


L'Italia immaginata. Iconografia di una nazione

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Female personifications of nations may have first emerged in ancient Asian civilisations, symbolising the fertility of the land while projecting the protective and even warmongering aura of Great Mothers. It is hardly surprising that such imagery would traditionally arise and develop from the emotional needs and imaginings of a male population. It is also to be expected that modern nations would then develop distinctive allegorical traits, as is the case for the historical iconography of European kingdoms and nations. In the case of Italy, traditional references include *Romanitas* and the Holy Church. Perhaps lesser known is the history and iconology of a peninsula of 'a thousand towers'.

This is the key theme of a collection that reads like a diachronic overview of Italy's feminine allegories and tower imagery in the synthesis of *Italia turrata* – 'turreted' Italy. As curator Giovanni Belardelli explains, this image is indebted to the proliferation of urban centres in centre-north Italy, and it would go on to symbolically and politically characterise the nation even after its unification imperfectly concealed its regionalist polycentrism (p. 21). Much of this stratigraphic collection thus revolves around the specific instantiations (or lack thereof) of such a theme, from ancient to contemporary times. The volume's political and cultural history is accompanied by a full-colour iconographic apparatus covering media from all eras – from ancient coinage and the *Arco di Traiano* (114–17 CE) to today's satirical vignettes, with everything in between, including the Biblioteca Marciana's *Italia fui* (1552), Antonio Canova's *Monumento funebre a Vittorio Alfieri* (1810), Francesco Hayez's *La meditazione* (1851), Giovanni Dupré's *Camillo Benso* (1873), Mario Sironi's *L'Italia corporativa* (1936), and *La Domenica del Corriere*'s popular post-war magazine covers (1953).

The collection can be divided into four historical sections. In the first, Francesco Marcattili traces Italy's 'turriger', 'turritus' and 'turrifer' iconographic elements, and discusses the nation's earliest allegorisations by the *italici* populations in the 3rd century BCE. Nicoletta Bazzano's contribution explores the nation as an object of musing by Dante, Petrarch and Machiavelli, when it maintained an aura of Roman grandeur and a role as the Church's testimony and *provinciarum domina*, while simultaneously being portrayed as fragmented and *prostrata* (prostrated). Cristina Galassi in turn focuses on the key influence of Cesare Ripa's 1953 *Iconologia*, where the relation between loci and images encapsulated the foundation of Italy as a 'proto-Arcadia with classical elements' (p. 104) for eras to come.

The second series of articles includes Erminia Irace's inquiry on competing traditional and post-revolutionary allegories that turned Italy into 'one of the most original places for the development of political iconography' (p. 116). Nicoletta Stradaoli's chapter follows by delving into a romantic sensibility coinciding with patriotic fervour surrounding the Risorgimento, when Ripa's *Italia turrata* accommodated neo-Guelph, monarchic and republican imagery alike. Similarly, Andrea Possieri highlights the polysemic post-1861 shift of such iconography at a time of unification, when the printed press emerged with its aim of

making Italians and novel monumental architecture arose to celebrate Vittorio Emanuele, Cavour and Garibaldi.

In the next section, Fausto Proietti addresses the French Marianne as a point of reference for national allegories, emphasising the symbol's longevity from pre-revolutionary France into the twentieth century and its capacity to accommodate the political imagination of different social groups. Claudia Mantovani discusses in turn the modernising Giolitti era in Italy, when tourist postcards and a flourishing luxury and fashion market featured in magazines to accommodate the emerging models of femininity of a *belle époque* bourgeoisie that looked beyond traditional mothers and austere Minervas.

Following these chapters, two contributions discuss the imagery of Italy between the two world conflicts of the twentieth century. Alessandro Campi focuses on the mobilisation of Italian iconography during the Great War, a period marked by an explosion of pamphlets, posters, postcards, newspapers and magazines, as well as Art Nouveau. Here, Italy may be a torn, mourning widow or a lost baby girl who spoke to an audience of orphans and survivors from decimated families. Next, Loreto di Nucci delineates the fascist transformation of Italian iconography, focusing on the work of Mario Sironi and on the emergence of a masculinised and warrior Italy as Rome personified; and on the iconography of a Mother Italy that bore children to war, and her place on the pages of *Il Popolo d'Italia* and *Rivista Illustrata*.

The final section addresses the most recent era. Cristina Baldassini examines how the *Italia turrita* turned, for the first time, into a politically divisive icon as it became associated with the Republic during the institutional referendum of 2 June 1946. At the same time, a less popular symbol of the Republic – the star with olive and oak branches – would develop. Eugenio Capozzi follows suit in discussing the drastic thinning of traditional *turrita* symbols when modern Italy turns, in satire, into the feminine target of greedy political leaders, as the fall of the First Republic looms. At this time, popular feminine symbols were instead embodied by the Miss Italy pageant's synthesis of regionalism and nationalism, by the busty stars of Italian cinema like Sofia Loren, by the neo-divas of industrialised Italy like Monica Vitti, and by national-popular Italian ambadress Raffaella Carrà. Finally, Marco Damiani's contribution focuses on three iconic satirical cartoonists and their treatment of the nation's image: Forattini, Emilio Giannelli and Vauro. Here, Italy can become the personified object of sexual advances and provocative male chauvinism, a symbol of institutional irony, or a *topos* for activist satire. Regardless, it is often depicted as grappling with scandals, calamities and crises: it is trampled, stabbed, drowned, hanged, ignited, bloodless, split in half, buried (p. 313).

Overall, this rich companion to Italy's iconography almost amounts to a compendium. While mostly seeing Italy through the lens of political thought and (art) history, its complex content matter and innumerable insights represent an important resource for scholars from the arts and humanities at large. As in many similar collections, the large number of contributions confines each to a limited word count. Consequently, an extensive chronological panorama occasionally leaves the reader wanting the authors to delve deeper into their topics; this is the case when the collection rightly touches on gender dynamics as they attend to diverse political projections, for example, or when the authors mention the place and role of southern Italy, which has been historically excluded from agency in the projection of *Italia turrita*. Despite such format limitations, *L'Italia immaginata* stands as an erudite walk through the historical and political events that punctuate Italy's feminine allegories, highlighting and suggesting the need for further, more extensive work on this complex and far-reaching topic.