

THE POWER OF IMAGES IN THE AGE OF MUSSOLINI

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In loving memory of my grandparents, babbo Luigi and nonna Velia

and

to my children, Marco and Liam

ABSTRACT

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The year 1937 marked the bimillenary of the birth of Augustus. With characteristic pomp and vigor, Benito Mussolini undertook numerous initiatives keyed to the occasion, including the opening of the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità*, the restoration of the *Ara Pacis*, and the reconstruction of *Piazza Augusto Imperatore*. New excavation campaigns were inaugurated at Augustan sites throughout the peninsula, while the state issued a series of commemorative stamps and medallions focused on ancient Rome. In the same year, Mussolini inaugurated an impressive square named *Forum Imperii*, situated within the *Foro Mussolini* – known today as the *Foro Italico*, in celebration of the first anniversary of his Ethiopian conquest.

The *Forum Imperii*'s decorative program included large-scale black and white figural mosaics flanked by rows of marble blocks; each of these featured inscriptions boasting about key events in the regime's history.

This work examines the iconography of the *Forum Imperii*'s mosaic decorative program and situates these visual statements into a broader discourse that encompasses the panorama of images that circulated in abundance throughout Italy and its colonies. Therein I highlight the Roman, particularly

Augustan, models that Mussolini consciously exploited to depict himself as the founder of a new empire. Of special interest are instances of analogy to the figurative references displayed on state-issued postcards, medals, and stamps. This study of quotidian – often ephemeral – objects, fundamental in any archeological analysis, underscores not only the scope of the iconography and its audiences, but also the extent to which the minor arts, along with state architecture, functioned as integral components of a multi-faceted system of propaganda. I demonstrate how the *Forum Imperii* operated effectively in the aggregate of Fascist propaganda by exploiting the images already present in the collective memory of Rome, a memory established through Mussolini's observance of the Augustan model of ritual, policy, public display, colonization, and his belief in personal destiny.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	iv
PREFACE	vii
CHAPTER 1.....	1
Fascist <i>Romanitas</i> and the Augustan Bimillenary	1
a. Rome and <i>Romanitas</i>	1
b. The Augustan Exhibition and the inauguration of Augustan sites	20
c. The <i>Istituto di Studi Romani</i> and the fostering of Augustan studies...	50
CHAPTER 2	55
Fascist Propaganda and the Role of Stamps, Coins and Medals.	55
a. Fascist propaganda	55
b. The first fascist coin and the <i>serie imperiale</i>	60
d. Stamps	69
e. Medals.....	84
CHAPTER 3	88
The Foro Mussolini	88
a. Renato Ricci and the <i>Opera Nazionale Balilla</i> (ONB).....	88
f. The Foro Mussolini.....	95
CHAPTER 4	123
The Mosaics.....	123
a. Decoration as mass communication	124
b. The Piazzale Project.....	127
c. The marble blocks: Mussolini's appropriation of time and Italy's <i>damnatio memoriae</i>	131
d. The themes of the mosaics (for the numbering see my plan).....	138
e. The demi-god dictator	154
f. The youthful <i>princeps</i>	158
g. Mussolini's Res Gestae.....	160
h. The school of Spilimbergo	169
i. The artists and the attribution of the compositions.....	175
Conclusions.....	201

PREFACE

The present-day *Foro Italico* in Rome is one of the most grandiose public projects designed and executed during the reign of Benito Mussolini. This urban complex, located on the northern side of Rome's Tiber River, was originally named *Foro Mussolini* and once housed the state's official athletic facilities. Its realization coincided with the founding of the Fascist youth organization called the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* (ONB) in 1926, which was devoted to both the physical and moral training of Italy's youth. The *Foro* effectively functioned as the paramilitary grounds for breeding future generations of Fascists.

On May 16, 1937 Mussolini inaugurated an impressive square situated within the *Foro Mussolini* in celebration of the first anniversary of his Ethiopian conquest; this, in turn, signaled the founding of a new empire intended to rival that of imperial Rome. The square was named *Forum Imperii* or *Piazzale dell'Impero*, an unequivocal reference to Rome's Imperial Fora, which had been recently excavated and restored by Mussolini during the construction of the *Via dell'Impero*. By this time, Mussolini had set up his offices in Palazzo Venezia where he delivered his momentous speeches, including the declaration of the new empire, from his balcony overlooking a sea of up-turned faces. The newly built *Via dell'Impero* monumentalized the connection between the Fascist present and the ancient Roman past, as it proceeded from Palazzo Venezia to the Colosseum by way of the Imperial Fora. The *Via dell'Impero* further functioned as a stage on which the party could parade its colors.

Conceived by Luigi Moretti, the plan of the *Forum Imperii* incorporated two pre-existing monuments -- an obelisk erected in honor of Mussolini in 1932, and a fountain, called the *Fontana della sfera*, constructed in 1933. The *Forum Imperii*'s extensive decorative program included large-scale black and white figural mosaics flanked by rows of marble blocks which featured inscriptions boasting about key events in the regime's history. The faces of five blocks were left blank so that subsequent achievements could be recorded.

Whereas other Fascist monuments largely suffered *damnatio memoriae* -- originally an ancient Roman practice of damning the memory of individuals by posthumously effacing their names from public monuments, defacing their statues, etc. -- the *Forum Imperii* remained untouched in the aftermath of Mussolini's ignominious defeat, in spite of its central role in Fascist propaganda. The obelisk alone, a forty-meter tall monolith with the inscription MVSSOLINI DVX, certainly qualified as a provocative candidate for postwar purging, as did the mosaics, but both were left intact. The sole, post-Fascist modifications that occurred at this site consisted of the reordering of the positions of the marble blocks together with the addition of two new inscriptions on the previously unfinished marble blocks. The one announced the end of the Fascist regime on July 26, 1943, and the other recorded the creation of the Republic of Italy on June 2, 1946. Ultimately the Fascist's oath was also removed from the mosaics.

The year of the *Forum Imperii*'s inauguration not only marked the first anniversary of the newly conquered empire, but also the bimillenary of the birth of the first Roman emperor, Augustus. With characteristic pomp and vigor,

Mussolini undertook a dizzying number of initiatives keyed to the fortuitous occasion, including the opening of a special exhibition devoted to Augustus. New excavation campaigns were inaugurated at Augustan sites throughout the peninsula, while the state issued a special series of commemorative postage stamps and medallions in Augustus's honor.

Despite the programmatic importance of this site and the regime that produced it, a comprehensive study of the *Forum Imperii*'s complex decorative program has never been attempted. In fact, studies of the site have focused either on the artists who were responsible for the design of the decorative elements, such as Gino Severini and Luigi Moretti, or the role that the *Foro Mussolini* played within the architectural dispute over the definition of a Fascist style.

My dissertation situates the *Forum Imperii* in its broader political and iconographical context, wherein I will highlight the Roman, particularly Augustan, models that Mussolini consciously exploited to depict himself as the founder of a newly configured empire. Of special interest are the visual analogies between Augustus and Mussolini as evinced by Fascist postcards, medals, coins, and postage stamps. This study of quotidian – often ephemeral – objects, fundamental in any archaeological analysis, underscores not only the scope of the iconography and its audiences, but also the extent to which the minor arts, along with state architecture, functioned as integral components of a multi-faceted system of propaganda. I demonstrate how the *Forum Imperii* operated effectively in the aggregate of Fascist propaganda by exploiting the images already present in the collective memory, which was established through Mussolini's observance

of the Augustan model of ritual, policy, public display and colonization, and his belief in his own destiny as a successor to the Roman emperors.

The dissertation has been organized into four chapters. The first chapter analyzes the cult of *Romanitas*, or Roman-ness, wherein I show how the myth of *Roma*, already borrowed during the Italian Risorgimento as a unifying element for the new nation, was transformed and adapted by Mussolini. I examine Giovanni Gentile's reform of the Italian school system and curricula, above all its emphasis on Roman history, and the role played by the colonization of Africa as an impetus for Roman imperial emulation. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates how Mussolini and his entourage exploited the fortuitous concurrence between the celebrations of the bimillenary and the anniversary of the new empire to add another dimension to the Duce's multifaceted personality cult, portraying him as the new Augustus.

Such a parallel is all the more significant because Mussolini never officially received the title of Emperor of Italy since the title was reserved for the king alone, Vittorio Emanuele III. This chapter also explains the ways in which the special Augustan exhibition was configured to celebrate the Fascist regime as a continuation of the Roman Empire, dedicating an entire section to the immortality of the concept of Rome in conjunction with the rebirth of the empire in Fascist Italy. The deeds of Augustus were highlighted in the exhibition as a way of drawing parallels to Mussolini's own achievements: the new family policies and the demographic campaign, the extensive building program within the city, the military conquest, and the founding of new colonies. The chapter's last

section considers the birth and function of the *Istituto di Studi Romani*, to which the field of Roman, and particularly Augustan, studies is greatly indebted, even though its findings were in many ways conditioned by Mussolini's determination to re-create and depict the Augustan regime in his own image.

In the second chapter I examine the importance placed by the Fascist party on propaganda with the creation of the Ministry of Popular Culture, and how such propaganda infiltrated every aspect of Italians' daily lives, in particular through postage stamps, coins, medallions, and postcards. A section of this chapter centers on those memorabilia issued on special occasions to commemorate Mussolini's personal or public achievements, following an imperial Roman precedent. The examples include the new coins minted to celebrate the anniversary of the conquest of Ethiopia, the stamps issued for the celebration of the Augustan Bimillenary, and the medals created for the official opening of the Foro Mussolini. A discussion of the honors showered upon Mussolini for services rendered, such as those awarded for the *Vittoriali*, the athletic competitions held every year in the *Foro Mussolini*, or as a testimony of gratitude and allegiance, becomes particularly important in this chapter, as such honors are directly related to the iconographic components of the *Forum Imperii's* visual program.

The third chapter, after a brief account of the role played by the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* (ONB) as a pivotal element of the new Italy envisioned by the Fascist Party, moves into a discussion of the construction of the *Foro Mussolini*, which underscores both the political and the topographical importance of this

urban site and its relation to the ancient prototypes. The chapter takes into account the decorative programs of several key buildings which display iconographical analogies to ancient Rome and help to place the decoration of the *Forum Imperii* within the broader context of Fascist monuments in Rome that echo similar themes. The last section is dedicated to a historical overview of the site up to its recent past.

The final chapter is devoted to a systematic analysis of the mosaics of the *Forum Imperii*. The first section outlines the role of art as mass communication, a topic particularly dear to Mussolini and places it within the debate over the interplay between (state) architecture and decoration, ignited in the 1930's. I also discuss how the outcomes of this debate relate to the mosaic program commissioned to decorate the Piazzale dell'Impero. I then discuss the iconographic program of these mosaics, highlighting the new Fascist dependence on the earlier Augustan repertoire of images, such as Mussolini's birth-sign, the lion or Leo, which was modeled on the system that Augustus himself had used for images of his own zodiac sign, the Capricorn. Mussolini's explicit instructions to be portrayed as eternally youthful, as in early Roman Imperial portraiture, will also be highlighted. These themes will then be compared to the production of postage stamps, coins, and medals that carry similar imagery. The last section is devoted to the School of Spilimbergo, responsible for executing the mosaics, and to the reconstruction of both the timeline and the means by which the project was carried out, emphasizing the collaborative rapport between Luigi Moretti and the artists in charge of the design of the mosaic panels. The archival documents in

the *Scuola Mosaicisti del Friuli* have enabled me to attribute, for the first time with certainty, the works to their respective artists, and these relationships are analyzed in this final section. I also examine the evidence for Mussolini's direction of the Foro's iconographic program in the context of theories of Imperial control of political imagery in antiquity.

CHAPTER 1

Fascist *Romanitas* and the Augustan Bimillenary

a. Rome and *Romanitas*

President Woodrow Wilson while writing during his travels in Italy noted:

At the sight of Rome's grandeur, exemplified in her eternal monuments, the savage interlopers from the Nordic forests bowed in a state of confusion as if in the presence of a prodigy suddenly revealed. Whether Republican, imperial or munipale, pagan or Christian, Rome and her perennial vitality stir the spirit of every nation in awe of her greatness and decadence.¹

This quote draws attention to two aspects of the myth of Rome: the intangible values to which it refers and the tangible ruins from a past still visible amidst the urban fabric. The Fascist regime's "Roman" rhetoric would incorporate both of these aspects though not always systematically or organically. This chapter will discuss the critical roles played by the city of Rome and the concept of *Romanitas* in Fascist rhetoric. I also demonstrate that *Romanitas* was not one of Mussolini's inventions but rather a legacy of the Italian Risorgimento², during which time the concept became a driving force in inventing, theorizing and then forging a national Italian identity. This chapter also sheds light on the role played by the celebrations organized in honor of the Augustan bimillenary (September 23, 1937- September 23, 1938).

With its characteristic boot shape extending into the Mediterranean Sea, Italy presents a geographically coherent picture, with clearly discernable, natural

¹ Opera XII 107-108.

² Baioni 2009.

borders.³ Today, this picture is in stark contrast with the actual internal divisions that run deeply throughout the peninsula, just as they did, albeit to a greater extent, at the time of the unification process.⁴ The fall of the Roman Empire had given rise to a loss of uniformity not only in political, but perhaps more so in linguistic and cultural terms as well. To make matters worse, “Italy never enjoyed the good fortune of being occupied in its entirety by a single invader.”⁵ Pre-unified Italy did not speak the same language, nor were its inhabitants Italians, but rather Romans, Florentines, Milanese, etc. In this respect Italy exemplifies a process of ethnogenesis identified by Balibar as follows:

no nation possesses an ethnic base naturally, but as social formations are nationalized, the populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them are ethnicized - that is, represented in the past or in the future as if they formed a natural community, possessing of itself *an identity of origins, culture and interests which transcends individuals and social conditions*.⁶

As far as Italy was concerned, however, exactly which origins, culture, and interests were to be singled out? Ultimately, it was in Rome that the fathers of the Risorgimento recognized the single unifying force capable of transcending the peninsula’s numerous divisions. Giuseppe Mazzini, one of the Italian nation’s founding fathers affirmed that: “a remote sign of greatness will appear before you

³ Galli della Loggia 1998: 7-11, with previous bibliography.

⁴ On the exceptionally fragmentary status of Italy as a country see Floris, 2009.

⁵ Galli della Loggia 1998: 18. All translations from the Italian into English are mine.

⁶ Balibar 2009: 164. Emphasis mine.

much like a beacon in the ocean. Bow down and adore it, for there is where the heart of Italy beats; there is where Rome solemnly rests for all eternity.”⁷

There were dissenting voices, nonetheless, and the vote to make Rome the capital of Italy was not unanimous. In the words of Stefano Iacini: “The idea of Rome as the seat of government is not a quintessentially liberal or patriotic choice ... nor does it meet the needs of a new Italy; it is the makeup of a decrepit Italy who has had her day.”⁸

On March 17, 1861 the kingdom of Italy was officially born. Yet, with Rome still in the hands of the pontiff, the kingdom remained deprived of its driving force, not to mention its geographical center, considering Rome’s strategic position on the peninsula. Accordingly, the unification process in Italy did not spread centrifugally from Rome outwards; rather, it gained momentum along a centripetal path from the far reaches of Italy’s borders towards the history-laden, ideological and “inevitable” capital.⁹

Once Italy had been officially proclaimed a kingdom, Cavour made the following declaration before parliament:

It is the historical, intellectual and moral circumstances that contribute collectively to determining the conditions of a leading nation’s capital. Rome enjoys a unique position among all the Italian cities in that the memory of its former self is not limited exclusively to a municipality; the entirety of Rome’s history from the time of the Caesars down to today is that of a city whose influence has extended infinitely beyond its borders;

⁷ Quoted in Vidotto 2001: 33-72.

⁸ Vidotto 2001:40.

⁹ Galasso, 1970. On the role of Rome as the capital see: Galli della Loggia, 1998:63-65; Vidotto 1996, Vidotto 1997; Vidotto 2001, Zucconi 2009.

that is to say, of a city destined to be the capital of a great State ... I have said it before, and I will reaffirm it, oh gentlemen: Rome and Rome alone must be the capital of Italy.¹⁰

But it was not until after the breach of Porta Pia on September 20, 1870 to the call of “give me Rome or give me death” that the process of unification was completed, and Rome crowned as the capital of the Kingdom of Italy.¹¹ At the time, Rome was as multi-faceted as the nation itself, lacking a physical center and embodying no single meaning. It was precisely this versatility that rendered Rome so appealing, offering itself up – at least politically – to the pursuit of various ideological agendas. In turn the city’s rich and complicated history lent itself to innumerable interpretations, evidence for which abounded before the eyes of visitors in the form of monuments from both the past and the present. In fact, the new capital was soon forced to come to terms with its own past, not only in historical and ideological terms, but also regarding the conspicuous physical presence of its urban fabric. Moreover, there remained the spectral presence, enclosed within the Vatican walls, of a pope who still refused to acknowledge Italy as a nation.

The main dichotomy exhibited in the new nation was above all political, as it had a lay monarchy as well as an ecclesiastical one, both of which persisted in Rome right up until the breach of the Porta Pia. The political invasion of the city became evident in the functional shift that a number of key buildings underwent,

¹⁰ Cavour 1861.

¹¹ The cry came from a supporter as Garibaldi was reviewing the National Guard in Palermo: Carabinieri 2012.

such as the Pantheon, which became, in effect, the sacrarium for the House of Savoia. Further proof of this invasion was provided by the newly erected structures, such as the National Monument to Victor Emanuel II.¹² These developments occurred, however, in fits and starts and without any overriding urban plan owing to the ubiquitous obstacles presented by the city's pre-existing fabric.¹³ To overcome these in favor of a grand scheme would have required the wholesale demolition of large swathes of the city.

As the city transformed into a modern capital, the education of the new Italians kept pace; for the ruling class of post-unified Italy was tasked with instilling in its citizens a sense of belonging to a national community. Hence the proliferation of monuments in honor of the lives sacrificed for the unification of Italy, i.e. memorials dedicated to the first heroes to be called Italians. At the same time, Parliament was deliberating over an apparent need for national legislation that would protect the country's cultural patrimony. It was widely accepted that Italy's identity resided in their past, traces of which were visible among the artifacts and monuments excavated in the newly united territory. The clarion call came on May 13, 1872, only two years after the definitive unification of the country as marked by the capture of Rome. It was on this date that the Minister of Education, Cesare Correnti, exhorted Parliament to jealously conserve, amass, and defend the country's monuments through the drafting of a national bill. He warned that the disparate pieces of legislation in place at the regional level were

¹² Tobia 1998.

¹³ Insolera 2002: 359-394.

insufficient measures to contend with the greed of art merchants. As a result, veritable travesties were being committed against the nation's glorious splendors. Correnti explained further that the regional legislative provisions were dangerously permissive in some provinces - even when adhered to in full – and excessively strict in others. Unfortunately, his bill was not passed into law until thirty years later, in 1902.¹⁴

Capitalizing on the cultural patrimony Italy had inherited from ancient civilizations to imprint a national identity on the minds of Italians required not only effective and standardized national policies that protected these resources from dispersal, but also the establishment of museums. This period witnessed, in fact, the creation of Italy's first national museums, in 1889, such as the Museo delle Terme in Rome and the Reale Museo Archeologico in Florence, which were to embody a shared history.¹⁵ History became the operative word in the newly devised school curricula. In particular, the study of ancient Roman history was emphasized and Italian history was viewed as its continuation, to the point that the terms "Rome" and "Italy" were used interchangeably in schoolbooks.

The myth of Rome was appropriated once again in 1911 in the service of the war against Libya, which was widely held as a renewed dominion over the Mediterranean.¹⁶ Already in 1871 Giuseppe Mazzini had interpreted the defeat of Carthage as the birth of the Roman Empire when: "the flag of Rome flew atop the

¹⁴ Troilo 2003.

¹⁵ Barbanera 1998; Massari 2011, Arthurs 2007 and 2012.

¹⁶ On archaeology and African imperialism in Italy see Petricoli 1990 and Munzi 2001.

Atlantis Mountains as Carthage lay overthrown, the Mediterranean was called Our Sea.”¹⁷ The rhetoric of the period asserted Italy’s historical, almost natural, claim on the continent of Africa. Two main reasons were offered up in support of this sense of entitlement: Africa’s geographical position, and the idea that its lands had not been fruitful since the time of the ancient Romans. On the occasion of the war against Libya, the eminent Italian poet named Giovanni Pascoli delivered a nostalgic, imperialistic speech in favor of this intervention on November 21, 1911:

large numbers of working class members [to be understood as Italians] have found a place of their own: a vast region made wet by the waves of our sea. . . and towards which our great island juts out impatiently; this immense region that had once been replete with water and verdant with trees and gardens thanks to the labors of our ancestors, is now, and has been for some time, mostly desert owing to the inactivity of the nomadic and slothful populations.¹⁸

Harking back to Rome’s glorious past thus provided justification for a military campaign in Libya, whose barren lands were to prosper once again with the return of a so-called civilizing power. Pascoli’s repeated reference to the possessive *our* was a direct appeal to his Italian readers. Through an illusion that relied just as heavily on exclusion as it did inclusion, Pascoli attempted to engender a sense of belonging among his readership, simultaneously distancing them from “the other.”

The year 1911 was unlike any year. It also marked the 50th anniversary of Italy’s unification. Among the events deemed worthy of the occasion, a festival

¹⁷ Quoted in Salvatori 2006b:765. See also Cofrancesco 2009.

¹⁸ Pascoli, *La Grande Proletaria s’è mossa*.

was planned which intended to surpass all others in its scope so as to document Italy's evolution into a nation.¹⁹ Originally, two international exhibitions were organized: in Turin, the kingdom's first capital, and in Rome. A third was subsequently added in Florence, which had been the capital prior to Rome.

Amidst the cultural events, the Regional and Ethnographic Show held in the Piazza d'Armi, situated in present-day Rome's neighborhood of Prati, constituted the main attraction. The exhibition's purpose was to convey to a large, general public contemporary concepts such as "unity and multiplicity"²⁰ and, by extension, the complexity of the Italian nation as a new, unified state, still divided in terms of its geography and local identities. In addition to the diverse display of artifacts originating from all four corners of Italian soil, fundamental conceptual themes were also showcased, not least of which were Italian beliefs, customs and traditions. Emphasis was placed therefore on the multivalent character of the Italian people. The objects gave material form to this variety yet the very act of collection created a kind of unity.²¹ As a paper of the time noted, the Italic peoples in all their diversity were to "find solidarity in the common ground that Rome came to represent".²²

The celebrations featured a myriad of forms representing the myth of Rome. Pavilions were often adorned with decorative programs in relief and

¹⁹ Massari 2011:9.

²⁰ Ibidem: 12.

²¹ The objects joined the collection of the Ethnographic Museum of Florence at the close of the celebration. Their ultimate destination was the National Museum of Ethnography, under construction at that time. The museum is known today as the Museum of Popular Art and Traditions in EUR, in Rome. See Massari 2011: 12.

²² *La Tribuna* February, 8 1908, quoted in Massari 2011: 15.

freestanding sculpture, which illustrated the official consecration of Rome before the whole nation and, indeed, the rest of the world. The pediment above the entrance to the Regional and Ethnographic Show epitomized such efforts, for it was fitted by the artist Enrico Quattrini with a sculptural group depicting a scene in which various cities paid homage to a personified Rome.

April 8 witnessed the grand opening of an archaeological exhibition housed in the newly restored halls of the Baths of Diocletian, which had by that time become the official location for the Museo delle Terme in 1889.²³ With its display of common ancient origins, the show served a very specific purpose, namely to renew and, indeed, entrench in the bosom of Italian viewers a sense of both belonging and national identity. In this vein, Rome's role in the public and private spheres at provincial levels received special attention. Each province, in fact, was invited to contribute reproductions of local evidence for Rome's direct influence on its built environment and material culture. In this way, molds and models were also employed without necessitating any specialized knowledge on the part of the viewer, thought to be readily able to perceive their message. Those responsible for the exhibition ultimately endeavored to reach a vast audience with an array of subjects, all ideologically charged, that had been theretofore accessible solely to the ruling class. The same year witnessed state-sponsored pilgrimages to the new capital. By then Rome had become home to monuments celebrating the newborn nation, which of course stood side by side with those

²³ Massari 2011: 172-173; Esposizione 1983; Barbanera 1998: 34-48.

dating back to its glorious past.²⁴ The National Monument of Victor Emanuel II, for instance, had caused a deafening hullabaloo because of its chosen location, next to the Roman and Imperial fora, as well as its form and style.²⁵ The monument was inaugurated on June 4th, on the heels of the archaeological exhibition, and celebrated Italy's first king, and by extension, the entire country. The statue of the goddess Roma was strategically situated in the center of the monument, beneath the statue of the king himself.

In the ensuing years Italy would find itself engaged - for the first time as a nation – in the First World War. Vittorio Zucconi has noted that the war immediately revealed the limitations of this tenuous national unity, for the moment soldiers were sent to the front line they encountered formidable language barriers.²⁶ Their commanding officers spoke in a dialect so distinct from their own that orders became unintelligible.

Italy's entry into war marked a radical change in attitude on the part of one major public figure who would eventually highlight the myth of Rome and the concept of *Romanitas* as the principal components of Italian identity: Benito Mussolini. Official biographies on Mussolini, particularly the one penned by Margherita Sarfatti, underscore how the myth of Rome developed into his source of inspiration and guiding principle:

the adolescent's stern face had learned to bow over his father's books as he translated Latin. He was spellbound by Caesar's memoirs, Tacitus's

²⁴ Tobia 1991; Agnew 1998.

²⁵ Atkinson 1998, Tobia 1998, Vidotto 2006: 137-139; Massari 2011: 166-169.

²⁶ Zucconi 2009: 73-74.

knowledge, and Aeneas's poem. The many fables about a once remote village of bandits in the hills of Latium whetted his burgeoning fascination for the myth of Rome as it became the center of a world, to which it bestowed a body of laws and ensured well-being.²⁷

However, this passion for and knowledge of the Latin language and culture were not always as cultivated as one might expect. In fact, Mussolini's familiarity with the Latin language was limited, and his

knowledge of classical Rome was very narrow, and influenced by eighteenth-century Enlightenment and nineteenth-century revolutionary thinking. Although his erudition in the matter was therefore not extensive, Roman history was always present in the background and was considered a direct and privileged heritage of Italy²⁸

The prominence that Rome came to possess in Mussolini's thinking, or at least his public expressions, may have owed a great deal to Margherita Sarfatti, who, in addition to writing an enormously popular biography of Mussolini, which was reprinted seventeen times, was also Il Duce's mistress. Well educated and wealthy, Sarfatti was in love with Rome. A number of authors have hypothesized that Mussolini's attitudes towards Rome – especially ancient Rome - changed thanks to both her influence and that exerted by specialists in antiquity, among whom was Pietro De Francisci, the founder of the Institute for Roman Studies and author of the tellingly named, *Spirito della civiltà romana* (1940)²⁹.

Until 1914, Mussolini's speeches depicted Rome in negative terms. In 1910 he had declared, "Enough with this stupid prejudice that everything and anything must be concentrated in Rome in the name of unification. Rome is a vampiric

²⁷ Sarfatti 1926: 42.

²⁸ Nelis 2007: 396-97.

²⁹ Visser 1992; Falasca-Zamponi 1997:51, Belardelli 2002; Salvatori 2006b: 769-771; Argenio 2008.

city that sucks the best blood from the nation.”³⁰ Later references to Rome assumed a more positive connotation, to the point that by 1922 the name – together with its associated past – would undergo a complete restoration:

we are intent on fashioning Rome as a city after our own spirit, that is to say, a purified city purged of all those elements that would corrupt and defile her; we shall endeavor to make Rome our beating heart and quick spirit of the imperial Italy that we all dream of.³¹

Although Mussolini was a child of the Risorgimento, he did not slavishly adhere to the Roman values espoused at that time, which largely pertained to the Republican period. Instead, Fascism filtered Rome in such a way as to emphasize her imperial past.³² Fascism did not present itself as merely a new movement, but rather as the return of a glorious past that had been revitalized through, most importantly, a “force that would unite Italy and Italians after centuries of disunity and foreign occupation.”³³

Apart from the obvious visual references to ancient Rome, such as the *fasci*, the eagles and the Roman salute, many of which are frequently misinterpreted or decontextualized, it is important not to lose sight of the unifying or cohesive power that was expected of the ancient Roman Empire’s role in the Fascist present. ³⁴

³⁰ Quoted in Salvatori 2006b:762.

³¹ Mussolini 1922: 412.

³² According to LaPenna 1975:1351 the poet Giosuè Carducci played a key role in the exploitation of antiquity, for “in him we see the transition between the cult of Republican Rome and that of imperial Rome.”

³³ Stone 1999:207.

³⁴ Gentile 1993; Giardina 2008; Argenio 2008.

The complex relationship between ancient Rome, or, more properly speaking, the notion of Roman qualities summed up by the term *Romanitas*, on the one hand and, on the other Fascist ideology has been thoroughly studied, in relation to the impact of Fascism on Classical Studies, and in relation to archaeology³⁵. Nevertheless, some clarification of what is meant by *Romanitas* is in order. When translated into English, the term may be defined as “the spirit or ideals of Ancient Rome.”³⁶ In reality, only a single instance of this word is known to exist in Latin literature. Tertullian, in his *De Pallio* (4.1), writes:

Quid nunc, si est Romanitas omni salus, nec honestis tamen modis ad Graios estis?

But now, if Romanity is to the benefit of all, why are you nonetheless inclined to the Greeks, even in less honourable matters?

Tertullian’s text refers to a recent change in attire in the city of Carthage: the choice to don the Roman toga as opposed to the traditional *pallium*. The term *Romanitas* is therefore employed to set up a contrast or distinction, but rather than pointing to what is specifically Roman, it denotes what is non-Punic: “an ethnic category distinct from the Roman colonizers.”³⁷ Tertullian does not explain the characteristics representative of *Romanitas*. Johannes Kramer maintains that the meaning of the word may be inferred from the context as signifying

³⁵ Regarding the impact of Fascism on the field of classical studies and Roman history: Cagnetta, 1976; Cagnetta 1979; Canfora 1976; Canfora 1977; Gentile 1990; Gentile 1993, Visser 1992. With respect to Fascism’s impact on the field of archaeology and the latter’s exploitation for political leverage: Perelli 1977; Kostof 1978; Manacorda and Tamassia 1985; Belardelli 2002, Salvatori 2006; Nelis 2007; Giadina 2008; Argenio 2008; Kallis 2011; Arthurs 2012.

³⁶ "Romanitas" *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English*. Ed. Jennifer Speake. Berkley Books, 1999.

³⁷ Wilhite 2007:133.

“römische Art, Römertum.”³⁸ From a single reference in classical Latin, this term acquired new layers of meaning during the modern period especially in relation to its Fascist use, which was charged with references to Roman culture. The question then becomes which values of Roman culture were to be expressed by *Romanitas*. These values, it turns out, did not remain constant. Analogous to Rome’s changing roles and status under the Fascist regime, the meanings to be conveyed through the use of *Romanitas* would align themselves with new agendas and shifts in the contemporary situation.

Under Italian Fascism, “Rome was an idea, an aesthetic and a location with infinite possibilities and identities.”³⁹ So, too, *Romanitas* became an ephemeral word that conveniently suited varying contexts and political messages. For this reason, it may be more appropriate to adopt the word *Romanitates* when discussing the Fascist period, in order to capture more fully the range of nuances that it gathered during the twenty years of Mussolini’s regime. As Marla Stone has rightly stated: “Romanità in Fascists’ hands was an extremely malleable and changing ideological construct. The meanings and uses of romanità shifted, as political and cultural conditions varied between 1922 and 1943.”⁴⁰

It was precisely Rome’s remarkable adaptability and versatility that enabled Fascism to back up practically any of the initiatives it wished with a Roman precedent: from references to the March on Rome to the demographical

³⁸ Kramer 1998: 81-82.

³⁹ Stone 1999: 220.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

policies and the colonial wars. Moreover, the regime adapted history in order to reaffirm, legitimize, and exalt its own successes, which, accordingly, became the end result of an uninterrupted historical continuum that had begun with the Rome of the Caesars and culminated in Mussolini's Rome.

At first these references to the past were only sporadic, but they soon received systematic implementation accompanied by a nearly obsessive repetition from the start of the Ethiopian campaign of 1935 onward. As with the war against Libya in 1911, the conquest of a new territory lent itself to historical re-enactment in which the Italians played the part of the Romans and- this time around- the English, who opposed their conquest of Ethiopia, represented the new Carthaginians. The Ethiopians were not cast as the new Carthaginians by dint of their indigenous status.⁴¹

The invasion of Ethiopia precipitated a breach in Italy's relations with the League of Nations, the international organization created after the First World War. Member states had pledged themselves not to go to war before submitting their disputes with each other, or states not members of the League, to arbitration or enquiry⁴². The League Council declared that Italy was the aggressor nation in the Ethiopian affair and moved to impose sanctions on Italy on October 11, 1935 (enacted only on November 15, 1935).⁴³ Unsurprisingly, the

⁴¹ Munzi 2001: 7, Falasca-Zamponi 1997: 162-182

⁴² <http://www.indiana.edu/~league/intro.htm>

⁴³ It has been noted how the measures were mild (no supply of arms or raw materials to Italy, no credit granted and a moratorium on importing Italian goods into the abiding countries) and that they were applied half-heartedly considering that neither Germany nor the U.S. signed off on them, while other countries hardly enforced them.

Italian response to the sanctions was, first, to ignore them enforcing “our discipline, our sobriety, our spirit of sacrifice”⁴⁴ and then to use them as an excuse to assert Italy’s absolute autarchy.⁴⁵

The new Italian empire was declared on May 9, 1936, when Mussolini himself announced from the balcony of Piazza Venezia before a sea of followers that Italy had finally acquired its empire.

Stone has noted that, as a result of the declaration of May 9th, there was a dramatic escalation in the appearance of forms and motifs based on Roman art.

The process of cultural appropriation involved

Roman forms, such as mosaics, murals, bas-relief and monumental public statuary, [which] often took Roman themes, especially readings of Roman history and myth which coincided with Fascist priorities. According to many fascist bureaucrats, officially sponsored competitions for “Roman” art forms symbolized a regeneration based on national traditions⁴⁶

Cloaked in *Romanitas*, state art sought to make ideological allusions clear and legible to large segments of the population, while allowing for a greater superimposition of an idealized common past. Thus, the newly created generation of Italians was to be raised on the myth of Rome. After all, “national

<http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/SoleOnLine4/Italia/2009/10/storie-storia-18-novembre-sanzioni-italia.shtml?uuid=682c2eb4-b999-11de-8e82-7af95a44f68d&DocRulesView=Libero>

The sanctions were lifted on July 15, 1936, in an attempt to weaken the Rome-Berlin axis and coax Italy towards a more moderate position. Fabbri 2012.

⁴⁴ Speech delivered by Mussolini on October 2, 1935, when the League of Nations was threatening to apply sanctions. It was also aired on the radio. See Falasca-Zamponi 1997:260.

⁴⁵ The propaganda campaigns became incessant, and Italian raw materials and/or names replaced foreign ones: tè (Italian for tea) became carcadè; caffè (coffee in Italian) was given negative press, which described the beverage as harmful to one’s health, and Italy began manufacturing a substitute made of chicory.

⁴⁶ Stone 1999: 212.

identity requires a common memory that is shared by people who do not know one another, but who think of themselves as having a common history.”⁴⁷

This new national awareness, particularly among the younger generations, was strenuously encouraged by the Fascist regime. Mussolini himself spared no expense in promoting youth policies.⁴⁸ He personally saw to it that a series of provisions for children were carried out, not the least of which were the prolific building of schools in Italy and the colonies, a large anti-malaria campaign, and the founding of two national institutions - the *Opera Maternità ed Infanzia (OMNI)*⁴⁹, whose mission was to protect indigent mothers and their children, and the *Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB)*⁵⁰, an Italian youth organization. Each of these undertakings, presumably, would collectively shape future generations into a corps of Italian citizens who would then remain unswervingly loyal to the regime. Every opportunity was seized to forge true Italians who incarnated Roman values par excellence, or were at least construed as such through the Fascist lens.

To the same desired effect, the entire scholastic system was reformed. In the words of Mussolini: “The Government demands that the school be inspired by the ideals of Fascism [...] it demands that the school at all levels and in all its instruction train Italian youth to understand Fascism, to ennoble itself through

⁴⁷ Agnew 1998:229.

⁴⁸ Koon 1995:33-59.

⁴⁹ R.D. n.2277, April 10, 1925.

⁵⁰ The ONB was instituted by Royal Decree (R.D.) 2247 April 3, 1926. Koon, 1985:90-115. In its heyday, this organization played a fundamental role in the education of Italian youth, which unfortunately cannot be expanded upon here. For further reading, see Santuccio, 2005, with previous bibliography.

Fascism, and to live in the historic climate created by the Fascist revolution.”⁵¹ Starting with the Gentile reform of 1923, the Fascist indoctrination (*fascistizzazione*) of schools was further propelled by an ambitious series of laws and decrees intended to enable the party to infiltrate the entire scholastic system. This culminated in 1939 with the Carta della Scuola Bottai.⁵² It is no wonder, then, that schools soon numbered among the most conducive breeding grounds for producing entire generations of Italians – ex novo -given their centralized organization, over which the state exercised direct control. To achieve its aims, the state deemed it necessary to revise school curricula thoroughly. Starting from elementary school, the revision entailed, for example, the introduction of Mussolini’s own mottoes and speeches into Italian language instruction, and in an effort to instill a stronger sense of belonging to a glorious imperial past, history was added to the subjects to be taught during the third year in elementary school. As Koon has demonstrated, history under the fascists was deployed in the construction of the myth of Italy as a civilizing force, a mission revived by the fascists that explicitly authorized imperial expansion:

Italy was portrayed as the cradle of civilization (the contributions of the Greeks were minimized or overlooked entirely) and the conqueror of the Western world. Ancient history was Roman history, meaning military history and studies of heroic figures such as Caesar and Augustus.⁵³

The process by which the concepts, ideas, and themes taught in schools had to be interpreted and presented so as to be consonant with Fascist principles led to the

⁵¹ Quoted in Koon 1985:33.

⁵² On the Fascist school system: Bertone 1975, Isneghi 1979, Charnitzky 1996

⁵³ Koon 1985:72.

adoption of a single textbook. Although a ministerial commission was entrusted with this revision-cum-standardization, Mussolini once again became personally involved by selecting many of the contributing authors himself. Employing every possible means to promote Fascist ideals and mold the *Italiano Nuovo*⁵⁴, the texts included illustrations of children wearing black shirts, as well as pictures of the Italian flag and the fasces. The stories narrated Mussolini's achievements, his childhood, and Fascism's successes: the "Battle of Wheat"⁵⁵, the Ethiopian exploit, the provisions for children, the reclaiming of the Pontine Marshes⁵⁶ and so on.

Accordingly, images conveying these Roman values were reproduced continuously, on the covers of school notebooks or report cards, as well as on more widely circulating objects like postage stamps. The same messages were further imparted through visits to exhibitions and monuments, not to mention the mandatory participation in the parades and similar celebratory events organized by the regime. Italy's younger generations thereby became much more than spectators; indeed, they were actors in the renaissance of Rome.

Mussolini's program included a piece of legislation prepared by the Minister of Education, Bottai, which remained in effect in its original wording

⁵⁴ This is the title of one of the textbooks.

⁵⁵ Officially launched on June 20, 1925, and aimed at increasing crop yield of this type of cereal in Italy. For the negative side effects of this policy, particularly the price increase in wheat, and the decline of horticulture, dairy farming and animal husbandry, see Falasca-Zamponi 1997: 150-155.

⁵⁶ On this topic, see Stabile 2002. On the new towns founded by the Fascist regime in the reclaimed land, see Pennacchi 2008.

until 1999.⁵⁷ In its initial stages the country had soon sensed the need for certain legislation to foster a national identity, so the law under Mussolini was based on the fundamental premise that historical, artistic, cultural, and environmental patrimony provided the core around which a people's identity and unity revolved.

The myth of Rome was the driving force that attempted to bring together a country that was relatively united geographically, yet thoroughly divided politically and culturally. Whereas the Risorgimento employed references to Rome only sporadically and directed them mostly at the upper-middle class, Fascist Italy expanded their target to include all levels of society, bombarding them by every means of communication.

Through sheer serendipity the celebrations dedicated to the first anniversary of the new empire coincided with the festivities that had already been planned in honor of the bimillenary marking the first emperor Augustus's birth, a subject to which we now turn.⁵⁸

b. The Augustan Exhibition and the inauguration of Augustan sites

The Mostra Augustea della Romanità (MAR) followed a common Fascist practice of commemorating anniversaries and historical events through the display of daily life, ranging from summer youth camps to the success stories of the *Opera*

⁵⁷ On the legislation protecting cultural patrimony in Italy, see Troilo 2003.

⁵⁸ The literature on the bimillenary is immense, more recently see Arthurs 2012; Marcello 2011, Kallis 2011; Argenio 2008, for previous references see Scriba 1995.

Nazionale Balilla.⁵⁹ Prior to the bimillenary of Augustus, those of both Virgil and Horace had also been celebrated, albeit on a smaller scale.⁶⁰ The concurrence of the new empire's anniversary with Augustus's bimillenary brought about a proliferation of publications both scholarly and popular, which highlighted each point of overlap between the achievements of the first emperor and those of Mussolini himself.⁶¹ Archaeological excavations in Rome were organized together with the restoration of the *Ara Pacis* and the so-called liberation of the *Augusteum* (The Mausoleum of Augustus). The crowning effort, however, was the exhibition centered on *Romanità*, conceived by Giulio Quirino Giglioli the curator in charge of the 1911 show.⁶² Unfortunately the contemporary sources on the subject provide only partial images or are limited to official press releases and therefore present a one-sided, "artificial" view. Nevertheless, the magazine and newspaper descriptions together with other contemporary publications devoted to various sections of the show attest to the extent of its popularity, which gave rise to an entire series entitled *Civiltà Romana*. Moreover, the event occasioned other volumes on Augustan studies throughout the world.

