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The cover features the work entitled "Aurora Pinto Bandeira", by the Brazilian plastic artist Assis Costa with the wine produced in the area. The first houses in Pinto Bandeira, in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, were built by Italian emigrants in 1876 and the church of Our Lady of Pompeii was built in 1922. Courtesy of the author.

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IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MIGRANTS

The Italian grapes that conquered the world

 **Bruno Mondadori**

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In my role as Director of one of the three organizations participating in this project, I have the great pleasure of introducing this excellent book, which collates the results of research bearing the title: “In the footsteps of migrants – the Italian grapes that conquered the world”.

It is a body of research strongly supported by the Department of Documentary, Linguistic-Philological and Geographic Sciences, which I represent. Not only does the project deserve a commendation, it also involves many aspects of the scientific activities pertaining to our very academic structure. In the project, in fact, and in the articles contained in the book – an important period of contemporary history stands out, the age of the Italian migration straddling the 19th and 20th centuries, studied by some professors of our Department with remarkable results. A fundamental contribution has also been made by “Fondazione Migrantes”.

There is a very important aspect of the research pertaining to geography too, especially an across-the-board geography which nowadays increasingly highlights the aspects of the production of foodstuffs and their impact on the socio-cultural structure of our countries. In this regard, I am honoured to mention the participation “Società Geografica Italiana Onlus”, an organization which is a substantial point of reference for every researcher in this field. I shall not neglect to mention the relevance that the framework of the project in Expo 2015 is going to provide, as such research is perfectly coherent with the goals of this extraordinary event.

As a scholar in Linguistics, however, I am pleased to underline that wine terminology is of great linguistic-cultural importance, the subject of various studies research projects and to which this work is the perfect companion – although not explicitly – and there will certainly be the time and place to develop this minor, although not completely irrelevant, aspect.

Special thanks are due to the editors, first of all the project coordinator, our colleague Flavia Cristaldi, who has also taken care of the collaboration with “Società Geografica Italiana Onlus”. We are also very grateful to Dr. Delfina Licata and her fruitful interaction with the “Fondazione Migrantes”. I shall not make individual mention the authors of the contributions, which make the book so meaningful, worth reading just for its wealth of iconography – any choice among so many relevant articles would be unfair on my part. Heartfelt thanks to everybody who chose to take part in truly interdisciplinary research, delivering its first concrete result – this important book. *Ad altiora*, as ever!



up such a good reputation that no vineyard would have existed without Italians to coordinate activities. Then, suddenly, everything changed.

Despite subsequent political measures which tended to change the state of affairs, the most determined Italians resisted the disorders of 1952, when the nationalist movement, which developed in the 1930s, started to rise up. The nationalists became stronger on July 31 1954 when the French authorities promised to grant autonomy to the country, until July 1957, when Tunisia gained independence from France. Although it was a very difficult period, with strikes and various forms of guerrilla activity, the Italians survived, continuing to cultivate their vineyards. However, the situation did not improve. On May 12 1964, the radio announced that Habib Bourguiba, President of Tunisia, had decided to expropriate all the assets and properties owned by foreigners in Tunisia and to nationalize companies, including agricultural ones. It was pointless running to their businesses in an attempt to save what they could, as the gates were closed and controlled by the local authorities, who prevented access. So many years of hard work under the Tunisian sun vanished in one day. While the troubles of 1957 had been

overcome and put behind them, just then it was impossible to fight against the strength of the local authorities, and the only feasible solution was to return to Italy. Upon arriving home, several of the Italians returning from Tunisia described to “La Domenica del Corriere”, how they felt when they had to abandon that land so abruptly, leaving behind the vineyards along with their belongings: “*They took everything, the house, the vineyard*”, said Concetta Bosco. “*It’s hard to give up, it’s hard, when I was born in that house and my children as well, when my father and my grandfather before him had worked on those vineyards*”, is the testimony of Rosario Mancuso (Blandi, 2012, p. 47).

Wine production in Tunisia has continued and today some Tunisian wineries run their businesses in the old Italian buildings, which still maintain their original features. Nowadays there is just one Sicilian company which is authorized to manage a Tunisian domain in Khanguet, near Grombalia and where, on the 200 acre estate, Carignano is cultivated among other varieties.

The Italians of Tunisia have started a new life elsewhere, but they are still deeply bound to that land, as they left behind on Tunisian soil a life built through hard work and sacrifice.

