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NOTE

This contribution is part of a larger dialogue of four articles and one response piece that form the current issue of JOLCEL. The other contributions are "Between Reading and Viewing: Mapping and Experiencing Rome and Other Spaces" by Klazina Staat (pp. 7–42), "The *Incipit* Miniature of the Morgan Gospel of John" by Barbara Baert (pp. 44–67), and "Looking at Latin 1911–1965–2019: An Ancient Language in Modern Art" by Simon Smets (pp. 103–37). The response piece is "Towards a Codico-Ecology of Latin" by Vincent Debiais (pp. 139–47).

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Language on Display Latin in the Material Culture of Fascist Italy[*]

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the various uses and functions of the Latin language in the material culture of Fascist Italy. It shows that Latin words and phrases were used across diverse media and artistic styles, served several communicative purposes, and went beyond elitist literary circles. The analysis pays special attention to the material aspects and symbolic implications of the ways in which Latin words were showcased in specific locations and settings. Through brief case studies from graphic design, architecture, monumental sculpture, and landscape design, it demonstrates how Latin could become a means of political messaging, also for those with limited knowledge of the language. Offering a more encompassing discussion of the subject than currently available, the article sets the stage for future research and presents some avenues for further exploration.

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1 Introduction

Italian Fascism has been described as "the most self-consciously visual of all political forms."[1] One of its defining features was its extensive use of signs, symbols,

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[1] Paxton, *The Anatomy*, 9.

and imagery associated with ancient Rome to communicate its views, advance its objectives, and engage as many Italians as possible in the vision of life it sought to create. While scholars have studied the role of language in Fascist propaganda, less attention has been paid to the embodied presence of language, including the use of Latin, in the visual culture of the *ventennio fascista*. This article builds upon recent investigations into Fascist Latinity by offering a preliminary exploration of the use of the language of ancient Rome in the material culture of the era. Rather than presenting a single, unified argument, it aims to outline some relevant aspects of the topic and raise various questions inherent to its study. By examining the physical features of Latin writing such as its visual characteristics, the surfaces on which it appears, its physical settings, and the symbolism attached to it, we can significantly broaden our understanding of how Latin was used as a means of political messaging in Fascist Italy.

The first two sections of the article briefly explain the current state of affairs (section 1) and propose a way to advance the scholarship by exploring the phenomenon more broadly, encompassing more aspects of the physical presence of Latin in Fascist Italy (section 2). The subsequent sections (3–6) provide examples of the diverse material contexts in which Latin was used and the issues raised by their analysis. These 'vignettes' demonstrate that Latin writing was employed in various styles and media, including in contexts outside elite culture and official state propaganda. Although the examples are limited and cannot be discussed in depth, they provide insight into the range of ways in which Latin was used in the material and visual culture of Italian Fascism, as well as the intricate relationships between language, visual and material culture, and ideology that emerge from examination of these uses. [2]

2 Latin beyond words: state of the question

The topic of Latin's use in Fascist Italy has been examined from different perspectives over the last few years. The regime's promotion of Latin in schools is well documented, and in recent years interest has grown in exploring the language's role as a medium of literary expression during the *ventennio*.[3] In conjunction with this, increasingly more detailed case studies of Latin texts of this period

[2] Offering some examples of Latin's usage in Fascist visual culture, the article raises questions and opens avenues for further research that also inspire the project "New Signs of Antiquity: The Uses of Latin in the Public Culture of Fascist Italy," currently underway at the University of Oslo (2021–2025). Most of it was written in the initial phases of the project, and some of its tenets will be reviewed in subsequent publications.

[3] On Latin in the Fascist schools, see esp. Fedeli, "Studio e uso"; Klein, *La politica linguistica*, 61–62; Klein "Language Policy"; Bruni, *Greco e latino*, 77–100; Charnitzky, *Die Schulpolitik*, 32–37; and Bordoni and Contessa, "Latino." Early hints at the active use of Latin during the *ventennio fascista* can be found in Perry, *The Roman Collegia*, 129–32; Gionta, "I certamina"; Aicher, "Mussolini's Forum"; Canfora, *Ideologie*, 96, 101–3; and esp. Fedeli, "Studio e uso." More extensive treatments of the subject of Fascist Latinity are Lamers, Reitz-Joosse and Sacré, "Neo-Latin Literature"; and Lamers and Reitz-Joosse, "*Lingua Lictoria*." More complete bibliography can be found in Lamers, Reitz-Joosse, and Sanzotta, eds., *Studies*, 1–3, with notes 1–6, to which can be added Ghilardi, "*La lingua di Roma*."

have recently been published.[4] Scholars have demonstrated that, within the framework of the Fascist 'cult of Rome,' Latin acquired a distinct ideological connotation and a national importance that, although not entirely novel, was effectively appropriated by the regime.[5] As the focus has been on texts produced by, and for, trained Latinists, the use of Latin under Fascism has sometimes been understood as distinct from more popular and mass manifestations of *romanità*.[6]

However, there is ample evidence to suggest that the lure of Latin was not restricted to learned literary circles. Despite the limited impact of the 'Latin-for-all' movement (pan-Latinism), Latin continued to be part of the daily experience of many Italians under Mussolini. Examples are legion. Members of the Fascist youth organization were distinguished with medals featuring Latin texts such as "Sorti devota futurae" ("Devoted to coming destiny") (fig. 1).[7] The barracks of the workers engaged in the construction of the town of Pontinia (Lazio) reportedly featured the Latin motto "Dux docet, docuit" ("The Leader teaches and has thought").[8] In processions, people carried banners with the slogan "Civis Romanus sum" ("I am a Roman citizen"), a phrase also favoured by Mussolini himself.[9] Larger audiences encountered Latin words and phrases in regime-organized mass spectacles. A tapestry bearing the Horatian phrase "Stet Capitolium fulgens" ("May the Capitol stand shining"), for instance, served as a backdrop during significant events, including the commemoration of Rome's anniversary at the Capitol Hill on April 21, 1923 and the ostentatious celebration of the fourteenth anniversary of the Fascist Revolution held in front of Palazzo Venezia in Rome in November 1936.[10]

These few examples show the multifaceted uses of Latin in various contexts to serve diverse purposes and reach different audiences. This phenomenon has yet to receive sustained scholarly attention, even though the role of writing and lettering in Fascist propaganda more generally has been discussed.[11] Two areas of scholarship have paid at least some attention to the embodied uses of Latin beyond the printed text during the *ventennio fascista*: epigraphists and philatelists have drawn attention to the use of Latin on buildings and postage stamps, respectively.

[4] See, in addition to the contributions in Lamers, Reitz-Joosse and Sanzotta, eds., *Studies*; also Bettegazzi, Lamers and Reitz-Joosse, "Viewing Rome"; Bragantini "Il 'latinista fascista'"; Fera, "Microcosmo letterario"; Lamers and Reitz-Joosse, *The Codex*; Scriba "Mussolini-Panegyrik." Latin texts engaging with Fascism and written under Mussolini's regime are currently being made available in the online repository *Fascist Latin Texts*. See Lamers and Reitz-Joosse, eds., *Fascist Latin Texts*.

[5] See Lamers and Reitz-Joosse, "*Lingua Lictoria*"; Lamers and Reitz-Joose, *The Codex*, 16–22; and, most extensively, Bettegazzi, "Ideologies."

[6] Roche, "Distant Models," 7. See also n. 49.

[7] Casolari, *25 anni*, 155 (VII-40).

[8] On this, see Ciammaruconi, "Tra estetica del potere," 18.

[9] A banner with the inscription "Civis Romanus sum" is, for example, shown in a newsreel of produced by Istituto Luce, preserved at the same institute, cod. M016903, from 01:16:24. The same newsreel shows an intertitle with the text "… alme sol … possis nihil Urbe Roma visere maius!" ("Oh nourishing Sun, may you never witness anything greater than the City of Rome") (Hor. *Carm. saec.* 9–12), superimposed on a bundle of *fasces* encircled by a laurel wreath (at 01:16:05). On Mussolini's use of the slogan "Civis Romanus sum," see Lamers, "Mussolini's Latin," 216–18.

[10] See Lamers and Reitz-Joosse, "Spectacular Latin."

[11] See esp. the insightful discussion in Petrucci, *Jeux de lettres*, 199–211.

