

ITALIAN TEXTBOOKS, FASCIST PROPAGANDA, AND ITALIAN IDENTITY ABROAD: the didactic manual *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*

Livros didáticos italianos, propaganda fascista e a identidade italiana no exterior:
o manual didático *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*

Libros de texto italianos, propaganda fascista y la identidad italiana en el exterior:
El manual didáctico *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*

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Abstract: This article examines the 1932 textbook *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*, produced during the fascist era for Italian schools overseas. Composed of texts and images, the book reflects the regime's effort to instill political, cultural, and ideological values among the descendants of Italians living outside Italy. The study underscores the textbook's chronological structure—culminating with the glorification of fascism—and analyzes how its textual and visual content reinforces Italian national identity and pride. Furthermore, it highlights the role of schoolbooks as both ideological and pedagogical tools. This analysis contributes to the history of education by showing how schoolbooks served to cement both nationalist and transnational narratives.

Keywords: Italian textbooks; fascist propaganda; Italian identity; Italian schools abroad.

Resumo: Este artigo analisa o livro didático *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia* (1932), produzido durante o período fascista para as escolas italianas no exterior. A obra, composta por textos e imagens, reflete a intenção do regime de disseminar valores políticos, culturais e ideológicos entre os descendentes de italianos fora da Itália. A pesquisa destaca a organização cronológica do livro, culminando no fascismo como um momento glorioso, e explora como o conteúdo textual e visual reforça a italianidade e o orgulho nacional. Além disso, evidencia o papel dos livros escolares como instrumentos ideológicos e pedagógicos. A análise contribui para o campo da história da educação, mostrando como materiais didáticos foram utilizados para consolidar narrativas nacionalistas e transnacionais.

Palavras-chave: livros didáticos italianos; propaganda fascista; identidade italiana; escolas italianas no exterior.

Resumen: Este artículo examina el libro de texto *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia* (1932), producido durante la época fascista para las escuelas italianas en el extranjero. Compuesta por textos e imágenes, la obra refleja el esfuerzo del régimen por inculcar valores políticos, culturales e ideológicos entre los descendientes de italianos fuera de Italia. El estudio subraya la estructura cronológica del libro—que culmina con la glorificación del fascismo—y analiza cómo su contenido textual y visual refuerza la identidad italiana y el orgullo nacional. Además, resalta el papel de los libros de texto como instrumentos ideológicos y pedagógicos. Este análisis aporta al campo de la historia de la educación al mostrar cómo estos materiales sirvieron para afianzar narrativas tanto nacionalistas como transnacionales.

Palabras clave: libros de texto italianos; propaganda fascista; identidad italiana; escuelas italianas en el extranjero.

INTRODUCTION

Among the pages of a textbook, there are stories that are traces of an era and a political project. Words laden with this ideology crossed oceans and reached the hands of children and young people in distant lands, such as South American countries. The books, silent travelers, carry with them not only lessons in grammar and history, but the strength of a regime that conceived them as sowers of a national identity, as an echo that resonates overseas. These books, in addition to teaching, also connected emigrated communities to the motherland, Italy, promoting identities aligned with a transnational political project¹.

The historical context of Italian fascism (1922-1943), with the government of Benito Mussolini, is crucial to understand the production and dissemination of Italian textbooks that aimed not only at school education in Italy, but also at ideological propagation in Italian communities abroad. The restructuring of textbooks to be sent abroad reflected Mussolini's project of consolidating the fascist regime in various parts of the world. This conjuncture is fundamental to understand the relevance and role of books such as *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia – Letture storiche* (The facts of Italians and Italy – Historical readings), an emblematic manual of the ideological project of the Italian fascist regime, which used school education as one of the pillars to consolidate national identity and disseminate its political ideology. It is thus part of a typology of books that were produced and published in Italy with the specific purpose of being sent to countries with Italian schools, the so-called *Scuole italiane all'estero* (Italian schools abroad), to meet the needs of Italian immigrants and descendants regarding schooling.

These books, controlled by the *Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione* and the *Ministero degli Affari Esteri*, were distributed through consulates and the Italian diplomatic network, thus reaching several locations, including Italian communities in Brazil and other South American countries. Within this context of circulation and cultural influence, this article aims to analyze the textbook *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*, produced by Mondadori in 1932 in Italy and intended for Italian schools abroad.

Recent studies, such as those by Castro (2023), Luchese (2017), Barausse (2019), Panizzolo (2019), have investigated the production, circulation and content of these materials, revealing their centrality in the formation of a transnational cultural identity. Italian scholars (Sani & Ascenzi, 2005; Ascenzi & Sani, 2009; Chiosso, 2013;

1 This article is part of a research project that seeks to identify, catalog and analyze the Italian textbooks that circulated in Italian schools in the South American context of Brazil and Argentina during the 20 years of fascist rule. This research was supported by the São Paulo Research Foundation (*Fundação de Pesquisa de São Paulo*, *FAPESP* n. 2023/16884-7 and *FAPESP* n. 2022/15183-2). I express my thanks to Professors Roberto Sani and Alberto Barausse for their support and valuable academic collaboration throughout the conduct of my research.

Barausse, 2008) have been dedicated to the study of textbook production in Italy, analyzing its evolution from the unification of the country to the fascist period. Their investigations address not only the materiality and contents of these manuals, but also the role of publishing houses and the processes of circulation of these materials in the educational and political context of the time. For Alberto Barausse (2019), textbooks played a fundamental role in the articulation of Italianity in the recipient countries, while reaffirming the link between immigrants and the fascist regime.

In this context, Castro (2023) points out that several researchers have been engaged in the study of this production, either through the analysis of the contents and intentions conveyed in these materials, or by examining the processes of production and circulation of books in Brazil. However, the author points out that there is still a need for a systematic mapping that identifies the titles of these works and the spaces where they circulated, a gap that the historiography of education needs to fill.

Based on this scenario, to contemplate the proposed discussions, this article is structured in three main sections, in addition to the initial and final considerations: the first addresses the theoretical and methodological construction of the research; the second discusses the production policy of Italian textbooks during the fascist regime and is dedicated to the production of the studied book; the third item, in turn, presents the contents of the manual *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*.

THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION

This article is part of the perspective of the transnational history of education, addressing the role of textbooks as cultural artifacts that connect local, national and global elements. Inspired by authors such as Ossenbach and Del Pozzo (2011), Vidal (2020), Fuchs (2014), the text also seeks to understand how these books contributed to the formation of cultural and political identities in migratory contexts. Martin Lawn (2014) discusses the concept of methodological nationalism and its challenges to transnational history, arguing that often educational research remains confined within national boundaries and ignores the external influences that shape local policies and practices. Interest in the transnational history of education has been growing. Authors such as Thomas Popkewitz (2008), Daniel Tröhler (2012), Droux and Hofstetter (2018), among others, offer in-depth analyses of the impact of cultural exchanges and international influences on local education systems.

