 Reading time: 7 min.

To get to know Don Bosco and his work, recourse to the sources is essential. The more we move chronologically away from the beginnings, the more important it is to go back to the origins. As in all other similar cases, consulting the primary sources – manuscripts and originals – is only possible for a few researchers who have the preparation and time to devote to this demanding task. For the vast majority of those who love Don Bosco and the Salesian charism, the sources are those produced by these primary researchers. We will spend time in this article presenting one of the most important of these sources, the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, leaving the other Salesian sources for later articles.

The *Biographical Memoirs of St John Bosco* were compiled from 1898 to 1939 by three authors: Fr John Baptist LEMOYNE (1839-1916), Vol. I-IX, Fr Angelo AMADEI (1868-1945), Vol. X, Fr Eugenio CERIA (1870-1957), Vol. XI-XIX. Two more volumes were added to these: an analytical index compiled by Fr Ernesto FOGLIO (1891-1947) and published in 1948, and an alphabetical index compiled by Fr Pietro CICCARELLI (1915-2001) and published in 1972.
These 'Memoirs' are the result of extensive research conducted over forty-two years, and have been presented chronologically, according to various periods in the life of St John Bosco, except for the last three volumes, as can be seen in the table below.

Vol.	Author	Years of reference	Published in	Pages
1	G.B. LEMOYNE	1815-1840	1898	523
2	G.B. LEMOYNE	1841-1846	1901	586
3	G.B. LEMOYNE	1847-1850	1903	652
4	G.B. LEMOYNE	1850-1853	1904	755
5	G.B. LEMOYNE	1854-1858	1905	940
6	G.B. LEMOYNE	1858-1861	1907	1079

7	G.B. LEMOYNE	1862-1864	1909	905
8	G.B. LEMOYNE	1865-1867	1912	1079
9	G.B. LEMOYNE	1868-1870	1917	1000
10	A. AMADEI	1871-1874	1939	1378
11	E. CERIA	1875	1930	619
12	E. CERIA	1876	1931	708
13	E. CERIA	1877-1878	1932	1012
14	E. CERIA	1879-1880	1933	850
15	E. CERIA	1881-1882	1934	863
16	E. CERIA	1883-1884	1935	724
17	E. CERIA	1884-1885	1936	901
18	E. CERIA	1886-1888	1937	878
19	E. CERIA	1888-1938	1939	454
20	E. FOGLIO		1948	620
21	P. CICCARELLI		1972	382

Much criticism has been levelled at these writings, but perhaps we must take into account the time and circumstances in which they were written, otherwise we run the risk of falling into a generic rejection of this source without even knowing what the reasons for certain criticisms are.

First of all, we must recognise that the criteria the authors followed in their research

were those of their time, with the means then available, with their merits and flaws, different from the scientific ones of today.

We must take into consideration the circumstances in which these volumes were written: just two years after Don Bosco's death, on 03.06.1890, the cause for canonisation had already been opened. The decree *super virtutibus* was promulgated on 20.02.1927, the beatification took place on 02.06.1929 and the canonisation on 01.04.1934. This is roughly the same period in which the 'Biographical Memoirs' were written. The authors' concern not to hinder the canonisation process clearly shows through.

We can also say that the Salesian Congregation was in its infancy and the first Salesians needed encouragement, which also explains a certain triumphalism in their writings.

Moreover, all three authors had known Don Bosco and, like so many others, had a real affection for their father, an affection that clearly influenced their writings, but this did not lead them to write lies or mislead their readers.

