

**Italian history, Mediterranean history:
New perspectives on an imperial and colonial past**

Andreas Guidi*

Negli ultimi anni, il legame fra Italia e Mediterraneo ha attirato un'attenzione da parte della storiografia. Questo legame viene ormai studiato tenendo conto del dibattito su nuove categorie spaziali fra le scale nazionale, regionale, e globale con un interesse crescente per la categoria di impero. Il presente saggio discute lo stato attuale della ricerca e possibili orizzonti. Uno sguardo d'insieme su quattro monografie in lingua inglese permette di considerare il Mediterraneo come spazio adatto a ripensare la storia italiana mettendo l'accento sul suo carattere imperiale, compresa la decolonizzazione e i suoi echi fino ad oggi. A partire da questi spunti, il saggio propone un dialogo con altre "aree" geo-storiche del bacino, la ricerca su fonti in varie lingue, e una maggiore attenzione per le realtà locali nel periodo precedente alla dominazione italiana.

Parole chiave: Italia, Mediterraneo, impero, colonialismo, spazio

In recent years, historiographical research has increasingly focused on the link between Italy and the Mediterranean, taking into account the debate on new spatial categories in national, regional and global history, and showing a growing interest in imperial history. This article discusses the status quo and future research perspectives. Focusing on four recent English-language publications, it approaches the Mediterranean as a space that challenges mainstream Italian history by highlighting its imperial nature, including decolonisation processes and their legacies in the present. Based on these premises, the article engages in a dialogue with other geohistorical "areas" of the Mediterranean, examining sources written in different languages and paying particular attention to local experiences prior to the Italian occupation.

Key words: Italy, Mediterranean, empire, colonialism, space

Over the last three decades, new spatial categories have emerged in the international historiographical debate. According to Karl Schlögel, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, historiography elaborated a 'spatial turn' inspired by other disciplines such as philosophy, anthropology and economics. No longer a

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* Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (INALCO), Paris; andreas.guidi@inalco.fr

static and univocal space, scholars have approached a plural spatiality that was subject to change, adding a critical perspective to the existing revisions of categories like temporality and discursiveness.¹ The point of convergence within this debate is the creation of alternatives to national history, understood as a narrative inherent in the institutions of the nation-state, which in turn is understood as a product of European and Western history. A greater focus on geo-historical “areas” and the transnational aspects of the studied phenomena allows us to rethink the “history of the fatherland” by linking spaces that do not correspond to territorial borders — an approach that increasingly involves the Italian context.² The fact that some processes of contemporary Italian history such as emigration, the world wars, as well as European and Atlantic integration took shape in an international context leaves little room for doubt. What is more interesting is the change of perspective on the *Risorgimento* and Fascism, the two phenomena of contemporary Italian history most studied abroad. Long considered exclusively Italian products, which has not prevented scholars from studying their exportation to other contexts, the construction of a unified state and the Fascist *ventennio* have recently been the subject of transnational and global studies.³

Regardless of the historiographical approach chosen in terms of the scale of observation, we need to clarify which spaces are best suited to exploring aspects of Italian history that have received little attention to date. A response that looks to the Mediterranean is gaining ground, particularly among academics abroad; thus, the Association for the Study of Modern Italy chose “Italian Mediterraneans 1800-2000” as the title of one of its most recent conferences.⁴ The event opened with a roundtable discussion bringing together history, anthropology and cultural studies; Maurizio Isabella, Konstantina Zanou, Barbara Curli and Naor Ben-Yehoyada talked about the relationship between Italy and the Mediterranean, focusing respectively on the constitutionalist uprisings of 1820-1821, the intersections of patriotic sentiments in the Ionian region in the late Venetian and Napoleonic periods, Italy’s role in the history of the Suez Canal and the links between Sicily and North Africa resulting from mobility in the central Mediterranean. These examples reflect

¹ Karl Schlögel, *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit. Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik*, Munich, Carl Hanser, 2003, pp. 60-71.

² Matthias Middell, Katja Naumann, *Global History and the Spatial Turn: From the Impact of Area Studies to the Study of Critical Junctures of Globalization*, “Journal of Global History”, 2010, n. 5-1, pp. 149-170.

³ See, for example: Maurizio Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile. Italian Emigres and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era*, Oxford. Oxford University Press, 2009; Arnd Bauerkämper, Grzegorz Rossolinski, (eds.), *Fascism without borders. Transnational connections and cooperation between movements and regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945*, New York, Berghahn, 2017.

⁴ See: https://iiclondra.esteri.it/iic_londra/it/gli_eventi/calendario/maps-borders-territories-a-webinar.html (last accessed 4 January 2022).

a tendency to redefine the axis of Italian history according to the gravitational pull of the Mediterranean.

In this article, I will discuss a number of existing publications, but also unexplored issues, to examine the main aspects of this tendency. By rethinking the relationship between Italy and the Mediterranean, we can adopt the critique formulated by the global history of Eurocentric perspectives and the primacy of the nation-state. Starting with the volume edited by Patrick Boucheron, “Histoire mondiale de la France”, Andrea Giardina — a specialist in Ancient Roman history — coordinated a collective work that laid the foundations for a global history of Italy.⁵ Without questioning the originality and value of these contributions, it cannot be denied — as Arthur Asseraf observed in his review of Boucheron’s text — that they risk emphasising the gap between the ‘national’ and the ‘global’, rather than critically reflecting on it.⁶ Instead, the present article argues that the regional scale of the Mediterranean can enable us to concretise and assess the spatial dimension of global history, which reads far-reaching transformations through notions such as ‘connection’, ‘mobility’ or ‘flows’.⁷ In addition, it reflects on a necessary condition to reach this turning point: the potential of historiography to detach itself, through its tools, from the idea of the “Mediterranean” as an imaginary product elaborated in the peninsula. In other words, it is not simply a matter of restoring an invented, forgotten, and then rediscovered Mediterranean to expand a “pre-packaged” national history of Italy.