For this article, the theory of the transnational history of education offers an analytical approach to understanding the circulation of school materials produced in Italy during the fascist period and their dissemination beyond national borders. From this perspective, the diffusion of these works can be interpreted as part of a broader project of propagating fascist ideology in territories where the presence of Italians was

significant. Thus, textbooks not only transmitted pedagogical content, but also acted as cultural mediators, reinforcing nationalist and political discourses. During the fascist regime, “educational editorial production in Italy was deeply integrated into the political project of the regime, which saw in school books an essential means to inculcate values of obedience, discipline and devotion to the State” (Chiosso, 2013, p. 74, our translation). This instrumentalization of schoolbooks as vehicles for propagating fascist ideology reinforces the importance of analyzing them in the transnational context of education. As Polenghi (2020) argues, fascism invested heavily in the creation of educational materials that conveyed values of obedience, devotion to the state and discipline. The study of textbooks and immigration schools therefore becomes a fertile field for the use of this approach (Weiduschadt & Castro, 2023), as educational elements carry with them cultural and pedagogical values that transcend the local context.

In the context of the transnational history of education, the analysis of textbooks and didactic manuals becomes essential to understand the diffusion of ideologies in specific contexts. As Bittencourt (1997, p. 73, our translation) points out, “[...] the textbook in school life can be the instrument of reproduction of ideologies and official knowledge imposed by certain sectors of power and by the State”. During the fascist regime, school materials not only fulfilled a pedagogical function, but were also strategic in spreading a nationalist narrative and legitimizing political propaganda. Integrated into a pedagogical apparatus controlled by the regime, textbooks contributed to the consolidation of dominant ideological discourses, shaping both the formal curriculum and the so-called hidden curriculum. Nosella (1981, p. 29, our translation) explains that “ideological contents form a good part of what would be called the ‘hidden curriculum’, by which the child assimilates certain behaviors, values, ways of conceiving reality, etc.”. In the case of Italian fascism, this educational strategy was fundamental to inculcate values of obedience, militarism and exaltation of the state and the figure of Mussolini.

Thus, the study of Italian textbooks allows us to observe how these materials played an active role in the circulation of the fascist ideal, contributing to the construction of a national identity aligned with the interests of the regime and reinforcing its influence on Italian communities abroad.

THE PRODUCTION OF THE BOOK *I FATTI DEGLI ITALIANI E DELL'ITALIA*

The production of the book *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia* is part of a broader context of use of school materials as instruments of identity formation and nationalization. Since the post-unification period in 1861, textbooks have played a fundamental role in the project of building a unified Italy, seeking to homogenize and

standardize teaching both within the Italian territory and in countries that received Italian migratory flows (Barausse, 2016).

Italians who had emigrated overseas received attention from the rulers as an Italian community outside Italy (Bertonha, 2001). The set of sources preserved in the Diplomatic Historical Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Italy (*Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri*) gives the dimension of the breadth of Italian schools around the world (Castro, 2024). Italian schoolbooks were protagonists and began to circulate in these schools in order to disseminate, among the most diverse countries, the notions of Italianness, nationality and a unified Italy.

In the scenario of the spread of fascist ideology, the fascist authorities, aware of the power of textbooks as formative tools, adapted their content to exalt the Italian homeland, glorify the figure of Mussolini and inculcate nationalist and authoritarian values. For Salvetti (2002), the most radical change in the production of textbooks was precisely in the period of the fascist government. The Gentile reform not only reorganized the school system, but also established a strict control over the contents of textbooks, ensuring that they were in line with the regime's guidelines. This educational policy reinforced the role of the school as a propaganda instrument, connecting pedagogical practices to Mussolini's political objectives (Ascenzi & Sani, 2009). For Salvetti (2002), these changes did not substantially impact Italian schools abroad in terms of the number of schools and the distribution of subsidies, but, with these determinations, schools began to receive new books according to fascist ideals (Salvetti, 2002).

It is in this context of the production of Italian textbooks for schools abroad that the book explored in this article appears. During the Italian fascist regime, a central role was played by publishers in spreading the ideals of the regime through textbooks. Publishers such as Arnoldo Mondadori, Libreria dello Stato, Bemporad & Figlio Editore and G. B. Paravia, among others, stood out in the production of educational materials aligned with the guidelines of the fascist regime, playing a fundamental role in the dissemination of its ideology through teaching. Under strong state supervision and with guidelines established by the Gentile Reform of 1923, these publishers adapted their publications to suit the purposes of the regime (Ascenzi & Sani, 2009). According to the authors, this editorial production, supervised by the Central Commission led by Lombardo Radice, guaranteed the ideological uniformity of the books and their wide distribution, both in Italy and in Italian communities abroad (Ascenzi & Sani, 2009).

For the book we analyzed in this text, the publisher responsible was *Arnoldo Mondadori Editore*, one of the publishers that most published textbooks in the fascist period. The aforementioned publisher was founded in the city of Ostiglia, Italy, in 1907 and endures to the present day, as *Gruppo Mondadori*, evidently with different characteristics from how it was founded. This publisher begins its trajectory by

publishing books for children and school books. Known as one of the largest publishers in Italy, at the time of the fascist government it had some problems with the regime for the publication of some copies of literature that were censored (Fabre, 2018). Benefiting from the reforms promoted by *Riforma Gentile* and the process of centralizing control over school materials, Mondadori was able to establish a prominent position in the Italian publishing market. The modernization of its production and commercial practices allowed the publisher to offer books of high graphic quality and ideologically aligned, which guaranteed their acceptance (Ascenzi & Sani, 2009). Editora Mondadori exemplifies how publishers were not only cultural agents, but also vehicles of political propaganda and instruments of ideological standardization during the *fascist Ventennio* (Ascenzi & Sani, 2009). These publishers not only printed the books, but also acted as cultural mediators, making it possible for the content to be adapted to the local audience without losing the central ideals of fascism.

In addition to the publishers, another fundamental point in the study of textbooks for Italian schools abroad is to understand the authors of the manuals. The book studied was produced by Gioacchino Volpe. Textbook authors, as well as publishers, played a key role in the spread of fascist ideology and *italianità* among emigrated communities. Volpe was a professor, researcher, writer of many history books². Gioacchino Volpe, writer/compiler³ of this textbook, was a university professor and an Italian politician, considered the “history of the nation”, he was “among the prominent intellectuals of the regime, in the period of the twenty fascist years” (Di Rienzo, 2013, para. 02, our translation), and his biography was described as follows:

Italian historian (Paganica, L'Aquila, 1876 - Santarcangelo di Romagna, 1971). He taught Modern History at the universities of Milan and Rome; nationalist, adhered to fascism [...] close to Corradinian nationalism, joined the fascist movement and was a deputy in parliament in the 27th legislature (1924-29); academic of Italy and secretary of the Academy (1929-34); national member of the Lyceums (1935-46); director of the *Italian Rivista storica* (1935-42); director of the medieval and modern history section of the Italian Encyclopedia (Treccani, 2011, para. 02, our translation)⁴.

2 Some of Volpe's main works: *Studi sulle istituzioni comunali a Pisa*; *Medio Evo italiano*; *Storici e maestri*; *Il Medioevo*; *Lo sviluppo storico del Fascismo*; *Francesco Crispi*; *Guerra, dopoguerra, fascismo*; *Ottobre 1917. Storia della Corsica italiana*; *Storia del movimento fascista*; *Il popolo italiano tra la pace e la guerra (1914-1915)*; *L'Italia moderna*.

3 The term writer/compiler of textbooks refers both to those who prepare original content for school textbooks and to those responsible for gathering, organizing and adapting materials from various sources for pedagogical purposes. In the context of Italian textbooks in Brazil between 1922 and 1943, this distinction is relevant, as many manuals were produced through the adaptation of Italian content to meet the needs of Italian schools abroad.