⁵⁹ See Stone 1999: 215-220, Russo 2001.

⁶⁰ Cagnetta 1990. Livy's celebrations were yet to come, see chap. 2.

⁶¹ The most famous example was the volume by Italo Balbo "Augustus and Mussolini". Written in 1937, this work was not published until 1941: see Kostof 1978: On the "unlimited" publications see Cagnetta 1979. See also chap.4.

⁶² At the time, he was Professor of Art History and Archaeology at "La Sapienza" University in Rome, and from 1927 "president of Section X for Fine Arts and Antiquities of Rome's Governorship." Barbanera, 1998: 146. On Giglioli see also Arthurs 2012: 91-107.

The exhibition opened on September 23, 1937 in the refurbished and enlarged Palazzo delle Esposizioni⁶³ and officially kicked off celebrations for the Augustan Bimillenary. It remained open to the public for an entire year and its popularity and impact were enormous: over 700,000 tickets were sold.⁶⁴ Its opening day also marked the regime's re-inauguration of the Exhibition on the Fascist Revolution.⁶⁵

The MAR had been proposed to Mussolini by Giglioli in 1932 following a conference held on Romanità, which was organized by the Institute for Roman Studies headed by Galassi Paluzzi.⁶⁶ The project was approved and financed by the Duce who dipped into his own personal funds to guarantee resources.⁶⁷ According to Friedemann Scriba: "The archival sources demonstrate that neither the regime nor the party intervened with regard to the show's content or ideology; instead, they were the entire responsibility of Giglioli."⁶⁸

The statement contrasts with Giglioli's *modus operandi*, or at least it contradicts Giglioli's own description of the protocol he followed in such instances. Giglioli

⁶³Three external pavilions were added: for the section on the army, the 'Augustan' house, and the giant scaled model of Rome at the time of Constantine by Italo Gismondi. On Giglioli's request to set up pavilions here and there among the ancient city's ruins, so to stand up in comparison to modern world expos – particularly that of Paris in 1937 – which was trying to "shift attention away from Rome," see Marcello 2011:228.

⁶⁴ Scriba 1995:67. The number increases to one million in *Esposizione 1983*. Arthurs 2012: remarks that the number is based on an average and that the majority of visits took place during the show's first three months. Giglioli asked the Duce if special discounts could be applied to ticket sales and whether groups could be invited to visit. Arthurs poses the question of how many visitors went "voluntarily" to the exhibition.

⁶⁵ The show is held in 1932 in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni, celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Fascist Revolution. Russo 2001; Salvatori 2003 and Stone 1993.

⁶⁶ On Galassi Paluzzi and the *Istituto di Studi Romani*, see *infra* in this chapter.

⁶⁷ On the show's genesis, see Arthurs 2012: 91-107; Marcello 2011 with previous bibliography.

⁶⁸ Scriba 1995:81-82.

put forth his ideas during private meetings with the Duce held every three or six months.⁶⁹ In an interview with the newspaper *Popolo d'Italia*, published on the eve of the show's inauguration, Giglioli asserted that, "for the historical portion, I had repeatedly received guidance from the Duce's own words and observations, which were transcribed [onto panels] in the various galleries to characterize the ancient empire while acting at the same time as a prelude to the realization of the one newly founded by the Duce himself."⁷⁰

Scriba's statement may be an accurate assessment for the moment when the project was conceived; however, it does not take into account the historical events between the decision in 1932 to set up the show and its inauguration in 1937. The Ethiopian conquest was a turning point and radically altered the meaning of – as well as Mussolini's attitude toward – the entire show. During the same interview, Giglioli explained that, "a final section was spontaneously added to the ancient ones."⁷¹ In this gallery designed to immortalize the idea of Rome and the rebirth of the empire in Fascist Italy, this last addition was the most blatantly propagandistic of all the displays in the exhibition.⁷²

⁶⁹ Marcello 2011:228. Scriba himself mentions the private audiences, apparently attributing a different meaning to them, Scriba 1998: 81. According to ACS records, Giglioli also turned to Mussolini to discuss details in the show's organization. In fact, Giglioli's requests show evidence of annotations in Mussolini's own handwriting (si/no/sta bene).

⁷⁰ *Il Popolo d'Italia*, September 22, 1937.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Gallery XXVI. In all the different editions of the exhibition catalogue, this room is the only one to receive a narrative description, rather than the usual list with explanations of the artifacts on view. It is therefore likely that very few or perhaps no objects were on view in this gallery space. Instead, references were made to them via photomontages, to which the catalogue illustrations attest, as they include images of Augustus's obelisk with that of Axum (see chap.3). The special feature was the extensive use of quotations to accompany the photomontages. The limited number of contemporary pictures documenting this room does not permit an accurate or

The gallery alone is evidence of Giglioli's awareness of the propagandistic opportunities that this venue offered as well as his appreciation for its potential political impact.⁷³ Further proof of Mussolini's influence in this endeavor lies in the inaugural speech delivered by Giglioli for the occasion, but approved in its final form by Mussolini himself.⁷⁴

Giglioli insisted that the exhibition be accessible to as many viewers as possible and expressed his sentiments to the Duce on December 22, 1937. The Duce responded on December 31 by sending out circulars to all of his ministers, stating that "for the purpose of national and cultural propaganda, the Duce is promoting group visits to the exhibition from among members of the army, the marines, the airforce, the MVSN (Milizia Volontaria Sicurezza Nazionale) university, high and middle school students, as well as the eldest and worthiest elementary school pupils." Achille Starace, the secretary of the Partito Nazionale Fascista, was against the idea of having school classes from other parts of Italy make the journey to Rome, for the additional expense would have been onerous to family budgets.⁷⁵ Similar responses were received from military ministers. Members of the Academy for Physical Education (at the Foro Mussolini) were

complete reconstruction of these images and their relationship to the textual elements. This space is the most ephemeral of them all. It is also noteworthy that neither of Eugene Strong's articles (from 1938 and 1939) makes any mention of this room in his commentary on the exhibition – an especially interesting omission considering that the main thrust of these publications was to cover the Roman parts.

⁷³ On Scriba's position, see Scriba 1996: 64-65. I agree with Marcello 2011: 227-28, who rejected Scriba's theory. Nelis and more recently Kallis espouse Scriba's theory.

⁷⁴ ACS, PCM, busta 2493, fasc.14/1, sottofascicoli 1-2, n.918. The letter exhibits the annotation "sta bene" written in blue graphite by Mussolini's hand. The speech was published in its entirety in the exhibition catalogue's second edition of 1938. It was not included in the 1937 edition.

⁷⁵ Letter dated January 10, 1938

admitted free of charge “in groups of 100 or 50 at a time.”⁷⁶ In anticipation of the exhibition, a massive advertising campaign was launched, employing the latest in modern technology: radio, with succinct promotional slogans, and cinematography, with newsreels intended to draw an international audience.⁷⁷

As with the 1911 show, it was decided that no original objects would be used. Cast reproductions would take their place, “since [these] offer greater homogeneity in terms of material, thereby avoiding potential aesthetic clashes among the pieces to be displayed, and they lend themselves to being set in a more modern context.”⁷⁸ Countless practical reasons were ultimately behind this decision. Costs could be reduced by eliminating the need for transportation and conservation, loan refusals could be avoided and large-scale monuments, such as triumphal arches and theaters, were impossible to put on view could be presented through photographic reproductions.⁷⁹ The exhibition included approximately 200 scale models⁸⁰ and more than 3000 casts of artifacts.⁸¹ Although many of the

⁷⁶ ACS sottofascicolo 4/6: group visits on the part of associations and organizations for students and others. The idea of offering discounts and reduced rates had already been successfully proposed on the occasion of the Fascist Revolution Exhibition, Stone 1993:233-236.

⁷⁷ Arthurs 2012: 108-110. Particularly the one entitled “Nella Luce di Roma”, see chap 4.

⁷⁸ Cat. 1938: XV

⁷⁹ This homogeneity was also intended to engender a sense of harmony while enhancing the public’s reception of the message: “visitors were no longer privy to the diversity of different marbles or the varied states of conservation and instead were presented with a series of homogenous and idealized artifacts”, Marcello 2011: 229.

⁸⁰ No single scale was applied throughout the show, though most objects were reconstructed according to the ratio of 1:20, 1:50 or 1:100. One guiding principle was observed: “the same scale was used for monuments belonging to the same class or typology, so as to allow for a greater appreciation of grandeur when viewing a series of similar objects housed in the same gallery space.” Esposizione 1983:81.

⁸¹ *Architettura*, 1938:655

earlier exhibition's objects were recycled for the occasion,⁸² and the collaboration of museums and cultural institutions throughout the world –the only exception being “Bolshevik” Russia-⁸³ the organization and installation took five years.

In contrast to the 1911 design, which adopted a topographical approach, the design of the MAR arranged objects so to avoid a “monotonous series of sections filled with objects that were only distinguishable from one another by a trained eye, as this might lead the public to cut their visits short.”⁸⁴ The show was designed to engage the general public, and categories “were created so as to appeal to the modern sensibilities of viewers who practiced this or that profession represented within the various, coherent sections.”⁸⁵

The didactic and propagandistic opportunities were never lost on the organizers, whose aim was to create a display that was attractive without sacrificing scientific rigor: “the monuments have not been arranged according to rigid curatorial conventions; rather, the layout integrates text panels, photomontages, geographic maps, diagrams, etc. which, when read together, unite scientific seriousness with the vivacity of a modern show, and provide all Italian viewers with legible documentation of our people's glorious first empire.

⁸² These pieces have joined the collection of the Museum of Roman Civilisation: many objects on view have two catalogue numbers, the current number and a second one preceded by the letters MAR. On the museum's founding, see Esposizione 1983, Arthurs 2012. With regards to having the exhibition extended and join the E42 (a project that was under discussion at that time), see especially Kallis 2011. The plans had the Duce's blessing.

⁸³ Under the headline “The Only One Absent from all the Civilized World,” the article read: “the only monuments in all the world that have necessarily been omitted are those housed in museums of Bolshevik Russia. In the end, their exemplars are few in number.” *Popolo d'Italia* September 22, 1937. Although none of the exhibition catalogues mention this, since the statement made a greater political impression because it appeared in a widely circulated newspaper.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ MAR Exhibition catalogue of 1938 (second edition): XVII.

In this way, they might be elevated spiritually and exhorted to pursue the stated purpose of the exhibition, which was inscribed at the main entrance,”⁸⁶ according to one of Mussolini’s mottos: “Italians, let the glories of the past be surpassed by those yet to come.”

Evidently, reactions to the show were positive. For example, Eugénie Strong wrote in 1938 upon visiting the Augustan Exhibition, “No one need fear that he is being invited to visit some dreary museum of casts. . . here is history reanimated to an end.”⁸⁷ The show’s initial inspirational message was coupled with further instruction to read the past as an incentive “to action in the present and future.”⁸⁸

The reopening, only hours after the Augustan inauguration, of the Fascist Revolution exhibition housed in the Villa Giulia, underscored this sense of continuity.⁸⁹ Simonetta Falasca Zamponi rightly observes that the Fascist Revolution show, “represented the origins of fascism, not its whole history to the present,”⁹⁰ in order to avoid the “risk of representing fascism’s past as past or slipping into a monumentalization that would signify closure rather than continuity.”⁹¹

This exhibition introduced a novelty in source material by inviting citizens to contribute their own “relics”, such as medals, photographs, postcards, to the

⁸⁶ Cat. 1938:XX.

⁸⁷ Strong 1938:169.

⁸⁸ Strong 1938:170.

⁸⁹ *Popolo d'Italia* September 24, 1937, “Mussolini inaugura la MAR e riapre con rito guerriero il sacrario della rivoluzione”.

⁹⁰ Falasca-Zamponi 1998:432

⁹¹ Falasca-Zamponi 1998: 433.

displays. Many citizens were thus elevated from the status of passive viewer to active participant. These spontaneous contributions were arranged so that the whole “itinerary for the public was obligatory; there was no possibility of skipping rooms or following an arbitrary order.”⁹² Visitors proceeding in the prescribed manner would be compelled to relive the events as they were presented, with the desired slant. Naturally, the celebrations surrounding the two inaugurations, in which all the Fascist regime’s major political and cultural figures participated, were thoroughly covered by the press.⁹³

As mentioned earlier, one of the innovative approaches in the design at the Augustan show was the use of themes in addition to purely geographic or temporal groupings. Among the categories chosen: “the first, historical and political, [was] devoted to the chronological development of the Empire; the second, to its architectural and engineering achievements; the third, to its religious and social life.”⁹⁴ The first section took up the building’s main floor and synthesized the guiding message of the entire exhibition: the continuity between the Roman past and the Fascist present, in and the link between the first Roman emperor and the new Duce of the newly (re-)born empire.

From the Via Nazionale a set of stairs led up to the entrance of the exhibition, where a temporary façade had been erected for the occasion, designed by Alfredo Scalpelli in the form of a modern triumphal arch. The use of

⁹² Falasca-Zamponi 1998: 431.

⁹³ Salvatori 2008: 445.

⁹⁴ Strong 1939: 139.

inscriptions over the iconographic elements was a predominant feature of this arch. The left and right bays recorded passages from ancient authors, which emphasized: “the Romans love of their homeland and their civilizing force in the rest of the world.”⁹⁵ The inscriptions represented a summary of Roman achievements in every field of human endeavor, as if to provide an abstract or synopsis of what was to follow within the gallery spaces. The word “REX” preceded the inscriptions on the left, whereas “DUX” preceded those on the right. The two words were repeated like a chant, four times and inscribed with much larger lettering than the remaining text.⁹⁶

The celebratory theme was reiterated upon entering the exhibition proper. In the distance was a statue of Augustus as Benefactor (*Augusto come Genio benefico*), which created the narrative focal point.⁹⁷ This epiphany could only be reached after proceeding along a precisely delineated, informative and evocative path.

Flavia Marcello notes that “the power of these exhibitions was invested as much in the objects and their modes of display as in their ability to evoke memory and construct links between past and present through spatial

⁹⁵ The 1938 catalogue: 3. Livy, XXXIII, 33, 5; Cic. *De Officiis*, I, 17, 57; Pliny The Elder, *Nat. Hist.* III, 3, 39; Aelius Aristides (without specifying the passage); Tertullian, *De Anima*, 30, 3; St. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, V, 12. Marcello 2011: 12 notes the importance of the choice made in the type of translation employed for the texts.

⁹⁶ Marcello remarks on the missing word “Rex” in the preparatory drawings, explaining that, “this was ostensibly to honor King Victor Emmanuel who had been nominated Emperor of Ethiopia” (p.230). I believe it is more plausible that the title “Rex” became a necessary addition out of diplomatic deference. Victor Emmanuel was, after all, the sovereign of Italy, at least on paper. That Mussolini considered it an injustice that Victor Emmanuel have the title of emperor, while Mussolini did all the work, is no secret.

⁹⁷ Vatican Museums, Museo Pio-Clementino.

experience.”⁹⁸ Accordingly the gallery space enjoyed a key role in the visitors’ experience and their perception of the show’s ultimate message, which unfolded during an ‘obligatory itinerary’⁹⁹, or ‘orchestrated sequence’ that resulted in a ‘selective approach to remembrance’. These elements aimed not only to create specific ties between Fascism and *Romanità*, but more important to the reenact the past keyed to modern sensibilities. Visitors could identify themselves with that past both as Fascists who share the same values and, above all, as Italians.

Mussolini personified to a certain extent his own words, especially as continuator of the deeds of the first emperor Augustus. During the inauguration, “Mussolini took care to stand where his figure and that of Augustus were in direct correlation”¹⁰⁰, while Giglioli addressed the duce directly, emphasizing how “all your works as ‘*civis romanus*’ are here present as the driving force of this exhibition, and mark a spontaneous and inevitable coincidence between your actions and those of the greatest Romans.”¹⁰¹ Giglioli’s speech was published fully in the *Popolo d’Italia*, which carefully described the event for the benefit of those unable to attend. The account emphasized the audience’s irrepressible applause when Giglioli indicated the presence of the Duce’s hand in Italy’s accomplishments together with his call to action expressed throughout the exhibition. Giglioli’s delivery was interrupted by cheers at the sound of “the

⁹⁸ Marcello 2011: 224.

⁹⁹ A study of the exhibition’s floor plans conserved in the ACS, which map out two possible routes for Mussolini to follow on the show’s opening, together with those published in *Architettura*, seems to suggest that the so-called mandatory itinerary within the exhibition was less a fixed than a highly recommended one.

¹⁰⁰ Marcello 2011:235.

¹⁰¹ Cat. 1938: VII. Underlining mine. *Civis Romanus* is a direct quote from Mussolini’s speech of April 21, 1922.

ancient Roman senate's salute to Augustus as the duce of Italy."¹⁰² These celebrated successes appeared repeatedly in various contexts throughout the show, thereby creating continual crossreferencing between one gallery space and another.

In the vestibule - while still under Augustus's gaze - visitors were greeted by an inscription capturing the Duce's imperative: "Italians! See to it that the glory of the future surpasses that of the past."¹⁰³ From there, one entered the Atrium of Victory, a spacious gallery that "assumed the shape of a Roman vault of the kind found in ancient baths. The room was constructed by imitating the same building technique."¹⁰⁴ The atrium was followed by the Hall of the Empire, whose entryway assumed the form of the façade of the temple of Augustus in Ancyra, reproduced in full scale and recording the full text of Augustus's *Res Gestae*. Objects were arranged in this hall as if to provide "an anthology of triumphal works; [...] monuments were chosen [...] with the sole intent to

¹⁰² *Popolo d'Italia* September 24, 1937.

¹⁰³ Giglioli also used these words during his inaugural speech for the show, on which Mussolini officially signed off. The speech was published in its entirety at the beginning of the exhibition catalogues, starting from the second edition.

In total, four catalogue editions exist with the main differences lying primarily in the changes made between the first and second, published in 1937 and 1938, respectively. The second edition strikes a more propagandistic tone and records descriptions of objects in greater detail. Above all, its text also pertains to the rooms' designs, including the inscriptions that appeared on the walls, not the least of which were those quoting Mussolini. Furthermore, this catalogue provides a greater number of illustrations, some of which also document the gallery on the rebirth of Rome and the obelisks of Augustus and Axum.

Later editions include changes, often minimal, that demonstrate how the exhibition evolved in reaction to current events and adapted to maximize propagandistic opportunities. The fourth and definitive edition of 1938 gave further voice to the zeitgeist Mussolini was striving to create. For instance, after describing Antoninus Pius's enlarged coin featuring the personification of eternal Rome, the catalogue echoes a sound bite from Mussolini's speech in Udine: "our intention is to make Rome the beating heart and quick spirit of the imperial Italy that we have all been dreaming of."

¹⁰⁴ Cat. 1938: 3.

impress with a grandiose representation of *Romanità*.”¹⁰⁵ Mussolini’s words shared billing with ancient quotes: “I do not live in the past. The past for me is nothing but a springboard from which to launch into the most sublime future.”¹⁰⁶

Once a clear illustration of the importance and grandeur of the Romans’ – and, by extension, Fascism’s – conquests was presented, the visitor was then invited to begin an historical survey of the evolution of the city of Rome, organized chronologically (and selectively) from its birth to its imperial rebirth in Fascist Italy. In the center of the gallery on the Origins of Rome (III), a full-sized plow rested on an enframed patch of actual dirt bearing Mussolini’s momentous utterance the day he founded Littoria: “The plow may furrow the land, but it’s the sword that protects it. Both the plowshare and the blade are fashioned from steel that has been tempered like the faith of our hearts.”¹⁰⁷ Magazine covers and newspapers alike were awash with images of Mussolini, the new Romulus, at the wheel of a tractor as he plowed the virgin soil of the newly founded colonies in the Pontine countryside. A Luce newsreel recounted the same episode with the evocative commentary, “the Duce renews Romulus’s rite, whereby he digs a groove in Aprilia’s soil.”¹⁰⁸ In the Agriculture and Land Surveying gallery (LXXIII) further references were made to these new settlements and to Fascist agrarian policies enacted in order “to remove people from the cities” and recreate the ideal “soldier-citizen”. The displays demonstrated “how Roman civilization

¹⁰⁵ Cat. 1938:11.

¹⁰⁶ Cat. 1938:20.

¹⁰⁷ Cat. 1938:36, speech of December 18, 1934.

¹⁰⁸ LUCE 29/04/1936 Bo877.

boasted the most modern practices, including cultivation methods; for instance, the Roman reclaiming of the Po Valley region, [...] practices that were spontaneously reintroduced centuries later by Fascism, when the Duce decided to reclaim the marshlands.”¹⁰⁹ The insertion of “spontaneously” stressed the notion that Fascism was not an imitation of the Roman past, but a natural continuation. The same room (LXXIII) exhibited a reproduction of the *Tellus* panel from the *Ara Pacis* to symbolize “the renewed fertility due to the agrarian policy of Augustus.”¹¹⁰ In addition to these agrarian policies, new legislation promoting procreation and the preservation of the “Italic” race were Fascist priorities that were also considered a continuation of Augustan concerns.

The Immortality of the Idea of Rome (XXVI), was situated opposite the gallery on the Origins of Rome (III), and was the most closely related to Fascism. Not surprisingly, the leitmotif was that of natural continuity between the Roman and the Fascist empires. In the middle of the room, atop a stele, stood a replica of the victory statue from the Nazario Sauro monument in Koper¹¹¹, flanked by busts of the king, Victor Emanuel III (on the left), and Mussolini (on the right), respectively. Both busts were expressly commissioned for the occasion. The walls bore the following inscription: “the words of great men from Dante down to Mussolini.”¹¹² Beneath the inscription, “a series of monuments were

¹⁰⁹ *il Popolo d'Italia*, September 22, 1937. The underlining is mine.

¹¹⁰ Strong 1938: 162.

¹¹¹ One of the heroes of the Istrian resistance movement during WWI, who was executed by the Austrians for treason. Designed by Attilio Selva, the statue went up in 1935 and was demolished in 1947.

¹¹² On Mussolini and the concept of history as the making of bold men, see Belardelli 2002: 334-38.

photographically reproduced to illustrate a Roman imperial idea - passed down from generation to generation – together with vivid reminders of recent events (parades, assemblies, rallies, etc.), during which the imperial spirit of Rome had been renewed through Fascism.”¹¹³

Among the Fascist works that were mentioned, there were also “the Roman monuments, to whose conservation and preservation much care and attention had been devoted, so that they might be venerated by posterity.”¹¹⁴ This reference to ‘archaeological’ interventions was accompanied by a picture of the Arch of Constantine¹¹⁵, as well as images of two modern triumphal arches built during the Fascist period: the Victory Monument in Bolzano, a work by Piacentini, to celebrate the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian empire¹¹⁶, and the Arch of the Phylenians in Libya, inaugurated on March 15, 1937, which straddles the Via Balbia.¹¹⁷ Captions for the two modern arches announced, “The series has been resumed.”

¹¹³ Cat. 1938: 435.

¹¹⁴ Cat. 1938: 436. Unfortunately, the catalogue does not specify which ones they were, but presumably the Forum of Augustus numbered among them, having been “freed” during the road works for Via dei Fori Imperiali.

¹¹⁵ After the clearing and renovation work in the Colosseum area was completed, this monument lent itself as a prime backdrop to Fascist parades. With this view, it was also reproduced on postage stamps: *Pro Opera Previdenza milizia*, 1935, a design by Mezzana in which soldiers are seen passing through Constantine’s Triumphal Arch accompanied by the words “in the footsteps of the ancient legions.” The image is practically identical to a well-known photograph of the period (cfr. Tamassia P. 194: military parade at the inauguration of the Via dei Trionfi on October 28, 1934).

¹¹⁶ Officially unveiled in 1928, the monument still stands in Bolzano. On triumphal arches and Mussolini, see Welge 2005.

¹¹⁷ The Arch of the Phylenians in Cyrenaica, which straddles the Libyan coast road (which was renamed Via Balbia in 1940, following the assassination of the Libyan governor, Italo Balbo) was inaugurated on March 15, 1937 during Mussolini’s visit. The story about the Phylenian brothers is retold by Sallust in *Bell Jugh.* 79. They were two Carthaginian brothers who had agreed to compete against two Greek men in order to settle a dispute over where to draw the border between two territories. The brothers’ victory was thrown into question when the Greeks

The same juxtaposition of the past with the present was employed for the display of the Augustan Obelisk and the Obelisk of Axum, also shown with the Lion of Judah, the symbol of the Ethiopian monarchy.¹¹⁸ The Italo-Ethiopian War commands the thematic focus of this room. Excerpts of Mussolini's speech from May 9, 1936, were placed above the aforementioned busts and on the pedestal of the Victory statue "like a classical festoon made of Roman laurel, joining the Augustan symbols in fateful unity."¹¹⁹ In this same space, other historical events, echoed by more current ones, were commemorated: the offering of gold by

demanding yet another trial of their good will: they were to be buried alive at the place where the border would be established between Cyrenaica and Carthage. The arch's attic records a quotation from Horace's *Carmen Saeculare* (*Alme Sol, possis nihil urbe Roma visere maius*). The same sentence appeared both on the 80 cent stamp for the airmail post series in honor of the Augustan bimillenary, as well as on the 5+2 for ordinary post in honor of the Horatian bimillenary (see chap.II). Beneath the attic, two bronze statues of the fraternal Phylenians are enframed. The interior barrel vault was decorated in relief sculpture depicting the Duce and the king. The arch was demolished by the Libyan government in 1973, and the two statues rest today at the edge of the road, whereas fragments of the relief sculpture were placed on view outside the Sirte Museum. The arch was celebrated on the Italian postage stamps for Libya, which were created to mark the inauguration of the road.

Sallust's text appears to have been Balbo's inspirational source for erecting the triumphal arch. There is an error in Welge's translation of the related catalogue entry: "Finally, there is the arch at the altar of the Phylenians in Cyrenaica by the architect Florestano di Fausto, remembering the triumphal voyage of the Duce in Libya and the inauguration of the *strada littoranea* [lictor's, or Fascist, street]". In the original Italian, the text reads *strada litoranea*, with a single letter "t", which simply means "coastal road", and is thus completely devoid of any political connotation much less of any reference to Fascism. The word for lictor's street would have been *littoriana*.

¹¹⁸ This information was not printed in the 1937 edition of the exhibition catalogue. On Mussolini and obelisks, see Wilkins, 2005: 61-63. On the obelisk of the Foro Mussolini, see especially Amelio 2009.

¹¹⁹ Cat. 1938: 442.

Roman women during the Punic wars¹²⁰, together with an image of the queen of Italy on the Day of Faith before the Altar of the Fatherland in Rome.¹²¹

Proclaimed on December 18, 1935, the *Giornata della Fede* (the Day of Faith) became one of the events organized in response to the sanctions against Italy, enforced by the League of Nations after Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. Italians were asked to donate their wedding bands. In exchange, they would receive rings made of iron inscribed with the date November 18, 1935, marking the beginning of the sanctions, together with the words "Gold to the Fatherland." It has been rightly noted that: "*Fede* in Italian has both the spiritual meaning of zeal and the material one of wedding ring [...] in its double meaning the *Giornata della Fede* aimed to ensure the population's faith in the regime's actions, both materially and symbolically."¹²²

The gesture of offering up the wedding rings was heightened in its symbolic significance through the regime's choice of location. On the appointed day, hundreds of thousands of Italians throughout the peninsula ceremoniously proceeded to their local monument that had been erected in commemoration of the fallen. By carrying out the act on this stage, participants performed a national display of unity against the aggression of the League of Nations.

¹²⁰ The reference was probably made to the Hortensia's speech contained in Appian, *Civil Wars*, 4.32-4 "Our mothers on one occasion long ago were superior to their sex and paid taxes, when your whole government was threatened and the city itself, when the Carthaginians were pressuring you. They gave willingly, not from their land or their fields or their dowry or their households, without which life would be unlivable for free women, but only from their own jewelry, and not with a fixed price set on it, nor under threat of informers and accusers or by force, but they gave as much as they themselves chose".

¹²¹ The ceremony was widely publicized, and images appeared in newspapers and newsreels.

¹²² Falasca-Zamponi 1997: 180-181.

In the MAR other juxtapositions of historical events with the Fascist present included a map of the Arno and Po Valleys¹²³, where the ancient Romans had reclaimed the land, alongside a map of the Pontine Marshes, which the Fascists reclaimed.¹²⁴ To conclude the analogy with the past and document the paragon of “true Roman works wrought by Fascism”, a photograph of the Foro Mussolini was displayed, with its “classically inspired center for physical education. The son of the she-wolf was also pictured in profile atop an imperial eagle in an allusion to the Roman basis for the Fascist Youth programs.”¹²⁵

According to Giglioli, this continuous thread could be recognized in other Fascist initiatives, for example, the “social welfare system that the emperor Augustus had ingeniously devised, which only the modern world, or I should say, only Fascist Italy was able to reintroduce after so many centuries; yet not so much out of a will to imitate, as out of a national instinct – stemming from our ancestry - to spontaneously create it.”¹²⁶ *Romanità* is almost equated with a genetic trait that explains the propensity to repeat and even surpass the achievements of one’s ancestors, enabling also a temporal leap.¹²⁷

Other gallery spaces lent themselves more readily to a Fascist interpretation of ancient Roman history, and therefore “charitable institutions

¹²³ The same map was on display in the gallery on agriculture (LXXIII).

¹²⁴ Cat. 1938: 438.

¹²⁵ Cat. 1938:437.

¹²⁶ Interview on the *Popolo d'Italia*, September 22 1937. Emphasis mine.

¹²⁷ On the role of Christianity as a bridge between ancient Roman and Fascist cultures, see Belardelli 2002. The role of Augustus as an intermediary for Christianity was symbolized through the announcement of the birth of Jesus according to words of Saint Luke, the evangelist, which were displayed in the gallery on Augustus. This line of reasoning was further developed and concluded in the gallery devoted to Constantine.

and imperial benefactions were documented with special care in view of modern Italy's interest in the subject"¹²⁸, above all with respect to the distribution of grain.¹²⁹ Here the most immediate correlation was to the Fascist Battle of Wheat conducted in tandem with the founding of the new colonies. This would have already been drilled into the visitors' collective memory, considering the extensive advertising campaigns that had vividly captured Mussolini in the act of threshing.

The same can be said of the room LXV, devoted to youth organizations and the Italian school system, which required little imagination to recognize ancient precedents for Fascist priorities. The education of Italy's youth played an enormous role in Mussolini's policies, and was integral to instilling a sense of allegiance to Fascism. The Foro Mussolini was the physical manifestation of the principles and ideals the regime sought to promote among its youngest followers. The sections of the show dedicated to children would have resonated particularly with those age groups that had experienced first hand the paramilitary organizations that the exhibition eulogized.

The exhibition catalogue of 1938 illustrated the changes that occurred in the structure of the youth organizations. From 1937 onwards, the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* (ONB), which had operated under the aegis of the Ministry of Education, became the Italian Fascist Youth Organization (GIL, Italian acronym

¹²⁸ Strong 1939: 162.

¹²⁹ Puglisi 1938. This volume also belongs to the series issued in conjunction with the exhibition.

for *Gioventù Italiana del Littorio*) and passed into the hands of the Fascist Party. Under the latter's control, the organization became increasingly militaristic.¹³⁰

The curators of the show were not always the same scholars who published on the various sections. A number of monographic works appeared, such as the series entitled *Roman Civilization*. Published in 1938, the volume devoted to youth organizations was written by Salvatore Puglisi and its preface is especially intriguing in its unwilling admission to a self-serving shift in the interpretation and emphasis of the past to serve present priorities:

Whereas previous scholarly interest in youth associations had been considered a mere curiosity within the field of ancient Roman studies, without any apparent or direct relation to the spirit of Roman civilization; today Fascism has placed political and military instruction of its younger generations at the cornerstone of its power to ensure the State's continued existence. As a result, the antique Roman institution known as *Iuventus* has received greater attention, insofar as its role in the life and history of the Roman empire is highlighted.¹³¹

Furthermore, Puglisi's analysis has an interpretation of the term *princeps iuventutis* that dovetails with the regime's propagandistic efforts. The definition of the figure as: "the rightful president of all of the youth organizations in the empire," is an addition to the customary meaning of "heir to the throne."¹³² This definition explains why Mussolini is celebrated as *princeps iuventutis* on the medals awarded to young winners at athletic contests. It is Mussolini in his capacity as *the* authority presiding over such events, and not as "successor to the

¹³⁰ "The youth associations created under Fascism, which have now adopted the glorious, ancient Roman name of *Gioventù* with the Roman titles of *Fascista* and *Littorio*, harken back to a precedent in Roman imperial life." Cat. 1938:785. Regarding the ONB and the GIL, see chapter 3.

¹³¹ Puglisi 1938: 5.

¹³² Puglisi 1938: 19.

throne”¹³³. The fact that official institutions (the state) were not interested in such organizations prior to the Augustan period, Puglisi wrote, was “the cause of the social and moral subversion that led the empire to the brink of ruin during the civil wars.”¹³⁴ The far-sightedness of Augustan policies, on the other hand, “provided for demographic legislation that would ensure the lineage’s physical integrity and continuation, and appreciated the moral and political impact of State intervention in the coordination of its youngest members.”

Mussolini not only restored order and unity to an Italian state left in chaos after the First World War, he also attempted to keep it from happening again by reorganizing youth associations and placing them under the direct aegis of the Fascist party. By 1938, the GIL was no longer a novelty. It operated smoothly and had enlisted all young Italians by that time. Contemporary descriptions of these organizations are telling: “after many centuries, an institution has reappeared in Italy that presents close analogies to the ancient *Iuventus* and today has adopted the same name *Gioventù* (*la Gioventù Italiana del Littorio*).”¹³⁵ These youth associations placed primary emphasis on gymnastic-military training and the collective demonstration of the skills acquired.¹³⁶ Children were sorted into three groups according to age. How could any child

¹³³ Puglisi, 1938:19. The book contains an illustration of a bronze medal showing Constantine as *Principes Iuventutis* (Arras, Paris). This medal was not on view at the show, although there was a golden one on display from the Augustan period dating back to 2 B.C. Its reverse has Caius and Lucius as *Principes Iuventutis* (RIC 206; Cohen 42), whereas the obverse has a portrait of Augustus, nearly identical to the likeness used on the commemorative medal for the bimillenary show. The golden one is now in the Museum of Este collection. On the medal, see chap. 3.

¹³⁴ Puglisi 1938: 6.

¹³⁵ Puglisi 1938: 6.

¹³⁶ Specific reference is made to the *Lusus Troiae*, Puglisi 1938:14

feel left out, for all of them were or had been at some point either “Children of the She-Wolf”, *Balilla*, or *Avanguardisti* members, and well-versed in drills and Fascist party pageants.

The *Popolo d'Italia* also underscored the points of reference between the institutions of the *Iuventus* and the “current Fascist university groups together with the other youth associations created by the regime.”¹³⁷ Puglisi’s tone, however, was adamant in his book “no direct link exists between the two institutions; still, they do demonstrate the historical continuity that exists between the new Italy and the ancient Roman empire”¹³⁸. Puglisi’s tautology would like to prove the *Romanità* of Fascism. In no uncertain terms, the Fascist regime was being exalted before the eyes of the visitors to the exhibition, Italian visitors nonetheless, as a continuation of the Roman Empire. Whether symbol or slogan, the message was compellingly clear: “an age of antiquity - beginning with Augustus...and his government – had to take its name from Italy; and whose *Romanità* modern day Italy has repeated.”¹³⁹

The central gallery devoted to Augustus and his family was thematically connected to other sections that focused on the “army, the navy, and legislation - all of which he reorganized on a new basis - and were linked up with his achievements.”¹⁴⁰ The section on law highlighted how “Roman law still remains

¹³⁷ *Popolo d'Italia*, September 22, 1937.

¹³⁸ Puglisi 1938: 7.

¹³⁹ Ferrabino, quoted in Perelli: 1977:220.

¹⁴⁰ Strong 1939:147.

the highest standard to underpin the civilized world today.”¹⁴¹ It is important to remember that the civil code was rewritten under Mussolini and this recalls the *Lex Julia et Papia Poppaea*, or “the complex body of legislation on marriages introduced by Augustus for the dual purpose of encouraging procreation while maintaining racial purity.”¹⁴² Prolific marriages that produced the next generation of soldiers necessary to carry on Rome’s imperial mission were therefore required under the Fascist regime, which singled out the most fertile mothers for solemn awards ceremonies.¹⁴³

The concept of “racial purity” points to a change in attitude that was to come to Italy between the exhibition’s opening and its closing a year later. A speech by Mussolini on September 18, 1938, during his trip to Trieste, marks Italy’s decisive turn for the worse that would eventually lead to the approval of racial laws on November 11 of that same year. Naturally, this revisited view of race created a whole new layer of meaning with regard to the Ethiopian conquest, one of the exhibition’s leit-motives. In 1938, Armando Lodolini’s *History of the Italian Race from Augustus to Mussolini* was published and cemented the author’s position already intimated in previous years.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Riccobono discusses Augustan legislation in the volume entitled *Augustus* published in 1938. On Riccobono’s and racial laws, see Mantello 1987.

¹⁴² Cat. 1938:283. Strong 1938: 174: “The marriage laws of Augustus and his measures for the increase of the birth rate, which have no doubt influenced modern legislation on the subject, are naturally given prominence”.

¹⁴³ Lazzaro-Crum 2004:16.

¹⁴⁴ Argenio 2008:159.

The Roman victories in Africa were advertised in such a way that they harkened back to the defeat of one of Rome's worst enemies: Carthage.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, the recent Italian conquests shed a new historical light on the two winged victory statues found "on a hill in the area of Carthage"¹⁴⁶ on display in the Hall of the Empire. The catalogue description underscored how these pieces were "worthy of representing the *Romanità* of Africa." Carthage played a key role in the representation of Rome's past. As early as 1926, in his lecture entitled *Ancient Rome on the Sea*, Mussolini affirmed that the fall of Carthage was decisive in making the Mediterranean a "Roman lake,"¹⁴⁷ effectively laying the foundation for an empire.¹⁴⁸ The Punic wars¹⁴⁹, especially the second, were the subject of a popular film produced in 1937 entitled *Scipione Africano*. The film narrated Rome's victory against the Carthaginian general and made known to a vast audience this sensationalized historical episode together with points of analogy to Mussolini's Ethiopian war, History was thus finally repeating itself with the conquest of Ethiopia, and the empire had returned to "the fateful hills of Rome."

The organizers of the MAR employed a visual vocabulary that encompassed a multitude of meanings that were readily applied to new

¹⁴⁵ For this subject see Munzi 2002.

¹⁴⁶ Cat.1938:17

¹⁴⁷ Mussolini, *Roma antica sul mare*, 1926. At first Mussolini defined World War II as the Fourth Punic War. Munzi 2002: 68.

¹⁴⁸ An entire section was devoted to the marines, the entrance to which recorded a passage from one of Mussolini's speeches. In the back of the gallery there was a colossal statue of Agrippa: "Augustus's great general and admiral, to whom we owe the victory at the Battle of Actium". Cat. 1938: 260-262.

¹⁴⁹ Gallery IV celebrated Rome's military expansion from the beginning of the Republic to the triumph over Carthage.

interpretations of concepts and events. A number of images referred to existing monuments within Rome's urban fabric, as well as in other Italian territories, while important events were perpetuated through tangible documentation that captured these ephemeral experiences in the form of politically laden imagery. The textual elements exerted a profound impact on the public as well.¹⁵⁰ The presence of inscriptions and quotations "from ancient and modern authors, hung like tapestries on the wall invite the new Italy to loom upon and emulate the works of old Rome."¹⁵¹ Moreover, the photographic enlargements of coins brought "these invaluable historic documents within the range of appreciation of the general public."¹⁵²

Numismatics came to operate outside of the specialist's field and became instrumental in the political and social propaganda of the time. Examples were not limited to reproducing images first used on ancient Roman coins, but included, above all, the striking of special edition coins that harkened back to the Roman past. On the occasion of the new empire's first anniversary, the so-called Empire Series was issued, which the *Popolo d'Italia* featured in an article accompanied by a photograph and full description of each denomination, and noted: "as in ancient Roman times coinage is used once again to celebrate the labors of a Nation."¹⁵³ Also described and illustrated in national newspapers¹⁵⁴,

¹⁵⁰ Strong 1938.

¹⁵¹ Strong 1938: 170.

¹⁵² Strong 1938:171.

¹⁵³ *Popolo d'Italia*, May 8 1937.

¹⁵⁴ "Le vestigia imperiali di Roma nei francobolli" by Giovanni Mastrorilli in *Il Mattino Illustrato*, 19 (10-17 maggio 1937). The same journal had previously published articles on stamps, for example 10-17 Agosto 1936 "Motti latini sui francobolli".

postage stamps, another form of currency, reproduced monuments on display in the exhibition or entire parts thereof.¹⁵⁵

This fragmentation was further exploited within the show itself, as some monuments or their details were shown in more than one gallery since they represented other didactic functions or interpretations in different contexts. For example the *Res Gestae*, whose text appeared on the reproduction of the monumental façade of the temple of Roma and Augustus in Ancyra, that was at the entrance of the exhibition. Its Italian translation was also found in both the gallery devoted to Augustan literature and in gallery LXXXI, where a table recorded the donations made by various emperors to their people and Augustus's was quoted from the *Res Gestae*. The *Ara Pacis*, on display as full scale model¹⁵⁶ and as separate panels. The panel depicting Aeneas was located in the gallery on the Origins of Rome, while the panel of the so-called *Tellus* complemented the gallery on agriculture.

These two monuments were used to construct a direct and physical juxtaposition within the city of Rome, creating a de facto "archaeological falsehood". This happened the moment the *Ara Pacis* was painstakingly

¹⁵⁵ On postage stamps, see chap.2.