International historiography on the Mediterranean is still dominated by the masterful work of Fernand Braudel, who made this region — despite its diversity — not only a coherent object of study but also an engine capable of generating theoretical tools to be applied to other contexts. Published in the aftermath of the Second World War, “La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II” presented an innovative historiographical temporality by delving into the depths of the *longue durée* (the slow and almost imperceptible pace of geoclimatic change and the relationship between populations and the environment), the *histoire conjoncturelle* (large-scale social, political and economic changes that are measurable in specific epochs) and, finally, the *histoire événementielle* (the rapid pace of change linked to wars, revolutions and catastrophes).⁸ More recently, other studies have taken up the challenge of narrating the Mediterranean on a large scale and over several centuries;

⁵ Patrick Boucheron (ed.), *Histoire mondiale de la France*, Paris, Seuil, 2017; Andrea Giardina (ed.), *Storia Mondiale dell’Italia*, Laterza, Bari, 2017.

⁶ Arthur Asseraf, *Le monde comme adjectif: Retour sur l’Histoire mondiale de la France*, “Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine”, 2021, n. 68/1, pp. 151-162.

⁷ Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2016, pp. 64-67.

⁸ Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1949.

here, Italy as a geographical category plays an important role. These include Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell's "The Corrupting Sea", which focuses on the period from Late Antiquity to the end of the Middle Ages and adopts a model that reinterprets (and redefines) Mediterranean unity by emphasising the connectivity of its micro-regions.⁹ In *The Great Sea*, David Abulafia continues the debate launched by Mediterranean history that focuses on the maritime dimension and the migration flows and human interaction that this 'liquidity' entails.¹⁰

On the other hand, recent research conducted in both France and Germany reveals a more critical attitude towards the Mediterranean, investigated beyond a coherent historiographical object defined a priori. Especially with regard to the contemporary period, the study of national and colonial categories has stressed the asymmetrical contacts between the region's shores. As the title of a recent volume edited by Claudia Moatti reminds us, the Mediterranean is destined to remain *introuvable* if we continue to search for it without challenging the epistemological categories that once defined this space.¹¹ Following this advice, I argue that it is a matter of equipping ourselves with new tools offered by the history of the contemporary Mediterranean region to redefine chronologies, perimeters, ideas, institutions and historical actors capable of inserting Italy into a polycentric, polyphonic and polyrhythmic narrative.

Looking at research on Italian history and culture, the boom in interest in the Mediterranean is neither a new phenomenon nor a prerogative of historians. As early as 2003, the Italianist Roberto Dainotto noticed an exponential increase in publications with the word 'Mediterranean' in the title. The term's inflation subsequently obstructed a critical discussion of the Mediterranean as an analytical category.¹² In a special issue of "California Italian Studies" in 2010, which brought together studies from different disciplines, editors Claudio Fogu and Lucia Re wanted to offer a 'critical rethinking of both the Mediterranean imaginary, which is in dire need of intellectual decolonization, and the equivalence established between Italian-ness and Mediterranean-ness in the global market of ideas'.¹³ Nearly a decade later, Nicola Labanca warned historians not to leave the field of Mediterranean studies to other disciplines,

⁹ Peregrine Horden, Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2000.

¹⁰ David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.

¹¹ Claudia Moatti (ed.), *La Méditerranée Introuvable. Relectures et Propositions*, Paris, Karthala, 2020. See also: Manuel Borutta, *Mediterraneum*, "Europäische Geschichte Online", 2020, <http://ieg-ego.eu/de/threads/crossroads/grenzregionen/manuel-borutta-mediterraneum> (last accessed 4 January 2022).

¹² Dainotto, Roberto, *Asimmetrie mediterranee: Etica e mare nostrum*, "NAE. Trimestrale di Cultura", 2003, n. 5, pp. 3-8.

¹³ Claudio Fogu, Lucia Re, *Italy in the Mediterranean today. A new Critical Topography*, "California Italian Studies", 2010, n. 1, pp. 1-9, here p. 1.

lamenting the ‘scarce’ number of Italian studies on this region.¹⁴ In short, the debate on how to put these proposals into practice remains open, and if Italian historiography is struggling with this discussion, important ideas are coming from the English-speaking world.

In a recent monograph, Claudio Fogu focused on the ‘Mediterranean form of the Italian imaginary’ to redefine the relationship between ‘south’ and ‘north’ in the formation of an Italian identity that oscillates between the Mediterranean and Europe.¹⁵ There is no need to stress the importance of such an approach at the time of writing, that is, when the Mediterranean is at the centre of migratory flows, military tensions and illegal trafficking, as well as suffering from the consequences of climate change. Whether it is the nefarious border control operation *Mare Nostrum*, the role of the Italian Navy in the Libyan civil war, or the seizure of tonnes of Captagon — a synthetic drug — from Syria (inaccurately dubbed the ‘ISIS drug’ in the press) in the port of Salerno, it is increasingly evident that Italy is linked to the changes and exchanges taking place in the Mediterranean and that the latter is a space in which the whole of continental Europe interacts through phenomena that involve the Middle East and Africa.¹⁶ By using the Mediterranean as a substitute for an unstable Italianness, Fogu has the undoubted merit of suggesting continuity where historiography tends to establish periodisation boundaries and identify points of rupture. Of particular interest is the idea of a continuous oscillation between *imperium* and *emporion* in the relationship between Italy and the Mediterranean, that is, the coexistence of centripetal, hierarchical and territorial forces, on the one hand, and centrifugal, syncretic forces that escape the logic of the territoriality of the sovereign state, on the other hand.¹⁷ At the same time, the author acknowledges that this Mediterranean has been fixed in a national imaginary that reflects both an imperial and a regional Italy, respectively through its expansionist ambitions and through the perceived immovable differences that make the very notion of national identity ephemeral.

Following Fogu, two directions emerge that can certainly not be reduced to an either/or, but which must be kept apart. In the first case, Italy and the Mediterranean could be further examined as two objects in perpetual interaction, influencing each other while remaining major players on the scene. In

¹⁴ Nicola Labanca, *La storia contemporanea del Mediterraneo. Per una discussione*, “Il mestiere di storico. Rivista della Società italiana per lo studio della storia contemporanea”, 2019, n. 11-2, pp. 5-49.

¹⁵ Claudio Fogu, *The fishing net and the spider web: Mediterranean imaginaries and the making of Italians*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p. 7.

