

Italian Bookmarks 1922-43

Mussolini and the Fascist Era

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The fascist movement was founded in 1919 and initially its members were mainly jobless soldiers back home after WW1 which had ended the year before. In 1921 it became a party, led by Mussolini, that ruled Italy from 1922 to the 8th September 1943.

The basic idea was to fight communism but at the same time they denied the principles of democracy. The name *fascismo* derives from *fasci da combattimento* (fighting bundles) groups of activists. Widely used symbols were *fasci di verghe* and *ascia* (bundles of rods and axe) which recalled the ancient Roman Empire.

The cult of ancient Rome was very strong and was utilized to justify aggression to foreign countries with the aim of recreating an empire and imposing a so-called “civilisation”.

A brief summary of the most significant steps:

1922 – Coup d’etat after the famous *marcia su Roma* – march to Rome of forty thousand *camicie nere* – black shirts.

1925 – All power is given to Mussolini who did not need to report to the Parliament any more but directly to the King.

1926 – The dictatorship is established: parties

and trade unions cancelled, opponents interned, free press forbidden.

1935 – Ethiopia is conquered and, together with Albania, Libya and Somalia, it becomes part of the New Empire.

1938 – Alliance with Germany in the *Patto d'acciaio* – Steel Pact.

1938 – Enactment of the “racial laws”.

1940 – Entry into the war, with invasion of France and Greece.

1941 – Russian campaign, backing Hitler troops.

1943 25th July – Arrest of Mussolini.

1943 September 8th – Armistice and downfall of the fascist regime.

1945 April 25th – End of WW2.



Fig 1



Fig 2



Fig 3

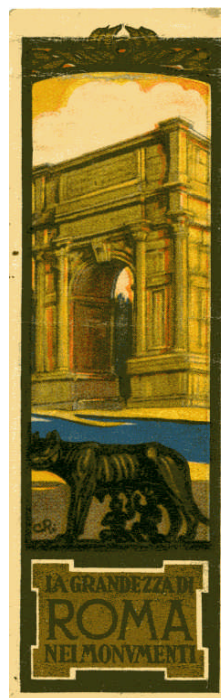


Fig 4



Fig 5

Italia nuova (The new Italy) is a series of four bookmarks in two sizes, illustrated by Carlo Romanelli (CRI is his signature) both for FILA, a major stationery producer and Belforte, the company printing FILA's promotional materials (Figs 1,2). On the backs you read (Figs 3, 4, 5, 6): *La grandezza di Roma nei monumenti, nelle leggi, nelle armi, sul mare* (The greatness of Rome with its monuments, with its laws, with its weapons, on the sea). Fig 7 shows the fourth item of the set *Italia nuova in Africa* (The new Italy in Africa) depicting *La marina d'Italia* (Italian navy). Others in this series are shown on page 29 of the excellent book *Segnalibro* (Bookmarks) written in 1995 by Marco Ferreri for Giorgetti, but this bookmark is missing.

In 1932, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the regime, FILA issued a series of four bookmarks titled: *Decennale fascista* (Fascist Decennial). Two of them refer to *Roma antica* (Ancient Rome) and two to *Roma fascista* (Fascist Rome). Unfortunately I possess none of these scarce bookmarks and I wish to thank fellow collectors Gabriele Pasquali and Sergio Crippa for the scans of three of them (Figs 8a/8b, 9, 10).



