Making Padanians

Barbarossa *(2009) and Repurposing the Myth of the Lombard League*

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My title plays on the oft-quoted statement by Italian statesman Massimo d'Azeglio at the first meeting of Parliament in the united Italian kingdom (1860), "We have made Italy, now we have to make Italians."[1] That statement informs my reading of Renzo Martinelli's 2009 would-be medieval epic film *Barbarossa*, which debuted in Italy in a climate of controversy, and which was subsequently a critical and financial failure.[2] More than a decade later, Luigi Andrea Berto offered what has become the standard criticism of this film, dubbing it a "failed *Braveheart*." Berto concluded that *Barbarossa* lacked the necessary punch to embolden Northern Italians into supporting secession, the agenda of the Italian political party Lega Nord (Northern League), the main proponents of the film.[3]

It is easy to dismiss *Barbarossa*. It did not have a theatrical release outside Italy, and its home releases, including an extended two-part miniseries that aired on television, have all but gone out of circulation.[4] However, its recent availability through online streaming platforms such as Amazon Prime has reintroduced it to a wider, non–Italian audience completely unaware of the background of the film.[5] That background propagates a nationalistic narrative that is more myth than history, reminiscent of similar movements from nineteenth-century Europe, albeit with a twist.

Barbarossa, released as *Sword of War* in the United States, and as *Barbarossa: Siege Lord* in other counties, to emphasize its martial focus, stars Rutger Hauer in the title role. The film focuses on Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa's efforts to subdue Italy and to defy the pope, and recounts the stories of those who, between 1158 and 1176, resisted the emperor and his attempts to subdue parts of Italy. Most prominent among those opposing the emperor is the legendary resistance fighter Alberto da Giussano (Raz Dugan), who, although his existence is contested by historians, has been featured prominently in stories used to bolster Italy's nationalistic origins. Through title cards and dialog, the movie emphasizes the point that the emperor's motivation is to expand the Holy Roman Empire to the boundaries and greatness that it enjoyed under Charlemagne.[6]

The film features Alberto da Giussano and the so-called Oath of Pontida (1167),

Rutger Hauer as Frederick I Barbarossa (*Barbarossa*, 2009).

which, like Giussano, is also contested by historians, as well as the very real Lombard League and the Battle of Legnano (1176). All four of these components—Giussano, the oath, the Lombard League, and Legnano—were integral to the creation of Italian nationalism in the mid-nineteenth century, as well as to the more recent efforts in the 1990s and 2000s by the Lega Nord to create a new nation dubbed Padania.[7]

This essay examines links among the 2009 production and release of *Barbarossa*, the nationalistic myth surrounding the resistance against Barbarossa in Italy (1158–1176), the formation of the Italian nation throughout the nineteenth century, and the efforts to create a new nation out of Northern Italy in the late twentieth-century. The film follows, I will argue, in the lengthy tradition of "imagined communities," a term coined by Benedict Anderson to define a nation as "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[8]

The History of Barbarossa's Italian Campaigns (1158–1176)

Barbarossa condenses nearly 20 years of conflict into what seems like a few short years. The only real indication that much time has passed occurs in the first twenty minutes of the film. In the first scene, the emperor encounters an adolescent Alberto da Giussano while on a hunt in Italy, and, in the third scene, the emperor marries the thirteen-year-old Beatrice I of Burgundy. Both Giussano and Beatrice are adults

minutes later. The film highlights portions of the emperor's campaigns including the capture and razing of Milan (1162), the plague in Rome that ravaged the emperor's army (1166), the evolving formation of the Lombard League, and, finally, the Battle of Legnano (1176). The only dates provided by the film itself include "12th Century AD," in the opening title card; another title card before the climax of the final battle that reads "LEGNANO. 29 MAY 1176." Throughout 1158–1176, historical records indicate that the emperor laid numerous sieges, often pitting the cities of Northern Italy against each other. However, because the film does not signpost dates, events separated by as much as a decade often seem to occur in quick succession.[9]

After the unification of Italy in 1860, the Italian government heeded Massimo d'Azeglio's instruction to "make Italians." Part of this effort established school curricula that taught a single Italian language. In an attempt to create a collective imagined history, schools also exposed children to stories about Alberto da Giussano, the Oath of Pontida, the Lombard League, and the Battle of Legnano. These stories were presented not as belonging to cities of Northern Italy, but as Italian stories representing the whole of the new Italian nation.[10] Legnano remains the most prominent of these stories, as its invocation is still part of the Italian national anthem, which says, "From the Alps to Sicily, everywhere is Legnano."[11] Historians have thoroughly documented how these stories were used to create a national identity for Italians who were, up to this point, never united as a single country.[12]

Barbarossa and the Risorgimento

Like other medieval stories repurposed for nineteenth-century nationalistic origins throughout Europe, episodes in *Barbarossa* can be traced to medieval sources. The Lombard League did form in 1167 with Milan, Crema, Bergamo, Brescia, and Manau as the core cities, but membership in the League ebbed and flowed, and eventually included the seventeen cities that signed the Peace of Constance (1183).[13] In this peace, both the emperor and the Lombard League made concessions.[14] At no point did the Lombard League consist of all the cities of Lombardy, and, even after Barbarossa's defeat at Legnano, Italian cities such as Pavia, Crema, Como, and Genoa remained allied with the emperor. In addition, the historical record indicates that the Italian cities were more concerned with disputes and alliances against each other than they were with a foreign invader, who, the cities saw fit to use against each other.[15]

The story of a figure named Alberto da Giussano does not appear in any medieval sources until 150 years after Barbarossa's Italian campaigns.[16] There are similar issues with the so-called Oath of Pontida by which da Giussano supposedly formed the "Company of Death," a group of 900 men who swore to die instead of retreating in their resistance to the emperor.[17] But the Oath of Pontida and the Company of Death are not mentioned in any historical documents until the late fifteenth century.[18] For nearly three centuries after the Peace of Constance (1183), the displaced people of Milan were at the core of the Lombard League's story in histories written about the events. That narrative changed in 1574, when Carlo Sigonio's *Storia di*

Raz Dugan as Alberto da Giussano (*Barbarossa*, 2009).