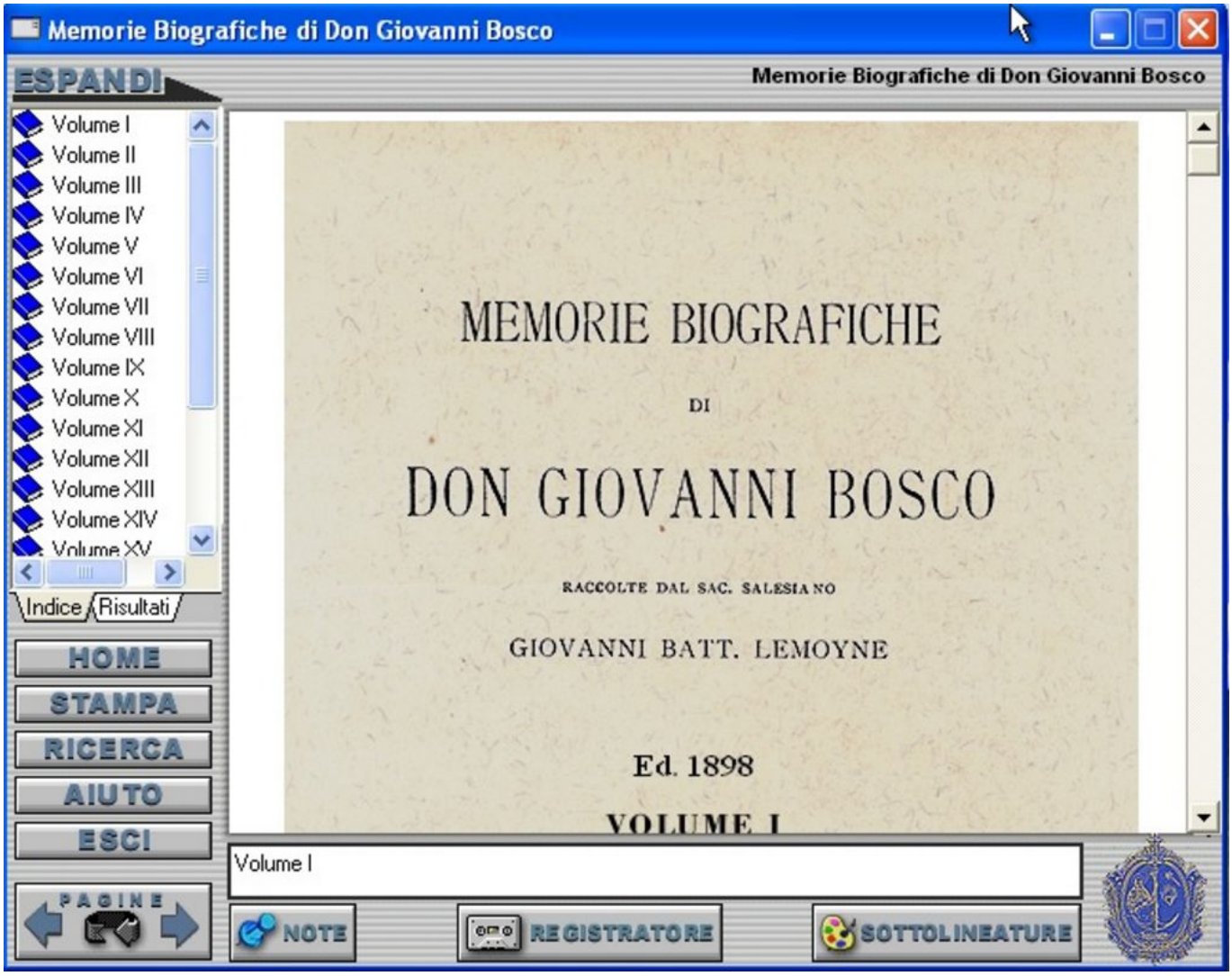
The life and works of a saint, in themselves, are very difficult to write about. And then, if it is a saint as enterprising as Don Bosco, it is even more complex. Because saints, by definition I would say, are those whose will is united with God, and understanding saints means in a certain way understanding God's plans. Telling the life of a saint without any reference to the divine enlightenment he receives and the real miracles he performs is almost impossible. And the supernatural events recounted in the 'Biographical Memoirs' are only a fraction of those that took place, because the saints themselves do everything possible to conceal them. Just remember the episode of Don Bosco's bread rolls.

But all these influences, circumstances and difficulties do not detract from the value of this monumental work of forty-two years that has borne fruit seen in entire generations of Salesians and people who have adopted Salesian spirituality.

However, not everyone has had the opportunity to have these writings at their fingertips. But today's technologies allow us to disseminate these sources with an ease never imagined before. We would like to present these resources, but since there are so many versions of the 'Biographical Memoirs' available on the Internet, a clarification is needed, as well as indications as to where they can be read,

consulted or downloaded from the Internet in various languages.

The first digitised version (1.1) of the ‘Biographical Memoirs’ in Italian was produced by the Salesian Communications Department in the year 2000 and was presented on a CD that contained proprietary software that could be installed. It was the scanned paper text, of which an automatic though not terribly accurate character recognition had been done with the means available at that time. With the arrival of the Windows Vista operating system in 2006, it became unusable due to incompatibility.



A second version (1.2) was made in 2005 from the scan made in 2000. This

improved version was uploaded the same year on the sdb.org website, where it can still be found in MsWord and PDF format. You can find it HERE. Almost all other Italian versions published on other sites or delivered from hand to hand have this version as their source.

A third version (1.3), even more improved, was finished in 2009. Concordances of all twenty volumes were made on this version, published HERE.

