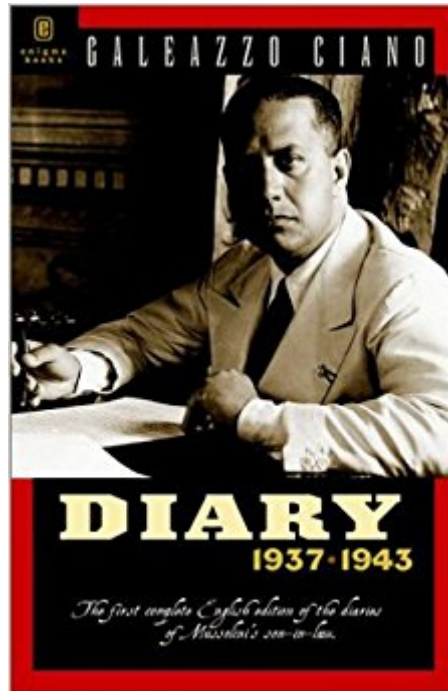




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Diary 1937-1943



Synopsis

The Ciano Diaries are one of the most important documents recording the events taking place in Europe leading up to the Second World War and how they effected the rest of the world. Galeazzo Ciano was in the forefront of those momentous events, not only because he happened to be Mussolini's son in law, but most important because at the age of 35 he was also Italy's Minister of Foreign Affairs and one of the major proponents of the Axis Alliance with Nazi Germany.

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Customer Reviews

Galeazzo Ciano was Mussolini's foreign affairs minister and his son-in-law. He was also a meticulous journal keeper, and the first complete English translation (by Robert L. Miller and Stanislao G. Pugliese) of Galeazzo Ciano: Diary 1937-1943 records his growing disenchantment with the German alliance and with Il Duce himself. In clean, succinct prose, Ciano candidly chronicles the murderous, unscrupulous operations of Nazi leadership, especially of Hitler and von Ribbentrop. The diary was smuggled to Switzerland (in spite of Nazi attempts to capture it) after Ciano's execution for voting against Mussolini. An important document of wartime history, this book will interest students, scholars and dedicated WWII or Italian history buffs. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Galeazzo Ciano (1903-1944). He married Mussolini's daughter Edda in 1930 and became Minister of Press and Propaganda. Appointed Foreign Minister in 1936. He promoted the Axis with Germany

but became disenchanted with the Nazis. Mussolini removed him in February 1943. On 25 July 1943 he voted against his father-in-law at the Grand Council. He was executed in 1944 after a show trial. His diary was smuggled out of Italy in 1944 by his wife. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Fascinating firsthand observations of the events that led to WWII and the early years of the war itself. Ciano is at times a sympathetic figure whose predictions of the impending disaster should Italy enter the war were correct. The sympathy disappears when he then shifts to an unshakeable, strutting confidence that he can recreate a Roman Empire with its heart in the Balkans utilizing an Italian army he knows to be woefully weak. One finds it difficult to reconcile these conflicting world views of his. Although Ciano could read world leaders, discern their motives and predict their actions he was fatally unable to discern the influence of the Petacci family upon Mussolini before it was too late. His inability to foresee his own arrest, imprisonment and execution is at odds with his other political talents.

Not many of the bigwigs of the '30s and '40s left diaries, but Count Galeazzo Ciano did. Historians have long used it for glimpses into the Nazis behavior, but as a loser in a losing country, Ciano's diaries have not been read for insight into Ciano. At least, not in English. A full and reasonably accurate, though only skimpily annotated, edition, this one, was not issued even in Italy until 1980, and not translated into English until 2002. Although Ciano wrote only a political diary, and even then asserted that it was only notes jotted during busy days as foreign minister, what he left is nevertheless revealing of more than names and dates. The one word historians use most often about Mussolini, Ciano's father-in-law, and the other leading Fascists is probably strutting. They are well justified in doing so. Strutting, posing, hollow men all. There was a great deal of blather in the '20s and '30s about Fascism as an ideology, its "corporatist" way supposedly offering a better system than parliamentary democracy, which was, in truth, in disrepute for excellent reasons. Ciano makes it clear, partly by omission, that nobody believed less in Fascism than the leading Fascists. They were nothing but gangsters, a sort of super Mafia who had come into control of a state. Not unlike Baathists in Iraq and Syria. Mussolini, who occasionally advised Ciano to insert one or other of his remarks into the diary, often told Ciano that at some point in the future he would put this or that aspect of Fascism into practice: deposing the monarchy, exterminating the weak (meaning, usually, the southern Italians) etc. Obviously, if Fascism was meant to be a superior form of political organization, its policies should have been imposed from the start. Renzo De Felice, an

