

2012

# Aesthetics under Mussolini: Public Art & Architecture, 1922-1940

Katherine Turro

Connecticut College, kturro@conncoll.edu

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## Recommended Citation

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The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.

**Aesthetics under Mussolini: Public Art & Architecture, 1922-1940**

An Honors Thesis  
Presented by  
**Katherine Turro**

To The Department of History  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
Honors in the Major Field

**Connecticut College**  
**New London, Connecticut**  
**May 3, 2012**

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## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Professor Forster for guiding me through this challenging process. Your encouragement and advice taught me to think in new ways. You pushed me to do my best work, to take risks, and to have fun. I would also like to thank Professor Paxton, Professor Sassin, and Professor Davis, whose insightful comments gave me new ideas and taught me to look at my work from different perspectives.

Thank you to the Connecticut College History Department for continuously offering great classes during my four years here. Taking inspiring classes drove me to complete this thesis. I would also like to thank the Honors Thesis Seminar for all of your positivity and ideas. I would not have been able to complete this thesis alone.

For your patience, support, and open ears, I would like to thank my family and friends. Your confidence encouraged me to study what I love and to experience things I never thought I would like.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone and everything involved in my experiences abroad in Rome. The opportunity to spend four months in this beautiful, historically rich city inspired this project.

## Introduction

This paper will focus on the aesthetic landscape of Rome from 1922 to 1940. This eighteen-year period signified a proliferation of archeological and architectural work funded by the Fascist regime. Mussolini's goal in these two projects was essentially to give Rome a face-lift so that it would be beautified and modernized. The Fascist Regime in Italy signaled a turning point in Italian history. At its onset, Italy lagged behind the rest of Europe in modernization and industry, remaining a predominantly agricultural society. When Mussolini came to power, he had the goal of proving to the rest of the Western world that Italy would be able to pull itself out of political and economic decline and solidify its strength and power.<sup>1</sup> In order to show this, Mussolini transformed the political system into an authoritative totalitarian regime, promoted the rights of the agrarian population, heightened censorship, and joined with Adolf Hitler in World War II. Additionally, the Fascist regime transformed the aesthetics of Rome. The public art and architecture of the nation's capital became an important form of propaganda. Although he never endorsed them publicly, Mussolini joined up with prominent Rationalist architects, most notably Marcello Piacentini, in the execution of these projects. Fascist public art, which took shape in both architectural and archeological form, reveals much about the regime itself. Fascist ideology was inconsistent and lacked any true theoretical base. Instead of creating a distinct aesthetic style, the regime cobbled together themes from art movements throughout the past centuries. The manner in which public art projects were developed and executed offers insight into this ideological confusion.

The architectural component of Mussolini's plans featured new modern buildings with hard lines and blank cement walls. Streets were redesigned and transformed into wide straight

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<sup>1</sup> Mack Smith, Dennis. *Modern Italy: A Political History*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1997. Print. 265.

<sup>2</sup> "Mussolini Sees Future on the Sea". *The New York Times*. Oct, 1926.

boulevards, a stark contrast from the narrow, winding roads from the medieval period.

Additionally, Mussolini intended to glorify himself through Fascist architecture. Many of the Rationalist architectural projects presented the dictator in a positive and magnificent light by portraying him as a hero to the country and a steadfast leader. Fascist architecture presented the regime in a similar manner. The regime viewed itself as saving Italy from the inactive, lazy parliamentary regime by focusing on improving the country and its citizens. The regime's style helped to foster a Fascist mindset that embraced sacrifice, heroism, and martyrdom, as well as power and strength.

As these architectural projects came to fruition, archeological excavations and restorations were occurring simultaneously. Historians argue that throughout his lifetime, Mussolini had always held a particular interest in the ancient Roman world, which explains his reasoning behind these projects. He constantly referenced ancient Rome in his speeches and writings. For example, when speaking to a group of students in Perugia in 1926 he referenced the great battle of Carthage in which the Romans were victorious.<sup>2</sup> Much of the ancient Roman imagery showcased under the regime reflected rhetoric of "Romanità", a concept that encompassed and glorified all things and ideas Roman. Mussolini used ancient Rome as a powerful force behind the Fascist regime. Imagery focused on the empire's successes and achievements. By incorporating references to the Roman world into his architecture and excavating and restoring ancient sites, Mussolini was able to draw on traditional imagery to push the regime forward. Mussolini often spoke of a "Roman tradition" referencing the heroic past and how this past would bring greatness to the new generations of Italy.<sup>3</sup> He also tied himself to the Roman emperors, using the connection to claim that Fascist Rome would be the next great

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<sup>2</sup> "Mussolini Sees Future on the Sea". *The New York Times*. Oct, 1926.

<sup>3</sup> Benito Mussolini, "The Greatness of the Country Will be Achieved by the New Generations". *Mussolini as Revealed in his Political Speeches, 1914-1923*. New York: Howard Fertig, 1976. 343

empire. In this manner, the Fascist regime tended to look to the past to look forward when planning architecture and public art.

However, the two separate, yet often overlapping projects reflect the inconsistencies in Fascist ideology. Mussolini's use of motifs from two artistic periods that occurred over two thousand years apart in his plan to restore Rome is inconsistent in itself. For example, Mussolini's New Museum featured ancient works of art housed in a modern building featuring blank walls and a sleek design. In 1931, Mussolini expressed his artistic goals. He stated, "we must create a new art, an art of today, a Fascist art".<sup>4</sup> This Fascist aesthetic became a trademark of the regime. The intermixing of the traditional and modern artistic styles gained worldwide attention as people wondered how such different methods could be used in a city known for its classical beauty. Although the Fascists claimed that they were concerned with developing their own fascist aesthetic, clearly their plan was disorganized. This disorganization and incoherence is apparent through the fact that the Fascist government promoted both architectural and archeological projects simultaneously under the goal of creating a new "Fascist aesthetic."

The confusing and inconsistent display of Fascist aesthetics reveals the clash of taste within the regime's ideology. Mussolini had difficulty explaining his obvious loyalty to the Rationalist art movement and he seemed to have just as much difficulty explaining the nature of the regime. Whenever he wrote or spoke of the subject, he described Italian Fascism as action based. In *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism* he stated, "I am not afraid of the world. I am a revolutionary and reactionary...I am afraid of the revolution which destroys and does not create".<sup>5</sup> Based on this statement, and other statements made with a similar message, it is

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<sup>4</sup> Benito Mussolini, "Architecture in Italy". *The New York Times*. Nov, 1931. Proquest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2007). 1.

<sup>5</sup> Benito Mussolini, "The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism". London: The Hogarth Press (1932). Translation by Jane Soames. 98.

evident that the regime revolved around the desire to act and create rather than establish a solid, coherent theoretical explanation. Mussolini was even disdainful of theoretical approaches, criticizing the Socialist party's focus on political thought and theory as a justification for its inaction. The Fascist effort to create serves as an explanation as to why these two very different projects occurred simultaneously. From the number of projects funded, it is evident that the regime was more concerned with completing as much architectural and archeological work as possible, instead of ensuring that the trends and imagery in the projects made sense ideologically. The thematic and stylistic overlap between the architectural and archeological projects reveals inconsistencies within Fascist ideology. If each branch had been truly planned in a clear and distinct manner, this overlap would have not occurred. Instead, we see a cobbling together of many different themes and symbolism that create a disorganized Fascist aesthetic.



## **Chapter 1: Historiography of Fascist Public Art and Architecture**

### **Introduction**

In recent decades, the study of Fascist architecture and public art under Mussolini has become a discussion among both historians and scholars of architecture. Although several books and articles were published on the topic in the years immediately after World War II, it is possible that the Italian population's desire to forget its Fascist past put a halt to efforts to uncover the reasoning behind Mussolini's aesthetic choices and their representation of Fascist ideology. More recent historians of Italy have linked Fascist excavations, building projects, and overall aesthetics to influences from the past, many noting references to ancient Rome. Historians examine the connections between Fascist architecture and ancient Rome in many ways. Leading historians in the field raise questions about the incorporation and of ancient imagery into and the choices behind Fascist architecture. Furthermore, while some historians choose to directly examine the links between Fascist architecture and ancient Rome, others focus on the role of architects and art movements and their relationships with the regime. Thus, it is evident that Fascist architecture and aesthetics cannot be studied simply as a political or cultural history. The study remains complicated, as each historian who writes on the topic focuses on different influential factors, such as the Rationalist art movement in Italy, or specific case studies on works of Fascist architecture. These different interpretations emphasize the complicated nature of Fascist aesthetics.

Furthermore, it is clear that there were two distinct branches of Fascist public art; one branch that focused on new, modern building projects designed to create a modern metropolis, and an archeological branch that focused on the excavation and restoration of ancient sites that

emphasized Rome's rich history. From an outside perspective it is nonsensical that these two projects would occur simultaneously under the same Fascist headline. Each set of projects produced different aesthetic styles and together they created a disjointed visual appearance. However, the juxtapositions and interplay between the two sheds light on the complicated nature of Fascist aesthetics and ideology. These discourses of historians of Fascist culture highlight the multi-sided essence and complexities of the regime. Additionally, scholarly work regarding the international reception of the Fascist public art offers further insight to the complete story. Understanding all of arguments will be essential in contextualizing my own analyses regarding the interplay between the architectural and archeological projects and Fascist ideologies.

### **Early Works on the Origins and Developments of Art Movements in Italy**

Early historians of Fascist architecture focus on the importance of the Rationalist movement in Italy. Vittorio Gregotti, an Italian architect born in 1927, is one of the earlier scholars to write on Fascist architecture. His book, *New Directions in Italian Architecture*, published in 1968, focuses on architectural trends in Italy. The first chapter, mainly dedicated to the origins of the Modern movement, notes the importance of the Futurist movement to the foundations of Modernism. Gregotti defines the ideology of the Futurist movement as “glorification of the machine” and as “efforts towards a radical renewal of architecture” with elements of “neo-nationalism”. However, Futurism faced difficulties as it developed in the post World War I period, a time when Italian politics and culture was characterized as intensely “anti-Futurist”. Instead of recognizing the problems of the young nation, the government conformed “with a body of myths and illusions” such as the myth of a strong, hardworking population, and a myth of economic privilege. Gregotti argues that the “triumph of Fascism” illustrates these

myths, which paralleled a new Rationalist movement in Italy that ignored Futurist avant-garde tendencies, and created a new classicism with a “return to order and the rejection of eclecticism”.<sup>6</sup> Gregotti discusses two architecture groups: the Milanese 900 and the Gruppo 7. The latter became the foundation of the Italian Rationalist movement. The Milanese 900 stemmed from a “moderate avant-garde position,” whereas the Gruppo 7 displayed a more prominent anti-Futurist attitude.<sup>7</sup> Gregotti cites a declaration made by Sebastiano Larco, Guido Frette, Carlo Enrico Rava, Luigi Figini, Gino Pollini, Giuseppe Terragni, and Adalberto Libera which states their intention of maintaining ties with tradition and creating a new, true architecture that stemmed from a tight relationship between “logic and rationality”.<sup>8</sup>

Gregotti’s chapter also traces the development of the Rationalist movement, particularly in relation to the Fascist regime, asserting that the connection between the two is debated. He claims it is almost impossible to firmly define the relationship between the two, because inconsistencies played out as “aesthetic confusion and deep ideological contradiction”.<sup>9</sup> However, at the same time the Fascist movement allowed for some of the most “original and committed Rationalist works” that were seen most prominently in Rationalist exhibitions, competitions, and discussions carried out in architectural magazines and newspapers such as *Casabella* and *Quadrante*.<sup>10</sup> One example of a successful Rationalist work that Gregotti cites is *La Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* (The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution), which established an “authentic language in Italian Rationalist architecture”.<sup>11</sup> Gregotti’s work lays the groundwork of Italian Rationalism by distinguishing the many characteristics of each movement.

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<sup>6</sup> Vittorio Gregotti. *New Directions in Italian Architecture*. New York: George Braziller, 1968. Print. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Gregotti, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Gregotti., 14.

<sup>9</sup> Gregotti., 17.

<sup>10</sup> Gregotti., 20.

<sup>11</sup> Gregotti., 23.

However, his work is incomplete in comparison to historians who elaborate on the topic because he only touches briefly on Rationalism's connection to the Fascist regime. He does not explain the goals and reasoning behind Rationalist architecture projects during the 1920s and 1930s despite the fact that he cites many examples, making this gap evident. He characterizes the Fascist regime as "aesthetic confusion" but offers only a brief discussion on what he calls the "tangled connection" between the two.<sup>12</sup> Over the next decades, several more historians built on this framework and revealed the relationship between the Rationalist movement and the Fascist regime.

In 1980, Diane Yvonne Ghirardo wrote on the topic of the Fascist regime's relationship with the Rationalist architects as a way to understand Fascist ideology. Ghirardo asserts that most of the architects involved in the projects were "ardent Fascists, even if by 1942 they had renounced Fascism". She claims that this view differs from previous historians who argued that the architects "played Fascist" in order to have their work funded.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, she argues that earlier historians have overlooked the idea that the architects had any connection to Fascism, and instead claims that the Rationalists "shared concepts and preoccupations with Italian Fascists". Fascist ideology was inconsistent and often not based on a coherent set of ideas.<sup>14</sup> For example, despite the fact that the party believed it represented something new and modern, far from the failed Liberal government, it is clear that Mussolini anchored the ideology of the regime in Italian history, specifically that of ancient Rome. Ghirardo sees a similar connection to the Rationalist's ideology because their own projects "straddled" modern and traditional beliefs as

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<sup>12</sup> Gregotti., 17.

<sup>13</sup> Diane Ghirardo. 1980. Italian architects and fascist politics: An evaluation of the rationalist's role in regime building. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 39 (2): 109.

<sup>14</sup> Ghirardo., 112

well.<sup>15</sup> The notion of inconsistency in Fascist ideology is a theme I will focus on in my argument, particularly in terms of its relationship to public art.

Ghirardo's work is further significant because she elaborates on how hierarchy was a major link between Fascism and Rationalism. She argues that both movements left no room for individuality because "authority strictly regulated each person's place".<sup>16</sup> Her definition of Rationalism as a combination of "all architectural tendencies into one" that renounces "individuality and expression" supports her claim that the movement often displayed these restrictions on individuality.<sup>17</sup> In addition, she claims that both Fascism and Rationalism displayed elitist and orderly components through hierarchy and loss of individuality. Elitism refers to class as well as age, as Mussolini aimed many of his architectural projects at youth groups. Ghirardo asserts that the Rationalists are similar to an elite, orderly, totalitarian political system because they "believed that they alone held the Truth" and that the movement was "destined to triumph".<sup>18</sup> The Rationalists aimed to achieve social order in the same ways that the Fascists desired; through social order, and elite and hierarchical, values. Ghirardo claims that these circumstances led the Rationalists to thrive, as Fascism was a "congenial political system within which to develop their architectural and social ideas".<sup>19</sup> Although a further analysis of historians understanding of the Fascist architects was to ensue, Ghirardo's work is significant because she links Fascist and Rationalist beliefs and ideals. She does note, however, that the relationship between the two is difficult to define because of the ambiguous nature of Mussolini's ideology.

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<sup>15</sup> Ghirardo., 114.

<sup>16</sup> Ghirardo., 121.

<sup>17</sup> Ghirardo., 123.

<sup>18</sup> Ghirardo., 125.

<sup>19</sup> Ghirardo., 126.

## **Rationalism and the Development of the *Il Movimento Italiano Per L'Architettura***

### ***Razionale***

Although Ghirardo's article provides an explanation of Fascist and Rationalist relations, Dennis Doordan, a History and Architectural Studies professor at the University of Notre Dame, offers the most extensive scholarship on the development of Rationalist architecture in Italy and its connection to the Fascist regime.<sup>20</sup> His dissertation, *Architecture and Politics in Fascist Italy*, published in 1983, contains a concise overview of the Rationalist movement with a chapter focusing specifically on its involvement with the Fascist party. Doordan argues that the members of *Il Movimento Italiano Per L'Architettura Razionale* (M.I.A.R, or Rationalist Architecture Movement) were purposeful in their attempts to integrate their innovative "aesthetic ideology with the political ideology of Fascism". He shows the ambiguous nature of "Fascist artistic and architectural policies" and offers a way in which historians can attempt to define this rather complex ideology.<sup>21</sup> Doordan is successful in his aim, as his dissertation offers a comprehensive explanation of a topic that previous historians have commonly characterized as undefinable.

Doordan outlines the origins of the Rationalist movement, describing how it began with the Gruppo 7's publication of a four-part manifesto in 1926. The group's goal was to distinguish itself from other contemporary architectural movements in Italy. Like Gregotti, Doordan mentions the influence of the post-War Futurist movement, which continued with the same avant-garde policies as pre-war Futurism. Additionally, Doordan mentions the role of the Novecentismo movement, which pushed for order and stability against the avant-garde policies

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<sup>20</sup> "Dennis Doordan." *University of Notre Dame: Art, Art History & Design*. University of Notre Dame. Web. 18 Jan. 2012. <<http://artdept.nd.edu/design/history-and-theory-of-design/faculty/dennis-doordan/>>.

<sup>21</sup> Dennis Doordan. *Architecture and Politics in Fascist Italy*. New York: Columbia University, 1983. 1.

of Futurism. Giovanni Muzio, a leader of the Novecentismo, asserted the importance of maintaining a link between modern architecture and the traditions of the classical Italian style.<sup>22</sup> Muzio's commentary opposed that of the Futurists' as Virgilio Marchi began arguing for the Futurist cause, stating that the architecture of the time needed to reflect sensitivity to the modern age. Non-Futurist work needed to be rejected and architecture had to become a "highly personal...intuitive act".<sup>23</sup> Doordan argues that after the Fascist Revolution in 1922, Futurism became important to the regime. The addition of Futurism in 1922 further presents evidence of the regime's conflicting ideological views.

Doordan examines the M.I.A.R.'s policies, outlined in 1926, which called for a new approach that was different from both the Novecentismo and Futurist movements. Doordan asserts that the Rationalists saw a new "spirit" in Europe in terms of architecture and like the Novecentismo, they maintained a strong sense of tradition in Italian architecture. However, instead of copying traditional architectural methods they instead believed that tradition could be displayed in new ways that represented the new spirit. New and modern building materials such as concrete and steel "offered new, dramatic possibilities" for architecture.<sup>24</sup> Unlike the Novecentismo, however, the Rationalists did not view this tradition as adaptable and appropriate for the "new contemporary context," but rather as proof that a "spirit of an era" could be the generating force in architecture. In addition, the M.I.A.R. rejected the Futurist notion that architecture should be an intense experience that renounces the influence of the individual.<sup>25</sup> Doordan's analysis contextualizes Rationalism within the setting of the cultural atmosphere of post World War I Italy. An understanding of the Futurist and Novecentismo movements adds

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<sup>22</sup> Doordan., 13-14.

<sup>23</sup> Doordan., 19.

<sup>24</sup> Doordan., 25-28.

<sup>25</sup> Doordan., 29.

insight to how the Rationalist movement was influenced, as well as how the interplay of ideas between the three groups was reflected in Italian society.

Doordan further asserts that the ideology of the M.I.A.R. was in tune with the cultural and artistic life of the Fascist party. One connection between the two is that they grew up in a tumultuous time filled with nationalistic and patriotic feelings, which would have made them “naturally receptive” to similar themes represented in Fascist propaganda.<sup>26</sup> Due to the context in which they grew up the young architects of the M.I.A.R. were most certainly Fascist.

Doordan claims that the Rationalist architects, like Fascists, found failure in the Liberal and Socialist parties and shared a similar ideology that rejected these old orders in Italy. These ideologies developed out of a “pervasive sense of frustration” with almost every element of life in the post-Risorgimento period.<sup>27</sup> Doordan writes that these similarities allowed the Rationalists to equate their own architectural projects with political issues.<sup>28</sup> Although the Rationalists outwardly expressed this affinity with Fascism, it was never clearly reciprocated. For example, Giuseppe Pagano praised the *Duce* and displayed excitement after Mussolini visited one of the Rationalist exhibitions. However, Doordan notes that unlike Hitler, Mussolini never involved himself in architectural debates, and refused to give more than “vague, rhetorical statements” about the nature of Fascist art.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Doordan believes that the characteristics of “Fascist” public art and architecture were too varied to draw a concrete set of conclusions about its attributes. Mussolini’s hesitancy to connect the regime to a particular form of art or architecture leads into another discussion of how historians began to view this branch as inconsistent. This idea is something that I will use when arguing my thesis. I believe that the varied and

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<sup>26</sup> Doordan., 134.

<sup>27</sup> Doordan., 135.

<sup>28</sup> Doordan., 136.

<sup>29</sup> Doordan., 138.



mismatched characteristics of Fascist public art and architecture comment on the incoherent nature of the regime itself. Mussolini refused to tie the regime with one particular trend and instead used a montage of styles.

Doordan asserts that iconic content, defined as the “transformation of political symbols into architectural forms”, was the most obvious art form. This iconography reflected Mussolini’s goal of representing Rome as the capital of “a new Mediterranean empire”. The association of Fascism as an “heir to the imperial legacy of Roman rule” was an effective way to combine architecture and ideology.<sup>30</sup> He concludes that the Rationalists were successful in promoting new ways of thinking about architecture in Italy because of the strength of their iconography. However, they did not succeed in their goal of fully connecting modern architecture to the regime because of Mussolini’s hesitancy to commit to one particular style. Doordan’s argument shows the ambiguity of Fascist aesthetics and how instead of being one cohesive movement, architecture and public art in the period branched into two categories: modern architectural building projects and restorations or iconic projects that connected the Fascist regime to the ancient period.

