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Stefania Barca. *Enclosing Water: Nature and Political Economy in a Mediterranean Valley, 1796-1916.* Cambridge: White Horse Press, 2010. xii + 180 pp. $33.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-874267-57-7.

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Industry, Water, and the Italian South

In the last few years, scholars have devoted increasing attention to the history of rivers. Inspired by the works of Donald Worster (*Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity and the Growth of the American West* [1985]), Richard White (*The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* [1995]), and Mark Cioc (*The Rhine: An Eco-Biography, 1815-2000* [2002]), a new generation of environmental historians has argued that the transformation of waterways has been crucial to the growth of nation-states and to the spread of industrial capitalism. Scholars now emphasize not only the economic benefits derived from "managing" rivers, but also the increased flooding, pollution, and social conflict that often accompany major water projects.

Stefania Barca's study of the Liri Valley bolsters this emerging scholarship. In *Enclosing Water*, Barca explores the impact of industrial capitalism on Italy's river Liri and on the fortunes of those who labored in the factories and mills of this valley during the 1800s. In her introduction, Barca explains that she wants to tell the story of the Industrial Revolution from the vantage point of a small region in the Apennine Mountains of central Italy, the Liri Valley. More precisely, she seeks to explore both the environmental consequences of industrialization and "the unequal relationships of access and vulnerability brought about in the process." According to Barca, by enclosing the river as private property, the region's mill owners "ended up manufacturing floods by the same means with which they were manufacturing woolens and paper sheets" (p. 4). Nor did the local population benefit much from the spread of privatization and industry. Workers experienced urban crowding, stagnating wages, and increased mortality from diseases spread by marshy, insalubrious conditions. Barca's main point about the failures of industrial capitalism, from an environmental perspective, is well supported. Flooding increased, at least in part due to weirs and dams placed in the river during the course of the nineteenth century. At the same time, however, some claims about the effects of industrial growth on family and gender relations are not fully supported by the evidence.

She divides her book into two parts: "Water and Revolution" and "The Economy of Water." Part 1 deals, for the most part, with pre- and post-French Revolution ideas about improving the rivers in order to create wealth in the Kingdom of Naples. Enlightenment era thinkers like Antonio Genovesi maintained that the hunger and poverty plaguing the Kingdom of Naples resulted from traditions of feudal privilege and communal property; only by abolishing feudal customs and enclosing land as private property could the kingdom prosper. Under the rubric of "Political Economy," this concept influenced a generation of economists, cartographers, and statisticians loyal to the Neapolitan state. Chapter 2 deals specifically with the belief that the river Liri was a disorderly river and that Enlightenment principles of property ownership, regulated by the state, would end flooding and encourage rational use of water for manufacturing. Chapter 3 is concerned with the actual enclosure and industrialization of the river valley. Here, Barca's argument is solid in one respect: drawing on government records and secondary works, she demonstrates that the use of hydraulic machinery spread along the Liri Valley, bringing mechanization to the wool and paper industries of the region. At the same time, Barca's examination of how mechanization influenced social relations is only

partially successful. It is clear, for example, that wages stagnated and that working conditions were often miserable in the region's mills. Yet Barca's discussion does not fully explore the influence of industrial capitalism on gender and family relations. Relatively brief references to low wages and the way women were exploited by mill owners during times of economic depression are compelling, but not enough to shed light on issues of such complexity.

Part 2 contains two additional chapters. The first explores the evolution of riverine property rights during the age of industrialization, while the second examines the role of the state in attempts to improve the Liri Valley for agriculture and navigation. Barca shows that existing definitions of private property were no match for the aggressive behavior of mill owners who wanted to exploit the waters of the Liri Valley. Under the law, the right to use water accrued to anyone who owned land beside a river. Moreover, definitions of what constituted state versus public waterways complicated this issue for years. Drawing on the records of court cases from the mid-nineteenth century, Barca shows that the result was a century of litigation between entrepreneurs competing for the right to construct mills, weirs, and other devices beside the river. Over time, the courts and government agencies supported definitions of rivers that emphasized the alleged congruence between private property and public good. This result favored town councils and property owners who wanted to avoid subjecting rivers and mill owners to any form of state regulation. While convincing, this chapter might have better set the stage for her overall argument if it had been placed in part 1, before a discussion of the material expansion of factories and mills.

A following chapter deals with what Barca calls the "un-improving state." Here she chronicles the unwillingness of state officials to fund major improvement projects throughout the nineteenth century. The result, she states, was that "the Liri watershed never had a comprehensive reclamation scheme, aimed at regulating water and forest use" (p. 130). Over time, the lack of government intervention contributed to deforestation, flooding, and the degradation of water in the Liri Valley. In this sense, the history of modernization in the Liri Valley differs from that of the Oderbruch, the Rhine, and other regions where assertive governments imposed their will on rivers that flowed through well-watered, alluvial plains. Overall, Barca argues that Enlightenment era ideas of "Political Economy" led not to efficiency and prosperity, but to environmental degradation and social injustice.

A few stylistic criticisms are also warranted. The use of a ten-point font for this text wears on the reader, as do occasional sentences that are overly long without necessarily providing clarity. Such stylistic issues could make this book a challenge for lower division college readers. In the end, however, this book should be valuable to specialists in the history of rivers and especially to those interested in the Mediterranean environment.

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