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‘The war that we prefer’: The Reclamation of the Pontine Marshes and Fascist Expansion

STEEN BO FRANDBSEN

South of Rome the plain of Agro Pontino stretches along the Tyrrhenian Coast with the steep Monti Lepini forming a natural barrier to the east. Today, the province of Latina makes a rather dynamic impression with its modern towns and heavily trafficked roads. Canals and straight lines dominate the open land, with its small farms and the plastic-covered fields of specialised agricultural production. Even if the signs of uncontrolled building activities are impossible to ignore, this area presents itself as a highly organised and planned region.

For almost two thousand years, though, Agro Pontino was one of the largest marshes, and one of the most feared malaria infested zones, on the Italian peninsula. Its vicinity to Rome made it one of the most notorious wastelands too. Among the fraternity of classical authors it was frequently mentioned, and ever since the Romans several tragic attempts had been undertaken in order to win back this potentially fertile area. After Italian unification, dozens of laws were passed by parliament on this matter, but they never resulted in effective action. Not only administrative and technological insufficiencies denied success, but the omnipresent threat of malaria ended all the offensives in the Agro Pontino. It was only from the beginning of the twentieth century that medical progress, combined with important developments in engineering, altered the prospects for the area.

Consequently it was a long overdue project that awaited the Fascists as they came to power. However, hardly any action was taken during the first decade of Mussolini’s rule, and it was only in the

1930s that the Pontine Marshes came to occupy a prominent position in the politics of the government. During the *Ventennio* it developed into one of the most renowned regions, becoming the most ‘fascist’ landscape on the peninsula: the warlike attack on the swamps and, subsequently, the disciplined organisation of a new society according to Fascist principles were impressive examples of what Fascism claimed to be. No other Italian region could claim a similar position in the official propaganda that turned the resurrected Agro Pontino into a model for the future. Internationally, it was listed together with the Zuidersee and the Tennessee Valley as the most impressive public works of the day.

Where the Romans, the Popes and the liberal politicians had failed, Fascism needed only a few years to turn the poisoned area into a potentially model agrarian society. Admirers of Mussolini in Italy and abroad never ceased to celebrate this spectacular triumph. Disciplined, well-organised and brilliantly masterminded by the *Duce* himself as the commander-in-chief, the working brigades had brought this large-scale attempt to dry up the marshes to a triumphant conclusion. The victorious battle against nature was extensively exploited by propaganda, and new media such as film and radio were protagonists in a widely successful attempt to present Fascism as the ideology of a new Italy, and Mussolini as its genius. In years when the democracies were struggling with all sorts of economic, social and political problems, Mussolini launched a huge programme for rebuilding his country. Located close to Rome, and therefore easy to reach for journalists, foreign visitors and for the *Duce* himself, the Agro Pontino became the positive symbol of Fascism.

Mussolini did not invent this intervention himself as Fascist propaganda tried to convince the world. Most of the planning had been done before he took over power, but the realisation was to be inseparably associated with the figure of the *Duce*. There can be no doubt about his decisive role during the whole process. He took all the important decisions, and his frequent visits to the area during the first years of his rule contributed to underlining its importance. Even if the decision to build new towns in Agro Pontino was against his original intentions, he went on to become an enthusiastic founder. Finally he turned the newly reclaimed area into a new province.

This project embraced a number of important aspects of Fascism. Among them were the demographic considerations about birth rates,

genetics and the moving of large populations from one part of the country to another. It was reckoned to have a positive influence on unemployment, and it was claimed to be the fulfilment of the old slogan of *terra ai contadini* from the war. The organisation of the new land represented a decisive step in the agricultural ideology of *ruralizzazione*, containing the ideas of *autarchia* and the vision of a solid society of fertile peasant-soldiers, well organised in hierarchic structures and free of all deprivations and the immoralities of modern city-life. Building up a new healthy society according to Fascist values also supported the idea of the mobilisation of the masses, in order to keep the population activated in a sort of continuous revolution. Finally, one should notice the *tabula rasa* perspective of having an empty area without history and tradition – especially in a country like Italy.

