

# Abstracts

Gil Emprin

*The consequences of the armistice of 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1943 in the French Alps*

The collapse of the Italian state and army on 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1943 brought the war back to the Alps. The new German occupying force in the French Alps put pressure on industrial firms and their young workers, expecting them to work for the German war economy. Political repression, which had been quite mild during the preceding Italian occupation of the region, now became very severe. The “Maquis” (resistance fighters) were attacked in Haute-Savoie and South Isère, while a symbolic demonstration of resistance held on 11<sup>th</sup> November in Grenoble was obstructed, leading 400 people to be taken to concentration camps in Germany. The resistance was in a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, it was more and more popular, but on the other hand, it was disrupted by the German repression and was constantly searching for weapons. Military action by the resistance started in November 1943, not in the mountains, but in the town of Grenoble, where urban guerillas attacked German officers, arms depots, factories and railways. A few Italian soldiers joined the French resistance. For the Jewish refugees who had found a place to hide in the Alps under Italian protection, the situation became dramatic: the German SS caught 750 people, despite the efforts of Jewish and Catholic organisations.

Alberto Cavaglion

*Jews under Italian occupation: the case of southern France and the Cuno region (1940–1943)*

The article discusses Davide Rodogno’s recent work, *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo: le politiche di occupazione dell’Italia fascista in Europa 1940–1945* (Torino 2003), mainly taking account of the part which refers specifically to racial policy in the Italian-occupied zone of the maritime Alps. Reviewing the latest studies on this issue, the author suggests that there is a potential lack of correspondence between the severe conclusions drawn in those works and the oral history documentation accumulated over the last 20 years. Without falling into the anthropological simplification which, for example, characterized Jonathan Steinberg’s book, *All or nothing: the Axis and the Holocaust* (London 1990), the article questions the nature of the Alps as a possible oasis or place of refuge. It also analyzes the problems with such an interpretation, framing it within the wider context of the events of summer 1943, as Italy began to move away from the harsh, oppressive policies of Nazism and the collaborationist government of Vichy. An appendix contains an unpublished document from the Administrative Departmental Archive of Nice.

Paolo Momigliano Levi

*September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1943 in the Aosta valley: fragments of a system in crisis*

Is there anything specific in how the Valle d'Aosta experienced the common events of the 8<sup>th</sup> September armistice and the resultant choosing of sides? Indeed, there was: already prior to the fall of Fascism, the political opposition grouped around the movement *La Jeune Vallée d'Aoste* had, before preparing itself for the partisan struggle, tried to pose the question of regional autonomy to the English representatives present in neighbouring Switzerland. Autonomy would have made of this border region a neutral zone in a strategic position between the rest of Italy, Savoy, and the Swiss Confederation. At the same time, as one of his letters from the start of August testifies, Émile Chanoux, leader of this regionalist-federalist current and future head of the Aostan resistance movement, sought out contacts in Rome among those circles operating clandestinely to establish links with the British and Americans. With the armistice, thousands of soldiers garrisoned in the town of Aosta and other parts of the valley, along with groups of troops at the Alpine Military School who had been left without precise instructions, had to decide within the space of a few days whether to disperse in civilian clothes in order to try and return home or reach Swiss territory, or to continue fighting in the growing partisan movement. This choice involved all those young men of military age in the region who refused to present themselves to the press-gangs of the Italian Social Republic. Many preferred to avoid the risk of being deported to Germany, constituting – valley by valley – the embryonic nucleus of the partisans. Nonetheless, the more than 5,000 workers and machine-operators at the high altitude Cogne mine found themselves in an even more uncertain situation, as they were at risk of a forced transfer to Germany. The two strongest components in contemporary Valdostan society – the workers and the peasants – found points of contact and common motives in the clandestine struggle, together with those members of the military and politicians who would join the resistance movement.

Christian Luchessa

*Swiss asylum policy after 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1943. Towards a dialogue between history and memory*

After the proclamation of the Italian ceasefire, Switzerland was confronted with a new refugee emergency. The first part of this contribution outlines the controversial measures put into place by the Swiss authorities in order to stem the sudden flood of thousands of military and civilian refugees fleeing the gradual Nazi occupation of northern and central Italy. In the second section of the article, the exposition of the historical facts makes way for a consideration of the heterogeneous field of historical memory. The author examines the ways in which the Swiss people have represented the behaviour of their own

country during the Second World War. The impetus for such an approach is provided by the numerous criticisms which Switzerland has attracted since the 1990s due to the allegedly opportunistic stance adopted by the ruling classes at the time.