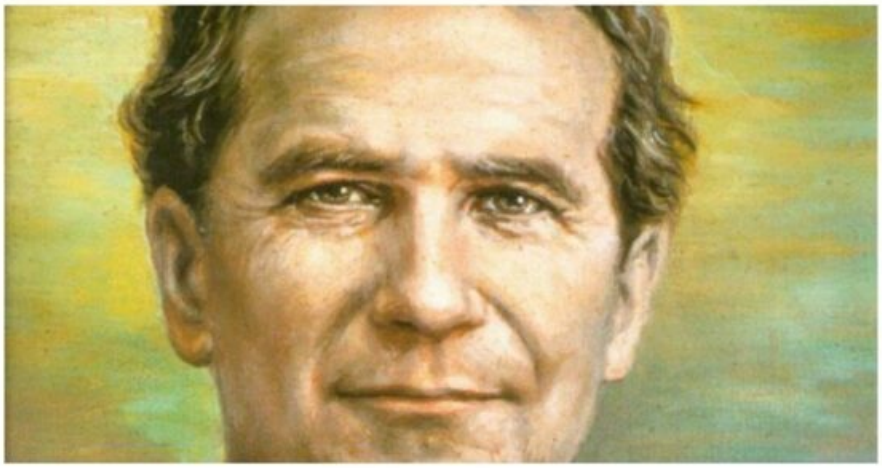
A fourth and final version (1.4) was completed in 2013. This latest version has been published on the donboscosanto.eu website in PDF format. Being the latest, it is the most accurate and error-free version.

There is **another Italian version (2)**, which has a new scan made in 2018 as its source, with automatic character recognition, which can be found HERE.

This year, 2023, a **new version (1.5)** of the 'Biographical Memoirs' was completed, starting from the second version, the 2005 one, which can be found at sdb.org. It was improved by Fr Roberto DOMINICI, sdb, and the Sicilian Province after a long period of work. Unlike the previous versions, it has the particularity that:
– all the volumes are presented in a single file, to facilitate the search (even if the file size is large); the search for groups of words is no longer hindered by the indications on the paper pages and within the square brackets as in the four previous versions;
– the search is very fast, immediate, with Adobe Reader XI (though not with earlier versions), and also fast with PDF-XChangeViewer;
– the A4 pages of the PDF file are separated according to the paper volumes; this way they can be used for bibliographic indication;
– there is a general table of contents, an index and also a repertory, all interactive.
We thank Fr Roberto because he has made it available both in **PDF** format (you can download it from HERE) and in **EPUB** format (you can download it from HERE).

Giovanni Battista LEMOYNE voll. I-IX,
Angelo AMADEI vol. X,
Eugenio CERIA voll. XI-XIX
Con Repertorio a cura di Pietro Ciccarelli

Memorie biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco



S E I

Società editrice internazionale
Torino

It must be said that **none of these Italian digital versions conform to the original**, but are partial manual corrections of scanned texts that are automatically recognised by OCR software. This is important to know because the textual search may not produce absolutely all results.

The ***Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*in English** were translated by Fr Felix Joseph PENNA, sdb (1904-1962), with Vols. I-XVI under the direction of Fr Diego BORGATELLO, sdb (1911-1994) and Vols. XVII-XIX under the direction of Fr Vincent Vinicio ZULIANI (1927-2011). They were published by Salesiana Publishers, INC., New Rochelle, USA, in 1964-2003, in 18 volumes.
A first scanned and searchable version of the “Biographical Memoirs” in English was started by Fr Paul LEUNG, sdb, Hong Kong in 2015. This version can be found HERE or HERE. It has to be said, however, that these scanned versions are faulty in significant ways, including omitting any number of pages.
A second searchable scanned version was produced in 2023 and can be found HERE.



VOLUME I - 1815-1840

THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

of Saint John Bosco

The **Spanish** language ***Memorias Biográficas de san Juan Bosco*** were translated by Fr José FERNÁNDEZ ALONSO, sdb (1885-1975) and Fr Basilio BUSTILLO CATALINA, sdb (1907-1998). They were published by Ediciones Don Bosco, Madrid, Spain, in 1981-1998, in 19 volumes. A CD containing all the texts of the twenty volumes, in digitised format, was also delivered with volume XX. The version you can find HERE is an extract taken in 2015 from this CD.
A second searchable scanned version was produced in 2018 and can be found HERE.