### **Studies on Mussolini’s City Planning and Archeological Projects**

Doordan’s work is important because it opened up new doors in the field. His analysis began discussions pertaining to other areas in Fascist public art, particularly in regards to city planning and archeological projects. Richard Etlin’s book, *Modernism in Italian Architecture, 1890-1940* published in 1991, signifies a prominent shift in thinking about these new ideas of city planning and archeological projects. This focus became the trend for more recent historians such as John Agnew, Borden W. Painter Jr., and Jan Nelis. Etlin recognizes that the relationship

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<sup>30</sup> Doordan., 141-143.

between Fascist ideology and Fascist art is a “morally charged issue” that still provokes debate.<sup>31</sup> He agrees that Rationalist architects found Fascism inherently appealing, but argues that Mussolini typically reshaped their private building plans to match his plans to “transform the city of Rome into a physical setting to show that the Fascist state was the lineal descendant of the ancient Roman empire”.<sup>32</sup> Mussolini used excavations and restorations of ancient Roman archaeological sites, as well as the creation of new monumental architecture to showcase his vision. Etlin references Mussolini’s speeches to support his claim that monumentalism, “a massive or imposing structure that usually reflects historical significance,” was intended to reference the ancient period.<sup>33</sup> Monumental architecture was effective because it both glorified the Fascist regime and connected the party to ancient Rome. Etlin refers to a “mystical fervor” that influenced this desire. Although the concept of mystical fervor evolved during the Risorgimento period, it influenced the way in which the Fascist party viewed its relationship with Rome. Mystical fervor was the desire to envision Rome as a mother and city by the sea that was forever prosperous.<sup>34</sup> Etlin claims that Hendrik Christian Andersen, a Norwegian sculpture, influenced this desire to connect Fascist Rome to imperial Rome through his plan for a “World Metropolis”. This observation is significant, as none of the previous historians discussed had made this claim. Etlin argues that Andersen’s plan influenced Fascist ideology and aesthetics. Andersen published this plan outlining a project for a utopian-style city located near Rome and circulated it throughout Europe. Mussolini examined the project, which Etlin claims shaped the

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<sup>31</sup> Richard A. Etlin, *Modernism in Italian Architecture, 1890-1940*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1991. 377.

<sup>32</sup> Etlin., 391.

<sup>33</sup> "Monumentalism." Def. 1. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*. Springfield: G&C Merriam, 1974. 747. Print.

<sup>34</sup> Etlin., 392.

Fascists' plan for a new Rome. The World Metropolis plan later influenced Marcello Piacentini, one of Mussolini's closest architects.<sup>35</sup>

Etlin's analysis of Andersen's plan for the "World Metropolis" began a wider discussion of Fascist city planning. This project was a plan for a utopian city intended to serve as a "World Center of Communication" that promoted worldwide peace and unity through various cultural centers; the Science Center, Art Center, and Physical Culture Center. Andersen believed that Rome was the ideal place for his project, which appealed to Mussolini and would inevitably influence Piacentini's later city planning. On October 28, 1930, Piacentini presented a new plan for the redesign of Rome called the *Piano Regolatore*, or grand plan, which depicted a redesign of the major boulevards that would add a "magnificent and monumental framework" to the city. Starting at Piazza del Popolo, three major streets would "radiate out" to other major piazzas, creating a network of important monuments.<sup>36</sup> Etlin's descriptions map out where the new streets lay in relation to the old, and each monument that would be connected by the new boulevards.

Painter, who published *Mussolini's Rome: Rebuilding the Eternal City* in 2005, focuses on Fascist archeology and city planning as well. He argues that the Fascist regime transformed Rome and that the re-design of the city reflected Fascist character and ideology.<sup>37</sup> In his historiography Painter asserts that the study of Fascist architecture had been neglected during the post-war period because many intellectuals of the time developed a "firmly antifascist stance" and that the government put its efforts into moving the Italian country away from its dictatorship

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<sup>35</sup> Etlin., 396.

<sup>36</sup> Etlin., 399-400.

<sup>37</sup> Borden W. Painter, Jr. 2005. *Mussolini's Rome: Rebuilding The Eternal City*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. XV.

past.<sup>38</sup> However, the study of the architecture of the period is important because it reveals Fascist policies and goals.<sup>39</sup> Painter states that Mussolini had an obsession with Rome, claiming that during the politically unstable years after World War I, Fascism offered an alternative representation as a “fresh, energetic movement that would take on the socialists and communists, protect property, and bring about change without the trauma of an armed revolution”.<sup>40</sup> Mussolini looked to ancient Rome to create this atmosphere because he understood the importance of Italian history in the world and intended to bring the city back to its glorious imperial past. Most of Rome’s archeological projects completed under the Fascist regime reflected this intention by making Rome a world stage. Mussolini’s connection with ancient Rome is an important concept because it starkly contrasts the practices of the Rationalist architects. Mussolini’s relationship with ancient Rome in terms of his choices regarding city planning will be an important theme in my paper. The Dictator’s beliefs about Roman history connect to significant themes in the regime’s overall ideology. The connection between the two needs to be carefully considered as I make my argument.

## **Discourses on Fascist Aesthetics**

### ***Romanità***

When discussing all of the different elements of Fascist architecture and archeological projects, it is inevitable that the nature of aesthetics will come into question. Similar to the incoherency of the projects themselves, Fascists aesthetics do not have a set of cohesive characteristics. Rather, Fascist aesthetics are made up of a set of various, and often disconnected, ideas and images. *Romanità*, or a sense of Romanness, is crucial to the study of

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<sup>38</sup> Painter., XVII.

<sup>39</sup> Painter., XVIII

<sup>40</sup> Painter., 1.

Fascist aesthetics in Italy. Painter claims that Mussolini had a “highly selective” memory of Roman history, which was evident in his speeches and his views and discourse on Emperor Augustus.<sup>41</sup> Jan Nelis builds on the myth of the *romanità* in her 2007 article, “Constructing Fascist Identity: Benito Mussolini and the Myth of ‘*Romanita*’”. Nelis defines the term as a “highly politicized, and ideologized vision of classical antiquity that is constructed by Italian Fascism,” writing that the core of *romanità* derived from the late Republican and early Imperial period of Roman history.<sup>42</sup> The myth of *romanità* played out in Mussolini’s vision of archeology and aesthetics. His discourse on *romanità* allowed him to represent the Fascist regime as recreating both an idealized past and movement towards the future.<sup>43</sup> Looking to his writings as well as archaeological projects, Nelis argues that Mussolini “struck a clearly imperial note” from the beginning of the regime. Mussolini’s desire to return Italy to the sea is an example that reflects the myth of *romanità*. After World War I and the Versailles Treaty in 1919, Mussolini felt as though Italy was a forgotten nation. Nelis claims that from his speeches, the Dictator clearly believed that Italy would become the Mediterranean capital it once was through the restoration of Imperial glory.<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, Painter argues that Mussolini used this myth of *romanità* as a way to look towards the future. Mussolini’s speeches recalled the glorious past by showcasing the reign of Augustus, which he saw as the most important period of Italy’s history. For example, during a speech made on Rome’s birthday, April 21, 1924, Mussolini used this rhetoric to make *romanità* an “integral part” of the Fascist state and ideology. He combined the Fascist emphasis on “youth, revolution, modernity, and the establishment of a new and vibrant Italy with the glories

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<sup>41</sup> Painter., 3.

<sup>42</sup> Jan Nelis, Constructing Fascist Identity: Benito Mussolini and the Myth of "Romanita". *The Classical World* 100.2 (2007), 392.

<sup>43</sup> Nelis., 393.

<sup>44</sup> Nelis., 398-400.

and achievements of ancient Rome”.<sup>45</sup> In this manner, *romanità* served both as ideology and visible propaganda. John Agnew, author of the 1998 article “The Impossible Capital: Monumental Rome under Liberal and Fascist Regimes, 1870-1943”, makes several important assertions that these later historians gloss over. Agnew views *romanità* as a product of both the Liberal and Fascist regimes. Agnew asserts that throughout history each generation of Italians tried to reinvent the ancient city’s rich history. He claims that this attempted reinvention has continuously occurred because the Italian people are looking for ways to fill a permanent feeling of nostalgia, with the loss of the Roman empire. When examining *romanità* and the Fascist regime, Agnew claims that its emergence as a dominant theme served to cover up “the ideological incoherence of Fascism”.<sup>46</sup> He views the use of this ideology as ineffective because the city’s history was so complex and full of so many symbols and architectural themes. Therefore, Mussolini’s oversimplification of Rome reflected his own ideological inconsistencies.<sup>47</sup> The myth of *romanità*, particularly Agnew’s discussion of the topic, will be essential to my argument because it reveals inconsistencies of the Fascist regime. The way in which Mussolini presented visual material to the Italian people in the sense of *romanità* reflected how he wished Rome to be seen. It is clear that the myth of *romanità* served as a shell under which lay a disconnected and scattered aesthetic style.

## Symbolism and Ritualization

Agnew’s analysis of *romanità* leads into another discussion that reflects how Fascist aesthetic style illustrates the incoherent ideology of the regime. Richard J. Golsan’s book,

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<sup>45</sup> Painter, 3-5.

<sup>46</sup> John Agnew, 1998. The Impossible Capital: Monumental Rome Under Liberal and Fascist Regimes, 1870-1943. *Geografiska Annaler* 80 (4): 237.

<sup>47</sup> Agnew, 239.

*Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture*, which is a compilation of essays by various historians, discusses the characteristics and symbols of Fascist aesthetics. Golsan discusses the difficulty of defining the term because “no particular literary genre can be linked exclusively to Fascist aesthetics,” showing the allusiveness of the regime.<sup>48</sup> However, Golsan claims that a common trait of Fascist aesthetics was the intended impact it was to have on the viewer. Golsan references Russell Berman’s essay to support his point. Berman’s essay claims that the reception of art is crucial. He states, “No longer an autonomist object of beauty to be contemplated by a passive recipient, it [Fascist public art] was designed to transform the status of the recipient in order to reunite him or her with the primal order of race and the permanence of unquestionable values”.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, Jeffrey T. Schnapp’s article, “Epic Demonstrations”, focuses exclusively on Italian Fascism and offers an analysis of its aesthetic qualities.<sup>50</sup> Schnapp’s essay illustrates the incoherence of both Fascist ideology and Fascist aesthetics. He refers to Fascist aesthetics as an “overproduction” that was “neither monolithic or homogenous,” writing that at the center of all this was an “oxymoron” because it exposed the connection between conservatism and traditionalism with revolutionary modernism.<sup>51</sup> Schnapp refers to Fascist aesthetics as both “hot and cold” to show this inconsistency. It was hot because Fascist artifacts show moments of “violent rupture, rapture, and desublimation, opening the door to new forms of selfhood and unleashing chaotic elemental forces”. On the other hand, he terms Fascist aesthetics “cold” because there is a desire to “stylize, strip of ornament, objectify, and distance”. Schnapp claims that these two conflicting ideas show the incoherent nature of the Fascist

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<sup>48</sup> Richard J. Golsan., *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture*. London: University of New England, 1992. xiv.

<sup>49</sup> Golsan., xv.

<sup>50</sup> Jeffrey T. Schnapp. "Epic Demonstrations." *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture*. Ed. Richard J. Golsan. London: University of New England, 1992. 1-37. Print.

<sup>51</sup> Schnapp, 3.

movement.<sup>52</sup> His article is key to understanding and analyzing the Fascist regime and its aesthetics because it shows that many inconsistencies and complexities that lay within.

## Monumentalism

Monumentalism is another important element of Fascist architecture or aesthetics that reveals the inconsistencies of the regime. Agnew defines monumentalism as “the spatial and architectural arrangement of sites designed to convey the political meanings embedded in the location and iconography of the specific sites both separately and taken together as an ensemble”.<sup>53</sup> Etlin asserts that monumental architecture enhanced Mussolini’s efforts to “create a physical and cultural setting that bespoke the empire”. Etlin’s discussion of Fascist aesthetics focuses specifically on “*fascies*” imagery in Fascist monumental architecture. *Fascies*, which reference ancient Rome, are a “bundle of rods with an ax that had been the sign of authority, justice, and force of the ancient Roman magistrates”. The term “Fascio Littorio” (lictoral *fascies*) stems from the attendants who carried the fascies while accompanying the magistrates. This image became the “sign of the empire” in Fascist Italy. Etlin claims that Italians had always had a deep connection with these symbols. On September 24, 1926, *fascies* were declared the “emblem of the Italian State”. The Fascist version of *fascies* was different from that of ancient Rome and they were described as having a “squat, forceful appearance, in distinct contrast to the ancient Roman *fascies*, which...have rather slender forms”. Through this analysis, Etlin argues that although the *fascies* were “made to harmonize with the monumental aspect of the architecture they adorned”, they typically suggested an aggressive tone.<sup>54</sup> The idea that *fascies* could be both harmonizing and aggressive is inconsistent in itself, offering insight to the nature of the Fascist

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<sup>52</sup> Schnapp., 4.

<sup>53</sup> Agnew, 229.

<sup>54</sup> Etlin, 404.



regime. Etlin's research on the *fasces* allows historians to look at monumentalism and Fascist aesthetics through a specific lens, which can then be transferred to other architectural and archeological elements of Fascist Rome.

Agnew's examination of Fascist aesthetics is less focused on a particular element of architecture than Etlin's. He claims that throughout Italian history rulers have tended to attempt to make Rome the symbolic center of the country. Agnew points to the Liberal period in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as a time when restoration projects were prevalent. For example, in 1911 the *Passeggiata Archeologica*, a project that focused on restoring all of the sites of ancient Rome between the Capitoline Hill and the Baths of Caracalla reshaped the city.<sup>55</sup> Agnew asserts that aside from more recent restorations the number of projects reached their peak at the height of the Fascist regime. Despite this peak, Agnew claims that Fascist efforts were problematic because the ancient history of the city was so strong that it was a constant challenge to the authenticity of these new projects. At the same time, the strength of Rome's history seemed to "invite its exploitation".<sup>56</sup> This statement shows that Mussolini's archeological and monumental projects were often extreme, and that images were manipulated to send a nationalistic, message.

Agnew characterizes the "ritualization" and "sacralization" of new monuments and excavations as common themes of Fascist aesthetics. These themes further expose elements of incoherence in Fascist architecture and ideology. For example, the inaugurations of each new monument were made up of elaborate processions and presentations along with Roman-style speeches. Agnew describes how Fascist architecture and aesthetics were "factionalized" because Mussolini's grand plan for Rome did not offer a solution "to the contradiction between 'necessity' and 'grandeur'". This contradiction was apparent as Mussolini took steps to redesign

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<sup>55</sup> Agnew, 231.

<sup>56</sup> Agnew., 233.

Rome by renovating the monuments and creating an “imperial” center around Piazza Venezia, but ignored the needs of the Italian population by focusing on the monuments instead of rebuilding impoverished neighborhoods. Agnew connects this issue with Mussolini’s desire to bring Rome back to the sea by using the construction of the *autostrada*, a road that could be accessed near the Capitoline Hill and linked Rome to the ancient port city of Ostia.<sup>57</sup> The *autostrada* serves as a way in which Fascist aesthetics and projects were characterized in terms of the Mediterranean imagery and ideals. The opulent, ritualistic, and symbolic elements of Mussolini’s architectural projects also shows a focus on grandeur over necessity; a contradiction within Fascist aesthetics and ideology.

In *Mussolini’s Rome*, Painter ties together many of these ideas regarding Fascist aesthetics. He claims that the myth of *romanità* was the basis for Mussolini’s archeological projects of excavation, restoration, and the addition of monumental architecture. In these projects, Roman imagery was replicated in a more aggressive, elaborate, over-the-top, and often incoherent manner. Painter outlines many of the projects that reflected this aesthetic including the renovation. He examines the Via Dell’Impero, Via dei Trionfi, the redesign of the area from Piazza Venezia to the Circus Maximus, and the 1932 Exhibition of Fascist Revolution, most of which were completed between 1932 and 1934. The fact that Mussolini chose to begin these projects in 1932 is significant because it marked the Decennale of the Fascist takeover during the March on Rome, October 28-29, 1922.<sup>58</sup> The year 1932 shows the intentionality of Mussolini’s grand plan. Painter characterizes these projects as “spectacles” through the way in which they

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<sup>57</sup> Agnew., 234.

<sup>58</sup> Painter, 21.

were designed and presented to the public, and through the sheer number of visitors that the new sights attracted, totaling almost four million.<sup>59</sup>

Other architectural projects continued well past 1934. Augustan imagery is a prominent theme that developed in Mussolini's later architectural and archeological plans. From speeches, writings, and earlier projects, it is evident that Mussolini held a peculiar obsession with Augustus. Painter claims that his obsession took full and tangible form between 1934 and 1938. "Augustan" projects began with the restoration of the Augustan Mausoleum, a site that had become overgrown and was deteriorating. The Ara Pacis museum, containing an ancient Altar of Peace from the Augustan period was placed across the street from the tomb. These two projects overseen by Antonio Muñoz were completed near the time of Augustus' bimillennial birthday.<sup>60</sup> In addition, Mussolini opened an exhibition on September 23, 1937 entitled the "Exhibition of Augustus and Romanness," which consisted of large models of the ancient city as well as "reproductions and models of imperial artifacts".<sup>61</sup> The exhibition featured information on Augustus's life and the Roman army and legal system during his rule. Painter claims that the Augustan Exhibition connected Fascist Rome to imperial Rome in a new way because it emphasized the "glorification" of imperial life and a *romanità* that was now permeated by universal culture: a "sense of social community based on Roman thought, politics, art, law, language, and religion." The connection to ancient Rome was much more apparent in the Augustan Exhibition than the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution because it "emphasized the direct connection between Rome's glorious past and the possibilities of the present". Through this exhibition, Mussolini portrayed himself as the new founder of the "new empire".<sup>62</sup> Painter's

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<sup>59</sup> Painter, 22.

<sup>60</sup> Painter, 73.

<sup>61</sup> Painter, 75.

<sup>62</sup> Painter, 76-77.

discussion of Augustan imagery shows that there was a shift towards a more focused topic regarding Fascist aesthetics. This discussion will be important to my argument because Augustan imagery shows how Fascist aesthetics were incoherent and complex. Instead of relying on a straight set of formulas, the aesthetics became a multi-faceted group of ideas, some related and others not. The inconsistencies of aesthetics reflect the transforming and evolving yet incoherent nature of Fascist ideology and its aesthetics.

### **Fascist Public Art and Architecture in the International World**

The role of international forces, particularly Germany, is the final and most recent way in which historians have studied Fascist architecture and public art. Both Painter, as well as Paul Baxa, author of the 2007 article “Capturing the Fascist Moment: Hitler’s Visit to Italy in 1938 and the Radicalization of Fascist Italy”, discuss the interplay between the Nazi and Fascist powers. They suggest that Hitler’s visit to Rome reflects how Mussolini wanted the city to be seen by the world. Preparations were made well in advance for Hitler’s highly anticipated arrival, including the construction of the new Ostiense train station. Mussolini wanted the station to be built in a way that would capture the imperial spirit of Rome. He ordered grand decorations and intricate Roman-style mosaics to be put on the floors representing Hitler’s Germany next to Mussolini’s Italy.<sup>63</sup> Baxa goes into great depth in his discussion of Hitler’s visit. He writes that Rome was turned into an “elaborate stage” and “grand spectacle” for the German leader, as Mussolini was aware that during the visit the whole world would have its eyes on Italy. Termini station was renovated as well, because Hitler would be leaving for his journeys to Florence and Naples from this location. Mussolini even went as far as covering up run-down buildings in the city that Hitler would be passing with billboards depicting Fascist propaganda and imagery, and

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<sup>63</sup> Painter, 119.

hanging massive German and Italian flags throughout the streets.<sup>64</sup> This masking shows that Mussolini was conscious of how Rome looked on the surface to the rest of the world. Hitler's arrival and celebratory procession through the streets was strategically planned, as well. The motorcade rode down a street newly named Viale Adolfo Hitler and then continued to pass by all of the important architectural projects that had been completed. In the following days, Hitler would visit sites such as the Pantheon, the Palazzo Venezia, the Foro Mussolini, the Capitoline Museums, and the Palatine Hill.<sup>65</sup> Baxa claims that the purpose of the spectacle was to show Italy as a world power, and hoped that all of the improvements made would exemplify this. The visit was featured in *Life* magazine, *The New York Times* and the *Illustrated London Times*, all of which portrayed the days as impressive, despite feelings of uncertainty regarding the motives of the Fascist and Nazi powers.<sup>66</sup> Hitler's visit to Rome was a significant event because it put the spotlight on Italy, and gave Mussolini the chance to show his country as an established superpower. The ways in which imagery, monuments, and architectural projects were manipulated and showcased for the visit shows the importance of Fascist public art. International reactions and opinions are important to my argument and the examination of international opinions can be used as a tool to reveal the inconsistencies of the regime. International reactions also reveal Mussolini's calculated goals when planning the project. He wanted to appeal to international forces by making the regime appear prosperous and productive.

Fascist public art and architecture has been viewed as shifting and changing over the years of the regime. Focuses have shifted from an examination of the Rationalist art movement and its relation to large-scale Fascist architectural projects, to an analysis of Fascist efforts to

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<sup>64</sup> Paul Baxa. 2007. Capturing The Fascist Moment: Hitler's Visit to Italy in 1938 and the Radicalization of Fascist Italy. *Journal of Contemporary History* 42 (7): 229-230.

<sup>65</sup> Baxa, 233-234.

<sup>66</sup> Baxa, 236.

rebuild and restore the ancient center of Rome. The latter focus has led to a discussion regarding Fascist aesthetics, which historians have collectively characterized as linked to the myth of *romanita*, Roman imagery replicated in a more aggressive manner, elaborate and grand display techniques, as well as Augustan imagery. In addition, newer discussions of how international forces saw Mussolini's Rome have become relevant. When all of this information is examined together, it is apparent that inconsistencies lay at the heart of the Fascist regime. The study of Fascist architecture, archeological projects, and its aesthetics is a way of analyzing and examining the incoherent nature and ideology of the regime.

## Chapter 2: A Short History of Fascism

### Mussolini's Rise to Power

Mussolini's rise to power as a dictator is a complicated history, as it depended not on him alone, but the circumstances of the time period. The country had been politically unstable ever since the unification of Italy in 1870. The elite's involvement in politics and economics created a stark contrast between the upper class and the masses. Italian historian, Alexander De Grand, breaks down the 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian population into five political groups: the dominant interest groups, the intermediate elites, and the mass base. De Grand describes each group writing,

“The political class refers to those members of parliament and of government who manage public affairs on the highest level. Dominant interest groups are the leading representatives of organized social and economic forces – landowner and industrial associates, the military, the Catholic Church. The intermediate elite is composed of those who link the political class and the dominant interest groups with the rest of society: estate managers...teachers, civil servants...Finally, the mass base has an urban sector of white-and blue-collar workers, small businessmen...the unemployed...small farmers...landless peasants”.<sup>67</sup>

Prior to 1900, Italy can be characterized as a largely agricultural society. As industrialization developed more people began moving from the countryside to major cities such as Milan and Turin. Although this industrialization moved rather slowly (moving much more slowly in the South than the North) in comparison to countries such as England, a shift occurred in economic, religious, and social spheres producing stresses between the dominant interest group and the political class.<sup>68</sup> The intermediate elite class played a vital role in the situation of the country.

