

ARCHAEOLOGY, ARCHITECTURE AND THE USE OF ROMANITÀ
IN FASCIST ITALY*

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Abstract: *After Mussolini has become the leader of Italy, Romanità increasingly starts to invade fascist propaganda. Romanità helped the promotion of imperial policies of the regime and in fact meant that the „spirit of the ancient Romans” was reborn in modern Italians. The Mostra Archeologica of 1911 played an important role in the promotion of ancient Rome and it’s values among the modern Italians. The Fascists used even further the concept of Romanità. By reshaping Rome and promotion through exhibitions of Augustus they tried to connect themselves with the founder of the Roman Empire. The glorious traditions of imperial Rome were reused to give legitimacy to a dictator who, increasingly, considered himself the incarnation of Augustus, but ultimately failed.*

Rezumat: *Autorul prezintă modul în care propaganda mussoliniană a utilizat simbolurile și valorile vechii Rome, prin promovarea conceptului de Romanità, pentru a oferi legitimitate regimului fascist.*

The monumental nature of the fascist *Romanità*, together with the fact that the center of this Roman revival was based on Rome itself, obscured other tentative approaches toward the Medieval or Renaissance past of interwar Italy. After Mussolini has become the leader of Italy, *Romanità* increasingly starts to invade fascist propaganda. *Romanità* helped the promotion of imperial policies of the regime and in fact meant that the „spirit of the ancient Romans” was reborn in modern Italians.

When one looks back in time, in the times of the First Roman Republic (proclaimed on February 15, 1798, under French control), he can

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notice how on the republican official seal are represented both the Phrygian cap of the liberated slaves and the fasces of the ancient Roman lictors². The modern Roman Republic, little sister of the French Republic, was constituted as a consequence of the military intervention of the the French Revolution. It was supposed that the new Republic would recreate the glory of the ancient one and that a new Rome would be re-born from the ashes, as the legendary Phoenix. Propaganda motifs related to antiquity could be seen on the new republican banknotes, issued by the Banco di S. Spirito in Rome and Sacro Monete della Pieta' di Roma – multiple fasces that framed the banknote, Phrygian caps in all four corners and the legionary eagle surrounded by a wreath³. On the upper left, there was the seal of the Roman Republic, whilst on the upper right, the seal of the Committee of Accountants has a woman in ancient clothing – most probably a personification of Rome – with fasces in her left hand and a spear with a Phrygian cap on the top in her left (Figure 1). These banknotes would be in circulation until Napoleon was finally defeated at Waterloo, in 1815, when the French withdrew from Italy and the old order was restored. Thus, the Republican banknotes lost all their value and ceased to exist.

In 1848, the Second Roman Republic was proclaimed (1849 – 1850). During the short interval between the proclamation and the swift French intervention in support of the Pope, there was issued a series of republican banknotes, where the motifs of fasces and legionary eagles were used once more⁴. In the following period, in the context of Italian unification movement, the myth of a revived Rome gradually took ground⁵. By the end of the nineteenth century, archaeological excavations

² SANDROCK 2011, in http://www.thecurrencycollector.com/pdfs/Italian_Paper_Money_Prior_to_Unification_-_Part_II.pdf, 14. 01. 2012.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ GILKES 2006, 36.

were carried out in the very centre of Rome, directed by Giacomo Boni⁶ and Rodolfo Lanciani⁷, which „brought to light the truth of Rome’s imperial age and delved into its mythical origins”⁸.

On the other hand, by the beginning of the 20th century Italy witnessed two antithetic nationalistic tendencies, with different attitudes on the Classical heritage – 1. the Futurist movement, which violently expressed a modernist Italianism, characterized by the struggle against traditions and archaeology (see the works of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Umberto Boccioni, Giovanni Papini) and 2. the idea of Italy as heir of the ancient Roman Empire, promoted by the Italian Nationalist Association (*Associazione Nazionalista Italiana*) led by Enrico Corradini. With the merging of the Nationalist Association with the National Fascist Party, in 1923, „ancient Rome became the mythical historical archetype of the new Italia: the myth of Rome, recovered in a modernistic key, permeated the cult and the liturgies of fascism, to the point that the regime tried to make the Italians the Romans of modernity, a people of citizen – soldiers devoted to the religion of state”⁹.

From this point of view, an important role was played by the *Mostra Archeologica*, an exposition organized by Rodolfo Lanciani in 1911, part of a larger series of exhibitions set in order to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Rome as capital of the unified Italy¹⁰. The exposition coincided with the Libyan War (1911 – 1912), unwittingly becoming a source of legitimacy for Italian claims over North Africa as a former Roman province. The aim of the *Mostra*, organised in the *Terme di Diocleziano* in Rome, was to show the sheer size of the Empire, by inviting in the exposition all the representatives of the 36 provinces of the former

⁶ Giacomo Boni was specialized in Roman architecture; since 1898 he was appointed Director of the archaeological excavations in Forum Romanum, which he directed until his death in 1925. He was a pioneer of stratigraphical research in Forum Romanum.

