



Excavating Modernity: The Roman Past in Fascist Italy

Joshua Arthurs

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The cultural and material legacies of the Roman Republic and Empire in evidence throughout Rome have made it the "Eternal City." Too often, however, this patrimony has caused Rome to be seen as static and antique, insulated from the transformations of the modern world. In *Excavating Modernity*, Joshua Arthurs dramatically revises this perception, arguing that as both place and idea, Rome was strongly shaped by a radical vision of modernity imposed by Mussolini's regime between the two world wars.

Italian Fascism's appropriation of the Roman past—the idea of Rome, or *romanità*—encapsulated the Fascist virtues of discipline, hierarchy, and order; the Fascist "new man" was modeled on the Roman legionary, the epitome of the virile citizen-soldier. This vision of modernity also transcended Italy's borders, with the Roman Empire providing a foundation for Fascism's own vision of Mediterranean domination and a European New Order. At the same time, *romanità* also served as a vocabulary of anxiety about modernity. Fears of population decline, racial degeneration and revolution were mapped onto the barbarian invasions and the fall of Rome. Offering a critical assessment of *romanità* and its effects, Arthurs explores the ways in which academics, officials, and ideologues approached Rome not as a site of distant glories but as a blueprint for contemporary life, a source of dynamic values to shape the present and future.

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