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# Misrepresentation of the Archaeological Record and Identity in Italy

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MISREPRESENTATION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD AND IDENTITY IN  
ITALY

by

JULIENNE ZAMBRI

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors Undergraduate Thesis program in Anthropology  
in the College of Sciences  
and in the Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

2024

Thesis Chair: Michael Callaghan

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the practice of the misrepresentation and manipulation of the archaeological record in Italy as it relates to identity formation through three main case studies. Moving chronologically, it begins by analyzing the Palermo National Exposition and the Mostra Etnografica Siciliana of Giuseppe Pitrè using Edward Said's Orientalism to reveal the othering of Sicilians at this exposition. The second case study looks at the Mostra Augustea della Romanità of the Fascist era, building on the extensive scholarly discussion regarding Mussolini's misrepresentation of ancient Roman archaeology to construct a fascist identity around the concept of romanità. Moving into the contemporary scene of Italian politics, the third case study analyzes the invention of Padanian ethnicity by Lega Nord in the 1990s and early 2000s by misrepresenting and obfuscating Celtic archaeology of Northern Italy. The analysis briefly discusses the newer phenomenon of "revenge archaeology," coined by Alessandro Vanzetti, in the region of Calabria, and its relationship to the other case studies and the history of the North-South divide. This thesis analyzes how the misrepresentation of the archaeological record and material culture have been used in Italy to reorganize and assert racial, ethnic, and national identities, as well as examining how these case studies interact with and build on one another.

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## INTRODUCTION

Identity remains a highly influential concept that impacts society in innumerable ways, underpinning major elements of how people understand and organize the world around them (Appiah, 2018). The connection between the archaeological record and identity has been supported by a number of scholars, as they have evidenced the impact and influence of the archaeological record on contemporary ideas of identity (Bonacchi et al., 2018; Hague et al., 2005; Hofmann et al., 2021). In this thesis, I use a series of chronological case studies to explore the ways in which the archaeological record has been misrepresented and manipulated by academic, elite, and political figures to form Italian identity. I analyze how the misrepresentation of the archaeological record and material culture have been used in Italy to reorganize and assert racial, ethnic, and national identities, as well as examining how these case studies interact with and build on one another.

Regarding the discussion of ethnic identity throughout this thesis, I will use the definition provided by Philip Yang, in which he explains ethnic and racial identity are “socially constructed partly on the basis of ancestry or presumed ancestry and more importantly by society, that the interests of ethnic groups also partly determine ethnic affiliation, and that ethnic boundaries are relatively stable but undergo changes from time to time.” Yang builds on the first point regarding ancestry by noting sociologist Max Weber’s explanation of ethnic groups as “a subjective belief in their common descent- because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization or migration- in such a way that this belief is important for

the continuation of the nonkinship communal relationships,” (Sollars, 1996). I will use this theory of ethnic and racial identity to inform my analysis.

Throughout this thesis, I will use the term “misrepresentation” to refer to the intentional manipulation, alteration, obfuscation, censoring, and selective inclusion and exclusion of archaeological materials.

## **Background**

Subjectivity in the interpretation of the archaeological record is inevitable; interpretations are never without bias and remain culturally informed, even when done by professionals. Professional archaeologists and similarly qualified individuals’ scientific and careful interpretations can illuminate the past, giving insight into the lives, beliefs, and practices of previous societies. However, interpretation of the archaeological record is not a practice restricted to professionals and scholars (Bonacchi et al., 2018; Hague et al., 2005; Hofmann et al., 2021). Thus, in the same way that the archaeological record can be interpreted in ways that illuminate, it can also be interpreted in ways that obscure.

In this way, it is the interpretation of the archaeological record that holds a great power of influence; this holds true with not only the insightful influence provided by professionals, but also with the influence provided by non-professionals, who may lack scientific or academic methods, rigor, or ethics (Dietler, 1994; Hofmann et al., 2021). Contemporary ideas are projected onto the architecture, objects, symbols, clothing, and artwork of the past; the archaeological record becomes “evidence” for genetics, race, ethnicity, ideology, religion, superiority, power,

purity, and prestige (Appiah, 2018; Bonacchi et al., 2018; Dietler, 1994; Hofmann et al., 2021; Kallis, 2016).

The intentional obscuring of archaeological findings has been seen before with different groups with varying degrees of power. These instances of the manipulation of the archaeological record can be examined to better understand the root ideology that causes these actors to intentionally misrepresent the archaeological record to their audience; power, money, and propaganda are among the motives of those who seek to do so (Hofmann et al., 2021).

## **Case Studies**

These case studies have been selected to show this practice across the Italian state's short history, as well as the different methods and motives of this practice by various groups. I aim to provide insight into the ways in which material culture has been abused by these groups and its impacts on regional, national, and racial identity within Italy.

Beginning with the post-unification era of Italian history, the first case study focuses on the use of material culture in the South of Italy in the context of racializing Southerners and the Southern Question. I examine the Palermo National Exposition of 1891-92 to understand how material culture was presented and its impact on the early formation of Italian identity. Drawing from the broader context of Italian criminology, this section examines how material culture was presented to the public and its effect on the emerging national and regional identities of Italy.

The second case study examines the manipulation of the archaeological record during the Italian Fascist period from 1922-43. Benito Mussolini's regime centered around the concept of *romanità* in order to create a national, unified identity for Italy; the Roman Empire and its

archaeological remnants were deemed by Mussolini to be an ideal source of propagandistic material. Throughout his rule, Mussolini commissioned numerous archaeological excavations, museums, and exhibitions that focused on imperial Roman archaeology (Kallis, 2011; Olariu, 2012; Tucci, 2020). The scope of Mussolini's use of archaeology in his regime is far too broad to cover comprehensively in my research. Therefore, I look at two major elements: the Mostra Augustea della Romanità and the Ara Pacis excavation, analyzing how these major archaeological projects were used in the crafting of a national fascist identity.

The third case study moves into the contemporary political landscape of Italy, with the case of Lega Nord, a populist regionalist political party that emerged in the late 1980s, whose platform centered on strong regionalism and anti-southern sentiment. The element of their political and cultural propaganda on which I focus is their invention of the ethnicity and identity of Padania (Albertazzi, 2007; Hague et al., 2005; Giordano, 2000). I analyze the ways in which Lega Nord employed Celtic archaeology in their platform to create a sense of identity among their audience.

In the final case study, I examine the concept of "revenge archaeology" as described by Alessandro Vanzetti, which describes the falsification and misrepresentation of the archaeological record as a means of reacting to a sense of marginalization (Hofmann et al., 2021). I use this concept to analyze how this has occurred in Calabria as a reaction to centuries of anti-Southern sentiment in the shaping and altering of local and regional identity.

It is my goal through this research to add to the existing scholarship surrounding both Italian identity and Italian archaeology, connecting the two and shedding light on the misuse and

misrepresentation of archaeological materials in Italian identity formation. I analyze the ways in which Italian identity and misrepresentations of archaeology interact, as well as the role of archaeological manipulation as a medium of propaganda in Italy in its short time as a unified nation. This study is not intended to be comprehensive, yet through this series of case studies, I hope to provide a glimpse into the complexities of identity and material cultural heritage in Italy.

### **Gap In Existing Research**

There already exists a great deal of literature on the topics of identity and archaeology in Italy, detailing the power of the connection between archaeology, identity, and Italian regional, national, and local identity. In this existing research, however, the impact of the misrepresentation and manipulation of the archaeological record remains largely unexplored.

In the earlier half of the Italian state's history, many scholars have analyzed the multitude of the ways in which the South was racialized and how this was understood in the context of colonialism and imperialism (Belmonte, 2017; Cianciolo Cosentino, 2018; Katz, 2020). It is my goal to recontextualize this analysis through the lens of manipulation of the archaeological record in order to understand the role that material culture played in early Italian identity formation.

Similarly, I use this same framework to analyze the vast literature that discusses the Fascist regime's use of archaeology in propaganda. The existing literature provides a great deal of insight into the Fascist use of archaeology in connection to the concept of *romanità*; I aim to build on this literature to focus more specifically on how this manipulation of archaeology influenced Mussolini's attempt at crafting a national identity (Kallis, 2011).

The gap in existing scholarship regarding the misrepresentation of the archaeological record by Lega Nord is much greater. Existing analysis on Lega Nord focuses largely on the political element of the party and their significance as a regionalist populist movement (Giordano, 2000; Fremeaux & Albertazzi, 2002; Hague et al., 2005; Richardson & Colombo, 2013). However, there is little analysis or discussion regarding their use of archaeology and material culture in their propaganda surrounding the core regionalist principles of the party. I seek to expand the discussion of Lega Nord focusing on the archaeological perspective.

Finally, regarding the concept of revenge archaeology in Calabria, a more recent and smaller phenomenon than the cases listed above, there is sparse scholarly analysis (Hofmann et al., 2021). I build on the limited existing analysis to further explore these instances and their relationship to identity.

## **Methodology**

The methodology of this project is multi-faceted; I draw from the robust academic literature surrounding many of these topics, primary sources, social and popular media, as well as informal interviews and museums, exhibitions, and monuments in Italy.

In my investigation of the racialization of the South and Sicily, I draw from the extensive research on the period, as well as examine the issue from primary sources, such as the catalogue of the Mostra Etnografica Siciliana. Scholars such as Jane Schneider and John Dickie have already provided a great deal of analysis on the North-South divide in the post-unification period, which I use to contextualize my argument, and to illuminate my analysis of how the use

of material culture came into play in the genesis of the North-South divide and racialization of Italy (Dickie, 1999; Schneider, 1998).

To inform my analysis of Mussolini's *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* and his manipulation of the archaeological record, I draw from the numerous books, articles, and other sources that describe and analyze the extent of his archaeological activities and propagandistic strategies. I also use primary sources from this era in my analysis, such as the *Catalogo Mostra Augustea della Romanità*, which allow me to have a much more detailed and in-depth view of exactly what these major propagandistic uses of archaeological materials would have been like at during the regime (Giglioli, 1937).

Regarding the case studies of Lega Nord and the South in more contemporary Italy, I draw from Lega Nord publications, posters, websites, social media, and photos in understanding their use of the archaeological record to invent Padanian identity.