⁷ Rodolfo Lanciani was Professor of Roman topography at Università di Roma (1878 – 1927), when he did archaeological researches in the center of Rome. His best known work is *Forma Urbis Romae* (1893 -1901), a set of 46 maps of ancient Rome, on scale 1: 1000.

⁸ GILKES 2006, 36.

⁹ MUNZI 2006, 79.

¹⁰ See for details and a full description of the *Mostra Archeologica*, PALOMBI 2009, 74 sq.

Roman Empire. Another purpose was to show the Roman influence, both on public and private life, in the provinces and the degree of Romanization they attended¹¹. The objectives declared by Lanciani in his inaugural discourse were threefold: to recompose the shape of the Roman Empire, by asking every of the 36 former provinces to provide a token of Roman beneficence for the respective province, especially in the field of public monuments. Then, to give back to the provinces the artistic treasures (as copies, of course) the Italians erected since the Renaissance, in order to enrich the local museums. Three, the tentative to re-compose the monuments or statuary groups which the „hostile vicissitudes“ altered or dispersed. To these declared objectives, Lanciani added a refined valorisation of the archaeological discoveries made by Italians, home and abroad¹². Lanciani knew how to conceive an exhibition that, despite evident nationalistic spirit of exalting Roman Empire and by analogy the Italian monarchy, still could include reference to the non – Roman elements upon which the Empire was built, as distinct from his former student Giglioli¹³, who did the opposite in installations of the future *Museo dell' Impero*. The principal message of exhibition propaganda remained that of Rome's pre-eminent civilising mission in overcoming barbarism, and the founding role of Augustus.

The exhibition begun with the *Dea Roma*, followed immediately by a room entirely dedicated to Augustus, giving to the founder of the Empire an honor denied to all other emperors. The subsequent rooms included objects arranged according to their provenance in the ancient provinces, with works from the palace of Diocletian at Split (Croatia), from the Tropaeum Traiani at Adamclisi (Romania), and from the theater at Orange (France). At the end, however, the Roman civilisation did not

¹¹ STRONG 1939, 137.

¹² PALOMBI 2009, 86.

¹³ Giulio Quirino Giglioli (1886–1956), was a former student and assistant of Lanciani. Since 1923, he held positions at the University of Rome, where he taught ancient topography and Classical art history. He was also archaeologist, being involved in the excavations from the Forum of Augustus and the Mausoleum of Augustus and Etruscan sites as well. He was closely related to the Fascist building projects in Rome and one of the regime's main collaborators in the use of archeology as propaganda.

remain unchallenged in its superiority: for example, the Greek government sent hundreds of plaster casts, including the sarcophagus of Hagia Triada. The show did represent barbarian culture alongside the Roman, but it was taken for granted that the Latins dominated. All of this linked with the political climate of colonial expansion promoted by the government of Giovanni Giolitti. However, the civilising message and the geographic organisation of the materials were not strictly connected. The message only became clear to the observer on the basis of single objects that could lead back to the thematic context¹⁴.

In connection with the Italian expansion in North Africa, there occurs the crystallization of the notion of *Romanità*, closely related to the idea of a revival of imperial Rome. Also, around 1900, the ancient concept of *Mare Nostrum* (referring the Mediterranean) made it's way in the Italian press¹⁵. Thus, the Risorgimento was redesigned as „a historical necessity” brought about by (divine) providence, in order to secure the success of the „civilizing mission”, which was held to be the „universal” vocation of the Roman – Italian race¹⁶.

The discontent generated by the end of WW1, when Italy felt betrayed by her allies at the peace talks, combined with the aggressive rise of social unrest – many of them fueled by Socialists and Bolsheviks – have led to a revolutionary state which of finally the Fascists took advantage to take over the government¹⁷. This could be achieved mainly through the paramilitary style of organization that the Fascist movement has benefitted. Although the movement's founder Benito Mussolini, a controversial figure – firstly a Socialist, then an Annunzian, finally *Il Duce* of the Fascist National Party¹⁸ - was not an admirer of historical disciplines, however he recognized their value, taking some elements of

¹⁴ BARBANERA 2008, 175.

¹⁵ SANDROCK 2011, [http://www.thecurrencycollector.com/pdfs/Italys Colonial Empire - A Paper Money Trail.pdf](http://www.thecurrencycollector.com/pdfs/Italys%20Colonial%20Empire%20-%20A%20Paper%20Money%20Trail.pdf), 14. 01. 2012.

¹⁶ VISSER 1992, 7.

¹⁷ NOLTE 2009, 422 – 484 describes in detail the rise of Fascism and Mussolini in the troubled context that followed the conclusion of the WW1.

¹⁸ NOLTE 2009, 422 - 484; Bosworth, 2002, 100 – 144, for the political evolution of Mussolini.

organization from the Roman legion. Thus, the Fascist *squadre* were organized on a paramilitary model – in the directives for organization („Direttive per l’organizzazione delle squadre fasciste”), issued in early 1922, the emphasis was on hierarchical organization, on a military model, partially using the ancient Roman military ranks. Thus, a *squadra* (20 – 50 men) was divided in *squadriglie* of 4 members, led by a „caporale”; 4 *squadre* formed a *centuria*, led by a „centurione”; 4 centuries formed a cohort, led by a „seniore”, and 3 – 9 cohorts formed a legion, led by a „console”¹⁹.

