

STUDIES IN ICONOLOGY 26

Mussolini's Medals

Latin – Materiality – Politics

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PEETERS

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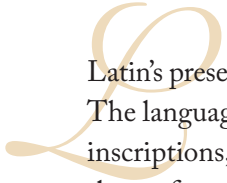
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1

Introduction





Latin's presence in visual and material culture has persisted well beyond antiquity. The language of ancient Rome decorates the facades of buildings in the form of inscriptions, adorns walls of street art in several European cities, and graces the surfaces of coins and medals. As a popular choice for tattoos, the language has also left an indelible mark etched into the bodies of individuals as diverse as Hollywood actors and prisoners of the Russian gulag.¹ Latin has been employed as a versatile means of expression within material cultures for centuries – not least within the realm of political material culture. Political material culture encompasses objects that carry political significance or convey political ideas and beliefs, whether as official state propaganda or personal statements of support or dissent. Within this context, Latin has been used both to propagate ideologies and to distort dominant ideological narratives, as well as to cement or challenge political realities. The diminishing knowledge of Latin in modern times has made it a less obvious choice for transmitting political messages, while the use of an ancient and 'dead' language may also be perceived, rightly or wrongly, as conflicting with modernity's prevailing narratives of social progress, cultural emancipation, and technological advancement. However, despite these factors, the political uses of Latin have not vanished in modern times.

What motivations have prompted the use of Latin in political material culture, and what literary, symbolic, and visual affordances does it offer for political messaging? How does the use of Latin in political material culture distinguish itself from other languages or forms of expression? How can material contexts transform old Latin phrases into political slogans? Conversely, what impact does the presence of Latin have on the significance of the surfaces it adorns?

The present essay explores the use of Latin expressions on political medals and medal-like artifacts such as medallions and plaques produced in Italy during the *ventennio fascista* (1922–1943). While the use of Latin in political material culture is by no means restricted to the *ventennio*, the Latin language carried particular ideological weight in Fascist Italy. Its use was actively promoted by the regime,

including by Benito Mussolini himself, as part of its cult of 'Romanness' (*romanità*),² and more generally, the presence of Latin marked the importance and solemnity of an occasion. Latin words and phrases were featured on various everyday items including postage stamps, postcards, banners, and medals, as well as on facades, walls, and monuments throughout Italy and its colonies. Often, these inscriptions involved quotes from earlier Latin authors or 'author-less' mottoes and *dicta* that had been in circulation for centuries. While these phrases themselves of course were not inherently Fascist, they were manipulated and framed, both textually and non-textually, to align with and embody political ideals associated with Fascism. The analysis of these framing techniques warrants a more comprehensive study than is currently available in order to understand better how Latin phrases, drawn from a diverse array of sources, were not just 'used', 'abused', or 'recycled' but de- and recontextualized as political slogans and mottoes within specific material settings to convey new ideological meanings.

With the exception of Latin epigraphy, the use of Latin in the political material culture of Fascist Italy remains largely unexplored. While Latin phrases are occasionally mentioned, transcribed, or translated in discussions of buildings, postage stamps, and medals, they are often not thoroughly studied.³ In studies on Fascism's material culture and propaganda, medals have yet to receive a thorough investigation, despite their acknowledged significance in Fascist propaganda. In the scarce studies available on Fascist medals, Latin legends receive only minimal attention, and more often than not, they are neither discussed nor transcribed. Even within the field of political iconography, the Latin legends of medals are regularly regarded simply as 'explanatory inscriptions', insofar as they provide names, dates, and events that illuminate the objects' historical context.⁴ Substantially less attention is given to the Latin inscriptions' rhetorical function as part of numismatic design and imagery. This essay presents a case study that explores both how the material and symbolic aspects of medals facilitated the alignment of Latin *dicta* with Fascist political messages, and how the Latin words in their turn added meaning and significance to these objects.

Medals, among the various objects inscribed with Latin, provide an interesting subject for studying the interplay between language, materiality, and political symbolism. Produced by a variety of societal agents for diverse occasions, they enjoyed widespread circulation, permeating various strata of society that

possessed differing levels of knowledge of Latin and its literary tradition. Medals were not intended for economic transactions but were primarily used for commemorative, honorary, or decorative purposes. Whether crafted from bronze, silver, gold, or less expensive metals designed for broader distribution, they carried a distinctive symbolic value closely associated with the acknowledgment of merit and achievement, particularly in the realms of military and sports – two ideologically important areas for the regime – and have traditionally played an important role in the context of national culture and its corresponding celebrations of the nation. Recent research has highlighted that Italian Fascist politics and propaganda characteristically blended references to and symbols of different eras of the nation's past. This allowed the propagandists to shape and promote a 'familiar' image of the regime and its leader, while anchoring it within the context of Italian national history.⁵ Medals are interesting objects in this regard. While they are an invention of the early Renaissance, they adopt the shapes and designs of ancient Roman coins.⁶ The medium of the medal thus evokes at least two relevant periods in Fascism's view of Italy's national culture: ancient Rome and the Renaissance, intertwining references to these eras with modern imagery and political symbolism. As we hope to show, the materiality of medals, especially their two-sided nature, endows them with a rhetorical potential lacking in other kinds of objects, such as posters and postage stamps. The use of Latin words and phrases was a powerful tool in unlocking the potential of medals for political messaging.

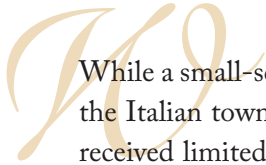
Before analysing the uses of Latin in medals and similar objects in Sections 4 and 5, the following two sections will first offer the necessary historical context by briefly presenting the creation and reception of numismatic objects in Fascist Italy (Section 2) and the specific symbolic significance ascribed to them during that period (Section 3).

- 1 On these examples, see Vincent Debiais, *Towards a Codico-Ecology of Latin*, in *Journal of Latin Cosmopolitanism and European Literatures*, 8, 2023, p. 139-147 (on Angelina Jolie's Latin tattoo) and Martin T. Dinter and Astrid Khoo, "If Skin Were Parchment...": *Tattoos in Antiquity*, in *Tattoo Histories: Transcultural Perspectives on the Narratives, Practices, and Representations of Tattooing*, ed. Sinah Theres Kloß, London, 2019, p. 85-102, p. 96-97 (on Latin tattoos in the gulag), with the further examples in D. S. Baldaev, Sergei Vasiliev, and Alexander Sidorov, *Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia*, London, 2008.
- 2 See Han Lamers & Bettina Reitz-Joosse, *Lingua Lictoria: The Latin Literature of Italian Fascism*, in *Classical Receptions Journal*, 8, 2, 2016, p. 216-252. See also the papers collected in Han Lamers, Bettina Reitz-Joosse & Valerio Sanzotta (eds.), *Studies in the Latin Literature and Epigraphy of Italian Fascism*, Leuven, 2020, with rich bibliography. For Mussolini's own use of Latin, see Han Lamers, *Mussolini's Latin*, in *Symbolae Osloenses*, 96, 1, 2022, p. 205-229.
- 3 On the Latin epigraphy in Rome of the period, see esp. Antonino Nastasi, *Le iscrizioni in latino di Roma Capitale (1870-2018)*, Rome, 2019, *passim*; Antonino Nastasi, *L'epigrafia in latino negli anni del fascismo: l'uso dei classici tra continuità e fratture*, in *Studies in the Latin Literature and Epigraphy of Italian Fascism*, eds. Han Lamers, Bettina Reitz-Joosse & Valerio Sanzotta, Leuven, 2020, p. 175-197; Antonino Nastasi & Silvia Orlandi, *L'epigrafia del Ventennio fascista a Roma tra damnatio memoriae, restauro filologico e antecedenti classici*, in *Il capitale culturale*, 27, 2023, p. 509-522; see also, most recently, Flavia Marcello, *Aspirations and Illusions of Control: Re-Contextualizing Rome's Fascist Epigraphy*, in *After the Fall: The Legacy of Fascism in Rome's Architectural and Urban History*, London, 2024, p. 140-170. The use of Latin quotes on postage stamps has also found some treatment: see, e.g., Agustín Ayuso Calvillo, *Entre difusión y propaganda: la literatura latina a través de los sellos de correos*, in *Minerva: Revista de filología clásica*, 20, 2007, p. 191-216; Anna Maria Liberati, *La storia attraverso i francobolli tra anniversari e ideologia nell'Italia degli anni Trenta del Novecento*, in *Civiltà Romana*, 1, 2014, p. 231-281; Angelo Luceri, *Quando la filatelia... 'non fa i conti' con la filologia (emissioni ed omissioni nella storia dei francobolli dedicati ai classici)*, in *Appunti Romani di Filologia*, 1, 1999, p. 127-140; Leonhard Schumacher, *Augusteische Propaganda und faschistische Rezeption*, in *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, 40, 4, 1988, p. 307-334. An initial, more general discussion of the subject is Han Lamers, *Language on Display: Latin in the Material Culture of Fascist Italy*, in *Journal of Latin Cosmopolitanism and European Literatures*, 8, 2023, with the bibliography there.
- 4 See, for example, Georg Syamken, *Medaille*, in *Handbuch der politischen Ikonographie*, eds. Uwe Fleckner, Martin Warnke & Hendrik Ziegler, Munich, 2011, p. 137-142, p. 137.
- 5 On this aspect of Fascism, with a special focus on its material culture, see Claudia Lazzaro & Roger J. Crum, *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, New York, 2005, although, typically, the articles collected there do not specifically focus on the role of Latin or language more generally in political material culture. For a discussion of how the image of Mussolini combined references to different eras of Italy's national past, see Giuliana Pieri, *The Portraits of the Duce*, in *The Cult of the Duce: Mussolini and the Italians*, eds. Christopher Duggan, Stephen Gundle & Giuliana Pieri, Manchester, 2013, p. 161-177.
- 6 Arne R. Flaten, *Renaissance Medals*, in *Renaissance Quarterly*, 71, 2, 2018, p. 645-656, p. 645.

2

Historical Setting: Designers, Producers, and Users





While a small-scale exhibition on the medals of the Fascist period took place in the Italian town of Cingoli (Macerata) in 2002, medallic items have generally received limited attention both in exhibitions and in scholarship.⁷ Despite the availability of studies examining medals by individual designers, sculptors, and producers, currently no comprehensive history exists specifically centred on the art of medal-making during the *ventennio fascista*. Single items are sometimes examined in broader discussions of Fascist propaganda, and a small number of specialized studies explore specific aspects of their iconography, such as the representation of the human body and portrayals of Benito Mussolini.⁸ Despite this lack of in-depth scholarly attention to the subject, we have an extensive record and material description of medals produced during this period, largely thanks to the efforts of Gianfranco Casolari (1936–2019), an Italian numismatic enthusiast and military aviation expert, who catalogued a significant portion of the material.⁹ Further items can be discovered in other catalogues of different kinds, including inventories of collections not specifically focused on medals. While the scholarly quality of these inventories may be inconsistent, they still significantly facilitate the study of these items, which would otherwise be dispersed among private collections and auction catalogues.¹⁰

It is currently impossible to determine exactly how many medals were produced during the *ventennio*. The most comprehensive published inventory of medals of the period, compiled by Casolari, includes over 2,200 different designs. Casolari acknowledges that his overview only represents a portion of the total medal production, and it is generally unknown how many physical exemplars were produced for each design. Years of special symbolic significance, such as 1929 (Lateran Pacts) and 1936 (Declaration of Empire), show larger numbers of entries in Casolari's list, suggesting an increased interest in medals during these years. Casolari's inventory reveals a consistent upward trend in medal designs for the first half of the 1930s, reaching its zenith in 1936. After that year, the number of entries in the list decreases annually, with the decline accelerating as

the regime's fall neared. About twenty percent of the entries in Casolari's inventory incorporate Latin words and phrases that reference Fascism, excluding common expressions such as *dux*, *S.P.Q.R.*, and Latinized names.¹¹ An extensive survey of other relevant catalogues and repositories, spanning both traditional print and digital resources, has yielded a compilation of nearly six hundred distinct designs featuring Fascist symbols accompanied by Latin phrases. About 160 of these designs are not recorded in Casolari's inventory. Some of them were reused independently several times. Designs featuring Latin phrases seem to have been particularly popular in 1936, with a doubling of the number of identified medal designs compared to the year before.

The role and function of medals in political material culture varied depending on context. They are defined by the conditions of the medals' production, consumption, and reception. Medal production involved multiple stakeholders, each with their own concerns and intentions, including commissioners, designers, and minters. Commissioners varied widely including both official institutions such as the military, local governments, and various organizations, and diverse non-governmental groups and individuals. They initiated the production of medallic objects for various reasons, and the motivations for including political messages could vary between commissioners. Additionally, designers, often sculptors, infused the process with their artistic preferences and stylistic orientations, as well as the traditions that guided their work. Finally, the minters or producers, with their technical capabilities and constraints, guided the material realization of the artifacts.¹² There may sometimes have been some overlap in these roles, and when it comes to Latin words and phrases, it is often impossible to say who authored or selected them, unless there are records documenting the production process or authors signed their names, as happened in some exceptional cases.¹³

Medals from this period usually lack clear attribution to a specific artist or minter. Nonetheless, some important names emerge. One artist who showed a special predilection for Latin texts in his designs was the widely celebrated sculptor Aurelio Mistruzzi (1880–1960), the official engraver of the Vatican (from 25 June 1932). He worked on medal design before, during, and after the *ventennio*. Under Mussolini's regime, he created political medals for various occasions, often featuring Latin legends. For example, he designed medals with Latin legends commemorating the Battaglia del Grano (the Battle for Grain, launched in 1925), the Lateran Pacts between the Italian Kingdom and the Holy See (1929),

and the completion of renovation works on the ancient Roman Curia (1940).¹⁴ We will return to some of his designs throughout our essay.

Another important designer of coins with Latin mottoes was Federigo Papi (1807-1982).¹⁵ Like Mistruzzi, Papi designed medals for the Roman Catholic Church, albeit in a smaller amount. His most significant contributions during the *ventennio* include a series of coins designed for the Fascist youth organization, the Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB; National Youth Organization 'Balilla'), which were produced at the Milan-based workshop Lorioli & Castelli. These medals, some of which featured Latin legends, were initially crafted in 1928 and continued to be reproduced at least until 1935.¹⁶ Consequently, they enjoyed wide distribution and reached a broader audience compared to many other, more exclusive pieces. Other designers of medals featuring Latin include Giuseppe Romagnoli (1872-1966), Giannino Castiglioni (1884-1971), Orlando Orlandini (1905-1986), Italo Ciampolini (1903-1956), and Emilio Monti (1901-1981). Both Castiglioni and Monti were associated with the renowned workshop of Stefano Johnson, and the former's father, Giacomo, served as its director.¹⁷ In addition to the Regia Zecca (Royal Mint) in Rome, Milan played an important role in the production of medals as many of the central workshops were located there, including those of Stefano Johnson and Lorioli & Castelli.

While we focus here on politically themed medals, artists creating these artifacts did not solely produce objects with political messages. Their overall oeuvres were often characterized by a wider thematic scope and variety. Additionally, the political orientations of individual artists may have varied, both among them and over time, making them difficult to classify conveniently. This complexity is exemplified by Aurelio Mistruzzi, who, after the demise of Fascism, revisited his earlier work in an attempt to free both the medallic medium and Latin from the constraints of Fascism. In the epilogue to this essay, we will show how, after 1943, he used his art as a vehicle for anti-Fascist messaging. However, our analysis does not rely on the medals under study as a means of understanding their makers' personal opinions on the regime or their motivations for accepting commissions condoning or promoting its ideology. Rather, we want to investigate how the designs of these medals, irrespective of the artists' individual convictions, enabled the alignment of Latin quotes and historical terms unrelated to Fascism with the regime's political rhetoric, and how the choice of Latin contributed to the political messages they conveyed.

Like their production quantities, the distribution of medals also varied greatly. Medals produced for governmental or semi-governmental organizations including the ONB, the Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia (ONMI; National Organization for Maternity and Childhood), and the Opera Nazionale del Dopolavoro (OND; National Organization for Recreation), as well as military distinctions, were often manufactured in substantial quantities. In contrast, certain medals were rare or even unique, especially when they were bestowed upon specific individuals.¹⁸ Even when medals were produced in limited quantities, however, their reach could extend through mass media channels such as magazines, journals, and newsreels. For example, the obverse of Aurelio Mistruzzi's medal marking the renovation of the Roman Curia, featuring the Latin legend *Ab imperio renovato anno III*, was included on post-cards celebrating the event.¹⁹ Sometimes such objects even appeared in international media, such as a medallion with Mussolini's portrait, produced around 1925 by the Rome-based Australian sculptor Dora Ohlfsen (1869–1948). While metal-cast versions of the medallion have yet to resurface, pictures of the artefact made their way to the Australian press. Interestingly, these photographs typically feature the plaster cast of Ohlfsen's medallion with Mussolini's signature and the Latin motto *Per aspera ad astra* ("Through adversity to the stars"), which the dictator himself added to the cast, according to reports (Fig. 1).²⁰ As a result of their inclusion in popular publications such as magazines and newspapers, even rare medals could reach a broader audience.

Different people encountered and interacted with medals in various ways: numismatists, collectors, and connoisseurs, visitors to exhibitions and shows, and the actual recipients of the medals. Among the first group, an organized community of specialists, collectors, and connoisseurs of numismatic items appears to have existed in Fascist Italy. Without doubt, the most prominent enthusiast was King Victor Emmanuel III, an avid numismatist who earned the nickname *re numismatico*. He elevated the status of numismatics in Italy through his royal endorsement and, more importantly, authored the *Corpus Nummorum Italicorum* (Corpus of Italian Coins). This monumental work on Italian coinage, spanning no less than twenty volumes, was published between 1910 and 1943.²¹ The Italian king was furthermore a founding member and honorary president of the Italian Numismatic Society, based in Milan and established in 1892. Numismatic enthusiasts also convened at the Royal Institute of Numismatics, founded in

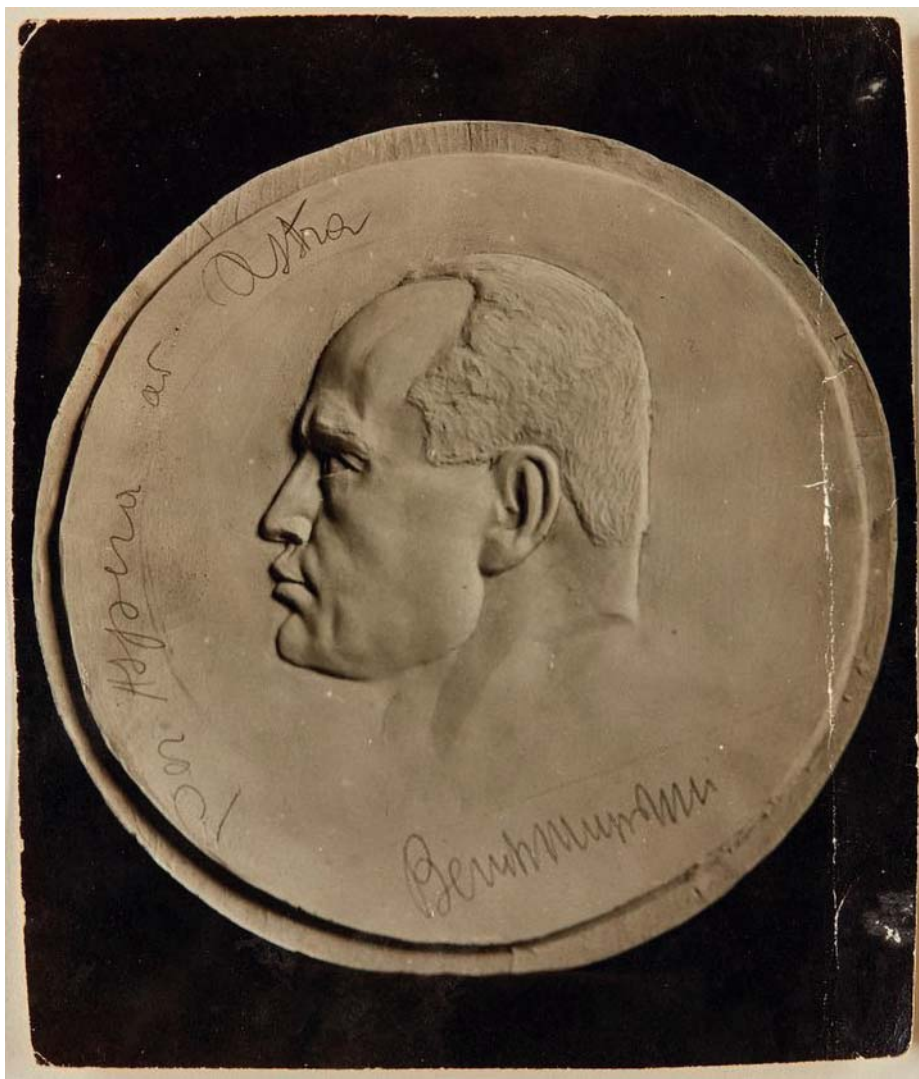


Fig. 1. Dora Ohlfsen (1869-1948). Medallion featuring a portrait of Benito Mussolini.

