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## Round Table. The 'British School' and Italian Historiography<sup>1</sup>

John Foot, Giulia Albanese, Ilaria Favretto, David Laven, and Marco Meriggi

Ilaria Favretto, 'Introduction'.

The contributions that follow draw on a round-table discussion that opened ASMI conference on the Historiography of Modern Italy in November 2016 in London. The year 2016 marked the twentieth anniversary of the Modern Italian History seminar held at the Institute of Historical Research. The seminar has acted as a valuable forum of discussion for scholars of Italy and the anniversary offered a wonderful opportunity to look back, and to take stock of, the state of historiographical debates on modern and contemporary Italian history. This conference was also the first ASMI conference after the death of Christopher Duggan, who was both president of ASMI and one of the IHR seminar's convenors. When devising the programme, the conference organisers agreed that a debate on British historians and the history of Italy would complement the conference well; most importantly, we thought this would also be the best way to remember and reflect upon Christopher's work. Giulia Albanese, John Foot, David Laven and Marco Meriggi kindly accepted my invitation to participate in the round-table and to have their contributions published in this special issue. It was a sparkling, wide-ranging and thought-provoking discussion, one which, had he still been alive, Chris would have loved to join, and no doubt, enriched with his in-depth knowledge of Italian history, Italian academia and publishing world.

Talking about 'British historians' and the 'history of Italy' in an increasingly globalised and interconnected academic environment might sound odd. As David Lodge's prescient (and brilliant) book *Small World* put it already in 1984, academics have long been operating and functioning in a very small world - a world, which internet, social media and low cost air companies are making smaller and smaller as the years go by. The 'transnational turn'

undergone by historiography has also contributed to making the use of national categories in historiographical thinking redundant. Labels such as 'British' or 'Italian' historians suggest a cultural and methodological homogeneity within both groups, which, of course, is not there. Both scholarly communities are extraordinarily cosmopolitan and encompass a wide range of historiographical approaches. Indeed one can attribute these differences more persuasively to age and generational imprinting than to national belonging. Moreover, many Italian historians have trained and built their careers in British universities and several Italianists of British nationality who have spent most of their academic life while based in Italy or outside the UK. These historians' profiles makes it extraordinarily hard to ascribe them to a specific 'national' historiographical tradition.

The contributors of this section all point to the incongruity of labels such as 'British' or 'Italian' historians and their limited value to discuss and make sense of historiographical developments and approaches. However, these labels are still very much in use in public and media debates. They seem to retain some resonance in academic circles and discussions too. When reviewing scholarship produced by British colleagues, Italian academics still often flag the author's Britishness as a sign of quality and impartiality in the case of appreciative reviews, or as a cause of naivety and superficiality in the case of disagreement. British historians working on modern Italian history have also contributed to their own 'othering'. They have, for instance, long prided themselves for producing interpretations of Italian history that, unlike those of their Italian equivalents, are not influenced by political contingencies, ideological or factional loyalties. They also take pride in their ability to reach out to the wider public using a writing and communication style which is profoundly different from that of Italian academic culture.

As Foot notes, these features might not be enough to define a 'British school' along the lines of well-known schools such as the French *Annales*. Nonetheless, together with a distinctively cultural approach, they have long characterised the work of British historians of

Italy. As Meriggi, Laven and Albanese suggest, albeit in a close and intertwined dialogue with their Italian counterparts, British historians have also played an important role in questioning long established periodisations, in challenging interpretations of key themes in nineteenth and twentieth-century Italy, such as the unification process or consensus under Fascism, and in encouraging research on new areas, particularly in the fields of social and cultural history. For instance, British historiography on Fascism, Albanese points out, has made an important contribution to the study of women under the regime, an established area of research in both academic communities today but not a few decades ago. British historiography has also positively encouraged comparative research.

The dialogue has therefore been a very fruitful one and one that has been increasingly facilitated by a growing number of translations of Italian books into English, the increase of Italian scholars – mostly from a younger generation – who publish their research in international academic journals, and the intensification of intra-academic exchanges and migratory movements in both directions. As David Laven put it, one can only hope that Brexit won't hinder this exchange in the future, and that conditions will remain for academics to move freely across Europe. This will help further consolidate an intellectual community for which national physical borders make little sense.