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<sup>67</sup> Alexander De Grand. *Italian Fascism: Its Origins & Development*. University of Nebraska Press, 2000. Ed. 3 3-4.

<sup>68</sup> De Grand, 5.

De Grand discusses the increasing number of educated people who did not have a stable place in a society with low levels of economic development as well as high illiteracy rates. Thus, the intermediate elite class began responding to their situation, which was often unemployment, by the formation of ideology that would become a weapon for the Fascist party.<sup>69</sup>

Benito Mussolini was born on July 29, 1883 in the rural town of Predappio in the Emilia-Romagna region. His mother was a teacher who hoped that education would bring her son out of obscurity and his father was a blacksmith and a revolutionary socialist. Mussolini spent his twenties teaching young children and moved to Switzerland in 1902 where he worked as a manual laborer and was exposed to many socialist groups. In his years in Switzerland, Mussolini met many Italian socialist leaders and joined the army where he began to move up the party ranks.<sup>70</sup> World War I was a turning point in both Mussolini's life and the Italian state. People felt divided between positions of neutrality versus interventionist measures. Initially, Italy was not involved in the war until 1915, choosing to hold a position of neutrality, with which Mussolini initially agreed. However, Mussolini changed his position from neutral to interventionist as the war began to create rifts between the classes leading to tensions and anger targeted particularly towards the political classes. He argued that the Socialist party could not remain "anchored to principal" and urged the party to take an interventionist stance as well. Unfortunately for Mussolini, the Italian Socialists disagreed and he was expelled from the party.<sup>71</sup>

Mussolini's involvement in the Italian army between 1915 and 1917 led to his development of a very nationalistic sentiment, which called for a new "coalition of producers, both bourgeoisie and proletarian, against the 'parasites' in the political class and in the Socialist

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<sup>69</sup> De Grand, 7-10.

<sup>70</sup> De Grand, 15-16.

<sup>71</sup> De Grand, 17-18.



party”.<sup>72</sup> Mussolini’s political career was in shambles by the end of World War I and with his expulsion from the socialist party and he began looking for a way to become noticed again. He began publishing the *Popolo d’Italia*, a newspaper that reflected his logic and gained a large following. On March 23, 1919 he founded a new political movement; *Fascio di Combattimento*. De Grand claims that at the time, *fascio* did not carry significance to what would become the movement; merely referring to a bundle of sticks. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it had become a phrase used to refer to a group of people. De Grand claims that true Fascism developed between the fall of 1920 and the spring of 1921 within rural Italy. The Fascist movement became stronger obtaining thirty-six out of 120 seats in Giolitti’s government, and was solidified in 1920 with the formation of the National Fascist Party (*Partito Nazionale Fascista, PNF*).<sup>73</sup> This new movement gained momentum quickly. Due to the post World War I conditions, the population was unhappy and tense, and many viewed the new movement as an alternative that “mobilized large numbers of discontented young officers, students, and professions in the cities and towns” and expressed their impatience with the old, liberal political class.<sup>74</sup>

The March on Rome, on October 27-29, 1922 signified a crucial turning point for the *PNF*. Mussolini knew that in order to solidify Fascist power, he would need to move in on Rome instead of remaining in the rural regions of Italy. On October 24, plans were laid out in Naples for the Fascist military squads to begin seizing major cities and then immediately converging on the capital.<sup>75</sup> Apparently, King Vittorio Emmanuel received a message that the Fascist rebels had plans of moving in on Rome, but he declined to sign the royal ratification

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<sup>72</sup> De Grand, 29.

<sup>73</sup> De Grand, 30-34.

<sup>74</sup> De Grand, 20.

<sup>75</sup> De Grand, 36.

presented by parliament, which “clinched the success of the revolt” for the Fascists.<sup>76</sup> Mussolini arrived in Rome on October 27, defeated Parliament, and became Italy’s youngest Prime Minister.<sup>77</sup> Historian Denis Mack Smith describes how during these few days Mussolini gained control of the press and was able to twist the story to make it sound as though the takeover of Rome had been a violent affair, when he had in fact just rode in on the train. In addition, before Mussolini’s arrival the government had attempted to form a coalition, which inevitably failed. With his control of the press, Mussolini forced newspapers not to mention the attempt to form a coalition government, which then undermined the public confidence in the liberal system.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, De Grand describes the March on Rome as more characteristic of psychological warfare than physical violence.<sup>79</sup> It was not until 1925 that Mussolini became a dictator, gaining full control over the Italian state and casting off King Vittorio Emmanuel, who still kept his title but essentially held no power. These initial actions are significant because they show the way in which Mussolini was able to manipulate his way into gaining full power. His ability to gain control relatively easily is also reflected in the context of the post-war period in which the country was unstable politically, economically, and socially.

### **Fascist Culture and Propaganda:**

Once Mussolini became dictator he initiated several cultural policies that were intended to unify the country. Italian history became newly polarized around the year 1922. It was

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<sup>76</sup> Mack Smith, Dennis. *Modern Italy: A Political History*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1997. Print. 319. Vittorio Emmanuel was asked to sign a Royal Ratification, which would have returned order to Italy and solidified his power. The King, knowing that the rebels were already moving in on Rome, refused to sign, which according to Mack Smith, “clinched” Fascist success. The reasons behind why Vittorio Emmanuel refused to sign the Ratification are unclear. Mack Smith says that the King was misinformed and had consulted the wrong people for advice, ultimately saying that he changed his mind too late.

<sup>77</sup> De Grand, 37.

<sup>78</sup> Mack Smith, 321-322.

<sup>79</sup> De Grand, 36-37.

referred to as *il primo anno* (the first year) and a new calendar was created signifying 1922 as Year One of the Fascist regime.<sup>80</sup> Taylor Cole, author of the 1938 article, “The Italian Ministry of Popular Culture” describes the formal institutions that oversaw Mussolini’s propaganda campaigns. He writes that the Governmental Press Bureau was established shortly after Mussolini came to power. On September 6, 1934, after complete Fascist solidification the Bureau was transformed into the Undersecretariat of State for Press and Propaganda. The government directly controlled the Press and Propaganda office, which supervised all aspects of Fascist propaganda. On June 24, 1935, the division was again changed into the Ministry of Press and Propaganda, which led to a more organized propaganda system. At first, the Ministry of Press and Propaganda controlled sixteen different divisions. These divisions were finally consolidated into six branches: “Italian Press, Foreign Press, Propaganda, Cinematography, Tourism, and Theater”.<sup>81</sup>

Edward Tannenbaum, author of *The Fascist Experience: Italian Culture and Society, 1922-1945*, published in 1972, traces the development and trends of Fascist propaganda. He writes that the press was the most common and effective form of propaganda in Mussolini’s early years of power because the nation did not yet have a well-developed system of radio and television. Each region had its own paper and Mussolini held a vast amount of power over these publications that made them fairly similar, which was an effective means of creating conformity. The *Corriere della Sera* in Milan, *Giornale d’Italia* and *Messaggero* in Rome, and *Il Mattino* in Naples all played important roles as propaganda.<sup>82</sup> Tannenbaum notes that because of Mussolini’s strict censorship laws the Italian population was in general very badly informed regarding public affairs. It became increasingly more difficult for people to learn about events

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<sup>80</sup> Mack Smith, 365.

<sup>81</sup> Taylor Cole. “The Italian Ministry of Popular Culture”. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*. July, 1938. 425-426.

<sup>82</sup> Edward Tannenbaum. *The Fascist Experience*. New York: Basic, 1972. Print. 222.

that were occurring abroad.<sup>83</sup> Mussolini's censorship laws clearly worked well as a form of propaganda for these reasons, making it more likely for the Italian people to conform to Fascism.

In the 1930s radio slowly became a mass medium in Italian society. Again, the government held a monopoly on all major radio stations. Tannenbaum explains how every major city had a transmitter and by 1933, "all important programs were broadcast on the national network." Additionally, Tannenbaum asserts that the Fascist regime used the "evocative qualities" of radio for propaganda purposes, rather than relying completely on news shows. For example, drum beats and chanting were common sounds heard on the radio. Tannenbaum writes, "Literate people found this style offensive, but millions of Italians could not completely shut out its foreboding effects". These techniques show how the government was successful in getting the attention of Italian citizens.<sup>84</sup>

Newsreels, although not as prevalent as newspapers, were another means of propaganda. In 1924, the *Istituto Nazionale L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa (L.U.C.E.)* was established in the southeast section of Rome. The *Istituto Nazionale L.U.C.E.* was in charge of producing and distributing documentary films and newsreels funded by the regime. These newsreels were commonly shown in theaters before feature films. Tannenbaum writes that it was known that Mussolini was stricter in the editing of the documentaries and newsreels than the newspapers. Censorship laws banned crime, sex, "ugliness", and brutality from Fascist television. Aside from government laws, the *Istituto Nazionale L.U.C.E.* had its own censorship laws, which made what was seen on television very limited, serving as an effective means of propaganda.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Tannenbaum, 224-225.

<sup>84</sup> Tannenbaum, 226.

<sup>85</sup> Tannenbaum, 229-230.

The Italian film industry, *Ente Nazionale Italiano Cinematografico (E.N.I.C.)* was founded between 1936 and 1937 and became a major form of Fascist propaganda. The *E.N.I.C.*, or *Cinecittà*, was one of the largest and most popular film industries in Europe. Despite the popularity of *Cinecittà*, American Hollywood films were also popular in Italy. *Cinecittà* films were similar in that most of them featured a “selfish hero redeemed by patriotism”.<sup>86</sup> Leopoldo Zurlo headed the censorship of film in an office in the ministry of the interior until he was transferred to the Ministry of Press and Propaganda. After the transfer, a board that “included representatives of the ministries of the interior, film corporations, and war; the party; and the G.U.F.” governed censorship in film.<sup>87</sup> Tannenbaum elaborates on how film served as a mechanism of propaganda to the Italian public writing,

““The generalization that seems most valid is that in Fascist Italy, more than in any other country except Nazi Germany, moviegoers were lulled into a false sense of security and national pride by not being confronted with any of the economic, social, or political problems of the real world on the silver screen”.<sup>88</sup>

### **Fascist Culture and Propaganda: The “Cult of the Duce”**

The “Cult of the Duce” was another important form of propaganda in the Fascist regime. De Grand writes that the myth of the Duce became increasingly important in ideology “as the regime moved towards simplified and ritualized thought and behavior”.<sup>89</sup> Additionally, Piero Melograni’s 1976 article “The Cult of the Duce in Mussolini’s Italy” provides details on the

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<sup>86</sup> Tannenbaum, 235.

<sup>87</sup> Tannenbaum, 238. The G.U.F. (Gioventù Universitaria Fascista) was an elite group of male and female university students between ages 18-24. The group was controlled by the Fascist Party. Tannenbaum, 119.

<sup>88</sup> Tannenbaum, 239.

<sup>89</sup> De Grand, 153.

formation of the cult and why it was effective. Melograni asserts that the Cult of the Duce stemmed more from religious behaviors and practices than political ones when he writes, “Mussolini obtained what it was possible to obtain in the Italy of the day by a kind of religious mobilization based on faith: it is no mere chance that when speaking of the ‘cult’ of the Duce we are using a word taken from the vocabulary of religion, not of politics”.<sup>90</sup> Since the time of his involvement with the Socialist party Mussolini was seen as a charismatic speaker who was always able to hold a crowd’s attention. Once he consolidated power as Prime Minister he aimed to establish himself as a legend.<sup>91</sup>

Melograni explains that the Cult of the Duce was truly established between 1925 and 1926. Prior to this development, Mussolini’s propaganda methods were “crude” and “limited”, however, the state of Italy at the time needs to be considered. In 1921, thirty percent of the Italian population was illiterate and fifty-six percent was still agrarian, which is why it was more difficult for the Fascist regime to effectively communicate their ideas. Additionally, the Matteotti Crisis of 1924 threatened Mussolini’s power.<sup>92</sup> By 1925 propaganda began to expand. Melograni asserts that the French writer, Gustave Le Bon particularly influenced the dictator, who referenced Le Bon in his own writing. Le Bon’s 1865 book *Psychologie Des Foules*, states, “crowds do not love kindly masters, but love tyrants who oppress them” and that leaders need to have the attributes of a Caesar: “his panache must be seductive...his authority must command respect, and his sabre must inspire fear”.<sup>93</sup> As Mussolini was serious about imposing his image

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<sup>90</sup> Piero Melograni. "The Cult of the Duce in Mussolini's Italy." *Journal of Contemporary History* 11.4 (1976): 221-37. *JSTOR*. Web. 224.

<sup>91</sup> Melograni, 225.

<sup>92</sup> In 1924 members of the Fascist party murdered Socialist leader, Giacomo Matteotti. Many Italians held Mussolini responsible for the murder and he did end up making a statement taking the blame for the event. However, people were still angry and threatened by the incident and many ended up leaving the Fascist party. See Melograni pg. 226.

<sup>93</sup> E. Ludwig, *Colloqui con Mussolini* (Milan 1965), 130-31, [first ed. 1932. English translation, *Talks with Mussolini* (London, 1933)]. As found in Melograni, pg. 227.

on the Italian population, efforts were drastic and bold. For example, each newspaper was obligated to showcase Mussolini's speeches and articles and typesetters always had to print "DUCE" in capital letters. Additionally, Mussolini's slogans were painted in bold, black lettering on the sides of buildings all over cities.<sup>94</sup>

The Cult of the Duce was also heavily connected to ancient Rome and there was a lack of restraint in the expression of these symbols. The term 'Duce' stems from the Latin word *Dux*, and lictoral *fascies* (a bundle of rods that symbolized power carried by Roman lictors who accompanied magistrates) became the symbol of the nation. Roman symbolism was everywhere. Fascists greeted each other with a 'Roman salute' and marched with a 'Roman step'. Labor Day was changed to April 21, the anniversary of the foundation of Rome, and the Roman eagle became an icon of the regime. Also, Mussolini was typically portrayed as a Roman *condottiere* (commander) in marble busts and bronze medallions; each of which were common objects of ancient Rome (see fig. 2.1).<sup>95</sup>



Fig. 2.1

Melograni also offers insight to reasons why the Cult of the Duce was so widespread and successful. One reason is because of the Fascist propaganda techniques that were previously

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<sup>94</sup> Melograni. 227.

<sup>95</sup> Melograni, 229-230.

discussed. Mussolini had always been very proud of his propaganda efforts, that is, until he was exposed to Nazi propaganda, which he then tried to emulate but was unsuccessful. However, his propaganda in Italy was successful based on the situation of the country. Additionally, Mussolini was skillful in turning any achievement that he made into a prestigious event, which led the population to hold him highly in their regard. Due to strict censorship, there was no outlet for him to be criticized so people were never exposed to his faults. Melograni writes that the combined reports of the press, radio, and television gave the impression that Italy was an “idyllic country with no thieves, murderers, railway accidents, or even floods”.<sup>96</sup> Although it sounds foolish to think that a country suffered from nothing as minor as a flood, Fascist censorship exemplifies the effectiveness of propaganda. Melograni also points to large efforts of repression as a reason why the Cult of the Duce was so successful. During Mussolini’s rule, several police forces existed including the *Squadristo*, a brutal police force in the early 1920s, and later O.V.R.A., a secret police force established in 1927.

The repressive nature of the regime, combined with the tendency of those under an authoritarian government to conform and become compliant, enabled the Cult of the Duce to permeate society.<sup>97</sup> Mack Smith describes Fascism as displaying an “artificial culture” that had a goal of displaying Fascist success and martyrdom, however the cultural features were casual compared to those of Nazism.<sup>98</sup> However, the Cult of the Duce and other forms of propaganda were important to Fascists because they allowed the government to portray itself in an intentional and purposeful manner. The notion of an “artificial culture” is a topic that I will explore because it shows the uniqueness of Fascist propaganda and culture in contrast to that in other totalitarian

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<sup>96</sup> Melograni, 231.

<sup>97</sup> Melograni, 232.

<sup>98</sup> Mack Smith, 362-363.



regimes, and further illustrates how architectural and archeological projects reveal inconsistencies in Fascist ideology.

### **Studies in Fascist Ideology and Definitions of the Term:**

The development and ideologies of the Fascist regime played an essential role in its policies towards public art and architecture. Historians emphasize the incoherence of Fascist ideology. I will use this concept when examining the architectural and archeological developments and trends in Rome. De Grand defines Fascism as a doctrine of “bourgeoisie resurgence whose essence was anti-liberalism and anti-socialism” with an ideology of radical nationalism that developed in response to socialism, yet borrowed from many other kinds of politics.<sup>99</sup> De Grand, however, points out that it is problematic to bridge the gap between what the Fascist party said and what it actually accomplished. This gap needs to be filled in order to respond to Fascism’s “vague, composite ideology”. When examining the circumstances in which Mussolini came to power, De Grand identifies that it was a response to a “crisis within Italian capitalism” as well as to a “breakdown of the Liberal parliamentary system” that developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>100</sup>

Historians have concluded that there are many definitions of Italian Fascism. They also agree that many factions existed within the Fascist regime. These different views emphasize the fact that one cannot make sweeping judgments when defining Fascism. De Grand characterizes Fascist ideology as consisting of several interpretations that appealed to many different groups in Italy, making it an attractive alternative to the liberal government. Six different varieties are

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<sup>99</sup> De Grand, xiv.

<sup>100</sup> De Grand, vx.

evident: National Syndicalism and Populism, Anti-democratic Modernism, *Squadristo*, Technocratic Fascism, Conservative Fascism, and Nationalist Fascism.<sup>101</sup>

De Grand identifies National Syndicalism and Populism as the “original nucleus” of the Fascist Regime. National Syndicalism and Populism was based on the idea that Italy should be organized as a society of producers - both manual and technical workers, and that this mixture would become the basis for new national political and economic order. De Grand describes national syndicalism’s ideology as “republican, anti-clerical, and vaguely socialistic”. Mussolini himself was never a syndicalist, but many of his friends and associates, who were influenced these ideas. The syndicalists moved to lower the voting age to 18, abolish a monarchical constitution, begin confiscating excess war profits, and increase the minimum wage. These ideas were attractive Italian intellectuals such as Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto, who aimed to disrupt the society’s confidence in Marxism.<sup>102</sup>

Anti-democratic modernism in the Fascist regime was related to the Futurist movement, which was based on the rejection of the “nineteenth-century dogma that modern industrial progress would lead to political democracy and equality”. Cultural rebels and anti-democratic elitists who claimed that Italy’s rebirth would only come through “spiritual renewal” joined the Futurist movement (and subsequently, their ideology). De Grand argues that there are moments when Mussolini came extremely close to joining ideologies with the Futurists since he favored their view that the “instinct, violence, and irrational forces” were reigning forces in the modern world. A central feature of anti-democratic modernism is the cult or myth of the hero or leader, which became an integral force in the Fascist regime.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> De Grand, 138-139.

<sup>102</sup> De Grand, 139-141.

<sup>103</sup> De Grand, 142.

*Squadristo*, or Ruralist Fascism, was the most radical and outwardly violent faction of Italian Fascism. Consisting of veterans, provincial students, and small town professionals and businessmen, members of *Squadristo* participated in “Anarchic explosions of violence that contained anti-urban, anti-modern, and anti-industrial elements”. Provincial *squadristo* was unique because its members claimed to represent a true Italy; one that was made up of peasant soldiers. De Grand writes that the group, whose intention was to rid the countryside of subversives, felt deeply attached to World War I and its members wanted to relive the experience through notions of heroism and sacrifice. *Squadristo*, however, remained short-lived since in 1925 Mussolini “chose the state bureaucracy rather than the party [*Squadristo*] as the instrument of authoritarian dictatorship”. Mussolini was able to tame the *Squadriste* movement, and although he never felt a connection to its radical goals, he was attracted to the “cult of the fallen” and the notions of a heroic past that the movement represented.<sup>104</sup>

Technocratic Fascism shares similarities with *Squadristo* in that it was a radical variation of Fascism. However, it differs because its supporters were elitist and urban. Technocratic Fascists aimed to control modernization by solving the problems of society through “corporative organization and planning”. This movement was popular with young Italians because they saw it as a vehicle that could create the change that they hoped to see. However, technocratic Fascism was largely unsuccessful, as it had to face strong industrial forces that were intent on building their own projects.<sup>105</sup>

De Grand characterizes the four Fascist variations listed so far as having little similarity “apart from the desire to replace the old political class”. Although these groups echoed the voices of the lower middle Italian classes, none of them shared similar ideologies, particularly in

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<sup>104</sup> De Grand, 143.

<sup>105</sup> De Grand, 144.

terms of how their goals should be executed. Thus, De Grand's next two variations, conservative fascism and nationalist fascism played a more integral role in Mussolini's regime. De Grand describes conservative fascism as the least ideological of all of the Fascist elements but as important in shaping the outlook of the regime. Conservative fascism was a way in which groups who did not necessarily want to be directly involved with the regime, could "absorb it [Fascism] within the traditional culture". De Grand describes nationalist fascism as "the most coherent version" of the conservative ideology. The joining of the Italian Nationalist Association to the Fascist party in 1923 opened up three ideas to the newly forming ideology:

"the need to reinforce the state apparatus by removing constraints on executive power, the determination to control the mass proletarian organizations by incorporating them within the structure of the state, and the need for a strong foreign policy as a way of focusing international will".<sup>106</sup>

Connections to the conservative Fascist wing are seen through the fact that the Nationalist Association was interested in maintaining the Church and the monarchy. However, their goal of reorganizing the political system went a step farther. When examining these six variations, De Grand notes that each one is similar in their rejection and hatred of socialism, and their desire to "overcome social and economic fragmentation through an authoritarian state". All of the varying Fascist ideologies agreed on four points: nationalism, elitism, authoritarianism, and collectivism. Additionally, the cult of the nation and state as well as the myth of heroism are seen as carrying through all of these themes. De Grand, however, describes how it is difficult to compile a solid and coherent definition of Italian Fascism because of the different factions within.<sup>107</sup> It is evident that although Mussolini attempted to create a unified Fascist party. Cracks remained and

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<sup>106</sup> De Grand, 145.

<sup>107</sup> De Grand, 145-147.

at times, widened, showing the artificial, fragmented, and at times incoherent nature of his regime. The fact that these six branches existed supports the argument that Italian Fascism had an inconsistent and unclear ideology.