Rome, ca. 1925. Gelatin silver photograph. 120 × 103 mm.

National Art Archive, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Inv. No. ARC366.1.10.

Courtesy of the National Art Archive, Art Gallery of New South Wales.



Fig. 2. Aurelio Mistruzzi (1880–1960). Bronze medal (50.5 mm). Rome, 1925.

Obverse (left) and reverse (right).

Artemide Aste (Dogana, San Marino). Auction 56E, lot 1051. Courtesy of Artemide Aste.

Rome in 1912 and restructured as a government entity in 1936. These organizations maintained their own publications, addressing numismatic subjects spanning from antiquity to their own time.²²

Medals reached somewhat broader audiences through numismatic exhibitions, although these shows do not seem to have been particularly frequent or aimed at the masses, unlike some other expositions during the same period, such as the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* (Rome, 1932–1934) and the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* (Rome, 1937–1938). In the spring of 1930, the *Mostra della Medaglia e della Placchetta Italiana* (Exhibition of the Italian Medal and Plaque) was held at Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome (26 April–1 June). Judging from contemporary media reports, the exhibition primarily aimed to reach out to artists in an attempt to boost the creation of artistic medals.²³ A short video in the Archivio Storico dell'Istituto Luce shows a selection of medals and plaques, featuring portraits of Pope Innocent XI (1676–1689), Queen Margherita of Savoy, King Victor Emmanuel, and Mussolini.²⁴ Mussolini is depicted wearing the collar of the Supreme Order of the Most Holy Annunciation, one of Italy's highest orders of chivalry founded around 1362 in Savoy. His portrait is encircled by the words *Benitus Mussolinus Dux MCMXXV* ("Duce Benito Mussolini 1925").²⁵ Similar shows were occasionally organized elsewhere, for example in Milan, where the Lombard section of the Centro Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento (National Centre for Renaissance Studies) organized a small-scale exhibition on Renaissance medals at

Castello Sforzesco in 1941 (19 April–15 May).²⁶ In addition to such more specialized exhibitions, medals were sometimes also present at broader art shows, such as the Mostra Sindacale di Belle Arti (Trade Union Exhibition of Fine Arts), which included medals with portraits of Mussolini by artists such as Mistruzzi and Papi.²⁷

The general population encountered medals on various occasions in their everyday lives. Almost every event deemed worthy of commemoration was accompanied by a medal or a similar token.²⁸ Medals were regarded as “the most widespread and easily accessible form of art” and an effective medium for disseminating political messages.²⁹ The Ministry of Finance, for example, commissioned medals featuring, on their obverse, the same image as the plaque displayed at Castel Sant’Angelo. These medals, which were produced in different dimensions and metals by the Royal Mint in Rome, were apparently presented to citizens who contributed to the recovery of Italy’s economy after the First World War by subscribing to the National Loan.³⁰ Their reverse displays the Latin legend *Italiam vehit fortunamque suam* (“He carries Italy and his own fortune,” Fig. 2). The words were complemented by an allegorical image of a muscular male figure steering a ship’s rudder adorned with fasces, suggesting the ship of state being guided through any storm by a strong-willed leader.³¹ The widespread dissemination of these medals is evidenced by their regular appearance at auction sites and numismatic forums today.³² Other organizations similarly commissioned their own medals for distribution among their members. The Fascist Youth Organization, for instance, used medals with the ‘Vergilian’ phrase *Sorti devota futurae* to distinguish young prize winners during its events,³³ while the Unione Fascista Famiglie Numerose (Fascist Union of Large Families), conferred medals upon exceptionally prolific mothers.³⁴ Schools, too, participated in the practice of awarding medals to their pupils during ceremonies that were recorded in news reels and magazine articles.³⁵ The ceremonial usage of medals ensured their widespread distribution in the daily lives of Italians and established them as an integral component of the regime’s representational strategies. In addition to being awarded, some medals were also commercialized and available for purchase by anyone interested.³⁶

Medals were not solely given to people for their individual accomplishments; they served other functions as well. Attendees at celebrations, openings, and exhibitions received medals and similar items as souvenirs. These varied from small tokens to larger medallions and plaques. Participants in the ceremonies

marking the bicentennial of the excavations at Herculaneum in 1938, for example, were presented with medals, while plaques seem to have been given out to participants at the Congress of the National Dante Alighieri Society in 1932.³⁷ Medals also occasionally served as diplomatic gifts. In 1923, the Philological Society of Friuli presented medals, designed by Mistruzzi, to both the king and Mussolini as a token of gratitude for the reorganization of the Friuli province.³⁸ The contexts in which medals were granted or displayed are usually not well documented, leaving us often poorly informed about specific occasions where medals were used. Later in the essay, however, we will discuss a relatively well-documented example of their diplomatic use on an international scale.

Some medals were, by contrast, not awarded to individuals but were instead used for more impersonal purposes that bordered on the ritualistic or superstitious, serving as talismans and dedicatory objects. They were, for example, enclosed in *prime pietre* (ceremonial first stones) of important building projects such as the Foro Italico in Rome and Mussolinia di Sicilia (present-day Santo Pietro), one of the new towns founded in Mussolini's honour.³⁹ By including medals in time capsules such as *prime pietre*, future generations could be informed about the achievements of the regime and its leader. Medallic items could also be positioned in significant locations for other purposes. A bronze exemplar of Ohlfsen's medal, featuring Mussolini's portrait, was for instance located at the entrance of the bauxite mines in Predil, apparently serving some kind of apotropaic purpose.⁴⁰

These examples show that the production, use, and interpretation of individual medals could vary from case to case. Nonetheless, they collectively shared a politico-symbolical significance and, as material objects, possessed a special rhetorical potential for the regime and its sympathizers. The following section will explore this subject in greater detail, followed by an analysis of the usage of the Latin language in Sections 4 and 5. For the medals' symbolic significance, we will draw from contemporary discussions of numismatics. The rhetorical potential of medals' materiality will then be illustrated with an example of how their two-sidedness could be used to associate Fascist Italy with a golden age it claimed to renew.

- 7 See Paolo Gentilozzi & Sergio Piermattei, *Le medaglie del Ventennio. Catalogo alla mostra V° Convegno Filatelico Numismatico, Cingoli, 16 giugno 2002*, Cingoli, 2002.
- 8 Iconographical studies on the subject include, for example, Fabrizio Finetti, *La rappresentazione del corpo nell'iconografia numismatica mediterranea occidentale. Il caso delle monete del Regno d'Italia nel XX secolo (1900-1943)*, PhD Thesis, Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, 2014, on the representation of the human body in Fascist numismatics, and Terzo Maffei, Alessandro Raspagni & Fausto Sparacino, *Ieri ho visto il Duce. Trilogia dell'iconografia mussoliniana. 2: Autografi, medaglie, distintivi*, Parma, 1999, p. 69-74 (medals) and p. 197-205 (other metal tokens), focussing on Mussolini's representation on medals. Some research has also been conducted on the representation of sport in Fascist medals: Francesco Gallo, *L'immagine sportiva nella medaglistica fascista*, MA Thesis, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Venice, 2017. More generally, medals are sometimes mentioned in the scholarship on visual and material culture of the period; see, e.g., Valentina Follo, *The Power of Images in the Age of Mussolini*, PhD Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 2013, *passim*. For discussions on medals by individual artists, please see the relevant notes below.
- 9 Gianfranco Casolari, *25 anni di storia: medaglie e decorazioni mussoliniane, 1922-1945*, Rimini, 1996; Gianfranco Casolari, *Il fulgore dell'oro nelle medaglie: da Umberto I, a Vittorio Emanuele III e Benito Mussolini*, San Lazzaro di Savena, 2004; Gianfranco Casolari, *Le medaglie sportive: da Umberto I a Vittorio Emanuele III e Benito Mussolini*, Bologna, 2008; *150 anni di medaglie Johnson, 1836-1986*, Milan, 1986. References to specific items recorded in Casolari refer to Casolari, *25 anni di storia*, *o.c.*, and adhere to the established conventions referring to this work, indicating the Fascist year in Roman numerals along with the respective item number in his catalogue (for example, Casolari VII.ro).
- 10 In addition to Casolari's catalogues, we have consulted Asta del Titano, *Importantissima collezione di medaglie dei Savoia e di Benito Mussolini in oro*, Dogana, 2008; Alessandro Brambilla, *Le medaglie italiane negli ultimi 200 anni. Parte seconda: 1900-1996*, Milan, 1997, esp. p. 618-812; Gentilozzi & Piermattei, *o.c.*; Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, *o.c.*, vol. 2, p. 76-195, p. 206-255; Arrigo Petacco, *Mussolini ritrovato: storia di una collezione proibita*, Bologna, 2009. Besides printed catalogues, other valuable resources we have consulted include the online repository *Numismatica Italiana*. While this is a semi-professional repository, it may not always adhere to scholarly standards. Additionally, we have consulted various auction platforms such as Arte Proibita, eBay, NumisBid, and OneBid. In cases where relevant and feasible, we have taken steps to verify the authenticity of items by contacting experts. Misunderstandings and misquotations of the Latin legends are fairly common.
- 11 The proportion of medals featuring Latin, measured as a proportion of the total number of items, was determined based on occurrences documented in Casolari, *25 anni di storia*, *o.c.* Items were counted separately if they showed variations in design on either side of the medal or bore a different date. The consistency between the percentage of medals with Latin inscriptions found in other numismatic sources and online with Casolari's figures suggests that his catalogue offers a reasonably representative overview of overall production.
- 12 An exemplary case study of how the different agents in the process could work together during the period under study is Antonella Amico & Gabriele

- Matteo Caporale, *Due medaglie del Senato del Regno: la Curia romana al Foro e la nuova sede delle Commissioni* (1939), in *MemoriaWeb. Trimestrale dell'Archivio storico del Senato della Repubblica*, 31 (Nuova serie), 2020, p. 1-20.
- 13 Perhaps the most spectacular example is the lavishly executed medal celebrating the Lateran Pact with a Latin text composed by the Latinist and Orientalist Giovanni Galbiati (1881-1966), who also served as the prefect of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan from 1924 until 1951: Casolari VII.10; *150 anni di medaglie Johnson, o.c.*, p. 187; Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, *o.c.*, vol. 2, p. 142-143 (Plate 34, No. 409).
- 14 On the medal for the Battle for Grain (Casolari IV.35), with the Latin legend *Fertilitas et abundantia* ("Fertility and abundance"), see Imbellone, *o.c.*, p. 49 (Fig. 54). See also Casolari III.14 for another medal celebrating the Battle, featuring the Latin legend *Patriam sustinet parvosque nepotes* ("He supports the fatherland and its young offspring," referring to Mussolini). On his medal celebrating the Lateran Pacts, see Imbellone, *o.c.*, p. 49-50. On his medal concerning the Curia (Casolari XVII.4), see Amico & Caporale, *o.c.*
- 15 On Papi, see Valeria Miletì Nardo, *Federigo Papi negli anni Trenta lontano dai cantieri di regime*, in *Annali di studi umanistici*, 7, 2019, p. 383-423.
- 16 The latest mention of the series in Casolari, *25 anni di storia, o.c.*, is for 1932 (X.41-42). However, there is evidence of exemplars with dating as late as XIII (1935), see *Numismatica Italiana, Opera Nazionale Balilla A. XIII* (Cod. W-ME6rO/138).
- 17 For Mistruzzi, see Giulio Montenero, *Aurelio Mistruzzi, 1880-1960*, Friuli, 1974 and Imbellone *o.c.* (esp. p. 37-101 for his civil medals during the *ventennio*). For Orlandini, see Luigi Servolini, *Dizionario illustrato degli incisori italiani, moderni e contemporanei*, vol. 4, Milan, 1970, s.v. and Gabriella Angeli Bufalini, *Le medaglie di Orlando Paladino Orlandini nelle collezioni del Museo*, Rome, 1995. For Castiglioni, see Giovanna Rosso del Brenna, *Castiglioni, Giannino*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 22, Rome, 1979, p. 152-154 and, more recently, Eugenio Guglielmi, *L'arte della medaglia: raffinata interpretazione del 'memento'*, in *L'arte del fare: Gianni Castiglioni scultore*, ed. Eugenio Guglielmi, Milan, 2015, p. 245-281. For Ciampolini, see Agostino Mario Comanducci, *Dizionario illustrato dei pittori, disegnatori e incisori italiani moderni e contemporanei*, Milan, 1962, s.v. For Monti, see Mariangela Johnson, *In ricordo di Emilio Monti, scultore e medaglista*, in *Medaglia*, 10, 17, 1982, p. 104-106; Lorioli & Conti, *o.c.*, s.v.
- 18 For an example of a unicum awarded to an individual, see Casolari XVI.103.
- 19 Amico & Caporale, *o.c.*, p. 9, 17; Casolari XVII.4; Gentilozzi & Piermattei, *o.c.*, p. 35, No. 41.
- 20 For the news reports, see e.g. *Clever Dora Ohlfsen (The Social Round)*, in *Register*, 30 April 1925, p. 7; Isabel Ramsay, *Australians Invade Paris*, in *Sunday Times*, 10 May 1925, p. 13; Freda Sternberg, *Australian Sculptor: Miss Ohlfsen's Studio in Rome*, in *The Herald*, 7 January 1926, p. 15; *Statue to Fallen: Woman Sculptor Cheered*, in *News*, 5 August 1926, p. 13. The original photograph of the plaster cast is now preserved in the Museum of New South Wales (for details, see Fig. 1). Its reverse bears the following handwritten text: "Photograph of my medallion of Benito Mussolini bearing his signature and inscription in pencil. Original plaster cast. Dora Ohlfsen. Rome 1925."
- 21 Lucia Travaini, *Storia di una passione: Vittorio Emanuele III e le monete*, Rome, 2005. On the Italian and European reception of this work, see Andrea

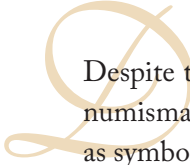
- Saccocci, *La 'fortuna' del Corpus Nummorum Italicorum nella letteratura numismatica italiana ed europea*, in *Giornata di studio: 100 anni del Corpus Nummorum Italicorum* (Milano, 15 maggio 2009), eds. Adriano Savio & Alessandro Cavagna, Milan, 2010, p. 91-107.
- 22 The Italian Numismatic Society published the annual (and ongoing) *Rivista italiana di numismatica e scienze affini*, which covered numismatics of all historical periods. Meanwhile, the Royal Institute's series *Atti e Memorie* placed a stronger emphasis on ancient Greek and Roman coinage. During the period between 1930 and 1940, there was a noticeable decrease in publications issued by the Society, coinciding with the suspension of its journal. On the journal's history see Giovanni Gorini, *Cento anni della Rivista italiana di numismatica*, in *Rivista italiana di numismatica e scienze affini*, 90, 1988, p. xix-xxix.
- 23 See *Mostra della Medaglia e Placchetta Italiana a Castel Sant'Angelo*, in *Le vie d'Italia*, 36, 1930, p. 196. To the best of our current knowledge, the exhibition did not issue a catalogue.
- 24 Rome, Archivio Storico dell'Istituto Luce, Giornale Luce A / A056902 (May 1930).
- 25 The plaque is rare. Another bronze plaque with the same portrait attributed to Mistruzzi (although rectangular, not round) measuring 30 × 22 cm, was previously available for purchase from Carlo Morandi in Domžale, Slovenia (object no. 4586). Another depiction of Mussolini by Mistruzzi is found in a bronze medallion, approximately 30 cm in diameter and inscribed with the motto *DVX*, which was offered for sale by RB Fine Arts in Tavares, FL. The exhibition also showed other works by Mistruzzi: Imbellone, *o.c.*, p. 54.
- 26 See the review Giorgio Nicodemi, *La Mostra della Medaglia del Rinascimento al Castello Sforzesco di Milano*, in *Rivista italiana di numismatica e scienze affini*, 43, 1941, p. 74-76.
- 27 See the discussion of the medals displayed there in R.S. (unid.), *La medaglia alla mostra sindacale romana di belle arti*, in *Numismatica e scienze affini*, 3, 3, 1937, p. 53-56. The exhibition of 1930 also included a medal by Mistruzzi showing a portrait of Mussolini on the obverse and, on the reverse, a personification of Rome with the Latin legend *Patria sustinet parvosque nepotes*. See Imbellone, *o.c.*, p. 53.
- 28 Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, *o.c.*, vol. 2, p. 73.
- 29 *La rinascita dell'arte della medaglia*, in *Capitolium*, 6, 1927, p. 310-312, p. 310 (for the full quote, see below n. 43).
- 30 aes. (unid.), *Medaglisti italiani moderni: Aurelio Mistruzzi*, in *Numismatica e scienze affini*, 1, 1, 1935, p. 8-13, p. 11.
- 31 The phrasing seems Mistruzzi's and is reminiscent of Roman epic. While *Italiam* as the first word of a hexameter evokes Vergil, the phrase *fortunamque suam* occurs twice at the beginning of a verse in Lucan. In Lucan 5.677, it appears in a passage describing Caesar's turbulent voyage by ship from Italy to Illyria, during which he survived a severe storm. Curiously, Luigi Previale cited the phrase from Mistruzzi's medal in an article on the unrelated subject of boxing in classical literature, suggesting it was from Vergil: Luigi Previale, *Il pugilato nelle letterature classiche*, in *Il mondo classico*, 5, 1-2, 1935, p. 90-110, p. 103.
- 32 Imbellone, *o.c.*, p. 45, with references. The medal is recorded, with various dimensions and materials, in Casolari III.1. A colour image is available in Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, *o.c.*, vol. 2, p. 102-103 (Plate 14, No. 170) and Asta del Titano, *o.c.*, p. 20 (No. 38), a golden exemplar. Museum MAGI '900 has an exemplar of the 80 mm bronze version: Petacco, *o.c.*, p. 72. On this collection, see Susanna Arangio, *Collecting Mussolini: The Case of the Susmel-Bargellini Collection*, in *Ex Novo*, 5, 2020,

- p. 7-18. Interestingly, the medal was included in an exhibition of modern Italian art in the Public Art Galleries in Brighton, fifty miles south of London, organized by Henry D. Roberts under the patronage of the Italian king in 1926. On this show, see Rosalind McKeever, *Exhibiting and Collecting the F-Word in Britain*, in *Curating Fascism: Exhibitions and Memory from the Fall of Mussolini to Today*, eds. Sharon Hecker & Raffaele Bedarida, London, 2023, p. 91-101, p. 92-93. See also Imbellone, *o.c.*, p. 47.
- 33 The medal was designed by Federigo Papi and produced by Lorioli & Castelli in Milan; it is recorded in Casolari VI.31; VII.40; Asta del Titano, *o.c.*, p. 34 (No. 74). Compare Vergil's *pesti devota futurae* (*Aen.* 1.712).
- 34 Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, *Mussolini, Mothers, and Maiolica*, in *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, eds. Claudia Lazzaro & Roger J. Crum, New York, 2005, p. 145-155, p. 147-148. For such an award ceremony, see, e.g., the newsreel preserved in Rome, Archivio Storico dell'Istituto Luce, Giornale Luce B / B1684 (dated 8 March 1940).
- 35 For example, a newsreel preserved in the Archivio Storico dell'Istituto Luce in Rome (Giornale Luce B / Bo610) shows pupils at the Roman elementary school Grazioli Lante della Rovere being awarded medals in 1935. The design of the medal appears to feature Mussolini's profile wearing a helmet.
- 36 Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, *o.c.*, vol. 2, p. 167.
- 37 For the Herculaneum medal (Casolari XVI.87), see Brian Brennan, *Amedeo Maiuri: Herculaneum, Archaeology and Fascist Propaganda*, in *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology*, 30, 1, 2020, p. 1-13, p. 10. For the plaque associated with the Congress of the National Dante Alighieri Society, see Casolari X.99.
- 38 The medal was originally created in common bronze and in a smaller format for members of the Friulian Philological Society in 1922; it was recast into three larger exemplars using more precious ancient bronze a year later. On this medal, see Alessandra Imbellone, *o.c.*, p. 42; Armando Mucchino (ed.), *Il lascito Aurelio Mistruzzi della Provincia di Udine*, Udine, 1992, p. 21-22, p. 33, p. 34; Concettina Alfieri, Giuseppe Bergamini & Dania Nobile (eds.), *Aurelio Mistruzzi: studii e medaglii tal lassit de Provincie di Udin / bozzetti e medaglie nel lascito della Provincia di Udine*, Udine, 2013, p. 88. The technical and historical details of the exemplar remaining with the Society (Palazzo Mantica, via Manin 18, Udine) can be found in the inventory of the Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, ID 896, compiled by E. Bertaglia.
- 39 On this usage of coins and medals, with special attention to the obelisk at the Foro Italico, see Han Lamers & Bettina Reitz-Joosse, *The Codex Fori Mussolini*, London, 2016, p. 66-75. The commemorative medal for the founding of Mussolinia di Sicilia, dating to 1924, can be found in Casolari II.16. For a contemporary account of the event, describing the medal, see *Il Presidente del Consiglio a Mussolinia ed a Ragusa*, in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 13 May 1924, p. 7.
- 40 According to the inventory of the Museum of New South Wales, another copy of the medallion was presented to Mussolini by the workers of the mines.

