

Deborah Paci (2016) *L'Arcipelago della Pace: Le isole Åland e il Baltico (XIX-XXI sec.)*, Milano, Edizioni Unicopli. 231pp, ISBN: 9788840018966. €18.00.

Deborah Paci, an Italian historian focusing on island studies particularly in the Mediterranean and Baltic context, has written the first Italian-language book on the Åland Islands, an autonomous and demilitarised group of islands located in the Baltic Sea between Finland and Sweden. The book provides a general outline of the history of the islands from the nineteenth century to the present. Probably due to language issues, Paci relies mainly on secondary sources in English and Romance languages. The book is indeed an excellent overview of the history and status of the Åland Islands for Romance-language readers. It offers also an outline of the reports of Italian diplomats concerning the Åland Islands from the start of the First World War to the end of the Second World War. Due to the historical focus of the book, it concentrates on issues of war and security, but some attention is also paid to autonomy arrangements and minority rights.

Paci puts primacy on the special character of the islands, which were part of Sweden until 1809, after which Finland and the Åland Islands were subsumed under Russian control. The island's inhabitants are almost uniquely Swedish-speaking, but they are part of the bilingual but Finnish-dominant Finland. Another unique characteristic of the islands is provided by the fact that they were demilitarised in 1856 after the Crimean War, an arrangement which has since been enlarged and specified and continues to be in force. The book usefully illustrates the long path of the islands from being a site of war to their current demilitarised and autonomous status under the rule of Finland. In 1921, the League of Nations decided that the islands be neutralised, i.e. that during the war the islands might not be used for any purpose connected with military operations, either directly or indirectly. The demilitarised status was further confirmed in a bilateral treaty between the Soviet Union and Finland in 1940 and in the Paris Peace Treaty after the Second World War. In addition to her analysis of these treaties, Paci focuses on how Italian diplomats discussed the agreements and military pressures related to the Åland Islands. The Åland Islands were important to Italian diplomats because Italy was one of the signatories to the 1921 convention, which was signed also by other major European powers of the time – Great Britain, France, and Germany – as well as Baltic Sea littoral states, excluding the Soviet Union, which was not approved as a League of Nations member due to the country's chaotic situation.

Paci pays attention to the desires of the islanders to unite with Sweden and to their comprehensive autonomy under the rule of Finland. She aptly demonstrates how those favouring Åland joining Sweden tried to demonstrate their genetic and cultural similarity with Swedes, but have since focused on the islanders' specific characteristics. For example, under Finnish rule the Ålanders have promoted their specificity with their own flag, mention of Åland in their Finnish passports, and an Internet domain (.ax). The historical overview also explains the opposition of the Swedish-speaking minority in the Finnish mainland to the islands becoming part of Sweden, which they felt could have harmed their own position in Finland. With the League of Nations Convention in 1921, the islanders were ultimately granted a comprehensive autonomy, including their own legislative assembly and the right to domicile on the islands only after five years of residence and good command of Swedish.

The discussion related to the autonomy arrangement is not very critical, but does acknowledge critiques of issues such as the language arrangements and education in the islands. For example, the author notes that it may be a problem in the current multicultural and mobile world that teaching in publicly-funded schools on the Åland Islands is in Swedish. This means, *inter alia*, that the small Finnish-speaking minority cannot receive education in Finnish unless a separate private school is established.

L'Arcipelago della Pace is concise and offers an easy-to-read introduction to the topic, but would have been enhanced for scholarly readers by a more analytical and/or comparative approach. The book discusses the history of the Åland Islands at a fairly superficial level rather than pointing out any general conclusions that could be drawn from the case. It does not refer to any other similar demilitarisation arrangements, such as in the Norwegian Svalbard archipelago or on certain Greek islands.

The major strength of the book is that it may attract readers who are not able to acquaint themselves with the topic through the volumes published in English, French, Swedish, and Finnish. A specialist on the Åland Islands would find some minor factual and translation errors, but may also find it interesting to examine which issues and events Paci considers most significant to the islands' history. The period from the end of the Second World War to the present is only covered in 20 pages, which means that the current context is sparsely discussed. Given that the book offers little comparative analysis, it does come as a surprise that its brief conclusion argues, based on previous studies, that the Åland Islands are a model for a peaceful settlement of disputes and minority accommodation.

The book usefully includes a list of the most important international treaties concerning the Åland Islands in French, which is positive, given that the treaties are difficult to find compiled in the original language. It provides also a chronological list of the most significant dates in the islands' history, as well as an index of names and a separate index of places and topics. All in all, the book can be recommended to any reader interested in islands and history, especially in the history of a very special group of islands located in the middle of the Baltic Sea.

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