

University of Groningen

Spectacular Latin

Lamers, Han; Reitz-Joosse, Bettina

Published in:
 Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies

DOI:
[10.1163/22116257-bja10062](https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-bja10062)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
 Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
 2023

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
 Lamers, H., & Reitz-Joosse, B. (2023). Spectacular Latin: The Role of the Latin Language in Political Spectacles under Italian Fascism. *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, 12(2), 278–304. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-bja10062>

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.



BRILL

FASCISM 12 (2023) 279–305

F A S C I S M

JOURNAL
OF
COMPARATIVE
FASCIST
STUDIES

brill.com/fasc

Spectacular Latin

The Role of the Latin Language in Political Spectacles under Italian Fascism

Han Lamers | ORCID: 0000-0001-7965-8339

University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

han.lamers@ifikk.uio.no

Bettina Reitz-Joosse | ORCID: 0000-0002-7512-3502

University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands

b.l.reitz-joosse@rug.nl

Received 22 April 2022 | Accepted 21 September 2023 |

Published online 13 December 2023

Abstract

This article explores the role of the Latin language in the context of political performance and spectacle under Italian Fascism. We investigate the different ways in which Latin words, phrases, and texts are used as visual and symbolic elements of Fascist performances and how they are staged in contemporary media coverage. Specifically, this article focuses on three case studies: first, human mosaics of the word *dux*; second, the use of a tapestry bearing a Latin motto in the context the fourteenth anniversary of Fascism; and finally, the role of a Latin foundation deposit in an inauguration ceremony for building works at the *Esposizione Universale di Roma*. Two main arguments connect the three case studies. First, we argue that the Latin language does not simply gesture towards Roman antiquity, but that it is used to evoke several different pasts at the same time. Second, we show that the Latin language has a range of affordances for diverse audiences, which are tied closely to the visibility, materiality, and symbolism of Latin during the *ventennio fascista*.

Keywords

Fascism – Latin language – spectacle – performance – romanità – Dux – deposit – Horace

Published with license by Koninklijke Brill NV | DOI:10.1163/22116257-bja10062

© HAN LAMERS AND BETTINA REITZ-JOOSSE, 2023 | ISSN# 2211-6249 (print) / 2211-6257 (online)
via Open Access. This is an open access article distributed under the terms
of the CC BY 4.0 license.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

This special issue of *Fascism—(Re)Living Greece and Rome: Performances of Classical Antiquity under Fascism*—aims to investigate the ways in which different kinds of performances and spectacles shaped and articulated imagined connections between Fascist present and the classical past. Our investigation of political spectacles of Italian Fascism focuses on one particular element of such performances which has not previously been studied, perhaps because at first sight it appears both ‘unspectacular’ and unsuited to performative contexts: the Latin language. In the course of three case studies we aim to show that the opposite is true. Latin, we argue, had a wide spectrum of symbolic affordances in Fascist performances, which appealed to different kinds of audiences and allowed for the integration of multiple pasts (rather than only classical Rome) into political spectacles, which were collectively experienced enactments of the Fascist present.¹

This article is built around three case studies. On the one hand, they encompass different types of political spectacle in Fascist Italy: a gymnastics display of the Fascist youth, a political rally in Piazza Venezia, and a formalized ritual of inauguration.² On the other hand, they showcase the different ways in which Latin could be a part of political spectacles: as a single word, a well-known phrase of a classical author, or in the shape of a longer written document. First, we analyse the practice of forming the Latin word *DVX* through ‘human mosaics’, i.e. by spelling the word itself through the arrangement of the bodies of young people. Second, we turn to a mass rally in front of Palazzo Venezia in 1936, where the stage featured, as its backdrop, a huge tapestry bearing a Latin motto taken from the ancient Roman poet Horace. Finally, we analyse the *posa della prima pietra* [laying of the first stone], the inauguration ceremony for building works at the projected site of the *Esposizione Universale di*

1 The concept of affordances was originally introduced by the psychologist James Gibson: James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception: Resources for Ecological Psychology* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1986). It has since been applied in a broad variety of disciplines. Here, we use it to describe the fact that environments, objects, or media hold potentials for particular interactions with them, which are enabled and restricted both by the nature of the objects/environments/media and by the capabilities of the interacting person. In our article, we investigate the affordances of Latin words or phrases in the context of political spectacle, asking ourselves what kinds of reactions and interactive practices they afforded for spectators and participants.

2 On spectacles in the political culture of Fascist Italy, see fundamentally Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (California: University of California Press, 1997). See also Medina Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle, and Tourism in Fascist Italy* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), discussing the staging of late-medieval and Renaissance sites and associated spectacles in Fascist Italy.

Roma [EUR; Universal Exposition of Rome, or the World's Fair], involving an inscription and a foundation deposit written in Latin. Before we turn to these case studies, we first offer some background on the symbolism of the Latin language in Fascist Italy as it has been understood until now.

During the last decade, the role of the Latin language under Italian Fascism has been increasingly studied. Scholars have explored the increased emphasis on the ancient languages in the educational system, its political motivations and its effects.³ Furthermore, increased attention has been paid to the practice of producing literary and epigraphic texts in Latin during the *ventennio fascista*, and to the ways in which Latin was theorized in its relation to the ambitions of the Fascist regime by different actors and interest groups.⁴ What most of this research has in common is that it focuses on those with a high degree of expertise in the language: academics, teachers, and clerics well-versed in the Latin literary tradition and in the composition and reading of Latin texts. Where such

3 On Latin in the educational system of Fascist Italy, see esp. Jürgen Charnitzky, *Die Schulpolitik des faschistischen Regimes in Italien (1922–1943)* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1994) and Elsa M. Bruni, *Greco e latino: Le lingue classiche nella scuola italiana (1860–2005)* (Rome: Armando, 2005), 77–100. A pioneering article on the subject is Paolo Fedeli, 'Studio e uso del latino nella scuola fascista,' in *Matrici culturali del fascismo: Seminari promossi dal Consiglio regionale pugliese e dall'Ateneo barese nel trentennale della Liberazione*, ed. Giuseppe Semerari (Bari: Università di Bari, 1977), 209–224.

