



The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy Since 1796

Christopher Duggan

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A sweeping, first-of-its-kind history of the creation of modern Italy

The birth of modern Italy was a messy affair. Inspired by a small group of writers, intellectuals, and politicians, Italy struggled in the first half of the nineteenth century to unite all Italians under one rule, throwing aside a multitude of corrupt old rulers and foreign occupiers. In the midst of this turmoil, Italian politicians felt compelled by a “force of destiny” hideously at odds with Italian reality. After great sacrifice Italy was finally unified -- and turned out to be just as fragile, impoverished, and backward as it had been before. The resentments this created led to Italy’s destructive role in World War I, the subsequent rise of Mussolini and authoritarianism in the 1920s and ’30s, and the nation’s humiliating defeat in World War II. This haunting legacy deeply informs the Italy of today.

Christopher Duggan skillfully interweaves Italy's art, music, literature, and architecture with its economic and social realities and political development to tell this extraordinary European story. The first English-language book to cover the full scope of modern Italy, from its origins more than two hundred years ago to the present, *The Force of Destiny* is a brilliant and comprehensive study -- and a frightening example of how easily nation-building and nationalism can slip toward authoritarianism and war.

The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy Since 1796 Details

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Lauren Albert says

History may repeat itself but modern Italian history does seem unusually unique. Its union was nothing like that of Germany and its split (north-south) nothing like that of the United States. Duggan does a good job of drawing out these things.

Ivan says

Dalla Repubblica Cisalpina all'Italia di Berlusconi, per quale alchimia, si è formata l'Italia unita, così diversa, per non dire inaggregabile nelle sue componenti regionali? Quale malattia genetica, ab origine, ha contratto l'Italia? o cosa è mancato durante la sua "forgiatura", oppure che cosa d'impuro, di allogeno si è mescolato ancor prima, durante la fusione dei suoi elementi deversi, per cui, quasi anomalia europea, ad uno stato unitario, più o meno autoritario, quasi totalizzante in certe epoche, non si è prodotto se non in parte minima, quasi irrisoria, il senso dello stato, o per lo meno il senso civico degli italiani? perchè manca oggi più di allora il sentire casa comune la nazione, bene comune la repubblica e le sue istituzioni, la società civile una famiglia nel senso più largo?

Un'Italia unita a forza dal destino (e del caso!)? Forse è proprio questo il nocciolo, mi è parso di capire. Molto bello questo libro, da leggere e, forse, meditare; avvincente nella prima parte (si legge con foga, sembra un romanzo), diventa meno scorrevole e un po' superficiale con il Novecento.

Czarny Pies says

The Force of Destiny is not a history of Italy, it is rather a history of the idea of Italy as held by the political and cultural elites of the region. Facts about the region which was unified into the Kingdom of Italy in 1861 are only alluded to when it is necessary to explain a change in this idea. Duggan writes in his preface: "This book ceases to examine how, under the impact of the Napoleon invasion and the mixture of their optimism and resentment that this engendered, an initially small group of men and women began to promote the idea of an Italian nation."

What results from this objective is a book of great pleasure for those Anglo-Saxons who periodically treat themselves to a Italian culture. Duggan explains the historical significance of Verdi, Mascagni, Manzoni, D'Annunzio, Marinetti, Boccioni, De Sica and Fellini to this English speaking readers. He even provides a very brilliant analysis of Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio. As an undergraduate, this book which lacks any economic, demographic or sociologic analysis would have made me purple with rage. As a retired person who loves to go to the opera, I enjoyed it immensely.

The problem with the book is that Duggan seems to feel that the world ended when Mussolini died. He states: "The approach the country's problems of the generation of the Risorgimento retained a powerful allure long after unification in 1860. ... It reached its apogee with fascism."

Duggan seems to feel that after the fall of Fascism, Italy became simply a banal social-democracy led by politicians obsessed with the material well-being of the population. Thus only 60 pages are devoted to the period from 1946 to 2008. In contrast, Mussolini's two decades get 120 pages. Mussolini after all was poet with a vision. Those that have followed him have been prosaic in the extreme.