Milano recontextualized the league to represent all of Lombardy, as opposed to just Milan and some allied cities.[19]

In his widely distributed and often translated *Histoire des républiques italiennes* (1807), Jean-Charles Léonard Sismonde de Sismondi depicted the Milanese, the core of the Lombard League, as a heroic people in the long struggle for Italian freedom. This narrative of the Lombard League fit squarely into growing anti-imperialistic sentiments found in historical works from the early nineteenth century, which supported Italian independence from Austria.[20] Poetry, art, and music followed suit and advanced the notion that life in nineteenth-century Italy under Austrian control was the equivalent of that in the twelfth century under Barbarossa, and the story of the Lombard League became common in artistic works. For example, one "survey counted thirty major nineteenth-century Italian paintings on the theme of the Lombard League, of which six depict the oaths of Pontida, and ten the battle of Legnano."[21] Verdi's opera *La battaglia di Legnano* is by far the most famous of the works that celebrated the Lombard League, focusing on a fictional Arrigo, a "thinly veiled Alberto da Giussano," who slays the emperor during the Battle of Legnano.[22] The opera debuted in Rome on 27 January 1849 and was enthusiastically received by citizens who sought to unify Italy, and the push for a unified Italy culminated in the so-called Risorgimento, the declaration in 1860 of a single Italian state

The evolving portrayal of the Lombard League and of its associated myths was, however, not without its critics, and historians began questioning the legitimacy of those myths in the second half of the nineteenth century.[23] Today, historians strongly dispute the nationalist use of the Lombard League as a part of the history

of the modern Italian nation, and they emphasize that the Lombard League did not represent all of medieval Lombardy: "In the thirteenth century, largely because of the independence enjoyed by Italian Communes, the allegiance of the 'people' is to a city, and within a city, to a particular area of it."[24]

The Lega Nord and Padania

Examined in the context of the Lega Nord,[25] an Italian political group that has pushed for the creation of a Northern Italian country dubbed Padania since the mid-nineties, the film *Barbarossa* can be seen as part of a long line of efforts to create a history of a unified Northern Italy, a history and identity that do not exist.[26] Declared as an independent nation by the Lega Nord in 1996, Padania received much political and media scrutiny, and members of the Lega Nord have continued to participate in Italian politics. Although their declaration of independence did not result in a real nation—not even in the opinion of so-called Padanians—members of the Lega Nord continue to push the idea of an independent Padania as a priority. Part of this effort has been to create a unique history and culture for Northern Italy, another "imagined community."[27] These efforts included newspapers, a television station, an orchestra, a circus, a Miss Padania pageant, musical and literary competitions, and art exhibitions.[28] Although all of these efforts have now ceased,[29] *Barbarossa* remains the most prominent and accessible remnant of the efforts to create Padanian identity, especially outside of Italy.

The Lega Nord was formed as an alliance of political parties in 1989 and became a single political party in 1991. Although relatively young compared to parties in other European countries, in the 2008 Italian Parliament, it was the oldest political party to hold any elected seats.[30] The party adopted a portrait of Alberto da Giussano as part of its official logo, which adorns its websites, ephemera, and flags.[31] Throughout the 1990s, the efforts of the Lega Nord coalesced around a common enemy: Southern Italians and their perceived center of power, Rome. During this decade, the success of the party was tied directly to its ability to harness outdated stereotypes of Southern Italians as being lazy, poor, and controlled by the corruption of the mob, all feeding off the economic prosperity of the North.[32]

In 1996, the Lega Nord produced a spectacle in Pontida, the supposed site of the medieval Oath of Pontida. The spectacle featured a mass demonstration and a declaration of independence for Padania, which fed into the party's efforts to give its members a sense of shared identity among the cities of the North that was simultaneously separate from that of the rest of Italy.[33] The event, which was covered heavily by the media, successfully created awareness.[34] The party then held yearly gatherings in Pontida with the aim of establishing a pilgrimage site of sorts for dedicated members. Such ceremonies and sites were necessary for this new "imagined community" because, as early as 1991, historians and political analysts argued that people who grew up in Northern Italy did not share any notion of community outside their own city.[35]

The success of establishing support for Padania among Northern Italians has, at times, varied. For example, surveys taken in 1997 found that as many as half of the

Lega Nord's voters supported secession from Italy, while only 19 percent of Northern Italians supported the proposal.[36] Other Italians, including those mostly outside of the North, treated the party and its new proposed nation as a sideshow, but, in 1996, the party leaders declared that secession was their only option to avoid economic turmoil or even a civil war.[37] Still, the party found success in local elections, as it presented solutions to real grievances among Northern Italians, focusing on political corruption, inefficient political systems, large regional differences between North and South, inadequate public services and their waste, and immigration.[38]

The message of the Lega Nord pivoted in 2000 when the party agreed to an alliance with the Centre-right coalition, making it in 2001, for the first time, part of the national government. Instead of secession, the party now sought devolution.[39] After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the party again shifted its opposition from Southern Italians to Muslims and non–Italian immigrants.[40] For example, the Lega Nord spoke out against the construction of mosques and other Islamic religious centers.[41] An opposition to non–Italians was always present as part of the party's agenda, but the Lega Nord's shift from opposition to Southern Italians to non–Italians grew significantly during the 2000s.[42] The party's new message increased its national support, and saw the party gain 3.9 percent, 4.6 percent, and 8.3 percent of the vote in general elections in 2001, 2006, and 2008, respectively.[43]

Barbarossa thus falls squarely within the group of medieval films that "have regularly been used to enshrine national identities," which "can record actual events in a nation or people's history—or what is perceived as their history."[44] The Lega Nord's efforts to influence the perception of Northern Italy's history provide a background to *Barbarossa*. The film was produced and released during the height of efforts for an independent Padania, but also shortly before the party adopted a broader nationalistic message for *all* of Italy against immigrants, Muslims, and the EU.[45] With this context, it is possible to understand better why *Barbarossa*, according to Berto, was a "failed *Braveheart*."[46]

Barbarossa *Production, Release, and Reception*

Prior to the release of *Barbarossa*, the film became the center of controversy in Italy, as the public learned that government funds were used in its production. Although touted as a historical and culturally significant film, the release of taped conversations revealed that the film was important to the Lega Nord's leadership.[47] But the production continued, despite the outcry against using public funds toward what was then criticized as a propaganda film for a political party. The Lega Nord and its associated organizations promoted the film, and even tried to organize viewing parties. A poster advertising the film's release and links to a trailer and website for the film could be found on the front page of the party's now defunct official website throughout October 2009. In the banner on the website that appeared across every one of its pages is the proclamation: "Lega Nord per l'indipendenza della Padania" (Northern League for the independence of Padania).[48] As early as July, the website for Movimento Giovani Padani (Padani Youth Movement) hosted a two-page

PDF meant to serve as a printable flyer that dedicated a full page to the release of *Barbarossa*. The page offered brief histories of Frederick Barbarossa, Alberto da Giussano, the Oath of Pontida, and the Battle of Legnano followed by text in boldface that proclaimed:

> This is the history of our land, the history of the north that no one has ever wanted to tell but finally on October 9 the film will be released in cinemas. The film will be titled "BARBAROSSA" The director is Renzo Martinelli (Vajont, The Merchant of Stones, Carnera etc.).
> Finally our history told in the cinema!!![49]