4 From the recent body of scholarship, see the contributions in Han Lamers, Bettina Reitz-Joosse, and Valerio Sanzotta, eds., *Studies in the Latin Literature and Epigraphy of Italian Fascism* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020); Samuel Agbamu, 'The *Arco dei Fileni*: A Fascist Reading of Sallust's *Bellum Iugurthinum*,' *Classical Receptions Journal* 11, no. 2 (2019): 157–177; Nicolò Bettegazzi, Han Lamers, and Bettina Reitz-Joosse, 'Viewing Rome in the Latin Literature of the *Ventennio Fascista*: Francesco Giammaria's *Capitolium Novum*,' *Fascism* 8, no. 2 (2019): 153–178, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-00802002>; Marianna Cereto, 'Pascoli latino per i ragazzi del littorio,' *Peloro* 6, no. 2 (2021): 121–186; Han Lamers and Bettina Reitz-Joosse, *The Codex Fori Mussolini: A Latin Text of Italian Fascism: Edited with Introduction, Commentary and Translation* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016 and 2017); Han Lamers and Bettina Reitz-Joosse, 'Lingua Lictoria: The Latin Literature of Italian Fascism,' *Classical Receptions Journal* 8, no. 2 (2016): 216–152; Han Lamers, Bettina Reitz-Joosse, and Dirk Sacré, 'Neo-Latin Literature, Italy 3: Fascism (1922–1943),' in *Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Neo-Latin World*, eds. Jan Bloemendal, Charles Fantazzi, and Philip Ford (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1091–1096; Han Lamers, 'Latinizing Mussolini's Message: Nicola Festa's Latin Translation of the "Proclamation of Empire" (1936/7),' *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 24, no. 2 (2017): 198–218; Dirk Sacré, 'De colloquiis quibusdam intra vicennium fascale conscriptis,' *Conventiculum anni 2019 Latinum*, 2020; Nicolò Bettegazzi, 'Ideologies of Latin in Fascist Italy (1922–1943): The Language of Rome between Fascism and Catholicism' (PhD diss., University of Groningen, 2023). An increasing number of Latin texts of Fascist Italy is now freely accessible in the online library *Fascist Latin Texts*, eds. Han Lamers and Bettina Reitz-Joosse, <https://flt.hf.uio.no>.

research has considered audiences of the Latin culture of the *ventennio*, it has generally been difficult to gauge the effect of these cultural-political efforts on those outside of these highly educated educational and scholarly circles.

In contrast, this article attempts to capture the effect of uses of Latin on large and diverse audiences, namely participants in Fascist political ceremonies and spectacles and the viewers of their mediatizations in the form of images or films. We investigate the different ways in which Latin words, phrases and texts are used as key visual and symbolic elements of Fascist performance, and the affordances of such elements for diverse audiences. In particular, we ask how Latin could function as a symbol in and of itself for spectators and participants who knew little Latin or none at all, while also pointing to symbolic potentials of specific Latin words or phrases only apparent to those with certain prior knowledge of Latin literature.⁵

In considering the role of Latin in the context of political performances, the content of a specific Latin utterance can be less important than its material and visual presence. We therefore focus particularly on the materiality of the containers of the Latin texts (e.g. stone, parchment, fabric, or human bodies) and the immediate material and visual context in which they function. Furthermore, we pay special attention to the mediatizations of the spectacles we study. We cannot access the spectacles independently of how they were staged in film or photography at the time, but this is by no means a hindrance to this investigation: rather, it allows us to explore the affordances of Latin for an even wider audience, since a spectacle attended by a few hundred spectators, such as the inauguration of the EUR building site in Rome, could subsequently be watched by a much larger audience as part of the *cinegiornale* [newsreels] all across the country.

Two main arguments connect our case studies. First, we emphasise that, in the context of particular political spectacles, the Latin language was capable of evoking multiple relevant pasts at the same time. As such, it could connect various stages and elements of the history and mythology of Rome.⁶ Second, we argue that the Latin language could have a range of affordances not only

5 The symbolic significance of Latin (Latin as a 'symbol' or a 'sign') is discussed from a historical perspective in Françoise Waquet, *Latin or the Empire of a Sign: From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (London: Verso, 2002). See also, for a more philological perspective, Joseph Farrell, *Latin Language and Latin Culture: From Ancient to Modern Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

6 Recent work on Fascist spectacle has pointed to the potential of spectacles' historical settings to invoke not only one specific historical moment but to create a sense of historical continuity from multiple pasts to the present (see footnote 21 below).

for classically educated elites, but also for non-Latinate participants and audiences of these spectacles, which are tied closely to the visuality, materiality, and symbolism of Latin during the *ventennio*.

Embodying the *DVX*: Latin in the Performance of ‘Human Mosaics’

One of the most eye-catching kinds of political performances of Italian Fascism were so-called ‘human mosaics’,⁷ which were formed by a group of people using their bodies to jointly create a formation in the shape of a word or a short phrase. Such formations were choreographed in different ways and in various contexts during the *ventennio*, most of them connected with physical training and education, and the performance of discipline and obedience.

A popular choice for such human mosaics was the three-letter word *DUX* or, in the correct Latin capitals, *DVX* [leader], which was regularly used as an alternative to the Italian *Duce* (Mussolini’s official title as dictator).⁸ The Latin *DVX* was similar enough to the Italian *duce* to be easily comprehensible for the many Italians who did not read Latin fluently (unlike some of the other Latin expressions used in Fascist propaganda, as discussed later in this article). The frequent association of Mussolini’s name with the Latin word *DVX* in effect rendered the two synonymous.⁹ The compact, three-letter word had a clear visual appeal that invited its use in the context of spectacles of various kinds. In addition to the letter *M*, for Mussolini, the word was a recurrent and almost obligatory element in the decoration of streets, squares, and façades when Mussolini visited

7 The term ‘human mosaics’ is used in this context by Enrico Sturani, *Otto milioni di cartoline per il duce* (Turin: Centro scientifico editore, 1995), 286.

8 Enrico Sturani has suggested that it was a picture of the photographer Giulio Parisio that inspired such formations with *Dux* and *Duce*. Sturani, *Otto milioni di cartoline*, 286. The practice of human mosaics in the shape of a leader’s name was nothing new. The first human mosaic of this kind caught on camera in Italy was for Pius IX, dating to 1886, according to Sturani, *Otto milioni di cartoline*, 287. Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, 81 used the term ‘human choreography’ for the same phenomenon.

9 The designation *Dux* for Mussolini was given exposure by the publication of Margherita Sarfatti’s early biography of the leader of Italian Fascism (and her lover), first published in English (1925) and then in Italian (1926). The Italian edition bore the simple title *Dux*. At the frontispiece of the Italian edition, Sarfatti used a picture of the white marble bust of Mussolini that she commissioned with Alfonso Wildt in 1923, also entitled *Dux*. Exhibited and reproduced frequently in the *ventennio*, the bust almost became ‘Mussolini’s official sculpted portrait’. Simona Storchi, ‘Margherita Sarfatti and the Invention of the Duce,’ in *The Cult of the Duce: Mussolini and the Italians*, eds. Stephen Gundle, Christopher Duggan, and Giuliana Pieri (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 49–50.

a town or city.¹⁰ It was also seen in banners, posters, and billboards, as a part of ephemeral architecture, including triumphal arches and lighting installations, and in more durable inscriptions in stone. Sometimes the word was used in short and memorable phrases such as *DVX LVX* [Leader, light], *VBI DVX, IBI LVX* [Where the Leader is, there is light], or *MVSSOLINI DVX* [Mussolini the Leader] which is still visible as the controversial inscription on the shaft of the marble obelisk of Foro Italico (the former Foro Mussolini) (see figure 1).¹¹

As a human mosaic, the word *DVX* could be integrated in spectacles of different kinds that also allowed for different interpretations of its use. When in 1936 Alessandro Pavolini, the Inspector of the National Fascist Party, visited two seaside holiday camps in Pescara, he was welcomed by the children and their supervisors. In the Luce-newsreel recording the event,¹² we see young boys in swimming suits lying down stretched out on the beach to form the word *DVX*. Their supervisors can be seen arranging the mosaic before both they and the bystanders turn towards the boys in *DVX*-formation and raise their arms in the Roman salute, as if Mussolini were physically present.¹³

10 Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, 80.