The appeal to the values of ancient Rome and the more pointed promotion of *Romanità* will be more visible in the Italian foreign policy, especially after the proclamation of the „Italian Empire” (May 9, 1936). Not being any novelty, *Romanità* was a concept used since the pre-war era, in order to promote conservative and reactionary ideas both in press and political debate²⁰. The concept has gained even greater importance by juxtaposition with *Italienità*, which stressed the „awakening” of the Italian spirit²¹. *Romanità* has become important especially in legitimizing the Italian conquests in Africa and the Balkans – while in Italy, the concept has been linked to an even closer association of Mussolini with the founder of the Roman Empire, Augustus. From this point of view, Mussolini’s speech from December 31, 1925, which compares the Augustan and modern Rome, is indicative: „In five years, Rome must appear marvelous to all the people of the world: vast, ordered, powerful as it was in the time of the first emperor Augustus.”²²

In the following years, Mussolini’s identification with Augustus will be strengthened and refined in two propagandistic directions: the Duke will emulate the politics of Augustus, and his apologists will create parallels between Fascist Italy and Augustan Rome. To do so there was a re-interpretation of history, being created, for example, parallels between

¹⁹ NOLTE 2009, 579.

²⁰ BEGG 2006, 20.

²¹ GILKES 2006, 39.

²² KOSTOF 1978, 284.

„the Roman revolution“ (133 – 27 BC) and the Risorgimento²³; in the same way the „Roman revolution“ preceded the Augustan Principate, in modern times, the Risorgimento preceded the ascension of Fascism and the foundation of a new Empire, whose leader – *Il Duce* – was the modern equivalent of Augustus²⁴. In the same order of ideas, the Fascist ideology used propaganda motifs taken from the Augustan one – such as the myth of the founder/saviour of the state, the emphasis on reviving the traditions, or the motif of the citizen – soldier and peasant in the same time²⁵. Moreover, certain similarities with the establishment of the Principate were highlighted – in particular that both the Principate and the Fascist Era brought order after a period of crisis. From this point of view, Roger Griffin had done an excellent analysis on the Fascist propaganda around the palingenetic myth.²⁶ However, since 1925, the Fascist elite has increasingly highlighted the similarities with the Augustan era, on Augustus as forerunner of Mussolini and the focus on *Romanità* as an ideological concept. In the same year, Carlo Galassi Paluzzi founded the *Istituto (Nazionale) di Studi Romani* in Rome. Paluzzi was especially close to the Minister of National Education, Giuseppe Bottai, who was interested in the use of ancient Rome in Fascist propaganda. Although the Institute was not, essentially, a Fascist institution, many of its researchers (Paluzzi included) were sympathetic to Fascism, which has facilitated the collaboration in promotion of a cult of Rome as part of the Fascist propaganda²⁷. The Institute was entrusted with the task of formulating a 'coherent fascist classicism', arguing that Fascism was the 'rebirth' of the ancient civilization and spreading the ideology through university lectures and scholarly magazines such as „Roma“.

On the other hand, the archaeological investigations – in Rome, Italy and the rest of the Empire – focused on the Classical archaeological

²³ VISSER 1992, 14.

²⁴ NOLTE 2009, 563: even since December 1923, Mussolini declared that between Garibaldi and the Black Shirts there existed a “ideal and historical continuity” and that the Fascism completes the Risorgimento.

²⁵ See for details OLARIU 2005, 16 sq.

²⁶ GRIFFIN 1996, 26 – 33.

²⁷ THOMAS 2003, <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2003/2003-06-39.html>, 01. 04. 2012.

strata – in order to enhance the parallelism. The researches has been well represented in the media, where “film footages chronicling excavation, restoration and construction projects at sites such as Ostia Antica, the Pantheon, the Markets of Trajan, the imperial forums, the Via dei Fori Imperiali, EUR, and the new university was edited into provocative newsreels and distributed to cinemas throughout the country”²⁸.

Two years later, the *Museo dell’ Impero* was inaugurated, under the direction of Giulio Quirino Giglioli, a former assistant of Rodolfo Lanciani, Etruscologist and art historian. Giglioli also investigated, with A. M. Collini, the crypt of the Mausoleum of Augustus (1926 – 1930), as part of a new systematic program for enhancement of the area and display of the ancient monuments²⁹.

The period was marked by expansion of the archaeological excavations in the Roman Forum, where the Classical stratum was privileged at the expense of the subsequent ones. The need for propaganda early display of ancient monuments led to a certain type of research involving quick cleaning („topographical excavation”)³⁰, to expose the ancestors to the contemporary, whom they „inspired”. This type of research unfortunately led to the disappearance of monuments of later ages – several churches and convents disappeared, the Velia Hill was partially excavated; the Alessandrino district, which contained, among others, the house of the famous 19th century antiquarian Francesco Martinetti – itself a monument of architecture – was erased and its inhabitants relocated to the outskirts of Rome. Similarly, Mussolini’s plan for remodelling and systematization of Rome, to its transformation into a capital worthy of the new Italian Empire led, with the creation of *Via dell’*

²⁸ MEDINA LASANSKY 2004, 8.

