
Foreword

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In 1949, a mere four years after Italy was liberated from Fascism, a small group of intellectuals, politicians and historians decided to establish a historical institute in Milan, which celebrated its seventieth anniversary only very recently. They called it ‘Istituto nazionale per la storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia’ (National Institute for the history of the Liberation Movement in Italy). Its founder and first president was Ferruccio Parri, the democrat and republican leader of the Action Party, who — among others — had animated the ‘Comitato di Liberazione nazionale Alta Italia’ (Committee of National Liberation for Northern Italy). Parri was one of the leaders of the Italian Resistance against Fascism, as well as the Prime minister of the first government born after Italy’s Liberation (25 April 1945).

The aim of the Institute was, in fact, to safeguard all documents relating to the Italian Resistance, rightfully considered both the most radical turning point in the history of Italy and the most unifying Italian political orientation. After all, what had distinguished the Italian Resistance — which was not devoid of radicalism — was its unifying drive, bringing together militants from the Communist Party, the Action Party, the Socialist Party and the Christian Democracy, as well as republicans, monarchists and anarchists. Moreover, the Resistance movement had raised the hopes of every single Italian (civilian or soldier) who wanted to put an end to Fascism and the Nazi occupation.

More importantly, only three months after its establishment, the Institute launched a ‘Rassegna bimestrale di studi e documenti’ (Review of studies and sources, to be published every two months): a scholarly journal that offered analyses and presented historical documents, with dedicated book reviews or review articles. The editorial board — which represented the Institute even though maintaining a wide degree of independence — was composed

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of intellectuals, historians and militants with a passion for history. It was the first journal in Italy to be entirely devoted to contemporary history; this was remarkable since, at that time, only Modern history and Risorgimento History were taught at Italian universities — contemporary history was yet to be born. Clearly the idea behind the Institute was to promote a critical approach to the Resistance (rather than an apology), to anti-fascism and to national history. This research activity also involved disseminating the obtained knowledge.

The ‘Rassegna’ soon moved from some dozens of pages to about two hundred pages per issue, and by the 1960s it had become an academic history journal in the full sense of the term. In 1974, it changed its name to ‘Italia contemporanea’. In a certain sense, then, ‘Italia contemporanea’ has existed for 70 years now, just like the Institute, which recently changed its name to ‘Istituto nazionale Ferruccio Parri. Rete degli Istituti per la storia della Resistenza e dell’età contemporanea’ (National Institute Ferruccio Parri. Network of Institutes for the history of the Resistance and the contemporary age). The reason behind this change is that, ever since the end of the war, and especially since the 1970s, about seventy regional or provincial Institutes have emerged across Italy; by uniting into a network, they contribute in a significant way to the study of contemporary history of Italian society in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In other words, they must no longer be considered simply as Institutes for the history of the Resistance but — within the boundaries of the possible, and funding permitting — as many-sided institutes of contemporary political, social and cultural history, which represent one of the most original and important aspects of Italian associationism in the field of history and, as we would nowadays say, history in public.

These Institutes — whenever and however possible — have produced first-class contributions to historiographical research relating to twentieth-century Italy, which have often been more experimental, innovative and up-to-date than what is commonly accepted in Italian universities and university departments. Consequently, ‘Italia contemporanea’ has become one of the most esteemed academic history journals in Italy: its editorial board has been composed of expert scholars for decades now, and it has always remained independent in its scholarly decisions. In fact, the independent ‘Agenzia nazionale di valutazione del sistema universitario e della ricerca’ (National agency for the assessment of the university system and research) has ranked the journal “A”, and in Italy it is considered one of the best journals of national contemporary history.

The journal is essentially composed of three sections: ‘Saggi’ (Essays, i.e. original research articles), ‘Note e discussioni’ (Notes and discussions, i.e. shorter discussion articles) and ‘Rassegna bibliografica’ (Bibliographical review, i.e. book reviews). All the issues from 1949 up to 2009 are now available in open access via the Institute’s website, at www.reteparri.it/publicazioni/italia-contemporanea. The most recent issues (since 2010) are available at www.francoangeli.it/riviste/Sommario.aspx?IDRivista=164. Now a four-monthly journal, ‘Italia contemporanea’ follows a strict double-blind peer

review procedure. In recent years, it has adopted a ‘hybrid’ form of publication, with some two-thirds of the articles being published in print and via a subscription, one third on line, in open access. The articles published in open access aren’t reprints of existing articles, though: they are entirely original articles, which can be accessed without a subscription to the journal.

The reason for describing — earlier on — the origins of our Institute and of our ‘*Italia contemporanea*’ is that, while these events are familiar to an Italian scholarly readership, they may not be known abroad.

We now launch a new initiative.

Although important libraries within the European and, in general, Western research context are subscribed to ‘*Italia contemporanea*’, making it available to readers in and beyond Europe, we felt it was necessary to offer a new series of publications aimed precisely at an English-language audience: the present ‘Yearbook’.

Indeed, one of the weaknesses of Italian historiography — whose best contributions are obviously of international, and internationalised, standards when it comes to research questions and methodologies — is the fact that it uses the Italian language. While many of the best Italian scholars of contemporary history read (and write in) English, French, German, Spanish and so on, not all among the best British, French, German, Spanish or American scholars read Italian. Consequently, it is more difficult to make the products of Italian contemporary history research known outside the Peninsula.

Through this ‘Yearbook’, ‘*Italia contemporanea*’ aims to contribute to resolve this problem. Its editorial board has selected about ten longer and shorter articles, which it felt represented the most innovative contributions to have appeared in the journal in 2020. The chosen articles address topics that have received little scholarly attention or adopt innovative research methodologies; either way, we are confident that they will prove of interest to an international readership. Thanks to the publisher, we were able to have the articles translated into English, and we have now gathered them in the present ‘Yearbook’. In doing so, ‘*Italia contemporanea*’ introduces these originally Italian themes, research projects and authors to a global readership. Furthermore, through this ‘Yearbook’, these articles (which have already gone through a rigorous double-blind peer review process) will be freely available in open access.

Obviously, everything has changed ever since the Institute was founded and the ‘*Rassegna*’ was launched: historical circumstances, protagonists, aims, the quality of historical research. Yet, the spirit of the first years hasn’t disappeared completely. The aim, now as then, remains that of studying the original and specific traits of contemporary Italy in the twentieth century and now also twenty-first century. The idea remains that of disseminating, as much as possible, the products of some of the best Italian historical research: previously in print, now on line; previously in a national context, now in the global arena.

