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The Living Archive

Archiving and Documenting Classical Performance during Fascism

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Abstract

This article discusses the practices of documentation and archiving related to classical performance in the Italian Fascist regime, and their implications for the study of fascist art and culture more widely. The first part discusses a number of institutions as the sites of Italian Fascism's archiving of classical performance. The second part, drawing on the work of Eric Ketelaar and Amalia G. Sabiescu, considers how Italian Fascism made use of the historically connoted 'cultural tools' of ancient Greek theatre as 'living archives'. It discusses the aesthetic means that came to characterize all classical performances as living archives and considers the use of ancient Greek and Roman sites all over the peninsula and in colonized Libya as the archival sites of the classical performances. In the conclusion, it argues that the combination of performance and archives empowered these cultural tools to become the means for the reconstruction and transmission of Fascism's newly crafted social memory and identity of the Italian nation.

Keywords

Italy – classical antiquity – Fascism – classical performance – theater – modernism – living archives – Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico (INDA)

This article discusses the practices of documentation and archiving related to the theatrical productions organized in Italy during the Fascist *ventennio* that employed the Greek theatrical model, i.e. its outdoor nature, large seating

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capacity, and combination of poetry, music and dance as part of the performance. As has been copiously demonstrated, theater played a pivotal role in Fascism's 'anthropological revolution', as historian Emilio Gentile has called it; that is, in the creation of a hoped-for 'new man' and the rebirth of the nation.¹ Fundamental to the reinstatement of theater within the regime's production of culture is Patricia Gaborik's recent book *Mussolini's Theatre*, which amply documents the paligenetic powers that Fascism afforded to theater and dramatic art more generally in the leader's plans for the nation's rebirth. A Fascist theater would emerge 'naturally' through what Gaborik terms the regime's 'strategic aestheticism', i.e. a 'recourse to aesthetics that went beyond the tactical, placing spiritual valor over immediate propagandistic efficacy'.²

The use of Graeco-Roman-inspired scripts and the appropriation of notably Greek staging techniques and Greek and Roman ancient sites, both on the peninsula and in colonized Libya, further, and rather uniquely, contributed to such a rebirth. Indeed, they were pivotal in the construction of what Roger Griffin has eloquently termed 'rooted modernism', the apparently jarring incorporation and use of antiquity within Fascism's forward-looking and markedly modernist political revolution. Antiquity, or, better, a re-imagination thereof, was embedded into the regime's programmatic supplanting of the existing modernity with an 'alternative' model that was to become the foundation of an alternative future.³ The so-called *rappresentazioni classiche* [classical performances], with respect to which 'classical' stands for the specific re-envisioning of Greek and Roman cultural artifacts and outputs purportedly created by Fascism,⁴ very effectively responded to a two-fold preoccupation: the creation

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- 1 Emilio Gentile, 'The Myth of National Regeneration in Italy: From Modernist Avant-Garde to Fascism,' in *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, eds. Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 42, *italics* in the original.
 - 2 Patricia Gaborik, *Mussolini's Theatre: Fascist Experiments in Art and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2021), 240. On theater and Italian Fascism, see also, amongst others, Emanuela Scarpellini, *Organizzazione teatrale e politica del teatro nell'Italia fascista* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1989); Jeffrey Schnapp, '18 BL: Fascist Mass Spectacle,' *Representations* 43 (1993): 89–125; and Jeffrey Schnapp, *Staging Fascism: 18 BL and the Theater of Masses for Masses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Gianfranco Pedullà, *Il teatro italiano nel tempo del fascismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994); Günter Berghaus, *Fascism and Theatre: Comparative Studies on the Aesthetics and Politics of Performance in Europe, 1925–1945* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1996); Mary Ann Frese Witt, *The Search for Modern Tragedy: Aesthetic Fascism in Italy and France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).
 - 3 Roger Griffin, 'Fascism's Modernist Revolution: A New Paradigm for the Study of Right-Wing Dictatorships,' *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 5, no. 2 (2016): 122, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-00502002>.
 - 4 The appropriation of Roman antiquity and architecture by Fascism has been the object of numerous studies, see the introduction to the latest edited volume on the topic for a full bib-

of an aesthetics that could one day be called Fascist, and the refashioning of Graeco-Roman material and cultural practices as part of the nation's ever-present grandeur.

Record-keeping and record-producing institutions serving the theater, including Graeco-Roman-inspired theater, proved central to Fascism's recreation of the nation's past. But institutional buildings were not the only means by which the regime achieved this goal. Indeed, Fascism made use of historically connoted 'cultural tools', or 'memory texts' (*lato sensu*), as archival scholar Eric Ketelaar has defined them, and re-activated them.⁵ Through performance, these 'cultural tools', i.e. the restored ancient sites and the many translations of Graeco-Roman dramatic scripts produced in the *ventennio*, as well as the set of aesthetic means that characterized all classical performances, were turned into 'living archives', the embodiments of a new, carefully crafted social memory. The combination of 'performance and archives', i.e. 'archival performativity' as it has recently been put, empowered these memory texts to become a 'powerful, complex means' for the reconstruction and transmission of Fascism's creation of a new social memory and identity for the Italian nation.⁶

Serious scrutiny of these memory texts and their main features is a timely step towards the writing of a more comprehensive historical account of the many ways Fascism appropriated classical antiquity to forge a new collective identity, as well as contributing to a reassessment of the importance of classical theatre for a history of fascist art and culture. But, more importantly, it helps uncover the many silent living remnants of this social memory today, whose roots and power structures are yet to be eviscerated in full. It is a critical move that is as much about unfolding the past as is about revealing the present and exposing the type(s) of narratives we are still (un)consciously entangled in.

liography: Helen Roche, "Distant Models"? Italian Fascism, National Socialism, and the Lure of the Classics,' in *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*, eds. Helen Roche and Kyriakos Demetriou (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 4.

- 5 Eric Ketelaar, 'Sharing: Collected Memories in Communities of Records,' *Archives & Manuscripts* 33, no. 1 (2005): 45; 'Social sharing is mediated by cultural tools. These tools are "texts" in any form; written, oral, as well as physical. The landscape or a building or a monument may serve as a memory text, while bodily texts are presented in commemorations, rituals and performances.'
- 6 Amalia G. Sabiescu, 'Living Archives and the Social Transmission of Memory,' *The Museum Journal* 63, no. 4 (2020): 506.

Institutional Archives

Alongside the establishment of efficient record-keeping institutions documenting the thriving dramatic activity of the *ventennio*, while also adjusting the records of those ‘archives’ into which Fascism engrained the regime’s new culture (i.e., the Greek and Roman ‘archives’), there were established bodies that represented and recast the adjusted past and functioned as the corrective cradle for the development of, and contribution to, a Fascist aesthetic. Some institutions of course, and very importantly, did both. The types of archives that have been selected here are those which most directly archived, documented, produced and/or had an impact on classical performances during the *ventennio*.