Italian historian who wrote a preface to this edition, comments that Ciano himself was never a convinced Fascist, but he misses the point. Nobody was. There is almost nothing attractive about Ciano's personality, as it comes through in the diary. Unlike almost all the other Fascists, when it came to war, Ciano at least went to the front. There he apparently actually faced real danger, but unfortunately his position, bomber leader, was despicable. Unlike Mussolini's son Vittorio, who exulted in dropping bombs on pitiful Abyssinian peasants, Ciano didn't brag, but he was a terror bomber, admitted it and advocated more of it. "Fisking" the diaries would be an amusing task for someone with time on his hands. Ciano was not embarrassed to write an entry contradicting what he had entered a few weeks or months before. Perhaps he was so much of an opportunist that he didn't realize what a weathercock he was. At any rate, there may have been politicians who had less moral sense, but there have been few who were so upfront about it. More than once, Ciano excoriates the Germans (especially Ribbentrop) for their warlike foolishness, and then in the same entry starts calculating how Italy can avoid being left "uncompensated" after the latest German adventure plays out. As the Allied armies closed in on Sicily -- something not mentioned in the diary -- Ciano lost his job, which he said did not bother him. That was in early 1943. Later, he was arrested, and late in the year, he was shot. In an envoi just before his trial, which he knew would be a sham, he wrote several unapologetic pages hoping that his children would read his diary. They almost didn't. Only bravery on the part of his widow saved these pages. From almost anybody else, the last pages to his children and his countrymen, written without flinching in the face of a shameful death, might have attained a degree of pathos, even nobility. It's not clear, though, that Ciano ever attained any degree of self-consciousness that would allow us to grant him that much. (A book like this does not lend itself to 's star rating system. I would have preferred to have left it "unrated," but the computer won't allow it.)

It is difficult to overstate the significance of Ciano's diary for the serious student of the period. Here are the musings of a man that started out as a willing and able Fascist, one who perpetrated crimes against humanity. His instigation of the Albanian affair, his strong push for the invasion of Greece, and support for Franco are well known examples of his dark and sinister machinations. Particularly throughout 1939 and early 1940, however, the diary reveals that his world view was slowly altered. Ciano's comments and observations about Hitler, Goering, von Ribbentrop and other key Nazi leaders are penetrating in their clarity. Ciano did everything he could to keep Italy out of the war. The fact that Mussolini allowed himself to be persuaded to do so until the collapse of France are telling indications that Ciano was effective. The diary entries reveal a man who was not particularly

analytical, but relied on a penetrating intuition and a sharp intelligence. He was a keen judge of character. It is probable that Ciano had very little time to sanitize the diary given the time between his downfall and his execution. The diaries were smuggled out of Italy by his wife (Mussolini's daughter Edda) for the express purpose of getting them to the Allies for publication to damage the Nazi leadership. This is no carefully crafted tale written by the author for the exoneration of past sins. Rather these are the writings of a man in the heat of the moment who was at a crucial place in history. Anyone who reads this diary will be impressed by the lack of moral judgement, by the cynicism, and by the sheer monstrosity of the leaders who made the decisions that resulted in upwards of 60-million deaths. Ciano was a key player in this group and his thoughts reflect his environment. They reflect men (Ciano included) who were self-serving, always looking for the main chance, power hungry, and totally unconcerned with the consequences to others. Here is a glimpse of the quintessential Axis politician. The one thing the diary is not is an outpouring of the true inner feelings of the author. Instead this diary is a straight-forward, running political analysis of the issues and impressions of the most able diplomat functioning within the Axis hierarchy during the years 1937-1942. To be sure it is self-serving, but for all that Ciano's diary is generally authentic and remarkably candid. Ciano's accounting quite simply rings true. One aspect of this diary that is most interesting is that Ciano disclosed to Mussolini that he was keeping it, and Mussolini condoned his doing so. By all accounts when Hitler learned of it, he wanted Ciano's diary found and destroyed. Hitler's henchmen went to great lengths in their attempts to carry out his wishes. Anything that Hitler felt as strongly about as Ciano's diary is worthy of investigation. This book is highly recommended.

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