



12-2017

Giuseppe Mazzini and the Origins of Fascism. By Simon Levis Sullam. Translated by Sergio Knipe and Oona Smyth. Italian and Italian American Studies. Edited by Stanislao G. Pugliese. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Pp. x+206. \$95.00 (cloth); \$69.99 (e-book).

Anthony Cardoza PhD
Loyola University Chicago, acardoz@luc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/history_facpubs



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cardoza PhD, Anthony. Giuseppe Mazzini and the Origins of Fascism. By Simon Levis Sullam. Translated by Sergio Knipe and Oona Smyth. Italian and Italian American Studies. Edited by Stanislao G. Pugliese. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Pp. x+206. \$95.00 (cloth); \$69.99 (e-book).. *The Journal of Modern History*, 89, 4: 966-968, 2017. Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, History: Faculty Publications and Other Works, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/694372>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Publications and Other Works by Department at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in History: Faculty Publications and Other Works by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).
© University of Chicago Press 2017

she also stresses that Venice was not unique, making effective comparisons with other European centers that seem to have boasted similar cultures of reading and writing.

In Part I, Ross also explores the practice of what she calls “testamentary humanism,” or examples of ordinary Venetians who used their wills to “articulate their literary, bibliographical, pedagogical, or philosophical commitments” (22). Again, Ross unearths a range of interesting examples here that stretch the traditional boundaries of humanistic culture across both class and gender. These include the daughter of a printer and wife of a perfumer who left bequests to her female tutor and a wine merchant preoccupied that his son receive a humanistic education. What materializes is a reflection of Venetian culture in which many people, particularly those in the middling classes, looked toward books and education as important avenues of social and career advancement, as well as ways of expressing and cementing kinship and friendship bonds and passing on knowledge and values.

In Part II, a series of three well-chosen case studies of sixteenth-century Venetian physicians allow the author to explore in greater depth how a few individuals followed these key avenues toward cultural legitimacy. Physicians emerged as the most notable group in Ross’s wider research into book ownership and testamentary humanism. This was, she suggests, because of their somewhat ambivalent social position between manual and professional work, and thus their common anxiety to secure their status as learned individuals and men of honor. Such men, Ross argues, had more to gain from the gloss of cultural legitimacy that came from humanistic pursuits than did Venetian patricians with more secure lineages and social standing. The second of Ross’s case studies, Francesco Longo, for example, might have possessed university degrees in medicine and the liberal arts, but his father had been an apothecary with a shop at Rialto, and thus a little too close to the manual and the menial to completely assure his son’s upward mobility.

This section explores some remarkable examples of the kind of sources considered more briefly in the earlier part of the book, such as Longo’s extended wills in which he drew philosophical lessons from ancient history to pass on to his heirs and promote their continued advancement. Most fascinating of all are the diaries of Alberto Rini, which recorded exceptional events and everyday transactions, noted gifts that the physician made of precious books and of wheels of cheese, transcribed medical recipes and “secrets,” and commented on the funerals of doges and the funeral of Rini’s dog (at which his maid delivered a eulogy). One of the themes that Ross ultimately highlights—and proves persuasively—is the need for historians to consider a wider range of forms of “self-writing” in the early modern world, including supposedly formulaic documents such as wills or account books found more often in archives than libraries. In creating such documents, many people not only expressed the “writing mania and fascination with the self that were characteristic of the Renaissance era” (164) but also left “textual monuments” to themselves which offer precious glimpses into their personal or familial beliefs, ideas, and sentiments.

ROSA SALZBERG

University of Warwick

Giuseppe Mazzini and the Origins of Fascism. By *Simon Levis Sullam*. Translated by *Sergio Knipe* and *Oona Smyth*. Italian and Italian American Studies. Edited by *Stanislao G. Pugliese*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Pp. x+206. \$95.00 (cloth); \$69.99 (e-book).

As its title clearly indicates, this brief but densely researched volume explores the role of one of the iconic figures of the Risorgimento in the emergence of a new nationalist po-

litical movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that then culminated in the triumph of Italian fascism. The work under review already appeared in an Italian edition, *L'apostolo a brandelli: L'eredità di Mazzini tra Risorgimento e fascismo* (Rome, 2010). In line with larger trends in the scholarship on modern Italy since the 1990s, the author situates his work within the new cultural historical approaches pioneered by Emilio Gentile, Alberto Banti, and Silvana Patriarca, among others. But unlike these scholars, he offers a more traditional history of ideas by focusing on references to Mazzini, his ideas, and his themes in the writings of a broad range of prominent new right and fascist intellectuals and politicians between the 1880s and the Second World War.

Levis Sullam advances a reinterpretation of Mazzini that challenges the conventional image of the steadfast proponent of a revolutionary, republican, democratic Italian nation. In support of his thesis, he first examines Mazzini's own vague and contradictory writings to identify certain recurring ideas and key terms. Levis Sullam's close reading of these texts highlights the Genoese revolutionary's hostility to the French Revolution, his condemnation of socialism and class struggle, his emphasis on duties over rights and emotions over reason, as well as his paternalist attitude toward the masses and his identification of the nation and national sovereignty with God. In the absence of a coherent and systematic doctrine, such ideas easily lent themselves to ideological appropriation by successive generations of antiliberal Italian intellectuals and political figures.