Whatever its faults, *The Force of Destiny* is guaranteed to please fans of Italian opera, futurist art and neorealsimo cinema. If you are one, then read this book.

Mark says

This excellent book is not so much a history of Italy as it is a history of the nation of Italy. As Christopher Duggan demonstrates, Italian nationalism was confined to a few intellectuals, artists and professionals, with regional identities predominant among the rest of the population. As a result, unification was superficial for much of the populace, who often found themselves at odds with the liberal state and forced to choose between this artificial link and their much deeper-seated loyalty to the Catholic Church. This approach helps make the appeal of Fascism much more understandable, with Duggan's analysis of this period one of the strongest points of this book. In the end, the reader is left with a deeper understanding of the problems Italy faces today, and perhaps as well a skepticism about the ability of Italians to address them in the future.

Stefanie says

An insightful record of Italy's modern history and search for identity. Although the Italian peninsula dominated politics and culture during the Roman Empire and Etruscan periods and experienced a resurgence of art and intellectualism during the Renaissance, the entire region was subject to foreign invasion and subjugation. Italy as a concept, let alone a nation, did not exist until 1861, with the Risorgimento. Previously, the peninsula was more of a geographical expression, composed of city-states, largely under French or Austrian rulership at the time of Napoleon's invasion. The peoples identified with their area, which is clearly expressed by the use of dialect; a standardized usage of Italian was not determined until the Risorgimento. This book traces the difficulties and challenges of unification and nationhood: divisions between North and South, leadership, the Church, the monarchy, dictatorship, world and civil war, the mafia, and party divisions. Italy continues to struggle to this day with debt and corruption. If you want to deepen your understanding of a culture and its people, this is a rewarding and rich examination.

Converse says

Emphasizes the frequent fear among Italian nationalists that their fellow citizens lack sufficient identification with the state and public spirit to allow a united Italy to persist.

Ratratrat says

Lo sto rilegendo, perché mi era piaciuto moltissimo. Descrive il formarsi dell'Italia, dapprima, e non solo coi soliti fatti che tutti abbiamo studiato a scuola, ma anche attraverso letture di letterati, storici, arti (il melodramma), cercando di farci entrare nel clima dell'epoca. Perché il 1796? perché le truppe napoleoniche si presentarono come apportatrici di libertà e per quanto egemonizzati dalla Francia, ci furono una Repubblica cisalpina, una cispadana, un regno d'Italia, una bandiera tricolore... che la restaurazione

successiva coprì ma non riuscì a far dimenticare.

Finito: ripassando la storia d'Italia in realtà si pone il problema di chi siano gli Italiani e quanto si sentano tali.

Milo (BOK) says

Don't normally read Non Fiction but this provided a good background on the history of Italy, and relevant to my Foundation Degree Course. If you wanted to learn more about the history of the state of the country since 1796, I'd recommend reading this.

Ray LaManna says

If you want to know what events led to the modern Italian state, this is the book for you. A scholarly but readable text... some close reading required but well worth it.

Fred Gorrell says

This encyclopedic description of the history of Italy, from the invasion of Napoleon through and beyond WWII, is written in an engaging style. The book provides an opportunity to contrast Italy's modern development with those of other emerging industrialized nations. Selected as background reading to prepare for a summer vacation in Italy, it provided a wealth of information that informed much of the sight-seeing we did.

Alex says

Great history from 1796 until unification. Decent job on 1930s and 1940s. Rest of the book is a bit dry (especially from 1880s until Mussolini).

Andrew says

The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy Since 1796, by Christopher Duggan, is a history of Italy around the time of its independence up until the present. The history often focuses on the literary and social aspects that many political events in the country sparked. This work can be squarely defined as a post modern history.