²⁹ KOSTOF 1978, 285.

³⁰ Carlo Anti was the main promoter of this type of archaeological research. His scientific activity was, since 1922, closely linked with the University of Padova and he was a enthusiastic collaborator of Mussolini. Since December 16, 1943, he was nominated as Direttore Generale at the Direzione Generale delle Arti in the newly created Repubblica Sociale Italiana.

Impero, to the partial obliteration of the Roman imperial *fora*³¹. The artifact recording also was affected, most of them, now at the *Museo della Civiltà Romana*, being without precise data on the context and location of their discovery, which makes almost impossible any scientific research on these pieces.

Other projects, such as the creation of the *Piazzale Augusto Imperatore*, were part of the grandiose plan of rebuilding Rome as the capital of the New Italian Empire. The ruins of the glorious ancestors would witness the rise of their offspring as a new world power. But the approach was debatable. The „glorious ruins“ were uncovered, but at the cost of later archaeological strata, which were totally neglected. Also, the recording of the findings was poor if not totally neglected.

Such a project was the creation of the *Piazzale Augusto Imperatore*, designed to be a landmark of Rome, which would combine the glory of the past and present. The Mausoleum of Augustus and its restoration were supposed to be the central pieces in the project exposition was to be held on the occasion of the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Augustus (1937). The restoration was to be part of a larger project, which aimed to create a *piazzale* where Antiquity, Christianity, and the Fascist Age would be reflected, by reshaping the entire area. In Mussolini's view, the project – which included, besides creating a *piazzale*, a wide passage towards Corso – would have a threefold use: history and beauty, traffic and hygiene (by traffic de-congestion in the area, the „cleaning“ of it – which meant the demolition of 120 houses and the cleaning of c. 27 000 m². The Duke assured his auditorium that every house would be photographed – inside and outside – in order to preserve the memory of the condemned buildings. Also, the social benefits were not negligible, since it offered jobs for workers for three years (as it would last the project)³². Restoration of the Mausoleum of Augustus, under the direction of Antonio Muñoz, was completed in time to celebrate the bimilennary of

³¹ <http://heritage-key.com/rome/dei-fori-imperiali-mussolinis-fascist-route-through-rome>, 01. 04. 2012.

³² KOSTOF 1978, 270: Mussolini's discourse, October 22 1934, before the start of clearance work around the Mausoleum of Augustus.

Augustus. The final version was the one proposed by Guglielmo Gatti, but received criticism from the politicians, due to the emphasis on dry restoration, only of archaeological nature³³. Other buildings that were to be erected in the Piazzale, which was to be used as „space definers” have undergone many alterations from the original design. From this point of view, the architect responsible for the final design of the Piazzale, Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo, „benefitted” of Mussolini’s indications (he changed the project according to his inspiration or during his „work” or ceremonial visits he made on the site), of the governors of Rome (Giuseppe Bottai, 1935 – 1936; Pietro Colonna, 1936 – 1939; Giangiacomo Borghese, 1939 – 1943) and of the principal sponsor of the project, INFPS („Istituto Nazionale Fascista della Provvidenza Sociale”)³⁴. Morpurgo’s final project was published in 1936. In the same complex, there was supposed to function a subterranean museum, where the reconstructed *Ara Pacis* would be displayed.

Ara Pacis, the second focal point of the plaza, was dedicated on January 30, 9 BC, to celebrate Augustus triumphal return (*adventus*) from his visit in Spain and Gaul in 13 BC³⁵. The building originally fell outside the *pomoerium*, on Via Flaminia, on the east side of Campus Martius. Built in the flood plain of Tiber, the altar came to be covered in centuries by ca. 4 m of silt. Some fragments belonging to the *Ara Pacis* were discovered in 1568 under the basilica San Lorenzo in Lucina and found their way to Villa Medici in Rome, to Vatican, to Palazzo Uffizi in Florence or in the Louvre Palace (Paris). In 1859, other fragments belonging to the shrine were identified under Teatro Olimpia (later Cinema Nuovo Olimpia). In 1937, due to the celebration of the bimillenary of Augustus, the Italian government decided to rescue these fragments by using the most advanced excavation techniques. Thus, in order not to jeopardize Cinema Nuovo Olimpia’s stability, the basement was frozen, the altar’s fragments taken and the remaining spaces were filled with concrete.

³³ KOSTOF 1978, 299.

³⁴ KOSTOF 1978, 289 – 291.

³⁵ HOLLIDAY 1990, 544.

Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo, in charge with the creation of *Piazzale Augusto Imperatore*, was also charged with the re-creation of *Ara Pacis* near the Mausoleum of Augustus. Besides Mausoleum and *Ara Pacis*, three churches were to be spared from the pickaxe: S. Carlo al Corso, S. Rocco and S. Girolamo degli Schiavoni (now known as S. Girolamo degli Illirici), also as a consequence of the recent Concordate concluded between Mussolini and the Papacy (in 1929). On this occasion, a new rapprochement was made between *Il Duce* and the founder of the Roman Empire. As justly appreciated Neil Leach: „Clearly, a common denominator between the Church and the fascist regime was found not only in the field of moral values but also in the imperial ambitions of *Il Duce*. From a Catholic point of view, Italian imperialism was in fact justified on the basis of Aquinas' doctrine of „the just cause“, often used to corroborate Mussolini's aspirations to expand Italy's „spazio vitale“ and in terms of demographic expansion”³⁶.

