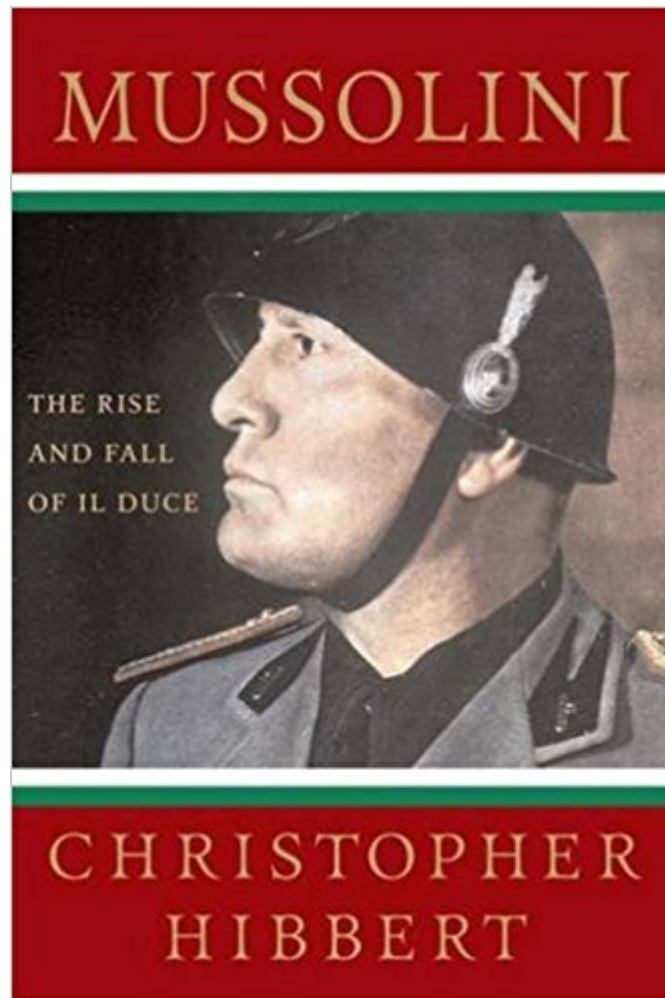




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# Mussolini: The Rise And Fall Of Il Duce



## Synopsis

With his signature insight and compelling style, Christopher Hibbert explains the extraordinary complexities and contradictions that characterized Benito Mussolini. Mussolini was born on a Sunday afternoon in 1883 in a village in central Italy. On a Saturday afternoon in 1945 he was shot by Communist partisans on the shores of Lake Como. In the sixty-two years in between those two fateful afternoons Mussolini lived one of the most dramatic lives in modern history. Hibbert traces Mussolini's unstoppable rise to power and details the nuances of his fascist ideology. This book examines Mussolini's legacy and reveals why he continues to be both revered and reviled by the Italian people.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Christopher Hibbert is a wonderful narrative historian who has illuminated many corners of Italian life and history. He has the gift of creating scenes and characters, of rendering the vividness of the past. His Mussolini is no exception. He manages to convey both the charisma and dilettantismo of Mussolini the revolutionary leader as well as the later folly of Il Duce, the dictator who began increasingly to believe his own rhetoric -- 'Mussolini is always right' -- in leading his country into World War and ruin.”

• Alexander Stille, award-winning author of *Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian-Jewish Families Under Fascism*, and of *The Sack of Rome: Media + Money + Celebrity = Power = Silvio Berlusconi*

“Hibbert is a remarkably prolific popular historian, who can take on almost anything, from Dickens to General Wolfe, from Agincourt to Garibaldi.”

• The Observer “An excellent account...balanced and

perceptive in outlook...well-written and entertaining. [Hibbert] is a superbly skillful historical writer. The Spectator "An adroitly written evocation of a compelling but enigmatic personality, a man whose ambition, idealism and opportunism would not seem out of place on the political scene today. Publishers Weekly on Disraeli "Hibbert's lively and engaging portrait of Benjamin Disraeli joins the author's numerous other well-received, popular biographies...A supremely readable and enjoyable study of a colorful, often astonishing and modern character. Library Journal on Disraeli

Christopher Hibbert, "a pearl of biographers" (New Statesman), is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and the author of many highly acclaimed books, including Disraeli, Edward VII, George VI, The Rise and Fall of the House of Medici, and Cavaliers and Roundheads. He lives in Henley-on-Thames, England.