Modern epigraphists (and, to a lesser extent, architectural historians) have shown how Latin inscriptions were interwoven into the fabric of public spaces in Fascist Italy, even though the regime generally favoured Italian as its primary epigraphic language.[12] The focus has been on Latin inscriptions used as *scritture esposte*, which are writings intended for display in highly visible areas, often to indicate their particular significance.[13] For the Fascist regime, inscriptions served as an important tool for asserting presence within Italy's public sphere. By leveraging the age-old tradition of Latin epigraphy, the regime inscribed itself in a long lineage of rulers and governing bodies, reaching back to ancient Rome. In this manner, it left its mark on the urban landscapes of Italian towns and cities, not least Rome.[14]

While we are well informed about the Fascist Latin inscriptions of Rome,[15] the use of Latin was not restricted to the capital. Latin inscriptions can also be found in other places, both in Italy and in the colonies. While some excellent work has recently been carried out on Latin inscriptions in Tyrolian Bozen (the Victory Monument) and Libya (the Arco dei Fileni),[16] many more texts remain

Figure 1: Bronze medal of the O.N.B. (Fascist Youth Organization), obverse, 1928.

[12] Nastasi, *Le iscrizioni*, xviii–xix.

[13] For a critical discussion of various definitions of *scritture esposte*, see Fraenkel, "Les écritures exposées."

[14] Benton, "Epigraphy," 163; Nastasi, "L'epigrafia," 175.

[15] See esp. Nastasi, *Le iscrizioni* and, specifically about Fascism; Nastasi, "L'epigrafia." Previous discussions include Addamiano, "Le iscrizioni"; Aicher, "Mussolini's Forum," 57–58; Benton, "Epigraphy"; Gamberale, "Iscrizioni in latino"; Marcello and Gwynne, "Speaking from the Walls"; and Rannem, *Bokstavene*, 330–57. The Latin inscription on Fascist Rome have been collected in a special section, curated by Antonino Nastasi, Lamers and Reitz-Joosse, eds., *Fascist Latin Texts*, https://flt.hf.uio.no/inscriptions.

[16] For Tyrolian Bozen, see Strobl, "'In honorem…'" and Strobl, "'Tu regere…'." For Libya, see Munzi, "Italian Archaeology," 86; and, most extensively now, Agbamu, "The Arco dei Fileni."

unrecorded and have not yet received scholarly discussion.[17] Some of them can be found in special places on the symbolic map of the Fascist movement, including Predappio (Mussolini's birthplace) and Milan (birthplace of the National Fascist Party). Studies have so far shown that inscriptions came in many shapes and forms, from quotations to original compositions, and from single words to short texts. It has also become clear that some quotes from ancient Latin authors, including passages from Horace, Vergil, and Livy, enjoyed special popularity, and scholars have examined how they were used and reused in various epigraphical contexts.[18] While scholars have mainly focused on inscriptions in stone and other durable materials, there have also been occasional discussions of the use of Latin in more temporary or 'ephemeral' inscriptions. This includes, for example, the Latin *X* (10) and *DVX* (Leader) featured at the Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista (1932) and the Latin quotations attached to walls of some of the exhibit rooms at the Mostra Augustea della Romanità in Rome (1937–1938), discussed by Tim Benton, Joshua Arthurs, and most recently, Nicolò Bettegazzi.[19]

In addition to Latin inscriptions, the Latin mottos on several series of postage stamps issued under the regime have attracted the attention of philatelists and cultural historians. Stamps with Latin texts issued under Fascism are included in the series produced for the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Fascist Revolution (1932), designed by Corrado Mezzana (1890–1952), and for the bimillenaries of Vergil (1930), again by Mezzana, Horace (1936), by Giuseppe Rondini (1885–1955), and Augustus (1937–1938) and Livy (1941), both by Mezzana.[20] These stamp series were carefully designed, and most of them carry quotes from ancient Latin authors, including Vergil, Horace, Livy, and Augustus. The Latin quotes on these stamps were sometimes tweaked and manipulated to bring out the political messages imposed on them.[21] Importantly, and just like at least some of the Latin inscriptions, the stamps not only circulated through daily use, but were also showcased in both national and international publications.[22]

Although Latin inscriptions and legends on stamps have received expert attention, there has been limited exploration of their interconnections within the

[17] Nastasi, "L'epigrafia," 197.

[18] See esp. Nastasi, "L'epigrafia," discussing the repeated uses of Vitr. *De arch.* 6.1.11, Hor. *Carm. saec.* 9–12, Verg. *Aen.* 6.851–853, Liv. 1.12.9, as well as the phrase *Have Roma*, in various epigraphical contexts in the city of Rome.

[19] Benton, "Epigraphy," 175–80; Arthurs, *Excavating Modernity*, 160–61; Bettegazzi, "Ideologies," 219–44, 332–34. On the Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista, see Stone, *The Patron State*, 128–76.

[20] The most complete discussion of these series is in Liberati, "La storia," 246–49 (Vergil), 250 (Fascist Revolution), 252–56 (Horace), 260–74 (Augustus), and 277–79 (Livy). A profound discussion with a focus on the series in celebration of Augustus, with due attention to the stamp's visual aspects and wider context, is Schumacher, "Augusteische Propaganda." Brief discussions with translations of the Latin mottos appear in Luceri, "Quando la filatelia" and Calvillo, "Entre difusión y propaganda," 193–200. The stamps are also briefly discussed in Foss, "Augustus," 314–15; and Falasca-Zamponi, *The Fascist Spectacle*, 92–93. For a more popular account, see Giuliani, "Latin and latinorum" (= Giuliani, "Latino e latonorum"), emphasizing the tension between the use of Latin and propaganda purposes.

[21] Liberati, "La storia," 262–63, 267–68; and Schumacher, "Augusteische Propaganda" for the Augustus series. Manipulations have sometimes been imprecisely referred to as "imprecisions" and "philological inaccuracies" (Luceri, "Quando la filatelia").

[22] For the main references, see Liberati, "La storia," 262n80. See also the interesting discussion of the 25-cent stamp in *Arte Cristiana*, with a large reproduction of the stamp (Lipinsky, "Cronaca").

broader context of Fascist visual and material culture and the use of Latin. Furthermore, Latin writing can be found on various objects that have been examined separately, but without due consideration of the role of the language in their material and artistic composition. One group of such items are coins and coin-like objects, such as medals and medallions, which have not received due analysis despite being collected and catalogued extensively by, mainly, Gianfranco Casolari.[23] Similarly, postcards have garnered attention from collectors and historians, particularly Enrico Sturani, but with limited emphasis on the Latin inscriptions often present on them.[24]

The widespread use of Latin on buildings and objects such as stamps and coins suggests that the significance of Latin went beyond the literal meaning of the words displayed. In what ways can we explore and understand the embodied uses of Latin writing in Fascist Italy from a more comprehensive perspective? How can we examine the interconnections between different instances of Latin usage, and how does it relate to the movement's propaganda and broader cultural discourse? What was the distinctive significance of employing Latin in these contexts, particularly in relation to Italian? While these questions cannot be answered comprehensively at this stage, we can suggest some avenues for further exploration. The next section will briefly contextualize the use of the language of Rome within the context of Fascist *romanità*, serving as a basis for re-evaluating the use of the language in Fascist material culture. Following that, we will analyse some specific examples (Sections 3–6).

3 Romanness, Latin, and material culture

The growing interest in the role of Latin in Fascist Italy reflects a broader trend among historians of Fascism to acknowledge the importance of culture and language in the formation and consolidation of the Fascist movement and state.[25] This cultural turn in the study of Italian Fascism has provided a deeper understanding of the cultural activities and artistic creations that sustained Mussolini's regime, especially the role of *romanità* or 'Romanness,' a term used by Fascists themselves to convey the idea of restoring the quality of 'being Roman' to the Italians. Historians have highlighted the "symbolic reconnection to Rome" as a core component of Fascist ideology.[26] More specifically, they have argued that this symbolic reconnection enabled the Fascists to legitimize their viewpoints and political actions, engender consensus among different strata of Italian society, and

[23] See, mainly, Casolari, *25 anni* and Casolari, *Il fulgore*. Together with Erlend Østrem Myklebust (University of Oslo), I am preparing an exploratory study of the subject.

[24] See Sturani, *Le cartoline*; Sturani, *Otto milioni di cartoline* for a collection of postcards featuring Mussolini; and Sturani, "Analysing Mussolini Postcards" for an analysis in English.

[25] Literature on this topic is vast. For a recent discussion of the scholarship on Fascist culture and its cultural and ideological background, see Tarquini, *Storia della cultura fascista*, 11–47.

[26] Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, 92. The work of Roger Griffin, in particular, has made this *palingenetic* tendency into a defining feature not only of Italian Fascism, but fascisms in general: see Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*.

give a sense of purpose to Italians who felt disoriented by the experience of the First World War and the rapid changes of modernity. The regime leveraged significant sectors of Italy's cultural life to promote the experience of 'being Roman' for the Italians, from education to archaeological excavations and art exhibitions, from architecture and urban planning to the production of films and grand-scale political spectacles.