On the other hand, the new buildings belonging to INFPS (*Fabbricando A* and *B*, intended for office buildings) and the *Collegio degli Illirici* (rebuilt in the period 1938 – 1939), were conducted to assess the rationalist architectural style so much appreciated by the Fascist regime and decorated with reliefs and mosaics that glorified the Fascist Age and its values. Thus, the *piazzale* was meant to be a blend of ancient imperial glory, Roman Catholic Christian values and the triumph of the Fascist era.

In fact, however, the *piazzale* creation marked the involvement of politics and the cheapness of realization. Instead of Morpurgo's elegant, simple and classical design on the *Ara Pacis* Museum, there was used a project altered at the last minute by a commission of engineers, who used cheap materials: „Originally intended to be built of glass and marble, the pavilion was constructed hurriedly and cheaply of glass, concrete and fake porphyry. It provided limited protection from urban pollution, the severe temperature changes in Rome, and other environmental factors. The side windows provided generous light but the ceiling was dark and low”³⁷. As for the „liberation“ of the Mausoleum, ca. 27 000 m² of debris had to be

³⁶ NOTARO 2005, 63.

³⁷ <http://cdm.reed.edu/ara-pacis/meier/piazza-augusto-imperatore/pavilion/>, 06. 04. 2012.

cleaned, with 126 houses, whose's dwellers were relocated on the outskirts of Rome³⁸, but the restoration, which was intended to be a propaganda masterpiece, did not go as planned (another option to restore the Mausoleum, proposed by the journalist and art critic Ugo Ojetti, suggested addition of a ring of statues of „the great Augustans” – Agrippa, Livia, Vergilius, Germanicus, Maecenas, Horatius, Titus Livius). The same Ojetti criticized the whole project of the *piazzale*, fearing that the issue would be too monotonous and that the public would have benefitted more from the presence of an auditorium in the Mausoleum, than the archaeological monument³⁹.

The largest building on the north side (*Fabbricato A*) provided office space for the INFPS, which financed the project. The Latin inscription at the far end of the building referred to the “extraction of the Mausoleum from the shadow of the centuries,” the reconstruction of the *Ara Pacis*, and the emergence of new streets, buildings, and churches in place of the former congestion. Two winged victories holding the fasces flanked the inscription. Above, were depictions of various kinds of work on either side of the central panel, which featured the river Tiber holding up Romulus and Remus with the she-wolf beneath. The same façade included further illustrations of Roman and fascist military prowess. At one end were depictions of ancient military artifacts such as helmets, shields, bows, and arrows. At the opposite end were modern weapons and motifs.

Ironically, the message of peace permeated the piazza. The Emperor Augustus established the *Pax Romana*, and his *Ara Pacis*, or Altar of Peace, would be the chief attraction along with the mausoleum. The building containing the *Collegio degli Illirici* housed a seminary for Croats and had mosaic panels on the top story celebrating Christ as Prince of Peace, PRINCIPIS PACIS⁴⁰.

Spiro Kostof came to this conclusion in his study of the *piazzale*: “But whatever the circumstances of its creation, the *piazzale* is not a good

³⁸ KOSTOF 1978, 270.

³⁹ KOSTOF 1978, 299.

⁴⁰ PAINTER JR. 2005, 74.

example of political art. Its aim is diffuse, both because the iconographic content to be broadcast was diffuse and also because the design of the *piazzale*, as it finally emerged, was diffuse. Romans were already cognizant of this kind of historical associationism through the full range of propaganda machinery used by the regime. What is doubtful is that the *piazzale* could sharpen the familiar message or add to it a new dimension of meaning. ...Its aim as political art had been to use relics of the Augustan age to lend authority to Fascist achievement. The contest, at least in the visual sense, was never really joined. The Fascist side of the balance is too weak: what we are conscious of is the Augustan substance. Our opinion of Augustus is not affected by the association with Mussolini, and our opinion of Mussolini is not enhanced. The Duce yields to the emperor and is lost. The Piazzale, in the end remains a colossal mistake."⁴¹

Another opinion states: "Undoubtedly, the *Piazzale Augusto Imperatore*, one of the largest squares in Rome, must have had its propaganda impact at the time, although the result was not equal to the expectations from both a scientific and an imaginative one"⁴².

In 1936, when fascist Italy has become an "empire", explicit references to the virtuousness of ancient Rome's imperial expansion can be made. This is given an additional boost by the prospect of 1937-1938, the year of the bimillenary celebration of emperor Augustus: through the organisation of a vast exposition (*Mostra Augustea della Romanità*), as well as through conferences, radio programmes and even stamps, the latter was lavishly commemorated as the emperor of peace, empire, law and order. The regime made ample use of Augustus to increase its popularity, even going so far as to distribute free train tickets to allow people from all over the country to visit the exposition⁴³.