The successful realisation of the huge project in a short time, and the almost mythic founding of a new society, gave the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes a positive reputation after the collapse of Fascism. There seemed to be no room for critique or revisionism *vis-à-vis* such a large-scale work of civilisation. Although Fascist speculations about the value of the area proved to be totally unrealistic – it was only in the 1960s that the expectations began to be fulfilled – the civilising aspect is probably responsible for the fact that the activities of the regime in this specific area were seldom considered for their military or colonialist implications. Still, the project demonstrated the presence of foreign politics even within an apparently exclusive domestic project. This becomes clear from political speeches, from the press and from the documentary films made about the activity in the countryside just outside the capital.

The modern province of Latina, with its expanding cities and its industries, its heavily trafficked roads and the ever growing number of tourists on its beaches, has obviously not followed the path of development laid out by the agricultural ideologists of fascist *ruralizzazione*.¹ But the traces of the old Agro Pontino are not lost, and there remain elements enough for a reading of monuments and landscapes along the lines of the original Fascist project. Before proceeding in this direction the role of *romanità* – the Fascist cult of antiquity – should briefly be considered. Here, we find some important ideological elements of importance to the foreign policy of the regime, although understanding the Roman connection is also

necessary for the reading of the Pontine Marshes. Roman ideology had a strong impact on several aspects of Fascism, but one of the most important was the idea of constructing an empire. In the realisation of this grand plan the Pontine Marshes took a prominent position.

Fascism and the Myth of Rome

Mussolini discovered Rome relatively late in his career, even if he said – on the occasion of receiving Roman citizenship in 1924 – that Rome had always been on his mind since his youth. Being himself a *romagnolo* from Predappio in the hills south of Forlì, he spent an important period of his life in Milan. Italy's self-proclaimed *Capitale Morale* remained the point of departure, and Fascism would continue to be largely a phenomenon of northern Italy until the March on Rome of 28 October 1922. In April that year Mussolini wrote in *Popolo d'Italia*: '*Roma è il nostro punto di partenza e di riferimento: è il nostro simbolo, o se si vuole, il nostro Mito*'.²

The choice of Rome for the role of capital in the Italian nation-state had been heavily influenced by the weight of the mythological idea of the eternal city. But even if the decision was inevitable, it still had its critics. Liberal democrats argued that its long tradition of universalism, despotism and oppression disqualified Rome as the capital of a liberal democracy, while Catholics found the decision an intolerable insult to the Pope. Liberal Italy never succeeded in reconciling the paradox of having a national capital with an outspoken universalist tradition. No solution was found to the problem of *coabitazione* with the Pope, with whom the liberals remained on bad terms. National ideology had never regarded antiquity as a suitable point of reference, even if the Roman past was always echoed in the idea of uniting the peninsula. The mainstream of Italian nationalism was orientated towards the Middle Ages as the glorious moment of the past: it was the medieval city states that were idealised, rather than the Roman Empire.

It was unavoidable, however, that antiquity gained a prominent position after the conquest of Rome in 1870. Excavations began immediately after the arrival of the Italian army. Later, an archaeological itinerary was constructed in order to facilitate visits to some of the most famous Roman monuments. Throughout the history of liberal Italy however, antiquity remained part of a highly

élitist culture. Sometimes symbolic parallels were too obvious. Liberal politicians would not hesitate to draw upon the Roman tradition to defend their imperialist projects in Africa. All the same antiquity did not figure as a prominent part of state ideology: it did not provide the justification for the new state, and the liberals were not presenting themselves as the Romans of the nineteenth century.

