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Amedeo Maiuri: Herculaneum, Archaeology and Fascist Propaganda

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Amedeo Maiuri (1886–1963) is rightly considered one of the greatest Italian archaeologists of the twentieth century and his scientific archaeological work at Herculaneum has been much studied. Yet while Maiuri's work flourished under the patronage of Mussolini's fascist regime, the nature of his relationship with the party has received less attention. This paper, based both on archival sources and Maiuri's published writings, investigates Maiuri's politically committed response through archaeology, both to the ideological and the propaganda needs of the fascist regime. It is argued here that Maiuri's writings as well as his museological practice in the reconstruction of Herculaneum as a 'resurrected' and 'living' Roman town, represent an attempt to further develop the affective aspect of the fascist doctrine of *romanità*. Maiuri, drawn to the 'action not words' of fascism, provided the regime's propaganda with an inspiring example of what willpower, hard work and modern machines could achieve in the archaeology of the 'New Italy.'

Introduction

On 9 April 1927, Benito Mussolini, speaking to the *Reale Società romana di storia patria* at its headquarters in Rome, announced two difficult archaeological projects. He committed his fascist government to the recovery of the Roman boats submerged in Lake Nemi and the resumption of the equally challenging excavation of the Roman town of Herculaneum. Herculaneum, like nearby Pompeii, had been destroyed and buried in the AD 79 eruption of Vesuvius and previous attempts at open-cut excavation had been abandoned because of the high costs involved. Unlike Pompeii, which was buried under ashes, Herculaneum had been engulfed by flows of pyroclastic material from the same eruption of Vesuvius. This cooled and hardened into a layer of *tufo*, igneous rock formed of hardened volcanic debris, some twenty meters thick. To disinter the ruins, nothing short of an open-cut mining operation was needed. The fifty-two years of inactivity under previous governments were ascribed by the Duce to a failure of political will. Now the Duce declared that under the fascist regime, as at Rome itself, so also at Herculaneum, the past would be recovered:

'... while in Rome the most august monuments of antiquity have been recovered through the will of the fascist government, not completely restored, which might be a stupid profanation, but simply exhumed and liberated from the parasitic incrustations accumulated over the centuries of abandonment, I am resolved to put my hand to a work that for long years

the scholars of all nations have vainly cried out for: the rebirth (rinascita) of Herculaneum' (Mussolini 1927 = *Opera Omnia* XXII 1957: 341).

What Mussolini's speech did not acknowledge was that Herculaneum, for nearly two centuries, had been a highly contested place. Even back in the 18th century, many criticisms had been levelled against the destructive incompetence of the Bourbon-era tunnellers (Horace Walpole (1740) 1937–1983: 17. 222; Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1762) 1762: 19; Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1787) 1913: 1.218). During the Risorgimento, when Italy took up the open-cut excavation that had been begun by the Bourbons in the early 19th century, there was a short lull in censure. Unfortunately, that open-cut excavation by the Italian state ceased in 1875 and work was abandoned because of the costs. Foreign disapproval once more became strident. Then, in 1906, an acrimonious controversy broke out when a Cambridge academic, Charles Waldstein, proposed an imaginative and daring scheme for an international project to undertake a complete excavation of Herculaneum. Unfortunately, Waldstein's proposal, which had many influential backers across Europe and in the United States, floundered after a series of misunderstandings. It was then finally sunk in a storm of nationalistic fervour whipped up by the Italian press (Waldstein 1908). The cultural nationalists who opposed the scheme were led by Giacomo Boni, the famous excavator of the Roman Forum and the Forum of Trajan. Boni appears to have played a duplicitous game with Waldstein, absenting himself from key meetings of the Central Commission of Fine Arts and Antiquities where the scheme was discussed, and leaking private correspondence with Waldstein to the press. Waldstein shows himself to have been somewhat naïve in

his dealings with Boni and was clearly outmanoeuvred by him (Waldstein 1908: 51–52; 250–251).

In February 1907 an excerpt of a letter from Boni to Waldstein was appended to a chauvinistic article in the Rome newspaper *La Tribuna* and this was used to rally opposition to the Herculaneum scheme (Waldstein 1908: 51–52). Then, in America, Boni was reported on 21 February 1907 as saying that it was to the dishonour of Italians ‘to go begging to foreigners’ (*The New York Times* 1907a: 6). Boni’s opposition seems to have been fuelled by his suspicion in February 1907 that one of Waldstein’s US backers, J. Pierpont Morgan, had illicitly obtained Italian antiquities for the Metropolitan Museum in New York (*The New York Times* 1907b: 4). Pierpont Morgan was already under suspicion in Italy in relation to the Monteleone Etruscan Chariot bought by him and acquired by the Met in 1903. Boni had opposed foreign excavations in Italy and, together with Corrado Ricci, supported plans for the Rosadi-Rava law (1909) for tighter controls on the export of antiquities (Balzani 2007). On the matter of Herculaneum Boni struck a chord with many conservative Italians, and the chauvinistic slogan ‘*L’Italia deve fare da sé*’ (‘Italy must do things itself’) triumphed over any consideration of what Waldstein had actually proposed.

Waldstein’s plan was rejected by the Italian government which announced it would undertake the excavation alone. However, despite the government appointing a committee in 1907, nothing more was done on the site of Herculaneum and twenty years passed. Mussolini was therefore able to capitalise on this inaction by previous liberal governments of the united Italy. What was needed was action, not words. The resumption of the excavations was to be an object lesson in the character of the ‘New Italy.’

Mussolini’s speech announcing the resumption of work raised the possibility of great finds – paintings and papyri in particular – and claimed that over many fruitless years in the distant past there had been sporadic excavations but they had been conducted ‘without order, without method’. This would all change. The most exacting standards of scientific excavation would be adhered to, regardless of the cost. Photography would record the finds and publications would increase the public’s knowledge of the ancient town. The modern town of Resina, that had been built above the ruins, would not be moved because Mussolini stressed that the proposed excavation would mainly take place outside the inhabited area. Later, party speeches, also reported in the press, stressed the positive impact that this project, like others, would make on the regional economy of the area around Naples (*Il Popolo d’Italia* 1927).