While Italian Fascism created a totalitarian state, Fascist notions of 'Romanness' did not constitute a fixed or immutable set of ideas and practices. Emphases in Romanness shifted over the course of the regime's twenty-year tenure in response to changing ideological and political priorities.[27] While cultural policies were formulated by government ministries and disseminated through state-supported institutions like the Istituto di Studi Romani in Rome, *romanità* had to be negotiated with groups representing diverse cultural and intellectual perspectives.[28] As Tim Benton noted, more generally, the regime's attempt to combine modernist elements with a veneration for Roman antiquity resulted in "continual uncertainties and ambiguities in the framing of cultural policy."[29] These frictions are reflected in the wide range of artistic and architectural styles endorsed by the regime, which exhibited a diversity of responses to the sometimes competing cultural impulses emanating from the government.[30]

The regime utilized visual forms and objects associated with ancient Rome to promote the ideals of *romanità* and foster a sense of Romanness among the Italian population. Symbols such as the *fasces*, the *lupa* or she-wolf, imperial eagle, Roman salute, and imperial-style standards served as a daily reminder of the regime's presence and dominance. They moreover made Italians feel connected to a present modelled by Fascism after a past they had learned to admire as a shared national heritage.[31] Roman signs and symbols were part of Fascism's "historic imaginary" and sustained Fascism's emphasis on its own "historic-ness" as the successor of ancient Rome.[32] As the language of Roman antiquity, Latin was an integral part of this historic imaginary.

Even if Latin was not universally understood by Italians, its presence had a symbolical value of its own. It was "an unknown tongue, and a familiar idiom."[33] While most Italians knew it primarily as the language of the Church, Fascism recast it as a symbol of its self-proclaimed "reconnection" with imperial Rome.[34] As Antonino Nastasi has pointed out, the use of Latin in the inscriptions of

[27] After Marla Stone, the main legitimizing work of Fascist uses of Rome is usually understood as falling into three main phases: Rome as a model for the legitimation of revolutionary action, the organization of combat, and Italian unity (1922–1925); for territorial expansion in the Mediterranean, aggressive foreign policy, and imperial ambitions (1925–1936); and finally for exclusivist and racist social and demographic policies (from the late 1930s onwards) (Stone, "A Flexible Rome"). See also the discussion of Roche, "Distant Models," 5–6.

[28] Arthurs, *Excavating Modernity*, 6.

[29] Benton, "Epigraphy," 168.

[30] This stylistic heterogeneity persisted at least until the late 1930s, as argued extensively by Stone, *The Patron State*.

[31] Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, 95–99.

[32] Fogu, "Actualism," 201; Fogu, "To Make History Present," 34.

[33] Waquet, *Latin*, 103 (describing the Latin used in the Catholic liturgy).

[34] On the tension between Fascist and Catholic claims to Latin, see Bettegazzi, "Ideologies."

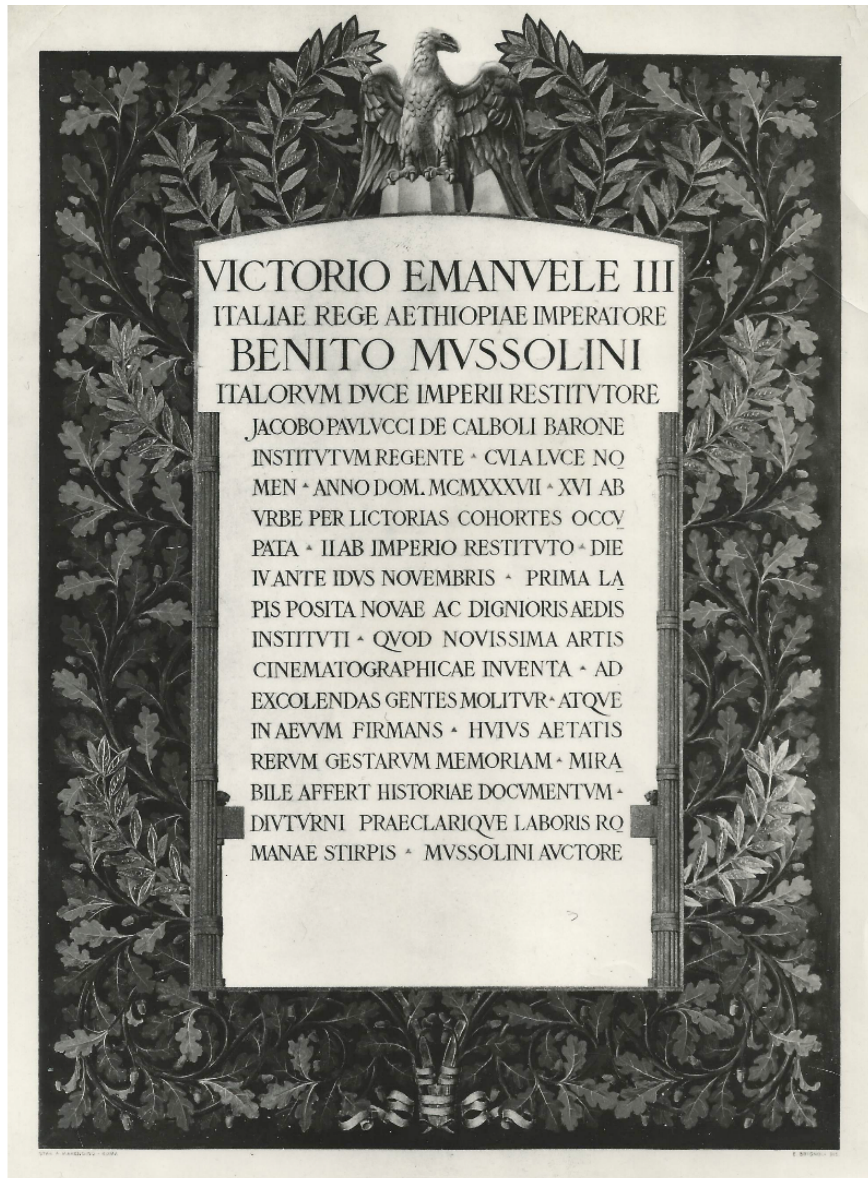

Figure 2. Parchment calligraphed by E. Brignoli for Istituto Luce, 1937.

Fascist Rome was a deliberate attempt to suggest political, military, and cultural continuity between Fascist Italy and imperial Rome.[35] Other scholars have equally highlighted the significance of the language itself. Discussing the iconographical representation of Fascist notions of justice in the Palazzo di Giustizia in Milan, for instance, Lucy Maulsby emphasized the connection between the use of Latin inscriptions in the Palazzo and the tradition of Roman law, which may have resonated in this context even for those who could not read Latin.[36] Similar associations between Fascist Italy and Roman antiquity can be observed in other forms of visual media where Latin was employed. Even those who were unable to read

35 Nastasi, “L’epigrafia,” 175. See also Nastasi, *Le iscrizioni*, xviii–xix.
36 Maulsby, “*Giustizia Fascista*,” 316.

or understand Latin could be drawn to the general meanings associated with the language.

There is yet another way in which Latin writing could afford political meaning beyond the message it conveyed in words. Laura Malvano Bechelloni has observed that the omnipresent Latin tags of Fascism, such as *SPQR* and *DVX*, served as "signes visuels de reconnaissance" ("visual signs of recognition") that, according to her, signified the vigilant presence of Mussolini's regime.[37] The notion of Latin as a *visual sign* provides a valuable starting point for reconsidering the role of the language in Fascist visual and material culture, as it aligns with insights from the anthropology of writing that emphasize the physical features of writing beyond its textual content in the meaning-making process. Language is not only read but also *seen*. It has its own visual semiotics.