¹⁵⁶ In an article of 1938, Strong's primary criticism of the exhibition is the lack of a full model of the *Ara Pacis*, which she discusses further in 1939. The description of the model, scaled 1:10, was, however, already included in the 1937 edition of the exhibition catalogue. One explanation might be an oversight on Strong's part, or that the model was not yet complete at the time (either way, it was still possible to provide a description of the monument) and was placed at a later moment. The inauguration of the restored *Ara Pacis* did not take place until after the exhibition came to a close on September 23, 1938.

recovered, for its reconstruction included the text of the *Res Gestae*,¹⁵⁷ which was placed on the wall of the pavilion designed by Morpurgo to face the Via di Ripetta. This made the monument an integral component of the recently restored Piazza Augusto Imperatore. The words of the *Res Gestae* were inscribed in marble from Rapolano in “beautiful Roman capital lettering” set in bronze.¹⁵⁸ Composed of seven panels, the inscription covered a surface area of 40 square meters and followed the critical edition of 1937, published in celebration of the occasion.¹⁵⁹

In antiquity, the text was associated with the Mausoleum of Augustus, not with the altar, whose original location differed from its Mussolinian setting.¹⁶⁰ The only relationship that existed in ancient times between the text and the altar is that the *Res Gestae* mentioned the altar’s construction as an expression of the Senate’s gratitude for the emperor’s safe return from Spain and Gaul.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ On the reconstruction of the text and its integration into the *Ara Pacis*, see Rossini 2006: 106-107. The author specifies: “we do not have any documents that indicate whose idea it was originally to enrich the pavilion for the *Ara Pacis* with such an ornate execution”.

¹⁵⁸ In which V was used for both the letters U and V.

¹⁵⁹ Concetta Barini was responsible for this edition in the series *Scriptores graeci et latini*, promoted by Benito Mussolini and entrusted to the Accademia dei Lincei. In the introduction of the published text, dated September 23, 1937, one reads: “lift up high, o legionaries, your standards and your hearts to salute the reappearance of the empire on the fateful hills of Rome after 15 centuries.” See note 78, chap.2.

The text is the only portion of the original structure that has been preserved in the new building designed by Richard Meier inaugurated in 2005.

¹⁶⁰ Its original position was along the Via Lata (present-day Via del Corso), the portion of the Via Flaminia within the city of Rome. Augustus used the Via Flaminia on his victorious return from Spain and Gaul.

¹⁶¹ “When I returned from Spain and Gaul, in the consulship of Tiberius Nero and Publius Quintilius, after successful operations in those provinces, the Senate voted in honor of my return the consecration of an altar to Pax Augusta in the Campus Martius, and on this altar it ordered the magistrates and priests and Vestal Virgins to make annual sacrifice:” *Res Gestae*, 12.

In part, the redesign of the area encompassing the Mausoleum of Augustus was to locate all three of these elements, so crucial to Augustan propaganda, in the same urban space. Freed of later buildings, the mausoleum acted as the centerpiece of the new piazza. The reconstructed altar flanked the side facing the river, and inscribed along the side of the altar's housing, the text overlooked the mausoleum.¹⁶²

Recognized as *the* icon of the Augustan period, the *Ara Pacis*'s significance permeated the new historical climate and formed one of the main attractions during the bimillenary's final ceremony held on September 23, 1938.¹⁶³ The monument's restoration and reconstruction symbolized the success of Fascist efficiency: the recovery of fragments excavated received thorough coverage in newspaper descriptions, as well as newsreels of the period.¹⁶⁴ The feat was presented as having been attempted time and again, but never completed owing to the technical difficulties. As with the draining of the Pontine Marshes, Fascist propaganda seized the opportunity to attribute these achievements to the determined "will" to succeed at all costs¹⁶⁵, under the aegis of the *dux* who made it all possible. The *Ara Pacis* became a symbol of the rebirth of Rome under

¹⁶² *Capitolium* 1938, Kostof 1978: 303-304. According to Kostof "sometime in 1937, the Duce gave the order to utilize this space [i.e. the area facing the Tiber] for the *Ara Pacis* to be set up on axis with the mausoleum": 303. The original project would have placed the altar inside the mausoleum, as this was conceived as a museum space: Kallis 2011: 818. Regarding the project to create a Fascism Museum there, see Kostof 1978. On the work conducted to clear the area, see Cardilli (ed.) 1995: 93-108.

¹⁶³ LUCE B1383 28/09/1938.

¹⁶⁴ LUCE B1211 (01/12/1937) "Il trasporto di frammenti dell'Ara Pacis a Roma per volere del Duce"; LUCE B1271 (16/03/1938) "visita ai lavori di restauro"; LUCE B1279 (30/03/1938) "vista del re ai lavori in corso".

¹⁶⁵ *Capitolium* 1938: 482.

Mussolini, the peacemaker¹⁶⁶ and founder of an empire under whose auspices the grandeur of Rome was reawakening.

The inauguration of the *Ara Pacis* fits into a broader plan to recover Augustan monuments in, but not limited to, Rome.¹⁶⁷ Several of these projects were already underway at the time of the bimillenary, and the celebrations only increased their momentum. One of the main sites of interest was the Mausoleum of Augustus¹⁶⁸. Renovation began in 1934 at Mussolini's behest: "Let the pickax speak!"¹⁶⁹ Despite the progress made on the mausoleum proper, which was inaugurated at the close of the bimillenary, the remainder of the piazza where "shops and residential spaces" were to be erected around the mausoleum was not completed until 1941.¹⁷⁰ One of these structures in Piazza Augusto Imperatore, the so-called building B, today the INPS (Istituto Nazionale di Previdenza Sociale), is particularly interesting. The façade towards the Mausoleum features a prominent Latin inscription¹⁷¹ flanked by two winged victories bearing the

¹⁶⁶ Kostof points out that the altar was dedicated to Augustus's Spanish victory in relation to the Fascist efforts to bolster Spain's dictator, Franco, in 1936.

¹⁶⁷ Especially interesting in view of these undertakings were the excavations conducted in Butrint, Albania, although the limitations in scope of this chapter does not permit an adequate discussion here. On the topic see Magnani 2007: 31-46.

¹⁶⁸ On the restoration work of the Mausoleum, see Wilkins 2005; Ridley, 1986; Kostof 1978 with previous bibliography. For the debates revolving around Richard Meier's project, see Rossini 2006.

¹⁶⁹ LUCE B0562 (09/1934) and B0576 (11/1934) on the demolition of buildings in the area.

¹⁷⁰ For the history of the construction see Cambedda and Tolomeo Speranza in Cardilli (ed) 1995: 93-97, where the authors show how the final function of the buildings was never clearly spelled out. See also Kostof 1978 who demonstrate how the financial support for this new construction was partially provided by INPFS (*Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Fascista*), from which requests were made to define the function of certain buildings, for example, for the purpose of housing. Construction work at the Augusteum, as at many other urban sites within Rome, played a crucial role in the regime's policies on job creation.

¹⁷¹ HUNC LOCUM UBI AUGUSTI MANES VOLITANT PER AURAS
POSTQUAM IMPERATORIS MAUSOLEUM EX SAECULORUM TENEBRIS
EST EXTRACTUM ARAEQUE PACIS DISIECTA MEMBRA REFECTA/

fascies of Roman lictors above an allegorical representation in mosaic of the Tiber River holding a basket with Romulus and Remus inside. Above the Tiber is an allegorical figure of Dawn, while the *Lupa* is seated at his feet. The entire composition is flanked on both sides by representations of Roman gods: on his left (starting from the top) are Juturna, Vesta and Vulcan, while on the right one sees Diana, Ceres and Saturn.¹⁷²

The mosaic adopts a peculiar iconography for the figure of Tiber, who is no longer “the bearded old Tiber lying in exhaustion, but rather a lively, robust youth.”¹⁷³ Under Fascism, not even the sacred river of Rome is spared a makeover. Instead, he regains his youthful vigor and is represented as one of the new Fascist youths.

MUSSOLINI DUX VETERIBUS ANGUSTIIS DELETIS SPLENDIDIORIBUS
VIIS AEDIFICIIS AEDIBUS AD HUMANITATIS MORES APTIS
ORNANDUM CENSUIT ANNO MDCCCCXL A. F. R. XVIII

“This is the place where the soul of Augustus flies through the breezes, after the mausoleum of the emperor was extracted from the darkness of the ages and the scattered pieces of the altar of peace were restored, Mussolini the leader ordered the old narrow places to be destroyed and the location to be adorned with streets, buildings, and shrines fitting for the ways of humanity in the year 1940, in the eighteenth year of the Fascist Era” (translation: Walter Englert, Reed College) <http://cdm.reed.edu/ara-pacis/meier/piazza-augusto-imperatore/fabbricato%20B1/>

¹⁷² The description is taken from interview with the author of the mosaic published by Muñoz in 1941 (*L'Urbe*: 28-30). Visser 1992 attempts to read the entire decorative program of the square, including the relief running on the architrave of the so-called building A, in the light of Augustan propaganda. I do not share his interpretation, which does not take into account any original sources for this space. The original sources used by Cambedda-Tolomeo Speranza (1995:158) specify: “non viene adottato un criterio unificante per tema e per tecnica dell’impianto decorativo; solo il mosaico di Ferrazzi ha una precisa attinenza con il carattere diremmo celebrativo della nuova piazza, dell’impero romano e di Roma. I restanti elementi istituiscono viceversa diretti legami con la natura e le attività che si sarebbero svolte nei rispettivi edifici”. This leads Visser to misinterpret the allegorical figures, for example, he wrongly describes the allegorical figure of Dawn as follows: “a man wading through water with a span of horses, as a tribute to the earliest settlers of the area, who had to toil on the Tiber-watered region before Roman civilization could flourish” (Visser 1992:126).

¹⁷³ Ferruccio Ferrazzi, the mosaic’s creator, thus describes its design in an article by Muñoz in the magazine *l'Urbe* issued in 1941, quoted in Cardilli (ed.) 1995: 159. The mosaic was commissioned in 1938, but not executed until 1941.

The inscription is significant as an example of Fascist architecture subjected to *damnatio memoriae*. The name Mussolini was only partially covered after the fall of the regime. The letters that remained legible were MUSSO, which could refer to the word for jackass in Italian dialect¹⁷⁴ as well as the location where Mussolini, on his way to Germany, was stopped and arrested by the partisans signaling the end of Fascism.¹⁷⁵ Between 1985 and 2006, the writing was cleaned so that today Mussolini's name stands out once again in the piazza.¹⁷⁶

The Augustan exhibition demonstrates the interchangeability and pervasiveness of carefully selected elements employed in the construct of Fascist propaganda. There were elements that equated Mussolini with Augustus, for instance, which outlived the actual span of the venue through various media, such as the postage stamps and mosaics treated in later chapters. These elements contributed to the creation of a multivalent visual language.

c. The *Istituto di Studi Romani* and the fostering of Augustan studies.

¹⁷⁴ Tamassia 1985:201

¹⁷⁵ http://archivioistorico.corriere.it/1996/gennaio/27/cattura_del_duce_Cronaca_diretta_co_9_960127979.shtml

¹⁷⁶ Tamassia speaks of letters being “chiseled away”. I used the word “covered” rather than “effaced” to describe the missing letters, as they were likely made to disappear through the application of a layer of cement, whose subsequent removal would allow them to reappear, undamaged, as they do today. I have been unable to identify the exact moment in which the lettering was restored.

One of the effects of the Augustan show was the proliferation of publications in Italy and abroad on nearly every aspect of Augustan politics. The Institute of Roman Studies contributed greatly to this diffusion, as it had with other initiatives, such as the organization of the bimillenary and the proposals to restore the *Ara Pacis* and the Mausoleum of Augustus.¹⁷⁷ The Institute was founded in 1925 by Carlo Galassi Paluzzi who had founded the magazine *Roma* two years earlier. According to the Royal Decree of February 16, 1926, the Institute became an official foundation for the purpose of “promoting and supporting studies centering on *Romanità*”. According to its statute its purpose was to “reawaken in Italians an historical appreciation for the civilizing function that Rome performed on the global stage.”¹⁷⁸ Mussolini was appointed honorary president.

Paluzzi described the institute’s aim to popularize scholarly findings: it was fundamental, he said, that “scientific contributions also be relevant to the current age in which history was being made in the name of Rome.”¹⁷⁹ The Institute would maintain its openly militant character throughout the Fascist period. Indeed boasted that it was “one of Fascism’s most faithful creations with regard to the new Italian spirit and revived national conscience.”¹⁸⁰ Thanks to the “Roman” climate that Mussolini had generated, the institute’s efforts could prosper. Ties to the Fascist party were financial as well as ideological. The

¹⁷⁷ La Penna 1999; Albertina Vittoria 2002; Argenio 2008: 101-107; Kallis 2011: 818, Arthurs 2012: 29-50.

¹⁷⁸ Vittoria 2002: 508.

¹⁷⁹ Paluzzi quoted in Vittoria 2002: 514.

¹⁸⁰ Vittoria 2002: 509.

institute received a fixed annual contribution directly from the Ministry of National Education. Additional funding was available in support of single project proposals. Moreover, the governorship of Rome provided accommodation free of charge. Initially the Institute was housed in the oratory attached to the Chiesa Nuova, and later in the former Institute for the Blind on the Aventine hill, where it is today.¹⁸¹

The Institute of Roman Studies also has a part in the more wider discussion of the control of information under Fascism.¹⁸² In 1926, the Directorate General for Academies and Libraries was formed within the Ministry of Public Education and was entrusted with the coordination of all existing cultural entities. In 1933 new laws were passed requiring a revision of all statutes pertaining to academies, as well as scientific, and cultural institutions in order to align the objectives of their activities with the “regime’s political and cultural needs.”¹⁸³

The Institute of Roman Studies presented a full range of activities pertaining to Rome which were however, strictly circumscribed by the three fundamental guidelines: first research and scientific endeavor (conferences, bibliographic documentation, the study and use of Latin, publications and competitive examinations); second methodical organization of Rom- related studies and projects (participation in conferences organized by others, and the

¹⁸¹ Vittoria 2002: 511.

¹⁸² On the topic see chapter 2.

¹⁸³ Vittoria 2002: 515.

creation of sections within the institute on a national level and beyond); third popularization of the research– the explicit target group for research activity and scientific publications was to extend well beyond the scientific community and embrace the public at large.

The didactic purpose behind the institute's initiatives was pursued with the latest in modern technology. For example, its participation in the organization of the MAR prompted the use of radio and cinematography, enhancing diffusion both in and outside of Italy. Starting in 1933, radio broadcasts featured a series entitled *Notes on Rome*, consisting of “brief cultural anecdotes that illustrated various aspects of Rome's history, its private and public life.”¹⁸⁴ Radio transmissions included conferences, too. Alongside the innovative techniques more traditional methods also continued to be used, such as exhibitions, educational trips, courses offered on Roman studies, and conferences.

One of the projects proposed in 1925 by Paluzzi on behalf of the institute shows how clearly the relationship between information and the public had changed during the Fascist period. Paluzzi had the idea to exploit advertising spaces for cultural purposes by inserting topographical, historical, or artistic-related content about the city in “psychologically strategic locations.”¹⁸⁵ One proposal advocated putting posters at bus stops. The institute also endorsed a

¹⁸⁴ Vittoria 2002: 528.

¹⁸⁵ Paluzzi quoted in Vittoria 2002: 529. This idea was fully developed and resubmitted to the Ministry of the Press and Propaganda in 1935.

promotional campaign to spread the use of Latin, especially outside of the classroom.¹⁸⁶

The institute was an active follower of political and ideological change or progress, less out of propagandistic fervor than out of the desire to support new claims and decisions with the latest scientific evidence. The War on Ethiopia, for example, prompted a number of conferences keyed to the theme of *Roman Africa*. The institute and the reputation of its associated scholars eventually became a liability following the end of the Fascist period, throwing into question the scientific value of their work.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ La Penna 1999: 625-626.

¹⁸⁷ On the topic of classicists and Fascism, see Cagnetta 1976, 1979 and Canfora 1976, 1979.

CHAPTER 2

Fascist Propaganda and the Role of Stamps, Coins and Medals.

a.Fascist propaganda

Mussolini, trained as a journalist, was aware of the necessity of creating and maintaining consensus in order for the regime to pursue its agenda. Mass communication was one of the most important areas where Fascism invested time and money to ensure the diffusion of the symbols, slogans and ideas of its leader. The constant repetition in diverse media of the same icons, words, images and rituals worked to create what has been called a secular religion.¹⁸⁸ One of the main efforts of the regime was to create a propaganda machine able to oversee and influence every aspect of Italian daily life. This was made clear by the new administrative organization in Fascist Italy, which was characterized by the creation and proliferation of public institutions that: “were increasingly characterized more as auxiliary or substitute State powers in activities traditionally reserved for the public administration, and allowed the State to penetrate areas previously unhindered by its regulation.”¹⁸⁹ These new institutions encompassed very diverse areas, such as youth education (*Opera Nazionale Balilla*, ONB) and the welfare of mothers and children (*Opera Maternità ed Infanzia*, OMNI), and they were specifically connected to

¹⁸⁸ Salvatori 2008: 334.

¹⁸⁹ Abram 2008: 2.

propagandistic intents, such as the *Istituto LUCE* (L' Unione Cinematografica Educativa). Such a range and variety of institutions allowed the regime to influence society in a widespread and direct way. However, it ALSO necessitated some centralization of competences to ensure that messages were coherent and distributed uniformly. Furthermore, the unified control and orientation of cultural life was the best guarantee for reinforcing fascist ideology, and it was aggressively implemented by the regime with the creation of the *Ministero della Cultura Popolare (Minculpop)*.¹⁹⁰

This ministry was established and became completely functional in just two years, and Galeazzo Ciano, the son-in-law of the dictator, played a key role. Appointed “*capo dell’Ufficio stampa*” on August 1, 1933 he was promoted only a year later to “*sottosegretario per la Stampa e la Propaganda*.”¹⁹¹ This promotion made him responsible for the vast majority of information sources: the press, both Italian and foreign, and the offices of propaganda, cinema and tourism. During his service, the use of radio also increased with the institution of the *Cronache del Regime*, a commentary on the day’s events that followed the radio news at 8pm. Among the many changes he brought about in the area of information management, the institutionalization of *veline* must be emphasized.¹⁹² *Veline* were the “ordini di stampa” (or “press orders”) typed on “carta da copie” (a thin, tissue-like paper) and were obligatory guidelines for the

¹⁹⁰ On the subject see Murialdi 2008, with bibliography. For the relation of the Press with the Minculpop see also Canosa 2002: 169-179.

¹⁹¹ R.D. September 6, 1934, n.1434

¹⁹² Murialdi 2008: 117

press. This procedure ensured that every single newspaper received the same information quickly and efficiently; which news to publish and how to do so.

These procedures were implemented so that Ciano would be able to attain the Duce's goals in less than a year, which were to "strengthen and expand control over newspapers and other publications" ¹⁹³ and that "all newspapers must be a single unit...serve the cause and inform people of all useful information." ¹⁹⁴

These results brought about Ciano's promotion and the transformation of the "sottosegretariato" into a ministry (Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda—Secretariat of Press and Propaganda) .¹⁹⁵ It is also possible that the decision to strengthen Ciano's role was motivated not only by his personal success, but also other factors. In the same year the ministry was created, 1935, preparations for the war with Ethiopia were also reaching an advanced stage. It was a very difficult and delicate war, especially considering the role of the League of Nations, of which both Ethiopia and Italy were members. Mussolini knew that he would have a battle on two fronts. He had to avoid a European war and gain the total support of the country. The minister proved to be up for the challenge, and Mussolini's popularity among Italians was at its height during the Ethiopian War.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³Murialdi 2008: 118

¹⁹⁴ Murialdi 2008: 114. On the subservience of the press see also Cassero 2004, who gathers many of the directives issued by the Duce's press office under the direction of Gaetano Polverelli, and the "fogli di disposizioni" by Achille Starace.

¹⁹⁵ This transformation was made official with the R.D. June 24, 1935, n.1009

¹⁹⁶ Del Boca in Isneghi 2011: 463-483.

The transformation of the under-secretariat into a ministry did not cause a radical transformation of the organizational structure. Rather, was unchanged except for the addition of two extremely important functions: total control of the radio and the power to seize and suppress newspapers. The latter had previously been a prerogative of the State Police.¹⁹⁷ The ministry had, therefore, total control over all newspapers, books (Italian and foreign), periodicals, radio movies, theater and tourism. It also asserted its influence over several cultural institutions, such as the Istituto LUCE, which was the sole entity that could provide and distribute pictures of the Duce¹⁹⁸, and over the *Agenzia Stefani*.¹⁹⁹

The Educational Film Union (L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa: LUCE), formed in 1923 and absorbed by the State two years later, operated under Mussolini's Press Office and enjoyed a monopoly over the production and distribution of his images. Mussolini himself would look at each image and approve or veto them by affixing a "yes" or "no" on the back of them. This process is exemplified by a *velina* sent on October 21, 1933:

The *Corriere della Sera* and *il Mattino* published two drawings representing the Duce. He liked one, but not the other. Therefore, the same regulations in force for photographs will apply to drawings as well. They must be presented beforehand to the Head of State's Press Office to be authorized for publication.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Murialdi 2008: 118.

¹⁹⁸ Cannistraro 1975:276

¹⁹⁹ see Canosa 2002

²⁰⁰ Franzinelli 2005: xvii.

This methodology soon caused repetition and monotony of images, but all of them were geared toward the same goal: “The press...had to keep up with the deification of the leader and supply images that were not only impervious to any criticism, but could also be imprinted in the minds of the citizens.”²⁰¹ Mussolini strict control over published images was probably inspired by his training as a journalist. A well-chosen image could make an impact upon the reader. Not everyone could read, but everyone could see.

The role of images within fascist propaganda, especially on stamps, medals and coins, has not been fully explored. Each of these types is analyzed in the following paragraphs in the context of the influence of Roman, and particularly Augustan, themes in Mussolinian propaganda, with particular reference to the mosaics at the *Piazzale dell’Impero*. The analysis focuses on stamps, coins and medals in relation to the use of imperial Roman iconography and the creation of a common system of symbols. The emphasis is on the iconography chosen to celebrate certain events in fascist history, not on the stylistic elements of such examples.

One further clarification must also be made in regard to the diverse nature of some of the categories examined. Stamps and coins are issued by the state, and have a practical and specific purpose. Both are characterized by a nominal rather than real value and a large number of items in circulation. The quantity is not directly proportional to the total number of residents, but to necessity (one person can also use many stamps while others use none). These two categories,

²⁰¹ Franzinelli 2005: xx.

notwithstanding their shared public quality—i.e. their circulation—are different in one major way: coins could not depict an image of the Duce, because the head of State in Italy was the king. Moreover, King Victor Emanuel III was a famous numismatist and was very concerned with the choice of themes and iconography,²⁰² so coins escaped Mussolini's influence.

Medals, however are often private possessions, produced individually and not intended for widespread circulation. They are involved in the analysis for this very reason. They are important for this analysis because of greater freedom in choice of iconography and the majority of them, unlike coins, depict Mussolini.

b. The first fascist coin and the *serie imperiale*

A few months after the march on Rome, it was vital to demonstrate the new Italian situation and ensure that Mussolini was involved in the creation of “an everlasting symbol of the arrival of fascism.”²⁰³ It was decided to create a new type of coin, and by December 24, 1922 the Minister of Finance sent a letter to Mussolini reassuring him that he had already approved the creation of a new coin punch²⁰⁴, and that the proposed models would be submitted to the *Consiglio dei Ministri* for the final decision.²⁰⁵ On January 1, 1923 at a meeting of the *Consiglio*

²⁰² Vittorio Emanuele was responsible for the *Corpus Nummorum Italicorum*. Upon his death he left his large coin collection to the *Museo Nazionale Romano*. See Travaini 2005

²⁰³ From a letter (with an illegible signature) received in mid-December by Giacomo Acerbo (Undersecretary of the presidency of the consiglio). Cited in Salvatori 2008.

²⁰⁴ A public contest had already been published in July 1922. The winner was Morbiducci. The necessity to create “the segno imperituro” rendered this type not current, and due to the change in the political climate he design a new model. Salvatori 2008: 337.

²⁰⁵ This news also appeared in the *Popolo d'Italia* December 27, 1922.

dei Ministri, it was decided to “issue 100 million Lire of cash vouchers in pure nickel in 1- and 2- lire pieces.” At the same meeting, Mussolini decided which symbols were to be stamped on the new coins: “on one side, the image of the King, and on the other the *fascio littorio*—the fascist emblem.”²⁰⁶

Technical factors determined the need to mint new coins valued at 1 and 2 lire. During World War I, the lack of metal, both precious and non-precious, forced the State to issue paper bills of the same value. The quality of the paper was extremely poor, and after a few years, such bills were unusable. The decision to use a coin as an “everlasting symbol of fascism” thus had practical repercussions. A few days after the decision was reached, Margherita Sarfatti wrote to Mussolini in the *Giornale d'Italia*, expressing her view on this topic.²⁰⁷ She stressed the importance of infusing this coin with an artistic value which would embody “the ultimate symbol of fascism”, due to the fact that coins are “humble agents of propaganda that can penetrate every area, be touched by every hand, both at home and abroad, speak to everyone and represent Italy for all.”²⁰⁸ Sarfatti noted and highlighted the intrinsic propagandistic value of this new coin, and the importance of making the right choice in terms of iconography: the wrong image could have negatively influenced Mussolini’s new movement.

The *fascio* was not a complete novelty. Before it was associated with the party founded by Mussolini, it had been used for example during the French

²⁰⁶Gentile 2001: 76-77; Salvatori 2008:341. This decision was then published as a Royal Decree on January 21, 1923 (R.D. January 21, 1923 n.215).

²⁰⁷ The letter was also published in the *Popolo d'Italia*, January 13, 1923. Excerpts are from Salvatori 2008.

²⁰⁸ Quoted in Gentile 2001: 77.

Revolution. Later, it was used also during the Italian Risorgimento but with a different meaning and a different iconography: “a Phrygian cap on a hatchet or a halberd, at the top of rods.”²⁰⁹ The Phrygian cap in particular stressed the element of liberty and freedom from tyranny.²¹⁰ To detach his chosen symbol from all its previous associations, Mussolini entrusted the archaeologist Giacomo Boni with reconstructing the true “fascio littorio” used by the Romans,²¹¹ And result was a “bundle of rods with a hatchet showed in profile.”²¹²

In a decree on June 14, 1923, seven months after the proposal was submitted for the Duce’s approval, the plans for the new type of coin were finalized.²¹³ The primary importance of this coin in the fascist propaganda machine has been stressed by Paola Salvatori, since it established “the iconography of the fascist fascio” and represented “the regime’s first official act of appropriation of the material and daily life of the Italian people.”²¹⁴ Moreover, “it was certainly not a mere coincidence that the first ‘objects’ that bore the official symbol of the emblem were those whose far-reaching ability to permeate perception overrode

²⁰⁹ Gentile 2001:77.

²¹⁰ For more on the use of this emblem in the United States, such as on the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., see Falasca-Zamponi 1995: 95.

²¹¹ Giardina ed. 2008 (2000): 224-227, Gentile ed. 2007 (1993: 88-90): 74-80; Salvatori 2008; see also *Il Giornale di Roma*, April 3 and 12, 1923 and the *Popolo d’Italia* April 4, 1923.

²¹² Gentile 2007: 77. In 1927 Pericle Ducati published a volume titled: “Origine e attributi del fascio littorio. Una pagina di storia che nessuno deve ignorare”. In 1932, to celebrate the decennial on the march on Rome, a volume was published to celebrate this symbol, Colini, 1932.

²¹³ G.U. 27 July, the decree of June 14 1923 n.1537 authorized the manufacture and release of *buoni di cassa (tokens)* in nickel for 2 Lire. The new fascist coin was commission to Publio Morbiducci and engraved by the head director of the mint and instructor of engraving at the *Regia scuola dell’arte della Medaglia*, it was given on the obverse the portrait of the king, facing right and the inscription VITTORIO-EMANUELE-III-RE-D’ITALIA; on the reverse the *fascio littorio* and the legend BUONO DA LIRE 2. Salvatori 2008:347. On Italian coins see Pagani 1965; Gigante 2004.

²¹⁴ Salvatori 2008: 349.

the concrete purpose and function that they were created for: thus, coins, and then stamps.”²¹⁵

The *fascio littorio* is, in fact, the most salient visual representation of Fascism. It was emblazoned on all public buildings, but also adorned everyday objects such as matches. Its presence was so intertwined into the appearance of cities that it was the target of the spontaneous acts of *damnatio* people carried out all over Italy immediately after the fall of Fascism.²¹⁶ In 1929 the *fascio Littorio* became a state symbol rather than solely the symbol of Mussolini’s new political party. Between 1925 and 1929, a series of legislative measures encouraged the ‘promotion’ of such iconography as the new State symbol, replacing the Savoia emblem.²¹⁷

On December 1, 1925, Mussolini decreed that the *fascio* had to be displayed on all ministerial buildings, and in 1926, on all the government buildings.²¹⁸ At the same time, to avoid trivialization or abuse of the symbol, permission for its reproduction was placed directly under the authority of the government or the fascist party. In March 1927, the *fascio* was juxtaposed with the Savoia emblem, and in 1928, all municipalities, provinces, charity organizations and parastatal institutions were encouraged to use the symbol on their stationery and official seals.²¹⁹ The last, and most important step was the Royal Decree of 1929, which

²¹⁵ Salvatori 2008:344.

²¹⁶ On *damnatio* as a spontaneous act after the fall of Fascism see Arthurs 2010.

²¹⁷ Salvatori 2008: 336-337; cf. Gentile 2007: 79-80 and Giardina 2000: 224-227.

²¹⁸ Salvatori 2008, p.336.

²¹⁹ RD June 14 1928, n.1430.

established the new “State emblem, substituting two fasci for the lions holding up the Savoia shield, as it had been on the coat of arms since 1809.”²²⁰

The creation of the Fascist design for the *fascio littorio* in part mirrors Mussolini’s attitude toward Rome. Until 1922, Mussolini viewed the city in a negative light. After that, with his seizure of power, Fascism was publicized as its direct and natural continuation, and visual and other references to the past became increasingly common²²¹. This identification with ancient Rome and its symbols became more obvious in Mussolinian propaganda, particularly after the conquest of Ethiopia in 1936.

After the appearance of the *fascio littorio* on coins, Mussolini at first seemed to show no further interest in their production, but in this new imperialistic climate he exceeded his prerogatives and minted a new series of coins. However, he found himself in the uncomfortable position of facing the so-called *Re Numismatico* (a nickname given to the king Victor Emanuel III owing to his knowledge of and passion for numismatics). The king had, in fact, initiated the *Corpus Nummorum Italicorum* and formed an extensive collection both of ancient and modern coins which is now housed in the *Museo Nazionale Romano* (Palazzo Massimo). Mussolini wanting to immortalize the achievements in

²²⁰ R.D. April 11, 1929, n.504. Gentile 2007: 80.

²²¹ Salvatori 2008: 335. See also Gentile 2007; Giardina 2008; Vidotto 2001: 172-223 and Vidotto 2005

Ethiopia, decided that issuing new money was the only way “to pass down to posterity his accomplishments and works.”²²²

The official protocol required that the king, who was the only one who could appear on coins and decide about the timing of their minting, must be notified first. But Mussolini skipped ahead and started up the process with the ministerial machine, the mint, and artists in order to produce a series of coins in precious metal as quickly as possible to commemorate the recent glorious events²²³. He summoned the director of the mint to his office at the Palazzo Venezia and asked for drafts to be delivered within 24 hours so he could select the new series. The director then turned to the director of the school of medals, Giuseppe Romagnoli. He was the trusted medallist of the king, and later of fascism because of “the effectiveness with which he could create in a modern style the attractive rhetoric of the past.”²²⁴ Within twenty-four hours, he prepared designs for ten obverse types with the portrait of the sovereign, twenty-eight reverse types with symbols of the Roman empire, and twenty-four on which the crest of the Savoia was in the background in relation to the *fascio*.²²⁵ The Duce was pleasantly surprised by such *fascistica rapidità* and proposed an award of distinction for the designer. As was his custom, he put his initials on his chosen types in blue pencil.²²⁶

²²² Orsini 1976: 34

²²³ Ibid: 35.

²²⁴ Ibid: 35-36.

²²⁵ Ibid: 36; Gigante 2004: 152.

²²⁶ Ibid: 35-36.

Only after he had done this did he inform the king of his intentions and submit the designs to him for his expert opinion (this might also have been an attempt to make up for his lack of respect for the institutional process). The king reserved the right to the final approval of the models and insisted that his image must be realistic rather than overly aesthetic.²²⁷

Once the models were selected, Mussolini confronted another difficulty, this time imposed by the minister of the economy. The conquest of Ethiopia may have allowed the empire to reappear on the fateful hills of Rome, but it had also brought economic sanctions upon Italy, and the State found itself in a very difficult position. Economic restrictions had been imposed on the Italian people, who had even been asked to contribute to the war's funding with the day of *oro alla patria*. It did not seem appropriate to issue gold and silver coins.

The Duce responded to this objection "the coin is an element of prestige, and a nation's greatness is measured also by the quality of its coins and banknotes. Foreign visitors see the money itself as a type of calling card, and it shapes their opinion."²²⁸ The mint sought to buy time, and without openly going against Mussolini, it began to mint the coins in silver. The gold 100- and 50-Lire coins were then created upon request only for private citizens, who had to provide the metal and pay an extra charge to have them struck.

²²⁷ See Gigante 2004: 170-187 for the series. Its striking was established with the R.D. September 3, 1936 n.2510 (for the gold emissions) and n.2511 (for silver, nickel and bronze).

²²⁸Gigante 2004: 149-150; 142.

This episode shows how Mussolini understood the impact that money could have on public opinion both in Italy and abroad, and how it could act as a tool of propaganda for the imperial message. On May 8 1937, a day before the first anniversary of the declaration of the empire, the coins were reproduced and illustrated in an article in the *Popolo d'Italia* (the most widely circulated newspaper at the time). The paper emphasized that they had been issued by order of the duce and that after the reappearance of the empire it was “obvious that the imperial symbols would return on the coins issued by the Mint of Rome.” After briefly describing the types, the author concludes: “As in ancient Roman times, coins reproduce once again in metal the deeds of a nation.”²²⁹

A portrait of the emperor king appears on the obverse, while the reverse displays clear references to the Roman past. The golden issues (struck only upon request by private individuals), have on the lire 100 a young *lictor* carrying the fasces and a miniature victory statue in his outstretched hand. Romagnoli's drawings displaying Mussolini's M for approval, label the image as “the victorious regime”²³⁰; the lire 50 design was inspired by the standards of the Roman legions and represents the new imperial trophy: an eagle resting atop the Savoia family's crest and that of the Fascist party. In the silver series, both the lire 20 and lire 10 stress recent Italian military achievements: *Italia* is, in fact, depicted on both as carrying a Victory in one hand and holding the Fasces with the other. In the Lire 20 she is seated upon a four horse chariot, while on the Lire 10 she is standing on

²²⁹ *Il Popolo d'Italia*, May 8 1937: 3 “Le nuove monete imperiali”, with picture.

²³⁰ Orsini 1976: 36. The final image is slightly different with the *lictor* carrying the fasces on his shoulder. See also Gigante 2004:149.

the bow of a ship, signifying the victory overseas.²³¹ The lire 5 celebrates the Italian mother as a symbol of fertility employing an iconography loosely inspired by the so-called Tellus panel on the *Ara Pacis*, and refers to the regimes demographic policies aimed at enlisting more soldiers in its efforts to expand the empire²³².

The imperial eagle, shown in various poses, appears both on the nickel (lire 2, 1 and 0.50) and bronze (5 cent) coins.²³³ The 10 cent bronze denomination features the fasces and the Savoia family's crest, from which stem (to the left) an ear of wheat and, to the right, two oak leaves.²³⁴ The ear of wheat perhaps refers to the prosperity brought about by Fascism, as exemplified in the Battle of the Wheat, whereas the oak leaves allude to eternity and strength. The oak tree was sacred to the god Jupiter, and oak leaves were offered as a crown (*corona civica*) to those who saved one or more of Rome's citizens. A famous example of which is the oak leaves crown bestowed upon Augustus. One of Fascism's hymns recalls this anecdote: "*Siam le foglie d'una quercia nate a nuova primavera: noi cadremo innanzi sera, ma la quercia resterà.*"²³⁵ The last denomination is the nickel, 20-cent issue with the head of *Italia Fascista* to the right on its obverse, partially eclipsed by the fasces²³⁶. Breaking with iconographic tradition, the figure is unmistakably masculine, expressing a gendered bias towards the new

²³¹ Orsini 1976: 38 and Gigante 2004: 158, 162.

²³² Orsini 1976: 38 and Gigante 2004:162.

²³³ Orsini 1976:39-40 and Gigante 2004:166, 170.

²³⁴ Orsini 1976: 40; Gigante 2004:179.

²³⁵ Inno al Fascismo (1927), music by Giuseppe Blanc, words Federico Valerio Ratti.

²³⁶ Orsini 1976:39; Gigante 2004:176

generation of Italians created by Fascism. Both the oak leaf motif and the decidedly male personification of Italy would later appear in the mosaic of the *Piazzale dell'Impero*.

d. Stamps

The postage stamp is as described by Federico Zeri: “a very precise indicator of political and cultural situations [and] the most concise and concentrated figurative medium of propaganda.”²³⁷ He stresses the two main elements of a stamp. It is small thus necessitating a “series of graphic, technical and symbolic choices” to make the message or the event celebrated readable and understandable. The message has to be clear and quick, with visual elements taking precedence over words. The challenges of presenting a message on a stamp are not so different than those on a coin. The paucity of physical space is, at times, addressed through the production of multiples, that is the incorporation of a main theme on several stamps of different values, all issued at the same time (as with the series celebrating the conquest of the empire). Second is its political impact. A series of stamps could be issued to celebrate specific events and commemorations. The event and the imagery chosen to celebrate it is a clear reflection of the political agenda of the authority issuing them, since a selection process is entailed.

²³⁷ Zeri 1980:10.

Stamps are mass produced guaranteeing wide circulation within the different strata of society and at the same time, a division between the graphic rendering and the message can occur. A sort of decontextualization takes place in which the aesthetic value outstrips the original and utilitarian purpose of sending mail. The result of this process is collectability, where specimens are conserved and acquired solely for their aesthetic and graphic value, which transforms an element of everyday life into a piece of art.

In the extensive bibliography on fascist propaganda, the impact and importance of these media are rarely discussed. The study of stamps normally remains relegated to articles in specialized magazines aimed at collectors. In 1980, Federico Zeri analyzed their propagandistic angle for the first time and attempted to frame the choice of themes on stamps within the historical context of their production.²³⁸ He notes that during fascism: “Italian stamps became a regular vehicle of propaganda, especially after 1929.”²³⁹

In 1929 the rotogravure was introduced as new technique for producing stamps in Italy. This process combined higher graphic and aesthetic quality with faster production: “because printing occurred on a rotary press, and no longer in single sheets, and provided accurate and modern prints.”²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Zeri 1980 (1993). The book discusses the origins of stamps, starting from pre-unification and ending at the years immediately before the volume’s publication. Unfortunately, it does not contain a bibliography or any bibliographical reference.

²³⁹ Zeri 1980: 31. Special issues of stamps had been printed before the advent of Fascism, in celebration of anniversary of the new Italian Nation (for example in 1911, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Italy’s unification) Zeri 1980: 22-24.

²⁴⁰ Diena 1966:52.

This innovative process brought about a systematization of themes and models to be issued, and lent itself to greater exploitation in the service of propaganda. Before this the choice of themes and models was inconsistent and almost random, although on occasion it did reflect *in nuce* several concepts that would become important to Fascism and exert a profound impact as a media form. Because of this new printing technology, from 1929 onward, the thematic and stylistic arbitrariness, due to the assignment of different artists to the designs of various denominations, was replaced by a more calculated choice of the historical events to be celebrated and more effective graphics. These new series tended to be entrusted to a single artist to ensure a sense of visual and graphic coherence that only enhanced the propagandistic message.

Furthermore, from 1929 on, the *fascio*—or rather the new fascio symbol of the Italian state that followed Giacomo Boni’s philological interpretation—systematically appeared on postage stamps,²⁴² as on a new series of ordinary stamps released on April 21st 1929, known as the “artistic” series, in which the king’s portrait was flanked by the *fascio littorio*, the new symbol of the State.²⁴³ This series was the standard until 1946.

²⁴² In 1923: for the first anniversary of the March on Rome, six stamps were issued in which the *fascio littorio* appeared for the first time. Although unified by a common theme—the *fascio*—the series appears disjointed because of the choice to assign the denominations’ designs to different artists. For example, the stamps priced at 10, 30, and 50 cents and designed by Duilio Cambellotti show the *fascio* as in Giacomo Boni’s version with lion heads and a backdrop of flowering almond trees, a symbol of youth. Diena 1966: 48. The fasces also appeared in the 1926 series *Pro Opere Previdenza Militia*.

²⁴³ R.D. April 11, 1929, n.504. The original name is the artistic series (*serie artistica*), but it is most commonly known as the *imperial series* (*serie imperiale*), owing its name probably to the: “date of release (*Birth of Rome*) or rather because of the subjects featured on them, i.e. the presence of *Julius Caesar and Augustus among the types*”: Diena 1966: 53.

The new regular mail series consisted of nineteen denominations from 5 cents to lire 50, “on each there were one or two *fasci littori*; and since the previous denominations issued would shortly be discontinued, with the printing of the imperial series, there would soon be no regular mail stamp left in Italy without the *fascio*.”²⁴⁴

As with the *fascio* themes referring to the Roman past had already appeared sporadically prior to the 1929 artistic series. In 1923, a series of three stamps depicting the oath of the Roman Legionary was released, with a surcharge supporting the Black Shirts²⁴⁵ ; in 1926, the Appian aqueduct and Castel Sant’Angelo appeared in the series *Pro Opera Previdenza MVSN*.²⁴⁶ References to the Roman past (the Capitoline She-wolf, the portrait of Caesar and Augustus) appeared in the artistic series of 1929, but the theme of Rome: “had not yet undergone that maturation period in an imperial, pre-medieval sense, that would then serve as one of the cornerstones of the regime’s propaganda.”²⁴⁷ The myth of Rome was later consciously exploited for propagandistic purposes on several series dedicated to important figures from the ancient world, such as Vergil (1930), Horace (1936)²⁴⁸, Augustus (1937) and Livy (1941).²⁴⁹ Two other series,

²⁴⁴ Diena 1966: 53.