This is a great book for understanding Mussolini as a person, not just as the leader of Fascist Italy. Though Mussolini could undoubtedly be a bully, Hibbert aptly shows another side to him as well. Rather than a caricature of a buffoonish dictator giving bombastic speeches, we get a more complete picture of who Mussolini was. It is richly detailed and intricate, reading in many places more like a novel than a history book. Despite its age (it was published in 1962), the book still has many insights and really does not appear to be dated at all. The book's focus is primarily on his years in power; his early life and ascent to power get covered in a few dozen pages. What is most notable among the earlier parts of the book is the fact that Mussolini initially began his career not only as a socialist, but a very radical socialist of the militant sort. He rose rapidly in pre-WWI Italy, eventually becoming editor in chief of *Avanti!*, the foremost socialist newspaper in the country. However, he stunned his fellow comrades when he supported Italy's entry into WWI on the side of the Entente powers; after this, he became ostracized from socialist circles. Yet Hibbert notes that Mussolini, from very early on, saw himself as Italy's man of destiny. Italy could be restored to its former grandeur, but it would need a forceful and dynamic leader in order to bring about this restoration. Naturally, Mussolini thought he was the guy to do it. The book does a great job of portraying Mussolini's massive ego and how that affected his decision-making and governing style. Yet Mussolini's ego would be a decisive factor in the crisis decade of the 1930s, in which fascism's ascendancy in Europe caused worry among the democracies of Great Britain and France. And though Mussolini is intimately associated with his admirer, Adolf Hitler, and their resulting

alliance, the path that led to the alliance was more complicated than might be expected. Hibbert does an admirable job of showing the dynamics of the relationship between Mussolini and Hitler. Simply put, for a while Mussolini had a strong distrust of Hitler and initially thought he was insane. Over time, however, we see a relationship develop between the two men where they would come to view each other as indispensable allies. Perhaps one of the most striking things about the book is how the last two years or so of Mussolini's life are covered. In July 1943, the Fascist Grand Council voted to depose Mussolini, and he was promptly arrested by the King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel III. This sent shockwaves throughout the world, and prompted a daring German raid to rescue him from his captors. It also prompted the German occupation of northern Italy, sparking a bitter and violent civil war which would see Fascist loyalists and German troops fight against anti-Fascist partisans. Despite being reinstated as head of the newly created Italian Social Republic based in Salò, Mussolini knew that it was now Hitler who would be calling the shots in Italy. He knew that he was little more than a figurehead serving as a German puppet. As a result, Mussolini became very withdrawn and philosophical, acting as if he was already part of history as opposed to participating in its creation. His ego shrank, and in his bouts of introspection he candidly admitted that he had made many mistakes; contrary to the assertions of the Fascist propaganda, Mussolini was not "always right". Overall, this is a great book for learning more about a man who, for better or for worse, dominated Italian politics for over 20 years and led Italy into the cataclysm of the Second World War. A man who committed himself to the enterprise of empire-building, but then lost the Empire that he so deeply desired.

If what you think about Italian Fascism is what you have read in liberal publications or were taught in liberal schools, then you do not understand Italian Fascism and Mussolini. Christopher Hibbert's *Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce*, is an outstanding work and insightful analysis of the man, and his dominant role in Italy and Europe during the first half of the twentieth century.

Probably the best book on Mussolini and Fascist Italy I have ever read. The author's style and pace are excellent (for me) and he makes Mussolini seem like a real, flesh and blood, here and now kind of figure. Familiar historical information was presented in a way that made much of it more relevant to Mussolini's era. This is a book that will stay in my reference library and one that I will recommend to those looking for a first rate book on a most interesting dictator. Should be a must read for anyone interested in WWII personalities. Joe Turner

Excellent reading, very detailed and well researched.

I have read other books by Hibbert, and he is great in all of them. Somehow he makes the famous seem personal, and wonderful footnotes. Anyone wanting to understand more about Fascism and/or Mussolini should read this book.

The book is easy to get into. The author makes it very enjoyable and yet filled with facts and enough details to make it count as a historical work . I am still reading it and finding it to be very enjoyable. .

Well written and very applicable to our current times.

Always thought Mussolini would have been better advised to focus on Italy, rather than go looking for glory and/or conquests elsewhere. Look at Franco, he managed to stay in power for decades and died an old man, rather than being shot and hung upside down like Mussolini. But then Spain under Franco took decades to emerge into a booming economy like Italy which had the Marshall Plan coming out of the Second World War. So better for the dictator to mind his own country like Franco, but better for the country to follow Mussolini and have the benefits of foreign investment capital.

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