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Everyday Life in Fascist Venice, 1929-40

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these essays cannot fully deliver on their stated intention to offer a “wide-ranging . . . analysis of Italian society’s involvement with fascism.” The “society of fascists” we encounter here is a partial one. Many chapters focus on the relationship between the regime and relatively narrow constituencies and individuals, whether the army, business leaders or historians. This book mostly tells the story of the relationship between the fascist regime and middle-class men. Women and rural and urban workers are conspicuous by their near total absence. The concentration on the middle-class reception of fascism may be partly explained by the wish to examine the traditional positing of the middle classes as a key ally of fascist rule. However, the book cannot fully claim to set out the real “society of fascists” without a thorough consideration of other groups, which together comprised the majority of that society. The notable exception to this is the fascinating essay by Pergher, which, although it considers a relatively small group of people—individual settlers in fascist Libya—highlights the gaps between fascist colonial rhetoric and the outlooks and modes of behavior of the “ordinary” Italians who put fascist colonialism into effect.

As is usually the case with edited collections, some essays impress more than others. Taken as a whole, this is a thought-provoking and worthwhile contribution to the field. It is also one that reveals the limits of historians’ success to date in really moving beyond the old binaries of consent and coercion. The recourse, as in Baris’s chapter, to using the term “passive consent” even when it has been asserted that “simple claims of middle-class ‘consent’ . . . do not suffice” is a case in point (pp. 71, 82). We cannot and should not throw out entirely either consent or coercion as explanations of how fascism could rule Italy for twenty years. Italian fascism *was* coercive, although as Albanese and others have made clear, we need a more complicated understanding of the purposes and uses of fascist violence, and some Italians *did* consent to fascism. But neither consent nor coercion can be understood without the corrective of the other and both terms inadequately reflect the “balance between pressure and voluntarism, imposition and contestation, allegiance and evasion, high-flying rhetoric and grubby reality” that shaped life under fascism (p. 2). What we still lack is a full exploration of what the terms that might replace or supplement “consent” and “coercion” actually entail. What counts as participation: party or syndicate membership or something more politically engaged? Is this the same as mobilization? How conscious is acquiescence? Further exploration and greater precision in the use of these alternate categories of relationships and ways of behaving is needed. Nevertheless, this volume merits attention as part of an important trajectory in the scholarly rethinking of some of the old and problematic questions which lie at the heart of understanding how fascism actually ruled and was lived.

KATE FERRIS
University of St Andrews

KATE FERRIS. *Everyday Life in Fascist Venice, 1929–40*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2012. Pp. x, 257. \$85.00.

For more than three decades, scholars of Nazi Germany led by Alf Lüdtke have analyzed dictatorship through the lens of *Alltagsgeschichte* or everyday history. Kate Ferris brings the subtleties of this methodological approach to the study of Italian fascism, aiming to explore popular experiences of political processes and practice in a field dominated by works inspired by the related but not analogous Italian methods of *microstoria* in the style of Carlo Ginzburg. Ferris emphasizes Venetians’ “ways of behaving” and individuals’ actions in response to fascist dictates. She seeks to demonstrate that “flexibility and non-uniformity of identities and mentalities” characterized Venetian men, women, and children of various social, economic, and political stripes (p. 7). The Italian nation, the Catholic Church, and the memory of the Venetian Republic serve as “mediating narratives” through which Benito Mussolini’s regime filtered, and ordinary Venetians understood, fascist aims, aspirations, and actions.

Ferris sets the stage by locating Venice in the inter-war Italian political environment, highlighting the city’s role in the Adriatic, the migration of the population from the historic center to the mainland or outlying islands, and the city’s relationship to tourism. Here, she builds on previous work on the political appropriation of space and the importance of mapping rituals and traditions in *luoghi comuni* or public spaces that the regime sought to control and dominate. Venice’s role as an architectural and cultural showpiece and fascism’s attempts to exploit this for local and international audiences appear as recurring themes. Ferris then moves on to explore Venetians’ encounters with fascism and fascist ideals through analyses of youths’ reception of comic books, public reception of Venetian festivals, popular response to sanctions relating to the Ethiopian War, and public views and rituals surrounding death.

Rather than a tight and cohesive narrative, the reader encounters glimpses or snapshots of the contradictions and ambiguities of Venetian life under the regime. Among Ferris’s *luoghi comuni* is the staged and re-crafted medieval Festa delle Marie. The marriage festival reintroduced in 1934 failed to have the desired effect, and women’s procreative choices in Venice, as in the rest of Italy, continued to be influenced by economic factors and cultural preferences. But the author’s analysis offers a nuanced view of how the regime attempted to fuse Venetian traditions, church influences, and fascist politics into a coherent worldview. Venetians responded to the public spectacle but adapted and celebrated it according to their own predilections and understandings of Venetian cultural life (pp. 90–100).