Studying Latin writing in Fascist Italy thus means considering its non-linguistic features, its material and visual aspects, as well as the cultural and ideological meanings often assigned to them. In the totalitarian context of Mussolini's Italy, even the seemingly most insignificant details could be imbued with ideological significance. Semiotic modes such as colours, graphological features, and typefaces could play an important part in creating meaning. Visual semiotics also highlights words' surfaces or 'screens' (e.g., parchment, marble, textile), their material substances (e.g., ink, gold, pigments), and even the tools and techniques of their production (e.g., chisel, pen, brush) as elements that can unlock meaning.[38] The document shown in fig. 2 provides a good example of how most of these physical characteristics reinforced the significance of the Latin text. For instance, the choice of parchment as the writing surface conveyed a sense of longevity and evoked associations with the *medioevo* and Renaissance, which were further reinforced by the humanist lettering style, calligraphic technique, and use of illumination. The selection of artistic techniques and materials, like the choice of Latin, reflected traditions that were viewed as part of a national heritage, 'revitalized' under Fascism, in which the Italians could take special pride.[39] In addition to the physical features of the writing and its immediate setting, the placement and location of Latin signs in space could also convey meanings that are not conveyed in words, and the same expression may have different connotations depending on its location. The symbolism of the word *DVX*, for instance, can vary greatly depending on its location and placement, whether it dominates a hillside just outside Rome, is affixed to an impromptu triumphal arch in Lucca erected in honour of Mussolini's visit to the city, or is mounted on a colossal 120-meter tower in Tripoli, Libya. Together, the physical and symbolic features of the Latin writing, as well as its techniques and media, both shape the visual appearance of the words and impact how they are understood and interpreted.[40]

37 Malvano Bechelloni, "Le mythe," 116.

38 See Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 216.

39 Lamers and Reitz-Joosse, *The Codex*, 75–81.

40 The rematerialization of the sign, which was advanced by, among others, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Louis Hjelmslev, has branched out in two main areas of scholarly investigation: visual semiotics, focusing on the role of visual modes in semiosis (fundamentally, Kess and Van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*), and geosemiotics, with a distinct focus on the role of physical placement in signification (esp. Scollon and

Understanding the physical aspects of writing and the symbolic dimension of language is particularly important in comprehending how Latin texts could encode meaning for audiences unable to understand the words. But even if most casual observers were unable to read Latin, this does not diminish the significance of the texts' literary meaning and rhetorical form. This is particularly true for Latin texts since their creation requires specialized knowledge of the language and its literary tradition. The investment of time and energy in the creation of Latin texts for buildings and objects suggests that the verbal message was regarded as significant. The point is not to argue against examining the literary content of these writings, but rather to avoid examining them in isolation from their physical context. By integrating non-linguistic features into the analysis, we can better understand how these Latin writings afforded meaning differently to multiple audiences with varying levels of familiarity with both the language and the Latin literary tradition.[41]

In the following sections, we will explore some examples of the embodied uses of Latin in Fascist Italy, building on the approach outlined above. We will examine various examples of Latin being employed in different contexts, including graphic design (section 3), architecture (section 4), monumental sculpture (section 5), and landscape design (section 6). Our analysis will cover a range of Latin expressions, from original compositions to quotations, and from one-word slogans to brief poems, highlighting how they interact differently with their particular physical surroundings. While each vignette takes a unique direction and does not necessarily contribute to a unified argument, a common thread throughout all of them is the presence of cultural ambiguities often associated with Italian Fascism. These include the tension between the ancient past and modernist present in Fascist ideology, as well as the oscillation between historicizing and modernist tendencies in Fascist visual culture.[42]

4 A postcard of October 30, 1922

While Latin is often associated with monumental inscriptions, to which we will return in the next section, it was also used to write on less prominent and imposing objects. Among the less studied items bearing Latin texts are postcards, which

Wong Scollon, *Discourse in Place*). Within literary studies, semiotic approaches are sometimes known as "multimodal stylistics," usually applied to the visual aspects of printed verbal (literary) language (see Nørgaard, "The Semiotics of Typography," with the useful references there).

41 This approach aligns with insights from affordance theory that have recently been applied in media and heritage studies (for its use in analyzing the role of Latin in Fascist spectacles, see Lamers and Reitz-Joosse, "Spectacular Latin").

42 While the focus of this article is on Latin's material presence in Fascism's visual culture, the language was occasionally also used orally in political contexts. Examples include a Latin speech of Minister of Colonies Pietro Lanza di Scalea in Tripoli in 1925 (*I fasci italiani all'estero* 2, no. 19, May 9, 1925: 24) and the performance of the *Carmen saeculare* at the Augusteum in Rome in 1927 (see Strobl, "'Possis nihil urbe…'"). For the inauguration of Ovid's statue in Sulmona, the mayor invited Domenico Tinozzi to compose Latin verses for public recitation, but the plan did not materialize (see Senigagliesi, *Un "sogno secolare,"* 162–64).

Figure 3: Postcard of the Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale.

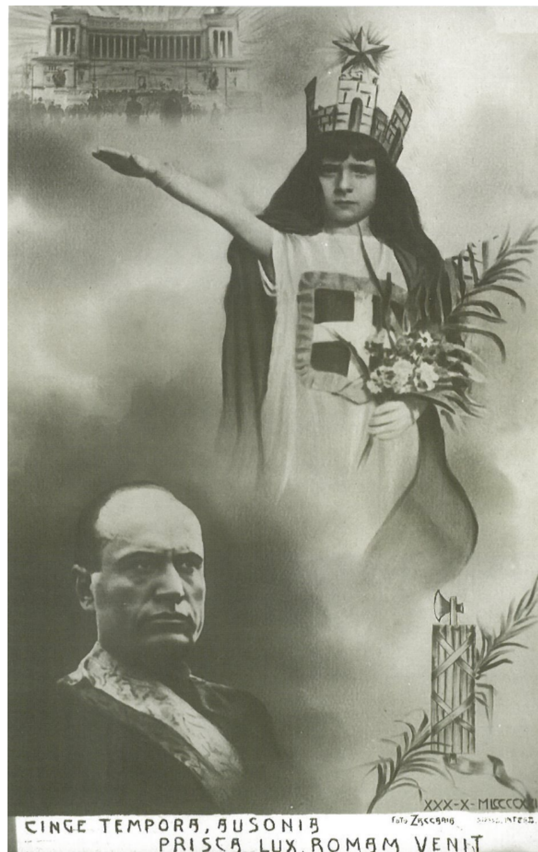

Figure 4: Postcard "Cinge tempora," October 30, 1922.

varied greatly in quality and style and served various purposes. Some of them were sent, while others were kept as personal mementos, almost "like holy images, stuck in the frame of a mirror alongside images of Christ and the pictures of family members living abroad, pinned on a bedroom wall or gathered in albums."[43] Some postcards were produced by official institutions or institutionalized groups, such as the Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale (Voluntary Militia for National Security), which had postcards printed with Latin mottos like "Acta non agenda" ("Actions, not plans") and "Usque dum vivam et ultra" ("As long as I shall live, and beyond") (fig. 3).[44] Other postcards, however, were created by private parties.

The postcard shown here, for example, was apparently produced by a private citizen (fig. 4). While we know it was printed by "Foto Zaccaria" in Florence, little is currently known about its background.[45] We do not know, for instance, who was involved in its design, how many cards were produced, and whether it was offered for sale or not. Nevertheless, the postcard holds significant value as a remarkably early example of Latin being used to commemorate Mussolini and Fascism. The postcard is dated October 30, 1922, just days after the March on Rome,

[43] Sturani, "Analysing Mussolini Postcards," 143.

[44] This concerns postcards of the 95th legion (Marzocco) and the 4th legion (Santorre di Santarosa), respectively. They are in private collections.

[45] For the postcard, see Sturani, *Otto milioni di cartoline*, 224 (no 12) and Sturani, *Le cartoline*, 56 (no 67). Enrico Sturani kindly notified me that the postcard's reverse side bears no postage stamp and that the exemplar depicted here was not sent (personal communication, May 2022).

which resulted in Mussolini's ascent to power and the establishment of his regime. It is also a striking example of how Latin could be utilized in visual media without reliance on the skill and expertise of the professional designers, printers, and Latinists on whom state propaganda could rely.

In the visual centre of the postcard, slightly to the right, is an image of a child, dressed up as *Italia turrita* (turreted Italy), a personification of Italy wearing a mural crown topped with the emblematic *Stella d'Italia* (Star of Italy). Her arm is raised in a Roman salute, then already associated with the Fascist movement. To the top left is a relatively small image of the Altar of the Fatherland, i.e., the Victor Emmanuel II Monument in Rome. The image's lower left corner shows a formal portrait of Benito Mussolini,[46] set against a darker background that fades around the edges. Mussolini is shown wearing the two-coloured scarf he supposedly wore during the March and that later became the honorary *sciarpa littorio*. To the right of the portrait is a drawing of a bundle of *fasces*, with a branch of the olive tree. The images on the postcard, comprising photographs and drawings, are arranged in a manner that evokes a sense of a homemade collage rather than a professional montage. The arrangement exudes a personal and handcrafted feel, rather than a polished commercial one.

The images assembled on the postcard would have been easily recognizable to any contemporary Italian, as they were already deeply embedded in the collective national imagery. Together, they served as powerful symbols of the ascendancy of Fascism, and Mussolini in particular, revitalizing Italian politics in a 'Roman' way.[47] The composition of the postcard, on the other hand, evokes a strong resemblance to religious-themed postcards of the Church, which typically depicted saints and popes, as opposed to the later state propaganda images commonly associated with Fascism. Devotional postcards could combine a portrait of the saint, a scene from their life or miracle, a significant building such as a shrine or church, symbols and attributes associated with the saint, and a short text such as an invocation. This postcard's composition closely follows this visual grammar, suggesting an overlap between religious and Fascist iconography.[48]

The inclusion of Latin on the postcard further reinforces this amalgamation of religious and Fascist imagery. The Latin text is positioned at the bottom of the image, against a blank background: "Cinge tempora, Ausonia / prisca lux, Romam venit" (for the interpretation, see n. 49). The Latin may be regarded to evoke the same devotional images which the overall composition suggests, with *lux venit* suggesting Biblical overtones (compare Jn. 3:19). The two lines are arranged one below the other, with the second line indented, creating an impression that the

[46] The portrait had been issued before, dated "Napoli 24-X-22" and signed "Foto Zaccaria Firenze," just like the postcard discussed here.

