

Analysing Mussolini postcards

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During the Fascist regime millions of postcards circulated featuring Mussolini in many different guises and forms. This article reflects on their production, distribution and consumption and considers the extent to which they can be seen as part of the propaganda of a totalitarian regime. It also explores the meanings of the imagery of a selection of postcards. It argues that Mussolini postcards, despite their vast numbers, amounted in fact to only a small proportion of those circulating under the regime. Moreover, many of them were produced by private publishers for profit rather than Fascist organisations or the state. Therefore they cannot simply be considered as a manifestation of totalitarianism and must rather be conceived in large part as an effect of the impact of Mussolini on popular culture.

Keywords: Mussolini; Fascism; propaganda; postcards

When people hear that I am interested in postcards, they tend to exclaim, ‘How nice! My child also collects Disney postcards!’ About 20 years ago I had had enough of it. I thought to myself that perhaps I would be taken seriously if I were to publish a study of several hundreds of pages about postcards, duly supported with notes and an extensive bibliography.¹ But what topic could most effectively achieve my aim? To write about Art Nouveau postcards, or those of the Futurists, would be too easy, since the cultural value of those movements was already well established and their postcards are in any case an epiphenomenon.² Propaganda postcards seemed in a way an obvious choice because there were many collectors of First World War postcards, as well as Soviet and Spanish civil war ones. However, these cards mainly attracted attention not on account of the intrinsic interest they held, but rather because there was an established concern with the topics depicted. I decided that, if I could show the intrinsically interesting aspects of even the most pre-judged and infamous postcards, then the established culture would have to admit the importance of any kind of postcards.

I chose as my object of research postcards depicting Mussolini, that is a man who was still demonised by the dominant strain of Italian culture, the man who was the prototype of the European dictators, who led his country to catastrophe, but who was also the inventor, in Italy at least, and in some respects more broadly, of a type of mass politics based on propaganda and the image.³ His postcards were anything but an epiphenomenon; they were extraordinarily widespread. For 20 years the Italian people were bombarded with a wide variety of postcard Mussolinis. One of the most interesting features of this phenomenon though was the fact that by no means all, in fact a minority of the postcards, were officially produced. Most were not propaganda in any strict sense but the products of private enterprise, published by companies cashing in on the popularity of the country’s dictator.

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Above all, when approaching images, we need to remember Magritte's warning, written on his famous painting, showing a very realistic pipe: *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. Of course nobody would be tempted to light and smoke this depicted pipe, but, when approaching images, almost everyone regards them very literally. They are taken at face value and are evaluated purely on the basis of whether they are accurate and true or not. Broader meanings and purposes tend to be overlooked. My aim was to develop a methodology that took account of the many other aspects of the postcard-object, including its production and circulation. Since publishing my initial findings (Sturani 1995), I have had several opportunities to refine and extend my analysis as postcards have gradually come to be accepted as a useful source for the understanding of Fascism and the relationships it established with the Italian people (Sturani 2003, 2008). I have also published a number of works dealing with political postcards in the eras of the Libyan war and the First World War (Sturani 2011a). In the present article, my aim is to map out some of the ways in which postcards can be read and identify some of the issues that they present better than any other medium. In addition, some reflections will be offered on two key historiographical issues: the matter of whether it is useful to think of Fascism as a totalitarian regime, and the extent to which the artefacts of the regime continue to carry the same meanings in the post-fascist world as they did in the interwar and war years.

The status of Mussolini postcards

In studying Mussolini postcards, I needed to set aside personal prejudices concerning the depicted subject. To ensure that I was not moved either by Mussolini's magnetic look or by anti-fascist *parti pris*, I resolved to examine first the reverse side. If the images were polysemic and allusive, there was no doubt about the reality that supported them. The postcard itself was the reality I needed to study. This reality is apparent on the reverse side of the postcard; here, different postal and editorial marks reveal the use of the postcard, its date and its producer.