Marco Meriggi, 'Reflections on the 'British School''

Before I offer some reflections on recent decades, I feel it is necessary to look back briefly to earlier periods of historiography. It is enough, with this in mind, to remember names such as Bolton King and George Macaulay Trevelyan, writers who even before the Great War had nurtured from a historiographical perspective the interest in Italian national unification, which had already been manifest in the warm support given to the Risorgimento movement by progressive opinion in Britain.<sup>2</sup>

This sympathetic approach remained vibrant until at least the early 1920s, when the advent of Fascism cast a sinister light on the history of the Risorgimento, obliging historians to address the process of unification with greater attention to its shortcomings and, in consequence, to scale down a hitherto one-sided admiration for its idealist and liberal direction. The premises were thus set out that would endure into the post-Second World War era as the dominant narrative within British historiography on nineteenth-century Italy: the Risorgimento as a failure. The individual who would articulate this position most persuasively would be Denis Mack Smith.

Mack Smith's books on Italian unification became best sellers in Italy, reaching a public that had never taken any significant interest in the work of the Italian scholars of the Risorgimento, but his critique of the rhetoric that underpinned the Risorgimento myth was not well-received in Italy among historians within the liberal tradition, who often responded to it with anger and barbed and negative reviews: Rosario Romeo's scathing assessment of Mack Smith perhaps sums up best the standard response (Riall 1994, 5).

In the late 1950s, the historian Giorgio Candeloro began to write his monumental *Storia dell'Italia moderna* from a Gramscian perspective (Candeloro, 1956-86). Candeloro also aimed to maintain his distance from the traditional rhetoric, and demonstrated a measured appreciation for those, such as Mack Smith, who emphasized the limits of the Risorgimento. After all, in many ways Mack Smith's works engaged effectively with a tradition critical of the Risorgimento that was always present within Italian historiography, and which, from the time that Candeloro initiated his project, began to become the dominant strand in Italian historiography.<sup>3</sup>

In any case, between the 1970s and the end of the twentieth century, the historiographical perspective on nineteenth-century Italy changed profoundly, both within Italy itself and in Britain, in consequence of the growing interest in social history. This interest was self-evidently not confined to the history of the nineteenth century, but it had the effect of

reducing the overwhelmingly historic-political forms that had until then been inscribed into the readings and interpretations of the Risorgimento. And it is significant that the important contribution to the history of the Risorgimento written by Stuart Woolf in Einaudi's *Storia d'Italia* made explicit mention in its title to social history, over and above the political, even if it was really politics that remained the focus of the book in question.<sup>4</sup> Some fifteen years later Stuart Woolf also wrote the preface to the Italian translation of John A. Davis's work, dedicated – as the title tells us – to *Conflict and Control* in nineteenth-century Italy (1988, 1989). In this book, Davis emphasized one of the principal novelties that the social historians' approach had brought to the study of the nineteenth century in Italy: a new periodization, based on the nature and characteristics of the theme under investigation, that was detached and distinct from the traditional historic-political periodization, and that no longer necessarily privileged 1860 as an ideal dividing line when approaching the study of the century. There began during these years, thanks in no small part to works such as that of Davis – based as it was on a dialogue with the most recent findings made by Italian historians – an exploration into broad fields of social, economic, and institutional history of nineteenth-century Italy, which tended to identify in the Risorgimento not so much as a drama to be considered from the perspective of Italian political exceptionalism, but rather as a series of local variations to be viewed within the context of a wider process of transformation within Europe.

Broadly speaking, works of original research by, among others, Paul Ginsborg, Adrian Lyttelton, Michael Broers, David Laven, and Jonathan Morris, fall into this category. But no less important in the 1990s was a particular sort of contribution made by British and Irish historiography to the study of the nineteenth century in Italy that developed in so effective a fashion as to become almost an art form, offering an external perspective on works being published within Italian scholarship, and the judicious assessments made on the merits and limits of the italophone historiography of the *Ottocento*. Among these works, I am

thinking especially of Davis's article 'Remapping Italy's path to the twentieth century' (1994) and Lucy Riall's *The Italian Risorgimento* (1994), in which – with loud echoes of the use of this term some years earlier by the likes of François Furet and Denis Richet in their treatment of the historiography of the French Revolution – they employed the term 'revisionist' to define the new lines of research in Italian historiography for a period that was no longer seen (just) as the Risorgimento and which was, instead, becoming ever more 'the long *Ottocento*'. This revisionism tended to water down the political dimension of the Risorgimento and to focus rather more on the themes of the transition of Italian society from the late ancien régime to the nineteenth-century liberal state.