THE DESERT MIRACLE: TALES OF MEN AND VINES IN LIBYA

Nadia Fusco, Sandra Leonardi

The history of Italian agricultural colonization in Libya is a story that begins with political events, which cannot be ignored if we are to understand the mechanisms put in place to achieve the objectives that Italy set itself on the “Fourth Shore”. The population plans, the wars, the local guerrillas are just the beginning of the history of whole farming families who moved to Libya to work the land, the land that was defined fertile and cultivable at the beginning of the Italian adventure (Natili, 2014).

The Italian presence in Libya, from political action to land transformation

“There in Mediterranean Africa, Rome’s name lives in the tradition, lives in the monuments. Tripolitania was already

part of the Roman Empire in Africa, and the wells that mark those lands that were flourishing gardens, the path of the first civilization, are all Roman, and the ruins of the villas, theatres and temples of the world’s rulers, show our fathers’ richness, the splendour of the vegetation and the richness of Tripolitania’ [...] we try to make these populations rich, to our advantage”.

These words, published in “Il Messaggero” on April 18th 1907, are one example of a multitude of voices which, in those years, spoke out in Italy in favour of the colonization of Libyan land, then under Ottoman rule (Vilayet of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica). The few opponents, although eminent people (Gaetano Salvemini, Arcangelo Ghisleri, Luigi Einaudi), were not

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listened to at all; the feeble echo of their invitations to give up such an idea was definitively silenced by the roar of the cannons that bombed Tripoli in October 1911 and declared the beginning of the war between Italy and Turkey.

After about a year, the Treaty of Lausanne ratified Italian sovereignty over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, even though Turkey retained its caliphate authority. The duplicity of this solution was resolved at the end of the First World War, with the second Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which officially ratified the Italian possession of Libyan territories.

Nevertheless, for a long time, what was determined by peace agreements did not correspond to actual reality in the territory itself: indeed, the Italian presence was only truly in force in the main towns along the narrow coastal strip; the hinterland, on the other hand, continued for a long time to be controlled by local resistance groups. The so-called Italian “re-conquest” campaign, declared as Fascism was thriving, and conducted with violent and aggressive methods, ended after the capture and the hanging of Omar al-Mukhtār (September 9th, 1931). He was the charismatic seventy-three-year leader of the Libyan resistance. In January 1932, General Badoglio was able to announce the final pacification of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.

Its military control of the territory allowed Italy to give a new impetus to the policies aimed at encouraging the development of its colony, strictly intended to take the form of agricultural development. Since the beginnings of the conquest, any other economic possibilities had been considered merely secondary and quite negligible. In Tripolitania, early attempts at agricultural development had already begun in the years before the First World War. The Italian Land Office was established in Tripoli, and was

appointed to identify private and state-owned land: only 3600 hectares were found to be in public ownership and most of it was not appropriate for agricultural use, being desert or steppe. The colonization project was carried out regardless, but was limited in scope; then the beginning of the war put an end to these albeit small-scale activities.

Only between 1922 and 1923 was it again possible to start to prepare a new colonization program: new rules were drawn up for land distribution and a banking organization was set up, the Cassa di Risparmio, aimed at providing credit for agricultural purposes. Giuseppe Volpi, governor of Tripolitania from 1921 to 1925, was the man behind these initiatives. To give new to agricultural development he issued decrees to increase the amount of public land. Freely and “broadly” interpreting Islamic law, according to which all lands belong to God and to the authority that represents him on Earth, a sort of presumption of public property of uncultivated land was introduced. Thus any land left uncultivated was considered state-owned; only property with title deeds clearly proving private ownership was not acquired. By applying these principles, Volpi increased the amount of public land, which had the advantage of being near the coast and the towns, from 3,600 hectares to 55,000.

This considerable increase particularly favoured the governor’s project, whose aim was to boost requests for land grants: it did not allow for the investment of state capital, therefore the only incentive attracting private investors was the guarantee of having vast areas of land in concession.

It was a strategy that produced positive results: a lot of private investors applied for the concession of land, also attracted by the favourable credit conditions.

