparate Italian territories were now united under French control. The Italian response to this was significant: there were calls for Italians to unite against foreign domination, and among some educated Italians there emerged the desire for greater national unity led by Italians themselves.

### Activity

Prepare a short presentation on the importance of the Napoleonic period for Italy.

## Why was there unrest in Italy between 1815 and 1848?

### The situation in 1815

Napoleon reached the height of his powers in 1807 after defeating Austria, Prussia and Russia. He dominated Europe, although he failed to defeat Britain. However, in 1812, Napoleon was forced to abandon his attempt to conquer Russia, with heavy losses. His enemies – Britain, Russia, Austria and Prussia – now joined forces against him. France was invaded and Napoleon abdicated in 1814.

Discussions were held by the victorious powers to decide what to do about Napoleon's European empire. At the Treaty of Vienna of 1815:

- Austria took control of an enlarged Lombardy and Venetia
- Piedmont took control of the Genoese Republic, Nice and more land in Savoy
- the pope was restored to his lands in central Italy
- the king of Naples was restored to Sicily and Naples
- Tuscany came under the control of an Austrian archduke
- an Austrian archduke took control of Modena
- Parma came under the rule of an Austrian-born duchess.

The old ruling families, the Austrian emperor and the pope now dominated Italy. This *Ancien Régime* (the 'old regime' – the name given to the monarchies of the 18th century) was determined to resist change. Most rulers sympathised with the king of Piedmont, who insisted on wearing an old-fashioned wig and preventing any modernisation – even the building of new roads and bridges. This traditionalist approach went against the idea of a united Italy.

However, it was not possible for life to return to how it had been in 1789. The Italians' experience of collective rule under France, and of the modernisation that the French had introduced, could not simply be forgotten. Napoleon had shown that there was an alternative to the authority of the pope and Italy's traditional rulers. Underpinning the French victories was a strong belief in ideals, charismatic leadership and the whole nation supporting the war effort (with the French army loyal to the nation rather than simply its ruler). Art, music and literature celebrated these big changes in the old order, and the turmoil that accompanied them. As the Holy Roman empire, the Spanish empire in South America and the French empire fell, there was a sense of new possibilities that increased people's enthusiasm for change.

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Forces for change in 1815	Forces for stability in 1815
By 1815, the idea existed among Piedmont's ruling class that Piedmont could become a strong Italian state in northern Italy and fill the power vacuum left by France.	There was no organised and effective movement for Italian unification.
Many merchants, administrators and landowners had benefited from the more unified rule imposed by France and access to wider markets in the French empire. In this way they had experienced the material benefits of change.	The peasantry were conservative, so they were not enthusiastic for change. They were traditionally loyal to their local rulers and to the Church, so they opposed French rule. The ideas of the French Revolution appealed far more to the urban population and to the middle classes.
Changes during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period meant that Europeans in general, and Italians in particular, were reluctant to return to the ways of the old regime.	The monarchs of Europe preferred to rule Italy as a series of independent states – and had the power to maintain this system.
There was a rise in the number of secret societies that wanted a more united Italy.	There remained deep divisions in Italy. Regional identity was far stronger than any desire to be a united nation. Differences in language and history between the various parts of Italy were a serious barrier to revolutionary change.

## Activity

Work in pairs. One of you should defend the view: 'In 1815 there was little prospect of change in Italy and the old regimes were strongly reasserted.'

The other should defend the view: 'Too much had changed in 1815 to make the restoration of the old regimes permanent.'

Write down six points for each view. Write each point on a separate card.

Then, on the back of each card, write down evidence to support that point.

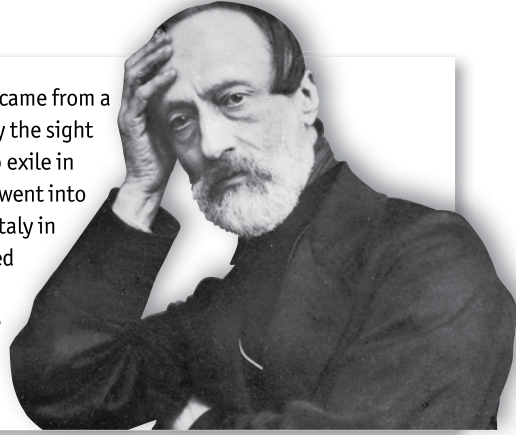
Practise making your points in pairs, then share your views in a class debate.

