



Valerie McGuire. *Italy's Sea: Empire and Nation in the Mediterranean, 1895-1945.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020. xvi + 295 pp. \$130.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-80034-800-4.

Reviewed by Joanna Bürger (University of Washington)

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Commissioned by Matteo Pretelli (University of Naples "L'Orientale")

Valerie McGuire's work *Italy's Sea: Empire and Nation in the Mediterranean*, which focuses on Italian rule over the Dodecanese islands in the Aegean Sea, constitutes an important contribution to the growing field of Mediterranean history. While scholarship on Italian colonialism has studied mainly the country's expansionism in Africa, McGuire shifts our attention to the Eastern Mediterranean. Spanning five decades (1895-1945), the book traces Italian engagement in the Aegean from the post-Risorgimento era to Italy's occupation of the islands (1912) and the period of fascist rule (1922-45).

The author argues that Italian governance over the Dodecanese and the imperial treatment of the local population differed substantially from Italy's subjugation of people in its African territories. With a background in literary studies, McGuire reads the Italian Mediterranean as an in-between space, at once an outpost of empire and a sphere of national re-enhancement, that influenced the discourse of citizenship and race in mainland Italy. Based on a variety of sources—colonial archives, oral testimonies, literature, photos, and film—the author suggests that Italian attitudes toward the Dodecanese oscillated between conceptualizing the archipelago as an “ancient

homeland” and imagining the islands as an exotic space of Levantine alterity. The theme of Italian ambivalence toward the Aegean runs through all the chapters.

The book proceeds chronologically with each chapter having the capacity to stand on its own by adducing different types of sources. Based on travel literature, the first chapter explores how Italian nationalist writers, who traversed the Aegean Sea in the period between the Italian unification and the Balkan wars, constructed the region as an exotic ancestral homeland, characterized by a shared Greco-Roman past and its proximity to the uncanny Levant. In the second chapter, McGuire analyzes how the colonial administration transformed Rhodes into a major tourist destination in the decades following Italian occupation. She argues that urban planning and reconstruction projects were designed to carve out the city's Venetian and Ottoman past, while undermining vestiges of the Byzantine period. The third chapter turns to Italian state building in the Dodecanese and the islanders' rendition as Mediterranean colonial subjects. While not perceiving them as full members of the Italian nation, the colonial administration's racial categorization, nonetheless, demarcated the Aegean subjects, based on their pre-

sumed “whiteness,” from colonized people in its African territories. Further, McGuire shows that the enactment of Italy’s race laws in 1936 generated an administrative shift from viewing Dodecanese Jews as potential allies to favoring the islands’ Greek Orthodox population and disparaging the Muslim and Jewish communities.[1] Based on oral testimonies, the book’s final chapter explores how locals interacted with the Italian administration in their everyday life. McGuire incorporates gender as framework of analysis in her study of quotidian forms of resistance to colonial rule.

While the book’s theoretical density renders it difficult to access for undergraduate students, it provides a fascinating journey to the Italian Dodecanese for graduate students and scholars with a background in Italian studies and an interest in Mediterranean history. McGuire’s ambitious and comprehensive work contributes essentially to understanding the intersection of colonial expansion, citizenship, and the construction of race in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Note

[1]. For additional information on the Jewish community of Rhodes see the author’s article: Valerie McGuire, “The Jewish Communities of Rhodes and Kos: A Transnational Community between Ottoman Collapse and the Italian Empire,” *Αρχαιοτάξιο/Archeiotaxio (Journal of Contemporary Social History Archives)* 19 (2017): 141-59.

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