The whole project of the resumption of excavations was the brainchild of the archaeologist Amedeo Maiuri, who in 1924 had been appointed by the regime as the superintendent of the excavation of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Indeed, there is much detail in the section of the Duce’s speech dealing with Herculaneum to suggest very strongly that Maiuri had a hand in its writing (Osanna 2017: 126–127). Maiuri was a right-wing nationalist who came to this prestigious position after serving as an archaeologist in the Italian-occupied Dodecanese, at first under the army and then under the civil governor.

In Rhodes, Maiuri showed himself to be a highly talented excavator and an energetic administrator. The Italian seizure of the islands of the Dodecanese was opposed by Greece, but Maiuri staked Italy’s cultural claim to them through his excavation of Lindos and other sites, the establishment of a new archaeological museum in Rhodes, and the restoration of the crusader buildings such as the Hospital of the Knights and the Palace of the Grand Master. From the beginning Maiuri promoted the state’s cultural policy program of *Italianità* and his first *Guide* to the monuments and to the Museo archeologico was published by the Italian army of occupation (Maiuri 1919). Maiuri, also keen to explore archaeological sites in Asia Minor, developed connections with conservative archaeologists, such as Roberto Paribeni (ASDMAE, AP 1919–1930 Dodecaneso, b. 981. fasc. 2373), who were the ‘forward scouts’ of Italian imperialism and keen to take advantage of a weakened Turkey (Petricioli 1990: 412–413; Veronese 2007: 137–150). Maiuri gained the enthusiastic backing of the governor Mario Lago for his work in the Dodecanese. Indeed, it was Mario Lago who wrote to Mussolini on 23 March 1923 in praise of Maiuri’s work in Rhodes (ASDMAE, AP 1919–30 Dodecaneso, b. 986. fasc. 2424 – *Trattazione generale*).

Shortly afterwards, Maiuri was appointed to the superintendency of Pompeii and Herculaneum where he replaced Vittorio Spinazzola, whose liberal connections, according to his son-in-law, Salvatore Aurigemma, most probably had lost him his position (Spinazzola 1953: Vol. 1, XI, note 1). Spinazzola appears to have had a number of work-place enemies but Aurigemma asserts that it was the archaeologist’s obvious adhesion to liberal ideas and his close links with F.S. Nitti and opponents of fascism that had cost him his position. Maiuri’s own relations with the fascist regime have been much debated by scholars (Barbanera 1998: 149–150; Bracco 1983: 50–52; Manacorda 1982; Manacorda and Tamassia 1985: 23–25; Maggi 2017, Osanna 2017, Pappalardo 2009: 11–20, 225–226; 2015: 68–71) but it will be argued here that the relevant archival materials showing the nature of his dealings with the government in relation to Herculaneum, as well as a number of his published statements, indicate an ardent commitment to the fascist regime.

Maiuri was a skilled political operator. In the case of the resumption of the Herculaneum excavations it has been established by Mario Capasso that Maiuri had first gained the in-principle support of Michele Castaldi, the High Commissioner for Naples. After this, Maiuri took the idea to Pietro Fedele, Minister for Public Education who then lobbied Mussolini on behalf of Maiuri’s plan to resume the excavations (Capasso 1991: 17–30; Maiuri 1992: 106–107). The Duce subsequently designated resumption of the excavation as ‘a work of national importance.’

The excavation of Herculaneum was to be developed by the regime as a major project. It was also clearly designed to show to a somewhat sceptical international community both the industry and resourcefulness of the ‘New Italy’ and the determination of the fascist government to complete this project. After an interval of fifty-two years since the last excavation, a new beginning was made at Herculaneum with vigour and determination. Indeed

this spirit of enthusiastic resolve was encapsulated by the Latin inscription on a ceremonial pick used by the king on 16 May 1927 to begin the excavation: '*Herculaneum effodiendum est/Herculaneum must be excavated*' (Notomista 2017; *The Times*, London 1927a and 1927b; *The Washington Post* 1927).

The fascist government liked to speak of archaeological campaigns as 'liberating' Roman buildings and the new Herculaneum excavations were spoken of, from the start, in bellicose language. Fascist ideology constantly stressed the primal necessity of struggle in all important human endeavours. Success came from struggle and the model of struggle was the soldier. Like many other Italian archaeologists in the fascist period (Manacorda and Tamassia 1985: 24), Maiuri used military language to describe the problems that he faced in his fieldwork.

Maiuri also liked to speak of the rebirth (*rinascita*) or resurrection (*resurrezione*) of the town and this language was commonly deployed in fascist propaganda as a metaphor for the rebirth of Italy and the Italian national spirit. Through publications, popular journalism and newsreels, that had covered the 'heroic years' of labour on the site, Herculaneum (and Maiuri) became world famous. At the same time the excavation of the site was used in propaganda to exemplify fascist values of struggle, speed, efficiency, organisation and order, and the application of modern science. The project also provided both skilled workers and labourers in the depressed local area with much-needed employment (Capasso 1991: 31–35; *Napoli e le opere del Regime* 1930; ACS MPI AABBA Div.1 1934–1940, b. 33, fasc. 536) and was part of the regime's stimulus of the economy of Naples.

Through the simultaneous excavation and restoration of houses and public buildings, Maiuri largely rebuilt Herculaneum. A great deal of what we see on site today dates not to antiquity but to the 1920s and 1930s (Rizzi and Barbieri 2000: 15). Maiuri also introduced a new style of presentation of everyday items by displaying them in their context in houses and shops on site. Herculaneum was developed by Maiuri in the 1930s as a place where Italians could descend to the bottom of the 20-metre-deep excavation pit, step back in time, and experience their unearthed *romanità*.