At the same time, or shortly thereafter, scholars such as John Dickie, Michael Broers, Robert Lumley, and Jonathan Morris were beginning to introduce – albeit with varying degrees of intensity – Edward Said's notion of 'orientalism' into the study of nineteenth-century Italy, usually – and Mike Broers is the notable exception here – applied to the south and the 'questione meridionale'. In so doing they were connecting with the interpretative frameworks put forward in Italy by the scholars grouped around the journal *Meridiana*. The 'deconstruction' of the classic political history of nineteenth-century Italy was in this way deepened and enriched by a further productive investigation's area.

Yet the historiographical vicissitudes of the first fifteen or so years of the new millennium would tell another story, which is, moreover, not without its own contradictions. Already in her 1994 volume, Lucy Riall had highlighted how the new Italian history of the Risorgimento, which she defined as 'revisionist', while boasting the merit of having opened up new and hitherto unexplored fields of research, nevertheless lacked a fundamental purpose, namely that of explaining the Risorgimento in a persuasive fashion.<sup>5</sup> Unification remained the event that was, without question, emblematic and specific to nineteenth-century Italy, and the principal reason for the enduring interest of British historians in the nineteenth century. Of course, we ought really at this point to start using the term 'Italo-British' historians,

given the strong presence within British academe of scholars from Italy, such as Eugenio Biagini, Maurizio Isabella, Roberto Romani, Marcella Pellegrino Sutcliffe, Danilo Raponi, and Enrico Dal Lago, who work on matters relating to nineteenth-century Italy. It is the Risorgimento that has continued to maintain this interest within Britain, and which found in Christopher Duggan in recent years one of its most perceptive and influential interpreters.

I think it is reasonable to say that in the first decade of this millennium, the Risorgimento has returned with a vengeance. It has, as it were, 'struck back' with considerable force, truly in its ideological and political dimension. It has certainly been approached from new methodological perspectives, especially those with their origins in cultural history and the history of the emotions. And it is certainly significant that the synthetic volume that has addressed Risorgimento history collectively from this perspective is an Anglo-Italian product: the *Risorgimento* volume in the *Storia d'Italia Einaudi*, edited by Mario Banti and Paul Ginsborg, on the basis of a renewed attention to the phenomenon of romanticism and of the cultural construction of political myths (2007). This approach has, in other respects, found a precise expression in Lucy Riall's *Garibaldi* (2007).

All of this brings us back to a problem, the question of the relationship between 'poetry and prose' in the construction of modern Italy, which constitutes the principal fulcrum for reflection on the period as offered by Christopher Duggan in his *Force of Destiny*. As we know, this is a work that is pessimistic in tone, reconnecting with Mack Smith, but in some ways going beyond his position, and tending to reconstruct an image not only of the Risorgimento, but of Italy itself and its approach to the contemporary 'as a failure' (Duggan, 2007).

David Laven, 'Reflections on British and Italian historians of the nineteenth century'

My own intellectual formation in some ways represents the fruitful relationship between British and Italian historians of nineteenth-century Italy. In the late 1980s, I was



blessed with two PhD supervisors. At the time this was rare. When in Cambridge, I was supervised by Derek Beales, expert on Joseph II, on Gladstone, on the history of religious houses, and on Italian unification. Derek – like Christopher Duggan – had been Denis Mack Smith's student. Derek arranged that, while I was working in the archives in Austria and Italy, I should be supervised by Marco Meriggi, a young scholar teaching at Trento, already established as the leading expert on the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia. Derek and Marco between them gave me access to two different ways of approaching the archive, two different historiographical traditions, two different networks. Their influence on me was immense: but on reflection I think it was as individuals rather than as a historian from Britain and a historian from Italy that they impacted upon my way of thinking about Italy's past.