Similarly, in my investigation of Calabrian revenge archaeology in the recent past, I use popular media, including social media and sensationalist publications to examine narratives surrounding falsification of the archaeological record and its role in creating identity in the broader context of the North-South divide.

## **Significance**

Archaeological patrimony is a major part of the public cultural sphere in Italy, which boasts the highest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the world (ISTAT, 2016; UNESCO, 2023). Previous research has established the impact that archaeological findings can

have on various elements of identity, as well as the malleability of identity (Appiah, 2018; Hofmann et al., 2021).

Further, these ideas of identity are integral in understanding contemporary Italian social and cultural issues. Ideas of race, nation, region, ancestry, superiority and inferiority have been “evidenced” using archaeological material; these various ideas relating to identity and understanding of the world greatly impact culture, politics, and society. In gaining insight into how these ideas of identity were formed, it can be better understood how they have manifested in the contemporary era; this reveals the ways in which sources of power, division, and prejudice in Italian culture, politics, and society have been shaped, and continue to be shaped, by these notions of identity.

## **CASE STUDY 1: THE PALERMO NATIONAL EXPOSITION**

### **Introduction to the Palermo National Exposition**

The Palermo National Exposition of 1891/2 was a grand exhibition consisting of numerous exhibits and pavilions all featuring various elements of Sicilian and Italian culture, art, science, and technology. The unification of Italy only a few decades before commenced strong interest in the identity and role of this new state and each of its regions. As the first exhibition to be held in Southern Italy, it presented a new opportunity for Italy to showcase the island to the upper echelons of Italian and European society (Belmonte, 2017; Greene, 2012; Schneider, 1998).

This section focuses on two exhibits from the Palermo National Exposition: The Mostra Etnografica Siciliana (Sicilian Ethnographic Exhibition) and the Mostra Eritrea (Eritrean Exhibition). I examine the ways in which the Mostra Etnografica Siciliana and the Mostra Eritrea misrepresented Sicilian material culture in order to organize the place of Sicily as the newly created Italian state searched for a national identity. In providing physical evidence for the sort of internal colonialism imposed on the Sicilian peasantry by the Northern Italian and Sicilian elites, these exhibits racialized and orientalized Sicilians by connecting and analogizing them to colonized Africans, who were viewed as the most savage and inferior people (Belmonte, 2017; Greene, 2012).

Though very few photos from the exhibition survive, some details of the display were recorded (Greene, 2012). These limited photos, the official zincotype catalog from the

exhibition, along with written reviews of the exhibits, provide some insight into the details of the manner of display inside the exhibit.

### **The Exhibits**

Curated by Sicilian Folklorist Giuseppe Pitrè and a testament to the scope of his work as an ethnographer, the Mostra Etnografica Siciliana was a wide-ranging exhibition documenting the material culture of the Sicilian poor and rural populations (Greene, 2012). On display was a vast array of household objects, clothing, costumes, cookware, votive tablets, carts, religious items, amulets, jewelry, toys, tools, agriculture-related items (Belmonte, 2017; Pitrè, 1892).

On display outside of the main exhibition buildings, much like the Mostra Etnografica Siciliana, was the Mostra Eritrea, also an ethnographic exhibit of Italy's new colony in East Africa. Situated outside of the exhibits featuring exemplars of Italian progress and modernity, this collection also contained numerous items from virtually all aspects of daily life; it consisted of an Arab cafe, a bazaar, and most enticing for the visitors, the Abyssinian Village, which consisted of not only a reconstruction of a village from the colonized territory, but even captive indigenous Africans. In this section, visitors could get a sense of what life was like in the colonized territories and see the exotic oddities brought back from expeditions (Belmonte, 2017; Greene, 2012).

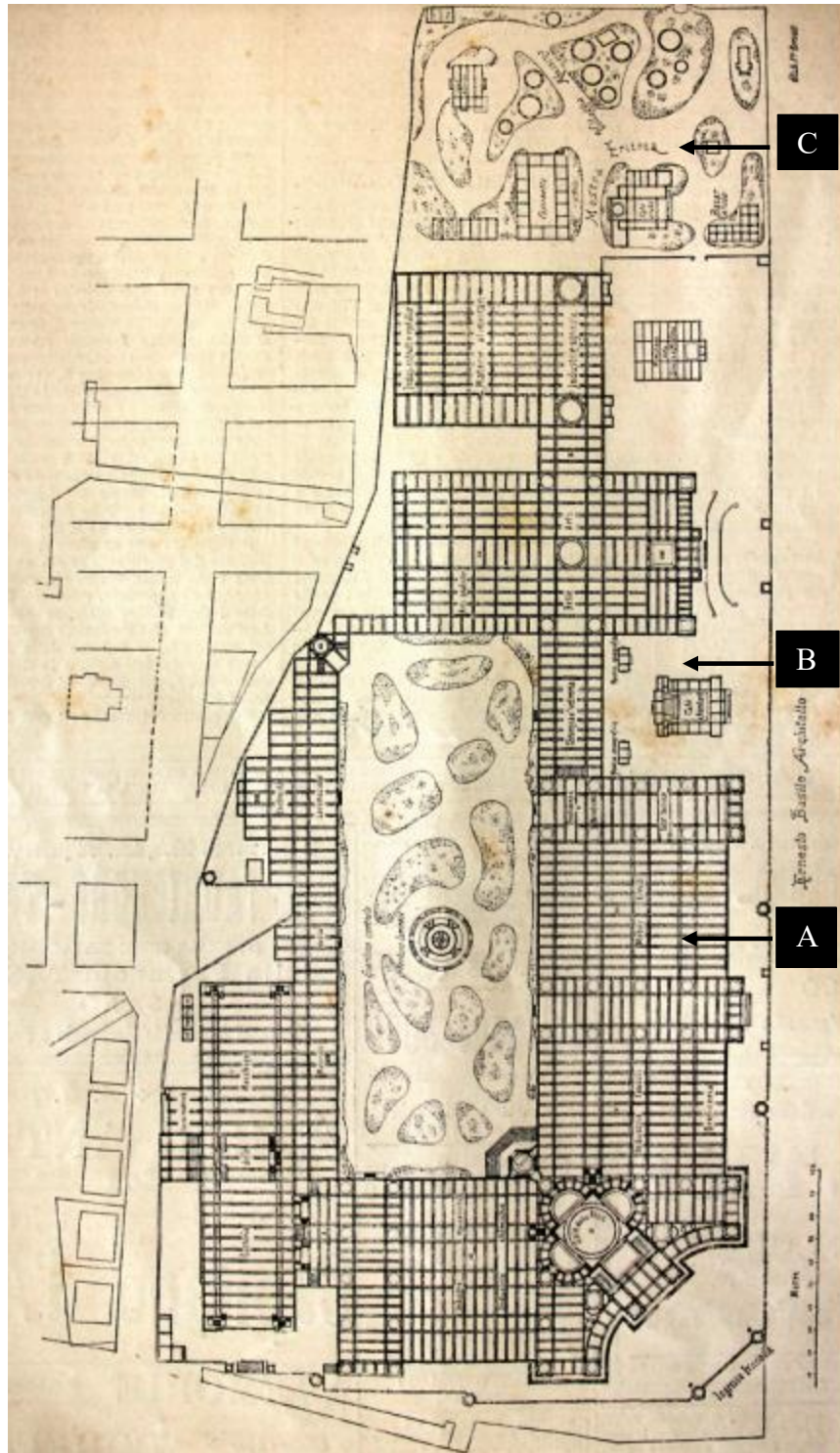


Figure 1: Plan of the Palermo National Exposition. Ernesto Basile, *Palermo e l'esposizione nazionale del 1891-92: Cronaca illustrata* 3 (1891): 24. From Dana Katz, "Barbarism Begins at Home" (2020).

## Analysis

These two exhibits, carefully curated for an audience of Italian and European elites, crafted the perfect narrative of progress and expansion for the new Italian state. The theme of Italian societal progress was strong throughout the Palermo National Exposition, most notably in the Belle Arti pavilion which showcased Sicilian and Italian high art; the collection featured sculptures, photographs, architectural miniatures, and paintings, displaying the grandeur of Italian and Sicilian elite culture. Throughout the Palermo National Exposition, this theme reminded the viewer of the historical civilizational progress of Italy and the role of Sicily in the Risorgimento, ending with the placement of the Sicilian elite in modern Italian high society and art (Belmonte, 2017; Greene 2012). In a clear break from the prestigious arts on show at the Belle Arti exhibit, the Mostra Etnografica Siciliana and Mostra Eritrea were placed together, outside of the main exhibitions of modernity and progress.

The plan of the Palermo National Exposition shows the separation between each of the three categories of exhibits (Figure 1). The main exhibits intended to display Italian prestigious institutions and arts are housed in the main building, shown with arrow A. The Mostra Etnografica Siciliana is removed to a degree from these arts; it is placed outside, away from the rest of the exhibits, but in relatively close proximity to the main building, shown with arrow B. The Mostra Eritrea, arrow C, however, was placed the furthest away and is an outdoor exhibition, similar to the Mostra Etnografica Siciliana. This intentional placement implies to the audience which exhibits are included in the prestige of Italy and which are considered other, exotic, and unworthy of being displayed with the superior group.

Circulating in the early anthropological world were the ideas of Lewis H. Morgan, who in 1877 published his work *Ancient Society*, which proposed a theory of cultural evolution consisting of three stages: Savagery, Barbarity, and Civilization. By the time of the Palermo National Exposition in 1891/2, this work was widely known (Erickson & Murphy, 2022; Morgan, 1877). Using Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) as a theoretical framework, Lewis Henry Morgan built upon his ideas in his *Ancient Society* (Erickson & Murphy, 2022). Darwin's *Origin of Species* was highly influential in this period and greatly informed scientific and anthropological thought. Darwin's origin of species brought broad ideas of natural progression and evolution through time; as these ideas quickly began to saturate the anthropological world, the notion of progress and species variation was applied to humans.