²⁴⁵ Diena 1966: 48. Here the *fascio* is depicted as the Republican type, before Giacomo Boni’s philological contribution.

²⁴⁶ Diena 1966: 51; see Zeri 1980:46-47.

²⁴⁷ Zeri 1980:33; Diena (1966: 54-55) states: “from 1929-1943, the propaganda through stamps was directed mainly at exalting the glories of ancient Italy, with particular reference to *Romanitas*...and the works of the regime”.

²⁴⁸ These stamps were published on the *Mattino Illustrato* August 10-17, 1936, n.32, anno XIII, p.7, “Motti latini sui francobolli”.

²⁴⁹ At the time Italy was already at war, and the chosen figures seem almost a justification of the armed conflict: Diena 1966: 57. Even if this series of stamps are not directly related to the mosaics of the Piazzale because they came afterward, they still bear witness to the longevity of the theme

although not directly celebrating Rome's historical events, used a visual vocabulary that echoed this past, the one for the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome, and the series celebrating the Empire. These are characterized not only by stylistic coherence (the same format, horizontal or vertical, borders, typographic style) which makes them instantly identifiable as part of a group, but also by the selection of historical themes and references that follow the same logic and work together with a clear didactic and propagandistic intent. In different ways, they all celebrated the results of fascism and the Duce.

In Roman, particularly imperial, times the reverse of coins was often used to record historical events as an important propagandistic tool. For example six medallions depicting scenes from Rome's early history were issued under Antoninus Pius, in 147 C.E., to celebrate the 900th anniversary of the founding of Rome.²⁵⁰

The most effective propaganda is "that which penetrates the public consciousness with the simplicity of its messages: that...which instills certainties in simple minds that are in need of an elementary interpretation of the complex things of the world." ²⁵¹

With their graphic and iconographic choices, and messages reduced to simple vignettes and mottos, stamps carry out their purpose of spreading propaganda effectively, especially in relation to their daily use. Of the abovementioned series,

of Rome and its variations. In this case, it is not Rome's civilizing capacity that is glorified, but its bellicose element.

²⁵⁰ Toynbee 1925:170-173.

²⁵¹ Bevilacqua in Isneghi 2010: 460.

particularly those with a greater ideological spin four were designed by the same artist, Corrado Mezzana.²⁵² Mezzana's father, Giovanni, moved to Rome after winning a public contest for a position in the postal administration and kindled Corrado's passion for archaeology and history. Educated in the Humanities, he graduated in law with a thesis entitled "*Legislation of fine arts and antiquities*."²⁵³ Over the course of his legal studies, he did not neglect his innate artistic abilities. In fact, he won a ten-year scholarship to the *Accademia di San Luca* and later earned a certification to teach drawing and art history. He possessed eclectic talents and worked in almost every discipline of artistic production, from magazine covers to scenography. His works show a deep awareness of history and Roman traditions from all time periods.²⁵⁴ This knowledge of the past led him to be chosen to "set up a room in the exhibition of *Mostra Augustea della Romanità*, the LIII room dedicated to industry and craftsmanship."²⁵⁵ He also created models for medals, such as the one celebrating the erection of the cross in the Colosseum to commemorate the Lateran Pacts between the Vatican and Italy in 1928.²⁵⁶

The choice to assign the preparatory drawings for Vergil's bimillenary to Corrado Mezzana in 1930 was made by the archaeologist Roberto Paribeni, at the time the

²⁵² More precisely: the series for Vergil's bimillenary (1930), for the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome (1932), the bimillenary of Augustus (1937) and the celebration of the empire (1938). On his life and works, including beyond the field of stamps, see Mezzana Zilli in Filanci 1990: 19 ff.

²⁵³ published by Loescher in 1913

²⁵⁴ See Mezzana Zilli in Filanci 1990

²⁵⁵ Mezzana-Zilli 1990: 21

²⁵⁶ Filanci 1990: 21.

chief executive of Antiquities and Fine arts, which gave him ample freedom in selecting both the themes and the quotations to reproduce.²⁵⁷

Mezzana well versed in classical culture “after a careful rereading of Virgil’s texts...was able to single out those verses that would resonate with the renewed cult of Rome and tie into the current reality.”²⁵⁸ Though relatively complex both in composition and allegory, the series was clear and legible. The Latin references, probably incomprehensible to many, were flanked by clearly decipherable images with an unmistakable effect that recalled the greatness of Rome in relation to the themes celebrated by the fascist regime of the time. Themes such as the return to the countryside, a rural lifestyle and the desire to stay away from the city, were embodied by the founding of new cities in the reclaimed Pontine Marshes. In some ways, this was a return to Roman colonization, the creation of outposts to defend national territory where the colonists were simultaneously *milites*.²⁵⁹ This land reclamation brought about the revival of the myth pertaining to Italy’s fertile soil, naturally bolstered by the regime’s efforts to win the so-called Battle of Wheat. References appear in different denominations in the Vergilian series: the 50 cent example depicted

²⁵⁷ The series consisted of thirteen stamps: nine models for the denominations from 15 cents to 10+ 2.5 Lire, plus one (replicated in four different denominations) for airmail. For a technical description, see R.D. February 19, 1931, n.256 and the detailed catalogue published by Filanci 1990: 28,45-49. See also Zeri 1980, Diena 1966: 55, Luceri 1999: 128.

²⁵⁸ Filanci 1990: 28. The care taken by the designer in his choice of themes to represent is the fact that the air series shows figures and quotes that could be linked with flight.

²⁵⁹ In a 1929 issue of *Italia Agricola*, the reclaimed Pontine Marshes, are described as: “a dam against the flood of urbanism; it is the way to conserve and enhance rural life that makes men healthy, strong, balanced, patient, and to make tomorrow’s good farmers and excellent soldiers”, cited in Bevilacqua in Isneghi (ed.), 2010.

young men and women threshing the fields with verses from the *Georgics*.²⁶⁰ Abundant harvests were referred to on the 30-cent stamps where the *Tellus* panel from the *Ara Pacis* appeared, also accompanied by a quote from the *Georgics*.²⁶¹ This stamp, however, also celebrated prolific Italian mothers, creating a new stock of Roman legionaries devoted to the new regime.

Policies regarding families and children, the new generation with the potential to recreate the Roman Empire under the renewed auspices of Rome, were celebrated on 75-cent stamps. A mother (the ideal Roman matron?) weaves on a traditional loom while being affectionately embraced by her children. A docile calf is also pictured. The quote is taken from the *Georgics*: “*Interea Dulces Pendent circum oscula nati.*”²⁶² Where newborns are both children and new herds, both a symbol and a result of Italian fertility.

The role of youth continued on the 20-cent stamp, where Anchises, in the Elysian Fields, instructs Aeneas on his role and shows him the future glory of Rome²⁶³. Rome’s grand future of conquests and its vast, powerful and long-lasting empire would be earned through the courage and valor of the new generations. Moreover, the stamps valued at 10 Lire and 2.50 Lire showed the unfortunate Turnus standing on a Roman chariot surrounded by his young peers, with the words: “*et opes nobis et adhuc intacta juventus.*”²⁶⁴ All these themes are thus synthesized in the denominations for airmail, which was destined to spread the

²⁶⁰ II, 458: *O Fortunatos nimium sua si bona norint agricolas.*

²⁶¹ *Georgics* II, 173: *Salve magna Parens frugum, Saturnia tellus.*

²⁶² *Georgics* II, 523.

²⁶³ *Aen.* VI 851: *Tu regere imperio populos romane memento.*

²⁶⁴ *Aen.* XI, 419.

new regime's message beyond Italy's borders. The design, identical on all denominations, shows Jupiter sanctifying Rome's immortal destiny at Venus's request: "*His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono.*"²⁶⁵ The eagle, both Jupiter's attribute and the Roman Empire's symbol, flies over a typical consular road that vanishes into the distance.

Such stamps continued to circulate for many years, though taking on new meanings and interpretations. For example, the series was issued with different colors and print in the Italian islands in the Aegean and in the colonies.

In 1932, two years after the Vergilian series a new one was released for the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome. This too was designed by Mezzana²⁶⁶ and displayed a predominance of Roman elements completely ignoring "*the very rich national artistic heritage.*"²⁶⁷ The series is extremely rich, with 20 different types. The classical pedimental frame, adopted for the stamps commemorating Vergil, is replaced by two diagonally placed *fasci*, and an Italian motto describing the vignettes takes the place of the Virgilian verses. This was not mere coincidence. The tenth anniversary of the March on Rome aroused widespread interest and was epitomized by a major exhibition. The use of the national language afforded a greater legibility, creating a synergy between text and image to convey the intended message to a larger audience.

²⁶⁵ *Aen.* I, 278.

²⁶⁶ Issued October 27, 1932. For the technical description, refer to R.D. January 26, 1933, n.50. See also Zeri 1980: 42; Dena 1966: 61, Filanci 1990: 14

²⁶⁷ Zeri 1980: 50.

The different types highlight yet again the works of the regime, and the results achieved since the March on Rome and become a celebration of Mussolini's *Res Gestae*, the same one that will be exalted in the decorative program of the mosaics in the *Piazzale dell'Impero*.

The theme of agriculture—the Battle of Wheat— reappeared on the 5-cent stamp. In the foreground, a farmer tills his fields using a traditional plow pulled by oxen, while in the background his colleague employs more modern technology: a tractor. The plow associated with the founding of Rome creates a link between the new and the ancient colonies, and in the MAR, it was the centerpiece in the hall dedicated to the origins of Rome. The 5-cent stamp was in direct dialogue with the 60 cent denomination that shows three arms with shovels at the ready creating a division between the formerly uncultivated land (identified by marshland plants) and the new farms. The motto of the 5 cent stamp, “so Italy would have bread for all its children”, is the directly connected with the 60 cent motto: “*the redeemed swamplands*”.

The family theme, embodied by the *Opera Nazionale Maternità ed Infanzia*, appeared on the 2.55 Lire stamps. A mother keeping watch over her child is accompanied by the words: “anxious vigilance over every cradle”. The result of such vigilance—that children would grow up healthy and strong—was also celebrated on stamps of a 20-cent value with the legend: “The children of Italy are called *Balilla*”. It was a celebration of youth organizations, the first of which was the ONB (*Opera Nazionale Balilla*). A young man dressed in the *balilla*

uniform holds a musket in his hand, with the statue of Balilla in Genoa in the background.

The theme of colonialism in its many different shades was found on stamps of different denominations. On the 35 cent stamp with the motto, “*new roads for new legions*”, an idealized image of the *Miliareum Aureum* is accompanied by two stylized arrows resembling road signs, signifying new progress strengthened by the past. This past/present dialogue is further demonstrated in 75-cent stamps. “*Returning where we already were*”. In the foreground, “a settler digging his spade in the desert-like area finds a mile marker and the slabs of a Roman road.”²⁶⁸

The one-Lira stamp evoked Mussolini’s theory of expansionism toward the sea, which he proposed in various speeches, and later sought to achieve with the creation of the EUR: “*Our destiny has always been at sea*”. The modern ships of the Italian navy are in the foreground, while the background shows ancient ships.

Rome’s heritage, in its greatness and splendor, renewed by recent archaeological excavation for the creation of Via dell’Impero was celebrated by the 5- and 2.50-Lire stamps. In the background are the rediscovered Trajan Markets and the shops of the Forum of Caesar.²⁶⁹ The motto on the stamp is: “*ancient vestiges, new auspices*”. On the stamp, the new *Via dell’Impero* is edited out to condense the discoveries made on both sides of the street into a single image. In the foreground is the statue of Julius Caesar, reproducing the Trajanic statue housed

²⁶⁸ The description is given in the R.D. January 26, 1933 n. 50.

²⁶⁹ For more on the excavation see Cardilli 1995

in the Palazzo Senatorio in Rome. A copy of this statue would be placed by the regime in front of the recently excavated forum of Caesar. The same statue would also appear on 2-lire banknotes, while the 1-lira note featured the statue of Augustus from Prima Porta.²⁷⁰

A new motif is also inserted into this series; the theme of sport on the 1.75-lire stamp: “*the Italian flag (tricolore) over every stadium*”. The stamp shows a brawny young man from behind as he raises the flag on the pole of the stadium. The year 1932 marked the inauguration of the *Stadio dei Marmi* within the Foro Mussolini. It is possible that the reference is not only to anticipated athletic achievements, but also to the new structures built for young people throughout Italy.

One of the most interesting elements of this series is the presence of two stamps with the likeness of Mussolini.²⁷¹ On the 2.50 lire stamp: “the pensive profile of the Duce oversees and commands the urge to action of the Fascist action squads (squadrisimo) represented by bayonettes and pennants pointed toward their target.”²⁷² The motto is absent and in its place are simply the words, “*exhibition of the fascist revolution*”.

The 0.50-lire stamp features the equestrian statue of Mussolini, a work by Graziosi, which once decorated the stadium of Bologna. Beneath it is the phrase

²⁷⁰ Taracchini 2001: 149.

²⁷¹ On the dispute over whether the images are truly of Mussolini, see Carobene 2008; Diena 1966: 62-63 (who only discusses the 0.50-Lire stamp with the Duce’s likeness). On p. 62 he writes: “it is the only one in the series of 20 in which the Duce can be seen...only in 1941...did he once again appear in a series issued”. The latter was put into circulation for the alliance with Hitler (cf. L2.50 value); Filanci 1990: 29; Zeri 1980: 57-59.

²⁷² Filanci 1990:59.

“if I advance, follow me!...” The stamp was initially written as 50L. The motivation for this choice was technical. Originally, the design was meant to be for the highest value of the series, at 2.50 lire. According to Diena, the choice was made: “as if to crown the sequence of the regime’s deeds with the image of its leader.”²⁷³ It was then decided to assign it a lower value but wider circulation, and the sketch was modified at the last minute. The rush to get it into circulation by October 28, the date of the anniversary, led to its rather shoddy correction: the 2 and the decimal were—they simply removed from the engraving that had already been created.

Unlike other contemporary dictators (Hitler, Franco and Stalin), Mussolini rarely appeared on stamps. This may be because Mussolini had to consider the “uncomfortable” presence of the king, who legally held the highest position in the State.²⁷⁴ The problem would also emerge after the conquest of Ethiopia. To Mussolini’s dissatisfaction, it would be the king who received the title of Emperor, while Mussolini would have to settle for Starace’s invention, and the title of founder of the empire. The absence of Mussolini on coins can be explained in the same way: only the king could appear there.

In 1937, a series of stamps was brought into circulation with both a greater visual and ideological impact. In fact, the celebration of the Augustan bimillenary

²⁷³ Diena 1966: 62.

²⁷⁴ On this topic see Filanci 1990: 29 with previous bibliography. Filanci maintains that Mezzana avoided representing Mussolini in his designs for the stamp series. The artist’s 1938 series, depicting the most eminent figures in Italian history, does not include Mussolini. I do not share this view, as I cannot to verify the extent to which Mezzana was able to exercise his artistic freedom. Considering Mussolini’s pervasive control over propaganda, I would assume that freedom was strictly limited.

enjoyed a large resonance in every aspect of Italian life.²⁷⁵ Corrado Mezzana was once again given the task of creating sketches.²⁷⁶ Each one demonstrates his attention to detail and exact references to Augustan achievements. It was not coincidental that many of the mottos were taken from the emperor's *Res Gestae*, and fittingly returned to the original Latin. The fact that Mezzana had also participated, in the arrangement of one of the exhibition halls for an exhibit on Augustus also helps explain his choice of certain visual references. He went beyond the obvious choices of the most important monuments from the Augustan period—the Ara Pacis or the statue from Prima Porta. In many cases, his sources of inspiration were works, or parts of them, displayed specifically for that exhibition (Colonna rostrata, Capitoline Caesar, the portrait of Augustus from Meroe and models of the temple of Jupiter by Gismondi, for example). They were images that were to become familiar to millions of Italian citizens who took part in the celebrations.²⁷⁷

The day that these stamps were released coincided with the *dies natalis* of Augustus, September 23, 1937.²⁷⁸ The Latin citations are not always accurate, but

²⁷⁵ “Le vestigial imperiali di Roma nei francobolli”, in *Il Mattino Illustrato*, n.10 May 10-17 1937.

²⁷⁶ Dina 1966: 56-57, Filanci 1990: 72. R.D. November 25, 1937 no. 2134

²⁷⁷ The individual stamps are discussed in relation to the panels of the mosaics of Piazzale dell'impero.

²⁷⁸ Luceri 1999:128. The author notes that the same day that year also saw the publication of the critical edition of the *Res Gestae*, edited by Concetta Barini, bound with the inscription “*iussu Beniti Mussolini[...] in Augusti natalem bis millesimum*”. Actually, the two phrases are separate. The first is in the description of the series for which the book was published:

“Scriptores Graeci et Latini/Iussu Beniti Mussolini /Consilio R. Academiae Lynceorum editi” while

In Augusti Natalem Bis Millesimum, appears on the title page and is followed in parentheses by the Roman date: (IX Kal. OCT. A. MCMXXXVII, A FASC.RESTIT.XV) and by one of Mussolini's

they rather are adapted for celebrations based on the politics of the time. The entire series was re-released in the Italian islands of the Aegean with different colors and overprints. For the colonies in Libya and Eastern Africa, a separate series with just three elements was released on April 25, 1938.²⁷⁹

In 1938, as part of the celebration of the anniversary of the Ethiopian conquest, a special series was released; the so-called Imperial Series. This too was designed by Mezzana²⁸⁰, in which “every value was dedicated to a figure or an event from ancient Roman or Italian history.”²⁸¹ Quotations from Mussolini himself replaced those of the ancient poets and were signed with the characteristic *M* of his signature at the bottom, even on the one that depicted the king-emperor. The most interesting are the first two of the series. The 10-cent stamp featured Romulus, dressed in a garment of fur, tracing with a plow the original outline of the city of Rome. At the top left is the Varronian date of the city’s founding, 753 B.C. On the right is the phrase: “*tracing the sign of the infallible destiny*”. In chronological order, or at least in the fascist vision of Roman history, the next stamp depicts the iconic statue of Prima Porta set against the backdrop of a map of the Roman Empire. On the left is the date 30 B.C., while the writing is a quotation from the Augustan room in the MAR: “*coordination of all forces under the order of a single one*”. The Roman salute, an invention of the Fascist Party

quotations: “*levate in alto, o legionari, le insegne il ferro e i cuori a salutare, dopo quindici secoli, la riapparizione dell’Impero sui colli fatali di Roma*” / Ex BENITI MUSSOLINI, Itolorum Ducis oratione, VII Id. Ma. a. MCMXXXVI, a. Fasc.rest. XIV, ab Imp.rest. I

²⁷⁹ R.D. March 10, 1938, n.772.

²⁸⁰ Dena 1966: 57-59. R.D. February 16, 1939 n.432. Issued October 28, 1938.

²⁸¹ Dena 1966: 58.

closely recalls the *adlocutio* gesture of Augustus from Prima porta. Mussolini performed it over and over again and was immortalized doing so in various media including newsreels, visually connecting himself with the first emperor.

This commemorative series demonstrates how Fascist propaganda permeated every part of Italian life, constantly reiterating the new symbols and themes of its secular religion. Such themes were carefully selected and executed with great attention to detail and graphic quality and were able to attract and speak to a large and diverse public.

e. Medals

There is no systematic *corpus* of medals produced between the two wars, and for many specimens there is not even bibliographical information. The most complete publication is the 1996 volume by Casolari. It is simply an edition of the author's private collection (albeit made up of thousands of pieces). In the introduction, he emphasizes how a complete catalogue would not be possible, since the period is "one of the most prolific of all times". The medals are organized based by year of the Fascist Era, and those without a date on them are inserted, whenever possible, in the year to which their iconography refers. In addition to this volume, there are also publications about the medal manufacturer Johnson, who was very active during fascism, but the publications are only related to their products. Various references to certain medals of

particular prestige or designed by notable artists can also be found in specialized magazines.²⁸²

Medals were forged to commemorate important events (such as the March on Rome and the Foundation of the Empire), enterprises that were particularly important for the regime (such as Battle for Wheat, Land reclamation, Sanctions), inauguration of large projects (Forum Mussolini), or shows and expositions (Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, Augustan Exhibition). Furthermore, they celebrated institutions, Ministries, events linked to the sporting world, or schools (*Littoriali*) and recognized the merits of individuals, such as Guglielmo Marconi. This last category also included distinctions given to and worn by the members of various associations, such as those awarded by the ONB on the occasion of the “Campi Dux” (Fascist Youth training camps).²⁸³ Many of these medals were also gifts for Mussolini, as his face was predominant on them in contrast to the situation with coins.²⁸⁴ The production of medals remained constant until 1936, but progressively diminished—especially those in precious metals—following the sanctions imposed on Italy after the invasion of Ethiopia. Casolari points out that for the occasion of the *Oro alla patria* (Gold for the nation), which was organized in response to the sanctions, “a considerable number of gold medals handed over to the State by both institutions and private

²⁸² There is no index of such magazines. A systematic perusal was not possible and would be far beyond the scope of this work.

²⁸³ Casolari 1996:254 (XI/36; XI/37).

²⁸⁴ Casolari 1996: intro.

citizens were melted down for the precious metal". Specimens in gold are thus extremely rare and often one of a kind.

The inclusion of references to the iconography of the medals in an analysis of the mosaic decorative program is dictated by the fact that they were a part of the private sphere of Italian citizens. The medals reflect which iconography and myths were received and assimilated by the population. Especially when bestowed upon Mussolini as tokens of gratitude for or recognition of his actions, these medals and their iconographic choices may indicate the designers' perceptions of the Duce's preferences (or at least what they were believed to be²⁸⁵. Similarly during the Augustan period, coin types were likely not chosen directly by the emperor, but by those who believed they were highlighting themes of which the emperor would have approved and been proud²⁸⁶.

For the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome (1932), a series of ten medals were issued. On the obverse, Mussolini is depicted in various uniforms, with the year of the Fascist Era clearly indicated. On the reverse a significant event is commemorated for each year. Among these is the Battle of Wheat and Reclamation of the Pontine Marshes.²⁸⁷ As we have seen, these themes reappeared on stamps as well.

²⁸⁵ The references for iconography that I considered pertinent to that of the mosaics are included in their own chapter. In this section I will cite certain examples relative to particular celebrations or categories.

²⁸⁶ Wallace-Hadrill 1986.

²⁸⁷ The medals were designed by Giannino Catiglioni and were forged in both bronze and silver. http://www.johnson1836.com/index.php?keyword=mussolini&Search=Search&Itemid=55&option=com_virtuemart&page=shop.browse&vmcchk=1&Itemid=55.

The same medal could also be “re-issued” in later years with a different meaning—or more accurately, with a different level of interpretation. In 1922, for example, a medal was released with the statue of Caesar on the obverse (the same one used on postage stamps) and a reference to the March on Rome on the reverse.²⁸⁸ The same obverse was used in 1937, but with a different reverse that celebrated the empire’s conquest with one of Mussolini’s quotes: “Legionaries, raise your banners, iron and hearts up high, and salute the return of the empire after fifteen centuries on the fateful hills of Rome.”²⁸⁹ The same quotation (or at least the second half) appeared on another medal, also issued after the conquest of Ethiopia, with the statue of Caesar in the background.²⁹⁰ The longevity of these images demonstrates both the care with which they were chosen and also the ability to keep them current, infusing them with new meanings that were abreast with the times.

The use of the same images, such as the statue of Caesar, on different medals, also indicates the reach of the fascist visual vocabulary, which also extended to stamps. The presence of such vocabulary will be fundamental in understanding the iconographic references in the mosaics at the Foro Mussolini, to which we turn in the next chapter.

²⁸⁸ Casolari 1996: 32 (I/2).

²⁸⁹ Casolari 1996: 333 (XIV/37).

²⁹⁰ Casolari 1996: 347 (XIV/140). In the description, it refers to the statue of Augustus, however it is clearly not. See also *Medaglie Johnson*:69 n. 16.

CHAPTER 3

The Foro Mussolini

In this chapter I discuss the birth of the Opera Nazionale Balilla and its role in the education Italy's young generations and in the planning and realization of the Foro Mussolini. I stress how ancient prototypes were an apt source of inspiration for this complex as they relate to the regime's archaeological campaigns to 'liberate' ancient monuments and in the light of the propaganda for the new Italian empire. I also consider the buildings, within and outside the Foro, that carry figurative analogies with the Piazzale dell'Impero, discussed in the next chapter.

a. Renato Ricci and the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* (ONB)

Renato Ricci played a crucial role in the planning and execution of the Foro Mussolini and of the *Forum Imperii* (the official name for the Piazzale dell'Impero).²⁹¹ Born in 1896 in Carrara, he was the son of the quarry foreman (*capocava*) of the conti Fabricotti, who owned the largest quarry in the area. His practical knowledge of the material earned him the trust of many artists who consulted him about the types of marble that would be best for their works. Ties to the marble industry were never severed, and between 1922 and 1926 Ricci served as president of the *Consorzio Marmi di Carrara* and in this position, he

²⁹¹ On Renato Ricci see, Ricci 2004:35-37; Ricci 2005:243-255; Caffaz 2006, Masia 2007: 9-10.

had a considerable impact on the development of the Foro , where Carrara marble was widely used. The block used to create Mussolini's obelisk was a gift from the *Consortio*. Like many of the founders of the Fascist movement, he had fought in World War I and was among the two hundred armed squad members (*squadristi armati*) who escorted Mussolini's train during his March on Rome on October 20, 1922. He soon pursued a political career within the Fascist Party and in 1924, he was elected deputy in the Italian Parliament, in 1926, he was nominated as undersecretary for national education dealing with the moral, civil, and scholastic education of Italian youth and helped to create the *Italiano nuovo*—new Italian—that Mussolini envisioned.

To reach this goal he visited educational institutions both in England (Cambridge, Oxford, Eton) and in the United States (Boston University, Yale and Princeton) and he met with Robert Baden Powell, founder of the scouts movement²⁹². The role of physical training and sport in these educational systems would be a source of inspiration for “creating an organization that would then be admired and imitated in all of Europe” ²⁹³ . In his pedagogical project, Ricci took advantage of the contribution by Eugenio Ferrauto, which later became the theory behind the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* (ONB) ²⁹⁴, the Fascist Youth Organization.

²⁹² Teja, in Santuccio 2005: 20-21.

²⁹³ Ibid. For example in the *Hitler-Jugend* .

²⁹⁴ Eugenio Ferrauto was a leading scholar on physical education from a scientific perspective. His ideas shaped the courses at the fascist academies in Rome and Orvieto, and later the courses of the ISEF (*Istituto Statale di Educazione Fisica*). In 1988 was renamed IUSM, where physical education instructors in Italy are still educated today. For more on the role of sport in a military

The ONB was established by law on April 3, 1926, as a: “moral institution...for the assistance and physical and moral education of youth.”²⁹⁵ The Duce regarded the ONB as the *pupilla del regime*²⁹⁶ and it was overseen directly by the Prime Minister. It was technically autonomous from the fascist party, but was a supplementary tool for schools in regards to education and propaganda, especially due to its spread throughout the territory. This was notably true after the dissolution of Catholic athletic associations, which were seen as rivals of the ONB.²⁹⁷ From 1935 “by order of the Duce, the privilege of receiving the membership card from the *Opera Balilla* was granted to all boys and girls of Italy of all ages, rather than waiting for their eighth birthday as had been the practice in previous years.”²⁹⁸ Children who took part were divided into the categories of the *Balilla*²⁹⁹ (up to 14 years of age) and the *Avanguardisti* (14 to 18 years)

context after the unification of Italy, see Angela Teja.<http://www.uniroma4.it/portal/appmanager/uniroma4/ateneo;jsessionid=01hHKJTJ4KBfc tJJhb3Qzwr6Jl1zG9trGcqzQJQyWh7RLTy4FymL!6973880? nfpb=true& pageLabel=Le Origin iMainPage v1>.

On Ferrauto see Finocchiaro in Santuccio 2005: 51-57.

²⁹⁵ Law n.2247 April 3, 1926, Art. 1. The full text of the law is published in Santuccio 1991: 72-73. On the ONB see Betti 1984; Teja, in Santuccio 2005: 13-57.

²⁹⁶ The Italian word *pupilla* as both the meaning of ward and teacher’s pet. The word was used on the ONB’s badges, which depicted Mussolini’s image.

²⁹⁷ See Tarquini 2011:154-160.

²⁹⁸ Galeotti 2001. The text includes complete copies of the manuals given to the Balilla and Piccola Italiana group leaders.

²⁹⁹ Balilla was the nickname given to a boy who started the revolt against the Austrians in Genoa on December 5, 1746. According to the story, he threw a stone at an Austrian officer who tried to make the people lift a mortar that was stuck in the mud. His name was unknown until 1845, when historians from Genoa identified him as Giovan Battista Perasso, a very common name in the area. Already in 1847 Balilla had become a national legend, and in the early years after unification his story was spread with particular enthusiasm in schools, especially at the elementary level. His youth helped young pupils identify with him and his ardor worked with the image of the Risorgimento of a new Italy. During the two decades of Fascism, he became the incarnation of all youth, especially with the creation of the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*. His myth, during the Fascist period, however, took on more military-like characteristics to align with the paramilitary role of the ONB, whose purpose was not only to forge future citizens, but more important the future soldiers of the regime. See G.Oliva, “Balilla”, in Isneghi, 2010: 338-462.

³⁰⁰, while initially, one became Balilla at the age of 8. This decision dates to 1935, when Mussolini opened up the ONB to children aged 6-8 years, who were called children of the she-wolf (*figli della lupa*). The Balilla and Avanguardisti had different names and attributes depending on their age group; for example, from 8-12 years they were *Balilla Escursionisti*

At Mussolini's behest on May 24 the *Leva Fascista* was held. It was a solemn ceremony with songs and parades to commemorate this rite of passage where "every age category gave a symbol of their own group to the younger one."³⁰¹ During the same ceremony, the new recruits would take the fascist oath, the text of which clearly outlined the paramilitary leanings of the institution.³⁰² This ceremony, which took place throughout Italy, and even in the colonies, was depicted in the mosaics in the Piazzale dell'Impero.

The ONB had a wide sphere of influence and had multiple functions (physical, moral, hygienic, charitable), each of which needed to be addressed through appropriate structures. In Ricci and his collaborators' vision, the first step was to create the right environment. Youths needed "fresh air, light, water and cleansing in the form of pools, sports fields, theaters, libraries, large study areas and so on."

³⁰⁰Galeotti 2001

³⁰¹ Teja in Santuccio 2005: 20. References to May 24 are made in the Balilla manuals fully reproduced in Galeotti, and this date is confirmed by the LUCE newsreel (27/05/1936). Teja (Santuccio 2005: 19) claims that it was held for the founding of Rome on April 21. The LUCE newsreels have both dates and I was unable to establish the exact time the event was moved to May 24, it must have been before 1935 since the text of the manual for the Balilla team leader that uses that date is from 1935. A Fascist Calendar published in the *Popolo D'Italia* September 13, 1937, lists the *Leva Fascista* on May 24.

³⁰² The fascist oath recited: "In the name of God and Italy, I swear to follow the orders of the DUCE, and to serve the Cause of the fascist Revolution with all my strength, and if necessary with my blood."

³⁰³ This vision gave life to a new architectural model: the *Casa Balilla*, a multipurpose space dedicated to physical activity, but also areas for education, offices, group rallies, and healthcare.³⁰⁴

The task of designing this new architectural typology fell to a young architect from the same area as Ricci: Enrico Del Debbio, who would go on to design the first project for the *Accademia Fascista di Educazione Fisica*, the core of the future Foro Mussolini. In 1928, Del Debbio published *Progetti di costruzione di case Balilla, palestre, campi sportive, piscine, etc. (Building designs for Case Balilla, gyms, sports fields, pools, etc.)*, that became an essential text for the future development of educational buildings. These new structures were also needed to host the gymnastics performances, parades and ceremonies that were so important to the fascist regime, as well as cultural and recreational events such as exhibitions.

The ONB, which focused on the physical and moral education of new young Italians, was part of a series of government provisions to benefit children. Among these were the construction of numerous schools, not only in Italy but also in the colonies, an extensive anti-malaria campaign, the creation of the *Opera Maternità ed Infanzia*³⁰⁵ (organization for mothers and children) and a systematic reform of the national school system³⁰⁶. The goal of these measures

³⁰³ Ricci 2006:246.

³⁰⁴ Santuccio 2005: 93-105; Capomolli, Mulazzani, Vittorini 2008.

³⁰⁵ R.D. n.2277 April 10, 1925.

³⁰⁶ Conveyed with the Gentile reform of 1923, 'fascistizzazione' of schools occurred through a series of laws and decrees that focused on widespread involvement by the fascist party in scholastic programs and structures. This process can be said to have concluded with the Carta

was to create a future generation (or rather a body of citizens) that was completely devoted to the regime.³⁰⁷

The ONB would be dissolved in 1937, few months after the inauguration of the Piazzale dell'Impero, and replaced with the *Gioventù Italiana del Littorio (GIL)*. The GIL was different since it was under the direct control of the Fascist party and had a much more militaristic approach toward the education of children. The first article of the law creates the GIL as a “unitary and totalitarian organization of the Youth forces of the Fascist regime, instituted within the National Fascist Party and directly dependent on the Secretary of the National Fascist Party.”³⁰⁸ The Secretary of State was its commander general, and its motto was: “Believe-Obey-Fight.” Registration with the GIL became mandatory even for children of six years and sanctioned the final *fascistizzazione* of the organization.

The Foro Mussolini is the embodiment of Renato Ricci's educational model. In a letter sent to Mussolini, Ricci declares

Your Excellency, in the wide range of activities undertaken, under Your guidance, by the ONB for the renewal and physical and moral improvement of the Italian race in order to prepare the leaders of the Nation's future army, one institution has proven to be particularly suited and effective...this institution is the *Accademia Fascista di Educazione Fisica*.³⁰⁹

della Scuola Bottai in 1939. On the scholastic system during fascism: Bertone 1975, Isneghi 1979, Charnitzky 1996. See also chap. 1.

³⁰⁷ On the need for a close link between fascism and education, as expressed by Mussolini, see Koon 1995: 33-59.

³⁰⁸ The GIL was created with the Royal Decree, n.1839 October 27, 1937. Published in Santuccio 1991: 73-74.

³⁰⁹ The letter is dated Nov. Anno IX. Ricci was trying to obtain a larger contribution from Mussolini for the management and operational costs of the *Accademia*. Quoted in Greco 1990b:442-443.

The *Accademia* was intended to prepare the male) managers of the ONB and constituted the initial core of the Foro itself.³¹⁰ In his project Ricci decided to employ young, often unknown artists and architects. How did he go about selecting the artists? It is impossible to determine with absolute certainty. Unfortunately: “there is no trace of a well-preserved systematic archive” for the ONB.³¹¹ We do know, however, that Ricci minimized bureaucracy in his organization. Projects were often assigned verbally and without an official *concorso* (public competition) to save time and money. In 1933, Giuseppe Pagano claimed that out of all the Fascist organizations, the ONB could be considered the most in-step with modern architecture, the truest expression of dynamism and the most progressive, thanks to Renato Ricci. He administered the organization

without the racket of complex competitive exams [...] without squandering money on complicated bureaucracy from centralized and lazy offices [...] without monopolizing the actions of one person or the reputation of an already-established expert [...], the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* went about choosing its architects among young people, distributing the work among freelance professionals.³¹²

Among the young protagonists Enrico del Debbio would remain the main point of reference for all projects pertaining to the Foro until 1933. In that year, however, another promising young architect arrived on the scene: Luigi Moretti, who

³¹⁰ The *quadri dirigenziali femminili* were educated in the *Collegio femminile* in Orvieto, Ricci 2005:36. The original name was *Scuola Superiore Fascista di Magistero di Educazione Fisica*. The term *Foro Mussolini* will appear the first time in 1929. Santuccio in Caporilli 1990: 163 and Santuccio 1991: 9. The decision to create a citadel for sport was after the institution of the *Accademia* in 1928. See Lucente 2002: 76.

³¹¹ Santuccio 2006:73. Part of the issue is due to the nature of the ONB whose administration, at different times, was demanded at different institutions. Data are located, by chance, in other publications or archives. Moreover according to Santuccio 2005: 90 “there are numerous voices that talk about how the official archive of the ONB and GIL went missing at the time of the fall of the Republic of Salò. Almost all of the most important documents were thrown in crates into Lake Garda.”

³¹² Pagano 1933.

stepped in as chief executive (*direttore tecnico*) for the ONB.³¹³ The circumstances that brought Ricci and Moretti together, and how the latter attained his position within the ONB “are today still unclear and largely undefined.”³¹⁴ It is likely that they met thanks to Angelo Canevari, a personal friend of Moretti’s already active within the Foro Mussolini, and Felicia Abbruzzese, the head of the Roman Women’s Fascist League, and Moretti’s childhood friend.³¹⁵ The Piazzale dell’Impero was Ricci’s last project within the Foro and can be seen as the *embodiement* of his educational ideology: the creation of a new ruling class, completely devoted to and indoctrinated in the Fascist ideal. A few months after the inauguration, Ricci was removed from his position and replaced by Achille Starace.

f. The Foro Mussolini

Mussolini laid the cornerstone of his forum and declared on February 5, 1928: “from a historical-political perspective, [this] monument in harkening back to Roman imperial tradition wishes to immortalize the memory of the new Fascist civilization for centuries, tying it to the name of its leader.”³¹⁶ This urban space housed the official athletic complex for physical education and is one of the most significant and monumental public works in Rome from the time of Benito Mussolini. Italy’s entry into war in 1942 left some of the structures unfinished or

³¹³ On Del Debbio, Sardo in Santuccio 2006: 63-71. On Moretti and Ricci Santuccio 2006: 73-90.

³¹⁴ Santuccio 2006:73.

³¹⁵ Santuccio 2006:77, see also Greco 1987:21 and Greco 1991:38. Between 1933 and 1936, Moretti designed six *Casa del Balilla* for the ONB, and the pavillion at the *Mostra delle Colonie estive*, discussed in chapter 4 in connection with the decoration by Achille Capizzano.

³¹⁶ Cited in Greco 1991: 7

only in their planning stages. Its present appearance is due to changes made in the postwar period, and particularly for the 1960 Olympics and the 1990 World Cup Championships.³¹⁷

In a 1933 article from the magazine *Architettura*, the architect Giulio Paniconi stressed two important aspects of the new structure. Its connection to the Roman past stressed the importance played by sports in the life of the ancient Romans, in particular in relation to their health. More important, was its social and political role. Paniconi said that: “the Foro Mussolini was meant to have a higher, more complete meaning; almost a solemn celebration in honor of eternal youth and Italian strength; almost an ode to Fascism that had coordinated, organized, and animated this youth to elevate it to its highest, inevitable destiny.”

³¹⁸ The Foro was not inspired solely by the ancient *gymnasia* because these structures were seen as limited in scope, essentially as gyms, but also in their architectural complexity, a simple open space surrounded by porticoes with rooms assigned different functions.³¹⁹ Since the new, planned, complex was destined for a wider range of functions - the civil, military, and political education of future Italians- other ancient Roman precedents, might be considered by way of comparison: the baths.³²⁰ The Roman baths were a place where the body was trained but also the mind. The complex would include libraries as well as rooms, which were lavishly decorated with works of art, that were dedicated to the

³¹⁷ For the history of the planning of the complex, Santuccio 1991: 7-23, G. Del Debbio (MdiR. 2004); Vidotto 2004, DiGirolamo 2008.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Pica 1937: 16.

³²⁰ Ibid.

declamations of philosophers and writers. However, the baths model cannot actually be equated with the *Foro Mussolini*, neither in structure nor in the underlying principles. Ancient Roman baths were open to the general public and also constituted a single architectural unit. The *Foro Mussolini*, however was constituted of different buildings within a single urban complex and might seem rather inspired by the urban Roman forum, from which the new work derived “its noble appearance and the suggestion for a name.”³²¹ The Foro, like all the other aspects of Fascism inspired by Romanitas, was not simply an imitation of an ancient structure, but rather a continuation and further development of ancient Roman architecture. The *Foro Mussolini* thus cannot be identified with a single model, but becomes something uniquely Fascist, having “a life of its own, with a form that is unequivocally its own” and only isolated details may be traced back to familiar forms.³²²

The need to put up various buildings also influenced the lengthy and complex story of the *Foro Mussolini*, which saw several phases of construction reflected in changing master urban plans that were adopted after construction had begun.³²³ The location chosen for the project was at a bend in the Tiber, against the striking backdrop of Monte Mario, between the Villa Madama and the Ponte Milvio. Selected by the original architect of the complex, Enrico del Dubbio, the site was subject to flooding, and it was necessary to raise the ground by about six meters, in order to remain above the flood levels of the Tiber River.

³²¹ *ibid.*

³²² *ibid.*: 17

³²³ see Caporilli 1990; Santuccio 1991, Santuccio 2005.

The same solution had been devised for the ancient Roman forum, presumably during the reign of Tarquinius Priscus.³²⁴

The reasons given by the architect for his choice for this preference were practical and also aesthetic: the depression in the land was needed to create, in classical fashion, open spaces for playing fields without any tall structures that might have interfered with the beauty of the surrounding area³²⁵ *i.e.* the Monte Mario hill, a lush green space still intact and untouched by building development. Therefore, the new structures were inspired by the relationship between art and nature during the late Republic and empire when theaters and stadiums were surrounded by gardens.

Del Debbio proposed various plans for the complex. The final design dates to 1932 and was part of the broader discourse of Rome's 1931 zoning legislation (*Piano Regolatore*)³²⁶, which earmarked the entire hill and the areas adjacent to the Foro for the establishment of a park. Del Debbio's project connected the area with the rest of the city's urban fabric by creating two bridges: one leading to the main entrance of the Foro³²⁷ and one facing south in the direction of Piazza Gentile da Fabriano.³²⁸ The first areas to be finished within the Foro were

³²⁴ Ammerman 1990.

³²⁵ Ibid. An example was the original Olympic stadium (originally named *Stadio dei Cipressi*). The present structure, as a result of the 1990 World Cup Championships, completely altered the connection between *Piazzale dell'Impero* and the hill of Monte Mario.