Mauro Begozzi

*Vanished into nothing! The first massacre of Jews in Italy on the shores of Lake Maggiore*

In rendering homage to the 56 victims of the first massacre of Jews in Italy, which occurred at the hands of the Nazis between the 15<sup>th</sup> September and the 11<sup>th</sup> October, 1943 on the shores of Lake Maggiore, the article retraces the long, laborious, swinging fortunes (both legal and historical) concerning an episode long – and not incorrectly – referred to as ‘the forgotten massacre’. The author reflects also on the long periods of silence about, and sudden bursts of attention towards, those most painful events over the last sixty years in the attempt to reconstruct a memory of them that is, if not shared, at least shareable. It remains however, a suspended memory, not just because of the absence of documentation, but also due to the absence of the ‘bodies’ and of a physical space where those who ‘disappeared into nothing’ might be buried and given a place where a memorial stone could finally be erected.

Valter Merazzi

*The long and restless Como front: expatriates, cross-border traffic and dramatic incidents from the armistice to the liberation*

Italy's more than 100-kilometre long border with neutral Switzerland, which is for the most part free of natural obstacles and passable in several places, had a major role to play after the 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1943. The Como region (the Comasco) was traversed by Allied prisoners-of-war, anti-fascist partisans, and military conscripts, who fled in considerable numbers from the Germans and the marauding squads of Mussolini's Italian Social Republic into the canton of Ticino. At the fragile safety-net constituted by the border, the fate of the Jews was also played out, after the Swiss decision to take in only women with children. The fascist militia marked itself out by being responsible for the capture and deportation of Jews. For the Comascan resistance, one of their primary activities was giving assistance to fugitives, as well as watching over the frontier to enable contacts with the Allies in Switzerland. The contraband routes provided the setting for these actions, which neither the Germans nor the Fascists were able to curb. The occupiers secured control over strategic communication routes and Lake Como itself was the seat of residence for the Army High Command and leading figures in the regime.

Bianca Ceresara Declich

*The 8<sup>th</sup> September in the province of Sondrio. Aspects of civilian resistance: from contraband goods to contraband people*

Fascism's agrarian policies, centred on cereal agriculture, were not suitable for the mountainous province of Sondrio, which was best adapted to wine production. The consequent impoverishment of the local population was aggravated by the restrictions imposed by the war, against which peasants sought to react by getting round the set quotas and adding to stockpiles. Civilian resistance was manifested in the help given after the 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1943 to soldiers on the run, captives, Jews, and – in the following months – to the partisans. Another important phenomenon was the widespread draft-dodging by those year-groups called up, with many of them going to join the partisans in the mountains. Notwithstanding the economic poverty, the population also avoided forced labour in Germany. Finally, large numbers of women were involved in the various forms of civilian resistance, while both private individuals and religious institutions offered aid to Jews fleeing to Switzerland.

Andrea Di Michele

*The 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1943 in South Tyrol*

For South Tyrol, the 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1943 represents an important date, with special meanings that are different from those in other areas of Italy. That date signals the end of Italian sovereignty and the start of the Nazi occupation of the area known as the *Alpenvorland* Zone of Operations, which comprised the provinces of Bolzano/Bozen, Trento and Belluno. This context turned on its head the power relationship between the two main linguistic groups in the region, the German and the Italian. Even today, the memory and interpretation of this date is the subject of discussion and dispute between the various linguistic, political, and cultural components in the province of Bolzano/Bozen. The policy of the Supreme Commissar for the *Alpenvorland*, Franz Hofer, manifested itself in a series of measures which make clear that the German aim was eventually to annexe these former territories of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy to the Third Reich. As the months passed and Nazi Germany's military situation deteriorated, Hofer's undeclared aim, pursued with great shrewdness, was – once Germany's military defeat was confirmed – to re-join South Tyrol to Austria or to be the creator of a Tyrolean state comprising the territories both north and south of the Brenner pass.

Marta Verginella

*“Italy has capitulated”. The 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1943 in Slovenia*

The 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1943 remained engrained in the memory of the Slovenian population, beyond political allegiance, social class and generational belonging, as a caesura in the events of the war. The break was characterised by the end of the Italian occupation of the entire province of Ljubljana, which had continued up until the eve of the armistice. Some witnesses remember the returning home of close family and relatives from Italian internment camps, others the flight towards the north of Italy after the dissolution of the Italian army's special battalions, and still others recalled the help given to fleeing Italian soldiers or to Slovene women following their husbands or boyfriends in the Italian army on the way to Italy. A striking feature common to both published and unpublished testimonies about the 8<sup>th</sup> September is the memory of the rapidity of what happened.