The echoes of this theory are very much seen through the notion of progress present in the Palermo National Exposition, and especially with the Mostra Etnografica Siciliana and the Mostra Eritrea. The Mostra Etnografica Siciliana, placed with physical separation from the rest of the exhibits much like the Mostra Eritrea, served as the next step in the progression of civilization. At the Palermo National Exposition, Morgan's ideas regarding civilization are reflected in the three cultures in progressing stages: Savagery at the Mostra Eritrea, Barbarism at the Mostra Etnografica Siciliana, and Civilization at the Belle Arti pavilion are all shown in proximity to one another.

The collectors and organizers of the event took a special interest in obtaining weapons and vegetation from the colonized region for display at the Mostra Eritrea (Belmonte, 2017). The cover page of the Mostra Eritrea ties weaponry, violence, and wilderness with East Africans and their society (Figure 2). The homes are shown surrounded by vegetation, only just revealed to the

viewer through the exotic jungle, with weapons prominently displayed around an African man. Each of these elements connects Africans to violence and wilderness, exemplifying existing colonial ideas that they were an uncivilized, barbaric society.

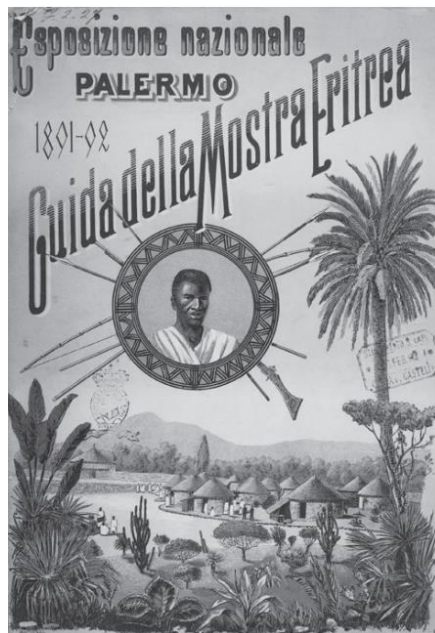


Figure 2: Cover of the *Guida della Mostra Eritrea: cataloghi delle collezioni esposte*. Citta di Castello, 1892. From Carmen Belmonte, *Staging Colonialism in the 'Other' Italy* (2017).

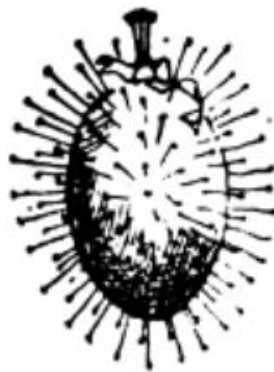


Figure 3: Witchcraft egg (ovu di la magaria). From *Catalogo della Mostra Etnografica Siciliana* (1892).



*Figure 4: Amulets and witchcraft objects. From Catalogo della Mostra Etnografica Siciliana (1892).*

Instead of attributing these cultural objects and their significance to two separate cultures, the organizers instead used it to connect Sicily to Africa, underscoring the notion that Sicily was a “hybrid” culture: halfway between barbaric African roots and civilized European progress (Cianciolo Cosentino, 2018). The exotic and oriental items on display, such as voodoo doll-like eggs, anti-witchcraft objects, and “primitive” tools, as well as orientalizing descriptions blurred the lines for the audience between the exotic and oriental items seen in both of the ethnographic exhibits (Figures 3 and 4) (Greene, 2012). Describing an example of Sicilian women’s dress, Pitre wrote “the cloak hides also the face, in a completely oriental form” (Pitre, 1892). Some of the items were even displayed on straw, representing Sicilian culture as unrefined and unworthy of prestige (Greene, 2012).

A strong interest in the primitivity and exoticness of everyday objects from both cultures is clear. The collections both included everyday objects; clothes, cooking items, tools and jewelry were among the items selected for display. The similarities in the types of objects

collected served to convey the close cultural connection between the two societies, and therefore, the primitivity of Sicily. The stark contrast between the two ethnographic exhibits and the Belle Arti exhibit underscores the placement of Sicilian peasantry as Italy's own inferior Other (Belmonte, 2017; Greene, 2012). In his discussion of intellectual authority in his highly influential work, *Orientalism* (1979), Edward Said wrote, “It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces,” (Said, 1979). Said’s analysis of intellectual authority as it relates to the understanding of taste and value is evident in the Palermo National Exposition; the organizers determine the value and worth of each of the three cultures’ art and objects under the guise of a sense of elevated, enlightened intellectual authority.

The use of an ethnographic exhibit itself was also intended to manipulate the view of Sicilian material culture. Such an exhibit would intentionally distance the viewer from the objects shown, with a very intentional sense of “exoticness” and “othering.” Ethnographic exhibits of this sort were reserved for colonized, “exotic” cultures. This type of exhibit would not have been used for a respected group considered capable of prestige and refinement (Greene, 2012). In placing two ethnographic-type exhibits next to one another, they made a clear connection between the two societies, connecting the hybrid Sicily with Africa, seen as the most extreme example of primitivity.

Further context can be garnered from the writings of the Italian criminologists of the period. The emerging field of Italian criminology likely influenced the Mostra Etnografica Siciliana and the ideas it implied. Among the most influential criminologist at the time was

Cesare Lombroso, whose 1876 work *Criminal Man* was already widely translated and known by the time of the Palermo National Exposition, in which he wrote “The inhabitants of Palermo, which is the center of the Mafia, are descended . . . from the rapacious Arab conquerors of Sicily, who were related to the Bedouins” (Greene, 2012; Schneider, 1998). Given that Lombroso and Pitre corresponded, it is plausible that Pitre was aware of Lombroso’s ideas (Greene, 2012). The racialization of Southerners was well established by the time of the Palermo National Exposition, which would then use its exhibits to build on these ideas and reorganize them within the new Italian society; as Greene writes, following the Risorgimento, a need emerged for an even more pronounced and articulated differencing between ‘peoples’ within Italy’s borders,” (Dickie, 1999; Greene, 2012; Schneider, 1998). In this way, the Mostra Etnografica Siciliana provided physical proof of the biological inferiority described by Lombroso.

The Mostra Etnografica Siciliana placed a great emphasis on the island’s atavistic nature “preserved in the pureness of its virginity”; it portrayed the Sicilian peasantry as a dying relic of a fascinating, yet backwards, way of life not seen in the North or among elites since the Middle Ages (Belmonte, 2017; Greene, 2012). The Sicilian everyday items were characterized through their inherent “primitivity,” again invoking biology and racial science to attest to their cultural inferiority, however fascinating (Belmonte, 2017).

The idea of Sicilian atavism and untouched, raw cultural purity is significant in the Mostra Etnografica Siciliana because the intentional portrayal of Sicilians as a sort of living relic of the past in need of civilizing is further misrepresentation of Sicilian material culture. The importance of representing Sicily as inferior in order to fit within the narratives of colonialism and emerging racial science stemmed from the desire for a sense of Italian identity, especially

one that posited Italy as powerful, advanced, and full of potential. Through misrepresenting Sicily as a hybrid, primitive culture that the North could civilize, the organizers preserve the sense of modernity and refinement in the north while bolstering the colonial power and potential to the South. The overarching theme throughout the Palermo National Exposition of Italian cultural and societal progress with Sicily situated in the middle, through the intentional display of these objects as primitive, atavistic, and unrefined, and through the analogizing of Sicily and Africa, intended to underscore the existing notion that Sicily had African foundations which was responsible for many of its biological and cultural shortcomings.

The exhibit's success in representing Sicilian culture as African, Oriental, and barbaric is seen in the exhibit reviews. They make evident that the analogizing of the *Mostra Eritrea* and the *Mostra Etnografica Siciliana* was unambiguous to the audience; the same language was often used to describe both of the exhibitions and their collections. Regarding the nature of Sicilian customs, one reviewer "defined them as 'bizarre customs, semi-oriental, or even savage,'" (Belmonte, 2017). This shows how successful the exhibition was at representing Sicilian folk culture as primitive, half-African, and fundamentally Other.

The Palermo National Exposition provides an insightful example of the attempt to organize and understand Sicily within the newly created Italian state. In representing Sicily as an inferior, primitive part of Italy that it could internally colonize, Italy's status among the other European colonizing nations was not lowered, without ignoring the issue of Sicily. With Sicily placed as a sort of hybrid culture between the two extremes - in a literal physical sense and also in manner of display- it shows the manipulation of the material culture of Sicily, intended to obfuscate the complex realities of newly formed Italy's diversity and to instead provide an exotic

example of the noble opportunity to civilize the region (Belmonte, 2017; Greene, 2012; Katz, 2018). Further, the display manner was intended to other the Sicilian population and to make the objects appear unrefined, barbaric, and atavistic, allowing Italy to assert its colonial civilizing mission onto Sicily. Instead of integrating Sicilian peasant culture into that of the rest of Italy, they instead chose to portray the population as barbaric to underscore the powerful colonial potential of the new state.

The characterization of Sicily as “Italy’s Africa,” through an internal Orientalism is clearly demonstrated throughout the exhibit (Belmonte, 2017; Greene, 2012; Schneider, 1998). Italy was more than eager to present itself as a colonial power, full of potential and progress; through the *Mostra Etnografica Siciliana*, they could demonstrate their noble civilizing mission within their own borders. It was very important to the elite Italian organizers of the exhibition to emphasize Italy’s new role in colonization and economic potential. The characterization of Sicily as African, primitive, and a people ruled by nature in need of civilizing evidences the intentional manipulation of the material culture. In not presenting Sicilian culture with prestige, and instead correlating it to Africa, the Palermo National Exposition serves to misrepresent the realities of Italy’s diversity and underscore the notion of an inferior barbaric South and civilized progressive North (Greene, 2012). The misrepresentation of the material culture of these societies was intended to mold the new place of Sicily in the Italian state, contextualized by Italy’s new status as a colonial power.