³²⁶ This discussion goes beyond the scope of this work. For more on the topic, Santuccio 1991: 9, Insolera 2001 (2nd ed): 143-156

³²⁷ For today's Duca d'Aosta Bridge, see. *Infra* in this chapter.

³²⁸ This connection was only completed in 2008 with the construction of the Music Bridge (a project by the English studio Buro Happold, who along with Powell-Williams Architects won the competition held by the Comune di Roma in 2000). It has this name because it connects to the

inaugurated on November 4, 1932, the anniversary of the victory³²⁹ over the Austro-Hungarian empire and consisted of the *Accademia Fascista di Educazione Fisica* (building H), the *Stadio dei Marmi*, the *Stadio dei Cipressi* (today known as the Olympic Stadium), and Mussolini's obelisk at the entrance. While the first three were Del Debbio's projects, the task of creating the monolith was assigned to Costantino Costantini.³³⁰

The obelisk is still one of the most distinctive features of the complex today, if for no other reason than the fact that Mussolini Dux is still visible on its side.³³¹ Obelisks in Rome were visual and conspicuous symbols of conquest and power brought from faraway lands, they testify to the achievements of the emperors and the might of Rome. The first two obelisks were carried off to Rome by Augustus from the great temple at Heliopolis after the conquest of Egypt in 30 B.C. Twenty years later, to celebrate the anniversary of this conquest, one such obelisk was placed by Augustus in the Campus Martius where it served as a gnomon for the solar meridian whereas the other was erected at the eastern end of the *spina* in the Circus Maximus.³³²

The impact of such impressive artifacts persisted during the ensuing centuries, even if the only obelisk that had remained standing in its original position was

Auditorium della Musica, created by Renzo Piano in the Flaminio neighborhood near the Olympic Village created for the 1960 games.

³²⁹ Santuccio 1991: 9. The same author in Caporilli 1990: 165, gave an earlier date for the inauguration of the first buildings, 4 November 1930.

³³⁰ Del Debbio emphasized that the arrival of this architect signaled a "series of reallocations for plans of various other works", see Santuccio 1991: 12.

³³¹ On the desire to destroy this reminder of fascism for the 1960 Olympics in Rome, see *infra* chapter 4.

³³² Claridge 2010. On the obelisks in Rome Sorek 2010, D'Onofrio 1967.

the one in the Vatican. The latter was the testimony of a major enterprise sponsored by Pope Sixtus V. In his Counter-reformatory will to underscore the Church's supremacy and aided by his architect Domenico Fontana, Sixtus was responsible for moving the ancient obelisks, they were relocated in front of the major churches of Rome and served as a visual point of reference for the many pilgrims who visited the city of Peter. The obelisk in the Vatican supposedly marked the place of the martyrdom of the apostle Peter and its significance for the church was immense. Sixtus was also responsible for finally completing the dome of the Basilica, and he wanted this massive testimony of Peter's martyrdom to act as the centerpiece before the Basilica's main entrance. The transportation was recorded in an illustrated volume with tables depicting all the various phases of the engineering feat, from the lowering to the moving and raising of the obelisk into its new position.

A similar procedure was adopted for Mussolini's obelisk, a gift from Renato Ricci and the tallest ever to be transported to Rome. Erected in the Duce's honor, the obelisk was documented from conception to completion - its quarrying and perilous, arduous journey from Carrara to Rome on a specially built boat (the *Apuano*) first along the coastline and ultimately along the Tiber. Daily newspapers and newsreels regularly reported progress often through visually compelling testimony, capturing Fascism's achievement in much the same way as

Sixtus's Counter-reformatory efforts are perpetuated through Fontana's volume.³³³

Following an ancient Roman practice that had enjoyed a revival at least as early as the 13th century and famously during the Renaissance when, for example, medals were created by Julius II for the founding of the new Basilica of St. Peter's in 1506, specially struck commemorative gold medals were placed in the foundation of Mussolini's obelisk.³³⁴ They portrayed Mussolini with a lion's skin, like Hercules, on the obverse, with the new obelisk on the reverse, and images of the medals were also reproduced in newspapers to celebrate the event.³³⁵ Accompanying the medals was "The Code of the Foro Mussolini" written by A.G. Amatucci, which contained a condensed history of the project, the Fascist party, and especially the Opera Balilla and the Foro Mussolini."³³⁶ A conspicuous section of the text focuses on works dedicated to young people, the creation of the ONB, and the role of Renato Ricci.³³⁷ Newspapers drew parallels between the obelisk and the figure of the emperor Augustus: "standing in the presence of the

³³³ On the parallel between Sixtus V and Mussolini, see Caffarelli 1935. For the history of the transportation of Mussolini's obelisk, see D'Amelio 2009.

³³⁴ On the tradition of coins in the foundation of buildings in the Roman era, see Facchinetti 2008. The tradition was picked up again at least as early as the 13th century, and had a moment of emphasis starting during the Rinascimento when medals were struck specially to celebrate the event. On the later tradition, see Weiss 1958. A famous example is the type of medal created by Julius II for the founding of the new St. Peter's Basilica in 1506. For iconography on the medals from the Foro Mussolini, see Casolari 1998: (X/31) and infra chap 4. On the obelisk: D'Amelio 2009.

³³⁵ In the *Corriere della Sera*, November 5, 1932 There is a picture of the medals.

³³⁶ Pica 1937: 103. The first to analyze the text in respect to the parallels with Augustus (and in particular his clear reference to the *Res Gestae*) was Aicher 2000. His analysis of the mosaics in terms of that comparison is limited, however in that essentially concentrates on the mosaics at the beginning of the Piazzale toward the obelisk with the maps. For my different interpretation, see chap. 4.

³³⁷ Pica: 104.

obelisk, Italians are instinctively reminded of Augustus's statue". A similar parallel was drawn after the conquest of Ethiopia, for the victory occasioned the transportation of an obelisk from Axum to Rome. The trophy's placement in the Piazza Capena at the beginning of the Via Imperiale, which was planned to connect Rome with Ostia, further underscored the imperial value of the artifact. The newsreel announcing its inauguration in Rome stresses how this represented the thirteenth monument from Africa to be brought within the Augustan walls over the centuries.³³⁸ As seen earlier, the obelisk of Axum was compared in the MAR to the one Augustus appropriated after his victory over Cleopatra. Mussolini's obelisk within the Foro, therefore, acted as a link to the imperial past of the city of Rome and with the victorious African (Egyptian) campaign of the emperor Augustus.

In 1933, before the taking the helm of the Foro's construction, Moretti was commissioned to plan the *Casa Balilla* in Trastevere for the ONB, which would not be completed and inaugurated until 1937.³³⁹ The *Casa Balilla* were multipurpose structures and their interior spaces were organized accordingly. The Trastevere example is divided into three main blocks. Although interconnected, each block has its own separate entrance. Split levels correspond to the buildings' three main functions (administration, recreation and health services) and galleries and corridors create additional spatial interrelationships.

³³⁸ Luce B1194, 03/11/1937.

³³⁹ The structure was renamed *Casa della Gioventù Italiana del Littorio* when this new institution took over for the ONB. See Domenicucci 2007 with previous bibliography; Storelli 2007; Marconi, 1941:360-379. This volume includes a text both in Italian and German, and contains also the description of the Piazzale dell'Impero.

The building (as with all those sponsored by the ONB) had extensive interior decoration, unfortunately very little of this survives and was not adequately described in contemporary publications. I have been able to reconstruct the decorative program for the *Casa Balilla in Trastevere*, particularly the contribution of one its artists, Achille Capizzano, who would later be responsible for some of the mosaics within the Piazzale.

The swimming pool was decorated with an encaustic painting by Orfeo Tamburi depicting swimmers.³⁴⁰ Angelo Canevari decorated the cafeteria with giant still lifes³⁴¹ and Achille Capizzano created the murals for the 650-seat theater. These murals, which are not survived, depicted silhouettes of athletes and a winged figure in flight overhead brandishing the *fascio littorio*.³⁴²

More than 50 meters long, in the “hall for respite and expositions”, a wall fresco by **Mario** Mafai recorded the triumph of a Roman emperor.³⁴³ This hall is on the second floor, the same level as the so-called Hall of Honor and Memory, it was located at the top of a staircase, directly across from the main entrance (on via Aschianghi) and at the end of the “Galleria d’onore”. The space was also well suited for gatherings, celebrations, and parades, and therefore its decorative program is the most propagandistic and politically charged. In the Hall of Honor

³⁴⁰ Tolomeo Speranza 1995:161-162.

³⁴¹ This information is recorded in a newspaper clipping, which I found in the private archive of Giuseppe Capizzano. It has been impossible to identify either the date or the newspaper, I will refer to it as “opere edilizie del regime”, which is the title of the article signed by Alberto Neppi.

³⁴² Marconi, *Architettura* 1941:373. The mural is visible in some photos from that period.

³⁴³ “trionfo augusteo” in *Opere edilizie del regime*. “Only fragments were uncovered of this last one during restoration” Storelli, 2007:12, 111-113; for the description Tolomeo 1995: 161-162; This space is defined differently by each author: Neppi (*vestibolo verso via Induno*); Tolomeo (*salone d’ingresso*); Marconi (*sala lettura per I ragazzi*).

and Memory displayed on one wall several bas reliefs in stucco in the form of medallion-like portraits (by Palazzi and Barbieri) of Roman emperors with their names inscribed beneath (from the left: Caesar, Augustus, Flavio- presumably Vespasian-, Marcus Aurelius, Claudius, and Trajan). A ledge supported a bronze bust of Mussolini in the guise of a Roman emperor wearing a *paludamentum* with his head uncovered.³⁴⁴

This identification of Mussolini as a new emperor was foreshadowed upon entering the atrium or gallery. Here Achille Capizzano decorated the left wall of the gallery, toward the Staircase of Honor, with verbal and visual elements recalling the “Ethiopian deeds”:³⁴⁵ a map of the Mediterranean in which the two Italian colonies Ethiopia and Libya were labeled and highlighted. On the other side of the map, the important dates for the military campaigns against Ethiopia were listed, while above it Mussolini’s motto “Noi tireremo dritto” was displayed together with the date of the declaration of the empire. “18 novembre A.XIV Sanzioni” was written below the map.³⁴⁶ Contemporary photographs show a lengthy inscription on the opposite wall, and another inscription appeared on both sides of the wall in front of the emperors’ medallions. Unfortunately, the angle of the photograph does not permit a reading of the now lost texts, although some of this information can be recovered from an annotation in Capizzano’s archive which reads: “inscriptions for Trastevere drawn from the Duce’s

³⁴⁴ The bust was executed by Andrea Spadini

³⁴⁵ *Opere edilizie*. In Capizzano’s little notebook listing (often without a date) the works he executed, we can read: “cartoons of the stucco designs for the vestibule in Trastevere”.

³⁴⁶ The map was recovered during restoration.

speeches.” We should, perhaps, imagine something akin to the map of Agrippa in the *Saepta* joined to Augustus’s *Res Gestae*.

The atrium with the Memorial Hall and the student library, is particularly significant when one considers the early-morning Balilla activities that began with paying homage to Fascist history.³⁴⁷ The built environment served as a constant reminder of Mussolini’s role as a new founder of the empire. His conquests and his own words were prominently displayed, while a bust with his effigy in the guise of a Roman emperor greeted the visitor upon entering the space. The imperial association continued as one ascended the staircase and entered the room featuring the stucco medallions with the portraits and names of the emperors, then discovered the adjacent reading room and its depiction of the Roman triumph. This space and Capizzano’s decoration, in particular, are especially important since they exemplify three of the themes that also appear in the decorative program of the Piazzale dell’Impero: Mussolini’s astrological sign, (following the Augustan example); the myth of Hercules and the use of maps.³⁴⁸

Capizzano’s interventions encompass another graffito located above the entrance to the atrium: from left to right (from the viewer’s perspective) there is a knight and a horse with a radiant crown (Sun/Mussolini?), with a lion below it, in

³⁴⁷ Storelli 2007:75

³⁴⁸ For the use of maps in relation to antiquity see chap.4.

the center a female figure and Icarus falling, and two male figures to the side running toward the left.³⁴⁹

The theme of Icarus appeared in another work executed by Moretti, the first project with which he was to be entrusted at the Foro: the “Casa del Balilla Sperimentale” which would later become the Casa delle Armi (Accademia di Scherma—the Fencing Academy).³⁵⁰

This project marked Moretti’s definitive takeover as the chief executive of the ONB, thereby replacing Del Debbio and was inaugurated on April 5, 1936³⁵¹ after a fundamental turn of events in the Foro’s evolution since: “in its ground plan and its relationship with the surrounding area, a general idea [was studied] for the Foro that was very different from the one laid out by Del Debbio.”³⁵²

The *Casa delle Armi* was inserted into the southern area of the complex near the South Residences, already completed as part of Del Debbio’s plan. The residences had to be adapted to conform to Moretti’s new and innovative structure by: “raising the height with the addition of one storey, demolishing a

³⁴⁹Above, an inscription reads, “We are the forerunners of what is to come”. The volume *Architettura* mentions neither this drawing nor its author. The pictures published therein, which probably date prior to 1941, do not show this engraving. It was added at a later date, possibly when the ONB became the GIL and at the same time the facade was redone, when the Casa Balilla became the Casa GIL. In the bibliography on this structure, I found only one reference that could refer to this installation: “nell’atrio altorilevi di Mario Barbieri” (*Architettura*, 1941: 368). The description as “high relief” does not seem to fit, however.

³⁵⁰ The bibliography for this building is extensive, see most recently Lucente 2002; Nizzi-Giunta 2006; Giunta-Nizzi 2010 with the earlier bibliography.

³⁵¹ *Il Tevere* April 2, 1936 and April 5, 1936. The same day saw also the inauguration of the Balilla’s statue in the Foro.

³⁵² Santuccio 1991: 12.

portion of the front, and covering the whole surface in marble.”³⁵³ The earliest structures in the complex, notably the *Accademia di Educazione Fisica*, had originally been painted in Pompeian red,³⁵⁴ since one of the characteristics of the original Foro was precisely the contrast between the red of the buildings, the white of the marble, the green of the hills, and the blue of the sky.³⁵⁵

For the *Accademia della Scherma*’s decorative program, Moretti turned to some artists who would later go on to collaborate with him on other projects, particularly the mosaics.

The almost monolithic whiteness of the marble sheets decorating the exterior of the structure was punctuated on the façade where the library was located (to the south) with Angelo Canevari’s multicolored mosaic. On the left, a female figure holds the Fascist emblem with her left hand while her right arm executes the fascist salute. Above her are Icarus and the horses of the sun. In the bottom center is the *Genio Italico*, and to the right there is a group of three athletes.³⁵⁶

The story of the young pioneer in the art of free-flight aviation, who loses his life in attempting the impossible, was appropriated by Fascism as a dual expression: a metaphor for aeronautics, a field which was making impressive strides in those

³⁵³ Del Debbio cited in Santuccio 1991: 15.

³⁵⁴ Caporilli 1990:58.

³⁵⁵ Masia 2007

³⁵⁶ Marson in Santuccio 2005: 229.

years, and as an identification with the intrepid shock troops of World War I (*arditi*).³⁵⁷

In 1934, the Italian Aeronautic Exhibition housed in the Palazzo dell'Arte in Milan paid homage to the regime's successes beginning in the mid-twenties with the Transatlantic flight of Italo Balbo, who subsequently became the Minister of Aeronautics. One of the exhibition's galleries centered on the figure of Icarus and displayed Marcello Mascherini's sculpture of the youth covering his face as he approaches the blinding sun, which was accompanied by Gabriele D'Annunzio's words exhorting the reader never to stop. The final line read that setting limits (*il non più oltre*) was tantamount to the worst blasphemy of the worst kind towards god and all of humanity.

D'Annunzio provided a source of inspiration in both word and deed. His aviation feats during World War I underscored such values as courage and sacrifice that Fascism would inherit. The poet dedicated one of his compositions to Icarus³⁵⁸, exemplifying his attachment to the mythical figure who represented the will to reach one's goals without fear of the consequences or risks involved: "then he wanted nothing else but the sun/ nothing other than reach it, observe it up close as it stands ablaze on its chariot, making me fearless." The last word, the Italian attribute *ardito* for fearless, alluded to the legendary shock troops (the *arditi*), who were a special force selected during World War I to engage in especially

³⁵⁷ For more on the myth of Icarus read through an anti-Fascist lens, see Farrell 1995.

³⁵⁸ D'Annunzio, *Alcyone*, ditirambo IV.

dangerous operations in order to defeat the enemies on the frontlines.³⁵⁹ This force was very dear to Fascism, particularly in its initial stages. Canevari's mosaic in the *Casa delle Armi* is a tribute to Fascism as a determined force incarnated by both Icarus and the new Italic generations symbolized by the three athletes.

The incorporation of solar imagery into the iconographic programs of ruler cult has a long history in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. One could cite, for example, the reliefs of Antiochus of Commagene in a *dextrarum iunctio* with Helios³⁶⁰, the links that Augustus forged with Apollo³⁶¹, or the solar colossus of Nero that subsequently framed the statue of Constantine above his arch³⁶². What was new, however, was the focus on Icarus, who had never entered the sphere of antiquity's ruler cults because he died.

Icarus returns as a motif in Severini's mosaic for the entrance to the Duce's gymnasium, which was completed shortly after the *Casa delle Armi*, but at the same time as the Piazzale dell'Impero in 1937.³⁶³ The mosaic shows a draped female figure to the left carrying the *fascio littorio*. Next to her, Icarus is depicted plummeting to earth after flying too closely to the sun, which appears in the upper register and is nearly eclipsed by Mussolini's zodiac sign, Leo. In this instance, the fall of Icarus seems to suggest the plight of those who dare aspire to Mussolini's height.

³⁵⁹ Tarquini 2011:51 with earlier bibliography.

³⁶⁰ Goell 1996.

³⁶¹ Zanker 1990.

³⁶² Bardill 2011.

³⁶³ For the duce's palestra see chap.4

The *Casa della Armi* featured another polychromatic mosaic in the pupils' entrance³⁶⁴, with a trophy in the center, encircled by six sabres on the left and five foils on the right. Plinio Marconi attributed this work was credited to Luigi Moretti,³⁶⁵ but documents from the archive of the School of Spilimbergo in Friuli, which was in charge of installing the mosaics, attribute the design to Angelo Canevari.³⁶⁶ The history of this mosaic, lost and re-found only in 2004, is emblematic of the unfortunate afterlife of the Casa delle Armi after the fall of Fascism. Since 1975, the structure was used as a bunker for trials that were particularly significant in recent Italian history, such as those for the attempted assassination of the pope John Paul II, and the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro.³⁶⁷ Recently, the structure was partially restored (drastically compromising any analysis of the original space) to accommodate the committee in support of Rome's bid for the 2020 Olympics.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁴ Lucente 2002: 41. The author describes it as a "black and white mosaic depicting an abundance of foils" basing the description only on sketches and preparatory drawings of the structure conserved in ACS. A few pages later in an annotation, however, it is written that "it has recently been discovered...the floor mosaic of the special students' entrance", without specifying that the mosaic is actually colored. On this discovery published in the daily Italian newspapers from 20 March, 2004: <http://www.architettilroma.it/archivio.aspx?id=5278>.

In November 2011, during a visit organized by the American Academy in Rome, I was able to personally observe the mosaics. I would like to thank professor Corey Brennan for the invitation.

³⁶⁵ *Architettura* 1941

³⁶⁶ Marson in Santuccio 2005: 229 "According to Gabriella Bucco, the design of the composition belongs to Canevari, while Plinio Marconi credited Moretti". In Bucco's unpublished doctoral thesis, she refers to archival documents to credit the mosaic. I have seen the letter attributing it to Canevari.

³⁶⁷ See Rossi 1982.

³⁶⁸ The bid was withdrawn because the Italian government headed by Mario Monti decided that the cost of construction could not be met due to the critical situation of the Italian economy. http://roma.corriere.it/roma/notizie/cronaca/12_febbraio_14/monti-cdm-roma-alemanno-olimpiadi-2020-1903276387660.shtml.

Inside the library, a touch of color was given to the ceiling in Pompeian red, where a panel was outlined in white stucco. The panel was enframed with *fasci littori* facing inward, and at its center an eagle was perched atop Mussolini's monogram from which a *fascio littorio* appears to spring forth.³⁶⁹ Above and below the head of the eagle are two dates: XXIII MARZO and XXVIII OTTOBRE. On the shorter ends of the panel, above the head and below the feet of the eagle there is a bull and the date XXIV MAGGIO. Below the eagle's talons are a lion and the date XVIII NOVEMBRE. The bull and the lion have been described as the ascendant and the zodiac sign of Mussolini.³⁷⁰ Mussolini's sign was Leo, as he was born on July 28, but his ascendant would have been Scorpio.³⁷¹ The attribution of the panel is controversial. Plinio Marconi credited it to the sculptor Oddo Aliventi, but it has been difficult to confirm because Aliventi's original typescript³⁷² does not include this panel. Considering both the iconography and the dates reported on the panels, I suggest a different attribution which has received confirmation in Capizzano's archive.

³⁶⁹ Marson in Santuccio 2005: 229 describes this central element as a "monogram of the GIL," but I disagree. The membership cards for the GIL, which remained the same for the entire life of the institution, did not have that monogram. In addition, the structure was inaugurated in April 1936, which was a year before the creation of the GIL (October 1937). In documentation from that time, there is no mention of decorations added after the inauguration. The same monogram, without the eagle, also appears on the panel that summarized the achievements of the ONB, used in the exhibit of athletic buildings curated by Moretti.

³⁷⁰ Marson in Santuccio 2005: 229.

³⁷¹ The calculation of a rising sign is made based on the date and time of birth. Mussolini was born at 2:00pm, therefore this is calculated as a Scorpio (vd.). Marson does not specify where the information comes from. It would be interesting to know, in order to understand if Mussolini was thought to have the rising sign of Taurus during fascism. As we will see later, the bull was very prominent in the mosaics of the Foro. For my interpretation, see *infra* chap. 4.

³⁷² in the archives of the *Galleria Nazionale D'Arte Moderna* in Rome. It lists the work he executed.

The dates in the panel are relevant to the history of Fascism and are arranged chronologically, ending with the last important event before the inauguration of the building. The date above the bull, May 24 (1915) corresponds with Italy's entry into the World War I; the next, March 23 (1919) is to the date of the foundation of the *Fasci di Combattimento*, and is followed by October 23 (1922), the date of the March on Rome. The last date is November 18 (1935), when sanctions were imposed on Italy for the war in Ethiopia. All these dates eventually reappear as inscriptions on the marble blocks along the Piazzale dell'Impero also designed by Achille Capizzano, and both the lion and the bull are nearly omnipresent elements in his work.³⁷³ One of his preparatory sketches for the Piazzale shows two rather similar figures in one of the panels. Searching the sketches and personal notes preserved in Capizzano's archive I found a brief annotation in the artist's hand listing the works he executed, among which can be read: "inscriptions intended for the library's ceiling" (Casa delle Armi). It is therefore plausible that Oddo Aliverti is the artist that executed the stucco. In addition, Capizzano was responsible for the fresco on the back wall, behind the spiral staircase leading to the library entrance on the second floor, which has not survived today. This will be discussed in relation to the iconography of the mosaics.³⁷⁴

The *Casa delle Armi* is composed of two distinct but complementary elements that fulfill the two functions of the building itself: one for sport, and the

³⁷³ For more on this topic see chap 4.

³⁷⁴ For more on this topic see chap.4.

other reserved for the library and the Museum of Arms, which could also be used for meetings and ceremonies.³⁷⁵After its inauguration, the celebratory function tended to take the upper hand, partly because the new orientation of the Fascist party to organize self-celebratory events, exhibits, and expositions. Such as the exhibition on athletic buildings from May-September 1937 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the founding of the ONB. Dedicated to the architecture of ONB, the exhibition paid tribute to all of the organization's achievements. Curated by Luigi Moretti, it was hosted in his recently inaugurated *Accademia di Scherma*.³⁷⁶

The exhibition took advantage of the various spaces and modern communication techniques, especially photographic montages. There were two main sections. One was installed in the main hall and in the library and was organized on different floor levels, with a focus on the Foro Mussolini, while the lower level centered on the academies in Orvieto, Forlì and Brindisi. The second section was in the fencing hall and dedicated to the many *Casa Balilla* in Italy and abroad.

At the entrance, on the main floor, a panel described the many buildings that had been erected by the organization from 1927 to 1937, during Ricci's ten-year tenure as president: 640 facilities commonly referred to as *Casa Balilla* and Casa

³⁷⁵ Lucente 2002: 36.

³⁷⁶ M. Cereghin assisted in organizing the installations. Neppi 1937; Pensabene 1937; *Il Popolo d'Italia* May 17, 1937; Santuccio 2006: 93-112; Rostagni 2008; Munafò - Tassi 2009:7, Vittorini, Capomolla, Mulazzani 2008:34.

del Marinaretto (little Sailor), 850 sports fields, 1150 gymnasiums, 22 swimming pools, 37 theaters, and 920 medical visiting rooms.

The room celebrating the Foro Mussolini was organized as follow: the main space was occupied by a model of the Foro, showing both buildings already executed as well as those planned but not yet realized. Flanking this model, along the gallery wall, maps and drawings recounted the historical development of the area from the time of Ovid, when it was occupied by patrician villas, through the time of the barbarian invasion, when it was used for encampments, through the Cinquecento, when Raphael's Villa Madama was constructed, up to the present time when the site was prepared for the new complex. Above these panels, a photographic montage demonstrated the significance of the Foro in relation to ancient prototypes. A map of the imperial Fora (Forma Urbis Lanciani?) was juxtaposed with a view of the Foro Mussolini and the Campus Martius.³⁷⁷ Another photograph presented the Doryphoros by Polykleitos, accompanied by the following line: "The monumentality and functions of the Roman Forum and Campus Martius have been revived in the Foro Mussolini". The message clear: The Foro Mussolini was a continuation of the ancient, classical tradition, and the new breeding ground for future generations of Italians.

A lengthier text explained the (more) physical connection between the historical sites rediscovered under Mussolini and this vast new project. The very debris that was produced during demolitions "to liberate - at the Duce's behest - illustrious

³⁷⁷ in Piranesi's idealized version, the same one published in the celebratory edition issued in 1937 for the Foro Mussolini and edited by Pica.

ancient Roman monuments” was used to fill the natural depression on which the Foro Mussolini was erected. It formed the foundation of this grand innovative complex, from the roots of which the next generations of Italians would stem.

Interestingly, an almost identical setting, comprising both the model and the photo montage, was displayed in another major exhibition taking place at the same time in the Circus Maximus: the *Mostra delle Colonie Estive*, inaugurated on June 20, 1937.³⁷⁸

In the exhibition in the *Casa delle Armi*, the space opposite the model of the Foro had panels arranged along the main axis providing information, on front and back, regarding the works already executed: the *Accademia* (edificio H), the obelisk, the *Fontana della Sfera*, and the Piazzale. The panel on the Piazzale sported select images of the mosaics – the representation of the conquest of Ethiopia, and those regarding the building activities.

Moretti’s project for the *Casa delle Armi* was associated with that of Costantino Costantini, who, at the same time, radically changed two of Del Debbio’s projects already underway (the North Residences and the Baths), signaling a decisive change, not only in the style of future installations, but more in general in the appearance of the complex and its connections with the rest of the city. In 1935, following the construction of the South Residences, the Fountain of the Sphere and the tennis stadium, Del Debbio’s time as the main

³⁷⁸ Casabella 1937:6-15; *Architettura*, 1937 (6):307-332; Pellicano 1937: 201-210. For a description of the Exhibition see chap. 4.

architect came to a close³⁷⁹ and once he became the chief executive of the ONB, Moretti's contributions to the Foro became even more apparent.

The years 1935-1936 were key in the construction of the Foro. On November 2, 1935, after the invasion of Ethiopia, the League of Nations imposed sanctions on Italy. Notwithstanding, only a few days later, on November 11, Italy bid its candidacy to host the 1940 Olympics with the publication of the brochure *Roma Olimpionica*³⁸⁰, in which the brand new structure of the Foro Mussolini were naturally praised.³⁸¹ It seemed very likely that Italy's candidacy would be successful, and in this context, the work for the Duca d'Aosta Bridge was initiated. It would align with the obelisk and the future Piazzale dell'Impero, to be built as a celebration of the first anniversary of the Ethiopian conquest ³⁸², which would connect the Foro Mussolini with the Flaminio neighborhood and form the main entrance to the Foro itself.³⁸³

³⁷⁹ According to Santuccio (in Caporilli 1990: 47) "in '35, Del Debbio left the technical consultancy for the revision of ONB projects, and the next year Luigi Moretti took over for him" but Ricci (in Santuccio 2005: 249) states "In 1932, the architect Luigi Moretti substituted Del Debbio in the coordination of construction for the Foro". However, in 1933 the first project for the complex was designed but not built: a fountain for the ONB (Santuccio 2005:81). It is agreed that 1933 was the date of Moretti's arrival in the staff of the Foro, also Greco in Santuccio 2005:183 and Lucente 2002.

³⁸⁰ See Toschi 1995: 277-285

³⁸¹ Santuccio, 1991:15 and Rossi 2004:13-28., with previous bibliography.

Rome withdrew its bid at the request of Japan (in 1940 it was to celebrate the 26th anniversary of the reigning dynasty), with the assurance that Japan would support Rome for the 1944 Olympics. Japan was then forced to decline the hosting of the games because it was at war with China, and they were reassigned to Helsinki. They too had to renounce them following the Soviet invasion in 1940. In 1939, to sponsor the games in Rome for 1944, CONI organized the publishing of a second *Roma Olimpica*. The games would then be given to London. Toschi 1995: 288-290.

³⁸² The inauguration occurred in May of 1937, but, plans for the event were already underway by the end of 1936. See chap. 4.

³⁸³ The bridge was under construction from 1936-1939 under the architect Fasolo and the engineer Martinelli (Santuccio 1991: 58-61).

While working on the Piazzale, Moretti also planned the *Palestra del Duce* housed within the Baths designed by Costantini³⁸⁴ as well as, the new urban plan for the entire complex (the *Forma Ultima Fori*) carried out between 1936 and 1937.³⁸⁵

The main feature of this new urban plan was the further develop what was partially anticipated by the previously constructed *Casa delle Armi*, providing a precise connotation for the Foro in relation to the city, by transforming it into northern Rome's monumental entrance, and as such into a "direct connection between this structure and the other admirable projects by the Duce in the heart of imperial Rome (the Imperial Fora, the *Via dell'Impero*, the *Via dei Trionfi*, and the Circus Maximus").³⁸⁶ Mussolini had intended for there to be a direct link between this new complex and the rediscovered historical center of Rome that the Fascist Party had actively been uncovering in those years. This ideal route, as if a new 'Triumphal Way', wound from the Foro Mussolini to specific and meaningful stations along the way: the Piazza del Popolo, the Mausoleum of Augustus, the Pantheon, the Palazzo Venezia and the Altare della Patria, the *Via dell'Impero*, the Colosseum, and the *Via dei Trionfi*. Later, this route would be expanded with the creation of the *Via Imperiale* in connection with the planning

³⁸⁴ see infra chap 4.

³⁸⁵ 1936 in Pica's book, but 1937 in Moretti's writings. On this topic see Santuccio 1991:24 footnote 56. This new master plan would be immortalized in the Piazzale dell'Impero in one of the mosaics by Achille Capizzano. See chap. 4. I use the definition *Forma Ultima Fori* in regards to the project from 1936 following Pica (1937). More recently, it has been used to indicate the new urban plan for the Foro outlined by Moretti in 1941 (Santuccio 1991: 19).

³⁸⁶ *ibid.*

of the Esposizione Universale to be held in Rome in 1942, to celebrate the Ventennial of the Fascist Revolution.³⁸⁷

The exposition had already been envisioned in 1935, and from the beginning its grounds was to become a new district in Rome, with permanent structures were to be permanent rather than temporary pavilions which would be dismantled at the end of the exhibition, as with Italy's 50th anniversary unification celebrations in 1911. The area was chosen by Mussolini for its important connection with the Via del Mare, a highway opened in 1928 between Rome and Ostia, since in his imperial vision Mussolini stressed the importance and the necessity of access to the sea. The Via Imperiale served precisely this purpose and would have connected the E42 to the city center through the Passeggiata Archeologica (the modern day Via delle Terme di Caracalla), the Via dei Trionfi (modern day Via di S. Gregorio), passing under the Arch of Constantine and proceeding to the Via dell'Impero (modern day Via dei Fori Imperiali).³⁸⁸ Newspapers constantly reported progress on the project testifying to the regime's Fascist efficiency. The works for the E42 also spurred further interests in the excavations at the harbor city of Ostia³⁸⁹, where major excavation and restoration campaigns were conducted between 1938 and 1942.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ Rossi 2004; Cristallini 1987, Insolera 2001 (2nd ed.): 157-174; Painter 2005: 125-133.

³⁸⁸ Ramieri in Cardilli (ed.) 1995: 109-114; Avetta 1985.

³⁸⁹ Calza 1938.

³⁹⁰ For Ostia as a possible inspiration for the mosaics of the Piazzale see chap.4.

For the Foro Mussolini, the period between 1937 and the World War II was characterized by “grandiose plans and little implementation” ³⁹¹ resulting from various economic and political changes (the conquest of Ethiopia, the sanctions and autarchy). Among these projects were the Arengo delle Nazioni and the colossal statue depicting Mussolini, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Italy’s entry into the war and the ousting of Mussolini from the government foretold the destiny of the complex. On August 9, 1943, the commissioner of the GIL, General Giovanni De Benedetti provided Pietro Badoglio with a program to arrange for the division of the institution’s property among seven different organizations, starting with the Foro. The changes that Del Debbio’s Accademia di Educazione Fisica underwent are emblematic of the various phases that the complex experienced after World War II.

The Anglo-American troops, after liberating Rome on June 4, 1944, occupied the structures of the Foro Mussolini (renamed Foro d’Italia by the new government), transforming it into the Fifth Army Rest Center,³⁹² and they stayed there until 1948.³⁹³ This repurposing saved the site, considering that it was filled with “politically incorrect” iconography and references. The obelisk was used as an

³⁹¹ Santuccio 1991: 18.

³⁹²Caporilli, 1990: 269.
<http://www.oberheide.org/hargiss/1945%20US%20Army/371/History%20US%20Army%20Rest%20Center.htm>

³⁹³ Cat. Skira 2004; Arthurs 2010: 119.

illustration on a brochure printed by the American Red Cross on the history of the U.S. Army Rest Center.³⁹⁴

In 1950, during the Holy Year, Building H within the complex was transformed into a hotel (Albergo Felix) and became the official headquarters of the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) in 1951. This allowed the committee to oversee the upgrading of the new Olympic stadium for the 1960 Olympics.³⁹⁵ In preparation, the Italian Olympic Committee and the Provincial Office for Tourism in Rome published a book in English to promote the event, with the prophetic title *Rome Awaits You*. In the introduction by the mayor of Rome, Umberto Tupini wrote in the introduction:

the various problems concerning accommodation and sporting facilities are being examined and solved with rational and organic criteria so as to offer a definite guarantee for the success of the Great Olympic Event which is now only 4 years away. It is our intention that Rome looks and appears to you in the way her past splendor brings to mind”.³⁹⁶

The publication highlighted the existing structures in Rome, but especially its historical artistic beauty, and seemed to make references to the past that sought to cancel out the Fascist connotation that many of the sports facilities had. The only reference to the Foro Mussolini was the following: “The fulcrum of the great Olympic celebration of Rome is the Foro Italico area. In front of the Stadium (the Stadio Olimpico n.d.r.), at the end of the Olympic Way, is the fountain, showing at its center the large marble globe”. The Olympic Way is the Piazzale

³⁹⁴For the last phases of the Foro Italico and its political significance in the context of contemporary Italy, see Arthurs 2010.

³⁹⁵ For the 1960 Olympics see Matteoni in Masia 2007: 40-44. For the mosaics see chap. 4

³⁹⁶ *Rome Awaits You* 1960:3

dell'Impero, one of the areas that resonates most strongly with remnants of Fascism, and in the photograph that this caption accompanies, the obelisk of Mussolini can be seen in the background.

Even more interesting is the choice of illustration for the dust jacket: a close-up of the reliefs in EUR that retrace the history of Rome from a Mussolinian perspective.³⁹⁷ The recent past of Rome sought to be neutralized through silence and by dusting off the ancient jewels of the city. One such example is the decision to hold the Greco-Roman wrestling events inside the Basilica of Maxentius. The athletic nature of the complex has been upheld through the present day, and in fact, some of the structures are still used by the CONI offices, while others house classrooms for the IUSM (University Institute of Motor Sciences).³⁹⁸

The 1990 World Cup Championships of soccer brought about the last modifications to the complex,³⁹⁹ and in more recent years it has continued to host athletic events on the international level, such as the world championship of swimming in 2009 and of tennis in 2012. In 2000, some parts of the structure became private, such as the tennis club.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁷ For more on the significance of the relief see chap.4.

³⁹⁸ With a Chancellor's Decree on modifications to University Regulations issued on 12 June 2008 and published in the official Gazette n. 146 from 24 June 2008, the IUSM was renamed as the Università degli Studi di Roma "Foro Italico". For this story see http://www.uniroma4.it/portal/appmanager/uniroma4/ateneo.jsessionid=01hHKJTJ4KBfctJJhb3Qzwr6Jl1zG9trGcqzQJQyWh7RLTy4FymL!6973880?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=Le_OriginiMainPage_v1

³⁹⁹ For more on the World Soccer Championships in Italy in 1990, emblematic of the story of today's Olympic stadium, see Paolini in MdiR, 2004: 45-51.

⁴⁰⁰ Masia 2007. Changes continue to occur.

The political and symbolic function of this complex, particularly the obelisk with the inscription “Mussolini Dux”, has attracted the attention of some extreme right wing groups, transforming the complex, and especially the Piazzale dell’Impero into a place of remembrance. Scholars and architects share the cause of preserving this place, but for different reasons, notwithstanding the heavy burden of political reminders of the Fascist period.⁴⁰¹ The Piazzale has unfortunately become one of the main points of access to the Olympic Stadium, so every Sunday, thousands of people walk on the mosaics, leaving them in a state of disrepair. During the week, it is a prime choice area for skateboarders.⁴⁰²

What is happening at the Foro Mussolini is clear evidence of one the problems Italy faces in general after the fall of the Fascist regime, and this is even more the case in Rome. For better or for worse, the twenty years of Fascism have left a profound legacy on the urban fabric of the capital.

The Imperial Fora in Rome represented one of the most evocative visualizations of the connection between power and propaganda, celebrating with lavish and coherent decorative programs the military and political achievements of the emperors who built them. The Foro Mussolini, though associated in name, was more of a hybrid structure, harkening back not only to ancient structures dedicated to physical health - the gymnasia and the baths - but also to the *Campus Martius*, as clearly stated in the explanatory panels on display in both

⁴⁰¹ On the political significance in modern Italy, see Arthurs, 2010.

⁴⁰² On the necessity of restoring the complex as part of the Italian cultural heritage, see the website *Italia Nostra*.

the *Mostra Dell'Edilizia* and the *Mostra delle Colonie Estive*. Like the ancient imperial fora the Foro Mussolini deftly exploited the input of emerging artists to adorn the spaces⁴⁰³ with repetitive imagery, which effectively developed a new artistic vocabulary in the service of Fascist propaganda aimed at forging a new generation of Italians wholly devoted to the Duce.

CHAPTER 4

The Mosaics

In this chapter I discuss the role played by the decorative arts, especially their relationship to architecture, as a means of mass communication during the Fascist period. To demonstrate the extent of this newly created propagandistic vocabulary I analyze the mosaics of the Piazzale dell'Impero at the Foro Mussolini and their iconographic significance in conjunction with comparanda from contemporary medals and stamps, as well as decorative elements of other structures both within and outside the Foro itself. The last section of the chapter is devoted to the attribution of the panels to the different artists involved in the project.

⁴⁰³ This follows the discussion started in the Convegno Volta of 1933 on the relationship between art and architecture, which resulted in the law of 2%.

a. Decoration as mass communication

Unlike the Nazi government's prescriptive pursuit of state architecture in Germany, the Fascist Party in Italy never imposed a single, specific style on the artists and architects responsible for state-sponsored projects. The debate that arose between Classicists and Modernists to determine which style was most appropriate for Fascist architecture is emblematic of this attitude.⁴⁰⁴ Mussolini's background as a journalist made him well aware, nonetheless, of the impact that images and slogans had on the masses, and he understood early on the crucial role that decorative programs on public buildings could play in spreading and reinforcing Fascist ideas and messages.

The keen awareness of the importance assigned to decorative programs by the Fascist regime is attested to in the long public debate on the role and interaction between the decorative arts (mural paintings, mosaics, statuary) and architecture. This concluded in the issue of the so-called "Law of 2%"⁴⁰⁵, which stipulated that in every state funded project 2% of the total expenditure should be allotted to that project's decoration.

As early as 1933, an internal memorandum sent to each ministry encouraged "more active involvement on the part of the Fascist Union for Artists in organizing open competitions for new building projects, monuments, artistic works, etc."⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁴ Ciucci 2002; Montorsi, 1993:87-90.

⁴⁰⁵ Cristallini in Lux 1985.

⁴⁰⁶ Cristallini in Guidoni 1992: 231-233.

On same year the 5th *Triennale* in Milan was removed from its historical location in Monza and housed in the new building designed by Giovanni Muzio created especially for the occasion, in Milan's *Parco Sempione*. The theme of the *Triennale* was on the practice of monumental mural painting in relation to architecture. Under the supervision of Mario Sironi, thirty artists decorated the walls of the *Palazzo dell' Arte*. Gino Severini was one the artists who participated in the exhibition with his mosaic *Le Arti* in the Hall of Honor, and his is the only work still in its original location.