## Secret societies and rebellions 1815–48

The period after 1815 saw an increase in the number of secret societies and illegal organisations pushing for change. Influential figures emerged, the most famous of whom was **Giuseppe Mazzini** (see page 26), and various rebellions failed. There was a significant movement for change in 1848, which became part of a European revolutionary movement. Yet, by 1850 the situation in Italy was much as it had been in 1815, and so prospects for unity were limited.

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**Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–72)** Mazzini came from a middle-class family in Genoa. He was inspired by the sight of the revolutionaries of 1821 waiting to go into exile in Spain. He joined the Carbonari (see below) and went into hiding, forming the underground group Young Italy in 1831 and taking part in whatever unrest occurred in Italy subsequently. Through his passionate writings, Mazzini became an inspirational figure for many Italians who wanted freedom from Austrian rule and a new unified Italy.



*Giuseppe Mazzini, the ‘Soul of Italy’*

### The Naples uprising

The Carbonari, or ‘charcoal burners’, were the most famous of a number of secret organisations to emerge in this period. This underground organisation adopted terms used in charcoal burning to develop a sort of secret code. Their aims included republicanism and support of ‘the people’, although their actual policies were often obscure. The Carbonari originated in Naples, but their influence later spread into the Papal States.

In 1817, the Carbonari led a small uprising against the pope’s rule, but it had little impact. Undeterred, they planned a larger rebellion in Naples in 1820, inspired by the revolution in Spain. The 1820 revolt was led by an army unit based in the town of Nola, and was supported by a leading general and some army officers and civil servants. The unexpected result of the revolt was that the king of Naples agreed to a constitution – a distinct set of rules by which Naples would be run and which prevented the king from simply acting as he wished. The Carbonari’s revolt spread to Sicily, but the king of Naples sent troops to crush it, and they suppressed the revolt with Austrian help in 1821.

### The Piedmont revolt

There was a military revolt against King Vittore Emanuele I of Piedmont in 1821, and various groups took part. Some were conspirators – different secret societies including the Carbonari – while others sought greater independence for certain regions, such as Genoa and Savoy. In addition, there were discontented army officers and some who hoped to annex Lombardy.

The officer in charge of the revolt was **Santorre di Santarosa**. In March 1821, he led army units in a march on Turin. Piedmont’s regime proved surprisingly weak and King Vittore Emanuele I abdicated, appointing his cousin **Carlo Alberto** as regent before going into exile.

Under pressure from the reformers, Carlo Alberto introduced a constitution based on the Spanish constitution. However, the new king Carlo Felice was afraid of the consequences of such radical changes, and he later withdrew it. With Austrian help, the rebel units were defeated during a skirmish at Novara in April 1821.

**Santorre di Santarosa (1783–1825)** Santarosa was a Sardinian officer who fought in the wars against Napoleon and bitterly opposed Austrian rule. He hoped for Piedmont's support for revolts in Naples. After the rebellion in Piedmont was crushed, Santarosa fled to France and later England. He died in exile.

**Carlo Alberto (1789–1849)** Carlo Alberto was heir to the throne of Piedmont, though he was not directly descended from King Carlo Felice, whom he succeeded in 1831. Alberto was educated in Geneva and France, and served as an officer in Napoleon's army. He sympathised with liberal reforms. As regent, he agreed to a constitution in Piedmont in 1821, but Carlo Felice prevented it. As king of Piedmont, Carlo Alberto introduced legal reforms and a new constitution. He fought against Austria in 1848 but was defeated, then fought again in 1849 and was defeated once more. He abdicated in favour of his son, Vittorio Emanuele, in March 1849.

The language of these revolts was poetic and powerful. Santarosa wrote movingly, 'The emancipation of Italy will occur: the signal has been given. O Italians, even if we have to wear chains, let us keep our hearts free.' However, there was little sign that the revolutions of 1820 were truly national in character. They often reflected local grievances and ideals rather than a planned programme for unification.