The fascist party and *romanità*

Romanità as a rational, aesthetic or emotional identification with classical Roman culture and socio-political values long predated the advent of fascism. Indeed, the educated upper-class and bourgeoisie in Italy were predisposed by their education to the appeal of such an outlook on the world. Roman culture, having assimilated the best that Hellenistic Greece had to offer, was extolled as the epitome of Western Civilization (Canfora 1976). Roman literature, art, law, political concepts and imperial organisation were powerful paradigms that might underlie the attitudes of cultural or political conservatives. Roman history was most commonly viewed as part of a seamless Italian history, and the Italian Renaissance celebrated the rebirth of the most classical of Roman values. When Italy in the late nineteenth century, in competition with other European powers, eyed colonial possessions around the

Mediterranean, memories of the Roman Empire inspired patriots and imperialists to reclaim their Roman past in Libya and the Dodecanese.

Romanità was the central element in the rhetorical façade that appropriated Roman history of the imperial period to magnify the regime and make it appear invincible (Belardelli 2005: 222–226; Giardina and Vauchez 2000: 212–296; Nelis 2007 and 2018; Roche 2018; Visser 1992). As Benedetto Croce observed in 1944, Roman imperial greatness was invoked by the regime in words 'whose virtue lay in their very vacuity' (Croce 1973: 39). *Romanità* could be shaped to become all things to all people. Indeed, in order to communicate the meaning of its Roman rhetoric to a broad and diverse popular audience, as opposed to a coterie of highly educated right-wing cultural nationalists, the party found that it needed to devise strategies of popularisation. These included the annual celebrations for the birthday of Rome, political rallies, festivals and celebrations with a 'Roman-style' choreography. There was, as well, the popularisation of Roman history and Roman archaeology through the cinema, tourism, *dopolavoro* (after-work) excursions and the *Giornale LUCE* newsreels. During the 1930s there were 225 newsreel items on Roman archaeology in Italy and Libya shown in cinemas.

Romanità was presented by the regime as something that might be apprehended in moments of emotional discovery as one visited Roman ruins, which might evoke historical memories in those who were the true descendants of the Romans. Mussolini told an audience in 1924 that while in his youth he had loved Rome, it was only years later, when he was able to actually walk in Rome among the 'living relics' of the Forum and along the Via Appia or near the great temples, that he truly understood his *romanità*. There, by these Roman stones, he frequently happened to meditate on 'the mystery of Rome' and on the 'mystery of the continuity of Rome.' This was an affective experience and, in recalling it for his audience, Mussolini contrasted such personal experience with the 'so-called critical history' which, in its overly rational way, 'tries hard to knock down the legendary.'

Yet, Mussolini asserted that 'an area of shadow always remains, where, from out of a cold and often absurd rationality, the irreplaceable legend comes back into blossom' (Mussolini 21 April 1924 = *Opera Omnia* XX, 1956: 234). Such sentiments, influenced by Mussolini's pronouncements, and the mystical school of the fascist party (Marchesini 1976: 55–73) became very much a part of fascist archaeology. Indeed, some key fascist archaeologists were suspicious of the overly systematic, 'overly rational' approach taken by their foreign colleagues. Such an approach was condemned because it denied space for an emotive sense of place and shunned a reverence for the legendary (Whitling 2019: 96). A mystical timelessness, a form of recovered cultural memory, played an important part in fascist conceptions of *romanità*.

In 1932 Maiuri published his first book on the site and its buildings and described the progress of the excavations thus far. This lavishly illustrated book, *Ercolano*, which appeared in the popular *Visioni Italiane* series, was not aimed at an international scholarly audience. Rather, it was intended for an Italian readership which would

include both armchair travellers and potential tourists. Indeed, while Maiuri wrote a number of articles about Herculaneum for Italian and foreign newspapers, the originally promised scholarly scientific publications never appeared during the 1930s. It was not until near the end of his career that Maiuri produced a major publication of the site (Maiuri 1958). Thus, in his review of the 1932 *Ercolano* the Russian scholar Michael Rostovtzeff, while heaping the highest praise on Maiuri's scientific fieldwork, still expressed his disappointment that no preliminary or final reports had been published on any of the buildings unearthed so far (Rostovtzeff 1932).

In line with the archaeological propaganda of the regime, Maiuri, in his 1932 *Ercolano*, stressed that Herculaneum allowed visitors to experience an almost mystical reintegration with their own Roman spirit (Maiuri 1932: 82). Maiuri's discussion of the Anglo-American Charles Waldstein's idealistic, but doomed, proposal for the international excavation of Herculaneum is also politically circumspect. It is known that Maiuri had the greatest personal respect for Waldstein and when that distinguished scholar died he even provided a Roman cinerary urn to be sent to his widow for his ashes (Maiuri 2008: 70; Iezzi and Scafati 1984: 260–261; ACS MPI AABBA Div. II 1925–1928, b. 20, fasc. 354). Magnanimously, in his *Ercolano*, Maiuri wrote of Waldstein as having had 'noble and generous intentions' (Maiuri 1932: 12–13). Yet, he also declared that Waldstein unconsciously reduced the matter of Herculaneum 'to a simple technical and financial problem' and that he was unable to appreciate 'the profound spiritual and cultural essence that had to mature and draw upon its own true resources in the life of a people.'

Maiuri offered his archaeological experience in the service of the fascist regime. At the time of the Augustan exhibition, the *Mostra Augustea della romanità* 1937–1938, for which he had offered technical advice on archaeological materials (Prisco 2014), Maiuri wrote enthusiastically of the didactic deployment of archaeology in the service of the fascist regime and the cause of *romanità*. He believed in the power of archaeological material thematically and imaginatively presented, to connect the broad masses of the people with their heritage of *romanità* (Maiuri 1937: 261–266). Indeed, Maiuri's comments leave no doubt that he saw the *Mostra Augustea della romanità* as essentially political, a 'link in the chain that is welded together' connecting the earlier *Mostra della Rivoluzione*, that was held at the same exhibition venue, and the *Mostra del Fascismo*, that was planned for the future (Maiuri 1937: 261). Maiuri asserted that *romanità* was 'the truly great unitary factor of the social and political order for a great part of the ancient world' and declared that the 1937–1938 *Mostra* would be for all Italians 'a religious reinvocation' of the wisdom, good sense and vitality of Roman institutions (Maiuri 1937: 263).

