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Diaspora (1880–1917)* by Pietro Di Paola (review)

Michael Blum

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Book Review

Knights Errant of Anarchy: London and the Italian Anarchist Diaspora (1880–1917)

Pietro Di Paola

Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017; 244 pages. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-84935-298-7.

With *The Knights Errant*, Pietro Di Paola, a senior lecturer in history, makes a solid contribution to the history of anarchy. The book follows the most recent trend in anarchist historiography by using a transnational approach. This approach has emerged in response to criticism of national studies of anarchism, which fail to explain the successes and retreats of Italian anarchists and casts the movement as disorganized and ineffective.¹ Building on the works of David Berry, Constance Bantman, and Benedict Anderson, the transnational perspective shows continuity in the Italian anarchist movement, explains reactions to repression, and expands the movement's geographical scope providing a fuller understanding of the anarchist movement.² Di Paola's work adds to the historiography by "exploring practical and ideological aspects of the Italian anarchists—their everyday lives as well as their ideological thought and its development—in London." He argues these exiled anarchists made up "one of the most significant nodes of the transnational anarchist network" (5).

The Knights is composed of seven chronological chapters, each centered around a theme that showcases the importance of the transnational perspective. For example, Chapter 6 takes readers inside anarchist social clubs, revealing the cultural aspects of the movement, quotidian practices, and the interactions among anarchists from various European countries who fled to London because of less restrictive British government policies. The interaction in these social clubs demonstrates the influence of anarchists from other countries in shaping the Italian movement. The final chapter, on World War I, is particularly interesting because it offers a new interpretation.

Rather than a conflict based on nationalism, it permanently split London's Italian anarchist community into pro and antiwar factions. As a result, some anarchists returned to Italy whereas others took part in the Russian Revolution, dissipating the community in London. Taken as whole, the thematic approach demonstrates the Italian anarchists' mobility.

To support his transnational argument, Di Paola uses a variety of Italian, French, and English primary sources, including anarchist newspapers and memoirs. The reports from London's police spies are of particular interest. Besides providing a level of intrigue, they offer an understanding of the concerns that the Italian anarchists posed to authorities, such as plotting assassinations, and provide insight into the lively culture of anarchists' night clubs. The author also does a good job of engaging with secondary sources by using works focused on anarchism in other European countries to illuminate their influence on Italian anarchism.

Overall, the book is well done. It makes a solid contribution to the historiography, is logically organized, and makes excellent use of sources. It could be used in an undergraduate or graduate class on anarchism or transnational history. As the travels of Italian anarchists demonstrate, the anarchist movement transcended national boundaries. Studying it through this lens offers a more complete picture and a fresh understanding of history.

MICHAEL BLUM

Notes

- 1 Davide Turcato, "Italian Anarchism as a Transnational Movement, 1885–1915," *International Review of Social History* 52 (2005): 407–44.
- 2 David Berry and Constance Bantman, eds., *New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour, and Syndicalism* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010); Constance Bantman, *The French Anarchists in London, 1880–1914* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2013); Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London: Verso, 2005).