11 Further examples are numerous. Most famously, the words *DVX* and *REX* were added to the façade of the Mostra Augustea della Romanità in Rome. See Valentina Follo, 'The Power of Images in the Age of Mussolini' (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2013), 29, and Bettigazzi, 'Ideologies of Latin', 224–226. Three other, less well-known examples are the following: *AVE DVX* attached to the Porta Elisa in Lucca in 1930, see 'Viaggio di Mussolini in Toscana,' *Giornale Luce*, May 1930, from 00:24:10, Archivio Luce, Giornale Luce A / A0587, cod. A058703, accessed November 3, 2023, <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000020886/2/viaggio-mussolini-toscana-1>; *DVX* in huge fluorescent letters attached to the façade of a building in Milan in 1932, see 'Milano accoglie il Duce con devota e vibrante passione,' *Giornale Luce*, November 4, 1932, from 00:55:25, Archivio Luce, Giornale Luce B / B0160, cod. B016004, accessed November 3, 2023, <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000009329/2/-18945>; *DVX* in giant dark letters attached to the podium from where Mussolini was speaking in Navarra in 1934, see 'Visita di Mussolini a Novara,' *Giornale Luce*, September 1934, from 00:18:45, Archivio Luce, Giornale Luce B / B0553, cod. B055301, accessed November 3, 2023, <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000014921/2/visita-mussolini-nova>.

12 The *Istituto Luce*, with Luce being the acronym for *L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa* [The Educational Film Union], was an Italian film corporation founded in 1924 and during the *ventennio* used for Fascist propaganda.

13 'L'ispettore del partito Paolini visita le colonie marine "Vittoria Colonna" e "Rosa Maltoni Mussolini",' *Giornale Luce*, September 1936, at 0:49:12–0:49:20, Archivio Luce, Giornale Luce B / B0950, cod. B095006, accessed November 3, 2023, <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000024691/2/l-ispettore-del-partito-paolini-visita-colonie-marine-vittoria-colonna-e-rosa-maltoni-mussolini-cura-del-sindacato-belle-arti.html>. A picture of 1938 shows a similar beach formation—'VV IL DUCE'—with bystanders performing a Roman salute. The image is available in Sturani, *Otto milioni di cartoline*, 287 (no. 191).



FIGURE 1 Obelisk at the Foro Italico, Rome
PHOTO BY BETTINA REITZ-JOOSSE

The bodies in the *DVX*-mosaic were apparently imagined as embodying the dictator in his absence. Human mosaics like this one in Pescara were one way of suggesting Mussolini's presence during holiday camps and schools, in addition to the virtual presence of the leader of Fascism through portraits and statues and broadcasting of his speeches. After the Roman salute, the boys are allowed to enter the water to swim, and the shots that follow show them playing in the water—the sense of disarray of these shots stands in sharp contrast with the previous *DVX*-formation as if to emphasize the collective effort of discipline and coordination this involved. The Latin word was staged as a direct, modern, youthful and vigorous expression of the young generation's discipleship of the Fascist leader.

The use of Latin rather than Italian obviously evoked the ancient Roman past and cast Mussolini as the 'Roman-style' leader of the Italians, the *Dux Italarum*. During the *ventennio*, the word *dux* was associated with emperor Augustus who had applied it to himself, in a different phrasing and context, in his autobiographical *Res Gestae*.¹⁴ The term *dux* was thus supposed to enforce the perceived parallel between Mussolini and Augustus, even though it was not one of the formal titles conferred on the emperor.¹⁵ The associations of the term were, however, not necessarily confined to Augustus or even ancient Rome. *Dux* also evoked mediaeval and Renaissance rulers and *condottieri* who had sometimes been called, or called themselves, *dux* in their capacity as commanders and military leaders (and independently of the title of duke). In propaganda images of the period, Mussolini, posing on horseback, was deliberately presented as a modern *condottiero*.¹⁶ The Latin term could thus suggest a long tradition of strongman leadership which, for the Fascists, had Roman-imperial overtones and sparked an association with the heroic-military values of the *condottieri*.

14 Giardina, 'Augusto tra due bimillenni,' 58. In his *Res Gestae* (25.2–4), Augustus claims that in 32 BC 'the whole of Italy of its own free will' swore allegiance to him and demanded him as *dux belli* at a moment when Rome was threatened by crisis and civil war. The context of the word in the *Res Gestae* does have some overlap with the political situation of the Fascist seizure of power as it was presented by the regime.

15 Cf. for example, Wilfried Stroh, *Latein ist tot, es lebe Latein! Kleine Geschichte einer großen Sprache* (Berlin: List Verlag, 2007), 280 and Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected*, 7.

16 The connection between the term *dux* and the *condottieri* has also been observed by Simone Verde, 'La fabbrica della storia: La tortuosa invenzione dell'identità fascista = The Fabrication of History: The Tortuous Process of Inventing Fascist Identity,' in *Imperituro: Renovatio Imperii: Ravenna nell'Europa Ottoniana = Ravenna in Ottonian Europe*, eds. Maria Pia Guermandi and Silvia Urbini (Bologna: Istituto Beni Culturali, 2014), 104–105. On the role of the figure of the medieval *condottiero* in representations of Mussolini more generally, see Beatrice Sica, 'Il Duce e il popolo-cavallo: Politica, pedagogia e propaganda nell'immagine di Mussolini condottiero,' *Studi culturali* 2 (2018): 159–188.

Beyond the level of the word, its meaning, and connotations, the Latin language itself could also afford additional meaning to the spectacle of the human mosaic, as a second example of this phenomenon shows. In 1940, a *DVX*-formation was part of a grander spectacle, staged at the Foro Mussolini (the current Foro Italico) in Rome to mark the visit of international delegations. The newsreel dedicated to the event shows large-scale parades of the Fascist youth organisation, including a flag show. Towards the end of the newsreel, the participants form the word-image *DVX*, with Mussolini himself watching the scene from above.¹⁷ The occasion was much more grandiose than Pavolini's visit to the holiday camps in Pescara: besides the presence of Mussolini himself, it involved an international audience gathered at a symbolically important place for the regime. The international image of Fascist Italy and its leader was at stake in this spectacle. The human mosaic could be construed as a sign of obedience and devotion to the leader of Fascism, and the choice to use the Latin translation of his title had special relevance in this context: since the early 1930s, the regime had been attempting to promote the Latin language as an international language of universal understanding between different (like-minded) nationals and citizens, and tried to stimulate its reintroduction as the *lingua franca* of academic research.¹⁸ As Italy's colonial expansion gained traction during the 1930s, the imperial associations of the Latin language had come to the fore—the language itself could serve as a sign of the ability of Rome's heirs to once more unite and control an empire.¹⁹

An important part of the meaning and significance of such human *DVX*-mosaics was in the actual performance of individuals using their bodies to visualize the title of their leader. Apart from this instant performative significance, however, these mosaics were also filmed or photographed for those not present at the event itself. As these formations were best viewed from above, film and photography enabled people to see them from the best possible angle. In particular, human mosaics in the shape of *DVX* and *Duce* circulated on propaganda postcards of the regime, which testifies to the ideological significance attached to them (figure 2). Formations with school children (both girls and

17 'Un'imponente manifestazione ginnico-militare al Foro Mussolini alla presenza di Mussolini, di autorità tedesche e giapponesi,' *Giornale Luce*, 1940, at 00:20:44 to 00:21:05, Archivio Luce, *Giornale Luce C. / CG002*, cod. CG00203, accessed November 3, 2023, <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000094808/2/un-imponente-manifestazione-ginnico-militare-al-foro-mussolini-alla-presenza-mussolini-autorita-tedesche-e-giapponesi-1.html>.

