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# (Re)Presenting Roman History in Italy, 1911-1955

*Joshua W. Arthurs*

The Museo della Civiltà Romana (MCR, Museum of Roman Civilization), located on the southern outskirts of Rome, is unique among the Eternal City's innumerable antiquities museums.<sup>1</sup> Whereas the venerable halls of the Vatican collections or the Capitoline, with their glittering patrimony of marbles and bronzes, celebrate the aesthetic triumphs of antiquity, the MCR presents visitors with "...objects from family life, customs, work implements...faithful testimony of the life of a people who, despite the distance of the centuries, are in essence so close to us...."<sup>2</sup> Many guidebooks attest to the Museum's "excellent and comprehensive exhibits" and its ability "to put Rome's scattered fragments and artifacts into context very helpfully."<sup>3</sup> Composed entirely of reproductions—plaster casts, scale models, photographs and maps—the MCR is considered one of the capital's most thorough and informative museums, an ideal first stop for tourists seeking a primer in Roman history.

At the same time, however, some of elements of the Museo della Civiltà Romana are immediately disquieting. The *Time Out Guide to Rome* notes its "vast blank walls and massive straight columns;" *Let's Go: Rome* warns that "if there was ever an intimidating museum façade, this is it."<sup>4</sup> A large table in one room converts prices from an ancient Roman market into Italian Lire—a double anachronism, given the advent of the Euro and the fact that the Lire are listed at their 1937 value. These and many other elements point to the Museum's previous incarnation as the Mostra Augustea della Romanità (MAR, Augustan Exhibition of the Roman Spirit), created by the Fascist regime in 1937-1938 to

commemorate the bimillenary of the emperor Augustus' birth. The majority of the objects on display were acquired during this period, and the imposing neoclassical edifice which houses the collections was originally projected as part of the Esposizione Universale di Roma (EUR, Universal Exhibition of Rome) of 1942, an unrealized "Olympiad of Civilizations" marking the twentieth anniversary of the "Blackshirt Revolution." While the present site of the MCR was constructed after the Second World War—inaugurated in 1952 and completed in 1955—it adheres closely to blueprints produced in the late 1930s.

The shadow of Mussolini's Italy therefore looms large over the installations, with their monumentality and severe whiteness; however, the institutional roots of the MCR stretch back even further. The Mostra Augustea was itself an elaboration of a 1911 archaeological exhibition (the Mostra Archeologica) organized by the renowned archaeologist Rodolfo Lanciani as part of an international exposition commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Italian unification. Although it operated on a far smaller scale, the Mostra Archeologica represents the point of origin for a trajectory marked by tremendous continuities, in terms of the objects on display, methodological and institutional principles, and personnel.<sup>5</sup>

The development of the Museo della Civiltà Romana therefore spans Italy's tumultuous twentieth century, offering a compelling case study in the ways in which different regimes—Liberal, Fascist, and Republican—conceived of classical Rome's position within the nexus of Italian national history, and how this in turn both informed and reflected the display of archaeological objects. What valence did the Roman past hold across the radical transformations that occurred between the eve of the First World War and the aftermath of the Second? How were identical artifacts deployed and re-deployed in these multiple contexts? How did the archaeologists of the 1930s attend to the task of "Fascistizing" an

exhibition created during the Liberal era, and how, subsequently, did the Museum's postwar curators handle the heavy burden of the Fascist past?

To date, the historiography on this subject has been fairly unanimous in drawing sharp distinctions between the bombastic excesses of the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* and the more legitimate representation of history in the *Mostra Archeologica* of 1911 and the present-day Museum. The Fascist-era exhibition is often depicted as the apogee of the regime's "cult of Rome," a rhetorical, pseudo-scientific exercise whose primary purpose was "not historical reconstruction, but recruiting the past for the present."<sup>6</sup> Conversely, while some observers have identified a degree of "moderate and contained provincial triumphalism" in 1911, and recognized an anticipation of the imperial rhetoric of the 1930s, Lanciani has been lauded for his scientific rigor and for assembling a collection of archaeological reproductions "which to this day present the public with an understanding of ancient life, with extraordinary immediacy and accessibility."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the MCR is seen as conserving "the most scientifically valid part of the *Mostra Augustea*," functioning as an important center for the study of antiquity, once shorn of its Fascist excesses.<sup>8</sup>

