

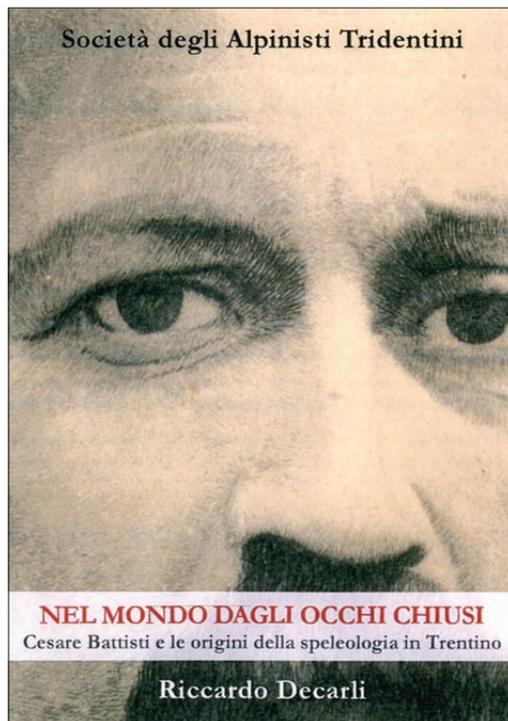
NEL MONDO DAGLI OCCHI CHIUSI BY RICCARDO DECARLI

The region of Trentino, situated in North-eastern Italy, lies on the southern flank of the Alps, where much of the mountainous landscape is dominated by the rock formations of the Dolomia Principale dolomite and the Calcarei Grigi limestone. Trentino has a rich history of alpine ascents and cave explorations.

This book, authored by Riccardo Decarli, published by the Società degli Alpinisti Tridentini, entitled “Nel Mondo dagli occhi chiusi: Cesare Battisti e le origini della speleologia in Trentino” (In the world with closed eyes: Cesare Battisti and the origins of speleology in Trentino) delves deeply into the life and scientific discoveries of a man called Cesare Battisti and a number of other people significantly involved in speleology during the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th Centuries.

Around Trentino, the name Cesare Battisti is well known, and has been used widely as the name of streets and town squares. In addition, one of the most well-known caves of the region, because it opens high on the imposing cliff wall of Mount Paganella that overlooks the town of Trento, is called Cesare Battisti Cave. However, his fame is associated mostly with his involvement in politics and to the tragic end to his life, while little is commonly known of his quality as an alpinist and his value as a geographer.

The first chapter of this book discusses the study of caves in Trentino up to the end of the 19th Century. It introduces some of the caves in the region that were already known about, some of which containing prehistoric artifacts, while others were used as fortifications. It



goes on to explain some of the first documented excursions, quoting sections of the original text that describe in exceptional detail all aspects of the trips, including timings, weather, equipment, cave temperature, cave passage and chamber dimensions, and cave decorations, and also includes copies of the original cave surveys and photos. During this time period, interest in the natural environment increased and alpine

tourism started to rise. Natural cavities became a curiosity and this book even includes a copy of an old postcard demonstrating this.

The second chapter introduces Cesare Battisti with a background of his family life, his schooling, and how he became interested in and started pursuing his passion for the alpine environment and caves. It explains that he was not only inquisitive of the natural environment but was also enthusiastic to document and disseminate his findings. A number of his major documents published during his lifetime are noted here, including geographical maps and texts that confirm his major interests as Trentino geography, lakes and hydrology, and karst.

The third chapter discusses the studies of Lake Terlagio conducted by Battisti and a colleague Giovanni Battista Trener; a chemist with whom he shared a passion for geology. Around the lake, they noticed examples of karst features, such as Karren, and using tracing experiments, they managed to demonstrate that the outflow of the lake was subterranean and was the source of spring located down in the valley.

Chapter Four discusses how Battisti attempted to create a group within the Società degli Alpinisti Triden-

tini dedicated to speleology for the specialized study of glaciology, hydrology, and speleology. The fifth chapter explains how Battisti and Trener started correspondence with the French researcher Edouard Alfred Martel; one of the fathers of modern speleology. What started as a number of letters discussing scientific findings, developed into a friendship that allowed the exchange of bibliographic documents and papers, the sending water samples to be analyzed by Martel, and the sharing of findings. Although this relationship undoubtedly improved the quality of the science carried out by the Trentino researchers, a shortage of local research centers, a lack of support from the Società degli Alpinisti Tridentini, and the interference of Battisti's political views meant that their scientific findings did not reach an international audience.

Following on from his study of Lake Terlago, Battisti turned his focus to The Lake of Lavarone and the hydrology of the Plateau of the seven communities, which is discussed in chapters six and seven. Here, we are shown Battisti's detailed proposal of the observations planned during cave visits, which has strong similarities to what is still carried out by researchers today, and which gained the researchers funding from the Italian Geographic Society. However, the scientific research was published only as a short text, and Battisti appears to have justified the funding with the production of a number of alpine tourism guides, but this became the beginning of the end of Battisti's research career.

The subsequent chapters (named: other speleological research, notes on other geographical publications, other caves and other speleologists, the legacy of Battisti, and Battisti alpinist) include notes of various caves dispersed over the region that Battisti visited and the progress made on these cave explorations to-date. Tribute is paid to the numerous other publications by Battisti that

include geographical maps and tourist guides. The book also discusses how Battisti influenced a passion for exploration and research and describes a number of other important caves in the region explored in more recent years. Battisti was not just interested in research, but also actively pushed for improvements in infrastructure to accommodate alpinists, such as with his participation in advancing the construction of a refuge on Mount Paganella. The final chapter notes that Battisti was not just a speleologist, but he was also a great hiker and climber and made new discoveries and completed many difficult routes in the Trentino mountains. He was also one of the first people in Trentino to become interested in alpine skiing, and published an early guide on how to ski, adapted from a French manual.

Overall, the book is an excellent account of the research of Cesare Battisti, which includes a strong attention to detail that demonstrates the authors skills of investigation and dedication. The inclusion of original quotes not only gives the reader an inside view of what it was like to be on an expedition with Battisti but ensures that this book itself is an historical source of information on Trentino speleology. The book is written in Italian and tends to take for granted that the reader has some prior knowledge of the Trentino region and its caves. It is highly adapted for an audience interested in the life of Cesare Battisti, the caves and geography of Trentino, or those fascinated in the history of speleology, particularly in an alpine environment. Personally, I was captivated by the thought of how our speleological predecessors, with limited equipment and little prior knowledge, managed to complete such detailed research that is still of great scientific value.

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