

Giardina, Andrea (Hrsg.): *Storia mondiale dell'Italia*. Rom: Laterza 2017. ISBN: 8858129830; 877 S.

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In a stimulating inaugural lecture to the conference „Storia d'Italia e storia globale“ at the Fondazione Istituto Gramsci in Rome in December 2014, Serge Gruzinski suggested a few areas that historians could explore in order to write a global history of Italy. Based on the reception books printed in Venice had in cities like Istanbul and Mexico City, he illustrated the role Italy played during the Renaissance between the Sublime Porte and Mexico, between the Ottoman Empire and the „New World“. Not only did this role consist in connecting cultures, but also in mediating and creating a new world knowledge. Another case study Gruzinski took into consideration came from the nineteenth century. The importance of opera in the globalization of culture has often been underlined. Italian music was very popular in South America, where it helped to shape economic, artistic and human ties. Yet, writing a global history of Italian opera should not only mean describing its popularity in regions like Latin America, but also – in an attempt to dismantle Eurocentric views of history – to reverse the perspective, by inquiring to what extent Italian composers and performers were influenced by non-European elements and experiences. What Gruzinski suggested was that writing a global history of Italy can best be done by, firstly, multiplying voices and sources in order to reduce Eurocentricism and, secondly, by paying attention to connections and entanglements between the local and the global.¹

The above-mentioned conference was an important stage for scholars working on Italian history from a global perspective, a trend that has increasingly received attention. Soon after, in 2017, the book reviewed here, *Storia mondiale dell'Italia*, was published. It followed the *Historie mondiale de la France*, edited by Patrick Boucheron, itself published in France and a little earlier than *Historia mundial de España*, edited by Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, in Spain.² A new interest in national

histories beyond national narratives seemed to have emerged in Western Europe, against the grain of the long-established tradition of writing history in narrowly national terms. *Storia mondiale dell'Italia* has been edited by Andrea Giardina, Professor of Ancient History at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa, in collaboration with Amedeo Feniello, Maria Pia Donato and Emmanuel Betta, specialists respectively in Medieval, Early Modern and Modern History. The volume did not give rise to the kind of wide-scale political discussions which occurred in France. Boucheron's book, which incidentally came out in the middle of the intense campaign for the 2017 French presidential elections opposing Macron and Le Pen, had sparked a lively debate on French nationalism. The book in discussion here adopts a very political position too. Significantly, the last article is dedicated to Lampedusa, an island which has become a symbol of historically rooted global inequality. The choice of ending this world history of Italy with the main arrival place in Europe for migrants from the Global South is telling of how one cannot understand the history of this country without framing it within global migrations and interconnections. The reader is thus asked to consider Lampedusa as the arrival point of a long journey filled with people of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds who have crossed the Peninsula across the centuries. That is why Giardina, in the *Introduction*, suggests that we should avoid searching for any fixity or continuity in Italian history, which the teleological narratives of nationalism might inspire (p. XIV). It is the instability of the narrative, its fluidity, which also determines the structure of the book. This does not follow a traditional chronological flow, but opens up spaces for reflection on specific moments, places, and individuals – all projected into a larger historical dimension. More precisely, the book, which consists of 180 short articles, is divided into

¹Serge Gruzinski, L'Italia nello specchio della storia globale, in: *Giornale di storia* 17 (2015), <https://www.giornaledistoria.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/specchio-globale.pdf> (28.04.2020).

²Katharina Seibert, Review of: Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas (ed.), *Historia mundial de España*, Barcelona 2018, in: *H-Soz-Kult*, <https://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/reb-27996> (07.05.2020).

12 sections spanning the centuries between 3200 B.C. and 2015. The authors are around 170 historians, mostly based in Italian universities. The first four sections are devoted to Prehistory, the Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Then three sections focus on the Early Modern period with the expansion of the historical horizon and the „new“ worlds and empires. Two sections, respectively entitled *Age of revolution* and *The nation and the world*, deal with the eighteenth and the nineteenth century. Three sections devoted to the years of the twentieth century until 2015 conclude the volume: the first entitled *Italians*, the other two recalling the Berlin wall and the time during and after the Cold War.

The red thread of the book is the idea that Italy is a mix of cultural, ethnic and religious elements and that being Italian means being the product of this mixture. Consequently, all attempts to recall an original and incorrupt hallmark of Italianness are misconceptions, the outcome of political manipulation across the centuries. Even looking back at the Peninsula before it became the core of the extended Roman empire shows that many inhabitants of this „Italy before Italy“ were immigrants from the East (Mario Lentano). Finally, the very foundation of Rome – as recounted according to the legend of Romulus and Remus – involves outsiders becoming „Italian“ after a long journey across the Mediterranean.

This takes the reader to a place of crucial importance for any world history of Italy: Rome, which became the capital city of the Italian national state in 1871, at the same time kept its universalistic nature as the former capital of the Roman empire and the center of the Catholic Church. These two elements granted Rome a special character as a world city. Setting out from the establishment of the Accademia di Francia in 1666, Giovanna Capitelli describes the cosmopolitan intellectual and artistic atmosphere of Rome in the 17th century. Interestingly enough, by drawing a comparison with France in his short introduction to *Storia mondiale dell'Italia (Invito al viaggio)*, Patrick Boucheron wonders if the book will cause less stir in Italy than his own caused in France, given the universalistic claims of Italian history and hence Italy's familiarity in dealing with the rest of the world

(p. XXX). As a matter of fact, the book has enjoyed an enthusiastic reception in Italy. Yet, one wonders how representative the small readership of this book is. That Italians have a problem with immigration and multiculturalism is proved by the fact that right-wing parties, like Salvini's *Lega* and Meloni's *Fratelli d'Italia*, enjoy extensive cultural popularity and electoral support.

Given the wide range of voices and themes, it is impossible to discuss all articles. Surely, the various sections confirm the impression that Italian global history has been a vivid research field for the Early Modern Age.³ The Risorgimento, the long process of national unification, has been well framed by transnational investigations, which is reflected in the book. Yet, the intersection between globalization and nationalization, which Sebastian Conrad analyzed for the German *Kaiserreich*⁴, remains an open research agenda for the history of the Italian Kingdom. Not least following Gruzinski's hints, much inspiration can be drawn from the article dealing with Italian music in New York (Carlotta Sorba) in the mid nineteenth century. An extra-European perspective is offered by the article on Adwa, the north Ethiopian city where emperor Menelik's army defeated the Italian troops in 1896, a piece that convincingly reports both Italian and Ethiopian impressions on the event (Uoldelul Chelati Dirar). This double perspective is often missing in articles on Italian migration, where national narratives still seem to endure. Regrettably, no article deals with the important topic of Italian emigration abroad after the Second World War. With the exception of an interesting article on the Muslim presence in Republican Italy (Leila El Houssi), migrations in the 20th century have not been given the required attention.

For a non-academic readership, *Storia mondiale dell'Italia* is an enjoyable book which offers a multifaceted view of Italy's past and can help set the country within a broader geographical framework. Professional historians will find many suggestions on how to write

³ See Giuseppe Marcocci, *L'Italia nella prima età globale* (ca. 1300–1700), in: *Storica* 60 (2014), 7–50.

⁴ Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisierung und Nation im Deutschen Kaiserreich*, München 2006.

new Italian histories, which are increasingly inspired by Serge Gruzinski's aforementioned advice: to limit Eurocentrism and to connect the local and the global.

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