The most obvious instance of Fascism’s archiving process relating to the production of theater in those years is the surviving *Ufficio Censura Teatrale* [Theatrical Censorship Office], which now contains around thirteen of the approximately eighteen thousand scripts which prefect Leopoldo Zurlo scrutinized and kept a copy of while in charge of the office from 1931 to 1944.⁷ The scripts were catalogued by Patrizia Ferrara in 2004 and are preserved at the *Archivio Centrale di Stato* [Central Archive of the State] in Rome. The archive contains only a few of the scripts employed for the classical performances because the censorship of these had been entrusted to the presidency of the *Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico* [INDA; National Institute of Ancient Drama] in Syracuse, on which more later.⁸ More generally, the archive is of great interest as a formidable repository of a stratification of memories: the institutional container of what had been rejected as well as approved (with corrections), and a most reliable witness to the main trends on the Italian stage at the time, linguistic and dramaturgical.⁹

Another major institutional archival site documenting the life of the nation in those years, and containing interesting footage on the classical performances produced during the *ventennio*, is the still very active *Istituto Luce*, known since 2011 as *Istituto Luce Cinecittà*. The acronym LUCE stands for *L’Unione Cinematografica Educativa* [The Educational Film Union], a name that was con-

7 Patrizia Ferrara, *Censura teatrale e fascismo (1931–1944): La storia, l’archivio, l’inventario* (Rome: Pubblicazioni degli archivi di Stato, 2004), IX. In the presentation of the book, Paola Carucci explains that 12,955 scripts were archived at the Office subsequent to a major flood that damaged a considerable number of the documents therein.

8 Ferrara, *Censura teatrale*, 396, 397, 759, 778.

9 See, most recently, Gaborik, *Mussolini’s Theatre*, 153–191.

ceived by Mussolini himself in September 1925 after having been favorably impressed with the union's first outputs.¹⁰

Istituto Luce soon became an incredibly powerful tool directed at 'disseminating footage that [was] cultural, educational, scientific, and propagandistic (socially and nationally); an institute of 'Italianness', as it was put by the Duce himself.¹¹ The president of Luce, Giacomo Paulucci di Calboli Barone, remarked upon its importance in 1934 that it was a proper 'archive' that could be consulted 'in retrospect';¹² that is, it provided appropriate documentation about that recreated past, distant and immediate, which was being rewritten and filmed as the new Italians were living it. A selection of the rich footage documenting the life of the nation was broadcast in all the theatres across the peninsula in the form of frequent newsreels.¹³

But, of course, the primary institutional record-keeping and record-producing body relating to classical performance is the still active National Institute of Ancient Drama (INDA). The establishment of INDA was officially formalized by the Fascist regime on 7 August 1925. After the Duce saw the performances of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* and Sophocles' *Antigone* at the ancient theater of Syracuse, directed by Classics scholar and *metteur en scène* Ettore Romagnoli and organized by the then local committee presided by count Mario Tommaso Gargallo (the primary financial sponsor of such cultural activities), he understood the importance of capitalizing on, and eventually seizing command of, such initiative.¹⁴

10 Before it became *Istituto Luce*, the institute went by the name *Sindacato Istruzione Cinematografica* [Cinematographic Education Union], an anonymous association created by the journalist and lawyer Luciano De Feo.

11 Henceforward, all translations from the Italian are my own. The words are attributed to Mussolini by the then president of Luce on page 7 of an archival document that probably represents the first draft of a newspaper article on the beginnings of Luce. The document is kept at the *Archivio di Stato* in Forlì-Cesena in the archival collection 'Giacomo Paulucci di Calboli Barone' under the title *Narrazione racconto sulla nascita dell'Istituto Luce* [Narration-story of the beginning of the Luce Institute], and is available online at Archivio Luce, accessed May 11, 2023, https://luceperladiattica.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/narrazione-racconto-sulla-nascita-dell_istituto-luce.pdf.

12 Luce, 'Origine, organizzazione e attività dell'Istituto Nazionale "Luce"; *Istituto poligrafico dello Stato*, Rome, 1934.

13 Gian Pietro Brunetta, 'Istituto Nazionale L.U.C.E.', in *Enciclopedia del Cinema*, accessed May 11, 2023, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/istituto-nazionale-l-u-c-e_%28Enciclopedia-del-Cinema%29/.

14 For further information on INDA's beginnings and official establishment, see Giovanna Di Martino, Eleftheria Ioannidou, and Sara Troiani, 'Introduction,' in *A Hellenic Modernism: Greek Theatre and Italian Fascism*, eds. Giovanna Di Martino, Eleftheria Ioannidou, and Sara Troiani, *Classical Receptions Journal* 16, no. 1 (2024); and Giovanna Di Mar-

Indeed, the Duce was so struck by what he saw that, reportedly, he told Gargallo that 'a National Institute of Drama must rise', and while such an institute should promote and organize productions primarily of the Graeco-Roman classics, in time it 'should also include modern works that revolve around or will revolve around Greek and Roman myths'.¹⁵ Not long after, on 17 February 1927, INDA was made responsible for the production of Greek and Roman drama and Graeco-Roman-inspired drama all over Italy. By 1934 there were as many as eleven locations that hosted classical drama,¹⁶ and on 2 March 1929 the Fascist state's control over the Syracusan initiative was complete. INDA became dependent directly upon the state, its offices were moved to Rome and its president chosen by the Prime Minister.¹⁷ Biagio Pace, a professor of Archaeology and the History of Classical Art in Pisa at the time and a member of the Chamber for Sicily in the National Fascist Party, was installed as president.

But, more importantly, INDA and its re-proposition of the Greek theater 'model', i.e. its architecture, its outdoor features, the festival surrounding it, and its appeal to, as well as inclusion of, the 'people', also functioned as an exemplar for the creation of non-classical festivals, musical and dramatic, all over the peninsula. The 1930s saw a significant rise in the popularity of outdoor venues for festivals of various genres, especially music, with notable productions leaving a mark on the development of Italian theater, including Max Reinhardt's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and Jean Copeau's *The Mystery of Saint Uliva* in 1933 at the *Maggio Musicale Fiorentino* festival.¹⁸ In 1939, no fewer than 347 festivals took place in forty-two outdoor venues, boasting a turnout of 1,749,272.¹⁹

tino, 'Constructing a Hellenic Modernism: Aeschylus at the Ancient Theatre of Syracuse (1914–1930),' in *A Hellenic Modernism: Greek Theatre and Italian Fascism*, eds. Giovanna Di Martino, Eleftheria Ioannidou, and Sara Troiani, *Classical Receptions Journal* 16, no. 1 (2024).

15 *Archivio Fondazione INDA* (hereafter: AFI) 1924, b 42, fasc. 5.

16 See AFI, b. 57, fasc. 5 for the modifications to the statute approved by INDA's committee, and an undated letter, but probably sent in February 1927, from Romagnoli to Gargallo where he reports to 'have personally agreed on the form of the modifications to be made to the statute with the Minister of Education Fedele', which had probably already reached the Count by the time of his letter (see in AFI, b. 59, fasc. 1).

17 Art. 5 also stated that the Ministry of Education should supervise the annual program of the Institute's activities. The actual document is in AFI b. 67, fasc.1; a summary was published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* on 12 April 1929. See also *Il bollettino dell'Istituto nazionale del dramma antico* (1929–1930): 214.