First I will talk about the good. This book does have some highly engaging content, with interesting anecdotes from local peoples, authors and political figures that existed through Italy's tumultuous history since 1796. For example, the author equates scenes from Carlo Collodi's "Pinocchio" to Italian moral ineptitude. The work is dotted with references like Pinocchio, which can provide an interesting background to the historical analysis. I was particularly impressed, however, with the quality of information on Italy's political climate. Much of Italy's history has been dominated by political factionalism related to a strong

sense of regional identity (municipalism) and the subsequent upheaval this has played in Italy's development (with its North/South split) or the characteristics of its political landscape is fascinating.

However, there are many low points in this narrative. For one, the post modernist aspect of this history often detracts from the history itself. An uneducated reader may have difficulty understanding the shift in events because they are barely mentioned at all. For example, the Occupation of Fiume in 1919 played an important part in Italian Fascist ideology and was a symbol of Italy's growing militarization. This is all explained in detail, but the annexation of Fiume in 1924, and the critical years that an independent Fiume played between 1919-1924 in Italy's international relationships with the UK and USA are not mentioned. The annexation itself is only mentioned in parenthesis, in less than a sentence.

Issues like these persist throughout the book. The history is often sidelined for the analysis, and this is a clear weakness in Duggan's work. I would have found the development of Italy and the political, social and economic consequences of unification and subsequent historical events more interesting if they were explained in any detail. Instead, tangent analysis often occurs, and although some of these tangents are interesting, they almost entirely focus on the ideological stance of Italy's current political climate, and nothing else.

In all, I would say this is a middling history, in my opinion. It focuses far too much on historical analysis, which may or may not be coloured with the authors own prejudices and ideological viewpoints, and far too little on the actual historical events in Italy since 1796. I would hesitantly recommend this book to those who have a background in Italian history, or who know a lot of the background facts. In this case, the analysis may be refreshing. If you are looking for a book to learn more about Italian history however, this one may be a skip.

Jim Puskas says

A pretty good reference book, a bit dry but fairly comprehensive, endeavoring to untangle the complexities of Italian history from the time of the Napoleonic invasion until almost the end of the 20th century. It therefore clearly covers a great deal of territory and does so in an even-handed manner, which is no small achievement, given the degree of passionate rivalry, internecine warfare and general skullduggery that characterized much of that period. That said, the high drama of the Risorgimento, the protracted and bitter struggle between the Church and the secular world, the topsy-turvy adventurism of successive Italian regimes leading up to and during the two Great Wars, all of that I believe merited a more colorful and even a light-hearted approach, to capitalize on the sheer outrageousness of many of the players and their adventures. There is surely the stuff of great theater here but the scholarly Duggan seems not to have noticed it. In a nutshell: Long on facts, short on entertainment.

Loring Wirbel says

In many cases, I'm not a big fan of post-modernist methods of relaying history. A strict linear recounting of "facts" can get tedious, to be sure, but all the claptrap of myth and narrative involved in post-modernism can make a reader lose the sense of what happened and when. Duggan is one of the few historians I have read who can combine linear and post-modern methods and come up with a viable, readable, and interesting book. He uses a strict linear historical method when necessary, but also asks the question, "Why did the Italian

people like Garibaldi? Why did they find a lying thug like Francesco Crispi useful in the Versailles era?" And of course, the answers to those questions show us why someone like Mussolini could come to power, and why Italians could elect, re-elect, and re-elect a clown like Berlusconi. This is not the ultimate book to provide a history of the fascist years, or a history of modern Italy, spanning the Red Brigades years to the Berlusconi clown-time. Instead, it is a sweeping view of myths and attitudes toward nationalism in Italy, covering the years from the House of Savoy in the 19th century to the decline and fall of Berlusconi. The book is written with a charming sense of humor and a master's touch for the turn of a phrase.

Jackson Cyril says

Duggan isn't so good on post WW2 Italian history, but he covers the period from 1796-1945 (some 540 pages of this 600pg book) exceptionally well. As a one-volume history of Italy, you can't go wrong with this book. Fantastically well-written, incisive analysis, a thorough examination of the source material and a fine introduction to the wide array of problems that have plagued, and continue to plague Italian society.