My own experience prompts me to ask whether it is possible to write of British or Italian historiographical approaches to the nineteenth century in Italy, given that they are so intertwined and interdependent. There are clearly differences in style and fashion between Italy and Britain. Yet to make sharp distinctions strikes me misleading. Let me give the example of another of Beales's students. Maurizio Isabella – currently at Queen Mary in London – like Meriggi, acknowledges the influence in his formation as a historian of the estimable Carlo Capra, the great historian of the Italian Enlightenment. Maurizio, however, is symptomatic of the strong tendency in the last thirty years for gifted Italian students to do doctoral research in the UK – a tendency perhaps typified by the stable of young scholars supervised by Christopher Duggan. This phenomenon has further blurred already fuzzy boundaries between the 'characteristic' approaches of Italian and of British historians. (We must hope that the detrimental consequences of Brexit do nothing to hinder this exchange in the future.)

If the traffic of personnel is now largely one-way, there was historically some significant movement of scholars in the opposite direction. Paul Ginsborg is probably best-known now as a historian of the twentieth century, but his early career in York and Cambridge was based on his nineteenth-century expertise. Ginsborg has now spent much more of his career

in Florence than in Britain. Would it be correct to see his renewed interventions in the history of the Risorgimento as characteristically British? Should we see an 'Italianised' Ginsborg – or Adrian Lytelton, Stuart Woolf, Paul Corner for that matter – as a *British* expert on Italian history? How do we categorise scholars teaching or trained within the EUI? Should we view Isabella as part of an Italian or a British tradition? Is it useful to consider these individuals as occupying a position of liminality, or as hybrids, or – as I would suggest – simply as individual historians in dialogue with other historians? And where does one insert historians such as, for example, John Davis, who, while British in formation, has spent the greater part of a distinguished career in the USA: should he be classified as a British or an American historian? I am personally by no means convinced that putting historians into such national categories is especially helpful in understanding the development of research and scholarship on *Ottocento* Italy.

Like Marco, I think it is helpful to glance back to earlier historians when considering these questions. As Marco has observed, historians such as Bolton King and G.M. Trevelyan whole-heartedly endorsed the heroic and idealistic nature of unification, echoing widespread British support for the process. Yet if one looks at Bolton King's 1901 assessment of the state of Italy *after* unification, jointly authored with his older, autodidact protégé, Thomas Okey – a basket maker who became Cambridge's first Serena Professor of Italian – two things become clear: first, that forty years after the establishment of a united Italy, these authors were appalled by the failure of Italy's ruling élites to remedy both deep-rooted and novel problems in the peninsula; and, second, that the authors' frustration was informed and shaped not by a distinctively Anglo-Saxon set of values, but by a wide-reading of Italian literature and by active engagement with prominent Italians of very varied outlook and experience, ranging from the manager of the Terni steel works to the editor of *Civiltà Cattolica* (King and Okey, 1901).

It is almost instinctive to assume that Okey and King viewed Italy in the late nineteenth century with an outsider's gaze. We might debate whether this gave them greater impartiality or fostered a sense of superiority, whether their views were marked by a sentimentalised affection or a tendency to 'orientalise'. Yet the judgements of foreigners often turned out in essence to be the re-articulation of what Italians themselves said or wrote. The same is probably true for most of what is published today. You need only to look at the bibliographies of scholars to see that any publication on modern Italian history in English – even if written by someone raised and predominantly trained in the United Kingdom – is shaped overwhelmingly by an engagement with Italian-language historiography. Most British historians, of course, usually have less extensive and regular access to the archival and other primary sources than their Italian counterparts. If this sometimes inclines the British towards the synthetic, or encourages them to adopt approaches or to focus on themes that require shorter spells in the archives, the resulting need for local assistance from archivists and Italian scholars also tends to shape the research, reducing contrasts in approach between native and outsider.