Maiuri emphasised the importance of epigraphy as it was employed in the *Mostra Augustea* (Maiuri 1937: 266). He viewed it as an instructional medium, as a historical commentary, and as a necessary complement to the

monumental structure of the exhibition. Given the importance of inscriptions in ancient and papal Rome, Maiuri argued that 'epigraphy needs to return to being an essential element in the works of the regime' (1937: 266). In line with the regime's assertion of the continuity between antiquity and fascism, Maiuri saw it as logical and natural that the great words of Mussolini, with their 'bare masculinity and power' (1937: 266) would take their place on the walls of the *Mostra Augustea* among the words of the historians, orators and jurists of antiquity and the fathers of the church. There, all the quotations would serve as 'one living voice' to affirm, recommend, and sanction the 'new history of Italy.'

Herculaneum as metaphor for the rebirth and resurrection of Italy

Maiuri's 1932 book *Ercolano* predictably carried the politically correct message that the 'resurrection' of Herculaneum had come about through 'the strong will of the government and the nation.' Maiuri's first chapter is on the excavation history of the site and it is constructed with a chiasmic structure that begins and concludes with contrasts between the living and the dead, the darkness of the tomb and the bright light of rebirth. Maiuri asserts that no visitor, if they had come to Herculaneum just a few years before and had seen little more than the 'skeletal aspect of a few walls,' and everything 'stripped of any sign of life or any hope of resurrection,' would ever have dared to hope that a renewed excavation of this '*città sepolta*' could ever come about.

Maiuri stressed the superiority of the scientific modern methods used in the current excavations compared to those used in past times. In the first three years of the resumed excavations the area cleared was about 4,500 sq. metres with more than 100,000 cubic metres of volcanic material being carted away. Eventually, in all, more than 200,000 cubic metres were removed from the excavated area.

Even in a short time a good part of the middle area of the city had been exposed, Maiuri declared, as a result of 'the good organisation of the work and the improved methods of excavation.' The speed of Maiuri's excavation would have been read as an illustration of the fascist doctrine of 'action not words.' It is reminiscent of the goal-setting and relentlessly determined completion of the regime's work targets on other national projects such as the draining of the Pontine Marshes or the building of the new town of Sabaudia, completed after just 253 days of 'heroic effort' in 1933.

The extent of what had been achieved in the first years of the new *scavi* at Herculaneum was similarly impressive and Maiuri in 1931 communicated to a popular audience in *L'Illustrazione Italiana* (Maiuri 1931a) a sense of what had been accomplished. In November 1931 *The Times* of London also featured an article by Maiuri entitled 'Herculaneum. Four Years of Discoveries' in which he presented the excavations as a heroic undertaking that, despite some people's initial misgivings, was proceeding 'with regular and uninterrupted rhythm.' The British public was informed that 'in just four years of intense and

laborious work twice as great an area had been uncovered as during the rather languid excavations between the years 1825 and 1875' (Maiuri 1931b).

Maiuri did not merely excavate the buildings of Herculaneum, he restored them in varying degrees in the process of digging them out of the 'tufo.' Thus, the Roman town of Herculaneum was disinterred and rebuilt at the same time. In part this practice was due to the exigencies of the digging process, especially where the volcanic deposits which had entered some buildings and filled them could not be removed without the buildings collapsing. Many structures had to be excavated, propped up and rebuilt in order to save them. Overall, Maiuri's aim was to recreate Herculaneum by restoring significant buildings and recreating the streetscapes of the ancient town. Maiuri's workers, the 'eager young recruits' and the 'haggard veterans,' worked methodically and relentlessly across the site through the 1930s (Figure 1).

The photo documentation of the Herculaneum excavation, something that owes a great deal to the practices followed by Spinazzola at Pompeii, is used by Maiuri in his 1932 book to construct a progressive visual narrative of the rebirth or resurrection of the ancient town. One such photo (Figure 2) shows, snaking into the distance, the track of the Decauville railway with its bins full of debris. In the foreground, to the right of the track, is a towering mound of amorphous compacted tufo. It is being attacked by four men using picks. On the top of the mound we see another man employing a pneumatic drill. A little further along on the right we see the first outlines of a building emerging from the *tufo* that has been broken up. The long lines left in the *tufo* by recent pneumatic drilling are visible. In the distance, beyond these signs of work, we see Roman houses which already have been excavated and restored. The edges of the excavation pit can be seen in the far distance.