From the printed credits, it was immediately evident that the majority of the images were not published by official organisations, but by private producers. It was not until the end of the 1930s that commercial cards decreased in number and the official ones began to prevail. What is the significance of this state of affairs? It suggests that from his ascension to power in 1922 until the conquest of Ethiopia in 1936, the Italian people were to a large degree supportive of Mussolini. This is not to gloss over the violence and illegality that preceded Mussolini's rise to power and the imposition of dictatorship but simply to look at the matter from the point of view of the popularity of the man.⁴ The identification with him was so extensive that, like for entertainment and sports stars, a market justifying the publication and sales of his portrait-postcards was created. This use of the image is significant not because it was unique. In the 1920s especially, Mussolini's image or personal endorsement was attached to a variety of commercial products. However, this did not persist long after the establishment of the regime. Permission was supposed to be obtained to use the dictator's image and this was normally denied when the ends were commercial. This ban, however, was never properly imposed on postcards just as magazine publishers were never discouraged from using cover photographs of Mussolini. It may be assumed that this was so because, whatever the motivations or circumstances of the production and distribution of these products, this type of use of the image was regarded as having propaganda value. In other words it contributed to the cult of the Duce. Yet these postcards were not offered free (like advertising and propaganda cards), but were sold like any other goods. Thus there was an element of choice involved in their acquisition that is not normally present when considering the tools of propaganda that dictatorships harness to impose their messages on a population.

Only after 1938, that is after his alliance with Hitler, the introduction of racial laws, and finally entry into the war, did popular support for Mussolini decline. With this decrease in popularity, the demand for his images diminished. Only then was there an increase in what can properly be termed propaganda postcards. The function of the official Mussolini postcards was thus not to impose a cult of Mussolini, but rather to try to halt – or at least mask – the decrease in his popularity.⁵

Evidently, these data obtained from postcards must be verified against other sources. For instance, on the basis of the information on the reverse of postcards, it transpires that the most important publisher of Mussolini's postcards was Ballerini of Florence. A newspaper article from 1937 discusses a legal action brought by Ballerini against another postcard publisher, Boeri of Rome (Giuliani 1936, 1; Sturani 2003, 126–129). Boeri was the publisher that worked for official Fascist organisations; it was accused of publishing a Mussolini portrait that had been stolen from a Ballerini postcard. Ballerini demonstrated that he bought this image for a large sum in order to be able to hold exclusive right to the portrait; he thus demanded heavy damages. The case should have been open and shut, but it was in fact won by the Fascist Boeri, who was able to demonstrate that Ballerini was not a member of the National Fascist Party.

The fact that the most important publisher of Mussolini's portraits was not a Fascist verifies that Mussolini postcards were not necessarily published for political or ideological reasons, but only for trade, that is because they were easy to sell. This tells us that, even though commercial applications of the Mussolini image were restricted, the image itself had, through its earlier multiplication, diffusion and variations, acquired properties that allowed commercial companies to think of it in terms of a resource that could be continually proposed as long as the man depicted remained popular enough to sustain demand.

Looking at the reverse side of the postcards also reveals whether the postcards were unused or whether they had been written on and sent. In fact, the vast majority of the hundreds of postcards I examined were unused. Now, what other kinds of postcards were bought not to be sent but to be kept? Only postcards of movie stars like Greta Garbo and Rudolph Valentino. It is probably not accidental that postcards of movie stars were also produced by the aforementioned Ballerini. For this reason, it can be said that postcards of Mussolini were often bought without any intention of sending them; rather, they were like holy images, like the saints and the stars. They were cult objects for fans around which, to quote Edgar Morin, 'an embryo of religion' was formed (1972, 65). These privately produced postcards were sold mostly by stationers and tobacconists' shops. Typically, they were displayed in racks or on stands. Once purchased they were then religiously kept like holy images, stuck in the frame of a mirror alongside images of Christ and the pictures of family members living abroad, pinned on a bedroom wall or gathered in albums.

If we consider these postcards like any other goods, from a quantitative point of view, we will be able to give an informed response to those who consider them purely to be propaganda (and we have seen that on many occasions they were not propaganda), even to the point of being instances of incessant bombardment and brainwashing.