Specialized architectural journals of the time, such as *Domus*, *Casabella* and *Quadrante*, maintained an ongoing debate originally generated by the event in Milan, on the (re-) introduction of pictorial and sculptural decoration in architecture.⁴⁰⁷ In 1934 Alessandro Pavolini, then secretary of the Fascist Party, issued a new building regulation, likely in response to this debate, that required a specific proportion of the total budget for each public project be allocated to its decorative program.⁴⁰⁸

The organization of the 6th *Convegno Volta* held in 1936 at the *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* in Rome marked further progress in this direction, as its official theme was architecture's relationship with the decorative arts.⁴⁰⁹ On December 6, 1938 the *Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri* issued a memorandum instructing that a minimum of 2% of the total cost of any public

⁴⁰⁷ Lux, 1990: 275ff.

⁴⁰⁸ Cristallini, in Lux, 1990: 313.

⁴⁰⁹ Roma Mussoliniana 1936; Prosperi, 1936; Greco, 1987: 20-23.

building be designated for works in the figurative arts. This memo became law on May 11, 1942.⁴¹⁰

Accordingly, the decorative artists assigned to public projects were to be chosen by the administration following a preliminary consultation with the National Fascist Fine Arts Union (*Sindacato Nazionale Fascista di Belle Arti*) together with the architect responsible for the building. The artists were required to be members of the Fascist Party, as was the practice in other trades and professions in Italy at that time. Artistic freedom of expression was thus strictly circumscribed by Party priorities and ideals.

The mosaics of the *Piazzale dell'Impero* were completed in 1937, i.e. before the law of 1942, was passed, but during the intense debate on the role that decoration should play in public buildings. They are thus a product of the artistic milieu of their time.

Luigi Moretti's decision to use mosaic decoration for such a large public space, although also dictated by mere practical considerations, such as preserving pre-existing symmetries and relationships between buildings, was inspired by these new tendencies. Capitalizing on the interconnection between architecture and decoration the long strips of mosaics presented a prime opportunity to develop a well-articulated message conveyed visually to the masses moving through this space.

⁴¹⁰ R.D. May 11, 1942, n.839. Finalized on July 29, 1949 n.717.

b. The Piazzale Project

On May 9, 1936, Benito Mussolini triumphantly declared to the waves of supporters gathered in the Piazza Venezia that Ethiopia had become Italian and that Italy had finally amassed the empire it so deserved. In celebration of this victory together with the first anniversary of the new empire, Mussolini commissioned the *Forum Imperii* (Piazzale dell'Impero) at the site of his own forum, consisting of an open-air ambulatory trapezoidal space connecting the obelisk, which had been dedicated four years earlier, with the *Fontana della Sfera*.⁴¹¹

This space was incorporated into the early plan conceived by Del Debbio in the simple form of a long road.⁴¹² Moretti reshaped this nondescript passage entirely, by layering it with multiple meanings and historical significance while transforming it into the main access to the Foro itself. His project called for a central marble platform stretching the entire length of the piazza that was flanked by a series of monumental black and white floor mosaics in rectilinear frame. A

⁴¹¹ Designed by the architects M. Paniconi and G. Pediconi, this monumental fountain was opened in 1934. It consists of a large circle at ground level and a pool created through a central depression that may be reached by to four symmetrical sets of stairs. The fountain's centerpiece is a sphere 3 meters in diameter and made from a single block of marble quarried in Carrara and donated by the same *consorzio* responsible for the monolith at the opposite end. The sphere appears to be suspended above the ground by the force of the water gushing forth from its circumference. The pool is surrounded by Giulio Rosso's black and white mosaics of marine animals. The same motifs, likely due to the reuse of cartoons, are employed by the artist to decorate the flooring of the indoor pools at the Palazzo delle Terme by Constantino Costantini. For more on the fountain, see Santuccio 1991:52; on the Palazzo delle Terme, Santuccio 1991:56-58.

⁴¹² See Marconi 1942:347.

band of mosaics encircled also the Fontana della Sfera.⁴¹³ These gave special emphasis to sports and scenes referring to the activities of labor organizations (*corporazioni*), the arts, sciences, crafts, industries, and the regime's social programs. Although the panels on both sides of the central platform have some of the same iconography, providing more sports scenes and others of Italy's younger generations to which the nearby facilities were dedicated, the black and white imagery also refers to the recent military conquests, building activity, and the flourishing arts and agricultural scenes connected with the newly founded rural colonies of the Pontine Marshes.

The overall design of the entire space follows a thematic arrangement, displaying a panoply of Fascist achievements which reads as a filmstrip narrating the successes of the Fascist Party and its Duce with a great ideological import.

The revival of the art of black and white mosaics was another example of Renato Ricci's successes, whereby he "enobled an ancient decorative form which had until then been relegated to useless and melancholic imitation of painting. This decorative art form was chosen for the most beautiful *Casa Balilla*, adorning their floor and wall surfaces."⁴¹⁴

⁴¹³ The Piazzale dell'Impero is 260 meters long. The total surface covered with mosaics, those encircling the Fontana della Sfera and in the trapezoidal space connecting the obelisk dedicated to Mussolini with the fountain itself, is 7500 square meters. The band of mosaics with maritime elements decorating the Fountain itself and realized by Giulio Rosso in 1933 is not included. The mosaics were, an essential part of the original project for the fountain, but their iconography is not in related to that of the rest.

⁴¹⁴ Magi Spinetti, in *Capitolium* 1934:99.

A direct connection with the Roman past is mentioned in the celebratory volume by Angelo Pica, published by the ONB in 1937. The author underscores how the mosaic surface of the Piazzale is: “the most important instance of its genre that has been attempted up to now, surpassing in scale even the most famous ancient examples in the Baths of Caracalla, from whose floor mosaics the Piazzale’s general style and subject matter derive.”⁴¹⁵ Modern scholars stress that the main source of inspiration were the mosaics at the archaeological site of Ostia, which was experiencing a new wave of interest precisely at that time because of its connection with the sea and therefore with the new Mediterranean Empire.⁴¹⁶

At the time of the Piazzale’s execution, several publications discussed the discoveries in Ostia. The Terme del Nettuno, discovered by Lanciani in 1888 and later investigated by Vaglieri between 1909-10⁴¹⁷, featured mythical maritime animals and seem to have inspired Giulio Rosso’s designs for the decoration of the Fontana della Sfera.⁴¹⁸ The boxer mosaics found in the *palestra* of the same Ostian baths might have also inspired figures in the Piazzale dell’Impero. In the years following the declaration of the Empire and the decision to host the Esposizione Universale in Rome (EUR) in the southern area of the city, Ostia soon became the focal point for the most extensive excavation campaigns ever launched in that area, between 1938-1942.

⁴¹⁵ Pica 1937:88

⁴¹⁶ Pirani 1998: 33, Di Girolamo 2008:87

⁴¹⁷ In 1926, moreover, Guido Calza published in *Architettura e Arti Decorative* (1926:337-344) an article on the same baths, which reproduces a picture of Neptune.

⁴¹⁸ Pirani 1998:33 proposes the decoration from the Terme dei Sette Sapienti as source of inspiration for the mosaics however the latter were not discovered until 1936 (LUCE 15/07/1936 B0919), several years after the fountain was executed.

Adopting a mosaic narrative to extol the virtues of the regime and its leader lent a didactic function to the Piazzale that was a physical space traversed daily by young learners, the new generations of Italians being forged by the same regime. A reading of the mosaics visually reinforced the ideals, mottos, and other forms of indoctrination intended to be assimilated through the study of revised schoolbooks. Moretti's project "*transforms the walkway into a gigantic propaganda machine and a solemn piazzale for assemblies.*"⁴¹⁹

The result is even more impressive when one considers the pre-existing structures. at the time of Moretti's conception for the Piazzale. Physically encumbered by their presence, the location was crisscrossed by lines of traffic leading to and from the Academy of Music, the Academy of Physical Education, and the Cypress Stadium (*Stadio dei Cipressi*). There were two distinct focal points – the *Fontana della Sfera* created in 1933 at the one end and, more important, the obelisk erected in honor of Mussolini in 1932 at the other. Politically powerful and physically imposing, the obelisk demanded a new setting that maintained its monumentality both in terms of symbolic message and visual impact. Last, but not least, the space needed to continue to perform its festive function as a stage for pageants, parades, and other processions.

Moretti's intervention, therefore, regularized the oblong tract between the obelisk and the fountain, resulting in an isosceles trapezoid that widens as it approaches the fountain. He adopted an extensive espalier of trees as a screen to eclipse the

⁴¹⁹ Greco 1990d: 191

view of the surrounding buildings, thereby physically isolating the Piazzale and causing it to lose its main original function as an intersection.⁴²⁰

The proportions of the obelisk risked being dwarfed by the piazzale's dimensions (ca. 280 X 60 meters), but rather its height was only accentuated by the use of the central platform that stretched the length of the piazza, serving as a ceremonial catwalk for the heads of the party. Flanking the platform, the mosaic compositions are framed by mosaic inscriptions proclaiming "Duce Duce," while exhibiting at regular intervals a *fascio littorio*, an eagle, which was associated with both Jupiter and imperial Rome, and a lion. Massive rectangular blocks of marble placed along the outermost perimeter of the piazzale punctuate the divisions between one mosaic quadrant and the next.

c. The marble blocks: Mussolini's appropriation of time and Italy's *damnatio memoriae*

The blocks, organized chronologically, carry inscriptions that complement the mosaics by also commemorating significant dates in Italy's Fascist history. This Fascist timeline - located on the right side facing the fountain (see my plan)-took as its starting point Mussolini's founding of the newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia* (L on my plan) on November 15, 1914. This was followed by Italy's entry into World War I (N) on May 23, 1915 and the celebration of the victory in Vittorio Veneto (M) on October 24, 1918, which was considered one of the major

⁴²⁰ Marconi 1942: 348

successes of the Italian nation against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Today these blocks are arranged differently, and the timeline has been altered, because of the transformation of the complex after the fall of the Fascist Regime. At the end of WWII, the Foro Mussolini, renamed Foro Italico, became the U.S. Army Rest Center.⁴²¹ The army's presence protected the monument from the spontaneous acts of destruction after 1945 that were aimed at prominent symbols of the Fascist dictatorship.

The most conspicuous visual legacy Fascism left behind in the Foro was, most conspicuously, the soaring obelisk that continued to immortalize the name of Mussolini. The destruction of this obelisk was contemplated in 1960 when Rome was chosen to host the Olympic Games. The heated debate between the Italian Communist Party (the PCI), which favored effacing any sign of Fascism and the Italian Social Movement (the MSI), which favored its preservation and conservation, commanded the attention of most newspapers at the time.⁴²²

On August 2, 1960, the daily paper published by the Italian Communist party, *L'Unità*, called for the removal of the inscriptions on the mosaics that praised Mussolini and the Fascist regime, as well as the defacing of the obelisk. Only a week later, this headline appears on the front page of the *L'Unità*: "first success of a democratic protest campaign: Cleaning begun at Foro Italico." Shortly after, new protests in parliament by representatives of the MSI brought the "Cleaning Campaign" to a screeching halt. However, the MSI had not intervened in time to

⁴²¹ Bari 2005:16; Painter 2005: 153; Caporilli-Simeoni 1990: 269.

⁴²² Di Girolamo 2008: 88; Vidotto 2006:93, Vidotto 2004:115 ff.

prevent the Fascist oath from being erased from panel 8.⁴²³ This missing portion was replaced at a much later date by a lion trampling on a snake, when a large-scale restoration campaign was conducted in anticipation of soccer the World Cup in 1990. Once again, the School in Spilimbergo was enlisted, and their efforts were aimed at consolidating the mosaics not recreating images that were completely lost.⁴²⁴

Prior to the 1960 Olympicsthe first three marble blocks on the right side of the Piazzale were repositioned.⁴²⁵ Their order and interconnected political message were altered for the modern viewer in emphasizing Italy's success during World War I, with the following progression of themes: the Battle of Vittorio Veneto, Italy's entry into WWI, and the creation of the *Popolo d'Italia*.

In the original arrangement, the Battle of Vittorio Veneto was preceeded by the founding by Mussolini of the *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* (I) on March 23, 1919, the March on Rome (H) on October 28, 1922, and the creation of the MVSN (*Milizia Volontaria Sicurezza Nazionale*) (G) on February 1, 1923. The block G includes the indication of the first year of the Fascist Era (A.I.E.F.). The timeline continues with several of Mussolini's main achievements: The Battle of Wheat (F) on 30 July 1925; the creation of the ONB and the law which gave legal status to labor unions (E) on April 3 1926; the first *Leva Fascista* and the *Carta del*

⁴²³ see *infra* subheading g.

⁴²⁴ Di Girolamo 2008:88, 90.

⁴²⁵ The right side with the obelisk at one's back. Vidotto 2004:114, but Di Girolamo 2008: 90 states that this repositioning and the new inscriptions proclaiming the end of the Fascist Regime and the beginning of the Republic were executed in the mid 60's after the Olympic games.

Lavoro (D) on April 21 1926; and finally the law of the *Gran Consiglio* (C) on 9 December 1928. The last inscription on the right side of the Piazzale celebrates the founding of the first colony in the reclaimed Pontine Marches, Littoria, on 19 December 1932 (B).

The timeline resumes on the left side of the Piazzale where, starting from the obelisk, a narrative of the main events relating to the war against Ethiopia is provided: the Duce's announcement to Italians of the beginning of the war (O) on October 2, 1935; the conquest of Adua (P) on October 6, 1935; and the economic sanctions against Italy by the League of Nations (Q) on November 18, 1935. As if to stress the strength of the Italian nation under the Fascist Regime and the positive reaction to the sanctions, the next block mentions the founding of two new colonies in the Pontine Marshes (R): Pontinia on December 18, 1935, and Aprilia on April 24, 1936. The last two blocks sanction the definitive victory of Mussolini and the conquest of the new Empire: the conquest of Addis Ababa (S) on May 5, 1936, and the declaration of the Empire (T) on May 9, 1936. Two more blocks, which are larger and perpendicular to the others (A and J), punctuate the end of the mosaic space before reaching the fountain. The one to the right, facing the fountain (A), is connected with the final episode of the African war. The side facing the piazzale records Mussolini's complete speech declaring the Empire on May 9, 1936, while the narrow side, towards the fountain, mentions one of the Foro Mussolini's Academy students who died fighting in the Ethiopian campaign.

Although the blocks record episodes that also receive visual representation in the mosaic designs, the marble inscriptions do not correspond precisely with the adjacent images. At the time of its inauguration, the marble timeline culminated with the “Declaration of the Empire” on May 9, 1936, betraying the regime’s misplaced optimism, five blocks were left blank so as to boast about and celebrate its future successes.

Ironically, the very next block announces the end of the regime on July 25 1943 (U). It is followed by the referendum to change Italy’s political structure from a monarchy to a republic on June 2, 1946 (V), and ultimately the birth of the Republic of Italy on January 1, 1948 (Z). These events were inscribed on the marble blocks that had originally been left blank for the 1960 Olympics.⁴²⁶

The inscriptions on the marble blocks were created by Achille Capizzano. In the private archive of his son, I found a small booklet with some personal annotations about his works; including a list of dates and corresponding events that were intended for the blocks. Twenty seven episodes appear in the list, but only eighteen of them were chosen to decorate the 17 inscribed blocks.⁴²⁷

Precedents for the use of a timeline on a public/honorific building can easily be found in ancient Rome, and the most prominent example dates to the Augustan period. The *Fasti Triumphales* were displayed on the triple-bayed arch in the Forum to celebrate the return of the Roman standards from the Parthians. Here,

⁴²⁶ Vidotto 2004: 119.

⁴²⁷ The episodes are more than the blocks, because (R) is used to record both the founding of Pontinia and Aprilia.

however, the list ends in 19B.C., and no room was left for future triumphs, stressing the allegedly permanent peace brought by the emperor to Rome.⁴²⁸

The use of such chronologies, as also in the map displayed within Moretti's Casa Balilla in Trastevere, is also connected with the transformation of the calendar and the appropriation of time by the Fascist Party. On December 25, 1926, it was decreed that all public and private documents, newspapers and letters must add to the standard date a Roman numeral indicating the Fascist Era. The Fascist calendar began on October 29, 1922, the day after the March on Rome⁴²⁹. The Fascist Year started on October 29 and ended on October 28, as was published in newspapers listing all the holidays and important dates for the Regime. The Fascist year introduced new national holidays such as May 24⁴³⁰ (Italy's entry into World War I), November 4 (the "Festa della Vittoria" celebrating the end of the same war), October 22 (the March on Rome) on October 22, and May 9 (the Celebration of the Empire).

One of the most important dates was April 21. The day was used for events and the inaugurations of new buildings, signifying the Birth of Rome, but also serving as a new Labor Day, replacing May 1. Such dates were imbued with powerful political meaning and were constantly revived and highlighted through their use for inaugurations, celebrations, and parades. Time itself was shaped by the successes and the achievements of Mussolini and his regime.

⁴²⁸ Rose 2005:33.

⁴²⁹ Cappelli-Viganò 1998:131.

⁴³⁰ For this date used to celebrate the Leva Fascista see Chap.3. The first Leva Fascista was held on April 21.

The appropriation of time was also one of the main preoccupations of Augustus as “the Roman calendar, decreed or inscribed, far from being a national, apolitical body of antiquarian lore, was a malleable system of political and ideological control.”⁴³¹ We have fragments of more than forty calendars from the Augustan period, while only the *Fasti Antiates* survive from the Republican period. The imperial interest in time, or rather its the appropriation, is exemplified by the giant *horologium*, which Augustus had erected in the Campus Martius. It was both a solar meridian and a calendar, and its gnomon was the obelisk brought back from Heliopolis by the emperor to celebrate his victory over the queen of Egypt, Cleopatra (and his fellow Roman, Mark Antony). This victory marked the end of a long period of civil war and the beginning of the new Augustan Peace.⁴³²

The Piazzale dell’Impero functioned as a calendar for Italians, with the dates of the current regime important successes. The calendar was decorated with mosaic representations of some of those achievements, all displayed in the shadow of Mussolini’s obelisk.

Moretti’s selection of a module to establish the spatial interrelationships for his project fell on the visitor. The marble blocks, for example, were deliberately made to “a person’s height,” permitting the obelisk to remain in view from all possible vantage points. The consistent spacing between the blocks establishes a rhythm for visitors moving from one mosaic composition to the

⁴³¹ Boyle 1997: 7

⁴³² On the *horologium* see Heslin 2007 with earlier bibliography.

next. Moretti's preliminary studies reveal his keen interest in creating excellent sight lines by carefully calculating the optimal dimensions of the mosaic decorative program, whose individual panels were colossal (6.10 x 9 meters). The panels required more than one vantage point for them to be fully appreciated and this encouraged visitors to move throughout the Piazzale and confront all the images and inscriptions.

d. The themes of the mosaics (for the numbering see my plan)

Upon entering the Piazzale the visitor is greeted (at left) by Mars (23), the god to whom Augustus dedicated the temple in his forum. The temple of Mars Ultor was excavated and restored for the opening of the Via dell'Impero (today's Via dei Fori Imperiali), so the appearance of Mars in the Piazzale was charged with a much broader meaning that one might initially expect.⁴³³ The god's spear directs the visitor's gaze to the first of the framed mosaics (22), which shows a fragment of an ancient map of Rome that highlights the area where Mussolini created the Via del Mare (today's Via del Teatro di Marcello).⁴³⁴ This new artery led to Ostia, the ancient port of Rome, and symbolically cleared the way for the so-called New Mediterranean Empire, accomplished through the conquest of Ethiopia.⁴³⁵ The

⁴³³ Marchetti-Longhi 1934; on Muñoz, Bellanca 2003. On the excavations: Cardilli (ed.) 1995.

⁴³⁴ The area corresponded to the Forum Holitorium and Forum Boarium. Telmon (1998:235) wrongly describes the area as the Roman Forum.

⁴³⁵ The emphasis placed by Mussolini on the necessity to have an outlet to the sea is clearly illustrated in the introduction to his lecture entitled *Roma Antica sul Mare* (1926), where he writes, "without its dominion of the sea Rome never would have conquered nor been able to conserve its empire."

iconography for these panels was chosen very carefully. The mosaic map reproduces distinct details, such as the Latin labeling of the monuments, appeared on the map of Rome edited by Rodolfo Lanciani.⁴³⁶ Together with the twins Romulus and Remus, the map evokes the mythological origins of the Eternal City. The mosaic on the opposite side of the central platform (2) features a map of the new Rome, “the map of the Foro Mussolini,” as planned in the *Forma Ultima Fori* (the final master plan), carried out by Moretti himself.⁴³⁷

The use of maps was not new to Mussolini’s Rome, as we have seen in the case of the map of the new African Empire displayed in the Casa Balilla in Trastevere. The most famous maps dating back to the time of the duce and still prominently visible in Rome are those along the Via dei Fori Imperiali, once known as the Via dell’Impero.

As early as 1893, the idea of creating an artery which would connect Piazza Venezia with the Colosseum and ease the flow of traffic coming from Via Cavour and the Termini Station. The project, however, was not completed until the reign of Mussolini.⁴³⁸ It caused the destruction of an entire neighborhood in Rome (the *quartiere Alessandrino*) and the relocation of its inhabitants to peripheral areas of the city, this was presented by the regime as a change necessary to ensure public health. A parallel objective of the demolition was the excavation

⁴³⁶ The map as designed by Capizzano is slightly more condensed: The temple of Fortuna Virilis appears, in fact, adjacent to the temples in the Forum Holitorium. The map shows, without labeling it, the Temple of Vesta. The presence of the two temples is very significant since they were both restored during the construction work for the Via del Mare (1926-1930). On the inauguration of the street see *Giornale LUCE* A0679 (22/10/1930).

⁴³⁷ On the *Forma Ultima Fori* see chap.3

⁴³⁸ Painter 2005:21-25. See also Minor 1999: 151-153.

and “rediscovery” of the ancient Imperial Fora. The creation of this new street allowed the regime to connect the present with its ancient past, as it linked the Piazza Venezia, where Mussolini’s office was, with the Colosseum. The newly excavated ancient structures, the Fora of Caesar, Trajan, Augustus, and Nerva served as archaeological commentaries on these messages were. In order to emphasize the ideological connection between the modern ruler and his predecessors, bronze replicas of ancient Roman statues of emperors were placed in front of each of the forum.

The area of Piazza Venezia in front of the Victor Emmanuel monument was emblematically renamed the Foro dell’Impero Fascista for a short period.⁴³⁹ On February 8, 1937 the governor of Rome wrote to the Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri asking permission to affix two plaques with this new name to Palazzo Venezia. On February 25, however, his request was denied because the two white marble plaques would have disturbed the building’s monochrome appearance.. Earlier, in 1932, the same area had been named the Foro Italico, as the LUCE newsreels documenting the demolition works attest.⁴⁴⁰ Once completed and inaugurated (on October 28, 1932 for the Decennial of the March on Rome) this new urban artery, the Via dell’Impero, became the preferred venue for the parades and celebrations of the Fascist Party.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁹ ACS, PCM, 7.2.532

⁴⁴⁰ LUCE B0058 “Roma lavori di sistemazione nel Foro Italico”, 1932. Filmed from atop the Victor Emmanuel monument, the newsreel provides a view of the construction underway in the area of the Imperial Fora. Also LUCE B0159, 04/11/1932,

⁴⁴¹ Ironically, it is still used today for annual parades, namely those in remembrance of the creation of the Republic on June 2.

Four large maps were placed on the external wall of the Basilica of Maxentius facing the Via dell'Impero further emphasize the revival of Roman grandeur and exalt the Duce as a new leader, on April 21, 1934,. The maps are marble with a very simple palette: cipollino for gray, travertine for white hues, and Black Apuan marble for the dark areas.⁴⁴² They narrate Rome's expansion within the Mediterranean, starting from the founding of Rome (753 B.C.), followed by the period of the Punic Wars and the destruction of Carthage (146 B.C.), and the empire at the death of Augustus (14 A.D.), culminating with its greatest expansion in A.D. 117 under Trajan. After the conquest of Ethiopia on October 1936, a fifth map was added which celebrated the new Italian Empire.⁴⁴³ After the fall of Fascism this map was removed, as were all the fasces decorating the lower right corners of the remaining maps.

The fifth map was anticipated by the temporary installation, on the base of the column of Marcus Aurelius, of a panel that tracked military operations in African territory to keep people abreast of progress. Once all the maps were installed, their iconography spread beyond of the city of Rome because they were circulated in newspapers and journals. This perpetuated the myth of Mussolini as the present-day founder of the Empire and cemented the idea that the Fascist Regime was something new, but also the continuation of a glorious past.

⁴⁴² Minor 1999:147.

⁴⁴³ On the maps, see Minor 1999. Minor notes that Muñoz stated that it was Mussolini's desire for the maps to be intelligible "both to the learned and the uncultivated", and for them to "evoke our pride and hope for the future", Muñoz quoted in Minor 1999:150

The Fascist penchant for cartographic display would continue after the creation of the Piazzale in another major mosaic decorative program sponsored by the regime: the Ostiense Train Station. Designed specifically to welcome and impress Hitler on his visit to Rome in 1938, it was not completed until 1940. The decorative program narrates some of the main events in Roman history, such as the arrival of Aeneas in Latium, the she-wolf and the twins, and Brennus and the Gauls. One of the mosaics displays a map of the empire at the time of Augustus and is accompanied by a representation of a triumphal arch and the statue of the Primaporta Augustus.⁴⁴⁴

Mussolini's use of large-scale maps follows Roman precedents, exemplified both in the "world" map set by Agrippa in the Porticus Vipsasia and the Severan marble plan in the Templus Pacis.⁴⁴⁵ In both cases, the maps highlighted the completion of allegedly successful military campaigns. Located along one of the most celebratory streets of Fascism, they perpetuated the ideal and the physical connection between the Roman past and the present.

In the Piazzale dell'Impero mosaics, the panel with the map of early Rome (22) also depicts a bull which represents Italy⁴⁴⁶. It sits opposite a lion which rests its paws in a gesture that suggests possession atop a globe on which Italy's peninsula, together with Libya and Ethiopia, are highlighted, to illustrate the new Italian colonial empire established under Mussolini. Capizzano, the designer of

⁴⁴⁴A preliminary work on the iconography has been done by Diebner 2004.

⁴⁴⁵Taub, 1993; Dilke in J.B. Harley (ed.) 1987:207-9.

⁴⁴⁶For the reasons of my interpretation see *infra*.

this panel, was well versed in ancient Roman history, and his choice of a bull to depict Italy may be connected with one of the most ancient episodes connected with the city's birth: the moment Cacus stole the cattle of Hercules. The story is described in Vergil's *Aeneid*⁴⁴⁷ and the setting for that episode is the area of the *Forum Holitorium* represented on the map.⁴⁴⁸

Italy was represented by a bull in another panel by Achille Capizzano, executed after 1937, "the Mediterranean." In the center of the panel is a youthful Neptune riding a shell drawn by four seahorses. In the lower left, there is a bearded man reclining among coral and other marine plants, and in the lower right, there is a pair of female figures. One represents Africa and is accompanied by a lion, alongside the other, personifying Italy, is accompanied by a bull. The bull was also the counterpart to the lion in the stucco decoration, which is no longer visible today, for the library ceiling in the *Casa delle Armi*.

The iconographic choice of a lion is of great significance. The lion embodies the strength, power and regality, but beyond these common associations is a special connotation reserved for the Duce. Leo was Mussolini's astrological sign, and thus the iconographic reference conveys the equation between these dominating figures.⁴⁴⁹ In its visual vocabulary, Mussolinian propaganda appropriates here an

⁴⁴⁷ Virgil, *Aen.*, VIII, 184-235; the same episode is also in Livy, *Hist.* 1.7. References to this myth are in other poets of the Augustan Period: Propertius 4.9 and Horace, *Od.* 3.14.; Severini represents the same episode in one of the mosaics for the *Palazzo degli Uffici* at the EUR, Calvesi 1992:313. Hercules and Cacus appear as a sculptural group in the *Stadio dei Marmi*: Santuccio 1991:49.

⁴⁴⁸ "La residenza di Caco viene localizzata sul Germalò, ai piedi dell'Aventino presso le Saline o nel Foro Boario", *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Antica* II Supplemento (1971) s.v. Roma.

⁴⁴⁹ See also Brunetti 1998:28.

Augustan practice, using the birth's sign as a symbol of the emperor. Suetonius reports that Augustus "had acquired such faith in fate that he made public his horoscope and had a silver coin struck with the image of the star sign Capricorn, under which he was born.⁴⁵⁰"

The message of Mussolini's connection with the lion was further emphasized by a Latin inscription: "*Inchoata Roma Forma Leonis*", or "Rome began in the likeness of the lion."⁴⁵¹ These classicizing letters supply the link between the visual allusions to Rome's ancient origins (the bull, the twins, and the ancient map) and its Fascist apex (the new Foro Mussolini). This first mosaic panel, therefore, encapsulates a carefully constructed prophecy that Mussolini successfully fulfilled through his military campaigns in Africa. The prophecy is visually realized in the panel directly opposite the first one (2), which presents a second map exhibiting the Foro Mussolini, the latest forum to be built in Rome. The map reproduces the *Forma Ultima Forii*, i.e. the final project, elaborated by Luigi Moretti. And the protective *numen* introducing this panel is Hercules, one of Mussolini's alter-egos.

The African military campaign is Mussolini's his greatest success. Among the documents in the Archivio Capizzano, I discovered an interesting piece of information which not only helps explain the iconography of the two

⁴⁵⁰ Suet., *Aug.* 94,12.

⁴⁵¹ I believe this quotation derives from the Mappamondo di Ebstorf. In its characteristically medieval depiction, Rome is represented as a city surrounded by wall with the Tiber running through it. Resting on the walls, there is a lion with the following inscription: *Secundu formā leonis inchoate roma*. Rome's description as a lion is discussed, during the same period as the mosaics, Fedele 1923: 107-122.

aforementioned panels, but also offers insights into the artist Achille Capizzano's creative process during their execution.

A handwritten list of works executed by the artist⁴⁵² mentions that Capizzano was commissioned⁴⁵³ to produce drawings for a decorated box for the Duce on the occasion of May 9, 1937. Capizzano also writes that the box would then be fabricated by Alfredo Ravasco Milano, a famous Italian goldsmith.⁴⁵⁴ The box is nearly square (26 x 28 cm) and it was to be presented on a "pillow in *verde antico* or *argento antico*". The central engraved silver panel on the lid was decorated with a map of the new African Empire "inlaid in lapis lazuli and the Mediterranean fashioned in enamel." Mussolini's initial is superimposed on the map and a medallion is depicted below. Above the letter M, are the words: "Hic sum ego". Flanking the map are two male figures, each resting his left hand on a club. The figure on the right appears to be standing atop a lion's skin. Above the map, are four *aurei imperiali*. The text does not explain whether they were supposed to be ancient Roman coins inserted into the lid or an engraved

⁴⁵² As previously mentioned when discussing the Casa Balilla in Trastevere, the archive contains several lists of works executed by the artist, but they are all without a date.

⁴⁵³ Possibly by Renato Ricci whose devotion to Mussolini led him to incorporate a private gymnasium within the Foro in homage to the Duce

⁴⁵⁴ My research thus far has not uncovered any other reference to this object, the reasons for which may be several: either the case was never executed or it was made as a private gift and as such was not advertised, perhaps because the materials used were precious and the financial situation of many Italians would have cautioned against making it publicly known. It is also conceivable that it was executed and is now lost (having been melted down, or ending up in a private collection). My interest resides not in the object per se, but in the preparatory drawings found in the same archive (neither labeled or dated, but easily recognizable). More than one sketch was rendered, each sharing similar iconographic elements yet differing in their arrangement. Two drawings of the box - one for the outside and another for the inside decoration offer detailed handwritten annotations about the materials to be used and explanations for the inscriptions to be included.

representation of them. The entire composition is framed by a simple double line. On either side of this central composition, important dates for the war in Ethiopia are listed. Above the lists eagles are outlined; cursory sketches of lions appear below lists.

In Capizzano's archive, I identified further drawings related to the sketch of the case's outside surface, particularly the top of the lid. These are detailed measured drawings. Perhaps the final designs for the engraver. One sketch shows a map of Italy and Africa superimposed by a lion (also visible are some of the stars that make up the zodiac sign Leo), above which the date of the declaration of the empire, May 9, is displayed, and directly underneath that there are six circles.

Below the map is Mussolini's initial in from which stems the Fascio Littorio; below them is a cameo with the portrait of the duce in profile facing right. On the left Hercules rests his left arm on his club and holds the Nemean Lion's skin in the other. On the right, a young Fascist (Balilla) rests his left hand on a *fascio littorio*. The entire composition is bracketed by the key dates and events of the Ethiopian war, listed in chronological order, from the first advances by General DeBono at the Eritrean border in October 1935⁴⁵⁵ to the conquest of Addis Ababa on May 5, 1936.

A second sketch likely offers a further elaboration of the design and a few of the elements are better delineated. The full constellation of Leo is now outlined

⁴⁵⁵ Left: 3 ottobre XII (Mareb), 5 ottobre (Adigrat), 6 ottobre Adua, 15 ottobre (Aksum), 8 novembre XIV (Macalle), 17 gennaio G. Doria.

underneath the lion. The six empty circles have been reduced to four and appear as medallions with portraits inside, analogous to the one of Mussolini, which faces left. In this sketch, the lion's skin is draped over Hercules's left rather than his right. The dates are identical.

The front of the is decorated with a medallion featuring a portrait (perhaps of Mussolini) framed by two dates, March 23 (probably to be read 24) and May 9, which marked Italy's entry into World War I and the Conquest of Ethiopia, respectively.⁴⁵⁶ At the bottom of the sketch there is an annotation by the artist: "the inside is to be lined with silver and the Foro Mussolini and the Imperial Fora are to be engraved; the reverse of the *aurei* should also be visible".

The second sketch shows the case with the lid opened, the design corresponds to the description above. The inside surface of the lid displays four circles at the bottom (the back of the *aurei imperiali*). Above them a reclining figure, probably the Tiber river, rests on what appears to be the fragment of a map, which on the left roughly echoes the plan of the Foro Mussolini known from the Piazzale and the so-called building H. To the right there is an outline of the Imperial Fora, with the Forum of Trajan clearly visible. According to the same drawing, the following words were to be engraved above the map: "The empire reappeared on the fateful hills of Rome". In the uppermost register the following phrase was to

⁴⁵⁶ The other preparatory sketches show only the top and front of the case, with the map on the lid almost identical: the medallion is above Mussolini's initial and there are no aurei, which instead are in these drawings and are arranged at the side of the maps with the names of the emperors. The front in one instance shows the medallion with a portrait; in the other, the lion rests his paws on the globe.

be engraved in capital lettering: “Inchoata est Roma Forma Leonis”; parenthetically, the artist refers to an “anonymous medieval author” in the right marginalia.⁴⁵⁷

The open case contains what appears to be a laurel crown in imitation of those used in the Roman triumph or worn by emperors. On the bottom inside surface, visible within the crown, the author’s annotation reads: ‘*Te regere imperio memento*’, which is a paraphrase from Virgilio”. This last phrase is paradigmatic of Mussolini’s frustrated desire to be called emperor, for the title was the exclusive right of the king of Italy. A gift of this sort, i.e. a case containing the imperial crown, would be considered a significant gesture as if to acknowledge the man to whom the attribute truly belonged.

The graffiti on the wall of the Casa Balilla di Trastevere exhibit a simplified version of the sketches of the case’s lid: the map is identical, but the lion, Hercules, and the Fascist male do not appear. Mussolini’s initial appears, without the fasces, in the upper right corner and functions as a signature for the quotation: “noi tireremo dritto,” which was not on the drawings. Another addition is the mention of the sanctions at the bottom of the map. Moreover, the portrait medallions are now displayed in a separate room, i.e. the Memorial Hall.

This ornately engraved case, presumably intended as a gift to Mussolini himself, is representative of the iconography, historical references, and quotations that constitute Achille Capizzano’s artistic repertoire (including the

⁴⁵⁷ This annotation supports my hypothesis as to the original source.

lion, Hercules, maps, and medallions) from which he would continue to draw for various other projects he was involved in. Successful in winning commissions, this repertoire sought to identify these projects with the person of the Duce.

There is no difference in the iconography of the Fascist period between public and private art in representations of Mussolini, as the instance of the private casket and the visual parallels to the very public mosaics illustrate. In the early empire, however, images of the emperor on private objects were different from those displayed in public.⁴⁵⁸ As with for example, the south processional frieze on the Ara Pacis (depicting, among others, Augustus) and the Gemma Augustea. On the Ara Pacis, Augustus is represented in his role as the first among equals and is not singled out through difference in scale or by other signifiers. A subtle but significant indication of his status is seen in the gesture of his outstretched hand, which exactly mimics that of Aeneas on one of the panles, thereby stressing Augustus's role as founder of the new order.⁴⁵⁹ On the Gemma Augustea, however, a quintessential visual expression of private homage to Augustus, the emperor appears godlike in the guise of Jupiter.

Images of the lion appear frequently in Mussolini's propaganda scheme both in and outside the Piazzale dell'Impero. For example, depictions of the object that inspired the name of his party, the fasces, commonly featured lion heads.⁴⁶⁰ Photographs and postcards portrayed the dictator together with a

⁴⁵⁸ Pollini in Kurt A. Raaflaub and M. Toher (ed.) 1993:334-363.

⁴⁵⁹ Rose 2005:43.

⁴⁶⁰ Colini 1932. See also chap. 2.

lioness he called *Italia*, who took up residence with him while she was still a cub. She was later given to Rome's zoo, where Mussolini would visit her.⁴⁶¹ The international press noted the symbiosis between Mussolini and his lioness: "Mussolini with his lion [...] is copying the manners of the ancient Roman emperor."⁴⁶² The Duce was shown as the tamer of ferocious beasts, able to subdue the wild forces of nature by virtue of his innate, superhuman physical and moral strength.⁴⁶³ Mussolini, the lion tamer, was the subject of satirical vignettes. One showed a lion resembling the king of Italy on a leash held by Mussolini to indicate in whose hands the power over the country really resided.

In the Piazzale's mosaics the lion's meaning may have had a more immediate association with recent Fascist history, in that the Lion of Judah was also the symbol of Ethiopia's monarchy. Only a few days before the inauguration of the mosaics the statue of the Lion of Judah removed from Addis Ababa was placed at the feet of the Monument to the Fallen of Dogali in the Piazza dei Cinquecento as a: "symbol of a bygone tyranny which Italy humiliates at the feet of her avenged heroes."⁴⁶⁴ Considering the Duce's successes in subduing the Ethiopian populace, the lion imagery in the first panel may allude to Mussolini as a tamer.

The lion appears as Mussolini's zodiac sign in two buildings within the forum's complex: in the floor mosaics for the Duce's private gymnasium designed by Gino

⁴⁶¹ Falasca-Zamponi 2003:115.

⁴⁶² Scott 1932:656

⁴⁶³ This was, in a very real sense, a continuation of a very old iconographic motif, the "potnios theon," or "master of the animals," wherein a god, hero, or ruler would be shown in a position of superiority over two flanking animals.

⁴⁶⁴ Luce newsreel B1094, 12/05/1937. Dogali was the site of a major Italian defeat in 1887, where 500 soldiers were slaughtered by the Ethiopians.

Severini, and in two instances in the *Casa delle Armi*. The Duce's gym, built inside the *Terme* complex, was conceived by Renato Ricci, the president of the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* (ONB), as a gift to Mussolini.⁴⁶⁵ Inaugurated on June 13, 1937, only a few weeks after the Piazzale, the gymnasium boasted ornate decoration fashioned by the same artists who created the designs for the Piazzale's mosaics. Severini's mosaic for the gym included the Duce's zodiac sign and was paired with the Herculean theme in Giulio Rosso's design for the curtains and Achille Capizzano's imagery engraved on Mussolini's silver-plated writing desk. That desk displayed Hercules with the lion-skin in the middle and four of his labors in the corners: the Nemean Lion, the Ceryneian Hind, the Centaur Nexus, and the Cretan Bull.⁴⁶⁶ Capizzano was also the designer of the fresco, now lost, that once decorated the staircase wall at the entrance to the Casa delle Armi. It was described in a contemporary newspaper:

A sturdy bronze figure dominates the wall; he is the symbol of the Fascist Idea of unity, as cool and impassive as the ideal Greek heroes. He rests his arm on the *Fascio Littorio* into which dates have been engraved, recalling the unforgettable moments in our history: the beginning of World War I, the Victory, the foundation of the Fascist Party, the March on Rome [...] and the iniquitous sanctions. [...] In the upper right, there is a lion, the symbol of medieval Rome and the auspicious zodiac sign ... of the Duce, which pounces upon a fragment of the *Forma Urbis* meaning that Rome has always been the cradle of universal ideas and that Roman laws still form the basis of today's civilization.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁵ Apparently Mussolini did not appreciate the gift, complaining that the Italians were not able to understand his appreciation for frugality. Greco, 1990d:194.

⁴⁶⁶ The desk is lost, but illustrations of the engravings appear in *Architettura* 1940: 594 and Perugini 1966:24.

⁴⁶⁷ *Il Mattino* Napoli May1, 1936, quoted in Brunetti 1998:27. See also Pellegrini 1966:20-21.

The reference to the lion as the “medieval symbol of Rome” would suggest the artist’s knowledge of the literature on the subject. If so, this further underscores the diligence and accuracy in carrying out the preparatory studies for these panels. The fragment of the Forma Urbis in the fresco is nearly identical to the one in the Piazzale’s mosaics. The newspaper’s description of the fresco is significant in that Capizzano was also the artist responsible for the introductory panel with the figure of the lion associated with a city map that attests to the continuity between the ancient past and Fascist present. The dates on the fasces in the fresco coincide with many of those inscribed on the Piazzale’s marble blocks, while the phrase “*Inchoata Roma Forma Leonis*” is echoed in the journalist’s statement that “Rome has always been the cradle of universal ideas”

Careful observation of the mosaic panel with the lion and the globe leads to the discovery that the latter reproduces the iconography of the Capricorn depicted on Augustan coins.⁴⁶⁸ Gems such as the Gemma Augustea as well as coins portrayed the Capricorn in connection with the emperor. One of the souvenir postcards sold at the Augustan exhibition features the Capricorn from the Gemma Augustea, as did the 25cent airmail postage stamp issued for the bimillenary.