¹⁶ On the Captagon incident see: https://rep.repubblica.it/pwa/generale/2020/07/10/news/la_droga_dell_isis_non_era_dell_isis_quelle_14_tonnellate_di_anfetamine_sequestrate_in_italia_e_il_legame_con_la_siria_di-261584585 (last accessed 4 January 2022).

¹⁷ Fogu, *The fishing net and the spider web: Mediterranean imaginaries and the making of Italians*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 6-7.

this case, Mediterranean Italy, or the Italian Mediterranean, would act as a lens through which to highlight another — more complex and contradictory — history (but still with Italy as the main character) or an unusual and unexpected voice (but still that of Italy as a *solo* actor). In the second case, while acknowledging the asymmetry resulting from the fact that the Mediterranean imaginary has appeared above all on the northern, Christian and white shores of this sea, we could challenge the idea that the Mediterranean is no more than the fruit of “Mediterraneanist” discourse, on a par with, for example, the East studied by Edward Said, the Balkans by Maria Todorova or Eastern Europe by Larry Wolff.¹⁸

In this sense, it would not be a matter of essentialising or characterising a region but of privileging it as a spatial lens, trying to emphasise its fragmentary nature and its exposure to the outside world, as well as the connections and interweaving that make it so dense. Quoting Eugenio Montale, the Mediterranean would be ‘vast, diverse and fixed at the same time’.¹⁹ Placing Italian history in this dimension would have three consequences: an opening up to other equally important historico-geographical areas in the Mediterranean; a greater inclusion of sources written in the languages of the region; and, finally, a new periodisation capable of transcending established canons such as pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial, or the liberal era vs the Fascist *ventennio* vs the Republican post-war period.

It is in the space between these two paths that I will discuss the intertwining of Italian history and the Mediterranean dimension in four recent monographs by Stephanie Malia Hom, Pamela Ballinger, Valerie McGuire and Dominique Reill. Both a joint book review and a discussion note, my article offers neither an in-depth analysis nor a general assessment of the works under consideration. Rather, it seeks to approach these studies as a whole, as a window on the current research landscape and the horizons that can be opened up by drawing on these works. This brings us to another premise, namely the fact that the monographs are difficult to compare because the authors all have different backgrounds and approaches: the methodology used by Stephanie Malia Hom and Pamela Ballinger combines archival research and ethnographic investigation; Valerie McGuire fits into the anglophone strand of Italian studies that focuses on cultural phenomena and media representations, also drawing on oral history and archival research; Dominique Reill, lastly, devotes particular attention to the link between the history of wide-ranging imperial transformations

¹⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Pantheon, 1978; Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997; Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1994.

¹⁹ From the poem “Mediterraneo”. Eugenio Montale, *Tutte le poesie*, Milano, Mondadori, 1984, p. 54.

and personal or commonplace events inspired by the history of everyday life. Rather than developing a comparative discussion, I will highlight the potential that such methodological diversity holds for future research.

Finally, it is worth noting the variety of topics covered by the authors. In “Empire’s Moebius Strip. Historical Echoes in Italy’s Crisis of Migration and Detention” (2019), Stephanie Malia Hom discusses what could be described as a background noise linking Italian and especially Fascist colonialism to the present: a knot between empire and mobility, reflected both in the repression of undesirable forms of mobility stigmatised as ‘nomadism’ and in the coercion of mobility in the form of settlement, repatriation, or detention.²⁰ Pamela Ballinger’s “The World Refugees Made. Decolonization and the Foundations of Postwar Italy” (2020) analyses the migration flows of various categories of refugees to Italy, focusing on the period between the Second World War to the immediate post-war era. Not limiting herself to the “repatriation” of the former colonists, the author reconstructs the processes of inclusion and exclusion of post-Fascist citizenship that developed through this mobility depending on local, national and international dynamics.²¹ Valerie McGuire is the only author who explicitly refers to the Mediterranean in “Italy’s Sea: Nation and Empire in the Mediterranean, 1895-1945” (2020). This study of colonialism in the Dodecanese (1912-1945) is based on a broader chronology that includes the literary and racial imaginaries of the Mediterranean in *belle époque* Italy up to the question of the memory of Italian colonial rule in the Dodecanese today.²² Finally, Dominique Reill has chosen the case of Fiume — a corner of the northern Mediterranean and commercial outlet of the Habsburg Empire — in the years following the First World War to move beyond the narratives that present D’Annunzio’s *impresa* and its paramilitary and scenic violence as the genesis of or prelude to Fascism. “The Fiume Crisis: Life in the Wake of the Habsburg Empire” (2020) reinserts Fiume into the *Finis Austriae* to study the civilian experience amidst economic problems, changing bureaucratic categories and coexisting notions such as imperial heritage, urban belonging, and pro-Italian nationalist mobilisation.²³

The four monographs cover different periods and contexts, and the Mediterranean emerges sometimes implicitly, sometimes as a discursive or analytical category. Nevertheless, they show that even when a history of the Mediterranean is not explicitly evoked, but history is written *in* the

²⁰ Stephanie Malia Hom, *Empire’s Mobius Strip. Historical Echoes in Italy’s Crisis of Migration and Detention*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2019.

²¹ Pamela Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made. Decolonization and the Foundations of Postwar Italy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2020.

²² Valerie McGuire, *Italy’s Sea. Empire and Nation in the Mediterranean, 1895-1945*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2020.

²³ Dominique Kirchner Reill, *The Fiume crisis. Life in the wake of the Habsburg Empire*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 2020.

Mediterranean, this region can reveal new keys to interpreting national history.²⁴ The historiographical dialogue between the authors covers themes such as imperialism, nationalism and Fascism, which are intertwined with notions of belonging, mobility and violence. All four works share this tangle, which calls for a reflection on questions of spatiality, perspective and temporality — three elements that constitute the core sections of this article.

Italy in a “vast” Mediterranean

By studying Italian history as Mediterranean history, we can expand the scope of research beyond the current borders of the *Bel Paese*. International historiography has long paid attention to the dispersion of Italian-speaking communities and institutions linked to the Italian state in the Mediterranean.²⁵ Thanks to their spatial approach, the four authors manage to decentralise traditional points of view in an original and productive way, both empirically and conceptually.

