

Il fascismo italiano. Storia e interpretazioni

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Emblematically recalling the title of a classic of historiography on the subject by Emilio Gentile, *Il fascismo italiano. Storia e interpretazioni* is a volume of great value that offers new food for thought when analysing a phenomenon that has continued to transform Italy since the early 1920s and whose spectre has often been evoked over the last hundred years. The editor, Giulia Albanese – a renowned expert in this field of research – has been inspired by the recent debate on the legitimacy of comparing contemporary populist right-wing movements and the fascist experiments of interwar Europe. The idea of this editorial project arose from precisely this topical reflection, which has led Albanese and the other contributors to the book to ‘reconstruct and rethink the fundamental features of the historical experience of Italian fascism’ (pp. 13–14) from its dawn to the collapse of Benito Mussolini’s regime in July 1943.

The volume is divided into 13 thematic chapters written by as many brilliant scholars of Fascism, belonging mainly, but not exclusively, to Italian academia. Each essay develops in an original way from a specific case study or episode to then formulate more general considerations. The first three chapters are dedicated to essential aspects of Fascist ideology and political practice. In Chapter 1, Matteo Millan addresses the issue of squadrist violence, its genesis and transformations, and its different forms and unique aspects, interestingly reporting cases of ‘minor’ – but no less paradigmatic – figures of Fascist squadristism. The essay by Valeria Deplano investigates the evolution of the Duce’s regime in an imperialistic sense, highlighting the links between empire, nation building, and the anthropological revolution that Mussolini committed to achieving throughout the *ventennio*. Claudia Baldoli, in Chapter 3, underlines the critical role of warfare in continuously mobilising citizens and strengthening their consent to the dictatorship. She focuses on the military failure of the regime – with special attention to air warfare – in terms of both military force deployed and measures to protect the civilian population during the Second World War.

The following four essays examine the regime’s influence on several structural elements of the country: namely, politics, economy, religion, and science. In Chapter 4, Matteo Di Figlia analyses the Fascist ruling class through the biographies of party secretaries, *federali*, and *prefetti*. He highlights how the Fascist political elite transformed the country and how power was articulated between the centre and the periphery. Bruno Settis, in Chapter 5, sheds light on the regime’s self-representation in the economic field and the relationship between public intervention and private powers, as well as the connections of the state with the entrepreneurial elite. He also questions whether it is possible to speak of a real economic modernisation during the *ventennio*. The tensions between the Fascist state and the Church are the subject of Chapter 6, by Gabriele Rigano, who illustrates how Fascism constantly ‘tried to bend Catholicism to its national-imperialist demands’ and superimposed the ‘Rome of Caesar’ on the ‘Rome of Peter’ (p. 147). Angelo Matteo Caglioti, in Chapter 7, points out the critical role of science in the totalitarian project of Fascism. The author provides an original examination of how

Fascist modernisation of meteorology led to its progressive professionalisation and militarisation through the creation of the Meteorological Service of the Regia Aeronautica.

The volume continues with four further chapters (8 to 11) that deal with the relationship between Fascist institutions and Italian society. Roberta Pergher's essay moves from the controversial political status of colonial subjects in Libya to reflect more broadly on Fascist concepts of citizenship, specifically on the way in which the Fascist state 'claimed the individual for itself, depriving him of all power at the same time' (p. 192). Ilaria Pavan looks at the Fascist welfare state and ponders continuities and discontinuities with the social policies of liberal Italy, as well as at the territorial, gender, and racial fractures on which the social initiatives of the regime were grounded. Adopting a bottom-up approach, Joshua Arthurs reflects on the use of the Fascist badge, its deep ideological, symbolic, and political value, and its impact on the daily life of the population. Alessio Gagliardi's chapter follows, investigating the adaptation of mass media to the needs of the dictatorship, the link between the Fascist desire to revolutionise society and the transformation of the propaganda apparatus, and the response of the Italians to this propaganda.

The volume concludes with two essays on antifascism and the reception of Fascism outside the national borders – with a focus on Western Europe – written respectively by Marco Bresciani and Giulia Albanese. These function to stress the link between the internal construction of the Blackshirts' regime and 'what happened against and outside it' (p. 15). Two absentees stand out – namely, a chapter on racism and antisemitism and a chapter on gender – which, however, the editor acknowledges and justifies in the introduction. A partial solution is given to this inconvenience since these macro-themes, although not analysed systematically, emerge transversely in several of the 13 chapters of the book.

Ultimately, *Il fascismo italiano* is a work by no means trivial at a time when the diffusion of the concept of 'global fascism' – certainly useful for investigations on a larger scale – sometimes produces the side effect of blurring the core elements of this phenomenon, diluting the meaning of the term 'fascism' until it disappears. While positioning itself in continuity with the vast existing literature on the interpretation of the fascist phenomenon, Giulia Albanese's volume presents us with innovative aspects, which contribute to making it a reference text for experts and students of fascism.

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Holy War: The Untold Story of Catholic Italy's Crusade Against the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

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Holy War is an important book connecting the history of Italian colonialism, the Vatican's relationship with Fascism, and the longer trajectory of contacts between the Catholic and the Ethiopian Orthodox Churches. It expands on the author's trilogy on Italian colonial violence in Ethiopia between 1935 and 1942: *The Plot to Kill Graziani* (2010), *The Massacre*