The celebrations associated to the bimillenary represented the top of Fascist identification with *Romanità* and underlined Mussolini's increasing tendency to identify with an imperial imagery. Also, the

⁴¹ KOSTOF 1978, 322.

⁴² NOTARO 2005, 63.

⁴³ NELIS 2008, 142.

celebrations were a landmark in the Fascist effort to transform Rome into a political centre of a new born world power.

In the center of these celebrations stood the Exhibition dedicated to the Augustan bimillenary, *Mostra Augustea della Romanità*. The initiator of the exhibition, Giulio Quirino Giglioli, former assistant of Rodolfo Lanciani, Etruscologist and at that time, Professor of Archaeology and History of Greek and Roman Art at the University of Rome, was assisted in its implementation by Carlo Galassi Paluzzi, the Director of *Istituto di Studi Romani* and Antonio Maria Coleni, archeologist of the City Hall of Rome, all three known as “spontaneous converts to fascism”⁴⁴. They brought with them, along with propaganda, scientific legitimacy and attracted many intellectuals on this occasion.

As Diane Ghirardo pointed: „a wide spectrum of intellectuals inside and outside local and state bureaucracies participated in the major cultural events of the era. With the marked increase in the pace and tempo of everything from exhibitions to the restoration of old buildings or art works under fascism, it comes as no surprise that librarians, architects, artists, bureaucrats, historians, critics, art historians, curators and others were eager to participate”⁴⁵.

The *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* opened on the emperor’s birthday —September 23rd — comprising over three thousand plaster casts, scale models, photographs and maps; it was held in the renovated *Palazzo delle Esposizioni* in Rome, where a massive Mussolinian epigraph inscribed over the entrance called for “the glories of the past [to] be surpassed by the glories of the future.”⁴⁶ The Exhibition brought together over 3,000 exhibits and received a generous catalogue of over 700 pages, edited by Giulio Quirino Giglioli and Gustavo Giovannoni. The Exhibition received unanimous acclaim, E. Strong achieving a comprehensive and laudatory description of it, even recommending to his British readers the organization of a similar one⁴⁷. In accordance with this

⁴⁴ MUNZI 2006, 84.

⁴⁵ GHIRARDO 1996, 365.

⁴⁶ ARTHURS 2007, 33.

⁴⁷ STRONG 1939, 166.

description, *Mostra Augustea* abandoned the principle of sharing the material by provinces (as in *Mostra Archeologica* from 1911), in favor of a tripartite distribution of the material: history and politics, for the chronologically development of the Empire; architectural and engineering accomplishments; social and religious life⁴⁸. The Exhibition was a mixture of history and mythology, where Augustus and his age represented the centerpiece. Perhaps the most curious representation of this type was in the main exhibition hall (Hall X), where the focus was occupied by a representation of Genius Augusti between the altars of Pax and Salus, and flanked by the statues of Augustus of Prima Porta and Augustus as Pontifex Maximus (an exquisite statue found on the Via Labicana in 1910)⁴⁹. The Genius Augusti was faced by a tall glass pillar which framed a cross inscribed in luminous characters with the words from the Gospel of St. Luke (II, 1 - 14). Immediately behind the luminous cross a cast of the medieval altar at the Ara Coeli, „set up on the spot where the Sybil prophesied to Augustus the Birth of the Child”⁵⁰, showed how deeply rooted, in the Middle Ages, was the belief in the coincidence of the two events. Mainly there are two tendencies: a recognition of the value of the Roman past to its Christian follow-up - sometimes translating itself into the idea of antiquity as a *praeparatio* of Christianity -, and an increasing presence of contributions related on aspects of fascist *Romanità*, whose merits are increasingly being lauded.

Previously, the Catholic Church was extremely careful in positioning relative to the pagan Rome and its values, as they were presented by the new rulers of Italy. Sometimes, the pagan antiquity was not only ignored, but rather criticized and, usually, separated from the Christian era⁵¹. On the other hand, after Church and State has reached a political (the Lateran Pact) as well as a civic (the *Concordato*) *entente* in 1929, and after a subsequent conflict with the fascist government on the

⁴⁸ STRONG 1939, 139.

⁴⁹ STRONG, 1939, 146

⁵⁰ STRONG, 1939, 150.

⁵¹ NELIS, 2008, 140.

role of the *Azione Cattolica* has been resolved, some aspects of the fascist *Romanità* were able to infiltrate the Catholic discourse on antiquity.

The political mythology was to be observed in the first rooms of the exhibition, dedicated to the origins of Rome – especially Hall III, “arranged with rare taste and intuition by Dr. Pietrangeli”⁵², where was presented the map of Aeneas’ journeys, as they were presented in Vergilius’ *Aeneis*. In the middle of the room, reigned the symbolic plow with which Romulus would have traced the *pomoerium*, set on a plot of real earth. Along with other exhibits that reminded the mythical past of Rome, drew attention the portraits of the seven kings of Rome, as they were depicted on Late Republican coins⁵³. The following rooms were dedicated to the Republic (up to Hall VIII inclusive), with an emphasis on the Roman expansion. A good representation was the dictatorship of Sulla; Caesar, in exchange, was somewhat under-represented because, if Augustus was to be the exposition’s focal point, the dictator must be kept in the shade. Similarly, in the halls dedicated to the imperial era (Halls XXII – XXIV), the potential competitors of Augustus – such as the Flavians, Trajan or Hadrian (whose 1800th commemoration will be held in the autumn of 1938, in a somptuous exhibition at Castel San’Angelo) and their achievements have underrepresented.