18 See, amongst others, Angelini, *Teatro*, 169–174.

19 Mario Corsi, *Il teatro all'aperto in Italia* (Milan and Rome: Rizzoli, 1939), 309.

Reinventing the 'Classical': A Hellenic Modernism

When INDA's leadership and core members were reshuffled and, by and large, replaced with committed, and artistically competent, blackshirts in 1929, the editorial board of the institute's academic journal jumped at the chance to reiterate the meaning as well as importance of their institution. They regarded it as one that had 'its roots in the history as well as the future of Italy' and whose task was to guide the 'Homeland back to its glorious classical tradition' through the rediscovery of 'the imperial heights of Greece and Rome'.²⁰

With the new and openly Fascist committee, INDA's 'strategic aestheticism' honed in on an aesthetics that could be recognizably 'classical' (itself a concept whose features were being redefined), while also strikingly modern(ist), i.e. embedded within the artistic and theatrical modernist experimentation that had been characterizing cultural productions all over Europe since the first decades of the twentieth century. In fact, the creation of a modernist yet Hellenising aesthetic, one that looked back as well as integrated the early-century avant-gardist theatrical experiments punctuating the European stage, had already begun under the partnership between Romagnoli and Gargallo and produced as well as oversaw the first Syracusan performances up until 1927. This aesthetic was particularly evident in Cambellotti's scenery for Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, performed for the Syracusan stage in 1924, when Mussolini saw the theatrical initiative as an asset for the creation of a Fascist theater.

From 1929 onwards, i.e. from Fascism's full control of INDA, the Institute's efforts were directed at fine-tuning this aesthetic which the editors of this special issue have recently defined 'Hellenic modernism'.²¹ Such efforts, however, were also accompanied by the creation of a new alternative narrative that, while praising the early efforts, recognized their many imperfections, and attributed ex-post to Fascism the supposed aesthetic perfection that had been achieved as well as the opening of theater to the masses. In other words, the Greek theatre model and the aesthetic that had developed through the first decades of the twentieth century were not only incorporated into Fascism's program of cultural and national renewal, but claimed as Fascism's own

20 *Dioniso* (1929): 215. The very same words were published again in 1939 by the head of the Press Office of the Theatre Directorate from 1935 Mario Corsi in his recollection of the development of open-air theatre under Fascism. Corsi, *Il teatro all' aperto in Italia*, 76.

21 Di Martino, Ioannidou, and Troiani, 'Introduction.'

achievements.²² The packaging and display of such an aesthetic, along with the literature and film footage produced around it, functioned as living archives, the successful repositories and iterations of Italy's 'classical' ever-present past.

The first instance in which INDA intended to develop and fine-tune the aesthetic of classical performances from 1930 onwards was its centralization of all artistic choices. Every single detail involved in the staging of classical productions all over Italy underwent Pace and his team's thorough scrutiny. This ranged from the very early choice of the ancient play (about three years prior its performance), to the appointment of the translator, choreographer, scenographer, musician, and cast, to the meticulous review process to which each component of the production was regularly subjected.²³ Not only did INDA, in the person of Pace first and foremost, with the help and collaboration of Franco Liberati, Vincenzo Bonajuto, Giovanni Gentile, and Nicola De Pirro, amongst others, steer and oversee artistic choices towards Fascism's strategic redefinition of the 'classical' with markedly modernist traits for all classical productions in Italy. As already mentioned, it also effectively functioned as a center of censorship for most (if not all) productions that adapted the ancient Graeco-Roman material in Italy at the time.²⁴ A serious and thorough process of review of the translations did indeed occur, internally within the INDA. Epistolary exchanges between the translators and the presidency help reveal the seriousness with which such scrutiny was undertaken.²⁵

22 For a detailed overview of the ways in which Fascism gradually claimed INDA's aesthetics and theatrical initiative as theirs, see Di Martino, 'Constructing a Hellenic Modernism.'

23 Before the rise of the Fascist regime, preparations for the Syracusan productions, even at their very beginnings, usually commenced only one year before the premiere (see, for example, AFI, b. 1, fasc. 1, where Romagnoli accepted undertaking the artistic directorship of the 1914 *Agamemnon* in a letter to Francesco Mauzeri dated March 1913, but submits his translation (as per contract) at a late date, on 15 March 1914). Starting from 1931, preparations for the next performances began three years in advance, except for those in 1936 for political reasons, i.e. Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. In a letter to Bignone dated 8 November 1935, Bonajuto mentions that 'because of the particular historical moment we are facing, it isn't yet sure whether our 1936 performances [will occur]'; AFI, b. 98, fasc. 2.

24 See, for example, a letter that INDA received on 18 August 1936 from the Accademia Olimpica in Vicenza which requested permission to put on Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* under Guido Salvini's direction at the Teatro Olimpico, organized by Classics scholar Manara Valgimigli. AFI, b. 96, fasc. 2.

25 See, for example, a series of epistolary exchanges between translator and Classics scholar Ettore Bignone and Vincenzo Bonajuto, which suggest that some heavy edits had been requested by the philosopher and president of the *Istituto Nazionale di Cultura Fascista* [National Institute of Fascist Culture] Giovanni Gentile, who regularly sat on INDA's committee beginning in 1932. AFI, b. 98, fasc. 1.

Exchanges between Pace and other translators beginning in 1930 seem to suggest that INDA's guidelines for, and edits to, the translations aimed at achieving clear, modern and theatrical language, but, most importantly, at providing Italy with its own Italian repertoire of the classics.²⁶ In the direction of linguistic clarity, theatrical effectiveness, and the 'Italianness' of the repertoire was, for example, Pace's suggestion in 1936 that for the 1939 performances in Syracuse the 'translator may be usefully made to collaborate with a theater professional, so as to revise said translation for theatrical aims'. The theater professional would transform the ancient work into 'a living and contemporary' one by 'mak[ing] all those suggestions that even the best translators may be lacking, [because they are] not acquainted with theater's style'.²⁷ INDA's involvement of a theater professional in the translation of Plautus' *Aulularia* and *Manacchi* (published and performed in 1938) does indeed go in this direction: in need of a 'lively translation' of Plautus' comedies, 'such that it can almost represent a modern re-elaboration [of them] for theatrical purposes', Pace reported, the comic playwright Luigi Chiarelli was chosen.²⁸

The mark of Pace and his team was also to be found in the somewhat unusual selection of some of the ancient plays for performance. This can be seen, for example, in the selection of Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* (1933), previously rarely seen on the modern stage;²⁹ *Oedipus at Colonus* (1936), which, though much more widely received, particularly on the musical stage,³⁰ was still in search of its modern debut in Italy as a single play; and Sophocles' *Ajax* (1939). Performing Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*, it was reported, partly responded to the Institute's moral task of 'educat[ing] the audience's palate',³¹ while also

26 These exchanges are available for consultation in the sections 'Organizzazione spettacoli' [Performance organization] of each production from 1914 to 1948 in AFI.

27 'Memorandum,' May 22, 1936, AFI, b. 96, fasc. 1.

28 Ibid. See also another 'Memorandum,' February 26, 1937, AFI, b. 115, fasc. 1, where it is reported that the job had been given to Luigi Chiarelli, who was required to present a detailed draft of his 'ideas around the translation and re-elaboration [of Plautus' comedies] in view of its theatrical production, for a modern audience'.