On the sheer numbers of Mussolini postcards

How many Mussolini postcards were there? For any research, you need to have an idea of the size of the field you are investigating. Only in this way can you have an idea of the representativeness of your sample. When I began this part of my research I had in my general collection 350 Mussolini postcards. Was this a valid sample? I consulted many specialised collections, commercial stocks, public archives and price catalogues. Finally, I managed to get hold of some old publishers' catalogues. I saw that I was familiar with 75–80% of the Mussolini

postcards in their catalogues. On this basis I calculated that there must have been a total of around 3000 different types of Mussolini postcard.

To get an idea of how many specimens there were, I separated them by printing typologies. By knowing the optimal quantity of the printed copies for each system, I calculated that there were in all around 100 million Mussolini postcards. This estimate in fact is cautious, since I did not calculate real photographic postcards, published by small companies who printed less than 200 copies of postcards – although I was aware of about 3000 such items in one collection alone.

All these figures seem enormous. They therefore confirm the idea of a real cult of Mussolini's personality through postcards. I then went to ISTAT and consulted statistics about the production of postcards under the regime. The supposed 100 million Mussolini postcards, expressed in tons, correspond to less than 1% of all postcards offered on the market in those years. Mussolini's portraits were widespread enough to explain the profitable production of them by many private companies, but their diffusion did not amount to a full-scale bombardment. They were only moderately ubiquitous by the standards of the time. Many collectors of the period could have collections of more than a thousand items, but if we relate the famous 100 million to the Italian population, we only arrive at one card per year for every 10 families.

Furthermore, if Mussolini's portraits are related to all postcards produced by official Fascist organisations, they amount to between 4% and 10% of the total. So, in the realm of postcards, Fascism was never subsumed by Mussolini.

Examining the postcards

Having dealt with preliminary issues, the face of the postcards can be considered, treating them like any other historical and iconographic document, that is to say without nostalgia or any need to establish a moral position in relation to them. The postcard images that have been chosen for presentation and discussion here have been selected because they convey an idea of the variety that was available and because they broadly cover the period of the regime. They seem to me, as a long-time student of them, to be representative in these specific senses. They are not presented in chronological order because old and new images mixed constantly in the sphere of postcards. The text of the article replaces conventional captions.

In Figure 1, some SS men look at a Mussolini postcard printed by a private publisher on the occasion of the dictator's visit to Berlin in September 1937. This kind of postcard was on open sale, displayed alongside other subjects, and a variety of other goods, in news kiosks, stationers' shops and tobacconists. They cannot be considered propaganda in the conventional sense because of the commercial nature of the publication and the fact that the public was presented with a free choice as to whether to peruse or buy them or not.⁶ Purchasing them was not necessarily an ideological act and may just as well have been motivated by the desire to own a souvenir or by a liking for the aesthetic properties of the card itself. Needless to say, such motivations did not actually conflict with the purposes of the regime even if they were more contingent than it might have preferred.

A major symbol of Mussolini's welfare policy was the gift parcel given to every child on the occasion of Epiphany (Figure 2). The festival, associated in central Italy with the arrival of the *befana*, or witch, bearing presents for children, was taken over and moulded into the institution of the *befana fascista*. In the parcel, typically, were shoes, food and Mussolini postcards. This can be considered a straightforward example of propaganda. As Cannistraro has noted, 'the creation of a sense of popular participation by means of welfare organisations' was one of the 'less obvious methods' of the 'highly complex' phenomenon of Fascist propaganda (Cannistraro