4 “Storico italiano (Paganica, L'Aquila, 1876 - Santarcangelo di Romagna 1971). Insegnò Storia moderna presso le univ. di Milano e di Roma; nazionalista, aderì al fascismo [...] Vicino al nazionalismo

Gioacchino Volpe's involvement with the fascist regime transcends his role as a historian and educator, revealing himself in his active participation in the creation of historical narratives aligned with the regime's nationalist and authoritarian ideals. As the author of textbooks for Italian schools and institutions abroad, Volpe used his position of intellectual prominence to consolidate a historical vision that exalted the role of the State and reinforced the Italian national identity, known as *italianità*. These manuals not only conveyed historical information, but also functioned as strategic propaganda instruments, playing a crucial role in training young people aligned with the cultural and political expectations of fascism. Volpe exemplifies the connection between academic production and political project, showing how intellectuals played an active role in the construction of the regime's ideological apparatus. Gioacchino Volpe joined in 1925 the Manifesto of fascist intellectuals, written by Giovanni Gentile, with whom he had a friendship since school days (Artifoni, 2020). Some biographers of Volpe point out contradictions in his relationship with fascism, highlighting paradoxical aspects of his adherence to the regime. However, these interpretations emerged largely after the fall of fascism, as evidenced by the following excerpt:

His acquiescence to fascism, although marked by acute moments of tension and discontent with the cultural, religious and racial policy of the regime, remained unchanged until Italy's entry into the war in June 1940. After the disastrous campaign of Greece, he progressively moved away from the dictatorship and, on July 25, greeted with relief the fall of Benito Mussolini, later refusing to join the Italian Social Republic. Purged from university education on July 31, 1944 and removed from the country's cultural life, thanks to a well-orchestrated campaign of persecution, the historian, although not renouncing his monarchical loyalism, approached the Italian Social Movement, desiring a moderate evolution capable of avoiding any nostalgic and revanchist drift, and of connecting to the vast area of national-liberal, conservative, secular, liberal and anti-Marxist opinion[...] (Di Rienzo, 2013, para. 03, our translation⁵).

corradiniano, confluì nel movimento fascista e fu deputato al parlamento nella XXVII legislatura (1924-29); accademico d'Italia e segretario dell'Accademia (1929-34); socio nazionale dei Lincei (1935-46); direttore della *Rivista storica italiana* (1935-42); direttore della sezione di storia medievale e moderna dell'*Enciclopedia Italiana*".

- 5 "Il suo consenso al fascismo, pur contraddistinto da acuti momenti di tensione e di scontento per la politica culturale, religiosa e razziale del regime, si mantenne inalterato fino all'entrata in guerra dell'Italia del giugno 1940. Dopo la disastrosa campagna di Grecia, si allontanò progressivamente dalla dittatura e il 25 luglio salutò con sollievo la caduta di Benito Mussolini rifiutandosi, poi, di aderire alla Repubblica sociale italiana. Epurato dall'insegnamento universitario, il 31 luglio 1944, e accantonato dalla vita culturale del Paese, grazie a una ben orchestrata campagna di persecuzione, lo storico, pur non rinunciando al suo lealismo monarchico, si accostò al Movimento sociale italiano auspicandone

Although he was an active intellectual during the fascist period, contributing textbooks and occupying prestigious positions, Gioacchino Volpe did not fail to express tensions and discontent with the regime. As Di Rienzo (2013) points out, Volpe maintained his loyalty to fascism until 1940, but gradually moved away from the more radical bases, approaching a moderate stance and aligned with national-liberal, conservative and anti-Marxist currents.

Understanding personalities and biographies such as that of Gioacchino Volpe highlights the complexity of the links between intellectuals and political regimes, requiring a careful analysis of the nuances, contradictions and trajectories that shape his choices and contributions over time, which is not the main objective of this text⁶. The complexity also reflects the production policies of Italian textbooks, intended for schools abroad, which were rigorously selected through specific competitions organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Italy.

For the production of each textbook, official competitions were held, in which the competing authors submitted their projects for evaluation. After selection, the chosen author received a financial incentive for the elaboration of the work, ensuring that the content was in line with the educational and ideological guidelines established by the government.

In the case of the manual analyzed in this article, *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*, there are archival records detailing the selection process, including ministerial decrees and circulars. One of these documents, the decree of June 12, 1922, authorized the holding of a specific competition for the production of a national history book for Italian elementary and popular schools abroad. The normative text precisely outlined the guidelines for the content and format of the material, highlighting the regime's concern with the standardization and diffusion of a historical narrative that reinforced Italian nationalist values, as follows:

Decrees:

Art. I – A prize competition is open for a national history text for use in Italian primary and popular schools abroad [...] Art. 2º – The text, in addition to being written in such a way as to offer a clear and precise idea of the history of Italy in the different periods, according to rational didactic criteria and with particular attention to the various manifestations of Italian civilization, must fully respond, both for this content and for the attitude of the exhibition, to that high and serene national spirit that must animate all the action of Italian schools abroad. In the part dedicated to ancient

un'evoluzione moderata in grado di evitare ogni deriva nostalgica e revanscista e di congiungerlo alla vasta area di opinione, nazional-liberale, conservatrice, laica, liberista e antimarxista [...] (Di Rienzo, 2013, to. 03)”.

6 To learn more about Volpe, see his biographies: Artifoni, E. (2020); Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana. (n.d.); Gioacchinovolpe.it. (n.d.)

history, the author should try to show, through a narrative presented in the simplest and shortest lines, and timely vivified by the most characteristic episodes, not only how Rome collected and fertilized the fruits of ancient civilizations, but, above all, how Rome, in its multiple life, with law, institutions, habits, art, literature and language, gave the world a civilization of its own that, even after the decline of the ancient age, gave our history its own character, so that young people, when they pass to the study of the Middle and Modern Ages, perceive the perennial tradition of Rome, which is for us a national tradition [...] Art. 4 – The prize is established in the amount of ten thousand lire [...] Art. 10 – The works that will be presented to the competition must be sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (General Directorate of Italian Schools Abroad) in at least three copies (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, June 12, 1922, p. 01-05, our translation)⁷.

As the process progressed, on January 10, 1924, a judging committee was established to evaluate the works submitted to the competition. The group was composed of Ferdinando Martini, Gioacchino Volpe and Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, leading figures in Italian culture and education at the time (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, May 7, 1924). However, as recorded in circular No. 87, of December 2, 1925, signed by Mussolini himself, the results of the first two notices were considered unsatisfactory, which evidenced challenges in the production of a material that fully met the expectations of the regime. The following excerpt demonstrates this result:

The contest for the history book also had a negative result in the second notice. Not being able to renounce to encourage the editing of such an important text for our educational institutions, I entrusted its compilation, with my decree of March 16, 1924, to

7 “Decreta:

