

Summaries of articles

The Role of the Party in the Totalitarian Laboratory of the Fascist Regime

E. GENTILE

The article is a new attempt to define the function of the fascist party in power by analysing its juridical position in the State, its activities and its policy in the fascistisation of men and women, since their birth. According to a common view, the party was a mere and passive instrument of Mussolini's dictatorship. The article gives a different interpretation of the role of the party. Even if the party was legally submitted to the State, it always claimed the right to control every aspect of public life. The party actually tried to subvert the State in order to achieve a real participation of the State. In this perspective, the article analyses the way the party spread its tentacles in the structure of the regime and society, and how it moulded men and women to breed "new Italians".

The "Führer Myth" and the Dynamic of the Nazi State

I. KERSHAW

The problem of explaining the dynamism of the Nazi State, and in particular the role of Hitler, has always been an issue at the centre of historical debate on the Third Reich. This article approaches the problem by concentrating not on the person of Hitler, and his direct actions, but on his symbolic Führer authority, and, therefore, on perceptions of Hitler and what he appeared to represent. It is argued that, within a system of rule in which Hitler's "charismatic" authority was superimposed upon, and eroded, the formal structures of a modern, bureaucratic state, the "heroic" image of Hitler—the "Führer myth"—functioned on a number of different levels as an agent of integration, mobilisation, and legitimation, and thereby as a decisive factor in forcing the momentum of Nazi rule and the process which led to the implementation of Nazi ideological goals.

Politics and Society: Power Structures in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany

Ph. BURRIN

The differences between the fascist and nazi regimes are obvious, but must one thus neglect their similarities? In their political structuration one finds four elements distinguishing them from other totalitarian regimes like the communist regime and making of them a proper political grouping: an alliance with conservative forces, a duel between the party and the state, popular support, and the myth of the leader. These four structures enter into specific combinations, and their existence enjoins us to explore the political culture of German and Italian societies.

***Vichy Singular, Vichy Plural:
an Aborted Attempt at Social Containment, 1941–42***

D. PESCHANSKI

Head of Information Services in a new team which rose to power with Darlan in February 1941, Paul Marion began to work towards a policy of total social containment based on an omnipotent state, a restricted activist elite, and no mass mobilization. The project thus concerned his own sector, but was intended to be more general. To further his aims, Marion was able to glean support from close friends from essentially “non-conformist” environments of the 1930s, and from the collaborationist current—of often underestimated importance—in the State apparatus. His successes highlight the heterogeneous nature of this regime in which power relations were in constant evolution between multiple elements. But his fundamental failure reveals the unity of this regime whose elites, ideological foundations, social and relay bases were primarily traditional and conservative.

Royal Heredity and Sacred Power Prior to 987

M. SOT

Historical anthropological reflection on sacred power in the Early Middle Ages leads to the isolation of a dialectic of the sacred involving magical power (acquired by deeds) and religious power (inherited). Christianity introduces a third component of sacredness which combines with these two.

It is in the light of these notions that one can systematically re-examine royal accessions to the throne in Western France from 888 to 987, when the kings belonged either to the Carolingian or Robertian families. All contemporary historiographic sources, considered here as representative of eye-witness opinion, present Eudes, the first non-Carolingian king in 888, as a conquering hero. Charles the Simple, his successor, was a Carolingian king who fell from power in 922 because he did not correspond to the Christian model of a sacred king. Though Hugues Capet did not have heredity in his favor in 987, his royal-blooded competitor, Charles of Lorraine, was neither a conquering hero nor a model of royal virtue: in accordance with the logic of the preceding accessions, Hugues Capet became the elected and sacred king.

In the Prince's Sphere: the Symbolics of Itinerant Power in the Maghreb J. DAKHLIA

The Maghreb's Beys and Sultans share a long tradition of voyaging, institutionalized in expeditions known as mehallas and harkas. These latter, which are almost always fiscal ventures, take on an obviously repressive character and constitute a means of controlling regions over which the central administration has little control. Their cost, however, is so high that the net balance after such a mobilization is sometimes nil. One must also interpret the “mehallas” as attempts to make people believe in the legitimacy of power, and as enactments of the kingdom's harmony, answering to the subjects' own expectations. The procession's staging borrows models of Muslim power which are not specific to the Maghreb: mimesis of the Prophet, the fiction of the Holy War, and so on. On the other hand, the structural tension between a mobile exercise of power and its sedentary practice—in an extremely shifting and unstable political context in which each group's alliance with the sovereign must be constantly renegotiated—may well be a feature particular to the Maghreb.

The Vendean Drifts of the Revolutionary Imagination

Cl. LANGLOIS

The cultural revolution of the year II intended to promote new heroes, anonymous men, women and children proposed in imitation of the popular masses. Painters, playwrights and engravers chose their subjects from this new pantheon, their more or less conscious choices leading to the naturalization as Vendean of those men and women who had come from outside the Vendée. In this movement of drift a new figure came to the fore: the Heroic Saint Milhier who incarnated all the contradictions of an imaginary in total crisis, being confronted, as were the Vendée, with an unspeakable and unrepresentable reality involving realism and allegory, the joint figuring of maternity and freedom, and the ubiquity of death.