Writing on all periods of Italian history has long been part of a transnational process. The result is that what an English-speaking scholar of Italy says about Italy is informed not only by the reading of the Italian literature (itself often shaped by monographic studies and methodological developments generated beyond the peninsula) but also by the works of scholars from other countries. In many ways it has long been hard to unpick the scholarship of Americans – or those within the American system – like Kent Roberts Greenfield, Reuben John Rath, Anthony Cardoza, Alan J. Reinerman, Steven C. Hughes, Alexander Grab – from their British counterparts. Equally, it is not possible to ignore the literature that has come out of France, Germany, and Austria, although it is striking the degree to which German-language works tend to be disregarded by both Italian and British historians, perhaps simply because of their linguistic shortcomings.<sup>6</sup>

In short, then, while it is certainly possible to speak of a cross-fertilisation and collaboration between British and Italian historians of the nineteenth century, I doubt the value of applying national labels. One genuine distinction is that nineteenth-century Italian history remains (unsurprisingly) significantly less politicised in Britain. Another is that the British system remains less deference-based when it comes to forging a career. The consequences of this are evident within, say, the Einaudi volume on the Risorgimento, jointly edited by Paul Ginsborg and Alberto Banti (2007). Not only does this collection of essays push the – deeply problematic – notion of the Risorgimento as a mass movement, but it also deliberately neglects the huge numbers of Italians who actively opposed unification or who were indifferent – if perhaps resigned – to the process. Such a position rejects the more sceptical attitude towards unification that characterised much of the literature, often Gramscian in inspiration, of the 1970s and 1980s, and clearly stems from a widespread anxiety within Italian academe since the 1990s about threats posed by separatist politics and conservative Catholicism. For much of the post-war era an uncritically positive narrative of unification was often associated with the political right. Now those who today are sceptical about the depth of support for Italian unity or who suggest its legacy – at least in the short-term – was often negative risk being marginalised by a growing *bantisti* orthodoxy. It is quite clear that a repetition of mantras drawn from Banti's work has become almost obligatory for many young Italian scholars of the Risorgimento. Failure to do so runs the risk of being labelled an apologist for various 'unsavoury' political positions. It is perhaps a sad reflection on the tight links within the Italo-British academic community that the same obsession with those who backed unification – surely an over-worked seam – seems to have permeated British scholarship too, irresponsibly leaving the study of those who resisted unification largely in the hands of those with the agenda of 'disfare l'Italia'. This is a shame, not least because it leaves major questions unanswered about how Italians felt about their new state. One useful rôle that might be played by scholars in Britain would be to act as a corrective to this, encouraging the study

of those many Italians who fought bravely in defence of a lost cause at Gaeta, avidly read *Civiltà cattolica*, failed to rise against the Austrians when Italy invaded Venetia, or rose against the new state in Palermo in 1866.

Giulia Albanese, 'Looking at Fascism through British Historiography'

It is not easy to consider the specificities of Italian and British historiography as separate worlds, since national boundaries do not have paramount weight with respect to the ways in which the history of fascism is written and conceived. Many historians, such as Christopher Duggan, have built bridges and established links between historians across the two countries.

Nonetheless, with regard to the impact of British historiography on Fascism on Italian historians, one may note that there are areas of Italian history that were explored in original ways in Britain and others that were popularized for the benefit of a wider public in a way that had not been attempted before in Italy or had not proven as effective. In relation to the former areas, I can indicate some of the questions that seem of the greatest relevance to me: the comparison of Fascist experiences<sup>7</sup>; the role of violence in shaping early Fascism (Lyttelton 1973, 1982); the research on Italy during the Second World War (Deakin, 1962; MacGregor Knox, 1986); the new chronologies, and therefore the new understanding, of the evolution of mass culture (Forgacs and Gundle, 2007); the historical dimension of the phenomenon of the Mafia;<sup>8</sup> and, finally, the attention given to the role of women under Fascism and beyond.<sup>9</sup>

The vast majority of these topics have become well-established in Italy by now and the research on them has made much progress in the country, in some cases mainly thanks to the attention originally devoted to them by British historians. Conversely, with regard to the study of mass society, women's history and general topics connected with private life,

or with groups which are considered marginal, British historians have not only opened new research paths, but have also developed them much further than Italian scholars have done.

Things have started to change in recent years. On the one hand, as far as I can tell, Italian historiography now has a greater impact on British historiography than in the past. This is confirmed by the fact that up until the 1980s there were no translations of Italian books on Fascism (except for the classic works by antifascist exiles such as Salvemini or Tasca). Since its publication in English, in 1987, a book such as Luisa Passerini's *Fascism in Popular Memory* has had a great impact on British historiography. And this process is not only the product of an increased interest towards Italy and its historiography, of the capacity of Italian historians to develop research that is meaningful for the international historiographical debate, but also a consequence of Italian scholars' acknowledgement of the growing internationalization of the studies on Fascism and hence of their desire to be read by a wider audience.