[47] Note that the monarchy is represented in the picture by the Savoy coat of arms (white cross on a red field) on the child's shirt and the small picture of the National Monument at the top left. There is no portrait of the king balancing that of Mussolini. The personification of Italy is fascisticized by the *saluto romano* (personifications of Italy would normally hold a victory wreath or scepter).

[48] For the convergence of political, popular, and religious imagery, particularly on postcards, see Sturani, *Le cartoline*, 189–98.

text forms an elegiac couplet. While the text thus appears as a caption of the overall collage, it does not provide any illuminating information. It is not as easily 'readable' as the other visual symbols on the card. The Latin does not feature a well-known phrase or quote that would be easily recognizable or understood, such as "Dux Lux" or "Civis Romanus sum," or the catchy mottos and proverbs printed on postcards of the Milizia, mentioned above. The Latin is riddled with linguistic idiosyncrasies and ambiguities, primarily caused by its confusing punctuation, which renders it difficult to decipher the meaning.[49] Even those who could not read Latin would likely recognize buzzwords such as *Roma* and *lux*. Those with some knowledge of Latin might recognize the Biblical reference. However, clarity of expression appears to be of secondary importance. The irregular handwriting on the postcard further highlights the text's gaucheness of expression. The text appears to have been written with an ordinary pen by someone lacking the calligraphic training seen in the above-mentioned parchment (fig. 2).

If we look at the Latin as a visual sign, the inclusion of Latin words on the card is more significant than their literal meaning. The Latin caption, loosely mimicking the shape of an elegiac distich, serves as a visual complement to the political images and symbols on the card, adding to the sense of Roman solemnity they seem eager to evoke. Its graphic and graphological features, such as the irregular handwriting, reinforce the postcard's personal and spontaneous character. Unresolved questions remain: should we interpret these features as intentional design decisions, strategically targeting the cultural tastes and preferences of common Italians? Or do they rather reflect less calculated expressions of personal enthusiasm for Mussolini? While these questions cannot be answered here, the example of the postcard serves as a reminder that such displays of allegiance, including the use of Latin, did not exclusively emanate from active engagement in propaganda initiatives supervised by the government or the National Fascist Party.

5 Inscriptions for two 'Houses of the Wounded'

While we do not know the intended audience and exact reach of the postcard discussed in the previous section, Latin inscriptions were ubiquitous in Fascist Italy and had the potential to appeal to diverse groups with varying degrees of familiarity with the language. As the regime consolidated its control over urban development projects across Italy and in its colonies, Latin inscriptions became

[49] If we accept the original punctuation, the line could be interpreted in two ways: "Gird your temples, ancient Ausonian light, [he?] has come [is coming?] to Rome" or "Gird your temples, Ausonia, ancient light, [he?] has come [is coming?] to Rome." The first option is unlikely as it would be odd to imagine *lux* girding its own temples. In both cases, the lack of a subject with *venit* is unusual. Against the background of the March on Rome, and given Mussolini's portrait on the card, Mussolini might be the implied subject. However, a vocative (*Ausonia*) following an imperative (*cinge*) should make sense, and *lux venit* is a known phrase from the Gospel (Jn. 3:19) (for *prisca lux* in a different context, see also Stat. *Silv.* 5.2.16). Therefore, it is possible that we should read: "Cinge tempora, Ausonia, prisca lux Romam venit" ("Gird your temples, Ausonia, ancient light has come [is coming?] to Rome"). *Tempora cinge* is usually joined with an ablative (Catull. 61.6, with *floribus*; Tib. 2.1.4, with *spicis*; Drac., *Rom.* 1.21, with *lauro*). The word *lux* resonates with *dux*, and the words were used together in Fascist decorations.

Figure 5: The Casa del Mutilato in Pordenone.
Situation of 2018.

an approved means of asserting the regime’s presence and authority. Contrary to some suggestions, Latin inscriptions were not exclusively reserved for structures associated with the cultural or intellectual elite, such as the campus of the Sapienza University in Rome.[50] Moreover, they were not limited to classicizing or historicizing styles, but were also utilized in boldly modernist buildings. The Case del Mutilato (Houses for the Wounded) in Pordenone (1934–1937) (fig. 5) and Catania (1933–1939) (fig. 6) are good examples of popular buildings in different architectural styles that prominently feature Latin inscriptions. These buildings moreover exemplify how Latin inscriptions could be carefully composed to convey a message, even when not everyone in the audience may have understood it.

The Casa del Mutilato was a new type of Fascist building that arose from the need to reintegrate wounded veterans into civil society after the First World War, as well as from the desire to glorify their sacrifice for the fatherland, a central tenet of Fascism. The buildings’ rhetoric of patriotic martyrdom and sacrifice, as Silvia Barisione has observed, was fully integrated into Fascist propaganda through pictorial and sculptural programs. This rhetoric often intertwined the glorification

[50] It has for example been suggested that Case del Fascio (local party headquarters) and Case del Balilla (local headquarters of the Fascist youth organization) often had Italian inscriptions “as these were buildings for the less educated classes” (Marcello and Gwynne, “Speaking from the Walls,” 325).

Figure 6: The Casa del Mutilato in Catania. Situation of 1939.

of the wounded with the commemoration of the dead, and it was not limited to the First World War. It frequently drew connections between fallen soldiers from various national struggles, including the Fascist March on Rome.[51] Because of the strong link between the Casa del Mutilato, Fascist propaganda, and Mussolini's regime, Latin inscriptions in these buildings gained political connotations, even if they did not explicitly mention Fascism. Antonino Nastasi's research has particularly shown how quotes from ancient authors, such as Livy and Horace, were "resemanticized" to align with Fascist political messages when they were integrated into urbanistic, architectural, and iconographical contexts controlled by the regime or its representatives.[52]

Despite being constructed for the same practical and symbolic purposes during the same period, the Houses of the Wounded in Catania and Pordenone present distinct styles that coexisted in Fascist Italy. The House in Pordenone, designed by Cesare Scoccimarro (1897–1953), is an outspokenly modernist structure, lacking sculptural and decorative ornament. The Catanian House, designed by Ercole Fischetti (1878–1959), more overtly references traditional 'Roman' architectural

[51] This specific type of building has yet to receive the level of scholarly attention it deserves but, see Barisione, "The Reception," 352–55, with the references there. The Houses of Pordenone and Catania are not discussed there. On the *casa* of Pordenone, see Bacchichet, "Urbanistica." On the *casa* of Catania, see Ciarmatori, Lorenzi, and Zaffini, "La Casa del Mutilato," 23 and Spina, "L'architettura a Catania."

[52] Nastasi, "L'epigrafia," 195–97. Nastasi also studied the Latin inscriptions of the Casa Madre dei Mutilati e degli Invalidi di Guerra in Rome: Nastasi, *Iscrizioni*, 333–37.

forms and decorations. While the building's structure features simplified modernist forms, its façade bears a striking resemblance to an ancient Roman triumphal arch, a resemblance further emphasized by the Latin inscription "in sacrificio triunphans" ("triumphant in sacrifice") carved on the pilaster at the entry's left.[53] Its design also includes Roman standards at the doorways, doors designed to evoke 'antiquity,' and, topping the entrance, a dramatic sculptural group of six life-sized human figures (ca. 190 cm) representing soldiers of various wars and milestone struggles in Italy's recent past, including the March on Rome and the imperial conquests.[54] The overall architectural style of each building can be seen to complement and reflect the character of its urban environment, with Pordenone's more modernist aesthetic contrasting with the Baroque-dominated architecture of Catania.

Notwithstanding the stylistic differences between the buildings, their façades have eye-catching Latin inscriptions. The inscription in Pordenone reads as follows:

> ... quo fata trahunt retrahuntque sequamur
> quicquid erit superanda omnis fortuna ferendo est.[55]

The one in Catania reads:

> Vulnera quae gerimus laeserunt corpora tantum
> spiritus at constans indomitusque viget.[56]

The use of Latin in these buildings could potentially amplify the solemn and quasi-religious atmosphere of the national cult of sacrifice, particularly for casual observers and passers-by who did not understand the language but could still perceive the weighty significance of the inscriptions. For them, the use of Latin may have evoked its use in religious settings such as churches and cemeteries, thereby invoking a similar sense of reverence and framing the cult of the fatherland as a secular religion. In Pordenone, even though the arrangement of the text does not replicate the display of hexameters familiar from modern editions, beholders with a classical education may have recognized a passage from Vergil's *Aeneid*. The text echoes Nautes' words to Aeneas, encouraging him to continue his fate-ordained

[53] The text "in sacrificio triumphans" was also used on the façades of other Houses of the Wounded, including the *casa* of Verona, where it serves as the main façade inscription. See Roverato, "L'architetto Francesco Maria Banterle," 179–81.