The presence of Italian settlers did not increase proportionally, however, because the private investors had no incentive to employ them, given that local labourers worked for less. During Emilio De Bono’s governorship (1925-28), in order to encourage more rural families to relocate, new clauses were introduced to the laws on land concessions: the State undertook to offer more substantial help to investors, who, in return, were obliged to buy stakes in family farms in proportion to the amount of land they had been granted. These reforms favoured new applications for land concessions, but they did not change the structure of landownership. A real change arrived some years later, during the governorship of Italo Balbo (1934-1940), characterized by a general overhaul of the institutional set-up of the settlement.

Balbo had clearly expressed his project: to populate Libya with large numbers of Italians, to make Libya the fourth shore, not just a glib rhetorical expression, but to populate it quickly. According to data from the 1937 census, private farms (excluding state-owned entities and land reclamation

agencies) numbered 800, extending over about 124,000 hectares, and continued to be large estates in the truest sense, in more than 90% of cases, with an average size of about 440 hectares. Also in 1937, the Italian agricultural population amounted to 2,711 families, representing 12,488 members.

Balbo’s project started with the enactment of Decree No. 701 of 1938 aimed at the gradual settlement of 500,000 people in Libya between 1938 and 1950.

On October 28th 1938 the first group of settlers, the so called “Esercito dei ventimila”, left Italy to arrive at their new destinations.

Here, thanks to government funding and the actual work of reclamation agencies (National Agency for the Colonization of Libya and Fascist Institute of Social Security, which operated only in Tripolitania) major intervention had already been accomplished in the area, transforming it to accommodate the settlers (Natili, 2014).

According to Balbo’s plan, in 1939 too the same number of settlers would leave for Libya. However, although reference continued to be made to

1. Mellaha Farm in 1923: tilling the steppe.

Source: “L’Italia coloniale” n. 8, 1926, p. 155.

L’ITALIA COLONIALE

I MIRACOLI DELLO “SCATOLONE DI SABBIA”..



FATTORIA DI MELLAHA, NEL 1923: DISSODAMENTO DELLA STEPPA. IL CAV. ABRIAL GUIDA LA PRIMA ARATRICE MECCANICA.

these as the “Second transmigration of twenty thousand to Libya”, the number of settlers who set off that year was just over 10,000.

The origins of viticulture

At the time of the Italian occupation, viticulture in Libya was not prominent; however, there were differences between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. In a few small oases in the western coastal region, besides the palms, vines were grown for domestic consumption. However, they were an almost spontaneous crop, being unpruned or untended. On the remainder of the land, viticulture was not at all widespread and remained so for a long time. The first signs of development in this area came only after the start of the military control of the territory.

At the end of 1932 the Agency for the colonization of Libya began its activities for the demographic colonization of Jebel in central Cyrenaica. It was decided to plant each farm with a vineyard, covering approximately two acres, in addition to starting the agricultural land transformation work in the first four districts under construction (Luigi Razza, Beda Littoria, Luigi di Savoia and Giovanni Bertà). As regards the grape varieties, Grenache and Carignano grapes were more widespread in French North Africa because these types gave excellent results in the experimental fields planted in Tripolitania. However, Nerello, Bombino and other southern Italian varieties were also cultivated. Cataratto, Inzolia and Clairette were the predominant white wine grapes, although less common than red varieties.

In the farm year 1937-1938, the area dedicated to vineyards in Cyrenaica covered 840 hectares, of which about 700 hectares were occupied by wine grapes and the remaining 140 hectares were for table grapes.



2.
Agriculture in Cyrenaica.
Source:
“L’Italia coloniale” n. 8,
1926, p.155.

The area with the greatest coverage of vineyards was the Benghazi plain.

The preference for this type of crop was linked in this region, more so than elsewhere, to the development of small-scale colonization; what’s more, the first agricultural development project took place here, and the largest town was nearby. All of these elements offered settlers the chance to overcome the difficulties related to the morphological characteristics of the region, which was unable to produce satisfactory results except when crops were flooded or irrigated.

In Tripolitania, the area planted with vines was less extensive: in 1939, it covered a total of 637 hectares, of which 94 (15%) in the province of Tripoli, while the remaining 543 hectares (85%) were in the province of Misrata.

In the area around Misrata, climatic conditions (around 150-200mm of rainfall per year) were not the most favourable for the development of agriculture and vines in particular. In fact, it was only the discovery of a rich artesian aquifer, at a depth of 350-400 metres, which made it possible to start intensive farming on a large scale in this area, with vines one of the main crops. In the Tripoli province, climatic conditions are generally better, which, together with the presence of ground water at a limited depth (from 12 to 30 metres), made it possible to embark upon an intensive agricultural program. Throughout Tripolitania the vines cultivated were the usual varieties already found in North Africa, namely Carignan and Alicante among black grapes and Clairette among white varieties.