Starting from places such as Lampedusa, the Cyrenaica plateau and the province of Rome, Hom reconstructs the persistent ‘imperial formations’ (p. 1) of these places, where the distinction between centre and periphery seems to dissolve into a perpetual link between people on the move and state interventions. Inspired by postcolonial studies, Hom uses the metaphor of the Möbius strip to define the exclusion and stigmatisation of mobility in its relationship with territorialisation in the period between the early twentieth-century empire and the third-millennium nation-state. Thus, the book offers an intertwined reading of the internment of anti-colonial rebels during the long Libyan War on the same Italian islands that have been affected by the arrival of migrants in recent years, and of the construction of detention camps for Bedouin rebels and then for today’s migrants, who have to await deportation after crossing the Mediterranean. From the point of view of spatiality, Hom’s analysis has the merit of starting from specific sites that are discussed together — leaning on Giorgio Agamben — as archetypes of contemporary history and modernity. Focusing on islands, camps and villages, the author invites us to rethink the space that connects Italy to the Mediterranean beyond the migratory routes and protagonists of historiography from north to south and vice versa.

²⁴ On the distinction between “history in” and “history of the Mediterranean”: Horden, Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2000, pp. 2-5.

²⁵ Daniel J. Grange, *L'Italie et la Méditerranée (1896-1911). Les fondements d'une politique étrangère*, Rome, Ecole Française de Rome, 1994; Julia Ann Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans. North Africa, Europe, and the Ottoman Empire in an Age of Migration, c. 1800-1900*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012; Marcella Aglietti, Mathieu Grenet, and Fabrice Jesné (eds.), *Consoli e consolati italiani dagli stati preunitari al fascismo (1802-1945)*, Rome, École française de Rome, 2020.

What emerges is a sharp critique of the state's imposition of immobility on unwanted subjects. Hom interprets detention as the opposite of promoting mobility among subjects who are privileged by the same authority, like the famous *Ventimila*, the agricultural settlers sent by the Duce to colonise the Libyan countryside or — more recently — the international tourists who continue to visit Lampedusa. “Empire's Moebius Strip” is a geographical, historical and anthropological study that sees mobility as a form of capital that separates the “damned of the earth” from the privileged class. The work therefore lends itself to a discussion of different Mediterranean contexts: think of other “islands” that were once places of exile and now places of “temporary residence”, such as Ottoman and then Greek Mytilene; other “camps” like those of Goli Otok in Tito's Yugoslavia and the Centros de Estancia Temporal de Inmigrantes in present-day Ceuta and Melilla; and the “villages” built by the Ottoman authorities to house Cretan Muslim refugees (*muhacirler*) in Rhodes or Beirut in the early twentieth century or, in contrast, the touristic and environmentally damaging “villages” in popular locations such as Djerba or Cyprus.

Hom's analysis of the mobility of repatriates after the fall of Fascism intersects with Pamela Ballinger's narrative in “The World Refugees Made”. From a spatial point of view, Ballinger's work has the great merit of providing an overview of the territories that were part of the Italian empire at the height of Mussolini's reign. From the Dodecanese to Libya, from Eritrea to Albania, from Ethiopia to Istria, the author reconstructs an imperial space that is in itself diverse and fragmented from an economic and social perspective, but also in terms of the legal and racial policies applied during and after the end of Fascism. Within this vast framework, the Mediterranean takes centre stage. Yet, it does not come across as an ordered space but as a crumbling empire that leads its subjects and citizens to seek new lives through mobility. Borrowing from an emigration research centre called *Altretalia*, Ballinger introduces the notion of *oltretalia* to deconstruct a narrative of migratory phenomena that affect Italy in terms of the reverberation and expansion abroad of a “standard” concept of Italianness. By highlighting the diverse and unordered movements during Italian decolonisation, the term *oltretalia* aims ‘not merely to pluralize an understanding of Italy but also destabilize and decenter it, just as the figure of the refugee decenters histories of the post-war period in Europe and beyond’ (p. 31).

The Mediterranean, then, is a post-imperial space in which national identity remains undefined, but also a non-sovereign space in which different forces faced the post-war problem of refugees arriving from the former empire. The merit of Ballinger's spatial analysis is precisely to show that the *Mare Nostrum* myth evaporated, burdening local, national and intergovernmental authorities with fragmented and sometimes conflicting responsibilities. From Rhodes to Tirana, from Tripoli to Pula, aid agencies appeared that were founded by

the local communities themselves, as well as bodies linked to the temporary administration of the Allied occupation, charitable bodies such as the Red Cross, the Vatican, the Italian ministries of Foreign Affairs and the Interior, up to the newly founded United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, the International Refugee Organization and the still existing United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. These institutions dealt — far from unanimously — with the assistance, transportation and resettlement of refugees, while at the same time determining their limits of citizenship and membership in the post-conflict national community. In subsequent decades, they eventually made way for the associative galaxy that was by now rooted in Italy, such as the Associazione Nazionale Venezia Giulia e Dalmazia, the Associazione Nazionale Cittadini Italiani e Familiari Rimpatriati dall'Albania or the Associazione Italiana Rimpatriati dalla Libia. It is through its cultural and political activities that this galaxy links Italy to its colonial and imperial heritage. In sum, Ballinger reminds us that, beyond the idea of a *mare nostrum* or a *mare aliorum*, the Mediterranean represents a concatenation of scales of observation: the fulcrum of the empire but not its exclusive container, the centre of local and international negotiations, and the background of distant trajectories that can converge towards focal points — the same fields and villages illustrated by Hom in “Empire’s Moebius Strip”.

Italy in a “diverse” Mediterranean

Both Hom and Ballinger draw attention to the correlation between space and belonging in processes of imperial formation and disintegration. In a similar vein, McGuire focuses on a Mediterranean colonial territory where the Italian occupiers elaborated specific criteria of citizenship and administration based on religious diversity. Beyond the governmental dimension, the Dodecanese — and, in a broader sense, the surrounding Aegean Sea — fascinated Italian scholars and politicians and, at the same time, posed a challenge to the definition of Italianness. McGuire insightfully covers the period before the occupation of the territory in 1912 and, building on D’Annunzio’s diaries and Giuseppe Sergi’s pseudoscientific theories on the ‘Mediterranean race’, demonstrates that the Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea represented a response to the ‘crisis of origins’ (p. 37) that emerged in Italian culture during Decadentism and social Darwinism. The Aegean became almost a synecdoche for the Mediterranean. The sense that Italian culture was rooted in this space was based on the Graeco-Roman glory of antiquity, but also on the Venetian and Genoese past of many of the area’s eastern territories, up to the point where there was no longer any doubt that Italian was still one of the *lingua francas* spoken on its various shores.