In subsequent chapters, the author first examines Mazzini's influence and the reinterpretation of his ideas by Francesco Crispi, the nationalist prime minister of the 1890s, whose rhetoric played on the themes of "duties" and "national mission" in his pursuit of Italian colonial power in the Mediterranean. In a similar fashion, Levis Sullam documents how the poets Giosuè Carducci, Giovanni Pascoli, and Gabriele d'Annunzio, as well as influential prewar theorists and cultural figures like George Sorel, Giovanni Papini, and Alfredo Oriani utilized certain Mazzinian ideas and symbols to advance their own intellectual or political agendas. Especially after 1900, both irrationalist and authoritarian cultural modernists and proponents of aggressive nationalism embraced the Risorgimento hero for favoring passion over reason and for his use of myths and utopian visions. From 1914 onward, Mazzini's stress on duty, discipline, collective solidarity, and the religion of the nation contributed, in turn, to a new ideology of war. Levis Sullam argues, in particular, that the Genoese revolutionary "played an important role" in Benito Mussolini's ideological transformation from a radical socialist to an antisocialist populist firebrand between 1914 and 1919.

In this context, Mazzinian symbolic language and his religion of the nation offered, according to the author, an ideological framework for the rise of fascism. He identifies the contributions to fascist ideology in Mazzini's notion of revolution; his critiques of class struggle, democracy, and individual rights; and his conception of the nation and the cult of action. The book traces their appropriation first by Mussolini's movement and then by the fascist regime, yielding "a seam of ideas that would run through the next two decades" (81). While Levis Sullam examines a number of fascist cultural and political figures in support of his thesis, he emphasizes, in particular, Mazzini's influence on the philosopher Giovanni Gentile, who transformed his religion of the nation into a fascist religion and "enshrined" his role in the ideological and political doctrines of Mussolini's regime. The author bolsters his interpretation of Mazzini as an icon of the right by highlighting the antifascist left's critiques of the Genoese political activist's religiosity and authoritarian tendencies.

Levis Sullam's interpretation of Mazzini's legacy in the rise of Italian fascism rests upon an impressive command of the writings of a wide range of intellectuals, cultural figures, and political activists over the span of a half century. Indeed, the book's detailed

analysis of references to Mazzini and the use of his key terms in these writings make a compelling case for the ideological appropriation of one of the heroes of the Risorgimento by the protagonists of the new right. Levis Sullam, however, does not see the Mazzinian legacy as solely the product of distortions by later generations. On the contrary, he identifies a paternalistic authoritarian ideological core, which “Mazzini conveyed through an irrationalist political style based on the use of symbolic terms and formulas aimed at eliciting subordination and submission” (5).

This book is not without its shortcomings. From the outset, the breadth of Mazzini’s writings and his failure to ever provide a systematic presentation of his ideas encourage multiple interpretations of his thought. In support of his portrait of this iconic figure, the author tends to pick out those parts that appeared to prepare the ground for fascism, while ignoring or playing down positions that complicate this interpretation such as Mazzini’s defense of individual rights, freedom of choice, and progress, which are also persistent elements in his thought. At the same time, Levis Sullam’s tendency to treat fascism as an essentially ideological phenomenon implies a rather teleological interpretation, in which the movement and regime emerged as the end results of pioneer thinkers. Mazzini and the intellectual and political figures who embraced or exploited his image and ideas certainly provided the cultural and ideological elements that made fascism imaginable, but they did not create the movement or usher it into power. Ideological appeal alone cannot explain the rise of the fascist movement or its accession to power in the mid-1920s. More generally, the stress on fascist ideology tends to focus on the intentions or aspirations of the regime, while neglecting its actual reception and impact in the larger society. These reservations, however, should not obscure the genuine achievements of this book. Indeed, Levis Sullam has convincingly demonstrated the link between Mazzinian thought and the right-wing ideological movements that emerged from the 1880s onward.

ANTHONY L. CARDOZA

Loyola University Chicago

Mussolini’s Army in the French Riviera: Italy’s Occupation of France. By *Emanuele Sica*. The History of Military Occupation. Edited by *John Laband* and *Ian F. W. Beckett*.

Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016. Pp. xx+276. \$40.00.

On June 24, 1940, after a short and disastrously mismanaged offensive, Italy concluded an armistice with France. For almost twenty-nine months thereafter the Italian army occupied a narrow ten-kilometer strip inside the former frontier, fronted by a fifty-kilometer demobilized area. Then on November 11, 1942, following the Allies’ invasion of North Africa, the Italian 4th Army moved west to occupy the area more or less stretching to the Rhone. A spatchcocked operation bore the hallmarks of the all-too-familiar inefficiency for which the Italian military has become a byword: the order to attack was postponed at midnight on November 11 and then reversed fifteen minutes later, and logistic weaknesses meant that some units took up to ten days to travel the seventy-five kilometers from Menton to Cannes and Grasse. The Italians had wanted Marseille but the Germans got there first.

Adopting a tripartite methodology, Emanuele Sica sets out to compare the Italians’ occupation of Provence with their occupation of the Balkans and the German occupation of France to show the structural effects of the occupation on the environment and living conditions of the occupied French population, and to describe the face-to-face experience