Art. I. È aperto un concorso a premio per un testo di storia patria ad uso delle scuole elementari e popolari italiane all'estero [...] Art. 2° Il testo, oltre ad essere redatto in modo da dare una chiara ed esatta idea della storia d'Italia nei vari periodi, secondo razionali criteri didattici e con particolare riguardo alle varie manifestazioni della civiltà italiana, dovrà rispondere pienamente, per questo stesso contenuto e per l'atteggiamento dell'esposizione, a quell'alto sereno spirito nazionale che deve animare tutta l'opera delle scuole italiane all'estero. Nella parte dedicata alla storia antica l'autore dovrà proporsi di far risaltare dalla narrazione, contenuta nelle linee più semplice e brevi, e avvivata opportunamente dagli episodi più caratteristici, non soltanto come Roma abbia raccolto e fecondo i frutti delle antiche civiltà, ma soprattutto come Roma, nella sua molteplice vita, con il diritto, le istituzioni, i costumi, l'arte la letteratura e la lingua abbia dato al mondo una civiltà sua che, pur dopo il tramonto dell'età antica, impresse alla nostra storia un carattere proprio, così che i Giovanetti, passando allo studio dell'età medioevale e moderna avvertano la perenne tradizione di Roma che è per noi tradizione nazionale [...] Art. 4 – Il premio è stabilito nella somma di lire diecimila [...] Art. 10 – Le opere che si presentano al concorso dovranno essere inviate al Ministero degli Affari Esteri (Direzione generale delle scuole italiane all'estero) in numero di almeno tre esemplari [...] (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 12 giugno de 1922, p. 01-05)”.

Prof. Gioacchino Volpe, professor of modern history at the R. University of Milan, who undertook to deliver it until 1925 (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, December 2, 1925, para. 01, Our translation⁸).

Thus, by decree, Gioacchino Volpe was officially in charge of the preparation of the didactic manual, with a deadline established for 1925: “I have the honor to submit for your signature the decree with which Prof. Gioacchino Volpe comes in charge of compiling the national history text for Italian schools abroad” (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 1925, para. Our translation)⁹. This decision reinforces the centrality of the State in the design of school materials aligned with the ideological guidelines of the fascist regime.

Although the contest took place during the 1920s, the book *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia* was only published in 1932, highlighting the long deadlines and complexities involved in the production of textbooks that followed the ideological and pedagogical guidelines of the fascist regime. This set of documents reflects how the fascist regime instrumentalized textbooks not only as pedagogical tools, but as a means of ideological propagation, strengthening the link between Italianness and the regime's transnational political project.

The analysis of this set of documents, preserved in ASMAE, reveals that Professor Gioacchino Volpe was not limited to the authorship of *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*, but also wrote another work aimed at Italian schools abroad. It is *Il Risorgimento dell'Italia*, a book authorized by the Ministry of Education and published in 1934. This second manual reinforces Volpe's commitment to the production of materials aligned with the official historical narrative of the fascist regime, consolidating his role as an influential intellectual in the construction of the national imagination among Italian communities abroad (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 1929-1935).

This trajectory of production and publication shows how Italian textbooks were carefully planned and executed to serve the political and cultural interests of the fascist regime. *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*, as a central example of this analysis, demonstrates the impact of state control on education abroad and the spread of a transnational nationalist identity. The structure and content of this manual not only

8 “Il concorso per il libro di storia ha avuto, anche nel secondo bando, un esito negativo. Non potendo rinunciare a incentivare la pubblicazione di un testo così importante per le nostre istituzioni scolastiche, ho affidato la sua redazione, con il mio decreto del 16 marzo 1924, al Prof. Gioacchino Volpe, professore di storia moderna presso l'Università R. di Milano, il quale si è impegnato a consegnarlo entro il 1925 (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 02 dicembre de 1925, para. 01)”.

9 “Mi onoro sottoporre alla firma dell'E. V. il decreto col quale il prof. Gioacchino Volpe viene incaricato di compilare il testo di storia nazionale per le scuole italiane all'estero (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 1925, para. 01)”.

reflect the ideological guidelines imposed by the regime, but also reveal the pedagogical strategies used to inculcate fascist values among young students.

Given this panorama, the next step of this investigation is to explore in detail the four parts that make up this didactic work, analyzing its contents and structures to understand how nationalist discourses were incorporated into school material.

THE BOOK OF HISTORICAL READINGS: THE FACTS OF THE ITALIANS AND ITALY

The textbook analyzed was published in brochure format, with a simple cover and dimensions of approximately 14 cm x 20 cm, a compact format and characteristic of the teaching materials of the time. The work has 364 pages, a number higher than the average of Italian textbooks destined abroad in the period, and is organized into four parts. The copy is illustrated and presents a total of 136 images, distributed throughout the text with different functions: some of them occupy a prominent place in the configuration of the pages, serving as visual reinforcement for the historical and ideological narrative, while others appear in smaller sizes, integrated into the textual flow. All the illustrations inside the book are in black and white, which was common for educational publications of the time, however, unlike the core, the cover was made in color, which suggests an aesthetic concern focused on the appreciation and attractiveness of the printed material, as can be seen in the sequence of this text:

Figure 1– Cover of the book *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*, year 1932



Fonte: Volpe (1932).

This cover conveys a visual message of nationalistic exaltation and cultural identity. At the center of the composition is a figure, the architectural elements, possibly inspired by Italian historical monuments, which reinforce the connection with the glorious past of Ancient Rome, a central theme in fascist propaganda and present in the texts that make up this textbook. The central coat of arms or symbol suggests a link with civic and patriotic values, and there are still human figures in an attitude of guard or reverence. Elements such as flags and shields underline the idea of unity and strength, and the symmetrical shape of the composition could reflect the fascist value of the order. The inscription *Scuole Italiane all'estero* (Italian Schools Abroad) emphasizes the transnational purpose of the material, aimed at emigrated communities. The use of 1932 as A.X. (Year X) reflects the adoption of the fascist chronology, begun in 1922 with the March on Rome¹⁰. Thus, the cover anticipates the function of the book as a vehicle for historical and cultural propaganda, projecting the values of Italian fascism beyond national borders. The relevance of the analysis of material aspects, such as the cover of books, is emphasized by several scholars, among them Chartier (2017), Choppin (2004) and Bittencourt (2008), who highlight the importance of physical support in the construction and transmission of meanings.

The book, still in the title, *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*, already calls to what it intends to present to readers: the historical facts of the country. Right in the first pages of the book, in which the author, Gioacchino Volpe, assumes the role of narrator, according to the excerpt highlighted below:

And for that, **I will tell you true things, things that I also saw with my own eyes and, almost, almost, I did with my hands...**
Because, you know: I am old, very old. And I have seen and done many things in my life! But the head still works, thank God!
I will tell you, therefore, the facts of the Italians and Italy, especially those of my time, since I was born. What happened before, for hundreds and thousands of years, **we will solve quickly**, because the thing is a little complicated. And then, I was not there. And if I said I know how things really happened, I would be lying. But some of these old facts, I need to tell you how I read them in the books. They are also beautiful, just as the life of the young is beautiful for us old; just as the springs of the rivers are beautiful, where the water appears almost singing and takes with it all the qualities, good or

10 For a more in-depth analysis of the counting of time during fascism and its impact on Italian society, it is recommended to consult the article *La cronologia fascista: l'era della rivoluzione* by Giovanni Paolucci, published in the journal *Storia Contemporanea* in 1985.

bad, that mother earth gave her and that she will later conserve...
(Volpe, 1932, p. 11, emphasis added¹¹).