3

The Political Symbolism of Medals and Their Materiality





Despite the different practical functions of medals and coins used as currency, numismatists have often discussed them together. Both coins and medals serve as symbols conveying national values, and in many respects, their roles are considered similar, if not identical.⁴¹ When it comes to their symbolic uses and significance in Fascist Italy, three key features stand out. First, they served to commemorate significant events in Italy's history and represent the country's cultural and national identity. Coins were regarded as "monuments and historical records of the glorious epoch we live in."⁴² In an article on the art of the medal, published in *Capitolium*, the anonymous author stated that:

the medal is especially intended to commemorate and celebrate, in the most widespread and easily accessible form of art, events of great public interest through a synthetic representation of relevant achievements and symbols, depicting the Men who are at the forefront of diverse national activities.⁴³

More specifically, both coins and medals were intended to reach out to future generations and immortalise Mussolini's fame as well as the accomplishments of Fascism. As early as 1923, Margherita Sarfatti (1880-1961), one of the foremost advocates of Fascist *romanità*, wrote about the importance of minting coins specifically devoted to the Fascist Revolution. In an open letter to Mussolini, first published in *Il Giornale d'Italia* and then reprinted in *Il popolo d'Italia*, Sarfatti wrote:

In twenty centuries, an unsuspecting peasant, ploughing the fields, will find during this age-old act a small worn disc among the brown earth; he will then clean it and discover the august name of the King and the symbol of the fasces, which is rejuvenated through the work and honour of Benito Mussolini, impressed in a seal of beauty and of supreme nobility!⁴⁴

Similar to how ancient coins served as reminders of Italy's ancient Roman heritage, Fascist coins and medals were intended to commemorate the achievements of the Fascist regime for future generations. By the year that Sarfatti published her open letter to Mussolini, the symbol of the fasces was featured on Italian currency, well before it became an official state symbol in 1926.⁴⁵ In subsequent years, coins were increasingly employed as a medium for propagating Fascist ideals. When Mussolini declared the establishment of the Italian Empire in 1936, for instance, the event was marked with a series of eleven coins. These coins, replete with imagery associated with Roman imperialism, were designed by Giuseppe Romagnoli, who was then serving as the director of the Royal School of the Art of the Medal.⁴⁶

Ideas like Sarfatti's were voiced years later by the magistrate and politician Enrico Mazzocchio (1889-1939), this time specifically about medals. Mazzocchio himself had a numismatic collection, which included items from Fascist Italy, collected in a special section entitled "Mussolini and his time."⁴⁷ When the Royal Institute of Numismatics opened its doors as a public institution in 1936, Mazzocchio delivered the opening address. In this context, he highlighted the role of the medal in the national culture of unified Italy. According to him, medals were particularly linked to the Risorgimento as they commemorated the accomplishments of the key figures in Italy's fight for independence, while also "reflect[ing] the anxieties, hopes, and endeavours that accompanied the people's movements and immortaliz[ing] the names of the martyrs." Mazzocchio further elucidated their significance by drawing a parallel with Fascist Italy as

the medals from the Fascist Era, with the countless depictions of the face and words of the Duce, and all the various manifestations of the entities and institutions He created, will remind future generations of how intense the exaltation of the spirits was, how extraordinary the zeal for action was, and how great the results were across every sphere of Italian life brought about by the Fascist Revolution.⁴⁸

Numerous commemorative medals of the kind Mazzocchio had in mind were made during this period. For example, the above-mentioned Giannino Castiglioni created a series of ten medals, produced at the workshop of Stefano Johnson in Milan and used to mark the tenth anniversary of the Fascist Revolution

in 1932. Each piece represented a year of Mussolini's dictatorship and emphasized a particular political accomplishment achieved during that period. Their obverses each displayed a portrait of Mussolini alongside the Fascist year, while their reverses featured allegorical representations of a key achievement of that year, accompanied by a legend, four of them in Latin.⁴⁹ For instance, the medal for the first year celebrates the March on Rome as the first triumph of Fascism. On its reverse, the top field displays a flying Victoria, while the bottom field exhibits a cluster of legionary eagles and *fasci littori* against a backdrop of a radiant sun. Prominently placed between the top and bottom fields, spanning the medal's full diameter, is the Latin legend *Incipit vita nova* ("Here a new life begins"), a phrase curiously adopted from Dante's *Vita nova* (I.I).⁵⁰ Typical for medals of the era, this artefact harnesses the symbols of ancient Rome, including its language, to announce the new order of Mussolini's Fascism that sought to renew and surpass the Roman Empire. Alongside the nine other medals in the series, this piece exemplifies the type of commemorative medals that Mazzocco probably envisioned.

Medals and coins were not only regarded as a means of commemorating Fascism and shaping the ways in which the regime would be remembered in the remote future. They were, secondly, also commonly understood as direct expressions of the nation's artistic, technical, and moral state, offering insights into national culture through the quality of their material, their iconography and style, and their technical execution. According to the numismatist and coin trader Ernesto Santamaria (1904-1992), who also served as the director of the journal *Numismatica e scienze affini*, coins revealed "the physiognomy and, I would even say, the spiritual legacy of the Nation. In vile times, vile coins; in times of abundance, abundant coins."⁵¹ As such, coins were viewed as significant instruments in showcasing the artistic and moral standing of Fascist Italy abroad. Therefore, the coins and medals of Fascist Italy had to be of the highest possible calibre.

As artefacts, coins and medals were viewed as closely intertwined with Italy's artistic history, spanning from antiquity through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Baroque, to modern Italy. Although the significance of the city of Rome was stressed in this respect,⁵² the continuing relevance of coins and medals in Italian culture more generally was also highlighted. In her letter to Mussolini, Sarfatti emphasized this point:

From the times of *Magna Graecia* to the Renaissance, and especially during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of the Venetian Republic, the most beautiful coins in the world flourished in our land, Italy, always young and great.⁵³

The production and cultivation of medals and coins were thus not necessarily perceived as being exclusively linked to Rome and an expression of Roman heritage, but also as a quintessentially Italian endeavour that encompassed the history of the entire peninsula. Consequently, these objects were often regarded as much an expression of *italianità* (Italian heritage) as they were of *romanità* (Roman heritage). This viewpoint aligns with how other arts and crafts, including calligraphy, book illumination, and tapestry making, were understood in this period; not merely did their production undergo institutional reorganization along national lines, but their symbolic value was also 'nationalized'.⁵⁴ Thus, while ancient Roman coins were a major source of inspiration for Fascist designs, they were by no means the only numismatic tradition that was tapped for political purposes.⁵⁵ The aesthetics of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance also played their part in the designs, with the medium of the medal itself being primarily an invention of the early Renaissance period. This aspect is also reflected in the Latin legends used for some of the medals, such as the quotation from Dante on the aforementioned medal designed by Castiglioni to commemorate the March of Rome.

Although coins and medals were understood to possess similar symbolic value, medals were occasionally characterized as "more universal" than coins due to their lacking an economic use in everyday life.⁵⁶ Furthermore, there seems to have been a striking difference in their perceived artistic quality, with medals typically being held in higher regard, whereas Italy's coins were deemed to have fallen short of the expectations held by certain experts and connoisseurs. The above-cited Ernesto Santamaria bemoaned their artistic and material quality, hoping that Mussolini's Italy would produce coins reflecting the grandeur of the Roman Empire it sought to revive. An anonymous author, writing as late as in 1936, similarly voiced disappointment that Italian coins were not being used effectively to celebrate the nation's recent achievements, including the Fascist revolution, and specifically criticized their outdated iconography.⁵⁷ In response to Romagnoli's series minted to celebrate the foundation of the empire, a critical commentator wrote that the series, due to its abstract symbolism and lack of historical specificity, did not match the "intellectual, artistic, and cultural

imperialism that Fascism intends to implement, along with the conquest of territorial and economic empire.”⁵⁸ In contrast, politically themed medals tended to generate more enthusiasm from the specialized audience compared to Italy’s coins, and renowned sculptors such as Mistruzzi crafted medals with more articulate political symbolism that, according to Santamaria and others, was lacking in most coins.

As symbolical objects, thirdly, medals were seen as reflections and celebrations of Italy’s moral, cultural, and economic state, as well as memorials of the most glorious eras of its history, honouring the nation’s regeneration under Mussolini for contemporary Italians, international audiences, and future generations. Additionally, as objects with a distinct materiality and specific designs, they served as tangible embodiments of a core tenet of Fascist ideology: the renewal of an idealized era of national greatness and celebrated traditions. By evoking connections between Fascist Italy and a historical ‘golden age,’ Fascist propaganda sought to inspire and unite Italians towards a vision of revitalization.⁵⁹ Ancient Rome, especially its imperial period, was a particularly prominent, though not exclusive, point of reference. Juxtaposing Fascist Italy with ancient Rome was a common strategy to forge symbolically meaningful connections between the regime and the golden age it aspired to revive and, in some respects, surpass. Drawing parallels between Roman political institutions and initiatives and those of Fascist Italy, including its leaders, was a frequent rhetorical tactic to make the parallels between the two eras as manifest as possible.⁶⁰

Medals offered special opportunities to carry out this strategy. Their two-sidedness, in particular, afforded a rhetorically powerful blending of elements from both Roman antiquity and the Fascist era. The basic rhetorical potential of this two-sidedness becomes evident in a medal minted for the ONMI (Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia), the national organization for supporting mothers and children in need (Fig. 3). Founded in 1925, the organization underwent restructuring in 1933/1934 aimed at deepening its affiliations with the National Fascist Party. Alessandro Brambilla notes that, by 1930 at the latest, the organization’s registration certificates were accompanied by medals of the kind shown here. Some examples only bear the Fascist dating *AN. IV*, referring to the year of the ONMI’s founding, while others, such as the one pictured, feature an additional date, likely indicating the production year. Most examples are made



Fig. 3. Golden medal for ONMI (18 karats; 27 mm), 1934.

Obverse (left) and reverse (right).

Nomisma (Serravalle, San Marino). Auction 56, lot 574. Courtesy of Nomisma.

of inexpensive metal, suggesting they were handed out in large quantities, although there are also examples in bronze and even gold.⁶¹

Like many medals, the exemplar shown here adheres to a time-honoured numismatic pattern derived from Roman coins. Roman coins had traditionally showcased an emperor's portrait on the obverse and a historical or mythological scene or allegorical representation on the reverse.⁶² This basic model has had a lasting influence on subsequent European traditions of both coins and medals, and Fascist items are no exception. They frequently feature a portrait on the obverse (typically Mussolini), alongside a range of political symbols on the reverse. In this instance, the medal's obverse displays a portrait of Mussolini, flanked by the royal House of Savoy's heraldic shield on the left (adorned with a crown) and fasces on the right (topped with an imperial eagle). It includes two Fascist-style dates (*AN. IV* and *A. XII*) and the organization's name in Italian written around the medal's circumference, positioned in a way that allows for easy legibility when suspended like a pendulum (*O. N. PROT. MATERNITÀ-INFANZIA*, i.e., Opera Nazionale per la Protezione della Maternità e Infanzia). This side of the medal has a distinctly modern design that is consistent, in both technical execution and artistic style, with the prevailing motifs seen on Italian currency of that time.

Upon flipping the medal, however, its reverse reveals entirely different imagery and complicates, or rather complements, the front side's outspoken modernity.



Fig. 4. Bronze *sestertius* featuring Trajan (98–117), 103–111 (33 mm).

Obverse (left) and reverse (right).

Münzkabinett – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Inv. No. 18200254. CC.

We see a male figure sitting on a curule seat with laurel crown and Roman toga, arm resting on a spear. With his outstretched arm, he presents what seems to be a gift of money. Standing before him is a matron cloaked in flowing attire, accompanied by two young children – one cradled in her arm and the other by her side – both reaching out their hands in gratitude. This iconography is directly copied from ancient Roman coins, more specifically of coins minted during the reign of the Emperor Trajan (Fig. 4).⁶³ The Latin legends on this side of the coin are also reproduced from the ancient models and refer to the *Alimenta Italiae* (“Nourishment for Italy”): the charitable alimentary schemes Trajan founded for the education and welfare of poor Italian children. The other Latin legends evoke other ancient Roman institutions, including the emperor (styled *optimus princeps*), the Senate, and the *senatus consultum*.⁶⁴

By reproducing Trajan’s coins in connection with the ONMI, the Italian organization is symbolically aligned with the historical Roman institution of the *Alimenta Italiae*. The analogy between ancient Roman and Fascist institutions often also highlighted a symbolical connection between the Roman Emperors responsible for such institutions, in this case Trajan, and the leader of Fascism, Mussolini, as their ‘renewer’ in modern form. In this medal, the analogy between Mussolini and Trajan is specifically suggested by the fact that the portrait of the Duce features on the obverse, a position traditionally occupied by a laurel-



Fig. 5. Unknown artist. Bronze medal (21.7 mm), celebrating the founding of Rome. Piacenza, 1922. Obverse (left) and reverse (right). From eBay listing *Piacenza Natale di Roma Festa del Lavoro 1922 Medaglia Partito di Governo*, by user *Studiofaleristicos*, last updated 30 October 2025. Courtesy of Studio Faleristico.

crowned emperor on the ancient *Alimenta Italiae* coins.⁶⁵ The designer of this medal thus used the two-sidedness of the medal to invite parallels between Fascist Italy and imperial Rome. Interestingly, language choice plays an integral part in this rhetoric, with Italian marking the ‘modern’ obverse and Latin the ‘ancient’ reverse.

Numerous other medals combined diverse historical elements in similar and different ways, with the Latin language often symbolizing the multiplicity of Italy’s national history and traditions. The production of Fascist medals with Latin had already started by Mussolini’s rise to political power in 1922. Prior to the March on Rome, the National Fascist Party had for example produced medals with Latin legends in honour of Mussolini, commemorating the opening of new Case del Fascio (the Party’s local offices), and celebrating the founding of Rome, such as a medal of 21 April 1922 bearing Vergil’s hexameter *Sit Romana potens Italia virtute propago* (“Let Rome’s posterity be powerful with Italian virtue”), taken from *Aen.* 12.827 (Fig. 5).⁶⁶

Why was Latin chosen for these legends? What advantages did the language of ancient Rome offer?

- 41 The Royal Institute of Numismatics dealt with both currency coins and other coin-like items, including medals. See the founding document printed in *Il nuovo Regio Istituto di Numismatica*, in *Numismatica e scienze affini*, 2, 1, 1936, p. 17-18, p. 17. To chart the relevant discourse, we conducted a survey of the most significant numismatic journals of the era, which encompassed *Rivista italiana di numismatica e scienze affini* (second and third series, 1918-1929; no issues 1930-1940), *Numismatica e scienze affini* (est. in 1935; from 1941, *Numismatica*), *Il Numismatico mantovano* (1927-1928), *Rassegna numismatica* (from 1936, *Rassegna monetaria*), and *Bollettino del circolo numismatico napoletano*. We also included some journals covering aspects of the visual and decorative arts more generally, including *Architettura e arti decorative*, *Bollettino della Federazione Nazionale Fascista dell'Industria Grafica ed Affini*, *Capitolium*, *Costruire*, and *L'Italiano*.
- 42 R.A.E. (unid.), *Per la monetazione dell'Impero*, in *Numismatica e scienze affini*, 2, 6, 1936, p. 99.
- 43 *La rinascita dell'arte della medaglia*, o.c., p. 310: "La medaglia è specialmente destinata a testimoniare e a celebrare nella forma d'arte di più larga e facile diffusione, gli avvenimenti che destano maggiore interesse nello spirito pubblico, con la rappresentazione sintetica delle opere e dei simboli, con la figurazione degli Uomini che sono ai vertici della multiforme attività nazionale."
- 44 Margherita Sarfatti, *Il Fascio romano: simbolo dello Stato sulle nuove monete*, in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 13 January 1923, p. 5: "Fra venti secoli, l'ignaro contadino che arando troverà nel gesto millenario un dischetto confuso tra la terra bruna, ripulendolo, trovi il nome augusto del Re, e il simbolo del Fascio, che rinverdisce per opera e onore di Benito Mussolini, impressi in un suggello di bellezza e di sovrana nobiltà!"
- 45 On the adoption of the *fascies* on Italy's national currency, see Paola S. Salvatori, *L'adozione del fascio littorio nella monetazione dell'Italia fascista*, in *Rivista italiana di numismatica e scienze affini*, 109, 2008, p. 333-352.
- 46 Roberto Paribeni, *Le monete dell'Impero sono state coniate*, in *Numismatica e scienze affini*, 3, 3, 1937, p. 62-63. The coins featured no Latin. Other coins by Romagnoli did. See, for example, Casolari VIII.85 (= Gentilozzi & Piermattei, o.c., p. 29, No. 27) and Casolari XII.104 (= Gentilozzi & Piermattei, o.c., p. 33, No. 38).
- 47 A.P. (unid.), *Il Medagliere del Senatore Mazzoccolo e la nuova sede dell'Ist. Italiano di Numismatica*, in *Numismatica e scienze affini*, 6, 1-2, 1940, p. 48. In 1937, Mazzoccolo published an essay on medals regarding the city of Gaeta in Lazio, where he had been *podestà* between 1930 and 1934 (Enrico Mazzoccolo, *Medaglie relative a Gaeta*, Naples, 1937).
- 48 Enrico Mazzoccolo, *Il R. Istituto di numismatica*, in *Numismatica e scienze affini*, 2, 3, 1936, p. 64-66, p. 65: "Così come, oggi, le medaglie dell'Era Fascista, con le innumerevoli figurazioni del volto e delle parole del Duce, e di tutte le svariatissime manifestazioni degli enti e degli istituti da Esso creati, ricorderanno ai posteri quanto immensa esaltazione di animi, e inaudito fervore di opere, e quanta grandezza di risultati, in tutti i campi della vita italiana, sia stata realizzata dalla Rivoluzione Fascista."
- 49 The medals can be seen together in Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, o.c., vol. 2, p. 108-109 (Plate 17, Nos. 196-205). A numismatic description of the series is in *150 anni di medaglie Johnson*, o.c., p. 67-68 (Nos. 197-207). Casolari dates each coin to the year it commemorates: Casolari I.23, II.13, III.16, IV.36, V.24,

- VI.19, VII.29, VIII.8, IX.6, X.16. It is probable that at least some of the coins were originally minted before 1932 and subsequently reissued together on the occasion of the *Decennale*.
- 50 See Dante Alighieri, *Opere. Volume primo. Rime, Vita nova, De vulgari eloquentia*, eds. Claudio Giunta, Guglielmo Gorni & Mirko Tavoni, Milan, 2011, p. 795-796.
- 51 Ernesto Santamaria, *Aspetti e aspirazioni del commercio numismatico in Italia*, in *Numismatica e scienze affini*, 4, 4, 1938, p. 77-81, p. 81: "La moneta, poi, si tramanda nei secoli e con essa si tramanda la fisionomia e, direi quasi, l'eredità spirituale della Nazione. In tempi vili, monete vili; in tempi di rigoglio, monete rigogliose."
- 52 See, for example, *La rinascita dell'arte della medaglia*, o.c., p. 312, promoting the primacy of Rome in the art of the medal.
- 53 Sarfatti, o.c., p. 5: "Dai tempi della Magna Grecia al Rinascimento, al Sei- e Settecento della Repubblica Veneziana specialmente, le più belle monete del mondo fiorirono in terra nostra, terra d'Italia sempre giovane e grande."
- 54 On calligraphy and illumination, for example, see Lamers and Reitz-Joose, *The Codex*, o.c., p. 79-80. On the art of tapestry making, see the remarks in Han Lamers & Bettina Reitz-Joose, *Spectacular Latin: The Role of the Latin Language in Political Spectacles under Italian Fascism*, in *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, 12, 2023, p. 279-305, p. 298-299.
- 55 For the importance on Roman 'imperial' designs for Fascist coinage, see e.g. Santamaria, o.c., p. 81.
- 56 See, for example, Alessandro Magnaguti, *Le medaglie virgiliane, in Il numismatico mantovano*, 5-6, 1927, p. 79-80, p. 79.
- 57 R.A.E. (unid.), *Povertà storica dell'attuale monetazione italiana*, in *Numismatica e scienze affini*, 2, 3, 1936, p. 53-55, p. 55.
- 58 These are the words of a certain P. P. S. (apparently Pietro and Pio Santamaria), appended to Paribeni, o.c., p. 63: "Ogni concreta e diretta allusione al fatto storico è bandita e, purtroppo, nessuno potrà riconoscervi un sintomo di quell'imperialismo intellettuale, artistico e culturale che il Fascismo si propone di attuare, insieme alla conquista dell'impero territoriale ed economico."
- 59 On the notion of Italian Fascism as a palinogenetic political movement, see especially Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, Basingstoke, 2007.
- 60 For the importance of juxtaposing Fascist Italy with ancient Rome, see, e.g., 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 & Kyriakos Demetriadou, Leiden, 2018, p. 157-177; Marla Stone, *A Flexible Rome: Fascism and the Cult of romanità*, in *Roman Presences: Reception of Rome in European Culture, 1798-1945*, ed. C. Edwards, Cambridge, 1999, p. 205-220; Romke Visser, *Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of Romanità*, in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27, 1, 1992, p. 5-22.
- 61 See the exemplars recorded in Casolari IV.41 (undated); Casolari XII.56 (dated *AN. XII*), with Asta del Titano, o.c., p. 37 (No. 83); Brambilla, o.c., p. 685 (undated); Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, o.c., vol. 2, p. 162-163 (Plate 44, Nos. 527-528), one of them dated to *AN. XV*.
- 62 Syamken, o.c., p. 137.
- 63 Harold Mattingly & Edward Allen Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. 2, London, 1926, Trajan 461. The matron is sometimes identified with Italia or Annona.
- 64 Along the upper rim of the medal is the legend *S.P.Q.R. optimo principi* ("The Senate and the Roman People to the best leader"), while the lower portion (or *exergum*) bears the legend *Alim(enta)*

Ital(iae). Positioned in the medal's so-called field, on the left and right sides of the image, are the letters *S* and *C*, denoting *Senatus Consulto* ("with the approval of the Senate"). See the entries *ALIM ITAL* and *ALIM ITAL S C*, in Seth William Stevenson, C. Roach Smith & Frederic W. Madden (eds.), *Dictionary of Roman Coins*, London, 1889, p. 36-38.