29 The Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama, based in the Classics Faculty at the University of Oxford (hereafter APGRD), records only three productions of *Women of Trachis* (bearing the same title as the original) prior to the play's debut in Syracuse in 1933, one at Fleeming Jenkin's theater in Scotland (1877; APGRD ID: 642), one in the Lecture Theatre of the British Museum (1903; APGRD ID: 6929), and one at the Royal Court Theatre in London (1911; APGRD ID: 6871). There is no reference to other productions of the play in Italy before 1933.

30 On the reception of *Oedipus at Colonus* in musical compositions, see Adrian Kelly, *Sophocles: Oedipus at Colonus* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 136.

31 Thus (reportedly) the General Director of Antiquity and Fine Arts Roberto Paribeni in one of INDA's committee meetings. 'Memorandum,' June 19, 1933, AFI, b. 80, fasc. 1.

tackling a cultural one, that of advancing scholarship on ancient theater on the one hand, and contributing to widening the theatrical repertoire on the other.³² Ajax, instead, as recited in the narrating voice in Luce's newsreel edition on 11 May 1939, was an exemplar for his 'sense of honor' and 'misrecognized heroism',³³ a concept particularly useful to Fascism's construction of a 'heroic national community', as Griffin has argued.³⁴

In developing a performance aesthetics for classical performances, INDA also looked outwards, absorbing, integrating and appropriating successful trends on the contemporary stage. The outward orientation of INDA is documented in the contributions contained in its journal, published more regularly and renamed *Dioniso* [Dionysus] from 1931 (formerly *Bollettino dell'Istituto nazionale del dramma antico*), as part of the regime's takeover of INDA. It featured editorial pieces on modern productions of Greek and Roman drama, and original plays inspired by them that were happening all over Europe: including in Greece, England, France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Austria, and Bulgaria. The 1935 edition of *Dioniso* included for the first time the column *Theatralia*, where it was explained that drama: 'even if it doesn't always concern ancient theater, . . . is now going to be part of our Notices. May this be the sign that today in Italy one cannot conceive of theory without practice. In other words, one cannot understand the serious and meticulous scholarship around ancient theater without considering its contemporary value. . . . Any modern outdoor re-evocation of drama aligns itself with this credo'.³⁵

The inclusion of modern adaptations of ancient drama as an important part of its study is reflected in the library acquisitions of INDA at the time, the copious and up-to-date reviews of books and articles related to the modern practice of staging ancient (and modern) drama, and its links with the scholarship and, more generally, the 'archives' for ancient theater itself.³⁶ A primary example

32 Ibid., where it is reported that the Syracusan performances of Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* demonstrated how 'theatrical' the play in fact was, 'cutting short on philological and aesthetic discussions hitherto made about this masterpiece by Sophocles'; thus, it was concluded, the 'Institute has fulfilled a cultural task.'

33 'Il teatro classico,' *Giornale Luce*, June 1932, Archivio Luce, *Giornale Luce A / A0976*, cod. A097602, accessed May 11, 2023, <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL500033887/2/il-teatro-classico.html>.

34 Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 1993), 79. The emphasis on heroism and honor also marked the interpretation of *Women of Trachis*, on which see Eleftheria Ioannidou, 'The Sweet Vitality of the Dancing Bodies: Classical Embodiment, Modernist Dance, and Fascist Visions in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* at Syracuse in 1933', in *Hercules Performed*, ed. Emma Stafford (Leiden: Brill, 2024 forthcoming).

35 *Dioniso* (1935): 48.

36 In *Dioniso*, much attention is given to the philological reconstruction of ancient music,

of this mutual relationship between practice and research was music. Musician and composer Ildebrando Pizzetti, for example, well acquainted with what was known of ancient Greek music at the time, wrote extensively and reflected on the best practices for the composition of modern music in contemporary productions of ancient drama. Another example is Pace's proposal that new discoveries around Byzantine music function as a model and 'inspiration' for new pieces of music for the Syracusan performances in 1936.³⁷

Dance was no less important in the scholarship on, and modern adaptation of, ancient drama at the time. *Dioniso* features numerous contributions on ancient and modern dance and book reviews on publications on the topic.³⁸ Jacques Dalcroze's eurhythmic was the most popular method employed in Graeco-Roman-inspired dance performances held in Italy in this period, either as solo pieces or as part of a modern adaptation of an ancient play.³⁹ Dalcroze-trained dancers were called to collaborate on the creation of dances for the Syracusan performances in 1922 under the supervision of Emilie, Jeanne, and

archaeological discoveries and reconstructions, and modern revisitations of classical plays, including translations, as well as modern plays inspired by the ancient dramatic corpus. See, for example, Luzzatto on Racine's *Iphigénie* in *Dioniso* (1933): 53–71; Bonaiuto on Jean Cocteau's *Antigone* in *Dioniso* (1935): 323–326; Blasi on Alfieri's classical tragedies, *Dioniso* (1934): 142–163; Arias on Gide and ancient theater, *Dioniso* (1935): 34–35; and Luzzatto on Leconte de Lisle's translations of the Greek tragedians and on translations of Aeschylus in Italy, *Dioniso* (1936): 243–251, and (1937): 51–61. Book reviews and/or contributions to the journal range from scholarship on contemporary theater authored by widely known theater experimentalists and scholars such as Bragaglia, D'Amico, and Renato Simoni. See, for example, Bragaglia's *Il Teatro e la rivoluzione* (1929), in *Bollettino dell'Istituto nazionale del dramma antico* (1929–1930): 253, and *Variazioni sulla regia* (1936), in *Dioniso* (1937): 207; D'Amico's *Il tramonto del grande attore* (1929), in *Bollettino dell'Istituto nazionale del dramma antico* (1929–1930): 242–246, and *Storia del teatro italiano* (1936), in *Dioniso* (1937): 69; and Renato Simoni's *Teatro di ieri* (1938), in *Dioniso* (1939): 187. Also scholarship on specific topics related to the modern reproduction of ancient drama, such as dance, was discussed. Like Jia Ruskaja's *La danza come un modo di essere* in *Bollettino dell'Istituto nazionale del dramma antico* (1929–1930): 72; Maurice Emmanuel's *La danse grecque antique d'après les monuments figurés* (1895), reviewed in *Dioniso* (1933): 86–90. On scenery see, amongst others, Bragaglia in *Dioniso* (1931): 13–26; Bonaiuto in *Dioniso* (1936): 113–126. See also the many contributions on archaeological discoveries and reconstructions of ancient theatrical sites all over Italy, and music. See for example Del Grande in *Dioniso* (1932–1933): 228–247 and 346–360, and *Dioniso* (1933–1935): 291–322 and Casali in this issue.

37 'Memorandum,' June 19, 1933, AFI, b. 80, fasc. 1. There may be a connection here with the Delphic Festivals (begun in 1927), which had turned to Byzantine music to reconstruct the ancient choruses.

38 See footnote 36.

39 In Antonio Giulio Bragaglia, *Scultura vivente* (Milan: L'Eroica, 1928), Bragaglia testifies to this by combining 'Hellenism' and 'eurhythmic' under one heading.

