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Reinventing *Romanitas*

Exchanges of Classical Antiquities as Symbolic Gifts between Italy and Spain (1933–1943)

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Abstract

Based on fresh archival research this article examines the exchange of Romanizing statuary between Italy and Spain during the *ventennio fascista*. Between 1933 and 1943, Italy and Spain exchanged copies of Roman statues as symbolic gestures, to substantiate their claims to a shared classical heritage of ‘imperial greatness’. Using press reports and documentary film excerpts the article reconstructs public events that took place in Merida, Tarragona, Palma, and Zaragoza and assesses their impact. Behind these exchanges, and public ceremonies staged on their occasion, lay the Fascist concept of *romanità*: an archaeologically and aesthetically charged discourse placing Late-Republican and Early-Imperial Roman heritage in the epicentre of Fascist identity politics. Through improvised public performances of *romanità*, classical materialities, monumental as well as spatial, were imbued with Fascist dynamics, as the past turned into the present and projected into the future. Through individual and collective performance these ceremonies embodied a primeval Fascist ideal that appeared at once spectacular and modern.

Keywords

Italy – Spain – Fascism – Falange – romanità – classical antiquity – Roman heritage – performance

Being Roman

This article studies a number of occasions where Romanizing artefacts were exchanged between Fascist Italy and Spain—before and after the establishment of Franco’s regime. It investigates how vestiges of the Roman past, and their materiality, were used by the two regimes in order to encapsulate Fascist rhetoric and embody their ideological and political agendas. In this reading, performances of and about the Roman past deployed archaeologically charged discourses with the intention of confirming Fascism and the Fascist ideal as a modern way of life, drawing its strength and historical legitimization from the classical past.

Italian nationalism often turned to Italy’s Roman heritage from 1870 onwards. However, it is with the *ventennio fascista* that the idea of *romanità* (from the Latin *Romanitas* or ‘Roman-ness’) became a central issue in current politics.¹ *Romanitas* was itself a relatively late concept: as a term, it was first coined in the third century CE in order to denote Roman identity and self-image, at a time when such qualities seemed threatened with extinction.² *Romanità*, as an archaeologically and aesthetically charged ideal, placed Late-Republican and Early-Imperial Roman heritage at the core of Fascist rhetoric on both the past and, crucially, the future. As has been observed by scholars studying Mussolini’s own ties with Roman antiquity and the idea of *romanità* in particular, Fascism was a modern ideology looking at the future, while at the same time looking back at an idealized Roman past. It was this ‘field of tension’, in the words of Jan Nelis, ‘that provided Fascism with much of its dynamic as well

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- 1 See, chiefly, Marla Stone, ‘A Flexible Rome: Fascism and the Cult of Romanità,’ in *Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789–1945*, ed. Catharine Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 205–220; Andrea Giardina, ‘The Fascist Myth of Romanity,’ *Estudos Avançados* 22, no. 62 (2008): 55–76; and Helen Roche, ‘Classics and Education in the Third Reich: *Die Alten Sprachen* and the Nazification of Latin- and Greek-Teaching in Secondary Schools,’ in *Brill’s Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany*, eds. Helen Roche and Kyriakos Demetriou (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 238–263.
 - 2 Bernard Green, *Christianity in Rome in the First Three Centuries* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 129; Greg Woolf *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 120.

as its attraction'.³ For Mussolini, who had some knowledge of Latin and used his own research of sorts to formulate a rather narrow personal understanding of ancient Rome mostly influenced by eighteenth-century Enlightenment and nineteenth-century revolutionary ideas, classical antiquity served as a prefiguration of Fascist values.⁴ In 1919, the Duce identified Fascist 'dignity' as 'more Roman',⁵ and declared 21 April, traditionally accepted as the day on which the city of Rome was founded, as the Day of the Fascists. 'On that day', he claimed, 'we, in the spirit of that city which has given two civilizations to the world, and will give a third, will recognize ourselves, and the regional legions will parade in our order, which is not military and not even German, but simply Roman . . . our step, which imposes an individual control to all, an order and discipline'. He also clarified: 'it is not we who copy the Germans, but they who copied and copy the Romans; therefore it is we who return to the origins, to our Roman, Latin, and Mediterranean style'.⁶ At one such celebration of Rome's birthday, in 1922, Mussolini presented his vision of a Fascist Rome: 'Rome is our point of departure and reference; it is our symbol or, if you wish, our myth. We dream of a Roman Italy, that is wise and strong, disciplined and imperial. Much of what was the immortal spirit of Rome, resurges in Fascism: Roman is the Lic-tor, Roman is our organization of combat, Roman is our pride and courage: *Civis Romanus sum* [I am a Roman citizen]'.⁷ Crucially, for Mussolini modern Italy's ties with classical Rome were personified in the historical characters of Julius Caesar and Augustus who were celebrated as the Empire's master builders. As has been observed, although in the early years Mussolini mimicked Julius Cae-

3 Jan Nelis, 'Constructing Fascist Identity: Benito Mussolini and the Myth of "Romanità"; *The Classical World* 100, no. 4 (2007): 393, <https://doi.org/10.1353/clw.2007.0069>; see also Jan Nelis, 'Fascist Modernity, Religion, and the Myth of Rome,' in *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany*, eds. Helen Roche and Kyriakos Demetriou (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 133–156; and, in general, Johann Chapoutot, *Le national-socialisme et l'Antiquité* (Paris: Quadrige, 2012), and Helen Roche, *Sparta's German Children: The Ideal of Ancient Sparta in the Royal Prussian Cadet-Corps, 1818–1920, and in National-Socialist Elite Schools (the Napolas), 1933–1945* (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2013). On the *fascas*, a Romano-Etruscan political symbol depicting a bound bundle of wooden rods, and its use as official emblem of Italy as a Fascist state (hence the name), see now T. Corey Brennan, *The Fasces: A History of Ancient Rome's Most Dangerous Political Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), esp. 178–197.

4 Nelis, 'Constructing Fascist Identity,' 396.

5 Eduardo and Duilio Susmel, eds., *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, vol. 14 (Florence: La Fenice, 1954), 228. Originally published in *Il popolo d'Italia*, no. 359, December 31, 1919.

6 Eduardo and Duilio Susmel, eds., *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, vol. 16 (Florence: La Fenice, 1955), 244. Originally delivered as a public oration in Bologna, on 3 April 1921.