- 65 Ancient numismatic iconography, including Latin legends, was also used on other medals during the *ventennio*. See, for example, the medal minted for the Esposizione Universale ed Internazionale of 1942 in Gentilozzi & Piermattei, *o.c.*, p. 37 (No. 47), not recorded in Casolari.
- 66 Catalogued as number 47 in Casolari, *25 anni di storia, o.c.*, p. 26.

4

The Use of Latin on Fascist Political Medals



In 1927, Alessandro Magnaguti (1887-1966), a professional numismatist and collector, lamented the lack of Latin legends on the Italian coins of his time.⁶⁷ In *Il numismatico mantovano*, a numismatic journal focusing on Mantua and its surrounding area, Magnaguti wrote:

Regarding Latin, why have we completely abandoned our mother tongue in the hands of foreigners? The best Latin grammars (until recently) certainly came from Germany, the texts from Teubner of Leipzig, and only English coins have Latin legends, some American and some Austrian as well. If this beautiful classical language, consecrated for centuries in all great official manifestations, is so widespread among non-Latin countries, why shouldn't *we* use it, the only legitimate heirs of Latin? In truth, no other language can ever replicate the authority and solemnity that emanates from Latin epigraphy. And what satisfaction it would be for the victorious soldiers, as well as for all of us Italians, if, like the emperors, King Umberto had taken the title of *Erythraeus*, and King Victor Emmanuel (whom posterity will have to call 'the Victorious') now took on the title of *Libycus Cyrenaicus*. Didn't the Kings of Sardinia like to be called *Rex Cypri et Jerusalem*, places of which they were only nominal sovereigns?⁶⁸

While Magnaguti was right to assert that the coins of the *ventennio* had limited or no Latin legends,⁶⁹ the language was used much more frequently on medals referencing Fascism, as well as in other forms of political material culture. More importantly, his observation reflects the special status of Latin in Fascist Italy: He considers Italians to be the most legitimate heirs to the Latin language and associates it with the expression of authority and solemnity, specifically suited to commemorate significant events for the nation – a fairly common viewpoint at the time. Magnaguti bolstered his argument by citing the use of Latin legends on coins of the Sardinian kings during the Middle Ages and on nineteenth-century Sardinian lira coins, invoking not only ancient Rome but also more

recent historical examples.⁷⁰ The language of ancient Rome, with its peculiar symbolism in Fascist Italy, enhanced the symbolic affordances associated with the medium of the medal discussed earlier, including its profound connection to solemn national achievements and events; its historical links to various periods of the nation's multifaceted history, ranging from Roman antiquity to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; and its expected ability to resonate with future generations.

Latin's special status as a 'medallic language' is also reflected in the kind of messages it conveyed on medals and similar artefacts. In this context, Latin legends usually carry more elaborate symbolic messages than their Italian counterparts. Italian texts often fulfil a chiefly descriptive role, providing information such as names, dates, and occasions. When Italian mottoes were used, they were often drawn directly from Fascist discourse, including slogans such as *Credere Obbedire Combattere* and *A chi l'Italia? A noi!* Latin legends, by contrast, often derived from classical, biblical, or humanist literature or quoted medieval or early modern proverbs. As a result, they invoked various historical points of reference. Their anachronism made them suitable instruments in Fascism's strategy of connecting different pasts with the Fascist era in its attempt to manage its own future reception.

In both numismatic scholarship and political iconography, Latin words and phrases are usually treated as *adjuncts* to the medals, rather than as integral components of the message the objects aim to convey. Nevertheless, Latin flagship terms such as *SPQR* and *DVX* have occasionally been recognized as 'visual signs' or 'labels' of *romanità*.⁷¹ The notion of the visual sign rightly emphasizes Latin's integral presence in the visual and material culture of the period. Given Latin's symbolic value, its mere presence on a surface conveyed a powerful message, which could also reach viewers who lacked sufficient knowledge of the language to understand the literal meaning of the words. Moreover, the visual aspects of the Latin texts, including Roman capitals and distinctive features such as interpuncts, would have strengthened the symbolic presence of the language as a visual representation of Romanness. Even for people unable to read and appreciate the language, the inclusion of Latin words and phrases could thus contribute to the overall sense of 'being Roman' that Fascism consistently aimed to evoke.⁷²

However, the notion of Latin as a 'visual sign' may also obscure the complexity of the language's role in Fascism's material culture. Latin phrases were not

only chosen because of their Latinity but deliberately selected to align with the political message to be conveyed by the surfaces they adorned. The language was still intended to convey a meaning beyond, and in addition to, its presence as a visual sign. Some of the phrases chosen were manipulated, with words altered, omitted, or rearranged.⁷³ The meaning of the Latin phrases was further altered by their integration into visual designs and material settings that framed them as political slogans. For example, quotes from ancient authors, such as Livy and Horace, were ‘resemanticized’ to align with Fascist political messages as they were integrated as inscriptions into urbanistic, architectural, and iconographical contexts, often controlled by the regime or its representatives.⁷⁴ Many of the phrases used to convey Fascist messages had been produced and used long before the *ventennio*. Without their juxtaposition with Fascist symbols or use in specific political contexts closely associated with Mussolini’s regime, they would not have been construed as ‘slogans’ of Fascism at all. Hence, the interplay between Latin and its immediate visual context and material setting was more complex than simply regarding Latin as a visual symbol on par with the fasces or the imperial eagle.

The following section presents examples that illustrate similar tactics of framing and manipulation, while also uncovering distinct characteristics specific to the medals studied here. Specifically, we will emphasize how Latin quotations were de- and recontextualized in the objects under study. This involves exploring how textual and non-textual framing strategies, in conjunction with material contexts of use, imbued Latin words and phrases with political and Fascist significance, despite being coined and occasionally used before the rise of Mussolini and his movement. Furthermore, we will interrogate and problematize the relevance of the ‘original’ context of the quotes in understanding the political significance of the Latin phrases in their new contexts of use. In literary studies, scholars typically examine how the original context of a quote or reference contributes to the creation of meaning in the text in which it is quoted or alluded to. Such intertextual analysis often allows readers to delve beneath the surface of a text and unearth layers of meaning that may not be readily apparent at first sight, enriching reading and interpretation.

In our case studies, engaging with the original context often unveils the manipulative strategies employed to transform Latin phrases into slogans of Fascism and thus weakens rather than enhances their rhetorical success in

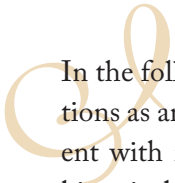
delivering a clear-cut political message. It seems that those who used these quotes generally did not intend to invite a thorough comparison with the original context. While Latin phrases are occasionally attributed to their historical authors, they are more often employed as if they have no author at all. This dissociation grants them the aura of proverbs or timeless truths, an effect reinforced by their Latinity. Simultaneously, their specific political pertinence often arises from their applications in modern political discourse; hence, their contemporary uses may be more relevant for understanding their political potential than their original usage by their authors. The following section will elaborate on this in more detail.

- 67 Among other things, Magnaguti was the author of *Ex nummis historia*, published in various instalments from 1949 onwards. The tenth fascicle, issued in 1951, covers the royal house of Savoy and the Italian Risorgimento; the *ventennio* is not covered. He also published a study of coins related to the city of Mantua: Alessandro Magnaguti, *Le medaglie mantovane*, Mantua, 1921.
- 68 Alessandro Magnaguti, *Le più belle del mondo: desideri e riflessioni sulle attuali monete italiane*, in *Il numismatico mantovano*, 2, 1927, p. 25–36, p. 36: “A proposito di latino, perché abbiamo abbandonato completamente la nostra lingua madre nelle mani di stranieri? Le migliori grammatiche latine venivano (fino a poco tempo fa) certamente dalla Germania, i testi da Teubner di Lipsia, e così solo le monete inglesi hanno leggende in latino, alcune americane e alcune austriache. Se questa bella lingua classica, consacrata da secoli in tutte le grandi manifestazioni ufficiali, è così diffusa tra i paesi non latini, perché non dovremmo usarla noi, unici eredi legittimi della latinità? In verità, nessun'altra lingua potrà mai replicare l'autorità e la solennità che proviene dall'epigrafia latina. E che soddisfazione sarebbe per i soldati vincitori, e per tutti noi italiani, se (come gli imperatori) il Re Umberto si fosse fregiato del titolo di *Erythreus* [sic] e ora il Re Vittorio Emanuele (che i posteri dovranno chiamare «Vittorioso») si fregiasse del titolo di *Libicus* [sic] *Cyrenaicus*. Non amavano già i Re di Sardegna farsi chiamare «Rex Cypri et Jerusalem», luoghi di cui erano sovrani soltanto di nome.”
- 69 The sole exception is the 50 *centesimi* coin in use between 1919 and 1935; its reverse features the goddess Aequitas, a personification of fairness, with her name spelled out, a symbol with ties to Roman imperial coins. See George S. Cuhaj & Michael Thomas (eds.), *Standard Catalog of World Coins, 1901–2000*, Wisconsin, 2014, p. 1286 (KM #61). The Sammarinese lira, which could be used interchangeably with the Italian lira, featured multiple Latin legends, including *Iustitia suprema lex esto* (p. 1905, KM #10), a rewriting of the Ciceronian *salus populi suprema lex esto* (see also KM #7–8 and 10). Unsurprisingly, the Vatican lira, designed by Mistruzzi and produced by the Banca d'Italia, frequently featured Latin, see Imbellone, *o.c.*, p. 50 (Fig. 56).
- 70 Sardinian lira coins produced between 1816 and 1861 gave the regent's Latinised name, along with the legend *D(ei) g(ratia) rex Sar(dinia) Cyp(ri) et Ier(usalem) / Dux Sab(audiae), Ianu(ae), et Montisf(errat)i, Princ(eps) Ped(emontii)*. See George S. Cuhaj & Michael Thomas (eds.), *Standard Catalog of World Coins, 1801–1900*, Wisconsin, 2009, p. 840–844.
- 71 See Laura Malvano Bechelloni, *Le mythe de la romanité et la politique de l'image dans l'Italie fasciste*, in *Vingtème Siècle*, 78, 2, 2003, p. 111–120, p. 116 (with brief discussion in Lamers, *Language on Display*, *o.c.*, p. 77).
- 72 See Lamers, *Language on Display*, *o.c.*
- 73 This has been shown, for instance, in occasional discussions of the inclusion of Latin quotes on postage stamps during the period, e.g. Liberati, *o.c.*, p. 262–263, 267–268.
- 74 Nastasi, *L'epigrafia*, *o.c.*, p. 195–197.

5

Minting Political Messages





In the following pages, we explore how the use of Latin *dicta* on medals functions as an integral component of Fascist rhetoric, which associates Italy's present with its glorified past and anchors Mussolini's Italy within the Italians' historical imagination. Our case studies, primarily from the mid-1930s – a peak period in numismatic production – illustrate various methods of blending the past with the present and reveal Latin's role as a rhetorical device. The contexts are varied. They include institutional and semi-private settings and extend to national and international stages; they also involve a range of users and audiences such as citizens, institutions, and officials. The medals under study showcase several different textual and non-textual strategies to align Latin phrases with diverse tenets of Fascist propaganda and ideology, whether supporting the regime's imperialist aspirations and triumphalism, Mussolini's leader cult, or the vision of a pan-Latin alliance led by Fascist Italy. While our analysis centres on the interconnection between Latin *dicta* and the political iconography that frames them, our case studies progress to encompass broader discourses, specific artistic and spatial settings, and ceremonial contexts in which the medals were used.

Two Sides of the Same Medal: The Roman and Fascist Empires

One approach to merging the Fascist present with the Roman past was to combine ancient and modern designs on either side of one medal, as seen with the ONMI medal previously mentioned. Other medals employed different methods to amalgamate the Roman past and Fascist present and used Latin in varying ways, while also evoking other aspects of Italy's more recent history. The medal shown in Figure 6, for example, demonstrates how Latin could be used to convey a political message connecting Fascism's political ambitions for a modern and future-oriented Italy with an idealized notion of ancient Rome in different and more complex ways. While the object's original context of use



Fig. 6. Unknown artist. Bronze medal (32.5 mm), commemorating the Ethiopian campaign, 1936. Obverse (left) and reverse (right). Drawing after the original by Dr. Brandaan Huigen (Cape Town/London).

remains uncertain, it was minted in conjunction with the Italian occupation of Ethiopia in May 1936 – a significant event widely celebrated as the apex of the regime's ambitions to establish an empire.⁷⁵ In Fascist propaganda, the newly formed empire was overtly linked with the empire of ancient Rome, framing it as a historically rightful 'return' of the *imperium Romanum* to the Italian people. This medal may have been conferred upon soldiers involved in the Ethiopian campaign, or it might have been minted for broader commemorative purposes. Its unambiguous imagery establishes a connection between the Ethiopian campaign, Fascism, and ancient Rome, and the Latin legends on both sides of the medal serve as conduits for communicating this message.

The medal's overall design maintains the previously observed pattern by combining a portrait of Benito Mussolini with an allegorical image. The obverse features Mussolini's profile portrait, showing the dictator wearing a modern military helmet. Surrounding his portrait, the Latin phrase *princeps iuventutis* is inscribed in high-relief modern capitals. The Latin phrase, meaning 'chief of the youth,' was regularly associated with Mussolini on medals, ranking second, in terms of frequency, only to the title *Duce* and its Latin version *Dux (Italarum)*. Particularly in his role as the supreme commander and trainer of the Italian



Fig. 7. Orlando Paladino Orlandini (1905-1986). Bronze medal (28.6 mm) for GUF, 1935. Obverse (left) and reverse (right). Moruzzi Numismatica (Rome). Inv. No. 135521. Courtesy of Moruzzi Numismatica.

youth, Mussolini was occasionally referred to as “Duce, *Princeps Iuventutis*.”⁷⁶ The phrase is especially prevalent on medals associated with Italian youth. For instance, medals for ONB, the *Fasci Giovanili di Combattimento* (FGC; Youth Combat Groups), and the *Gruppi Universitari Fascisti* (GUF; Fascist University Groups) all depict comparable portraits of Mussolini with the same honorary title (Fig. 7).⁷⁷ The Roman competitions in sports, arts, and culture, known as the *Littorali*, also featured medals that prominently displayed Mussolini’s portrait alongside the designation *princeps iuventutis*.⁷⁸

The term *princeps iuventutis* is not a modern invention. It originated in antiquity, yet its historical meaning is vague. In the Roman Republic, the designation had been used in the plural for the patrician equestrians – typically the sons of the senatorial elite – who were organized into special military units. Discussions of the expression during the *ventennio* – for example, in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* – connect it with the organisation of the *ludi iuveniles*.⁷⁹ The GUF medal, accordingly, pairs a reference to the *ludi iuveniles* on the reverse with the portrayal of Mussolini as *princeps iuventutis* on the obverse. As a more formalized title, however, the term was mainly associated with Augustan and imperial Rome. Emperor Augustus granted the appellation to his grandsons



Fig. 8. Silver *denarius* (17 mm), featuring Augustus as well as Gaius and Lucius Caesar, 2 BC–4 AD. Obverse (left) and reverse (right). Münzkabinett – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Inv. No. 18217360. CC.

Lucius and Gaius, singling them out as his youthful heirs apparent. Coins struck for the occasion feature the portrait of Augustus on the obverse and on the reverse depict his two grandsons facing one another, each wearing a toga and resting a hand on a shield (Fig. 8). Behind the shields are two spears, and between them is depicted a *simpulum* (a small sacrificial ladle) on the left and a *lituus* (augural wand) on the right. While their names are written in the coin's reverse exergue, its upper circumference features the following legend, reading anti-clockwise: AVGVSTI F. COS. DESIG PRINC. IVVENT (*Augusti filii consules designati, principes iuventutis*). After Augustus, subsequent emperors followed suit by granting the title to their own heirs.⁸⁰

Whatever its precise historical references, in the context of Fascist propaganda, the specific historical connotations of the term seem to have faded away into a more general association of Mussolini as the supreme moral and military leader of the Italian youth. The symbolic significance of the title appears to have been derived primarily from its connection to ancient Rome and Latin culture, rather than its specific historical meaning. Any too-literal parallel between Mussolini and the historical *principes iuventutis* fails, as he was neither a young aristocrat nor the designated heir of an emperor. Instead, the ancient term creates an evocative connection between Mussolini, his regime, and the ancient Roman elite, suggesting a sense of continuity between the new order of Fascism and the historical heritage of imperial Rome.

The Latin on the reverse of the medal in Fig. 6 equally lacks historical specificity and links Fascist Italy to Roman antiquity in an evocative, rhetorical way. Commemorating the conquest of Ethiopia, the reverse features an image of a Roman military standard crowned with the traditional eagle encircled by a victory wreath, accompanied by the legend *S.P.Q.R.* Adjacent to the standard, both on its left and right sides, are two dates formatted according to the Fascist convention, marking the occupation of the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, on 5 May 1936, and 9 May the same year, when Mussolini declared the empire from his balcony at Piazza Venezia in Rome (*V. MAG. / A. XIV* and *IX. MAG. / A. XIV*). Positioned at the bottom of the medal's reverse, capital letters spell out the Italian phrase: *ETIOPIA / ITALIANA* ("Italian Ethiopia"). At the upper edge of the medal, positioned above the Roman standard, appears another legend in Latin: *Hic manebimus optime* ("Here will be the best place for us to stay"), a quotation extracted from the work of the Roman historian Livy (5.55.1-2). Coupled with the Roman-style standard, the Latin can be understood to evoke a general sense of the 'Romanness' of the campaign, also emphasized by the regime's propaganda machine.

Like the title *princeps iuventutis* on the medal's obverse, the historical meaning of the Latin phrase *Hic manebimus optime* is only marginally relevant to its new context. In Livy's original account, the words are attributed to an unnamed centurion, who, with his cohort, proceeds through the forum and past the comitium, shortly after the city's sack by the Gauls in 390 BCE. As the cohorts pass the Comitium, the Senate is deliberating the question of whether to abandon Rome and settle elsewhere or to remain and initiate the reconstruction of the city. The words of the centurion prove to be a decisive turning point in the ongoing discussions. Livy writes:

... centurio in comitio exclamavit: "Signifer, statue signum; hic manebimus optime." Qua voce audita et senatus accipere se omen ex curia egressus conclamavit et plebs circumfusa adprobavit. Antiquata deinde lege promisce urbs aedificari coepta.

... a centurion called out: "Standard-bearer, plant the standard. It will be best for us to stay here." Hearing these words, the senate came out of the senate house and shouted that they accepted the omen. The plebs gathered around and gave their approval. The bill was then rejected, and the building of the city was begun randomly.⁸¹

Thus, in Livy's text, the words apply to a specific episode in Rome's early republican history and convey the resolute desire to remain in Rome and rebuild the city. The medal's context and iconography, however, give the words a different meaning. Severed from Livy and applied to a new context, the phrase morphs into a proclamation of imperial presence in a foreign land. While *hic*, in the ancient text, refers to the city of Rome, on the medal, it references Ethiopia; the *signum* in Livy's account is echoed in the medal's imagery, but now imagined on African soil rather than in the Roman forum. Removed from their historical context, the words' meaning becomes adaptable, while their antiquity and Latinity – rather than their specific historical content – appear to enhance their symbolic significance.