Fascism took a different approach to these questions. Arguably Mussolini was the last political leader to take historical continuity seriously in his propaganda, and it is impossible to read his *Third Rome* without a historic perspective. Fascism claimed to take up old Roman traditions. Mussolini denounced liberal democracy, *plutocrazia*, as a foreign and 'un-Italian' import, and he was often portrayed as a tribune of the people, or a *condottiere*, to underline the tradition of populist leaders and men of action, before he finally became the *Duce*.

Mussolini's interest in Rome grew stronger during 1920 and 1921 as his nationalistic fervour turned into an imperialistic project. He declared that, 'Our imperialism is Roman, Latin and Mediterranean. The Italian people must be, of necessity, expansionist'.³ He demanded colonies, and claimed the Mediterranean as *mare nostrum*, as it had been to the Romans. In this particular context, Mussolini's choice of Roman ideology was a brilliant move. It postulated a historical right by referring to Roman times, but it also promised a solution to the problems of the Italian capital. If the nation state was to be surpassed by an empire, the problems of continuity not only vanished, but this very continuity, this tradition, was the justification for Mussolini's programme. Rome would become the centre of a recreated empire, of a new, a third and Fascist civilisation. The *Third Rome* – very soon the Fascists monopolised this terminology to such a degree that it has almost been forgotten that the liberals used it too – re-established continuity and took up the tradition of classical Rome. The period from 1870 to 1922 was virtually ignored and, as Fascist power became indisputable, Mussolini was in a position to conclude the *conciliazione* with the Pope. The Italian capital was no longer in conflict with the universal tradition. The *Third Rome* became inseparable from the idea of an empire and of *romanità*. The creation of a worthy capital and a scenography of power, characterised by a new monumentalisation of the city, particularly preoccupied Mussolini in his first 15 years in power. In this perspective, the use

and abuse of antiquity became a means to promote and diffuse the idea of the continuity and the historical tradition of an empire.

If liberal Italy had had its problems with having a national capital with a universal tradition, of combining modern democracy with the Caesarism of the Romans, and the national ideology with that of Roman imperialism, Mussolini solved all these problems by accepting the universal role of Rome, the dictatorship, and by idealising an Italian imperialist mission beyond the scope of the nation-state. At least in this respect Fascism provided a homogeneous and self-evident ideology.

The 'Myth of Rome' was omnipresent. It left its mark on the urban projects of the capital, it had its role in linguistic politics, in the symbols of Fascism, in monuments, in rhetoric, in architecture and in the cult of Mussolini as a modern Augustus. It provided an argument – even if a doubtful and problematic one – for an imperialist expansion, which was presented as the historical mission of the Italian people. The 'Myth of Rome' was also present in the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes, the Agro Pontino.

Here, the Fascists worked on Roman ground, and they never forgot to remind everyone about it. The Via Appia, the most famous of all Roman roads, crossed the plain. Earlier works in the area had made it possible to re-establish its old route, but it was only with the Fascist reclamation that this major infrastructural construction won back its prominent position in the landscape. Since the Romans, the Agro Pontino had been a neglected and extremely disreputable area. In vain Pliny the Elder had appealed to his contemporaries to do something about the humiliating growth of the marshes so close to the capital, but neither the Romans nor anybody else had ever been able to control this piece of nature.

Mussolini was explicitly referring to the Romans as the work of reclamation began. It was one of the aims of Fascism to re-educate the Italians and make them as tough and victorious as the Romans. This could not be achieved in one day, but Mussolini was always impatient. He could not await the appearance of this new Italian race. Already during the works in Agro Pontino a stage was reached where the Fascists surpassed their idealised ancestors. Pliny's famous words were put at the front of the new provincial *Palazzo del Governo* in Littoria,⁴ where they reminded Italians about the Roman dimension to this landscape, and made it clear for all to see that Fascism had finally done what Pliny had demanded.