The **French** language ***Memoires Biographiques de Jean Bosco*** have been translated by various authors. In detail, Vol. II – translator unknown, Vol. IV – M. Yves LE COZ, sdb, Salesian Brother (1916-2015), vol. V – Fr Marceau PROU, sdb (1921-2016), Vol. XII – soeur Joséphine Depraz, fma and Vol. XX, the analytical index – Fr Philippe Frémin, sdb. They were published by Editrice SDB, in the years

1997-2017, in 5 volumes. There is the intention to continue the translation of the remaining volumes.
The scanned volumes can be downloaded from HERE and HERE.

MEMOIRES BIOGRAPHIQUES

DE

JEAN BOSCO

recueillis par

JEAN-BAPTISTE LEMOYNE
prêtre salésien

EDITION HORS COMMERCE

VOLUME II

SAN BENIGNO CANAVESE
ECOLE TYPOGRAPHIQUE ET LIBRAIRIE SALESIENNES

1901

The **Polish**-language ***Pamiętników Biograficznych Memoirs*** were translated by Fr Czesław PIECZEŃCZYK, SDB (1912-1993), between 1958 and 1972. Older versions of Polish translations date mainly from the Second World War, when Professor Fr Wincenty Fęcki corrected the work of a group of students. They were published in Pogrzebień, Poland, in 18 volumes.
The digital version edited by Fr Stanislaw Lobodźc and Fr Stanislaw Gorczakowski was opened on 19 June 2010. The entire 18-volume collection can be found HERE and also HERE.

KS. JAN BAPTYSTA LEMOYNE

MEMORIE BIOGRAFICHE DI DON GIOVANNI BOSCO

TOM I

1815 - 1841

TŁUMACZ KS. CZESŁAW PIECZEŃCZYK SDB

POGRZEBIEŃ 1968

The **Portuguese** language ***Memórias Biográficas de São João Bosco*** have been translated by various translators since 2018. To date (February 2023), the first twelve volumes have been translated and printed and the remainder are expected to be printed until 2025. The publisher is Editora Edebê, Brasilia, Brazil. For now, they can only be obtained by purchasing them from HERE or from HERE.

JOÃO BATISTA LEMOYNE



MEMÓRIAS BIOGRÁFICAS DE SÃO JOÃO BOSCO

VOLUME I

editora edebê

The Biographical Memoirs in the **Slovenian** language ***Biografskispominisv Janeza Boska*** were translated by Fr Valter Bruno DERMOTA, sdb, Salesian from Slovenia (1915-1994) and printed between 2012 and 2022. The publisher is Publisher Salve d.o.o. Ljubljana, Ljubljana, and the digital collection of the 17 volumes can be found online HERE and HERE.

BIOGRAFSKI SPOMINI SV. JANEZA BOSKA

ZBRAL

JANEZ KRSTNIK LEMOYNE

1. ZVEZEK

LJUBLJANA 2012

The **Czech** language Biographical Memoirs ***Memorie-ekniha*** were translated into a selection made by Fr Oldrich Josef MED (1914-1991), sdb, a Salesian from Bohemia, Czech Rep. in the 1980s. Volumes I- XIV are presented in a single digital file together with the Memoirs of the Oratory of St John Bosco and are available online HERE and HERE.