## **CASE STUDY 2: MUSSOLINI'S MOSTRA AUGUSTEA DELLA ROMANITÀ**

Less than a century after the unification of Italy, Benito Mussolini rose to power in 1922 as the head of the National Fascist Party and Duce of Italy. This marked the beginning of his twenty-year regime, which would be characterized by a propaganda campaign of extensive scale and scope. Mussolini was a master of rhetoric and persuasion; as a former journalist and editor, he was well aware of how to persuade audiences and craft narratives to influence the Italian public (Pugliese, 2004; Tucci, 2020). His twenty-year-long propaganda campaign centered around the concept of *romanità*: the notion that Ancient Roman values and spirit had survived in each region of Italy after the fall of the empire, threading together each region with this “Romanness.” In the fascist mind, the new regime provided the opportunity for a new Roman revolution in which the *romanità* of Italy could rise again to the level of glory of the old empire (Arthurs, 2012; Olariu, 2012). I will explore the use of *romanità* in the Mostra Augustea della Romanità (MAR; Augustean Exposition of Romanità) to understand the ways in which fascist archaeology intentionally misrepresented and manipulated the archaeological record to fit fascist narratives and unite all of Italy under a single national identity.

### **Mussolini and Romanità**

The propagandistic exploitation of Ancient Rome as a symbol of a strong national Italy was a well-explored concept prior to the rise of fascism. Struggling with uniting the diverse regions of Italy since the Risorgimento, the Italian state had taken a great interest in Ancient Rome as a symbol of unification, especially as a strategy to counter Papal hegemony in Rome. In

the post-unification period, a renewed interest in Roman archaeology and heritage was prominent; clearly, the propagandistic potential of Ancient Rome was extensive (Fadda, 2021).

Mussolini considered it imperative that Italy had a unifying identity under fascism (Pugliese, 2004). The hypernational nature of fascism necessitated that Italy be unified under a single, strong identity. Under the Fascist regime, Ancient Rome was transformed from the remnants of an ancient society to an idealized past, a glorious legacy to be inherited and surpassed by the new Fascist era. Rome and its founders gained a status similar to a creation myth, beyond that of normal heritage (Kallis Tucci, 2020).

An integral element of Mussolini's propagandistic strategy was to use Roman artifacts, symbols, and architecture to interlace the modern Fascist state with the Roman Empire. He created exhibits, ephemeral architecture, and symbols to convey the underlying Roman ideals and heritage of every facet of Italian society (Arthurs, 2012, Kallis 2011).

### **The Role of Augustus**

The decision to curate an exhibition centering the Emperor Augustus was a highly calculated propagandistic choice. As the founder of the Roman Empire, Augustus held great propagandic potential that Mussolini exploited throughout his reign; he often analogized himself with Augustus, emphasizing the notion that both were the founders of new empires connected through *romanità*. Emperor Augustus, known as the “emperor of peace, empire, law and order,” provided the perfect analogy for Mussolini himself as the founder of a new Fascist era (Olariu, 2012). In the later years of his power, Mussolini even claimed to be Emperor Augustus reincarnated (Olariu, 2012). Given the powerful symbol of Augustus as a conqueror and founder

of Italy's greatest empire, and therefore a seminal figure in the creation of *romanità*, the MAR presented an opportunity to exploit this concept archaeologically (Kallis, 2011).

### **The Mostra Augustea Della Romanità**

Organized in large part by Giulio Quirino Giglioli, a top fascist archaeologist who spearheaded a number of other major fascist archaeological excavations, exhibitions, and projects, and Carlo Galassi Paluzzi, director of the Istituto di Studi Romani and also a major fascist archaeologist, the MAR was the result of the coalescence of some of the greatest minds of fascist archaeological propaganda. These actors of the regime were well aware of the propagandistic spectacle at the heart of such a massive project.

The MAR was initially conceptualized in the early 1930s for the 1937/38 bimillennial celebration of the birth of Augustus. The scale of the exhibition was massive: thousands of objects, two temple reconstructions, and an ephemeral facade made for an impressive spectacle (Tucci, 2020; Olariu, 2012).

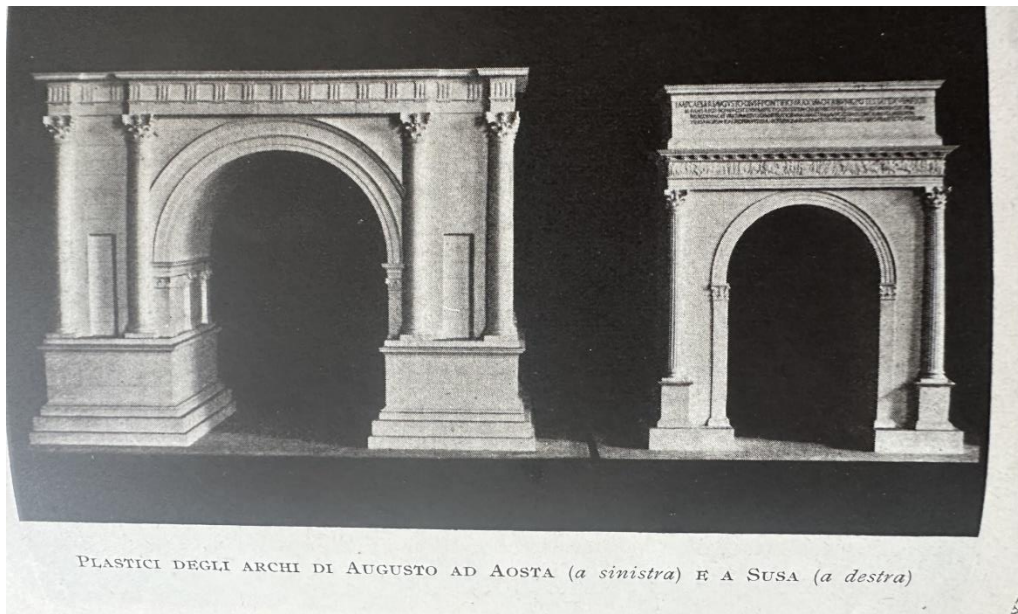
Mussolini's MAR was intended to blend *romanità* and fascist expansionism into a single, cohesive idea around which a national fascist identity could be formed. Expansion and conquest were at the forefront of the Fascist state; colonial endeavors justified through the connection to and resurgence of the Roman Empire provided Mussolini with a clean narrative. Mussolini was greatly interested in colonizing both Africa and the Balkans, justified by *romanità* and the concept of Roman primacy, the idea that Ancient Rome was the foundation for all western societies. This notion of Roman primacy would be significant throughout the MAR, using artifacts that would reflect homogeneity, unity, and uniformity across the Roman Empire, therefore providing justification for fascist expansion into former Roman territories (Arthurs,

2012; Kallis, 2016; Olariu, 2012). There was no interest in realism or accuracy, only in the curation and exploitation of artifacts that would feed into the idealization of the Roman Empire (Arthurs, 2012; Kallis, 2016).

### **The Exhibits**

An important element of the MAR's propaganda was its use of architecture throughout the exhibition. Libraries, monuments, temples, plazas and complexes, bridges, and arches were reproduced in plastic miniatures for the exhibition. These similar models were often paired together, having been strategically selected for their similarities and adherence to fascist ideals of Rome (Giglioli, 1937; Olariu, 2012).

A pair of ancient triumphal arches provides an example of the propaganda at work: miniature reproductions of the Arch of Augustus and Aosta and the Arch of Susa were displayed together, intended to tie them to one another (Figure 5). The scale models, colorless and highly airbrushed, look very similar to each other. They have little decoration, austere facades, and appear quite severe in style. These arches look strikingly similar to Fascist architecture, which had a heavy Roman influence (Giglioli, 1937; Tucci, 2020). However, upon examining several other arches from the same time period, it becomes clear that this style was not a true representation of Roman triumphal arches of the Augustean era, which was vast in its diversity (Figures 6, 7 and 8). Each of the arches would have been brightly painted, but even without color, the great variation in style, size, and decoration is evident. Such a contrast exemplifies the narrative regarding Roman architecture intended to reflect fascist narratives of homogeneity across the empire, *romanità*, and Roman primacy (Arthurs, 2012; Tucci, 2020).



*Figure 5: Miniature plaster replicas of the Arch of Augustus at Aosta (left) and the Arch of Augustus at Susa (right).  
From Catalogo della Mostra Augustea della Romanità (1939).*



*Figure 6: Arch of Glanum. From Wikipedia.*



*Figure 7: Arch of Drusus. From Wikipedia.*



*Figure 8: Arch of Orange. From Viator.*

Portrait busts made up another significant grouping of artifacts in the MAR (Giglioli, 1937). Notably, the portrait busts chosen for display appear quite similar. Busts depicting emperors and other high-status elites made for an impressive display: dozens of faces immortalized in stone, all strikingly similar, idealized in their style, providing visitors with the chance to come eye to eye with the mythic founders of *romanità* itself.

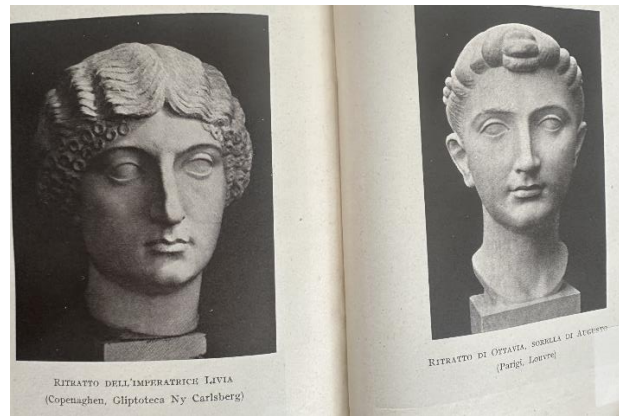
Two female portrait busts, one of Empress Livia and one of Ottavia, sister of Emperor Augustus, provide a look into the fascist portrayal of Rome (Figure 10). Both portraits depict beautiful, youthful women each with a serene expression on their face (Giglioli, 1937). Such similar portraits of beautiful, elite women reinforce this idealized, god-like reverence for ancient Roman society. The similarity in the portraits also underscores the fascist narrative of Roman primacy and cultural uniformity across the empire. In this way, these busts serve to show the Adam and Eve of *romanità*, a powerful symbol connecting the past and present.

In comparison with the other portrait bust from the same time period (Figure 9), it is evident by selecting busts with similar styles, and by changing the medium (and therefore color and texture), the Fascist archaeologists designed an edited version of Roman sculpture. Rather

than providing examples of the vast diversity and color of the period, the MAR served to show the uniformity, unity, and lack of variation of the Roman Empire, fitting the fascist ideals of Rome. Given the true range of Roman portraiture, the selection of only very similar busts for display shows yet again the intentional misrepresentation of Roman archaeology as a form of propaganda.