The fusion of Mediterraneanness and Italianness merged with the expansionist ambitions of the Kingdom of Italy. In this sense, Italy contributed to making the Mediterranean of the contemporary age the ‘colonial sea’ described by Manuel Borutta and Sakis Gekas.²⁶ As McGuire points out, this fed ‘the fantasy that the Italian state would achieve its full potential as a nation-state once it achieved an empire in the Mediterranean’ (p. 4). At the same time, this fusion clashed with the presence in the Aegean not only of orthodox Greeks but especially Muslims and Jews. For four centuries, Rhodes had been part of a province that the Ottomans called the ‘islands of the White Sea’ (*Cezayir-i Bahr-i Sefid*).²⁷ The author discusses the cultural implications of Italian colonial rule in this corner of the Mediterranean, from tourism via citizenship to the impact of Fascism. If the impressive scenic and archaeological beauty of Rhodes made it a popular tourist destination, the descriptions of the Italian Touring Club and the Istituto LUCE newsreels created a visual and media bridge between the metropolis and the colony. In both cases, the multi-faith character of Rhodes allowed propaganda to remain balanced between Orientalist exoticism and Mediterranean-Levantine familiarity. The search for a legal balance was more complicated. The Dodecanese occupied a special place in the Italian empire, and the official term “Possedimento delle Isole Italiane dell’Egeo” created a gap between the notions of colony and province within the Italian state. Furthermore, the concept of a ‘Mediterranean race’ divided the Aegeans from the African population in terms of a presumed higher degree of “civilisation” and similarity to the Italians, which also led to a large number of mixed marriages between Italian colonists and Dodecanesian women of other religions. It is no coincidence that Nicola Labanca has called the Dodecanese a ‘white colony’, the history of which is more similar to that of the Ionian Islands or Cyprus under British rule than to that of the African territories of the Fascist empire.²⁸

McGuire describes the paradoxes of Fascist colonialism’s concept of race between mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, “Italy’s Sea” recounts the example of Aegean citizenship bestowed on the Dodecanese of all creeds, perhaps overestimating the idea of a Mediterranean, colonial *communitas* in a situation where references to an “Aegean subordination” persisted without undoing the difference between Italian citizenship and the status of

²⁶ Manuel Borutta, Sakis Gekas, *A Colonial Sea. The Mediterranean, 1798-1956*, “European Review of History: Revue européenne d’histoire”, 2012, n. 19-1, pp. 1-13.

²⁷ In Ottoman sources, the toponym “White Sea” refers specifically, but not exclusively, to the Aegean Sea. Modern Turkish, by contrast, uses the equivalent *Akdeniz* for the Mediterranean in general.

²⁸ Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare: Storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2002, p. 181; Sakis Gekas, *Xenocracy: State, Class and Colonialism in the Ionian Islands, 1815-1864*, New York, Berghahn, 2017; Alexis Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, London, I. B. Tauris, 2014.

the majority of the local population. On the other hand, McGuire builds on the oral history previously explored by Nicholas Doumanis to insist not only on the ambivalence of Fascist colonialism towards the definition of its Aegean territory and population, but also on the latter's perception of Italian rule.²⁹ The paradox of the Fascist myth that combines Romanness, Italianness and Mediterraneanness lies in the fact that many Dodecanesians developed a simultaneous feeling of esteem for and hostility to the occupiers. Especially in later accounts, these two opposites developed into a generally positive view of "Italians" and a negative view of "Fascists". McGuire interprets this ambiguity not as a dualism inherent in colonial rule, but as a strategy of local subalterns. The more intimate dimension of personal relations with Italians posed less relevant problems compared to relations with the state, which was more easily associated with Fascism. Likewise, infrastructural changes tend to be remembered as "Italian" achievements while the experience of the Second World War is recalled as the harshest moment of Fascist occupation. In this sense, it should be stressed that the Aegean was the scene of the almost total deportation of the local Jewish community, which makes Rhodes (and Kos) part of that same genocidal Mediterranean to which Hom refers in the case of the Bedouins of Cyrenaica, and which is also gaining increasing attention from historians abroad. The Mediterranean thus becomes a privileged lens to examine the extent to which the persecutions, genocides and war crimes of Italian Fascism were intertwined with the double discrimination against Jews and various African populations.³⁰ Focusing on the cultural aspects of the occupation, McGuire presents a Mediterranean that, rather than concretising the idea of a "Italy's sea", turns out to be a 'mirage of both national and colonial possibility' (p. 25); in doing so, she extends the interconnected reading of empire and nation during Fascism that Roberta Pergher introduced in a recent study.³¹

If there is one Mediterranean city where this "mirage" of nationalism changed the history of the peninsula, it is undoubtedly Fiume (now Rijeka, in Croatia). The period after the First World War in this corner of the Mediterranean is the focus of Dominique Reill's study, *The Fiume Crisis*.

²⁹ Nicholas Doumanis, *Myth and memory in the Mediterranean: Remembering fascism's empire*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1997.

³⁰ Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, *D'une persécution l'autre: Racisme colonial et anti-sémitisme dans l'Italie fasciste*, "Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine", 2008, n. 55-3, pp. 116-137; Patrick Bernhard, *Behind the Battle Lines. Italian Atrocities and the Persecution of Arabs, Berbers, and Jews in North Africa during World War II*, "Holocaust and Genocide Studies", 2012, no. 26-3, pp. 425-446; Anthony McElligott, *The Deportation of the Jews of Rhodes, 1944. An Integrated History*, in Giorgios Antoniou, A. Dirk Moses (eds.), *The Holocaust in Greece*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 58-86.

