

PLACEMAKING IN ROME OVER CENTURIES

SEBASTIANI (A.) *Ancient Rome and the Modern Italian State. Ideological Placemaking, Archaeology, and Architecture, 1870–1945*. Pp. xxx + 274, ills. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Cased, £85, US\$110. ISBN: 978-1-009-35410-3.
doi:10.1017/S0009840X24000271

S.'s monograph is a reminder of the forceful material and ideological manipulations in Rome perpetrated by Italy's Fascist regime. It brings novelty to these themes by applying theories of placemaking to detail how specific imperial ruins and new, anciently inspired buildings were employed to project fascist values. His narrative is not restricted to the decades of Fascism's rise and *floruit*; rather, he charts the seeds of placemaking planted after Italy's unification in the 1870s and even in ancient Rome.

The first chapter describes the theories of placemaking that form the core of the study. S. is honest about the promises and pitfalls of this approach – that places are actively made and that the agents of placemaking (which include archaeologists) are subjective actors. Authenticity, a core concept, is reaffirmed throughout the work and defined in ways that underscore its slipperiness. For S. it is possible to find an authentic version of a monument that encompasses its materiality and context, underscoring its meaning to the community that created it (p. 13). Ideally, all would have a shared understanding of a monument, its significance and its communicative power. But as S. demonstrates, this process can often be corrupted; under Fascism a rigid ideological placemaking was imposed, warping perception of these monuments, which he describes as 'mutilation' that erased their intended prior meaning (pp. 13–14). The tale is therefore a cautionary one: how can we learn from the misuse of the past, as defined from our non-fascist perspective? Readers are also faced with a conundrum: if we accept, as theories of placemaking insist, that the meaning of a monument is not fixed but 'labile' (p. 11), then, what is the most authentic version of a monument, especially for ones as long-lived as those in Rome?

In Chapter 2 S. presents a long view of how Rome's identity as a city, and later national capital, became so intertwined with its ancient past and monuments. *Romanitas*, the essence of ancient Roman-ness, set the city apart as a unique place. Each successive age has re-engaged this material past. The Fascist regime would take this further, what S. subtitled 'isolation, sanitification, and remodelling' (p. 37), placing monuments emblematic of *Romanitas* at the centre, to construct an ideological narrative of modernity and the 'new man' (pp. 44–7). It is from these ingredients that the Fascists engaged in 'distorted ideological placemaking' (p. 48), antithetical to nurturing the authenticity of monuments.

Chapter 3 fleshes out a detailed narrative of placemaking post-unification (1870–1922). In this period Rome experienced frenetic urban changes as well as dismantling of Renaissance and early modern monuments and neighbourhoods. Many projects were enacted to disengage the Holy See's influence on the urban fabric. S. demonstrates how Mussolini's programme was a continuation of earlier decisions and precedents. G. Boni and R. Lanciani appear here, the former's mythic, deep history of early Rome fodder for Fascist agendas, the latter marginalised despite his work on the *Forma Urbis Italiae*. We are reminded that an archaeologist's work never unfolds in a scholarly vacuum.

In Chapter 4 S. aims to establish the authentic 'historical identities' of four classical monuments in their ancient contexts (p. 97) to then, in Chapter 5, interrogate their Fascist manipulation: the Ara Pacis, the Mausoleum of Augustus, the Colosseum and

the Imperial Fora. The methodological and theoretical intentions in setting a baseline interpretation of ancient viewership are well taken. The readings proposed will be recognisable to archaeologists and historians. Notes extending interactions with these monuments into later historical periods are welcome, but could be more extensive. The perspective interrogated is an elite one, presented as singular and primary. We hear nothing of alternative experiences related to gender, social class, age or immigrant status. An acknowledgement that this exercise of placemaking in antiquity, starting under Augustus, was its own ideological cudgel is needed. By treating these monuments as individual case studies, S. underscores the profound effects that Fascist isolation of these monuments still has today in structuring scholarship. Had he demonstrated the interconnected nature of these urban spaces through time, it would have been a truer reflection of pre-modern placemaking. Such a thought-exercise, though, would have had holes born of data-loss, emphasising S.'s argument of the cost of Fascist placemaking.