While my intention is by no means to valorize any aspect of the Fascist-era project—which was indeed heavily marked by the militarist and expansionist rhetoric of the regime—I believe that the assessment above is problematic in several respects. First, it seems to rest on a less than nuanced conception of the relationship between science and politics, or practice and discourse. This study seeks to demonstrate the extent to which both sides of these binary oppositions are inextricably intertwined and mutually constitutive. Secondly, the characterization of the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* as an "ideological" endeavor—in contrast to both its predecessor and its successor—overlooks both the "scientific" aspirations of its organizers and the extent to which both its

precursor and successor were also highly imbued with nationalist and imperialist discourses. Finally, the path leading to the current Museo della Civiltà Romana was marked not only by the shifting political landscape of modern Italy, but also by considerable institutional continuities that render simple dichotomies problematic.

In short, I am interested in understanding how we perceive the relationship between the display of the past, ideology (especially with regards to nationalism), and archaeology as a disciplinary practice. Why do we consider one representation of history more “nationalist” or “ideological” than another? At what moment is meaning inscribed in, and ascribed to, archaeological artifacts? Where do science, representation and politics intersect?

**“The Indelible Testimony of Latin Greatness”: the Mostra Archeologica of 1911**

As previously mentioned, this story begins with the 1911 international exposition marking the fiftieth anniversary of Italian unification.<sup>9</sup> In keeping with other expositions and World’s Fairs of its day, the *Cinquantenario* was conceived as a celebration of progress, technology and the achievements of bourgeois civilization. This theme resonated particularly strongly in Italy: after fifty years of unity, *Italiotta* (“little Italy”) continued to lag far behind in economic, social and technological development, and was eager to improve its position on the periphery of European modernity. Accordingly, exhibitions in Turin and Rome would demonstrate Italian accomplishments in every endeavor, from public hygiene and commerce to sport and archaeology. The event, in the words of its promoters, would serve as a stage upon which

the Third Italy, in its daring self-assurance, in the audacity of its ineluctable will, affirms its existence, its unity, to the entire

world...with Rome, the Eternal City, at its head, the cradle of its civilization, the center and heart of its new destiny.<sup>10</sup>

While the Rome exposition's main pavilions were situated on the northern edge of the city, the Mostra Archeologica was located to the east, in the Baths of Diocletian outside Stazione Termini. To many observers, this locale was as significant as the installations themselves. For centuries, the ancient Baths had been occupied by wine-sellers, blacksmiths' shops and other unsavory establishments. Such reminders of Italian backwardness were particularly distressing for the exposition's organizers, as "the disgraceful sight...gives foreigners an unfavorable indication of how we attend to the task of preserving this marvelous monument."<sup>11</sup> Restoring the monument to its original state, argued the mayor, "would be widely praised abroad, where cultured persons are unable to fathom how in Rome we tolerate such disfigurements of the glorious ruins..."<sup>12</sup> In short, the excavations were "an undertaking that both science and national decorum demand."<sup>13</sup>

Just as the "reclamation" of the Baths was conceived in terms of the restoration of national dignity, Rodolfo Lanciani believed that the Mostra Archeologica was motivated by an analogous "triple purpose":

We tried, above all, to reconstruct a picture of Roman civilization under the Empire, asking each of its thirty-six provinces to contribute some reminder of the benefits it received from Rome in various aspects of civic and private life, and especially in terms of public works. Then we began the task of restoring to Her—in copy form, of course, of course—the artistic treasures that have been carried away since the Renaissance, to enrich museums in other countries. Thirdly, we have tried to

reconstruct monuments and statuary groups that the vicissitudes of time have broken and scattered.<sup>14</sup>

These goals were explicitly reflected in the composition and organization of the installations. The visitor's itinerary began with a series of three rooms, devoted to Eternal Rome (featuring personifications of the city and other divinities), to the *Imperium Romanum* (with mile-markers and columns from distant lands, stressing the extent of Rome's expansion) and to the Divine Augustus, the founder of the Empire. Having emphasized the imperial mission emanating from the capital, the rest of the exhibition was organized on the basis of the ancient provinces, paralleling the national pavilions featured elsewhere in the city. In other words, rather than France, Germany, Hungary and so on, visitors toured "the three Gauls, the two Germanias, the two Pannonias, the two Moesias, Dacia, the three Spains, Mauretania, Numidia, Britannia, Belgium, Batavia, and Egypt."<sup>15</sup> One room featured a scale model of fourth-century Rome, built by the French architect Paul Bigot, which offered a leisurely promenade through the ancient city:

a stroll through imperial Rome thus becomes the easiest and most delightful of things. You are a visitor? Enter the city through the Via Appia, follow Via Nova, bathe in the Baths of Caracalla....Who wouldn't want to devote at least a day of their lives to enjoy the spectacle of imperial Rome, to live for an instant as a contemporary of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, to roam the streets, the Fora, and the temples of the metropolis, all magically resurrected?<sup>16</sup>