In another sense, too, this medal demonstrates that the ancient sources may not always have been the primary reference points for the creators. Fascist appropriation of ancient Roman iconography was often 'filtered' through its use in later periods, such as the Renaissance and the Novecento.⁸² The same often applies to Latin *dicta*. Unlike the Latin appellation on the medal's obverse, the Livy quote had an existing role in Italian political discourse which contributed more directly to its symbolic significance than its specific context in Livy. The phrase resurfaced in 1870, when the politician and economist Quintino Sella (1827–1884) reportedly employed it to assert Rome's status as the nation's capital following the transfer of the government from Florence.⁸³ It was also used in relation to Rome under Fascism, exemplified by a medal commemorating the first anniversary of the March on Rome (1923). The medal depicts a gesturing Mussolini holding fasces, with the Capitol in the background, and the words *Hic manebimus optime*.⁸⁴ Here, the phrase refers to the city of Rome and asserts the Fascist presence in the Italian capital and government.

The words were however also used in a more expansive sense, extending beyond their specific reference to the city of Rome. This is particularly evident in the way Gabriele d'Annunzio, the flamboyant writer and politician whose rhetoric left a mark on Mussolini, employed them. D'Annunzio used Livy's words in the context of territorial expansion in connection with his short-lived Italian Regency of Carnaro in present-day Croatia (1919–1920). He regarded Livy's words as a motto of the Roman legionaries and had a special predilection for them.⁸⁵ Adopting them as the motto of his own enterprise, he declared that "in our hearts, in our souls, on the doors, on stones everywhere, we have engraved



Fig. 9. Adolfo De Carolis (1874-1928). Bronze medal (41 mm), commissioned by Gabriele d'Annunzio, 1919. Obverse (left) and reverse (right). War Militaria (Florence). Inv. No. MEDo7B. Courtesy of War Militaria.

our Roman motto *Hic manebimus optime*.⁸⁶ He also included the sentence on one of his most famous medals, produced in 1920 (Fig. 9). Designed by Adolfo De Carolis (1874-1928), the medal showcases the Latin motto alongside a depiction of a Roman standard encircled by hands aggressively grasping knives. D'Annunzio bestowed the medal upon his military recruits and others who supported his cause in various ways. In 1926, a royal decree officially recognized the medal as a decoration for members of the *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale*, and eligibility was extended to the Italian Armed Forces in 1928.⁸⁷ D'Annunzio's medal not only foreshadowed the imagery of the Ethiopian medal but also expanded the meaning of the Latin quote: from 'we will stay where we are' to 'we have come here to stay.'

Against this background, the Ethiopian medal of 1936 acquires an added symbolic significance that it lacks when viewed in isolation or compared only to its ancient source text. Through the similar symbols it showcases, it can be regarded as a response and rival to d'Annunzio's medal and the achievement it memorializes. By employing the familiar Latin words to symbolize Italy's aggressive territorial expansion into Ethiopia, the medal highlights Fascism's

superiority over the short-lived accomplishments of d'Annunzio's Regency. Throughout the *ventennio*, the motto was extensively employed to denote the expansion of the Italian empire, not solely on medals like this one, but also on postcards, stamps, and various other items.⁸⁸

When considered as a whole, the two sides of the medal thus convey a clear political message through the utilization of distinct symbolic elements, encompassing imagery and text that reinforce each other. This communication strategy additionally capitalizes on the symbolic value of the Latin language due to its connection with ancient imperial Rome. Despite the marked divergence in contexts, the employment of well-known Latin words serves to endow Italy's incursion into Ethiopia with a semblance of legitimacy, drawn from the Roman tradition, that the regime asserted for its own cause.

Secularising Christian Messages, Sacralising Fascism

Latin was not only linked to the ancient Rome of the emperors, but also intricately connected to its self-proclaimed successor: the Rome of the popes and the Roman Catholic Church. Most Italians would encounter Latin primarily during Mass and see it in churches and other settings associated with the Roman Church. Moreover, just as they appeared on Fascist 'merchandise', Latin words and phrases were often featured on Catholic postcards, posters, and medals. The use of Latin by the Vatican aimed to ensure continuity with its ancient Roman tradition and to symbolize the universal mission of the Catholic Church. Recently, Nicolò Bettegazzi has demonstrated how Latin became entangled in the rivalry between the Vatican and Mussolini's regime for ownership of the Roman heritage.⁸⁹ The competing uses of Latin as symbols of distinct Romanness are certainly also evident in material culture, notably in the context of medallic art, where the popes maintained a longstanding tradition of producing coins and medals adorned with Latin legends. Some of the medallists whose work is discussed above put their artistic skills to the service of both the regime and the Vatican.

The cultural complexities of appropriating the language of the Church for a Fascist message are evident in the use of Latin phrases that originally held Christian significance and were employed by the Church as well. Their meanings were secularized by their application in political material culture through verbal manipulation, symbolic framing, or a combination of the two. Did the

Fascist appropriation of Latin desecralize the language, or did it instead sacralise worldly political messages? The examples analysed below suggest that the answer is not straightforward. Latin phrases from the Christian tradition, including the Bible, could be de- and recontextualized to convey a secular political message aligned with Fascism, but at the same time, their use arguably also imparted a sacred aura to the Fascist message. This is consistent with the fact that Fascist propaganda frequently merged political and religious elements, integrating quasi-religious ceremonies, practices, and symbols into political activities and communication. For example, Mussolini was portrayed as a messianic figure, the worldly saviour of the Italian nation. The Fascists crafted a distinct Fascist credo inspired by Christian statement of doctrine, and after the Lateran Concordats of 1929, the regime's political ceremonies occasionally involved representatives of the Roman Catholic Church. Two Latin phrases used on medals can illustrate this blending of political and religious points of reference: the well-known Christian slogan *In hoc signo vinces* ("In this sign you shall be victorious") and a lesser-known quotation directly derived from the Book of Job, *Levabitur aquila et in arduis ponet nidum suum* ("The eagle will soar and build its nest on high").

The slogan *In hoc signo vinces* was found on various medals during the *ventennio* and was also used by the Vatican in its propaganda efforts to advocate for Roman Catholicism and counteract communism. Another medal celebrating the occupation of Ethiopia demonstrates how iconography could serve to align Latin words with political messages far removed from their original contexts (Fig. 10). This particular medal commemorated Pietro Badoglio (1871-1956), the Italian general in charge of the campaign who, after the conquest of Ethiopia, became the region's viceroy. Its reverse reveals that it was commissioned by the Italian community in the Ironbound neighborhood of Newark, New Jersey, offering an example of private commissioning from outside Italy. The Italian government had strategically established a presence within various Italian-American communities; this allowed it to monitor the opinions of Italian expatriates and spread the regime's propaganda abroad. The Ironbound neighbourhood specifically appeared to have supported the regime, as evidenced by over a thousand men from the neighbourhood volunteering as reservists for the Ethiopian campaign. Moreover, communist demonstrators faced hostility from both law enforcement and local residents in the area.⁹⁰



Fig. 10. Unknown artist. Golden medal (14 karats; 34 mm), gifted to Pietro Badoglio, 1936.
Drawing after the original by Dr. Brandaan Huigen (Cape Town/London).

The obverse of the medal features dense imagery along with a Latin phrase inscribed along its upper border. The design showcases a range of commonly known symbols. The composition is dominated by the image of an eagle atop a globe, spreading its wings. In the medal's lowest register, amid olive branches, are depicted, from left to right, fasces with the inscription *S.P.Q.R.*, a regal crown, and an ancient-style lyre. Positioned to the right of the eagle's extended wing stands an architectural structure, reminiscent of a triumphal arch, while a Christian cross emerges on the left, partially obscured by the eagle's wing. Crowning the composition, amidst celestial clouds and accompanied by a sun to the right, the Latin maxim *In hoc signo vinces* is rendered in discreet capital letters, with interpuncts to separate the words in ancient Roman fashion.

The phrase *In hoc signo vinces* ("In this sign you shall be victorious") comes from a renowned story from the life of Constantine the Great. As first recorded by Eusebius of Caesarea (d. ca. 339), Constantine had a vision in the year 312, just before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. He and his soldiers saw, in Eusebius'

words, “up in the sky and resting over the sun, a cross-shaped trophy formed from light, and a text attached to it which said: *τούτῳ νικά*” (“by this, conquer”) (*Life of Constantine* 1.28.2). Based on this vision, as well as a subsequent dream in which Christ appeared to him, Constantine decided to use the emblem of the cross to protect his armies against enemy attacks. This extraordinary occurrence was interpreted as a prophecy of Constantine’s triumph over his rival Maxentius, as well as a catalyst for his ultimate conversion to Christianity. In the later Latin tradition, the words circulated mainly in the form *In hoc signo vinces*, with *signo* added and a future tense instead of Eusebius’ imperative.⁹¹

In its Latin form the phrase is overwhelmingly found on coins and medals, emblems, and other artistic representations, from at least the early Middle Ages onwards. It is often paired with a radiated Latin cross, occasionally accompanied by a crown. In this medal’s imagery, by contrast, the cross is merely one among several symbols and does not occupy a preeminent position. Instead, the focal point of the composition is reserved for the eagle spreading its wings. The majestic bird, rather than the cross, is thus foregrounded as the *signum* mentioned in the Latin quote. While the eagle has its own spiritual connotations in religious settings, in this context it clearly evokes the imperial eagle or *aquila* of Rome, which was ubiquitous in Fascist political symbolism.⁹² The eagle’s position on top of the globe may refer to the expansion of Italian, and Fascist, imperial rule, but it might also convey the message of Fascism’s global influence, emphasized by the fact that the medal was commissioned by overseas emigrants in the US.

The manipulation of the meaning of *signum* through the overall iconography in which the ancient quote appeared was not an isolated instance; more pronounced examples of this kind of resemanticization also exist. As early as 10 September 1923, less than a year after the March on Rome, Mussolini was presented with a gold medal in Milan. Crafted by the lesser-known medal manufacturer Emilio Pagani, the medal reportedly depicted an image of Victory on one side and fasces with the legend *In hoc signo vinces* on the other.⁹³ Although no physical example of the medal has yet surfaced, a similar bronze medal, previously unrecorded, was sold in Slovenia and is now in a private collection (Fig. 11).⁹⁴ In this instance, the Christian meaning of the original text is ‘overwritten’ with a secular political message, and the Latin phrase is aligned with a



Fig. 11. Emilio Pagani (1866-1933). Bronze medal (28 mm), 1923.
Drawing after the original by Dr. Brandaan Huigen (Cape Town/London).

Fascist message. Much like the employment of the title *princeps iuventutis* and the Livy quote on the medal discussed previously, the rhetorical effect of the Latin here seems to emanate mainly from the symbolic resonance of the language and its link to Roman antiquity. Furthermore, a vague recollection of the *dictum*'s association with an important historical event may have, for some, added an air of historical grandeur to Mussolini and his achievements, and even a sense of divine vocation.⁹⁵

While these medals illustrate the manipulation of the quote's historical meaning, Fascist Italy was not the only entity to take the phrase out of its religious context and apply a new meaning. The cigarette producer Pall Mall, for instance, adopted the slogan as its trademark in 1925.⁹⁶ Interestingly, the religious connotation of the slogan persisted in the background, particularly because of its association with the medieval Crusaders who also used it as their motto. In 1999, a proposal was put forth to change Pall Mall's motto, at least in Islamic countries, to *in hoc signo felices* (lit. "happy under this sign") as the original "might endanger the brand in [a] Moslem country like Indonesia ..., if they find out the meaning/history of this sentence."⁹⁷

In Fascist Italy, the religious connotation of the phrase was not completely extinguished either, as it continued to be used with overt religious implications by the Roman Catholic Church during the 1930s, in connection with its anti-communist campaign. In 1936, for example, the Vatican's Secretariat on Atheism organized a traveling exhibition to raise awareness about the perils the Vatican associated with communism. The show communicated a clear-cut message: communism could only be eliminated through the collaboration of civil governments with the Catholic Church on a global scale. This message was highlighted by an iconic image that was prominently displayed throughout the exhibition and was also included in the visitor booklet and associated advertising (Fig. 12). The image featured a shining white crucifix alongside a black, blood-stained hammer and sickle, set against the backdrop of a globe. These visuals symbolized the world-wide struggle between the 'illuminating' power of the Roman Catholic Church and the 'dark' forces of communism. The image explicitly posed the question, *Quale segno vincerà?* ("Which sign will win?") with the word *vincerà* highlighted in bold white, drawing attention to the similarly shiny crucifix. The inscription on the cross provided the answer: *In hoc signo vinces*.⁹⁸ When viewed within the context of the Vatican's use of the Latin phrase, the Fascist appropriation of it in secular political contexts assumes a potentially even more antagonistic tone. While these specific instances may not directly respond to each other, they do indicate a broader and often implicit ideological struggle between the Fascist regime and the Roman Catholic Church in their competing claims to the ancient language of Rome.

Another striking example of Fascist appropriation of Christian *dicta* is provided by a bronze medallion with a diameter of twelve centimeters, produced in 1934, for an unknown occasion (Fig. 13).⁹⁹ At least one surviving specimen has a hole in the upper section, accompanied by a tricolor lintel,¹⁰⁰ while another was affixed to a wooden surface alongside a complementary counterpart plaque depicting the king.¹⁰¹ This suggests that these medallions were either hung or displayed as portraits in public spaces or in private homes. The object demonstrates that manipulations of Christian texts not only involved reframing the quote through the addition of political symbols and iconography but sometimes also entailed alterations to the text itself.

The plaque shown here depicts a profile of Mussolini in ancient Roman attire, reminiscent of the *lorica* or cuirass of a centurion, with a lion-head

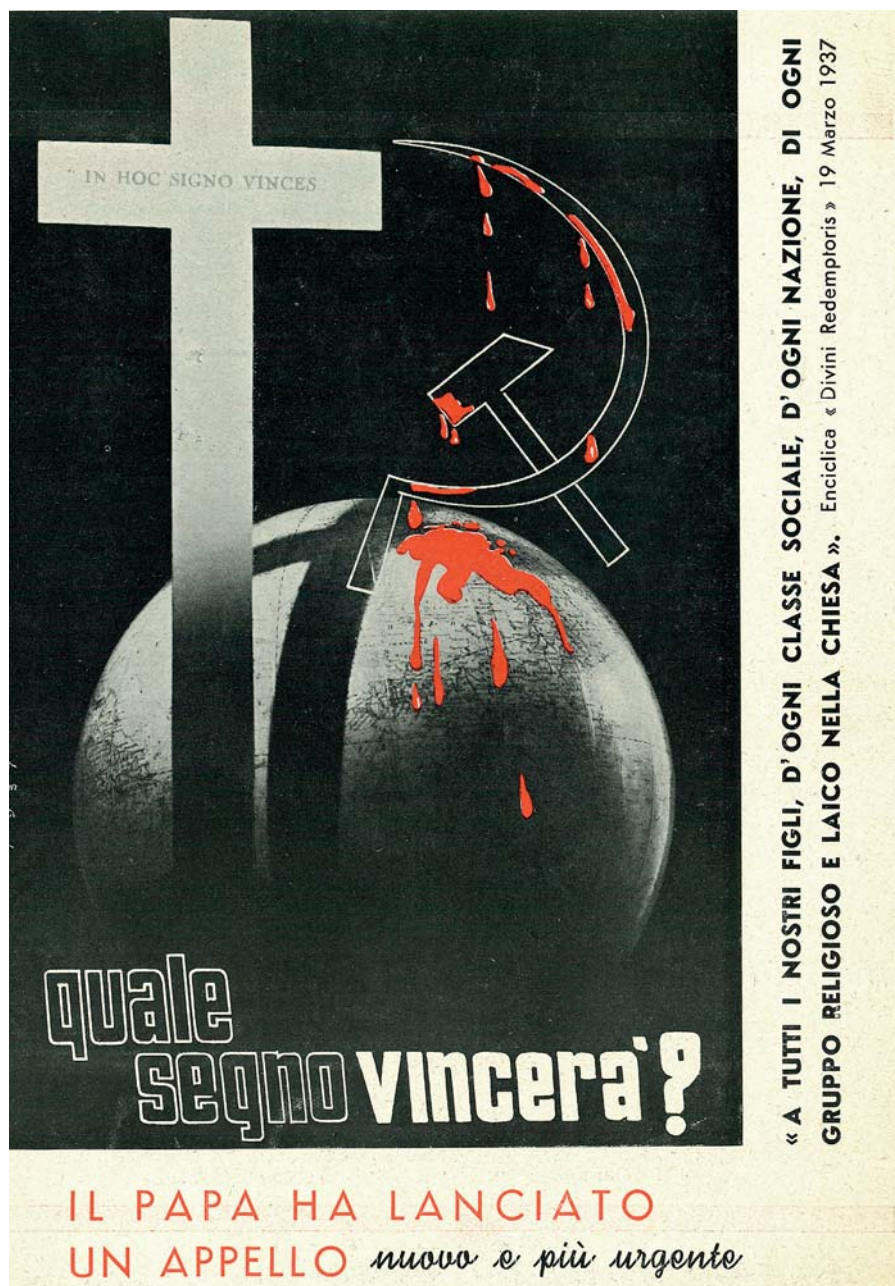


Fig. 12. Anti-communist leaflet of the Vatican Secretariat on Atheism, 1937.

Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, JESCOM 1038, DcA, fasc. SAR.

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Fig. 13. E. Tonucci (?). Bronze medal (131 mm), 1936.

From Paolo Gentilozzi & Sergio Piermattei, *Le medaglie del Ventennio*.

Catalogo alla mostra V° Convegno Filatelico Numismatico, Cingoli, 16 giugno 2002, Cingoli, 2002, p. 58, No. 87.

brooch. An eagle sits on his shoulder. The legend includes *DVX* and the Fascist year (*A. XIV*), while a lengthier Latin phrase encircles the object's diameter: *Levabitur aquila et in arduis ponet nidum suum* ("The eagle will soar and build its nest on high"). This Latin phrase is derived from the Book of Job (39:27). In the original biblical context, the question forms part of a sequence of queries God directs to Job to underscore the limitations of human agency in comparison to the divine. According to the Vulgate translation, God spoke to Job as follows (Job 39:26–30):

*Numquid per sapientiam tuam plumescit accipiter, expandens alas suas ad austrum?
 Numquid ad praeceptum tuum elevabitur aquila et in arduis ponet nidum suum?
 In petris manet et in praeruptis silicibus commoratur atque in culmine et arce. Inde
 contemplatur escam, et de longe oculi eius prospiciunt. Pulli eius lambent sanguinem;
 et, ubicumque cadaver fuerit, statim adest.*

Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom and spread its wings toward the south?
Does the eagle soar at your command and build its nest on high? It dwells on a cliff and stays there at night; a rocky crag is its stronghold. From there it looks for food; its eyes detect it from afar. Its young ones feast on blood, and where the slain are, there it is.

The text on the plaque manipulates the sentence from Job 29:27, removing the first four words and erasing the question mark, transforming the biblical question into a declarative statement. The question in the Book of Job is rhetorical, emphasizing that only God has the ability to command the eagle. In contrast, the revised phrasing on the plaque boldly suggests that Mussolini shares this power. While the eagle in the biblical passage has occasionally been interpreted as a symbol of divine insight, within this context, and also considering Mussolini's 'Roman' attire, it evokes the imperial eagle of ancient Rome. While Fascist iconography invests the manipulated quote with a crude, secular political message, the biblical connotation of the Latin phrasing lends a sense of solemnity and sanctity to the imagery associated with Mussolini. This transference aligns with Mussolini's cultivated image as a superhuman and messianic leader, which was also promoted by the regime's propaganda machine.

Examples such as *In hoc signo vinces* and *Levabitur aquila et in arduis ponet nidum suum* demonstrate how Christian Latin phrases could morph into political messages through iconographical framing and textual manipulation, with the underlying Christian tradition potentially imparting a solemn or sacred aura to the secular message. They moreover show that the use of Latin phrases on medals spanned the wider Latin tradition and incorporated sources from Christian literature. The citation from the Book of Job moreover serves as a reminder that Latin phrases extended beyond well-known quotes and catchphrases and included more obscure references that may not have been easily recognized or understood. These *dicta* were also manipulated to express political messages supporting Fascism, and the next section will present another example of this manipulation.