Then followed a list of eight dates and locations throughout October where there would be viewing parties for the film at different theaters across Italy.[50]

The leaders of the Lega Nord were vocal in their enthusiasm for the film and for what they hoped could be accomplished by its release. Giancarlo Giorgetti, the party's national secretary, proclaimed, "The instinct of domination with which Barbarossa looked at Padania was the same instinct with which Rome today looks at the North."[51] Notice the evocation of "Padania" in regards to a film that explicitly excluded it. Umberto Bossi, who was, at the time, the party's leader while also serving as the Italian minister for federal reforms, anticipated an international appeal for the film, and hoped "this film can be seen by audiences all over the world, and become for our land an analogue of what *Braveheart* was for Scottish culture and identity."[52] Bossi had been vocal about his appreciation for *Braveheart* since its release in 1995, often declaring it his favorite film, going so far as to proclaim in one speech, "I am Braveheart," which led the Italian press to dub him "MacBossi."[53]

The controversy over the use of government funds for a political propaganda film plagued *Barbarossa* all the way up to its release, as Bossi aired clips from the film at political rallies, urging supporters to see the film. Just over a week before *Barbarossa*'s release, Cecile Cassel, who played Beatrice of Burgundy in the film, stated that she "knew nothing of the political ghosts behind" it, and demurred that "if I had known, I probably would not have accepted the part."[54] Director Renzo Martinelli retorted that Cassel, "Like many French people, has an enormous sense of self-importance" and questioned whether he would cast her again.[55] Despite the public drama, Bossi emerged from a viewing of the film to proclaim that "this is the dawn of a reawakening."[56] The film would prove anything but.

Barbarossa had a wide release in Italy on 9 October 2009, but it failed to garner popular interest, opening only sixth in terms of its box office, whereas Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* took the number one spot in the country for the second week in a row.[57] The following week, *Barbarossa* was not even in Italy's top ten grossing films.[58] One historian saw the film in Rome on 20 October along with a sparse group of moviegoers, and, upon returning, for a second viewing, on 3 November, found that the film was no longer showing in Rome.[59]

Barbarossa was universally panned, with critics describing it as "just plain bad,"[60] "boring and predictable,"[61] and suffering from an "epidemic of clunky screenwriting."[62] The criticism is warranted, as the film is painfully unsubtle, lacking any nuance in its storytelling. Critics delighted in pointing out the irony that many of the extras were recruited from Romania, which was both the filming location and

the home to a group of people that the Lega Nord had explicitly targeted with its anti-immigration messages.[63]

The Siege of Milan

Barbarossa depicts a single siege of Milan that appears to last a few days, only succeeding with the help of treachery. The historical record tells us that the capture of Milan required two lengthy sieges over the course of years, and that the Milanese were starved into submission, and then the city was razed. The first siege was attempted in August 1158, but ended in a truce when severe heat exhausted both sides.[64] In December 1161, Barbarossa renewed his attempt to capture Milan by blockading all the roads, eventually starving the city into submission in March 1162.[65] Between 1158 and 1162, all of Barbarossa's efforts were directed toward weakening Milan and its allies with multiple sieges, battles, and targeted devastation of the countryside.[66] In contrast, the film depicts a single siege of Milan, which lasts 23 minutes in the theatrical cut.

One of the more melodramatic scenes in the cinematic siege comes when the emperor orders two towers to be rolled toward the walls of Milan. Eleonora (Kasia Smutniak), an invented love interest of Alberto da Giussano, who is derided as a "witch" because of her visions, had already warned that Alberto's brothers would be killed by Milanese arrows. Although Eleonora's warnings are dismissed, the prophecy comes true when the defenders realize that Milanese prisoners, including Alberto's brothers, are tied to the front of the approaching siege towers. The film plays up the drama while the defenders hesitate to shoot their crossbows at the towers for fear of hitting their own citizens. When one defender finally initiates the attack, everyone else looses their arrows, killing the prisoners and some of the attackers until the emperor's troops retreat. Although the defenders needed only to aim at those attackers pushing the towers, they loosed their arrows up and down the structures, ensuring that all the prisoners were killed.

Kasia Smutniak as Eleonora (*Barbarossa*, 2009).

While the scene has no historical relationship to either of the sieges of Milan, it does borrow an anecdote from Barbarossa's siege of Crema in 1159. The historical account of that siege is quite different with the construction of a single tower that required upwards of 500 men to move, instead of only the dozen or so men depicted in the film.[67] To deter attacks from the city, Creman prisoners were tied to the front of the tower and even provided with candles at night so that they could be clearly seen.[68] And, instead of arrows, the defenders used artillery projectiles meant to destroy the tower. Upon killing some or all of the prisoners, Barbarossa replaced the prisoners with bundles of sticks.[69]

Trebuchets loom heavily throughout *Barbarossa*. The film ends with a flaming projectile coming toward the camera. When Barbarossa decides to besiege Milan, he deploys trebuchets, and the filmmakers depict a barrage of flaming and exploding projectiles not unlike that of an artillery barrage from a twentieth-century war film. Perhaps to earn one of its alternate titles—*Siege Lord*—in a less-than-three-minute montage, there are no fewer than 87 flaming projectiles launched from trebuchets toward Milan. One scene shows ten such projectiles flying all at once.[70]

Villains and Witches in Barbarossa

One of the many criticisms of the film is how subdued Barbarossa is in his ruthlessness.[71] If he is meant to be a villain whom viewers dislike, he often comes off as benevolent, pushing for diplomacy and only using violence as a last resort.[72] In the film's first scene, an adolescent Alberto da Giussano saves the emperor from a charging boar in the forest. The grateful emperor gifts a dagger to Giussano, which he carries throughout the film. Later, during the siege of Milan, Giussano sneaks into Barbarossa's tent to assassinate the emperor. Barbarossa catches Giussano in the act, but the emperor recognizes the dagger. Recalling the scene in the forest, the emperor lets Giussano leave without calling for his guards.

In one of the more gruesome scenes, Barbarossa cuts off the ear of one Italian for his part in nearly killing the emperor. The filmmakers omitted numerous medieval stories of killing or blinding captives, or of cutting off the right hand from those who attempted to provide supplies to Milan, arguably a lesser crime than an assassination attempt.[73] Critics compared the characterization of the emperor in *Barbarossa* to that of Edward I in *Braveheart* who was extreme in his measures toward his enemies, as well as toward his own family.[74]

The main villain in *Barbarossa* is Siniscalco Barozzi (F. Murray Abraham), a Milanese diplomat who sides with the invaders. After initiating the attack on the Milanese prisoners tied to the front of Barbarossa's siege towers and then opening the gates of Milan, Barozzi uses the power that he has acquired from the emperor to collect taxes aggressively and to terrorize locals while pursuing the affections of Tessa (Federica Martinelli), the sister of Eleonora, the alleged witch. Throughout the film, Tessa spurns Barozzi's overtures, which fluctuate among tenderness, aggression, flattery, bribery, and even begging. During the siege of Milan, Barozzi looses the arrow that kills Reinero da Giussano (Karl Baker), who was both Alberto's brother

and Tessa's love interest. Reinero's death sends Tessa into hiding in a nearby convent. Later, while ransacking the convent and removing the veils of the nuns, Barozzi discovers Tessa among them.[75] In her final attempts to flee Barozzi, Tessa jumps to her death from a tower. Suicide is seemingly her only way to escape her pursuer.