For Lanciani and his colleagues, this resurrection of imperial Rome, particularly as reflected in the geographic layout of the exhibits, would



demonstrate the work of civilization carried out by Rome in the ancient world: casts, photographs, plans, and designs provide an exact reproduction of the monuments created by Roman genius in the most distant regions of the world, remaining today as indelible testimony of Latin greatness.<sup>17</sup>

The theme of the civilizing mission was further emphasized by the objects on display. Instead of artifacts that reflected indigenous or syncretic ancient cultures, the organizers chose pieces that remained relatively uniform across the provinces: aqueducts, triumphal arches, and bridges. The result was that visitors went from room to room, seeing essentially identical pieces in different national contexts, reinforcing a sense of the unity and uniformity of Roman culture as it spread inexorably through the ancient world, ultimately laying the foundation for modern civilization. For Lanciani, this arrangement demonstrated “how these countries, which were our ancient provinces, are still governed by Roman laws, and how their inhabitants walk on roads that we built, cross mountains through passes that we opened and rivers over bridges that we constructed, drink from aqueducts that we connected, and find refuge for their ships...in the ports that we founded.”<sup>18</sup> By extension, modern Europe’s debt to the Empire reinforced the claim of cultural and historical primacy made by the most direct descendant of ancient Rome—namely the Italian state, reunited after centuries of internal strife and foreign intervention. The pieces provided by foreign countries represented “an act of filial devotion to the ancient mother.”<sup>19</sup> The theme of empire carried an additional resonance in 1911: only months away from the conquest of Libya, the legacy of Rome’s *Mare Nostrum* served as a powerful rhetorical tool for Italian aspirations for an overseas colonial empire.<sup>20</sup>

The other two facets of Lanciani's "triple purpose" involved the restitution of works that had been carried off from Italy since the Renaissance, and the reconstruction of damaged monuments. Given financial and logistical constraints, this could only be achieved through the use of scale models, casts, photographs and other reproductions. While some considered the use of copies to be a major shortcoming of the exhibition (especially considering the extraordinary wealth of originals displayed in the major museums), the organizers argued that this approach represented a major technical innovation. Rome's traditional museums were imposing in their pedigree and formality, and geared almost exclusively to the fine arts; by contrast, Lanciani and his colleagues claimed that their project offered a rational, scientific exposition of the Roman world, allowing visitors to examine the artifacts much more closely than would be possible with originals; scale models, identified with labels, showed fragmented monuments in their original state, often for the first time in centuries. The use of reproductions thus enabled the development of a new collection to rival more established institutions, stressing the provenance and documentary value of the objects over their aesthetic significance. For Lanciani,

[The exhibition] must not just offer a simple collection of important, curious or beautiful objects, but should be proof of the new energies which the Italian people have decided, in recent times, to devote to the conquest and illustration of this magnificent patrimony of forms and ideas....the Exhibition is designed above all to demonstrate the vigorous energy which Italian archaeologists employed at home and abroad, wherever they were led by visions of new victories for science.<sup>21</sup>

In a sense, then, the Mostra Archeologica celebrated not only the legacy of Imperial Rome—and by implication, the aspirations of modern

Italy—but also the emergence of Italian archaeology as a national discipline, on par with the Northern Europeans who for so long had dominated the study of antiquity. This goal was most clearly reflected by the section devoted to Greece, which displayed objects recently recovered from Italian excavations in Crete. Although some reviewers questioned “whether it was wise so to enlarge the original scope of the exhibition as to admit casts illustrative of the whole history of Greek art...the exhibition has thus lost its unity,” the Greek rooms ultimately served to provide further evidence of Italy’s new standing as an archaeological power.<sup>22</sup> No less than the exhibitions devoted to industry and commerce, the Mostra Archeologica marked Italian progress—in this case, the ability of the nation to reclaim, recover and display its ancient past, just as the excavation of the Baths of Diocletian served to erase reminders of a backwards, medieval Italy.