Cultural Revival: Augustan – Renaissance – Fascist Rome

Alongside imperial and Christian Rome, the heritage of the Italian Renaissance served as another important ideological reference point in Fascist material



Fig. 14. Unknown artist. Bronze medal (30.5 mm), probably for Riccardo Dalla Vedova, ca. 1936. Obverse (left) and reverse (right). Drawing after the original by Dr. Brandaan Huigen (Cape Town/London).

culture. These eras were regarded as periods of exceptional accomplishment that had profoundly shaped Italy, and their legacies were believed to be renewed under Mussolini's leadership. The medal shown here (Fig. 14) connects Fascist Italy with both Augustan and Renaissance Rome through its imagery and legends. The medal's iconography and legends draw inspiration from various traditions to endorse Mussolini and Fascism. Dated to the fourteenth year of the Fascist era, the item was produced in at least two sizes: one had a diameter of 30.50 mm, designed to be worn, while the other measured 98 mm and probably served decorative purposes.¹⁰² The design can be connected with the Department of Orthopaedics of the then Royal University of Rome (present-day Sapienza University of Rome), which opened its doors at the brand-new university campus, the Città Universitaria, on 30 October 1935. As we shall see, the Latin and Greek phrases on the medal were also displayed in that department as slogans or inscriptions, while the imagery of the medal's reverse recurred in the institute's sculptural decorations. The current department, still based in the same building, possesses a rare photograph of the medal's model, capturing the obverse and reverse side by side.¹⁰³ However, the exact occasion the medal marks remains unknown. The Fascist dating on its obverse places its original production between 29 October 1935 and 29 October 1936. During this time, several events

could have prompted its creation. In addition to the institute's opening, the university hosted the third congress of the International Society of Orthopaedic Surgery on 25 September 1936. The program included a visit to the cutting-edge department and an audience with Benito Mussolini at the Palazzo Venezia for select international scientists. Given the political significance of this event, the medal would have been a fitting memento for the participants.¹⁰⁴

The medal's obverse shows the Latin words *Impiger magnas inter opes inops* ("Industrious, poor among great riches") surrounding a profile portrait of Benito Mussolini. They come from one of Horace's odes in which the poet criticises the unquenchable desire for wealth (Hor. *Carm.* 3.16.21-28):

*quanto quisque sibi plura negaverit,
ab dis plura feret: nil cupientium
nudus castra peto et transfuga divitum
partis linquere gestio,
contemptae dominus splendidior rei
quam si quidquid arat impiger Apulus
occultare meis dicerer horreis,
magnas inter opes inops.*

The more a person denies himself, the more he will receive from the gods. Destitute myself, I want to join the camp of those who desire nothing; a deserter, I am eager to abandon the side of the rich, and thus acquire more credit for being master of the wealth I reject than were I said to hide away in my barns everything that the tireless Apulian reaps, a pauper surrounded by great riches.¹⁰⁵

In Horace's text, *impiger* and *magnas inter opes inops* serve different syntactic roles and refer to two distinct persons: the former describes an unnamed Apulian, while the latter is commonly construed as referring back to the subject of *dicerer* (namely, the poet's own persona).¹⁰⁶ On the medal, however, *impiger* and *magnas inter opes inops* are joined to form a somewhat unusual continuous phrase. This curious phrasing was also, in this specific form, used as a motto by Riccardo Dalla Vedova (1871-1942), founder and director of the Department of Orthopaedics. Fond of quoting Latin and Greek phrases in his written work and conversations, Dalla Vedova reportedly used it as a slogan in his clinic, presumably as an

inscription.¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, in Dalla Vedova's circle, the words were not only considered an expression of humanist erudition but also carried specific political significance. Writing shortly after the orthopaedist's death, his colleague Filippo Caccia, professor of traumatology and Lieutenant General of the Medical Service, wrote that Dalla Vedova "was a convinced Fascist" and added:

Few, like him, can better exemplify the Horatian motto so familiar to him, which he also displayed in his clinic, *impiger, magnas inter opes inops*, to convey the ideal image befitting a true Fascist.¹⁰⁸

Caccia, while acknowledging Horace as the source of the Latin inscription in Dalla Vedova's clinic, explicitly assigns a distinctively Fascist significance to the ancient words. On the medal under consideration here, this point is further underscored by conjoining the phrase with Mussolini's portrait. Through the close association of the Latin text with Mussolini's image, the Latin phrase is turned into a statement about the Fascist leader. In line with Fascist propaganda, the text suggests that Mussolini is an industrious leader who does not personally enjoy the rewards of his hard work but unselfishly devotes his efforts to Italy and its citizens.

The medal's reverse evokes associations with another cultural tradition that was central to Italy's national past and appropriated by Fascism: the Renaissance. This face shows an intricate iconography, depicting a male figure standing in a chariot pulled by two horses, whipping them as they are about to climb a rocky pinnacle, where a winged horse rears. The scene is accompanied by a Greek legend, which was uncommon in Fascist Italy: ΟΡΘΩΣ ΚΑΙ ΜΗ ΛΟΞΙΩΣ (ὀρθῶς καὶ μὴ λοξίως: "straight and not bent").¹⁰⁹ The exergue features horizontally positioned fasces. In contrast to the medal's obverse, the basic message of the reverse – both its imagery and legend – is subtler and not immediately clear. However, bibliophiles and book collectors would easily recognize the combination of the Greek motto and the iconography as originating in a specific and rather famous Renaissance *impresa*, i.e., a distinct emblem placed on the title page or book cover as a mark of ownership. The *impresa* in question, attributed to Claudio Tolomei (1492–1556), has captured the attention of book collectors and bibliophiles ever since the nineteenth century. Bindings with this emblem



Fig. 15. Claudio Tolomei (1492-1556). Impresa of Apollo and Pegasus on the binding of a copy of *Pindari poetae vetustissimi Olympia Pythia Nemea Isthmia* (Basel, Andreas Cratander, 1535), ca. 1545-1547. USTC No. 684133. PrPh Books, New York, NY. Courtesy of PrPh Books.

were highly sought after and were also forged (Fig. 15).¹¹⁰ Although the image does not depict a particular scene from ancient literature, it has commonly been interpreted as depicting Apollo, the god of poetry, ascending Parnassus, where Pegasus, symbolizing poetic genius and literary fame, awaits him. Thus, its central concept seems to be the attainment of fame through the cultivation of the arts.¹¹¹

This very iconography, along with the Greek text, recurs in the vestibule of Dalla Vedova's Department of Orthopaedics, which houses a specially commissioned bronze relief designed by the famed sculptor and decorator Alfredo Biagini (1886-1952) and approved by Marcello Piacentini (1881-1960), the architect overseeing the institute's construction (Fig. 16). This relief, featuring similar yet not identical iconography, originally had a bronze frame, which was replaced by a marble one during its restoration in 1996. The previous frame included fasces on the left side (similar to the fasces in the medal's exergue), with the Greek text divided across the upper, right, and lower sections of the frame.¹¹² The similarities in the iconography and the identical Greek text likely led to the attribution of the medal to Biagini, although this attribution is not further substantiated.¹¹³ The imagery and Greek text might have been selected for the institute because of their connection with the medical profession. In older scholarship, the *impresa* from which this design derives was attributed to Demetrio Canevari (1559-1625), who, like Dalla Vedova, was a medical doctor and an avid book collector based in Rome. The medical context of the *impresa* foregrounds Apollo's role as a god of healing rather than as a deity of poetry and the arts.¹¹⁴ In the context of Dalla Vedova's clinic, the Greek motto could specifically serve as a motto for orthopaedics, as the discipline's purpose is to restore and maintain a healthy and well-functioning alignment of the body's structure. The association of the *impresa* with medicine, and specifically orthopaedics, probably explains why Dalla Vedova also selected the medal's reverse as the cover illustration for the scientific journal he directed.¹¹⁵ Like the Horatian quote on the medal's obverse, the Greek motto was thus closely linked to Dalla Vedova's clinic and reflects the director's personal preferences.

However, like the Latin side of the medal, the Greek side also bears political hints. In addition to the fasces in the exergue, the medal's iconography alters the emblem's imagery in at least one more subtle way that glorifies Fascism and its leader. On the medal, the figure riding the chariot lacks the customary attributes



Fig. 16. Alfredo Biagini (1886-1952). Relief in the entrance hall of the Clinica Ortopedica – CU016, Sapienza University of Rome. Photography by Dr. Antonino Nastasi (Rome).

of a youthful Apollo, including the iconic flowing locks of hair. The bald and compact head instead resembles Mussolini's profile, while the muscular body aligns with the Fascist aesthetic of the male physique seen in other representations of male figures in Fascist propaganda.¹¹⁶ Just as the association between the Horatian phrasing and Mussolini's portrait on the medal's obverse turns the Latin into a statement about Mussolini, the Mussolini-like presence on the reverse seems to transform the whole scene, and the Greek text, into a statement about Fascism and its leader. Beholders are encouraged to interpret the Greek phrase as a motto describing both Mussolini's plain speech and readiness to action, and the image becomes an allegory of determined political accomplishment. Together with the addition of the fasces in the exergue, the medal's obverse thus exemplifies how iconography, too, could be 'fascisticized' through manipulative alterations to its original composition.

When considered together, the two sides of this medal evoke Latin and Greek learning and establish connections between Fascist imagery and diverse eras of Italy's cultural tradition. For those familiar with the original contexts of these phrases, they call to mind associations with Augustan Rome (Horace) and Renaissance Rome (Tolomei or Canevari). These two eras are united by a resounding sense of cultural renaissance, not least characterized by the proliferation of Latin and Greek language and literature. Mussolini's image on the medal's obverse, along with the 'Mussolinian presence' on the reverse, suggest that following in the footsteps of Augustan and Renaissance Rome, Fascist Rome, also symbolized by fasces on the reverse, ushers in a similar reawakening of science and scholarship. Fascist propaganda consistently accentuated the connection between the emerging new university centre and the Renaissance *Studium Urbis* to highlight the former's historical importance, symbolizing the nation's cultural revival under Fascist leadership.¹¹⁷ As with other examples we have examined, the medal's designer harnessed the material attributes of the object, including its two-sidedness, not just juxtaposing Augustan Rome and Mussolini's Rome but also amalgamating ancient, Renaissance, and Fascist spheres of reference into a single object glorifying Fascist Italy and its leader. The ancient languages thus become an integral and constitutive part of the visual evocation of Fascism's special place in history and thus celebrate, to recall Claudio Fogu's term, its multifaceted 'historic-ness'.¹¹⁸

Latin as a Diplomatic Gift: Fascism and Pan-Latinism

The specific circumstances in which medals were used often remain unknown or unclear, as with the previous example. However, sometimes more information is available. One such instance in particular highlights the importance of the performative context of these objects in understanding the role of Latin as a political instrument, while also illustrating how their material presentation shapes the political significance of the Latin (Fig. 17). The specific medallion shown here served as a diplomatic gift in a ceremony that took place in Brussels in the spring of 1927, intended to strengthen the relationship between Belgium and Italy.¹¹⁹ For this occasion, the medallion, with a diameter of 26 centimetres, was displayed in a stand brimming with political symbolism.¹²⁰ The stand comprises a base of ancient green marble,¹²¹ flanked by two bronze fasces with blades which, according to at least one report, were crafted from captured enemy cannons of the First World War.¹²² A gilded eagle adorns the base and rests on a cartouche with a Latin distich, to which we will return. While the object's location was unknown for decades, it has now been identified in the Brussels City Museum.¹²³

The design for the medal's obverse was created by the famed sculptor Aurelio Mistruzzi and was selected by the Governor of Rome, Prince Ludovico Spada Potenziani, as the "symbol of the City and the Magistrature of the Governor", in 1927.¹²⁴ The design shows a profile portrait of the Goddess Roma, adorned with a Roman helmet surrounded by laurel and oak leaves. To the keen observer, the helmet's decoration shows a subtle relief depicting the iconic imagery of the eagle and the she-wolf with Romulus and Remus. In the background, to the left of the Goddess, the fasces are featured, flanked by the customary blade and further associating the image with Mussolini's regime. The Latin legend running around the medal's periphery is a tendentious adaptation of the third strophe of Horace's *Carmen saeculare* (9-12): *Alme sol, possis nihil Urbe Roma visere maius* ("O kindly Sun, may you never be able to behold anything greater than the city of Rome"), omitting some words from the original: *Alme Sol, curru nitido diem qui / promis et celas aliusque et idem / nasceris, possis nihil urbe Roma / visere maius* ("O kindly Sun, who with your shining car bring forth the day and hide it away, who are born anew and yet the same, may you never be able to behold anything greater than the city of Rome!").



Fig. 17. Aurelio Mistruzzi (1880–1960). Bronze with Goddess Roma on an elaborate stand, offered by Carlo Delcroix to the City of Brussels in 1927 (260 mm).

Dimensions of the object: 705 x 432 x 150 mm. Brussels City Museum. Inv. No. B.1927.1.
Courtesy of the Brussels City Museum.

The *Carmen saeculare* had a special place in Fascist notions of Romanness. Although Horace's poem served as a significant cultural reference point before the emergence of Fascism, its popularity intensified during the *ventennio*. It was widely regarded as the first national hymn of the Italian people and was frequently performed, translated, and cited. The poem's popularity was so significant that it has been regarded as "one of the musical pillars of the Fascist regime."¹²⁵ Just weeks before the medal's presentation in Brussels, for instance, the Mausoleum of Augustus, then still used as a theatre, hosted a performance of Horace's hymn set to music by Aldo Aytano (1900-1988).¹²⁶ The words inscribed on Mistruzzi's medal, derived from the poem's third stanza, were particularly widespread and appeared on facades, triumphal arches, newsreels, postage stamps, and postcards.¹²⁷ They also served as a *leitmotiv* in Latin poems glorifying Mussolini.¹²⁸ Especially during the later 1930s, with events such as the Ethiopian Wars and the declaration of the Italian Empire, they were perceived as a prophetic declaration from the past that Mussolini's Italy now finally was fulfilling.

Against this background, it is not surprising that Mistruzzi's design with the Horatian phrase resurfaced frequently in the later 1920s and 1930s, usually in smaller, more typically medal-style formats. It was not only used by the Roman Governorate but also by other entities, and it circulated in designs with variations and different reverses, in various materials and dimensions. For example, it was combined with an image of Mussolini on the reverse, further cementing its association with Fascist Rome, for a medal for the Scuola Edmondo De Amicis in Rome (1932).¹²⁹ Around the same time, several organizations honoured the senator and former governor of Rome, Filippo Cremonesi (1872-1942), with gold medals bearing this design on their obverses.¹³⁰ The design was also used for medals presented to English players participating in the Italy versus England international friendly match, held in Rome on 13 May 1933.¹³¹ Mistruzzi's design thus serves as a reminder that individual medal designs could be repurposed across diverse contexts, combined with different reverses or obverses, and created in various materials and dimensions. In all these different contexts, the Latin could potentially hold a different significance and fulfil a different symbolic role.

During the ceremony in Brussels, the Latin of the object was made to serve a distinctive political purpose. The event was part of a campaign led by the renowned Italian war invalid Carlo Delcroix (1896-1977), who served as the president of the Associazione nazionale mutilati e invalidi di Guerra (National

Association of War Invalids and Maimed Veterans). As a decorated war hero who lost both his hands and eyesight during the First World War, he played an important role in Fascist ceremonies commemorating the war and served as a representative for Mussolini's regime abroad.¹³² Having authored essays on war heroism and strongly patriotic poems, his work gained attention internationally, leading one commentator in 1926 to remark that Fascism had found in Delcroix "a literary genius whose fame may live with that of Mussolini."¹³³ In May 1927, Delcroix, who had Belgian roots, led a delegation of Italian war veterans to Belgium, visiting several Belgian cities such as Brussels, Ghent, Antwerp, Liege, and Namur. Belgian media extensively covered the warm reception received by the Italian war heroes, with Delcroix delivering several impassioned speeches emphasizing the deep connection between the two nations. It was reported that during some of these events, both Belgians and Italians energetically shouted the name of Mussolini and performed the Fascist salute. Consequently, several critical voices, both within Belgium and abroad, regarded the entire visit as a promotional campaign for Fascism and Mussolini's regime.¹³⁴ In addition to engaging with Italian communities in Belgium, Delcroix's delegation made a point to visit monuments dedicated to fallen soldiers and paid their respects to the Unknown Soldier. Moreover, the group had grand meetings with high-ranking officials, including King Albert I and Queen Elisabeth of Belgium, to whom Delcroix presented a Roman *gladius* with the Latin motto *Ante mori quam foedari* ("Rather die than be dishonoured") chiselled on its hilt.¹³⁵

Latin had a special place in several other events related to Delcroix's visit. The theme of a shared linguistic and cultural heritage, encapsulated in the evocative and somewhat elusive notion of *latinità*, appears to have been a recurring point in his speeches. During his visit to Namur, he for instance delivered a speech in which he reportedly emphasized the "renaissance of Latin brotherhood" between Belgium and Italy.¹³⁶ In Antwerp, Delcroix broadened his vision of Italo-Belgian affinity to include the country's Flemish-speaking citizens as well. Referring to them as guardians of both *latinità* and the Roman Church, he emphasized their role in preserving both the Latin heritage and the traditions of Catholicism, which, especially before the reforms of the Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965, were neatly intertwined.¹³⁷ Thus, Delcroix seemed to have engaged Belgium in a pan-Latin community that Fascist Italy aimed to establish, fostering connections between Italy and Romance countries all over the world.¹³⁸

In this context, the use of Latin on the diplomatic object, including Mistruzzi's medal, carries significant ideological implications that can only be fully understood when considering the ceremonial setting in which the artifact was presented. On 10 May, Delcroix and his delegation visited the Town Hall of Brussels, where they were welcomed by the city's mayor, Adolphe Max (1869–1939). As the Italians' reception neared its conclusion, Delcroix, on behalf of the City of Rome and its Governor, presented the object to the mayor, expressing his wish for it to be preserved in the town hall as a symbol of friendship between Italians and Belgians. The connection between the two nations was further evoked through the Latin distich inscribed within a cartouche on the object's base. The writer of the distich has remained unidentified, but it was possibly Raffaello Santarelli (1888–1966) who, between 1925 and 1953, composed most Latin texts commissioned by the City of Rome.¹³⁹

Adorned with the emblematic abbreviation *SPQR*, representing Rome's people and government, the distich read:

*Maternam effigiem coluit quam Belgica virtus
Mittit, Bruxellae, Roma vetusta tibi.*

Ancient Rome sends you, Brussels, an image of the Mother, which Belgian courage has always held in reverence.

Having presented the object to the mayor, Delcroix led three cheers in honour of the defenders of *latinità*, alternating between French and Italian. Subsequently, one of his companions recited two documents composed in Latin in the name of the City of Rome and its Governor.¹⁴⁰ The selection of languages during the ceremony appears to have been deliberate, uniting French, Italian, and Latin to highlight the common thread of Latinity. Hence, Delcroix's emphasis on shared *latinità*, the Latin speeches delivered on the occasion, and the use of Latin on both the medal and its dedication all indicate the particular significance the language of Rome was supposed to hold in this context. The language not only added an air of solemnity and gravity to the secular political ceremony commemorating shared wartime suffering, but also underscored a strong relationship between the Italians and French-speaking Belgians as bearers of the Latin and, more generally, Roman heritage.

However, the use of Latin in the inscriptions and speeches accompanying the gift-giving also reveals something significant about the cultural inequality symbolized and reinforced by the gift. The rhetoric of shared *latinità*, propagated by Delcroix, masks the primacy of Rome and Italy that typically underpins Fascist discourse. While other nations may claim a share of the Roman heritage, including Latin, Italian Fascism viewed itself as the primary, and at times sole legitimate, inheritor of ancient Rome and its language. The Italians were supposed to have a privileged connection with Rome and its cultural traditions, and this exceptionalism shaped the regime's approach to cultural interactions internationally. This sense of cultural pre-eminence is also evident in the Latin texts inscribed on the object that Delcroix presented to the mayor of Brussels. The Horatian words on the medal unambiguously proclaim Rome's primacy in the world and enhance the symbolic significance of the depiction of the Goddess Rome. For the Fascist Governor of Rome, Prince Spada Potenziani, Mistruzzi's *Dea Roma* represented "the universal and everlasting worship of Italy and the civilized world."¹⁴¹

The elegiac distich on the base further defines the relationship between Brussels and Rome, as well as between Belgium and Italy. A quick reading of the distich might suggest that Belgium, like Italy, is a direct descendant of ancient Rome, but the Latin allows for meaningful ambiguity. Literally, the text states that *Belgica virtus* celebrated the *effigies*, the image or likeness, of Rome, not Rome itself, directly.¹⁴² The proximity to, or direct physical encounter with, Rome and its cultural heritage was significant in Fascist rhetoric regarding the Italians' supposed Romanness. The dominant attitude is aptly illustrated by the motto adopted, in 1933, by the Scuola Militare di Roma: *Romana virtus Romae discitur* ("Roman courage is learned in Rome") and, the implication is, nowhere else in the same way.¹⁴³ *Belgica virtus*, by contrast, is obviously not inspired by the same direct experience of Rome and its traditions, unlike the *Romana virtus* that Mussolini's regime asserted to have rekindled in the Italians. The distich thus subtly strengthens a sense of distance between Brussels and Rome, as well as Belgium and Italy. At the same time, it reinforces the special connection between Fascist Italy and ancient Rome. The Italian delegation presented this gift to Brussels not only on behalf of modern Rome but also symbolically, according to the distich, on behalf of *vetusta Roma*; it thus served as a placeholder for ancient Rome. The message conveyed is evident: while the Belgians may

participate in the cultural heritage of Rome, the Italians maintain their position as Rome's most legitimate successors.