[54] The external sculptural decorations are the work of Salvatore Juvara, Giuseppe D'Angelo, and Salvo Giordano. The statues have been identified as the African War of 1896, the Libyan War of 1911, the First World War, the March on Rome, the conquest of Ethiopia in 1936, and the Spanish War of the same year.

[55] "Let us go where the fates, in their ebb and flow, draw us; come what may, endurance must master every fortune."

[56] "The wounds we carry only harmed our bodies, but our spirit thrives unwavering and unbroken."

Figure 7: The Casa del Mutilato in Pordenone, inscription (*Aen.* 5.709–710).

journey to Italy (*Aen.* 5.709–710). The passage is made to illustrate patriotic sacrifice and endurance for the fatherland, which aligns with the purpose of the Casa del Mutilato as a place of honour for wounded war veterans.[57]

The physical features of the inscription at Pordenone are striking (fig. 7). The Latin writing, composed of prominent block letters each measuring 45 x 10 cm, dominates the façade's overall design. The style of the lettering is distinctively modernist, following the building's style, and evokes the characteristic *bastone* letter type favoured by Fascist architects as signifying the abandonment of "outdated conventions and bourgeois snobbery."[58] The modernity of the letters is also emphasized by their high-relief form, rather than traditional carving. Interestingly, the interpuncts separating the words, though not a common feature in modern writing, recall the writing practice of ancient times, as interpuncts fell out of use in Latin in the course of the second century CE.[59] The use of Latin rather than Italian, the reference to Vergil, and the use of interpuncts reminiscent of antiquity associate the modern building with ancient Rome. Meanwhile, the boldly modernist design of the building and the modern lettering of the inscription provide a contemporary framework for the ancient words, visually linking them with the renewed civil life of Fascist Italy represented by the Casa del Mutilato.

The Latin inscription on the façade of the House of the Wounded in Catania (fig. 8) also connects the building and the cult it represents to the Roman past, but in a manner distinct from that of the building in Pordenone. Unlike the inscription in Pordenone, the one in Catania employs a more traditional lettering style in Roman capitals carved in the more conventional manner. While the dominant inscription in Pordenone turns the building into a "speaking stone,"[60] the inscription in Catania seems to give voice to the soldiers whose sacrifices the building honours, and who are made to seem present in the sculptural group on the façade. For those able to read the Latin, this effect is achieved by the use of the first-person plural ("the wounds *we* carry"), which is not commonly seen in inscriptions. Assigning a Latin statement to war veterans imbues them with a

[57] The text of the inscription was selected by the House's president, Mario Pupin, replacing the earlier plan to inscribe the purpose of the building on its attic. See Baccichet, "Urbanistica," 14.

[58] Benton, "Epigraphy," 167. While often used as an umbrella term for sans-serif fonts, the *bastone* shows quite some variation. Some distinctive features of the letters employed in Pordenone include the use of U instead of V, an A with a low crossbar, E and F with equal-length crossbars, a perfectly round O, P and R with heavy bowls, and an asymmetrical S.

[59] Wingo, *Latin Punctuation*, 16–17.

[60] Baccichet, "Urbanistica," 12.

Figure 8: Casa del Mutilato in Catania, inscriptions.

sense of elevated status as if it were ‘canonizing’ them. As in Pordenone, the use of Latin links the modern realities of national struggle with a time-hallowed ‘Roman’ tradition. But what ancient tradition is evoked here? The text, carefully composed by an unknown author,[61] blends various aspects of *romanità* through the different literary traditions it recalls.

For readers familiar with Vergil’s *Aeneid*, the first line of the inscription is reminiscent of the way in which Hector is imagined appearing to Aeneas in the second book: “bearing those many wounds (*vulneraque illa gerens*) he received around his native walls” (*Aen.* 2.278–279). The pentameter’s *spiritus viget*, on the other hand, calls to mind a line by the fourth-century Christian poet Iuvencus: “Spiritus iste viget, sed corpus debile labat,” put in the mouth of Christ addressing Peter (*Evangeliorum libri* 4.500). In addition to alluding to the theme of sacrifice, the two passages evoke two Latin epic traditions that were central to Italian *romanità* and coexisted in tension under Fascism: the tradition of Augustan-imperial Rome, represented by Vergil’s *Aeneid*, and the tradition of Christian-

[61] Sciacca, “23 maggio,” 59.

Apostolic Rome, evoked by the allusion to Iuvencus' Biblical epic. Given these allusions to epic poetry, the choice of an elegiac distich also gains significance. The elegiac couplet has traditionally been regarded as 'lame' due to the unequal length of its verses, with the pentameter 'missing one foot' compared to the *herous* (hexameter). Is the concept of the 'missing foot' emphasized in the façade's design? The pentameter is intriguingly split at the central caesura, with *spiritus at constans* displaced to the left and *indomitusque viget* to the right, creating an open space or gap in the middle. One could interpret this gap as a visualization of the 'missing foot' or *vulnus*, symbolizing the sacrifice the building and the institution it represents seek to commemorate and honour.

As noted earlier, most readers would not have been able to read the Latin text of the inscriptions or appreciate the literary allusions drawn out here. However, literary meaning and form were not neglected. The inscriptions were carefully selected (as in Pordenone) or composed (as in Catania), indicating they were intended to appeal to at least some readers. Moreover, these crafted inscriptions demonstrated to knowledgeable observers that the Fascist regime had the ability to recruit and utilize individuals with the specialized literary and linguistic skills required to produce them. The examples discussed here show that Latin was used in various styles in architectural inscriptions to establish connections with ancient Rome in different ways. Even though the inscriptions did not mention Fascism explicitly, their physical features and their connection with this specific type of building turned them into political statements associated with Fascism, a relationship which could dissolve as the purpose and symbolism of the buildings changed—as we shall see, in another context, in the next section.

6 *The Navigator* of Genoa

The previous sections have demonstrated how the physical context and presentation of Latin impacted the way it was incorporated into the political message being conveyed, whether through a postcard, building, or any other medium. While visual framing often afforded political interpretations of the Latin, additional factors of discursive framing also encouraged people to reinterpret the Latin in light of Fascism. Here, I would like to highlight two such factors. First, Fascist signification could be elicited by the presence of texts adjacent to the Latin. Secondly, political connotations could emerge from the use of specific Latin words and phrases in Fascist discourse. The Latin phrases that were used by Mussolini himself, including "Civis Romanus sum" and "Per aspera ad astra," would gain special political significance, as they were sometimes explicitly 'fascisticized'.[62] Although not as ubiquitous as Italian slogans like "Credere, obbedire, combattere" ("Believe, obey, fight") and "Mussolini ha sempre ragione" ("Mussolini is always right"),

[62] See the comparable observations in Benton, "Epigraphy," 187–89 concerning the Italian inscription of the so-called Colosseo Quadrato (the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana), which adapts Mussolini's declaration of war on Ethiopia (October 2, 1935). On the post-Fascist reinterpretation of the inscription, see Panico, "Questioning What Remains," 42–44. On Mussolini's use of Latin, see Lamers, "Mussolini's Latin," 211–21.

some Latin stock phrases circulated widely and served the purpose of propaganda.[63] Unlike the Latin texts discussed in the previous sections—such as the slightly obscure postcard inscription, the Vergilian quote at Pordenone, and the crafted elegiac distich in Catania—some of these Latin words and slogans were widely recognized and could be understood even by those unfamiliar with the language. The next section will delve into the analysis of a single buzzword, while in this section, our focus will be on a well-known Latin proverb.