In Italy, where not only Marinetti and his fellow futurists found the weight of history and tradition intolerable, Agro Pontino emerged as a fascinating *tabula rasa*, as virgin soil. With the sole exception of the Via Appia there were no traces left of a history that had to be recorded or respected. This was quite different from the difficulties that met planners and politicians in the centre of Rome. It was very much like conquering land in Africa, or in some other space beyond civilisation. Here, in the Agro Pontino, Fascism conquered a new land for Italy. In 1934 Mussolini decided to transform it into a new province, the 93rd Italian province, bearing the symbolic name of Littoria – like its newly founded capital. The symbolic denomination underlined the crucial role that this new province was expected to have in the Fascist state.

The War that we Prefer

‘È questa la guerra che noi preferiamo’, Mussolini proclaimed in his speech at the inauguration of the new town of Littoria on 18 December 1932.⁵ It went on to become one of the most popular maxims of the *Duce*, and a sort of headline for the gigantic work of pulling the marshes out of two and half millennia of neglect. And this way of waging war with tractors, threshing machines and thousands of peasants, with the digging of canals instead of trenches and fighting mosquitos instead of enemy soldiers, perfectly suited the dictator in his ambition to present himself as the promoter of a new and stronger Italy. The world outside also became impressed with this activity, and the reclamation of the marshes developed into a symbol of peace and prosperity.

‘È qui che abbiamo condotto e condurremo delle vere e proprie operazioni di guerra. È questa la guerra che noi preferiamo’, Mussolini said, adding, ‘Ma occorre che tutti ci lascino intenti al nostro lavoro’.⁶ Here, the applause of the thousands gathered in the square of the new town interrupted his speech. Mussolini realised that his audience had understood, and omitted the following sentence: ‘*se non ci vuole che noi applichiamo in altri campi, quella stessa energia, quello stesso metodo, quello stesso spirito*’.⁷ This warning clearly pointed toward the military and aggressive dimension that never disappeared from Mussolini’s rhetoric. The reclamation of the Agro Pontino was a work of peace, but it was accompanied by metaphors of war. This

'*guerra che noi preferiamo*' was closely connected to Fascist plans for expansion and imperialism.

The unfolding of the Fascist organisation of the Agro Pontino did not follow any masterplan; in fact, the total lack of regional planning was often criticised. Similar to many other developments during the *Ventennio*, it was characterised by those typically spontaneous and impulsive decisions that were an inseparable part of Mussolini's political style. Still the works in the reclaimed fields did fall into a general pattern: that of building up an ideal society based on the principles of *ruralizzazione*, *autarchia* and a corporate and hierarchic structure of society. This pattern was to be exported to the future colonies; the Agro Pontino became the training ground.

Mussolini always stressed the future role of the peasants. He was proud of being one himself, and he was the first Italian political leader to take the world of the peasants seriously. No liberal politician had ever taken active part in the harvest and seated himself among the farm workers. He wanted to stop the peasants moving to the cities; partly due to a strong agrarian romanticism and a disgust for the mentality of the city proletariat, and partly because he wanted the peasants to form the stable backbone of society. Their values would be an important ingredient in the future state, just as they had been in antiquity. But the peasants were also much more fertile than the rest of the population. As fertility and demography became fixed ideas with the *Duce* from the late 1920s onwards, the ideology of a *ruralizzazione* developed. Agro Pontino opened up possibilities for realising this agrarian society.

The fertility of the peasants was an important argument, but Fascism also expected them to form the core of the armies of the future. In the trenches, Mussolini had experienced the superior quality and morale of soldiers from peasant backgrounds. As the project of colonising the Agro Pontino took shape, Fascism picked up another Roman tradition. Although the land was not divided into the same rigid pattern as Roman newland, it was organised into small plots, each with a farmhouse, that would be the home of a colonising family (up to 17 persons). The organisation of the land was delegated to the veteran's organisation, the *Opera Nazionale dei Combattenti*. Once more following Roman tradition, Mussolini wanted the veterans of the Great War to settle in the new land. These brave men – the real aristocracy of the Italian state as Mussolini called them –

would turn the wasteland into cornfields, and raise a new generation of peasant warriors. During the first phase the settlers were chosen by application. Later, Agro Pontino turned into a place where local Fascist authorities in the Romagna and in Veneto exported politically or socially problematic families. Very often these deported newcomers had no agrarian background at all, and their lack of experience (combined with an obvious absence of enthusiasm) soon became a threat to the success of the whole project.

