

INTERVIEWS: EFD

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Italian Institute of
Historical StudiesIstituto Italiano di
Studi Storici

Naples

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As arranged by B. Croce, EFD saw Professor Federico Chabod, Director of the Institute, and from him learned of its origin, organization and activities. Croce, who has never been an academic, has long been attracted by the idea of becoming in his later years a teacher of the younger generation. Before the end of Fascism and later during the war, Croce kept this idea in mind. Numerous conversations with Raffaele Mattioli, President of the Banca Commerciale Italiana, led to the formulation of a tentative plan when conditions would permit for the founding of a small historical institute under Croce's supervision where the most promising younger historians of Italy could assemble for study and research. With the end of the war, came the opportunity to put the idea into practice. With the assistance of Mattioli, Luigi Einaudi and others, several of the leading banks of Italy were persuaded to contribute a modest sum for the organization and maintenance of a historical institute. Croce himself, who had his palace restored to him and necessary repairs made, has donated to the institute, which is incorporated as an 'ente morale', the use of the rooms and books for a seven-year period without cost. The five leading banks contribute enough money for the support of Professor Chabod, Director of the Institute and Professor of Modern History, Professor Pugliese, Professor of Ancient History, and Professor Parente, Professor of Medieval History. The maximum capacity of the Institute is 25 students. Fourteen fellowships have been made available to the Institute by leading commercial firms of Italy and they are awarded by competition on a regional basis. Eleven students are paying their own expenses at the Institute. All of these students have completed their work at an Italian university which confers the Ph. D. degree after four years of study. The program of study consists of four or five lectures a week, an informal conference for all students with Croce approximately every ten days and individual research with the assistance of the appropriate member of the staff. The Institute started in September 1947 and fellowships are awarded on a one-year basis but Chabod would not rule out the possibility of a second year's study at the Institute.

The resources of the Institute consist of Croce's own library (see separate interview), free time for research and the opportunity to consult the staff members. In addition, the University of Naples and the Historical Society of Naples both have good libraries which are accessible to students at the Institute. According to Chabod, the needs of the Institute are more fellowships so that the highest quality of student from all over Italy can be chosen, money for the purchase of

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current books and some periodicals, assistance for the publication of books and monographs completed by the students, and opportunities for foreign study by students after a year's work at the Institute. It would also be desirable to have a few students from foreign countries attend the Institute but Chabod felt strongly that the total number of students should not exceed 25.

EFD was very favorably impressed by Chabod (see separate interview) and by the general atmosphere of informality, industry and high seriousness which seemed to prevail. Because of other appointments, EFD had no opportunity to interview any of the students at the Institute but Chabod undertook to make arrangements to have two students see EFD in Rome.

EFD subsequently made inquiries about the Institute and Chabod in various quarters and everywhere received the highest recommendations of both. Among those who felt that RF assistance, if requested, would be proper and beneficial were Einaudi, Morey, U.S. Cultural Attache, Laurance Roberts, Director of the American Academy at Rome, Ivella, Sforza's secretary, and numerous academic persons in the fields of history and philosophy. As a result of continued inquiries, EFD learned that Croce himself adhered strongly to his own position which emphasizes the uniqueness of historical phenomena and the importance of the esthetic-moral approach. Chabod and the other members of the staff are not completely committed to Croce's doctrine although appreciative of its value. Consequently, students at the Institute appear to receive a good balance between the Crocean and the 'sociological' approach to history. It is EFD's opinion that although the philosophy and historical methods of Croce should not be regarded as the ultimate solution, it is important to keep this school of thought alive for its own sake and as a counter-balance to more deterministic schools of historical method elsewhere.

Chabod will write to EFD setting forth a statement of the situation and needs of the Institute.

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