

PREFACE

The Force of History: modern Italian historiography and the legacy of Christopher Duggan

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The 2016 ASMI conference on *The Force of History: Critical Perspectives on the Historiography of Modern Italy* was held almost exactly one year after the untimely death of Christopher Duggan, who had been closely involved with the Association almost since its founding in 1982. Christopher had served a term as secretary, been a member of the executive committee for many years, and was elected Chair in 2015. It was not just the suddenness of his passing that occasioned the decision to dedicate the conference to the historiography of modern Italy and to focus on a selection of themes that were at the core of his interests. It was the sense that Christopher's work had been central to the recent British historiography of Italy while also being located firmly in a tradition of scholarship that dated back at least to the immediate post-war period and which found its main exponent in his one-time supervisor Denis Mack Smith. If Mack Smith – whose death at age 97 occurred in July 2017 – can himself be seen as belonging to a current stretching back to Bolton King and G.M. Trevelyan then Duggan can be viewed as a historian with deep roots in tradition, the practitioner of a type of historiography of Italy that was simultaneously engaged and detached, deeply knowledgeable but also in important ways external to most Italian historiography.

Like Mack Smith, on whom he modelled himself, especially in the early years of his career, Christopher was passionately committed to archival research and equally committed to overturning shibboleths. His work on the mafia, which challenged current ideas of it as a centralised, structured organisation, was immediately controversial. Mack Smith's first book, *Cavour and Garibaldi 1860: A Study in Conflict*, had also been largely about Sicily, and Duggan's revision and updating in 1986 of the book on the island that Mack Smith had published with the classicist Moses Finley in 1968 cemented Christopher's reputation as his pupil and heir. Duggan's subsequent work followed his maestro's interest in the Risorgimento, biography and Fascism. Christopher was unusual as a historian of his generation in developing a series of distinct specialist competences while always keeping the general picture firmly in view. The two editions of his *A Concise History of Italy*, the monumental *The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy Since 1796*, and the many book reviews he wrote for the THES, the TLS and numerous journals and other publications (listed in the bibliography compiled by Stuart Oglethorpe for this issue) testify to his range. Christopher was a voracious reader who prided himself on being up to date with the literature across the whole of modern Italian history.

Christopher can be seen as having practised scholarship of a traditional kind, but that would not be a complete or entirely accurate picture of his work. While starting from ostensibly quite

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conventional methods and concerns, he ventured into new areas and engaged with new historiographical trends. The articles published in this issue of *Modern Italy* and the many papers presented at the 2016 conference testify to the influence of his work, its impact and its legacy. The Risorgimento, the mafia, Fascism and Fascism's aftermath are absolutely central topics in the study of modern Italy and in each area innovative research has been produced by historians from inside and outside Italy. The articles in this issue cite Christopher's writings on these topics not out of a duty of genuflection but in genuine tribute to a scholar whose work continues to provoke debate and stimulate new research. Inevitably, of course, some of this new work takes issue with his findings and interpretations or goes well beyond them.

It is appropriate that the issue should open with David Laven's examination of the writings of William Stillman, the American author of the only other biography of Francesco Crispi, published in 1899, and that its closing research article is Hannah Malone's discussion of the architectural legacy of Fascism. Duggan's magnificent biography of Crispi is generally regarded as his best book and it is certainly the one that took him longest to research and write. It was the work through which he completed his transition as a historian from the island of Sicily to the nation, and through which the problem of nation building came to occupy a place at the centre of his interests. As Malone points out, at the time of his death, he was planning to embark on a large collective research project on the legacies of Fascism. This topic is one that has recently given rise to a number of studies and the project, had it secured funding and been carried through to its intended ends, would undoubtedly have made a substantial contribution to a burgeoning field. It arose from his contribution to a previous project on the personality cult of Mussolini, on which he worked with Giuliana Pieri and others, including myself, and which gave rise to his prize-winning volume *Fascist Voices*.