On the other hand, if the “political” section of the exhibition was full of symbolism that sometimes forced the rapprochement between the ancient Roman state and the “New Roman Empire” of Mussolini, the other two sections presented, at the first floor, aspects related to the empire and its civilizing mission – art and architecture, engineering, roads and communications, the military – whilst at the top floor, there were treated aspects related to civilization and daily life. In all, *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* presented a totalitarian, technological, militarized and rigidly hierarchical picture of the ancient world. The thematic organization of the rooms, while disposing with the monotony of the geographic layout, depicted Roman culture in its entirety as uniform and

⁵² STRONG, 1939, 140; also, the archaeological research from Butrint, Albania, after 1930, were used to illustrate *Romanità*: GILKES 2006, 46..

⁵³ STRONG 1939, 140.

homogenous not only across space, but across time and in every sector of public and private life.

Traditions were always used by the totalitarian regimes. The appeal to such traditions was intended to bind the aesthetic and political realms of the community together as a cohesive unit and to ensure continuity and legitimacy for the government based upon that newly unified community. The past was not meant to be embraced merely on its own terms but, although apparently paradoxical, evoking the past was a means of transforming the movement into a modern state. In this context, *Romanità* and all what presupposes this concept make no exception. Brought with the help of French bayonets, a new nationalist breath will crystallize during the Risorgimento and will find its peak in interwar Italy. This murmur is to be found in the revolutionary iconography of the 19th century, but especially the Fascist era – a strange combination of traditionalism and extreme modernity – made use and abuse of it. The glorious traditions of imperial Rome were reused to give legitimacy to a dictator who, increasingly, considered himself the incarnation of Augustus, but ultimately failed.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1. Banco di S. Spirito banknote of 60 baiocchi, dated 1798. From: SANDROCK, JOHN E., „Italian Paper Money Prior to Unification – Part II”, in http://www.thecurrencycollector.com/pdfs/Italian_Paper_Money_Prior_to_Unification_-_Part_II.pdf, 14. 01. 2011.

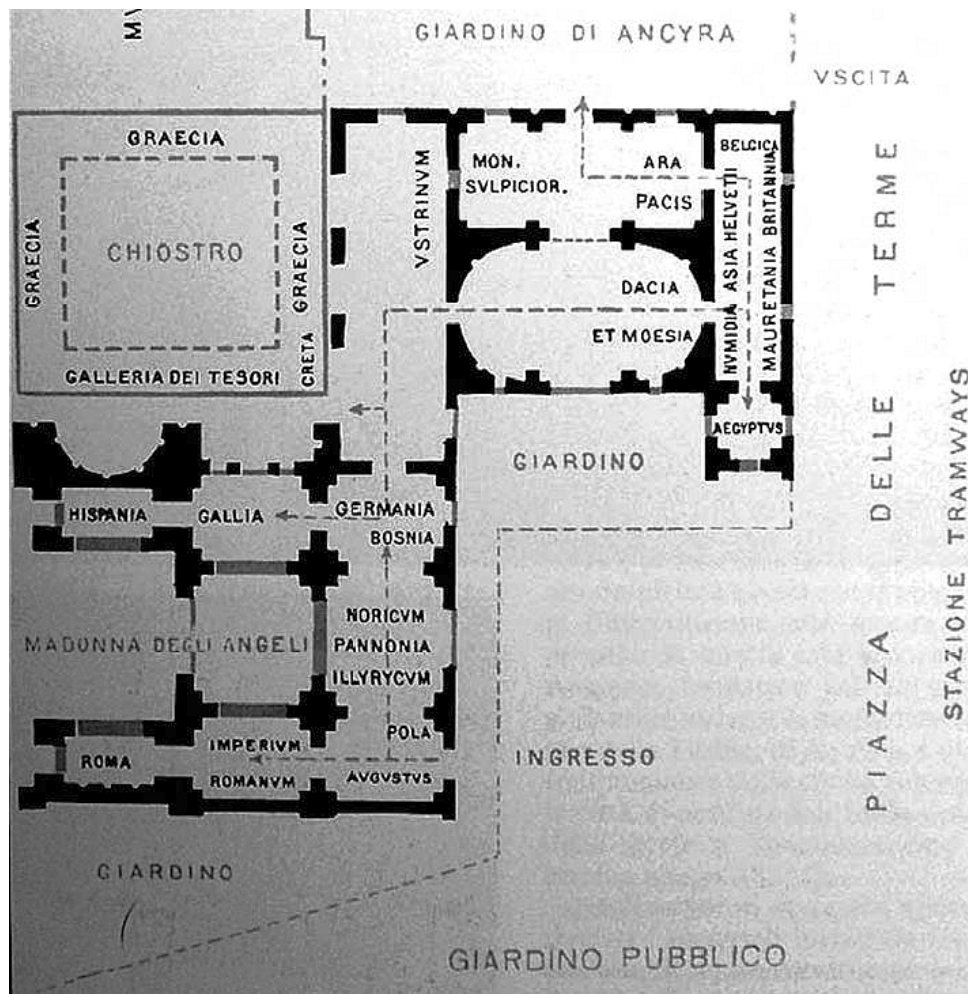


Fig. 2. General plan of the organization of the *Mostra Archeologica*, 1911.
 From: PALOMBI 2009, 89, figure 10.