18 Lamers and Reitz-Joosse, '*Lingua lictoria*,' 232–237.

19 See e.g. Agbamu, '*The Arco dei Fileni*'; Lamers and Reitz-Joosse, '*Lingua lictoria*,' 237–245.

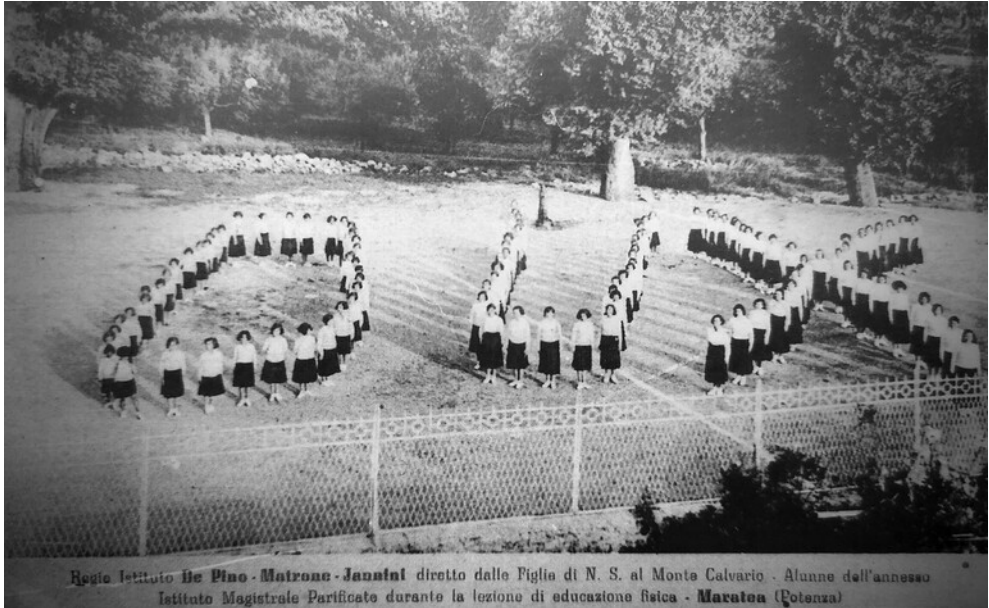


FIGURE 2 Postcard showing a human mosaic of the word *DUX*
 REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF ENRICO STURANI, *OTTO MILIONI DI CARTOLINE PER IL DUCE* (TURIN: CENTRO SCIENTIFICO EDITORE, 1995), 287

boys) seem to have been an especially popular subject.²⁰ Postcards, and pictures more generally, made it possible to preserve an optimally staged memory of these mosaic-performances.

The Fabric of Roman Imperialism: Latin Quotations and the Staging of Mass Rallies

Mass rallies were arguably the most frequent spectacle events in Fascist Italy. Mussolini would address crowds at carefully selected historical sites, such as the Colosseum in Rome (figure 3) and Piazza della Signoria in Florence, which enabled him to ally his image 'at once with the deepest traditions and with the most forward-looking, modernizing impulses' of his time.²¹ The display of Latin phrases was sometimes part of the 'decors' or 'stages' of these rallies. As such,

²⁰ For some examples, see Sturani, *Otto milioni di cartoline*, 287.

²¹ Diane Yvonne Ghirardo, 'Città Fascista: Surveillance and Spectacle,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no. 2 (1996): 350. Mussolini and Hitler greeted the crowds from the balcony of Palazzo Vecchio on 9 May 1938. Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected*, 91, 94–95.



FIGURE 3 Benito Mussolini speaks in front of the Colosseum, 1936

REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG PHOTO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO (IMAGE ID: C45YHY)

Latin contributed to establishing the association of various different pasts with modern, Fascist Italy. A particularly eye-catching example of this is the grandiose staging of the celebrations of the fourteenth anniversary of the Fascist regime in 1936. Instead of addressing the crowds from the balcony of Palazzo Venezia, Mussolini addressed them from an impressive stage constructed in front of the palazzo. This enabled him to engage more directly with the audience and to award prizes to individual citizens personally. The garlanded stage, covered in black, was flanked by two giant *fascies*, and carried a banner with the imperial eagle on its front. Behind Mussolini were guards holding Roman-style standards. As a scenographic backdrop for the spectacle, a colourful tapestry of impressive dimensions (480×770 cm), was hung from the palazzo's facade (figure 4). The linen tapestry displayed an intricate figurative design with flowers, garlands, and cornucopias in bright colours. While the vibrant colours were not visible in contemporary films and pictures of the event, they must have made the tapestry stand out at the scene for all those who attended the event in real life.²² Its middle register showed a car-

22 For the newsreel of the event, directed by Arturo Gemmiti, see 'La celebrazione del xiv



FIGURE 4 Mussolini speaks in front of Palazzo Venezia in Rome, 1936
 REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG PHOTO / ALAMY STOCK
 PHOTO (IMAGE ID: 2GY4WF0)

touché, flanked by two allegorical figures representing the arts (left) and the sciences (right). The cartouche itself contained the *lupa* of Rome (the she-wolf connected to the founding of Rome), a date, and three Latin words: *Stet Capitolium / fulgens* [may the Capitol stand shining]. The Latin words with the *lupa* were at the heart of the composition (figure 5).

The imperial eagle, the giant *fascies*, the Roman-style standards with *SPQR* [*Senatus Populusque Romanus*: the Senate and People of Rome, referring to the

annuale del regime fascista,' *Giornale Luce*, November 4, 1936, with shots of the podium with tapestry from 00:41:19, Archivio Luce, *Giornale Luce B / B0984*, cod. B098407, accessed November 3, 2023, <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL500-0026272/2/la-celebrazione-del-xiv-annuale-del-regime-fascista.html>. While the Luce video allows us to understand the components of the parade and prize-giving ceremonies and hence the context in which the Latin quotation functioned, the poor quality of the video as currently available does not allow us to draw any conclusions about the mediatization of the Latin citation specifically.



FIGURE 5 Detail of figure 4

government of ancient Rome], and the Latin text, all evoked the Roman empire and contributed to the general sense of *romanità* the Fascists wanted their spectacles to convey.²³ But besides evoking the ancient Roman past, the tapestry also opens up further temporal dimensions. The medium of the tapestry itself evokes the *medioevo* as well as the Baroque, a connection also made explicit by contemporaries.²⁴ The tapestry's style, on the other hand, is indebted to the Art Nouveau movement, which flourished in Italy between the 1890s and the First World War. Its recent date was further specified by the abbreviation *AUC MMDCLVI*, which stands for *ab urbe condita* [from the founding of the City, i.e. Rome]. The 2657th year after the mythical foundation year of Rome (753 BC) is 1902, the year in which the Municipality of Rome commissioned the

23 Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle, passim*, especially 90–99.