³¹ Roberta Pergher, *Mussolini's Nation-Empire. Sovereignty and Settlement in Italy's Borderlands, 1922-1943*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Reill has the great merit of detaching the events of Fiume from the paradigm of “proto-fascism” — and D’Annunzio’s excesses in general — that still dominates Italian historiography.³² Opening with a splendid description of city life on the eve of the Bloody Christmas of 1920, the author pays homage to Fiume’s multicultural substrate from the very first pages, underlining how the nationalist outburst of D’Annunzio and his legionaries ‘interrupted a world but did not transform it’ (p. 13). Hence, Fiume rightly belongs to a diverse Mediterranean, one that confronted Italian nationalism and imperialism without being reduced to a mere stage for phenomena born on the peninsula. Far from being a lascivious backdrop for the legionnaires’ exaggerations and experiments, Reill’s Fiume was first and foremost the main port of the Transleithanian territory (the part of the Habsburg monarchy controlled from Budapest), characterised by multilingualism and difficult to manage because of its autonomous status as a *corpus separatum* and a network of mobility that linked the city to its hinterland as well as to Mediterranean and transatlantic migratory flows. Reill focuses on these aspects of the Mediterranean’s imperial diversity to study its gradual decline, thus overcoming the idea that it ended suddenly and violently. Even during the occupation of D’Annunzio’s forces (September 1919-December 1920) and after the Treaty of Rapallo, which sanctioned the creation of the Free State of Fiume, the city maintained a vitality that allowed it to accept Italianisation by adapting it to its Habsburg heritage.

The city did not remain indifferent to the idea that D’Annunzio’s occupation represented the promise of a new Italy. Fiume was a political centre that was also geographically outside the peninsula, where revolutionary and authoritarian aspects ended up giving rise to a Fascist putsch as early as March 1922, thus anticipating the Fascists’ nationwide seizure of power. Nonetheless, Fiume represented ‘a move to continue empire under the aegis of nation’ (p. 17), a process of which Reill investigates various aspects by linking the trajectories of the city’s inhabitants to the material aspects of their everyday life, from the issue of currency exchange to the transformations of the concept of sovereignty, from the definition of citizenship to Italian nationalist propaganda in the streets and schools. In terms of imperial continuity, one could mention the legal notion of ‘pertinence’ (German *Heimatrecht*, Croatian *zavičajnost*). Reserved for Hungarian citizens until 1918 (thus excluding Habsburg subjects from Cisleithania, which was governed by Vienna), ‘pertinence’ conferred legal and fiscal rights by sanctioning full membership of the Fiume community as opposed to mere residence. In a period marked by the growth of the urban population, the ‘pertinent’ inhabitants of Fiume shared everyday experiences with the residents who lacked these privileges, making the city a site of legal inequality. What happened when the Italian National Council began to govern

³² See Marco Mondini, *Fiume 1919. Una guerra civile italiana*, Rome, Salerno, 2019.

Fiume in December 1918? Reill describes the transformation of ‘pertinence’ into citizenship not as a rupture or abrupt Italianisation, but as a phenomenon dictated by pragmatism. By relaxing the criteria for obtaining ‘pertinence’, but forcing applicants to renounce their other nationalities (pp. 149-50), the pro-Italian authorities bet on a rapid annexation by the Kingdom of Italy and changed the population’s legal and administrative ties; they thus blocked the rise of Hungary (whose territory had, in the meantime, shrunk by almost three quarters) and absorbed thousands of Fiuman citizens who had not not enjoyed full rights before the fall of the Habsburg Empire into the local domain.

The tension between nation and empire is, then, a common thread that links the works of Hom, Ballinger, McGuire and Reill. The latter offers a particularly original contribution, not limiting herself to projects of governmentality dictated by Rome but adopting the point of view of a new territory with its own past in which this tension was already at work before the advent of the legionnaires and Fascism. In a delicate but dynamic historical moment, between the end of the Habsburg Empire and the construction of the Fascist one, the experience of Fiume reminds us that cultural and demographic diversity was an important element in the bond between Italy and the Mediterranean. This diversity gave rise — as in the case of the Aegean Possedimento — to administrative projects that were difficult to classify on the basis of a dichotomy between imperialism and nationalism. In one of the many interesting anecdotes that can be found in “The Fiume Crisis”, Reill mentions an exchange of telegrams in 1919 between Fiume and San Marino. Reill argues that the representatives of the city in the Kvarner Gulf drew inspiration from the formula that bound the Apennine republic to Rome, in which the maintenance of sovereignty did not exclude privileged, if not exclusive, ties to organs of the Italian state (pp. 131-2). In other words, in the twentieth-century Mediterranean, the *corpus separatum* of a defunct empire could continue to imagine its autonomy by combining it with a pragmatic connection to Italy: hence, this was not a transition from empire to nation, but the persistence from one empire to another made possible by the appropriation of the discourse on Adriatic and Mediterranean Italianness.

A “fixed” Mediterranean?

Looking at the four monographs together, the Mediterranean appears as a constant factor in Italian history from the late nineteenth century to the present day, acting as a geographical point of focus and — albeit with varying intensity — as a concept linked to the perception of national and imperial identity. But how do we deal with this continuity if we take the political and social transformations of Italian history into consideration? The authors answer this question in different ways.

Reill chooses a narrow periodisation to dismantle a much wider paradigm of Italian history. Daily life during the “funeral wake” of the Habsburg Empire reminds us that ‘nation-states in the mid-twentieth century were fraught enterprises whose inherent contradictions (...) triggered so many of the frustrations that led to much of the world we know’ (p. 234). We should, then, treat the Italian empire as a post-Habsburg Empire if we are to restore its substrate to what historiography has, since the 1990s, called ‘border Fascism’.³³ Thanks to the solid equipment that distinguishes a historian of the Adriatic, Reill introduces a new imperial conjunction — concerning the “imperialist” autonomism of a local community — that contributes to the study of nationalist irredentism.