### Activity

Find out more about the Carbonari using an internet search or your library. Why do you think the Carbonari are important? What led Italians to join secret societies such as these?

## The 1831 rebellions

Throughout 1830, there was increasing unrest across Europe. The fall of the reactionary monarch Charles X in France, who abdicated on 2 August 1830, triggered revolts in Italy. Rebellions began in Modena and Parma and then spread to the Papal States, where the repressive policies of Pope Leo XIII were unpopular in the northern Legations (comprising the cities of Bologna, Ferrara, Ravenna and Forlì). Although relatively small numbers were involved, the revolutionaries succeeded in driving out the duchess of Parma.

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Some rebels from Modena joined them to form a small army, but this was easily suppressed by the duke of Modena, Francesco IV. In the Papal States, there was an attempt to set up a ‘government of the Italian provinces’ by some middle-class nationalists, but the pope appealed for Austrian support and the revolt was quickly repressed. A few more disturbances were crushed in 1832.

The rebellion of 1831 (if, indeed, these local protests and riots deserve that name) lasted for three weeks. However, the middle-class protestors had little sense of any national movement and were unable to act together. For instance, the people of Bologna distrusted the people of Modena and would not co-operate with them. In the end, Austrian troops decisively crushed the rebellions.

Mazzini hoped to inspire the Italian people to a national uprising, but this did not occur. However, he continued to plot – although his planned rising in Genoa was thwarted by the king of Piedmont, Carlo Alberto, in 1833. ‘They cannot kill ideas’ Mazzini said, but Piedmont’s police and army were able to suppress the revolutionaries.

**SOURCE A**

Why should not a new Rome, the Rome of the Italian people arise to create a vast unity, to link together and harmonise earth and heaven, right and duty? The labours, studies and sorrows of my life have not only confirmed this idea but transformed it into a faith. A mighty hope flashed before my spirit like a star. I saw regenerate Italy becoming at one bound the missionary of a religion of progress and brotherhood, far grander than any she gave to humanity in the past.

Mazzini, G. 1864. *Life and writings of Mazzini*. London, UK.

Look at Source A. How would you describe the tone of this piece of writing? Do you think that Mazzini is simply concerned with Italian unification? Why do you think writing such as this might have been influential?

**Underground resistance**

In 1831, Mazzini set up a secret society called Young Italy. It was a quasi-religious organisation, with ‘apostles’ providing teaching and instruction that was supposed to lead towards a final revolution. The group attracted a larger membership than older societies, but its aims were not clearly defined. While there was talk of ‘the people’ and ‘the nation’, policies of reform and equality, and ideas about what form a future unified Italy would take, were poorly thought through.

The members of Young Italy were investigated by the authorities and many were forced into exile, as was Mazzini himself. There were also unrealistic attempts at risings; for example, plans to start a revolution in Genoa in 1834 failed. Later, in 1844, the Bandiera brothers – Emilio and Attilio – were inspired by Mazzini's example. The brothers were noble Venetians, and officers in the Austrian navy, who formed their own secret society called *Esperia*. In correspondence with Mazzini, who was then exiled in London, they led an expedition to Calabria in Naples in the hope of starting a national rising. The revolt ended when the Bandiera brothers and 17 of their followers were executed.

### Activity

Why did the Italian risings between 1820 and 1844 achieve so little? Find five reasons and write them on cards, then rank the reasons by importance.

## Why did the 1848 revolutions fail and how important were they?

By 1848, Italian unification remained a remote possibility:

- most Italian peasants had little interest in the nationalist ideas of Mazzini and the secret societies
- Italy's rulers, supported by Austria, were strong enough to suppress the revolts
- the secret societies were not organised effectively and sometimes their aims were not very clear
- the educated middle classes, who were most attracted to the new ideas, were a minority.

Despite this, in 1848 there were major disturbances and significant unrest with the aim of achieving change and greater Italian unity.

### New ideas

There was a considerable growth in radical literature after 1815. Various ideas for change were written about and discussed. Young Italy and Mazzini produced numerous articles and books urging change, which were not fully censored. There was also a growth of more moderate writing.