24 See, for example, Filippo Clementi's discussion of tapestries. He strongly associated them with the early modern period as well as with the city of Rome, and also mentioned Erolì in this context: Filippo Clementi, 'L'arte dell'arazzo in Roma,' *Capitolium: Rassegna mensile del Governatorato* 14, no. 7 (1939): 336–337.

tapestry in the Roman workshop of Erulo Erolì (1854–1916).²⁵ For those familiar with the abbreviation, the formula made explicit the modern date of the tapestry, indicating its distance from ancient Rome as a main reference point. All these layers (Roman antiquity, Renaissance Rome, and recent pre-Fascist Italy) are present in the spectacle, which can therefore not be regarded as a simple re-enactment of one specific period or even ‘Roman antiquity’.

Spectators present at the celebration might have recognized the tapestry from solemn ceremonies at the Capitol. It had originally been commissioned in 1902 for the Palazzo Senatorio on the Capitol, which had served as Rome’s town hall since 1871, and it had been used for the decoration of the staircase to its main entrance at special occasions (see figure 6).²⁶ For the occasion of the regime’s anniversary, however, the tapestry’s symbolic potential was brought to bear on the spectacle in front of the Palazzo Venezia, and Mussolini’s headquarters were thereby symbolically connected to the Capitol as a centre of specifically Roman, governmental authority. This association was accentuated by the Latin quotation. Although the phrase *stet Capitolium fulgens* [May the gleaming Capitol stand] is not as easily and intuitively comprehensible as the single word *Dux*, the word *Capitolium* is unambiguous, and evokes the Capitoline context for which the tapestry was originally intended. The move of the tapestry from the Palazzo Senatorio to the Palazzo Venezia also contributed to creating the impression of a shift of emphasis from the traditional centre of Roman governmental authority to Mussolini’s headquarters as the centre of Rome’s new empire under Fascism. This symbolic gesture was entirely in line with the regime’s wider urbanistic ambition to ‘reunite the Capitol, the sacred centre of Roman greatness, with town life and with the seat of government’.²⁷

While the Latin words on the tapestry were able to convey a sense of Rome’s long tradition of greatness and of the ‘transfer of power’ from the Capitol to Palazzo Venezia to any viewer, regardless of their educational background, they

25 It was part of a series of twenty-five tapestries designed by Erulo Erolì for the decoration of the façade of the Capitoline Palace (twenty-two for the windows, three for the balconies). Commissioned in 1902 by the municipality of Rome, they were finished in 1926 by Erolì’s sons (and are now preserved in the Museo di Roma di Palazzo Braschi). On the history of the tapestries, see Teresa Zambrotta, ‘L’arredo della piazza del Campidoglio: Gli arazzi di Erulo Erolì,’ in *La capitale a Roma: Città e arredo urbano, 1870–1945*, ed. Anna Maria Cerioni (Rome: Edizioni Carte Segrete, 1991), 140–141. The tapestry with the Horace-quotation was the biggest one of the three major tapestries of the series, all of which bore a Latin quotation.

26 For a picture from the Fascist period, see Zambrotta, ‘L’arredo della piazza del Campidoglio,’ 141.

27 Fritz Saxl, *Lectures*, vol. 1 (London: Warburg Institute, 1957), 213.



FIGURE 6 Benito Mussolini watching a parade of Balilla from the Capitol building, April 21, 1923
PHOTO: A. BRUNI, FROM *L'ILLUSTRAZIONE ITALIANA* 50, NO. 17, APRIL 29, 1923

also contained an added propagandistic dimension for those spectators who were familiar with classical Latin literature. The close relationship between the continued existence of the Capitol, with its triad of ancient temples, and the Roman empire as a whole, was an established and much-invoked trope. The words used in the tapestry specifically derive from one of Horace's so-called *Roman Odes*.²⁸ Ode 3.3, celebrating integrity and resolution, largely consists of a speech of the goddess Juno among the gods about the destined greatness of Rome. Accepting that her own favourite city, Troy, will never rise again, Juno transfers her allegiance to Rome and agrees to the deification of Rome's founder Romulus. The words *stet Capitolium fulgens* occur in Juno's extended prophecy of Rome's expanding empire: 'dum Priami Paridisque busto / insultet armentum et catulos ferae / celent inultae, stet Capitolium / fulgens triumphatique possit / Roma ferox dare iura Medis' [As long as cattle trample on the tombs of Priam and Paris, and wild beasts safely hide their whelps within them, may the gleaming Capitol stand, and may warlike Rome have the power to rule over the conquered Medes].²⁹

These words, including their aggressively expansionist rhetoric, were of renewed ideological significance in November 1936, just months after the proclamation of the Italian empire from that same Palazzo Venezia on 9 May. In its new context, the phrase acquired new meaning in the present: the ancient prophecy of Rome's imperial greatness, as originally formulated by Horace, had been fulfilled again under Fascism and its founder Mussolini.³⁰ That this symbolic potential of the three words was not lost on learned spectators appears from a rare eye-witness account of the Austrian art historian Fritz Saxl (1890–1948), a close collaborator of Aby Warburg and one of the guiding spirits of the Warburg Institute in London after its move from Hamburg due to Nazi repression. Saxl had seen a version of Erolì's tapestry with the Horace quote being used as backdrop to one of Mussolini's performances at the Palazzo Senatorio at the Capitol, possibly in a photograph.³¹ The occasion was the oath of the young Fascists on 3 November 1930. In a lecture on the political symbolism of

28 Horace, *Roman Odes*, 3.3.42–43.

29 The translation is taken from Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, transl. Niall Rudd (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 149.

30 In this respect, the phrase is used similarly to much more well-known Vergilian prophecies of Rome's future greatness, such as Anchises' prophecy in *Aeneid* 6 or the renewal of the Golden Age in *Eclogue* 4.

31 In view of some differences (see next note), Saxl might have seen another, adapted and 'fascisticized' version of the tapestry of Erolì, but this cannot be confirmed at this point. Attempts to obtain more information about the tapestry preserved in the Museo di Roma di Palazzo Braschi have so far been unsuccessful.

the Capitol held in Rome in January 1938, Saxl observed: 'I think that nobody will doubt the political importance of this revival of Horace's prophecy when he sees that Mussolini used the symbol of the Roman *lupa* with the inscription *Stet Capitolium fulgens* as the background for his own person when speaking from the Capitol'.³² This remark allows us a rare insight into one response to the use of Latin text in such spectacles, and it shows that some audiences clearly recognized the more complex ideological motivations for choosing specific Latin quotations.

