

the book succeeds in assembling the seemingly disparate proofs of Italy's long and lasting impact on Philadelphia, from the city's early days as the nation's capital to its present status as an important educational and cultural center. The volume's take on the historical and sociocultural connections between Philadelphia and Italy is less scholarly than it is laudatory. Nevertheless, a critical question haunts the final section: in the face of ever-increasing globalization and shifting demographics, how can Philadelphia maintain not just its links to Italy, but also its identity as a city with an unmistakable Italian American flavor? A certain degree of tension thus underlies the volume's exultant act of commemoration.

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**Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti, and Davide Trentacoste, eds. *Rereading Travellers to the East: Shaping Identities and Building the Nation in Post-unification Italy*. Firenze: Firenze UP 2022. Pp. 229.**

The cultural predicaments of Italy's Oriental fantasies have attracted sustained critical attention: in the wake of this growing interest, the brilliant collection of essays gathered by Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti and Davide Trentacoste offers a much-welcomed contribution. Probing the multifaceted relations that linked modern Italy to Asia, the Middle East and Africa, *Re-Reading Travellers to the East* unearths a wide spectrum of intellectual experiences ranging from Giovanni Gentile's involvement in the Istituto Italiano per il Medio e Estremo Oriente to Fascist attempts to (re)claim the "Italianness" of Marco Polo, from the exploits of colonial architecture in the Dodecanese islands to an overview of the (largely unmapped) history of Italian travel writing to Iran. A solid critical aim holds together this versatile mosaic of critical forays: to deconstruct the multiple "re-readings" through which post-Unification Italy has sought to resuscitate the "mythical" halo of a tradition of medieval and early modern travelers. As it was often the case in the intellectual history of the peninsula, the retroactive glorification of an obfuscated 'primate' (to recall a classic pamphlet by Vincenzo Gioberti) had to buttress far more pragmatic interests: the "myth of Italian travelers in the East," stretching from Polo and Matteo Ricci to Giuseppe Tucci, was an artificial construction conjured up to bolster Italy's aspirations in the brutal arena of imperial ambitions. Previous studies by Barbara Spackman (*Accidental Orientalist: Modern Italian Travelers in Ottoman Lands*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017) and Fabrizio de Donno (*Italian Orientalism: Nationhood, Cosmopolitanism and the Cultural Politics of Identity*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019) have highlighted the need to problematize Italy's involvement in the fabrication of the Oriental(ist) myth: building on these strands of research, *Re-Reading Travellers to the East* dissects the crucial mechanisms in the intellectual machinery of Italian Orientalism—a compensation mechanism. Italy "felt the

need to compensate for losses and a lack of relevance in the international arena by referring to a glorious past” of “travelers, explorers and inventors” known to all (13). An invented tradition had to offset the meager results of a deluding, and mostly disappointing, foreign policy.

The opening contribution by Beatrice Falcucci, “‘Rievocare certe nobili opere dei nostri maggiori’: the Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO) and the ‘Myth’ of Italian Travellers to the East” (29-64), thus sets a first keystone in the volume reconstructing the hitherto largely uncharted history of the Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East, founded in 1933 by leading Tibetologist Giuseppe Tucci with the backing of Giovanni Gentile. The IsMEO showcased the ideological tensions underpinning Fascist Oriental fantasies. If at the heart of Fascist policy was the desire “to rebuild an (imaginary) Italian empire,” Falcucci notes, Orientalist studies had to confirm “that Italians had arrived ‘first’ in a particular place (on a mountain top, an inaccessible city, a distant island)”: erudite justifications had to underpin otherwise dubious colonial claims (29-30). The next chapter by Fabrizio de Donno (“Rereading Italian Travellers to Africa: Precursors, Identities and Interracial Relations in Narratives of Italian Colonialism,” 65-82) shifts the focus to “transformations of Italian colonial consciousness” in East Africa, the most dramatic case of Fascist imperialism. De Donno’s critical excavation juxtaposes Fascist re-interpretations of the work of Pellegrino Matteucci (1850-1881), one of the most renowned Italian explorers to Ethiopia, vis-à-vis radically different postcolonial re-readings of other two key texts in Italian colonial literature, Indro Montanelli’s *XX Battaglione eritreo* (1936) and Enrico Emanuelli’s novel *Settimana nera* (1961), re-read and commented in this case by Angelo del Boca and Igiaba Scego. This intertextual dialogue is meant to unravel the parabola of Italian colonial memory “from celebration to postcolonial amnesia and shame” and its multiple, and often contradictory, reconfigurations (68).

The essays by Alessandro Tripepi and Aglaia de Angelis engage the cultural re-appropriations of other significant episodes in the history of Italy’s relations with Asia. Tripepi’s essay (“Unsheathing the Katana. The Long Fortune of the First Two Japanese Embassies in Italy: Rediscovery and Rereading between Continuity and Discontinuity,” 83-103) scrutinizes the intellectual re-discovery of the first two Japanese diplomatic missions to early modern Europe—the Tenshō embassy in 1582-1590 and the less fortunate Keicho embassy (1613-1620)—examining how Italian scholarship and press re-contextualized these early contacts in the wake of Japan’s reprisal of diplomatic contacts with Europe spearheaded by Iwakura Tomomi, one of the founding fathers of modern Japanese foreign policy, who visited Rome in the spring of 1870 against the background of the modernization triggered by the Meiji restoration. On the other hand, making us of refined theoretical tools derived from Barthes, Derrida and Nabokov’s *Lectures on Literature*, the chapter authored by de Angelis (“Lodovico Nocentini: A Rereader of Modern Italian Travellers to China,” 103-24) sheds light on the