The miracle in the sand

In Tripolitania, in 1927, 90,000 hectares of land on which olives, almonds and vineyards were planted, were in the process of improvement. We have accurate information about certain farming projects thanks to articles published in the press of the regime. ‘L’Italia coloniale’, for example, gives details of the figures and the farms granted to Italians in Libya, and plenty of references and images were also published in ‘L’agricoltura coloniale’.

Articles in praise of the hard agricultural graft carried out in Libya featured in journals dedicated to lighter topics, such as ‘Le vie d’Italia’, the Touring Club Italiano’s magazine, which details the results achieved in 1929 in relation to an experiment carried out in agricultural Tripolitania thanks to the tenacity of the Italian dealers and local labourers: “Not to mention the vineyard, which in just twelve months, gave the contractor the joy of picking the first cluster in 1928” (*Le vie d’Italia*, 1929, p. 676).

This description is of the De Micheli farm in Azizia, in the North West of the country, in the middle of the central Gefara, where 21,000 vines were planted in 1930-31. There the continental climate, characterized by high temperature changes, scarce rainfall and low humidity, created such ideal conditions that the whole area was taken into account by the Colonial Authority as an area of economic advancement in drawing up its “colonization plans”. In several places vineyards were planted. In Sidi Mesri, on the Durano’s farm a vineyard with 30,000 vines came into production in 4 – 5 years. In Zenata, in an area of about 218 hectares, the brothers Sergio, Matteo and Renato Ingravalle, described as modest and soft-spoken men, arrived in Libya with their families. They devoted themselves with love



3.
Six-year-old vineyard
in Zenata, grafted with
Zibibbo onto American vines.
Source:
“L’Italia coloniale”,
n. 9, 1927, p. 140.

4. The lawyer Giacomo Marchino, commissary of the Chamber of Commerce in Tripoli.

Source: "L'Italia coloniale", n. 8, 1926, p. 155.



and dedication to the improvement of their farm, planting 50,000 vines, of which 35,000 went into production at the end of the 1920s. Also here on a lot of 8 hectares, taken over in 1918, the contractor planted some 5000 vines out of a total of 7000 fruit trees planted in the area. At Bir Sbapil, on a lot of 263 hectares, taken over in 1923, the Ostuni farm had 3000 vines which gave excellent results in just three years. There were lands cultivated for vineyards in Mellaha, a few kilometres from Tripoli, a sandy steppe area from which, in the opinion of many, it was impossible to expect positive results from cultivation in terms of wine-growing. After tilling the soil in the spring of 1923, the first cuttings were planted and the first grapes appeared after three years. The dealer Luciano Abrial, a "handsome, tough pioneer, shrewd and tenacious" (*L'Italia Coloniale*, 1926, p. 155), planted a vineyard with 100,000 vines on a lot of 501 hectares, half of the surface area of the farm, and he saw the results of his work not long after.

The methods of cultivation in Tripolitania, given the climatic conditions and soil properties, could not reproduce those of the Motherland, for the grapes were grown in bushes in the sand. Grapes were used both for domestic consumption and for export: if the grapes ripened from July 10th to August 10th, they were entered in the



register of choice fruit and vegetables for export.

Vito Zanon, a Giuseppino missionary, wrote that in Cyrenaica the soil was very suitable for grape growing. With the exception of the narrow strip running along the shoreline, everywhere the soil was clayey, chalky, ferruginous, rich in potassium and phosphorus, all edaphic characteristics that allowed European vines to take root, unlike American vines.

The main areas of cultivation were near Berka and Benghazi, where the soil was very red, and Sidi Bu-Facra, Gariunes (where wine grapes were grown) Karkura and Zuetina.

The Benghazi area was the best for vines due to its climate.

According to reports, temperatures averaged around 20° C, with 450 mm of rain per year. Sometimes the harvest came earlier, in June and July, in particular for the most common grape varieties. The first buds appeared in March, at 13° C; in April the first flowers blossomed, at 17° C. In spite of the changes that could occur between April and May, crops did not suffer damage; indeed, according to the story of father Zanon and botanists at the time, these changes were useful for growing vines.

