

BOOK REVIEWS

Réveiller l'archive d'une guerre coloniale. Photographies et écrits de Gaston Chérau, correspondant de guerre lors du conflit italo-turc pour la Libye (1911–1912)

by Pierre Schill, Grâne, Creaphis Éditions, 2018, 480 pp., € 35.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-2-35428-141-0

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In the light of the widespread persistence of forms of racial discrimination, the understanding of the legacies of colonialism becomes still more urgent. If the study of Italy (and its relations with both proximate and distant geographical areas) is to proceed in a way that is aware of the decolonising agenda, then it is clearly necessary to promote an enhanced understanding of the nature and consequences of Italian expansionism. Though it is true that recent years have witnessed an impressive growth in scholarship of the period in question, there are still many areas that remain to be fully uncovered. It is equally important to consider the mode of access that underlies any consideration of the colonial past and the kind of knowledge that it is likely to create.

Réveiller l'archive d'une guerre coloniale offers an extremely valuable contribution to our knowledge of the reality of Italian expansionism and an intense exploration of how such knowledge is brought into being. The work is centred on the photographs that Gaston Chérau (1872–1937), a writer of prose fiction and a correspondent for the French daily, *Le Matin*, took of the Italo-Turkish war during the period that he spent in Tripolitania from November 1911 to January 1912. The archive of more than 200 of Chérau's photographs, uncovered by Pierre Schill, is reproduced in the pages of the volume. It is disturbing viewing. The pictures taken by the French journalist cover the battle of Aïn-Zara in December 1911; and the discovery, a month earlier, of the mutilated bodies of Italian soldiers, killed in the wake of the battle of Sciara Sciat in October 1911. Above all, the photographs document the nature of the reprisals that were perpetuated against those members of Tripolitania's indigenous population who resisted the imposition of Italian rule and the climate of terror that accompanied the Italian appropriation of the Libyan coastline.

The volume thus provides Chérau's visual testimony of the nature of the conflict and examines its wider implications. The horror that accompanied the Italian invasion of Libya is immediately exposed by the photographs. We see the ferocity of the conflict; the extent of resistance to the new colonising power; the determination on the part of the military authorities to use public executions as a means of quelling popular resistance; the evident connection between the first phases of the conflict and the later 'pacification' of Libya which was to begin in the wake of the First World War, to be accelerated under Fascism, and to last with unremitting violence until the early 1930s.

Accompanying the photographic archive is the painstaking recreation of the context in which the photographs were taken. Schill provides a meticulous account of the phases of the Italo-Turkish war and the pressures that impinged upon those who were tasked to report on its progress. He explores the responses that Chéreau recorded in his private correspondence and the subsequent role that some of his photographs played in the anti-colonialist stance of the publication *La Bataille Syndicaliste*. The articles that were printed in *Le Matin* together with his photographs are reproduced in the volume, as is Chéreau's one attempt to cast his experiences as a photojournalist in Libya in literary form.

We therefore have a complex interpretation of how a witness attempted to record and then disseminate the extreme sights with which he was confronted during the short period in which he covered the conflict. This complexity of interpretation is substantiated in the final part of the volume which records how Schill has, over several years, worked with artists and writers to draw out and remediate the significance of the photographic archive. In the final pages of the volume there are essays by Caroline Recher and Smaranda Olcèse that respectively examine the processes behind the preparation of the exhibition '*À fendre le cœur le plus dur - témoigner la guerre/ regards sur une archive*' (held in 2015 and 2016) and behind the translation of the archive into a dance performance. There is also a contribution by Mathieu Larnaudie on themes that Jérôme Ferrari and Olivier Rohe address in their literary work on Chéreau's archive. Lastly, Quentin Deluermoz explores the nature of the archive and the work of the historian. In all cases, the essays are open-ended and intended to suggest the multiplicity of approaches to the archive.

Réveiller l'archive d'une guerre coloniale has been prepared with the utmost standards of scholarly rigour and with a profound and multi-faceted understanding of the perspectives with which an archive can be viewed and how its relevance to the present can be explored through a series of interconnected prisms. It opens the question as to how the images are likely to be seen in the context of the Libyan memory of the colonial past. Considering the urgency of developing a sophisticated knowledge of all aspects of the impact of colonialism, this is a book that should be widely read.

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Vedere per credere. Il racconto museale dell'Italia unita

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This recent book by Massimo Baioni provides an effective analysis of the history of museums of the Risorgimento in united Italy. Throughout its short history as a nation, Italy has experienced major changes, turning from a Liberal monarchy to a Fascist dictatorship and finally to a democratic republic: whatever its institutional and political form,