Lilli Braun. Pupils of the Dalcroze-founded Hellerau-Laxenburg school performed in the Syracusan performances in 1924 under the direction of Valerie Kratina, and again from 1933 to 1939 under the supervision of Rosalia Chladek. Dance as a practice was also widely used in the religious festivals inspired by the ancient Graeco-Roman world, such as the Panathenaic Games (1936) and the festival in honor of Ceres (1938), both held in Paestum and choreographed by the Hellerau-Laxenburg artistic leader Chladek.

As Patrizia Veroli has recently argued, Jia Ruskaja is probably one of the most interesting figures for dance in Italy in the first half of the century and a pivotal figure in the change of meaning of the adjective 'classical' for dance in Italy during the *ventennio*, previously and afterwards identified with 'ballet'.⁴⁰ The founder of a school of *danze classiche* [classical dances] in 1927 and later called to direct the *Regia Scuola di Danza* [Royal School for Dance] in 1940, Ruskaja strove to create a style that would react to the academicism and neoclassicism still pervading dance, while also inscribing it within the new modernity proposed by Fascism. Dance was thus reconceived as an all-encompassing re-education of the female body on and off stage, and in social contexts. While undoubtedly drawing on ancient Greece, the 'classical quality of the new style', as was written on Ruskaja's programs, was of a 'serene, sunny, and exquisitely Mediterranean' taste.⁴¹ The dancing bodies of such classical dances functioned as living archives of the manifestly imperialist and racist reconfiguration of the Mediterranean by the regime, particularly from 1935 onwards.

Alongside film footage of some of the classical dances performed within the context of the classical performances, or as part of larger cultural events that had at their center ancient Greek scripts, Luce also contains archival material on such 'classical style' more generally. The opening scene of Luce's 14 July 1937 newsreel, reportedly a 'recital of classical dances given by a group of young fascist women' within the context of the *Mostra nazionale delle colonie estive e dell'assistenza all'infanzia* [Exhibition of the summer holidays and assistance to childhood],⁴² documents a sequence of moves and poses that closely retrace those captured in a June 1932 newsreel and that represent the classical dances

40 Patrizia Veroli, 'Classical Dance and Mediterranean Imaginaries: Jia Ruskaja in Fascist Italy,' in *A Hellenic Modernism: Greek Theatre and Italian Fascism*, eds. Giovanna Di Martino, Eleftheria Ioannidou, and Sara Troiani, *Classical Receptions Journal* 16, no. 1 (2024).

41 Veroli, 'Classical Dance and Mediterranean Imaginaries.'

42 'Un saggio di danza classica,' *Giornale Luce*, July 14, 1937, Archivio Luce, *Giornale Luce B / B1129*, cod. B112906, accessed May 11, 2023, <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000025983/2/un-saggio-danza-classica.html?startPage=0>.

of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* performed in Paestum and choreographed by Minnie Smolkowa Casella.⁴³ In other words, there was no difference between the classical dances performed in the context of ancient Greek drama from those performed in the general context of the education in and introduction to the female Fascist youth to dance: the former had fully permeated the latter.

Performance Spaces between Restoration and Reconstruction

Scenery too played a pivotal role in the archiving process of the novel aesthetics of the classical performances occurring all over Italy during the *ventennio*. Art-Nouveau and modernist artist Duilio Cambellotti had been assigned the task of constructing the scenery for most of the Syracusan and, more generally, INDA productions of ancient Greek and Roman drama since its first production, the *Agamemnon*, in 1914.⁴⁴ Put in the same class as Bragaglia and Georges Pitoëff by D'Amico in his *Tramonto del grande attore* [The sunset of the great actor] published in 1929, Cambellotti was considered an avant-garde artist who gradually developed a 'prudent modernism' that became the hallmark of the reinvention of the 'classical' with modernist traits that characterized most classical performances produced in this period, and beyond.⁴⁵ Strongly against an 'erudite' scenery that slavishly reproduced the archaeological outlook of the ancient one, whatever that was, Cambellotti strove to provide a 'Greek atmosphere'.⁴⁶ It was his understanding that the ancient authors had 'their own personalities', which stood out as 'independent from both the time and place in which they lived as authors' as well as 'from the time and place in which it is believed such more or less imaginary tales occurred'.⁴⁷ The final results that Cambellotti eventually attained in his sceneries were massive abstractions that reminded the spectator of the Greek spirit and the 'spirit of the drama', a 'Hellenic atmosphere', while leaning towards a generalizing 'architectonic and symmetrical

43 'Il teatro classico,' Archivio Luce.

44 On Cambellotti, see, amongst others, Franca Angelini, *Teatro e spettacolo nel primo Novecento* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1988), 206–208; and Monica Centanni, *Artista di Dioniso: Duilio Cambellotti e il Teatro greco di Siracusa 1914–1948* (Milan: Electa, 2004). During the *ventennio*, Cambellotti designed the scenery of eighteen productions in Syracuse, Ostia, and Taormina. Cambellotti also designed the scenery for the 1948 *Oresteia*, the play chosen to resume INDA's activities after the war. In 1939, INDA asked the architect Pietro Aschieri to design the scenery while Cambellotti was still in charge of costumes.

45 D'Amico quoted in Angelini, *Teatro*, 206.

46 Duilio Cambellotti, *Teatro storia arte: Scritti di Duilio Cambellotti*, ed. M. Quesada (Palermo: Novecento, 1982), 27.

47 Cambellotti, *Teatro storia arte*, 96.

unit',⁴⁸ obtained through an 'abstraction' process designed to carve out a 'solid architectonic line able to sum up the drama being performed'.⁴⁹

Alongside the construction of modernist sceneries, there occurred another important activity that was directed at reactivating the many extant ancient sites all over Italy and in colonized Libya that could host such modernist sceneries and become 'archival' cradles, as it were, of the aesthetic that was being developed in the same years. The reason behind the use of ancient sites as active performance spaces is abundantly clear: they provided a visible trace of a link between Greece and Rome *and* Italy's past. 'Italy is scattered with . . . ancient buildings', argued De Pirro in his 1938 *Il teatro per il popolo* [Theater for the people] to explain the use of ancient sites for the classical performances. The south is especially rife with such ruins due to its history interweaving with that of ancient Greece; alongside the many Greek remnants of ancient amphitheaters, there also survive 'Roman amphitheaters . . ., circuses, thermal baths, *fora* and *basilicae*, equally ideal [as the Greek] to use as settings for the evocation of classical theater'.⁵⁰

But there was something rather unique about Italy's ruins which set them apart from other ancient ruins in other countries and thus justified their use for contemporary productions of ancient theater. Indeed, De Pirro argues:

it should be immediately noted that we did not give in to any archaeological delight in exploiting ancient ruins and monuments in view of performance; from the perspective of a banal scenery logic, it would in fact appear nonsensical that the setting of a classical tragedy [be] the ruins of an archaeological excavation and the actual setting of that scene replace[d] with the traces of a world from the past. But in Italy, the taste that these ruins of antiquity possess is not derived from a cold, cultural evocation; they adhere intimately to the landscape, they connect with it—one would say—alive and contemporary . . . Everything appears to be joined together in perfect harmony, where the ancient is not just a memory, but a living truth, which today's reality has spiritually conquered.⁵¹

In other words, it was the meaning that 'today's reality', i.e. Fascist modernity, had afforded to such ruins, as archival sites of 'living truths', that substantiated

48 Ibid., 27.

49 Ibid., 30. See also the re-envisioning and transformation of the classical past in the visual apparatus of the so-called 'peplum' film, developed a few decades later in Italy (I am indebted to the anonymous reviewer for this observation).

