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BOOK REVIEW

The Oxford handbook of Italian politics, edited by Erik Jones and Gianfranco Pasquino, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, 800 pp., £95.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-19-966974-5

5 *The Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics*, edited by Erik Jones and Gianfranco Pasquino, is a useful tool for scholars who are interested in Italian politics and society. Specialists can refresh their knowledge with a great trove of facts and some interpretations, while beginners will have the opportunity to be introduced to the subtleties and complications of the political life of 'one of Europe's most exciting and turbulent democracies'.

10 *The Handbook* is organised in 54 chapters that are arranged in nine parts. The table of contents differs from that of other similar publications. The reader will not find the usual division according to the main scientific subfields of political science (as, for instance, in the *Oxford Handbook of French Politics*), not to mention the different theoretical approaches, which are completely ignored (see, by contrast, the *Oxford Handbook of British Politics*). In fact, almost half of the contributions come from scholars who are not political scientists but historians and sociologists, and a narrative approach characterises almost all the chapters. The volume is introduced by a part dedicated to 'Core Concepts', keywords frequently recurring in the intellectual and political debate in Italy. Some refer to actors (Elites, Partitocracy), others to a historical period or a political practice (Risorgimento and Trasformismo), and the last one to the enduring gap between North and South (The Southern Question). In the editors' intent, knowledge of these concepts should familiarise readers with the Italian context. The second part is dedicated to the main political institutions.

15 After a chapter dealing with the constitution, other chapters briefly describe the development of the presidency of the Republic, the government and the prime minister, the parliament, the courts, the electoral systems, the party systems and the bureaucracy. Surprisingly, there is no chapter on electoral behaviour and public opinion. Part III is dedicated to political and ideological traditions and is linked with part IV, which discusses the main political periods of the Italian Republic, from the first post-fascist cabinets to Renzi's government. Part V shifts the focus from the general historical outlines to 10 political biographies, in Plutarch's style. The life trajectories of two 'leaders' are described in depth, in single chapters, where they cross each other in crucial phases of the Italian recent history. The Catholic religion and the Church have been fundamental elements of the Italian political landscape. Therefore, a whole part (VI) is understandably dedicated to the relationship between religion and politics. The following parts (VII and VIII) tackle issues that are less directly linked to the electoral process and that involve

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economic interests (part VII) and various aspects of Italian society (part VIII). While some of the chapters in these two parts are among the most interesting and well-written in this handbook, the grouping of the topics is confusing. Next to chapters dedicated to public policies, the reader finds others about interest groups or political institutions; chapters on some endemic plagues of the Italian social (and political) life, such as corruption or criminal organisations, are mingled with others about movements, immigration, women in politics, press and cinema. The last part (IX) tackles the external relations of Italy and is divided into three chapters according to the main areas of interest of Italian foreign policy (Atlantic Alliance, Europe and Mediterranean countries).

After reading such a great collection of contributions it is very difficult to formulate an overall evaluation. As a scholar interested in Italian politics, I am grateful to the editors for their attempt to address in detail so many aspects of it. Nevertheless, a general drawback negatively affects even those chapters and authors I found most convincing. It is fragmentation, ironically one of the drawbacks that also characterises the Italian political system. The chapters are too numerous and too short. On the one hand, given the large number of contributions, the same facts are often repeated from one chapter to another and coordination among contributions is not always satisfactory; on the other hand, the authors often only have the space to write short historical accounts. Even when the topics have triggered lively political and scientific debates or an abundant scholarly production, readers will not find summaries of the different positions in the literature or comparisons with other countries that could help them to better grasp the peculiarity of the Italian case. It is a pity in an editorial effort that is, nevertheless, highly commendable.

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