7 Eduardo and Duilio Susmel, eds., *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, vol. 18 (Florence: La Fenice, 1956), 160–161. Originally published in *Il popolo d'Italia*, no. 95, April 21, 1922.

sar as the idea of a Fascist Empire appeared to be realized, he subsequently shifted his attention towards Augustus, who became the object of his systematic emulation.⁸ This became most obvious with the commemoration of the bimillenary of Augustus in 1937, celebrated with parades, book publications, and the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* [Augustan Exhibition of Romanità] curated by archaeologist Giulio Quirino Giglioli.⁹ The exhibition celebrated the Italian bonds with Roman civilization following the aesthetic premises of Fascism by incorporating material and pictorial evidence to display Roman imperial glory.¹⁰ Spain contributed to this propagandistic event by shipping archaeological artefacts, photographs, replicas, and mock-ups to Rome to showcase the significance of the *Hispania Romana* in forming a common Roman identity.¹¹ The suppression of the pre-Roman cultures of the Iberian Peninsula and the exaltation of the imperial greatness of the two modern states as inheritors of the Roman empire were fundamental elements in the exhibition.¹²

8 Ann Thoman Wilkins, 'Augustus, Mussolini, and the Parallel Imagery of Empire,' in *Donatello Among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, eds. Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 53–54; see though Nelis, 'Constructing Fascist Identity,' 407 n. 48.

9 See Annie Esmé Lewine, 'Ancient Rome in Modern Italy: Mussolini's Manipulation of Roman History in the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità*,' *Studies in Mediterranean Antiquity and Classics* 2, no. 1 (2008): article 5; Aristotle Kallis, "'Framing" Romanità: The Celebrations for the *Bimillenario Augusteo* and the *Augusteo–Ara Pacis* Project,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 4 (2011): 809–831, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009411413407>; Friedemann Scriba, 'L'estetizzazione della politica nell'età di Mussolini e il caso della *Mostra Augustea della Romanità*: Appunti su problemi di storiografia circa Fascismo e cultura,' *Civiltà romana: Rivista pluridisciplinare di studi su Roma antica e le sue interpretazioni* 1 (2014): 125–158; and Joshua Arthurs, 'Bathing in the Spirit of Eternal Rome: The *Mostra Augustea della Romanità*,' in *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany*, eds. Helen Roche and Kyriakos Demetriou (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 157–177.

10 *La Stampa*, September 23, 1937, 3; *La Stampa*, September 24, 1937, 1. On the imagery generated by the exhibition, see Mario Torelli, 'Archeologia e fascismo: Creazione e diffusione di un Mito attraverso i Francobolli del Regime,' in *Repensar la Escuela del CSIC en Roma: Cien años de memoria*, eds. Ricardo Olmos, Trinidad Tortosa, and Juan Pedro Bellón (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2010), 385–405.

11 Trinidad Tortosa, 'La aportación de Hispania a la *Mostra Augustea della Romanità*: Dedicada a celebrar el bimilenario del nacimiento del emperador Augusto,' in *Patrimonio arqueológico español en Roma: 'Le Mostre Internazionali di Archeologia' de 1911 y 1937 como instrumentos de memoria histórica*, ed. Trinidad Tortosa (Rome: Erma di Bretschneider, 2020), 427–430; Antonio Duplá Ansuátegui, 'La *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* y el contexto político y cultural español: Fernando Valls Taberner y el bimilenario de Augusto en España,' in *Patrimonio arqueológico español en Roma: 'Le Mostre Internazionali di Archeologia' de 1911 y 1937 como instrumentos de memoria histórica*, ed. Trinidad Tortosa (Rome: Erma di Bretschneider, 2020), 451–467.

12 Anna Maria Liberati, 'Bimillenario della nascita di Augusto: La rappresentazione delle

Archaeological performance, what Mussolini himself instigated when he famously invited ‘cedo la parola al piccone’ [the pickaxe to speak], became instrumental in establishing a direct link between Fascist Italy and classical Rome,¹³ and at the same time turning politics under Fascism into a game of public ceremonies and aestheticized heritage, what the Duce liked to identify as *lo stile fascista* [the Fascist style].¹⁴ It was archaeology, the material traces of history in the face of Roman art and the masterpieces it produced, that was often used in order to export *lo stile fascista* elsewhere. The sections that follow argue that, much more than merely relying on a sort of ‘historic imaginary’ as suggested by Claudio Fogu among others,¹⁵ Fascism systematically instrumentalized a deep, as well as spectacular, antiquarian sensitivity. In this respect, classical antiquity was deployed by the Fascists as a political weapon in the present, and in a way that it affected both the politics of the time as well as later views and appropriations of the classical heritage itself.

Exporting *Romanitas*

A first effort by Italy to export *Romanitas* to Spain occurred soon after Italian diplomat Raffaele Guariglia, who proved instrumental to this sort of archaeological diplomacy, was named ambassador of Rome to Madrid in 1932.¹⁶ This was Guariglia’s first ambassadorial posting, following twenty-three years of service in lower ranking posts in Paris, London, St Petersburg, and Brussels. A

Province Augustee della Hispania Romana nella Mostra Augustea della Romanità del 1937–1938,’ in *2nd Congr s internacional d’arqueologia i m n antic August i les prov ncies occidentals 2000 aniversari de la mort d’August*, Tarragona 26–29 November 2014, vol. 1, ed. Jordi L pez (Tarragona: Vilar Fundaci  Privada M tua Catalana, 2015), 179–184.

- 13 Stephen L. Dyson, *In Pursuit of Ancient Pasts: A History of Classical Archaeology in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006). See also the analysis in Daniele Manacorda and Renato Tamassia, *Il piccone del regime* (Rome: Armando Curcio, 1985), and Marcello Barbanera, *Storia dell’archeologia classica in Italia: Dal 1764 ai giorni nostri* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2022), § 6.4.
- 14 Nelis, ‘Constructing Fascist Identity,’ 409–413; also Han Lamers and Bettina Reitz-Joose, *The Codex Fori Mussolini: A Latin Text of Italian Fascism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).
- 15 Claudio Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).
- 16 For the destabilizing role of the Italian embassy in Spain during the Spanish Republic, and especially Guariglia’s activity, see Rub n Dom nguez M ndez, ‘El embajador Raffaele Guariglia en Espa a (1932–1935): Reacci n italiana ante una eventual P rdida de Fuerza en su pol tica mediterr nea y americana,’ *Revista de Historia Iberoamericana* 6, no. 1 (2013): 56–72.

member of the Italian aristocracy (he was a Baron), and a committed monarchist, Guariglia was to serve as minister of foreign affairs in the government of Pietro Badoglio, after Mussolini's deposition in 1943. When the German army occupied Italy a few weeks later, he had to seek refuge in the Spanish Embassy in Rome, taking advantage of the strong ties he had forged in the meantime with Franco and his regime. Guariglia, however, first served in Madrid under the Republicans. In the aftermath of Spanish dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera's resignation in 1930, when Fascist Italy lost a political ally,¹⁷ and following the proclamation of the Republic in April of the following year, he was sent to Spain with the mission to prevent a Spanish approach with France, which would unbalance Italy's political influence in the Mediterranean.¹⁸ Through economic subventions to monarchist or Falangist groups and the Spanish press, Guariglia attempted to undermine the regime, and ideologically influence public opinion towards the Fascists.¹⁹