*Figure 9: First Century Roman bronze bust of a woman. From Archaeological Museum, Empuries, Spain*



*Figure 10: Portrait busts of Empress Livia (left) and Octavia, sister of Augustus (right). From Catalogo della Mostra Augustea della Romanità (1939).*

## Temple Reconstructions

Within the MAR were two full-scale reconstructions of temples from the Augustean era: the Ara Pacis and the Temple of Augustus were both excavated, reconstructed, and placed as major installations in the MAR (Arthurs, 2012; Kallis, 2011).

The grand scale of the temples provided viewers with the opportunity to experience the grandeur of Ancient Rome in a more spatial sense. In having these temple reconstructions the MAR created even closer ties between modern Italy and the ancient empire; visitors walked

through ancient temples just as Romans themselves did, creating parallel experiences within the same structure and physical context. This further interlaced the two cultures, weaving together two millennia into a single experience and set of values and ideals. These reconstructions of architectural feats again curate a specific understanding of Ancient Rome; one that was endlessly advanced, grand, and powerful. Never to be mentioned or acknowledged were the brutal realities of the empire for those who lived in it or the many problems it faced at every level.

### **Analysis**

The MAR, in execution, exhibition, and excavation served to fulfill one goal for the fascist regime: to produce grand, extensive physical archaeological proof of the claim of *romanità* and Roman Primacy. The unity and homogeneity of the Roman Empire was plain for the audience to see; they need not take the word of the regime, they could go and see for themselves why the regime must expand and conquer the lands of the former empire. The idea of Italy and the West connected and intertwined by Ancient Rome was undeniable; all of the evidence pointed to this conclusion.

The intent to disrupt, misrepresent, and manipulate the archaeological record is remarkable. It underscores the importance that archaeology held as a tool of propaganda. The archaeological record provided the perfect backdrop to creating a unifying identity for such a young and incredibly diverse country.

An integral element of this propaganda campaign and the use of archaeology was to make identity much more tangible for the Italian public. In using a large-scale exhibition to bolster the fascist sense of identity, abstract ideas of *romanità* were brought to life, providing the physical

world of romanità, and giving the Italian public a much closer relationship to their ancestral culture.

The blatant misrepresentation and manipulation of archaeological findings in fascist archaeology requires no retrospect to see; in the later half of the Fascist era, Antonio Gramsci wrote, "All of the work of interpretation of the Italian past and the series of ideological constructions and historical novels that have derived from it is prevalently linked to the 'claim' to finding a national unity, at least in fact, throughout the period from Ancient Rome to the present" (Fadda, 2021). Fascists themselves also admitted their distortion: regarding the use of white plaster casts rather than originals, Giglioli believed it brought "a useful homogeneity to the materials and allow[ed] them to be organized in a more modern fashion than would be the case with originals [and did not] present any aesthetic drawbacks, since the technology employed [had] reached the highest level of perfection," (Arthurs, 2012). Such a statement makes clear that archaeological accuracy was not the intention of the exhibition; rather, fascist aesthetics and an appearance of homogeneity throughout the empire were prioritized to curate a specific understanding of the Roman Empire.

The MAR allowed the regime to truly showcase the full propagandistic power of the fascist archaeological projects. It proved fascist archaeology to be a massively useful tool to provide tangible evidence for fascist claims about the past and about the nature of Italy and the Italian people. In using these materials, they proved that a uniform, national identity existed, as the evidence predated the medieval breakup of the Italian regions.

It was through this exhibition that decades of fascist propaganda and ideology were crystallized: a massive exhibition blurring the lines between modernity and ancient Rome,

showcasing the broad uniformity of the empire, glorified in its militarism and power. The MAR sought to blend together modern Italian society and ancient society by showing their aesthetics, architecture, culture, and values as one and the same. The goal of the MAR was both to glorify and to connect that glory to the modern period.

A key part of the misrepresentation and manipulation was to idealize Roman society within the confines of fascist ideology, creating a mythologized culture from which *romanità* was able to permeate the next two thousand years of Italian society. This mythologized culture provided a sort of creation myth for the idea of Roman primacy and justification for colonization and fascist expansion. In misrepresenting Roman archaeology in this manner, the Fascist regime converted archaeology into a sanitized medium of propaganda whose function was to mold a new Italian identity through a manipulated and mythologized view of the past.

### **CASE STUDY 3: LEGA NORD'S PADANIA**

In the second half of the 20th century, populist-regionalist movements emerged across much of Western Europe, with Italy as no exception; the Liga Veneta, Lega Lombarda, and Alleanza Toscana were among the numerous regionalist movements seen in Italy in this period. One of these populist regionalist movements, however, has become the topic of much scholarly discourse due to its unique nature: the Lega Nord (Giordano, 2000; Gold, 2003). I will explore the ways in which Lega Nord manipulated and misrepresented the archaeological record and cultural heritage for their propagandistic invention of Padanian identity.

#### **Lega Nord Background**

Lega Nord formed in 1989, led by Umberto Bossi, a politician notorious for his crude and bawdy comments (Gold, 2003). The party rose out of a strong anti-southern sentiment, with members frequently disparaging Southerners and the South (Bossi made frequent comments referring to Southerners using derogatory language, including calling them pigs, mafiosi, and terroni, a term that can be translated as dirty peasant), which by this point in time were often characterized as the culprit of Italy's problems within public discourse (ANSA, 2015; Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 2002; Times Of Malta, 2010). In combination with this view, the South and its inhabitants remained subject to orientalist stereotypes; they were deemed economic burdens, resource leeches, culturally backwards, genetically inferior, violent, lazy, and corrupt. This was in stark contrast, according to Lega Nord, to the economically prosperous and diverse, morally strong, modern-minded, and organized North (Huysseune, 2006).

This strong anti-Southern populist-regionalist platform appealed to a long-existing precedent of anti-Southern sentiment in the North. The Southerners were considered “biologically inferior beings, semi-barbaric or full barbarians...[and] lazy,” by the North (Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 2002). A key element of Lega Nord’s rhetoric was the belief of both biological and cultural superiority over the South, echoing decades of this kind of language among Northerners (Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 2002).

Following Lega Nord’s initial years, the party moved to a new strategy to appeal to their base; rather than platform themselves as a solely economic and civic-based party, they began to incorporate the great propagandistic potential of ethnoregionalism. As Huysseune writes, Lega Nord should be interpreted as a “political entrepreneur that has successfully offered an ideology to this electorate,” (Gold, 2003; Huysseune, 2006).

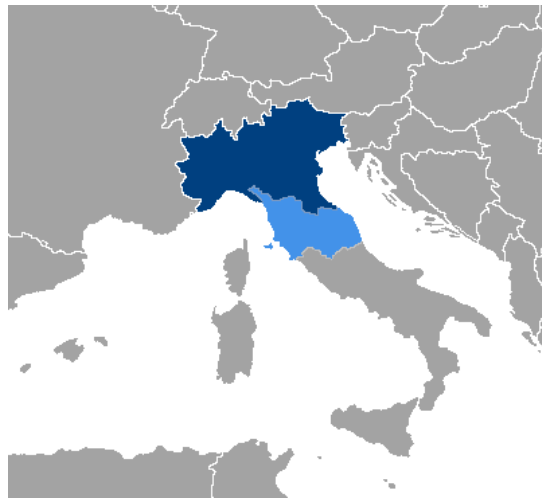
Members of Lega Nord, called Leghisti, faced a problem with this new tactic: Northern Italy had no single or unique ethnic identity for them to use. Prior to unification, Northern Italy had always consisted of numerous autonomous states and regions that differed culturally, linguistically, and politically (Albertazzi, 2006; Giordano, Hague et al., 2005). This left Lega Nord without an available one-size-fits-all ethnic or cultural group to appeal to through shared ethnic bonds and interests.

### **The Invention of Padania**

Undeterred by this obstacle to their ethnonationalist dreams, the Leghisti simply invented their own ethnicity and historical territories: thus Padania was born. Padania was Lega Nord’s new ethnicity; it was made up of Northern Italy and its inhabitants, and the party was officially

renamed to Lega Nord per L'Indipendenza della Padania, or the Northern League for the Independence of Padania (Gold, 2003).

Perhaps “reborn” would better characterize Padanians in the eyes of the Leghisti. In order to maximize the propagandistic potential of their newly minted Padania, Lega Nord had to create a heritage for Padanians to which they could attach their political interests. In creating this new shared 'heritage,' the Leghisti bolstered their claims of being an oppressed and invaded minority culture, desperate to save their heritage before it was corrupted by the Southerners. They likened themselves to the Basque and Catalan peoples, among other ethnic groups fighting for autonomy (Gold, 2003; McDonnell 2006).



*Figure 11: Map of Padania as defined by Lega Nord. From Wikipedia Commons*

Referring only to the geographic region of the Po Valley, prior to its use by Lega Nord, the term “Padania” had no meaning regarding the inhabitants of the North. Upon its adoption by Lega Nord, the meaning of Padania quickly expanded to fit the agenda of the party. It encompassed all of the Northern regions and dipped further down as well into Tuscany, Umbria, and Marche, as these regions were deemed acceptable by the Leghisti (Figure 11)(Giordano,

2000). According to Lega Nord, Padania was the homeland of Padanians, a Celtic ethnicity that had lived under the rule of others, never given their independence (Albertazzi, 2006). To form a sense of Padanian identity, the Leghisti looked to the past, creating Padanian ethnicity based on a warped understanding of ancient Celtic culture and Medieval Northern Italian history. It was crucial for Lega Nord to bend the past to fit their narrative of a culturally and genetically unified North throughout history; in order to create a strong sense of “other” from which to secede, there first had to be an “us” (Newth, 2018). The secessionist movement to free Padania from the grip of the South was made official in 1996 with the Dichiarazione di Indipendenza della Padania (Declaration of Independence of Padania).