Moving peasants from northern Italy to Agro Pontino was a large-scale example of Fascist demographic policy. In the province of Littoria hardly any locals were settled, and in this respect the fifth province of Lazio remains estranged from the rest of the region. In fact, an alien community was implanted much the same way as happened in the colonies. Loyalty toward the regime was more pronounced, especially in and around Littoria, where the most convinced Fascists were settled. If the results of the land reclamation were frustrating during the first years, the newly installed peasant population lived up to expectations with respect to fertility. The province conquered the leading position in the birth rate statistics.⁸

In the 1930s, Agro Pontino became one of the main theatres for the so-called *Battaglia del grano*, which was one of the links between the politics of *ruralizzazione* and the idea of *autarchia*. This once more moved attention away from the city culture and out into the open fields, where a new aesthetic of cornfields and open landscapes was presented to the Italians. The stereotypes of Italy should no longer be limited to the Cupola of Brunelleschi in Florence, the Campo of Siena, the Castel Sant'Angelo of Rome, the San Marco of Venice or some of the other famous illustrations of the city culture of the peninsula. The noble art of threshing was demonstrated in the *piazze* of Rome, and a cornfield was arranged in the centre of Bologna. The rhetoric of war dominated: it was a battle, the *Duce* had set up a general staff, and the peasants were an army of *veliti*, fighting another decisive battle for Italy. Mussolini himself could not be a passive spectator, and regularly participated in the harvest in the wheat fields.⁹

The province of Littoria was populated and structured very much the same way as would be the case in a newly conquered colony. The construction of small service-centres (*borghi*) and of cities that were not supposed to be called cities at all, underlined this dimension of the work. The large-scale moving of peasants and their housing, and

the creation of a hierarchical structure in the countryside, could be interpreted as a peaceful and progressive project. But in Fascist rhetoric, peace and war were always two sides of the same coin. In Littoria a monument reminding one of an antique *rostra* was raised to symbolise it: one side celebrated the battle of Monte Grappa, the other was dedicated to the battle against the Pontine Marshes. The small *borghis* that are spread around the countryside still bear the exotic names of the long forgotten battlefields of Bainsizza, Podgora, Carso, Isonzo, Sabotino and the Piave. The names were chosen to keep the memory of war alive among the peasants, who were, of course, supposed to be ready for future battles.

Beyond any doubt Fascism succeeded in creating a new agrarian landscape in the Agro Pontino, although the expected results only turned up decades after the fall of the regime, and although the territory owed its prosperity only in part to an agrarian economy. It is interesting that the Agro Pontino almost exclusively contributed to a positive image of Fascism – that of the *guerra che noi preferiamo*. During Fascism it became the symbol of an effective political leadership, and thereafter it remained one of the positive deeds of a no longer admired regime.

There remains plenty of evidence that testifies to the special position Fascism accredited to the province of Littoria. The name of the province and of the provincial capital in itself demonstrates the close affinity with the party, Littoria being of course synonymous with Fascism. Mussolini would visit this real Fascist town more often than most other Italian places. In the 1940s the Fascist Party was erecting the largest provincial party headquarter outside Rome (a huge building in the form of an ‘M’), and even in the *Stadio dei Marmi* in Rome the figure symbolising Littoria has a conspicuous position and holds the *fasces*, whereas all the other allegoric statues of provincial capitals encircling the stadium only hold requisites of different sports. No other province could be said to be Fascist in the same degree as Littoria. A number of provinces had been created by Mussolini, but only Littoria had been created in an area which Fascism had conquered for Italy. Also, in this sense, one must understand the connection between reclamation and colonial expansion. The Agro Pontino was a new land very much in the same sense as Ethiopia. Only Fascism had brought ‘civilisation’ to these malaria-ridden areas that used to be wasteland.