To continue this mission, Lanciani envisioned the exhibition as a didactic institution, “an aid and...a meeting-place for scholars of Roman *antiquities*, just as other museums served, and continue to serve, for scholars of Roman *art*.”<sup>23</sup> He therefore called for the Mostra Archeologica to be transformed into a permanent museum, so that “the youth of Italy will find inspiration in this future Museum of Empire, with all those virtues which made Rome the dominator of the world, morally and materially.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Taking a bath in *Romanità*: the Mostra Augustea della Romanità, 1937-1938**

The First World War and the turmoil of the postwar years, culminating in the Fascist seizure of power, meant that Lanciani never lived to see his dream of a permanent institution realized. In 1932, however, the project was taken up by Giulio Quirino Giglioli, a leading Italian archaeologist and Fascist deputy who had served as Lanciani’s secretary in 1911.<sup>25</sup>

Giglioli proposed that the collection be reorganized and expanded for a new exhibition to coincide with the regime's celebration, in 1937, of the bimillenary of Augustus' birth. With Mussolini's imprimatur, the Mostra Augustea della Romanità opened on the emperor's birthday—September 23<sup>rd</sup>—comprising over three thousand plaster casts, scale models, photographs and maps; it was held in the renovated Palace of Exhibitions in Rome, where a massive Mussolinian epigraph inscribed over the entrance called for “the glories of the past [to] be surpassed by the glories of the future.”<sup>26</sup>

Although Augustus was the central figure, the exhibition was envisioned as a “vivid pageant of Roman history” in which visitors could, in another phrase of the Duce's, “bathe themselves in *romanità*.”<sup>27</sup> The collections were greatly expanded, and the installations underwent a dramatic reorganization. In lieu of the geographic layout, the Fascist-era exhibition was divided into three sections. The main floor traced the development of Roman civilization from its legendary origins all the way to the advent of Fascism, with each phase anticipating the telos of Mussolini's new Italy: the conquests of the Republic necessitated the rise of a strong authoritarian leader; the *Pax Romana* ushered in by Augustus was the necessary precondition for the birth of Christ; the Catholic Church kept the flame of *romanità* burning during the centuries of decline, until its revival under the Fascist regime. This message was brought home most forcefully in the final room, devoted to “The Immortality of the Idea of Rome and the Rebirth of Empire in Fascist Italy,” inspired by the conviction that

The Roman imperial idea was not extinguished with the fall of the Western Empire...it persevered mystically during the Middle Ages, and through it came the Renaissance and the Risorgimento in Italy....With Fascism, with the will of the *Duce*,

every ideal, every institution, every Roman deed will return to shine in the new Italy, and after the epic conflict of combatants on African soil, the Roman Empire rises up out of the ruins of a barbarian empire.<sup>28</sup>

The parallels between the Rome of Augustus and Mussolini's Italy were made explicit at every turn. Both the Emperor and the Duce had emerged from a situation of civil disorder to reform and renovate decaying political structures; both had sought to effect a radical moral transformation of their people, drawing inspiration from the immutable values of the *mos maiorum* (the sacred "way of the elders"). In the wake of the conquest of Ethiopia, Mussolini could claim to have emulated the *imperium* of his ancient precursor.

The two other sections of the Mostra Augustea departed from the chronological organization of the main floor. The lower level displayed public works, monumental architecture, roads and the military, echoing the 1911 Exhibition's emphasis on empire and the civilizing mission. The upper floor dealt with aspects of everyday life in ancient Rome, from religion to fashion, family life to music. Although these rooms lacked the explicit symbolism of the main floor, every facet of Roman life was depicted as an anticipation of the disciplined, corporative modernity heralded by Fascism. Room 27, for example, with its models of latrines and sewer systems, documented the Roman state's "instinctive need for cleanliness and bodily hygiene."<sup>29</sup> Room 61, on family life, demonstrated that "the Roman familial institution distinguished itself from that of other ancient peoples because of its healthier and more solid spirit of rectitude and abnegation...fecund virtues that prepared the Roman citizen for the trials and triumphs of public life and for his dominion over the world."<sup>30</sup>

In sum, the Mostra Augustea della Romanità presented a totalitarian, technological, militarized and rigidly hierarchical picture of the ancient world. The thematic organization of the rooms, while disposing with the monotony of the geographic layout, depicted Roman culture in its entirety as uniform and homogenous not only across space, but across time and in every sector of public and private life. As one of Giglioli's collaborators put it, the exhibition "does not seek to illustrate or document events or representations of a historical period, or to limit itself to one branch of human activity; rather, it embraces...every manifestation of a great civilization, the greatest in the ancient world and the foundation for the modern world, over the span of more than a millennium."<sup>31</sup>