Fig. 3. Mausoleum of Augustus exposed, 1937. From KOSTOF 1978, 272, figure 2.

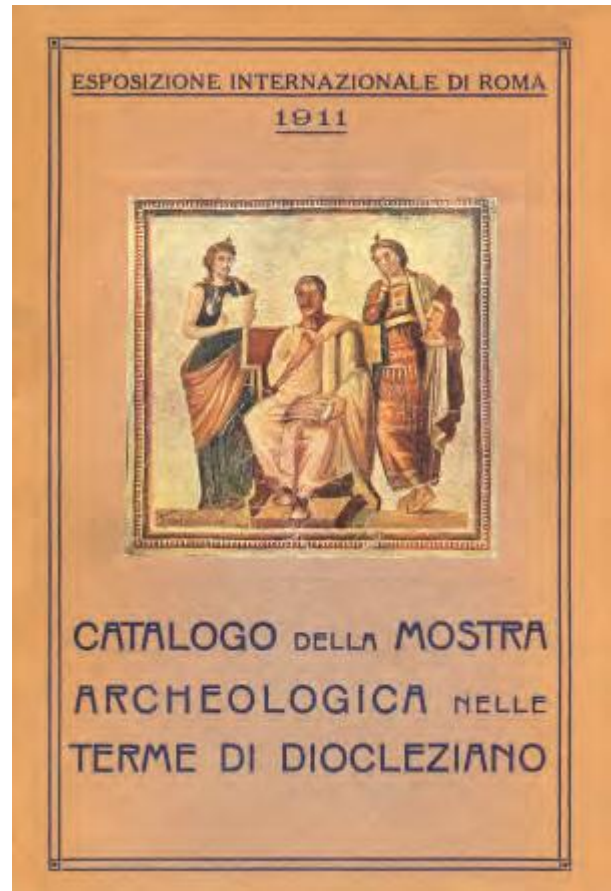


Fig. 4. Front Cover of the Catalogue of the Mostra Archeologica (1911).

From: BELLON, f. a., 207, figure 50,

<http://digital.csic.es/bitstream/10261/32392/1/La%20Mostra%20Archeologica%20nelle%20Terme%20di%20Diocleziano%201911.pdf>, 16. 04. 2012.

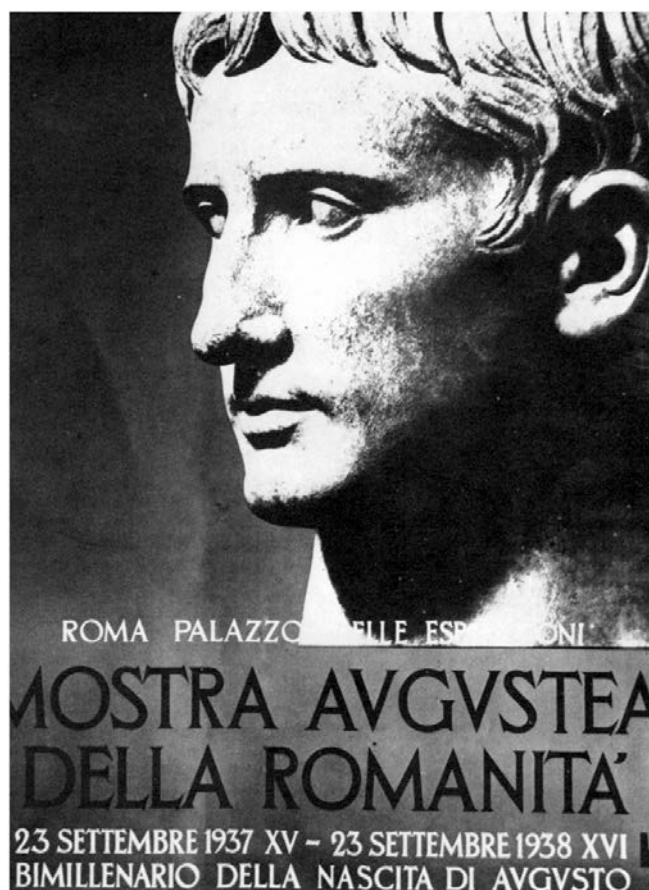


Fig. 5. The poster of the Mostra Augustea della Romanità, 1937. From: <http://people.unica.it/eikonikos/progetti-di-ricerca/progetto-nigra-subucula/>, 11. 04. 2012.

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