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Imperial heroism and the aesthetics of masculinity in Mussolini's Italy: the case of Rodolfo Graziani

I utilized my time at the BSR working on my book project, provisionally entitled 'Fascist Italy's Colonial Hero: The Myth of Rodolfo Graziani', based on my recently defended doctoral dissertation which provides the first comprehensive assessment of the public life, myth-making and collective remembrance of Italy's most prominent colonial general, Rodolfo Graziani, in light of his publicly funded monument near Rome in 2012. By detailing the heroic construction of Graziani, the project aims to offer critical new insight into imperial heroism and popular culture during the Fascist *Ventennio* and their legacies after 1945 in relation to recent global events, from the rehabilitation of the far right in contemporary politics to debates about imperial monuments since the transnational rise of the Black Lives Matter movement.

My primary research has revealed that Graziani's rise to fame can be traced back to his role in the 'pacification' of Libya in the 1920s as the Fascist government was attracted by Graziani's youth, ambition and leadership. His brutality and rapid military successes consequently led to his heroization, as he initiated genocidal measures such as the creation of concentration camps in Libya, which caused the death of 83,000 Cyrenaicans, and the extensive utilization of illegal poison gases during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Whilst the Libyan population named him 'the butcher' for his terror tactics, Italian journalists deemed him 'il grande condottiero del continente nero' for his leading role in ending the Libyan 'pacification' in 1931 and his successful military campaign in Ethiopia which prompted Mussolini's declaration of the Fascist Empire in 1936. His atrocities were heavily censored in national press reports which were instead filled with intense praise of Graziani's military might as he came to embody contemporary ideologies of national pride, identity and empire.

Through examination of literary and visual propaganda, I have found that the Fascist regime utilized Graziani as the military poster-boy for Italy's colonial wars and aspirations. Graziani's portrayal as Fascist Italy's imperial 'uomo nuovo' was disseminated in mainstream domestic publications: the front pages of *Corriere della Sera's* weekly supplement, for example, printed fierce watercolours of Graziani and his mechanized army throughout the Ethiopian campaign and colourful depictions of Graziani with the shadows of Roman emperors leading him into battle. Images of Graziani as a prototype of modern Italian masculinity were widely disseminated in popular newspapers and magazines, emanating themes of heightened masculinity and connections old and new between heroes of the Roman Empire, Renaissance ideals and neoclassical sculpture.

Heightened visual analysis and new historical insight has allowed me to draw critical comparison between the material culture of the ancient Roman Empire and the propaganda and censorship of the Fascist regime and its colonial enterprises. As a trained historian of modern and contemporary Italy, the vast interdisciplinary network of artists, classicist and art historians at the BSR has helped me to expand my research scope and methodological framework in order to produce truly interdisciplinary work. I am very grateful to have been part of this wonderful community, which has given me

crucial access to the BSR library's wealth of resources, Italian archives and a highly productive and welcoming work environment.

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ROME AWARDS

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Restorations of empire in Africa: ancient Rome and modern Italy's African colonies

I had written my PhD (King's College London, 2019) on the ideological uses of ancient Roman imperialism in the context of modern Italy's imperial endeavours in Africa (broadly from 1861 to 1945) and, returning to my thesis as I began to prepare it for publication as a monograph, became aware of some major gaps in the narrative that I had constructed during my doctoral work. I therefore came to Rome to take up an award at the BSR with four key aims in mind.

Firstly, I wanted to learn more about the role of the British School and the other international research institutions within this context of classicizing ideologies of Italian imperialism. Secondly, I hoped to investigate how secular uses of antiquity interacted with Catholic ones, both before and after the Lateran Pacts of 1929. Thirdly, I aimed to explore more fully the voices oppositional to hegemonic and imperialistic uses of classical antiquity, both within the academy, but also from non-specialist spheres. Finally, I aimed to disentangle some elements of the postcolonial, post-Fascist histories of the various exhibitions staged in Italy in celebration of both Roman antiquity and Italian imperialism.

I began by focusing on the BSR's own archives, which were amazingly informative for my aims of investigating the role of the international schools within the context of Italian imperial classicisms, and in terms of the histories of the Roman and colonial exhibitions staged in Italy during my period. The Eugenie Strong archives were in equal parts useful, perplexing and amusing. I was especially struck by a letter that she had written to excuse her absence from a colleague's lecture, citing, nonchalantly, the death of a maid that evening as the reason. The tone of this excuse, I thought, revealed a fair bit about the character of this formidable scholar and important figure for the history of the School. Similarly revealing was a letter in which she recused herself from serving on the committee, formed in the Fascist period, to promote the uses of Latin in scholarly contexts, in which she claims that her Latin was not good enough to have a valid say in matters. I was able to construct a much fuller picture of Strong's relationships with key figures of Italian classics, and, through casual notes, letters, and annotations, catch a glimpse of her personal, and by dint of her importance the BSR's institutional, attitudes towards Italian imperial classical discourses and endeavours.

Similarly invaluable were the archives of the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives programme housed at the BSR. The inventories of items from the various exhibitions staged in Italy shortly before the Second World War, and recovered by Allied forces towards the end of the war, were illuminating for what they were unable to account