Moreover, over the last few years a greater interconnection has developed between the two historiographies in term of research themes. Recently, John Foot's research on *Italy's Divided Memory* and the *Legacy of the Italian Resistance* by Philip Cook were well received in Italy, both by historians and by the wider public. Nonetheless, the fields and topics they address were not unknown to Italian historians (on the contrary, they had first been approached by Italians). And the case of the memory of Fascism is only one among the possible examples that can be offered.

Besides, it seems to me that something is changing also in the ways these studies on Fascism are received and read in Italy. No later than three years ago, I was especially surprised to find that a few new books on consensus ('consenso') during Fascism were being published in the UK more or less at the same time, and that they had raised a significant debate, not limited in academic journals. Paul Corner's book on *The Fascist Party and*

*Popular Opinion in Mussolini's Italy* and Christopher Duggan's *Fascist Voices* were widely discussed in the UK press, more so than in Italy<sup>10</sup>. This was especially true of Duggan's book, which was the winner of the prestigious Wolfson prize, explicitly aimed at promoting research able to engage a public wider than the academic one. Nonetheless, both the number of reviews on these books and their breadth shed light on the interest shown towards the theme of Italian popular participation in the Fascist regime, a theme that 20 years ago would have been widely discussed also in the Italian press (but not today). Why is it that these issues were more relevant in 2013 (when the books came out), here in the UK, than in Italy? This has obviously nothing to do with the authors, both of whom are widely recognized in Italy and beyond, nor with their writing skills – which have always been an element of praise in Italy whenever British historians have been compared with Italian ones, and which have actually drawn Italian attention to British historians. Nonetheless in this period – probably things will change in the near future – the interest towards these issues in Italy had largely waned as something already known or not worthy of discussion, perhaps because of a sort of domestication of Fascism or because of a feeling of distance from this historical phase.

In a different direction, though on parallel grounds, I was also struck by a conference held in April 2015 at the New School in New York on *Fascism across Borders*. Its explicit aim was to reflect upon the fact that “Although Fascism as a regime disappeared in the West after World War II, it is undeniable that its ideology did not. In fact, the present economic crisis has the effect of stimulating the birth of new forms of Fascist movements in many countries, not only in Europe”. It would take some efforts for me to think of an academic discussion on Fascism developed on these grounds in Italy.

Looking at the ways Fascism is studied in Italy, lately most Italian historians have tended to avoid polemical discussions on politics and historical comparisons across time.

Most of them – of us – have also refused to explicitly think about the present, largely because of the extremely polarized ways in which these issues had been discussed in the past.

This scholarly approach has brought great advantages to Italian historiography, as previously polarized research did not help develop new threads of analysis and critical approaches. At the same time, it seems to me that it is still meaningful to discuss Fascism in critical ways, with new sources and new questions to ask, while explicitly addressing, in the public arena and as historians of Fascism, current authoritarian tendencies and desires for a strong leader in Europe and beyond (starting, most recently, in the United States) - even though, as historians, we are more inclined to stress the differences than the similarities, to insist on discontinuities rather than on continuities.

Furthermore, one of the reasons for the increased interest in Fascism in Britain over the last two decades certainly has something to do with Italian politics and in particular with the peculiar features of the Berlusconi era. This political phase stimulated – along with a certain complaisance toward Italy – new questions about the ways in which, above all, the relationship between the political leader and the people is constructed in Italy, but also about the relationship between the public sphere, power, and the private sphere in this country. This was very clear in the reviews of Duggan's *Fascist Voices*, but also in those of Corner's book on public opinion, although there is no doubt that there are huge differences between Fascism and Berlusconiism, differences that the authors would certainly acknowledge. Nonetheless, reading about Fascism helped the British public opinion and historians to reflect on Berlusconi's Italy, and also to confirm their ideas about its peculiarities. One is led to wonder, however, whether, following the rise of Trump in the US and Brexit, this Berlusconi phase in Italian history is still to be regarded as an exception, rather than as a general trend among modern democracies in an age of crisis. And we will also have to see, then, whether the



new situation will have any impact on the ways in which the historiography on Fascism is produced and received both in Italy and in the UK.