nineteenth-century reappraisal of the most celebrated Italian traveler to China after Polo: Matteo Ricci. After a prolonged oblivion in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, linked to the troubled vicissitudes that accompanied the suppression of the Company of Jesus in 1773, de Angelis identifies in the book by Italian scholar Lodovico Nocentini (*Il primo sinologo: P. Matteo Ricci*, 1882) the beginning of a belated rediscovery of Ricci. Nocentini's book, however, is interpreted as starting point of a specifically secular appropriation of Ricci's oeuvre intended to refashion the Jesuit missionary as the "Italian" founding father of "sinology as field of science" (117). Italy's cultural relations with China are also at the center of the chapter by Laura de Giorgi, "An Italian Hero for China. Reading Marco Polo in the Fascist Era," (161-80) where the author scrutinizes the ideological (mis)appropriation of the figure of Marco Polo pursued by Fascist culture. Functional to the image of a "civilizing colonialism" advocated by Fascism in his Asian foreign policy, Polo was evoked by the regime propaganda as the idealized portrait of a 'good' colonizer, precursor of "Italy's historical capacity to weave dialogue and cooperation with the East": however, as De Giorgio points out, such mythicization of proto-colonial enterprises was destined to loom as a haunting "ghost" in postwar Chinese scholarship on Polo (174-175).

The contributions by Luca Orlandi, Davide Trentacoste, and Emanuele Giusti explore largely uncharted territories in the history of Italy's cultural relations with the East and are thus particularly fascinating: Orlandi presents a well-researched investigation of the cultural and heritage policies implemented by Fascist authorities in the Dodecanese islands ("Searching for 'Italianità' in the Dodecanese Islands (1912-1943). Some Considerations on Art, Architecture and Archaeology through the Works of Hermes Balducci," 125-40). This micro-intellectual biography devoted to Hermes Balducci, a polyhedric architect, engineer and designer who joined the Istituto Storico-Archeologico FERT established in Rhodes by Italian authorities, offers a springboard to assess the impact that Fascist ideals of *italianità* and *romanità* had in archaeological research in the eastern Mediterranean. Trentacoste, on the other hand, brings back to light the largely unknown history of Fakhr al-Dīn Ma'n (1572-1635), Ottoman governor of modern day Lebanon, and his involvement in the "eastern ambitions" of 17<sup>th</sup> century Grand Duchy of Tuscany. His chapter ("Medici Ambitions and Fascist Policies. (Re)reading the Relations between Italy and the Levant in the 1930s through the Historiography on Fakhr al-Dīn II," 141-60) examines the tardive "rediscovery" of Fakhr al-Dīn tempestuous diplomatic career sponsored by the Reale Accademia d'Italia in the mid-1930s and acutely reconnects this scholarly interest to far more incisive Fascist (and covertly anti-British) ambitions in the Levant. The contribution of Emanuele Giusti ("The Idea of Italian Travellers to Iran. Scholarly Research and Cultural Diplomacy in Post-war Italy," 181-210) presents an ambitious overview of Italian travel records to Iran, spanning from the Dominican friar Ricoldo of Montecroce (1243-1320) to

modern archaeological campaigns launched by Tucci's IsMEO in Iran (in parallel with the economic interests pursued by Enrico Mattei's ENI). Surveying an impressive repertoire of sources, Giusti is able to show how such literary tradition was retrospectively historicized and constructed to "embody the idea of the continuous cultural and 'civilizational' exchange," forging an *impromptu* cultural bridge between the Italian and Persian national traditions (183).

Giovanni Tarantino's final contribution ("Notes on Rereading and Re-enacting China," 211-20) closes the volume with a thought-provoking reflection about the *nachleben* of Michele Antonioni's celebrated documentary *Chung Kuo, Cina*, filmed in the midst of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (the title of the film simply reflects the romanization of the word Zhongguo/中国, "China" in standard Mandarin). Initially sponsored by the Maoist political leadership, *Chung Kuo* was nevertheless bashed and censored in China: Tarantino takes up this unexpected backfire by Chinese spectators at Antonioni's documentary to point out how the film could be "read and reread in many ways," seen through "different gazes": from the angle of an ingenuous "European public," "curious about a non-Soviet socialism," through the radically different gaze of Chinese spectators and finally through the self-reflective gaze of the very people who stare back at Antonioni's camera "in the melancholy austerity of their impoverished situation" (216). It is this multiplicity of gazes, of endless appropriations and re-appropriations through which Italy has forged its imaginary about the "Orient," that the authors of *Re-Reading Travellers to the East* have brilliantly pursued, probed and reconstructed.

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**Diana Garvin. *Feeding Fascism: The Politics of Women's Food Work*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2022. Pp. 292.**

When one asks how much popular consensus endorsed Mussolini's regime, it is tempting to imagine that all Italians were either committed fascists or sworn anti-fascists, all the time. Resisting such absolutism, Diana Garvin instead asks, "What happened *between* rebellion and consent?" (8). Analyzing fascist alimentary policy and the roles prescribed for Italian women in the dream of national autarky, Garvin finds that although Fascism dictated how women should farm, manufacture, and cook to feed their families, women maintained some freedom in their daily culinary work. In a two-way negotiation dubbed "tabletop politics" (4), women sometimes supported fascist food policies and sometimes resisted—because ideology held less sway than day-to-day necessity in determining if and when they toed the party line. The productive tension between the book's two sets of archival sources—those produced by elite men to direct women's labor and those generated by women during their daily toil—demonstrates that, true to Michel De Certeau's theory of the practice of everyday life and the blurred line