

Eugenio Del Piero, *Volare alto! Carlo Leopoldo Lualdi. Uomo e imprenditore geniale*, Forum, Udine, 'Storie d'ingegno, storie d'impresa', 2024.

Eugenio Del Piero's book, *Volare alto! Carlo Leopoldo Lualdi. Uomo e imprenditore geniale*, represents a significant contribution to the field of contemporary economic and business history, with particular reference to the post-war Italian context. The work, whilst taking the form of an entrepreneurial biography, transcends the limits of this genre and presents itself instead as a complex investigation into the dynamics of technological innovation, industrial culture and the relationship between private enterprise and political-institutional constraints in twentieth-century Italy.

This intention emerges clearly from the very first pages of the book: the author reconstructs the figure of Carlo Leopoldo Lualdi not only as the protagonist of a corporate story, but also and above all as a representative of a historical period characterised by profound economic and social transformations. Del Piero explicitly states, in fact, that the book "is not a history of LIMA – 'Lualdi Industrie Meccaniche Anduins' the name of the enterprise founded by Lualdi –, or is so only in part", thereby emphasising the centrality of the biographical and cultural dimensions over the purely corporate one.

To achieve this objective, the work stands out methodologically for its integrated use of diverse sources: archival documentation, oral testimonies, iconographic materials and secondary sources, a variety that allows the author to construct a rich and layered narrative, in which the micro-historical dimension is constantly interwoven with the broader historical narrative.

One of the book's main strengths lies in the portrayal of Lualdi as a paradigm of the innovative entrepreneur. Del Piero emphasises the protagonist's 'foresight' and 'visionary' dimension, defining them as his hallmark. This characterisation is not purely rhetorical, but is borne out by numerous biographical episodes: from his early inclination towards technical experimentation, evidenced by the prototypes he built in his youth, to the helicopter project, which represents the culmination of his innovative ambition. At the same time, Lualdi's biography is reconstructed with attention to family and educational influences. The influence of his father, an electrical engineer, and the educational environment of the technical school in Udine emerge as fundamental elements in the formation of a mindset oriented towards experimentation and the integration of theory and practice. In this sense, the volume also contributes to the history of technical education in Italy, highlighting the role

of educational institutions in fostering the development of advanced industrial skills.

A particularly significant element is the extensive historical contextualisation that accompanies the biographical narrative. Del Piero devotes considerable space to describing the political and institutional context, especially during the Second World War and the immediate post-war period. The situation in Friuli under German occupation, with its political and military complexities, is described effectively and helps to explain Lualdi's business decisions, including the decision to move to a little village Anduins. Even more significant is the analysis of the international context.

The author highlights how the helicopter project came up against structural limitations stemming from Italy's subordinate position in the post-war international system. The reference to the 1947 Paris Treaty and the restrictions imposed on the aeronautical sector is particularly illuminating, and from this perspective, Lualdi's story takes on symbolic significance: the project's failure is not attributable to technical or entrepreneurial shortcomings, but to external constraints that limited the autonomy of private enterprise.

The founding of LIMA constitutes one of the central moments of the book. The author meticulously reconstructs the corporate developments and strategic choices leading to the company's establishment, highlighting the gradual and experimental nature of the process. Particularly interesting is the analysis of the decision to locate the company in Anduins, a marginal area from both a geographical and economic perspective. Del Piero highlights the logistical and infrastructural difficulties associated with this choice, describing an environment lacking adequate transport links and services. However, this marginality is interpreted not only as a limitation but also as an opportunity: the periphery becomes a space of autonomy, where the entrepreneur can develop innovative projects without being constrained by the rigidity of large industrial centres, an interpretation that fits into a historiographical tradition that highlights the role of peripheral areas in innovation processes.

The chapter dedicated to the helicopter project forms the heart of the volume: it is a project that reveals a way of working by Lualdi defined by the author as 'Galilean' or 'Leonardesque', that is, an approach based on iterative experimentation and on a cultural tradition that values the artisanal and empirical dimension of technical knowledge. The failure of the helicopter project is also analysed in a highly convincing manner, highlighting a series of contributing factors: pressure from international industrial interests, particularly American

ones, the weakness of Italian institutions, and the lack of adequate political support. In this sense, the case of the helicopter designed by Lualdi becomes a paradigmatic example of the structural limitations that innovation processes encountered in post-war Italy.

Another original aspect of the book is its focus on family dynamics and their impact on corporate governance. The relationship between Carlo Leopoldo and his brother Paolo is analysed as a balance between innovation and prudence, between risk and stability. Paolo, described as a conservative figure with a keen eye for financial matters, plays a key role in curbing his brother's more daring ambitions. This internal dynamic, moreover, offers a broader starting point for reflecting on governance models in family businesses, highlighting how the success or failure of certain strategies may depend not only on external factors, but also on internal balances within companies.

Overall, *Volare alto!* is a work of great interest to scholars of economic history, business history and the history of technological innovation. However, by effectively combining the biographical and analytical dimensions, the book also appeals to a non-specialist audience, offering a rich and detailed reconstruction of a complex entrepreneurial figure. Furthermore, to facilitate reading and allow the narrative to unfold seamlessly, the prose is clear and accessible, whilst remaining inspired by the utmost scientific rigour; the structure is organised into thematic and chronological chapters; and there is an illustrative section comprising period documents and photographs, where these images do not serve a merely illustrative function but help to construct a visual dimension of the story, making the context in which the events unfold more tangible.

The story of Carlo Leopoldo Lualdi thus emerges as emblematic of a historical period in which individual initiative is confronted with structural constraints of a political and economic nature. In this sense, Del Piero's book also constitutes a reflection on the conditions for innovation in Italy and on the limitations that have historically shaped its development. For these reasons, the work represents a significant contribution to the understanding of Italian industrial history and offers insights that remain relevant today, at a time when the relationship between innovation, politics and the market continues to be at the centre of scientific and public debate.

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