As Albertazzi notes, Lega Nord spent much of the 1990s "engaging in constant identity-building symbolic action" (Albertazzi, 2006). To form this sense of heritage, Lega Nord relied heavily on appropriating symbols from Celtic archaeology, as well as imagery of medieval legendary heroes, to form a sense of shared heritage. Celtic symbols, imagery, figures, and archaeology were all used to craft the notion of a lost “Padania,” a Celtic nation of Northern Italy that now remained oppressed and burdened by the South and Rome.

### **The True Celtic Culture**

Prehistoric Western/Central Europe was populated in part by Celts, a culture that stemmed from Northwestern Europe and migrated eastward. The Celts, along with other cultures, such as the Etruscans, populated northern Italy for a period of about two to three centuries, with the earliest estimate at around the sixth century BCE (Albertazzi, 2006). Northern Italy, even in prehistory, was always inhabited by multiple diverse cultural groups (Laffranchi et al., 2019).

The Celts themselves are considered highly diverse; this diversity was to such a high degree that not all archaeologists agree with the use of the term Celtic to describe them. There exists an ongoing scholarly discussion regarding the nature of Celtic archaeology in Europe. Some archaeologists are of the opinion that the term “Celtic” has been applied too broadly to prehistoric cultures across much of Western Europe, causing the blurring of dozens of separate cultures due to some similarities in art style across multiple regions in the Iron Age (Chadwick, 1997; Dietler, 1994; Laffranchi et al., 2019).

Conversely, some archaeologists insist that the term Celtic is being reasonably applied across the continent as language and some art styles appear to have spread across Western Europe as Celtic peoples migrated, maintaining that this renders the term “Celtic” an accurate descriptor (Dietler, 1994).

Regardless of the accuracy of referring to many cultures across Western Europe under a single name, one element of Celtic archaeology has remained consistent: the Celts were extremely diverse in much of their material culture, and their archaeological remains vary widely across regions and time (Dietler, 1994; Giordano, 2000).

### **Northern Italy Background**

The North of Italy, since prehistory, had continuously been inhabited by dozens of different cultural groups. Following the fall of the Western Roman Empire and until the unification of Italy, a period of almost 1,400 years, Northern Italy was a fragmented region, often with changing political boundaries. Over this extensive period, the North was ruled in tandem by empires, duchies, kingdoms, principalities, marquisates, and republics (Albertazzi, 2006; Cole, 1995).

## The Sun of the Alps

The emblem of Lega Nord provides an example of the appropriation of Celtic culture and symbols. The green Celtic 'sole delle Alpi,' or "sun of the Alps," is a symbol common throughout Lega Nord's imagery (Figure 12). Beyond just appropriating the use of this symbol, Leghisti also falsely attributed this symbol to the Longobards, another historical group of Northern Italy that Lega Nord heavily appropriated. It is also significant that the sun of the Alps was not a historically used symbol for the North prior to its use by the Leghisti; it is only associated with the Celtic period several millennia ago. Lega Nord, however, adopted it from Celtic archaeology for its use in crafting a sense of "Celticness" among Northerners to emphasize a shared heritage (Albertazzi, 2006; Gold, 2003).



*Figure 12: Lega Nord Emblem. From Leganord.org*

## Alberto Da Giussano

The legendary hero, Alberto da Giussano, also took prominence in Lega Nord's formation of Padania. As a 12th century knight, Alberto da Giussano fought for the Longobard League against the forces of Frederick Barbarossa, the Holy Roman Emperor. The Longobards were a Northern Italian group that formed the Longobard League, a powerful political alliance spanning

much of Northern Italy in the first half of the Medieval period, extending their power further down the peninsula in the early medieval period (Bitelli et al., 2020). In his fight against the Holy Roman Empire, Alberto da Giussano earned a legendary status in Longobard history.

The Lega Nord emblem depicts him dressed in armor in a powerful victorious pose holding a sword and shield (Figure 12). While Alberto da Giussano was a real historical figure, Lega Nord's portrayal of him and prominent use of his image and story is a mischaracterization. Lega Nord misrepresented his reason for fighting; they wanted to create an image of Padania as the perpetual warrior, and Giussano was a perfect symbol, as he represented a valiant warrior who fought against a stronger power for his people's autonomy (Albertazzi, 2006).

There was, however, one important aspect of Alberto da Giussano that Lega Nord very conveniently ignores: though he is presented prominently as one of the symbols of Padania, Alberto da Giussano was not Padanian. Alberto was a Longobard, not part of an invented Padanian monolithic Northern ethnicity that would not be conceived of until almost 1000 years after his existence.

### **Costuming Heritage**

Lega Nord's Celtic symbolism can be seen at the rallies in the 1990s that called for an independent Padania. Supporters came dressed as their newly adopted "roots"; they wore helmets, armor, tunics, and other "Celtic" garments, underscoring the importance that this newly adopted Celtic heritage played in their understanding of cultural and political aims (Figure 13).

Given that Padanian heritage was entirely manufactured, it provides an interesting look into the use of archaeological findings and symbols in the formation and molding of modern identities. Attendees at these events did not have any real connection to Celtic culture or life, but

nevertheless came to these rallies with various stereotypical Celtic items (Hofmann et al., 2021). It shows how Lega Nord's Celtic Padanian identity and emphasis on a generic warrior gained support and was quickly adopted by their supporters, despite the fact that this is not actually their heritage. These costume-like elements of the rallies show the role that physical symbols played in establishing the concept of a Padanian ethnicity. Lega Nord, however, decided to manipulate the archaeological record and archaeological materials such as clothing and armor to make it appear as though these items were that of a Celtic Padania.

Funding to expand Celtic archaeological research was even offered by Lega Nord, the result of which has “been a strengthening of populist feelings towards a Celtic past, which spans only three to four centuries of local history,” (Hofmann et al., 2021). The true nature of Celtic archaeology was, of course, excluded. Archaeological findings that revealed the ethnic diversity of the North, as well as its strong ties to Rome were ignored. Lega Nord was instead in favor of holding rallies and festivals featuring Celtic costumes, music, and food (Hofmann et al., 2021). A strong interest in Celtic “feeling” through archeology and aesthetics is notable.



*Figure 13: Lega Nord Rally. From Filippo Cola*



*Figure 14: Padania Coin. From <http://chiefacoins.com/Database/Micro-Nations/Padania-LegaNord.htm>*

## Coins

Even further, Lega Nord minted their own Padania coins, featuring the Lega Nord typical symbols of the party, including the Sun of the Alps, a profile image of Alberto da Giussano, as well as the same image of him from the emblem (Figure 14). These are significant as they do two things at once: attributing Longobards and symbols to an ethnicity and nation that never existed and that they did not belong to, and also creating a “history” through the coins, very similar to the many coin artifacts found throughout Europe and Italy that serve as reminders of past empires, kingdoms, and republics. These coins “historify” Padania, again giving them a founding myth/hero to which they can attach themselves and trace their history. Now Padania had their own coins to serve as physical proof and reminders of the shared Padanian heritage of the North.

Going back millennia, to the time of the Roman Republic, coins have served as physical, enduring evidence of power in Italy. Coins, medals, and medallions from regimes as well as important, powerful figures of the aristocracy are common artifacts from the past two and a half millennia of Italian history. These coins have created a robust tangible record of the changing of power and political sphere in Italy that is familiar to the public; medals have also been used extensively in the Catholic church as both symbols of major figures and in pilgrimage rites (Vatican Apostolic Library, 2024). The broad use of coins as a durable, tangible record of both power, politics, and identity is clear. The creation and distribution of coins by Lega Nord can be seen as another way of attempting to use Italian archaeological heritage as a way to shape identity. They appropriate familiar aesthetics, using their emotional and historical symbols as records of heritage and history to historify Padania and assert themselves as an ethnically unified Celtic nation. This greatly aligned with their secessionist goals as it merged the political element

of coins as their own currency as well as the historical and archaeological element of putting the face of their Celtic ancestry with the name Padania on the coin together.

## **Analysis**

In using Celtic symbols and archaeological imagery, the Lega Nord was able to craft a mystic, invented sense of “cultural heritage” for their audience. The use of the medieval heroic figure Alberto da Giussano and the use of Celtic imagery throughout the creation of Padania gave their platform much more legitimacy as an ethnonationalist movement.

Lega Nord intentionally kept their archaeological arguments vague; they spoke of Celtic heritage across Padania, but never pointed to a specific archaeological finding or Celtic monument. Nevertheless, after funding archaeological research on Celts in Northern Italy which produced findings contrary to Lega Nord’s narrative, popular support for Padania only increased. It seems that the idea of archaeological findings of Celtic sites in support of Padania was more important than the actual findings themselves. In not attaching themselves to any single site, object, or finding, the party was able to avoid any uncomfortable questions; they could not be held to their word if they had no concrete evidence they pointed to. Their platform of a Celtic Padania was constantly shifting to best fit the secessionist narrative; they adopted any region deemed sufficiently Northern into Celtic Padania if it suited their agenda, and molded Padania to whatever seemed to rile their base the most (Albertazzi, 2006).

Many of the same ideas of Southern inferiority, both genetic and cultural, seen at the Palermo National Exposition discussed in the first case study are reflected in Lega Nord’s platform. Lega Nord created a ready-to-wear ethnicity that perfectly aligned with their political platform: Padania represented all of the North, dated to prehistory (ensuring Northern genetics

would never mix with the South), was among the whiter, more modern and organized societies of Northern and Western Europe, and had its own symbols and heroes separate from Rome and the South. Lega Nord argues that Celtic blood was preserved through millennia, forming a “genetic bank” that preserved the pure “Celticness of the North,” (Albertazzi, 2006). Even further, it had historically (according to the party) always fought for autonomy, like Alberto da Giussano so valiantly did (Albertazzi, 2006). Nevermind the fact that northerners had not been Celtic for millennia, or that Celts themselves were ethnically complex, or the fact that Alberto da Giussano was a Longobard, not Padanian, or the existence of extensive genetic mixture across Europe and Italy throughout the millennia (Hague et al., 2005; Albertazzi, 2006; Gold, 2003; Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 2002).

Of course, no identity is fully “authentic,” as virtually all identities of ethnicity and heritage contain inconsistencies, inaccuracies, and false attributions (Appiah, 2018). However, in the case of Padania, everyone involved in its creation knew it was an artificial ethnicity invented for the purposes of winning elections and gaining traction as a populist regionalist movement into a ethnonationalist movement (Albertazzi, 2006).