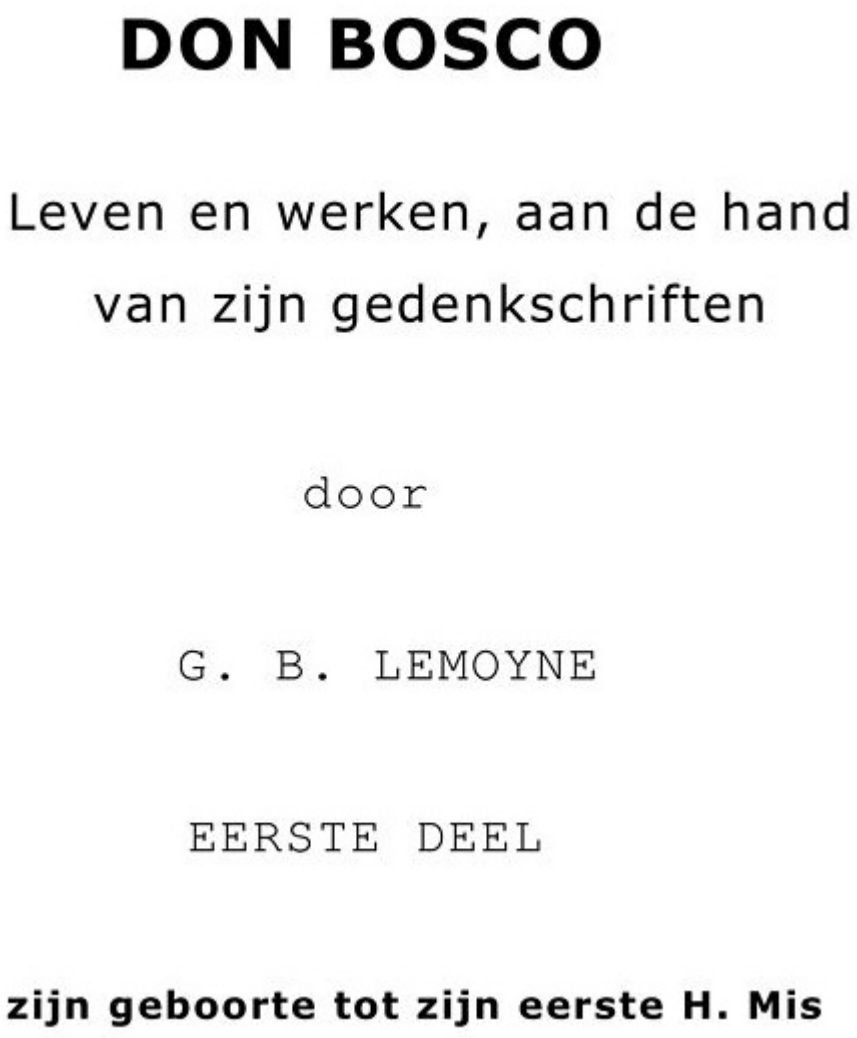
Po stopách charismatického světce



Z knihy Memorie Biografiche
vybral a přeložil P. Oldřich Med, SDB

I.–V. díl

The **Dutch** language **Biographische Gedenkschriften van de H. Johannes Bosco** were translated under the initial care of Fr Marcel BAERT, sdb (1918-2006) in the Don Boscokring (Don Bosco Circle), of the theology department of Oud-Heverlee (Belgium). The translators, Fr Hubert ABRAMS, sdb (1913-1987), Fr Gerard GRIJSPEER, sdb (1896-1982), Fr Corneel NYSEN, sdb (1901-1985), J.H.P. Jacobs and Dr J. Muys worked from 1961 until 1979, when they finished; in 1991 the alphabetical repertory was also published. 20 volumes have been translated and published and the digital version was finalised in 2013. The entire 20-volume collection can be found HERE.


DON BOSCO

Leven en werken, aan de hand
van zijn gedenkschriften

door

G. B. LEMOYNE

EERSTE DEEL

Van zijn geboorte tot zijn eerste H. Mis

The “Biographical Memoirs” in the **Vietnamese** language ***Hồi Ký Tiểu Sử Thánh Gioan Bosco*** have been translated under the care of Fr Thinh Phuoc Joseph

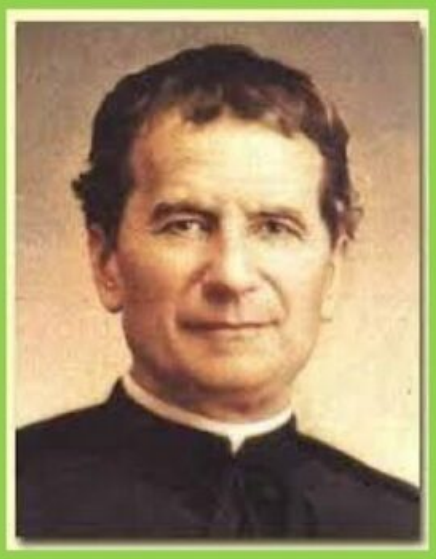
NGUYEN, sdb, in accordance with the Italian and English versions. There are 10 translated volumes, from which four have been published; the translation project continues. They can be found HERE.

Giovanni Battista Lemoyne SDB

HỒI KÝ

TIỂU SỬ

THÁNH GIOAN BOSCO



Tập I

1815-1841

The **Chinese**-language **‘Biographical Memoirs’** have been translated into 5 volumes. There is no information regarding digitisation.

There are unconfirmed reports of translations into other languages as well; as soon as we verify the reliability of the information, we will share it.

All these works of translation and dissemination of the ‘Biographical Memoirs’ indicate to us that they are and will remain a main reference for the Salesian charism. This impressive work prompts us to be grateful to those who over the years have committed themselves to writing, translating, publishing, digitising and sharing downloadable or consultable versions on the Internet. We wish good work to those who are still engaged in this fine service to Don Bosco and the charism, offering a little prayer for them when we remember that we have received graces through these writings.