

Federico Chabod. *Italian Foreign Policy: The Statecraft of the Founders.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996. xlv + 593 pp. \$77.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-691-04451-4.



Reviewed by Christopher Storrs

Published on H-Italy (November, 1996)

In 1936 Federico Chabod, already a distinguished historian of state formation in Renaissance Italy, was invited to contribute the section covering the years 1870-1896 to a projected multi-authored History of Italian Foreign Policy from 1861 to 1914, based upon the Italian diplomatic archives. Chabod's work on the project was interrupted in the 1940s by his role in first the partisan struggle in his native Val d'Aosta and subsequently the debates about Aosta's role in the postwar Italian state. However, the first volume of his contribution to the project, entitled *Storia della Politica Estera Italiana dal 1870 al 1896: le Premesse*, was published in 1951 by Laterza. Chabod intended to publish four further volumes, on the details of diplomacy and foreign policy between 1870 and 1896, but these were never in fact published, primarily because of Chabod's early death in 1960. It is this first and only volume (prefaced by a biographical-bibliographical note on Chabod by Francesco Tuccari and an abridged translation of Walter Maturi's contribution to the posthumous appreciation of Chabod published in *Rivista Storica Italiana* in December 1960) that is now published in Princeton's Giovanni Agnelli Foundation

Series, whose objects include making available to a wider, non-Italian reading audience some of the leading works of Italian humanities scholars.

This is not therefore a new book. On the contrary, it is one with which many English-reading historians have been indirectly familiar for a generation through the mediation of works such as C. Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925* (1967) and C. J. Lowe and F. Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy, 1870-1940* (1975), whose references echo and explain the general acclaim with which Chabod's Italian volume was met in and after 1951. For this reason alone, the belated appearance of this book in English translation is welcome. What makes it so important? Above all, it is a study of the attitudes (*mentalites*) and to a lesser degree of the material conditions and people which and who influenced and conducted Italian foreign policy in the generation after 1870.

It is difficult to identify individual aspects in such a rich volume, but Chabod's discussion of the impact upon Italians and upon Italian policy of the idea of Rome after its capture in 1870 has rightly been singled out by most commentators.

Among the other strengths of the book is the extent to which Chabod ranges widely over the nineteenth century--making the book as useful for attitudes during the generation (and more) before 1870 as after. (Cavour and Mazzini bulk as large in the index as the men in charge of policy after 1870). The study is equally impressive for being based upon a wide range of sources, notably the Italian (and to a much lesser extent non-Italian) diplomatic archives, but also private family papers (of ministers and diplomats), parliamentary debates, and the press (extensive citations sometimes making for substantial footnotes). Chabod, whose book reveals his interest in the relationship between ideas and policy, has been criticised for omitting to consider social and economic forces. In fact, that is not entirely true (as Tuccari notes): an awareness on the part of Italy's leaders of the new state's economic and other material weaknesses is seen by Chabod as contributing to the pursuit of a less gloriously or dramatically "revolutionary" foreign policy by the new Italy after 1870.

Chabod is also worth reading for some of his broader approaches and insights, many of which remain pertinent. He will have no truck with those who urge the "primacy" of either foreign or domestic policy. For him, as for Croce, the two are simply different facets of the one ethic of the governing elite. Chabod is also critical of some of the newer approaches to history of his own day, including "geopolitics" and the notion that any state has fixed, immutable interests. On occasion, too, Chabod fruitfully brings his earlier work on Machiavelli to bear on the subject. Finally, although there are no overt references, Chabod's book is an interesting text for those wishing to probe the mind of a leading intellectual who lived through the transition from Liberal to Fascist Italy (and beyond).

As for this English-language edition, the translation is admirable. In some respects the editor has improved on Chabod's original, constructing a

useful bibliography (omitted in the original) from Chabod's references. Given the book's age, it might have been helpful (especially if the book is to be used for teaching) to learn more about just how far Chabod's conclusions have been overtaken by research since 1951. In addition, the title (which gives no indication that the book covers the period 1870-96) could have been more explicit. As it is, the title might indicate a book about modern Italian foreign policy (although students of foreign policy in general would certainly find the book worth reading). But these are minor points. This is a fine edition of an excellent book and augurs well for a series that will, if it continues in the same vein, be a boon to English-reading researchers and teachers of Italian history everywhere.

Copyright (c) 1996 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-italy>

Citation: Christopher Storrs. Review of Chabod, Federico. *Italian Foreign Policy: The Statecraft of the Founders*. H-Italy, H-Net Reviews. November, 1996.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=676>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.