The language is somewhat poetic in the passage: “the springs of the rivers, where the water appears almost singing”, reinforcing the idea that the book is a tool of cultural and, of course, moral formation. By stating that he will tell “true things” and that some of them were experienced by himself, the author tries to establish a bond of trust with the reader, while legitimizing the content presented. This narrative strategy is not neutral; it dialogues directly with fascism's goals of creating a unified and exalted national history, using textbooks as ideological instruments to reinforce values such as Italianness and loyalty to the state. Still, the narrative structure reveals a clear purpose: to simplify complex events and promote a linear and exalted interpretation of Italian history, when Volpe mentions that we will “quickly resolve” the facts of hundreds or thousands of years and that he will narrate only what he has read in the books. The book thus plays a dual role, characteristic of the fascist period: teaching and indoctrinating.

At the beginning of the book, even before the first part, it is indicated to whom the book is intended:

This book is written for young Italians abroad who attend the last class of elementary school and vocational, preparatory or job initiation schools.

With a clarity never achieved in a history book for primary schools, Gioacchino Volpe narrates glorious and sad events of our great country.

Students should not only learn dates or facts, but should know how to reflect on what is told here and make this blood their blood of this great truth: that there is no strength, no greatness, no defense without unity, agreement and faith in the Homeland. Piero Parini (Volpe, 1932, para. 01-03, our translation¹²).

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- 11 “E per questo, vi racconterò cose vere, cose anche che ho visto coi miei occhi e, quasi quasi, fatto con le mie mani... Perché, voi lo sapete: io sono vecchio, molto vecchio. E ne ho viste e ne ho fatte in vita mia! Ma la testa mi serve ancora, grazie a Dio! Vi racconterò, dunque, i fatti degli Italiani e dell'Italia, specialmente quelli del mio tempo, da quando sono nato io. Quel che è successo prima, per centinaia e migliaia d'anni, lo sbrigheremo correndo, perché la cosa è un po' complicata. E poi, io non c'ero. E se dovessi dire di saper come veramente andarono le cose, direi una bugia. Ma qualcuno di quei fatti antichi, bisogna pure che li racconti, come li ho letti nei libri. Sono belli anch'essi, come è bella la vita dei ragazzi per noi vecchi; come sono belle le sorgenti dei fiumi, dove l'acqua vien fuori quasi cantando e porta con sé tutte le qualità, buone o cattive, che la madre terra le ha dato e che essa poi conserverà...”.
- 12 “Questo libro è stato scritto per i ragazzi italiani all'estero che frequentano l'ultima classe elementare e le scuole professionali, preparatorie o di avviamento al lavoro.

The first element that draws attention is who wrote this, say, presentation of the book: Piero Parini. Parini was secretary of the *fasci all'estero*, which were sections of the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (PNF) and were implemented abroad with the aim of spreading the fascist ideology in the emigrated Italian collectivities (Bertonha, 1998). Another important reference in Parini's presentation is the allusion to the Homeland, to faith and to the union of the country, expressed in the excerpt: “[...] that there is no strength, no greatness, no defense without unity, harmony and faith in the homeland”. The Italian homeland – and, in this context, the fascist homeland –, together with the Catholic faith and the family, were central values expressed in the texts and textbooks guided by the regime. School textbooks not only conveyed pedagogical content, but also amplified these ideals through narratives that combined national heroism, obedience, and devotion to the homeland. Thus, a sense of civic duty was created that transcended the school environment and reinforced the principles of the regime, as highlighted by Ascenzi and Sani (2009).

For the authors, textbooks were not neutral instruments, but carefully designed artifacts to reinforce the regime's ideology, connecting the fascist homeland to traditionally Italian values, but reinterpreted from the perspective of authoritarianism (Ascenzi & Sani, 2009).

After this discussion, the article will continue with the detailed presentation of each part of the book *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*, analyzing its structure, narrative and pedagogical intentions. The work is organized into four parts, each subdivided into several subtitles, which, in turn, are accompanied by short explanatory texts on the topic addressed and, in some cases, images that reinforce the content presented.

First part: come L'Italia cominciò a nascere e verse la sua fanciulezza e la giovinezza – how Italy began to be born and to live its childhood and youth

The first part of the book occupies the space between pages 09 and 90 and has 46 images. The table below shows the titles of the 24 texts in this section:

Con chiarezza non mai fino ad ora raggiunta in un libro di storia per le scuole primarie, Gioacchino Volpe narra vicende gloriose e tristi del nostro grande Paese.

Gli alunni non imparino soltanto delle date o dei fatti, ma sappiano riflettere su quanto è qui raccontato e facciano sangue del loro sangue di questa grande verità: che non vi è forza, non vi è grandezza, non vi è difesa senza l'Unione, la concordia e la fede nella Patria. Piero Parini”.

Table 01 – Titles of part 01 of the book *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*

1. Il miracolo di Roma	13. Dante, padre degli italiani
2. Le ondate dei barbari. L'Italia in pezzi	14. L'Italia che diventa più unita
3. La nuova vita	15. Repubblica veneziana and signoria sforzesca
4. Re and Imperatori	16. Principi guerrieri and principi mercanti
5. L'età dei Castelli	17. Lo Stato del Papa e il Regno di Sicilia
6. Sorge il tempo delle città	18. L'Italia, grande e fiorito giardino
7. Città e Pontefici contro l'Imperatore	19. Ma poca concordia e pochi armi
8. Il grande regno di Sicilia e di Puglia	20. Grandi signori, gli Italiani
9. Un grande re: Federico II	21. Italiani fuori d'Italia
10. San Francesco d'Assisi	22. Un Papa vulcanico: Sisto V
11. Il nuovo popolo italiano	23. Un tramonto luminoso
12. Genova a ponente, Venezia a levante	24. Un giovane che cresce bene

Source: prepared by the author based on Volpe (1932).

The author addresses several elements of Italy before its unification, highlighting the challenges, achievements and symbols that contributed to the construction of an idea of Italianity. The titles suggest a preoccupation with highlighting emblematic moments in Italian history, such as *Il miracolo di Roma* (The Miracle of Rome), which alludes to Rome's central role as a symbol of power and civilization, and *Le ondate dei barbari. L'Italia in pezzi* (The waves of the barbarians. Italy in pieces), which addresses the fragmentation of the territory after the barbarian invasions. This narrative structure not only presents historical facts, but also reinforces an idealized vision of continuity and overcoming that culminates in the unification of Italy.

Another relevant point is the presence of figures and events that symbolize the cultural and spiritual unity of Italy, such as Dante Alighieri, presented as the father of Italians, and St. Francis of Assisi, representing spirituality. The inclusion of texts such as *L'Italia, grande e fiorito giardino* (Italy, large and flowery garden) and *L'Italia che diventa più unita* (Italy that becomes more united) reflects the effort to exalt the country's natural beauties and cultural cohesion. In addition, the summary highlights the attempt to connect Italian history to the greatness and global contribution of Italians, as in *Italiani fuori d'Italia* (Italians outside Italy), addressing the role of the diaspora and its relevance on the international stage. This approach is complemented by texts such as *Un giovane che cresce bene* (A young man who grows well), which symbolize optimism about the nation's future.

The selection of themes and the narrative organization of the book reinforce values such as unity, greatness and historical continuity, with the aim of instilling a sense of national pride in readers. Given the space limitation of this article, it is not possible to present excerpts of all topics covered in the textbook. However, it has been selected some representative excerpts that exemplify the proposed argument. As already mentioned, religion is a recurring theme throughout the work:

Since men like these have existed in all Christian countries; but Italy, perhaps, more than any other country. In Italy was Rome, the great capital of the Catholic Church, seat of the popes. And it was from the Catholic Church, from the popes, that came the greatest impulse to act for the faith and for the good of men [...] (Volpe, 1932, p. 81, our translation)¹³.