Other tapestries from the series originally designed by Erulo Eroli for the Palazzo Senatorio were also used for the purposes of political display. For example, a photograph taken from a low angle showed Mussolini in black uniform, gesturing and clearly in full oratorical flow (figure 7). He is standing in front of Eroli's tapestry bearing the Latin text *arx omnium nationum* [the citadel of all nations]. This is a quotation from one of Cicero's speeches, which—in its original context—also refers to the Capitol.³³ In the picture, the tapestry itself is only partly visible, and most of its figural motives have been omitted from view. However, the photographer has made sure that the Latin text is prominently visible to the upper right of Mussolini. It almost features as the image's 'second subject' in addition to Mussolini. For those familiar with the provenance of the Latin words, the allusion to Cicero may suggest a specific parallel between Mussolini's oratorical prowess and that of the most famous orator of ancient Rome,³⁴ while for others, the presence of Latin words could point more generally to the rebirth of ancient oratory in the present.

32 Saxl, *Lectures*, vol. 1, 213; Wolfgang Hardtwig, *Ordnungen in der Krise: Zur politischen Kulturgeschichte Deutschlands 1900–1933* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 456. Saxl included an image of unknown provenance that shows the tapestry hanging from the platform of the central entrance staircase of Palazzo Senatorio at the Capitol. It also shows that a portion of the original tapestry has been removed to reveal the statue of the Goddess Roma, which is in the platform's central niche. *Fasces* have been added to either side. This is not the case in previous images of the tapestry at the same location (compare fig. 6, where the tapestry covers sight of the statue). The letters of the text *Stet Capitolium fulgens* have been emphasized by dark black colouring in Saxl's image. For the image, see Fritz Saxl, *Lectures* (London: Warburg Institute, 1957), vol. 2, plate 142c. The occasion is also mentioned in Catharine Edwards, *Writing Rome: Textual Approaches to the City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 94 and Alison Cooley, 'Inscribing History at Rome,' *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies. Supplement* 75 (2000): 20, calling it a 'banner', drawing on Saxl's discussion.

33 Cicero, *Verr.* 2.5.72.

34 The image is briefly mentioned in Shadow Zimmerman, 'Mussolini and Marinetti: Performing Citizenship in Fascist Italy,' in *Theatre and Citizenship*, ed. Andrew Gibb (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2020), 47.



FIGURE 7 Mussolini speaking in front of Erolì's tapestries with the caption *Arx omnium nationum*, date and place unknown. Photo of Library of Congress, Call Number: LC-USW33-000890-ZC [P&P]
COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PRINTS & PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION

Constructing Eternity: Latin Documents in the Ceremony of the *Posa della Prima Pietra*

Finally, we turn to a type of spectacle which was a regular occurrence in this period of urbanistic change and large-scale building activity: the performative beginning of construction works, marked by the ceremonial *posa della prima pietra*. During the *ventennio*, such ceremonies usually involved state representatives (in the case of high-profile projects, Mussolini himself often took part) and representatives of the Catholic Church.³⁵ During these ceremonies, a deposit of some kind, usually a text written on parchment, was placed and sealed inside a block of stone (the *prima pietra*), which was then blessed and finally lowered into the foundations of the new building.³⁶ These texts could be composed in Latin, and although they were usually short and to the point, we know of at least one very extensive example: the *Codex fori Mussolini*, which was sealed into the base of the obelisk at the Foro Mussolini.³⁷

The Fascists themselves sometimes considered the ceremony of the *posa della prima pietra* as something of a relic of the (wrong kind of) past: an old-fashioned, static ritual, too bourgeois in character, and lacking Fascism's trademark dynamism and energy. Mussolini himself seems to have had reservations about the ceremony. For example, when he had to miss such a ceremony for the city of Littoria (1932), far from showing regret, he called it, in a telegram to the city's mayor, Valentino Orsolini Cencelli, 'un reliquiato d'altri tempi' [a

35 On these ceremonies in Fascist Italy, see Flavia Marcello, 'Building the Image of Power: Images of Romanità in the Civic Architecture of Fascist Italy,' in *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany*, eds. Helen Roche and Kyriakos Demetriou (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 349–350; Paolo Nicoloso, *Mussolini, Architect: Propaganda and Urban Landscape in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2022), 18–20. On the rituals of architectural inauguration in Fascist Italy see Flavia Marcello, 'Forma Urbis Mussolini: Vision and Rhetoric in the Designs for Fascist Rome,' in *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany*, eds. Helen Roche and Kyriakos Demetriou (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2018), 392–339.

36 On foundation deposits as a cultural phenomenon, see William E. Jarvis, *Time Capsules: A Cultural History* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2002); on Italian Renaissance examples see Minou Schraven, 'Founding Rome Anew: Pope Sixtus IV and the Foundation of Ponte Sisto, 1473,' in *Foundation, Dedication and Consecration in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Maarten Delbeke and Minou Schraven (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 129–251; Minou Schraven, 'Out of Sight, Yet Still in Place: On the Use of Italian Renaissance Portrait Medals as Building Deposits,' *Res* 55–56 (2009): 182–193.

37 This deposit is the subject of Lamers and Reitz-Joose, *The Codex fori Mussolini*. We also discuss other Latin deposit texts from this period at pp. 75–81, see esp. note 158.

relic of a different time].³⁸ As Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi has shown in her analysis of Fascist language, even the words referring to the ceremony were felt to lack dynamism and energy. Achille Starace, the long-serving secretary of the Fascist Party, condemned the use of the expression *posa della prima pietra*. For him, that formula needed to be replaced with more energetic and more concrete expressions such as ‘l’inizio dei lavori’ [the beginning of works] or ‘il primo colpo di piccone’ [the first stroke of the pickaxe].³⁹

It was not only the name that needed to be brought in line with contemporary Fascist aesthetics. The ceremonies themselves, too, were staged and mediated in such a way as to convey the modernist, dynamic energy that the Italian Fascists aimed to project around their construction efforts, while associations with various Roman and Italian pasts were made part of this new dynamic and Fascist spectacle. Here, we focus particularly on the presence and display of the Latin language in the staging and mediatization of such ceremonies.⁴⁰

An example of this is the inauguration of the construction site of the office blocks at the location of the projected World’s Fair, the Esposizione Universale di Roma, in October of 1937. The ceremony was carefully staged and filmed for *Giornale Luce*.⁴¹ The resulting film, directed by Arnaldo Ricotti, was shown as a newsreel on 27 October 1937. The film, which was about three minutes long, frames the *posa della prima pietra* in a number of ways. The arrival of Mussolini at the opening of the film is accompanied by cheering crowds: blackshirts are shown presenting the Roman salute, and workmen cheer by raising their shovels into the air. This opening is followed by the ceremony proper: Mussolini is shown signing a document and personally enclosing the metal tube containing the document within the *prima pietra*, which is then blessed and lowered into the ground. The second half of the film focuses on the building site itself, which Mussolini tours on foot: noisy machinery, running workmen

38 Cited in Massimo Tomasini, ‘Latina: Doppia identità,’ in «*Restituiamo la storia*» dal Lazio all’Oltremare: *Modelli insediativi della piana pontina*, ed. Sergio Zevi (Rome: Gangemi, 2009), 10.

39 Cited in Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, 106, from Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Partito Nazionale Fascista, Foglio di Disposizioni, no. 1155, September 24, 1938.