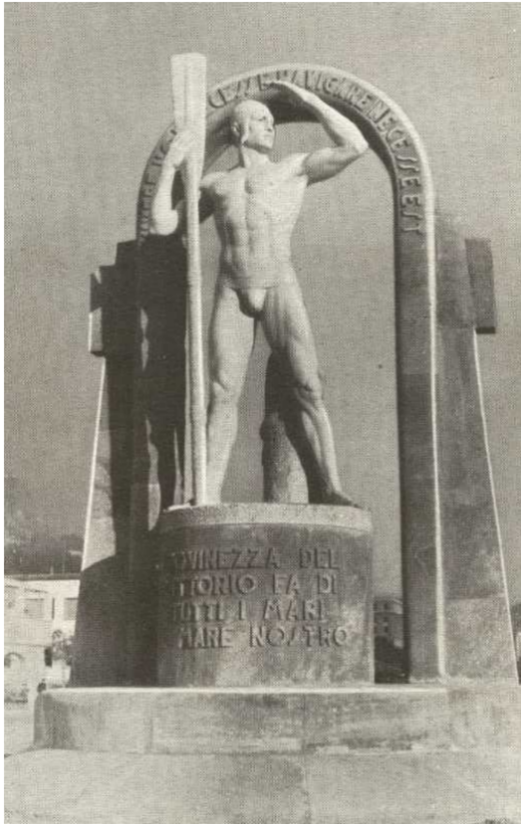

Figure 9: *Il Navigatore* in Genoa. Situation of 1941.

Figure 10: *Il Navigatore*. Situation of 2015.

An illuminating example of how visual framing and discursive connotation could work in tandem to invest a Latin phrase with Fascist significance is the line chosen to adorn a still-standing statue in Genoa, *Il Navigatore*, sculpted by Antonio Maria Morera (1888–1964), then secretary of the directorate of the Sindacato Fascista di Belle Arti (fig. 9). In 1938, a plaster cast of the statue was presented to Mussolini during his visit to Genoa. The final version of the statue was completed in 1940, with some alterations made to the original design. It was installed on the seafront of the city's Foce district.[64] The large figure of Carrara marble, modelled after the Genoese athlete Nicolò Tronci, looks out over the sea, holding a rudder in his right hand. Placed on a granite base, the statue is framed by a rounded arch bearing

[63] The importance of such “detachable and repeatable” phrases for propaganda purposes was highlighted by Oddo, *The Discourse of Propaganda*, 12, 14–16.

[64] Fochessati, “1938: Mussolini's Visit,” 430.

the following Latin text in distinctly modern, high-relief letters: "Vivere non necesse, navigare necesse est" ("Living is not necessary, sailing is"). This Latin phrase goes back to a Renaissance translation of Plutarch's *Life of Pompey*, in which Pompey the Great exhorted his hesitant sailors to set sail for Rome to make the necessary grain deliveries.[65] Detached from its traditional context, the phrase was popular during the *ventennio* and was recast as a Fascist slogan (also in its shortened form *Navigare necesse*).

Mussolini himself had a special predilection for the motto and used it repeatedly in essays and speeches. The leader of Fascism framed the Latin expression in a way that made it represent distinctively Fascist ideals. In a front-page article in *Il popolo d'Italia*, he declared that the proverb had been a motto of imperial Rome even before Hanseatic cities in Germany had taken it as their slogan. He used the phrase to express Fascist values, reclaiming it as a fittingly 'Roman' motto for the Italians under Fascism.[66] The Mussolinian connotations would have been obvious to many Italians seeing the inscription. The statue's base had an additional Italian inscription that reinforced the Fascist interpretation of the monument and, consequently, the Latin used on it: "Giovinezza del Littorio fa di tutti i mari il mare nostro" ("The Youth of the Lictor makes of all the seas our sea"). The Italian inscription articulates an explicit political ambition, while the Latin saying conveys a more general sense of determination. When read together, however, the Italian phrase becomes enshrined within the cultural aura of the Latin proverb, while the Latin motto seems to morph into an expansionist slogan for Fascism's imperialistic ambitions. The Fascist significance of the Latin was further underlined by its visual framing, as two stylized *fasces* originally flanked the statue. The presence of the *fasces* and the Italian inscription transformed the Latin proverb into an aggressive and imperialistic slogan, aligning with Mussolini's use of the Latin.[67] Morera's statue exemplifies how Latin phrases that did not overtly reference the regime could be imbued with its ideology by being anchored in Fascist symbolic discourse, both through Mussolini's own discursive interventions and the visual and verbal paratexts that surrounded the slogan.

After Fascism's fall, *Il Navigatore* was subjected to a form of "ideological restyling."[68] The *fasces* were removed, and the Italian inscription was erased (fig. 10). The Latin motto, however, remained. Through the removal of the most recognizable markers of Fascism, the Latin slogan could apparently be ideologically 'cleansed': the Latin was dissociated from the aggressive expansionism it had been made to represent under, and by, Mussolini. As the omnipresence of the dictator's words ebbed away, the Latin phrase could be reinterpreted to serve other ideological purposes. The situation is of course different for Latin signs that were more instantly intelligible as 'Fascist' because they referenced Mussolini or the

[65] On the background story and reception of the Latin phrase, see González Vaquerizo, "*Nauigare necesse est*."

[66] On Mussolini's usage of it, see Lamers, "Mussolini's Latin," 218–20.

[67] Even the rudder was interpreted as a sign of "affermato dominio del mare" (cited in Fochessati, "La statua," 23).

[68] Fochessati, "La statua," 25: "*restyling* 'ideologico,'"; yet compare Fochessati, "1938: Mussolini's Visit," 430, observing that the statue "lost its rhetorical message," which seems to imply something different from the idea of restyling.

regime: these were sometimes defaced or removed from public view after Mussolini's fall.[69] Overall, however, responses to Fascist relics were inconsistent, and responses to Latin on public surfaces are no exception.[70] Latin texts in public spaces sometimes remained in place, just like the many *fasces* and other Fascist signs remained visible in the streets of Rome and many other places in Italy. Some of them occasionally stir debate, such as the inscription *MVSSOLINI DVX* on the obelisk at the Foro Italico. Others remained unaddressed.[71]

7 Pine-tree *DVX*

The Latin word *DVX* inscribed into the Italian landscape, including hillslopes and rocks, stands out as one of the most remarkable inscriptions of Mussolini's regime that have endured since its downfall. The word was used in several so-called 'landscape inscriptions': place markings in a natural environment (here in the form of letters and words) which "signal a cultural presence and give the land social significance."[72] Together with the word *REX*, for instance, *DVX* was displayed in Hollywood-style letters on a hillslope in Piedmont, not far from Castello di Avigliana at Monte Pezzulano.[73] Some of these landscape inscriptions are still visible today in certain parts of Italy. At Villa Santa Maria (Chieti), for instance, the word (ca. 3 meters high) can still be observed on a rocky formation called "La Penna."[74] *DVX* could function as a kind of 'logo' for Mussolini's regime, similar to the letter *M* and the ubiquitous symbol of the *fasces*. The decision to use *dux* instead of the more prevalent Italian term *duce* may have been influenced by the visual and graphic advantages of the Latin word, but it was also intended to forge a more apparent link with ancient Rome, particularly with Augustus.[75] It was probably the most visible Latin word in Fascist Italy, as it was repeated in many different contexts and media, from inscriptions through neon letters to 'human mosaics'.[76] However, often its ideological significance arguably went beyond its use as a simple logo. The symbolic implications of *DVX* are shaped by both its physical placement and its materiality within a specific context.

[69] The main targets of these acts of this feverish campaign of *damnatio memoriae* after Mussolini's deposition were portraits of the *Duce* and his name, images of *fasci*, indications of the Fascist year reckoning, and toponymy the regime had imposed. See Arthurs, "'Voleva essere Cesare...,'" 287.

[70] Panico, "Questioning What Remains," 35.

[71] Examples are legion. The most famous example is the inscription at the Piazza Augusto Imperatore, where Mussolini's name was restored. See Arthurs, "'Voleva essere Cesare...,'" 283–84. For an engaging analysis of various instances of epigraphic *damnatio memoriae* after Fascism, see Nastasi and Orlandi, "L'epigrafia."

[72] Wilson and David, "Introduction," 1.

[73] See the newsreel in Istituto Luce, Giornale Luce, cod. B156501, from 00:45:38.

[74] The inscription was topped by an indication of the year: "A XVIII," i.e., the eighteenth year of the Fascist regime (1940).

[75] The specific connotations of the term *Dux* warrant a separate treatment. For some observations, see Lamers and Reitz-Joosse, "Spectacular Latin."

[76] On the human mosaics, in particular, see ibid.

Figure 11: *Pineta Dux* at the Monte Giano (Rieti). Situation of 2014.

This can be illustrated by briefly examining one of the most prominent examples of a landscape inscription featuring the Latin word, known as the *pineta Dux*, located on the western hillslope of Monte Giano, approximately 80 kilometres northeast of Rome as the crow flies (fig. 11). In the late 1930s,[77] students at the forestry school in nearby Cittaducale, a fraction of the National Forest Militia, planted around 20,000 naturalized pine trees in the pattern of the word *DVX* as a logo of Fascism.[78] In this sense, the tree formation was a corollary of the usual Latin inscriptions in Italian towns and cities, marking Mussolini's (and Fascism's) presence in the cityscapes of Italy. According to contemporary witness reports, the students who planted the trees were assisted spontaneously by the local population. The emphasis on the spontaneous nature of the landscape inscription and the effort involved in its creation enhance its significance as a symbol of the

[77] Giusti reports 1936–1937 as the years of construction in Giusti, "La pineta," 4. VanderGoot dates the planting to 1939, see VanderGoot, "Fervor and a Forest"; VanderGoot, "Logging," 147.