Also, there are texts that deal with Italian colonizers from other territories, such as Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci, according to the excerpt below:

And finally, at dawn on October 12, a cry: land! Dry land! Columbus, then, was not mistaken. But instead of reaching Asia, the land reached by Marco Polo last, he reached a new continent, an unknown continent, about which no one knew anything; and if someone, centuries before, carried away by a storm, had arrived there by chance, of that there was no memory left. The new continent was not named after Columbus, but after Amerigo Vespucci, who was also an Italian navigator, incidentally from a Florentine family, like Toscanelli. He sailed the land discovered by Columbus, visited it, made it known. And one day, in an atlas printed in Germany, the figure of the new continent appeared: and, below it, the word America... (Volpe, 1932, p. 81, our translation)¹⁴.

The excerpt presents Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci as Italians who played key roles in the exploration of new territories. In describing the episode

13 “Poiché di uomini come questi ne diedero tutti i paesi cristiani: ma l’Italia, forse, più di tutti i paesi. In Italia c’era Roma, la grande capitale della Chiesa Cattolica, sede dei papi. E della Chiesa Cattolica, dai Papi, veniva la spinta maggiore ad operare per la fede e per il bene degli uomini. [...]”.

14 “E finalmente, all’alba del 12 ottobre, un grido: Terra! Terra! Colombo non s’era dunque ingannato. Solo che, invece di giungere all’Asia, alla terra a cui era giunto in ultimo Marco Polo, giungeva ad un nuovo continente, ad continente sconosciuto di cui nessuno sapeva nulla; e se qualcuno, secoli prima, spinto della tempesta, c’era per caso arrivato, ora nessuno più ne aveva memoria. Al nuovo continente, non Colombo diede il nome: ma Amerigo Vespucci, che era un navigatore italiano pur esso, anzi di famiglia fiorentina, come Toscanelli. Egli costeggiò la terra scoperta da Colombo, la visitò, la fece conoscere. E un bel giorno, sopra un atlante stampato in Germania, venne fuori la figura del nuovo continente: e sotto, la parola America...”.

of the discovery of America, the text reinforces a heroic and celebratory vision of these figures, aligning with a narrative of national exaltation that permeates the book.

The reference to Rome and Romanity, as mentioned above, is clearly identified in the following excerpt:

[...] In this way, Rome began to have a second greatness. And all were convinced that Rome could not die; that Rome was necessary to the world, as the head is necessary to the body. The pilgrims who from all countries, with long and tiring journeys, arrived in Rome to kneel here, before the tombs of the saints; they looked, full of amazement, at the great ancient monuments, the Forum and the Colosseum; and said: "Rome is the head of the world and the sustenance of the world. If Rome falls, so will the world..." (Volpe, 1932, p. 18-19, our translation)¹⁵.

The book thus seeks to return to the Italian origins in the Roman period and to the greatness of its monuments. For Brandalise (2012), in the Latin American context, Italy, during fascism, sought to associate: "[...] *latinità*, *romanità* and *italianità*, under the theoretical and practical designs of fascism [...]" (Brandalise, 2012, p. 300). The mention of Rome is expressed in other books of the period, for example, the book *Quando il Mondo era Roma*, a book of brief news, analyzed by Luchese (2022). The passages about Rome are accompanied by images such as the following:

15 "[...] In questo modo, Roma cominciò ad avere una seconda grandezza. E tutti se persuasero che Roma non poteva morire; che Roma era necessaria al mondo, come è necessaria la testa al corpo. I pellegrini che da ogni paese, con lunghi e faticosi viaggi giungevano a Roma, per inginocchiarsi qui, davanti alle tombe dei santi: guardavano, pieni di stupore, i grandi monumenti antichi, il Fòro e il Colosseo; e dicevano: 'Roma è il capo del mondo e il sostegno del mondo. Se Roma cade, anche il mondo cade...'"

Figure 2 – Representation of the Colosseum and monuments of Ancient Rome. Image present on page 19 of the didactic book *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*, illustrating the greatness of the classic ruins in the formation of the Italian national identity



Fonte: Volpe (1932, p. 19).

The image features a view of Rome's great ancient monuments, including the imposing Colosseum and Arch of Titus. At the same time, the caption “*Guardavano i grandi monumenti antichi...*” (“They looked at the great ancient monuments...”.) directs the interpretation to an admired and nostalgic look at the historical roots of Italian identity. The images of the school books are not placed randomly, they form the whole message of the text, they are powerful for the potentiation of what is written. In this sense, Chartier agrees: “linking the power of the writings to that of the images that read, hear or see them, with the socially differentiated mental categories, which are the matrices of classifications and judgments [...]” (Chartier, 2017, p. 11). Images in textbooks transcend the decorative function, becoming strategic elements of pedagogical and ideological communication. In the books produced for the fascist regime, in addition to the chosen authors, illustrators were also selected, sometimes the author was not always responsible for the images (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 1929-1935)¹⁶.

16 The 136 images present in this book were analyzed in detail in another article, highlighting their relevance as visual instruments to reinforce the historical and ideological narrative of the text.

Second part: Come L'Italia acquistò la sua indipendenza e la sua unità - How Italy gained its independence and unity

The second part consists of 42 texts, from pages 91 to 224, and 31 images. It addresses the struggles of the unification period, focusing on the events that led to Italian unification, known as the *Risorgimento*¹⁷.

Table 02 – Titles of part 02 of the book *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*

1. Ritorna la primavera	22. Il Re esule
2. Una buona spinta: Napoleone	23. Brescia e Roma
3. L'Italia in rivoluzione	24. Memorie degli anni sacri
4. Tornano i vecchi governi	25. Il Gianicolo
5. Santorre Santarosa	26. Vi offro fame, sete, battaglie e morte...
6. Federico Confalonieri	27. Luigi Orlando, che rinnovò l'industria del ferro
7. Sù, Italia novella, sù libera ed una!	28. Vittorio Emanuele e Cavour
8. Il chicco di grano	29. Genova, porto di mare!
9. Gli esuli	30. I Trecento di Carlo Pisacane
10. Coraggio, fede e volontà di Mazzini	31. Re Vittorio e Napoleone III
11. Attilio ed Emilio Bandiera	32. San Martino, grande battaglia!
12. Garibaldi in America	33. Mille uomini all'acquisto di un regno
13. L'officina	34. «Italia e Vittorio Emanuele!»
14. Ricordi dell'infanzia	35. A Palermo! A Palermo!
15. L'anno delle Speranze	36. La fine di un regno
16. Le Cinque Giornate dei Milanesi	37. «...arrivederci a Roma e a Venezia!»
17. L'anno della gioventù	38. Finalmente!
18. Tornano gli Esuli!	39. La morte di Cavour
19. La guerra di Carlo Alberto	40. «O Roma o morte!»
20. Viva il Re d'Italia	41. La spina al cuore
21. La guerra del popolo	42. Vinceremo mamma, andremo a Roma!

Source: prepared by the author based on Volpe (1932).

