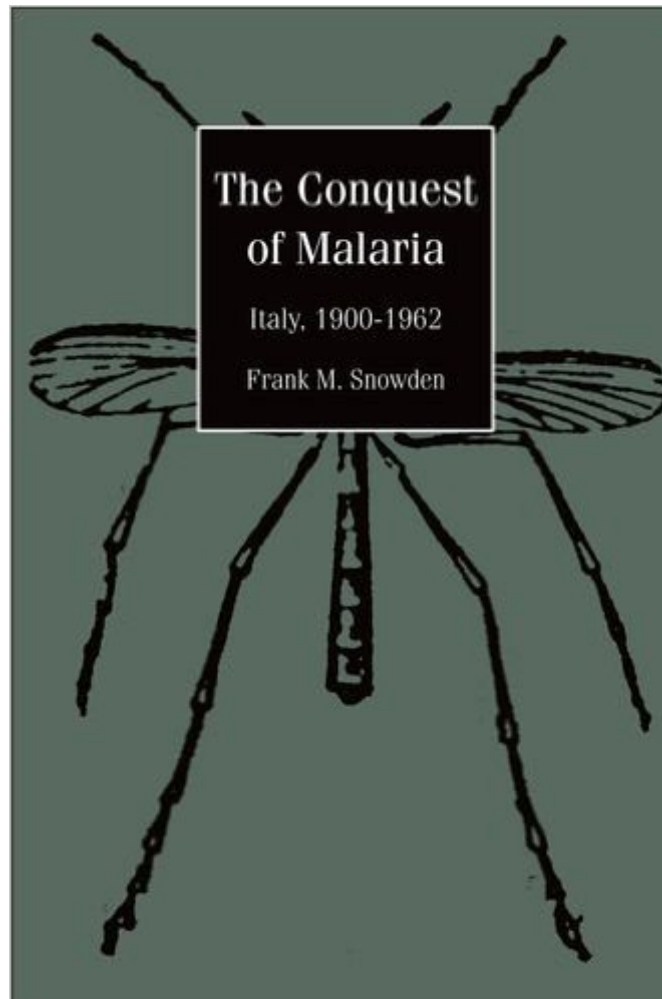


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The Conquest Of Malaria: Italy, 1900-1962



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.

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Customer Reviews

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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