Although this tone reflected a shift from the bourgeois universalism of 1911, the Mostra Augustea closely resembled its precursor in methodological and institutional terms. As before, it was composed entirely of reproductions and models. The plaster casts, proudly executed by Italian experts, gave "a useful homogeneity to the materials and allow[ed] them to be organized in a more modern fashion than would be the case with originals [and] does not present any aesthetic drawbacks, since the technology used has reached the highest level of perfection."<sup>32</sup> The pieces would be arranged "not with the rigid norms of museums, but integrated with texts, photo-montages, maps and diagrams, which together create sections that unite scientific rigor and the liveliness of a modern exposition....In this way, not only specialists, not only those who love history and archaeology, but all Italians can easily find documentation of the glorious first Empire of our people...."<sup>33</sup> To this end, many of the MAR's rooms were designed by young modernist architects, in order to avoid "monotony" and "coldness."<sup>34</sup> In the age of mass politics, the didactic function of the exhibition took on an added dimension. It was conceived as an institution of historical, moral

and political education for the masses, and it made skillful use of film and radio to encourage attendance; the regime's "after-work" organization offered package tours and discounted train fares so that Italians from every corner of the country could converge on the capital for the bimillenary celebration. Whereas the archaeological exhibition of the Liberal era had been "inadequate to the great task of documenting Roman civilization in a totalitarian manner, and limited to narrow scientific documentation," the Mostra Augustea would offer a voluminous but accessible vision of the ancient world that reflected the values and priorities of the New Italy.<sup>35</sup>

Like Lanciani before him, Giglioli aspired to transform the collection into a permanent museum. This wish was granted by the regime: the collections were to be expanded and recast as a permanent Exhibition of *Romanità*, as part of the Esposizione Universale di Roma in 1942. With the Second World War and the fall of the regime, however, this plan never came to fruition.

#### **"An Open Book": the Museo della Civiltà Romana, 1952-1955**

Fascism's demise, however, did not mean that Lanciani and Giglioli's goal of a permanent museum was laid to rest. In 1950, the project was revived under the aegis of FIAT, which envisioned a "grand Museum of Latin Civilization, in which Italy would be able to see its original contribution to world civilization fully synthesized, and in which the world could rediscover the origins of so many elements of its culture, and recognize its ties with Rome."<sup>36</sup> The Museum of Roman Civilization (as it was renamed) was inaugurated in 1952 and completed in 1955, under the direction of Antonio Maria Colini, one of Giglioli's collaborators in 1937. Although the installations were to some extent expanded and reorganized, the overall format and tone of the Museum hardly departed from the Fascist-era exhibition. A comparison of the

catalogs from 1937 and 1958 demonstrates the considerable correspondence between the two exhibits. The first set of rooms, organized chronologically, offered a synthesis of Roman history from Romulus to the rise of Christianity; the second section displayed monumental architecture and public works; and the last part of the Museum dealt with everyday life in antiquity. Over the years, individual pieces have been added or removed, and modifications made to adapt the collections to their new surroundings (for example, the room devoted to the army in the Mostra Augustea was divided into four smaller rooms in the MCR), but there have been no substantial changes that would disrupt the overall structure established in 1937. There were some attempts to efface the most explicit reminders of its earlier incarnation – the historical rooms no longer culminated in Fascist Italy, and the ubiquitous quotations from Mussolini were gone – but in its form and content, the Museum preserved the fundamental characteristics of its predecessor. The objects on display (as always, consisting solely of reproductions) were more or less identical, and even the Museum’s catalog was little more than a reprint of the catalog of the Mostra Augustea with the most glaring Fascist phrases excised. As the *American Journal of Archaeology* noted approvingly, “the parts having a temporary or propaganda character, according to the political climate, have disappeared; all the material has been arranged according to more logical, rigorous criteria...”<sup>37</sup>

For Colini, as for Lanciani and Giglioli before him, the Museum would be a “living organism,” a rigorous, “scientific” institution compared to Rome’s traditional art-historical museums. Like his predecessors, he saw its value primarily in didactic terms, believing that it would serve as

a precious means of instruction for young people, especially those studying the classics; it offers direct and extremely



interesting comparisons between contemporary life and antiquity for every category of professional, artist, and artisan. For every kind of tourist, it is an indispensable resource for visiting the city, its famous monuments and its museums.<sup>38</sup>