¹⁷ The *Risorgimento* was the political and social movement that led to the unification of Italy, which took place between 1815 and 1870. This process culminated in the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861 and the annexation of Rome in 1870, consolidating Italian territorial unity. Among its main protagonists were Giuseppe Mazzini, Camillo di Cavour, Giuseppe Garibaldi and King Victor Emmanuel II, see more in Banti (2013).

In this section, the narrative is structured in such a way as to emphasize the heroic efforts and sacrifices of the main exponents of the period, such as Mazzini, Garibaldi, Vittorio Emanuele II and Cavour, presented as central figures in the consolidation of Italian identity. The texts not only enhance the role of these individuals, but also reinforce the values of courage, sacrifice, and loyalty. Texts such as *Garibaldi in America* and *Vi offro fame, sete, battaglie e morte...* (I offer you hunger, thirst, battles and death...) highlight the trajectory of Giuseppe Garibaldi. The section also addresses the Italian monarchy and events such as the conquest of Rome in 1871, in the text *Finalmente!* Finally The inclusion of texts such as *Gli esuli* and *Tornano gli Esuli!* (The Exiles / The Return of the Exiles) highlights the suffering and resilience of Italians who fought for independence. In addition, he alternates between texts that refer to military history with everyday themes, as in *Il chicco di grano* (The grain of wheat). Images, in turn, complement the text by illustrating battles, leaders and symbols, enriching the reader's experience and reinforcing the propagandistic message.

THIRD PART: COME L'ITALIA SI ORDINÒ E CREBBE NELLE ARTI DELLA PACE - HOW ITALY ORGANIZED AND GREW IN THE ARTS OF PEACE

The third part of the book consists of 19 titles, spanning pages 225 to 278. It is the smallest section of the work and also the one that presents the smallest number of images, totaling 17. The content of this part emphasizes the impact of the Italian diaspora and the role played by immigrants in the development of various regions of the world. The table below reproduces the titles of the texts.

Table 03 - Titles of part 03 of the book *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*

1. Quel che disse Roma agli Italiani	11. Il tricolore in Africa
2. Altri nemici da combattere	12. Amba Alagi e Makallé
3. Le scuole, le strade, gli acquedotti	13. Una sconfitta che non è sconfitta
4. Nino Bixio da soldato a navigatore	14. Vittorio Emanuele III re sul mare
5. Anni triste	15. La «Stella Polare»
6. La terra e le industrie	16. Gli emigrante
7. Alessandro Rossi, il lanaiuolo	17. Italiani dissodatori di terre e costruttori di città
8. Pacinotti, Galileo Ferraris, Marconi	18. Cristiani e Italiani esemplari
9. Gli esploratori dell'Africa	19. Gli Italiani a Tripoli e a Bengasi
10. I missionari: Massaia, Don Bosco	

Source: prepared by the author based on Volpe (1932).

The third part highlights the emigration of Italians: “In short, not everything was beautiful in those years, but also not everything was ugly. Cloudy sky, but with clear sky openings and sun rays...” (Volpe, 1932, p. 268, our translation)¹⁸, and continues to narrate about the misery and discontent of so many people and the decision to leave, “Where were they going, then? What were they going to do? Who knows! They went to all places and exercised all the trades [...]” (Volpe, 1932, p. 81, our translation)¹⁹. The approach is from a contingent of people who suffered a lot on the trip, on arrival and in the work they carried out in the receiving country. The speech emphasizes the contribution of Italians to the development of the countries that welcomed them:

But, as I told you, there were clouds and sunbeams at the same time. The Italians sowed those countries with bones, fertilized those lands with bones, yes, it is true! But at the same time, we can say the following: it was mostly the Italians who plowed and dug the land, drained the swamps, grew the wheat, planted the vineyard, the coffee, the citrus and olive orchards, founded and populated villages that later became cities in Argentina, Brazil, California, Tunisia! (Volpe, 1932, p. 269-270, our translation²⁰).

The author continues by stating that: “so, we did not see all this. He only saw that mass of ants that migrated, migrated without respite from ports and stations” (Volpe, 1932, p. 271, our translation²¹). This passage reflects the duality of the migratory experience, marked by suffering, but also by achievements that contributed to the construction of Italian communities. The section also explores the role of Italians in various spheres, such as science and technology, represented by figures such as Alessandro Rossi and Marconi, as well as explorers and missionaries in Africa in texts such as *Gli esploratori dell'Africa* (The Explorers of Africa) and *Gli Italiani a Tripoli e a Bengasi* (To Italians in Tripoli and Benghazi) that connect Italian expansion to the colonialist project of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

18 *Insomma, non tutto era bello in questi anni, ma neanche tutto era brutto. Cielo nuvoloso, ma sprazzi di sereno e raggi di sole...* (Volpe, 1932, p. 268).

19 *Dove andavano, poi? Che cosa andavano a fare? Mah! Andavano un po' dappertutto e facevano tutti i mestieri [...]* (Volpe, 1932, p. 268).

20 *Ma, come vi ho detto, c'era, insieme, nuvole e raggi e sole. Gli Italiani seminarono di ossa quei paesi, concimarono do ossa quelle terre, sì, è vero! Ma intanto, possiamo dir questo: Sono Italiani, per la più parte, quelli che hanno arato e vangato la terra, prosciugato le paludi, coltivato in grano, piantato la vigna, il caffè, l'agrumeto, l'oliveto, fondato e popolato villaggi divenuti poi città, in Argentina, in Brasile, in California, in Tunisia!* (Volpe, 1932, p. 269-270).

21 *Allora, tutto questo noi non lo vedevamo. Vedevamo solo quella massa di formiche che migravano, migravano senza tregua dai porti e dalle stazioni [...]* (Volpe, 1932, p. 271).

Part four: *L'Italia verso la grandezza* - Italy towards greatness

The fourth part, composed of 23 sections, between pages 279 and 357, deals intensely with the fascist period, Benito Mussolini, the march on Rome, os *fasci all'estero*. This is the part of the text that has a total of 42 images.

Table 04 - Titles of part 04 of the book *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*

1. La grande guerra	13. 13. Il Milite Ignoto
2. La canzone degli Alpini	14. 114. I Fascismo e la marcia su Roma
3. Dal monte Pasubio a Gorizia	15. Il lavoro nelle colonie
4. Il martirio di Nazirio Sauro	16. Il pane degli Italiani
5. Una battaglia sfortunata	17. I fanti alla conquista della terra
6. La parola di Re Vittorio: «Siate un esercito solo!»	18. L'artigiano e l'operaio
7. Grappa e Piave	19. Navigare è necessario
8. Imprese di marinai e di volatori	20. Cominciar dalla pianticella giovane
9. Una battaglia di dieci giorni	21. L'Italia una grande famiglia
10. Vittorio Veneto	22. Pio XI e Mussolini
11. Tornano i combattenti	23. Ricchezza da conservare e accrescere
12. Mussolini e D'Annunzio	

Source: chart prepared by the author, 2024, based on the book Volpe, 1932.