Mussolini’s contemporaries were evidently aware of the first emperor’s fascination with his zodiac sign, since the Augustan exhibition catalogue made reference to Augustus’s sign in the captions for the coin with the Capricorn and

⁴⁶⁸ Barton 1995.

the Gemma Augustea.⁴⁶⁹ To this, we may add the visual correlation between the emperor and his zodiac sign of conception on the above mentioned 25 cent stamp issued to celebrate the Augustan bimillenary, on a medallion expressly struck for the same occasion.⁴⁷⁰

The same association was also incorporated in preparatory sketches for the mosaics in the main hall of the convention center in EUR.⁴⁷¹ For a larger audience, the association was clearly evoked in one of the documentaries devoted to the Augustan exhibition entitled *Nella luce di Roma*.⁴⁷² The documentary reconstructs the history of Rome starting with the flight of Aeneas from Troy, through the Punic Wars, and culminating in the March on Rome. The narration is accompanied visually by maps, models and reconstructions from the MAR. The portrait of Augustus from Meroe in Egypt was featured together with a model of the Forum of Augustus, described by the narrator as “one of the most effective demonstrations of a zeitgeist for an age in which every artistic endeavor is intimately linked to the personality of the head of state”. Next to them were placed the Gemma Augustea and the so-called Tellus relief from the Ara Pacis.

The reception hall in the convention center was the most significant room in EUR’s most important building, conceived as a temple or sacrarium of the concept of Rome.⁴⁷³ With this in mind that the themes for the hall’s decoration

⁴⁶⁹ MAR cat. 1938:111-13.

⁴⁷⁰ Casolari 1996:386 (XV/104)

⁴⁷¹ These mosaics were in the end never executed. On the EUR see Calvesi 1992.

⁴⁷² 1938 LUCE DO44507.

⁴⁷³ Calvesi 1992:340.

were defined: Rome's origins, the empire, the rebirth and universality of the church and Mussolini's Rome. These assignments were entrusted to four different artists who chose which topics to develop. Achille Capizzano opted for the Empire, sketches for which are preserved and in at least three of these preliminary studies.⁴⁷⁴ The figure of Augustus is associated with his zodiac sign and all of them demonstrate that the artist borrowed from "ancient iconographic sources, all on display in reproductions at the Augustan exhibition on *Romanità*".⁴⁷⁵

Of particular interest is one of the preliminary drawings entitled *The Triumph of Augustus*, which reveals that the composition's central detail was inspired by the Gemma Augustea. The telling title "The Triumph of Augustus" is followed by the annotation "zodiac sign" written in the artist's hand, suggesting his knowledge of the subject.⁴⁷⁶

e. The demi-god dictator

As one enters the Piazzale from the obelisk, Hercules with his distinctive lion-skin is visible on the right. The attribute is eminently suitable for the decorative program, since Zeus allegedly attached the lion-skin to the sky to immortalize Hercules's first labor, the Slaying of the Nemean Lion, thereby

⁴⁷⁴ Many are in the Archivio Capizzano and have been recently published in Sicoli 2010.

⁴⁷⁵ Calvesi 1992: 344.

⁴⁷⁶ Published in Sicoli 2010:32.

creating the constellation Leo.⁴⁷⁷ Besides furnishing this astrological connotation, Hercules also served Mussolini's purposes as a superhuman image of physical strength and invincibility. Among the numerous projects planned for the forum, but never completed, was the colossal statue of Hercules with the likeness of Mussolini⁴⁷⁸. Mussolini wearing the lion's skin of the demi-god is also celebrated on the medals issued for the dedication of the forum in 1932⁴⁷⁹, as well as in the 1933 design for ONB badges.⁴⁸⁰ Seemingly without reservation, Mussolini was depicted godlike during his own lifetime, even on everyday objects that received wide circulation, and in this respect he surpassed Augustus who was depicted as a god exclusively on court cameos, such as the Gemma Augustea, intended for a restricted elite audience or outside of Italy in areas with a well established ruler cult.

An interesting medal, dating as early as 1926 and issued in honor of Mussolini, attests to the pervasiveness of this association in the private sphere as well. The obverse features a portrait of Mussolini wearing the neck chain of Our Lady of the Annunciation, whereas the reverse features Hercules defeating the Nemean Lion.⁴⁸¹ A nearly identical image of the labor appeared in Canevari's frescoes for

⁴⁷⁷ Hyginus, *Astronomica* 2.24; Seneca *Oed.* 38ff.; Seneca *Hercules Furens* 942 ff.; Brunetti 1998, was the first to mention the connection between Hercules and the constellation of Leo, but she did not push any further implication for such

⁴⁷⁸ Santuccio 1991:54 and Greco in Santuccio 2005:178; Gentile 2007: 105-106.

⁴⁷⁹ Casolari 1996: 224 (X/31), 225 (X/38).

⁴⁸⁰ Casolari 1996: 254 (XI/36).

⁴⁸¹ Casolari 1996: (IV/9). Unfortunately the catalogue does not provide additional information about the donor or the occasion for such a gift. The neck chain of Our Lady of the Annunciation (collare dell'Annunziata) was the highest honour granted by the Savoia family.

the ONB pavilion at the 1937 Exhibition of the Summer Camps in the Circus Maximus, curated by Luigi Moretti.⁴⁸²

As noted earlier, Hercules was a protagonist in the decorative program for Mussolini's personal gymnasium. Two statues of the hero guarded the entrance to the Stadio dei Marmi. One was sculpted by Silvio Canevari, the brother of Angelo Canevari who was responsible for some of the Piazzale's mosaic compositions. Hercules makes a further appearance in Achille Capizzano's mosaic near the fountain at the end of the Piazzale (33). The mosaic has three registers: the upper portion displays the imperial eagle; the middle portion, three images of the Greek hero; and the lower section a lion crushing a serpent.⁴⁸³

Similar iconography may be found on a medal issued by Italian immigrants of North America on the occasion of the Decennial of the Fascist Revolution in 1932. The medal was created to "acknowledge B. Mussolini and the Regime's merits for their accomplishments, which brought further prestige to Italy on the international stage" ⁴⁸⁴. The obverse depicts a lion ascending a slope while his hind paws crush a serpent. The legend reads: *Dixi, fecit, ascendo*. A similar image was used in a commercial for an Italian chemical company. With the Colosseum in the background, a lion crushes a large snake with his paw, the label reads: "even in the field of biochemistry, Fascist Italy is self-sufficient."⁴⁸⁵ During

⁴⁸² *Architettura* 1937:325.

⁴⁸³ A similar scene (a lion stepping over a straight line) appears also in the panel 6 This figure was employed to cover the *damnatio memoriae* intervention occasioned by the Olympic Games of 1960. See chap.3.

⁴⁸⁴ Casolari 1996: (X/25)

⁴⁸⁵ *Il Popolo d'Italia* 22/09/1937.

the civil war, Caesar issued coins with an elephant crushing a snake on the obverse, and while the significance of the snake is debated amongst numismatists, the iconography could have been a source of inspiration for such a representation.⁴⁸⁶

The meaning of this imagery with a lion crushing the serpent may also be explained as emblematic of the Italian “victory” over the sanctions imposed by the League of Nations in 1935, at the time of Italy’s initial bellicose provocations in Ethiopia. My deduction is based on two pieces of evidence: the inscription on the marble blocks along the Piazzale that records this particular episode, and a medallion struck in 1936 on which the word *Sanzioni* (sanctions) identifies a snake that menacingly encircles Fascist Italy, coiling around it in an attempt to squeeze it economically.⁴⁸⁷

The reverse displays the Legionary standard with an eagle and the letters S.P.Q.R. superimposed over an outline of Africa. Significantly, the legend reproduces the words from the Duce’s speech on the need for Italy to expand in the Mediterranean region: “they are attempting to commit that most grievous injustice which is to rob us of some room in the sun. (signed) Mussolini.”⁴⁸⁸

For all of this there were many ancient models. The link between Hercules and Augustus appears in ancient sources, especially particularly from the Augustan

⁴⁸⁶ Woytek 2003:124

⁴⁸⁷ Casolari 1996: (XVI/55)

⁴⁸⁸ Discourse pronounced by Mussolini on 26 October 1935. The discourse continued making a direct reference to the sanctions .

period.⁴⁸⁹ In Vergil's *Aeneid*, during Aeneas's visit to the Elysian Fields when Augustus is compared to Hercules (and Dionysus) for the extent of his conquests ("not even Hercules traveled that much.")⁴⁹⁰ Horace also makes the connection upon Augustus's triumphant return from Spain.⁴⁹¹ Later Cassius Dio affirms that: "only Hercules and his labors might induce me to a comparison with Augustus."⁴⁹²

f. The youthful *princeps*

The Piazzale dell'Impero boasts neither a colossal statue nor a modest bust; nor even a mosaic portrait of Benito Mussolini.⁴⁹³ Yet the Fascist leader is still present in every component of the iconographic program. In the mosaic panels, the pervasive and multivalent image of the lion shares company with numerous figures of young athletes, particularly in the mosaics encircling the Fontana della Sfera and this recall the photographs of the athletic dictator sponsored and released by the government's press agency.⁴⁹⁴ Mussolini himself stressed his multiple athletic abilities in an interview with an American United Press

⁴⁸⁹ I thank Prof. John F. Miller for pointing this out. On the parallel between Hercules and Augustus see Huttner 1997 and Spencer 2001. On this connection in the mosaics see Aicher 2000: 135-137.

⁴⁹⁰ *Aen.* 6.801-805.

⁴⁹¹ *Odes*, 3.14.

⁴⁹² *Hist.* 56, 36, 3-5.

⁴⁹³ Telmon in Santuccio 2005:234 describes incorrectly: "fasces, eagles, lions, heads of Mussolini which connect the different panels." Heads of the duce are present in Achille Capizzano's preparatory drawings for the Piazzale, now in the Archivio Moretti (ACS), but they were never executed.

⁴⁹⁴ e.g. a *velina* dated July 4, 1938

journalist Webb Miller: “I devote anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes a day to physical exercise and I practice nearly all disciplines.”⁴⁹⁵

As if to prefigure the covers of magazines like *Sports Illustrated*, these action shots of Mussolini sought to showcase his supposedly limitless capabilities and perpetuate the aura of invincibility that surrounded him.⁴⁹⁶ He did, after all, survive three assassination attempts. Equally important, Mussolini’s exhibitionism fed the myth of his eternal youth. Youth, strength, and militancy were among the driving forces of the Fascist Revolution and constituted the movement’s most innovative elements, or were at least presented as such. It was no coincidence that “Youth” became the title of the Party’s hymn.

By 1937, Mussolini was a middle-aged man, yet he allowed only those pictures to circulate that gave the impression that he was untouched by the passage of time. Authorized portraits of the Duce were charged with the task of prolonging his youthful appearance.⁴⁹⁷ This follows the model of Augustus, who looks decidedly youthful in the Prima Porta statue, considering that he was in his seventies.

Mussolini was celebrated as *Princeps Juventutis* on the medals given to the winners of the *Littoriali*, the university-level competitions held annually in different fields, culture-, sport- and work-related.⁴⁹⁸ The participants were selected first at the provincial level and then at the national level through the

⁴⁹⁵ *Il Popolo d’Italia*, March 9, 1937

⁴⁹⁶ Franzinelli-Marino 2003:VIII.

⁴⁹⁷ The Duce did not like the press to dwell on his birthday. See Cassero 2008, reproduced memo (*velina*) of 28 July 1939.

⁴⁹⁸ Casolari 1996: (XI, 57). See also chapter 2.

GUF chapters (Fascist University Groups), and those who qualified were called *Littori*. Imagery of Mussolini engaged in various sports appeared on medals with the legend: *Dux docet*.⁴⁹⁹ He thus became the ideal to be emulated. He was the perpetual youth - even in his fifties – who inspired the new generations, *Littori* and others.

g. Mussolini's Res Gestae

Two historical events were primarily responsible for instilling in Mussolini an ardent interest in Rome's Augustan past: the conquest of Ethiopia in 1936 and its annual anniversary, which fell on the date of the Augustan bimillenary. The regime portrayed Mussolini's military victory as the beginning of a new colonial empire for Italy and the Duce presented himself as its founder. This title held special meaning because Mussolini was unable to assume the same title as those of the ancient emperors he so admired. He was only the head of government, not the king.⁵⁰⁰

The literature produced during the celebration of the bimillenary constantly emphasized the analogies between the deeds accomplished by both Augustus and Mussolini. These comparisons were also visually emphasized in the Forum's mosaics and in the base of the obelisk in a parchment eulogy to Mussolini in

⁴⁹⁹ Casolari 1996: (XV, 4 and 98bis).

⁵⁰⁰ R.D. n.754 granted the title of Emperor of Ethiopia to the king and his successors. See Minor 1999:161. On the relationship between Mussolini and the King, especially after the conquest of Ethiopia, Gentile 2007:154.

Latin, which could be called Mussolini's *Res Gestae*. Among his chief accomplishments recorded were: "*Italiae urbes, in primis Romam, magnificis iisque utilibus aedificiis exornandam*". The iconography of panels 4 and 5 conveys the regime's achievements in the fields of architecture, sculpture, and monumental painting. Similar imagery appears also in the mosaics surrounding the fountain (40a).

In the Foro Mussolini a general glorification of the arts, which are seen as flourishing under the regime thanks to the veritable boom in building activity, may be recognized in the overall program of the complex itself. Not far from the Piazzale stood the *Stadio dei Marmi*, adorned with sixty male statues, one for each of the Italian provinces, that made up the new Italy, and constituted a fitting assembly for a complex where future Italian leaders were to be trained by the ONB to serve Fascism. This advertisement of empire, using provincial personifications, calls to mind similar programs in ancient Rome with the same propagandistic intent, such as the *Porticus ad Nationes*⁵⁰¹ and the panels carried in the funeral of Augustus⁵⁰², perhaps copied in the Aphrodisias *Sebasteion* and the *Hadrianeum*⁵⁰³. The provincial reliefs from the *Hadrianeum* were on exhibition on the Capitoline Museum at the time that the new sculptural program for the Foro was being planned and they have served as models.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰¹ Serv. *Aen.* viii. 721

⁵⁰² Suet. *Augustus*, 101; Tacitus, *Ann.*, 1.8.3.5; Cassius Dio 56.34.1-3.

⁵⁰³ Smith 1988: 50-77.

⁵⁰⁴ Jones 1912.

A connection may be drawn between the representation of an artist painting in panel 5 and the aforementioned debate at the 1936 Volta Convention regarding the relationship of architecture and the decorative arts, from which emerges the potential role that such a type of painting might play in affirming Fascist ideals.

Panels 15 and 19 exemplify Fascism's role in the well being of the people. Number 15 includes scenes of fishing and hunting, the animals depicted, such as lions, allude to the new empire and its abundant fauna. Complementing these scenes, the subject of panel 19's subject is agriculture, echoing Mussolini's reclamation of the Pontine Marshes for the new colonies. And again homage is paid to the Duce's good works in the parchment placed in the obelisk's foundation: "*Agri culturae autem prospexit atque consuluit ita ut loca diu inculta et pestifera brevi feracia ac salutare fierant; colonias armis praescriptisque firmavit*". ("Agriculture, fishing and hunting represent man's ability to procure nourishment").

Panels 7 and 8 are connected with the theme of providing for the people and should be read as a single composition. In the central scene, panel 8 depicts young men in a jeep who wear the distinctive black shirt and fez of the Fascists. They carry muskets and a small flag with one of Mussolini's mottos "*Me ne frego*". It is likely a representation of the March on Rome of October 28, 1922, which was observed as the beginning of the new Fascist Era in the Fascist

Calendar, and became a festive occasion every year with parades and other activities.⁵⁰⁵

Above the jeep, which displays interesting details like the inscription “*W Mussolini*”, (*viva Mussolini* in cursive) is a knight in the throes of defeating two huge monsters that resemble gigantic salamanders. A similar imagery was used by Giulio Rosso in one of the mosaics he designed for the EUR, *The Armed Forces*⁵⁰⁶. While the scene may have been inspired by the iconography of Saint George, the patron saint of cavalry, may be also a reference to a more common type devised during the Fascist period to indicate the victory of Fascism over its enemies, particularly those associated with “plutocracies” and “Bolshevism”. Such foes were characteristically cast as monsters, serpents or reptiles. Rome’s Ostiense station, for example, houses a mosaic in which the personification of Fascism, a young (naked) man wearing only a cloak and performing the Roman salute, stands above a lizard-like creature of sorts with its head transfixed by a spear.⁵⁰⁷

In many of his addresses, Mussolini inveighed against the wealthy democracies, such as England, and the menace of Communism. His tirades became more and more aggressive and received greater attention from the press, especially after the League of Nations sanctions against Italy after the invasion of Ethiopia. A

⁵⁰⁵ The march was more symbolic than effective. Mussolini himself reached Rome by train joining the troops only once in Rome (Zucconi 2009). On the introduction of the E.F. (Era Fascista) on all official and public act of the State see Gentile 2007 (4):89-90.

⁵⁰⁶ For the mosaics at the EUR see Cristallini in Calvesi(ed.) 1992:297 ff.

⁵⁰⁷ On the mosaics at the Ostiense Station see Dybner 2004:161-162.

postcard of the time, entitled *Our Enemy*, further exemplifies this theme. It features a dragon with two heads, one labeled “Plutocracy” and the other “Bolshevism”. Its body is labelled “International Hebraism” and its tail “Freemasonry”. A quotation from Mussolini provides a heading above the image of the beast: “you cannot fight if you do not hate the enemy in front of you”. The postcard includes a handwritten message that reads: “Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin are the true exponents of the international Hebrew and Freemason plutocracy.”

Similar imagery is seen on some of the medals awarded in 1937 to the Italian veterans of the Spanish War.⁵⁰⁸ One shows a Roman soldier attacking a dragon, with the legend *Virtus Romana Vincit* underneath it.⁵⁰⁹ Another features a nude virile figure fighting serpents with the legend *Virtute Duce*.⁵¹⁰ A third medal, with an even more explicit message, portrays a knight in virile nudity attacking a dragon with bow and arrow.⁵¹¹ The dragon holds the hammer and sickle, unmistakable Communist symbols, in its claws. The inscription on the reverse reads: “To the volunteers who fought against Communism for Spain and civilization”. Analogous iconography had already appeared in 1928 on the “Buono da 2 lire” issued for the Expo in Milan. Here the naked knight tramples a

⁵⁰⁸ The war (1936-39) was fought between the forces endorsing the Republic and the Nacionales, who were supporters of Nationalism. Italy and Germany they sided with General Francisco Franco in what they interpreted as a war against Marxists.

⁵⁰⁹ Casolari 1996: (XV/23; V/24)

⁵¹⁰ Casolari 1996: (XV/26)

⁵¹¹ Casolari 1996: (XV/21)

serpent under his horse's hooves. The legend reads: "Head of the Government Benito Mussolini."⁵¹²

Within the Foro Mussolini, the same theme is represented in the main hall (the *aula magna*) of the *Accademia di Educazione Fisica* in an encaustic created by Luigi Montanarini. A naked youth, carrying a black flag, holds a *fascio littorio* in one hand and a club in the other and stomps on a naked figure whose strands of hair are actually snakes.⁵¹³ The club could be a reference either to the *squadristi*, the black shirts who used blackjacks and castor oil to persuade non-Fascists, or it could also be a more subtle reference to Mussolini himself. The club was one of the attributes of Hercules, who, as we have seen, was often associated with the duce. All of these examples show how in the Italians' collective memory "monsters" were associated with the enemy of the state who were defeated by Fascism and Mussolini. The enemies have iconography similar to that on the Caesarian coins with the dragon.

In the mosaic (6), the two scenes, the March on Rome and the victorious knight, are separated by the phrase "A Noi". This was the reply given by all the black shirts springing to attention to the invocation: "Black shirts! Salute the Duce, the Founder of the Empire." Starace, the secretary of the Fascist party, composed this

⁵¹² Gigante 2004:88. The obverse shows the king's portrait.

⁵¹³ Executed in 1927, the painting represents "the Facts of Fascist History". Its pendant on the opposite wall was by Angelo Canevari showing the principal events in Roman History. These two compositions reinforced the idea of Fascism as a direct consequence of the Roman Empire. Greco 1990b: 434 and Greco 1991:49

slogan to flatter Mussolini because it was not permissible to celebrate him as the Emperor of Ethiopia, since the title was reserved for the king.⁵¹⁴

The central scene is bracketed by images related to the Fascists' pledges to Mussolini himself. On the right, the repeated inscription DUCE and young men performing the Fascist salute. On the other side, a boy receives a musket from an older comrade, accompanied by the oath of allegiance to the party. The text of the oath was originally inscribed into the stone then removed during the 1960s. The scene likely represents the Fascist conscription (the *Leva Fascista*), one of the ONB's major celebrations that sanctioned the rite of passage from one generation to another.

With the March on Rome and with the advent of Mussolini, Italy was once more able to follow in the footsteps of its ancient predecessors, the Romans, and finally achieve what for centuries had been only a dream: commanding an empire. Panel 7 conveys this achievement. Images of soldiers, now turned into farmers, symbolize the ideal of the Roman citizen ("because it is the plow that tills the soil, but it is the sword that defends it") and demonstrate the civilizing force of Fascism.⁵¹⁵ In the top left corner, an Ethiopian, accompanied by the Lion of Judah, performs the Fascist salute to the Italian flag.

At the end of the Piazzale and marking the transition between the central platform and the mosaic area encircling the fountain, Italy is depicted as a young

⁵¹⁴ *Corriere della Sera*, 27 maggio 1937. See also Cassero 2004: 148.

⁵¹⁵ See chap 1 on the plough displayed in the room of the MAR dedicated to the origins of Rome.

male surrounded by the arts. Beneath him the she-wolf (symbol of Rome) is represented, while to his left there is a lion, and to his right an eagle, the symbol of the Imperial power.⁵¹⁶

Around the *Fontana della Sfera* the mosaics follow a different scheme. Eight large panels with sports scenes alternate with eight smaller panels, each following a tripartite arrangement. In the top register there is a bird (either an eagle or a vulture) flying or standing. In the middle zone the main scene displays male figures connected with military activities even if not always clearly spelled out, and in the bottom register there are animals, mostly felines. Below this tripartite composition more animals are seen running or fighting.

The spaces between the large and small panels are decorated with small scenes of human activity: hunting, harvesting, children playing, fishing, industry, and painting. Below these vignettes, there is a continuous frieze displaying alternately modern and ancient weapons. The eight large panels are framed above and below by circular band. The inner one has repeated the motif composed of Mussolini's initial and a *fascio littorio* crowned in the middle by an eagle's head, flanked by four large fasces alternating with branches of laurel and oak. The outer band repeats alternately the two texts "Duce a noi" and "Opera Nazionale Balilla".

In the decorative program of the *Fontana della Sfera* the eight mosaic compositions displaying athletic activities, were emphasized judging by their larger scale. These images obviously refer to the location and its sports facilities,

⁵¹⁶ For the iconography of this panel, see subheadings of the artists and the attributions of panels.

while the smaller panels reiterate the reason behind the creation of such a program, the first anniversary celebration of the conquest of Ethiopia. In their attire and postures, the male figures recall ancient soldiers and stress the continuation between the past and the present - the Roman conquest of Africa and Mussolini's new colonies. The animals depicted, particularly the different felines, underscore a geographical (African) element.

On the other hand, the vignettes depicting daily activities reinforce the positive effects of this conquest for Italy and its population. Women and children, and in particular panel 29a, where an entire family is shown while a field is being plowed, are emblematic of the pro-family fascist policies, but they also refer to the role played by the new cities founded in the reclaimed Pontine Marshes. The frieze with weapons reiterates this concept. Italy needed new land, the "deserved place under the sun," and the sanctions imposed were unjust, for the land was only attainable through war. The weapons depicted are both modern (machine guns) and ancient (helmets, shields and swords) a further reminder of Fascism as a continuation of the Roman Empire. In this respect, the mosaics around the fountain reinforce the Piazzale's main program, while echoing the weapons friezes that often appear on ancient Roman triumphal monuments.

h. The school of Spilimbergo⁵¹⁷

The Friulian School for Mosaicists (*Scuola Mosaicisti del Friuli*) founded in 1922 shortly after the end of World War I offered not only professional training to aspiring mosaicists, and also helped its graduates secure better jobs. The chosen location was in an economically depressed area, and the school aimed at improving employment opportunities and economic conditions for the local inhabitants.

The original project had a comprehensive curriculum that would have provided a general education, including drawing and foreign language courses, for example, in addition to the pupils' technical training. This curriculum was soon abandoned for financial reasons as it quickly became apparent that a more realistic aim was to mold pupils into skilled craftsmen rather than artists.⁵¹⁸ In 1927 the school merged with the Night School for Drawing & Design (*Scuola Serale di Disegno*) and was re-named "*Scuola Professionale Irene di Spilimbergo*". In uniting forces into one vocational school, it was agreed that morning courses would be devoted to education of the mosaicists, whereas the evening curriculum would cater to other craftsmen.

⁵¹⁷ For a detailed history of the school, see Venuto 2000. In the course of my research, I have consulted the archive of the Scuola Mosaicisti del Friuli (now ASMF). I am very grateful to the director of the school, Dott. Gian Piero Brovedani, and to Dott.ssa Danila Venuto for their kind assistance during my research. The documentation includes the correspondence between Baldini and the artists (which covers the period Dec. 12, 1936-April 23, 1937) and between Baldini and Moretti; and the financial documentation pertinent to the costs and timetable for the execution of the works. ASMF, Cartolare 71, cartella 109 (1936-1937)-Viale del Monolite (Foro Mussolini). The file or '*cartella*' is divided up into several smaller files or '*sottocartelle*'. The correspondence is incomplete. In several letters I found references to previous communications which are not in the archive. I have also searched the ACS, but no information has come to light.

⁵¹⁸ During this period the director of the school was Antonio Sussi (1922-1927). He was opposed to the political implications of the school's affiliation with the *Unione Industriale Fascista della Provincia di Udine* and resigned in 1928.

The year 1928 marked a major shift in the school's mission when it joined the *Unione Industriale Fascista della Provincia di Udine* and appointed Antonio Baldini as its new director. Under his directorship (1935-1936) the school executed mosaic programs for the *Foro Mussolini*: the *Fontana dell Sfera* (designed by Giulio Rosso), the indoor pool area's floors (also by Rosso) and interior walls (by Angelo Canevari)⁵¹⁹, the exterior of the Fencing Academy (also by Canevari), and the polychromatic entrance (designed by Luigi Moretti) reserved solely for members of the academy.

Baldini completely revamped the curriculum by organizing it into a three-year program, whereby the school produced professional graduates not only capable of executing mosaics, but also of creating their own designs and original works. Baldini also enhanced the pupils' future job prospects by adding two new course offerings: a "class for terrace layers and cement workers"⁵²⁰ and an "elective class". The latter course was especially innovative, it was conceived as a workshop where external commissions (*lavori per conto terzi*) could be executed, thereby offering real work opportunities to alumni of the school but also to pupils during the summer months.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁹ The pools are situated inside the Palazzo delle Terme, opened on June 13, 1937. The larger one (50 x 19 meters) was entirely decorated in mosaics, including the wall surfaces within which it was housed. It was connected by a marble staircase to the upper level where refreshments were served near a solarium. A private elevator connected it with the Duce's personal gymnasium (see above). The smaller pool located on the mezzanine floor was devoted to the Balilla and Avanguardisti. See Santuccio 1991: 56-58.

⁵²⁰ *Terrazzo*: "a term applied to any floor in which pieces of stone are bonded in a cement bed", Grossutti 2008: 7

⁵²¹ The percentages of the earnings for each category were clearly stipulated: 60% to the "esecutori", 20% to the teachers, 10% to the school as "rimborso spese" and 10% to be destined to a fund for scholarships.

The school's new operations attracted private donors, such as, the Italo-American society called the "*National Terrazzo and Mosaic Association*", an association of American flooring contractors founded by immigrants from Friuli, the same region where the school was located.⁵²² With their financial support, the school purchased a new site in Via Corridoni, Spilimbergo, where it still is today.

Among Baldini's innovations, the publication of yearbooks met with great success, in that they put the school on the map for the general public and increased enrollment figures not only of students from outside the region, but also from abroad. This sparked the interest of specialized journals and newspapers. In 1931, the school received the Duce's official acknowledgement, and two years later, it was awarded the gold medal at the Art Exhibition of the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* in Udine.

Winning the gold medal is likely what brought the school to the attention of Renato Ricci who was the national president of the ONB and directly involved in the construction plans of the newly inaugurated Foro Mussolini. Antonio Baldini's proactive and farsighted administration is not doubt responsible for the prestigious commission and to execute of mosaics for the Foro Mussolini.

The school worked on the decoration of the Foro Mussolini from the summer of 1932 through the spring of 1937 and executed the mosaics for the *Piazzale della*

⁵²² Founded in Feb. 1924 in Chicago, the Association is still active today: <http://www.ntma.com/>; see also Grossutti 2008.

Vittoria, the *Viale del Monolite* and the *Palestra del Duce among others*.⁵²³ Apart from a professionally competent and reliable work force, the school offered the added advantage of extremely competitive prices since they were “limited to covering the most basic costs, i.e. the expenses for materials and labor.”⁵²⁴ To cope with the immense quantity of work - the total surface area to be covered by the mosaic decoration in the Piazzale dell’Impero alone covered 10,000 square meters - Baldini employed not only the students attending the “elective class,” but also pupils from regular classes as well as unemployed mosaicists from the region and alumni of the school. This flexible management of the job market sealed the deal for the school on more than one occasion. Other businesses were unable to compete with the school’s bids, since workers could be hired or let go according to the workload, without adding any financial burden to the school.⁵²⁵

Because it was a daunting task to cover so much surface area, the school employed the technique known as *a rovescio su carta*, or alternatively *a rivoltatura*⁵²⁶. This was both efficient and relatively inexpensive as it allows

⁵²³ Originally the execution of the mosaic for the gym, designed by Gino Severini, had been assigned to the Scuola Vaticana, but the poor work made it pass the commission to Spilimbergo, see the correspondence in ASMF, Cartolare 71, letters by Francesconi to Baldini, March 2, 1937 and March 23, 1937.

The other works commissioned to the school are: two walls of the “sala mensa ufficiali” of the Accademia di Educazione Fisica (inaugurated November 4, 1932); the entrance mosaic to the Stadio dei Marmi by Canevari (1933); the decoration of the inner circle of the Fontana della Sfera, by Giulio Rosso (1934); external wall of the Casa delle Armi by Canevari (1934-35); floors (by Giulio Rosso) and walls (by Canevari) of the indoor swimming pools (1934-37); mosaic in the entrance hall of the Casa delle Armi (by Canevari, 1936).

⁵²⁴ Venuto 2000: 72

⁵²⁵ Bucco 1994:332

⁵²⁶ The cartoon is placed faced down onto a sheet of specially treated paper and copied. The *tesserae* are then glued upsidedown to the paper. The panels are assembled on the surface to be decorated by placing them on a foundation layer of adhesive, while keeping the surface of the *tesserae* that is attached to the paper up. The paper is finally removed with sponge baths of warm water. When the surface to be decorated is extensive, the original drawing is divided into several

several panels to be executed simultaneously. The large panels were produced at the School in Spilimbergo in several pieces and were then assembled upon arrival at their final destination. Thanks to this technique, the mosaics were completed in record time between mid-February and May 7, 1937.⁵²⁷

The artists sent the school:

cartoons to the scale of 1:3 or 1:20, accompanied by a color sketch of the composition. The school saw to the rest, enlarging the cartoons to actual size, preparing the transparent overlays, and producing the mosaic panels using the technique *a rovescio su carta*.⁵²⁸

This process may have led to the delay in the inauguration since the process entirely depended on the artists' ability to deliver their sketches on time. Without the sketches the school's team could not proceed. The last sketch arrived on April 27, 1937, only a few days before the originally scheduled date for the inauguration.

Baldini was the technical and artistic supervisor of all the works and he was assisted by two foremen in Spilimbergo and two in Rome.⁵²⁹ Baldini was indispensable in the execution of the technical aspects of each panel, as achieving the "*chiaroscuro*" effect or rendering the surface. It is notable that,

panels numbered on the back, as with the mosaics in the Foro Italico. In the ASMF, documentation is preserved about the execution and the shipment to Rome of the different panels. Cartolare 71, fasc. "esecuzione e piani di posa".

⁵²⁷ The school's annual report for the 1936-1937 underscores how in such a brief period of time as much as 1500 square meters of mosaic were executed for the Viale alone.

⁵²⁸ Bucco, 1994: 330. All the artists requested that their cartoons be returned, but some of those executed by Canevari were kept by Baldini for the school., as well as few drawings on tracing paper (*lucidi*) by Giulio Rosso, in particular for some of the panels around the Fontana della Sfera, which I will discuss later on.

⁵²⁹ The masters Giuseppe Teia and Pietro Corrado and the masters Alfio Tambosso and Olivo Francesconi, respectively. The ASMF preserves the correspondence between Baldini and the supervisors and demonstrates how carefully the director handled the execution of this work, overseeing at the same time the welfare of the workers (both pupils of the school and its alumni).

with the exception of Gino Severini, the artists responsible for the designs were not accustomed to producing cartoons for mosaics, and were therefore sometimes in doubt about the final visual effect of their works. Some of the correspondence between Angelo Canevari and Antonio Baldini illustrates precisely this dilemma.⁵³⁰

The inauguration of the Piazzale was “expressly scheduled” to take place on May 9, 1937⁵³¹, exactly one year after the announcement of the conquest of Ethiopia by Mussolini. In the end, the event had to be postponed.

Documentation in the archives of the School of Spilimbergo helps develop an approximate timeline for execution by the school of the various panels'. The first preliminary sketch for one of the mosaic panel designs that arrived at the school, was sent by Giulio Rosso on December 12, 1936.⁵³² The last one was not received until April 27, 1937. Considering that the inauguration deadline was only a few days away, it is not surprising to read in Baldini's correspondence with Moretti about the frantic pace at which the school had been working. Amato de Marco, the commissioner for the school, made it clear to the head of the ONB that the school and its students were sparing no effort to carry out the project in as quickly as possible.⁵³³ On several occasions the school's director was forced to put pressure on the artists to send their drawings on time. Notwithstanding the school's efforts, the Piazzale dell'Impero's big day had to be rescheduled for a

⁵³⁰ ASMF, Cartolare 71, cartella “corrispondenza pittori” letter Baldini to Giulio Rosso, February 13, 1937 and Baldini's letter to Angelo Canevari February 9, 1937

⁵³¹ ASFM, Moretti's telegram to the school (April 25, 1937): “inauguration irrevocably set for May 9”.

⁵³² ASMF, Cart. 71 Rosso-Baldini, December 12, 1936.

⁵³³ ASFM, Cart. 71 De Marco- ONB, May 6, 1937.

week later and was celebrated on May 16, 1937.⁵³⁴ The delay in progress on the Piazzale's mosaic panels was exacerbated by the school's involvement in the production of the mosaics for both the indoor swimming pool area and the Palestra del Duce, inaugurated only shortly afterwards on June 13, 1937.⁵³⁵

With the deadline of May 9 looming⁵³⁶ the number of students and workers mustered by that the school of Spilimbergo proved insufficient. Three hundred students from the *Accademia Littoria*, participants in a preliminary course of study leading to admission into the Academy for Physical Education, were enlisted to augment the work force and to lay the mosaic floors in their final location. Newspapers and newsreels put a spotlight on the regime's immense project and boasted the "fascist speed with which it had been undertaken, involving 400 people in total among stonecutters and mosaicists of the ONB's specialized school."⁵³⁷

i. The artists and the attribution of the compositions⁵³⁸

The artists who designed the panels for the Piazzale dell'Impero had all been handpicked by Renato Ricci, as was his custom, without announcing a public

⁵³⁴ *Il Popolo d'Italia* May 17, 1937, "the Duce inaugurated the Piazzale dell'Impero yesterday morning". Caporilli-Simeoni 1990:134, erroneously states, "the school and its pupils succeeded in realizing the project for the viale by May 7, only two days before the inauguration".

⁵³⁵ Greco, 1991: 56

⁵³⁶ The school had been commissioned on January 18, 1937, but for a much more limited surface.

⁵³⁷ LUCE, 19/5/1937. For each square meters 7500 *tessereae*.

⁵³⁸ See my plan.

competition.⁵³⁹ Aiming out of the latter selection process may have been dictated, on the one hand, by the extremely limited amount of time allotted for the execution of the project predetermined by the celebrations to be held in honor of the first anniversary of the empire on May 9, 1937. On the other hand, each of the chosen artists had previously had a hand in one or more of the projects within the Foro Mussolini, and they were therefore already considered members of the team. Indeed, the significance that the mosaics were meant to communicate was crucial for both the student body attending the Academy, which constituted future generations of the Fascist Party's leading class, and those visiting the complex each day.

In previous scholarship only the composition by Gino Severini and Achille Capizzano have been attributed with certainty.⁵⁴⁰ Devoting much of my research on both the archival material and other invaluable contemporary sources I have been able to attribute all of them.

The problem was first addressed in 1994 in Antonella Bucco's unpublished Ph.D dissertation⁵⁴¹, and Telmon's work follows her lead regarding more than the attributions. Both authors account for twenty two compositions altogether. A closer look at the plan published by Moretti in 1941, however, reveals a somewhat

⁵³⁹ Greco, 1987: 21. See also the same author in Lux 1985: 463.

⁵⁴⁰ Lately Telmon in Santuccio 2005: 234-236. Contradicting her own statement about this uncertainty, she attributes each panel to an artist without a question mark and without an explanation or bibliographical reference for such attribution in a final scheme.

⁵⁴¹ My attributions, in some instances, differ from hers and they are based both on the archival documentation in ASMF and on more recent publications on the different artists not available at the time of her writing. I am extremely fortunate to have been able in contacting the son of Achille Capizzano, who very graciously granted me permission to study all the sketches, notes and documents belonging to his father. This trove of information proved key in the attribution of some panels and for the understanding of the original design planned by Moretti but never completed.

different layout: along the sides of the central platform run two symmetrical rows of ten mosaic panels. Two separate compositions with a gigantic figure are at the end near the obelisk. A single composition caps off the opposite end near the fountain. According to Moretti's scheme, the decorative program for the Piazzale dell'Impero called for a total of 23 compositions.⁵⁴²

The documentation preserved in Spilimbergo's archives offers yet another account for it clearly enumerates the execution of 19 compositions⁵⁴³. While the records assign individual totals for the number of works created by each of the artists involved, they do not always specify the subject of each composition. Neither of these contemporary sources accurately reflects the Piazzale's current situation. A glance from the direction of the obelisk to the double rows of mosaics immediately reveals two blank panels to the left and right of the central platform.⁵⁴⁴ The total of the mosaic compositions is twenty one.

Pictures of the Piazzale in Angelo Pica's publication of 1937 add additional information and confirm the presence of only nineteen mosaic compositions. The images show that four panels in all had been left blank, not only the second ones in (panels 3 and 21 mentioned above), but also the penultimate panels (numbers 10 and 14 on my plan). Thus, Pica corroborates Spilimbergo's archival statement that only 19 compositions were carried out.

⁵⁴² Architetture 1941.

⁵⁴³ ASMF Moretti-Baldini April 17, 1937. It lists 16 panels (9x6 meters), a composition by Severini in which the series culminates at the end near the Fontana della Sfera, and the two gigantic figures (Hercules and Mars).

⁵⁴⁴ Numbers 3 and 21 on my plan.

Why then do both Bucco and Telmon identify twenty two? Bucco's misnumbering is the result of she using the original documentation in Spilimbergo without comparing it to records elsewhere. Apparently she was not aware of the documents in the private archive of Giuseppe Capizzano.

In Capizzano's archive, an inspector's certificate (*certificato di collaudo*), dated January 4, 1943 and signed both by the artist in his capacity as "construction superintendent" and the "company entrusted with the operations" under the name Evandro Monticelli in Rome, provides proof that two panels (numbers 10 and 14 on my plan) were executed much later than other mosaics. The document also refers to a previous contract, dated May 22, 1942, between the same artist and company for "carrying out the work for the remaining four panels in mosaic at the Piazzale dell'Impero in the Foro Mussolini."⁵⁴⁵ The certificate attests, therefore, that only two out of the four panels originally commissioned had been completed between May 1942 and January 1943. The inspection was conducted specifically for two panels "Battaglia" (Battle) and "Mediterraneo" (the Mediterranean).⁵⁴⁶ Work on the other two, "Nascita di Roma" (the Birth of Rome) and "Impero" (the Empire)⁵⁴⁷ had been suspended owing to a change in motif "per cambiata finalità". The iconography of the last two, which were never executed, will be discussed below in the section on Achille Capizzano.

⁵⁴⁵ Archivio Giuseppe Capizzano The document has already been considered by Maria Brunetti (1998:27). My conclusions are different.

⁵⁴⁶ Compositions 10 and 14, respectively.

⁵⁴⁷ Panels 3 and 21, respectively

Bucco, in an attempt to reconcile the documentation in Spilimbergo⁵⁴⁸ and the current state of the Piazzale (with twenty one compositions) makes several untenable claims. She says that panels 7 and 8⁵⁴⁹ should be considered as a single composition⁵⁵⁰. Also, since she did not know that two of the panels were executed by Capizzano at a later date, she attributed them to the wrong artist.

Telmon apparently depends on Bucco's scheme although Bucco's work is not cited in Telmon's bibliography. She also repeats some of Bucco's other errors".⁵⁵¹

As published in *Architettura*, Luigi Moretti's original plan called for a continuous strip of mosaics running from the obelisk to the fountain and back. The inspector's certificate (*certificato di collaudo*) from the Capizzano's archive demonstrates that at the time of the inauguration, in 1937, this strip was interrupted by four gaps. This is confirmed by the illustrations in the official publication on the Foro Mussolini of 1937 together with photographs in newspapers capturing the inaugural event.⁵⁵²

Why was the execution of these four panels suspended? It seems likely that the sheer size of the project overwhelmed the team. It is also probable, as can be

⁵⁴⁸ The nineteen panels listed and the number of panels attributed to each artist.

⁵⁴⁹ XVI and XVII in her text.

⁵⁵⁰ Bucco 1994: 354, 358.

