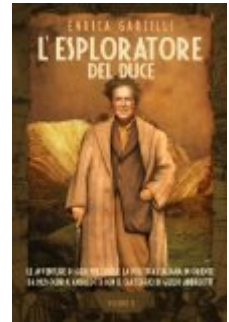


Enrica Garzilli. *L'esploratore del Duce: le avventure di Giuseppe Tucci e la politica italiana in Oriente da Mussolini a Andreotti; con il carteggio di Giulio Andreotti.* Rome: Memori and Milano: Asiatica Association, 2012. 2 volumes. 513 and 592 pp. \$45.00, paper, ISBN 978-88-900226-6-1.



Reviewed by Francesca Orsini

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Commissioned by Sumit Guha (The University of Texas at Austin)

[Ed. note: The author, Dr. Enrica Garzilli, has provided a response to this review of her book. A link to the response can be found below the review.]

I was intrigued when I, though not a Tibet specialist, was asked to review this book. This was my chance to learn about the origins of Italian Orientalism, of which I was in my own way an epigone, and to understand why it had leaned so much more towards esoteric subjects and contributed to perpetuating an image of South Asia (and Tibet) as an exotic and mysterious land to be studied by a select and dedicated few. My own professor of Hindi at Venice University, Prof. Laxman Prasad Misra, had been “brought” to Italy from Jabalpur by Giuseppe Tucci in the 1950s and established by him as professor at both Rome and Venice Universities according to a system of personal patronage that seemed part and parcel of the discipline. I must admit that when I received the two bulky volumes (together running over 1,200 pages) I balked a little, but nonetheless sat down to read, starting from the additional seven-

ty-page introduction that established what a difficult and all-consuming project this had been. Giuseppe Tucci (1895-1984) was a prodigious writer, philologist, archaeologist, and travel writer, and is still considered an authority on early modern Tibetan history and art: his *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (two volumes, 1949) is still the standard work, and his essay “Tibetan Conflict in the Sixteenth Century” was reprinted in the 2013 *Tibetan History Reader*. A friend tells me that Tucci is still among the first authors assigned in Tibetan studies programs. And then the title, *The Duce’s Explorer!* Indeed some of the most engaging pages are about Tucci’s ardently Fascist Sanskrit teacher, the genial Carlo Formichi, who taught Italian in Shantiniketan for a while and there, together with Tucci, befriended Rabindranath Tagore and invited him to visit Italy and Mussolini.

Like so many others, Tagore was apparently much impressed by Tucci’s scholarship and linguistic abilities, and shared long walks and conversations with him. What did they talk about? Well ... this is exactly the problem with this book.

After reading it, what I have learned about Tucci is the following—that he was a prodigious scholar and linguist; that he was also a difficult, proud, and arrogant character; he wrote indefatigably fundamental works on Tibet and on Indian philosophy (his bibliography runs over thirty pages); he traveled eight times to Tibet and collected hundreds of manuscripts for the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO) in Rome that he helped establish—and for himself, when the Tibetan lamas were not looking. (One good anecdote is that when Tucci used to visit the National Archives in New Delhi, a peon was deputed to follow him all the time to make sure that he did not steal anything.) Mussolini and his minister Giovanni Gentile—and after WWII, Giulio Andreotti—supported Tucci financially and politically because they shared a vision of Italy’s expansion in Asia—but we are not told what this vision was. I also learned that several of Tucci’s companions on his travels, like Fosco Maraini, later broke with him, and several of Tucci’s erstwhile students declined to talk to the author about him. Even the letter exchange with Andreotti, far from shedding light on Tucci’s political leanings or on Andreotti’s political vision regarding South Asia, reiterate official support and testify to Tucci’s ability to win powerful backers. Tucci’s archaeological expeditions were always luxuriously provided for, we are told, but what were their scientific achievements? This unfortunately is not the place where you will find an answer to this question. Despite Garzilli’s extraordinary dedication, this biography drowns the reader in superlatives and generalizations, uses twenty words when two would be enough, and resolutely refuses to engage in a critical analysis of Tucci’s contribution. I found myself a twenty-year-old student again, being told how “great” and “learned” Italian Orientalists were without being told why.

Author Response: <https://networks.h-net.org/node/22055/discussions/46429/re-orsini-garzilli-esploratore-del-duce-le-avventure-di-giuseppe>

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
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