Less convincing, with respect to the uniqueness or relevance to everyday life in Venice, are Ferris’s discussions of the reaction to sanctions, autarky, and rationing on the home front during the Ethiopian War

and the commemoration of the Battle of the Piave River in 1938. Intended to promote the glories of the nation and the Italian military, these policies and commemorations elicited responses from the population, but, in the narrative, the uniquely Venetian character of this response is not clear.

The “Premio da Ponte” student essay contest of 1935 furnishes an opportunity to examine youngsters’ response to fascist propaganda and their inculcation of fascist ideals presented in popular comic books. Ferris quotes several essays and youths’ reactions at length and employs quantitative analysis to show that the majority of essay writers and winners did not refer specifically to fascism (pp. 67–76). Yet, additional evidence seems necessary to prove her assertion that Venetian children were “not so easily or automatically permeable” to the regime’s political messages disseminated in children’s literature (p. 82).

The reader wants to learn more of the scope of non-compliance, semi-compliance, and acquiescence and the ways in which individuals expressed support for, opposition to, or even ignorance of fascist aims, aspirations, and policies. Snippets drawn from Maria Damirini’s memoirs, a wide array of Venetian newspapers, and other sources call out for further examination to explain the contours of everyday life. Emphasis on the fascist roll call draws attention to the impact of fascist ideals of national sacrifice and duty on death rituals, but much more could be made of the comparisons between civilian and military death rituals and the impact on Venetian rituals of the fascist obsession with death.

Throughout the book, discourses on methodology and passages exploring the work of other scholars and the broader history of Italian fascism interrupt the examination of everyday experiences in Venice. Syncretic presentation of evidence makes the chronology difficult to follow, and so the reader has little sense of changing dynamics between the individual and the regime over time. Nonetheless, Ferris succeeds in demonstrating that the dichotomous categories of consent and dissent fail to capture the complexity of everyday life under fascism and that fascism’s failure to penetrate the layers of everyday Venetian life was indicative of the failure nationwide to install a dictatorship.

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JOSHUA ARTHURS. *Excavating Modernity: The Roman Past in Fascist Italy*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press. 2012. Pp. xiii, 216. \$45.00.

The title of this excellent book challenges the reader to accept fascist-era archaeology in Rome as an exercise in modernity. Joshua Arthurs’s examination of *Romanità*, the fascist regime’s attempt to declare itself a reincarnation of the Roman Empire, suggests that the dictatorship used the Roman past not merely as propaganda to prop up a “sawdust Caesar” but as a means of effecting its so-called anthropological revolution. In unpacking the multiple discourses and people who ad-

vanced the idea of *Romanità*, both fascist and non-fascist, Arthurs shows that the concept of *Romanità* under fascism was complex and subtle and that it did not necessarily support the conservative, reactionary side of the regime—even though many of its adherents came from a traditional, conservative background. As a result, the book makes a valuable contribution to a growing scholarship that views fascist cultural initiatives as revolutionary and modernist as opposed to reactionary and derivative. Arthurs’s aim is to view *Romanità* as a vital part of this project of modernity.

In the first chapter, Arthurs skillfully demonstrates the different kinds of *Romanità* that fascism drew upon, some of which were contradictory. These ranged from the Third Rome idea of Giuseppe Mazzini to the anti-historical, radical modernism of Futurism and the conservative nationalism of Enrico Corradini, all of which contributed to the “synthesis of the incongruous elements” that made up fascist *Romanità* (p. 25). The task of forging this synthesis was left not to party hacks but to scholars in institutions like the Istituto di Studi Romani (ISR) founded by the Catholic conservative Carlo Galassi Paluzzi in 1922. Paluzzi was no fascist, and his institute enjoyed a degree of autonomy under the Mussolini regime, yet he promoted a scholarly *Romanità* in line with fascism’s disdain for the positivist scholarship that existed under liberal Italy. The goal of the ISR was to transform Roman studies from “sterility and effete historicism” into “virile scholarship” aimed at creating a “unitary and totalitarian vision” of the Roman heritage (p. 35).

Archaeology was used in a similar way. Although much of the archaeological work in fascist Rome was directed by the conservative Antonio Muñoz, head of the Fine Arts department of the Roman city government, this activity also demonstrated a modern impulse. Under the regime archaeology was “informed by the aggressive desire to reclaim space and bodies, erase the visible passage of time from the face of the Eternal City and blur the boundaries—spatial, temporal, and experiential—between the Roman past and Fascist present” (p. 60). This approach to archaeology was serviced by “metaphors of medicalized violence” used to justify the regime’s heavy-handed incisions into the Roman cityscape (p. 61). Arthurs argues that this was a profoundly radical use of archaeology in that it did not aim to produce a new or deeper understanding of ancient Rome but to reveal what was already known to exist and isolate these ruins so as to render them more monumental—all in order to transform the cityscape of Rome to serve the fascist revolution.

The summit of the regime’s evocation of the Roman past came with the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* which opened in September 1937 to mark the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Rome’s first emperor. This event has been typically seen as the point where the regime’s tolerance for modernist art and architecture ended and fascist culture took a conservative turn. Arthurs disagrees arguing convincingly that the *Mostra Augustea* was far more modern in tone compared to the