### **Studies in Italian Fascism: Historical Trends**

When examining the different variations of Italian Fascism, it is also important to understand how the study of the topic has changed and evolved in the past decades, influencing definitions used to describe the ideology. Roger Griffin, author of the article “The Concept that Came Out of the Cold: the Progressive Historicization of Generic Fascism and its New Relevance to Teaching Twentieth-Century History”, published in 2003, discusses these trends. Griffin explains the contested history of Fascism by illustrating how it is important to determine the differences between “Fascism” (Mussolini’s regime) and “fascism” (a generic phenomenon that was the “product of Mussolini’s megalomania or the botched process of Italian unification”). One of Griffin’s main concerns for the study of fascism is how it has been largely neglected in the classroom for the past decades is voiced when he writes, “For decades, the only serviceable generic term applied in the context of such questions was ‘totalitarianism’, which was widely used in such a definitionally vague way as to be little more than a blunt instrument for a serious analytical purposes”.<sup>108</sup>

Griffin traces the ways in which historians studied fascism, beginning with Marxist definitions that view it as an agent of capitalism because it appealed to the working class.<sup>109</sup> However, this definition is problematic because it suggests that fascism was exclusive to the working class, when it was in fact, attractive to both capitalists and elitists. Griffin analyses

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<sup>108</sup> Roger Griffin. "The Concept That Came Out of the Cold." *History Compass* 1 (2003): 1-41. Web. 2.

<sup>109</sup> Griffin, 3.

Comintern Orthodoxy from the 1930s, a school that defined fascism as an “openly terroristic dictatorship of the bourgeoisie”. He references Antonio Gramsci, an Italian philosopher, who argued that cultural hegemony played a role in this dictatorship to illustrate the Comintern Orthodoxy interpretation. In addition, Walter Benjamin, who supported this ideology, views fascism as “the ‘aesthetization’ of a reactionary form of government aimed at deceiving the masses into colluding with their own alienation and exploitation through empty rhetoric and carefully staged spectacles, including war itself”.<sup>110</sup> Benjamin’s view is a more realistic interpretation of fascism because it shows the relationship between Fascist policies and propaganda tactics and its ideology, whereas the definition of Comintern Orthodox group oversimplifies the nature of the regime.

Arnd Bauerkämper, author of the 2006 article “A New Consensus? Recent Research on Fascism in Europe, 1918-1945”, argues that there are three major periods of research on fascism. The first is in the 1920s, when observers looked at fascism to make predictions about politics. The second is in the 1930s when the consolidation of Stalinism provoked debate about totalitarianism, and then finally in the 1950s during the Cold War, which fueled new discussions regarding totalitarian regimes. Bauerkämper traces how research on fascism temporarily declined after World War II and then dwindled again from the 1960s to the 1980s because historians were “disenchanted” by the use of generic definitions for the term.<sup>111</sup> Griffin elaborates on the 1970s, writing that the shallow definitions of fascism at the time did not allow historians to easily find a consensus. He references trends in textbooks that only listed the term with a “slightly different checklist of attributes” that completely ignored the ideological aspect. Griffin claims that this has now changed as historians have begun to take Fascist ideology seriously and have begun to

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<sup>110</sup> Griffin, 4.

<sup>111</sup> Arnd Bauerkämper. "A New Consensus? Recent Research on Fascism in Europe, 1918-1945." *History Compass* 4/3 (2006): 536-66. Web. 537.

understand how “Fascist claims to be inaugurating a revolution of Italy’s political and social culture were more than cynical propaganda or self-delusion”.<sup>112</sup> In addition, Bauerkämper opens up the discussion of a new interest in Fascist culture that occurred in the 1990s when historians began to examine the relationship between fascist ideology and culture.<sup>113</sup> Bauerkämper’s analysis of historical trends is important to my thesis. His analysis offers insight to the trends of studies in Fascism. Additionally, his discussion of how the study of Fascist culture is a topic of fairly recent interest explains why the examination of Fascist public art and architecture only surfaced to a broad extent in the past few decades.

Griffin discusses problems with the ways in which fascism has been studied previously, claiming that there is an unsophisticated trend in equating fascism with “mindless authoritarianism” and “pure evil”. Additionally, grouping Nazism and Fascism together, along with the racial stereotyping that goes along with it, is problematic. Griffin suggests that Nazi ideology is more racist than Fascist ideology. He argues that it was not until Hitler and Mussolini began working closely together that Italian Fascism developed a sense of a superior race.<sup>114</sup> Griffin asserts that fascism is more complex, and that it does have a meaning outside Italy, pointing to a “New Consensus” where historians can agree on a definition of the term that allows “Nazism, and all other fascisms, including Fascism itself, to be located within the wider mix of events and processes that constitute modern history”. More importantly, in the past decade scholars have agreed that concepts of fascism are helpful when discussing revolutionary forms of nationalism. Griffin writes,

“fascism is a revolutionary form of nationalism bent on mobilizing all ‘healthy’ social and political energies to resist the onslaught of ‘decadence’ so as to achieve the goal of

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<sup>112</sup> Griffin, 6-7.

<sup>113</sup> Bauerkämper, 537.

<sup>114</sup> Griffin, 8-9.

national rebirth, a project that involves the regeneration...of both the political culture and the social and ethical culture that underpins it”.<sup>115</sup>

Bauerkämper adds to the complexity of this definition by presenting the work of Roger Eatwell who focuses more on fascism’s “affective appeals to economic and social realities”.

Bauerkämper writes,

“According to Eatwell’s interpretation, fascism was a ‘spectral-syncretic ideology’ characterized by a complex of four core themes: ‘(a) “natural history; (b) geopolitics; (c) political economy; and (d) leadership, activism, party, and propaganda”’,

which he then sums up himself by claiming, “Rather than a coherent body of political thought, fascism was a variant of the radical, extreme or new right as ‘styles of thought’ which responded to socialist movements and governments”.<sup>116</sup> These are the definitions that I will be using when analyzing how Fascist public art and architecture reflected Mussolini’s regime because they offer insight to the complexities and incoherent nature of Fascism.

In addition, I believe that these definitions work in accord with Bauerkämper’s discussion of the relationship between Fascist ideology and Fascist aesthetics, a topic that gained momentum during the 1980s. Bauerkämper references George L. Mosse’s work to assert, “Myths and symbols were to portray fascism as a powerful force of rejuvenation. Fascist aesthetics compromised the adulation of war and violence, the leadership cult, paramilitary marches and rallies as well as the cult of the dead”.<sup>117</sup> Griffin writes about the importance of the study of specific aspects of the Fascist regime, asserting that the agreement regarding the definitions above is evident because there has since been a rise in scholarship on specific

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<sup>115</sup> Griffin. 12-13.

<sup>116</sup> Bauerkämper, 541.

<sup>117</sup> Bauerkämper, 547.



phenomena associated with Fascism, one of which is an increase in the study of Fascist art.<sup>118</sup>

Through an examination of Fascist culture and ideology, as well as the trends in which Italian Fascism is defined, it is evident that there are links. An understanding of Fascist culture and ideology will be necessary for contextualizing the interplay between architecture and archeology and the Fascist regime.

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<sup>118</sup> Griffin, 13.

### **Chapter 3: *La Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* and *La Mostra Augustea della Romanità*: A Comparison**

Two major exhibitions in the 1930s showcased the contrasting architectural and archeological movements during the Fascist period. The first major exhibition, *La Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* (The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution) was open from 1932 to 1934. This exhibition focused on Italian history in the decades leading up to the Fascist takeover and outlined important themes through the use of photography collages, statues, and artifacts. *La Mostra Augustea della Romanità* (The Augustan Exhibition) opened in 1937 and highlighted Rome's glorious ancient past. Both exhibitions were held at the Palazzo dell'Esposizione on the Via Nazionale. For each project the architects transformed the exterior of the palazzo to match the theme. Many people of all nationalities came to visit the spectacles and the Fascist Party made sure that the intent and goals of the exhibitions were outlined clearly so that the Fascist voice rang true. These two exhibitions are reflective of the art movements during the Fascist periods. They represent the two branches, architecture and archeological restorations, that were occurring simultaneously, reflecting the multi-sided character of Fascist aesthetics.

Although it is evident that the intention of each exhibition was linked back to Fascism, each was presented in a very different manner. *La Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* became an outlet for Mussolini to express his voice regarding the decisions surrounding the formation and goals of the Fascist party. A guidebook accompanying the exhibition, written by Luigi Freddi, clearly states this. Freddi claimed that the exhibition was an “objective and faithful chronological reconstruction of the origins and development of the Fascist Revolution” and that it served as a display of the regimes great achievements.<sup>119</sup> The exhibition relied on visual stimulation. Documents and relics such as photographs, memorabilia, banners, flags, newspaper articles,

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<sup>119</sup> Dino Alfieri and Luigi Freddi, *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*. Rome: Partito Nazionale Fascista, 1933, 7.

quotes from speeches, and extravagant pieces of sculpture and architecture, which “re-evoked the atmosphere” of each important event beginning in 1914 were presented according to theme.<sup>120</sup>

The National Fascist Party had high hopes for their exhibition claiming that despite all of the variety in artifacts, there was a strong sense of “prevailing harmony” within the exhibit. The party wrote that the exhibition “appeals to the fancy, stimulates the imagination, and re-animates the mind”.<sup>121</sup> This acknowledgement of the hope that the exhibit would be harmonious and engaging sets the stage for how the National Fascist Party perceived and planned to portray recent Italian history.

Although the Augustan Exhibition dealt with a time period not current to Fascist Rome, there was still an underlying purpose. *La Mostra Augustea della Romanità* embodied many of Mussolini’s beliefs about Rome’s historical past discussed by Painter and Agnew. At the onset of the opening in 1937, Massimo Pallottino wrote an article in the architectural journal *Capitolium* that provides descriptions, images, and insights to the project. Pallottino clearly stated the intentions of the exhibition, showing how it differed from previous projects at the Palazzo dell’Esposizione:

*“che non si propone d’illustrare e documentare avvenimenti e realizzazioni di un periodo storico o limitate ad una branchia dell’attività umana; ma abbraccia...tutte le manifestazioni di una grande civiltà.”* (This [exhibition] is not intended to illustrate or document the events and achievements of a historical period, or limit them to a small amount of human activity; but to embrace...all manifestations of a great civilization).<sup>122</sup>

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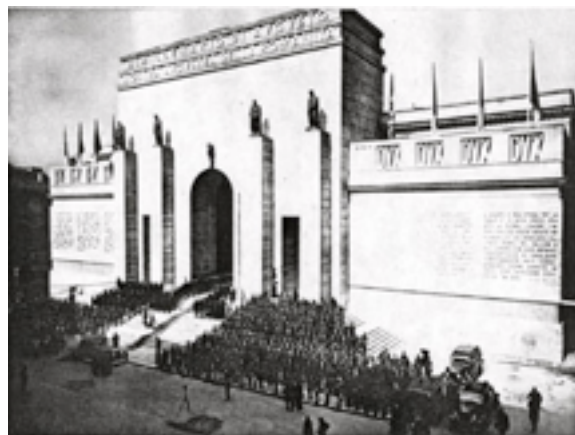
<sup>120</sup> Alfieri & Freddi, 9.

<sup>121</sup> Alfieri & Freddi, 9.

<sup>122</sup> Massimo Pallottino “La Mostra Augustae della Romanita”. *Capitolium* 1937, 520-521. Accompanied by my own translation.

In this statement Pallottino explained that the exhibition was supposed to be an overall embodiment of the Augustan period, rather than a historical timeline like the opening rooms of *La Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*. He also explained how the Fascist party saw parallels between themselves and Augustan Rome when he wrote, “*Ammoniscono i visitatori e i passanti sulla Potenza indistruttibile di Roma, sulle doti della gente Italica*” (The exhibition cautions visitors of the indestructible nature of Rome and is a gift to the Italian people). The fact that the Fascist party viewed the exhibition as a gift means that it felt it had a responsibility to teach the Italian people about their country’s history. From the overall design and organization of the exhibition, it is evident that Fascism played less of a role in the meaning and intent. The goal was showcasing a glorious moment in history so that people would know what was possible for the present and future.<sup>123</sup>

The façades of the two exhibitions best illustrates how the design and overall environment between the two differed. Both were held at the Palazzo dell’Esposizione, which was transformed to accord with the content of the exhibitions. The façade of the 1932 exhibition was strong, with forceful straight lines and bold features that embodied the modern architecture of the Fascist regime (see Fig. 3.1). Four large *fasci* command attention over the



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<sup>123</sup> Pallattino, 519.

Fig. 3.1

entrance and are flanked by two huge red Roman numeral X's that symbolize the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March on Rome. Although eye-catching, the Augustan exhibition had a much more refined, gentler façade. The outside was modeled on a Roman temple with marble walls holding inscriptions from ancient Roman and Christian texts, and tall columns topped with replicas of ancient statues. Pallottino emphasized how the impressive entranceway, designed by Alfredo Scalpelli, showcased a more modern take on an ancient triumphal arch.<sup>124</sup>

The layout of the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution was significant as well. Visitors entered up a grand staircase that led to the lobby and ground floor, which held the majority of the exhibition (see Fig. 3.2). Arrows reading "*Percorso del Pubblico*" (public path) dot their way around the ground floor on the map.<sup>125</sup> The route of the arrows shows the suggested path and emphasizes the order in which the National Fascist Party wanted the exhibit to be seen. Arranged in alphabetical order, smaller rooms line the periphery of the exhibit. Each room highlighted significant events of the pre-Revolutionary era, moving in chronological order. For example, Room A chronicled the outbreak of World War I in 1914 to the foundation of Mussolini's newspaper, *Popolo d'Italia*.<sup>126</sup> Some of the rooms were very specific in the time period, such as Rooms P and Q, both of which were dedicated entirely to the March on Rome, October 22 to 29, 1922.<sup>127</sup> The breakdown of how the rooms are organized is important because it puts an emphasis on the Fascist Party's opinions of major events since 1914.

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<sup>124</sup> Pallottino, 519.

<sup>125</sup> Freddi, 38.

<sup>126</sup> Freddi, 72.

<sup>127</sup> Freddi, 192.

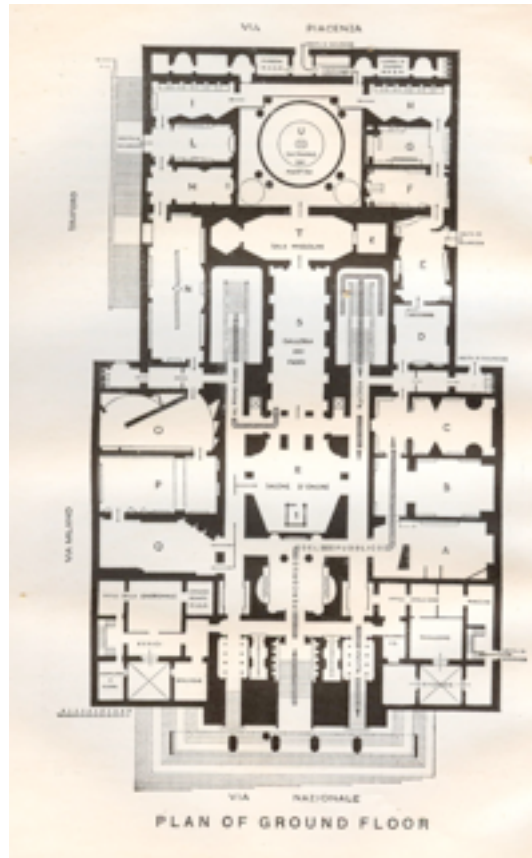


Fig 3.2

The fact that the Fascist Party dedicated two whole rooms to the March on Rome alone shows this event as a turning point in Fascist history. After circling the outside rooms of the exhibition, the arrows guided the visitor back to the lobby of the palazzo, through four larger rooms that illustrated overarching themes. These center rooms are entitled the Room of Honor, the Gallery of the Fasces, Mussolini's Room, and the Sanctuary of the Martyrs.<sup>128</sup> Since they were at the end, it is assumed that seeing the final rooms after viewing a comprehensive history of Italy since 1914 would allow visitors to draw conclusions about the main themes and goals of the Fascist party such as martyrs, upholding military honor, and nationalism. These symbols support Nelis' and Painter's discussion about *romanità* because they reveal an interest in ancient

<sup>128</sup> Freddi, 38.

values. The visual manner of the exhibition creates an intense experience that is successful in appealing to emotion that would have drawn people to these messages. Furthermore, the subjects of these larger center rooms are important because they illustrate themes that pertain to the rest of the exhibition. Imagery and writings regarding themes such as Mussolini's role in Italy, the stories of martyrs, the honoring fallen war heroes, and the concept of the "fasci" all make consistent appearances throughout the rooms. Furthermore, the fact that at the end an entire room is dedicated to each one solidifies their significance to the Fascist ideology.

Imagery and themes that reference ancient Rome are present in both exhibitions, particularly the glorification of warfare and violence. The Roman Empire gained most of its success from its imperial conquests and these victories were present in most forms of monumental architecture. Victory monuments such as the column of Marcus Aurelius and Trajan's Column depicted imagery of Roman conquests and served as representations of the empire's power. Roman ideals also valued heroism and military valor and prestige, all elements that the Fascist Party valued as well.<sup>129</sup> The number of examples in the exhibition of themes of heroism or martyrs for the Fascist cause, as well as the glorification of war, is countless. Room C focused on the Italian involvement in World War I and the entranceway features an image of an "armed Italy". The image is not only ancient in the way that it is done as a Roman-style woman holding a sword in relief form, but it symbolizes war for Italy as well.<sup>130</sup> The display cases in Room C highlighted individuals who died in the war, as well as martyrs for the Fascist cause. For example, bloodstained letters of Enrico Toti were proudly displayed, along with a flag pierced by bullet holes that covered him while he died. There were more bloodstained letters and clothing items of the men who died in the war. The background to all of these items

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<sup>129</sup> Painter, 3.

<sup>130</sup> Freddi, 96.

was photography of the war-tormented landscape.<sup>131</sup> Imagery of the glorification of violence carries on in the rooms that chronicle the events after the war, showing that this theme was persistent in Fascist ideology. Room N, which displayed the history of 1921, particularly shows these themes as one of the displays honors individuals who have fallen for the Fascist cause. For example, a piece of the bridge off of which young Fascist, Giovanni Berta, was thrown lay in a showcase. Another display contained images of dead bodies of those who were killed, including a twelve-year-old boy and nine young sailors (see Fig. 3.3). Blood stained drums, letters, and newspaper articles were displayed along with photographs of the “Massacre at the Diana Theater”, which left twenty-one Fascist dead. Placed around these images and objects were hands holding rifles, pickaxes, and machine guns to represent all of the bloodshed.<sup>132</sup>



Fig. 3.3

<sup>131</sup> Freddi, 102.

<sup>132</sup> Freddi, 165.



Additionally, two of the middle rooms, the Room of Honor and the Sanctuary of Martyrs, illustrate the war-like character of the exhibition, as well relating as to *romanità* and the Cult of the Duce. In the Room of Honor, a large axe showing Mussolini's motto, "order – authority – justice" and "believe – obey – fight" is displayed.<sup>133</sup> These violent, strong words make the connection to all of the images of bloodshed very clear. The connection between the Fascist Party and its ideology to the glorification of violence make the two seem inseparable. Furthermore, in the Sanctuary of Martyrs, there is a black metal cross rising out of a "blood red pedestal" and the room is filled with banners of each Fascist fighting squadron and all of the names of the dead. Freddi writes that this room shows that "Fascism confers the highest rank on the sacrifice of Fallen comrades by crowning them with immortality", which further solidifies the notion of heroism through death and the glorification of war, an ideal that the ancient Romans held very dearly.<sup>134</sup> The fact that all of these men are being honored for their sacrifices to the Fascist regime shows this idea of Roman heroism. Yet, because there is so much emphasis on the heroic bloodshed in the exhibition as a whole glorifies violence and gives the impression that death for the Fascist cause is necessary and honored as a way of personal sacrifice.

Other imagery in the exhibition is subtler in referencing ancient Rome. The inclusion of Roman imagery seems out of place, as the exhibition is extremely modernist, but the relationship between the two may represent the idea of using the old to move forward, which was an important part of the Fascist ideology. The use of is an important part of the exhibition. According to Etlin, these fasces were viewed as a symbol of Rome and Italy and they were used to "harmonize with the monumental aspect of the architecture they adorned". *Fasces* were declared the national emblem of Italy in 1926 and the Fascist version was depicted in a "squat,

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<sup>133</sup> Freddi, 214.

<sup>134</sup> Freddi, 227.

forceful appearance”.<sup>135</sup> In addition to the façade, many of the rooms such as Room B, featured “monumental fasces” holding up Mussolini’s inscriptions.<sup>136</sup> This imagery ties Fascism to the ancient world. These symbols appear in Room O on a lower section of the wall that is dedicated to workers with a metal figure holds a “lictor’s axe”.<sup>137</sup>

Another reference is the Roman numeral X, which appears frequently throughout the exhibit and represents 1932, the 10<sup>th</sup> year since the Fascist Revolution (see Fig. 3.4).<sup>138</sup>



Fig. 3.4

The largest X is located in the grand entranceway and is painted in “tricolor” against a dark background. Bright lights and red arches line the hallway and the X is “flanked by two fluted Fasces”, which frame giant letters writing out the Fascist oath.<sup>139</sup> The use of the Roman numeral is linked to ancient Rome because at the start of the Fascist Revolution, Mussolini began using the Roman numerals to mark the years, starting again at I, signifying a new beginning. The

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<sup>135</sup> Etlin, 404.

<sup>136</sup> Freddi, 85.

<sup>137</sup> Freddi, 186.

<sup>138</sup> The Roman numeral X appears in many other architectural projects during the Fascist period, as well.

<sup>139</sup> Freddi, 68.

ancient Roman calendar marked the years in this way, as well. The use of artwork done in relief form is also reflective of ancient imagery. For example, Room A is filled with reliefs placed high on the walls depicting the soldiers marching off to war in 1914.<sup>140</sup> Room B also contains a high relief showing Mussolini as “The Determinator”<sup>141</sup>, which not only speaks to art forms of ancient Rome, but also relates back to the ways in which Mussolini was portrayed in the same “god-like” manners of the Roman emperors. This title also shows Mussolini’s control and leadership, in the face of decision-making. Room Q also features a relief of “Fasces exalting the nation” during the March on Rome.<sup>142</sup> Reliefs were a popular method of showing events and images in ancient Rome. Reliefs depicting battles, victories, or even religious events were built into public monuments such as columns or arches. Although the context for the reliefs in the exhibition are used in a different setting, the use and ideas in them can be linked back to the ancient period.

