

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Ferne Nachbarn: Vergleichende Studien zu Deutschland und Italien in der Moderne**, by CHRISTOF DIPPER, Cologne/Weimar/Vienna, Böhlau, 2017, 362 pp., €45.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-3-412-50787-9

This book gathers together 12 essays published by the author since 2000 and one essay, the first in the collection, ‘Revolution und Reaktion im Jakobinismus. Die Agrarprogramme der italienischen und deutschen Jakobiner’, which appeared in the late 1970s. The title of the volume, *Ferne Nachbarn*, which could be translated as ‘distant neighbours’ or ‘far near neighbours’, sums up the central thesis developed by Christof Dipper, one of the German historians most attentive to the history of contemporary Italy and relations between the two countries.

According to Dipper, the idea of a parallel Italo-German history between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has no foundation. From this point of view, the cover image represents a sort of prologue to the essays collected in the book. As many historians of the relationship between Italy and Germany know well, dozens of conferences and works dedicated to the history of bilateral relations have been, and indeed continue to be, accompanied by the image of Friedrich Overbeck’s painting depicting the friendship of the two countries through their personification in the guise of two seated women holding hands in a loving attitude. On the cover of Dipper’s book, however, we find an equally well-known, but less used, historical image. It is a French caricature of the Triple Alliance, dating from the late nineteenth century. Germany is represented by the anthropomorphised figure of an enormous and powerful ox, while Italy is represented as a tiny frog, intimidated by the majesty of the mighty ox. This emphasises the strong asymmetry between the two countries, rather than a relationship characterised by analogy and symmetry. The comparative history approach in the published essays highlights the asymmetries in the historical processes of the two countries. Indeed, according to Dipper, these asymmetries are what stand out most when comparing the two countries’ paths towards modernity.

As is well known, several factors have contributed to the spread of the thesis of historical-political parallels between the two countries. First of all, both Italy and Germany became nation states in the second half of the nineteenth century, after national movements had been stimulated by the impact of the French revolutionary armies and the subsequent Napoleonic invasions, which brought about decisive institutional reforms. The revolutionary movements of 1848–1849 affected both countries and their respective national unifications took place in the 20 years that followed. In the twentieth century the thesis of a parallel history finds some of the most obvious points of support. Between the two World Wars, although not in precisely coinciding historical moments, both Italy and Germany rejected their previous parliamentary traditions to embrace Fascism and Nazism and establish authoritarian and, according to many historians, totalitarian political regimes. After the Second World War, Italy and Western Germany, both in the Western Bloc, successfully reintroduced a parliamentary system, embarked on unprecedented economic development and endorsed a stronger economic and political integration of Western Europe. Moreover, the perceived parallelism extends beyond precise historical conjunctures to include political leaders who acted in a similar way and were often in concert with each other: Cavour and Bismarck, Hitler and Mussolini, De Gasperi and Adenauer.

However, according to Dipper, the path of the two countries towards ‘modernity’, a concept that is considered more controversial in German than in Italian historiography, is studded with apparent similarities that do not stand up to close historical examination. Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century, the author convincingly highlights how the Enlightenment in Italy failed to achieve the popular impact that its German equivalent enjoyed. For Dipper, the process of building the nation state has encountered many more obstacles in Italy than in Germany, while the two authoritarian regimes of Fascism and Nazism had very different effects on their respective societies, thus influencing the postwar years of the two countries in different ways. Together with Dipper’s essays on the great steps towards modernity, already known to scholars, this volume includes contributions addressing other issues, including ‘Unversehens in Feindesland: Deutsche und Italiener 1943 bis 1950’ (‘Unexpectedly in Enemy Territory: Germans and Italians 1943–1950’). Between 1945 and 1947 many of the Italians in Germany, and many Germans in Italy, who were waiting to be transferred to their homeland expressed the desire not to return to their country of origin. In several cases, contacts and political and economic relations were established during this period that were to be strengthened after the Italian political stabilisation in 1948 and the establishment of the German Federal Republic. In this essay, the comparative study of the history of relations between the two countries enables the author to undermine one of the most established views on the role of the immediate postwar period: that of the end of the Second World War as a ‘Stunde Null’, or ‘zero hour’, for politics, economy, society and culture.

*Ferne Nachbarn* is undoubtedly a successful scholarly compilation. It is an indispensable book for anyone interested in the history of the two countries and their relationship. At the same time, from a methodological standpoint, the book offers proof of how comparative history can be a valuable tool to shed light on the fractures and specificities hidden beneath the façade of superficially similar developments.

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**Agli albori delle democrazie moderne. Filippo Mazzei (1730-1816)**, edited by RENATO PASTA, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2018, 217 pp., €38.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-9359-149-2

This book, edited by Renato Pasta, provides a stimulating synthesis of the thought of Filippo Mazzei, a multi-faceted merchant, physician and traveller from Tuscany. Originating from the conference held in 2016 to celebrate the bicentenary of Mazzei’s death, the volume begins with a biography, then carries the reader through the transition in international and economic history in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a transition that would launch Europe into a new socio-institutional dimension. Clearly, this was not an instantaneous process, but an enduring one, destined to culminate at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The volume presents ten essays which outline Mazzei quite clearly as a versatile man and a cultural mediator between Europe and America. He was an active protagonist of the American Revolution and an attentive observer of the French Revolution, as well as becoming a point of