40 On the mediatization of these ceremonies, see Marcello, ‘Building the Image of Power,’ 325–369, who observes (349–350) that ‘as many as 288 newsreels were dedicated either to the laying of a foundation stone, or the inauguration of a partially completed building.’

41 ‘Il Duce posa la prima pietra della costruzione del palazzo degli Uffici per l’esposizione mondiale,’ *Giornale Luce*, October 27, 1937, Archivio Luce, *Giornale Luce B / B1188*, cod. B118808, accessed November 3, 2023, <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000023664/2/il-duce-posa-prima-pietra-della-costruzione-del-palazzo-degli-uffici-l-esposizione-mondiale.html>.



FIGURE 8 Video still from *Giornale Luce*, B1188, October 27, 1937, showing the contents of the foundation deposit for the office blocks at the site of the world exhibition (00:33:09)

and shots of the vastness and emptiness of the construction ground convey the ambition and dynamism of this construction project. The shots displaying the contents of the foundation deposit are embedded into this dynamic narrative. The stillness and concentrated focus of these scenes gives them a particular emphasis.

During the still sequence focused on the deposit, the camera first captures its contents, carefully arranged (figure 8). For about three seconds, viewers are shown the block itself, which bears the Latin inscription *deo iuvante et patria virtute* [with the help of god and the virtue of the fatherland] on one side, and a relief of the *fasces* on the other. Due to the camera angle, the word *virtute* [virtue] is obscured by the table in front, highlighting the fact that it is the presence of a Latin inscription, rather than its wording, that is important to the message being conveyed.

Positioned in front of this block is a table on which the parchment and a metal tube (into which it will be placed) are displayed. In the next shot, we see Mussolini standing in front of the table and attentively looking at the document, apparently reading its contents (figure 9). This is followed directly by



FIGURE 9 Video still from *Giornale Luce*, B1188, October 27, 1937, showing Mussolini at the construction site of the office blocks for the world exhibition (00:33:12)

a shot of the document itself (figure 10). The effect of this sequence is dramatic: it is as though we were looking at the text through Mussolini's eyes.

The document is on view for about three seconds, before we return to a side view of Mussolini signing it. The shot is too brief for viewers to be able to read the text. They can, however, make out that the text is written in Latin, and they can absorb the fact that it is written in capital letters, and that the parchment is decorated by drawn *fascies*. Of all the words on the page, the ones which they are most likely to focus on in their brief view of the document are *BENITVS MVSSOLINI*, about a third of the way down the page, and written in much larger size than the remainder of the text.⁴²

Although the Latin prose text was specifically composed for the occasion, its content is irrelevant to the performative context. Relevant, instead, are the material form and appearance of the parchment and the presence of the Latin language itself. Just like Erolì's tapestry, discussed in the previous section, the visual appearance of the parchment document activates several different

42 The first line, which reads *Victorio Emmanuele III*, is also written in larger capitals, but remains at the margin of the shot.

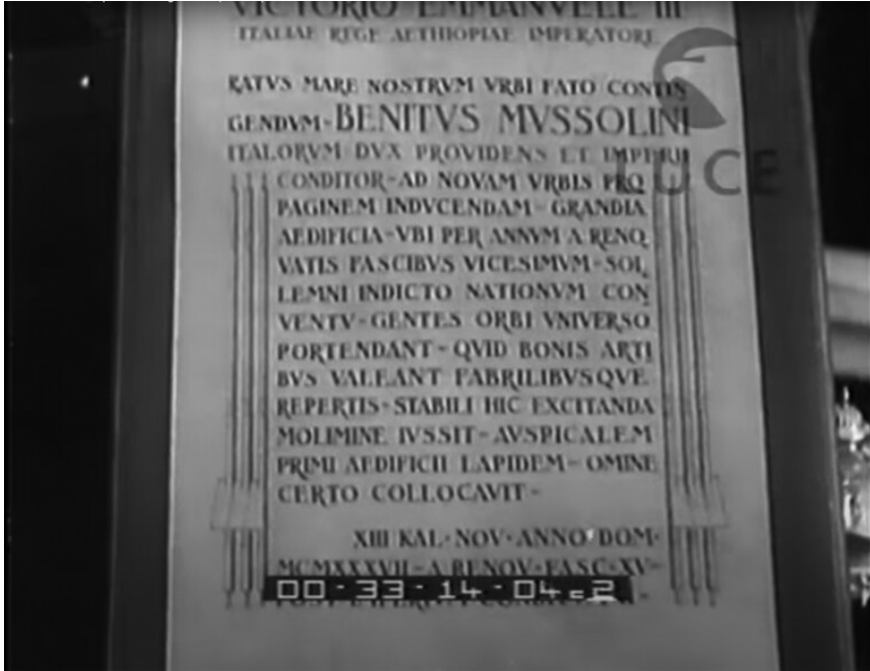


FIGURE 10 Video still from *Giornale Luce*, B1188, October 27, 1937, showing the Latin text for the office blocks at the site of the world exhibition (00:33:14)

Roman and Italian pasts at the same time. The *fascies* evoke both Roman past and Fascist present. The fact that the text was written on parchment and in Roman capitals, and that the writing was accompanied by marginal decorations, also evokes the manuscript tradition which connects Roman antiquity to the early modern period, and aesthetically evokes the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, so that the overall effect is a complex mixture of ancient, Medieval, and Renaissance elements. The multiplicity of Latin pasts is further reinforced by the presence of the Latin inscription in Roman capitals on the outside of the stone block, which connects the Roman past to the Fascist present.

Furthermore, the use of Latin here should be seen in the context of the meanings attached to Latin during this period: in different ways, Latin was promoted as the privileged language of Fascism and of modernity, as well as a language capable of transcending times and ages.⁴³ The latter is especially important in the context of a foundation deposit, designed to allow for a formalized

43 Lamers and Reitz-Joose, *Lingua lictoria*.

form of communication with a distant future. Within the essentially ephemeral context of the ceremony, both the Latin language itself and its media (inscription and parchment manuscript) not only evoke the different pasts of Rome but also and simultaneously offer a promise of survival and transcendence.

While the content of the Latin deposit text was inaccessible to viewers of the newsreel, this may have been different for those who actually attended the ceremony. While only a few might have caught a glimpse of the original deposit, a facsimile of the parchment was put on display on a nearby wall.⁴⁴ This display-copy allowed visitors at the site, both on the day of the *posa della prima pietra* and later on, to view the Latin text in full. Once again, many of those able to view the document may have understood little more than the fact that this text was written in Latin, and that it prominently mentioned *BENITVS MVSSOLINI*. However, a portion of those attending the ceremony or visiting the site at a later date would have been able to read and interpret the Latin text in more detail.⁴⁵

Victorio Emmanuele III Italiae rege, Aethiopiae imperatore, ratus mare nostrum Vrbi fato contingendum, BENITVS MVSSOLINI, Itatorum dux providens⁴⁶ et imperii conditor, ad novam Vrbis propaginem inducendam grandia aedificia, ubi per annum a renovatis fascibus vicesimum sollemni indicto nationum conventu gentes orbi universo portendant⁴⁷ quid bonis artibus valeant fabrilibusque repertis, stabili hic excitanda molimine iussit, auspicalem primi aedificii⁴⁸ lapidem omine certo collocavit. XIII Kal. Nov. anno. Dom. MCMXXXVII a renov. fasc. XV.⁴⁹

Which translates as:

When Victor Emmanuel III was King of Italy and Emperor of Ethiopia, BENITO MUSSOLINI, the foresighted leader of the Italians and founder of

44 Giulio Tian, 'Die Weltausstellung 1942 in Rom,' *Der Bauingenieur* 21 (1940): 303.

45 We print the text as it appears on the original document shown in the Luce newsreel. The reproduction in Tian, 'Die Weltausstellung,' diverges from this text on a number of details, either because of inaccurate transcription or because there were divergences between the original deposit and the display copy that Tian reported. We indicated all such divergences in the notes below.

