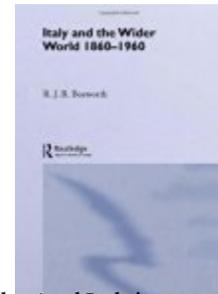


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

R. J. B. Bosworth. *Italy and the Wider World, 1860-1960*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996. x + 264 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-13477-4.

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Published on H-Italy (December, 1996)



In eight short chapters, Richard Bosworth attempts the herculean task of presenting “a history of Italy’s relationship with the wider world in the period since national ‘unification’” (p. x). He hopes to raise “structural questions about how Italy (and the Italies) related to the wider world” (p. 13). Many fine monographs deal with specific aspects of foreign policy and national identity in discrete periods, yet available sources (especially those in English) do not address the broader context of Italian relations over such an extended period. Princeton’s recent decision to reissue Federico Chabod’s classic (1951) survey of Italian foreign policy from 1870 to 1896 offers evidence that the field is wide open for scholars wishing to introduce new material treating Italian foreign relations. Yet, despite its title, Bosworth’s book is not an account of Italian international relations from 1860 to 1960; those searching for a work on Italian foreign relations along the lines of Vera Zamagni’s economic history will be disappointed. Instead, Bosworth draws on an extensive range of published sources to formulate an international identity, or a host of international identities, for Italy in the modern world.

Bosworth aims to transform traditional diplomatic history, using a creative thematic approach to incorporate social and cultural forces into political analyses. In a brief introduction, he challenges scholars to integrate literature on Italian diplomacy “often posited on the most simplistic historicist assumptions” with newer historiography “acknowledging the ambiguities of Italian identity” (p. 5). Two chapters examining Italian diplomacy and European politics follow. Chapters 3 through 8 deal with domestic and international perceptions of Italy’s military, commerce, imperial ambitions, emigration, culture and ideology, and finally, tourism. Throughout the text, the reader sees clearly links with some of

Bosworth’s earlier work, which emphasized Italy’s struggle prior to World War I as the “least of the Great Powers.” In this study, Bosworth sees Fascist foreign policy as an extension of this great power pretension. Italy, he hypothesizes, accepted its role as a middling power only after the Second World War.

Bosworth presents an alluring moving picture portrait of Italy, recounting the country’s foibles and charms, and presenting its inconsistencies as perceived by the wider world. His narrative is lively and entertaining, and he frequently uses Italian expressions and idiom to lend local color. Italian, British, American, and Australian sources support his assertions of Italy’s incomplete unification, malleability in international affairs, and inability and/or resistance to presenting a unified face to the world. The Australian sources, in particular, enrich the account, offering North Americans and Europeans a rare perspective on the acceptance of Italy and Italians abroad. Given the range of works cited, a bibliography would have been helpful to scholars wishing to keep track of the sources listed in copious notes (pp. 188-240).

While the attempt to define and explain Italy’s place in the world seems a worthwhile endeavor, Bosworth’s ambition has overextended his reach. The breadth of the work and its innovative approach are at once its strengths and great weaknesses. Casting a wide net allows Bosworth to identify long-term trends and to describe continuities and disjunctures in international views of Italy over the course of a century. Yet, the pointillist picture he paints is composed of related dots too small in size and arranged on a canvas far too large to form the image he wishes to convey.

The call for debate on the “Italies” historic identity reverberates throughout the text, yet Bosworth adopts no

consistent research strategy to answer the fundamental questions he poses nor does he present his findings in an organized manner. Bosworth's "wider world" includes, for the most part, only the English-speaking world, and he uses sources in English or Italian. The weakness becomes evident in the chapter on emigration, in which large numbers of Italian emigrants to Western Europe and Latin America receive scant treatment next to their counterparts in North America and Australia. Bosworth, led by his sources, seems to stray a bit from the international path in this chapter and discusses the role of internal migration in the formation of Italian identity. This detour might have introduced another facet for discussion, yet Bosworth neglects to carry the idea through to other parts of the book. A discussion of internal tourism in the chapter devoted to leisure would have been a natural complement.