In 1933, Guariglia attended the first modern official revival of the Roman theatre in Merida, following the extensive excavation and restoration of the site that had begun in 1910. He then offered a laurel branch, apparently collected from the area around the Roman Capitolium, sent by the Governor of Rome as a gift to the city symbolizing its Roman past.²⁰ The Republican Prime Minister of Spain at the time, Manuel Azaña, who was destined to be the country's President when the Civil War broke out in 1936, was also present in Merida. He was therefore able to sense that Mussolini's gesture had been conceived merely in order to promote what Mussolini himself had described, years previously, as Fascist Italy's 'Roman, Latin, and Mediterranean style'. In his memoirs, Azaña ironically describes Guariglia's gift as a performance 'en el modo fascista' [in the Fascist way], patching together 'el imperio, la cultura romana y otras entidades' [the Empire, Roman culture and other things], wishing to present Italians and

17 Margarita Díaz-Andreu, 'Romanità in Spain? The Contacts Between Spanish and Italian Classical Archaeologists during the Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923–1930),' in *History of Archaeology: International Perspectives*, eds. Géraldine Delley, Margarita Díaz-Andreu, François Djindjian, Víctor M. Fernández, Alessandro Guidi, and Marc-Antoine Kaeser (Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing, 2016), 35–49.

18 Domínguez Méndez, 'El embajador Raffaele Guariglia.'

19 The diffusion of Italian propaganda (Italian press, book translations, leaflets, and magazines) and diplomatic attempts to promote a common Fascist ideology intensified during the Spanish Civil War, see: Patrizia Dogliani, 'Italian Fascist Cultural Intervention in the Spanish World, 1938–1943,' in *Continental Transfers: Cultural and Political Exchange among Spain, Italy and Argentina, 1914–1945*, eds. Maximiliano Fuentes Codera and Patrizia Dogliani (New York and Oxford: Berghahn), 140–165.

20 *Blanco y Negro*, July 9, 1933, 172.



FIGURE 1
Marble statue of Octavian (the *Prima Porta Augustus*)

SOURCE: THE VATICAN, ROME

Spaniards ‘todos romanizados, todos latinos y muy contentos’ [all Romanized, all Latinized, and very happy with themselves].²¹ He nevertheless accepted the gift, and discretely avoided entering into a political confrontation with the Italian ambassador and his superiors back home.

In August 1934, Mussolini sent a new gift symbolic of Roman antiquity to Spain, this time to the city of Tarragona, and once again on Guariglia’s initiative—who himself seems to have had developed a good understanding of the political power that could be invested in the materialities of the classical past. The gift was now a statue, a full-size replica of the celebrated Roman original known as the *Augustus of Prima Porta* (figure 1).²² Presumed to have been made in about 14–29 CE, though copying a still earlier bronze original of about 20 BCE, the *Augustus* was discovered in 1863 at the so-called ‘Villa Suburbana’ (also known as the ‘Villa of Livia’, Augustus’s widow), in the Roman suburb of Prima Porta. It shows Augustus as *imperator*, that is as commander-in-chief of the Roman army, but also barefoot—perhaps a convention referring to his prior divinization, as well as an allusion to classical Greek sculpture, and the Polyclitan *Doryphorus* in particular. The reliefs decorating the breastplate worn by the statue refer to the recovery by Augustus, in 20 BCE, of the Roman military standards lost to the Parthians after the defeat of Crassus at the battle of Carrhae thirty-three years earlier. The central scene referring to

21 Manuel Azaña, *Diarios 1932–1933: Los Cuadernos Robados* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1997), 373.

22 See Glenys Davies, *Gender and Body Language in Roman Art* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 120–124.

the event is surrounded by images of female barbarian captives personifying the Eastern Roman provinces, images of Diana and Apollo, and a number of celestial personifications including Caelus (Sky), Sol (Sun), and Aurora (Dawn) surrounding Tellus (Earth).²³ The Emperor is shown in the rhetorical *adlocutio* pose, a conventional mode of Roman address before the troops, or in the Senate.²⁴

The statue stands therefore as a textbook of Roman imperial politics, nevertheless employing a vocabulary that would certainly fit Fascist rhetoric in 1930s Italy.²⁵ This explains its use as a political symbol by Mussolini, who used a replica of the same type to decorate the entrance to Rome's Forum Augusti.²⁶ Presumably, the same symbolisms were valid for what was to become Franco's Spain during the early years of the regime, though in a rather awkward fashion, since the Iberian Peninsula was also counted as one of those 'captive lands' Augustus had subjugated in Antiquity. With its references to military victories against barbaric nations and the enslavement of Oriental lands, the statue promotes the model of the all-powerful leader, firmly rooted to his ancient land and its centuries-old traditions; and, to top it all off, the *adlocutio* gesture, that was too terribly close to the Fascist salute to pass unnoticed.

The corporeal connotations of the Prima Porta type are nicely exemplified by its employment for at least one of the imposingly masculine statues erected in 1932 in order to adorn the Stadio dei Marmi at the Foro Mussolini, renamed Foro Italico after 1945 (figure 2).²⁷ Designed in the 1920s and inaugurated in 1932, the stadium was originally planned as an annex to the Fascist Academy of Physical Education next door (now seat of the Italian Olympic Committee). The fifty-nine male sculptures adorning its steps, all made of Car-

23 See, chiefly, Indra Kagis McEwan, *Vitruvius: Writing the Body of Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 250–275; John Pollini, 'The Augustus from Prima Porta and the Transformation of the Polykleitan Heroic Ideal: The Rhetoric of Art,' in *Polykleitos, the Doryphoros, and Tradition*, ed. Warren G. Moon (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 262–282; Jaś Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 159–172; Michael Squire, *The Art of the Body: Antiquity and its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 135–141.

24 Davies, *Gender and Body Language*, 124.

25 Nelis, 'Constructing Fascist Identity,' 393.

26 See Squire, *The Art of the Body*, 245 fig. 3.

27 See George Mott, *Foro Italico* (New York: Powerhouse Books, 2003); Squire, *The Art of the Body*, 22–23. On the Nazi and Fascist fascination with classical masculinity, see Daniel Wildmann, 'Desired Bodies: Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia*, Aryan Masculinity and the Classical Body,' in *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany*, eds. Helen Roche and Kyriakos Demetriou (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 60–81.



