

*Excavating Modernity: The Roman Past in Fascist Italy*. Joshua Arthurs. New York: Cornell University Press, 2012. ISBN: 9780801449987

Throughout contemporary academic spheres, recent discourse revolving around the history of Fascism has turned towards the regime's vision of modernism. According to *Excavating Modernity*, the implication of said scholarly approach necessitates some extension in terms of Fascism's complex relationship with the notion of *romanità* (Romanness), which has predominantly been dismissed as national pomposity. Specifically, Arthurs argues that *romanità* was an integral part of Fascism's endeavor of modernizing and shaping Italian space, history, and bodies. This schema developed through the regime's various archeological and research projects throughout Rome including, but not limited to, the Istituto di Studi Romani (Institute of Roman Studies), the Mostra Augustea della Romanità, and various urban planning developments. These sights, studied in conjunction with Fascism's historical intersections, stand as ways in which Fascist modernity was structured by historical philosophy.

Arthurs frames his work within the trajectory of the Eternal City and its function as both place and idea. Chapter 1 provides the reader with a preliminary basis of *romanità*'s position within the 'various Romes' that preceded Fascism. The "First Rome" refers to the Rome of antiquity, and the "Second Rome" to that under Christianity. The analysis of Risorgimento and Liberal Italy provides the reader with an account of the historical realization of the "Third Rome," which was originally theorized by Giuseppe Mazzini as a space of continuity the encompasses Rome's various pasts. This Rome, according to Mazzini, was one of national sovereignty, an ideal realized following the shift of Italy's capital from Florence to Rome in 1870. During the twentieth century, this Rome, according to modernist aesthetes, suffered from *pasatismo* ("past-ism") as Italy seemed unable to look beyond its trajectory of past feats. The

Associazione Nazionalista Italiana (ANI) integrated *romanità* into its agenda of “proletarian nationalism,” and Benito Mussolini would later utilize this concept. Here, Mussolini’s March on Rome is read as a movement that reclaims the capital from its previous influences (liberalism, socialism, and Catholicism) as a means of redefining the city and its relation to its own antiquity. Arthur thus presents the early stages of Fascism and the March on Rome as political acts that moved *romanità* towards an actualized program as opposed to national nostalgia.

Following the March on Rome, the Istituto di Studi Romani was established as a means of sustaining *romanità* studies. As discussed in Chapter 2, “Science and Faith,” the institution became dedicated to projects within the public sphere. This mission was executed through various scholarly undertakings such as historic and scientific exhibitions, an “epigraphic census,” and a proposed reassessment of Roman history vis-à-vis a thirty-volume history of the *Storia di Roma*. Its projects also mediated between church and state, as Catholicism also maintained its own view of *romanità*. *Scienza e Fede* (Science and Faith) interconnected church and regime by uniting, to an extent, each respective view under the notion that “Christ is Roman.” Though the ISR remained relatively independent from state control, it remained dedicated to the study of *romanità* as an active process through which Rome would achieve modernity.

It is to this undertaking of modernity that Chapter 3, “History and Hygiene in Mussolini’s Rome,” turns. Arthur’s transitions from *romanità* as scholarship to its interconnectivity with ‘Rome-as-place.’ Specifically, he breaks Rome into three different ‘places’: *Roma nuova*, *Roma antica*, and *Roma vecchia*. The ‘new’ Rome focused on the principles of the Fascist regime and totalitarian planning through modern design, whereas the ‘other Romes’ pertained to a reclaiming of the Roman past as integral to the Fascist present. Various neighborhoods and historic quarters were demolished, displacing countless Italian citizens to working-class suburbs.

This “sanitization” of Rome paralleled the excavation of many historic sites as a means of reclaiming the past for Fascist intent. Sites of antiquity, such as the Theater of Marcellus and the Mausoleum of Augustus, became redefined as sites of modernity. These three ‘spaces’ of Rome exemplify the mediation and intersection between *romanità* and modernity that Mussolini sought to accomplish. These divisions allow for a thorough understanding of the transition between Pre-Fascist Rome and Rome under Mussolini, which is all too often overlooked by readers as a Rome that seldom changes.

The concluding chapters, “The Totalitarian Museum” and “Empire, Race, and the Decline of *Romanità*” track the shift from the conception of the Mostra Augustea della Romanità and the transition of *romanità* as Fascist theory shifted and intermingled with *Germanentum*. Following an in-depth analysis of the Mostra Archeologica of 1911 and the Museo Dell’Impero Romano, Arthurs addresses the Mostra Augustea, initially conceived to commemorate the Augustan bimillenary, and its mission to display Rome’s longevity as an empire of the people. This exhibit stood as the integration of *romanità* into political culture. It integrated replications with various texts, photographs, and other display media, coalescing science, antiquity, and modernism. The state mobilized promotion of the exhibit, both locally and internationally, further emphasized its intentions as a demonstration of empire resurgence. Both *romanità* and the notion of the Roman ‘empire’ would later be problematized following Fascism’s adoption of racist ideology in 1938. This shift instigated discourses that connected *romanità* and *Germanentum*. The “new” empire transitioned from the ideology of “Romanness” based on culture and history to the myth of Roman “universality” as Italy later sought conquest in Africa and Europe. As Fascism moved further away from its preceding dependence on *romanità*, Arthurs describes the postwar rejection of *romanità* following the regime’s demise.

*Excavating Modernity* provides an invaluable analysis of the connection between Fascism's implementation of *romanità* and its schema of modernization. It provides an extensive exploration of the interconnections between various sites of scholarship, antiquity, and modernity as a means of successfully describing how *romanità* shaped, and was shaped by, various yet intersecting modes of historical representation. Ultimately, it intuitively foregrounds the dynamics of authority as a mechanism of hierarchical and spatial control, and therefore offers a trajectory that is capable of extending far beyond its regulated sources.

Kelsey Moore, M.A. School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California