In Chapter 5 S. dissects the Fascist programme: a reworking of the urban plan to foreground selected Roman monuments, expropriating land and destroying non-imperial material traces in the process. While isolation of monuments was a Fascist placemaking tactic, S. reconstructs how new routes through the city linked them. Although S. is acutely concerned with the *sventramento*'s ramifications, he could have done more with words and images to bring this dismantling to life. From the narrative we understand how the Fascists enacted change, we are assured of the links between visual language and ideology, we read descriptions of the stage sets for Fascist propaganda. However, the true price – to the remains of the multivalent past largely cancelled, to the communities dismantled, at such great scale – remains muted. Foregrounding photos from the time can stand in for the irretrievable voices of the displaced and silenced (R. Leone, A. Margiotta [edd.], *Fori Imperiali. Demolizioni e scavi* [2007]).

Chapter 6 further recounts the profound urban changes brought about under Fascism, by interrogating cases of new monuments, both aspirational and completed. Here, architecture harkens back to imperial Roman models: the creation of EUR, the Olympic Stadium or La Sapienza are no different from the construction of the Imperial Fora, but were sited outside of the ancient core of the city. The *Danteum*, intended for the Via dell'Impero (now Fori Imperiali), was never realised; this was not a space for new monuments, but rather for the appreciation of ancient ones. S. argues that the relevance of these new constructions died with the end of the Fascist regime. Yet, their recognisability in today's Rome speaks to their success as a visual language among Rome's longstanding architectural richness.

S. has linked important historic events and monuments, and consulted a staggering variety of sources. He reminds readers that these monuments still speak of complexity despite their turbulent post-classical lives. S.'s afterword asks readers to heed the lessons of Fascist placemaking: it was ruinous to archaeological data; it destroyed communities and irrevocably transformed Rome's urban fabric; it made ancient monuments the puppets of a state propagating violence, racism and authoritarianism. But he does not call for their modifications to be undone. Rather, these monuments need to be 'enhanced' (p. 236) through contextualisation that affirms their historical authenticity over time. The remaking of Rome in the post-unification and fascist periods was a 'false and ill-idealized reflection' of this earlier age, but we can be more conscious to resurrect Rome's 'original' features and disseminate them to as many people as possible (p. 236). Yet, S. elides that objective, singular narratives can be a tall order, not just among scholars, but also among local communities and even tourists. Since he insists that subsequent historical engagements and uses of these monuments should be remembered and debated, studied and disseminated, can authenticity serve as a counterweight to the material potency created

by the Fascists? The Via dei Fori Imperiali serves as the stage along which Italy's military marches on 2 June; it funnels traffic and tourists, who view ancient monuments along it, as originally intended; it forms part of the modern city's identity. In other words, this Fascist co-option remains part of the everyday.

I agree with S. that new techniques of communication in cultural patrimony that aim to present a multi-layered chronological picture of a monument can help to advance the complexity of the past (p. 237). But I leave this book wanting a firmer statement of the challenges and requirements to bring this about across a lived cityscape. It took more than 50 years to build this narrative around *Romanitas*. It involved intellectual and educational institutions, economic investment, publicity and propaganda, leadership that spoke out frequently and charismatically about the symbolism of material remains for society, in addition to the striking material remains themselves. Reorienting the discourse requires an integrated effort from politicians, educators, archaeologists, community leaders and communities to juggle these many narratives and historical moments and to relay what is gained and lost in each, even when material traces of most historical periods are exiguous or absent. S. demonstrates that resurrecting this history is half the battle. The other half is learning from it to devise workable, productive strategies that make the past's complexity not only understandable, but also valued and consistent in everyday life: everyone's prized resource, not the sacrificial lamb of political movements and vicissitudes.

McGill University

DARIAN MARIE TOTTEN
darian.totten@mcgill.ca