FIGURE 2 Marble statue from the Foro Italico in Rome
SOURCE: DIMITRIS PLANTZOS AND VASILEIOS BALASKAS

rara marble, represent the individual provinces of a unified, Modern Italy (and were originally meant to be sixty in total), but in a way in which to allude to Ancient Rome. Each statue shows a scantily clad young man posing as an athlete, though also displaying distinctive features of his home district (Arezzo, Caltanissetta, and so on), which appear to have donated the individual figures to the Nation's capital. Ironically, fig-leaves had to be added to many of the original torsos to satisfy the Catholic Church's protests over the stark display of so much heathen nudity. Still, the statues in the Foro Mussolini do manage to convey their intended message, by enforcing the Fascist body as political canon. A body, to be sure, that relies on the evocation of classical masculinity (and an imagined one at that) in order to convey a thoroughly modern ideology.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that in 1934, the Spanish Republican authorities sensed the Fascist allusions of Mussolini's gift and tried to downplay the gesture.²⁸ The Spanish daily *El Sol*, among others, reported in a lukewarm manner on the event (figure 3), claiming that Tarragona had a fundamental role in the growth of the Roman Empire and that the modern city preserved Augustus' *romanità*. The bimillenary of Augustus, it was added in the piece, would be an opportunity to have his statue return as a symbolic figure for the identity of the city.²⁹ The statue was discretely placed in the Archaeological Promenade next to the city walls in 1936, before it was removed the following year, owing to the erupting Civil War and the bombing of the city by the Italian Legionary Air Force.³⁰

The victory of the Spanish Nationalists in April 1939 brought about a considerable shift in the way this and other such gifts were perceived. Following the example of Italy, a series of activities were also organized in Spain to honor the long dead Roman Emperor after Franco's victory. And although Franco was not very much interested in classical antiquity himself (or any matters cultural, it seems), it was the *Falange Española*,³¹ the Fascist political party he instituted in support of his regime, that demonstrated strong Italian influences, that imple-

28 *El Heraldo de Madrid*, August 4, 1934, 14. However, local intellectuals, such as writer Lluís Bertran i Pijoan, saw the gift as a local honor, and proof of Tarragona's glorious Roman past. *Diari de Tarragona*, August 12, 1934, 1–2.

29 *El Sol*, August 7, 1934, 1.

30 *Diari de Tarragona*, April 12, 1936, 1; *Diari de Tarragona*, December 19, 1937, 1; also see Montserrat Duch Plana, 'Republicans i franquistes davant l'Estàtua d'August a Tarragona,' *L'Avenç* 316 (2006): 22–27.

31 After merging with other parties, it was renamed *Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista* [FET y de las JONS; Traditionalist Spanish Phalanx of the Councils of the National-Syndicalist Offensive].

mented a strong rhetoric of Roman imperial ideals and shared *Romanitas*.³² On 11 July 1939, five years after its arrival to Tarragona, the statue of Augustus was finally formally unveiled in the form of a spectacular celebration staged by Tarragona's municipal authorities (figures 4 and 5). Galeazzo Ciano, then Italy's minister of foreign affairs, was present at the unveiling during a diplomatic trip to Spain. The ceremony had acquired a demonstrably festive character, as the town's streets were adorned with fake 'Roman' columns and arches, decorated with flags and catchphrases in Latin, praising the idea of *Romanitas* and the glory of Rome, ancient and modern.³³ Ciano along with the Spanish minister of the interior, Serrano Suñer, and various other officials, entered the city by car, receiving the enthusiastic welcome of the cheering public.³⁴ They then walked to the Archaeological Promenade and the Italian minister unveiled the statue, which was covered with Franco's Spanish flag.³⁵ The ceremony continued with two speeches delivered by Ciano and Suñer, who exalted Roman identity, the 'grandeza imperial' [imperial greatness] of the two countries and the way the two leaders, Franco and Mussolini, were modern embodiments of Augustus (figure 6).³⁶ The two dictators were thus introduced as founders of the new Spanish and Italian *Imperia*, and symbolic heirs of Augustus and

32 See Ismael Saz Campos, 'Falange e Italia: Aspectos poco conocidos del fascismo español,' *Estudis d'història contemporània del País Valencià* 3 (1982): 237–283. Although this is not the place to discuss whether Franco and his regime may be classified as truly fascist or not, it may be pointed out that although Franco's makings were quite different to those of Mussolini (and of course Hitler), who were politicians while he was a military man determined to enforce an ultra-reactionary, ultra-Catholic, and aggressively anti-communist agenda, his regime prior to 1945 may be characterized as National–Catholic and 'fascitized,' if not fascist tout-court. As, contrary to Mussolini and Hitler, Franco was to survive the Second World War, and able to rule Spain well into the postwar era, he was able to redefine his political views, as well as his rhetoric, later in his career. One of these moves was the demotion of the *Falange*, which was now 'left to hibernate,' retaining its name but effectively losing its fascist character and access to power. On this discussion, see chiefly Ismael Saz Campos, 'Fascism, Fascitization and Developmentalism in Franco's Dictatorship,' *Social History* 29, no. 3 (2004): 342–357, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0307102042000257629>.

33 For a short video recording the arrival of Ciano in Tarragona and the unveiling of the statue of Augustus, see 'La visita di Galeazzo Ciano,' *Giornale Luce*, July 19, 1939, Archivio Luce, *Giornale Luce B / B1548*, cod. B154807, accessed March 24, 2022, <http://bit.ly/3wXRDk>. For the use of propagandistic decoration in Franco's mass celebrations see Mónica Vázquez Astorga, 'Celebraciones de masas con significado político: Los ceremoniales proyectados desde el Departamento de Plástica en los Años de la Guerra Civil Española,' *Artígrama* 19 (2004): 197–226.

34 *Falange*, July 12, 1939, 1.

35 *Falange*, July 12, 1939, 7 afternoon edition.

36 *La Vanguardia*, July 12, 1939, 2.

LA VANGUARDIA

BARCELONA
Miércoles 12 de julio de 1939
AÑO DE LA VICTORIA

ESPAÑOLA

SUPLEMENTO
GRÁFICO

FUNDADORES: DON CARLOS Y DON BARTOLOMÉ GODO

Año LV - Número 22.716

DIRECTOR: LUIS DE GALINSOGA

En la vieja Tarraco imperial



TARRAGONA. - El conde Ciano, acompañado del ministro de la Gobernación, señor Serrano Súñer, visita las gloriosas ruinas romanas de la torre de los Escipiones (Foto, Pérez de Rosas)

FIGURE 4 Front page of the Spanish daily *La Vanguardia*, July 12, 1939, reporting on Galeazzo Ciano's official visit to Tarragona

SOURCE: *LA VANGUARDIA*



FIGURE 5 'Triumphant visit to Tarragona,' *La Vanguardia*, July 12, 1939
 SOURCE: LA VANGUARDIA



FIGURE 6 The Tarragona unveiling, July 11, 1939
 SOURCE: EFE: SERVICIOS

Rome. Incidentally, the words 'empire' / 'imperial' are mentioned seven times in their speeches. Four refer to the ancient Roman period and three to modern Italy and Spain. These describe Mussolini's success in creating another Fascist Empire and the Spanish effort to reach 'imperial greatness' under Franco's leadership.³⁷ Suñer, who, unlike Franco, was a hardcore Falangist and quite close to Mussolini's embrace of Roman heritage as a Fascist quality,³⁸ also scornfully criticized the statue's Republican misadventure: 'During Red Captivity', he said, referring to the years of Republican administration, 'crude and criminal hands threw the statue of the Emperor, our victorious Caesar, to the ground. Franco liberated this city from that despicable captivity, with Spanish forces and Roman legions. This is why it is important today, [my fellow] Spaniards, that a young minister . . . , a renowned figure of Roman politics, comes here to restore the statue of the Emperor'.³⁹ Suñer was one of the most influential politicians in the early Francoist regime and the effective leader of the Falange from 1937 to 1942. His close relationship with Mussolini's regime, and his belief in a Spanish imperium based on the concept of *Romanitas*, were crucial in the fascistization of the dictatorship until 1942.⁴⁰ It was under Suñer's terms that Falange reached its apogee as a Fascist party with classicist ideology aligned to the Italian *Romanitas*.