Barozzi is genuinely distraught, and, at Tessa's funeral, a grieving Eleonora attempts to slit his throat. Barozzi survives the attack and orders Eleonora to be burned at the stake as a witch. While awaiting her execution, Eleonora is visited by Beatrice of Burgundy, the emperor's wife, who learns of the prisoner's supposed visionary gifts. The film treats these visions as an affliction that has plagued Eleonora since she survived a lightning strike as a child. Fearing what supernatural retribution may come from Eleonora's execution, Beatrice succeeds in replacing the would-be victim with another prisoner. Although everyone, including Alberto da Giussano, believes Eleonora has died, she is revealed to be quite alive after the Battle of Legnano, disguised among imperial troops.[76] Before Eleonora's reveal, Barozzi dies slowly at the hands of Giussano, who lists all the grievances committed by the turncoat diplomat, as he drives his sword into Barozzi's chest.

Thus, the main villain of *Barbarossa* is not the invading emperor who razes Milan, but a scheming politician turned traitor. In contrast, Barbarossa is always depicted as a conflicted ruler who only uses force when pushed. In several scenes, Barbarossa chooses to use diplomacy even when his advisors advocate for military action. Additionally, although Beatrice was married to Barbarossa at age thirteen, the emperor takes what audiences may interpret as a progressive attitude toward her from a medieval point of view. Barbarossa shows her respect, seeking her counsel privately as well as in the councils of war typically reserved for men, who are baffled by her presence. While Beatrice strives to serve the interests of the emperor by deriding her family when they do not provide adequate support to Barbarossa, she also saves the life of Giussano's love interest. The characters Barozzi and Eleonora lack any historical counterparts, artistic license aims to provide more backstory and motivation for Giussano. But, when coupled with the often-reserved approach of Barbarossa, Barozzi's villainy ultimately overshadows that of the emperor.

City Names in Barbarossa

The names of Northern Italian cities loom large in *Barbarossa*, while the most familiar city to non–Italians is arguably Rome. Although Pope Alexander III and Rome played significant roles in Barbarossa's Italian campaigns, the film hardly mentions the pope or the anti-pope that crowned Beatrice, and Hauer's Barbarossa only visits the city briefly. One of the advisors to the cinematic Barbarossa quips that "Rome is weak and sick," and that the new pope should be friendly. Later, while he is in Rome, plague breaks out, and Barbarossa determines to flee the city. These moments serve coincidentally to slander some of the Lega Nord's traditional targets: Southern Italy and Rome.[77]

Elsewhere, intertitles indicating location often overlay a scene change, and real Italian cities are constantly evoked in the film's dialog. An early scene in the

two-part miniseries depicts an adolescent Alberto da Guissano inquiring about cities in Northern Italy. The adults use food and utensils at a banquet table to map out Northern Italy and its major cities including Milan, Venice, Lodi, Genova, Pavia, Bergamo, Como, Novara, and Verona, all cities where the Lega Nord had some success in local elections.[78] Viewers should not, however, expect these actual city names to correspond directly with the inhabitants of modern cities. Historians such as Tommaso di Capegana Falconieri have argued not only that such attempts to connect medieval histories and origins to the modern stem from nineteenth-century nationalism, but also that such attempts push:

> a misunderstanding that confuses planes of reality, that disregards the infinite gaps in history, that confers ethnic unity on fluid, amalgamated, and diverse populations, that ignores that constructions of memory may vary culturally according to the social groups that produced them, and that, in the end, attributes to the people an uninterrupted historical memory.[79]

Falconieri uses the examples of the now-debunked misconception that medieval Franks and *Germani* correspond directly to today's French and Germans, respectively, but he could just as easily point to the supposed connection between a short-lived twelfth-century Lombard League and an imagined twenty-first-century Padania. He astutely asks:

> In fact, even when a certain territory has been home to a single people (and no more than one, of course), a people that has been ethnically continuous from the Middle Ages to our days—and such a thing does happen here and there—how can one think that this same people has had a continuous identity, that they have felt the same way for centuries, and centuries, and centuries?[80]

This lack of continuity, coupled with the prevailing Italian tendency to associate one's identity to an area within a city, can help explain why the Lega Nord has focused on common enemies to unite the people of Northern Italy, as well as the lack of success the Lega Nord has had in creating Padania.

The Future of Barbarossa *and Padania*

To return to the notion that *Barbarossa* is a "failed *Braveheart*," or, as I labeled it above, a "would-be epic," *Barbarossa* does have all the expected plot devices generally found in medieval film epics, including a "venture of large proportions," a "definitive moment for a group," a hero whose "actions have greater meaning because they have an impact upon the success or failure of the group," and an "eve-of-battle speech."[81] And *Barbarossa* certainly tried to elicit passion in viewers, as its characters, reminiscent of those in *Braveheart*, often chant "freedom" after speeches made by Alberto da Giussano. However, among audiences in Italy or elsewhere, the filmmakers failed to "evoke compassionate empathetic and sympathetic responses" or to inspire identification with the hero, the key results some historians believe are necessary for a film to be dubbed an epic.[82] The exception to universal lackluster responses would be among Lega Nord party leaders, of course, but this

group is hardly large or influential enough to ensure *Barbarossa*'s designation as an epic film.