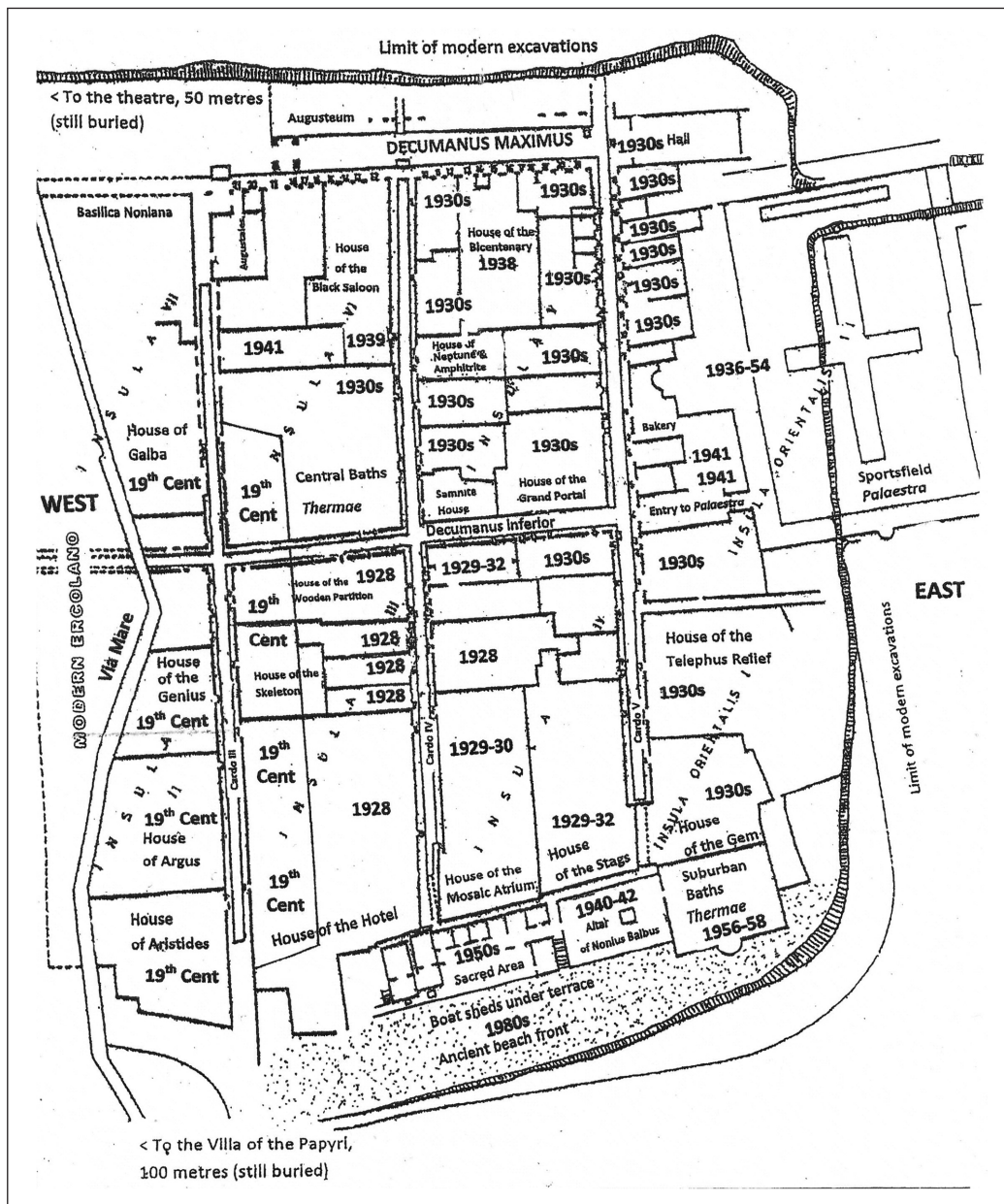


Figure 1: The progress of the excavation of Herculaneum during the 19th and 20th centuries.



Figure 2: The excavation of Herulaneum c.1929. Maiuri 1932: 16.

Excavation photographs such as this were composed to carry a message of hard work and perseverance. Later, looking back to these years, Maiuri remembered the noise on site: the din of the compressors, the squeak of the winches and the growl of the trucks. The photographs used in Maiuri's book *Ercolano* were brought to life in a *Giornale LUCE* newsreel with sound, made for a mass audience and shown in Italian cinemas in 1932 (*Giornale LUCE* 1932). We see workers rhythmically hammering long metal spikes into the edge of a *tuffo* embankment and we hear the metallic sound made by their efforts. They lever the now-embedded spikes and a part of the embankment collapses. Huge slabs of *tuffo* break off and slide into the pit below. Other scenes show Roman frescoes emerging as a pick removes the debris that surrounds them. There is no voice-over because the soundtrack, the constant din of workplace noise, carries the message of unrelenting labour.

Maiuri thought that Herculaneum was an exciting place for people to visit, not just for its Roman buildings but also because of the lessons it taught. He believed that the debris that had engulfed the town, and was being

removed, gave the visitor to the site an overwhelming sense of the struggle that man always wages against the forces of nature (Maiuri 1929). Sites of 'heroic struggle,' such as Sabaudia or Herculaneum, were promoted by the regime as tourist attractions because they could serve a didactic purpose. It is revealing to note the striking poster by Marcello Dudovich (**Figure 3**), commissioned by the state tourist organisation and the state railway around 1930, because it focused the viewer's attention on the gargantuan task of the regime's excavation project at Herculaneum. The artist depicted the hand of an unseen giant lifting up a massive rock overlay to reveal the ruined city still preserved beneath.

As an archaeologist with boundless energy and a determination to make a new beginning at Herculaneum Maiuri was committed to work on until the task was completed. With his yearly goals, his efficient machines and his loyal workers imbued with a sense of mission, Maiuri was indeed emblematic of the 'New Italian' that Griffin has shown was being promoted at that time by the regime (Griffin 2007). Through his *novi scavi* Maiuri made a new beginning as he broke with the indolence and limited



Figure 3: Ercolano poster by Marcello Dudovich c.1930. Image courtesy of Poster Photo Archives, Rennert's Gallery, NY.

vision of those who had come before him in order to inaugurate a new era at Herculaneum.

Maiuri's 'living city' and the experience of *romanità*

Maiuri sought to engage with a wider popular audience through newspaper articles and interviews with reporters. His stated aim was to capture 'the spirit of the past' and show ordinary people something of a 'resuscitated' and 'living' antiquity that was far removed from 'bookish learning' (Maiuri 1929). When he published photographs in *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, Maiuri declared that these could say more than any written description that he could offer (Maiuri 1929).

Maiuri was skilled at gaining publicity for the excavations at Herculaneum. In June 1934, for example, Maiuri's sensational discovery of two magnificent polychrome mosaics – one depicting Neptune and his consort Amphitrite and another showing a hunt – was featured as front-page news in both *Il Giornale d'Italia* (1934) and *La Tribuna* (1934). The quality of these two mosaic compositions captured the public imagination and the attendant publicity was valuable also to the propaganda of the regime. Within days the *Corriere della Sera* was trumpeting the personal interest that Mussolini took in the excavations and the paper praised the enlightened fascist policy that supported the archaeological work at Herculaneum. The paper's readers also learned that Mussolini had personally given Maiuri a gift, an *offerta privata*, of 100,000 lire towards the excavations of

Herculaneum (*Corriere della Sera* 1934). In a 1941 speech on the Campidoglio Maiuri expressed his gratitude to the Duce for having resumed the excavations in 1927 and for supporting them. Maiuri noted that without the special laws approved by the High Commissioner for Naples, Michele Castaldi, he would not have been able to achieve the property acquisitions necessary for the excavations (Guzzo 2010).