The Tarragona Augustus was the first of three replicas of classical sculpture to be exchanged between Italy and Spain in those years, in order to promote Fascist rhetoric on racial bonds, *Imperium*, and *Romanitas*, thus turning an exchange of antiquities into a political statement.⁴¹ Similar gestures involving statuary located in Spain itself are also recorded. Soon after the nationalist coup in July 1936 that led to the Spanish Civil War, Arconovaldo Bonaccorsi,

37 *La Vanguardia*, July 12, 1939, 1.

38 See, for example, Sid Lowe, *Catholicism, War and the Foundation of Francoism: The Juventud de Acción Popular in Spain, 1931–1939* (Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 221–222.

39 *Falange*, July 12, 1939, 12 afternoon edition; *La Vanguardia*, July 12, 1939, 2.

40 Antonio Duplá Ansuátegui, 'Falange e Historia Antigua,' in *Antigüedad y franquismo (1936–1975)*, eds. Fernando Wulff Alonso and Manuel Álvarez Martí-Aguilar (Málaga: Centro de Ediciones de la Diputación de Málaga, 2003), 75–94. On Suñer's political career and eventual dismissal, see, Joan María Thomàs, 'Getting to Know Ramón Serrano Suñer: Reality and Invention, 1937–1942,' *International Journal of Iberian Studies* 18 no. 3 (2005): 165–179.

41 Irene Mañas Romero, 'La historia de Roma y la España Romana como elementos de la identidad española durante el Período Franquista,' in *El franquismo y la apropiación del pasado: El uso de la historia, de la arqueología y de la historia del arte para la legitimación de la dictadura*, ed. Francisco José Moreno Martín (Madrid: Paglo Iglesias Foundation, 2017), 89–106.

an Italian *squadrista* acting on Mussolini's orders, captured the Balearic Island of Majorca and initiated a brutal persecution of the local communists and republicans. The Fascist rehabilitation of the island during the three-year Italian occupation included the 'Romanization' of the urban landscape of Palma, the island's capital. In particular, on 30 October 1936 the municipal authorities decreed that one of the town's main streets be renamed from 'La Rambla' to 'Vía Roma', to honor the Italian assistance in the national cause.⁴² Other such street-name changes, such as the introduction of a 'Vía Alemania' and a 'Vía Portugal', also commemorated the German and Portuguese support, respectively. In addition, the deputy mayor of Palma, Guillermo Cirerol, proposed that Vía Roma be adorned with two seventeenth century statues from the Despuig Collection at the Palma Municipal Museum reproducing Roman prototypes, a Julius Caesar and a Nero.⁴³ The exact time of their installation is unknown, but it seems that they were replaced by copies during the 1940s, while the originals were moved back to the museum. The monumental statues were part of a larger complex commemorating the Julio-Claudian dynasty. They were made in the seventeenth century following original Roman models of the first century CE.⁴⁴

Back to the mainland, one year after Tarragona, in March 1940, the Spanish press circulated details of a gift that Franco commissioned for Mussolini, to commemorate, again, the bimillenary of Augustus. This time the gift was a bronze copy, created by Spanish sculptor Emilio Aladrén, of a marble head of Augustus found in Merida. The head belonged to a full-bodied statue of the so-called *Pontifex Maximus* type (also known as the *Via Labicana* type) portraying Augustus as the chief-high Priest of Rome. As it was made of Italian Carrara marble, it had presumably been exported from Rome to Merida a decade or so after the city's foundation in 25 BC as *Emerita Augusta* (scholars believe the *Pontifex Maximus* type to have been created in circa 12 BC). While information about any related ceremony is absent in this case, we learn that the actual bronze used to cast the replica was symbolically taken from captured canons of the Republican army during the Battle of Ebro in 1938.⁴⁵ The sculpture was accompanied by a honorific inscription in Latin that reads: 'Italia Duci Romani

42 Municipal Archive of Palma, City Council Meetings 1936, Session October 30, 1936, 447–448.

43 As above; Antonio Despuig y Dameto was a Spanish archbishop, cardinal and collector from Majorca (1745–1813). During the years that he worked in Italy he conducted various excavations and shipped many of the findings to his country house in Raixa, Majorca. His collection was given to the Municipality of Palma in 1923.

44 Manuela Domínguez Ruiz, *El Fons escultòric de la col·lecció Despuig d'escultura clàssica*, (Palma: Ajuntament de Palma, 2017).

45 *Diario de la Marina*, March 17, 1940, 1.

Imperii Reinstauratori, Hispaniarum Imperator, In Divi Augusti Bimilenum, Hispanicae Victoriae, Anno Lictori Aevi XVII D.D., which translates as: ‘The Emperor of the Spaniards, to Duce, Restorator of the Roman Imperium in Italy, on the Bimillennial of Divine Augustus and the Spanish Victory, Year 17 of the Age of the Lictor G[ave as] G[ift].’⁴⁶

A significant detail about the Spanish gift to Rome and its intended political content on behalf of the Spaniards, comes from a piece titled *Estampas Hispanorromanas* [Hispanic-Roman Imprints], published in the Spanish-Italian magazine *Legiones y Falanges* in October 1941 (figure 7). In the piece, Spanish archaeologist Julio Martínez Santa-Olalla claimed that thanks to Augustus, Merida became the first city to forge national consciousness in Spain. Martínez Santa-Olalla extolled Merida’s historical significance in the Roman Empire and the Iberian Peninsula, which not only justified Augustus’s strategic talent but also produced renowned monuments and artefacts that still embellished the modern city in his day. Illustrated with a photograph of the original head of Augustus used as the prototype for Franco’s gift to Mussolini, the piece in *Legiones y Falanges*—obviously addressing an agonistically fascist readership in both countries—attempts to counter-appropriate a Roman ideal already appropriated by Mussolini, thus claiming for Spain its fair share in this newly invented *Romanitas*. Significantly, Santa-Olalla does not mention Franco’s gift but makes a point of illustrating its origin, next to a subtle reminder that—contrary to Italy, where archaeology is blooming under the leadership of the state—in Spain budgets for archaeological digs remain sparse. It might be difficult to argue that Santa-Olalla, a Falangist himself and a Germanophile whose racist scholarship was deeply influenced by the theories of Gustaff Kossina and his Nazi followers,⁴⁷ serving as Spain’s General Excavation Commissioner at the time, would push for the adoption of Mussolini’s archaeological diplomacy while favoring Spain’s Aryanization rather than its Romanization.⁴⁸ It seems however that, at least for a seasoned archaeologist like Santa-Olalla, the point of appropriating a classical image in order to promote contemporary political agendas was not altogether missed.

