

## Introduction. Difficult Heritage and Its Making

Flaminia Bartolini

McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research; Cambridge Heritage Research Centre,  
University of Cambridge

Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, along with other twentieth-century authoritarian regimes, have often attempted to create consensus through propagandistic reinterpretations of the classical past. As recent scholarship has shown, the Fascist appropriation of *romanità* and Nazi philhellenism were not only conditioned by earlier cultural conceptions but were also a key political tool in motivating and mobilising citizens to fulfil the aims of the fascist state (Roche, Bartolini & Schmaltz 2019). Once Fascism and Nazism had fallen, the material legacies of both regimes then became objects of destruction, reinterpretation and memory work. Thus, the archaeological and architectural heritage of these regimes, now tainted by their ideology, has not only suffered the consequences of *damnatio memoriae* in the aftermath of regime change, but continues even today to inflame contemporary public debate.

This special issue represents the product of the second of two interdisciplinary workshops exploring these themes which was held at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge, on 3 December 2019, organised by Flaminia Bartolini, the guest editor of the present issue of *Ex Novo Journal of Archaeology*, and generously funded by the Research Hub for German Studies/Forschungszentrum für Deutschland-Studien of Cambridge (DAAD-Cambridge Hub). The workshop brought together a group of international experts, including historians of Germany and Italy, classicists, archaeologists, and art historians, to explore the complex relationships between antiquity and materiality, both during and after Fascism and National Socialism.

Among the core issues raised by both the presentations and round-table debate, and the ensuing open discussion, is the effect that fascist material culture still has on societies, and the fact that the reuse of these legacies has been central in the construction of both post-Nazi and post-Fascist national identities. This contrasts with previous scholarship, which in the Italian case focused almost exclusively on the avant-garde, modernist dimensions of Fascist culture, while scholarship on National Socialism tended to emphasise the importance of the myth of the origin ideology. The crucial role played by the heritage professionals, heritage scholars and functionaries who drove much of this discourse has clearly formed a fruitful new sphere of enquiry; all in all, the complexities of the renegotiation of the legacies of both regimes were illuminated afresh. The presentations also successfully applied many of the tools of heritage theory – including critical theory, archaeological, artistic and architectural analysis – to the modern history context.

The articles in this special issue examine the topics from a number of perspectives. Two papers focus on the complex reception of the after-life of material legacies of Fascism in Italy, with a synoptic paper by Flaminia Bartolini on 'Dealing with Heritage of the Dictatorship in Italy', and Susanna Arangio's work on Mussolini's iconography and the Susmel-Bargellini collection. More specific case studies on Fascist New Cities and Fascist concentration camps feature a paper by Davide Brugnatti and Giuseppe Muroli entitled 'Edmondo Rossoni and Tresigallo, an atypical case of a regime town', as well as a report from Marzia Luppi and Francesca Schintu on 'A difficult heritage. The experience of Fossoli Camp Foundation'.

The debate includes the material legacies of Nazism in Europe with a paper on 'The Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg – difficult heritage and open space' by Alexander Schmidt, followed by a case study from Dagmar Zadrazilova on 'Berlin Tempelhof: From multifaceted heritage site to creative industry hub?'.

From the special issue it emerged that heritage-making in post-dictatorial societies has been influenced by reactions to political and social change and has contributed to a discursive politicisation of previous regimes. Moreover, heritage sites (memorials, detention centres, sacred sites, or dictators' own properties) and museums connected to regime-change in Italy and in Germany were in dialogue with broader research in Europe and transnationally, the papers testifying to how challenged heritage professionals are when facing uncertainty and curating changes, and how little they have been trained to do so.

It also emerged how, in places of recent and past conflicts, the practice of *heritagization* has proven to be a contentious subject, with contrasting collective memories, often shifting, following a change of regime. As heritage sites have a central role in inscribing collective and individual memory in the construction of a coherent historical narrative about the past, when the prevailing political and social situations of divided societies tend to be unresolved due to the lack of a unifying narrative about the past, heritage becomes a political tool: they risk representing a 'favoured' narrative, watering down past violence with long-lasting consequences in contemporary societies.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Dacia Viejo-Rose, Marie-Louise Sørensen and Paola di Giuseppantonio di Franco as their approach has influenced my progress as a student deeply. I am also grateful to Joshua Arthurs, Aristotle Kallis and Ruth Ben-Ghiat for giving me their feedback on some of my ideas.

For this research I received much appreciated financial support from the Department of Archaeology, the Dorothy Garrod Fund, the DAAD, the ASMI Christopher Duggan travel fund and Anthony Wilkinson grant.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to the editors of *Ex Novo* for the energy poured into the realisation of this project and the assistance provided all through the publication process.

**References**

ROCHE H., BARTOLINI F. & SCHMALTZ T. (2019) Editorial Introduction: Fascist and National Socialist Antiquities and Materialities from the Interwar Era to the Present Day, in: H. ROCHE, F. BARTOLINI & T. SCHMALTZ *Fascism*, Special Issue: Fascist and National Socialist Antiquities and Materialities from the Interwar Era to the Present Day, 8 (2): 121-126.