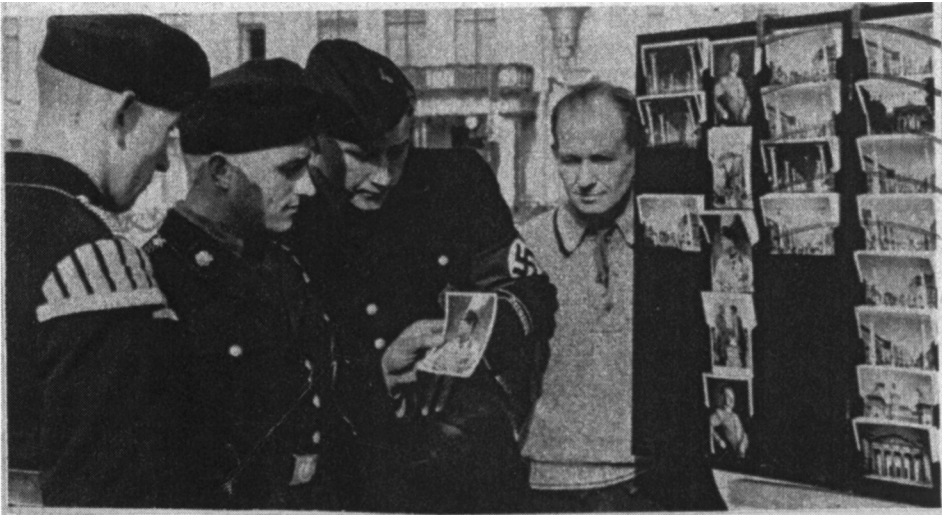


Figure 1.

1975, 72). Youth was a key target of this for, as Stone observes, ‘by 1936 the turn to the young had become a central plank of the regime’s propaganda campaign for a perpetual Fascist revolution’ (Stone 1998, 197).



Figure 2.

The postcard on the left below (Figure 3) is a real photograph printed on card with the reverse side printed for mail use. Images of this kind were produced in a limited number of copies (maximum 50–100) for the people present on the occasion of one of Mussolini’s visits to a given city or region. Here Mussolini is photographed in a precise context and the date is 1930. The

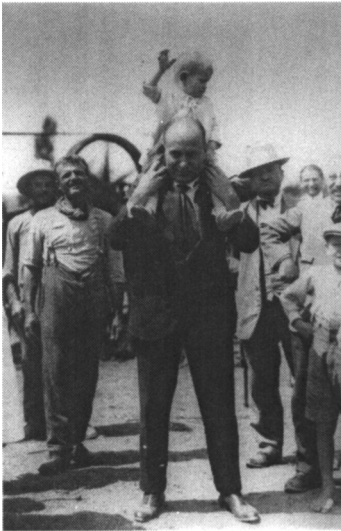


Figure 3.

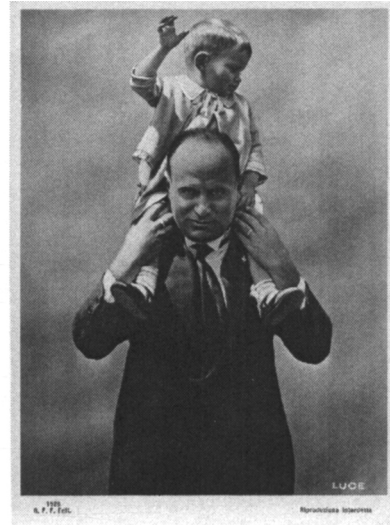


Figure 4.

child on the dictator's shoulders is his son Vittorio, but note that the child on the right of the image is barefoot. In this respect, the image has documentary value as it captures an economic reality that was normally hidden. In the card on the right (Figure 4), which is an official Fascist one dating from 1937, only the Duce and his son figure. In this way the original document is transformed into a symbol that was reproduced in 10,000 or more copies for the national market. It does not show a precise reality but rather illustrates a general idea, that of the paternal leader. Showing the Duce and his eldest son together in this way also had dynastic overtones. Nevertheless, retouching was probably used here, as in other cases, mainly for aesthetic reasons, to 'clear' the image by eliminating all disturbing elements. The disappearance of the surrounding gaggle, with its awkward and revealing details, cannot in fact be regarded in the same way as the elimination of Trotsky and other disgraced comrades from Lenin's side in photographs in the Soviet Union. This was, rather, a cosmetic case, since the aim was to turn Mussolini into a symbol, 'by means of the construction of a popular image that reflected certain qualities' and by drawing on elements of 'traditional popular culture' (Stone 1998, 80). Idealisation was part of the process whereby the pattern of consent was to be forged and perpetuated.