The most famous of these moderate writers was a Piedmontese churchman, **Vincenzo Gioberti** (see page 30), whose *Il Primato Morale e Civile degli Italiani* ('The Moral and Civil Primacy of the Italians') was printed in 1843. Gioberti anticipated changes in Europe and Italy under a reformed papacy, and envisioned a confederation of Italian rulers under the pope's guidance. In this new Italian union, Piedmont would supply the military power and Rome the spiritual leadership.

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**Vincenzo Gioberti (1801–52)** Gioberti was initially a royal chaplain in Piedmont, and he was influenced by Mazzini's ideas. He was exiled in 1833 as a nationalist conspirator, after which time he taught philosophy in Paris. Gioberti's vision of a papal-led Italian resurgence made him famous. He returned to Italy in 1847 and became president of the Piedmontese Chamber of Deputies, and in 1848 Carlo Alberto made him prime minister of Piedmont. After the king's defeat and abdication in 1849, Gioberti retired from public life.

In 1844, Cesare Balbo published *Speranze d'Italia* ('Hopes of Italy'), in which he outlined his idea for a league of Italy free from Austrian influence. Balbo, a soldier and diplomat, also sought Italian unification under the pope. By contrast, **Massimo d'Azeglio** sought free trade within Italy, law reform and greater freedom of speech, including more freedom for the press. He thought these aims would be achieved if the Italian princes co-operated.

**Massimo d'Azeglio (1798–1866)** Azeglio was born in Turin. He moved to Milan, where he became a writer and, in the 1840s, a moderate Italian nationalist. He hoped that the pope and the king of Piedmont would lead the movement to unite northern and central Italy. He fought in the revolutions of 1848 and was prime minister of Piedmont from 1849 to 1852. He was replaced by Count Camillo di Cavour as prime minister, whom he supported until 1860, but whose plans for taking over Naples and Sicily he opposed.

These moderate writers were mainly from Piedmont, and they proposed an Italian union of different states rather than fundamental unity. They influenced future leaders, especially Count Camillo di Cavour (see pages 44–45), as well as middle-class intellectuals and some of the educated Italian élite. For instance, Azeglio met Carlo Alberto of Piedmont in October 1845 to discuss the possibility of a 'conservative revolution' supported by the king. However, these moderate writers actually had very little impact on the Italian population as a whole.

### The new pope

While ideas were spreading about a papal-led federation, Cardinal Mastai-Ferretti was elected pope in June 1846, taking the title Pius IX ('Pio Nono' in Italian). Pius had a reputation as a liberal who favoured change. This reputation seemed justified when he released some political prisoners in the Papal States. He also made changes in the way the states were ruled, so that some people who were not churchmen were allowed to participate in government.



The papacy had previously resisted change. The Church had lost power under the French Revolution and so, after 1815, it supported the Ancien Régime (see page 24) in suppressing nationalism. Furthermore, as an international organisation, the Church had little to gain from the rise of nation states. It also considered liberalism to be ungodly.

Between 1815 and 1846, a succession of popes spoke out against political change, and the Papal States was ruled as an absolute monarchy.

- Pius VII (1800–23) had been imprisoned by Napoleon. After 1815, he reintroduced the index (a list of banned books) and the Inquisition (a sort of religious police to investigate and punish opposition to Catholicism). He also restored the Jesuits, a powerful religious order that promoted strict discipline in religion and education.
- Leo XII (1823–29) was even more backward-looking, and restored both the powers of the landed aristocracy in the Papal States and the restrictions on Jews. He also increased the authority of the police in his lands.
- Following a decade of rule under Pius VIII (1820–30), Gregory XVI (1831–46) used Austrian military forces to suppress opposition in central Italy. He opposed the building of railways because he thought they would spread dangerous new ideas and undermine traditional rural life.

It is somewhat surprising that writers such as Gioberti and Balbo (see pages 29–30) could hope that the papacy might actually lead a movement for Italian unification. The popes had dominated large areas of central Italy and prevented change; they had spoken out publicly against change and nationalism; they had allied with Austria as well as backing the efforts of other rulers to stifle new ideas. So, when a more liberal and modern pope – Pius IX – was elected in 1846, many nationalists hoped that the Church might use its moral authority and influence over rural Italy and Catholic Austria to work for greater national unity.