Agro Pontino and the African War

Monuments and symbols in the provincial capital were – similar to the new names of the *borghi* – generally dedicated to the memory of the recent war.¹⁰ Later on the emphasis was changing. In the third, and best preserved, of the five Pontine new towns, Pontinia, the congruence between the founding of the town and the African war is clearly demonstrated. Here, the few visitors find themselves confronted with three texts on the front of the rustique Palazzo Comunale. One is written around the top of the tower quoting the final passage of Mussolini's speech at the inauguration of the province of Littoria; one of those sentences that most clearly stresses the double-sidedness of the activity: *È l'aratro che traccia il solco, ma è la spada che lo difende. E il vomere e la lama sono entrambi di acciaio temperato, come la fede dei nostri cuori*.¹¹ The second inscription is written on a travertine plate placed on the wall beside the entrance. It contains a condemnation of the 52 countries behind the so-called *assedio economico* – the international sanctions against Italy imposed during the Ethiopian war – and their ingratitude toward the people that offered civilisation to the rest of the world.¹² The last one, placed above the balcony, is the birth-certificate of the city. It links its foundation directly to the African war:

Il XVIII dicembre l'anno XIV E.F. XXXI giorno dell'assedio economico Pontinia III città fondata nell'agro redento inizia la sua vita consacrando la vittoria dell'Italia fascista sulla ribelle mortifera palude mentre le legioni di Roma sorrette dalla volontà indomabile del popolo Italiano conquistando alla patria nel continente africano con la spada con l'aratro ed il piccone una nuova provincia.

Mussolini himself mentioned the war in Africa in his inauguration speech in Pontinia, which he gave on the 18 December 1935,¹³ and *Il Popolo d'Italia*, in its extensive report from the day of Fascist celebration and success in the Pontine Marshes, underlined the connection between the two wars:

La nascita di Pontinia, infine, nell'ora stessa in cui il tricolore sventola sulle conquistate terre del Tigray e della Somalia, viene a chiarire, se ancora fosse necessario, le necessità umane, indifferibili e imperative, e quelle storiche e militari, da cui è

*stata generata la nostra impresa africana: quelle stesse necessità che ci hanno indotti precisamente a riscattare e utilizzare, con uno sforzo eroico, ogni zolla del territorio nazionale e dare pane e lavoro a migliaia e migliaia di famiglie.*¹⁴

Building up the new province of Littoria was the conquest of a new colony. It also represented the Fascist victory over nature, and not least the realisation of a project that not even the mighty Romans had been able to complete. From here, new legions would be prepared to cross *mare nostrum* and continue the work abroad.

The inscriptions from Pontinia only constitute one of several examples of the continuous presence of Mussolini and Fascism in the modern province of Latina. Today they are mostly ignored, and even though the connection between the reclamation of the Agro Pontino and Fascism's imperialist efforts in Africa is clearly demonstrated, its meaning is hardly understood. How the Italians dealt with Fascism after the fall of Mussolini still offers lots of fascinating questions. This aspect can easily be studied in the former marshes south of Rome. Another location, where the Pontine Marshes and the African war are present, takes us finally to Rome, to a monument that is still very much intact and not only a very obvious example of how the Fascists used the Roman tradition, but also a celebration of Fascism and of the foundation of the new empire – and last but not least a fine example of how Italians have tried to 'historise' Fascism. *Foro Mussolini* – today known as *Foro Italico* – is the setting created for the Olympic Games of 1940 and for the education of the *Balillas*. Behind the obelisk – a *carrarese* monolith with the well-preserved inscription '*Mussolini Dux*' – lies a large rectangular *piazza* with mosaics. It was inaugurated to celebrate the first anniversary of the proclamation of the Empire in 1937, and it was carefully restored before the finals of the football World Cup in 1990, where even some of the most directly propagandist mosaics underwent a thorough restoration; a couple of them were even reconstructed. The black and white mosaics are quite similar to those Roman mosaics found during the excavations in *Ostia Antica* in the 1930s. Some of the motives are obviously inspired from antiquity and others are dedicated to different sports. But, then, there are also 'M's and 'DVCE' inscriptions. In the middle of it all the scene is suddenly taken over by tanks, airplanes, guns, *balillas* and a truck with *squadristi* with