What is the future of *Barbarossa* and Padania then? The 2010s brought in new party leadership after scandals in 2012 brought down Lega Nord's founder and leader, Umberto Bossi. During this period, most of the institutions of Padania—including its art organizations, newspaper, radio station, and television station—all ceased operation, either because of a lack of interest or of funding.[83] In 2013, Matteo Salvini became the party's new leader, and he immediately sought to rebuild the diminished reputation of the party by shifting its appeal to a nationalist message focused on Italy as a whole.[84] As part of this process, Salvini conducted an apology tour of sorts, during which he sought to gain support from citizens in Southern Italy. To cement the change in focus and attempted appeal, he dropped the word Nord from the party's name, which became simply known as Lega (League).[85] The party's critical focus shifted completely from Southern Italians to all immigrants in general, and the first public demonstration organized by the party under Salvini's leadership was the "Stop Invasione" rally in Milan (18 October 2014).[86] In 2018, the efforts to appeal to the whole of Italy helped the Lega achieve its greatest success in the general elections, with 17.4 percent of the vote as opposed to a mere 8 percent in 2013, and the party became part of the national government for a fifth time, thanks to the need to form a coalition to achieve a Parliamentary majority.[87]

On the surface, this new Italian nationalistic tone appears wholehearted, but the dream of an autonomous North still remains alive. Analyses of social media posts by the Lega and party leaders reveal that, while pro–North posts decreased in the 2010s, they did not totally disappear, and still accounted for small a percentage of the party's Facebook posts.[88] In addition, discussions with party leaders reveal a dualistic approach in which initially the party is eagerly pushing a brand of Italian nationalism that is clearly antagonistic toward immigrants, Muslims, and the EU. But, once new members gain entry into the party, they are introduced to a secondary agenda calling for eventual Northern independence. Thus, the Lega "currently has two contrasting, yet coexisting souls, building on similar 'exclusionary' values but showing allegiance to different 'imagined communities.'"[89]

Today, most people in Italy appear to dismiss the notion of a Padania, a place several scholars recently dubbed "the Lega's mythical homeland."[90] Conversely, the term persists outside of Italy with some seriousness. For example, consider the multiple editions of James B. Minahan's books on nationless peoples, published between the mid–1990s and mid–2010s. His initial edition (1996) made no mention of Padania,[91] but later editions (2000 and 2002) at least evoke the would-be nation when discussing population groups such as the Lombards.[92] Minahan's most recent edition (2016) features a dedicated entry for "Padanian," which he describes as "Northern Italian," while noting that all history occurring in Northern Italy is Padanian history, dating back to the Romans. Furthermore, Minahan now calls Padania the "center of the medieval Renaissance."[93] Such sentiments obviously fit the Lega's dream of Padania.

As for any potential future audience for *Barbarossa*, content providers such as Amazon Prime refer to old films and television series as "long-tail," older content

that is not the primary reason most users subscribe to streaming services. Such long-tail films do, however, offer more content to those subscribers and, in the best of circumstances, attract viewers, eager or curious.[94] *Barbarossa* is currently available as such a film, especially in the United States, where streaming catalogs simply list it as a medieval film without any mention of its nationalistic or other political context. Descriptions of the film presented in these catalogs are brief, but all are variations of each other. The longest description can be found on Vudu, which presents the emperor as a larger-than-life conqueror with a seemingly magical sword:

> Brandishing his unstoppable sword of war, German Emperor Barbarossa will stop at nothing to conquer enemy lands and to revive the empire that once belonged to Charles the Great. But a young man from Milan, along with his army of 900 men known as the Company of Death, is prepared to challenge the Emperor and his relentless dominance.[95]

A shorter description from Tubi tells us, "In medieval Europe, the only hope against the reign of a ruthless German emperor is a scrappy band of mercenaries led by a young man from Milan."[96]

When watching *Barbarossa*, viewers are exposed to a host of medieval tropes they typically associate as authentically medieval including witch-burning, blacksmiths, farmers, knights, dungeons, cathedrals, castles, banquets, prophecies, cavalry charges, sieges, crossbows, and trebuchets. In the extended miniseries, there are also catacombs, a relic, and a trial by ordeal.[97] The film tells us that it "was inspired by real historical events," even citing a history book as its basis before the end credits roll, adding to its historical authenticity.[98] Newer audiences will be unaware that the film depicts people and events that historians dismiss as mythical, such as Alberto da Giussano—or that the film perpetuates the same discredited nineteenth-century nationalistic themes perpetuated during the formation of Italy. Such a benign view of *Barbarossa* is likely to continue.

Conversely, *Barbarossa* is unlikely to awaken any support for an independent Padania. As Laura S. Harrison and Andrew B.R. Elliott demonstrate in their essay in this collection, those seeking an inspirational film to promote independence of a people or region against a larger nation will probably still turn to *Braveheart*. However, the critical appeal of *Barbarossa* pales in comparison to Mel Gibson's Oscar-winning blockbuster that has, at times, transcended its original Scottish bounds. After all, prior to, and even after, the release of *Barbarossa*, banners and computer desktop wallpapers employing images from *Braveheart* to promote an independent Padania were found on Lega Nord affiliated websites.[99]

In another scenario, is it possible that *Barbarossa* could find some traction as a pro–Italy film, as the Lega has shifted its public message? The myth of the Lombard League has been used to promote a nationalistic Italy, as well as a separatist Northern Italy, and it may very well be used as an anti-immigrant-Muslim-EU rallying cry. *Barbarossa* is generic enough that the same images and messages employed during the unification of Italy in the nineteenth century are readily available in the film. Thus, in an ironic twist, *Barbarossa* incorporated the myths originally used to promote the unification of Italy in the nineteenth century, but with the goal of promoting secession in the twenty-first century, and the film could then find itself used

instead for promoting an isolated Italy. Such a shift would of course require the film to be repackaged, or for it to be, at the very least, differently promoted. Only time will tell, but, if the use of the Lombard League for conflicting purposes over the past two centuries is any indication, such a repackaging of *Barbarossa* is a very real possibility. Regardless, it is important to situate *Barbarossa* in the "Middle Ages of *national identities*" in Umberto Eco's "Ten Little Middle Ages," a "political utopia, a celebration of past grandeur, to be opposed to the miseries of enslavement and foreign domination."[100]

Notes

1. Quoted in E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 44.

2. The film opened in 267 theaters in Italy and did not break into the top five movies that week. By its third and final week, the film was only available in 20 theaters. See "Sword of War (2009)," *IMDbPro*: https://pro.imdb.com/title/tt1242516/boxoffice (accessed 24 July 2022). During its three-week run, the film grossed €1 million, against a budget of between €9 and €30 million (sources vary). Mary P. Wood, "Contemporary Italian Film in the New Media World," in *A Companion to Italian Cinema*, ed. Frank Burke (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), p. 314. Some professional reviews are cited later in the essay, but the film only scored 14 percent among audiences with 100-plus ratings on Rotten Tomatoes. "Sword of War," *Rotten Tomatoes*, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/barbarossa (accessed 17 April 2023).

3. Luigi Andrea Berto, *Old Stories and Contemporary Issues in Films about Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Idealistic Thinking, Sex, Lies, and Video Political Agendas* (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 31–32. For more on *Braveheart* (1995) emboldening nationalism not just in Scotland, but worldwide, see the essay by Laura S. Harrison and Andrew B.R. Elliott in this collection.

4. *Barbarossa* saw television debuts in Italy, Lebanon, and Hungary. It also had DVD and Blu-ray releases in Finland, Germany, Australia, Japan, and the United States. See "Sword of War (2009)," *IMDbPro*, https://pro.imdb.com/title/tt1242516/companycredits (accessed 24 July 2022).

