

BOOK REVIEW

I luoghi del fascismo. Memoria, politica, rimozione

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I luoghi del fascismo. Memoria, politica, rimozione aims to bring together the numerous material testimonies of Fascism that are scattered across Italy, reconstructing their history and the debate around them since the end of the regime, and then investigating their contemporary value. The editors, Giulia Albanese and Lucia Ceci, pose as principal questions what use has been made of these places in republican Italy, and what memory of the relationship with Fascism the country retains today.

The volume originates from a project carried out by the Ferruccio Parri National Institute since 2018, which seeks to map all the places in Italy that are the object of more or less conscious commemoration of Fascism and to collect information on their toponymy, symbols, and monuments. Thanks to significant media coverage, the Institute's project, whose constantly updated results can be consulted on a website (www.luoghidelfascismo.it), has managed to relocate the Fascist heritage issue from academic to public debate, a goal repeatedly invoked in the volume.

The book collects 16 essays by archaeologists, historians and art and architecture historians that deal with emblematic case studies. The first part, *I luoghi della memoria*, reviews more generally the present situation in Italy: its internal lack of homogeneity, the stylistic architectural pluralism of Fascism, the progressive depoliticisation of places, the different types of places and memory to contend with. From these essays, the perspective of conservation in Italian public opinion – contested and problematised by all the authors – appears prevalent. The Italian obsession with heritage and preservation does not consider any other possibility than to erase or protect, even restore (as in the case of Mario Sironi's unveiled fresco mentioned by Carmen Belmonte, p. 88). Italy seems to have a long-term memory as far as conservation is concerned, but a short-term memory with regards to the Fascist *ventennio*. The Arch of Victory in Bolzano, where the monument has been refurbished and reopened with a display itinerary in multiple languages that promotes understanding and contextualisation, stands out as the only virtuous example of a 'democratic reappropriation of the monumental memory of Fascism' and an 'all-round recontextualisation of the monument' (p. 53).

In the second section, *Centri e periferie della memoria*, nine distinctive contexts are analysed to address different geographical and chronological memory-related scenarios. Rome stands out, with its imperial monuments and the project of the *Fori*, which is

discussed by Giorgio Lucaroni and Flaminia Bartolini, while Milan represents to Barbara Bracco the most modern face of Fascism. The other essays give attention to local cases in the national territory, from the new towns of the Agro Pontino, which invoke Fascist memory by their mere existence, to the embedded problem of toponymy in Padua. Despite the conspicuous presence of streets and monuments that still celebrate or refer to the regime, Southern Italy is somewhat sacrificed from this selection; its sole representative case is Michele Bianchi's mausoleum in Belmonte Calabro. These different case studies show the uneven ways in which the sites of Fascism were transformed, according to the social and political history of the territory. The traces of the regime were best preserved where they had lost their most immediate ideological characterisation, creating a continuity between the nation's past, Fascism, and the present. Through the essays, the different temporal phases that have affected the re-signification of these places appear even clearer: the productive iconoclasm of 1945, the long oblivion of the second half of the century, and ultimately the 'preservation without reflection' (p. 226) of today, in which buildings or symbols are taken out of history to become part of a heritage that must be protected at all costs. Particularly thought-provoking in this larger middle section is the different methodological approach of the authors, which mirrors the complexity of the ongoing debate on this subject. While Barbara Bracco optimistically believes that Milan 'has succeeded in reabsorbing or depowering its lictor signs in a cultural and urban landscape that now speaks another language' (p. 146), thanks to a 'beneficial indifference' (p. 146) that has now repositioned the city on a different horizon, Emanuele Ertola discusses the crystallisation of buildings, in his case the *Case del fascio*, left standing as mere remnants of Fascism (p. 217). By telling the biography of Como and Bergamo's *case del fascio*, their construction, the re-use of their spaces, the testimony of the will to impose significant outward signs of change, he confirms the impossibility of ignoring their cumbersome presence and unmistakable identity.

The third and last part of the volume, *I luoghi dei fascismi in Europa*, proposes an openness and confrontation with other nations and their ways of dealing with the material legacies of totalitarianism. Christoph Cornelissen discusses the sites of Nazism in Germany, their rapid disappearance from collective memory, and their 'de-localisation' (p. 271), focusing mainly on the transformation of former concentration camps into memorial sites. In this case, it is interesting to note that Germany was subject to an opposite process to that in Italy, in which a change in the general perception of these places was only made possible by a greater distance in time and profound changes in historical culture. On the other hand, Xosé M. Núñez Seixas highlights how the problem of the historical memory of Francoism in recent Spanish democracy is still an intrinsically political issue. Lastly, Daniele Serapiglia not only focuses on the material presence of Salazar's dictatorship in Portugal, but also on that of the colonial Empire and of the Lusitanian Catholic Church. These two presences – colonialism and the Church – played equally fundamental roles in the Italian *ventennio*, and could have been discussed in greater depth in this volume.

As a side note, the editors could have given a more prominent role to the illustrations of the contexts described by the authors. The 21 pages of black-and-white pictures are enough to provide an overview of some monuments, but given the relevance of images when dealing with material legacies there might have been more. Nevertheless, *I luoghi del fascismo* is admirable for its ambition to capture the complexity of the cultural and political debate around the Fascist legacy, and for its inclusion of lesser-known but equally significant cases of so-called provincial Fascism. The volume should be considered a valuable contribution to this field of study in Italy, since the majority of the recent scholarship and reflection has appeared in English.