Conversely, McGuire examines Italian colonial history in the Dodecanese by combining cultural production, media representation and interactions between state and population. The author thus breaks away from an approach centred on Fascism and its ‘new Mediterranean order’.³⁴ The focus of McGuire’s analysis is not so much the administrative policies of a colony, but rather the deeper discourse on Mediterraneanness and, especially, the ambivalence of ethnic and racial classifications. The author argues that ‘debates among state nationalists during the interwar period are prescient of the ways in which hierarchies of race linked to the Italian colonial past have impacted the reception of immigrants in more recent years’ (p. 11). In her introduction and conclusion, McGuire thus moves beyond the perspective centred on Italian sovereignty over the islands to suggest that, in the ‘selective memory’ of the local Greek population, the experience of colonial rule continues to define the intersections — and contradictions — between ‘Europe’s southern question’ of recent years and Greece’s Mediterraneanness, for instance in the case of the economic crisis and the migration crisis (pp. 1, 251).

In this sense, “Italy’s Sea” engages in an interesting dialogue with “The World Refugees Made” and “Empire’s Moebius Strip”. The temporality chosen by Ballinger is only apparently focused on the years of the disintegration of the Fascist empire and decolonisation (1941-1960). The author starts with a detailed analysis of decolonisation, of which she questions the ‘quick, easy, or early’ nature, arguing instead that ‘reperiodizing Italy’s contraction not as precocious but rather as a “long decolonization”’ allows for the reconstruction of the vicissitudes of the people whose mobility depended on the end of Fascism, but also of the sources of the colonial period after the empire’s territories were lost. Rather than repeating the paradigm of amnesia concerning the colonial past, Ballinger takes an ethnographic approach to the dispersal of archives and

³³ Raoul Pupo, *Il fascismo di confine. Una chiave interpretativa per un approccio comparativo*, “Storia e regione”, 2011, no. 20-1, pp. 11-9.

³⁴ This narrative owes much to the important study of the same name: Davide Rodogno, *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo. Le politiche di occupazione dell’Italia fascista in Europa*, Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 2003.

places that contain the still visible traces of this mobility to add ‘greater nuance than that of mere forgetting / enforced forgetting’ (pp. 18-9, 21). Describing a kind of short-circuit between the history and memory of post-Fascist decolonisation, Ballinger ascribes to the Mediterranean a founding role for contemporary Italy.

“The World Refugees Made” criticises a perception that, even in the media, creates superficial parallels between an “us” represented by the Italian emigrants who left the peninsula at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to settle overseas, and a “them” represented by the immigrants who have arrived in Italy by crossing the Mediterranean in more recent times. Ballinger rightly points out that, since the Second World War, Italy has been the more or less temporary destination of thousands of “immigrants” crossing the Mediterranean. By separating national refugees from ‘foreign refugees’, often coming from the same places, the state ‘closed the door on large-scale naturalization’, and the consequences of this process persist to this day (p. 30). Another short-circuit concerns the rhetoric of neo-fascist groups used in murals and posters that try to revive slogans from the *Ventennio*, especially to recruit militants in schools, are not new in Rome or anywhere else; Ballinger cites the example of a neo-fascist poster she spotted in the Monteverde neighbourhood in 2011, with the slogan ‘Ritorneremo!’ and a grandfather in uniform holding a child, both scanning the horizon. The event in question, called a ‘Commemoration of the martyrs of the foibe and of Istrian and Dalmatian exiles’, was held on the occasion of the *Giorno del Ricordo*. As Ballinger points out, this date commemorates the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty in 1947, which sanctioned the end of the Italian empire by failing to establish an eastern border, leading to the exodus of Istrians and Dalmatians. The same poster calling for a “return” is none other than the reproduction of a poster produced by the Fascist regime in 1943, shortly before the Armistice of Cassibile. Invoking the ‘African sickness’ of ‘millions and millions of Italians’, the regime promised a return to the colonies that — like all wartime propaganda promises — did not come true (pp. 56, 213). “The World Refugees Made” therefore teaches us that the Mediterranean is not just a space of exclusion where Italy refused and continues to refuse mechanisms that can facilitate naturalisation. Likewise, a certain “Mediterraneanism” remains a hotbed of nationalist and irredentist sentiments nurtured by extreme right-wing groups. A reading of the Mediterranean that can decentralise certain paradigms on the history of the nation-state must, at the same time, face the heavy legacy of Fascism and the pitfalls of revisionism. Mussolini himself described Fascism, in an interview shortly before his capture in April 1945, as the ‘most Mediterranean and European of all ideas’.³⁵

³⁵ Elia Rosati, *CasaPound Italia. Fascisti del terzo millennio*, Milano, Mimesis, 2018, pp. 112-113.

The fixity of the Mediterranean in Italian history, then, does not mean that it never changes, but that it is in continuous refraction, a trace that runs along the Möbius strip described by Hom. If this trace is continuous, will it last forever? “Empire’s Moebius Strip” implies that the union of territoriality and biopolitics that binds contemporary Italy to the legacy of its colonial empire has now taken on a European dimension. Recalling the example of Fiume in which — according to Reill — the official end of an empire facilitated the establishment of a new imperial logic, the aporias of Italian decolonisation could thus be read from a broader perspective. Considering that each European country carries an imperial legacy and that many of these countries are the successors not of a province, but of the metropolis of an empire, one could connect Hom’s (and McGuire’s) cue to an observation by Timothy Snyder, according to whom the European Union is a ‘soft landing after empire’.³⁶ If we turn our attention from the unitary and continental aspect to the border and maritime aspect of European integration, we see that the Mediterranean could destabilise the idea that post-war Europe was born ‘after empires’. Instead, the EU would appear to be a further ‘imperial formation’ next to those described by the four authors, in which Italy and its history continue to play an important, though no longer exclusive, role.

From the *imperium* of history to the historiographical *emporion*

The four monographs examined here testify to a growing and highly original historiographical interest in Italy and the Mediterranean within the English-speaking world. All works share a particular focus on the concept of empire, in line with the so-called new imperial history that has proved capable of mediating between area studies and global history. It is precisely from this observation that we can identify a number of research avenues that, in addition to the aforementioned imperial continuities in the construction of Europe after 1945 (and even more so after 1989), may open up new avenues of investigation. In this regard, we can take Montale’s triad — the Mediterranean as a space that is ‘vast, diverse and fixed at the same time’ — as a point of reference and assess the extent to which it is absent from the four books. Taking up Fogu’s categories of *imperium* and *emporion*, we can thus identify some elements capable of reconciling attention to Italy’s imperial past with research practices that recall the region’s syncretic and plural character.