50 Nicola De Pirro, *Il teatro per il popolo* (Rome: Novissima, 1938), 7.

51 De Pirro, *Il teatro per il popolo*, 8.

the choice of antiquity's ruins for performance. In a continuum that combined the (idealized) past with the present as in a (perpetual) self-actualizing mode, Fascism had conflated history (or, better, histories) into an ever-present that would ground its future temporality. Much of the archaeological work underlying the restoration of such ancient sites as well as the literature around it are perfect examples of Fascism's idiosyncratic 'symbiosis of historical time with synchronic time',⁵² and the role that Greek and Roman cultural tools played in such a project.

In Ostia, for example, the early-century excavations at the Roman theater were generally aimed at restoring what time had preserved, as Elizabeth Jane Shepherd has argued.⁵³ But when, inspired by the success of the classical performances in Syracuse, some years later, the archaeologist Guido Calza sought the government's help to continue work on the site, the main purpose of such endeavor had shifted from 'restoration' to 'reconstruction'.⁵⁴ With the organization of a theatrical production of Plautus' *Aulularia* in 1922, Calza was certain to entice the government into establishing another pole of attraction for the classical performances.⁵⁵ In 1928, Calza explained how he had obtained Mussolini's approval for the project through the intercession of Futurist and House member Giuseppe Bottai: Rome's Governorate agreed to take on the financial aspects of the theater's reconstruction and INDA to support the staging costs of future theatrical productions. Included in the renovation was the reconstruction of the *cavea*, with a view to inflating its capacity to 2,800 spectators (figure 1).⁵⁶ The architectural plan, Calza argued in response to a series of attacks on the aggressive nature of such work,⁵⁷ was grounded on a serious and rigorous archaeological study of the monument.⁵⁸

52 Roger Griffin, 'The Ideological and Temporal Implications of Fascism's Use of "Stripped Classicism" in Civic Architecture,' Online Talk at the Digital Symposium *The Fascist Archive in Performance*, January 15, 2021, organized by Giovanna Di Martino, Eleftheria Ioannidou, and Sara Troiani.

53 Elizabeth Jane Shepherd, "'L'evocazione rapida di un sogno': Prime esperienze di teatro all'aperto ad Ostia Antica,' *Acta photographica: Rivista di fotografia, cultura e territorio* (2005): 136.

54 Ibid.

55 Guido Calza, 'Il Teatro Romano di Ostia,' *Bollettino dell'Istituto nazionale del dramma antico*, no. 4 (1928): 4–7.

56 Shepherd, "'L'evocazione'", 137 and related figures.

57 See architect Gustavo Giovannoni's and archaeologist Armin von Gerkan's comments in Shepherd, "'L'evocazione'", 137. It seems as though such reconstruction made use of old and new material, resulting in a patchwork that unnecessarily hindered future serious research on the monument.

58 Calza, 'Il Teatro Romano di Ostia,' 6–7. For the second round of excavations prompted by



FIGURE 1 Photograph of Duilio Cambellotti's scenery for the *Seven Against Thebes*, *Antigone*, and *Clouds* at the ancient theater of Ostia, performed on 24–26 and 28–29 May, 1–2 and 4–8 June 1927
COURTESY OF SOPRINTENDENZA PER I BENI ARCHEOLOGICI DI OSTIA, ARCHIVIO FOTOGRAFICO, AF SBAO NEG. B 2348

Similarly, and exemplary of Fascism's fusion of different temporalities into one ever-present continuum, was the case of Paestum.⁵⁹ Here, too, work had been done to transform this site into another 'living' archive of classical performances. As Longo argues, efforts were put into creating a capacious *cavea* between the first and second temples of Hera as well as a wooden platform that operated as the ideal orchestra of this (re-purposed) 'ancient theater', of which the Doric columns in the background represented its *skènè* (figures 2 and 3). In keeping with the outlook of an ancient theater, the *cavea* was made of the rocks that had detached from the city walls and had not been re-employed in their reconstruction.⁶⁰

the organization of the *Esposizione Universale* scheduled for 1942, see Shepherd, "L'evocazione", 138 and Scarpellini, *Organizzazione teatrale*, 314.

59 The timeline and overview of excavations and findings reported here draw on Fausto Longo, 'Archeologia e fascismo a Paestum,' in: Chiara Lambert and Felice Pastore, eds., *Miti e popoli del Mediterraneo antico: Scritti in onore di Gabriella d'Henry* (Salerno: Arci Postiglione, 2004), 121–130.

60 See Longo, 'Archeologia e fascismo a Paestum,' 127–128 for a detailed overview of the archaeological steps to creating such *cavea* and restoring the surroundings.

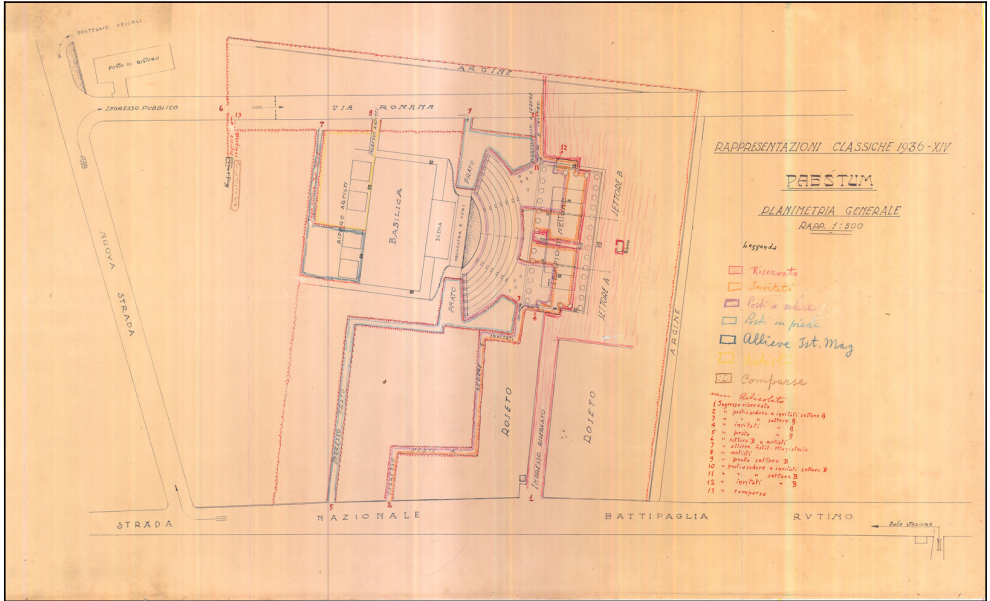


FIGURE 2 Reproduction of the plans for the creation of the *cavea* FROM FAUSTO LONGO'S PERSONAL ARCHIVE. COURTESY OF ENTE AI MONUMENTI PER LA PROVINCIA DI SALERNO