However, Pius IX was under great pressure from the cardinals within the Church to avoid revolution. Ultimately, he reverted to the attitudes of his predecessors by failing to support nationalism:

- in 1866, he condemned liberalism and democracy in the so-called Syllabus of Errors
- in 1870, he strengthened the authority of the papacy by introducing a decree on papal infallibility that made the pope's 'pronouncements unchallengeable'; this effectively stated that the pope's opinion could never be wrong.

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### Reforming states

In Piedmont and Tuscany, there was some interest in modernisation. For example, Piedmont's king, Carlo Alberto, introduced more liberal press laws that reduced censorship of newspapers and journals. Then, in November 1847, the grand duke of Tuscany, Alberto, agreed a customs union with the pope that ended all taxes on trade between the two states. Shortly afterwards, in January 1848, demonstrations and unrest in Palermo forced the king of Naples to agree to a constitution for Sicily.

### Peasant discontent

Economic changes also caused unrest and contributed to the revolution in 1848. There had been a continuing fall in agricultural prices since 1815. A pamphlet of 1847 outlined the woes of the peasants (Source B).

#### SOURCE B

The condition of the peasants is appalling. They dig all day for just enough to obtain bread and oil and make a soup of wild herbs. In the winter hunger forces them to ask the landlords for food; he gives it but only if they repay him twice as much or even more at harvest time and only if they let him make love to their wives and daughters. The peasant has to sell his honour for bread.

*Extract from a pamphlet issued in 1847 by the Neapolitan liberal Settembrini, published anonymously.*

There was also an increase in the number of day labourers, as opposed to peasants who rented or owned land. These casual workers were without work when times were hard, and this increased poverty in the countryside.

With food prices falling, landowners needed to maximise profits. To increase revenues from wheat, common pasture land was converted to cereal crops and there was more deforestation. These measures put pressure on rural workers, who relied on their traditional rights to use common land for their livestock and had little to fall back on in times of bad harvests. When their wages fell, famine and starvation led to unrest. In February and March 1848, there were food riots in Lombardy and some land seizures in Tuscany. There were also outbreaks of machine-breaking on some estates, along with rural strikes.

Agrarian unrest made the problems of keeping order more difficult for Italian governments at a time when they were also facing political discontent. For example, rural unrest in Lombardy in early 1848 coincided with political activity against the Austrian tax on tobacco. Those involved in rural unrest did not seek Italian unification, but the revolts undermined the authority of Italy's rulers.

## Discontent among the middle classes

Economic development in the first half of the 19th century led to the rise of a larger and more prosperous middle class, and better communication between regions. In the 1840s, railways linking key cities in the north – Turin and Genoa, Milan and Venice, Florence and Pisa – were a symbol of this modernisation and change, and generated profits for investors. Banking and finance also prospered in the north, with new banks in Genoa and Turin. There was also an expansion in the textile industry.

Greater economic development created a demand for free trade. It also increased the confidence of Italy's middle classes and their desire for self-rule. There developed a belief that Italy would grow and prosper if it were not controlled by Austria and its allies. The effect of this was to encourage demands for an end to Austrian domination and a more united Italy.

## 1848: the main events of the revolutions

The events of 1848 began as small uprisings and built into a wider revolution.

- A revolt in Sicily gathered enough support to make Ferdinand II of Naples agree to a constitution.
- This in turn led to moves towards constitutional rule in Florence for the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, in Turin for Piedmont-Sardinia, and in Rome for the Papal States.
- There was revolution in France in February 1848.
- Unrest spread to Austria, and the Austrian foreign minister Kelems von Metternich, responsible for Austrian repression, was forced to resign.
- Revolts broke out in Hungary.
- In March 1848, a revolution in Milan was supported by the neighbouring provinces, and the Austrian army was forced into retreat.
- Venice was the next to revolt: on 22 March, Austrian forces surrendered and the Venetian Republic was restored under the patriot **Daniele Manin** (see page 34).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-60884-9 – History for the IB Diploma: Unification and Consolidation of Germany and Italy 1815–90

Mike Wells

Excerpt

[More information](#)**The Unification and Consolidation of Germany and Italy 1815–90**