46 *Heraldo de Zamora*, March 16, 1940, 6; *Pensamiento Alavés*, March 16, 1940, 4.

47 Alfredo Mederos Martín, ‘Julio Martínez Santa-Olalla y la interpretación ariaria de la Prehistoria de España (1939–1945),’ *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología* 69/70 (2003/2004): 13–56; Gonzalo Ruiz Zapatero, ‘The Totalitarian Distortion: The “Prehistoric Roots” of Franco’s Spain,’ in *Science and Fascism*, eds. Rafael Huertas and Carmen Ortiz (Madrid: Twelve Streets, 1998), 147–160.

48 Mederos Martín, ‘Julio Martínez Santa-Olalla and the Aryan Interpretation.’

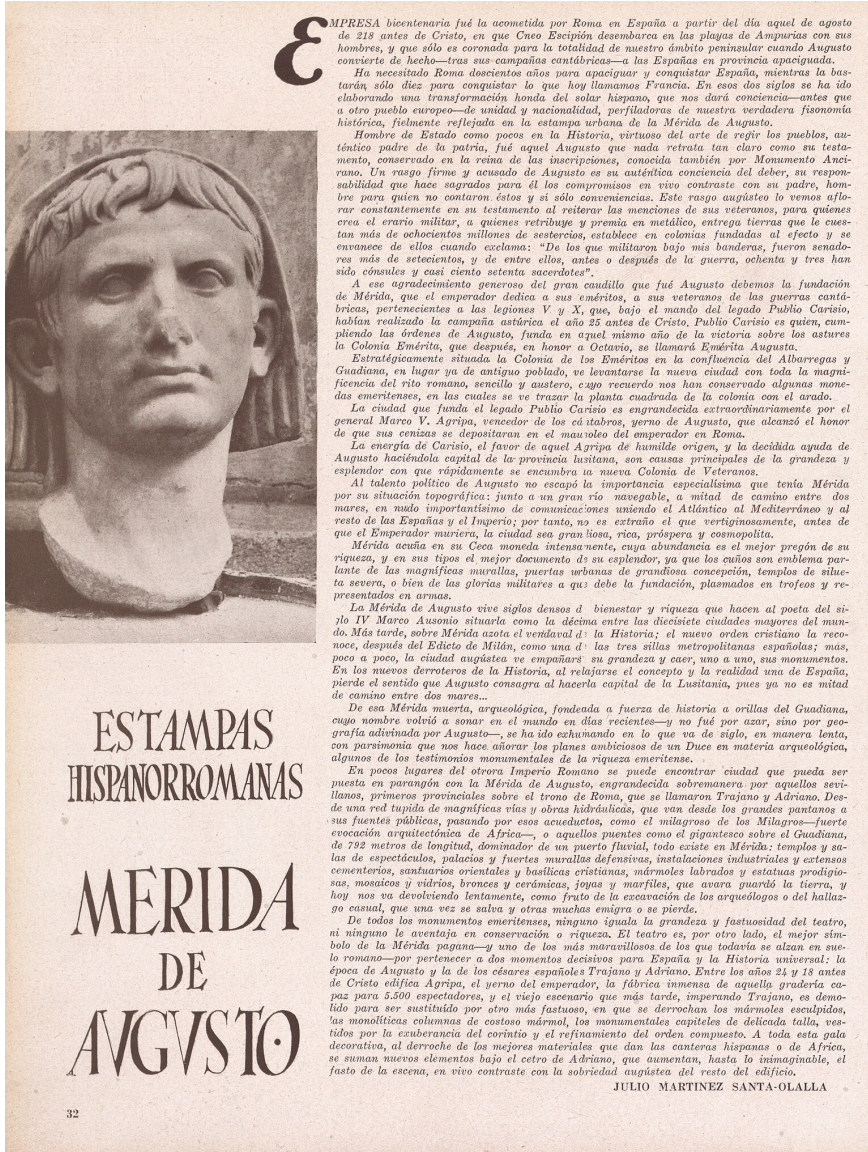


FIGURE 7 An article published in *Legiones y Falanges* (October 1941), discussing the importance of Merida for Roman history and its significance for the Romanization of Spain
SOURCE: NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SPAIN

It should also be noted that documents such as this reflect the tension regarding Roman heritage and its employment in Fascist rhetoric, as well as Francoist propaganda in Spain during the 1920s and the 1930s. Even though, as already stated, Franco was not personally invested in the idea of a Spanish *Romanitas* (see above and note 32), many nationalist intellectuals supporting his regime certainly were. From 1936 until the end of the Second World War, members of the Spanish Falange appeared to eagerly embrace the ideas of a revived *Pax Romana*, of a new Golden Age such as that ushered by Augustus, and of *Romanitas*, as components of an international Fascist ideal in which Spain played an essential role both in the time of Augustus and in that of Franco. One is reminded, among others, of the senior *falangista* Rafael Sánchez Mazas, who was among those who promoted the example of the Roman Emperor Trajan (born in what now is Spanish Andalusia) as a forerunner of Franco's own service to the universal cause of *romanità*, as promoted by Mussolini. As such, Trajan was celebrated as Franco's Roman alter ego, providing a necessary link guaranteeing the victory of international Fascism both in military and spiritual terms. As Romania under Ion Antonescu, who ascended to power in 1940, seemed to embrace totalitarian ideals similar to those promoted by Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco, intellectuals such as Sánchez Mazas were keen to push the Trajan analogy even further. After all, it was Emperor Trajan who had conquered Dacia, the land where Romania now lay, and was thus able to solidify the Empire with the blood of his Hispano-Roman troops.⁴⁹ In this sense, Trajan, and other celebrated Romans of Iberian origin, such as Seneca, Martial, or Lucan, became, in the eyes of Falangist theorists, agents that contributed to the *Hispanization* of the empire, a process that presumably regenerated Roman civilization.⁵⁰ It is through such pseudo-historical claims that Spanish intellectuals would justify acceptance, on their part, of Italian supremacy in a future, fascistized world, based on the inherently Italian concept of *romanità*, thus synthesizing classical *Romanitas*, Fascist Roman-ness, and the Francoist desire to appear great and imperial.