The Herculaneum rebuilt by Maiuri was a triumph of archaeological *verismo*. The buildings looked Roman but a great deal of what the visitor saw was modern. Maiuri was influenced in this, to varying degrees, by the work of Vittorio Spinazzola at Pompeii and Arthur Evans at Knossos on Crete. However, Maiuri is on record as having made disparaging comments about Evans' 'mania' for total reconstruction and he also disapproved of the 'bizarrely coloured' and over-restored frescoes at Knossos (Livadiotti and Rocco 1996: 193; Appendice *documentaria* no.10).

What made Herculaneum appear 'authentic' were small touches – lumps of carbonised wood were affixed to modern doorframes and fresco fragments pieced together on walls. Maiuri's own practice was not to fully reconstruct the upper storeys of buildings nor to extend or recreate frescoes. His personal aesthetic tended towards a romantic sense of the ruins, with signs of their incompleteness and the passage of time. Some upper storey walls were not rebuilt and the visitor could look into a building as if into a doll's house. Here and there, *ad identicum* Roman rooftops with reproduction 'Roman tiles' covered significant buildings and took attention away from the modern reinforced concrete slabs that he used to cover 70% of other lesser structures.

Fascinated by the human experience of the people of the town, the archaeologist presented the visitor to Herculaneum with contextualised displays of objects from everyday life with the stated aim of reproducing what he termed the 'human face' of the town (Camardo 2016). Across the site in houses and shops, 50 glass showcases displayed 1,233 of the small objects that had been found during the excavations. There was a windlass and some preserved rope displayed near a well, in another building a large wooden clothes press was shown, and in a number of locations carbonised wooden furniture was exhibited. Sometimes it was the small things of ordinary everyday life that had the greatest impact on visitors.

A journalist from *The Washington Post* visiting the 'living city' of Herculaneum told his audience: 'While the older excavators at Pompeii had merely shown one or two ruined walls, a new spirit was at work at Herculaneum ... objects dug up are not considered for their intrinsic value as finds, but as contributing to the reconstruction of each house, so that ultimately the whole city may be recreated' (*The Washington Post* 1930). In the bakery of Sextus Patulcius Felix a number of baking dishes were displayed on the back wall near the mills and oven. In a *taberna* visitors could see a wall painting of Priapus and foods that were on sale on the day of the destruction. One house featured a room displaying a skeleton on a bed, a marble table, a bronze lampstand and a reproduction of a weaving frame with Roman terracotta loom weights attached. The display looked convincing, yet detailed research by Camardo has

revealed a number of inconsistencies between the display room as Maiuri set it up, and the records of the excavation (Camardo 2006).

The appeal of Herculaneum, where the actual Roman objects used in everyday life 2,000 years ago were being displayed in newly restored Roman buildings, was immediate. It was an extraordinary historical recreation, a constructed '*lieu de mémoire*' (Nora 1989: 31–48) and invested with contemporary political significance in the context of fascist Italy. Indeed, the reconstructed Roman town has similarities to the reconstruction of colonial Williamsburg in Virginia across the Atlantic undertaken during the 1930s by the Rev. W. A. R. Goodwin and John D. Rockefeller. Williamsburg was designed as a city-museum and as a 'shrine' where the great events of early American history might be 'visualised in their proper setting' (Williamsburg Restoration 1931: 6). For its part, Maiuri's 'living' Roman town of Herculaneum provided a similar means by which the fascist party could popularise and materialise the abstruse concept of *romanità* in a way that might make it more accessible for the average Italian visitor.

Herculaneum, buried and then reborn, was an eternal place that could be imbued with a religious aura in keeping with the regime's sacralization of Roman ruins, and determined development of Roman rituals and liturgies. As Emilio Gentile has observed Roman ruins served as sacred centres where people were brought into contact with the magical power of Rome (Gentile 1990: 245; 1993: 148–154; Scriba 1996). In his popular 1932 book on Herculaneum Maiuri spoke of the ruins of the town in reverential tones as a place which offered the visitor a 'spiritual reintegration into the past.' Here in the ruins was the hearth where burned the 'small inextinguishable lamp of our spirit' (Maiuri 1932: 82). A major newspaper (*Corriere della Sera*: 1938) spoke of the ruins of Herculaneum as a spiritually significant place for Italian people as the descendants of the Romans. Its very stones were infused with *romanità*.

The bicentennial celebrations at Herculaneum 25 September 1938

The year 1938 represented the high water mark of *romanità* due to the year-long *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* that celebrated the bimillennium of the birth of Augustus with a display of archaeological materials (Arthurs 2018). The year also marked the two hundredth anniversary of the excavations at Herculaneum and Maiuri lobbied hard to link in the Herculaneum bicentenary celebrations with the September birthday of Augustus, the inauguration of the *Ara Pacis* at Rome and the closing ceremonies of the *Mostra Augustea*.

The Augustan bimillennium was planned to end with a *Convegno Augusteo* (Silverio 2014), a conference for 329 Italian and foreign archaeologists and historians who were to be invited to the inauguration of the *Ara Pacis*. They were also to visit archaeological sites and new excavations at Rome and Ostia. It was on Maiuri's suggestion that these distinguished scholars would be invited to visit the Vesuvian sites and celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the excavations at Herculaneum.