Although *La Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* contains many references to ancient Rome, the Augustan exhibition displays much more obvious imagery. This imagery makes sense, as the theme of the exhibition was memorializing and honoring Rome’s history. However, the choice of the designers to recreate a temple for the outside reveals the measures that the Fascist regime was taking to make a statement. The recreation of the temple allows for the exhibition to be fluid and concise, and the façade brings the importance of the ancient world to Mussolini out into the public eye. Although the façade of the Fascist Revolution exhibition has more modern qualities, the references to the Imperial past signify that it is an important theme of the Fascist regime. Links to the ancient world are apparent throughout the Fascist Revolution exhibition, showing an overall connection between modernism and ancient-style art. However,

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<sup>140</sup> Freddi, 74.

<sup>141</sup> Freddi, 92.

<sup>142</sup> Freddi, 205.

the Augustan exhibition solely depends on ancient imagery, which differs from the forceful modern qualities of the earlier project. This major difference between the two exemplifies the extremities of the projects that were occurring around the city under the Fascist regime.

The Augustan exhibition was organized by room according to themes in the same manner of the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution. Pallattino's article begins with the main floor in the Room of Augustus (see Fig 3.5), which showcases statues of the emperor in various forms; "*come genio, come guerriero, come sacerdote*" (as a genius, as a warrior, and as a priest). In this room the visitor was treated to several large reliefs. The first depicts the mythical origins of Rome with Aeneas's journey from Troy and the subsequent destruction of the Rome. To contrast this low point in Roman history, the second relief features scenes from the victorious battle over Carthage. The Room of Augustus also features a brightly lit cross in order to show that the roots of Christianity began in ancient Rome.<sup>143</sup> However, the placement of the cross is problematic, as Christianity did not become the official religion of the Roman Empire until Constantine. Aside from the addition of the cross in the Room of Augustus, there is a room dedicated to Constantine as well. Although Augustus and Christianity do not go hand in hand, perhaps the designers of the exhibition tied the two together in order to show the weight that Augustus' rule had on the world. This connection is evident, as Pallattino comments that Augustus was "*il fondatore della realtà storica dalla quale prende le mosse la formazione del mondo moderno*" (the founder of a new historical reality which began with the formation of the modern world).<sup>144</sup> This quote is significant because it suggests that the Fascists saw history as truly beginning with Augustan Rome and that the foundations of their world at that moment were based on the world that the emperor created.

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<sup>143</sup> Pallattino, 523. The translation is my own.

<sup>144</sup> Pallattino, 523. The translation is my own.



Fig. 3.5

The Room of Augustus seems to actually have been several smaller rooms connected by an overarching theme. Pallatino's article mentions that when walking through the Room of Augustus, the visitors passed by the Room of Julius Caesar, which is dominated by a massive statue of the emperor and includes reliefs that depict the scenes of war that were so frequent during his rule. Pallatino refers to Caesar as "*il Dittatore*" (the dictator), which gives the impression that he believes Rome became more humane and just when Augustus came to power. Aside from imagery of the emperor, the room also features replicas and information regarding daily life during the Augustan period. Around the walls there are inscriptions of writings by famous authors and poets of the period, as well as images of Augustus' family members, close confidante, and members of his court. Additionally, there are replicas of monuments erected during his rule showing them as they appeared during the time. Evidently, the designers of the exhibition went a step further even including statues of soldiers in uniform, replicas of the ships used in the Roman navy, and models of weapons, equipment, and fortifications.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Pallatino, 524.

Pallattino also describes the Room of Imperialism, which continues with Roman life after Augustus and contains historical facts about public life in Imperial Rome. The features of this room suggest that the creators believed that continuity existed from the Augustan period to the rest of ancient Rome's history. Part of the Room of Imperialism showcases the age of Trajan, which Pallattino describes as happy and prosperous. Additionally, paintings in the room exemplify the Roman army defending the empire from the threat of barbaric pressures from the East. Pallattino then points to the Room of Christianity, which holds another brightly lit cross that takes up most of the back wall. Both rooms are decorated with inscriptions of quotes of more famous authors and reliefs of prominent members of the Roman Senate. Pallattino explains how all of these elements are significant because they follow the framework of progress made beginning with Augustus. Pallattino writes, "*la visione della continuità di Roma attraverso il medio evo e nei tempi moderni e della sua piena rinascita nel Fascismo e nel nuovo Impero*" (the vision of Rome continued through the Middle Ages and the modern times, and its full rebirth is with Fascism and the new Empire) to show that Mussolini believes that this progress carries on through the Fascist regime.<sup>146</sup>

The lower floor, designed by Italo Giusmondo, highlights elements of cultural life in ancient Rome. Pallattino states that models of temples, forums, basilicas, theaters, circuses, baths, aqueducts, fountains, bridges, palaces, houses, markets, and even walls and doors offer a complete reconstruction of Imperial life (see Fig 3.6). Additionally, a map outlining the boundaries of the Empire past London and Paris helps illustrate the vastness of the empire.<sup>147</sup> Ancient industry and craft were also described in these rooms. Prints cover

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<sup>146</sup> Pallattino, 524. The translation is my own.

<sup>147</sup> Pallattino, 525.



Fig. 3.6

the walls featuring different products that were distributed regionally and commercially. Additionally there are scenes of agricultural life. For example, charts with information on the size of fields, facts about breeding, hunting, fishing, and images and plaster models of food, medicinal practices, and games. A large display case holds gems and coins. Scenes of private life in the ancient period are shown as well. For example, there are busts and statues of people with various hairstyles and clothing and models of instruments and architectural decorations. Additionally, there is information about education and the military. This room even includes artifacts from the Hellenistic period to compare the progress that had been made. Pallattino also describes a reconstruction of a panoramic image of Constantine's Rome that completes the story of Roman civilization.<sup>148</sup>

Pallattino then explains the planning and organization of *La Mostra Augustea della Romanità*, which officially began in 1932 when Mussolini approved the project. Material, such as casts of monuments and prints and photographs had been collected since 1911. Once the project was approved, designers began working hard to categorize and restore the material, as

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<sup>148</sup> Pallattino, 526.

well as gathering more reproductions of sculptures and mosaics, and smaller household artifacts. Museums from around the world sent materials for the exhibition, and a team of designers built other pieces, such as models of war machines, wagons, and furniture. Pallattino describes how Mussolini was involved with the construction and design of the exhibition. During the preparation, the team wrote a quarterly report that included images and plans for what would go in each room. After five years of hard work, all of the material was brought to the Palazzo dell'Esposizione and assembled.<sup>149</sup>

Pallattino concludes the article with a quote from Mussolini: “*Fate che le glorie del passato siano superate dalle glorie dell'avvenire*” (Let the glories of the past be surpassed by the glories of the future).<sup>150</sup> This concept will be important to my argument when I assert that the Fascist regime used ancient imagery as a building block off of which to establish its own power and to act as a “second” empire. One of the main differences between the two exhibitions is how much of a presence Mussolini and the Fascist regime has in each. In the Augustan exhibition, Mussolini is barely visible whereas in the Fascist Revolution exhibition, his presence is almost overwhelming. The role of Benito Mussolini as “Il Duce” plays a major part of the imagery and content of the exhibition. As seen previously, Melograni explains how Mussolini creates a cult around himself through various forms of propaganda. It is clear that he had the overruling power and all-assuming control of the exhibition. In the opening section Freddi writes, “The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, organized in accordance with the Duce’s wishes through the agency of the Fascist Party...”<sup>151</sup> Thus, the importance and strength of Mussolini’s power as the Fascist leader is established from the very beginning. The way in which Mussolini was presented in the guidebook is important in furthering the understanding of his power, and the ways in which his

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<sup>149</sup> Pallattino, 527.

<sup>150</sup> Pallattino, 528. The translation is my own.

<sup>151</sup> Freddi, 7.



fellow Fascists perceived him. Mussolini was presented as a patriotic figure throughout the early stages of the Fascist party. He guided the Italian people after the war, during a time filled with “delusions of peace”, when the current Italian government was instable and inactive.<sup>152</sup> Massive images of *Popolo d'Italia*, Mussolini’s newspaper highlighted his battle against the socialist party. Freddi described Mussolini as a “steady compass” and deemed his writing “works of enlightenment”.<sup>153</sup> More of Mussolini’s texts were prominently displayed in Room G, which focused on December of 1919, a time in which Fascism was pitted against Nitti’s Government, which the Fascist Party claims practiced “old neutral elements” in their aims. This room portrayed the liberal Nitti Government as having disregarded the honor of the Italian soldiers that fought in the war; a stark comparison to the Fascist groups who valued “military valor” and honor. Freddi wrote of Mussolini’s strong leadership abilities, giving the warning of “Fascist action, under the Duce’s personal guidance, arrests the subversive avalanche and checks the ruin... by the tolerant, complacent passivity of the government.”<sup>154</sup> The Fascist Party, on the other hand, was portrayed as active and progressive, furthering the state of the Italian nation.

Similar tensions between the Fascist and Socialist parties was a prominent theme in Room G and are illustrated in a display case holding a pillar with Socialist quotes that refuted the Fascists. At the other end of the room there was a “large architectural block” that read words from one of Mussolini’s articles in *Popolo d'Italia* stating, “We contest the maneuver that consists in inverting the responsibility”. These words crush the quotes from the Nitti Government.<sup>155</sup> The alarming nature of the red and black color combination added a bold and violent feeling to this section of the room (see Fig. 3.7). Furthermore, the idea that Mussolini’s

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<sup>152</sup> Freddi, 14.

<sup>153</sup> Freddi, 15- 18.

<sup>154</sup> Freddi, 127-128.

<sup>155</sup> Freddi, 129.

words are literally “crushing” the words of his opponents show how the Fascist Party sees him as a powerful leader and a force with which to be reckoned.



Fig 3.7

Mussolini was also portrayed in a manner that invokes the memory of ancient Rome. During the Imperial period, imagery of emperors was prevalent in architecture such as temples, obelisks, statues, and reliefs. This imagery often intended to connect the emperor to the divine. Imagery of Mussolini, although presented somewhat differently, can be seen as reflecting this concept. Statues of Mussolini were present in several rooms in the exhibit, for example, in Room E where there was a large statue of him standing in front of newspaper clippings from *Popolo d'Italia*.<sup>156</sup> In Room G, there was also a large image of Mussolini, surrounded by Italian infantrymen portrayed as wooden robots, taking an oath to the Duce.<sup>157</sup> Furthermore, there was an entire room dedicated to Mussolini featuring his manuscripts, photographs of his childhood, and more newspaper articles. All of these images reference Roman imagery because they

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<sup>156</sup> Freddi, 119.

<sup>157</sup> Freddi, 129.

suggest that Mussolini has an all-knowing presence, especially in the exhibit showing the soldiers taking an oath. Since he had such a large presence in the exhibition, there was a feeling of familiarity so that the people connect with him, yet at the same time he was held up to a high level, which depicted him in an almost divine-like manner, similar to the Roman emperors.

Both exhibitions contain ancient Roman imagery and have similar intentions. However, the manner in which they display this information is very different. The use of both modern and classical techniques in the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution can be seen as a commentary on the idea of rebuilding the present for the future, based on powerful, fundamental ideals from the past. The classical elements in the exhibition also have a modern twist, showing that the Fascist Party sees itself as building upon old thoughts and ideas with modern goals and aims. This document shows one side of Fascist public art projects. The exhibition was connected to the interpretations of Rationalist architects but evidently is full of inconsistent images. The classically inspired images and the references to the myth of the Duce show how one aspect of Fascist public art that reflected ancient Rome. On the other hand, the sleek modern designs and the precise nature of the exhibition reflect a new, forward thinking approach. The Augustan exhibition remains purer in its representation of the Fascist regime trying to connect itself with ancient Rome. There is no distraction from heavy metal machinery and hard lines when the designers present what they see as important about the period. Additionally, the Augustan exhibition stands to serve as an example of how Mussolini believes that he can use the past to move forward in a way that relies less on visual stimulation and overload. It seems odd that two projects so different would appear within the same decade, however they reflect a clash of tastes in Fascist aesthetics.

## Chapter 4: Architecture and the Fascist Regime

Fascism marked a turning point in Roman architecture by adding a layer of clean modern buildings defined by cold lines and windows to the classical, medieval, and Renaissance structures of the city. In the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, most of the countries in Europe had already undergone architectural renovations. Italy lagged behind the rest of Europe, so it was important for Mussolini to catch up to the rest of the continent. By the 1930s the modernist movement was beginning to take shape around the world. The Fascist government used modern architecture as propaganda and as symbols of the regime that revealed important messages. As discussed in the previous chapter, Mussolini's aid and support of the Rationalist art movement in Italy is evident although he never made any official statements. According to Diane Ghirardo, Rationalist architecture featured elements of hierarchy, structure, and order that renounced individual expression of any form. Marcello Piacentini was one of the leading architects during the Fascist period. Piacentini was responsible for many of the urban planning and architectural projects in Rome. Although other architects were involved in countless projects, Piacentini was responsible for overseeing urban planning and worked closely with the Duce. Richard Etlin writes that the dictator intended to "transform the city of Rome into a physical setting to show that the Fascist state was the lineal descendant of the ancient Roman empire", showing that Ancient Rome was an ever-present theme in Fascist rhetoric.<sup>158</sup>

Journalists across the world questioned how Mussolini planned to incorporate a Rationalist layer of architecture to the city while at the same time, not take away from Rome's unique layers of beauty. Some supported the new plans whereas others expressed concern. A *New York Times* article entitled "Fascisti Would Surpass Even Michelangelo in Designing Rome to Dwarf New York", from February 15, 1926, addresses these issues. The article describes

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<sup>158</sup> Etlin, 391.

Mussolini as having a “magic hand” that will revive Italian architecture and make New York look old fashioned in comparison. It acknowledges that these new architectural plans are a source of insecurity when it states, “The new Rome must be a continuation of medieval, Christian and ancient Rome – calm, dignified, and balanced” and explains how critics questioned and asserted that modern architecture is not suitable for a city with so much history.<sup>159</sup> In 1928, this concern is still evident. Another *New York Times* article, “Rome Rebuilds in Augustan Grandeur”, highlights the Governor of Rome’s trip to New York. During the visit, Americans questioned the Governor about the new projects in the city. He reassured them that the new and old architecture would be “harmoniously” linked: “It [Fascist building projects] will not copy the designs of ancient Rome, but will, while reflecting the building ideals of a new age, maintain a spirit of rhythm without which the whole project would necessarily fail of effectiveness”.<sup>160</sup> The publication of this information and the questioning of the Fascist agenda in *The New York Times*, shows that journalists were not quite able to understand how Mussolini planned to relate modern architecture back to ancient Rome. This commentary sheds light on how international journalists viewed the regime’s clash of tastes. The regime’s need to reassure may also signify their shaky views on the projects and struggle to create a clear, coherent message.

Despite the unclear reasoning behind the claim that modern architecture was intended to be an extension of ancient Rome, it is clear that Mussolini at least had a way of explaining his ideas. Two articles from February 15, 1926 reported on this intent: the *New York Times* article, “Fascisti Would Surpass Even Michelangelo in Designing Rome to Dwarf New York”, and another from *The Washington Post* entitled “Rome, as Rebuilt, May be Startling in

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<sup>159</sup> “Fascisti Would Surpass Even Michelangelo in Designing a Rome to Dwarf New York”. *The New York Times*. Feb. 15, 1926. Proquest Historical Newspapers The New York Times. 1.

<sup>160</sup> “Rome Rebuilds in Augustan Grandeur”. *The New York Times*. July 1, 1928. Proquest Historical Newspapers The New York Times. 75.

Architecture”. Both articles quote T.F. Marinetti, an important Rationalist architect. He states, “We want Rome to have a Mussolinian imprint, that is to say Fascist Futurism, never an archeological imprint”.<sup>161</sup> This statement shows how the regime intended to create a new architectural style that reflected a modern aesthetic. New Rationalist buildings added another layer to Rome’s architecture, revealing that the regime cobbled together different styles in the hopes of creating a unified and distinct aesthetic.

In 1931 Mussolini began to make statements and give speeches about the progress of architectural projects on which the regime was working. He spoke of the importance of art, as described in the *New York Times*:

“‘Art has always been one of Italy’s great spiritual forces,’ the Premier declared, ‘even in periods of political decadence when Italy’s population was divided. Today Italy is a great people. In these conditions art pleases me even more because it is not tied up with a period of political decadence but to a period of political and moral ascension’”.<sup>162</sup>

In this quote, Mussolini tied great art to great politics and morals. Furthermore, by referring to art as a “spiritual force” he signified that he viewed it as something necessary for the Fascist regime as well as a factor that would make Italy more successful. Later that year Mussolini made another statement: “We do not want to make Italy the museum of its past exploits; on the contrary, we must build up a new patriarchy to put side by side the one left us by our forefathers; we must create a new art, an art of today, a Fascist art”.<sup>163</sup> Unlike many of Mussolini’s earlier statements, this quote offers a more direct insight as to his plans for art and architecture in Rome.

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<sup>161</sup> “Rome, as Rebuilt, May be Startling in Architecture”. *The Washington Post*. February 15, 1926. Proquest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1994), 4.

<sup>162</sup> “Urges Discipline in Art”. *The New York Times*. January 4, 1931. Proquest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2007), 29.

<sup>163</sup> Francesco Monotti, “Architecture in Italy”. *The New York Times*. November 1, 1931. Proquest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2007), 127.

It is evident that Mussolini hoped to use architecture as a means of creating a new version of the powerful, imperial city. By stating that he wants to create something “side by side” to that of the “forefathers”, or great Roman emperors, Mussolini revealed that the Fascists were looking to the past in order to move forwards. As discussed in the previous chapter, ancient Roman rhetoric was a key trait of the Fascist regime. Historians such as Agnew, Painter, and Etlin have concluded that although ancient Rome was so important to Mussolini and his followers, the overall ideology was inconsistent because both urban planning and archeological restorations and discoveries were occurring simultaneously. Although these two branches were very different in aesthetics, style, and goal, ancient Roman imagery and rhetoric is a theme that is underlying throughout. The manner in which the Fascist Regime used this imagery and rhetoric varied. This chapter discusses several important architectural projects and innovations that occurred under Mussolini: *La Città Universitaria di Roma* (the University City of Rome), *Il Foro Mussolini* (The Mussolini Forum), and city planning and new street design. The Fascist government used ancient Roman imagery and rhetoric in these projects as a way to reference the ancient past with the hopes of creating something new. With modern architecture, Mussolini hoped to put his own imprint on the artistic world, in a similar manner to the Roman emperors. Furthermore, although Mussolini and his architects vocalized references to ancient Rome when discussing these modern structures the imagery and rhetoric was much more subtle than that of the archeological projects and excavations

The City University of Rome exemplifies the features of Rationalist architecture. Painter describes how before the Fascist era, *La Sapienza*, located near the Piazza Navona was the only university in the city. Plans for building a new university near Termini had begun in the early 1900s. The Fascist Regime, however, was responsible for bringing the project to life and





three years in a speed that only the Fascist regime could achieve. He refers to the university as *il miracolo* (a miracle) and discusses how he had been skeptical upon first viewing of the site that was just a foundation scattered with rocks.<sup>166</sup> A description written in this manner makes the construction all the more impressive. The imagery of a field with rocks suggests that the Fascist architects truly had to build the university out of nothing, furthering the notion that Mussolini was more focused on goals than theory. Furthermore, Renato Pacini's article in the architectural journal, *Emporium*, adds to the idea that the construction of the University of Rome was a miracle. Pacini discussed the controversy over the initial designs of the university. He writes of attempts, from both architects and audiences, to push towards traditionalism rather than rationalism, revealing an unclear goal. The designers of the university hoped to accomplish a project that pleased people yet did not compromise their originality.<sup>167</sup> This idea that the architects had to overcome and work around this controversy furthers the spectacular and successful nature of the university.

The article, "*Opere Ciclopiche a Roma, La Città Universitaria*" offers a complete description of the layout of the new university, as well as descriptions of specific buildings (See Fig 4.1). Ninety million lire was allotted for the construction of the university.<sup>168</sup> The overall university covered 215,000 square meters of land, 40,000 of which was covered by actual buildings.<sup>169</sup> Most of the building material consisted of concrete, glass, brick, travertine, and aluminum. The City University of Rome was located beyond the Termini district of Rome between a major hospital and University Avenue.<sup>170</sup> The author marvels at the construction of

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<sup>166</sup> "Opere Ciclopiche a Roma, La Città Universitaria." 380.

<sup>167</sup> R. Pacini. "Il Grandioso Progetto della Città Universitaria". *Emporium*. Bergamo, Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche: March 1933. 180-184. Pg 177-178.

<sup>168</sup> "Rome's University City". *The New York Times*. November 24, 1935. Proquest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2007). X9.

<sup>169</sup> R. Pacini Pg 179.

<sup>170</sup> "Opere Ciclopiche a Roma, La Città Universitaria." 381.

the university, stating that only under the architectural genius of Marcello Piacentini, and the carefully picked young architects, as well as the use of modern materials such as concrete could such a task be achieved.<sup>171</sup> The university's main entrance was on the side with the hospital and the avenue led up to the Rectorio, an "imposing" main building that held the university library and the main hall (See Fig. 4.2). Piacentini designed the Rectorio, a "noble piece of architecture", with a travertine façade. A large statue of Minerva, as well as several bas-reliefs adorned the walkway leading up to the Rectorio. The exterior of the building featured a large monumental staircase and four tall travertine columns, as seen Fig 4.2. The author describes how these features gave an element of solemnity to the entire structure. It is apparent, looking at the image of the Rectorio, that the design follows Rationalist guidelines with linear features and solid cement walls. The pieces in the main hall, however, show how Roman imagery was still able to appear. The statue of Minerva (or Athena) and the bas reliefs are used in a way, however, not to reminisce on the past, but instead to present Rome in a new, modern light.