Fig 6



Fig 7



Fig 8a



Fig 8b

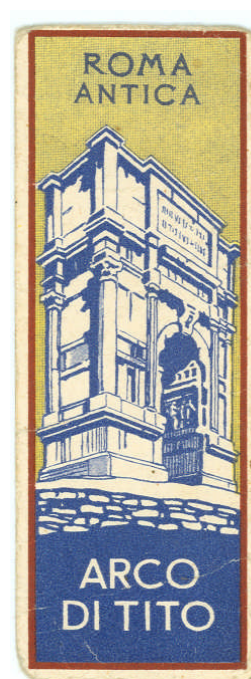


Fig 9

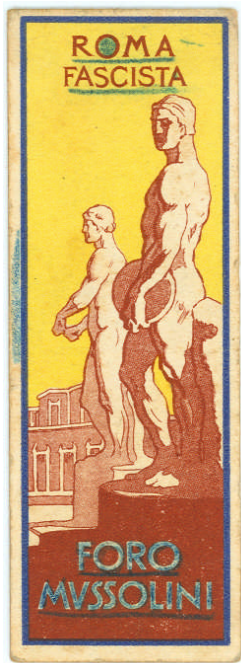


Fig 10



Fig 11



Fig 12a



Fig 12b

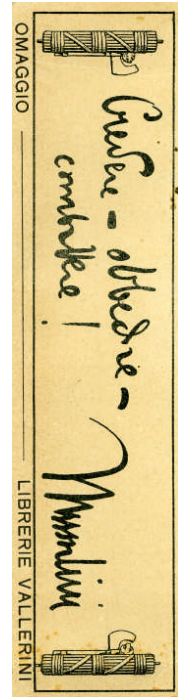


Fig 13



Fig 14a



Fig 14b



Fig 15



Fig 16a



Fig 16b

In 1933, a rare and nice die cut bookmark (Fig 11) was issued on occasion of the *Crociera Aerea del Decennale* (Air Cruise of the Decennial) when Italo Balbo, ministry of aviation, led a formation of 25 seaplanes, via Iceland and Canada, to Chicago for the World Expo and then to New York. Please note that on many bookmarks the date is written twice: in normal and in Roman numerals starting from 1922; i.e 1937 and XV E.F. (*Epoca Fascista* – Fascist period).

The occupation of Horn of Africa countries meant tropical fruits previously unknown to most people were now imported to Italy. An interesting bookmark teaches when bananas are ready to be eaten. On Fig 12a is stated: *Così è acerba* (So it is unripe) and on the back, Fig 12b: *Così è matura e squisita* (So it is ripe and delicious). Fascism meant Mussolini and the cult of personality involved: on Fig 13 his most famous motto: *Credere, obbedire, combattere* (Believe, Obey, Fight); on Figs 14a/14b, issued for the anti-tuberculosis campaign, can be read Mussolini's statement: *La nostra volontà è metodica, tenace, indomabile* (Our will is methodical, tenacious, indomitable); Fig 15 shows a bookmark issued by the Red Cross with Mussolini's profile.

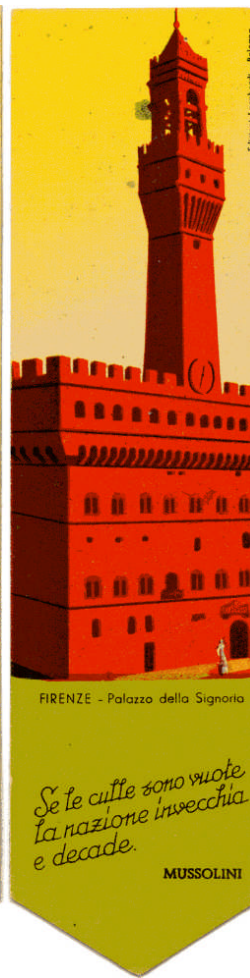


Fig 17a/b

Fig 18 a/b

Fig 19

Leonhardi was the Italian daughter company of a German ink factory. They issued a series of 30 bookmarks with views of 25 Italian and of 5 colonial cities. On some of them, of course, sayings of the Dictator are quoted. Figure 19 - *Riscattare la terra: con la terra gli uomini: e con gli uomini la razza* (Redeem the land: with the land the people: with the people the race) and *Se le culle sono vuote, la nazione invecchia e decade* (Empty cradles mean a nation that grows old and declines).

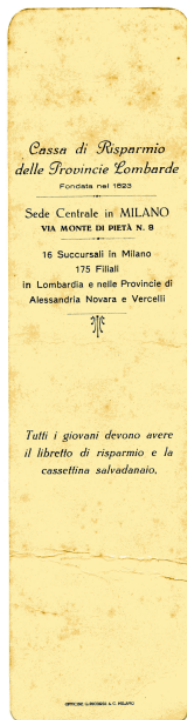


Fig 20b

Fig 20a

Two bookmarks issued by Cariplo, a Milan Saving Bank, show the same illustration before and during the Mussolini era. On the first there is written: *Giovinezza previdente: col lavoro e col risparmio prepara l'avvenire* (Farsighted youth: through work and savings prepares the future) while the latter contains Mussolini's version: *Nella volontà tenace del popolo italiano di lavorare e risparmiare, è una sicura garanzia del suo avvenire* (In the tenacious willingness of the Italian people to work and to save, lies the certainty for his future) see Figures 20a/20b.