Maiuri's aim was to showcase the excavations and the great progress made at Herculaneum before a distinguished audience of the world's most eminent archaeologists and ancient historians. In his 1937 proposals to the regime for a celebration in 1938 of the bicentenary of the Herculaneum excavations, Maiuri had stated that the resumed excavations undertaken as a consequence of the 'will of the Duce' showed that 'fascist Italy was victorious on this battlefield as well' (ACS MPI AABBA Div. II 1934–40, b. 33, fasc. 536). Such victories he noted would take their place as part of the annals of the 'New Italy.'

The international scholarly community would have remembered still the acrimony of the Italian reaction to Charles Waldstein's proposal for a co-operative international excavation project at Herculaneum. They would also have been aware that for twenty years nothing had been done on the site until the rise of the Duce and the appointment of Maiuri. On a number of levels, therefore, both Maiuri and the regime hoped to make a favourable impression on international scholarly opinion and to attract publicity for the new excavations from the major American and European newspapers.

Such high hopes were not realised. Fascist foreign policy, the atrocities in Ethiopia and the blatant co-option of Augustus by the regime to justify their contemporary imperialism resulted in a reaction against the celebrations by many British and French scholars. In late 1937 the young Oxford historian Ronald Syme had spoken anxiously of the coming Augustan year 1937–1938 – 'a memorable and alarming anniversary looms heavily upon us' (Syme 1937: 194) – and by the end of the Augustan year few British and French scholars wished to be publicly associated with the *Convegno Augusteo*. The list of potential invitees had been revised a number of times and invitations were sent out late. The response was disappointing. By then the celebrations at Rome and Herculaneum were increasingly overshadowed in the foreign press by weightier matters: the Sudetenland crisis, growing fears of a European war and finally, the drama of the Munich Conference (A.C. 1938).

In its report on the *Ara Pacis* ceremony at Rome, *The Times* of London lamented that no representatives of British universities or learned institutions had been able to attend (*The Times* 1938). The Director of the British School at Rome, C.A. Ralegh Radford, who had enjoyed good relations with the regime, was excavating in Cornwall. He declared himself unable to return in time. Hugh Last, the Regius Professor at Oxford, a noted scholar of Augustus, and an opponent of Nazism, did not attend the *Convegno*, it would seem, for political reasons (Last 1950: 14; Murray 2010: 82–83). Because of the recent racial laws, Arnaldo Momigliano, one of the greatest Italian scholars of his time, was excluded because he was Jewish (Silverio 2014: 405–411).

Conspicuous amongst the foreign scholars who did attend the *Convegno Augusteo* and then afterwards travel on to the Herculaneum celebrations was Gerhart Rodenwaldt, director of the German Archaeological Institute who led the German delegation. Rodenwaldt was not a member of the Nationalist Socialist Party, but by avoiding politics he had by 1937 achieved an accommodation with the Third Reich (Sünderhauf 2008; Losemann

2001: 71–88). The foreign philofascists included the American archaeologist A.W. Van Buren who had written in praise of both the regime's archaeology policy and the Foro Mussolini (Van Buren 1929a, 1929b, 1930, 1933). Jérôme Carcopino, who, as the head of the *École française de Rome*, also attended the *Convegno*, was known as a strident European imperialist. Carcopino later became Minister for Education in the collaborationist Vichy Regime (Bernard 2017; Cacy-Debray 2001).

Then there was the British archaeologist Eugénie Strong, who was a fervent admirer of both Mussolini and the regime (Strong 1938a). At the inauguration of the *Ara Pacis*, Strong, as the spokesperson for the foreign scholars who were present, delivered a congratulatory speech to Mussolini. Despite the well-known massacres of Ethiopians by the fascist imperialists in the years just prior to these celebrations, Strong praised Mussolini as a 'peacemaker.' She declared that Mussolini, like Augustus, celebrated not his victories themselves but the peace that he had established through them (Strong 1938b).

After their program in Rome members of the *Convegno* travelled down to Naples for the Herculaneum bicentenary celebrations on 25 September. The Education Minister Giuseppe Bottai presided (Mussolini was in Munich for the conference with Hitler, Chamberlain and Daladier) and the distinguished scholars were guided around the excavations by Maiuri. In honour of the occasion a recently restored house, now named the House of the Bicentenary, was opened.

The celebration at Herculaneum was very much a fascist festival. Minister Bottai and the official party first visited the local Casa del Fascio before touring the ruins. Maiuri gave a speech about the 'reconquest of the site by hard work.' Both a newsreel (*Giornale LUCE* 1938) and a photograph (**Figure 4**) show him dressed in the black jacket of the fascist party, which was, however, something routinely

required of important state officials on formal occasions such as this. A 1935 photograph of Maiuri together with Mussolini at Paestum shows him in the full uniform of the fascist militia, wearing the tasselled cap with *fasces* badge, the black shirt of the party and a Sam Browne belt (Maggi 2017: 100). In September 1938 Maiuri wore just the black jacket of the party and white trousers as he accompanied the more splendidly uniformed official party around the ruins of Herculaneum.

The visit by the minister Giuseppe Bottai and the members of the *Convegno* at the end of the Augustan year was featured in a *Giornale LUCE* newsreel. The ruins were presented as the documentation of the 'eternal Italian civilisation' and the segment ended with a portrait bust of Augustus who was also being celebrated. It is notable that the newsreel voice-over speaks enthusiastically and very pointedly of Herculaneum as illustrating the ancient civilization of the Italian 'race.' Herculaneum speaks for the ancient glory of '*la razza italiana*.'

This type of racial emphasis in the party's presentation of the archaeological site is significant because during September 1938, the first fascist racial laws against Jews were being implemented and others were in preparation. Clearly the conjunction, in this propaganda newsreel, of classical portrait statues and reliefs with a racist voice-over was intended to mould further public opinion. This was propaganda far more subtle than the image on the August cover of the new journal *La Difesa della Razza* (*La Difesa della Razza* 1938). That journal had compared stereotypical 'semitic' and 'negroid' profiles to supposedly 'superior' physiognomical features as exemplified by a classical statue.