In the wake of Fascism's demise and the total discrediting of aggressive expansionist rhetoric, Colini had to tread carefully in expounding upon the Museum's larger significance. While the 1911 exhibition had stressed the universality of the City's imperial mission, and the *Mostra Augustea* had depicted the Roman world as a disciplined, organic martial state, he acknowledged that "...we have to recognize that we have fairly vague ideas about ancient civilization in general, and in our case, about Roman civilization."<sup>39</sup> The chief value of the objects on display was therefore their ability to evoke the details of daily life in the ancient world:

What did the ancient Romans eat? How did the wealthy and the most humble classes live? How did they travel? How were the soldiers of various specialties dressed and armed?...How did Roman women dress? How did they do their hair?<sup>40</sup>

Whereas claims of scientificity and didacticism had once been inextricably linked to the "national" mission of the exhibitions, they now served to distance the Museum from its association with its Fascist precursor; technology was recast as a guarantor of rigor and objectivity, free from ideological contamination. Furthermore, argued Colini, the devastation wrought by the war meant that many of the Museum's holdings were now the only extant copies of valuable artifacts. Wedding technical achievement with accessibility, the new Museum would therefore serve several interconnected functions: it would provide a rational, scientific presentation of Roman history in contrast to the city's

traditional museums, which were “fundamentally concerned with artistic phenomena, and overlook the other aspects of ancient life”; it would serve as an educational institution for every type of visitor; and it would act as a scientific archive of Roman antiquities for researchers, unparalleled in volume and breadth.<sup>41</sup> Though the MCR has seen its collections enlarged and its building renovated over the years, it has maintained essentially the same mission and format since 1955.

What conclusions can be drawn from this narrative, and how does it relate to the problem of nationalism, historiography and the (re)construction of the past? Clearly, all three cases demonstrate the malleability and multiple meanings of the Roman past in Italy. In 1911, the Roman Empire was cast as a precursor to liberal bourgeois internationalism and as a justification for Italian colonialism. In 1937, it was depicted as a blueprint for Fascist modernity, a fully mobilized and hierarchical mass society ruled by discipline. The current Museum presents Roman history in the manner of a secondary-school textbook.

Beyond reiterating the flexibility and subjectivity of historical representation, however, this story is also useful in elucidating the relationship between the historical disciplines and the political culture of nationalism. In the wake of constructivist theories of the nation, of “imagined communities” that “invent traditions,” many contemporary scholars have tended to posit the relationship between nationalism and the historical disciplines as one of ideological distortion or “using and abusing” the past: archaeology and museology are cast as objective sciences producing neutral results, which are in turn subject to manipulation, particularly on the level of interpretation and display.<sup>42</sup>

Some recent scholarship, however, has demonstrated the extent to which the nation not only influences, but *constitutes* the historical disciplines.<sup>43</sup> Certainly professional archaeology and museology—in

contrast to earlier antiquarianism—emerged in the nineteenth century as an instrument of the modern nation-state.<sup>44</sup> The material evidence produced by excavations and put on display for a general public provides scientific legitimation to myths of national origin, not just reflecting pre-existing discourse but producing historical “facts” that are constitutive of national identity.<sup>45</sup> Thus archaeology must be understood not just as a science subject to manipulation, but as a form of textual production; not solely the recovery of a static, objective past but a rhetorical strategy located in the present.<sup>46</sup> I would therefore like to suggest that the historical disciplines should not be seen only as practices which can serve as vehicles for nationalist discourse, but as “national sciences,” as profoundly national projects in themselves.

The three incarnations of the archaeological exhibition offer a compelling case in point. The “nationalization,” “Fascistization,” or “de-Fascistization” of Roman history cannot be attributed solely to the presence or absence of ideologically charged symbols, but more fundamentally to the physical layout of the installations themselves. As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill has argued, the taxonomy of museological artifacts – though presented as self-evident or “obvious” – both alters the significance attributed to the objects and expresses underlying social values and power relationships.<sup>47</sup> In this instance, the objects acquired their particular resonance from their respective taxonomic structures: the geographic layout of 1911 was essential to its celebration of progress and universalism; the historical and thematic approach in 1937 was essential to the juxtaposition of Augustan Rome and Mussolinian Italy; and, conversely, the absence of a fundamental reorganization in 1955 has meant that the present-day Museum serves as much as a monument to Italy’s inability to come to terms with the Fascist past as it does as a lesson in Roman history.