In the absence of a real Padanian culture and therefore heritage objects, Lega Nord strategically selected objects, people, and imagery that would act as a new “set” of cultural heritage that could assert Padania’s place among the white Northern and Western European ethnicities. Lega Nord appropriated the language and strategies used often by minorities and oppressed peoples, framing the Northern Padanians as an indigenous group that was being oppressed and colonized by the South. Lega Nord spoke about preserving their heritage and never conceding their ancestry. Creating Padania only bolstered their argument; now they could

claim to be members of an ethnicity oppressed for centuries, always attacked and oppressed by those to the South (Hague et al., 2005).

The blurring of cultures, time periods, and disdain for any sort of real accuracy in their understanding and depiction of the past illuminates the true role that cultural heritage played for the Leghisti: a medium of identity propaganda, used to craft a background and heritage that would provide an emotional and historical backing to align with the economic and political goals of Lega Nord (Giordano, 2000; Hague et al., 2005; Albertazzi, 2006; Gold, 2003; Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 2002). The Leghisti formed a perfect history with its aesthetics, a legendary hero, and white, valiant, pure ancient culture, whose legacy could be seen in the supporters wearing costume-like Celtic clothing and accessories.

## ANALYSIS

Though the scope of this thesis is narrow, the enduring and impactful nature of pseudoarchaeology in Italy is evident. I explore the hierarchies created in these examples, the strategies used, and the legacies of pseudoarchaeology that prevail through time. All three of these case studies provide an example of how the archaeological record, even when misrepresented, can be used to heavily influence, shape, and invent identities. Major players in the Italian political and cultural spheres strategically used material culture to add an element of “proof” to their claims regarding the nature of race, ethnicity, and heritage, exemplifying the strong role of material culture in the creation and shaping of identity. In each of these contexts, these actors were consciously trying to shape identity, revealing their knowledge of the power of material culture in identity.

### **Shaping Hierarchies**

Each case study provides an example of how misrepresentations of the archaeological record can influence very real ideas of heritage. Even further, they exemplify the ways in which these ideas of heritage have been used to shape ideas of race and ethnic hierarchy and relationships. In each context, the archaeological record was manipulated specifically to reorganize or reassert racial, ethnic, or regional hierarchies and understandings. Racial hierarchy was reorganized by a newly formed Italian State at the Palermo National Exposition; Sicily was reorganized within Italy as the internal Orient, a people in need of civilizing in their own nation. The Mostra Etnografica Siciliana provided a way for Italian elites to understand the role of Sicily in Italy, and to other them as a part of placing Italy on the larger international stage. The Fascist

regime used Roman archaeology to assert the racial superiority and uniformity of the “Roman race” across Italy. The Mostra Augustea della Romanità served to provide proof for the eternal supremacy of Italians and to unify the nation under Fascism. In the late 20th century, Lega Nord appropriated ancient Celtic archaeology, using folk archaeology to craft the notion of a superior-but-oppressed Padanian ethnic identity for the political aims of the secessionist populist party.

### **Strategies Employed**

It is also interesting to note the many ways that archaeology was used in these processes. In the Palermo National Exposition, misrepresentations of material culture were used to racialize Sicilian peasantry through a kind of internal Orientalism. It placed Sicilians in a different racial category from other Italians, contributing to anti-Southern sentiment in the following decades. For Mussolini and the Fascist regime, misrepresenting the archaeological record served the opposite purpose by crafting a unifying national identity that included all of Italy under the label of the superior Roman Race. Lega Nord then echoed the Palermo National Exposition and Giuseppe Pitrè with their misuse of archaeology to reinforce the North-South divide and ethnically, culturally, and biologically other the South, while simultaneously creating a Celtic Padanian ethnicity.

The strategies employed in each example also vary. The Palermo National Exposition focused heavily on manner of display and framing of objects to communicate their primitivity, while the MAR's strategy relied more on heavy editing of the archaeological record and altering replicas of objects. In a strong break from the first two, Lega Nord used obfuscation as their primary tactic; Padanian heritage was constantly changing. The Leghisti's combination of outright lies and vague gestures to a Celtic golden age to best fit their populist politics. Despite

the differing methods, the end result remained the same: the molding of identity to reorganize the place and understanding of Italians both domestically and abroad.

Benito Mussolini's MAR highlights another way in which manipulations of archaeology can be used to form identity, focusing outside the scope of the North-South divide and instead, on a broader scale, worked to manipulate archaeological materials to create an ideal, superior nation that encapsulated all of Italy. The Fascist regime's MAR truly illustrates the ability for archaeology to be the basis of an entire propaganda campaign; the vastness of Roman archaeology and its historical prestige allowed for a large-scale, decades-long campaign to have a seemingly infinite source of "evidence" for the Fascist identity narrative. The Fascist regime still used archaeology in much the same way as the other case studies: they followed the same formula by creating a sense of "us" versus "Other" to exploit. In the fascist context, this manifested as a new "we," the Roman Race, and a new Other in the periphery of the Fascist empire to justify expansionist and colonial policies in North Africa, Ethiopia, and the Balkans (Arthurs, 2012; Gilkes & Lida, 2000).

### **Calabrian Revenge Archaeology**

Lega Nord's anti-South movement of the 1990s and early 2000s was met in 2002 with what Alessandro Vanzetti calls "revenge archaeology." This new instance of the misrepresentation of the archaeological record occurred (and still continues) in the town of Nardodipace, Calabria, providing a new, divergent example of how pseudoarchaeological ideas interact with one another.



*Figure 15: Map of Italy with Calabria highlighted in orange. From Britannica.*

The southernmost region of the Italian peninsula, Calabria, is characterized by its extremely mountainous terrain (Figure 15). With a population of almost two million people, Calabria is a largely agricultural region. In common discourse, Calabria is known for corruption, mafia, and economic issues such as high unemployment and poverty. The region exemplifies many of the negative stereotypes historically projected onto the South, having been on the receiving end of much of the most brutal rhetoric regarding the demonization of the South (Aprile, 2011; ISTAT, 2013; Pipyrrou, 2016).



*Figure 16: The "Calabrian Stonehenge" rock formations near Nardodipace, Calabria. From Scienze-naturali.com*



*Figure 17: The "Calabrian Stonehenge" rock formations near Nardodipace, Calabria. From Scienze-naturali.com*

In the small village of Nardodipace, Calabria, a smaller-scale instance of pseudoarchaeology has made local headlines in recent years (Hofmann et al., 2021). In 2002, unusual, boulderous geological formations near Nardodipace were discovered in the mountainous region following a forest fire that revealed much of the landscape (Figures 16 and 17). These naturally-occurring formations, despite not being associated with any evidence of human activity, have been heralded by locals as a kind of “Calabrian Stonehenge,” (Lonelyplanetitalia.it, 2020). Local “experts” have made grand claims about this “archaeological site,” characterizing it as evidence of a lost ancient civilization of Calabria. One local article described those who made these “megoliths” as “an evolved people” capable of great knowledge (Viaggiareincalabria.com). Some articles attribute the stones to the Pelasgians, a prehistoric people of the Eastern Mediterranean, and it has appeared on social media, as in the Facebook page “Calabria: The Other Italy,” which aims to showcase the lesser-known culture and beauty of Calabria ([Facebook.com/calabriatheotheritaly](https://www.facebook.com/calabriatheotheritaly); Scienze-naturali.com, 2015).

An important aspect of this site is that it is claimed to be the work of a population that predates Greek colonization of Southern Italy, meaning that native ancient Calabrians must have been the ones responsible for such an impressive feat, not ancient Greeks, which are the focus of much of Calabrian archaeology.

The notion that this site was made from a highly advanced, ancient Calabrian civilization can be better understood in the context of historic attitudes towards Calabria within Italy. Calabria has long been a target of anti-Southern sentiment, racialization, and prejudice; it is sometimes referred to as “Calafrica” and “Saudi Calabria,” terms that allude to the prejudiced (yet relatively widespread) view that Calabria is a less civilized, backwards region (Figure 18). In public discourse, Calabria is often discussed as a burden and drain on the rest of Italy (Aprile, 2011; Pipyrrou, 2016).

Given Calabria’s place in Italian public discourse as a leeching, barbaric region, the discovery of an archaeological site of such an advanced people can be understood as a sort of reactionary revenge archaeology, rejecting the notion of inferiority of Calabrian heritage. As a result, the Calabrian Stonehenge can be understood in the context of a sense of internalized racism/prejudice by Calabrians; the idea of the South being inferior and fundamentally different from the North is a prevalent view in both the North and South (Aprile, 2011). With this new “archaeological” discovery, Calabrians now have the opportunity to align themselves on par with the Northern regions by also giving themselves an elevated heritage. The racialization and prejudice towards the south is still abundantly clear. Many of the ideas against which the Calabrian revenge archaeology is reacting to can clearly find its roots in the same ideas pushed

by Pitrè and the criminologists such as Lombroso and Niceforo at the Palermo National Exposition in the late 19th century.



Figure 18: Image posted to Facebook, claimed to be originally posted by a Lega Nord member. The image shows the South labeled as "Continente Nero" (black continent), Calabria labeled as "Calabria Saudita" (Saudi Arabia), and Sicily labeled as "Gheddafiland." The post had over 1,000 interactions. From: <https://www.facebook.com/TonyMelee/posts/una-cartina-geografica-dei-militanti-lega-nord-anni-90-come-si-cambia-per-non-mo/293098988851110/>.

This “Calabrian Stonehenge” exemplifies Vanzetti’s revenge archaeology, which is a form of pseudoarchaeology that stems from “Loose interest groups focused on history / identity” and “Local scholars, self-taught historians, [and] members of the public,” (Hofmann et al., 2021). He explains that revenge archaeology occurs as a reactionary response to a group feeling wronged by traditional institutions that ignore or hide the true, more prestigious archaeology of

the group. The occurrence of revenge archaeology in Nardodipace reveals a strong desire from locals to use archaeological materials as “proof” of the greatness of Calabrians and the existence of prestigious heritage. This example highlights the significance of having a sense of pride in Calabrian heritage (rather than from Rome or Magna Graecia, an area encompassing Southern Italy that was colonized by ancient Greeks in the eighth century BCE), especially as a response to very heavy anti-Southern and anti-Calabrian prejudice (Ceserani, 2011).