grafitti 'A Noi' or a flag with 'me ne frego' written on it. An Ethiopian warrior pays tribute to an Italian soldier, and the text informs the reader that on 9 May 1936 Italy finally got its empire.

Two rows of marble stones flank the *piazza*, and each stone bears an inscription that recalls an important date in the history of Fascism. Together, they establish a chronology containing the glorious moments of the *Ventennio*. The visitor can literally stroll along the course of history, starting with the entry into the First World War and moving on to the creation of the Fascist state, the founding of the new cities in Agro Pontino,¹⁵ the war in Ethiopia and, on the seventeenth stone, to the proclamation of the empire. On the eighteenth stone suddenly appears the inscription: 'Fine del regime Fascista'. The following two marble blocks record the abolition of the monarchy, and the introduction of the republican constitution in 1948. After Fascism the monument was not destroyed, but rather these additions succeeded in turning the story upside down.

NOTES

1. Mussolini himself took the first step in this direction by allowing the construction of cities in the Agro Pontino.
2. 'Rome is our point of departure and our point of reference: it is our symbol, or if one wishes, our myth', *Popolo d'Italia*, 21 April 1922.
3. Speech at the second adunata fascista, 29 maggio 1920, quoted in Angelo del Boca, 'L'impero', in Mario Isnenghi (ed.), *I luoghi della memoria* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1996), pp.415–37, here p.417.
4. After the collapse of Fascism, Littoria had its name changed to the more neutral Latina.
5. 'La nascita di Littoria', in Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, eds. Eduardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel, 36 volumes (Firenze: La Fenice, 1963–73), pp.184–5.
6. 'It is here that we have undertaken and will undertake real military operations. This is the war that we prefer. But it is important that people allow us to work'.
7. Riccardo Mariani, *Fascismo e 'città nuove'* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1976), pp.87–8.
8. Carl Ipsen, *Dictating Demography. The problem of population in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
9. Some of these aspects are treated in Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle. The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley, CA, and London: University of California Press, 1997).
10. In front of the elementary school of Latina both sides of a stone is used for commemorating on the one side the battle of Mount Grappa and on the other the 'battle' of the Pontine Marshes.
11. 'L'aratro e la spada', 18 December 1934, in Mussolini (note 5), Vol.XXVI, pp.401–2.
12. '18 novembre 1935 XIV A ricordo dell'assedio perchè resti documentata nei secoli l'enorme ingiustizia consumata contro l'Italia alla quale tanta deve la civilizzazione di

tutti i continenti’. Similar inscriptions were placed in townhalls all over Italy, and they still can be seen in a few remote places, such as Licenza (Lazio) and Gesualdo (Campania).

13. ‘Inaugurazione di Pontinia’, 18 December 1935, in Mussolini (note 5), Vol. XXVIII, pp. 202–3.
14. ‘Il Duce comincia con il gesto del seminatore la vita del nuovo comune di Pontinia’, *Il Popolo d’Italia* 313, 19 December 1935.
15. Interestingly all the new towns outside the province of Littoria are not mentioned, but neither is the town of Sabaudia, which was the second of the foundations in the Agro Pontino. Sabaudia was – as her name tells – not connected with the party or Mussolini, but with the royal dynasty of the Savoia.