In the end, though, the continuities between the three are just as suggestive as their differences. Lanciani, Giglioli and Colini all made similar claims to scientificity, envisioning their projects in terms of a national mission and using technology and modern display techniques to mediate between Roman past and Italian present, in contrast to traditional art-historical museums; the exclusive use of reproductions in all three cases was the key aspect of this orientation. All three archaeologists shared the conviction that the exhibitions should serve a didactic function, particularly for future generations. The frequent distinction between the “scientific” representation of the past of 1911 and the present-day Museum on the one hand, and the rhetorical excesses of the Mostra Augustea on the other, therefore depends on a problematic distinction between practice, representation, and meaning.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on research at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), the Archivio Storico Capitolino (ASC), the Istituto Nazionale di Studi Romani (ISR), and the Museo della Civiltà Romana (MCR), which also houses the archives of the Mostra Augustea della Romanità. Special acknowledgement should go to the staff of the MCR (in particular to Dr. Clotilde D’Amato) and the City of Rome’s Superintendence of Antiquities and Fine Arts.

<sup>2</sup> Matilde Burri Rossi, *Il Museo della Civiltà Romana: itinerario ragionato per una visita al Museo* (Rome: C. Colombo, 1976), 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Let’s Go Italy*, (Cambridge: MacMillan, 2003), 512; and *TimeOut Guide to Rome*, (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 155.

<sup>4</sup> *TimeOut Guide to Rome*, 155; and *Let’s Go: Rome*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2004), 176.

<sup>5</sup> For an institutional history of the three exhibitions, produced by the personnel of the Museum, see Giuseppina Pisani Sartorio, ed., *Dalla mostra al museo: dalla Mostra archeologica di 1911 al Museo della Civiltà Romana* (Venice: Marsilio, 1983). For a detailed analysis of the Mostra Augustea della Romanità, and some discussion of the other cases, see Friedemann Scriba, *Augustus im*

*Schwartzenhemd? Die Mostra Augustea della Romanità* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Marla Stone, "A Flexible Rome: Fascism and the Cult of Romanità," in *Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789-1945*, ed. Catherine Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 215. See also Mariella Cagnetta, "Il mito di Augusto e la "rivoluzione" fascista," *Quaderni di Storia* 2, no. 3 (1976).

<sup>7</sup> Giuseppina Pisani Sartorio, "Dalla mostra al museo," in *Dalla mostra al museo*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Giuseppina Pisani Sartorio, "Il Museo della Civiltà Romana," in *Dalla mostra al museo*, 106. For a similar assessment, see Alessandro Guidi, "Nationalism without a Nation: the Italian Case," in *Nationalism and Archaeology in Europe*, ed. Margarita Díaz-Andreu and Timothy Champion (London: UCL Press, 1996), 113.

<sup>9</sup> The Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed in 1861, though Rome remained under Papal rule until 1870. For a general discussion of the *Cinquantenario* of 1911, see Gianna Piantoni, ed., *Roma 1911* (Rome: De Luca, 1980).

<sup>10</sup> Program of the Executive Committee, 6 July 1909, in ACS PCM 1910, fasc.16.

<sup>11</sup> Orlando to Tittoni, 21 July 1904, ACS MPI AABBA 1908-1912 Div. I, b.151, fasc.2808.

<sup>12</sup> Aldibrandi-MPI, 20 October 1906, ACS MPI AABBA 1908-1912 Div. I, b.151, fasc.2808.

<sup>13</sup> MPI parliamentary report, 28 January, 1907, ACS MPI AABBA 1908-1912 Div. I, b.151, fasc.2808.

<sup>14</sup> *Catalogo della Mostra Archeologica nelle Terme di Diocleziano*, (Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d'Arte Grafiche, 1911), 9.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> "Un vernissage archeologico alle Terme," *Il Giornale d'Italia*, 21 April 1911.

<sup>17</sup> Comitato Esecutivo per le Feste Commemorative del 1911 in Roma, *Guida ufficiale delle esposizioni di Roma* (Rome: G. Bertero & Co., 1911), 202.

<sup>18</sup> *Catalogo della Mostra Archeologica nelle Terme di Diocleziano*, 9-10.

<sup>19</sup> Attilio Rossi, "Le Terme Diocleziane e la Mostra archeologica," *La Tribuna*, 7 March 1911.