In Libya, one of the atmospheric enemies of the vineyard was the wind, so the vineyard was planted with local systems: in 'low stumps' with branches

5. Vineyard after three years of work in 1923.

Source: "L'Italia coloniale" n. 8, 1926, p. 155.

left free on the ground; raising the branches meant exposing them to the Ghibli desert wind, which would have burned them. Pergolas were few and far between, and had to be leaning against the walls of the houses or secured with iron wire, tied so tight that they could not move, otherwise the wind would have torn leaves off, threatening the ripening of the grapes. Water was very important for a good harvest and so the Italians built new irrigation systems taking water from the wadis. The Giuseppini monks knew this very well because they had their mission in Fuehat (Cyrenaica) where the grapevine prospered and gave good results especially as it was well-watered from the 'wadi'.

The conditions seemed to be so favourable that the National Association for Italian Missionaries, thanks to the Giuseppini monks, planted a vineyard which comprised 30,000 vines as early as 1915.

Father Zanon wrote that in the same years Italian vines arrived from Saonara province of Padua to check which would be best suited to the local terrain and so produce a better product. "Thirty-nine varieties of table grapes, and about thirty wine grape cuttings, after a year in the vivarium, have for the most part taken root, except for some which will be immediately replaced. In a few years, it will be possible to see from their development how well they adapt to climate, without being treated with special care, except for the water

needed for them to take root. The best ones can later be grafted onto local vines, and used either for rooted cuttings or for further grafts" (Zanon, 1926, p. 282). In Benghazi the spreading vine found no obstacles and was also used for social purposes. The director of the local penal colony, Cavaliere Francesco Stagno, decided to plant a vineyard on the prison grounds to be cultivated by the prison labourers.

Work in the fields was in itself very hard and in Libya fatigue increased due to the characteristics of the soil and climate, but that did not quash the determination of the Italians, who were astonished at the products that were able to grow. In 1928, reflecting the work done in the colony, on the occasion of the Natale di Roma festival (commemorating the city's foundation), an exhibition was held in Benghazi to show what had been achieved and, among all the agricultural products showcased, grapes and wine were highlighted.

Italians strongly preserved the eating habits and customs of their native land, not only with regard to vine-growing but also for the use made of it, and literature records these habits, which were retained even at different latitudes from those of their origins.

A funny, charming story about that is told by Victor Majar, born in Libya, who in his novel "Hurry Sundown", describes a real-life episode which his father witnessed.

He describes the very peculiar



6. Prisoners at the penal colony of Benghazi, shown working in the vineyard.

Source: "L'Italia coloniale", n. 8, 1926, p. 155.

habit of a truck driver originally from Trieste, Vinicio, who “driving trucks through sandy plateaus and deserts”, especially along the 1822 km of Libyan coast (p. 31), took special steps to try to alleviate the hardships of the trip and the high temperatures: he placed a demijohn above the cab and “with a rubber tube that reached the lips of the driver” he used to cool off. “Its content, red Refosco wine, was focolar furlan, the “hearth of Friuli”, was the only legacy of his mountain origins, the only remedy against the focolar “frican, the heat of Africa. Positioned on the roof and exposed to the wind, the demijohn

did not diminish the load capacity of the truck and kept the wine cool at all times. The flap of the window then served as a faucet: if closed, it jammed the rubber tube, if open, it allowed the driver to suck the native nectar” (Majar, 2003, p. 31).

The inventiveness of our countrymen overcame all obstacles in their attempts to maintain links with their native country. Despite the cultural and environmental challenges, which in some cases became prohibitive, Italian immigrants proved to be tenacious winegrowers even where it seemed impossible.



7. Examples of fruits and wine on display at the exhibition in Benghazi in 1928.

Source: “L’Agricoltura coloniale”, n. 6, 1916, p. 140.



BENGASI: ARATURA MECCANICA.

BERKA (BENGASI): VIGNA E OLIVETO.

8.

Vineyard in Benghazi.

Source: “L’Italia Coloniale”, n. 8, 1926, p. 156.

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Although this paper is the result of a joint effort between the authors, Nadia Fusco oversaw the paragraphs entitled “The Italian presence in Libya: from political action to transformation” and “The Origins of Viticulture”. Sandra Leonardi oversaw the paragraph entitled: “The miracle in the sand”.