

contexts, if not every representation of Japan in the twentieth century. Monserrati argues that there is ‘a specific Italian version of Orientalism(s) toward Japan’ (p. 3), a ‘relational Orientalism’ that, strengthened by both historical similarities and the lack of colonial interests in East Asia, promotes a ‘different relationality, one not necessarily dominated by colonialist discourses’ (p. 32). Still, the concept of Orientalism as an imperialist outlook is difficult to generalise – as demonstrated by Suzanne Marchand in the case of Germany. Furthermore, it is also questionable whether ‘Western’ representations of modern Japan could ever be considered a part of Orientalist discourses, since Japan was by no means a passive object of foreign narratives but participated meaningfully in shaping its own image abroad. In this sense, instead of emphasising a national exceptionalism, the concept of ‘relational Orientalism’ could be used for describing a wider, more complex, trans-national phenomenon.

Funding Statement. This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 101019008.



doi:10.1017/mit.2022.57

Italy’s Sea: Empire and Nation in the Mediterranean, 1895–1945

by Valerie McGuire, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2020, xiii + 285 pp., \$130.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781800348004

Jessi A.J. Gilchrist

Department of War Studies, King’s College London
Email: jessi.gilchrist@kcl.ac.uk

Italian empire-building is often remembered as a uniquely Fascist phenomenon and an aberration from the longstanding Italian tradition of being the *brava gente* – the ‘good people’. Valerie McGuire’s recent book challenges both of these trends by asking questions that are novel in approach and geographical focus. McGuire draws on a rich range of interdisciplinary methods and rare archival sources to investigate the little-known experience of empire in the Dodecanese Islands across both Liberal and Fascist eras. She demonstrates that shifting and unstable ideas about nation and race characterised Italian empire- and nation-building between 1895 and 1945. *Italy’s Sea* makes an important contribution not only to the history of Italian imperialism, but also to grappling with its long-lasting legacies shaping public understandings of Italian and Greek cultural identity within Europe today.

Italy’s Sea unfolds chronologically to examine the special place of the Mediterranean within Italy’s nation-building project. The Dodecanese Islands serve as a case study to explore the central tension that emerged between the aesthetic of *mediterraneità* (or Mediterraneanness), which celebrated a certain degree of cosmopolitan diversity,

and that of *romanità* (or Romanness), which pursued an assimilationist and exclusionist approach to nation-building. The first chapter begins this story in the post-unification period through the lens of Italian travellers on voyages to the Near East. Both fictional and historical accounts of travel by famed figures, including Gabriele D'Annunzio, Luigi Federzoni, Enrico Corradini, and Orazio Pedrazzi, reveal growing understandings of the Aegean as simultaneously 'oriental' and familiarly Italian – what McGuire terms an 'unhomoely homeland' (p. 42). McGuire's analysis makes clear that the writings produced during this era marked the Mediterranean as a 'colonial sea' underscoring the tension between nation and empire with which Italian officials would struggle for decades to come.

The middle chapters shift the focus to the Dodecanese Islands during the period of formal occupation from 1912 to 1943. Chapter 2 narrows in on the efforts of the Italian state – both Liberal and Fascist – to establish the island of Rhodes as a tourism mecca in the eastern Mediterranean after invading it during the Italo-Turkish War. Embracing the *mediterraneità* aesthetic, the tourism project exploited Rhodes's nineteenth-century reputation as a destination for Grand Tour travellers looking for a taste of the 'orient' as a basis to undertake modernisation initiatives intended to fashion elements of the 'orient' into a luxurious yet authentic travel experience. In many ways, however, the tourism project only further complicated Rhodes's ambiguous status within the empire by representing it as neither a colony nor a borderland within tourism propaganda (p. 91).

In the third chapter, the central thesis of *Italy's Sea* truly shines. McGuire explores the ways in which the competing *mediterraneità* and *romanità* aesthetics fundamentally shaped national, racial, and legal belonging in the Aegean Sea. In contrast to the Italian empire in North Africa, the citizenship project in the Dodecanese Islands was deeply entwined with the imperial discourse on establishing Italian statehood in the Aegean. Here, McGuire argues that locals on the islands were represented as *potential* citizens within the nation (p. 146). The 1933 citizenship reforms marked the apotheosis of this *mediterraneità* identity by introducing the option of naturalisation to full metropolitan citizenship in addition to the pre-existing Italian Aegean citizenship category. A particular strength of this chapter is its analysis of the rollbacks that followed in the latter half of the decade as the Fascist state increasingly championed a *romanità* identity. In the case of Jewish applicants, the Italian state liberally granted nationality after the 1933 reforms but, when the Fascist state introduced its infamous 1938 Race Laws, it nullified citizenships acquired since 1919. This section culminates with a powerful condemnation of the Italian state's role in rendering thousands of Jews stateless on the eve of the Second World War.

The final chapter reflects on everyday life under Italian occupation. Bringing together archival records and more than 40 interviews, McGuire makes visible the ways in which locals engaged with their colonial occupiers – through acquiescence, resistance, and complacency. The even greater value of this chapter is in its exploration of the tension between how the experience of Italian occupation is remembered and what the local histories tell us about the past. The period of occupation under Liberal Italy and the Fascist governorship of Mario Lago are often remembered by locals as benign. But peering into lived experience reveals that the changes undertaken by the new 'Fascist' Governor Cesare De Vecchi in the late 1930s were not an aberration. They grew out of a longstanding process concerned with how best to secure the loyalty of Dodecanese locals to the regime.

The real strength of *Italy's Sea* is in its disruption of dominant conceptual binaries prevalent in the field. The scholarship on Italian empire-building has tended to question to what extent there was a specifically 'Fascist' form of imperialism that marked a departure from the *brava gente* Liberal tradition. McGuire effectively situates the colonial project in the Aegean Sea within a broader tradition of Italian imperialism that sprawled across both Liberal and Fascist regimes. McGuire also pushes against the colonial-metropole binary which has long dominated the literature on empire by applying what she terms a

'thalassological' framework to centre the mobile and transnational experience of life in the Mediterranean Sea. At times, however, the author might have done more to bring greater nuance to what is often referred to in the book as 'the state'. A deeper sense of decision-making processes and the relationship between the local governors in Rhodes and the leadership in Rome might help the reader to understand not only how the gradual shift from *mediterraneità* to *romanità* was represented and understood on the ground, but also the factors and personalities driving this shift across time.

In the end, *Italy's Sea* effectively carves out a new space for thinking about the Italian empire with respect to both geographies and technologies of rule. It is not sufficient to characterise Italian empire-building only by the instances of Fascist colonial war for which it is most known. Italian imperialism had many faces. It took shape through tourism projects, education initiatives, literature, architecture, and citizenship regimes, all of which evolved in relation to the shifting conceptions of what it meant to be Italian. Only by understanding the multitude of ways in which Italian imperialism operated and touched daily life can we understand its long-lasting legacies. McGuire makes the compelling case that these imperial dynamics did not cease to exist when formal occupation ended but are essential to understanding the complex and layered nature of Mediterranean identities today.

doi:10.1017/mit.2022.58