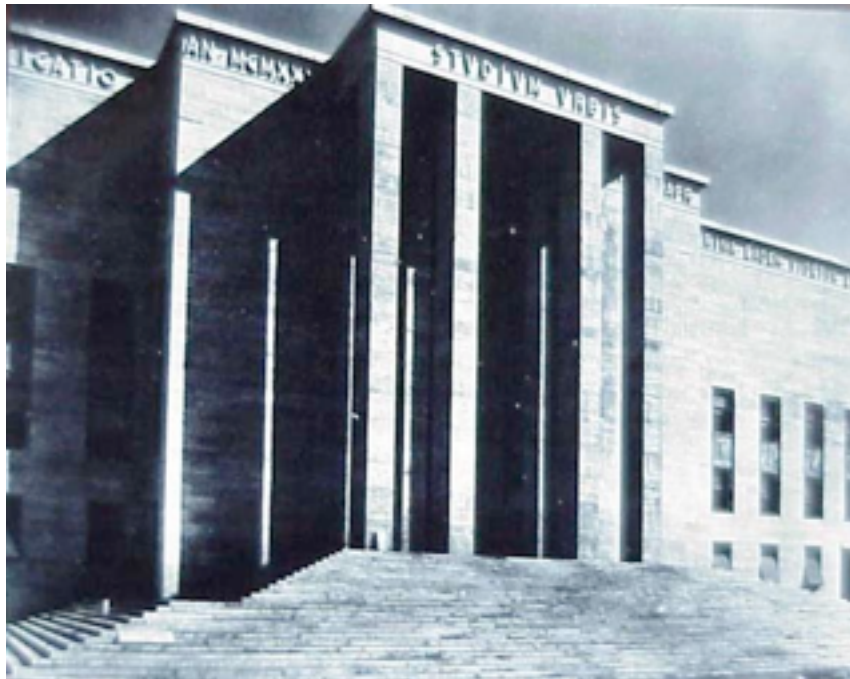


Fig 4.2

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<sup>171</sup> "Opere Ciclopiche a Roma, La Città Universitaria." 380.

Additionally, the Rectory served as a point of interest in both architectural journals. The massive building held the *aula magna* (great hall), and a library on the second and third floors. The author of “Il Grandioso Progetto della Città Universitaria” describes the *aula magna*, which he considers “*più vaste che esistano oggi*” (the most extensive or vast building of the time). He discusses how the *aula magna* was built like an amphitheater, and at nine hundred square meters could hold around 3,000 people. On the stage was a single podium with a scenic painted background and a large stained-glass window. The impeccable acoustics of the room allowed for great speaking events and large meetings. The University library is described impressively as well. Light was meant to pour in through the huge windows on the upper-floors into the large hall that held 600,000 volumes. The library also held two large reading rooms and other small rooms for classroom purposes.<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, Pacini writes, “*L’edificio domina la città materialmente e moralmente*” (The building dominates the city materially and morally), claiming that the Rectory is intended to be the spiritual center of both the university and Rome.<sup>173</sup>

The authors also discuss the rest of the campus. The buildings housing the studies of the Humanities and Law stand on either side of the Rectory. Behind the Rectory there is an Orthopedic and Hygiene clinic. The new university also holds an Institute of Physics, which has 237 rooms, an Institute of Minerals and Geology, with 200 rooms, and Institutes of Botany and Chemistry.<sup>174</sup> Pacini also describes the details of the buildings nearer to the edges of the campus. He discusses the construction of an outdoor theater, sports fields, and tennis courts.<sup>175</sup> Additionally, *The New York Times* reports on residence life for students: “*A Caso dello Studente*, which will provide living quarters for 300 resident students. The majority of the students will

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<sup>172</sup> “Opere Ciclopiche a Roma, La Città Universitaria.” 382.

<sup>173</sup> R. Pacini 180. The translation is my own.

<sup>174</sup> “Opere Ciclopiche a Roma, La Città Universitaria.” 382

<sup>175</sup> R. Pacini 181.

continue to live outside the university walls”.<sup>176</sup> Based on the articles, there is an overall sense that the university is based on rationalist principles. One author writes, “*Queste vaste composizioni architettoniche sono basate o sul sistema della rigida simmetria o su quello romantico della varietà*” (The vast architectural composition is based on the system of rigid symmetry of the Romanesque).<sup>177</sup> Additionally, Pacini writes of the importance of rationality both inside and outside of the buildings.<sup>178</sup> *The New York Times* describes the university as being “Designed on austere utilitarian lines”.<sup>179</sup> All of these elements signify rationalist elements and exemplify new, modern architecture. The new university served as an example of new architecture that showcased how the Fascist regime embraced (maybe not explicitly) the Rationalist art movement. However, just because the University featured modern elements such as cement structures with linear forms and large glass windows, it does not necessarily mean that subtle references towards ancient Rome are inexistent. Architects also made note that parts of the university were built off of a “basilican” plan, in that many of the buildings were symmetrical. Symmetry is a common Roman quality that is found in temple and stadium designs. However, the architects made note that the use of symmetry differed, explaining that although the plan showcased this, that none of the buildings were exactly the same.<sup>180</sup> Thus, the University City of Rome shows how the Fascist Regime was able to reference ancient Roman imagery in its architectural projects, but in a way that built on it and tried to make a name for itself. Roman imagery was not used in Fascist architecture as a way to hold up and reminisce on the glorious past. It was instead used as a building block on which Mussolini could make a name for himself artistically. Compromised of many elements, the overall design of the University

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<sup>176</sup> “Rome’s University City”. *The New York Times*.

<sup>177</sup> “Opere Ciclopiche a Roma, La Città Universitaria.” 383. The translation is my own.

<sup>178</sup> R. Pacini 181.

<sup>179</sup> “Rome’s University City”. *The New York Times*.

<sup>180</sup> “Opere Ciclopiche a Roma, La Città Universitaria.” 383.

exemplifies an image of Fascist aesthetics that appeared as a patchwork quilt of different styles and characteristics.

The *Foro Mussolini*, Rome's new "sports center" is another major architectural achievement of the Fascist period. The *Foro Mussolini* was built in stages beginning in 1928 and the first set of buildings opened on November 4, 1932 in time to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome. Enrico Del Debbio designed the beginning stages of the complex until his death in 1928 after which Luigi Moretti replaced him. The huge forum was located on the outskirts of the city, similarly to the *Universitaria di Roma*, in an area slightly north of the Vatican between the Tiber River and the foot of Monte Mario.<sup>181</sup> The architectural journal *Capitolium*, describes how Del Debbio picked this location for the historic landscape between the bank of the Tiber and the rolling hills of Monte Mario.<sup>182</sup> Plino Marconi discusses some of the difficulties that the architects faced when planning the Forum because they had to negotiate the structures that already existed in the area.<sup>183</sup> As the planning began and decisions needed to be made, many buildings were torn down to make room for the new forum. *The New York Times* reported, "Everywhere, in this district, old buildings that do not fit into the new scheme, are to be demolished". The article explained that although people may feel apprehensive about this choice, that it was the best decision for the improvement of the city. The goal was to keep the structures in the area that were "the most revered".<sup>184</sup> The logic behind Mussolini's decisions on which buildings to keep and destroy is significant. Buildings from the ancient, Renaissance, and 18<sup>th</sup> century periods were kept whereas medieval structures were demolished. This pattern supports Painter's argument in that Mussolini wanted to associate the

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<sup>181</sup> Painter, 40.

<sup>182</sup> "Nuove Opere al Foro Mussolini". *Capitolium* (1938): 197-205. 197.

<sup>183</sup> Luigi Moretti, "Il Piazzale Dell'Impero al Foro Mussolini in Roma". *Architettura: Rivista del Sindacato Nazionale Fascista Architetti*. September-October 1941: 347.

<sup>184</sup> "Rome Rebuilds in Augustan Grandeur". *The New York Times*.

regime with the most prolific art periods. The act of clearing away old, non-important buildings according to the Fascists, combined with the obvious naming of the Forum, shows that Mussolini was intent on leaving his imprint on Rome. He was also modeling the project off of a Roman forum, again showing how both modern and traditional overlapped.

Made up of many different complexes, the Mussolini Forum served several purposes; as a sports center as well as a political and cultural center. Mussolini intended to use the forum to hold impressive ceremonies and competitions. Marconi describes the layout of the forum. The plan was developed on an axis where different “arteries” led to the six main regions of the complex. *The New York Times* noted that although the Mussolini forum was based on the design of those from the ancient period, that it contained more “utilitarian features”.<sup>185</sup> The forum featured many different elements, all for different public purposes. The way in which architects wrote about the project shows that Mussolini used inspirations from ancient Rome to on one hand remember the past, but to also show the glory of Fascist Italy. For example, one architect wrote,

*“Non era però solamente un richiamo alla grandiosità architettonica dei complessi repubblicani e imperiali; voleva, invece, essere un vero e proprio programma politico, poichè politica era la funzione dell’antico foro”* (It [the Forum] was not only a reminder of the grand, complex architecture of the republic and empire, but instead was a real political program, as ancient forums functioned as political centers as well).<sup>186</sup>

The author justified the multi-faceted function of the forum by reasoning that forums during the Roman Empire served similar purposes.

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<sup>185</sup> “Rome Rebuilds in Augustan Grandeur”. *The New York Times*.

<sup>186</sup> “Nuove Opere al Foro Mussolini”. 199. The translation is my own.

Marconi's article focuses mainly on *Il Piazzale dell'Impero* (The Emperor's Square) in the Mussolini Forum (See Fig 4.3). The Emperor's Square, located between the Via Flaminia and the Ponte Duce d'Aosta, served as a connector between the Academy of Physical Education,



Fig 4.3

and the swimming complex. Marconi wrote how the square was set on an “*obliqui simmetrici*” (oblique symmetrical) ground plan and had several different axes. The square, approximately two hundred eighty by sixty meters in dimension contained a fountain at one end and an obelisk at the other end.<sup>187</sup> The obelisk in the Piazzale dell'Impero is a main focus of Gustavo Brigante Colonna, a writer for *Capitolium*. Colonna traced the obelisk's journey to Rome where it was dedicated to Mussolini and installed in the Piazzale dell'Impero. By 1929, the year the article was published, plans for the Mussolini Forum were already under way. Colonna discusses the arrangements for the obelisk to be raised in October 1930, and how the four hundred-ton piece of marble was transported through the city. The obelisk has a base that is three meters on each side and is about nineteen meters tall.<sup>188</sup> The majority of the article, however, does not focus on this

<sup>187</sup> “Moretti, 347. The translation is my own.

<sup>188</sup> Gustavo Brigante Colonna, “Mentre L’obelisko Dedicato al Duce Viaggia Verso Roma.” *Capitolium*. May, 1929: 270.

obelisk, but instead gives a history of obelisks in Rome. Colonna explains how obelisks have been an important symbol in Rome throughout history because rulers used the Egyptian monuments as a way to assert their own power. He offers descriptions of other important obelisks that traveled to Rome as a way to show the importance of this most recent one that is dedicated to Mussolini.<sup>189</sup> Colonna asserts that by using the obelisk, Mussolini ties himself to the traditions of the Roman emperors and the greatest generations of Italians.<sup>190</sup> Apart from the obelisk, the Piazzala dell'Impero also contains tiled mosaics around the circumference, done by Luigi Moretti. The intricate mosaics, made of black and white tiles, featured scenic images such as the ocean and aquatic life. Marconi calls the mosaics a fundamental composition of ancient art.<sup>191</sup> Despite these obvious references to ancient Roman imagery, the Piazzale dell'Impero has a more utilitarian feel that derives particularly from the large marble blocks that line the space (see Fig 4.4). These squares create an empty, stark feeling while keeping the design uniform. Each block



Fig 4.4

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<sup>189</sup> Colonna, 271.

<sup>190</sup> Colonna, 277.

<sup>191</sup> Moretti, 351.



features large Latin type with quotes about the messages in Fascism and the importance of remembering the fallen Fascists and the Cult of the Martyr.

The Aquatics center is another major part of the Mussolini Forum. The facility contained two large swimming pools; one for schools to use that was strictly for swimming purposes and another that was open to the general public. The structure was mostly open, with windows spanning from the floor to the ceiling so that the light could come in from all sides. White marble and mosaics depicting aquatic scenes were on the floor surrounding the pools. Additionally, the aquatic center contained male and female changing rooms each holding 1,400 seats as well as rooms for “sun therapy” treatment. The author makes note that the large 4,000 square meter terrace outside the pool building was also available for sun therapy.<sup>192</sup> The references towards ancient Rome stand out more strongly in the Aquatic Center. For example, many people at the time felt as though the Forum could be compared to both the Baths of Caracalla and Ostia Antica. Additionally, the mosaics featured ancient imagery, gilded bronze statues were placed around the Forum, and the marble structures were reminiscent of the classical style.<sup>193</sup> At the same time, the architects were careful to create their own imprint on the structure so that it was not a reproduction of the ancient period. The author makes it clear that the plans for the forum went in accordance with those of the Fascist Academy. He writes, “*L’edificio, finito nella parte rimanente, riprende volutamente, con ottime proporzioni, le forme esterne e i valori volumetrici e cromatici dell’Accademia Fascista*” (The building, as it is finished, has the forms, values, volumes, and colors that the Fascist Academy wanted).<sup>194</sup> The forms of the Mussolini Forum reference ancient Rome more directly than those in the University City of Rome. However, just because the reference is more direct, the intention of using the

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<sup>192</sup> “Nuove Opere al Foro Mussolini”, 204-205.

<sup>193</sup> “Nuove Opere al Foro Mussolini”. 199.

<sup>194</sup> “Nuove Opere al Foro Mussolini”. 202.

Roman imagery is still to use it as a building block for new, modern Fascist architecture. The way in which the portrayal of Roman imagery differs, shows that there is a complex nature to the reasoning behind Fascist architecture. Although the regime claimed it wanted to pave its own way in the artistic world by not modeling itself off ancient Rome, the Mussolini Forum shows how, at times, the outcome was complex and flawed. Additionally, the fact that Fascist architecture can be characterized as extremely utilitarian and modern, as well as largely reminiscent of a Roman bath offers insight to the incoherent ideology of the Fascist regime.

City planning and street re-design drastically changed much of the city landscape and is an aspect of reconstruction for which the Fascist regime is most well known. Many of the new streets were located either in proximity to the ancient center or on the outskirts of the city. Often times, the streets constructed on the edge of the city were done because of the number of people being relocated due to building projects. The Fascist government presented their decision to demolish many of the older structures in the city center as an effort to make the city more sanitary. In 1931, Arnaldo Cortesi, a correspondent for *The New York Times* wrote, “The result was that several hundreds of houses in Rome have been left in exactly the same state they were decades ago. Many are almost falling down, because of decay and are ugly and unsanitary”.<sup>195</sup> The government believed that these buildings were unsanitary because the tiny, narrow streets made for close living quarters. Subsequently, much of Rome’s population relocated to the edge of the city. Transportation improvement was also a priority for the Fascist government. Cortesi explains that the regime hoped to solve the traffic issue with four new subway lines. Although transportation and sanitary issues evidently played a large role in new city planning, aesthetics played an important role as well. This double role is illustrated in Cortesi’s statement that,

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<sup>195</sup> Arnaldo Cortesi, “City Plan For Rome Goes to Mussolini”. *The New York Times*. February 1, 1931. Proquest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2007), 56.

“...all previous plans are to be united into a single plan which the municipality is determined to apply vigorously in the shortest time without passing through the centre of the city and by superimposing on the ancient city a network of new streets for traffic. Thus two new wide streets will be built running north to south and four east to west. Apart from these new streets and a few alterations intended to render views of ancient monuments easier, the old part of the city will be left as it is at present”.<sup>196</sup>

This statement offers insight to the two-sided nature of city planning. On one hand, Mussolini was interested in creating a more fluid street system with better transportation that was more aesthetically pleasing. Yet, at the same time, he used the new street systems as a way to show off important historical sites. Various street projects exemplified different extents to which each of these projects juxtaposed each other.

New streets, aside from the three major ones that Painter and Etlin discuss, also feature elements that combined old and new styles, showing that Mussolini used city planning as a way to expose the past. Marcello Piacentini was responsible for much of the street designs. Richard Etlin discusses the importance of Piacentini's 1925 plan, *La Grande Roma*, which called for a “grandiose” remodeling of the city. Etlin writes, “Piacentini now cited the trident-like spread of three avenues radiating out from Piazza del Popolo as the ‘magnificent and monumental framework; of cities the world over’”.<sup>197</sup> He describes how a *corso* (road) was meant to travel from the Piazza del Popolo to the Vittorio Emmanuel monument. Two other streets, the Via dell'Impero and the Via del Mare, branch off diagonally (see Fig 4.5). Etlin claims that the location of these three major avenues was

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<sup>196</sup> Cortesi, *The New York Times*.

<sup>197</sup> Etlin, 400.



Fig 4.5

strategically placed because they all traveled through two “archeological zones” and contained elements of renovated architecture.<sup>198</sup> Additionally, Painter illustrates the importance of the Via dell’Impero. The construction of this avenue was key to improving Rome’s transportation because it connected to the Via Cavour, which led to Termini train station.<sup>199</sup> One way that transportation was improved was through the widening of the roads. In 1928, *The New York Times* reported how many streets, for example, the Via Tritoni were very narrow and had uneven cobblestones. New, wide boulevards would feature more utilitarian characteristics.<sup>200</sup> Furthermore, the Via dell’Impero offered better views of the Colosseum and the Basilica of Maxentius. Painter writes, “The Via dell’Impero perfectly expressed the fascist wedding of past and present, traditional and modern that became the hallmark of Mussolini’s Rome”.<sup>201</sup> Etlin’s analysis showed how *La Grande Roma* set the stage for urban street planning during the Fascist period because he asserts that Mussolini made an effort to use these new streets to connect ancient monuments. This “trident” street layout is an example of new roads that intentionally

<sup>198</sup> Etlin, 400-403.

<sup>199</sup> Painter, 22.

<sup>200</sup> “Rome Rebuilds in Augustan Grandeur”. *The New York Times*.

<sup>201</sup> Painter, 22.

intersected at certain locations in order to make ancient areas of the center more accessible to the public.

The Via dei Trionfi (Street of Triumphs) is another prominent city-planning project of the Fascist period. Starting at the Colosseum and heading in a southeast direction, the Via dei Trionfi exposed both the Capitoline Hill and widened pre-existing streets. Antonio Muñoz, author of *Via dei Trionfi, Isolamento del Campidoglio*, gives a long history of the road, explaining the transformation of the same avenue over the centuries and different improvements that were made. For example, in 1890, architects constructed several new buildings along the Piazza di S. Gregory (a square along the road), one of which was a three-story building.<sup>202</sup> Muñoz gives many more stages of the layout of the street, describing all of the issues still present and how they were not solved until the Fascist architects came along. The way in which the problems with previous plans are highlighted and then compared to the improvements under Mussolini show that the Fascist regime viewed itself as a force that both strengthened and beautified Rome. This tone sets the stage for Mussolini's intentions behind many of the city planning projects because he presents the regime as the ultimate problem solvers, fixing all of the issues that no one was previously able to fix. Furthermore, this ties the Fascist greatness to ancient Rome, as the only previously time period with which the Fascists could connect.

The Via dei Trionfi has two functions. Muñoz writes, "*mentre l'isolamento del Campidoglio e l'allargamento di Via della Consolazione sono un completamento, estetico e pratico, della seconda.*" (While first isolating the Capitoline hill and widening the Road of Consolation, and second is aesthetically pleasing and practical).<sup>203</sup> This statement shows the two goals in mind when improving the road, and also allows insight onto how the Fascist Regime

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<sup>202</sup> Antonio Muñoz, *Via dei Trionfi, Isolamento del Campidoglio*. Rome: Governatorato di Roma, 1933, 6.

<sup>203</sup> Muñoz, *Via dei Trionfi*, 5. Translation is my own.

used ancient Roman imagery to make the city look more modern and aesthetically pleasing. At the end closest to the Colosseum, the road split around the Arch of Constantine and joined again in front of the Colosseum. Here, it joined with the Via dell'Impero. Muñoz describes how the street is designed in a Roman manner but that the road is not meant to be an “archeological walk”. Instead the Via dei Trionfi is modern and “pulsing with life”. Aside from beginning at the Colosseum and the Arch of Constantine, the road passes through many more of Rome’s historic sites such as the Capitoline hill, the Celio, the Palatine hill, and the Aventine hill. It is clear that this road functions not only as a way to improve traffic conditions in the city, but also is also an effort to make ancient areas of the city more visible. A connection to ancient Rome is also evident as Muñoz writes, “*lo spirito dell’Italia nuova si ricongiunge a quello della Roma antica, le cui pietre riacquistano oggi vita e valore, come venti secoli fa*” (the spirit of the new Italy rejoins that of ancient Rome, whose stones now live and regain the same value that they did twenty centuries ago).<sup>204</sup> This statement shows a desire to connect the Fascist regime to the past.

The construction of the Corso del Rinascimento (Road of the Renaissance) also signifies efforts to show the Fascist regime as the government that finally made improvements to Rome. Arnaldo Foschini, author of an article in *Capitolium*, claimed that a plan to make improvements had been discussed for over twelve years but no project began until Mussolini made the decision. Buildings with “no artistic importance” were demolished and a new road was built, bordering Campo dei Fiori and then joining with the Tiber River at the Ponte Sisto.<sup>205</sup> Foschini explains how the new road not only solved major traffic problems by directing cars away from Piazza Navona, but also added an interesting layer of aesthetics to the city. He discusses how earlier plans suggested that the road actually cut through Piazza Navona, but said that Mussolini shut

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<sup>204</sup> Muñoz, *Via dei Trionfi*, 21. Translation is my own.

<sup>205</sup> Arnaldo Foschini, “Il Corso del Rinascimento”. *Capitolium* (1937). 73-74.

down this, as it would ruin the aesthetic effect of the 17<sup>th</sup> century square.<sup>206</sup> Again, this discussion gives the impression that Italy was faced with major problems that only the Fascist regime was able to fix.

The construction of the Corso del Rinascimento created a wide, straight avenue that cut through what were previously old, medieval neighborhoods with winding roads. Foschini writes, however, that the construction preserves important structures such as those built during the Renaissance period. The buildings along the route, many of which were owned by the Spanish Embassy were to be aligned as well.<sup>207</sup> The road was urbanized as well, with the addition of stores replacing what used to be old houses. Foschini juxtaposes the Roman, Renaissance, and Modern period with that of the Medieval period. He explains how the Corso del Rinascimento's straight design adheres to the "Roman urban" nature, writing,

*"Soltano le vie tracciate nel medio evo, infatti, erano quasi sempre tortuose, mentre quelle dell'epoca romana o quelle del rinascimento e del sette-ottocento erano quasi sempre rettilinee"* (Only the roads constructed in the Middle ages were disorganized, whereas those of the Roman period, the Renaissance, and the 18<sup>th</sup> century were always straight).<sup>208</sup>

By comparing Rationalist architecture to that of the Classical, and Renaissance periods, Foschini links the Fascist period with the great art movements of history. He asserts that although modern architecture may not look similar to classical and Renaissance architecture, that the fundamentals derive from simplicity and harmony. However, the root of this "clarity and serenity" derives from the architecture of the ancient period.<sup>209</sup> Additionally, the fact that Mussolini ordered the destruction of most Medieval buildings in the area, cuts out an important

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<sup>206</sup> Foschini, 76.