**Daniele Manin (1804–57)** Manin came from one of Venice's foremost families. He became a nationalist. He was arrested by the Austrians in January 1848, but was released two months later, after people protested to the Austrian governor. Manin and his fellow conspirators sometimes met in Venice's Caffè Florian, Europe's first coffee house. He led the Republic of San Marco, which was established when Austria was driven out of the city in 1848. He reluctantly agreed to Piedmont ruling Venice, but after King Carlo Alberto's defeat in 1848 he defended the Venetian Republic against Austria as head of a triumvirate (three-man government) and then as president. He was eventually defeated by an Austrian bombardment, and lived out his days in exile and hardship in France.

1848 was a key year for Italian revolutionary movements. The high point was the invasion of Austrian territory by Carlo Alberto of Piedmont, supported by volunteers from Naples, the Papal States and Tuscany.

There were now provisional popular governments in Venice and Milan. The king of Piedmont sought an end to foreign rule and some sort of greater Italian union. There was growing enthusiasm for greater national unity and freedom from Austrian rule.

Volunteers from different parts of the Italian peninsula came to the north. Passionate ideological feeling was spread by those influenced by Mazzini, and revolutionary leaders such as Manin were emerging. France and Austria were too distracted by their own revolutions to intervene, and Britain was sympathetic to Italian nationalism.

Carlo Alberto  
of Piedmont-  
Sardinia



## The failure of the revolutions

However, the revolts of 1848 were not a decisive turning point. Pope Pius IX was deeply concerned by the unrest and, on 29 April, he issued a formal declaration (an ‘allocution’) against change. This destroyed any hope that the pope would throw his spiritual authority behind Italian union and mobilise Italy’s Catholic peasant masses.

The pope’s declaration was followed by the end of the revolution in Naples. The divisions between Sicilians and the mainland, and the king of Piedmont’s inability to maintain control of his armed forces, resulted in the restoration of royal control on 15 May. This marked the beginning of the end for the revolutions in the south of Italy.

Strong leadership by Piedmont might have resulted in Austria’s defeat and the creation of some unity in the north. However, Carlo Alberto was no Napoleon. His armies let the Austrians retreat into their stronghold – the famous ‘Quadrilateral’, which consisted of four major Austrian fortresses at Verona, Mantua, Peschiera and Legnago (see map on page 59) – that dominated Lombardy. This made it difficult for any army to effectively challenge Austrian power.

On 25 July 1848, Piedmont’s army was defeated by the Austrian army at Custoza, and Carlo Alberto signed a ceasefire with Austria.

If Carlo Alberto was not going to lead a movement for Italian unity, there was always the possibility of a popular democratic assembly. Mazzini pushed for this and, in October 1848, a nationalist government was elected in Tuscany that was ready to support an Italian parliament in resisting Austrian rule. The grand duke fled and on 15 November 1848 the pope’s minister, Rossi, was murdered during an uprising in Rome. The pope also fled the city, and the revolutionaries declared a Roman republic. In February 1849, Carlo Alberto broke his truce and resumed the war against Austria.

By now, however, there was less chance of unification than there had been in March 1848:

- the Roman and Florentine republics were too extreme for many Italians – they were too democratic, too opposed to the pope and too hostile to traditional authority; the language used by Mazzini was too revolutionary
- in Piedmont, there were divisions within the government and the ruling classes about whether to support Italian unity
- Naples was once again under the king’s control
- the revolutions in France, Germany, Hungary and Austria were clearly failing.

**The Unification and Consolidation of Germany and Italy 1815–90**

A decisive military victory might have turned the situation in the nationalists' favour. However, once again the Piedmont army was defeated by the Austrians, at Novara on 23 March 1849. After the defeat, Carlo Alberto abdicated in favour of his son, Vittorio Emanuele II.