Such work should be read within the context of another important archaeological discovery in Paestum, coeval with the organization of the first classical performances there: the rediscovery of the ruins of the Italic Temple, or Temple of Peace, which, it was conjectured, dated to the 4th century BCE. Not only was such temple a perfect exemplar of the artistically fortunate union between Greek and indigenous cultures, but its dating clearly placed such artistic achievement within the framework of the Lucanians' military conquest of Paestum over the Greeks.⁶¹

Perfectly in line with Fascism's overall reconfiguration and deflation of Italy's past(s), the President of the Institution for the Activities and Monuments in the province of Salerno, Sabato Visco, openly situated this conquest within a historical continuum that went from the Lucanians to the Roman Empire and from the Roman Empire to Fascism. In fact, the reconstruction of a pillar from the Italic temple, and the celebration thereof, functioned almost as a prefiguration of the Roman Empire, old and new, the first building block of Italy's 'history': 'By erecting this pillar we want to connect our history with that of the

61 Ibid., 129.



FIGURE 3 Photograph of the *cavea*
 COURTESY OF FONDO ERNESTO SAMARITANI, LABORATORIO-ARCHIVIO DI
 STORIA DELL'ARTE, UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI SALERNO

first, indigenous Italic peoples, as well as celebrate the beginning of that movement against the foreigner which had to culminate with the unification of Italy, achieved by Rome.⁶² And if the parallel had not been sufficiently exhausted, Visco later compared Paestum's military loyalty to Rome with that of the south of Italy to the Fascist regime.⁶³ So, when the Panathenaic games occurred in Paestum on 6–7 June 1936, the press did not miss the chance to celebrate the Greek, native and Roman attributes engrained all together in re-opened Paestum: it was described as the 'magnificent Achaean colony, the fierce land of the Lucanians, and a devoted Roman province'.⁶⁴

62 Sabato Visco, 'Ritornano le colonne sul tempio di Pesto: Il Discorso dell'On. Visco,' *Il Giornale d'Italia*, June 12, 1934, XII, 6.

63 Longo remarks that if Visco had wished to strike a chord in line with Fascism's exaltation of Rome and its history, this should not be seen to be in contrast with an equally celebratory praise of the achievements of Greek civilization, as well as of the unique marriage between the Greeks and the indigenous peoples in the south of Italy and Sicily that prompted the production of some of the most beautiful artistic achievements of all time. Longo, 'Archeologia e fascismo a Paestum,' 129.

64 G.T., 'Le Panatenaiche,' *Il Giornale di Roma*, 21 June 1936.

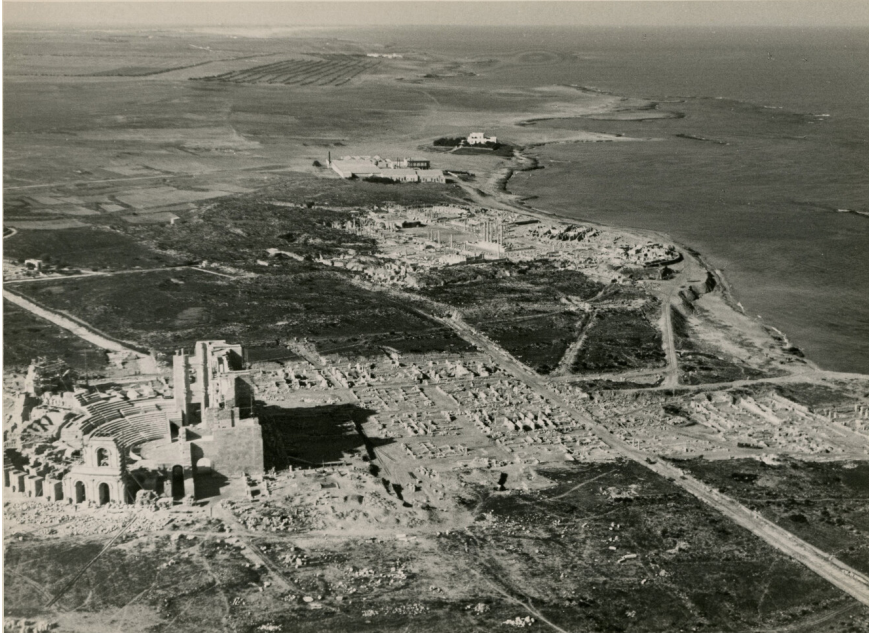


FIGURE 4 Overview of Sabratha, anonymous photographer

COURTESY OF CENTRO STUDI TEATRO STABILE TORINO—TEATRO NAZIONALE

Another eloquent example is the highly praised restoration work undertaken at the Roman theater of Sabratha in recently colonized Libya, which began with Giacomo Guidi, the supervisor of all archaeological activities in Tripolitania between 1928 and 1936, and was completed by Giacomo Caputo, his successor (figure 4).⁶⁵ Such reconstruction featured amongst the Fascist governor of Italian Libya Italo Balbo's programmatic return of Libyan antiquities to their ancient Roman splendor and the inclusion of Libya within the new

65 See Massimiliano Munzi's extensive work on archaeological works in Sabratha during this period and beyond. In his re-assessment of the archaeological works undertaken in Italian Libya, Munzi tones down the generally post-war condemnation of Italian colonial archaeology and puts it in the context of other excavations occurring at the same time, such as those by the French in the Maghreb; Kathleen Kenyon's coeval and extraordinary stratigraphical method employed in Palestine was the exception. Kenyon would direct the first stratigraphical excavation in Sabratha after the war in 1948 when the colony fell under British power. The technique employed in the restoration of ancient monuments in Italian Libya (and elsewhere) was indeed remarkable, as he argues in *L'epica del ritorno: Archeologia e politica nella Tripolitania italiana* (Rome: L'Erma' di Bretschneider, 2001).

Roman Empire.⁶⁶ It was clear from the Duce's first visit to the Italian colony in 1926 that the unearthing of 'Rome' in Libya was to take on clear ideological traits: on 12 April, while at Sabratha, he was recorded to have written in a visitors' registry that he was standing 'between the Rome of the past and the Rome of the future'.⁶⁷

Much of the rich material documenting and archiving both Mussolini's visit and Italy's colonial power in Libya openly underlies this double entendre of Rome. This is the case, for example, of a 43-minute-long film footage retracing the territories which had been occupied and colonized by Fascist Italy, eloquently titled *Il Ritorno di Roma* [The return of Rome].⁶⁸ The video commences with a quasi-quotation of the words that Suetonius puts in Julius Caesar's mouth upon his conquest of 'Africa': 'Te teneo, Africa' [I hold you, Africa]. (A decade later, the same quotation would be used as the main title of a collection of writings in the form of an epistolary directed at Mussolini by Italy's *poeta vate*, Gabriele D'Annunzio (*Teneo te, Africa*, 1936)). The film continues with an extensive overview of each city. Every place is painstakingly linked with ancient Rome in some way and mapped onto the new Rome. Sabratha features as the 'trade centre founded by Flavia Domitilla' and, most importantly, the home to Justinian I, the 'master of [Roman] law'; but the parade of images following such statement defines the contours of the (new) Rome as if on an ideal historical continuum with the ancient. One can see the local populations made to labor over this conceptually conflated 'Rome', first at the site of the ancient Roman theater and then in other places, briefly captured in the footage.