5. Although not available to purchase digitally, in May 2023, the theatrical version of the film, rebranded as *Sword of War*, was available in the United States to watch for free with ads through at least ten streaming catalogs, including Vudu, Tubi, FilmRise, FilmRise History, FilmRise for Her, Fawesome, Drama Movies & TV by Fawesome, The Roku Channel, Freevee, and Amazon Prime. "Barbarossa (2009)," *JustWatch*, https://www.justwatch.com/us/movie/barbarossa (accessed 21 May 2023); "Sword of War," *Roku*, https://www.roku.com/whats-on/movies/sword-of-war (access 21 May 2023).

6. The opening title card tells us that Barbarossa ruled Northern Italy and that "his dream is to conquer also Central and Southern Italy, thus reviving the ancient empire founded by Charlemagne." Throughout the film, advisors to Barbarossa emphasize that he is close to reestablishing the empire of Charlemagne.

7. *Padania* is a Latin term that refers to "the basin of the River Po in Northern Italy." See Benito Giordano, "The Contrasting Geographies of 'Padania': The Case of the Lega Nord in Northern Italy," *Area* 33.1 (2001): 28.

8. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, new ed. (1983; rpt. London: Verso, 2006), p. 6.

9. There are two versions of the film: the theatrical release, and an extended two-part miniseries. Unless stated otherwise, all references throughout this essay are to the theatrical release. References to the 126-minute theatrical release come from Renzo Martinelli, dir., *Sword of War*, Blu-ray (2009; Toronto: Entertainment One Films Canada, 2011). References to the 197-minute miniseries come from Renzo Martinelli, dir., *Barbarossa: Sword of War*, DVD (2009; Utrecht: Dutch Filmworks, 2011). The extended miniseries version of *Barbarossa* includes more scenes from the childhood of Alberto da Giussano, but, once he becomes an adult, the lack of a clear passage of time persists. One reviewer, who only watched the theatrical cut, pointed out that half the film "suddenly seems as if several parts of a TV miniseries had been cut together." Pierre Pawlik, "Barbarossa," *Actionfreunde*, 12 May 2012, https://www.actionfreunde.de/barbarossa/ (accessed 17 April 2023). However, a more astute reviewer suggested, with more than a great deal of tongue in cheek, that viewers might be able to track time in the second half of the film by the lengthening of Raz Dugan's hair. Chiara Guida, "Barbarossa—recensione," *Cinefilos*, 17 January 2010, https://www.cinefilos.it/tutto-film/recensioni/barbarossa-1751 (accessed 17 April 2023).

10. Mauro Moretti and Ilaria Porciani, "Italy's Various Middle Ages," in *The Uses of the Middle Ages in Modern European States: History, Nationhood and the Search for Orgins*, eds. R.J.W. Evans and Guy P. Marchal (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 191.

11. Alberto Mario Banti, *The Nation of the Risorgimento: Kinship, Sanctity, and Honour in the Origins of Unified Italy*, trans. Stuart Oglethorpe (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 65.

12. For a recent, thorough history of incorporating medieval history into the origins of nineteenth-century nations, see Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, "'Medieval' Identities in Italy: National, Regional, Local," in *Manufacturing Middle Ages: Entangled History of Medievalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Patrick J. Geary and Gábor Klaniczay (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 319–345.

13. Edward Coleman, "The Lombard League: History and Myth," in *European Encounters: Essays in Memory of Albert Lovett*, eds. Judith Delvin and Howard B. Clark (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2003), pp. 58–60.

14. John B. Freed, *Frederick Barbarossa: The Prince and the Myth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 424.

15. Coleman, pp. 58–60.

16. Recently, Federico A. Rossi di Marignano has pointed to an "Alberto de Gluxano," twenty-eighth in a list of fifty names in a letter dated 1196, twenty years after Legnano, from Porta Comacina addressed to the pope. Marignano concludes "an Alberto da Giussano thus really existed in Milan in the second half of the 12th century." Federico A. Rossi di Marignano, *Federico Barbarossa e Beatrice di Borgogna Re e regina d'Italia* (Stabilimento: Oscar Mondadori, 2012), p. 195.

17. See Paolo Grillo, *Legnano 1176: Una Battaglio per la Libertà* (Rome: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 2015), pp. 153–157.

18. Coleman, p. 61.

19. Coleman, p. 61.

20. See, or example, Alessandro Manzoni's *Adelchi* (1822), Cesare Cantú's *Storia universale* (1838), and Carolo Troya's *Storia d'Italia del medio evo* (1853). Coleman, p. 63, 74n38.

21. Coleman, pp. 62–63, 65.

22. Coleman, p. 66.

23. Coleman, pp. 66–67.

24. Diego Zancani, "The Notion of 'Lombard' and 'Lombardy' in the Middle Ages," in *Medieval Europeans: Studies in Ethnic Identity and National Perspectives in Medieval Europe*, ed. Alfred P. Smyth (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 223.

25. The Lega Nord has gone through multiple name changes and shifts in its professed focus. Today, it is simply known as the Lega (League). For the purposes of this essay, Lega Nord will be used, as the party used this name when *Barbarossa* was produced and released (2007–2009).

26. In 1991, Carl E. Ruzza and Oliver Schmidtke pointed out "Lombard identity, however, is new." And "until recently most people who grew up in Lombardy were not too concerned with being Lombards or even aware of it," but instead identified with local villages and cities. See "The Making of the Lombard League," *Telos* 90 (1991): 64.

27. Anderson, pp. 5–6.

28. Although most of these Padanian organizations are now defunct, a thorough examination of the efforts to create platforms and attract "Padanian" artists near the peak of such efforts can be found in Martina Avanza, "Des artistes pour la Padanie. L'art indentitaire de la Ligue du Nord," *Sociétés & Représentations* 11 (2001): 433–453.

29. Cinzia Padovani, "Lega and Anti-Immigration: The Importance of Hegemony Critique for Social Media Analysis and Protest," *International Journal of Communication* 12 (2018): 3570.

30. The story of the Lega Nord is still evolving, but a solid overview of the party's origins, its participation in Italian politics, and its efforts to create Padania is available in Roberto Biorcio, "The Northern League," in *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe: Dimensions of Success*, eds. Oscar Mazzoleni and Sean Meuller (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 135–151. The party was born in 1989 with the merger of six regionalist parties, all vying for some form of autonomy in Northern Italy and Tuscany, but the core of the party came from the Lombard League, originally formed in 1982. See Ruzza and Schmidtke, p. 57.