John Foot, 'Some Reflections on the 'British School' and Italian history'

Despite many claims to the contrary, there is no such thing as a 'British School' of British historians who have worked on Italy or Italian-related subjects. A series of casual and institutionally linked events have led over time since the 1970s (but also to some extent since periods of the nineteenth century) to a number of published works (some of them very influential) by British historians and others about Italy. This series or cluster of publications has often been framed (officially but usually unofficially) especially within the Italian context, as a 'school'. Yet, these works do not have (in any sense) the theoretical and methodological cohesion of a school such as that linked, for example, to the Annales school in France or the micro-historians in Italy in the 1970s.

Nonetheless, it is useful to pick out and discuss some trends and methodologies which have marked the interest of British historians in Italy since the 1950s and 1960s, and the ways in which a reciprocal influence between Britain and Italy created specific intellectual networks. Take, for example, the role of Luigi Meneghello in creating the Department of Italian studies at the University of Reading in the 1950s and 1960s, and the way that department linked up to a specific idea of *how* to study Italy and pioneered the use of cultural studies and cultural history.<sup>11</sup>

Over time, different individuals have operated within this world of British studies of Italy, and it should also be noted that non-academics have also played an important role in the understanding of Italy in the English-speaking world, as with the life and work of Stuart Hood and also that of travel writers such as Eric Newby and Norman Lewis. Other cultural

and academic connections were created through Italians escaping fascism, such as the historian Arnaldo Momigliano and his daughter the academic Laura Lepschy, or through participation by British soldiers in the liberation of Italy in World War Two, as with Christopher Seton-Watson, historian and founder of ASMI, an organisation which groups together historians of Italy working largely in British universities.

There is no space here to detail the individual biographies of these pathways and the personal and institutional connections and networks involved. However, I would like to pull out certain features which I think group together some of the work that has been done by British historians of Italy. A first key group identity and methodological approach was created through the immense influence of the work of Antonio Gramsci in the UK (and the US) and the impact of Gramsci's writings on cultural approaches to history, politics and other spheres. This led to a strong cultural historical approach to Italy, but also to a series of books about Gramsci *himself* and the period of the *biennio rosso* and the rise of fascism, by Gwyn Williams, Martin Clark, Paul Corner and others (Clark, 1977; Corner, 1975; Davis, 1979; Williams, 1975). This interest in Gramsci went beyond the university into popular theatre, as with Trevor Griffiths's play *Occupations* (Griffiths, 1974). The 'Gramsci boom' was powerful and long-lasting, and can almost be said to have invented cultural studies, in Birmingham and elsewhere.

The widespread interest in Gramsci led directly to studies of the Italian Communist Party, from a cultural history and political studies approach, as with the work of Stephen Gundle, Simon Parker, Stephen Hellmann and many others (Gundle, 2000; Hellman, 1988; Parker, 1994). Gramsci's impact can also be seen in the grouping of works around Italian cinema and the country's cultural industries, as with the body of research produced by David Forgacs, who is also himself an expert on Gramsci (Forgacs, 1994).

Methodologically (but also culturally) it could be argued that British historians have had a strong tendency to write for a wider rather than a merely academic public. Books by

British historians have often sold very well in Italy, in part because of the way they have been written and structured, but also thanks to the advantages of being an outsider. In his introduction to Mack Smith's book, which was sent to all those who had a subscription to the PCI-linked magazine *Vie Nuove* in 1972, Davide Lajolo, wrote that the book 'racconta la storia senza paludarsi, senza mettersi in cattedra', and 'È un libro che può essere letto con profitto da tutti i componenti della famiglia' (Lajolo in Mack Smith, 1969 n.p.) But if the public lapped up books like Denis Mack Smith's publications on the Risorgimento and his *History of Italy*, as well as Paul Ginsborg's *A History of Contemporary Italy* or Lucy Riall's work on Garibaldi, Italian academics and reviewers were not always so positive. The hostility to many successful British studies of Italy was part of the way in which a supposed 'British school' was created – as an enemy to be contrasted – an Other.