This part of the book is written in such a way as to exalt this period as the era of greatness of Italy, something already evident in the title: “Italy towards greatness”. The texts address fundamental events for the legitimation of fascism, such as *Il Fascismo e la marcia su Roma* (Fascism and the March on Rome), which celebrates the historical moment of Mussolini's seizure of power, while the text *Pio XI e Mussolini* highlights the rapprochement between the fascist regime and the Catholic Church, consolidated by the Lateran Treaty in 1929 (*Trattato Lateranense*)²². The exaltation of Mussolini as a central figure is present in several excerpts of the book. The excerpts below exemplify this approach:

Fascism and the March on Rome

Thus Italy began to heal from its war wounds. But recovery was slow. Discord and disorder continued: there was, yes, everywhere, a great desire to return to the fields and workshops [...] Faced with

22 For more on the Treaty, see: Barberini, 2010.

this, the government was weak, it was timid. It was not a government for such difficult times. It was not a government worthy of victorious Italy. It lacked the necessary strength to ensure internal order and the soul to lead Italian youth to great ideals. Thus, more and more, the idea entered the minds of the people that it was necessary to change the men of government and the ways of governing! [...] (Volpe, 1932, p. 81, our translation²³).

And he adds that, for this:

And so, the Italians, with Mussolini, have recently proposed to resurrect the work of the skilled craftsman, who knows how to hit the iron well, shape a beautiful medal, carve a piece of furniture, draw beautiful fabrics, chisel a silver cup to be given as a prize to the winner of a competition or the handle of a sword to a victorious general, fuse a bell with beautiful lines and a beautiful sound [...] (Volpe, 1932, p. 81, our translation²⁴).

The texts also highlight the role of the *all'estero fasci*, addressing how Italian communities abroad were mobilized to support the regime. This theme is inserted in texts such as “*Navigare è necessário*” (*Navigating is necessary*) and “*Il pane degli Italiani*” (*The bread of the Italians*), which reinforce the idea that the effort of the emigrants contributed to the aggrandizement of the homeland. The presence of titles such as “*L'Italia una grande famiglia*” (*Italy, a large family*) suggests the attempt to reinforce national cohesion through the family metaphor, connecting the idea of the homeland to that of a harmonious and hierarchical social structure. This section ends with the text *Ricchezza da conservare e accrescere* (Wealth to preserve and increase):

These are the facts of the Italians, since Rome fell and Italy, like a new plant born in an old stump, began to grow. At first, it walked slowly and almost lost, often tripping and falling. It did not even know who it was and what it wanted: as a boy. Then it quickened its pace, began to understand who it was and what it wanted. And first,

23 “Il Fascismo e la Marcia su Roma

Così l'Italia cominciava a risanare dalle sue ferite di guerra. Ma la guarigione era lenta. Discordie e disordini seguitavano: c'era sì, da per tutto, grande desiderio di tornare ai campi e alle officine [...] Di Fronte a costoro, il Governo era debole, era timido. Non era un governo per tempi così difficili. Non un governo degno dell'Italia vittoriosa. Gli mancava la forza necessaria per assicurar l'ordine interno, e l'anima per guidare ad alto segno la gioventù italiana. Così, sempre più, entrò nel popolo l'idea che bisognasse mutare gli uomini del governo e i modi di governare! [...]”.

24 “E così, gli Italiani, con Mussolini, si proposero, in questi ultimi tempi, di fare risorgere il lavoro dell'abile artigiano, di chi sa battere bene il ferro, modellare una bella medaglia, intagliare un nobile, disegnare belle stoffe, cesellare una coppa d'argento da dare in premio al vincitore di una gara l'impugnatura di una spada per un generale vittorioso, fondere una campana di belle linee e di bel suono [...]”.

few understood this; then the few became many. And they went from words to action. Today, all Italian people know who they are and what they want. You too, young people, are learning. We will see you at work in a few years. You have inherited a beautiful wealth, along with many hardships. Be careful to keep it and make it grow. Only what grows is preserved (Volpe, 1932, p. 357, our translation²⁵).

This fourth part of the book is the most overtly ideological, using a historical narrative to justify and celebrate the deeds of the fascist regime. The combination of texts and images serves to create a visual and textual narrative that exalts Mussolini's figure and fascist values, while connecting these elements to Italy's glorious past.

The fourth part of the book is the most explicitly ideological, structured in a historical narrative that seeks not only to justify but also to celebrate the achievements of the fascist regime. The combination of texts and images plays a strategic role in the construction of a visual and textual narrative that exalts the figure of Mussolini, reinforcing fascist values and associating them with Italy's glorious past. This intentional use of pedagogical resources suggests a deliberate effort to legitimize the regime, linking it to the historical continuity of the Italian nation. Thus, this section reflects the purpose of the book as a whole: to educate and indoctrinate.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study was concerned with presenting the textbook and made it possible to understand some of the characteristics of Italian textbooks produced in the Fascist period for Italian schools outside Italy, without, however, exhausting the discussion. Textbooks function as privileged historical sources for understanding the intersections between politics, culture and school education in transnational contexts.

The analysis of the textbook *I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia* reveals how schoolbooks were strategically designed to consolidate Italian national identity and spread fascist ideology among Italians abroad. The organization of the book in a chronological structure, culminating in the exaltation of the fascist regime as the apex of the Italian trajectory, evidences the intention to inculcate political and cultural values aligned with Mussolini's authoritarian project. This narrative construction

25 “Questi sono i fatti degli Italiani, che da Roma cadde e l'Italia, come una pianta nuova nata sopra un vecchio ceppo cominciò a crescere. Da principio, camminò lenta e quasi smarrita, spesso increspando e cadendo. Non sapeva bene neanche essa chi fosse e che cosa volesse: come un ragazzo. Poi, accelerò il passo, cominciò a capire chi essa era e che cosa voleva. E prima lo capirono pochi; poi i pochi diventarono molti. E passarono dalle parole all'azione. Oggi, tutto il popolo italiano sa chi esse è e che cosa esso vuole. Anche voi, ragazzi, lo state imparando. Vi vedremo all'opera fra pochi anni. Ereditate una bella ricchezza, messa insieme con tanti stenti Attenzione a conservarla ed accrescerla! Si conserva solo quel che si accresce”.

reinforces an ideal of transnational Italianity, going beyond the geographical borders of Italy and reaching the emigrated communities, which were seen as an extension of the motherland.

The research conducted demonstrates that textbooks were not just pedagogical tools, but carefully crafted propaganda tools to spread specific values among Italian descendants. The materiality of the book – its layout, images, lexical choices and structure – collaborates to strengthen discourses of unity, obedience and nationalism, fundamental to the construction of the fascist imaginary. The association between education and political ideology, explicitly expressed in the analyzed manual, reinforces the importance of understanding textbooks not only as teaching supports, but also as cultural artifacts that reflect and perpetuate political projects.

In addition, this study is part of the field of transnational history of education, showing how textbooks circulated beyond national borders and were adapted to meet a specific audience. The diffusion of these materials in the *Scuole italiane all'estero* reinforces the idea that fascism used education as a means of cultural and ideological control, ensuring that the new generations of Italian descendants remained connected to the regime. The way the textbook analyzed is organized is a chronological sequence up to the period of fascism, listing that this is a moment considered glorious for Italy and that the country will rise from new ideological, political, cultural and family orientations; therefore, this should, according to the ideals of the regime, also be among those Italians outside Italy.

Finally, this study reaffirms the importance of textbooks as primary sources in the analysis of the intersections between education, politics and culture. The critical understanding of these materials allows not only to shed light on the past, but also to reflect on the mechanisms by which historical narratives and ideological values continue to be shaped and transmitted through education.

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