The three images below (Figures 5, 6 and 7) form another sequence. In the first postcard the caption specifies the place, time and occasion of the depicted event. The second postcard is devoid of caption and the image has been cropped to make Mussolini stand out against a clear sky. In the third postcard, only Mussolini is shown. Although it does not come over in reproduction, the original postcard features a clear halo around his head. Here again a process of symbolisation and idealisation was at work. The fact that such manipulations were operated not only by officials but by publishers reveals the variety of inputs into the personality cult and the extent to which it was a shared phenomenon.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.

The next two postcards (Figures 8 and 9) are official propaganda images dating from 1940. They were produced in order to show both that Mussolini was very popular and that he was in tune with the population. The images also appeared along with others in a volume entitled *Duce e popolo*. 'In them', the comment in the book stated, 'are narrated, not with the pen – that can mislead – but with the lens – that documents – the encounters between the Duce and his people; in them it is the people themselves who respond, with their immense love for the Duce, to misinformed foreign calumnies' (Massoni 1942, page unnumbered). The calumny, it was



Figure 8.



Figure 9.

specified, was the belief that Italians were no longer enamoured of the Duce. In Figure 8 the foreground stresses the full immersion of the dictator in the crowd as people press forward to get close to him. In Figure 9 cropping produces a different effect; this time the message of the image is that he is listening to the Italian people one by one.

Figure 10 features a photographic portrait in *maudit* style that Mussolini was very fond of. Dating from 1921, it was often reproduced and featured on the cover jacket of the first Italian edition of Margherita Sarfatti's biography *Dux*, published by Mondadori in 1926. The focus is clearly on the eyes and forehead of the subject, whose determination and severity are stressed.

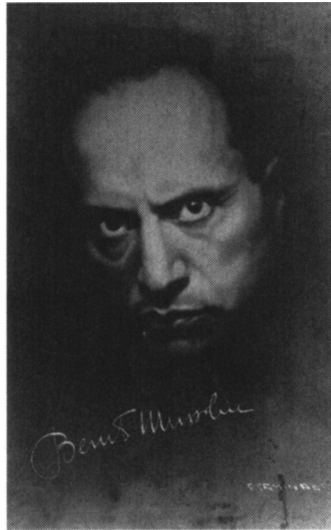


Figure 10.

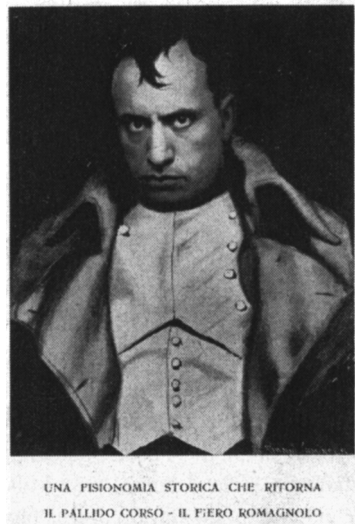


Figure 11.

Images of this type were created in the early 1920s but remained popular as they evoked the man who restored order to Italy and who would not hesitate to sort out trouble-makers in the future. For this reason it was often used in schools. In Figure 11, dating from 1923, the image has been modified and manipulated to cast Mussolini as Napoleon. Today this sort of photomontage seems crude or amusing. But during his time, Mussolini was frequently compared to Bonaparte. Indeed, according to his son Vittorio, he was 'a profound admirer' of the sometime emperor of the French, who was considered to have been of Italian origin during the regime (Campi 2007, 75–78). Anecdotes and visual evidence from the time suggest that Mussolini took several of his

most famous gestures, including the folding of his arms, from Napoleon. Over time, his relationship with Napoleon evolved. In his Caesarean phase, it was Napoleon the warrior who most appealed to him; later still it was the destiny of the leader recalled from exile on Elba who exercised his fantasy (Campi 2007, 82–86). For fanatical Fascists, of course, Mussolini was incomparable, a figure far superior to any historical antecedent.



Figure 12.



Figure 13.