Reliance on numerous, yet scattered published sources leads Bosworth to adopt a somewhat idiosyncratic view. Reference to available archival sources, especially those for the period prior to World War I, would greatly strengthen arguments regarding the direction and sentiments of those in power. Some chosen sources are used with a heavy hand. Bosworth condemns Attilio Tamaro as an example of a "nostalgic (ex- Nationalist) Fascist" who after World War II searched his "dictionary of rhetoric to find words to deplore Italy's fall from grace" (p. 54). Tamaro may be described as an extremist, but the work quoted here, and his others written in the immediate postwar period, are more likely pleas for Italian attention to the fate of his native Trieste (a Free Territory under Allied Military Control) than reflections of his nationalist nostalgia and Fascist leanings.

Broad observations are sometimes reduced to inaccuracies. For example, in his discussion of the fluidity of Italian state boundaries, Bosworth mentions "Istria and pieces of Dalmatia ... annexed in 1918-1919" (p. 2). Yet, Adriatic border questions remained open until 1924. He writes of the "unslaked thirst" for territorial gain of "Italian politicians and intellectuals" who until the defeat of Fascism in 1940-45 "talked glibly of 'regaining' Nice or Savoy, Corsica or Fiume ..." (p. 3). Fiume was part of Italy during the Fascist period.

Describing the foreign policy of Italy from 1860 to 1914, Bosworth becomes tangled in his own analysis. He quotes Prime Minister Depretis, "whenever I see an international crisis on the horizon I open my umbrella and wait till it passes" to explain that Italian diplomats strove "as far as possible to circumvent international broils."

However, in the following paragraph, he asserts that Italy "regularly acted as a force for general peace in Europe (although that did not rule out the seeking of specific advantage)." Was Italy essentially passive or did it take an active role? Further, Bosworth claims that "Italy hoped not to jangle the harmony of the Concert of Europe" (p. 27). The rise of modern Italy and Germany and the search of those states during the second half of the nineteenth century for a role in European affairs necessarily upset the traditional Concert of Europe.

Bosworth's decision to divide the section on politics and diplomacy into two chapters, the first dealing with the period from 1860 to 1922 and the second addressing events from the March on Rome to 1960 is enigmatic. It seems to imply that Bosworth sees Fascist policy as a break with the past. On the contrary, he proceeds to demonstrate Fascist continuities with Liberal Italy's practices in the areas of statecraft and diplomacy (p. 54), commerce (pp. 86-87), and the military (pp. 72-73). He associates change with the establishment of the Republic and the acceptance of "limited sovereignty" (p. 54) after World War II.

In his quest to reconstruct a world view of the "imagined community" (p. x) of Italies and to explain the resilience of Italian culture, Bosworth is, in the end, reduced to sentimental and somewhat nostalgic descriptions of particularly "Italian" characteristics, reminiscent of those found in the writings of Luigi Barzini. Though Emma Ciccotosto emigrated to Australia as a small child, as an adult Bosworth contends, "she still radiates a certain sort of 'Italian' 'culture'. It mingles with materialism, generosity and hospitality, good or abundant cooking, a willingness to touch and to sing ..." (pp. 141-42). Bosworth urges us not to accept this "amalgam of qualities" as the embodiment of the Italian family, not because it reflects blatant stereotyping, but because "the family, like everything else, is a process and not a thing and is subject to change over time and space" (p. 142). He concludes the monograph with a similarly sentimental description of Italy and Italians, voicing the hope that Italy will find a place in the new world order lest a "certain charm, a certain elegance, a certain beauty, a certain humility, a certain perseverance a certain sense of work and play, of love and of charity ... a certain willingness to engage in *rapporti umani*, will, among other, not always so positive, matters, be lost" (p. 187).

Bosworth does acknowledge some of the limitations of his study. He refers to himself as an "outsider" looking into the window of the candy shop of Italy. He also

acknowledges his role as a “canguro” (kangaroo), always moving “restlessly on to ponder something else” (p. x). This restless spirit is reflected in a lack of consistency in his account. Yet, despite its methodological failings and inaccuracies, the book is a pleasure to read. It is also refreshing to read the work of a scholar who is so generous in his praise of the research of fellow scholars and who takes such evident joy in the presentation of his own scholarship.

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Citation: Maura E. Hametz. Review of Bosworth, R. J. B., *Italy and the Wider World, 1860-1960*. H-Italy, H-Net Reviews. December, 1996.

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