[78] VanderGoot, "Logging," 147.

population's loyalty to Mussolini. As such, the *pineta Dux* is not only a written message, but also carries significance as a communal *act* of writing.[79] In practical terms, the *DVX*-patterned forest of eight hectares served the purpose of protecting the village of Antrodoco from the effect of landslides caused by heavy winter rains. The political symbolism of the tree formation in the *pineta Dux* inscription is evident against this background. The word *DVX* evoked Mussolini's 'beneficial presence' in the Italian landscape and could be seen to represent an almost apotropaic power, averting natural disasters from the area.[80]

Interestingly, the word's material form, consisting entirely of pine trees, added to its symbolical significance. The use of this type of tree reinforced its association with both ancient and Fascist Rome. Pine trees evoked classical Rome and the Roman army, which had used them as a source of timber for shipbuilding and to stabilize coastal dunes. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, this kind of tree moreover became part of attempts to create urban environments and landscapes that would cement a common identity for the unified nation. As Kristi Cheramie and Antonella De Michelis observed, pine trees in this context "mediated newness, reframed Baroque opulence, and distracted from decay, injecting views of antiquity with a renewed appearance of timelessness and perseverance."[81] The trees had the capacity to "look as old as the ruins but in fact be as young as the new nation."[82] Fascism adopted the nationalist symbolism of this kind of tree and aligned it with its own symbolic order. The regime planted thousands of them at Via dell'Impero, along the Via Appia, on the premises of the Foro Italico, from the Circus Maximus to the Baths of Caracalla, as well as in the EUR district. Like the use of Latin, the choice of pine trees evoked a distinct sense of *romanità* radiating, as it were, directly from Fascist Rome to Monte Giano, and reinforcing the impression of the regime's "vigilant presence" in the Italian landscape.[83]

The example of the *pineta* illustrates how the Roman symbolism and the ideological significance of the *DVX*-sign were shaped not only by the use of Latin, but also by material, location, and effort put into its actual construction, and how Fascism picked up existing symbols to convey its message.

79 For the notion of the act of writing (*acte d'écriture*), see esp. Fraenkel, "Actes d'écriture."

80 It seems that records for the planning and construction of the project are far and few between, see Giusti, "La pineta," 3; VanderGoot, "Fervor and a Forest," 141. For some historical details, see, Giusti, "La pineta." For photographic documentation and maps of the current situation, see VanderGoot "Logging" and "Fervor and a Forest"; see also Ciani, *Graffiti*, 61–62. On the Fascist domination of the natural landscape, see also Armiero and Graf von Hardenberg, "Green Rhetoric."

81 Cheramie and De Michelis, *Through Time*, 278.

82 Ibid.

83 The *pineta Dux* survives mostly intact, despite the wildfires of August 2017, and is still visible from Monte Mario and the Gianicolo in Rome when the air is clear (Giusti, "La pineta," 3). The pine tree formation was restored by the right-wing group *CasaPound Italia* and sympathizers in early 2018. On this, see Bialasiewicz and Stallone, "Focalizing New-Fascism," 434–35.

8 Closing reflections

This essay shed light on how the language of ancient Rome could be transformed into a versatile instrument of political messaging across diverse media, encompassing postcards, inscriptions, sculptures, and landscapes, and reaching a wide range of audiences. It scratched the surface of the topic and may have raised more questions than it answered. Drawing out some of them can help open up avenues for further reflection and research on this subject.

The examined examples reveal how the physical style and presentation of Latin writing contributed to its capacity to convey political messages aligned with Fascism. While physical features played a significant role, factors such as location and placement, adjacent texts, and the re-signification of the Latin words 'on display' could also affect its meaning. The question remains whether these factors contributed equally in each instance, and if not, how they could vary from context to context. While the article primarily examined the influence of the material features and physical settings of Latin writing on its significance, it also acknowledged the capacity of the language to shape the meaning of the objects and environments to which it was applied. For example, how do Latin words alter the significance of the landscape in which they are 'inscribed'? Furthermore, examples such as the *pineta Dux* draw attention to the very act of writing and its lasting significance. They prompt us to ask how the process of crafting Latin signs could reverberate in their interpretation and reception.

Additionally, the preceding pages demonstrated that a more inclusive examination of Latin's material presence reveals ambiguities that permeate Fascist culture more broadly. These ambiguities encompass a constant oscillation between the Roman past and the Fascist present, as well as diverse conceptions of Romanness that simultaneously evoke various Roman pasts, such as Augustan Rome and Christian Rome. However, understanding the specific responses to embodied Latin is a recurring challenge, as Latin signs often addressed diverse or amorphous groups. Furthermore, sources shedding light on how certain individuals and groups responded are usually lacking. Gaining insight into the perspectives of those involved in creating these texts can offer glimpses into at least the *intended* responses. The involvement of multiple agents, including commissioners, designers, producers, and writers, raises questions about collaboration and division of responsibilities, and how these might have impacted meaning-making. Who was responsible for the Latin texts in the process, and did those involved share the same expectations regarding their role and function?

Ancient Rome, along with its language, "assumed a rather specific and more systematic ideological role" under Fascism.[84] The exact features of Latin's use within the Fascist cult of Rome, such as the occasions and intensity of its use, the selection of vocabulary, stylistic features, and preferences for specific quotations or proverbs, require further investigation. Gaining a deeper understanding of the characteristics of Latin's material presence can also enhance our understanding of how its usage diverged from that of Italian, which, undoubtedly, continued to

[84] Liberati, "La storia," 233.

serve as the regime's primary language of propaganda and communication. It is worth remembering that the political use of Latin in Fascist Italy was by no means a novelty, nor was it unique to this particular time and place. Ever since antiquity, Latin had been employed in political inscriptions, as well as in other media such as medals, stamps, and postcards, including in the propaganda of the Roman Catholic Church. Latin mottos were also frequently used in heraldry, including in military contexts, prior to the rise of Fascism. The appeal of Latin to the Fascists was partly due to its pre-existing tradition of use in the political sphere, like other symbols they employed. However, even though Fascism did not introduce something entirely new, it is still not sufficiently clear how it transformed existing uses of Latin to suit its political purposes, and how the Fascist adoption of Latin differed from previous political uses, as well as how it responded to competing discourses, including the material culture of the Church. There is still much insight to be gained in this area.

List of figures

Figure 1. Medal of the Opera Nazionale Balilla, 1928. Obverse. Bronze, ⌀ 39.8. Design: Papi. Mint: Lorioli & Castelli. Private collection. Photograph by author. License CC-BY-NC-SA.

Figure 2. Original photograph of a parchment calligraphed by Enrico Brignoli, ca. 1937. Private collection. Photograph by author. License CC-BY-NC-SA.

Figure 3. Postcard of the fourth legion (Santorre di Santarosa) of the Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale of Alessandria. Private collection. Photograph by A. Rovida.

Figure 4. Postcard produced by Foto Zaccaria in Florence, 1922. Reproduced by permission from E. Sturani, *Otto milioni di cartoline*, 224.

Figure 5. Casa del Mutilato in Pordenone, 2018. Photograph by L. Laureati. Reproduced by permission of Comune di Pordenone. License CC-BY.

Figure 6. Casa del Mutilato in Catania. Date: March 23, 1939. Photograph by S. Consoli. Alinari Archives, Florence (archive no.: AVQ-A-002228-0001). Reproduced by permission of Alinari Archives, Florence.

Figure 7. Casa del Mutilato in Pordenone (inscription), 2018. Photograph by L. Laureati. Reproduced by permission of Comune di Pordenone. License CC-BY.

Figure 8. Casa del Mutilato in Catania (inscription), March 23, 1939. Photograph by S. Consoli. Alinari Archives, Florence (archive no.: AVQ-A-002228-0001). Reproduced by permission of Alinari Archives, Florence.

Figure 9. Antonio Maria Morera's *Il Navigatore*, Genoa, 1941. Reproduced from *Genova*, January 1, 1941, 28.

Figure 10. Antonio Maria Morera's *Il Navigatore*, Genoa, 2015. Photograph by L. Visconti. Reproduced by permission of Wolfsoniana – Palazzo Ducale Fondazione per la Cultura, Genoa.

Figure 11. The *pineta Dux* at Monte Giano (Rieti), August 7, 2014. Photograph by ROMAOSLO. Reproduced by permission of iStock by Getty Images.

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