<sup>207</sup> Foschini, 78.

<sup>208</sup> Foschini, 81-82. This is my own translation.

<sup>209</sup> Foschini, 84.

part of Roman history, which shows that he is twisting how he wants the city to be seen. The name of the road “Renaissance”, as well, suggests that the Fascists see their architecture as a moment of artistic rebirth. In this way, ancient imagery (as well as Renaissance imagery) is prevalent in city planning. Furthermore, the dual nature of the architectural projects, of being both very modern yet continuing to reference ancient Rome reveals the problematic characteristics of the Fascist style. The fact that all of these architectural projects reflected varying degrees of Roman imagery, for example, very little in the University and much more in the Mussolini Forum, further shows this inconsistency. It is only natural that Fascist aesthetics would reflect its ideology.



## Chapter 5: Archeology and the Fascist Regime

Although the Fascist Regime forged the way for new architectural movements in Rome, archeological restorations and excavations made up a significant amount of its projects. It is evident that Mussolini held a special interest in ancient Rome. Borden W. Painter even goes as far to say that the dictator was obsessed with the city. Painter writes, “He now saw it as his mission to make the city once more a place of greatness and grandeur worthy of Rome’s imperial past. The city’s rich history, monuments, and sites could now be used and refashioned by the regime to define and display the new fascist Italy”.<sup>210</sup> However, the way in which Mussolini used the many archeological projects that were completed under the regime differed from the manner and symbolism of the grand architectural projects. Instead of using Roman imagery as a vehicle for creating a Fascist imprint on the city, themes surrounding archeological restorations revolved more around the embracing of Rome’s great past. By holding the ancient past on a pedestal, Mussolini was able to relate his regime to the Imperial period. Furthermore, Mussolini commonly tied himself to ancient emperors, particularly Emperor Augustus, which is evident from the role of the emperor in the 1937 Augustan Exhibition. Mussolini is responsible for countless historical renovations around the city including the Augustan Ara Pacis and Mausoleum, the forums in the ancient center, the *Teatro Argentina*, and the Theater of Marcellus. Each of these monuments illustrates how the Fascist regime used ancient imagery to remember Italy’s glorious past, while at the same time representing a clash of tastes.

Painter illustrates how Mussolini employed architects and archeologists to go about the task of restoring the ancient city and offers insight to the dictator’s intentions. He writes, “Clearing away old and often decrepit buildings opened spaces around imperial sites, such as the Theater of Marcellus, for display, making contemporary Italians proud and inspiring the awe of

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<sup>210</sup> Painter, 63.

tourists”. The timing of the projects commonly related to the ancient period as well. For example, as Rome’s “traditional birthday”, April 21<sup>st</sup>, became an annual “Fascist holiday” that was used as an occasion for “speeches, ceremonies, and, as the years moved along, the opening of new streets, buildings, and monuments”.<sup>211</sup> The decision to open new monuments to the public on Rome’s birthday is significant because it created a mindset that revolved around the past.

Archeological work began in the 1920s with the opening of what is now known as Largo Argentina, a set of four ancient temples set next to each other (see Fig 5.1). On April 21, 1929 Largo Argentina opened to the public.<sup>212</sup> After the opening of Largo Argentina, Antonio Muñoz served as Mussolini’s main overseer for the imperial restorations of the city. He was also responsible for overseeing the excavations of the various other monuments in the ancient city center, for example, the Theater of Marcellus. In 1928, Mussolini appointed Muñoz “director of antiquities and fine arts for the Governatorato”.<sup>213</sup> Muñoz was highly supportive of the Duce’s efforts to restore the ancient monuments, which he highlighted in his 1935 book, *Roma di Mussolini*. He compared Mussolini’s building strategies to the likes of Emperor Augustus, Pope Leo X, and Pope Sixtus X, writing, “Only the energy of a great ruler could bring about in such a short time such a profound renovation”.<sup>214</sup> The outcome of these important restorations would greatly reflect how Mussolini saw himself as a ruler, and how he viewed Italy’s past.

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<sup>211</sup> Painter, 3-4.

<sup>212</sup> Painter, 7.

<sup>213</sup> Painter, 8-9.

<sup>214</sup> Antonio Muñoz *Roma di Mussolini: Con 549 Illustrazioni*, Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1935, x. Also found in Painter, Borden W. *Mussolini’s Rome*. 9.



Fig 5.1

Mussolini's writings and speeches offer insight to how he revered the Imperial period. In a speech given on October 5, 1926 in Perugia, Mussolini explained the importance of Rome's outward expansion towards the Mediterranean Sea. A reporter from *The New York Times* recounted the event to the American public. The Duce spoke of ancient Rome and claimed that the Romans, "originally a pastoral people" realized that they needed the sea and a strong naval power to become a world dominator. Mussolini stated, "Roman history...reached a critical turning point between the years 272 B.C. and 260 B.C. The Roman Empire, which reached its greatest power two centuries later under Augustus, was born in those ten years". The author of the article describes how the Duce then "traced the gradual ascension of the Roman naval power till the final overthrow of Carthage, which left Rome the undisputed master of the sea".<sup>215</sup> The fact that Mussolini gave a speech during this time that focused more on the ancient period than present day issues shows that Roman imagery was deeply ingrained in the Fascist mindset.

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<sup>215</sup> "Mussolini Sees Future on the Sea". *The New York Times*. October 6, 1926. Proquest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2007). 1.

Ancient emperors are again the topic of another article published in 1933. The author, Valentine Thomson, asserted that Mussolini's work in Rome had made it as grand as in the imperial days. She quoted Mussolini saying, "There are two problems in one...one is dictated by necessity, the other by the greatness of Rome", which shows that efforts to restore ancient monuments revealed his own obsessions with the past.<sup>216</sup> Thomson's article illustrates how the ancient rhetoric in Mussolini's speeches was so pronounced that even international newspapers were dedicating entire articles to his projects. This trend reflects the concept of *romanità*, in which the Fascists desired to romanticize Roman imagery.

Mussolini's speeches and writings also linked his own image to that of the Roman emperors. He often describes himself as the overseer of the archeological projects, in a similar manner in which the emperors would have. Thomson's article illustrates this link when she quotes the Duce saying, "In a very few years, Rome will seem a miracle to all people in the world – vast, ordered, beautiful as in the time of Augustus".<sup>217</sup> She describes how the Augustan period is known as being a prosperous one and how his rule was signified by Roman victory, peace, and major construction and beautification. Many more examples show Mussolini's insistence on connecting himself to the ancient emperors. For example, in 1932 he stated, "I consider myself without false modesty the spiritual father of the Master Plan of Rome".<sup>218</sup> Mussolini's architects also furthered this notion. *Emporium* magazine published an article in 1933 that stated,

"Today Rome has a city plan worthy of its greatness...that only the Fascist Regime has known how to realize, and because it constitutes also the necessary basis that will allow

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<sup>216</sup> Valentine Thomson, "Mussolini Builds a Rome of the Caesars". *The New York Times*. March 19, 1933. Proquest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2007) 1.

<sup>217</sup> Thomson 2.

<sup>218</sup> Spiro Kostof. *The Third Rome, 1870-1950: Traffic and Glory*. Berkeley: University Art Museum. 1973. 33. As found in Painter, Borden W. *Mussolini's Rome*. 6.

the posterity of distant ages to identify along side the Rome of the Caesars, and the Rome of Sixtus V, the Rome of Mussolini renewed and surpassing ancient greatness”.<sup>219</sup>

Mussolini’s 1932 statement of his intention to make present day Rome as glorious as Augustan Rome connects him to the emperor responsible for the major transformation. Additionally, the article that compares Mussolinian Rome to ancient Rome displays this theme. This comparison provides insight to monuments that Mussolini chose to restore and how the Myth of *Romanità* influenced his thinking.

As previously discussed, the Largo Argentina was one of the first excavations of the Fascist period. Work officially began on the Largo Argentina in 1926, however Muñoz describes how archeologists came across the site almost by accident. Painter describes how in 1925, the area of the Largo Argentina was “a maze of alleys and decrepit housing”.<sup>220</sup> Muñoz explains how in 1911, a surveyor was examining the walls near the church of S. Nicola Cesarini and discovered the remains of ancient columns. Several columns already existed and were attributed to a Temple of Hercules, but the surveyor discovered an additional rectangular base. The surveyor made note of the finding and when Muñoz began a new project in 1926 he decided to completely demolish the church, as well as several old houses in the surrounding area. With the demolition, Muñoz and his team discovered that there were actually four ancient temples that were relatively well preserved.<sup>221</sup>

Muñoz writes how the history of the four temples at the Largo Argentina is complex and relatively unknown. Most archeologists believed (and still believe today) that the temples dated back to the Republic age. However, Muñoz and his team were unsure of the ancient deities to which they were dedicated. Aside from the temple structures, the only other artifacts found were

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<sup>219</sup> “Il Nuovo Piano Regolatore di Roma,” *Emporium* 78 (1933): 223. As found in Painter, 18.

<sup>220</sup> Painter, *Mussolini’s Rome*. Pg 7.

<sup>221</sup> Muñoz, *Roma di Mussolini*, 146.

large marble pieces of a female head, and smaller fragments of arms, hands and feet (See Fig 5.2). Muñoz writes,

*“Ciò che a pensare si trattasse di una di quelle celebri figure colossali...che avevano il corpo fatto in muratura, ricoperta di lamine di bronzo o di marmi a colori, e la testa e le estremità in marmo bianco”* (Which makes one think that this was one of the famous colossal figures, whose body was constructed in bronze or colored marble, and the head and extremities in white marble).<sup>222</sup>

In his book, Muñoz concludes that the head most likely belongs to the Goddess Juno. The restorations done to the site were complicated. Muñoz describes the surprised reactions of the crowd when the project was unveiled in 1929. All of the tall columns of each temple had been put back in their places. Staircases and capitals had been rebuilt and the marble had been cleaned.<sup>223</sup> Mussolini was particularly interested in how this ancient site juxtaposed more modern buildings of the city. The fact that the Duce was willing to demolish a church to uncover ancient sites of “artistic value” shows that he was only interested in specific time periods rather than in preserving general architecture of the past. Painter notes that the discovery of the four temples was significant because at the time, they were some of the oldest uncovered buildings in Rome.<sup>224</sup> This discovery illustrates how Mussolini was intent on exposing the monuments and landmarks of Rome’s history for the benefit of the Fascist Regime.

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<sup>222</sup> Muñoz, 150. Translation is my own.

<sup>223</sup> Muñoz, 151.

<sup>224</sup> Painter, 7-8.

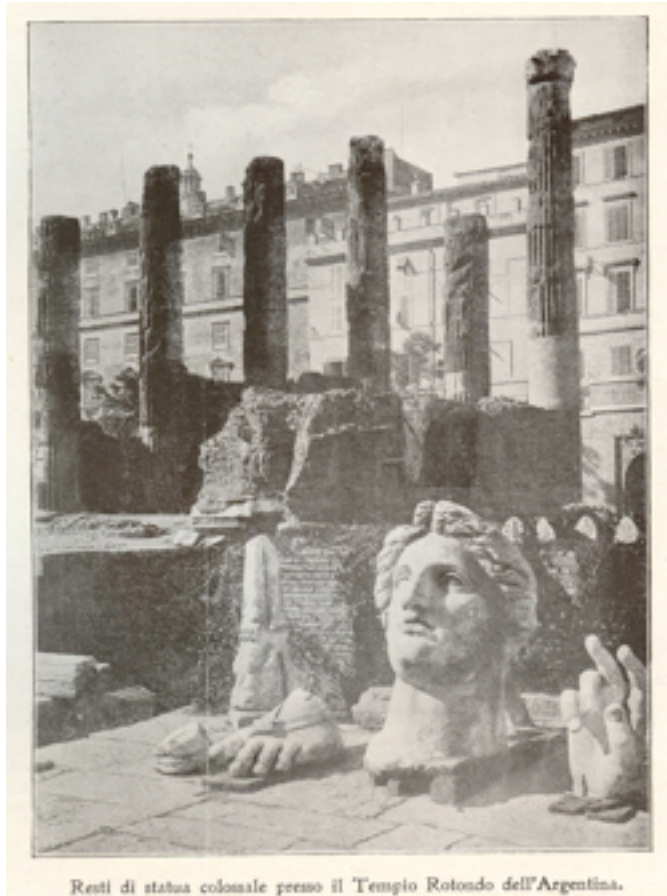


Fig 5.2

Despite the fact that the Largo Argentina was an important find in archeological history, it was an accidental. Many of the other archeological projects completed during the Fascist era were sites that had already been discovered and needed restorations. The reconstruction of the Ara Pacis (Augustus's altar of peace) began in December 1937 (see Fig 5.3).<sup>225</sup> Guiseppe Moretti, a writer for *Capitolium*, illustrates the history of the Augustan monument. He explains how Emperor Augustus returned to Rome from victories in Spain and Gaul on July 4, 13 B.C. In order to commemorate the victory, as well as the establishment of "civil order" and "tranquility" in the two provinces, he ordered the construction of the altar of peace.<sup>226</sup> Moretti claims that the Ara Pacis signified the moment when Imperial Rome became a happier and more peaceful

<sup>225</sup> Guiseppe Moretti, "Lo Scavo e La Ricostruzione Dell'Ara Pacis Augustae". *Capitolium*. Roma: 1938. 480.

<sup>226</sup> Moretti, 479.

civilization. Additionally, Moretti traces the history of the Ara Pacis after the ancient period, claiming that the monument was probably initially saved because of the religious and political history that it displayed. In 1568, the Palazzo di Peretti overlapped most of the location of the Ara Pacis. Moretti explains how many of the pieces were distributed through different areas of Italy, as at the time the altar was not a site of interest. Additionally, in 1859 the Duke of Fiano obtained several important pieces. He kept them until 1898 when he passed them along to the National Roman museum. For example, the relief of Tullus went to Cardinal Andrea Ricci in Montepulciano. In 1780, six more slabs of processional reliefs were transported to Florence. He also acknowledges that many of the important pieces were crushed in order to make cement for the foundation of the palace.

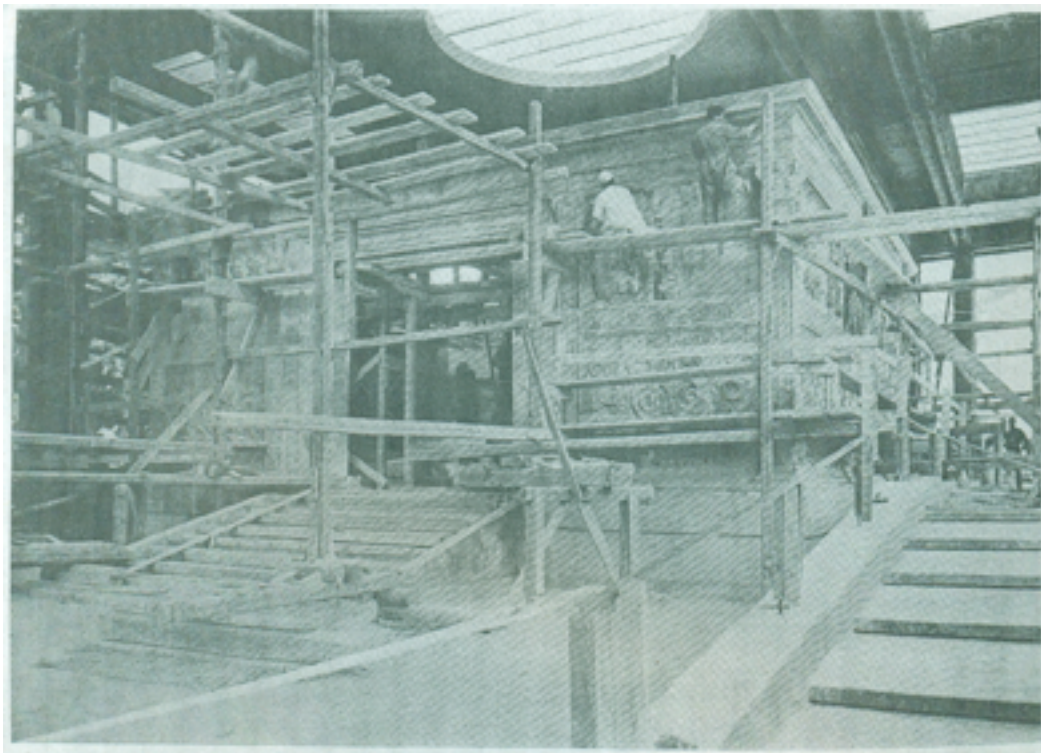


Fig 5.3

In 1903, Angiolo Pasqui led an excavation near the site that uncovered several more important pieces. Pasqui faced many difficulties during the dig because water had penetrated some of the clay and marble causing the reliefs to swell. “Absorption pumps” were dug into the ground on



the side of the palace, which partially remedied the issue. However, since some of the pieces had been destroyed when all of the remaining pieces returned to Rome the altar was still not complete.<sup>227</sup> In 1937, Mussolini ordered the excavation and restoration of the Ara Pacis to resume immediately. Moretti claims that Mussolini viewed the Ara Pacis as “*dell’insigne monumento*” (a distinguished monument) that called for further research.<sup>228</sup> The archeological team made several important recoveries. These discoveries include marble figures of Augustus’ lictors, several large pieces of the frieze, and most of the entire left side of the altar.<sup>229</sup>



Fig 5.4

The reconstruction of the Ara Pacis is significant because it showcases important information about the history of the Roman Empire and the Augustan age. The Fascist Regime would have been interested in these particular elements because of the manner in which they portrayed both Augustus and Rome’s history as well as because the Myth of *Romanità*. Many

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<sup>227</sup> Moretti, 480-481.

<sup>228</sup> Moretti, 482. This is the same year as the Augustan Exhibition

<sup>229</sup> Moretti, 484.

political figures are represented in the south side of the altar. Moretti describes how this side featured Augustus and a group of lictors standing between the two consuls, Tiberius and Quintilio Varo. Following these figures stood the ladies of the Imperial house (Livia, Julia, and Antonia), and an old man who was probably Agrippa. Moretti claims that this scene was probably a depiction of Augustus' ceremony on July 4, 13 A.D. when he victoriously returned home to Rome. The north side features other important figures of the Roman Senate, as well as prominent magistrates and priests. Moretti describes how images of fruits and flowers encircled the figures, and were also abundant in the interior of the altar.<sup>230</sup> The friezes of the Ara Pacis depicted many more important figures of the ancient period, illustrating each important level of society and important activities for these people (see Fig 5.4). For example, one frieze depicting the celebration of rites featured the Pontifex Maximus and the six Vestal Virgins. Images of animals and farms also showcased daily Roman life. Shepherds in robes watched over sheep, and images of rolling fields and fences making their way around the interior of the altar suggest rural life in Augustan Rome.

The Ara Pacis symbolizes many important themes that the Fascist Regime held close. Moretti explains how the illustrations of Imperial life served as a way to offer insight to Italy's past. For example, many reliefs featured scenes of sacrificial rituals. Scenes depicting the Campo Marzio as a place where ministers would oversee sacrificial rites and ceremonies, as well as images of both humans and animals waiting to be sacrificed made up many of the reliefs.<sup>231</sup> Themes such as sacrifice and martyrdom were important to the Fascist regime. Additionally the image of Augustus was important to the regime, particularly to Mussolini. As seen through the 1937 Augustan exhibition, the founder of the Roman Empire appeared frequently in Mussolini's

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<sup>230</sup> Moretti, 487.

<sup>231</sup> Moretti, 488.

speeches and writings. Mussolini felt as though he was connected to Augustus in many ways, and that the Fascist regime was the next greatest empire after Augustus'. Mussolini's strong feelings about Augustus offers insight as to why he was so intent on reconstructing artifacts and monuments from this period. Aside from a few reliefs depicting more rural life in the Imperial period, the Ara Pacis represents the life of elite and political figures in Rome. These are the people that Mussolini was most interested in because they represented the great achievements and prosperity of the Empire. Additionally, the nature imagery can be seen as representative of peace and prosperity rather than as factual information about the life of ordinary people. Moretti writes that the "*scena serena e gaia*" (serene and joyous scenes) depicted in the Ara Pacis not only were valuable scenes of "*realità storica*" (historical reality) but also represented harmony and splendor.<sup>232</sup> Evidently, the Fascist Regime was intent on remembering the greatness of the ancient past because the sites it chose to restore represented victories and powerful figures.

These themes lead to a discussion of the restoration of the Augustan Mausoleum, which occurred simultaneously with the reconstruction of the Ara Pacis. The two projects are closely linked, not only in location, but also through the fact that they both are representative of Augustus. Excavations of the Augustan Mausoleum began in 1937 as well, and Muñoz describes the site as "*la tomba del fondatore dell'impero, e dei suoi congiunti e discendenti*" (the tomb of the founder of the Empire, as well as of his relatives and descendents).<sup>233</sup> The original design of the Mausoleum was a round structure about eighty-six meters in diameter; "*un tumulo di terra ornato di alberi e sormontato da un'edicola e della statua di Augusto*" (a mound of earth decorated with trees and crowned with a statue of Augustus). Muñoz traces the history of the site after the fall of the empire, explaining how during the following centuries it became a

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<sup>232</sup> Moretti, 487. Translation is my own.

<sup>233</sup> Muñoz, *Roma di Mussolini*. 169. Translation is my own.

fortress, a garden, an arena for bull runs, an outdoor theater, and a concert hall. Muñoz explains how Mussolini was intent on beginning the project as soon as possible. With regards to the mausoleum, the Fascists viewed themselves as returning the state of Augustus' tomb to its rightful place. This belief comes through when Muñoz writes,

*“Il Mausoleo sarà presto liberato dalle costruzioni indegne che lo circondano, e verrà di nuovo coperto dal suo tumulo arboreo; secondo il nuovo Piano Regolatore, esso formerà centro da cui partiranno grandi strade in varie direzioni”* (The Mausoleum will soon be freed from the unworthy buildings which surround it, and will return back to the tree covered grave. According to the new Piano Regolatore, the Mausoleum will be the center for where great roads begin, branching off in various directions).

The Fascist excavation also revealed new discoveries, such as many descriptions in various cells about Emperors Nerva and Vespasian, as well as some of Augustus' grandsons. Additionally, a vase that is believed to have once held the ashes of Octavia, Augustus' sister, was found.<sup>234</sup> The Regime's intent on focusing their powers on recovering these monuments shows that there was a particular connection to Augustus. Furthermore, both of these projects, along with the Augustan Exhibition, were planned right in time for Augustus' bi-millennial birthday, which solidifies what Painter refers to as Mussolini's obsession with the emperor. Clearly the Regime saw these monuments as intertwined, not only as projects that would improve the aesthetics of the city, but to showcase the impressive nature of the Augustan period as well.