In this way, the Latin texts on the object both contribute to the ideological message of the ceremony in which they were used and gain specific ideological significance within that ceremonial context. As the same design by Mistruzzi was employed in different contexts in the later 1920s and 1930s, Horace's words would acquire new significance in each instance. Their changing meaning and significance were largely shaped by their immediate material contexts, encompassing each medal's particular iconography and political imagery, as well as the performative contexts in which they were put to use.

- 75 The unattributed coin is recorded in Casolari XIV.182. See also Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, *o.c.*, vol. 2, p. 112-113 (Plate 19, No. 224), for a colour image of a copy in silvered bronze.
- 76 *Annuario della Regia Università di Modena*, Modena, 1937, p. 30.
- 77 The motif of Mussolini with the legend *princeps iuventutis* was popular on medals, and many artists used it, including Manetti (Casolari XIII.40; Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, *o.c.*, vol. 2, p. 111 [Plate 18, No. 209]; Castiglioni (Casolari XII.57); Orlandini (Casolari XIII.38; Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, *o.c.*, vol. 2, p. 91 [Plate 8, Nos. 105, 106]); Monti (Casolari XII.58). Several of these designs were used with multiple reverses. For some further examples, see Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, *o.c.*, vol. 2, p. 80-81 (Plate 3, Nos. 33-44) and p. 86-87 (Plate 6, Nos. 72, 74, 76, 77). See also the medal used for the Giochi Partenopei (Parthenopaeian Games) organized in Naples in 1935 and in which the Gruppi Universitari Fascisti and the Comandi Federali dei Fasci Giovanili participated: Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, *o.c.*, vol. 2, p. 80-81 (Plate 8, No. 106) = Casolari XIII.40 and *ibid.*, p. 110-111 (Plate 18, No. 209), not in Casolari. For an example of a school medal, see Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, *o.c.*, vol. 2, p. 90-91 (Plate 8, No. 105). A plaque with a diameter of 19 cm, showing Manetti's portrait of a helmeted Mussolini with the legend *princeps iuventutis*, is recorded in Terzo Maffei, Alessandro Raspagni & Fausto Sparacino, *Ieri ho visto il Duce. Trilogia dell'iconografia mussoliniana. 1: Biografia cronologica e memorabilia*, Parma, 1999, p. 159. On the role of the phrase in propaganda related to the Italian youth, see Follo, *o.c.*, p. 39-40.
- 78 See, e.g., Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, *o.c.*, vol. 2, p. 88-89 (Plate 7, Nos. 88, 91, 89, 90), p. 118-119 (Plate 22, No. 262) (= Casolari X.58), p. 142-153 (Plate 34, No. 401) (= Casolari XI.57).
- 79 M.D.C., *Iuventus*, in *Enciclopedia Italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti*, vol. 20, Rome, 1936, p. 67. For a thorough discussion of how the term has been understood, see Marietta Horster, *Princeps iuventutis: Concept, Realisation, Representation*, in *Figures d'empire, fragments de mémoire*, eds. Stéphane Benoist, Anne Daguet-Gagey & Christine Hoët-Van Cauwenberghe, Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2020, p. 73-103, esp. n. 1.
- 80 Exceptionally, on a coin dating to 306, Constantine was accorded the title *princeps iuventutis* in addition to *augustus*, for which see Mark Humphries, *From Usurper to Emperor: The Politics of Legitimation in the Age of Constantine*, in *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 1, 2008, p. 82-100.
- 81 Translation after Livy, *The History of Rome, Books 1-5*, transl. Valerie M. Warrior, Hackett, 2006, p. 403.
- 82 Pieri, *o.c.*, p. 168.
- 83 Sarasino De Mauri, *Flores Sententiarum: raccolta di sentenze, proverbi e motti latini*, Milan, 1926, p. 601. On the Latin motto in general, see also Renzo Tosi, *Dizionario delle sentenze latine e greche*, Milan, 2017, No. 981.
- 84 For this medal, see Casolari II.11 and Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, *o.c.*, vol. 2, p. 130-131 (Plate 28, No. 338).
- 85 See Gabriele d'Annunzio, *Prose di ricerca, di lotta, di comando, di conquista, di tormento, d'indovino, di rinnovamento, di celebrazione, di rivendicazione, di liberazione, di favole, di giochi, di baleni*, ed. Egidio Bianchetti, Milan, 1966, p. 1092.
- 86 Gastone Canziani & Paolo Cavassini, *A Fiume con D'Annunzio. Lettere 1919-1920*, Ravenna, 2008, p. 55: "Nei nostri cuori, nell'anima, sulle porte, sui sassi da per tutto abbiamo impresso il nostro motto romano *Hic manebimus optime*. E rimarremo."
- 87 On d'Annunzio's medal and its uses under Fascism, see Federico Carlo Simonelli,

- D'Annunzio e il mito di Fiume: riti, simboli, narrazioni*, Ospedaletto, 2021, p. 250–253. On his wider use of the Latin phrase, see also Simone Maiolini & Patrizia Paradisi, *I motti di Gabriele d'Annunzio: le fonti, la storia, i significati*, Milan, 2022, p. 78–80, 172, 197, 219, 323. On his impact on the numismatic iconography of (Fascist) Italy, see Giuseppe Alonzo, *Dall'iconografia delle monete antiche all'ideologia della nazione futura: proiezioni della numismatica greco-italica di D'Annunzio sulla nuova monetazione sabauda*, in *Proceedings of the 14th International Numismatic Congress, Glasgow 2009*, ed. Nicholas Holmes, Glasgow, 2011, p. 1985–1991, with the references there.
- 88 See e.g. the illustration by Damiano Damiani printed in *La Rivista Illustrata del Popolo d'Italia*, March 1936, p. 11, together with Mussolini's speeches declaring the empire.
- 89 Nicolò Bett ragazzi, *Ideologies of Latin in Fascist Italy (1922–1943): The Language of Rome between Fascism and Catholicism*, PhD Thesis, University of Groningen, Groningen, 2023.
- 90 See *Reds Boo the Rex as Fascists Sail in New York Times*, 20 October, 1935, p. 34. It is difficult to say how involved the official channels of the regime were in the commissioning of this medal specifically. For a general overview of the reception of Italian Fascism in Italian-American communities, see Stefano Luconi, *Fascism and Italian-American Identity Politics*, in *Italian Americana*, 33, 1, 2015, p. 6–24. See also Philip V. Cannistraro, *Fascism and Italian-Americans in Detroit 1933–1935*, in *International Migration Review*, 9, 1, 1975, p. 29–40, for an interesting case. A general history of the Ironbound area can be found in Edward A. Jardim, *The Ironbound: An Illustrated History of Newark's 'Down Neck'*, Frenchtown, New Jersey, 2016.
- 91 The exact Latin formulation goes back to the Middle Ages. On the Latinization of the phrase, see the remarks in Nikolaus Staubach, *In hoc signo vinces: Wundererklärung und Wunderkritik im vormodernen Wissensdiskurs*, in *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 43, 1, 2009, p. 1–52, p. 7, with n. 23.
- 92 It is possible that some contemporaries associated the eagle and the Latin *signum* through their reading of Dante's *Paradiso* 6, wherein the eagle is featured as the *segno* (Dante's word) or symbol of the Roman Empire. In Dante's representation, the eagle assumes a crucial role in expounding the providential history of Rome, as conveyed by the emperor Justinian.
- 93 Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini: dal viaggio negli Abruzzi al delitto Matteotti (23 agosto 1923–13 giugno 1924)*, eds. Duilio Susmel & Edoardo Susmel, Florence, 1956, p. 18 (note).
- 94 The bronze medal, with a diameter of 28 mm and original sewn ribbon, was sold by Carlo Morandi in Domžale, Slovenia (object no. 1079). We thank Mr. Morandi for confirming these details.
- 95 Explicit comparisons between Mussolini and Constantine the Great are mostly confined to the period following the success of the Lateran Pacts in 1929. On the imagined parallels between them, see the remarks in Nicolò Bett ragazzi, Han Lamers & Bettina Reitz-Joosse, *Viewing Rome in the Latin Literature of the Ventennio Fascista: Francesco Giammaria's Capitolium Novum*, in *Fascism*, 8, 2, 2019, p. 153–178, p. 172, with the references there.
- 96 Hannah Campbell, *Why Did They Name It...?*, New York, 1964, p. 110; Richard Kluger, *Ashes to Ashes: America's Hundred-Year Cigarette War, the Public Health, and the Unabashed Triumph of Philip Morris*, New York, 1996, p. 117–118.

- 97 See Zeffrey Alamsyah's email to Apurv Nagpal, dating to 20 January 2000 and preserved in the British American Tobacco Records (ID hgjy0202). The modern political significance of the motto is primarily due to its association with the Crusades, which also makes it appealing to far-right Islamophobic groups like the English Defence League (EDL). For the use of the quote by the English Defence League, see Andrew B.R. Elliott, *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media: Appropriating the Middle Ages in the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge, 2017, p. 155-182.
- 98 On the Vatican's anti-communist exhibition and the poster, see also Giuliana Chamedes, *The Vatican, Nazi-Fascism, and the Making of Transnational Anti-Communism in the 1930s*, in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 51, 2016, p. 261-290.
- 99 See Gentilozzi & Piermattei, *o.c.*, p. 58 (No. 87), misattributing the item to "Tarullus" (a misreading of the signature); Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, *o.c.*, vol. 1, p. 161; Petacco, *o.c.*, p. 67. Most of these items are in private collections, but one exemplar is preserved in Museum MAGI '900 in Pieve di Cento near Bologna.
- 100 The exemplar was auctioned online at NumisBids by Numismatica Rinieri (Via de' Poeti 4, Bologna, Italy) on 11 September 2022 (Lot 468). Marco Rinieri confirmed the physical details of the object and kindly provided images for inspection (p.c. 29 August 2023).
- 101 The plaque shows a profile portrait of the king, embellished with a Latin inscription (*Venit imperaturus a Mari Nostro*). A wooden tablet with the two plaques has been preserved in an unidentified private collection. In addition to the portraits, this tablet bears a small metal plate in the shape of a *tabula ansata* with the text "Coop. Fonditori Mutilati Roma". It was recently listed for sale anonymously on the website Arte Proibita (date and lot number not specified; last accessed on 28 August 2023).
- 102 Casolari XIV.2, without noting the Greek; see also Maffei, Raspagni & Sparacino, *o.c.*, vol. 2, p. 128-129 (Plate 27, No. 323).
- 103 The photograph is framed and displayed on a wall the Orthopaedics Department: Rome, Città Universitaria, Clinica ortopedica, building CU016, first floor, last inspected by Dr. Antonino Nastasi on 7 November 2023. The anonymous caption accompanying the photograph, presumably added in the late 1990s, attributes the design of the medal to Alfredo Biagini and incorrectly states that it was not minted.
- 104 On the conference, see the reports in, e.g., *Notiziario*, in *Bibliografia ortopedica*, 19, 5, 1936, p. 425-427 and Eduard Vander Elst (ed.), *Société Internationale de Chirurgie Orthopédique et de Traumatologie: 50 Years of Achievement, Paris October 10th, 1929 – Kyoto October 15th-20th, 1978*, Berlin & Heidelberg, 1978, p. 38-39.
- 105 Translation after Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, transl. Niall Rudd, Cambridge, Mass. & London, 2004, p. 185.
- 106 See, for example, the interpretations of François Villeneuve, *Horace, Tome I: Odes et épodes*, Paris, 1981, p. 126; David West, *Horace, Odes III: Dulce Periculum*, Oxford, 2002, p. 141; Robert G.M. Nisbet and Niall Rudd, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book III*, Oxford, 2004, p. 207-208; Anthony John Woodman, *Horace: Odes Book III*, Cambridge, 2022, p. 259. Note that, grammatically, the phrase *magnas inter opes inops* could also be regarded as in apposition with *Apulus*; however, this interpretation would be less appropriate contextually.
- 107 Filippo Caccia, *Prof. Riccardo Dalla Vedova. 8 ottobre 1871 – 24 maggio 1942-XX*, in *Atti della Accademia Lancisiana di Roma*, 14, 1942, p. 7-19, p. 11. We have not been able to trace the original location

- of the inscription in the Department. The building was severely damaged during the bombardments of 19 July 1943, and after the fall of Mussolini's regime, symbols and inscriptions reminiscent of Fascism were sometimes removed.
- 108 Filippo Caccia, *o.c.*, p. 11: "Era anche un convinto fascista. A pochi, come a Lui, si può meglio attribuire il motto oraziano, a Lui tanto familiare e che ha anche riprodotto nella sua Clinica, *impiger, magnas inter opes inops* per esprimere la sagoma che si addice al fascista puro." Note the comma after *impiger*, which might or might not reflect the punctuation in the original inscription.
- 109 On the rarity of Greek legends and inscriptions, see, e.g., Gallo *o.c.*, p. 26.
- 110 The emblem's iconography was also available through various reproductions in the bibliophilic literature, e.g., in Jacques Joseph Techener & Léon Techener, *Histoire de la bibliophilie. Reliures. Recherches sur les bibliothèques des plus célèbres amateurs. Armorial des bibliophiles*, Paris, 1861, Plate 7 and Vittorio De Toldo, *L'art italien de la reliure du livre (XV-XVI^e siècle)*, Milan, 1924, Plates 33-37.
- III The most recent discussion of the *impresa*'s iconography is Anthony Hobson, *Apollo and Pegasus: An Enquiry into the Formation and Dispersal of a Renaissance Library*, Amsterdam, 1975, p. 17-36, without a detailed discussion of the Greek text. For a slightly different interpretation, see Giuseppe Fumagalli, *Di Demetrio Canevari medico e bibliofilo genovese e delle preziose legature che si dicono a lui appartenute*, in *La Bibliofilia*, 4, 1902-1903, p. 300-316, p. 308. Fumagalli construed the emblem as an allegory of genius addressing difficulties outright in order to overcome them, without attempting to bypass them through craftiness or deceit. The interpretation was also adopted by Antonio Bellucci, *Illustrazione di 22 ignote legature adespote OPΘΩΣ KAI MH ΛΟΞΙΩΣ erroneamente dette Canevari*, in *Bollettino del bibliofilo*, 2, 1920, p. 1-30, p. 10-11.
- 112 On the relief and its history, see also Ida Mitrano, *La Sapienza, 1932-1935. Arte, architettura e storia. I documenti del Consorzio per l'assetto edilizio della Regia università di Roma*, Rome, 2008, p. 121-122, D'Angelo's entry in *Arte in Sapienza: catalogo delle opere nella Città universitaria. Prime ricerche*, ed. Eliana Billi, Rome, 2023, p. 227-228, and Luigi Romanini (ed.), *60 anniversario della fondazione dell'Istituto di clinica ortopedica e traumatologica dell'università di Roma 'La Sapienza': Un itinerario di scienza e cultura universitaria della scuola ortopedica romana*, Rome, 1997, p. 56-57. In literature about Biagini's relief, the scene has been interpreted as depicting the myth of Pegasus and Bellerophon. However, this subject seems out of place in this context, and its iconography does not align with that of the relief. For this position, see, for instance, D'Angelo, *o.c.* The imagery's connection with the Renaissance *impresa* has not been noted. On the inscription, see Nastasi, *Le iscrizioni*, *o.c.*, p. 723-724. The commission documents are preserved in Archivio Storico dell'Università La Sapienza, Fondo Consorzio per l'assetto Edilizio della Regia Università di Roma, F. 357 B. 45.
- 113 See Romanini, *o.c.*, p. 14.
- 114 The first to connect the emblem with Canevari was Techener & Techener, *o.c.*, Plate 7. The hypothesis was refuted in 1903 by Fumagalli, *o.c.* The association with Canevari remained strong in later scholarship: Hobson, *o.c.*, p. 3-4. In more recent scholarship, the *impresa* is commonly associated with the library of Giovanni Battista Grimaldi (1524-ca. 1612). On the evidence for the attribution to Grimaldi's library, see the discussion of Hobsen, *o.c.*

- 115 The journal was entitled *Ortopedia e traumatologia dell'apparato motore* (Orthopaedics and Traumatology of the Neuromuscular System). The medal appeared on the journal's cover from January 1936 (issue 7) until the end of 1940 (issue 12). The journal provides no information about the medal's context. See also Romanini, *o.c.*, p. 14.
- 116 Note that in Alfredo Biagini's bronze relief the image of Apollo is also replaced by another figure that does not possess the distinct Mussolinian characteristics.
- 117 See, for example, the discussion of Riccardo V. Ceccherini, *Dallo Studium Urbis alla Città degli Studi*, in *Capitolium*, 9, 12, 1933, p. 591-610.
- 118 See Claudio Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary. Politics of History in Fascist Italy*, Toronto, 2003.
- 119 On the notion of diplomatic objects and gifts, see Lif Lund Jacobsen, Irina Fedorova & Julia Lajus, *The Seismograph as a Diplomatic Object: The Soviet-American Exchange of Instruments, 1958-1964*, in *Centaurus*, 63, 2, 2021, p. 277-295.
- 120 The material details of the artefact are derived from *La rinascita dell'arte della medaglia*, *o.c.*, p. 312. The material of the medal was described as both silver (*La rinascita*, *o.c.*) and silvered bronze (*Les mutilés italiens en Belgique*, in *Le Vingtième Siècle*, 11 May 1927, p. 1).
- 121 The word used to describe the stone is *marmo verde antico* which suggests *marmor thessalicum*, not really marble but a greenish, white-veined serpentine.
- 122 This was reported in *La visite des invalides italiens en Belgique*, in *La Libre Belgique*, 11 May 1927.
- 123 The object (Brussels City Museum, Inv. No. B.1927.1) is currently not on display. We extend our gratitude to Marieke De Baerdemaeker for her assistance in locating the object.
- 124 *La rinascita dell'arte della medaglia*, *o.c.*, p. 311. Exemplars for the Governorate typically feature the sober legend "Il Governatore di Roma" (The Governor of Rome) on their reverse. An undated exemplar (silver, 61mm, 83 g.) is recorded, without date, in Gentilozzi & Piermattei, *o.c.*, p. 38 (No. 49).
- 125 See Wolfgang Strobl, "Possis nihil urbe Roma visere maius": *Zur politischen und musikalischen Rezeption des Carmen saeculare im italienischen Faschismus und zu einer Vertonung Aldo Aytanos (1926/27)*, in *Latomus*, 74, 3, 2015, p. 735-778, p. 749.
- 126 On the reception of the *Carmen saeculare*, see esp. Strobl, "Possis nihil urbe Roma visere maius", *o.c.*
- 127 Newsreels: Lamers, *Language on Display*, *o.c.*, 71n9. Stamps: Liberati, *o.c.*, and Schumacher, *o.c.* Inscriptions: Samuel Agbamu, *The Arco dei Fileni: A Fascist Reading of Sallust's Bellum Iugurthinum*, in *Classical Receptions Journal*, 11, 2, 2019, p. 157-177; Nastasi, *L'epigrafia*, *o.c.*, p. 180-187; Wolfgang Strobl, "Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento...": *Zur Rezeption von Vergil und Horaz im italienischen Faschismus am Beispiel des Siegesplatzes in Bozen*, in *Antike und Abendland*, 58, 2012, p. 143-166.
- 128 Paolo Fedeli, *Uso e abuso della poesia di Orazio nelle odi al Duce e al fascismo*, in *Studies in the Latin Literature and Epigraphy of Italian Fascism*, eds. Han Lamers, Bettina Reitz-Joosse & Valerio Sanzotta, Leuven, 2020, p. 51-75, p. 72.
- 129 Under Mistruzzi's name, exemplars were issued by various organizations based in Rome, including the Cassa di Risparmio (1927) and the Scuola Edmondo De Amicis (1932): Casolari V.76, Casolari X.120. It was also used for medals related to events held in the city such as the first Congresso Nazionale di Studi Romani (1928), the Congresso Giuridico di Roma (1932), and the Congresso Internazionale Assicurazioni Generali

