

Recensioni/*Essay Reviews*

Nencini P, *La minaccia stupefacente. Storia politica della droga in Italia*. Bologna: Il Mulino; 2017.

History of medicine in Italy has seldom paid attention to drugs and the norms framing addictive substances. In other countries, the issue has been touched upon by a large literature, interweaving history of medicine, colonial studies, and global history. This book goes in the direction of filling that gap, gathering together the evolution of laws, the political debates, and the medical-pharmaceutical thought that - in principle - should have been the starting point for any normative attempt. The book mostly covers the time from the Italian unification to the WWII. Seven chapters are devoted to this range, while only the last chapter focuses on the post-WWII decades. This partition makes sense, since it is in the last decades of the XIX century that addiction becomes an issue. As Paolo Nencini - retired professor of pharmacology - has already detailed in other works, the history of drugs use and abuse is very long, but only recently opium, coca, and their by-products started to attract social criticism. Medicine largely used these substances, for a wide variety of goals. Their effect were thoroughly studied in patients everywhere in Europe, and Italian doctors were not alien to therapeutic uses of addictive drugs. On the background of British literature, Nencini re-views Italian researches and clinical cases involving opium and coca. Just like their international colleagues, several Italian physicians were aware of the therapeutic potential of such substances. Paolo Mantegazza, the leading Italian physiologist in mid-1800's, sponsored the use of coca as a form of "doping" for working class. Workers (and the general public) were not waiting for medical advice, though, and "energy drinks" including coca as ingredients were quickly marketed: the famous Coca-cola was one, and in Italy the local tradition mixed Marsala sweet wine with cocaine. Medical uses were also rapidly adopted: local anesthesia could be induced by cocaine, and other the-

rapeutic uses were suggested in the last decades of the XIX and the beginning of XX century. The medical history of drugs is interwoven with the international management of drug trade. Nencini frames Italian drugs policy in the international context. It is well-known that opium has been central in the wars between Great Britain and China, and that the expansion of opium trade is strictly connected to British colonialism. Italy had clearly a minor role in this global scenario: the national market for opium and cocaine was only a fraction of the British or the French markets, so that Italian Government did not look at drugs as a public health issue. In fact, drugs were considered to be a problem of diplomacy: Italy was repeatedly shown before WWI to be one of the trading routes for controlled substances, acting as a link between Europe and Middle-East/North Africa, an anticipation of the role the nation entertained in post-WWII.

Two chapters of the book focus on alcoholic beverages, detailing how a tradition of social drinking with scarce significance became a problem to be addressed by medicine and politics. Structural changes in society lead to alcohol (and other substances) abuse in the early '900s, though it was primarily the "social" dimension of drinking - group of men, usually working class, gathering together in drinking dens such as "osterie" or "bettole" - that was the focus of restrictive laws passed during the Fascist regime. Alcohol was also targeted because of the several problems caused by drunk soldiers during the WWI. The Great War is also considered to be a turning point in the circulation of drugs in Italy, with a new "epidemic" of abuse of cocaine and opiates. A series of new laws, providing for the restriction of such substances, were passed, unsuccessfully. If limited, the circulation and use of drugs was enough to support an illegal market, outpacing the capacity of the pharmacists to smuggle little amounts of substances from their legal sources.

The last chapter of the book is devoted to the post-WWII decades: the main focus is on the several laws and international agree-

ments - U.S. inspired - that created the strong prohibitionist frame, and as a consequence allowed for huge illegal profits by the Italian Mafia acting as a link between producers and consumers. Italy became central in fighting the “war on drugs”, though its internal market remained somewhat limited until the 1970s.

This inspiring book shows some minor shortcomings (for example, there’s little space for the treatment and management of addicts). However, it builds on a rich literature, made of published and archival sources. As such, it paves the way for further research on several aspects of addictive drugs circulation and use, while providing an interesting and stimulating perspective to understand the genesis and development of contemporary attitude towards drugs.

Mauro Capocci

Angelidi C, Calofonos GT, *Dreaming in Byzantium and Beyond*.  
Dorchester: Ashgate; 2014.

I sogni, le profezie, le visioni e tutte quelle forme di mediazione della realtà che danno luogo, in letteratura, a speciali elementi ‘narrativi’, - spesso funzionali allo svolgimento della trama alla quale imprimono una direzione nuova, e, al contempo, una nuova, significativa conclusione -, costituiscono uno strumento di eccezione per esplorare aspetti importanti di una cultura e di una civiltà. O meglio, per analizzare il riflesso ultimo che un sistema di valori e conoscenze acquisite, diffuse ed imposte, ha sulla sensibilità, collettiva ed individuale.

I sogni *are a convenient path to a culture’s imagination*. Così esordisce il prologo al volume *Dreaming in Byzantium and Beyond*, curato da Christine Angelidi e Geroge T. Calofonos, nel quale sono raccolti i contributi di un Colloquio dal titolo *Dreams and Visions in Late*