31. David Ward, "Massimo D'Azeglio Ettore Fieramosca: The Necessity and the Joy of Fiction," in *New Perspectives in Italian Cultural Studies*, Volume 2: The Arts and History, ed. Graziella Parati (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013), pp. 8–9.

32. Benito Giordano, "A Place Called Padania? The Lega Nord and the Political Representation of Northern Italy," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 6.3 (1999): 217.

33. Giordano, p. 219.

34. Giuseppe Sciortino, "Just Before the Fall: The Northern League and the Cultural Construction of a Secessionist Claim," *International Sociology* 14.3 (1999): 327.

35. Ruzza and Schmidtke, p. 64; Giordana, pp. 219, 227; Sciortino, p. 322.

36. Biorcio, p. 146.

37. One media outlet described the Lega Nord as "an army of uneducated villagers challenging the Italian intelligentisa." Quoted in Ruzza and Schmidtke, p. 58.

38. Ruzza and Schmidtke, pp. 60–61.

39. Biorcio, p. 147.

40. "Arguably, 9/11 was a godsend for the Lega, as it helped justify radicalizing the party's position from being critical of how immigration had been managed by successive governments, to framing [immigration] as an existential threat to the very survival of identities and culture of northern Italians, thus tapping into the increasing fear and resentment of the local population toward foreigners." Daniele Albertazzi, Arianna Giovannini, and Antonella Seddone, "'No Regionalism Please, We Are Leghisti!' The Transformation of the Italian Lega Nord Under the Leadership of Matteo Salvini," *Regional & Federal Studies* 28.5 (2018): 648.

41. Biorcio, p. 148. This anti–Muslim focus continued into the 2010s, and the leader of the Lega Nord during most of this decade, Matteo Salvini, repeatedly made statements targeting Muslims. For example, in one tweet leading up to an anti-immigration rally in 2014, Salvini stated, "Not even a mosque will be built for those who do not recognize women's rights!" Padovani, p. 3568.

42. A survey in 2001, for instance, revealed that 59 percent of party members believed immigrants were a danger to the national culture, but, by 2009, that sentiment had taken root in 86 percent of party members. Similarly, in 1996, 38 percent believed immigrants were a danger to employment, but, by 2009, 65 percent held that view. Gianluca Passarelli, "Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe: The Case of the Italian Northern League," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 18.1 (2013): 62, table 1.

43. Passarelli, pp. 56, 57, figure 1.

44. Kevin J. Harty, *The Reel Middle Ages: American, Western and Eastern European, Middle Eastern and Asian Films about Medieval Europe* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1999), p. 6.

45. I address the evolving nationalistic message of the Lega Nord later in this essay.

46. Berto, p. 31.

47. The details were exposed when a 2007 wiretapped conversation between Agostino Saccá and Silvio Berlusconi was made public. See Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, "Barbarossa e la Lega Nord: A proposito di un film, delle storie e della storia," *Nuova Serie* 44.132 (December 2009): 859–860. A full transcript is available at "Saccá, Berlusconi e le Strappone," *La Stampa*, 28 June 2007, https://www.lastampa.it/blogs/2008/06/28/news/sacca-berlusconi-e-le-strappone-1.37257991/ (accessed 16 April 2023).

48. Archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20091027155104/http://www.leganord.org/ (accessed 6 November 2022).

49. "Questa è la storia della nostra terra, la storia del nord che mai nessuno ha voluto raccontare ma finalmente il prossimo 9 ottobre uscirà il film nelle sale cinematografiche. Il film si intitolerà "BARBAROSSA" Il regista è Renzo Martinelli (Vajont, il mercante di pietre, Carnera ecc.) Finalmente la nostra storia raccontata al cinema!!!" Movimento Giovani Padani, 7 July 2010, www.giovanipadani.leganord.org/articoli.asp?ID=9370. Archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20100707043954/http://www.giovanipadani.leganord.org/articoli.asp?ID=9370 (accessed 6 November 2022).

50. Movimento Giovani Padani.

51. Statement made on 14 March 2009 during a preview of the film. Quoted in "Barbarossa, il leader della Lega nell'epic movie di Martinelli," 29 August 2009, *L'Eco di Bergamo*, https://www.ecodibergamo.it/stories/cultura-e-spettacoli/87312_barbarossa_il_leader_della_lega_nellepic_movie_di_martinelli/ (accessed 8 November 2022).

52. Quoted in "Barbarossa, il leader della Lega nell'epic movie di Martinelli."

53. Terry Cochran, *Twilight of the Literary: Figures of Thought in the Age of Print* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 34; and Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), p. 167.

54. Tom Kington, "International: Actor shocked by 'hijack' of film by Italy's far right," *The Guardian*, 30 September 2009, 21.

55. Kington, "International," p. 21.

56. Tom Kington, "Italy split by film account of heroic Milan rebels: Cinema epic depicting struggle by northern Italians flops, despite backing from Berlusconi," *The Guardian*, 18 October 2009, 37.

57. Data on the number of theaters and box office performance is from "Italian 2009 Weekend 41," *Box Office Mojo*, https://www.boxofficemojo.com/weekend/2009W41/?area=IT (accessed 8 November 2022). However, Falconieri provided a number of 283 theaters in "Barbarossa e la Lega Nord," p. 860.

58. *Barbarossa* had dropped to the 11th spot. "Italian 2009 Weekend 42," *Box Office Mojo*, https://www.boxofficemojo.com/weekend/2009W42/?area=IT (accessed 16 April 2023).

59. Falconieri, "Barbarossa e la Lega Nord," p. 861.

60. Sandra Alvarez, "MOVIE REVIEW: *Barbarossa—Siege Lord*," MEDIEVALISTS.NET 28 May 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20170811190752/https://www.medievalists.net/2014/05/movie-review-barbarossa-siege-lord/ (accessed 24 May 2022).

61. Andrew E. Larsen, "Barbarossa: Braveheart in Italy," *An Historian Goes to the Movies: Exploring History on the Screen*, 7 May 2015, https://aelarsen.wordpress.com/2015/05/07/barbarossa-braveheart-in-italy/ (accessed 17 July 2022).

62. Alex von Tunzelmann, "Barbarossa: Siege Lord—why the emperor needs a new movie," *The Guardian*, 16 May 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2012/may/16/barbarossa-siege-lord-emperor (accessed 8 April 2023).

63. For example, after pointing out the nationality of the extras, Gabriele Barcaro quipped, "who's going to

tell the notoriously anti-Romanian Lega Nord?" Gabriele Barcaro, "Barbarossa has Lega Nord written all over it," *Cineuropa*, 8 October 2009, https://cineuropa.org/en/newsdetail/113933/ (accessed 8 November 2022). Another reviewer found the use of Romanians puzzling. Falconieri, "Barbarossa e la Lega Nord," p. 864.