Following the defeat of Piedmont's army:

- Austria occupied Lombardy and the Venetian mainland
- Ferdinand II of Naples took control of Sicily, in March 1849
- the grand duke of Tuscany was restored by Austrian forces, in May 1849
- the Roman republic, led by Mazzini and defended by his idealistic commander Giuseppe Garibaldi (see pages 64–65), was attacked by French troops sent in by the new president Louis Napoleon (a nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte who would become Emperor Napoleon III in 1851)
- French Catholics were anxious to restore the pope to Rome and ensure his protection; although the French forces were fiercely resisted, the Roman republic fell on 3 July 1849
- the last revolutionary stronghold, Venice, was forced to surrender to Austria on 24 August 1849.

*Piedmontese troops at Novara in 1849*



### Activity

As a class, decide on at least five elements that were essential to the success of the revolutions of 1848. For example, was there a strong and charismatic national leader? Add notes to a table like the one below.

(The table gives an example, but you need not start with this – discuss the order in which to put the factors.)

Precondition for success	Did this exist in 1848?	How important was this element?
A successful and charismatic national leader	No – Carlo Alberto was not a successful military leader and was inconsistent. The pope would not take on the role of national leader. Although there were heroic figures, such as Manin and Mazzini, they were not strong national leaders. There were too many divisions and no single figure to unite them.	

Next, work in groups to prepare posters on each of the five elements. You will need to organise the posters for a mini-exhibition to explain the failures of 1848. Think carefully about the order in which the posters will appear.

## The reasons for failure

The most obvious reason for the failure of the revolutions of 1848–49 was the strength of the Austrian army under its military leader Josef Radetzky. Although the Austrian government was forced out, its army could rely on the effective defence provided by the Quadrilateral (see page 35) and the discipline of its soldiers, who were drawn from across the empire and were unsympathetic to revolutionary nationalism. Against these forces, Piedmont's army was ineffective.

Had Piedmont's army been supported by a national uprising, then the outcome might have been different. However, the papal allocution and the flight of Pope Pius IX from Rome reduced Catholic support for Italian unification. Furthermore, the majority of Italian peasants did not seek political change. Although rural discontent had contributed to the initial unrest in early 1848, this was not the same as popular mass support for a united Italy. There was also little backing for an Italian assembly and, with the exception of Piedmont's ruling élite, little interest in greater rule by Piedmont.

### The Unification and Consolidation of Germany and Italy 1815–90

The various forces for change of the previous 50 years did not come together effectively enough for the revolutions of 1848 to succeed.

- Most Italians did not share the desire of Piedmont's military and aristocracy for dynastic expansion, and there was insufficient military power and diplomatic influence to gain control of Lombardy.
- The Mazzinians were admired by some for their heroic defence of Rome, yet many others were appalled by these 'extreme republicans', who reminded them of the terrors of the French Revolution. Rome and Venice remained isolated centres of resistance.
- Many northern liberal Italians saw the Sicilian revolt as simply an expression of the island's restlessness and desire for independence.
- Furthermore, the foreign powers were too strong. Although threatened by revolution, Austria remained powerful enough to reassert its authority over Italy, Germany and Hungary – at least for the time being. Austria had a strong army and its opponents in all three areas were divided.
- The French were no longer the liberal bringers of revolution; instead, they protected the pope against it.
- The tsarist monarchy in Russia was untouched by revolution and encouraged the restoration of reactionary regimes.

#### Activity

'The 1848 Revolutions failed because Italians were too divided.' How far do you agree with this view?

Make a plan to answer this question. Start with points that might support this view. Then make a list of points that do not support this view but explain the failure in other ways.

Which viewpoint do you think is most convincing and why?

#### SOURCE C

The defeat of the 1848 movement was certainly a grave blow to the cause of Italian independence and liberty; but this had by now gone too far on its way to be stopped.

Procacci, G. 1970. *History of the Italian People*. London, UK. Weidenfeld & Nicolson. p. 248.



**SOURCE D**

As the revolutionary movement collapsed, everywhere in Italy except in Piedmont the clocks were turned back. The liberal reforms had not brought the princes respect and support. Instead the floodgates had been opened and a dangerous tide of social and political unrest unleashed. In Piedmont the new king was eager after his father's defeat to revoke the constitution, but the Austrians made him keep it.

*Adapted from Duggan, C. 2007. The Force of Destiny. London, UK. Penguin. pp. 181–82.*

**Discussion point**

Some historians believe that after 1848, unification was assured (Source C). However, other historians take an opposing view (Source D). Which view do you agree with and why?