46 Tian, 'Die Weltausstellung,' 303: *providens*.

47 Tian, 'Die Weltausstellung,' 303: *portendat*.

48 Tian, 'Die Weltausstellung,' 303: *aedifici*.

49 The subscript of the text is not reproduced in Tian, 'Die Weltausstellung' and the bottom line is unreadable in the Luce version of the newsreel due to the superimposed times-tamp.

the empire, thought that the *mare nostrum* should be connected to the City by fate. In order to expand the City further, he ordered the construction of great buildings with an unyielding effort, at the place where, in the 20th year since the renewal of the Fasces, a solemn congress of the nations had been announced at which the people were to exhibit to the whole world their achievements in the arts and crafts. He laid the auspicious cornerstone of the first building with a favourable omen. October 20th of the Year of the Lord 1937—the 15th since the renewal of the Fasces.

For those who were able to read it, the text memorialized Mussolini's decision to build the EUR-complex for the purpose of connecting the city of Rome to the *mare nostrum* and to house the world exhibition which had been planned for the year 1942. The text also records the *posa della prima pietra* itself during the ceremony shown in the newsreel. The style of the Latin is classicizing, although the text does not contain easily identifiable tags or quotations from well-known ancient authors such as Vergil or Cicero, as many Latin texts of this period did.⁵⁰ Special emphasis is placed on the figure of Mussolini himself, called *Italorum dux providens et imperii conditor* [provident leader of the Italians and founder of the empire],⁵¹ combining within himself two facets of the model of the Roman emperor Augustus, ever present in Fascist *romanità*: decisive leadership in times of crisis on the one hand, and the stabilizing, foundational role for a new kind of state on the other. The Latin text includes several references to novelty and renewal, typical of Latin texts of this period, which often seek to combine links to the Roman past with the sense of revolutionary beginnings.⁵² A final, noteworthy element of the text is its emphasis on the auspicious nature of this beginning: while the ceremony was—as the Luce newsreel shows—attended by Catholic clerics who blessed the *prima pietra* as a means of asking divine protection for the project, the Latin text phrases comparable hopes and expectations for a blessed future in the language of pagan Roman religion. It terms the *prima pietra* a *lapis auspicalis* [auspicious stone], deposited *omine certo* [with a certain omen], invoking Roman foundation ceremonies, where the favour of the gods at the initiation of a building project was

50 For an example, see Lamers and Reitz-Joose, *Codex fori Mussolini*, 23–27.

51 On *dux*, see above. The phrase *imperii conditor* [founder of the empire] is applied to Romulus and Aeneas in Florus (*Flor. Epit.* 1.1.1.1) and Donatus (*Interpr. Verg.* ed. Georgii, vol. 1, 7; vol. 2, 574), respectively.

52 On the vocabulary of the new in Fascist Latin texts, see Lamers and Reitz-Joose, '*Lingua lictoria*,' 216–252. On the 'palingenetic' myth of Fascism see, fundamentally, Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Pinter, 1991).

determined, for example, through the interpretation of bird flight.⁵³ The Latin text thus translates an element of the ritual into a different conceptual and historical vocabulary, reinforcing the impression of different pasts converging into the different elements of the ceremony.

Conclusion

The three case studies presented in this article illuminate how different types of Latin texts were a crucial part of the staging of Italy's many pasts and reinvigorated in the Fascist present. Disentangling these pasts—besides Roman antiquity also the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the *Risorgimento*, and the First World War—requires paying close attention to the materiality of the Latin medium and its various symbolic affordances. The literal embodiment of the word *DUX* by the Italian youth, and the bystanders' acknowledgement of the Duce's 'presence' in the human letter formation, collapses temporal distance and emphasizes the power and immediacy of the Latin word in the present. On the other hand, material objects such as tapestry and parchment gesture towards more specific 'pasts', layering on top of Roman antiquity's later periods of transmission of, and engagement with, ancient Rome. Similarly, the use of Latin not only signals the *romanità* of Fascist Italy, but also evokes the continuous influence of ancient Rome all the way from antiquity up to the twentieth century.

Central to our analysis is that the presence of Latin words and phrases in political performances has a range of affordances for different participants. While classically educated spectators such as Fritz Saxl could reflect on the content of the Latin texts or phrases, their origin, and their significance for the present situation, a greater part of the audience would have responded primarily to Latin itself as a sign and symbol of *romanità*, of power, universality, continuity, or eternity. Furthermore, the international and imperialist ideals associated with the Latin language in this period reinforced its particular resonance for international visitors, such as the Austrian Saxl, the international delegations at the Foro Mussolini, or those attending the celebrations of the fourteenth anniversary of Rome at Piazza Venezia.⁵⁴

53 This is the cause of the conflict between Romulus and Remus in Roman foundational mythology. For auspicious omens attending building operations see e.g. Propertius, *Elegies* 4.1.67–69.

54 On Latin as an international and imperial language, see Lamers and Reitz-Joosse, '*Lingua lictoria*.'

The mediatizations of these performances further extend the potential audience, and they afford different kinds of experience: the human *DVX*-mosaics, for example, can only be fully appreciated from a distance or a height, rendering photography or film the primary means of unlocking their full potential for a wide audience. Contemporary mediatizations also frame the uses of Latin in specific ways. In the Luce films we analysed, for instance, Latin appears in static, rather solemn contexts, which are contrasted with surrounding expressions of energy and dynamism: the children lying still and disciplined on the beach before being allowed to swim; or the noise and bustle of the building stilled for a moment of quiet contemplation and solemnity as the deposit is viewed and sealed. Finally, staged and recorded audience responses, which are shown as part of a film or photograph, model appropriate attitudes and reactions for those viewing the mediatized version: the reverent acknowledgement of the embodied presence of the Duce; an ecstatic cheering in an excited crowd; or an attentive silence during a ceremonial moment.

Acknowledgments

Research for this article was funded through the project 'New Signs of Antiquity' (University of Oslo), funded by the Research Council of Norway (grant nr. 316016), and through Anchoring Innovation, the Gravitation Grant research agenda of the Dutch National Research School in Classical Studies (OIKOS). Anchoring Innovation is financially supported by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (NWO project number 024.003.012). We thank the conference organisers for the opportunity to develop this paper, and the audience members and anonymous readers for helpful suggestions and criticism.