Firstly, if the spatiality of the Mediterranean has made it possible to read contemporary Italian history from new vantage-points, the borders where this history intersects with that of other countries and regions remain to

³⁶ Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom. Russia, Europe, America*, New York, Penguin, 2018, p. 72.

be explored. This dialogue with “other” historiographies is most evident in Ballinger’s and Reill’s works, which are characterised by an interest in the Adriatic region and therefore in (post-)Habsburg, Balkan, and Central European history. By contrast, an encounter with the history of the Middle East and North Africa — that is, with Ottoman and post-Ottoman history, in the era in question — is largely absent in current scholarship.³⁷ It is not a matter of questioning the contributions of Italian studies abroad, but of acknowledging that the development in the Mediterranean area of other regional disciplines (area studies) now enables and encourages these to engage with Italian history in the training of young researchers. If, in the future, an Italianist-Mediterraneanist profile takes shape, it can only benefit from a deeper eclecticism with regard to the contemporary histories of the other countries and regions of the Mediterranean basin. This polycentrism could also enhance the historiographical value of the Mediterranean in terms of global history, not only through edited collections — as already demonstrated by some recent contributions — but also through monographs.³⁸

Secondly, the diversity of the Mediterranean would be even more productive if historians had access to sources in different languages, which are available in Italian and other countries’ archives. It would, then, be necessary to further integrate the acquisition of Mediterranean languages — especially those of the southern and eastern shores — into the study and specialisation programmes dedicated to this region. In this sense, the recent launch of a three-year course in Società e Culture del Mediterraneo at the University of Bologna’s Ravenna branch, which has a strong historiographical component but is open to interdisciplinarity and foreign language learning, is a promising initiative; in general, progress in exchange programmes between universities in Italy and elsewhere in the Mediterranean region at all levels of education and research would be beneficial.³⁹ Italian colonial rule in particular, but also irredentism and military occupations up to the most recent migration flows, can be reinterpreted by supplementing the sources of the Italian state with those of the polyphonic (and polyglot) galaxy of institutions and actors that interacted with it, leaving traces in different languages in schools, courts, prisons and police records, as well as newspapers, not to mention diaries, autobiographical memories, oral testimo-

³⁷ In this sense, the recent publications by Arturo Marzano and Giampaolo Conte are only two possible examples of how a Mediterranean approach can be as useful for Italian history as for that of other countries in the same region. Arturo Marzano, *Onde Fasciste. La propaganda araba di Radio Bari (1934-43)*, Rome, Carocci, 2015; Giampaolo Conte, *Il tesoro del sultano. L’Italia, le grandi potenze e le finanze ottomane: 1881-1914*, L’Aquila, Textus, 2018.

³⁸ Maurizio Isabella, Konstantina Zanou (eds.), *Mediterranean diasporas: Politics and ideas in the long 19th century*, London, Bloomsbury, 2015; The Black Mediterranean Collective (ed.), *The Black Mediterranean. Bodies, Borders and Citizenship*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

³⁹ See: <https://corsi.unibo.it/laurea/CultureMediterraneo/il-corso> (last accessed 4 January 2022).

nies and artistic creations. This will give us a higher-resolution image of the Mediterranean region and of the confrontation of contemporary Italian history with other realities.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning the temporality of the Mediterranean. While the strength of the books by Hom, Ballinger and McGuire — more or less explicitly inspired by a postcolonial approach — lies in the extension of the Mediterranean's historical dimension beyond the end of Italian sovereignty, Reill's specific contribution is to shed light on the period before the Italian annexation of Fiume. The least explored theme is precisely that of the *precolonial* (or pre-annexation) history of the Mediterranean. Especially North African history is moving rapidly towards an approach that re-evaluates the intertwining of local realities, links with the Ottoman Empire and subsequent colonial transformations from a strongly Mediterranean perspective.⁴⁰ There is still a lack of studies on Italian and Fascist imperialism that interpret the political and social situation of the territories that fell under Italian rule not as a mere prelude, but as an integral part of the narrative.⁴¹ In this way, a Mediterranean approach can add value to the polyrhythmic character of history, understood as various speeds of change, persistence over time and the co-presence of different perceptions regarding the “end” and “beginning” of new epochs.

Although Italian administrations often claimed, for propaganda purposes, that the new territories were characterised by backwardness, immobility, inertia and isolation, the complex worlds of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica or the Ottoman Dodecanese, as well as the Adriatic littoral in the Habsburg Empire, had in reality kept pace with the changes and connectivity of the Mediterranean region before the Italian armed forces arrived. The Bedouins of the Senussi Sufi order, who were involved in arms smuggling during the Scramble for Africa, the networks of Dalmatian and Istrian migrants who linked the Habsburg Empire to the overseas world, the Dodecanese sponge divers who exported this practice to America, or the many Ottoman political prisoners who were held precisely in Rhodes or Tripoli in accordance with the *sürgün* banishment practice: these are just a few examples of a precolonial Mediterranean that was open to the world and to economic and social change. By focusing on these phenomena, we can overcome the suspension of history that results from the repeated emphasis on imperial formations interpreted as exclusively Italian, as when Fascist rhetoric appropriated the *Imperium Romanum* or the rule of the Venetian *Serenissima*. It was this heterogeneous

⁴⁰ Adam Mestyan, *Arab Patriotism. The Ideology and Culture of Power in Late Ottoman Egypt*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2017; M'hamed Oualdi, *A Slave between Empires. A Transimperial History of North Africa*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2020.

⁴¹ This “imperial consequence” is one of the objectives of my monograph: Andreas Guidi, *Generations of Empire. Youth from Ottoman to Italian Rule in the Mediterranean*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2022.

context that created challenges and opportunities for Italian imperialism once it established itself in these territories as a sovereign force. Keeping the brackets of imperial history open, not only to the most recent events but above all to the earlier ones, is the most interesting challenge for a historiographical investigation that is committed to relocating the trajectory of Italian history in its indissoluble, and therefore intricate, link with Mediterranean history.

Translated by Andrea Hajek