In that same year of 1940, another replica of Augustus of Prima Porta was offered by Mussolini to Spain. This time the honored city was Zaragoza, which

49 On the use of characters of ancient Iberian history to promote Franco's authoritarianism, see Oliver Baldwin, 'Caudillo de España: Viriathus, Trajan, Franco,' in *Rome and Iberia: Diversity of Relations from Antiquity to Modernity*, eds. Adriana Grzelak-Krzyszczak and Maria Judyta Wozniak (Lodz: Lodz University Press, 2021), 313–339 (esp. 333–334 for Sánchez Mazas and his employment of Trajan as a precursor of Franco).

50 Francisco Pina Polo, 'El estudio de la historia antigua en España bajo el franquismo,' *Anales de Historia Antigua, Medieval y Moderna* 41 (2009): 21–32.

like Tarragona and Merida had been founded by Augustus. For the appropriate reception of the gift, a symbolic ceremony that would strengthen the spirit of shared *Romanitas* was scheduled from 30 May to 4 June 1940.⁵¹ It was organized under the name *Semana Augustea* on the initiative of Pascual Galindo, a professor at the University of Zaragoza, and the Society that he had founded along with some of his colleagues, with the collaboration of the Italian embassy in Spain and the Italian Institute of Culture.⁵² Featuring a series of events of an academic and political nature, the *Semana Augustea* comprised various activities, from conferences on Roman civilization and archaeological tours, to cultural spectacles and military parades. The public unveiling of the bronze copy of Augustus took place on 2 June at the Plaza de Paraíso,⁵³ in a spirit of collective euphoria, in the presence of high-standing academics of the time, diplomats and politicians from the two countries (figure 8).⁵⁴ The representative of the Italian Embassy in Spain, Count Vittorio Zoppi, along with the mayor of Zaragoza, unveiled the statue, and spoke about its symbolic importance for the city, the heroic Italian soldiers who fought there during the Spanish Civil War and the shared Roman roots of the two countries.⁵⁵ Once again, the city was adorned with flags and coats of arms, while a military parade and the performance of national anthems gave the proceedings the impression of a ritual.

The base of the statue reads: 'CAES ·AUGVSTO/ CIVITAS·AB·IPSO ·FVNDATA/ F·C/ MCMXXX' and 'DVX ITALIAE/ IMAGINEM CAESARAVGVSTAE/ D.D.' Once more, an inscription written in Latin (a language in reality hardly ever read or written and certainly not spoken in either one of the two countries) was used to connect the Roman past (referring to Caesar Augustus as Zaragoza's founder)

51 *Aragón*, January 1940, 19.

52 Antonio Duplá Ansuátegui, 'Semana Augustea de Zaragoza (30 Mayo–4 Junio 1940),' in *La cristalización del pasado: Génesis y desarrollo del marco institucional de la arqueología en España*, eds. Gloria Mora y Margarita Díaz-Andreu (Malaga: Editorial de la Universidad de Málaga, 1997), 565–566.

53 Antonio Duplá Ansuátegui, 'Augusto y el franquismo: Ecos del bimilenario de Augusto en España,' *Revista de Historiografía* 27 (2017): 152–154, <https://doi.org/10.20318/revhisto.2017.3968>; For a short video recording the unveiling, see 'Lo scoprimento della statua di Augusto donata alla città di Saragozza,' *Giornale Luce*, June 21, 1940, Archivio Luce, *Giornale Luce C / C0050*, cod. 005002, accessed March 24, 2022, <http://bit.ly/3HXAVID>.

54 *ABC Madrid*, June 4, 1940, 7.

55 *La Vanguardia*, June 4, 1940, 5; *Aragón*, May–June 1940, 56. In fact, the Italian soldiers who had fought on Franco's side enjoyed spectacular Fascist celebrations on their way back to Italy in October 1938. On their way to the port of Cadiz, from where they would embark, they stopped in Merida and received honorary medals—not surprisingly—in a spectacle organized in the Roman theatre of Merida, in 'an act of great emotion and tribute to the brother country,' *Azul*, October 16, 1938, 15. Also *La Prensa*, October 16, 1938, 4.

El regalo de Mussolini a Zaragoza

BENITO Mussolini, el genial estadista que en un lapso de tiempo, corto para la historia de los pueblos, ha sabido elevar a su país al rango de gran potencia, ha tenido la gentileza de regalar a nuestra Zaragoza la estatua de su fundador César Augusto.

Lazo nuevo que une a España e Italia. ¿Cómo pudo transcurrir tantos tiempos en el olvido la figura del gran Emperador romano que echó los cimientos de nuestra ciudad?

Vivía, sí, en la mente de los eruditos; tropezaban con ella los rebuscadores de cosas viejas, entre el polvo de los archivos, y en la pátina que recubre los muros y abraza las piedras miliarias; pero el pueblo, aun aquel que no puede ser llamado "vulgo", desconoce la enorme figura histórica de César Augusto que da su nombre a un siglo; y contempla con indiferencia los numerosos vestigios de la dominación romana, en España.

Para nosotros, de Roma vino la lengua, de Roma vino el derecho, de Roma vinieron progreso y cultura. Afines por raza y espíritu los italianos y los españoles de hogar, al igual que los iberos y los habitantes del Lacio de antaño, se comprenden y se funden en comunidad de ideal.

Este regalo del Duce a la vieja Cesaraugusta y la aceptación por su parte de la presidencia de honor en la Junta del Bimilenario, constituyen el remate, corona y cifra de tantos presentes como Italia viene haciendo a España, de un modo especial en estos últimos tiempos: presentes de sangre legionaria, de material bélico, de aliento contra la incomprensión, la torpeza y la maldad.

¡Oh, qué majestuosamente señoreará una de nuestras viejas plazas o calles, singularmente las que más sabor tengan a romanidad, la estatua de César Augusto enviada por el Duce!

Por ella, vendrán en conocimiento de nuestro abuelo los que hasta ahora lo desconocían, y aprenderán a amar la ciudad romana, después cristiana fidelísima, y hoy y para siempre española como la que más.

Es hora de revalorizar los pergaminos de nuestra raza. Hombres pérfidos o nul aconsejados pretendieron hacer almoneda con ellos, y ha sido preciso un enorme y sangriento sacrificio para evitar el sacrilegio.

Se evitó; y sobre el pavé se levantan de nuevo nuestros



valores morales comenzando por el catolicismo. No podía faltar nuestra romanidad.

De aquí la oportunidad del regalo que Mussolini hace a Zaragoza, y que Zaragoza acepta alborozada reverente y agradecida.

Honrando a su fundador, Cesaraugusta se honra a sí misma.