But what is most interesting for our discourse here is the process of re-signification that the theater underwent when it was fully re-activated as a performance space for its inauguration on 19 March 1937 at the presence of the Duce with a production of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (figures 5 and 6).⁶⁹

66 Pio Gardenghi, 'Il risorto teatro romano di Sabratha,' *Libia* 1937, no. 1, 17; and Massimiliano Munzi, 'Italian archaeologists in colonial Tripolitania,' *Libyan Studies* 43 (2012): 94.

67 Mussolini quoted in Munzi, *L'epica del ritorno*, 82.

68 'Ritorno di Roma,' 1926, Archivio Luce, cod. M014903, accessed April 24, 2023, <https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL3000052275/1/-49866.html>.

69 For *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Renato Simoni acted as artistic director and Guido Salvini as director, the music score was that of Andrea Gabriele from the 1585 production of *OT*, copied and directed by Ferdinando Liuzzi, and the cast included Annibale Ninchi (Oedipus), Gualtiero Tumiati (Tiresias), Corrado Racca (Priest), Carlo Ninchi (Creon), Enzo Biliotti (Laius' servant), Carlo Lombardi (messenger from Corinth), Edoardo Toniolo (messenger of the palace), with a choreography by Carla Strauss. There occurred another production a year later, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, directed by Guido Salvini, with music by Ghedini; the cast included Laura Adani (Iphigenia) and a choreography by Carla Strauss.



FIGURE 5 Photograph of the poster for *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1937 at the ancient Roman theater of Sabratha, by the *Direzione generale del Teatro*
 COURTESY OF CENTRO STUDI TEATRO STABILE TORINO—TEATRO NAZIONALE

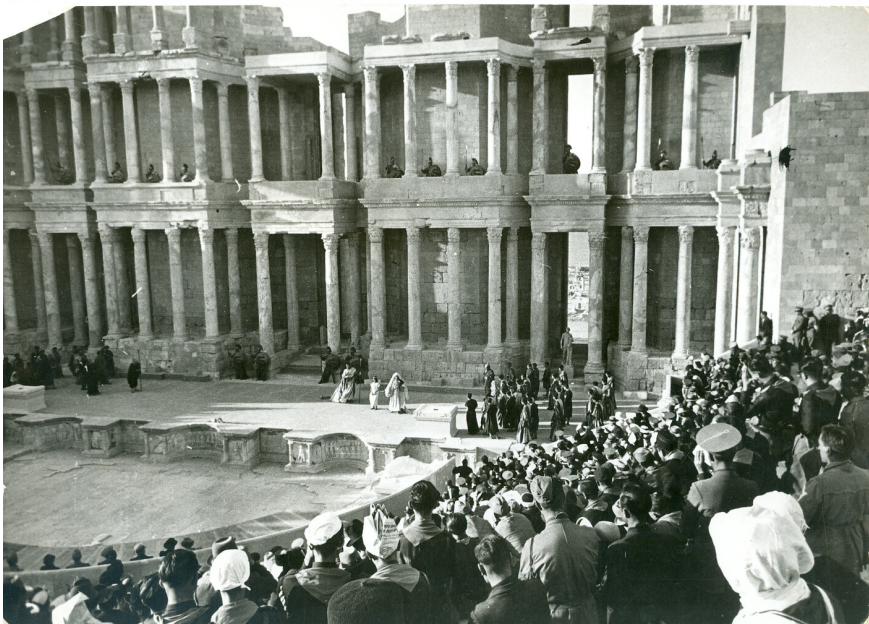


FIGURE 6 Photograph of a scene from *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1937 at the ancient Roman theater of Sabratha, by the *Direzione generale del Teatro*
COURTESY OF CENTRO STUDI TEATRO STABILE TORINO—TEATRO NAZIONALE

The ancient site was re-purposed to host classical performances in the spirit of that 'Hellenic modernism' that was being displayed by INDA on the mainland. The 'what' of the staging did not matter so much as the 'how' it was done, that is, the aesthetic means which testified to the modernity of these ancient scripts and of their (archival) 'containers', namely the ancient theaters. But rather than, or in place of, the modernist geometric assemblages of blocks that Cambellotti built his scenery on for most of the INDA productions, this time it was 'the archaeology' itself, as Gaborik argues, that 'funneled into artistic novelty'.⁷⁰ In other words, the reconstructed theater functioned as the aesthetically modern(ized) backdrop of the ancient production inaugurating the theater, as the living 'archive' that helped recast a mythological past which was now conflating three different epochs, the 'Greek', through the production of *Oedipus Tyrannus*; the 'Roman, to whose ancient power and incomparable spiritual prestige the glorious [theater] building testified'; and, of course, the 'new Italian Empire'.⁷¹ It was reported that the production had been ably divested from 'archaeological heaviness' (to be read as a synonym of 'academicism') and 'pro-

70 Gaborik, *Mussolini's Theatre*, 249.

71 Corsi, *Il teatro all' aperto in Italia*, 180.

jected onto an atmosphere of modernity'.⁷² The transformation of the ancient site of Sabratha into another living archive was complete: it could now join the parade with the others and function as the cradle for the overall aesthetic of the classical performances during Fascism.

Conclusions

The aesthetic that was displayed in these restored ancient Greek and Roman sites, and that functioned as itself a living archive, was packaging a specific vision of classical antiquity. This vision was one that implemented on INDA's aesthetic achievements up until 1927, as well as one that integrated early-century and contemporary avant-gardist and modernist trends, dramatic, musical and theatrical. It was a carefully crafted 'Hellenic modernism' that fused classical theater with distinctively modernist traits and perfectly converged into Fascism's program of cultural and national renewal.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the *Archivio Fondazione INDA* (AFI) and the archivist Elena Servito, in particular, for welcoming me into the archives for long periods of time between 2017 and 2021, where I was able to consult the documents contained in the collection *Archivio INDA 1912 luglio 1–1948 dicembre 13*: all the reference codes used for the documents contained in the collection and quoted throughout this article refer to INDA's archive catalogue available online at <https://www.indafondazione.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/AFI-Riordino-e-inventariazione-I-LOTTO-Archivio-storico-INDA-1912-1948-I-lotto.pdf>, accessed May 12, 2023. I would also like to thank the *Centro Studi Teatro Stabile Torino* for allowing me to reproduce the photographs contained in their archive and capturing moments of the production of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* at the ancient Roman theater of Sabratha (1937); the *Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici di Ostia* for allowing me to reproduce here a photograph of the scenery in Ostia for the 1927 productions contained in their *Archivio Fotografico*; and the *Fondo Ernesto Samaritani, Laboratorio-Archivio di Storia dell'Arte*, based at *Università degli Studi di Salerno*, with particular thanks to Donato Cappetta for his help in finding the two photographs I needed and Fausto Longo for sending me one of the two from his personal collection.

⁷² Ibid., 181.