The most ambitious of Fascist projects was that of the ‘anthropological revolution’ aimed at turning the Italians into a race of ‘dominators, conquerors and creators of civilisation’ (Gentile 2002, 235). From as early as 1923, the regeneration of the Italian race by means of discipline, work and faith was presented by Mussolini as one of his aims. This was not a secondary objective. As Gentile writes, ‘for the Fascists, the success of their whole totalitarian experiment of building a “new man” and a new civilisation depended on the success of the anthropological revolution’ (Gentile 2002, 235). It was, he argues, pursued ‘in a basically coherent manner with a clear awareness of the objectives that needed to be met’. The first incarnation of this ‘new Italian’ was the *squadrista*, the member of the Fascist squads that terrorised leftists and trade unionists mainly in the period before 1922.⁷ Later it was Mussolini himself who became the prototype of the new Italian. The visual representation of this fact in Figures 12 and 13 suggested that a cloning process was the means whereby the transformation would occur. The ‘soldier citizen’ of the Fascist era was a figure who bore a physical resemblance to the dictator. Unwittingly, such images betrayed the failure of the anthropological revolution, a fact that Mussolini blamed on the Italians themselves (Lyttelton 1973, 259). What they revealed was that only the exterior behaviour and physiognomy could be imitated.⁸

While Hitler had his own personal photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann, Mussolini let many photographers, official and private, take his image. Although the Istituto Luce enjoyed a privileged position in the production and distribution of photographs of Mussolini to the press, its photographers were almost never named and never credited. Independent photographic agencies functioned in a different way and were often able to get their work to newspapers more

quickly than Luce. Private individuals, some of them photographers, also snapped the Duce on his many visits and public engagements. It was common for these images to be turned into postcards and printed in a few copies. In Figure 14 the dictator is shown celebrating the first



Figure 14.

harvest in the reclaimed marshland. After the ceremony, Mussolini is very relaxed in the company of the peasants. Indeed, so relaxed is he that his pose is not very martial. An image like this would not have been taken up by a national organization. If it had been taken by a Luce photographer, it would in all probability have been discarded.⁹ It was in fact reproduced in limited numbers as a real photograph with a postcard format on the reverse side.



Figure 15.

The sphere of private production was one in which censorship was not at all systematic. Anyone wishing to use Mussolini's name or image in advertising was supposed to obtain permission via his private secretary. Almost always such permission was denied, as were requests from official and unofficial organizations for the right to elect Mussolini to honorary membership or from schools, convalescent homes and so on to bear the name of Mussolini or one of his family members (Gundle 2008, 46–48). There was a concern to preserve the exclusivity of the Mussolini name and fear that excessive or inappropriate use would undermine the sacred aura with which it was surrounded (Figure 15). His image was associated in official propaganda with the official symbols of the nation, with the armed forces and with the infrastructural projects on which the regime staked its claim to be renewing the country. Private use was in a sense a profanation or debasement. However, this did not prevent unauthorised appropriations and use of the Mussolini image. As far as postcards were concerned, publishers soon learned that it was best not to ask permission. If they did so, it was often withheld. If, however, they were printed and sold then nothing was done to prevent it. In this sense it can be said that the very numerous private postcards were tolerated but neither supported nor officially allowed. This tolerance also explains why so many citizens made their own Mussolini images, often in a very popular and kitsch style. A good number of these were sent as homages to Mussolini, who is known to have accepted them while not approving them. In their own way, they showed the dictator as human or accessible or they functioned as a barometer of his popularity (Sturani 2008, 118).

Anti-fascist images of Mussolini, needless to say, did not circulate openly under the regime, that is to say, from 1925. They were not therefore turned into postcards and offered for sale. Outside Italy the situation was different, at least from the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 when international opinion swung against the regime. Especially in countries like France, where anti-fascist exiles gathered anti-Mussolinian caricatures and satirical images. Figure 16 shows a postcard image produced by the Communists of Brussels. Other cartoons and caricatures, some of them depicting Mussolini as a lap dog, snake or fish, other with a sexual connotation, were

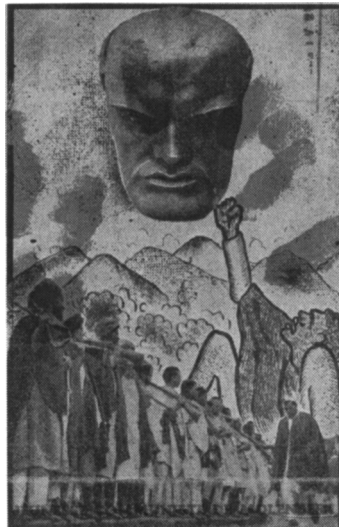


Figure 16.