### **Prevailing Narratives**

It is interesting to note the interaction of conflicting pseudoarchaeological narratives; the Calabrian Stonehenge works in response to a long history of anti-South archaeological manipulation, as seen with the Palermo National Exposition and Padania. Calabrian archaeological misrepresentation occurs in reaction to previous instances of the same phenomenon, using the same tactics (on a much smaller, more local scale) to assert ideas of worthiness and reorganize the place of a historically rejected region. As stated by Pino Aprile, there remains a persistent view of the Southerners as a people who "belong to a human species that is degraded or incomplete, as though during the course of evolution, it regressed or stopped at the threshold of civilization, unable to cross it entirely," (Aprile, 2011). In creating a new narrative of Calabrians descending from some great, advanced civilization, they are able to contend their place among the “superior” more Northern regions that host a great deal of prestigious archaeological heritage.

Each of these case studies also highlights the great propagandistic potential of misrepresentations of archaeology to create a sense of an “us” and an “other.” These misrepresentations exemplify the vast power of ideas of heritage in determining the in-group

versus the other; pseudoarchaeology has the ability to create a false sense of a shared history, culture, biology, and values. The idea that the in-group may not currently share the same values, culture, and lifestyle but still shares the same ancestry and heritage allows people to connect to and relate to one another through the past. Archaeology serves as a physical memory of the past when personal ones do not exist. The tangible nature of the archaeological record makes its misrepresentation both easy to capitalize on and extremely influential for those unfamiliar with the subject.

Italy's extreme diversity makes these notions of heritage and identity particularly unique; in a nation with several dozen indigenous languages, multiple autochthonous ethnic groups, major differences in culture, lifestyle, and aesthetic, and relatively recent unification, ideas of heritage are multifaceted and have a number of influences from which actors can easily draw from to either accentuate or downplay for their particular interests.

### **Interactions and Legacies**

It is also interesting to note how these case studies interact with one another. The Palermo National Exposition was part of the emergence of the North-South divide and strong anti-Southern sentiment and racism. The Palermo National Exposition focused on othering Sicilians and making them appear backwards and barbaric through the representation of Sicilian culture as hybrid and half-Oriental. Just over a century later, Lega Nord echoed these same sentiments, but this time misrepresented the archaeological record to reinforce the North-South divide by focusing on creating a new "native" North, as seen with Padania. In this way, we can see the ways in which these different misrepresentations of the archaeological record interact with one another and compound. Lega Nord used further misrepresentations of the archaeological record

to build on over a century of misrepresentations of the South and Southern material culture. It becomes clear that each misrepresentation does not exist in a vacuum; they interact with one another, crafting completely separate ideas of heritage and ethnicity from the reality. In this way, pseudoarchaeology allows for a completely different archaeological canon, one that allows for race and ethnicity and prejudice to be “proven” by the archaeological record as some sort of tangible evidence.

This then affects other elements of the same conversation, as seen in Calabria. Even the revenge archaeology of Nardodipace does not outright reject the premise of archaeology as a form of proof of superiority, but instead builds upon these same ideas. The notion that archaeology can be used to “prove” identity and ideas of racial or ethnic hierarchy had become so ingrained that the rejection of internalized racism still maintained and worked within this false premise.

### **Connections and Contrasts**

In the case studies, including Calabria, misrepresentations of the archaeological record inform and change cultures' relationships to one another. It can be used to divide, incite, unify, and create hierarchies between groups. This creation of hierarchies through the falsification of the archaeological record becomes apparent throughout each of these case studies. In each example, through just over a century, a new hierarchy was being created or reasserted; each new actor seeking to reorganize the hierarchy to ensure their group emerged at the top. Even with the Calabrian revenge archaeology, there is the desire to assimilate themselves within the upper levels of hierarchy, among those who have impressive, prestigious heritage sites. This highlights the role of archaeology in understanding a sense of cultural hierarchy, as though it provides

evidence of the worthiness of a modern people. It shows the strong influence ideas of the past have on people today; even objects and sites from thousands of years ago have the ability to determine a group's worth, prestige, and level of civility.

In each case, it is also clear how archaeology was used as a tool to accomplish a political, social, or propagandistic goal. Finding the objective archaeological truth was never the intention. Rather, these people recognized the strong influence on identity that material culture holds, and deliberately altered the archaeological record to serve their ideology. The notion of identity is highly malleable, as explained by Appiah, who notes that virtually all ideas of group heritage and identity are based on half-truths or omissions; all identities consist of edited versions of the past (Appiah, 2018).

A shared theme in each of these four examples discussed is evident: the misrepresentation and manipulation of the archaeological record to mold relationships between groups across Italy. Mussolini's MAR provides a contrast to the other three examples, highlighting the ways in which these misrepresentations can be used to unify and suppress differences in culture and history.

Calabrian revenge archaeology is distinct from the others in several ways: it occurs on a much smaller scale and, unlike the other three examples, did not come from societal elites or large-scale political actors. It is the most "democratized" example of the four, in the sense that it stemmed from the local level, rather than from a more top-down diffusion. It also serves as a reminder that manipulation of the archaeological record for the purpose of identity creation is not solely done for large-scale consumption or solely by elites/those with greater reach and power. This practice can exist at all levels.

The Mostra Etnografica Siciliana, in contrast, provides an example of how the misrepresentation of material culture can be done not only on a political level, but also by academics in the sphere of high society. Giuseppe Pitrè was a renowned ethnographer and medical doctor; academia was heavily involved with this instance of misrepresentation. While the Italian political scene of the period impacted the themes and goals of the Palermo National Exposition, overt political actors were not the only people responsible.

Lega Nord made clear that the actual presence of archaeological materials is not necessary for the misrepresentation to occur; the emotional element of feeling both pride and nativism through the idea of a shared, yet exclusive heritage, regardless of the accuracy of the materials is clear; populism is a fantastic opportunity for pseudoarchaeology to thrive. It diverged from the rest in that it relied very little on specific objects or sites and instead fused the imagery of pop-archaeology with vague imagined ideals to form Padanian identity.

## **CONCLUSION**

This thesis seeks to illuminate the role of pseudoarchaeology in the creation of Italian identity, adding to the discussion of how and why pseudoarchaeology is employed by various actors. It contributes to a larger scholarly discussion regarding the role of pseudoarchaeology in society and its impacts on identity, especially as it relates to the creation of “us” versus “Other,” and of racial and ethnic hierarchies. Though this discussion is limited in its scope to Italy, pseudoarchaeology in its many forms is a global phenomenon. Parallels between these case studies and other instances of pseudoarchaeology can be drawn to better understand the motivations of the actors and contexts in which pseudoarchaeology flourishes. My findings also contribute to an understanding of the ways in which separate instances of pseudoarchaeology interact with one another and compound, highlighting the complexity of the phenomenon, as well as its ability to persist through time.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The analysis was heavily informed by larger theoretical frameworks, especially Edward Said’s Orientalism, in my discussion of the North-South divide and the othering of Southerners, and Kwame Anthony Appiah’s understanding of identity as an ever-changing, malleable concept without rigid boundaries. These frameworks contextualize the purpose and ideology behind several of these case studies.

### **Field Overlap**

Despite the extensive political science research on the topic of Lega Nord’s Padania, little has been written on this subject from an anthropological or archaeological point of view. I

provide a new lens through which to analyze the practice, that of an archaeological perspective. I also provide further context to Vanzetti's revenge archaeology in Calabria, providing additional information regarding its formation and the historical precedent that serves as a catalyst for this type of pseudoarchaeology.

The overlap of several fields with regard to pseudoarchaeology, especially art history and political science is apparent throughout each section. I underscore the various uses behind the misrepresentation of the archaeological record: nation formation, propaganda, populism, and revenge archaeology. I provide a deeper analysis into the numerous ways in which symbols of the past and art historical information can be misrepresented for notions of identity.

### **Limitations**

This thesis has several limitations in its research capability: I limited my scholarly sources in large part to English-language sources, while still including major Italian-language primary sources, such as the catalog of the Mostra Etnografica Siciliana by Giuseppe Pitre and the catalog of the Mostra Augustea della Romanità by Giulio Quirino Giglioli, and several of the local Calabrian sources. I was able to draw from the extensive English scholarship on these topics to inform my analysis, while also using the previously listed primary sources.

This study was also bounded in some ways by the lack of primary sources for the Mostra Etnografica Siciliana case study, of which very few primary sources exist. Working within this constraint, I relied on translations of exhibition reviews from the Palermo National Exposition and the Mostra Etnografica Siciliana catalog by Pitre to inform my analysis of the first chapter.

### **Implications for Archaeology**

A broader implication of the study lies on the field of archaeology itself; in each of the three main case studies I examined, professional archaeologists and anthropologists were involved to some degree. Giuseppe Pitrè was an early ethnographer, the MAR was created by top Italian Fascist archaeologists, and Lega Nord funded archaeologists to research ancient Celts in Northern Italy. It is important to note that in each of these contexts, professional archaeologists or early anthropologists were involved or engaged with the misrepresentation of the archaeological record; these case studies did not solely rely on non-professionals. This has broader implications for the discipline as a whole because it shows how public trust in each of these projects was not wholly unreasonable; professionals were engaging with and often directly responsible for these misrepresentations of the archaeological record.

### **Implications in Society & Politics**

This thesis also has broader implications regarding the use of misrepresenting archaeology for political motivations. The three case studies each exemplify the ways in which, in very different periods and contexts, the misrepresentation of the archaeological record was used as a nefarious political tool. Imagery of the past, even when misrepresented, still holds the ability to bleed into the political and social sphere through the shaping of identity. The presence of revenge archaeology in contemporary Calabria, over 20 years after the rise of Lega Nord, and over 120 years after the Palermo National Exposition, highlights the ongoing nature of this issue. Pseudoarchaeology represents a very real, influential counterweight (often with compelling narratives conveniently attached) to the archaeological findings painstakingly researched by professionals.

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