



Dinosaurs of Italy, C. Dal Sasso, 2004, Indiana University Press, 232 p. (hardcover, USD 35.00), ISBN: 0-253-34514-6.

Dinosaurs, or terrible lizards as R. Owen christened them, ruled the Earth for 160 million years. During that time span they evolved into variety of different species, varying in size from the pigeon-sized dwarfs to the earth-shaking titans. They vanished from our planet 65 million years ago, long before our own species arose, but they still live in our imagination and through the pages of our books. Dinosaur research is one of the most expanding science fields throughout the last decades, with numerous new finds and discoveries. Today, dinosaur fossils are known from every continent, even Antarctica, but there are still some places you expect them to have been found, but where they were little known until recently: Italy, for example.

Dinosaurs of Italy is one such book that brings the dinosaurs closer to our imaginations, as if they had not gone extinct. Cristiano Dal Sasso, one of the leading Italian dinosaur experts, and his collaborator Giuseppe Brillante made considerable effort to present the little-known Italian dinosaur heritage in a novel and imaginative fashion. Although entitled *Dinosaurs of Italy*, the book deals not only with dinosaurs but also with the finds of other such Mesozoic reptiles in Italy as pterosaurs and ichthyosaurs. This book is an apparent successor to Dal Sasso's earlier article, entitled also "Dinosaurs of Italy," which was published in 2003 as one of the contributions to the thematic issue of *Comptes Rendus Palevol*—European dinosaurs. This new book represents, as the author stated, an up-to-date summary of dinosaur research in Italy.

The book consists of nine chapters, including an introduction and foreword written by Philip J. Currie. It is written not only for the dinosaur specialists but for nonexpert readers as well. The leisureed phrasing is wisely accompanied with black and white photos, drawings, and diagrams. They are not always of a prime quality, but there are a lot of exciting drawings by F. Fogliazza.

After the first introductory chapter with general information about the dinosaurs, their systematics, taxonomy, and way of life, each chapter that follows covers one specific find made in Italian. In the second chapter Dal Sasso gives us insight into the numerous footprint localities found recently in Italy, focused at the famous sites Lavini di Marco and Altamura, where the latter has the potential to become one of the largest

footprint localities in the world. The third chapter is actually the essence of the book. Here, the author demonstrates the whole story regarding one of the most spectacular dinosaur finds in the world. In a narrative and sometimes thrilling way, the reader is familiarized with the discovery, preparation, investigation, and publication of an extremely well-preserved dinosaur fossil, *Scipionyx samniticus*, one of the few dinosaur species found with internal organs preserved. Furthermore, the author demonstrates unique insight into Ciro's (the nickname given to the *Scipionyx* fossil) anatomy, paleoenvironment, and paleogeography. And there is even a short tale, which takes us back 110 million years ago to witness the last moments of Ciro's short life (it was actually a juvenile individual). Here the author demonstrates his skill as a true storyteller. The fourth chapter deals with another extraordinary preserved dinosaur fossil nicknamed Antonio. An almost entire skeleton of a primitive hadrosaur was unearthed from its limestone tomb, and the author discusses its origin, provenance, and life habits. Fragmentary finds of one of the earliest large theropods are discussed in the fifth chapter. The story of the most ancient allosauroid on the planet has been told in the same way as in previous chapters. The same style follows us through the next chapters where the numerous discoveries of Mesozoic marine and flying reptiles occupy reader's attention. Such exceptional fossil finds as those of *Besanosaurus*, *Tanystropheus*, or *Eudimorphodon* are literally revived in the pages of this book. As in the previous chapters, the way the story goes is the same. First, the author tells the history of the discovery and the process of its excavation, and then we learn why a particular fossil is so important (with the description of its main characters). Finally, broader aspects are considered about its taxonomic relationship, paleoenvironment reconstruction, and paleobiology. This is probably one of the few shortcomings of the book—the different stories are written in the same way, which could be a little tiresome to the reader; the book is actually written as a novel, not as a scientific reading. The story of how the most spectacular dinosaur extinction theory evolved dominates the eighth chapter. The storytelling is something different in this chapter, as the author guides us through how and why Alvarez's theory of an asteroid impact was born near the little town of Gubbio. The story of birds as

dinosaur descendants additionally spices up the discussion. The final chapter of this book is devoted to the future of Italian dinosaurs in which Dal Sasso gives us a clue of Italy's great potential for the future discoveries. As he says at the very end of the book (p. 200): "...this book is only the start. The story of Italian dinosaurs has just begun."

In summary, *Dinosaurs of Italy* represents another valuable contribution to the IU Press *Life of the Past* series, and I warmly recommend it to everyone with interest not only in dinosaurs but in extinct life as well. It will give you an engaging and picturesque insight into the life on Earth, as it once was. For the

field experts, on the other hand, I would recommend Dal Sasso's article in *Comptes Rendus Palevol* to get brief information about Italian dinosaurs with the higher quality color images.

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