The culmination of the September visit of party and government officials to Herculaneum was reported to be the acclamation of the Duce and 'Imperial Italy' by a crowd of academics, *camice nere* and visitors in the partially excavated Roman *palaestra* at Herculaneum. It was



Figure 4: The Education Minister Giuseppe Bottai with Amedeo Maiuri (left) at Herculaneum 25 September 1938. Photographer: Studio Troncone. © Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori, Fondo fotografico Giuseppe Bottai A11_B29_F01.

a common practice at Rome for the Fascist Party to use Roman ruins as a significant backdrop to parades on the Via dell'Impero or exhibitions in the Circus Maximus (Kallis 2014). Here in 1938, as he had done in June 1927 when he had negotiated party use of the amphitheatre, rather than the forum at Pompeii (ACS MPI AABBA Div. II 1934–1940, b. 21, fasc. 367), Maiuri made available the ancient sports field at Herculaneum as an appropriate Roman backdrop to a Fascist Party spectacle of manufactured consensus.

The half-excavated *palaestra* was also a significant place in which to locate the acclamation of the Duce because Mussolini identified himself with Augustus who had promoted the physical education of youth. The *iuvenes* of Augustus' time were paralleled in the 1930s by the Italian youth who were enrolled in the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* (ONB) and *Gioventù del littorio* (GIL). The Herculaneum *palaestra* was also especially associated with Hercules, the legendary founder of the town and protector of gymnasia (Delorme 1960: 339–340), and by extension with Mussolini, the new Hercules who was the patron of the excavations. Mussolini had long associated himself with the muscular Hercules and in fascist iconography of the late 1930s (Lamers and Reitz-Joosse 2016: 63–69) and on ONB and Littorali sports medals in 1931 he was depicted as Hercules draped in the skin of the slain Nemean lion (Casolari 1996: X/38). (Figure 5) Mussolini held the title *princeps iuventutis* and appeared with this title on athletic medals for youth that bore his head (Casolari 1996: XIII/38).

At Herculaneum, the September 1938 Bicentennial ceremonies ended with the presentation of medals to all the participants. On the obverse of the medal (Figure 6) was a depiction of Hercules fighting the Nemean lion with a legend around the image commemorating the 200th anniversary (Casolari 1996: XVI/87). The reverse (Figure 7) depicted the newly excavated ruins at the end of *Cardo V* together with a dedicatory panel with a Latin



Figure 5: Mussolini as Hercules in the skin of the Nemean lion. Littorali medal 1932 Casolari 1996 X/58. <http://www.mpa41.com/medaglie.asp?anno=1932>.

text commemorating the remarkable excavations 'begun again by the order of Benito Mussolini.' This text is framed by two lictorial bundles of *fasces*. It is significant that the 1938 medal showed Hercules in the process of fighting the Nemean lion. The hero had not yet killed the wild animal nor skinned it for his trophy. Clearly Herculaneum was still a labour in progress, an ongoing struggle that required the continuing attention of Mussolini, the modern Hercules.



Figure 6: Herculaneum medal 1938. Hercules fighting the Nemean lion. Casolari 1996 XVI/87 Obverse. Text on the edge: ANNO CC A PRIMIS ERUTIS HERCULANEI VESTIGIIS MDCCXXXVIII-MCMXXXVIII. <http://www.mpa41.com/medaglie.asp?anno=1938>.



Figure 7: The ruins of Herculaneum and commemorative text framed by bundled lictorial fasces. Casolari 1996 XVI/87. Reverse. Text: AD NOVAS HERCULANENSES EFFOSSIONES ABHINC ANNOS XI IUSSU BENITI MUSSOLINI DENUO SUSCEPTAS ACRIUS PERACTAS RITE MEMORANDAS KAL. OCTOBR. MCMXXXVIII A FASC. REST. XVI. <http://www.mpa41.com/medaglie.asp?anno=1938>.

Conclusions

It is impossible for us to know, and idly speculate, whether Amedeo Maiuri was merely a careerist or opportunist who, for his own interests and advancement, conformed to the ideology of the patron state, or was a fascist of conviction. However, if he is to be taken at his own word, he was a fervent supporter of the fascist regime and committed to the Duce. Maiuri's work at Herculaneum, and his presentation of it in his writings, both illustrate how strongly he was drawn to the 'action not words' aspect of fascism.

He was a fervent believer in the power of the will. In a later remembrance of Mussolini's 1927 speech announcing the resumption of the excavations, Maiuri expressed publicly in the press his admiration for 'that bare and clearly observable will' revealed by the Duce in his speech on that occasion (Maiuri 1938). Like the Battle of the Pontine Marshes or the Battle for the Grain, the propaganda message of the Herculaneum excavations was that the energetic application of willpower, hard work and modern machines to a task of national importance, would ensure its success.

In essence Maiuri and the regime deployed the '*novissimi scavi*' in an attempt to counter previous foreign criticism of the earlier inactivity by the Italian state at this significant archaeological site. Thus, the ongoing work at Herculaneum was extolled by the Fascist Party as an impressive example of the energy and capability harnessed by Mussolini in the 'New Italy.'

Maiuri served the fascist regime by elaborating the mystical aspect to be found within the party's doctrine of *romanità*. It was a *romanità* that was imaginatively and physically embedded in the 'living city' of Herculaneum. Thus Roman Herculaneum came to be described as a timeless place which 'breathed from each and every stone an overwhelming atmosphere of *romanità*' (*Corriere della Sera*: 1938). As a '*lieu de mémoire*' Herculaneum offered visitors an essentially 'spiritual' experience of the eternal *romanità* of the Italian people. In fascist propaganda it was this experience that was then seamlessly linked to other fascist discourses of national identity, political allegiance and Italy's civilising imperial mission in the world.

Abbreviations

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| ACS | Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome |
| AABBAA | Antichità e Belle Arti |
| ASDMAE | Archivio storico diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Rome |
| AP | Affari Politici 1919–1930 |
| b. | <i>busta</i> (box) |
| fasc. | <i>fascicolo</i> (folder) |

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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All translations given in this paper are by the author.

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