The eminent Italian historian Rosario Romeo took a particular dislike to Mack Smith's work. In the third volume of his monumental work *Cavour e il suo tempo* (1984) he accused Mack Smith in his footnotes of peddling 'gossip' and of a tendency towards 'incoherence' and 'contradiction'. Famously, he also wrote (in another footnote) that 'Every reference to things that really happened in his [Mack Smith's] work is purely casual.' (1985, 715). Christopher Duggan, whose work was also often written with a wide and more general public in mind, also suffered at the hands of Italian historians. Ernesto Galli Della Loggia called his *The Force of Destiny* a 'caricaturale' version of Italian history in the *Corriere della Sera* (Galli della Loggia, 2011) and Roberto Vivarelli dedicated an extraordinary 30 pages to a negative assessment of that same book in the *Rivista Storica Italiana* (Vivarelli, 2009).

British historians have rarely found work within Italian universities, which remain institutionally closed to the outside world, and this underlined their role as outsiders in most cases. There is, therefore, no British school, but we can discern some trends in the way that British historians have chosen *what* to study about Italy, but also *why* and *when*, and

the ways in which Italians have reacted and attempted to engage with these works, or rejected them.

In general, political factions in Italy amongst academics have often struggled to position the works of foreigners within their clearly defined frameworks. Hence, for example, George Mosse was largely praised by left-wing historians until he himself was singled out for positive comment by Renzo De Felice. De Felice's preface to the translation of *La nazionalizzazione delle masse* (a translation carried out by De Felice's wife, Livia) in 1975, was, on its own, enough to put many left-wing historians off Mosse altogether. De Felice himself described that preface as a kind of 'curse' for Mosse in Italy (Aramini, 2010). Many of those on the left began to reject Mosse's work, within the logic of 'my enemy's friend must also be my enemy'. More generally, in this sense, there is a big gap in our understanding thanks to the rarity of audience and reception studies for subjects like history and cultural studies in the Italian context.

As historians we rarely study ourselves, nor do we try and understand why we work on what we do, how we write, for whom we write and why we react to the work of colleagues in certain ways. Such studies, however, would be illuminating, not just about history, but about the links between institutions, politics, careers and personal rivalries and jealousies, and the often suffocating and conservative atmosphere of the academic world.

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<sup>1</sup> These short discussion papers were initially given at the ASMI conference in London in November 2016. They have been written up, edited and brought together for this special issue of *Modern Italy*. The notes refer to the individual sections of the Round Table, while the bibliography has been combined. The authors would like to dedicate this discussion to the memory of Christopher Duggan.

<sup>2</sup> On this phase of the British historiography of the nineteenth-century Italy, see Matassa (2011).

<sup>3</sup> For Candeloro's assessment of Mack Smith (1954) see Candeloro (1964: 566).

<sup>4</sup> Woolf (1973). The book's English version is Woolf (1979).

<sup>5</sup> 'Why did national unification happen at all?' Riall (1994: 10).

<sup>6</sup> When, for example, Paul Ginsborg issued a new Italian language edition of his marvellous study of the Venetian revolution of 1848–9, he made no mention at all of thirty years of extensive research on Austrian rule of Venetia, which puts the Habsburgs in a vastly more positive light, focusing his scant historiographical amendments almost entirely on the work of Alberto Banti. One reason for this is probably because much of the recent research is in German. Ginsborg (1978; new edition, 2007); published in English (1979). Banti (2000).

<sup>7</sup> This field of enquiry was inaugurated by Woolf (1968) and has recently developed with Bessel (1996) and MacGregor Knox (2007).

<sup>8</sup> See Christopher Duggan's PhD thesis and the book based on it (2008).

<sup>9</sup> See for example Willson (2002) written after De Grazia (1992).

<sup>10</sup> Henrik Bering, 'Dear Duce. Benito Mussolini's Devoted Subjects Made Pilgrimages to His Birthplace and Sent Him 1500 Letters a Day', *Wall Street Journal*, 16 August 2013; Christopher Hirst, 'The Banality of Evil, Spoken in Its Own Voice. Fascist Voices', *The Independent*, 6 December 2013; Ian Thomson, 'Roman Descent. Italy under Mussolini is Revealed through the Accounts of Ordinary People', *Financial Times*, 14 December 2012; Ruth Ben Ghiat, 'Fascist Voices: An Intimate History of Mussolini's Italy', *THES*, 10 January 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Editor's note: Christopher Duggan built on this tradition in Reading University in the 1990s and 2000s.