**Theory of knowledge****History and opinion**

Why do historians have different views about events in the past? Does this make history more or less valid as an academic discipline if what happened in the past is a matter of opinion?

# End of chapter activities

## Paper 3 exam practice

### Question

Assess the causes and results of the 1848 revolutions in Italy.  
[20 marks]

### Skill focus

Understanding the wording of a question

### Examiner's tips

Though it seems almost too obvious to need stating, the first step in producing a high-scoring essay is to look **closely** at the wording of the question. Every year, students throw away marks by not paying sufficient attention to the demands of the question.

It is therefore important to start by identifying the **key or 'command' words** in the question. In the question above, the key words are as follows:

- assess
- causes
- results
- revolutions.

Key words are intended to give you clear instructions about what you need to cover in your essay – hence they are sometimes called 'command' words. If you ignore them, you will not score high marks, no matter how precise and accurate your knowledge of the period.

- **Assess** is not the same as describe – it asks for some analysis and judgements about relative importance and not just a list.
- **Causes** – this is not the same as a general account of the background and events of 1848. While you need to isolate and explain different causes, for higher marks you will need to assess their relative importance.
- **Results** can be long- or short-term, and your assessment will involve some discussion of how important the results were.
- **Revolutions** – Italy was made up of several disparate nations in 1848, and you will need to demonstrate an awareness of these different areas.

For this question, you will need to cover the following aspects:

- **the long-term influences behind the events of 1848:** the growth of anti-foreign feeling, including resentment of foreign rule; the revolts and risings, and the influence of Young Italy and Mazzini
- **the changes in the 1840s:** the hopes encouraged by the accession of Pius IX and ideas of a papal-led Italian confederation
- **the short-term economic crisis:** how this led to popular discontent
- **the Sicilian rebellion:** why Sicily was particularly restless
- **the European context:** the effects of unrest in France and the spread of revolution to Austria
- **the importance of Piedmont:** the decision of Carlo Alberto to lead the movement for change
- **the short-term results:** the failures and the restoration of foreign and monarchical rule, and the presence of French troops in Rome
- **the longer-term results:** the example of a Piedmontese-led movement for expansion; the emergence of heroic figures such as Manin and Garibaldi; the rise of moderate nationalism and modernisation such as that typified by Cavour's modernisation in Piedmont; the understanding that Italy was unlikely to be able to be unified by its own efforts alone and needed foreign support.

## Common mistakes

Under exam pressure, two types of mistakes are particularly common.

One is to begin by giving some pre-1848 context but then simply to describe the situation in Italy – the different provinces, the linguistic and social differences and so on, without really linking this information to why revolutions broke out in 1848.

The other mistake is to focus entirely on a description of what happened, rather than isolating the results. This type of narrative-based account will not score highly, as it will not explicitly address the question. Also, a list of causes and results is not enough to achieve higher-level marks – this will depend on estimating the **relative importance** of long- and short-term factors and discussing the issues that historians have raised. The question you need to answer is: How important was nationalism before 1848, and did the revolutions make unity more or less achievable?

While it is helpful to have revision notes, spider diagrams and lists, it is important that you use these as aids to thinking about **the significance of the issues** and to help you address the command 'assess', which is different to 'describe' or 'explain'.

**The Unification and Consolidation of Germany and Italy 1815–90**

## Activity

In this chapter, the focus is on understanding the question and producing a brief essay plan. So, look again at the question, the tips and the simplified markscheme on page 223. Now, using the information from this chapter, and any other sources of information available to you, draw up an essay plan (perhaps in the form of a spider diagram), which has all the necessary headings for a well-focussed and clearly structured response to the question.

## Paper 3 practice questions

- 1 Compare the causes and results of any two revolutions of 1848.
- 2 Were the 1848 revolutions in Italy bound to fail?
- 3 Assess the positive and negative contributions of the following in Italian unification: separatism, republicanism, foreign involvement. (Think about this question in relation to the material covered in Chapter 1.)
- 4 To what extent was the cause of Italian unity helped or hindered by the events of 1848–49?
- 5 Assess the development of nationalism in Italy between 1815 and 1859.