

Deutsche und italienische Besatzung im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien 1941 bis 1943/45,

by SANELA SCHMID, Oldenbourg, De Gruyter, 2019, 437 pp., €79.95 (hardback), ISBN 978-3-11-062031-3 (open source: <https://www.degruyter.com/view/title/541903>)

Hitler's allies during the Second World War have long been overshadowed by the Reich's imposing presence both in collective memory and scholarship. Only recently have historical studies moved towards a more differentiated approach that puts into sharper relief the agency of all the Axis partners. In line with this trend, Fascist Italy's occupation policies in the Balkans, France, and the USSR, victims of a decade-long oblivion both in Italy and abroad, have received stronger attention. Over the last 20 years a flurry of studies, mostly written by young Italian scholars, have investigated different aspects of Fascist imperialism. More recently, they have been joined by non-Italian scholars who have brought fresh air into an otherwise nationally centred field. Sanela Schmid's dissertation on Italian and German occupation policies in the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, henceforth NDH) subscribes to this trend. By offering a comparative analysis of Axis relations and policies in the NDH, investigating a wide array of sources of German, Italian, and Yugoslavian provenance, the book makes a substantial contribution to the transnationalisation of this field.

Comprising Croatia, Syrmia, Slavonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the NDH was created out of the dismemberment of Yugoslavia in April 1941. Supported by Italy since 1929, the ultranationalist and pro-Fascist Ustasha movement seemed to Mussolini the perfect candidate to rule the new state. The movement's leader, Ante Pavelić, did not have clear political plans, nor did he formulate a coherent policy once in power. The Ustasha government immediately persecuted all the ethnic groups considered 'aliens' to the Croat nation: Serbs, Jews, and Roma. Ethnic violence was not steered by Zagreb but resulted from widespread warlordism, causing enormous social and economic upheaval. Soon, both Italian and German occupiers became weary of the Ustasas as they appeared to undermine security in the region. In addition, conflicts arose between Rome and Zagreb over territory since Italy had annexed parts of Dalmatia, which the Ustasas regarded as Croat land. Despite shared disillusionment with the Ustasas, the Axis partners maintained very different attitudes towards the NDH over the following years. Whereas Hitler adhered to the alliance, preserving the NDH's sovereignty and even trying to consolidate its power, the Italian army invaded and administered large swathes of NDH territory after September 1941. This move, intended to stop the spread of violence in territories considered parts of Fascist Italy's imperial preserve, brought relations with Zagreb to their lowest point. According to Schmid, Italy's imperial plans set Rome on a collision course with the NDH, while Hitler on the other hand relied on Pavelić until the very end of the occupation to conserve manpower and material resources for the eastern front.

This difference, in itself no novelty to historians, constitutes the backdrop against which Schmid interprets the occupation policies of the two Axis powers within the NDH. Her central argument is that differences between the policies of the two Axis partners were rooted in their respective ideologies and imperial plans. The first two chapters of the book describe Italy's and Germany's imperial visions for the Balkans, the establishment of the NDH, the Ustasha persecution of ethnic groups, and the growth of the Serb Chetnik and partisan resistance movements. The following chapter investigates how 'imperial relations' among the two powers pivoted on their respective dealings with the Ustasas. Economic and food policies are dealt with in a subchapter, as they were part of this imperial entanglement.

The minorities issue, dealt with in the fifth chapter, is of major importance in the context of the NDH as its population was a patchwork of different ethnic groups. In the territories occupied in

September 1941, the Italians pursued an alliance with the Serbs, victims of Ustasha persecution, a policy systematised by General Mario Roatta after January 1942 with the creation of Serb collaborationist units. Conversely, no clearly defined approach can be discerned in Rome's policy towards the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina. These populations enjoyed protection in regions under direct Italian occupation, but they were exposed to violent attacks in areas that the Italian army left to the control of the Chetniks. German policies towards Muslim populations were more consistent, especially after 1943 when Bosnian Muslims were recruited for a special Waffen-SS division. Other ethnic groups, including Jews and ethnic Germans, became major sources of friction between the two Axis powers. The Italians offered protection to the Jews residing in their territory, rejecting all demands from the Ustashes and Germans for their deportation. German authorities consistently relied upon ethnic Germans as a means to reinforce their influence in the country, a strategy bitterly resented by the Italians.

Despite Schmid's emphasis on ideology, such differences were not always rooted in ideological tenets. Rather, they were the outcome of a specific constellation of interests. This is clearly shown by the fact that after the Italian surrender in September 1943, the Germans – who now had to garrison extensive areas, exceeding their capacities – followed the footsteps of their Italian predecessors by arming units of Serb collaborators. A chapter of the book is devoted to a comparative analysis of the propaganda of the two Axis powers, both towards their own troops and the population. Two final chapters investigate their approaches to anti-partisan warfare.

Sanela Schmid's detailed and comprehensive study provides an important contribution to the understanding of the Axis occupation policies in the Balkans. An English or Italian translation would greatly add to the scholarship on Fascism. My only criticism is that her focus on ideology as the main explaining factor of this complex web of interactions seems to be contradicted by the relative flexibility with which both Axis powers handled major issues such as minorities policy and counterinsurgency. Moreover, the author's concept of ideology does not take enough into consideration recent historiographical trends towards adopting a less intentionalist view of this term, stressing instead its praxeological dimension.

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Abolitionism and the Persistence of Slavery in Italian States, 1750–1850, by GIULIA BONAZZA, Cham, Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, vii + 227 pp., €72.79 (hardback), ISBN 978-3-030-01348-6.

Giulia Bonazza's *Abolitionism and the Persistence of Slavery in Italian States, 1750–1850* has a straightforward and provocative thesis. She argues that an international abolitionist discourse flourished in Italy between 1750 and 1850, at the same time as homegrown forms of slavery persisted. This disjuncture, between an ideological commitment to abolition and a pragmatic continuation of multiple forms of slavery, defined the question of slavery and abolition in pre-unitarian Italy. Unlike Great Britain and France, for Italy slavery did not happen in some faraway colony – it happened at home. While enslaved people in Italy were small in number by the mid-eighteenth