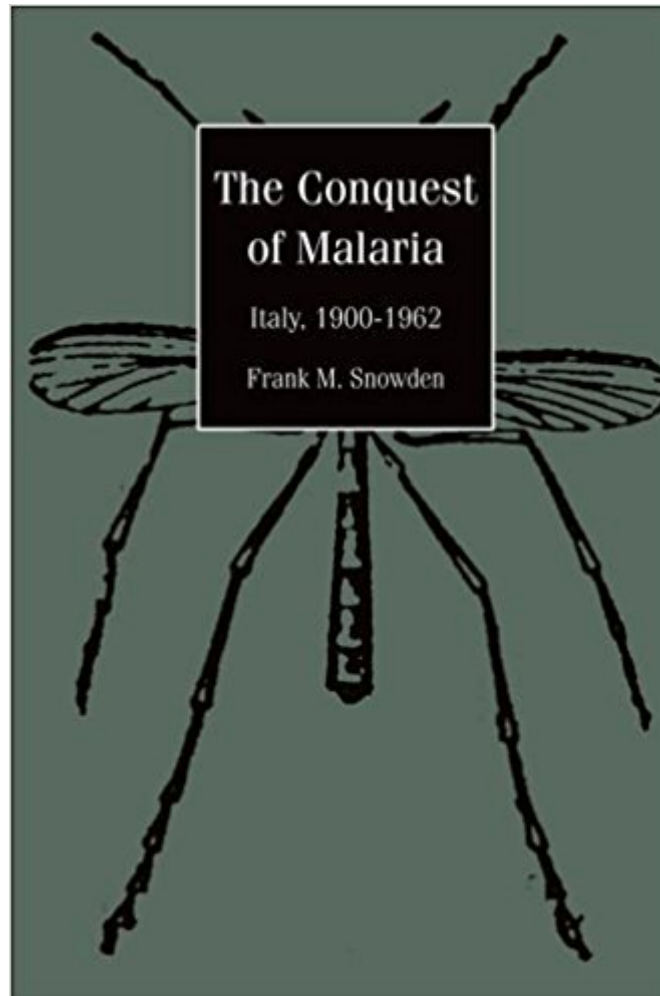




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# The Conquest Of Malaria: Italy, 1900-1962



## Synopsis

At the outset of the twentieth century, malaria was Italy's major public health problem. It was the cause of low productivity, poverty, and economic backwardness, while it also stunted literacy, limited political participation, and undermined the army. In this book Frank Snowden recounts how Italy became the world center for the development of malariology as a medical discipline and launched the first national campaign to eradicate the disease. Snowden traces the early advances, the setbacks of world wars and Fascist dictatorship, and the final victory against malaria after World War II. He shows how the medical and teaching professions helped educate people in their own self-defense and in the process expanded trade unionism, women's consciousness, and civil liberties. He also discusses the antimalarial effort under Mussolini's regime and reveals the shocking details of the German army's intentional release of malaria among Italian civilians—the first and only known example of bioterror in twentieth-century Europe. Comprehensive and enlightening, this history offers important lessons for today's global malaria emergency.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"With this book, Snowden achieves two difficult goals. He demonstrates how important malaria was to the political and social history of Italy to the mid-twentieth century, an aspect of the country's course underappreciated by its historians. Perhaps more importantly, he has crafted a marvelously detailed case study in the control of malaria, that shows how closely

intertwined are the environmental, medical, social and political features of a landscape that nurtures the disease. Whether describing the temporary Fascist victory over malaria in the Pontine Marshes or the deliberate creation of malarial epidemics by retreating Nazis, Snowden's lively account convinces the reader that as malaria goes, so goes Italy. This is a first rate, valuable book that belongs on the shelf of historian and malariologist alike."

•Dr. Margaret Humphreys, Professor of History, Duke University (Dr. Margaret Humphreys)"Frank Snowden's research on Italy's battle against malaria combines a mastery of the scientific literature with a profound understanding of the laws of motion of Italian society and politics."

•John Dickie, author of *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Italian Mafia* (John Dickie)"Frank Snowden's study of the scourge and final eradication of malaria in Italy is a masterpiece. Rigorous, passionate, and highly original, it deserves a wide audience amongst historians and students."

•John Foot, reader in Modern Italian History, Department of Italian, University College London (John Foot)"A highly original and authoritative reconstruction of Italy's historic and sometimes tragic battle with malaria; in its historical sweep, this book brilliantly conceptualizes disease within a political landscape that includes socialists, liberals, feminists, and fascists. A model for research on the history of medicine."

•Mary Gibson, City University of New York (Mary Gibson)

Frank M. Snowden is professor of history at Yale University.

Nowadays, malaria is typically relegated to a few developing countries around the equator. But it also afflicted Italy during much of the early twentieth century. Especially the warm southern regions. In no small part, it laid low the productivity of the people. Snowden shows how it became the predominant public health issue for many Italian governments. Progress against malaria was slow and fitful. Quinine was recognised and promoted freely to sufferers. A dramatic and measurable improvement over what came before. As seen in a table, where the mortality per million fell from 490 in 1900 to 57 in 1914. Few public treatments have been as effective and, indeed, as simple and cheap to implement. But World War 1 led to a resurgence, due to the difficult conditions of hostilities and the drain on government resources for the war effort. The postwar rise of Mussolini gave an episode in the struggle against malaria. He saw defeating it as a huge boost to his government. Thus, massive resources were spent on efforts like draining the Pontine Marshes, and other similar efforts in Apulia and Tuscany. World War 2 led to the 1944 episode where the Wehrmacht introduced bioterror, by enabling the breeding of *Anopheles* in swamps, as the German army

retreated north. Snowden's description of this is well done. In Europe, at least, it was the only known use of bioterror in the 20th century. And in direct contravention to the Conventions that Germany had signed before the war. Some readers will also see parallels with the Japanese biological efforts in Manchuria during that war.

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