distributed in Italy by the Allies as part of the propaganda effort accompanying the war of liberation (Gundle 2010, 15–35). The macabre display of the body of the dictator and his associates in Milan's Piazzale Loreto in April 1945 was widely reported but few images of that event appeared in the press and none in newsreels shown in Italy. However, photographers took many pictures and, indeed, the bodies were raised from the ground and hung upside down precisely so that they could get a better view. Figure 17 is a postcard which shows the bodies of



Figure 17.

Mussolini and Claretta, the former holding a Fascist standard placed there for derision. As Mirco Dondi has argued, Piazzale Loreto was a crucial part of the process whereby Italians freed themselves of their dictator and opened a new, democratic political phase (1996, 487–499; Luzzatto 1998). On the reverse side of one of these postcards, sent to an anti-fascist exiled in Paris, there were only two words written: *'puoi tornare'*.

The meaning of the postcards

What, then, is the significance of these postcard images? The eclectic nature of Fascist policy in relation to the arts arose, it has been said, 'out of its pursuit of consent, its hybrid cultural influences, and its non-monolithic understanding of the possibilities of an aestheticized politics' (Stone 1998, 15). The variety of postcard styles reflects both the many iconographies that circulated under the regime and a certain freedom of commercial action. In contrast to the situation in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, where the production of postcards featuring the dictator was the exclusive prerogative of official publishers, in Italy it was in the hands of private as well as state or state-sponsored ones. Postcards were not produced in the same way as, say, postage stamps. Postcard images of Mussolini could just as well be based on snapshots, private sittings with photographers, illustrations or montages. Images were cropped and manipulated for propaganda ends but also for purely aesthetic or commercial ones. Unlike other dictators, Mussolini never imposed a single model or reference point. There was no standard print run; it

could be anything from 20 to 20,000. Thus it is possible to argue that, as far as history is concerned, the postcards have value both as documents of a given reality and as symbols of a realm of negotiation between different forces and currents operating in Italy at the time.

This state of affairs has implications for the interpretation of Fascism more broadly. Was it, in short, a totalitarian regime or does the plurality of forces at play in this sphere suggest rather that it was at best an imperfect dictatorship, one which never fully realised its totalitarian aspirations? Recently, Richard Bosworth (2009) has advanced the notion that Fascism was a 'weak dictatorship' and Mussolini by no means always in charge, but one area where the dictatorship's control is not usually doubted is that of the media. In fact the pattern was complex. While the press and radio were closely supervised and departures from official directives swiftly corrected, the same cannot be said for cinema (where the majority of production was private). Officially sponsored or approved productions coexisted with entertainments (such as the famous 'white telephone' films) that were organised in the basis of values and appeals that had little or nothing to do with the regime's declared purposes. Certainly, in the area of popular postcard production too, there was no simple echoing of the themes and motifs of the regime. On the contrary, on the tobacconists' stands, Fascism was absorbed into the light genres that dominated the market and which were linked to the imaginative realm of ordinary people: good wishes, festivities, babies, smiling girls, famous actors and, in time of war, mothers and children awaiting the return of the menfolk, religious imagery and so on.