64. Peter Purton, *A History of the Early Medieval Siege, c. 450–1200* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), pp. 288–289.

65. Purton, p. 290; Freed, p. 284.

66. For a detailed analysis of Barbaross's efforts to capture Milan, see Freed, pp. 276–302.

67. Freed, p. 247.

68. Thomas Carson, ed. and trans., *Barbarossa in Italy* (New York: Italica Press, 1994), chapter 2, lines 2990–3110; Purton, p. 289; Freed, *Frederick Barbarossa*, p. 247.

69. Freed, p. 247.

70. Using the theatrical version, this number was determined by counting each projectile depicted from scene to scene in the chaotic montage where every impact produced an explosion.

71. Falconieri, "Barbarossa e la Lega Nord," pp. 866–867.

72. One reviewer even found herself sympathizing with Barbarossa at times, praising the acting of Rutger Hauer. Emma Hutchings, "Barbarossa Siege Lord (2009)," *FlickFeast*, 31 March 2011, http://www.flickfeast.co.uk/reviews/dvd-reviews/barbarossa-siege-lord-2009/ (accessed 17 April 2023).

73. There is even one account of 25 amputations in a single day. Freed, pp. 283–284.

74. See Laura S. Harrison and Andrew B.R. Elliott's essay "Medieval Scotland on Film: *Braveheart* and the Scottish Discursive Imaginary" in this collection for more on the cinematic Edward I.

75. One historian could not help but notice that the film premiered the same day the Lega Nord introduced legislation to prohibit Muslim women from wearing burkas or niqābs. Falconieri, "Barbarossa e la Lega Nord," 865.

76. The scene is reminiscent of one in *The Return of the King* where Éowyn disguises herself among the Riders of Rohan. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955), p. 116. Tolkien's scene was dramatically played out by Mirando Otto in the film adaptation. Peter Jackson, dir., *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (New Line Cinema, 2003). Falconieri also references Éowyn in the scenes from *Barbarossa* that feature Beatrice of Burgundy riding alongside soldiers. See "Barbarossa e la Lega Nord," p. 863.

77. This point was also made by Falconieri, "Barbarossa e la Lega Nord," p. 862.

78. See for example, Giordano, pp. 32–33.

79. Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, *The Militant Middle Ages: Contemporary Politics Between New Barbarians and Modern Crusaders*, trans. Andrew M. Hiltzik (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 185.

80. Falconieri, *The Militant Middle Ages*, p. 185.

81. For example, see Paul B. Sturtevant, "Defining the Epic: Medieval and Fantasy Epics," in *Return of the Epic Film: Genre, Aesthetics and History in the 21st Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 125

82. Sturtevant, p. 125.

83. Matteo Salvini shut down the last three, arguing that the cost was no longer justified for such traditional media outlets when the Internet was a superior means of spreading its message. Padovani, p. 3570.

84. Albertazzi, Giovannini, and Seddone, p. 646.

85. Albertazzi, Giovannini, and Seddone, pp. 649, 650.

86. One in-depth study of the Twitter campaign to organize and garner support for the rally revealed that proponents depicted immigrants as "invaders," "criminals," and "Islamic invaders." See Padovani, pp. 3554, 3565–3569.

87. Albertazzi, Giovannini, and Seddone, pp. 650, 646; and Padovani, p. 3554.

88. Albertazzi, Giovannini, and Seddone, p. 656, 659.

89. Albertazzi, Giovannini, and Seddone, p. 659.

90. Padovani, p. 3559. In 2015, Italian artist Filippo Minelli published his satirical tome *Padania Classics*. Based on five years of blogging photographs from Northern Italy, Minelli lampooned the notion of Padania—"a Nation formerly not recognized by anyone"—with images of highways, parking lots, billboards, and construction sites. Filippo Minelli, *Atlante dei Classici Padani* (Brescia: Krisis, 2015).

91. James B. Minahan, *Nations Without States: A Historical Dictionary of Contemporary National Movements* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996).

92. James B. Minahan, *One Europe, Many Nations: A Historical Dictionary of European National Groups* (Westport: Greenwood, 2000), p. 432; and James B. Minahan, *Encyclopedia of Stateless Nations: Ethnic and National Groups around the World*, 4 vols. (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002), vol. 3, pp. 1113–1114.

93. James B. Minahan, *Encyclopedia of Stateless Nations: Ethnic and National Groups around the World*, 2nd ed. (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2016), pp. 324–325.

94. Chris Anderson, "The Long Tail," *WIRED*, 1 October 2004, https://www.wired.com/2004/10/tail/ (accessed 16 April 2023).

95. "Sword of War," *Vudu*, https://www.vudu.com/content/movies/details/Sword-of-War/186879 (accessed 21 May 2023).

96. "Sword of War, *Tubi*, https://tubitv.com/movies/504667/sword-of-war (access 21 May 2023).

97. Not all of these tropes are necessarily accurate. For example, the burning of a witch is better placed historically in the Renaissance. See Amy S. Kaufman and Paul B. Sturtevant, *The Devil's Historians: How Modern Extremists Abuse the Medieval Past* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), pp. 9–10, 161–162n2. An audience's willingness to accept the presence of such tropes as authentic, regardless of their authenticity, has been explored by numerous historians. For example, Andrew B.R. Elliot coined the term "historicons," which are "visual conventions which each aim to evoke to the spectator an element of 'medievality.'" Andrew B.R. Elliott, *Remaking the Middles Ages: The Methods of Cinema and History in Portraying the Medieval World* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), p. 182. See also Kevin J. Harty's essay at the end of this collection.

98. Federico A. Rossi di Marignano, *Federico Barbarossa e Beatrice di Borgogna: Re e regina d'Italia* (Segrate: Oscar Mondadori, 2009). The book was released in conjunction with the film and features a photograph of Rutger Hauer as Barbarossa on the cover. Although the book cites historical sources, Falconieri has demonstrated how Marignano's regular use of "Padania" throughout the text reveal his sentiments toward a Lega Nord friendly reading of medieval history. See "Barbarossa e la Lega Nord," pp. 866–867.

99. One such background features Mel Gibson as William Wallace, a sketch of Alberto da Giussano, the flag of Milan, and an outline of Northern Italy superimposed on a photo of the Alps. "Giochi MGP," *Movimento Giovani Padani*, archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20091216084357/http://www.giovanipadani.leganord.org/giochi.asp (accessed 16 April 2023).

100. Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver (1967; rpt. San Diego: Harcourt, 1986), 70. Italics in the original.

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For
Jeffrey Richards,
whose *Swordsman of the Silver Screen* (1977)
showed us the way,
and
François Amy de la Bretèque,
whose *L'Imaginaire medieval dans le cinéma occidental* (2004)
kept us on the path—
with great admiration and continuing gratitude.

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