⁵⁵¹ For example Telmon lists n. 5 as "A. Canevari: Agrarian Reform". Since the panel n. 5 shows hockey players and not a scene connected with agriculture, I believe that her labeling is based on a typographical error in Bucco's dissertation. Bucco writes (1994: 354), "the number V exalts the Fascist Agrarian Reform". Here V should be read as IV, as she rightly does only a few lines later. Telmon describes panel n.14 as: "G.Rosso, Allegory: Europe and Africa". Brunetti's publication, cited in Telmon's bibliography, rightly attributes this panel to Capizzano. Only Bucco, whose work predates Brunetti, attributes it to Rosso on the basis of stylistic analogies and Telmon may have followed Bucco's attribution. I would also note that Telmon's scheme, with a few slight differences, is practically identical, even in the mistakes, to Comuzzi's list in her unpublished dissertation.

⁵⁵² Pica 1937: 254, 256; "Il Piazzale dell'Impero è stato inaugurato al Foro Mussolini" (1937-XV, May 18) in *La Tribuna*, 117, 1. Roma; *Architettura*, 1941: 348, 350.

inferred from the correspondence between the director of the school in Spilimbergo, the architect Moretti and the various artists, that, while the overall theme of the mosaic program was prescribed - a celebration of Fascism, Mussolini and his deeds - the specific subject for each panel was left up to the creative genius of the artists. This lack of coordination also likely caused the majority of the delays, the deliveries of the sketches, the subsequent creation of the mosaic compositions, and, ultimately, their labour-intensive installation in the Foro Mussolini.

A plan preserved in ASMF appears to support this hypothesis. It is identical to the plan published by Pica in every respect except for some handwritten annotations.⁵⁵³ The plan arrived in Spilimbergo as an enclosure with a letter by Gino Severini, dated March 4, 1937. While the annotations and marginalia are not always decipherable⁵⁵⁴, there is a clearly legible “x” on each of the four panels that were completed at a later date. The accompanying letter offers more insight into the team’s *modus operandi*. Severini writes:

I am sending you a plan of the Monolith Walkway, at the head of which the composition ‘Italy Surrounded by the Arts’ is to be located. I am sending you the preparatory designs for pouncing. On this map, the central axis and the base line for the composition have been marked out with (I believe) the exact measurements. In any case, there won’t be any major discrepancies; once the mosaic is ready to be placed in its final position,

⁵⁵³ Pica 1937: tav. XXIV. Because Pica’s publication came out before the inauguration, it includes a plan that was not up-to-date and was different from the one published later in *Architettura* 1941, which shows the themes as completed.

⁵⁵⁴ For example the letters might indicate the initials of the artists, but they do not always correspond to the final location of the mosaics.

the architect Moretti will provide all the necessary instructions in greater detail.⁵⁵⁵

In the postscript, Severini adds:

I am also responsible for the first two panels, numbers 1 and 2, to go along the walkway; they must be placed where numbers 1 and 2 have been marked (in red) on the map. The compositions are already complete and the draftsman will convert them into their actual size for the final execution, all of which I will send to you as soon as possible.

The position of “Italy Surrounded by the Arts” is also indicated in red on the plan.

This composition was one of the first completed as Severini described on

February 12:

I have handed over to Tartaglia, our courier in Rome, a roll containing the full- scale designs to be pounced (spolveri) for my composition of “Italy and the Arts” [...] together with this roll I have included a gouache sketch to the scale of 1:12 showing the interplay of black and white [...] this composition belongs at the beginning on the walkway’s central axis near the fountain; all the measurements have been provided. I have also enclosed a tracing of the central athlete (representing Italy), because it provides the diagonals that will help you establish the placement of the other figures.⁵⁵⁶

This letter not only supplies evidence for the project’s progress, but also for iconography of Severini’s work. The literature on the subject refers to the central figure as Fascism, Augustus or Romulus, figures that were consistent with the overall decorative theme.⁵⁵⁷ Romulus was probably suggested because of Severini’s mosaic decorating the fountains at the Ufficio degli Archivi in EUR, with similar iconography and a clear reference to Romulus. However, Italy is

⁵⁵⁵ ASFM March 4, 1937 and ASMF Severini-Moretti, April 6 1937. The emphasis is mine. This map is preserved in the archive, but not with the letter. I was able to identify it thank to the precise information in the letter (nn. 1 and 2 in red) and by looking at the handwriting.

⁵⁵⁶ Emphasis mine. The gouache sketch is not in the archive.

⁵⁵⁷ Pirani-Tozzi 1998: 30 and Benzi 1992:75 (Fascism); Greco 1991:40 (Romulus or Augustus).

usually represented as a female figure, as in Severini's original version for this composition, in which she appeared seated upon a throne similar to depictions of the Madonna as *Maestà*.⁵⁵⁸

In this context, the decision to cast the role with a male seems particularly meaningful. The Foro Mussolini was the breeding ground for new Italians and therefore the new Italy. Severini's letter seems to indicate that the "Italy" composition served as a capping off of the end of the Piazzale towards the mosaics encircling the Fontana della Sfera. The two unfinished panels to which he refers in the postscript were placed at the ends of each mosaic strip and in relation to this central composition.

In fact, this solution does not appear to have been the only one proposed. On April 5, Capizzano writes to Baldini informing his reader that on March 31, "by the order of architect Moretti, I sent you a cartoon of my preliminary study for a "*pannello libero*" to be placed along the Monolith Walkway in Foro Mussolini."⁵⁵⁹

"*Pannello libero*" suggests that the exact position for this and perhaps other compositions had not been established before work. It appears that the overall scheme for the Piazzale was allowed to evolve, iconographically and otherwise. That it was viewed as a work in progress is further illustrated by a second letter that Capizzano sent to Baldini a few days later. When asked whether

⁵⁵⁸Pirani-Tozzi 1998:31; Imponente 1991:18. It was not possible to determine when the iconography was changed.

⁵⁵⁹ ASMF, Capizzano-Baldini, April 5, 1937

the size of the panels differed from the previously finished examples. Capizzano replied:

the reason the cartoon I have posted you turns out to have different dimensions is that the mosaic will be positioned together with another one (whose cartoon I will soon send you) at the head of the Monolith Walkway toward the Fountain. They are two compositions *volanti* (floating). We'll decide on location as far as the precise spot is concerned. [...] That said, you may most definitely carry out the work according to the cartoon's design.⁵⁶⁰

He also encloses a plan showing the relative position of the mosaics at the end of the walkway towards the fountain.

This letter is in stark contrast to Severini's annotated map and instructions, which assigned his compositions to the same location.

It appears that both artists were unaware of these conflicting plans, as shown in Severini's letter to Baldini of April 8, two days prior to Capizzano's own letter:

I have sent you...another cartoon for the mosaics on the Monolith Walkway. Together with the designs for pouncing I have included a small sketch in black and white which indicates the arrangement of the various components that make up the entire panel [...] which must be placed to the left as you look towards the fountain, and must be the first in the series of panels because that is what was decided at the beginning of this project and therefore was fashioned in accord with the central composition of Italy with the Arts. In the next few days I will send you the first panel to the right, so that you may have the beginning and the head of the walkway.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁶⁰ ASMF, Capizzano-Baldini, April 10, 1937

⁵⁶¹ ASMF, Severini-Baldini, April 8, 1937

In the same letter Severini asked to put his signature on the mosaic. While the gouache sketch is not in the archive, but it may be shown in Santuccio 1991:39 (fig. 64) and Benzi 1992:n.58 which has Severini's signature. Today the mosaic today has no signature, but this could be the result of the later restoration campaigns.

To clarify the position of the two panels, he encloses a sketch which shows the position of the fountain and the central platform, between which composition of Italy with the Arts was to be placed. To the left of the platform he indicates “the panel that I am sending you now”, and to the right, “the panel that I will send you in eight days”. The latter was actually sent on April 22, and the accompanying letter, which is interesting in its own right for its description of the panel, offers further insights into the *modus operandi* of the school and the team of artists involved in the various, simultaneous projects executed for the Foro Mussolini.

Severini writes:

as the previous one, this cartoon is also comprised of five smaller compositions arranged according to the small sketch to the scale of 1:20, enclosed. However you will only find four compositions, because the one marked with the letter D on the sketch as already been carried out and transferred onto canvas can now be found at the Foro Mussolini ready for execution. All that remains to be done is the addition of the border pattern along two of its sides, and then the removal, on site, of several red elements that were fine for the original destination, but not for this one [translator’s note: the underlining is in red in the original text and below the following annotation has also been written in red: *Sala del Duce Piscine?*]. [...] the position of this panel is to the right as you face the composition the composition of the Arts towards which the runners are oriented.⁵⁶²

It has been suggested that the composition marked with the letter D was originally intended for the Palestra del Duce located inside the Terme.⁵⁶³ It is the only panel in the entire Piazzale with several elements in “Verona pink marble” (the horse’s reins and the staff of one of the athletes) and its dimensions are identical to the one in the palestra del Duce today. The annotation in red (Sala

⁵⁶² ASMF, Severini-Baldini, April 22, 1937

⁵⁶³ Piranesi-Tozzi 1998:50; Benzi 1992:66.

Duce Piscine?) in Severini's letter appears to confirm this hypothesis, although Severini's precise instructions to remove the colored elements (the "rossi") were apparently never carried out, as they are visible today in the Piazzale.⁵⁶⁴

In the end the decision to replace the composition executed for the Palestra was probably determined by the fact that the final design for the Duce's gym - replete with a reference to Mussolini's zodiac sign, Leo - proved undoubtedly more congenial with the space's overall Herculean theme.

The decision to use Severini's tri-partite composition to cap off the walkway towards the fountain, and Capizzano's two free compositions (*pannelli liberi*) at the opposite end toward the obelisk to accompany the giant figures of Hercules and Mars greeting visitors at the entrance to the Piazzale in the Foro Mussolini was likely made in the interest of maintaining a uniform design. The issues raised by the different solutions for the compositions demonstrate that artists were not necessarily assigned to fill specific spaces along the sequence of mosaic panels. Moreover, the letters reveal that Capizzano was not called upon until a later date to contribute designs for the Piazzale. This is despite his collaboration with Moretti from the beginning, as attested by his preparatory drawings for the Piazzale's general design.

On February 12, 1937, Severini wrote to Baldini, the director of the School of Spilimbergo, that one of his compositions for the Piazzale was on its way. His

⁵⁶⁴ The sketch to which his letter refers may be the one published in Benzi (1992: 66), since it includes an annotation with nearly the same wording as Severini's letter

comment suggests that Capizzano had not yet been involved in the preparation of the panels. He says: "I believe you have already been apprised of this project on which the painters Rosso and Canevari are also working". There is no mention of Capizzano's participation. Indeed the first letter sent by Capizzano to Spilimbergo was dated April 5, 1937.

These letters also illustrate the school's working environment and the obstacles faced while executing the mosaics. The work load was overwhelming, the artists were dilatory in sending off their sketches, and there was little of coordination of themes to be depicted. This may explain why four panels were ultimately left unfinished. Two were executed at a later date by Capizzano (*Battaglia* and *Mediterraneo*) and two were never begun (*Nascita di Roma* and *Impero*). One of Moretti's letters to Baldini, sent less than a month before the inauguration, suggests that although additional panels were originally planned, for the reasons listed above, their realization came to a halt.⁵⁶⁵ Moretti asks the school to verify how many cartoons have been received up to the present. According to the information provided by the artists, there should have been three compositions by Severini, the "head composition" paired with the two panels measuring 9x6 meters; six 9x6 panels and one "cartoon representing Mars" by Canevari; seven 9x6 panels and one "cartoon representing Hercules" by

⁵⁶⁵ ASMF, Moretti to Baldini, April 17, 1937 (the letters has corrections done with a red pencil).

Rosso; one panel depicting a map of the “imperial fora”⁵⁶⁶ and another panel with a map of the Foro Mussolini by Capizzano. Moretti says:

By order of His Excellency [i.e. Ricci] you should stop working on either cartoon number 7 by Rosso or number 6 by Canevari – whichever one has not yet been started – owing to a desired change in the layout. In this way the 9x6 panels to be executed by the school amount to 16 in all.⁵⁶⁷

The letter has pencil annotations which attest that cartoon number 6 by Canevari had not yet been completed, because it had not yet arrived. The final effect and message of the Piazzale’s decorative program could be influenced or altered because one artist had not completed his assignment.

According to the original project, Moretti intended the Piazzale to narrate a story without interruption, one that celebrated the regime’s successes in a clearly legible manner both for visitors and pupils attending the Academy. The lack of time, the delays in the sketches’ deliveries - despite reminders - and the numerous commissions the school was forced to juggle enabled only a portion of the story to be told.

The last sections of mosaics were sent by the school on the evening of May 7, 1937, and Baldini wrote to Moretti: “I hope that at this point the walkway appears in its grandiose monumentality and that the remaining sections may be put into place with great ease in the course of tomorrow owing to their simplicity.”⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁶ Sic in the letter. The map actually shows the Forum Holitorium and Forum Boarium.

⁵⁶⁷ The total number of compositions executed by the school is therefore nineteen: sixteen panels, the head composition and the two giant figures of Mars and Hercules.

⁵⁶⁸ ASMF, Baldini-Moretti May 7, 1937.

The project did not resume until the anniversary celebrations were over. Another company, Monticelli in Rome, was hired to complete the work and the remaining panels were assigned to a single artist, Achille Capizzano, both to reduce the costs and to speed up the process.

Moretti clearly hoped that the project would be completed as indicated both by the commission to finish the remaining compositions and the plan published in the 1941 volume of *Architettura*, which optimistically displays an uninterrupted sequence of mosaics, instead of reproducing the actual state of the Piazzale with the four missing panels. The walkway had already been inaugurated when the plan was published in 1941. The plan appears to be identical to the one published by Pica in 1937, but closer inspection, reveals that the 1941 images reproduced for the various panels correspond rather to the actual compositions in the Piazzale. The commission for the four remaining mosaic compositions was carried out only in part because Italy's entry into the war and the unspecified "change in destination" of the works, leaving the narration incomplete.

The strong ideological and propagandistic nature of the Piazzale's decorative program, strictly linked to the purpose for which it was conceived, the celebration of both the first anniversary and the grandeur of the new Fascist empire, underwent partial changes during the final phases of production. These alterations did not result from new aesthetic or thematic considerations, but from seemingly trivial events. These documents also show how archival sources provide new insights into the history of this immense project.

After establishing an accurate number for the compositions realized by the time of the Piazzale's inauguration in 1937 (see my plan), I now turn to making accurate artistic attributions to each of them.

Giulio Rosso:⁵⁶⁹

It is unknown what prompted Rosso's hand in the Piazzale dell'Impero's decoration at the Foro Mussolini, where he executed several works, although it is not surprising since he previously fashioned the mosaics with maritime subjects for the floors of the indoor pool area inside the Palazzo delle Terme by Costantino Costantini, in addition to the mosaics decorating the inner circle of the contiguous *Fontana della Sfera*⁵⁷⁰ (displaying maritime elements and mythological figures, as we have seen possibly inspired both by the mosaics in the Baths of Caracalla and the Bathes of Neptune in Ostia) and the tapestry for the Palestra del Duce depicting Herculean themes. In 1939 Rosso and Gino Sevrini, collaborated on the decoration for the *Fontana del Palazzo dell'EUR*, furnishing six mosaics celebrating the deeds of Fascism: Building Activity (*Costruzioni*), the Reclamation of the Marshes, the Armed Forces, the Belle Arti, the Welfare Programs and, finally, Industry⁵⁷¹. Rosso's repertoire related to that in his panels in the Piazzale dell'impero, as for example between the representations of "Architecture" for the Piazzale (4) and "Building Activity" in EUR. Rosso was also

⁵⁶⁹ (Florence 1897-San Paolo del Brasile 1976)

⁵⁷⁰ Those mosaics show striking resemblances, probably due to the reuse of the same cartoons.

⁵⁷¹ Cristallini in Guidoni 1992:310-314. The mosaics are badly damaged by the constant running of the water, and therefore are now extremely difficult to read.

responsible, as shown in the documentation preserved in the ASMF, for most of the compositions in the Piazzale including the sports scenes decorating the outer band of the Fontana della Sfera.⁵⁷²

I have been able to attribute to Giulio Rosso the following seven panels, as well as the gigantic figure of Hercules

Hercules⁵⁷³

n. 4 Builders⁵⁷⁴

n. 5 Artists⁵⁷⁵

n.7 “Italy finally has its empire”

n. 8 “To Us”

n. 15 Scenes of hunting and fishing

n. 17 Sports and games⁵⁷⁶

n.19 Agricultural scenes

Rosso was also the designer of the complementary decorative elements and the written slogans (the letters refer to my edited plan):⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷² The sketches of all those compositions are preserved in ASMF. I could not find anywhere references to the author/s of the small compositions which alternate those large sport scenes, with the exception for the one attributed to Achille Capizzano (n. 33 in my edited plan). It might be Rosso since he was also responsible for all the other scenes in this area and had already decorated the Fountain.

⁵⁷³ The cartoon was sent on April 12th 1937.

⁵⁷⁴ The title was given by Rosso in a letter to Baldini on April 12, 1937: “Few days ago I sent the n.6 (costruttori/builders) and the n.7 for the walkway.” The cartoons arrived in Spilimbergo on April 11 as noted in Baldini’s the reply: “we received the cartoons for your ‘gruppo 6’ (builders) and today of your gruppo 8 (artists), on the other hand we never received the group 7”. In his correspondence Rosso never mentions a group 8, perhaps the number 8 was written in error instead of 5. The group 7 arrived on April 14.

⁵⁷⁵ Sent on February 23.

⁵⁷⁶ The mosaic is badly damaged and only few figures can be identified. Fortunately pictures of the original composition appear in Pica 1937: fig. 259 and *Architettura* 1941. Bucco attributed the panel to Rosso because the “peculiar use of *prospettiva*.”

- A) The large fasces introducing rows of compositions.
- B) The frieze with the fasces, the eagle, and the lion on both long sides of the central platform.
- C) The slogan “Molti nemici molto onore” (many enemies, much honor) flanking the “head composition” toward the fountain.
- D) The slogan “*Duce, Duce*” repeated at regular intervals along the strip between the rows of panels and the marble blocks.

The correspondence in the ASMF shows that Giulio Rosso was Moretti’s main contact for technical issues arising from the execution of the mosaics. In a response to Baldini of December 17 1936 with regard to the dimensions for the *tesserae*, he writes:

Dearest Baldini, I have submitted your queries to the architect Moretti who will answer you directly. In any case, you may consider these lines as confirmation of what the two of us have established. The main issue is our time constraints for which reason it is necessary to begin immediately with the material that you have at your disposal, using the 10x10 *tesserae* mixed with the 12x12 *tesserae* (these measurements are valid for the entire job). As far as the thickness is concerned, go ahead with those that you have at 10 and 12cm and in the meantime place an order for 15cm *tesserae*; once these are available continue the work with these thicker *tesserae*. For the surface area you may calculate between 1000 and 1500m.²

Rosso was the first artist to send a cartoon to Spilimbergo – on December 12, 1936.

⁵⁷⁷ ASMF Rosso-Baldini, April 19th 1937: “today I send the friezes, the slogans, the 3 meters high fasci and the 5 meter high giant”.

Angelo Canevari:⁵⁷⁸

Little is known about this artist, although he received other commissions for the Foro Mussolini: the mosaic decorating the outer wall of the *Casa delle Armi*, the mosaic adorning the entrance to the *Stadio dei Marmi*, the wall mosaics of the indoor swimming pool area and the mosaics with musical instruments in the Academy of Music.⁵⁷⁹

Angelo may have been introduced to Renato Ricci by Angelo's younger brother, Silvio, who was the sculptor for one of the two Hercules statues in the *Stadio dei Marmi* and for two bronzes, one depicting an archer (Arciere) and the other a Fromboliere-David, in the *Palestra del Duce*.⁵⁸⁰

According to Antonella Greco he was an “*assiduous collaborator and personal friend of Moretti's*,” for whom he designed the first cover of *Spazio*, a journal founded by the architect. His friendship with Moretti is commemorated in the monumental encaustic painting decorating the Assembly Hall of the Academy designed by Del Debbio. The painting recounts the most salient episodes in the history of the Roman Empire (the She-wolf, the killing of Remus and the building of the walls) and Moretti is celebrated and depicted as the enthroned emperor.⁵⁸¹

For the Piazzale, Canevari executed five panels, all representing sports scenes, and the giant figure of Mars, a pendant to Rosso's Hercules. The Mars has been

⁵⁷⁸ (Viterbo 1901-Roma 1955), for his life see Imponente 1991:21

⁵⁷⁹ Inaugurated after 1937, see Santuccio 1991: 56.

⁵⁸⁰ Greco 1990a=Greco 1991:40

⁵⁸¹ Greco 1987:22; Greco 1990b: 433-434.

widely but erroneously attributed to Giulio Rosso.⁵⁸² The correspondence between Baldini and Moretti in the ASMF ascribes the figure to Canevari.⁵⁸³ My attributions for the other panels are based on a comparative study of Canevari's tracings published in *Severini al Foro Italico* and archival records.

Each of the following compositions display various athletic disciplines:

n.6 Discus throwing, the still rings, the vaulting horse⁵⁸⁴

n.9 Running, wrestling, and volleyball⁵⁸⁵

n.16 Diving and swimming⁵⁸⁶

n.18 Hockey, wall bars, pole vault⁵⁸⁷

n.20 Soccer, rope climbing, archery⁵⁸⁸

Achille Capizzano:

Capizzano was likely Moretti's closest collaborator. Moretti was a dear friend as well as the godfather of his son, Giuseppe.⁵⁸⁹ After the artist's premature death, Moretti looked after his child. He was a regular guest at Capizzano's house where they would discuss their different projects. While Moretti verbalized his ideas,

⁵⁸² Telmon in Santuccio 2005:236; Greco 1991: 28; Imponente 1991:20.

⁵⁸³ ASMF Cart 71, Moretti-Baldini April 17, 1937.

⁵⁸⁴ In Canevari's correspondence this is the panel n. 5, sent on March 4, 1937. I was able to identify it with a sketch published in Pirani-Tozzi 1998. The sketch shows a n.5 in the bottom left corner.

⁵⁸⁵ Pirani-Tozzi 1998:29, 74, fig.37.

⁵⁸⁶ *Architettura* 1941: 358 (the caption referring to this mosaic has the name of Canevari as the author) and Pirani-Tozzi 1998:26

⁵⁸⁷ In Canevari correspondence this is the panel n. 3, sent before Feb. 9th 1937. The letter provide an accurate description of the composition: "Dear Baldini today I sent the cartoons for the panel n.3...in the cartoons sent, as you will see, the following elements need to be completed: the jumpers' poles...the squares where the climbers are, moreover two black little clouds, the frame for the still life which is on the side".

⁵⁸⁸ *Architettura* 1941: 358; Pirani-Tozzi 1998:29,75, fig.36.

⁵⁸⁹ I would like to thank the general Giuseppe Capizzano for sharing information about his father.

Capizzano gave them visual form, committing them to paper. Many these sketches are now in the personal collection of Giuseppe Capizzano.

While still a student, Capizzano was one of Moretti's associates, collaborating at his firm with other architects and the painter Gentilini.⁵⁹⁰ In 1933 he decorated interiors for the *Casa del Fascio* in *Montesacro*⁵⁹¹ with a program clearly inspired by the regime's projects particularly those in relation with the 'rediscovery' of Imperial Rome. The decoration is lost; but a description appeared in contemporary newspapers.

The entrance wall displayed

a view of the Via Imperiale dominated by the statues of the Caesars with a view of the sky and of Maxentius's Basilica. The main wall displayed in its center a large severe and serene figure of Roma with the symbols of the ancient and renewed Italy and had as a backdrop a large stone with the inscription *Pacata Europa Auspice Roma*....on the one side of this imposing figure there was the "Bonifica", on the other side Trajan's Market and the excavations of Imperial Rome, a symbol of our renewed fervor and pride in our sense of belonging to the ancient and splendid Fatherland. On the back wall, the name of the Duce triumphs and his work personified in the Foro Mussolini which in spirit consisted in a continuation as well as an integral part of the fora of the great Caesars.

At the same time in the early 1930's Capizzano collaborated with Moretti at the Balilla headquarters in Trastevere⁵⁹² and Piacenza, at the O.N.B. pavilion at the *Mostra delle colonie estive* held in the Circus Maximus. In 1936, he executed the fresco in the entrance hall of the *Casa delle Armi* at the Foro Mussolini, and he also contributed to the decoration for the *Palestra del Duce*, where he designed

⁵⁹⁰ Bucci-Mulazzani 2000:210; Crispolti in Brunetti 1998:12

⁵⁹¹ *Giornale d'Italia*, August 1933-XI; *Il Popolo di Roma*, Roma, 13 August 1933-XI; *Il Mattino*, Napoli, 25 August 1933-XI. See also Perugini 1966:20; Crispolti in Brunetti 1998:16.

⁵⁹² Outside of Rome, he also worked at the mosaics' designing in the G.I.L. in Piacenza and Trete.

the graffiti engraved into Mussolini's silver-laminated bureau. Capizzano draw up the plans for the Piazzale, for which he prepared "seven large cartoons ... symbolizing the myths, the origins and the successes of Rome together with their perpetuation and reflection in the Fascist era."⁵⁹³

The three panels he designed for the Piazzale, two of which were mentioned earlier, are described as follows:⁵⁹⁴

the bull and the lion grasping a globe on which the new Italian colonial empire is clearly indicated. Between the two beasts a broken tablet exhibiting part of a map of ancient Rome; at the edge of the tablet the twins are represented near the Pomerium of the nascent Urbs; opposite from them, the personification of the Tiber" (panel number 22 according to my plan).

"On the opposite side [of the central platform], as a counterpart to the imagery alluding to the origins of Rome's fortune and the final conquest, a second representation of the ancient, bearded Tiber River, a lion devouring a calf, a young horse tamer, two gymnasts and a tablet similar to the previous one [displaying] an outlined but complete map of the Foro Mussolini" (panel number 2 on my plan).

The third panel is located within the outer decorative ring encircling the *Fontana della Sfera*:

in the upper section there is an eagle about to take wing; in the middle, three figures of ancient Greek heroes are grouped together. In the lower section there is a lion that crushes a snake. (number 33 on my plan).

To these three panels, we may add the two executed after 1937

Mediterraneo -The Mediterranean (n.10 on my plan)
Battaglia -Battle (n.14 on my plan)

⁵⁹³ Perugini 1966:21; see also Brunetti 1998:27. Those sketches are now preserved in the Archivio Moretti (Archivio Centrale dello Stato -ACS) Rome.

⁵⁹⁴ Manuscript Archivio Capizzano,

The first panel depicts Neptune riding a shell pulled by hippocamps and accompanied by dolphins. In the right corner, a bearded man reclines, on a background of corals, with his hand outstretched toward two female figures opposite him. The females are seated and one (Italy) is accompanied by a Bull, while the other, with distinctive African features is accompanied by a lion.

The *Battaglia* panel depicts a battle scene on horseback with the monumental female head of Victory in the center above the scene. Given that the soldiers are on horseback without stirrups and modern attire, the event represented must refer to the past. An identification can be suggested by considering Capizzano's other projects at this time. In the same year he was creating the panels for the Piazzale he was also engaged in the competition for the Sala dei Congressi at the EUR. In the many sketches he produced for the competition, he makes reference to three historical battles: Actium, Alesia, and the defeat of Hannibal. Actium was a naval battle, but either of the others could be the subject of the *Battaglia*. The African connection of Hannibal and the destruction of Carthage would have been more appropriate to a program designed to celebrate the conquest of Ethiopia.

For the Piazzale there were also two panels that were planned but never realized:

Nascita di Roma -The Birth of Rome (n.21 on my plan)

Impero- The Empire (n.3 on my plan)

The titles assigned to the last two panels are given in the inspector's certificate, mentioned earlier, seem to have been inspired by their nearest neighbors, i.e the panels featuring the maps. The *Birth of Rome* would have complemented the

map showing the *Pomerium of the nascent Urbs* (22) (specifically the area of the Forum Boarium and Holitorium), while *The Empire* would have been the pendant to the map showing the new Rome (2), represented by the plan of the latest forum built within the boundaries of the Fascist city. Notably, the map displays the master plan for the Foro Mussolini, as it was redesigned by Moretti himself in 1936, the *Forma Ultima Fori*.

While the existing documentation offers no parallels for the composition of the *Impero*, we can suggest the iconography or themes of the *Birth of Rome* thanks to a sketch in Capizzano's archive labeled "Origini di Roma." The composition is similar to that of the panels of the Piazzale. Several scenes oriented in different directions are separated by frames with geometrical/floral motives. The artist directed the visitor's attention toward the focal point of the composition, the central platform of the piazzale. The main scene is labeled "Romolo traccia il solco" (and a man ploughing the terrain is visible) and underneath "fondazione di Roma" (the figures are not so easily discernible). Around this composition, oriented as one should walk around the panel, are some of the main episodes of early Rome: "uccisione di Romolo" (probably to be understood as "by Romulus"), the Founding of Lavinium, Gara degli Uccelli, Mars and Rhea Sylvia, the Tiber, Lupa and twins".

Capizzano's compositions, both planned and executed, shows his propensity for clarity. He himself noted,⁵⁹⁵ he wanted to be understood by the people and

⁵⁹⁵ Manuscript Archivio Capizzano.

therefore used: “an elementary symbology facilitating the reading of the compositions having a political and commemorative character.”⁵⁹⁶

Gino Severini⁵⁹⁷

According to Antonella Greco: “to this day it has not been possible to determine in what way Severini became affiliated with this enterprise, other than by way of the duke’s personal intervention, with whom he was in contact, or one of his (Severini’s) friends’ intervention, such as Oppo.”⁵⁹⁸

Before embarking on the projects at the Foro Mussolini, Severini was the only one among the artists who had extensive knowledge of mosaic techniques. He understood the technical subtleties between the execution of a work in mosaic as compared to painting. He called for a renaissance of mosaic work in one interesting chapter of his book *Ragionamenti sulle arti figurative* and the creation of a school for mosaic training.⁵⁹⁹ To promote this goal and have the opportunity to introduce his views on modern art in Italy and abroad, he attempted an audience with Mussolini himself as early as 1934 and then later in 1935 and 1938.⁶⁰⁰

His first collaboration with Luigi Moretti, and within the complex of the Foro Mussolini, was the *Palestra del Duce*, where he executed the mosaics for the

⁵⁹⁶ Sicoli in Brunetti 1998:21.

⁵⁹⁷ (Cortona 1883-Parigi 1966). On his life and career see Pirani-Tozzi 1998; Benzi 1992; Imponente 1991.

⁵⁹⁸ Greco 1987: 23.

⁵⁹⁹ Greco 1987: 21.

⁶⁰⁰ Greco 1990b:431-455.

gym's entrance way and the walls of its resting area. That he executed the following panels within the Piazzale has never been questioned:

n. 12 Italy Surrounded by the Arts

n. 13 Javelin throwers and bucolic scenes

n.11 runners, steeplechase, a hand with a chronometer.

The overall decorative program for the Foro Mussolini and the Piazzale dell'Impero was the fruit of collaborative efforts among a new generation of emerging artists and architects, the most prominent of whom was Luigi Moretti. Orchestrating the selection of these players, Renato Ricci played a decisive role in his capacity as head of the O.N.B., the institution responsible for the creation of the Foro Mussolini which the high-ranking party members would call their home. The selection criteria together with the motivations behind Ricci's choice of one artist over another remain unknown, but it is clear that they were not based on the results of a public contest or open competition as was otherwise customary at that time. The outcome for the program was nevertheless a homogeneous one, with a discernable thematic pattern (consisting of the lion, maps, Icarus and Hercules). The very repetition would suggest that Renato Ricci regarded each of these elements as integral to conveying the values and messages embodied by this urban site, its facilities, and their functions. It can be argued that these same themes were endorsed by the Fascist Regime given the significant and

propagandistic nature of the Foro Mussolini. Like Marcus Agrippa, Renato Ricci exercised his influence to create a new artistic vocabulary, and thus became Mussolini's *longa manus*: "*in primis res a Duce mire gestas memoriae proderent.*"⁶⁰¹

To what extent was Mussolini directly involved in the choice of the designs for the mosaic decorative program? A definitive answer is impossible mainly because of the loss of the ONB's archives, which might have held of correspondence or other documents attesting to his voice in the matter. There are at least two instances in which Mussolini directly intervened in the decision-making process. In the minting of the new coins dedicated to the Empire he used his initial to seal his approval for a theme and he played a role in the organization of the MAR, as shown by Giglioli's reference to personal meetings and discussions with the Duce. It is safe to say that Mussolini approved of the imagery proposed for the Piazzale, because it had appeared in earlier projects, such as in the Casa delle Armi, and would be seen in later ones, such as the mosaics at the Ostiense station and in EUR. Private objects such as medals would also come to share the same imagery of the snake and Hercules.

An ancient parallel to this kind of endorsement might be the case of Augustus, whose direct involvement in the numerous projects that he sponsored is also not certain. As noted by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, iconography is often not the direct choice of the emperor, but rather the offering of symbols of respect to the

⁶⁰¹ These words are taken from the dedicatory parchment of the Foro Mussolini, written by A.G. Amatucci, and placed in the foundation of the obelisk. The text appears in Pica 1937:104.

emperor himself: images were chosen with the expectation of pleasing or flattering the head of the State.⁶⁰² The selection of this vocabulary, was therefore, not the direct action of the head of the state, but rather his passive or tacit acceptance of the proposals. Iconography that was less agreeable likely disappeared fairly quickly. For the population, the viewers, the imagery cemented and further augmented acceptance of their leader and fostered a belief in his abilities.

An interesting distinction between early imperial and Mussolini's propaganda rests in the latter's choice to use the same vocabulary both in the public and in the private sphere. Until the end, the duce was convinced of the people's devotion to him, and this prompted him to stress his possession of supernatural powers. He was Hercules in his private gymnasium as well as on the badges of the ONB, worn everyday by the new generations of Italians in whom he wished to instill unswerving loyalty.

Conclusions

To this day, the city of Rome impresses visitors with the co-existence of its ancient ruins and modern buildings. The Piazza Venezia, in particular, concentrates in a relatively small space what ancient Rome meant for modern Italy. Alongside the historically rich site of the Imperial Fora, testament to the

⁶⁰² Wallace-Hadrill 1986.

city's glorious past, is the massive presence of the Victor Emmanuel Monument, built to celebrate the first king of a new nation. Antiquity thus displayed is, however, the result of an artificial image of Rome, the embodiment of an ideal and the result of intensive excavation campaigns conducted during the Fascist period. The city of Rome, with its physical remains and historical ideals, was used during the Risorgimento to create and promote a sense of national identity. It is significant that one of the main events for the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the unification of Italy was an exhibition on Rome, to which each region contributed casts and copies of Roman artifacts from its territory. One of the first bills to be proposed upon unification⁶⁰³ focused on the protection of Italy's cultural patrimony.

Although he initially expressed an aversion towards the capital city, Mussolini soon came to understand Rome's potential for his cause and he learned to capitalize on the city's ideological patrimony by elaborating upon a myth, *Romanitas*, that was already present in the Italians' collective memory. With Mussolini, *Romanitas* came into daily life in Italy. Widely circulated objects, such as coins and postage stamps, were constant reminders of the ideals embodied by the concept of *Romanitas*, and created a visual vocabulary that was perpetuated throughout Italy thanks to serial production. This Roman rhetoric also found expression in school reforms, as a result of which history, particularly Roman history, became an important subject. The conquest of Ethiopia represented a major turning point in the revival of Rome's imperial past.

⁶⁰³ By Cesare Correnti in 1872.

Subsequently, parallels were drawn more and more frequently between the Fascist present and antiquity. The military victory coincided with the celebration of the Augustan Bimillenary, and the *Mostra Archeologica della Romanità* - planned in 1932 - was used to underscore the message that Fascism not only represented a return to the Roman Empire, but also its natural continuation. The Fascist leader began to be viewed as a new emperor, even if he never actually acquired the title.

In this light, the regime's achievements, whether they pertained to the reclamation of marsh land to found new colonies or the institution of welfare programs for women and children (the OMNI and the ONB), were interpreted according to ancient precedents or prototypes. One of the principal manifestations of Mussolini's dictatorship was in Rome's built environment. The building projects he pursued ranged from "freeing the ancient monuments from their inferior surroundings," as in the case of the Mausoleum of Augustus or the Imperial Fora, to the urban planning of entirely new sites and neighborhoods, such as the EUR.

The Foro Mussolini was among the most significant of these large-scale projects. Considered above all a breeding ground for future generations of loyal Fascist Italians, the Foro Mussolini also recruited new artistic talent, which ultimately forged a new attitude toward the relationship between art and architecture. Moreover locating the Foro in the northernmost part of the city automatically established the site as the main point of entry to the city from that direction. The

Foro led visitors from the modern imperial model to the recently excavated relics of its antecedents in the heart of Rome.

The Imperial Fora is one of the most eloquent public expressions of the relationship between political power and propaganda, in which individual patronage served as self-aggrandizement. These ancient architectural complexes are characterized by a carefully orchestrated synergy between the functions of their architectural forms and the iconography of their decorative programs. They create both obvious and subtle cross-references that communicate the sanctioned version of how the patron is to be remembered, as exemplified by the Forum of Augustus. Not only in its name the Foro Mussolini harkens back to these ancient architectural forms, most remarkably in its own monumental display of complex decorative program.

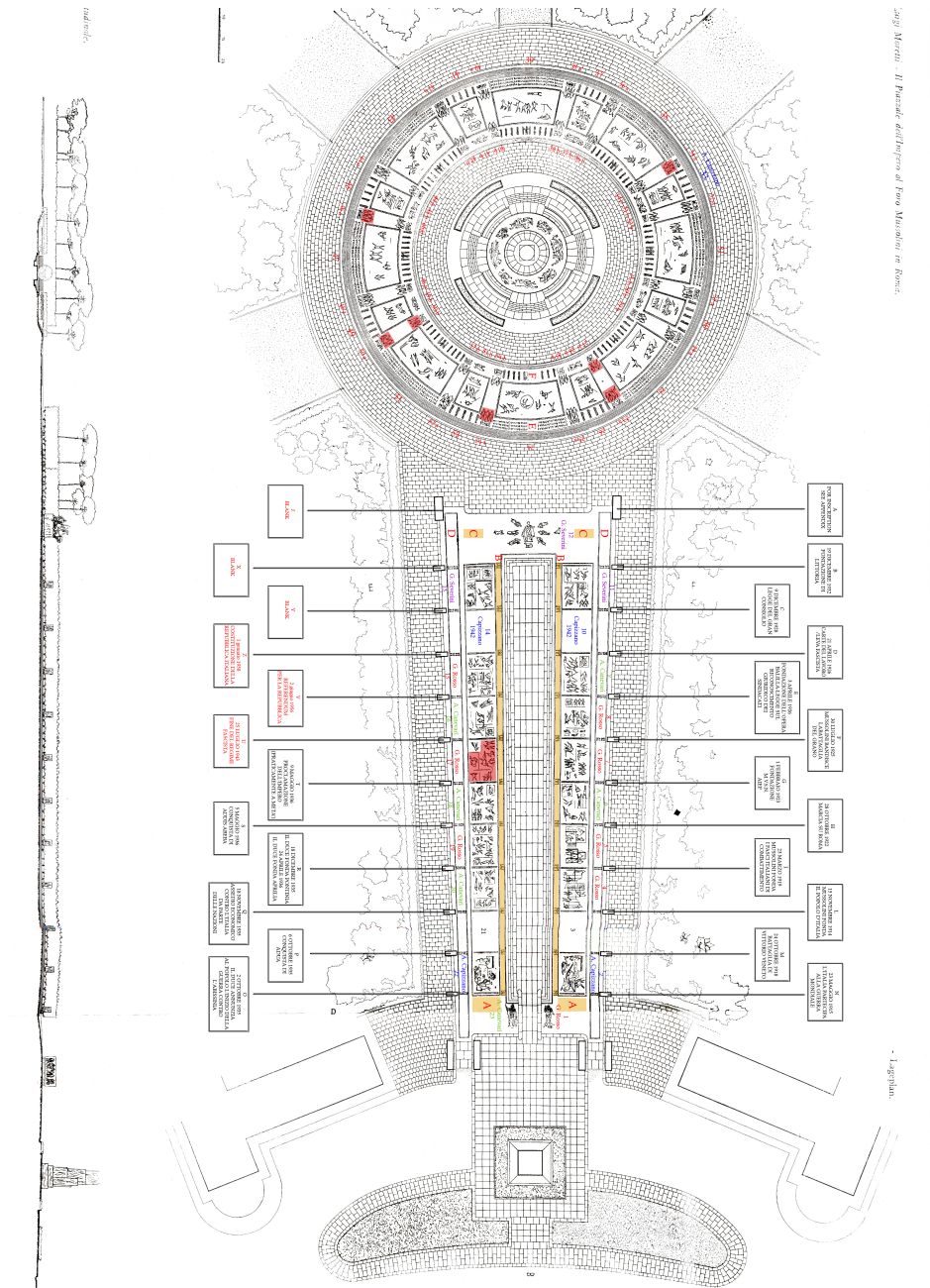
Within the Foro Mussolini, the messages conveyed through the mosaics in the *Forum Imperii* functioned effectively in that aggregate of Fascist propaganda by exploiting the images already present in the collective memory, a memory established through the constant assimilation of various media relating Mussolini to Augustus, which also received visual expression in this decorative program.

The events held in honor of the bimillenary cemented the associations between Mussolini and the famous founder of the empire, giving back to the Duce some of the titles and honors he believed he deserved. Although Mussolini was unable to officially use the title of emperor, the continual parallels that were drawn between him and Augustus effectively conferred this title upon him by association,

becoming a sort of *cognomen ex virtutis*. The celebratory events on the first anniversary of the newly founded empire afforded the opportunity to express the Fascist assimilation of ancient Rome's political culture and ambitions through the design of the decorative program in mosaic. The *Forum Imperii* became a vehicle to exalt the "myth of the Duce" and pursue his propagandistic agenda.

Plan elaboration: Arch.Giulia Rotelli

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