The regime also targeted the ancient Roman city center and various ancient forums as major restoration projects. These projects support the notion that the regime was solely focused on preserving monuments funded by the elite sectors of society. Muñoz describes the intensity of the projects, explaining that the excavations of the various forums took over eight years, and

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<sup>234</sup> Muñoz, *Roma di Mussolini*. 170. Translation is my own.

that once they were finished Mussolini had accomplished more work than was completed during the last five centuries.<sup>235</sup> Prior to the opening of the newly restored forums in the ancient city center, the regime completed work on the new Via dell'Impero, the wide boulevard that connected to the Via Cavour and Termini Station. Running from the Vittorio Emmanuel monument to the Colosseum, the avenue not only improved traffic flow, one of the major goals of Fascist city planning, but also improved access to the ancient city center.<sup>236</sup> Painter illustrates how the Via dell'Impero allowed for the visibility of "Trajan's Column, Trajan's Market, Trajan's Forum, and Augustus's forum on the left, and Caesar's Forum on the right". Visitors could also see the Forum of Nerva and additionally, "Statues of Caesar, Augustus, Trajan, and Nerva lined the street. The street also offered new access to the Roman Forum".<sup>237</sup> The Via dell'Impero served as a way of combining ancient and modern elements. Clearly, the regime used the construction of the new street to draw attention to Rome's revered monuments.

Painter illustrates how the Via dell'Impero also exposed the Basilica Maxentius, a huge structure located in the Roman Forum.<sup>238</sup> The Roman Forum, along with Caesar's Forum, Augustus' Forum, and Nerva's Forum, became major excavation sites from the late 1920s into the 1930s. Anne O'Hare McCormick, a reporter from *The New York Times* describes the improvements and discoveries made by Fascist archeologists. She explains how in the pre-Fascist world, the Basilica Maxentius was wrongly accredited to Emperor Constantine. She illustrates the progress made to the Roman Forum as well writing, "The hollow was the Forum, by day too thoroughly cleared and organized for those who remember its former romantic desolation, but at night restored to a semblance of the Civic Centre it used to be when

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<sup>235</sup> Muñoz, *Roma di Mussolini*. 130.

<sup>236</sup> Painter, 22.

<sup>237</sup> Painter, 23-24.

<sup>238</sup> Painter, 22.

disputatious gentlemen in togas paced the pavement of the Sacred Way”.<sup>239</sup> McCormick’s comments illustrate the manner in which the Regime would have wanted their work to be seen by the international world. Additionally, McCormick’s wording about the Forum being restored in a way that made it possible to imagine Roman magistrates strolling through the streets, shows the lengths that the archeologists took to make improvements and to restore the scenery to the closest possible level of originality possible.

At the time of the Fascist takeover, the majority of these sites were still underground. The Temple of Mars Ultor was initially discovered at the site of the Forum of Augustus. Three fluted columns emerged from the ground and were surrounded by large, stone walls that enclosed the ancient forum.<sup>240</sup> Corrado Ricci led the excavation of the Augustan Forum, uncovering the entire base of the Temple of Mars Ultor. Remains of a large room and staircase, thought to be the Temple of Augustus were also discovered. The Forum also contained large statues of Mars and Venus, as well as statues of heroes from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, showing how Christian monks later infiltrated the space.<sup>241</sup> Additionally, the Forum of Nerva remained mostly underground alongside a long colonnade, which is thought to be the remains of the border surrounding the Temple of Minerva.<sup>242</sup> *Roma di Mussolini* explains how in 1932, Caesar’s Forum was the last to be discovered, although it is the oldest in age. Archeologists prior to the Fascist period had deemed this area completely destroyed, but Muñoz and his team made substantial recoveries. The Basilica Argentaria, an ancient meeting place for

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<sup>239</sup> Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Dreams of Empire Kindle Rome”. *The New York Times*. August 25, 1935. Proquest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2007) 1.

<sup>240</sup> Muñoz, *Roma di Mussolini*. 131.

<sup>241</sup> Muñoz, *Roma di Mussolini*. 138.

<sup>242</sup> Muñoz, *Roma di Mussolini*. 131-132.



Il Tempio di Marte e il Foro di Augusto prima dell'isolamento (1923).

Fig 5.5



Il Foro di Augusto dopo gli scavi (luglio 1929).

Fig 5.6

Top: The Augustan Forum before the excavation in 1923.  
Below: After excavation in 1929.

bankers made up a large portion of Caesar's Forum. The team also discovered the remains of the temple of Venus Genetrix (see Fig 5.7).<sup>243</sup> Based on the images in Fig. 1.6, it is evident that vast improvements were made to the Forum of Augustus, along with other major forums. The regime's work to uncover these monuments and historical sites supports Painter and Agnews' arguments regarding the Myth of *Romanità*, and reveals how the Fascist aesthetic was forming in a multi-sided manner.



Fig 5.7

The excavation of Trajan's Forum proved to be the biggest project out of all of the forums (see Fig. 5.8). Muñoz describes the impressive nature of Trajan's Forum, citing an account given by Constantius II, who saw the Forum in 356 A.D. and stated, "*era il più bel monumento del mondo*" (it was the most beautiful monument in the world). Trajan's Forum is impressive, as the emperor ordered to have it built into the side of the Quirinal Hill in order to

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<sup>243</sup> Muñoz, *Roma di Mussolini*. 135.



obtain maximum height. The excavation of the Forum allowed for the locations of various structures to be differentiated more clearly. For example, archeologists were finally able to draw a ground plan for the Basilica of Ulpia.<sup>244</sup> Valentine Thomson of *The New York Times* recounts the excitement at the excavation of Trajan's Forum in 1933. She writes, "The Forum of Trajan has been entirely cleared of the squalid buildings covering it. But still innumerable treasures remain to be unearthed, if the list of what the Rome of the fourth century contained is any indication".<sup>245</sup> Thomson's mention of undesirable buildings being cleared away shows the reoccurring nature of the regime choosing to demolish residential areas and medieval buildings in favor of the ancient sites. Trajan's Forum has many important historical components including a triumphal arch, a Latin and Greek library, and a temple dedicated to Trajan. Most notably is Trajan's column, a monument that survived throughout the centuries and "miraculously" escaped the hands of Gianlorenzo Bernini, who wanted to transport it elsewhere.<sup>246</sup> Trajan's addition to the city also includes a vast market that is semi-circular in shape and housed hundreds of shops and offices where trading and other business was done. Muñoz describes the scene as bustling, with merchants selling herbs, vegetables, fruits, fish, meat, oil, and wine. Trajan's Market served a dual purpose of covering the cut that had been made into the Quirinal Hill, as well as becoming the prominent market place that ancient Rome had lacked thus far.<sup>247</sup> After its excavation, Trajan's Market became a huge tourist attraction and was even opened as a book market that replicated its ancient function. Anne O'Hare McCormick describes the rotating marketplace writing, "Trajan's market, a few years

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<sup>244</sup> Muñoz, *Roma di Mussolini*. 140.

<sup>245</sup> Thomson, *The New York Times*. 3.

<sup>246</sup> Muñoz, *Roma di Mussolini*. 131-132.

<sup>247</sup> Muñoz, *Roma di Mussolini*. 142-144.



Il Foro Traiano prima dell'isolamento (1923).



Il Foro Traiano e Via dell'Impero durante i lavori (febbraio 1932).

Fig 5.8

ago buried in the cellars of old houses, is exhumed and restored to become again a going emporium, one week for books, another for toys, a third for peasant embroideries".<sup>248</sup> The act of

<sup>248</sup> McCormick, *The New York Times*. 1.

making Trajan's Market a place where modern people could now go and buy souvenirs in essence of the past, is evocative of how Mussolini was intent on using the monuments as a way to hold up the ancient past. By allowing spectators to physically walk through Trajan's Market, as one would have during its original time, made history easier to access by ordinary people.

On the other side of the Capitoline Hill, work was also completed at the Theater of Marcellus, a large structure built during the final years of the Roman Republic, and officially inaugurated during the reign of Augustus (see Fig 5.9). In 1930, Edward Alden Jewell from *The New York Times*, wrote that the archeologists had been "entirely successful" in "'releasing' the theater of Marcellus".<sup>249</sup> During the excavation, directed by Professor Alberto Calza Bini, the theater was drained of sewage that had been ruining the stone, allowing the row of double arches around the amphitheater to be completely reopened. Muñoz writes, "*per tanti secoli così indegnamente depurtato e camuffato*" (for so many centuries, so shamefully disfigured and disguised), the Theater of Marcellus was finally returned to its former glory.<sup>250</sup> Julius Caesar had begun building the theater out of stone and Augustus, who dedicated the structure to the memory of his late nephew, Marcellus, added additions. The Fascist excavation of the Theater of Marcellus opened up many new historical discoveries. Archeologists found the remains of columns and the base of the Temple of Apollo.<sup>251</sup> Additionally, three temples in the Forum Holitorium were found. The Theater of Marcellus stood against the Palazzo Orsini, a building from the Renaissance. Muñoz explains that the palazzo was not destroyed because the archeologists were ordered to preserve any building that held artistic significance from any time

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<sup>249</sup> Edward Alden Jewell, "In Rome, Old and New Emerge Together". *The New York Times*. November 2, 1930. Proquest Historical Newspapers The New York Times, 1.

<sup>250</sup> Muñoz, *Roma di Mussolini*. 162.

<sup>251</sup> Muñoz, *Roma di Mussolini*. 164.

period. However, many medieval buildings, as well as civilian homes, were demolished in the process.<sup>252</sup> These orders show the intentions of the regime. It is telling that Mussolini and his



Il Teatro di Marcello isolato (1932).

Fig 5.9

Fascist colleagues chose to focus their attention on the major monuments and structures of ancient history. The regime chose to restore the places that were most representative of the leaders of the time rather than focusing on restoring artifacts of the lives of everyday people. In doing this, Mussolini was able to connect himself to these great emperors, especially with the additions of his own monuments.

People around the world noticed the major changes that the Fascist regime made to the ancient city. Valentine Thomson wrote that Fascism “is changing the face of the Eternal City by digging up the buried glories of [the past]”. The majority of her article focuses on the ancient emperors’ contributions to the city. She writes, “Under Augustus, Rome reached new heights of

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<sup>252</sup> Muñoz, *Roma di Mussolini*. 166.

beauty, passing from brick to marble”.<sup>253</sup> Additionally, McCormick praises the regime’s achievements, writing about Rome’s restorations in a romantic and nostalgic manner.

“In Beethoven’s trumpeting finale, one could almost hear the chariots of the imperial Triumphs clattering down from the Arch of Titus to the foot of the Capitol. The illuminated terraces were the slopes of the Palatine Hill, once more the back gardens of Augustus and Claudius and the shady paths where Cicero and Livy walked as they descended from the Apollo Library”.<sup>254</sup>

She also praised the work of Antonio Muñoz, saying that he had done more for Rome in the twelve years of excavations than had been done in the past century. She writes that Mussolini had planned to create a new modern city around the periphery of the old, so that the historic greatness would be exposed.<sup>255</sup>

Thus, the regime’s archeological projects emphasize how city planning was used in a different manner regarding the status of the ancient city center. Roads like the Via dell’Impero improved traffic by connecting to other major avenues, but unlike roads such as the Corso dei Rinascimento, it was also constructed to provide easier access and to show off Rome’s historic past. The excavations, as well, were intended to hold up the past, and the regime chose carefully, focusing mostly on works commissioned by the great emperors. Archeological planning held different intentions than that of architectural. Both meant to show the Fascist state as a modern, powerful force, but archeological projects revealed the nature of *Romanità* in Fascist society.

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<sup>253</sup> Thomson, *The New York Times*. Pg 1.

<sup>254</sup> McCormick, *The New York Times*. 1.

<sup>255</sup> McCormick, *The New York Times*. 3.

## Conclusion

The architectural and archeological projects during the Fascist Regime clearly signify important themes and objectives of the government while largely remaining different projects. Mussolini and his peers maintained a strong objective of improving the physical landscape of the nation's capital. The construction of the University City of Rome added a new level of education to the country, making Rome more modern and progressive, whereas projects such as the excavation of the Roman Forum looked back to the city's ancient history. It is clear that the Fascist state concerned itself with both modernity and progress, but at the same time aimed to restore the ancient city center to both remember the past, and possibly to bring in tourists and revenue to the country. Examples of this desire are evident in many of the travel guides published in the 1930s by the Italian State Tourism Department. For example, a *Tourist Review* from 1935 states that Rome, "characterized the architecture of Imperial Rome is revived in Fascist architecture, which also displays a revival of the pleasure derived from vast but light structures with gracefully developed harmonious lines".<sup>256</sup> Another travel guide from the same year writes of ancient Rome as holding "hidden gems", which are "ideal havens where life takes on a serene calm...enchants and attracts the tourist".<sup>257</sup> Statements such as these acknowledge that the Fascist state was persistent in using the improvements made to the city to showcase Italy's impressiveness. They also suggest that the government was very much aware of how other countries perceived Italy.

Although the two previous chapters show that architectural and archeological city projects in Rome were largely two separate developments, underlying similarities remain. This similarity is evident most clearly in the ambiguous nature of Fascist city planning. It is evident,

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<sup>256</sup> *Travel in Italy: Tourist Review of the E.N.I.T. and of the Italian State Railways*. Rome: Via Vittorio Veneto. September 1935. 14.

<sup>257</sup> *Travel in Italy*. 1935. 15.

from examples of the Via dei Trionfi and the Corso del Rinascimento, that city planning took form in a larger framework as a means of traffic improvement and efforts to make Rome more modern. However, roads such as the Via dell'Impero, and can be viewed as reasons why city planning was much more complex than falling simply into the architectural or archeological category. The Piano Regolatore of 1931 was Mussolini's (along with his architectural advisors') new city plan. Painter writes that the two main features of the plan were "the ordering of the old city and the creation of new zones for expansion". The regime aimed to improve traffic, create more green areas in the city, build new transportation facilities, and create schools, hospitals and housing.<sup>258</sup>

The goals of the Piano Regolatore are evident from the architectural and archeological projects. All of the new street projects widened boulevards, and gave citizens easier access to traffic routes away from the winding narrow roads in between each neighborhood. Additionally, the University City of Rome and the Mussolini Forum increased access to education and fitness, which the Fascists saw as improving the population. At the same time, the Fascist government succeeded in "ordering the old city" with the excavation of the numerous forums and various monuments. Although the Piano Regolatore designated that these two projects were entirely separate, it is clear that there was some overlap, particularly with the construction of the Via dell'Impero. The road ran from southeast from the Vittorio Emmanuel monument, through the different forums, to the Colosseum. It seems odd that a wide, modern boulevard similar to the ones being constructed outside the ancient center would be placed right in the middle.

Supporting the notion that this example shows the grey nature of many elements of the Fascist urban reconstruction plan, Painter claims, "The Via dell'Impero perfectly expressed the fascist wedding of past and present, traditional and modern that became a hallmark of Mussolini's

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<sup>258</sup> Painter, 16-17.

Rome”.<sup>259</sup> The Via dell’Impero not only improved traffic in this section of the city, it provided easier access to the monuments as well. Painter writes that spectators standing on the new street could see “the combination of Trajan’s Column, Trajan’s Market, Trajan’s Forum, and Augustus’s Forum on the left, and Caesar’s Forum on the right...Statues of Caesar, Augustus, Trajan, and Nerva lined the street”.<sup>260</sup> By having access to all of these sites, as well as ornamenting the street with images of the ancient emperors, the Fascist regime was able to achieve both of their goals with one project. Additionally, the “wedding of past and present” represents this clash of taste with regards to Fascist artistic interests.

Several other examples, aside from the projects previously discussed, more clearly and directly reveal these instances of overlap. *L’Ara Dei Caduti Fascisti* (The Monument to Fallen Fascists) is another example that exemplifies that despite having two separate plans outlined in the Piano Regolatore, the separation was not so black and white. The Monument to the Fallen Fascists was inaugurated in October of 1926. Despite the fact that its inauguration was prior to the official announcement of the Piano Regolatore, it remained an important monument of the Fascist period. According to R. Bonfiglietti, the author of an essay about the piece in *Capitolium*, the monument essentially consisted of the base of an ancient obelisk that had been lying, unclaimed, in a warehouse in Rome.<sup>261</sup> Bonfiglietti traces the history of the obelisk, explaining how it probably arrived in Rome between the periods of Emperors Commodus and Gallienus. A battle around 409 A.D. led to fires, which destroyed the obelisk, as it cracked in half, remaining this way for over thirteen centuries. Much of Bonfiglietti’s article focuses on the history of obelisks in general and the step-by-step process in how the obelisk based used in the monument

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<sup>259</sup> Painter, 22.

<sup>260</sup> Painter, 23-24.

<sup>261</sup> R. Bonfiglietti, “L’Ara Dei Caduti Fascist Eretta Sul Campidoglio”. *Capitolium* (1928). 416.



was recovered and restored.<sup>262</sup> The base was converted into a monument dedicated to fallen Fascists in 1926 and was placed on the Campidoglio, in the center of the ancient city.<sup>263</sup> The juxtaposition between the meaning behind the monument and the material out of which it was made, as well as its placement is significant. The obelisk base and the placement of the monument on the Campidoglio stem from ancient tradition, however a monument to Fascism is modern. The decision to use an object that symbolized power in ancient Rome as a memorial to fallen Fascists links the ancient and modern periods. This example shows the Fascist regime commemorating their modern day heroes with an object and a location of the past.

The *Nuovo Museo Mussolini* is an example of a Fascist art project that reflects the incoherency of the regime's ideology, particularly in terms of aesthetics. Construction began in 1924 at a site where remains of several ancient buildings had been found. S. Bocconi's article detailing the project in *Capitolium* explains the organization and logic behind Mussolini's new museum. He discusses how the museum, full of artistic work (some incomplete) from the ancient world harmonized with the design of the building. Airy gardens and marble statues contrasted the cold feeling of the more modern city building.<sup>264</sup> Bocconi explains how the rooms were arranged according to the size of the art that they held. Statues of gods such as Jupiter, Juno, Athena, and the Capitoline Triad stood in a large center room. Additionally, the rest of the rooms in the museum were organized by time period, featuring work from the Hellenistic age, the Republican age and the rules of various emperors during the empire. However, from the images accompanying the article, it is evident that the walls of the building were stark and shaped with strong lines and curves.<sup>265</sup> Mussolini's New Museum simultaneously featured

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<sup>262</sup> Bonfiglietti, 417.

<sup>263</sup> Bonfiglietti, 418.

<sup>264</sup> S. Bocconi, "Il Nuovo Museo Mussolini". *Capitolium* (1925-26). 471.

<sup>265</sup> Bocconi, 473-74.

modern artwork. Bocconi describes the second floor of the museum as being decorated with paintings, sculptures, prints by artists both living and recently deceased.<sup>266</sup> It is curious that a museum located on the Capitolium and featuring mostly ancient works of art would hold new artwork as well. Bocconi justifies the inclusion of modern art in his conclusion as he explains that although the New Museum does not claim to be a real gallery of modern art, it is included because it enhances the range of great artistic movements. Essentially, Bocconi argues that modern art should be held to the same esteem as that of the ancient works.<sup>267</sup> Mussolini's New Museum again shows the intertwining nature of the architectural and archeological projects. The Fascist architectural movement in Rome pushed the Rationalist movement to a new level whereas archeological excavations looked towards the past. The combination of modern and ancient art in one museum, funded by the Fascist regime, exemplifies the interplay between the two goals.

The seemingly distinct plans of the Piano Regolatore of 1931 as well as Fascist city restructuring plans in general reveal the nature of Mussolini's regime by showing that Fascism was more about action than theory. The intermixing of ancient and modern aesthetics in many Fascist public art projects occurred because Mussolini did not follow his own plans (loosely summarized in the Piano Regolatore) and instead was more interested in doing and creating as much as he could. Mussolini's pamphlet, *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism*, published in 1932 is his only written account regarding the policies of Fascism. In this essay, Mussolini explains the importance of Fascist action. He writes, "My own doctrine, even in this period, had always been a doctrine of action", continuing, "It was born of the need for action and it was itself from the beginning practical rather than theoretical; it was not merely another

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<sup>266</sup> Bocconi, 480.

<sup>267</sup> Bocconi, 481.

political party, even in the first two years, in opposition to all political parties as such, and itself a living movement”.<sup>268</sup> Additionally, most of the essay refutes Socialist doctrine. Instead of discussing the actual policies of the Fascist regime, Mussolini spends most of the essay writing how Fascist policies are different from socialist policies. This call for action, rather than displaying any kind of theoretical base reveals the extent to which the Fascist regime was mostly about getting projects done. The plans outlined in the Piano Regolatore of 1931 clearly state that the government was interested in both archeological restoration and architectural building and expansion. In the plan, these projects are stated as being separate. However, from the examples seen in this conclusion, it is clear that both themes had the possibility of overlapping. This overlap shows that Mussolini and his cohorts, as displayed in the *Political and Social Doctrines of Fascism*, were more concerned with the number of projects completed, rather than whether or not they were ideologically consistent.

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<sup>268</sup> Benito Mussolini, “The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism”. London: The Hogarth Press (1932). Translation by Jane Soames. 7-8.

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Dino Alfieri and Luigi Freddi, *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* (Rome: Partito Nazionale Fascista) 1933. Fig 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.7,

Painter, Borden W, Jr. 2005. *Mussolini's Rome: Rebuilding The Eternal City*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. XV. Fig 3.1, 4.5,

Massimo Pallattino “La Mostra Augustae della Romanita”. *Capitolium* (1937). Fig 3.5, 3.6

R.V. Ceccherini, “Dello Studium Urbis alla Citta degli Studi”. *Capitolium* (1933). Fig 4.1

“Opere Ciclopiche a Roma, La Città Universitaria.” *Almanacco Enciclopedico del ‘Popolo d’Italia’*. Milano: 1937. 387-383. Fig 4.2

“Nuove Opere al Foro Mussolini”. *Capitolium* (1938): 197-205. Fig 4.3, 4.4

Muñoz, Antonio, *Roma di Mussolini: Con 549 Illustrazioni*, Milano: Fratelli Treves (1935) Fig 5.1, 5.2, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9

Guiseppe Moretti, “Lo Scavo e La Ricostruzione Dell’Ara Pacis Augustae”. *Capitolium*. Roma: 1938. Fig 5.3, 5.4