<sup>20</sup> Archaeology played an important part in Italian claims to colonial territories in North Africa; see Massimiliano Munzi, *L'epica del ritorno: archeologia e politica nella Tripolitania italiana* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2001); and Marta Petricoli, *Archeologia e Mare Nostrum: le missioni archeologiche nella politica mediterranea dell'Italia, 1898/1943* (Roma: V. Levi, 1990).

<sup>21</sup> Program of the Executive Committee, 6 July 1909, in ACS PCM 1910, fasc.16.

<sup>22</sup> Mrs. Arthur (Eugenie) Strong, "The Exhibition Illustrative of the Provinces of the Roman Empire, at the Baths of Diocletian, Rome," *Journal of Roman Studies* 1.1 (1911), 44.

<sup>23</sup> Rodolfo Lanciani, "La Mostra Archeologica alle Terme Diocleziane," *Roma – Rassegna Illustrata dell'Esposizione del 1911*, 27 March 1911, 11-12. Italics in original.

<sup>24</sup> *Catalogo della Mostra Archeologica nelle Terme di Diocleziano*, 11.

<sup>25</sup> In fact, the collections of the Mostra Archeologica were reopened to the public in 1926 as a new Museum of the Roman Empire, with Giglioli as director, although this was a temporary arrangement that maintained essentially the same structure as the 1911 Exhibition.

<sup>26</sup> On Fascist *romanità*, see my forthcoming doctoral dissertation, *Roman Modernities: Nation, Empire and Romanità in Fascist Italy*. See also Mariella Cagnetta, *Antichisti e impero fascista* (Bari: Laterza, 1979); Luciano Canfora, *Ideologie del classicismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979); Andrea Giardina and André Vauchez, *Il mito di Roma da Carlo Magno a Mussolini* (Bari: Laterza, 2000); Luciano Perelli, "Sul culto fascista della romanità," *Quaderni di Storia* 3, no. 5 (1977) and Romke Visser, "Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of Romanità," *Journal of Contemporary History*, no. 27 (1992).

<sup>27</sup> Pamphlet *Mostra Augustea della Romanità – Bimillenary of the Birth of the Emperor Augustus*, 1937; in MCR MAR, loose files.

<sup>28</sup> *Mostra Augustea della Romanità: catalogo*, 1 ed. (Rome: C. Colombo, 1937), 362.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 378.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 599.

<sup>31</sup> Massimo Pallottino, "La Mostra Augustea della Romanità," *Capitolium* 12, no.12 (1937), 520-521.

<sup>32</sup> *Mostra Augustea della Romanità: catalogo*, x-xi.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

<sup>34</sup> On the design of the MAR's rooms, see Marco Rinaldi, "La Mostra Augustea della Romanità (1937-1938): architettura, scenografia e propaganda in alcuni progetti inediti di allestimento," *Ricerche di Storia dell'Arte*, no. 63 (1997).

<sup>35</sup> Pallottino, "La Mostra Augustea della Romanità," 526.

<sup>36</sup> Colini to dalla Torre, 7/3/50, in ASC Rip. X, 1920-1953, b.278, fasc.4. In fact, FIAT had been involved in the construction of the museum prior to the fall of the regime.

<sup>37</sup> B.M. Felletti Maj, *American Journal of Archaeology* 65, no.3 (1961), 327.

<sup>38</sup> Undated and unsigned, 1955, MCR, loose file "Museo dell'Impero – Schede ecc."

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> For this approach, see for example Paul Graves-Brown, Siân Jones, and Clive Gamble, eds, *Cultural Identity and Archaeology: the Construction of European Communities* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Philip Kohl and Clare Fawcett, eds, *Nationalism, Politics and the Practice of Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Michael Galaty and Charles Watkinson, eds, *Archaeology under Dictatorship* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2004). In the Italian context, see especially Daniele Manacorda and Renato Tamassia, *Il piccone del regime* (Roma: Armando Curcio, 1985); and Luisa Quartermaine, "'Slouching Towards Rome': Mussolini's Imperial Vision," in *Urban Society in Roman Italy*, ed. T.J. Cornell and Kathryn Lomas (London: University College London Press, 1995).

<sup>43</sup> See for example Margarita Díaz-Andreu García and Timothy Champion, "Nationalism and Archaeology in Europe: an Introduction," in *Nationalism and Archaeology in Europe*. ed. Margarita Díaz-Andreu and Timothy Champion.

<sup>44</sup> For a useful history of modern archaeological theory, see Bruce Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>45</sup> This argument is particularly well-articulated in Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>46</sup> This argument owes much to Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley, *Re-Constructing Archaeology: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>47</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 5-6.