Fig 21a



Fig 21b

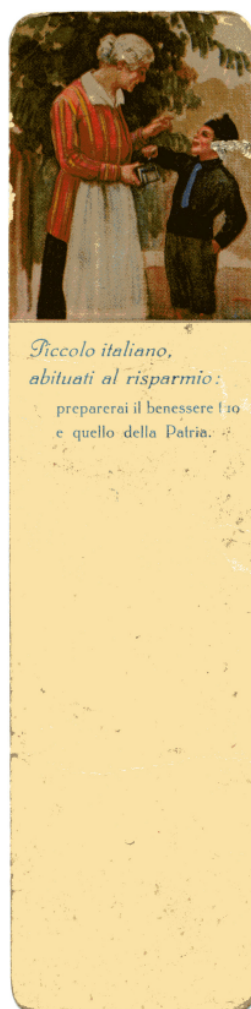


Fig 22



Fig 23

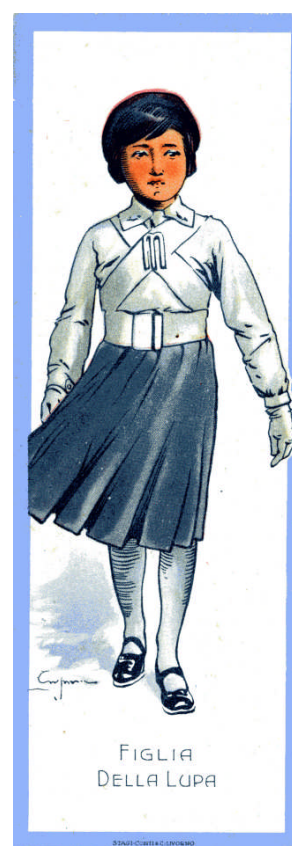


Fig 24a



Fig 24b

The importance of saving is stressed also by Parma Saving Bank on Figures 21a/21b: *Un popolo che risparmia è arbitro del suo destino* (A people which saves is arbiter of its destiny).

The propaganda also involved the rising generation: the boys, dressed in the fascist black shirt, were organized in the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*, an association similar to Baden Powell's Scouts. On Figure 22, Milan Saving Bank: *Piccolo italiano, abituati al risparmio* (Young Italian, get used to saving) while on Figure 23, Macedonia brand of cigarettes, the *Balilla* boy winks, promoting tobacco. The girls were called *Figlie della lupa* (Daughters of the wolf), memory of the Founding Fathers of Rome who were orphans supposedly suckled by a wolf (Figure 24a/24b – Leghorn Saving Bank).



Fig 25a (above)
Figs 25b/c/d (right)

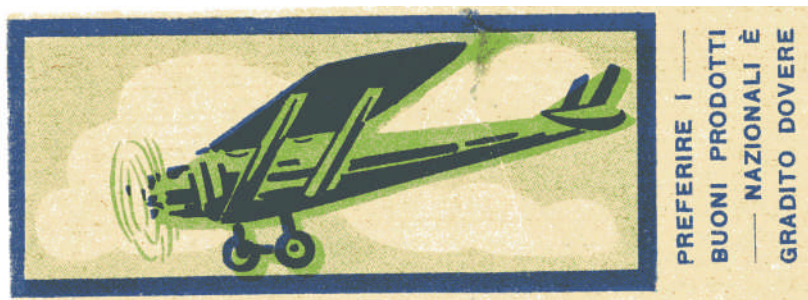


Fig 26

During the Regime, special emphasis was given to autarchy, the need to use and consume only nationally produced goods. Presbitero, a pencils and nibs company, issued bookmarks stressing such a need: *Preferire i buoni prodotti nazionali è gradito dovere* (To prefer sound national products is a must) and *Nelle scuole italiane usare matite italiane* (In Italian schools use Italian pencils) Figures 25a/b/c/d, 26.

Of course this is only a selection. Clearly there are other interesting pieces (and we collectors eagerly pursue them), but I hope to have given a good idea of the commercial bookmarks printed during that insane period of our history with their messages imbued with propaganda.

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