FIGURE 8 'The gift of Mussolini to Zaragoza,' Aragón, January 19, 1940
SOURCE: SINDICATO DE INICIATIVA Y PROPAGANDA DE ARAGON

to the Fascist present (i.e. Mussolini's—referred to as 'Italy's Leader' in the inscription—gift of Augustus's statue). However, as Han Lamers and Bettina Reitz-Joose have argued, the role of Latin in Italian public discourse changed drastically under the *ventennio fascista*, as it was enveloped with the cultural and ideological importance of Rome.⁵⁶ In many ways, under Mussolini, Latin became a part of the *Romanitas* strategy, and to a certain extent a 'Fascist' language in itself. As Lamers and Reitz-Joose point out, the use of Latin enabled the Fascist orientation towards the Roman past, as a way to promote something essentially 'new and modern',⁵⁷ a new order anticipated and in fact promised by a revived Roman-ness.

The use of Latin in Franco's gift to Mussolini copying the Merida Augustus as described above, confirms this. By referring to the two men as 'imperatores' and 'duces', the Latin inscription establishes a time-space continuum with ancient Rome and Augustus himself, confirming Mussolini and Franco as his legitimate heirs (and in fact reminding Mussolini that Franco is also an *imperator*, a fellow-protagonist in the same game of classical revival and modern identity politics).

Moreover, the use of Latin is also deployed in order to create an eager audience of dutiful subjects, and an international one at that. By playing the Roman card against (and, in a sense, both alongside and counter to) Hitler's Aryanism, Mussolini and Franco seem to be pushing for a Mediterranean united under the specter of classical Rome in its Fascist re-interpretation. The Latin language on the one hand, and the power of images appropriated from the classical archive on the other, are used to forge what Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi has described as Fascism's 'bodily economy'.⁵⁸ Based on the ideals of nationalist devotion and patriotic sacrifice, Mussolini's Fascism and Francoist-Falangist rhetoric were in need of an orderly mass of docile bodies, ready to repeat the masculine triumphs achieved by Rome and its legions under the emperors. The public feasts studied in this paper seem to have been instrumental in this discourse: through the deployment of classical antiquity as a bio-template of sorts, these public gestures of archaeophilia were meant to inscribe Mussolini and Franco's Fascist notions of Empire onto their ever-ready, always-available populations; to a global mass (*une masse globale*), to paraphrase Michel Foucault, who had been habituated into accepting the authority of classical antiquity as an archetype in their present condition.⁵⁹ An archetype, that is, confirming the ruler's right not

56 Lamers and Reitz-Joose, *The Codex Fori Mussolini*, 16–27.

57 op.cit., 17.

58 Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 119–147.

59 Michel Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société: Cours au Collège de France 1976* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 214.

only 'to make live' but also 'to let die' as an exercise in bio-power.⁶⁰ Therefore, by transferring classical Rome's biopower into Spain and Italy's interwar realities, the two leaders imbue Fascist ideas with the allure of a coveted *Romanitas*, thus re-inventing *Romanitas* as a Fascist ideal. Those among the population who espouse the Fascist ideals are the true Romans, and therefore belong to the nation; everybody else does not belong, therefore their bodies may be sorted away. It is this notion of a shared classicality, among an assortment of other versions of patriotism, that would turn Mussolini and Franco's subjects into a well-organized mass of disposable bodies, happy to be made live as modern versions of their imagined classical selves or—if it should come to that—to be let die.

Conclusion: Disciplined and Imperial

Revisiting these celebrations and public rituals paying homage to Rome and *Romanitas* helps us identify the ways in which classical heritage became instrumental for Fascist rhetoric under Mussolini and Franco in terms of both its materiality as well as its spatiality. Rome, Tarragona, Zaragoza, Palma, and Merida, all carry obvious Roman pasts, readily recognizable through the archaeological remains they are able to display. Under Fascist rule, these and other 'classical' cities—most notably Rome—became theatres of public rituals and political gesturing. Political agents—in fact actors—of the time, from Guariglia, Ciano, and Suñer to Mussolini himself cast themselves as the protagonists in this Fascist theatre of *Romanitas*.⁶¹ More than highlighting Fascism's inherent palingenetic aspect, therefore, the antiquity-inspired performances discussed in this article aim at mobilizing their audience into imagining themselves as the dutiful soldiers of a new, Fascist state; a re-Romanised body of citizens which, as Mussolini himself envisaged in 1922, would be both 'disciplined and imperial'.⁶² The crushing termination of the era of Mussolini meant the end of *romanità*, a concept that lost its importance for Spain when the Falange lost its political power in 1942, thus allowing Franco to reinvent his regime as the postwar dictatorship that it became, eager to forget its brief fascination with a revived, Fascist *Romanitas*. The new orientation towards an imperial, Catholic, and nationalist *Hispanidad*, which had begun to gain ground by the end of the

60 Op.cit.

61 Giardina, 'The Fascist Myth of Romanity,' 70.

62 Ibid., note 7.

Spanish Civil War, when Spain no longer depended on the Italian military aid, was incompatible with the Fascist *Romanitas* Mussolini aimed to export.⁶³

For what Mussolini and his comrades were in fact exporting to Spain, in the archaeophilic guise of *romanità* / *Romanitas*, was *lo stile fascista*: what Mussolini imagined as a singular ‘Roman, Latin, and Mediterranean’ character, uniting the peoples of South Europe and North Africa under a common, Fascist rule.⁶⁴ A way of life where politics was aestheticized to such an extent so as to become naturalized as such, and in effect to become life itself. Fascism used the classical past not only as a way to legitimize its claims to power. Fascist leaders and intellectuals used classical Rome as an aesthetic and ideological archetype for the modern era, and at the same time in order to help their subjects imagine themselves as the dutiful soldiers of a new, Fascist state. This Fascist—and imperial—state was what the Francoist regime sought to create through its brief fraternization with Italy, a diplomatic move that would forge a new Mediterranean force.⁶⁵ Like the sixty male statues of the Stadio dei Marmi, the Roman replicas exchanged between Italy and Spain in the 1930s were meant to lead Rome’s ‘regional legions’ parading in the Fascist order; classical materialities (monumental as well as spatial) were thus imbued with Fascist dynamics, as the past turned into the present and projected into the future. It is though through the power of performance, individual and collective, that these ceremonies materialized themselves as communal experiences of a primeval Fascist ideal realized as the new present: spectacular and modern.

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63 Dogliani, ‘Italian Fascist Cultural Intervention,’ 154–156.

64 For the Italian colonial claims in Libya based on a common Roman past see Samuel Agbamu, ‘The Arco dei Fileni: A Fascist Reading of Sallust’s *Bellum Iugurthinum*,’ *Classical Receptions Journal* 11, no. 2 (2019): 157–177, <https://doi.org/10.1093/crj/cly023>; and Massimiliano Munzi, *L’epica del ritorno: Archeologia e politica nella Tripolitania italiana* (Roma: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2001).

65 Giorgia Priorelli, ‘“The Founders of a European Era”? The Fascist and Falangist Plans for Italy and Spain in the New Nazi Order,’ *Modern Italy* 24, no. 3 (2019): 317–330, <https://doi.org/10.1017/mit.2019.15>.

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