

precisely the coherence with which Pappalardo pursues his thesis, through the twists and turns of a winding and at times labyrinthine path, that – despite a few stretches – makes the book remarkable and worth reading.

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Mussolini's Nature: An Environmental History of Italian Fascism

by Marco Armiero, Roberta Biasillo and Wilko Graf von Hardenberg, translated by James Sievert, Cambridge, MS and London, The MIT Press, 2022, viii + 251 pp., \$30.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-262-54471-9

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At a time shaped by our emergence from the Covid-19 pandemic and overshadowed by ever pressing concerns about the climate crisis, including our over-reliance on imported oil from unstable parts of the world, *Mussolini's Nature: An Environmental History of Italian Fascism* is as timely as it is important. The authors, M. Armiero, R. Biasillo and W.G. von Hardenberg, note that today, apologist ideas of Mussolini's Fascism persist – not only did the trains run on time but the protection of the environment was at the forefront of Italian Fascist policy – and one can only presume that such ideas abound following the recent success of the populist right in Italy. Therefore, the authors wish to reject any sense that Mussolini was in any way a champion of environmental causes. However, as they declare, their book is not an assessment of the 'green' credentials of the Fascist regime. Rather, it is an evaluation of Mussolini and the policies of his regime in terms of the prevailing views of nature and the material consequences for the Italian landscape. The book spans the life of Mussolini from a small boy growing up in Emilia Romagna through the years of the Fascist regime, ending with some considerations of his postwar environmental legacy. Ultimately, the authors show how the environment is an integral part of any political endeavour.

The book is organised thematically and is made up of six chapters with a short introduction and conclusion. It begins with an analysis of Mussolini and the development of his relationship with nature from the perspective of two women close to him. Other themes dealt with are the Fascist environmental projects of land reclamation and the Battle for Grain; the drive for autarky, with a focus on dam building and the development of the gasogene engine; conservation policies and in particular the establishment of national parks and the apparent contradictions with Fascist ideas of nature; Italian colonialism in Africa; and finally, the legacy of Fascism's environmental and colonial policies, and how to deal with them in an appropriate way.

This is a fascinating, concise book, carefully researched, very well translated and full of interesting detail. It generally passes quickly through the more familiar details of

Mussolini's Fascism and brings to the fore lesser-known minutiae of the regime's relationship with the environment. Relying on two contemporary biographies, the book begins with a thought-provoking examination of the personal and contradictory connection Mussolini himself was purported to have had with nature. His one-time mistress, Margherita Sarfatti, describes him as transcending human limits through his ability to connect with his 'animal nature' (p. 18). She highlights his apparent courage which, she argues, stems from his time spent in the Friulian Alps during the First World War. Thus, he has been shaped by his close links to the natural landscape of the motherland. Rachele, Mussolini's 'peasant wife', in contrast, underlines his fear of contagion and the physical fragility of his body. Nevertheless, both women construct an image of Mussolini in which 'external' and 'internal' elements of nature intertwine (p. 26). In their narratives, we are shown how natural externalities seemingly shape the individual and ultimately the character and race of the Italian nation.

As the authors move on to discuss the drive for autarky, particularly insightful are the descriptions of the long-forgotten associated disasters. This enterprise, the authors argue, was a demonstration of the subjugation of the natural environment to the requirements of the Italian economy. Therefore, the inhabitants and the natural landscape were 'inferior' to the needs of the mother country (p. 65). This 'inferiority' is demonstrated by the accidents in Gleno in Lombardy in 1923, and Molare in Piedmont in 1935. Both killed hundreds and neither ended in satisfactory justice for the victims' families. Similarly, details of mining accidents from 1937 to 1940 in Istria and Sardinia due to a lack of safety measures for the workers are notably absent from the archives of the Istituto Luce, the Italian film cooperation founded by Mussolini. This subjugation of nature and its inhabitants is also highlighted in relation to the poor protection reserved for native species of flora and fauna and the 'coincidental' support for the creation of Italy's first national parks (p. 94). Essentially, the regime sought to promote an image of nature as a foe, controlled by the strength and will power of an awe-inspiring regime. The draining of the Pontine marshes and the Battle for Grain are explored successfully as more explicit examples of this control.

The last two chapters of the book are dedicated to a thoughtful discussion of Italian colonialism and its legacy. The authors explore the 'imaginary nature' used by the regime to promote an artificial narrative of a green and promised land for all (p. 143). As is made abundantly clear, the reality was failure, characterised by violence, waste, drought and illness. There follows an interesting and very topical discussion of today's role for monuments, in this case those originally designed to celebrate the accomplishments of Italian colonialism. Rather than 'erasing' them, the authors warn of the importance of not allowing such symbols to become 'mute pieces of a landscape without history' (p. 178).

The authors conclude by emphasising the different narratives – and their inherent contradictions – that aid our understanding of Fascist political ecology. Here, context from other European countries may have served to strengthen their argument. The analysis of such narratives, which are effectively interwoven into this volume, are essential so that we can move on from a simplistic examination of 'words' versus 'deeds' (p. 182). The authors are also keen to invalidate any notion that Fascist environmental policy was 'new' or that it 'revived' nature in some way (p. 183). Rather, they highlight the continuation from the Liberal, to the Fascist and on to the Republican eras.