The overall impression is that postcards performed propaganda functions, especially in the late 1930s and 1940s, but they also served to cater for a certain popular enthusiasm for the regime and its leader, to document or remember events and visits, to satisfy a demand for imagery of all types. In contrast to other media, such as the press or radio, postcards could be managed at a personal level; the publication of images, the rhythms of production and the places of display and sale were multiple. They could be determined at the national scale, by a single stationer or tobacconist or by a network of retailers in a single city or region. Being cheap and easy to produce and distribute meant that the postcards were flexible and adaptable as a medium. Perhaps for this reason, the relative incoherence of Fascism, its internal contradictions and the conflicts over its nature and purposes found in the postcard an ideal vehicle for reflection. Beyond the propaganda production, postcards were geared very specifically to different segments of the public and different tastes. One can say that, in this respect, Fascism penetrated, at times, the everyday and the lived sphere; postcards involved all social and cultural levels and Fascism circulated widely through them. But it did so largely in terms and according to tastes that had relatively little to do with the regime and its declared intentions to transform the Italians. Like quizzes and popular songs, they only loosely and indirectly contributed to the Fascist project and they did so more with the aim of pacifying society than of revolutionising it.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, it might be asked what happened to the collections of Mussolini postcards that were formed under the regime. Were they moved from table tops to the bottom of a drawer, or were they disposed of? The evidence in this difficult area suggests that the cards of the dictator that were kept by individuals were often thrown away. The iconoclastic fury that hit monuments, statues and busts in July 1943 found a domestic counterpart in the destruction of privately held images. Most of the collections that escaped this destiny did so because they were held by convinced Fascists whose convictions were not altered by the fall of the regime and the war of liberation.¹⁰ In some cases they were preserved for decades and passed from generation to

generation. In other cases, the collections that survived were eventually sold or broken up and offered for sale by dealers in visual ephemera, old books and Fascist souvenirs. There they encountered new types of collectors, some of them serious collectors of memorabilia of the period motivated by historical interest, a taste for the visual style of the interwar years, or, in some cases, a morbid curiosity for the dark glamour of Fascism and its dictator. Thus the meanings that these artefacts have decades after the death of their subject and the regime he forged are various. Postcard collectors may opt to specialise in a particular genre but most collections include many subjects since it is the postcard rather than the image on its face that is of interest; it is the encounters, preferences and tastes of the collector that give them meaning.

Notes

1. My experiences of collecting and studying postcards are recounted in Sturani (2004).
2. I have in more recent years concluded that the relationship between art and postcards is in fact worthy of extensive study. Two volumes of a projected three-volume study of this phenomenon have so far been published (Sturani 2010, 2011).
3. On Mussolini's image in relation to earlier Italian leaders and in the context of Fascism, see the essays in De Luna, D'Autilia and L. Criscenti (2005).
4. On the relationship between Mussolini's personal popularity and his political success, see Biondi (1973).
5. On the declining popularity of Mussolini and Fascism from the late 1930s, and especially from 1941, see Corner (2009).
6. On the state-orchestrated nature of propaganda, and its relation to the mechanisms of production and consumption in the artistic sphere, see Stone (1998), 15–16. Her reflections on cultural consumers and the issue of consent, which she regards as presenting a 'difficult meaning to probe' are on p. 16. For more general considerations on Fascist propaganda, see Cannistraro 1975, 70–99.
7. On the phenomenon of *squadristo* and the importance of the myth surrounding it in Fascism, see Lyttelton (1973), 52–76.
8. As Corner concludes, 'fascism managed to impose itself on popular attitudes much less successfully than either National Socialism or Soviet communism'; see Corner (2009), 142.
9. On the Luce images that were not published, see Franzinelli and Marino (2003).
10. The main collections of postcards in Italy are not mono-thematic but include a wide range of subjects. In the absence of major public collections of postcards, these are a fundamental resource for research. The main collections are listed in detail in Sturani 1995, 189–93. The only ones that have a public function are the Civica raccolta di stampe Achille Bertarelli (Milan) and The Wolfsonian Foundation (Miami Beach and Genoa).

Notes on contributor

Enrico Sturani is the leading historian of postcards in Italy. He published his first study of Mussolini postcards in 1995: *Otto milioni di cartoline per il duce* (Turin, Centro Scientifico Editore), which was followed by *Le cartoline del duce* (Turin, Edizioni del Capricorno, 2003). Recently he has been engaged in the production of a three volume study of the relationship between postcards and art. So far two volumes have appeared: *CARToline: L'arte alla prova della cartolina* (Manduria, Barbieri, 2010) and *La cartolina nell'arte: fatta a pezzi, stravolta, esaltata* (Manduria: Barbieri, 2011). His memoirs, *Memorie di un cartolinaio: aneddoti divertenti e surreali di una vita da collezionista* (Rome, Coniglio), were published in 2004.

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