



Hugh Shankland. *Out of Italy: The Story of Italians in North East England.* Leicester: Troubador Publishing, 2014. xi + 329 pp. \$23.96 (paper), ISBN 978-1-78306-376-5.



Reviewed by Stefano Luconi (University of Florence)

Published on H-Italy (May, 2015)

Commissioned by Matteo Pretelli (University of Warwick)

A Long Journey

As England has hardly been a major destination for Italian migrants, their presence in this country has elicited little scholarly interest. Remarkably, a standard reference work on the Italian experience abroad such as volume 2 of *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana* incorporates a chapter on Russia and subchapters on Peru and Venezuela, but not a section on England or the United Kingdom.[1] The leading exceptions are primarily Lucio Sponza's monographs regarding Italians' perception and plight in Britain in the nineteenth century and during World War II.[2] In the last few years, however, a significant rise in the number of Italian newcomers in the United Kingdom, which is now the third-ranking receiving society for the current outflow from Italy, has resulted in an increasing attention to this heretofore overlooked dimension of the Italian exodus.[3] Yet, London has been the favored setting for many of the most recent studies on Italians in Britain, to the detriment of research into other places and areas.[4]

Contrary to this trend, Hugh Shankland sails in almost uncharted waters and investigates the birth,

growth, and consolidation of the Italian community in North East England. Rich with illustrations and frequently overlong quotations from insufficiently identified primary sources that include numerous personal interviews by the author himself, *Out of Italy* offers an enticingly written but sketchily developed account which, as the subtitle itself reads, is more a story than a history of Italian immigrants in this region. Aiming at a comprehensiveness that can hardly be achieved in fewer than 350 pages, Shankland adopts a long-term perspective spanning from the Roman conquest of Britannia to the early twenty-first century. His approach not only raises unanswered theoretical problems, for example, as for the existence of some sort of Italianness in the Classic Age and the suitability of the inclusion of Swiss immigrants from Canton Ticino in the study. It also implies unconvincing selections. One wonders, for instance, why Shankland addresses the tabling of a bill to grant Italian citizens residing abroad external voting rights in 1993 but neglects the subsequent passing of such legislation and its implementation on the occasion of Italy's 2006 par-

liamentary elections.

Shankland reconstructs the diverse Italian waves that foreran the mass arrivals in North East England: the elite migration of priests and merchants in the Middle Ages as well as mercenaries and military engineers in the Renaissance; the subsequent tides of skilled craftsmen such as the stuccoists in the eighteenth century and the barometer and plaster statuette makers as well as glass, mosaic, and terrazzo workers in the nineteenth century; the political exiles during the Risorgimento. The focus of the book, however, is on the mass influx of mainly street entertainers and peddlers that characterized the last third of the nineteenth century. Most of these newcomers were from rural background in southern Italy. They were usually exploited by fellow-ethnic labor bosses (the *padroni*), lived at the margins of the adoptive society in overcrowded and filthy quarters, and fostered innuendoes about the Italians' alleged inferiority as well as supposed moral depravation.

Out of Italy also concentrates on the subsequent achievements of the members of the Italian community in the following decades. A few organ grinders and other street musicians seasonally peddled ice cream. The latter trade had prevailed among the immigrants by the turn of the twentieth century and turned out to be key to the Italians' accommodation within the host country. After World War I, several street vendors managed to open ice-cream parlors that often became springboards toward more robust and profitable entrepreneurial activities in this and other related catering businesses such as cafes, pizzerias, restaurants, and fish-and-chips shops. While the volume makes it clear that Italians faced no native competition especially in the production and sale of ice cream, it does not elaborate on how they had access to the capital to start their own businesses.

Two chapters are devoted, respectively, to the influence of Fascism and the impact of World War II on the Italian community. Benito Mussolini's regime won significant support among Italians, out of ethnic pride rather than ideological commitment, especially at the time of the conquest of Ethiopia in 1935-36, although the Duce's colonial war brought forth the hostility of the British government and fanned initial suspicions about the immigrants' loyalty to their host land. Such concerns paved the way to the outburst of blatant anti-Italian feelings and the enforcement of internments in the wake of Mussolini's entry into World War II against the United Kingdom. The military conflict, however, triggered the forced arrival of additional Italians as prisoners of war who were

deported to labor camps in North East England. A final chapter covers the resumption of mass immigration in the postwar years and offers a profile of today's community.

Overall, Shankland highlights Italians' resilience and valuable contribution to North East England, along with their capacity to retain their ethnic identity and sense of belonging over the years and the generations. He aptly places immigration to this region against the broader backdrop of the Italian exodus to Britain as a whole. Nonetheless, the context sometimes prevails over the case study. Quantitative data, for instance, refer largely to the former scenario and the attitude of the newcomers in North East England is now and then inferred from their fellow countrymen's behavior in the country at large.

The volume would have profited by engaging a closer dialogue with the existing scholarship on Italian immigration to the United Kingdom. The rather short but annotated lists of bibliographical references at the end of each chapter, whose titles are barely discussed within the text of the volume, omit several paramount studies in the field. For instance, among other works, the reader will search in vain for Claudia Baldoli's examination of the *fasci* in Britain, Isabella Insolubile's research on the Italian prisoners of war, and Michele Colucci's monograph about postwar migration.[5] More informative than analytical, Shankland's book also reveals little grasp of the categories and paradigms by which the history of Italian immigration is usually investigated. For example, while the author stresses the Italians' current preservation of ties to the ancestral land by casting light on features that would fittingly fall within the definition of transnationalism, this concept does not appear in the text.

Still, notwithstanding these drawbacks, Shankland has provided an insightful overview of the Italian presence in North East England. While *Out of Italy* is not the definitive work on this topic, the volume will prove to be a useful starting point for further academic research.

Notes

[1]. Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi, and Emilio Franzina, eds., *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana: Arrivi* (Rome: Donzelli, 2002).

[2]. Lucio Sponza, *Italian Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Realities and Images* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988), and *Divided Loyalties: Italians in Britain during the Second World War* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

[3]. Maddalena Tirabassi and Alvisè del Pra, *La meglio Italia: Le mobilità italiane nel XXI secolo* (Turin: Accademia University Press, 2014).

[4]. See, e.g., Francesca Romana Seganti, "Beyond Virtuality: The Case of the Latest Generation of Italians in London and Its Use of Cyberspace," *Altreitalie* 19, no. 35 (July-December 2007): 125-48; and Alessandro Forte, *La Londra degli italiani: Dai penny ice alla City: due secoli*

di emigrazione (Rome: Aliberti, 2012).

[5]. Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascists and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (Oxford: Berg, 2003); Isabella Insolubile, *Wops: I prigionieri italiani in Gran Bretagna (1941-1946)* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2012); and Michele Colucci, *Emigrazione e ricostruzione: Italiani in Gran Bretagna dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale* (Foligno: Editoriale Umbra, 2009).

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Citation: Stefano Luconi. Review of Shankland, Hugh, *Out of Italy: The Story of Italians in North East England*. H-Italy, H-Net Reviews. May, 2015.

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