Christopher believed passionately in *Fascist Voices*. He visited the national diary archive in Pieve Santo Stefano on numerous occasions and was hugely excited by the material he found there which, he believed, gave a unique insight into the way ordinary Italians embraced Fascism. It was fortuitous that the book appeared almost simultaneously with Paul Corner's *The Fascist Party and Popular Opinion in Mussolini's Italy*. In a number of joint presentations, the two historians debated the nature of consensus and consent under Fascism, a question to which Corner returns in this issue. Though the book was exceptionally well-received in the UK and in France, like some of his earlier works it did not go down so well in Italy. Christopher was vexed by the silence of the Italian press and the diffidence of historians. Though he had never lived for a long period in Italy, he did not overtly position himself as an outsider, even if this is how he was often perceived. He engaged constructively with the work of Italian historians and was candid in acknowledging his debts, for example to Alberto Banti's work on nation-building in the preface to *The Force of Destiny*. In common with other British scholars of his generation, he neither exhibited nor felt any superiority towards the country or the people whose history he studied. What he perhaps underestimated was the extent to which the question of the consent that many Italians supposedly accorded to the dictatorship was still a sensitive one. However, as several contributions to the conference discussions underlined, he was by no means alone in finding himself on the receiving end of Italian hostility.

The issue of whether there is today or has been at any time such a thing as a 'British school' of historians of Italy is a theme that pervades the round table discussion between Marco Meriggi, John Foot, Giulia Albanese and David Laven that is reproduced here. Foot flatly rejects such an idea on account of the heterogeneity of its supposed members and their very different positions in relation to the Italian academic world. Meriggi and Albanese, by contrast, highlight the specific contribution of British scholars to the study of the Risorgimento, Fascism and other topics. At one

level, they are right to underline the specific role of numerous British scholars over a remarkably long period. However, the British contribution, especially in recent decades, has been part of a broader current. The fact that ASMI has always counted on a significant number of non-British members is testimony to this. For this reason, it might be more fruitful to think in terms of a corpus of international scholarship on modern and contemporary Italy, a corpus which is perhaps dominated by the works of English-speaking scholars – or, more accurately, scholars working in Britain, Ireland, the USA, Canada and Australasia – but which also includes substantial contributions from France, Germany and other countries.

The issue therefore is not simply one of bilateral relations between Britain and Italy or even of the multiplicity of relations between single British-trained academics and Italian institutions and historiography. One of Duggan's final initiatives was to plan a seminar between British-based and French-based scholars. The idea came about after Marie-Anne Matard Bonucci challenged him to explain why he and other British scholars consistently ignored the work of their French counterparts. The issue was not one of language, since he, like most scholars of his generation and background, had a good reading knowledge of French. Rather it was a matter of habit and perhaps ignorance. With characteristic generosity of spirit, Christopher admitted the problem and set about doing something to remedy it. The seminar that he conceived was organised by myself and Marzia Maccaferri for ASMI and Marc Lazar for Sciences Po (Paris) in two legs (Paris, Spring 2016; London, Autumn 2017). Moreover, two of the most prominent French scholars of modern Italy, Marie-Anne Matard Bonucci and Catherine Brice, were present at the 2016 ASMI conference, the former in the role of keynote speaker. The seminars have begun a dialogue that has highlighted some broad differences (put very simply, the French tend to be more political in approach, the British more cultural) while establishing the sort of cordial personal relations that augur well for future exchanges and collaborations.

The range of topics and approaches presented in this issue of *Modern Italy* stand as testimony to a rich and fruitful conference and to Christopher Duggan's legacy. Special thanks are due to those who organised the conference's sections: John Dickie (the mafia), Ilaria Favretto (round table on British historians and the history of Italy), Axel Körner (Duggan's Crispi in transnational perspective), Carl Levy (20 years of the IHR modern Italian history seminar), Maria Sophia Quine (Fascism and totalitarianism) and Marzia Maccaferri (legacies of Fascism). Alessandra Antola Swan contributed to all the preparatory meetings and oversaw the conference organisation. The journal's co-editors would like to acknowledge the invaluable support given by John Dickie and John Foot in helping to put together the special issue.