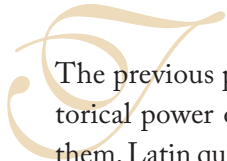
- in Rome (1934): Casolari VI.76, Casolari X.100, Casolari X.120, Casolari XII.106. For a medal commemorating Italy's fallen soldiers from the First World War (1928), Mistruzzi's depiction of Goddess Roma was combined with another Latin legend, derived from Justinian's *Digests* (50.1.33): *Roma communis patria* ("Rome, our common homeland").
- 130 Asta del Titano, *o.c.*, p. 61 (Nos. 144-145).
- 131 Different exemplars of this medal were auctioned at Graham Budd Auctions (London) in May 2018 (Lot 763), June 2021 (Lot 817), and December 2021 (Lot 54). The reverse carries the text "INGHILTERRA / ITALIA / ROMA / 13 MAGGIO 1933 / A. XI." We are grateful to Graham Budd for confirming these details (p.c. 24 January 2024).
- 132 On Delcroix's role in Fascist Italy, see the discussion of Matteo Di Figlia, *The Blind Bard and the Unflagging Hierarchy: Memories of War and Self-Representations in Fascist Italy*, in *Časopis za povijest Zapadne Hrvatske / West Croatian History Journal*, 8, 2013, p. 13-32. On his role as an international actor, see Ángel Alcalde, *War Veterans as Transnational Actors: Politics, Alliances and Networks in the Interwar Period*, in *European Review of History / Revue européenne d'histoire*, 25, 3-4, 2018, p. 492-511, p. 504-505.
- 133 R. E. Gordon George, *Carlo Delcroix in Italy: The Heroism of Suffering*, in *New Blackfriars*, 7, 1926, p. 207-214, p. 207. Delcroix may have been behind some short Latin inscriptions in the Casa Madre dei Mutilati in Rome: Flavia Marcello, *Between Censure and Celebration: The Decorative Plan of the Casa Madre dei Mutilati in Rome (1926-1939)*, in *Modern Italy*, 24, 2, 2019, p. 179-198, p. 189.
- 134 Pro-Fascist outbursts were reported in, for instance, *Anvers a fait aux glorieux mutilés italiens le plus chaleureux accueil*, in *La Métropole*, 12 May 1927, p. 1-2, p. 2;
- Uitbarstingen van geestdrift. – Het bezoek der Italiaansche invaliden. – Hartelijk onthaal in Antwerpen*, in *De Nieuwe Gazet*, 11 May 1927, p. 1-2, p. 2; *Bruxelles fait aux mutilés italiens un accueil enthousiaste et fraternel*, in *Le Vingtième Siècle*, 8 May 1927, p. 1; E.S., *Les grands invalides italiens chez nous. A Liège (suite)*, in *Le Vingtième Siècle*, 14 May 1927, p. 3. It was also reported, often critically, in the Netherlands: see, e.g., *Fascistische uitbundigheid en sinjoren-nuchterheid*, in *Dagblad van Noord-Brabant*, 17 May 1927, p. 1; *De zwaai der Belgicisten*, in *De Avondpost*, 19 May 1927, p. [5]; Marc. De C., *Nieuws uit België*, in *Provinciale Geldersche en Nijmeegsche Courant*, 20 May 1927, 2nd fasc., p. [2]: "[N]u de gasten vertrokken zijn heeft men den indruk dat men, in stede van invaliden, fascistische propagandisten heeft ontvangen!" ("Now that the guests have left, one gets the impression that, instead of invalids, they hosted Fascist propagandists!").
- 135 *Les mutilés italiens au Musée de l'Armée*, in *L'Avenir du Luxembourg*, 11 May 1927, p. 2; *De Italiaansche invaliden in Brussel*, in *De Gazet van Antwerpen*, 11 May 1927, p. 2; *De Italiaansche invaliden te België*, in *Het Nieuws van de Dag*, 11 May 1927, p. 3; *Les grands invalides chez S. M. le Roi*, in *Le Vingtième Siècle*, 10 May 1927, p. 2. The Latin motto has no clear origin but was traditionally used by the Roman Antamoro family (compare *Ante mori*): Vittorio Spredi (ed.), *Enciclopedia storico-nobiliare italiana*, Milan, 1928, p. 398.
- 136 "Ce qui nous a le plus frappés, dit-il, en visitant les villes belges, c'est la renaissance de la fraternité latine" ("What struck us the most, he said, as we visited the Belgian cities, was the renaissance of Latin brotherhood"), reported in *L'adieu des mutilés italiens*, in *Le Vingtième Siècle*, 15 May 1927, p. 1.

- 137 *Un solennel hommage de Carlo Delcroix à la Flandre*, in *Le Vingtième Siècle*, 13 May 1927, p. 2, quoting Delcroix directly.
- 138 Delcroix was not alone in highlighting the 'Roman' and 'Latin' connection between Belgium and Italy. Compare, for instance, the interesting discussion of Antonio Bruers, *La questione fiamminga alla luce di Roma*, in *Antieuropa*, 1, 1929, p. 692-701.
- 139 On Santarelli, see Antonino Nastasi, *Santarelli, Raffaello*, in *Fascist Latin Texts*, eds. Han Lamers & Bettina Reitz-Joosse. One of Santarelli's inscriptions, at Piazza di Sant'Andrea della Valle 6 in Rome, has *bellica virtus* in the same position of the verse as *Belgica virtus* in the inscription on the object (Nastasi, *Piazza di Sant'Andrea della Valle [extant]* in *Fascist Latin Texts*, eds. Han Lamers & Bettina Reitz-Joosse, and Nastasi, *Le iscrizioni*, o.c., p. 140-141).
- 140 The ceremony is described in some detail in *Les mutilés italiens en Belgique*, in *Le Vingtième Siècle*, 11 May 1927, p. 1; see also *La visite des invalides italiens en Belgique*, o.c., citing the Horatian line in Latin. The ceremony was described in less detail in *Les fêtes italo-belges*, in *L'Indépendance Belge*, 11 May 1927, p. 2; *Les mutilés italiens en Belgique*, in *Le Soir*, 11 May 1927, p. 3; *Uitbarstingen*, o.c., p. 1. The text of the Latin speeches is currently unknown.
- 141 *La rinascita dell'arte della medaglia*, o.c., p. 311.
- 142 In the only two occurrences of the expression *effigiem colere* in classical literature, the term *effigies* refers to visual representations produced by art in general (Ov. *Pont.* 2.8.60) and a specific portrait or bust (Tac. *Ann.* 16.7.2).
- 143 For the inscription at the Scuola Militare di Roma, see Nastasi, *Le iscrizioni*, o.c., p. 221-223.

6

By Way of Conclusion





The previous pages have shown how Latin epigraphs could amplify the rhetorical power of medals for both those who could and could not understand them. Latin quotes added meaning and significance to the surfaces they adorned, elevating their status and linking them with various facets of Romanness, from Augustan and imperial Rome through Roman Christianity to d'Annunzio's Roman patriotism. The choice of Latin can thus be regarded as an integral part of Fascism's strategy to link Mussolini's Italy with significant historical legacies and traditions, while at the same time projecting a lasting image of Fascist Italy into the future. We hope that our case studies have offered a glimpse into what a more comprehensive examination of these artefacts could reveal about Fascist Italy's material culture and the role of the Latin language within it.

In conclusion, we would like to highlight three considerations that we have gleaned from our explorations. First, the examples discussed have shown that Latin expressions on medals cannot be understood as mere instances of 'reuse' or 'recycling' of antiquity. Instead, Latin phrases, taken from a range of sources, were deliberately de- and re-contextualized. This process of transformation involved not just selecting a phrase from a text and 'planting' it in another context but also adapting it to a new setting and shaping its visual and material context to effectively facilitate its rhetorical purpose. Latin *dicta* were transformed both by severing them from their prior context and occasionally changing and manipulating the words to accommodate the desired meaning. Additionally, the medals' material attributes, such as their two-sidedness and their iconographies, were harnessed to mould familiar (and not so familiar) Latin expressions into slogans and mottoes of Fascism.

Secondly, the case studies we examined bring attention to an often-under-emphasized aspect of the way in which Latin *dicta* gain political meaning. It is common to trace these sayings back to their original context and view their manipulation as a distortion of their original meaning, often described by scholars as the 'abuse' of, for example, Livy and Horace, or Scripture. Indeed, it is

important to compare Latin phrases to their original context to uncover the manipulative strategies employed. However, their potential political appeal cannot always be reduced to their ancient source. Latin phrases, like objects, have more complex 'cultural biographies' that shape their meanings and cultural values.¹⁴⁴ Before being repurposed to convey Fascist political messages, many of them were already embedded in cultural and political discourse, and their more recent histories are sometimes more relevant to their symbolic meaning than their historical origins. For example, in the case of *Hic manebimus optime*, its use by Gabriele d'Annunzio seems more immediately relevant to understanding its political appeal for Fascism than its original context in Livy's history of Rome. The relevance of modern discourse is also apparent in contemporary discussions, like Carlo Vignoli's account of Latin mottoes in aeronautic contexts, including medals, where he consistently references d'Annunzio's use of specific mottoes.¹⁴⁵ This highlights the significance of considering the broader circulation of such *dicta* and understanding their use in Fascist propaganda as an effort to establish control over their usage, meaning, and dissemination within Italy's political discourse.

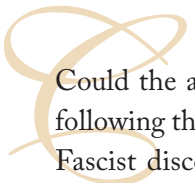
Thirdly, the use of Latin in material culture can be studied without reducing the language either to textual meaning or to visual script. The multiple facets of the language remain often underemphasized, as literary scholars typically focus on literary and textual aspects, while visual scholars prioritize visual and material features. We have sought to integrate various aspects of how language can be meaningful in material culture, encompassing the symbolic value of language choice, the literary meaning and significance of the words used, and their material form and shape, as well as the imagery that frames them and the performative setting in which they are inscribed. This approach recognizes that language in material culture is usually crafted to be both read and seen, by many different people. In this case, for example, Latin epigraphs had to convey their rhetorical impact across various groups, from the academic circles of Riccardo Dalla Vedova's clinic to the broader masses of boys and girls who were awarded medals with Latin legends during grand public events. They conveyed distinct messages to different groups, ranging from a general sense of a shared Roman heritage to cunningly encoded political messages. Through a more differentiated, multimodal approach like the one used here, we can try to grasp the politico-symbolical potential of Latin, as well as any language, within the realm of material culture, both within and beyond the context of Fascist Italy.

- 144 On the notion of object biography, originating in archaeology, see, fundamentally, Chris Gosden & Yvonne Marshall, *The Cultural Biography of Objects*, in *World Archaeology*, 31, 2, 1999, p. 169-178, along with the other articles included in that special issue of the journal.
- 145 Carlo Vignoli, *L'aviazione e la lingua di Roma*, in *Atti del 4. Congresso Nazionale di Studi Romani*, ed. Carlo Galassi Paluzzi, vol. 4, Bologna, 1938, p. 113-122.

7

Epilogue: Mistruzzi's Medals





Could the ancient language of Rome shake off the associations with Fascism following the fall of Mussolini's regime? Was it possible to employ Latin in anti-Fascist discourses and material cultures after the regime had so thoroughly appropriated it?

While anti-Fascist responses to Latin remain underexplored, medals may shed interesting light on these questions. The famed Aurelio Mistruzzi, following Mussolini's downfall in 1943, repurposed – or rather re-politicized – the Latin language through his medals in order to criticize Fascism. While during the *ventennio fascista*, the same medallist had used Latin phrases to articulate political messages aligned with Fascism, soon after the war, the medals he designed celebrated the downfall of Fascism, praised the defeat of Germany, and paid tribute to Holocaust victims. Through these medals, Mistruzzi satirized and distorted the very Fascist symbols he had previously deftly employed, while attempting to rescue Latin from the sombre remnants of Mussolini's Italy. Two examples can highlight this significant change in his use of Latin.

In a medal Mistruzzi crafted as early as 1943, the obverse portrays the goddess Liberty bound to fasces (Fig. 18). Just above the date of the March on Rome, we read the Latin legend *ludibrium libertatis* (“A mockery of liberty”). Although not an ancient phrasing, the words evoke phrases like *praesidium libertatis* (“defence of liberty”), found in Livy 3.55, to refer to the *provocatio* – the Roman practice of appealing to the people against magistrates' decisions – which was to provide a check against the potential abuse of power and to uphold the rights of citizens. While the medal's obverse thus parodies Fascist symbolism with Liberty being bound to fasces, its reverse takes it a step further by distorting and even fracturing these symbols. It shows fasces broken into two pieces by three lightning bolts, a common symbol of resistance to National Socialism in Germany and Austria. Here, too, Latin is part of the message, and unlike the symbol of the fasces, it remains intact as a herald of a new, free order, devoid of Fascism, as it taps new sources. Together with the date of Mussolini's



Fig. 18. Aurelio Mistruzzi (1880–1960). Bronze medal (93 mm), 1943. Obverse (left) and reverse (right). Artemide Aste (Dogana, San Marino). Auction 45, lot 994. Courtesy of Artemide Aste.

arrest (25 July 1943), the medal's reverse shows the words *restituta libertas* ("liberty restored"). This legend references Roman coins dating to the brief reign of Galba in 69 CE. Galba employed the same words to symbolize his reign's intended departure from the tyrannical rule of his predecessor Nero.¹⁴⁶ Thus, Mistruzzi's recontextualization of Galba's slogan frames Mussolini as a tyrannical Nero who has now been overthrown by the restoration of liberty. The phrase *restituta libertas* also references the common Fascist dating formula *a fascibus restructis* ("from the restoration of the fasces"). With the Fascist phrase in mind, and alongside the imagery of Fascism's broken symbols, *restituta libertas* becomes the slogan of an anti-Fascist counter-discourse, in which Latin heralds the restoration of liberty instead of Fascism. Mistruzzi made a similar message more explicit on another medal he designed a year later in 1944, featuring the legend *fascibus confractis resurgo* ("with the fasces broken, I rise anew").¹⁴⁷ In this way, the medallist responded to, and inverted, the rhetoric of Fascism in the same language he had previously employed to support it.

Mistruzzi employed similar strategies of critique in other post-Fascist medals. One of them features the image of a dog wearing a collar bearing the logo of the National Fascist Party (Fig. 19). The animal, reminiscent of the Roman she-wolf the Fascists adopted as an emblem, is firmly grasped by an arm adorned with a swastika. The message is clear: Italian Fascism has served as a handmaiden to German National Socialism. This subservience is made explicit



Fig. 19. Aurelio Mistruzzi (1880–1960). Bronze medal (96 mm), 1943. Obverse (left) and reverse (right). Nomisma (Serravalle, San Marino). Auction 65, lot 614. Courtesy of Nomisma.

in the Latin legend: *vestigando atque deferendo servit* (the dog “serves by tracking and retrieving”). The choice of Latin conveys a sense of irony. The language which Mussolini had called “the language of a people of soldiers, of conquerors, of builders, of legislators, of victors” and that had served as a *praeconium* of Italy’s ‘Roman greatness’ under Fascism, is now used to proclaim its inferiority to its German master.¹⁴⁸ The medal’s reverse features a similar form of political counter-iconography, with Latin once again assuming an important role. It depicts two books, inscribed *lex* and *ius*, on a balance weighted down by fasces on the opposite side. While the books symbolize citizens’ rights (*lex*) and the law (*ius*), the fasces are accompanied by the violent Fascist slogan *me ne frego* (“I don’t give a damn”). The juxtaposition of Latin and Italian highlights the contrast between the time-honoured tradition of Roman law and order and the sloganistic ad hoc politics of Fascism, and denies Fascism the Latin idiom it previously had usurped. Another Latin phrase further frames the interpretation of the allegorical scene: *hinc patriae perniciēs* (“hence the destruction of the fatherland”), highlighting the idea that the regime’s disregard for citizens’ rights and the law (*lex* and *ius*) and freedom (*libertas*, depicted in chains), has had disastrous consequences for Italy. The phrase recalls Cicero’s *hinc patriae proditioes* (“hence treachery against the fatherland,” Cic. *Sen.* 40) in a passage that cites Archytas of Tarentum’s criticism of low pleasures as a source of treason and other crimes against the state.

Mistruzzi's allusions to republican practices and authors, as well as his use of Galba's anti-Neronian motto, show that alternative Latin traditions could be tapped to challenge and resist Fascist appropriations of the language. His example also demonstrates how Latin, celebrated as the language of Roman greatness under Mussolini, could be used ironically to herald Fascism's subservient position to National Socialism and its eventual downfall. These critical and ironical modes of using Latin greatly diverge from the regime's preference for bombastic imperial Latinity, exemplified by tendentious quotations from works such as the *Carmen saeculare*, which Mistruzzi himself had used in his *Dea Roma* medal. While Mistruzzi fractured and ridiculed other symbols of Fascism in his medals, he spared Latin from rejection and distortion. By re-framing Latin legends within his anti-Fascist counter-iconography, Mistruzzi attempted to disentangle the language from its former associations with Fascism and to position it for a future without Mussolini.

- 146 Edwin S. Ramage, *Denigration of Predecessor under Claudius, Galba, and Vespasian*, in *Historia*, 32, 2, 1983, p. 201-214, p. 207.
- 147 This medal was issued for the Società Bigliani, on which see Imbellone, *o.c.*, p. 74.
- 148 Mussolini's statement is cited in Carlo Galassi Paluzzi, *L'I.S.R. a rapporto dal Duce*, in *Per lo studio e l'uso del latino: bollettino internazionale di studi, ricerche, informazioni*, 3, 1, 1941, p. 35. On the statement, see Lamers, *Mussolini's Latin*, *o.c.*, p. 215. On Latin as the *praeconium* of Roman greatness, see Lamers and Reitz-Joosse, *The Codex*, *o.c.*, p. 17-19.

Illustrations

- Fig. 1. Dora Ohlfsen (1869–1948). Medallion featuring a portrait of Benito Mussolini. Rome, ca. 1925. Gelatin silver photograph. 120 × 103 mm. National Art Archive, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Inv. No. ARC366.1.10. Courtesy of the National Art Archive, Art Gallery of New South Wales.
- Fig. 2. Aurelio Mistruzzi (1880–1960). Bronze medal (50.5 mm), 1925. Artemide Aste (Dogana, San Marino). Auction 56E, lot 1051. Courtesy of Artemide Aste.
- Fig. 3. Golden medal for ONMI (18 karats; 27 mm), 1934. Nomisma (Serravalle, San Marino). Auction 56, lot 574. Courtesy of Nomisma.
- Fig. 4. Bronze *sestertius* featuring Trajan (98–117), 103–111 (33 mm). Münzkabinett – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Inv. No. 18200254. CC.
- Fig. 5. Unknown artist. Bronze medal (21.7 mm), celebrating the founding of Rome. Piacenza, 1922. From eBay listing *Piacenza Natale di Roma Festa del Lavoro 1922 Medaglia Partito di Governo*, by user Studiofaleristicosas, last updated 30 October 2025. Courtesy of Studio Faleristico.
- Fig. 6. Unknown artist. Bronze medal (32.5 mm), commemorating the Ethiopian campaign, 1936. Drawing after the original by Dr. Brandaan Huigen (Cape Town/London).
- Fig. 7. Orlando Paladino Orlandini (1905–1986). Bronze medal (28.6 mm) for GUF, 1935. Moruzzi Numismatica (Rome). Inv. No. 135521. Courtesy of Moruzzi Numismatica.
- Fig. 8. Silver *denarius* (17 mm), featuring Augustus as well as Gaius and Lucius Caesar, 2 BC–4 AD. Münzkabinett – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Inv. No. 18217360. CC.
- Fig. 9. Adolfo De Carolis (1874–1928). Bronze medal (41 mm), commissioned by Gabriele d’Annunzio, 1919. War Militaria (Florence). Inv. No. MED07B. Courtesy of War Militaria.
- Fig. 10. Unknown artist. Golden medal (14 karats; 34 mm), gifted to Pietro Badoglio, 1936. Drawing after the original by Dr. Brandaan Huigen (Cape Town/London).
- Fig. 11. Emilio Pagani (1866–1933). Bronze medal (28 mm), 1923. Drawing after the original by Dr. Brandaan Huigen (Cape Town/London).
- Fig. 12. Anti-communist leaflet of the Vatican Secretariat on Atheism, 1937. Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, JESCOM 1038, DcA, fasc. SAR. © Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu.
- Fig. 13. E. Tonucci (?). Bronze medal (131 mm), 1936. From Paolo Gentilozzi & Sergio Piermattei, *Le medaglie del Ventennio. Catalogo alla mostra V° Convegno Filatelico Numismatico, Cingoli, 16 giugno 2002*, Cingoli, 2002, p. 58, No. 87.
- Fig. 14. Unknown artist. Bronze medal (30.5 mm), probably for Riccardo Dalla Vedova, ca. 1936. Drawing after the original by Dr. Brandaan Huigen (Cape Town/London).
- Fig. 15. Claudio Tolomei (1492–1556). Impresa of Apollo and Pegasus on the binding of a copy of *Pindari poetae vetustissimi Olympia Pythia Nemea Isthmia* (Basel, Andreas Cratander, 1535), ca. 1545–1547. USTC No. 684133. PrPh Books, New York, NY. Courtesy of PrPh Books.

- Fig. 16. Alfredo Biagini (1886–1952). Relief in the entrance hall of the Clinica Ortopedica – CU016, Sapienza University of Rome. Photography by Dr. Antonino Nastasi (Rome).
- Fig. 17. Aurelio Mistruzzi (1880–1960). Bronze with Goddess Roma on an elaborate stand, offered by Carlo Delcroix to the City of Brussels in 1927 (260 mm). Dimensions of the object: 705 × 432 × 150 mm. Brussels City Museum. Inv. No. B.1927.1. Courtesy of the Brussels City Museum.
- Fig. 18. Aurelio Mistruzzi (1880–1960). Bronze medal (93 mm), 1943. Artemide Aste (Dogana, San Marino). Auction 45, lot 994. Courtesy of Artemide Aste.
- Fig. 19. Aurelio Mistruzzi (1880–1960). Bronze medal (96 mm), 1943. Nomisma (Serravalle, San Marino). Auction 65, lot 614. Courtesy of Nomisma.

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Colophon

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