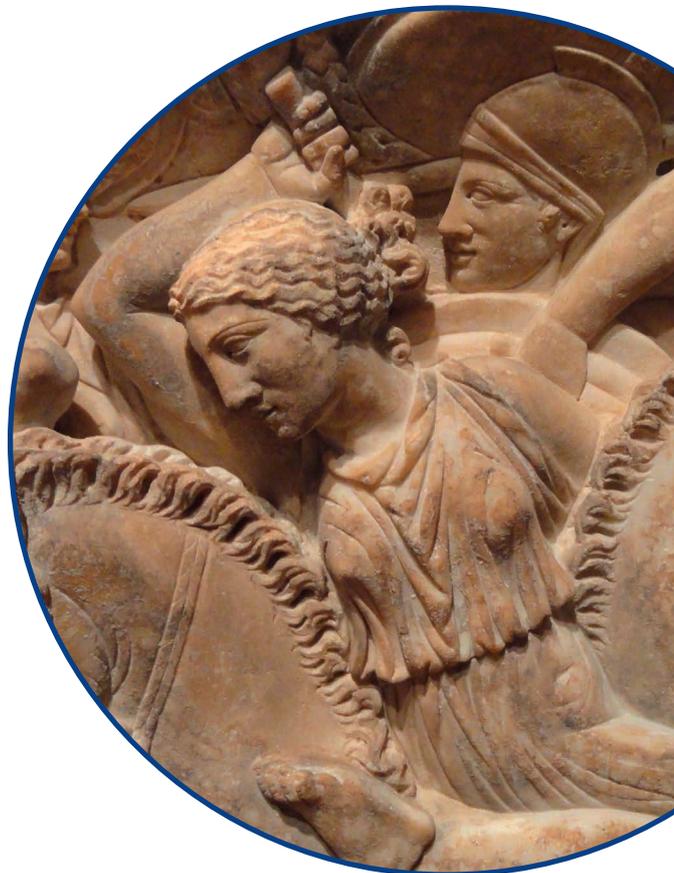


JOURNAL FOR TRANSCULTURAL PRESENCES &  
DIACHRONIC IDENTITIES FROM ANTIQUITY TO DATE

# thersites

16/2023



[www.thersites-journal.de](http://www.thersites-journal.de)

## **Imprint**

### **Universität Potsdam 2023**

Historisches Institut, Professur Geschichte des Altertums  
Am Neuen Palais 10, 14469 Potsdam (Germany)  
<https://www.thersites-journal.de/>

### **Editors**

Apl. Prof. Dr. Annemarie Ambühl (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz)  
Prof. Dr. Filippo Carlà-Uhink (Universität Potsdam)  
PD Dr. Christian Rollinger (Universität Trier)  
Prof. Dr. Christine Walde (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz)

**ISSN 2364-7612**

### **Contact**

#### **Principal Contact**

Prof. Dr. Filippo Carlà-Uhink  
Email: [thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de](mailto:thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de)

#### **Support Contact**

PD Dr. Christian Rollinger  
Email: [thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de](mailto:thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de)

### **Layout and Typesetting**

text plus form, Dresden

Cover pictures:

Left – Amazone zu Pferde, Bronze, Skulptur von Franz von Stuck, 1897, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover. Abbildung: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Franz\\_v\\_Struck\\_Amazone\\_Pferd.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Franz_v_Struck_Amazone_Pferd.JPG) nach CC BY 3.0 (Hajotthu)

Right – Amazonomachie auf einem römischen Steinsarkophag, ca. 230 n. Chr., Inv. 1932.49, Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Cambridge (MA). Abbildung: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Amazonomachy\\_detail\\_late\\_2nd\\_to\\_early\\_3rd\\_century\\_AD\\_front\\_and\\_side\\_of\\_a\\_sarcophagus\\_Roman\\_Pentelic\\_marble\\_-\\_Sackler\\_Museum\\_-\\_DSCo2390.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Amazonomachy_detail_late_2nd_to_early_3rd_century_AD_front_and_side_of_a_sarcophagus_Roman_Pentelic_marble_-_Sackler_Museum_-_DSCo2390.JPG), nach CCo 1.0 (Daderot)

### **Published online at:**

<https://doi.org/10.34679/thersites.vol16>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons License:  
Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

This does not apply to quoted content from other authors.  
To view a copy of this license visit

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

ANDREA AVALLI

(Scuola Superiore di Studi Storici, San Marino)

## Review of Dario Barbera: *Processo al Classico. L'epurazione dell'archeologia fascista*

ETS (Pisa 2022) (= Studi di archeologia e storia del mondo antico e medievale), 264 pp. ISBN: 9788846762191, € 25

A new book on the post-war Italian epuration trials of fascist archaeologists was recently published. It was long due. Since the late 1970s much has been done to study the relationship between classical studies, antiquity, and Italian fascism – the same process has concurrently regarded German historiography on Nazi classical culture<sup>1</sup>. Since then, scholars of different disciplines, such as

history, philology, archaeology, architecture, and art history have pointed out how ancient history, particularly Rome, was at the very heart of fascist ideology and cultural policies throughout Mussolini's rule (1922–1945)<sup>2</sup>. However,

---

*Antike* (Hamburg 1977). See Paola Salvatori, Fascismo e romanità, *Studi Storici* 55, 1 (2014), 227–239.

<sup>2</sup> Among the most recent, see Joshua Arthurs, *Excavating modernity. The Roman past in Fascist Italy* (Ithaca – London 2012); Aristotle Kallis, *The Third Rome, 1922–1943. The making of the fascist capital* (Basingstoke 2014); Paola Salvatori, *Mussolini e la storia. Dal socialismo al fascismo (1900–1922)* (Roma 2016); Helen Roche, Kyriakos Demetriou (eds.), *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Leiden – Boston 2018); Paola Salvatori (ed.), *Il*

---

<sup>1</sup> The first enquiries on the Italian case were published in *Quaderni di storia* since 1975 and were followed by Mariella Cagnetta, *Antichisti e impero fascista* (Bari 1979), and Luciano Canfora, *Ideologie del classicismo* (Torino 1980). Meanwhile, in Germany, Volker Losemann was among the first to write on such a matter: Volker Losemann, *Nationalsozialismus und*

we are still far from reaching a satisfactory knowledge of how the fall of the dictatorship and the end of the war affected classical studies and, more generally, the post-fascist Italian relationship with antiquity. Speaking of Italian classicists, we only knew that – like all academics – antifascist epuration only regarded a part of them, a minority that by 1948 was eventually reintegrated into universities and rehabilitated. That is why a book on the history of the post-fascist cultural transition starts to fill a historiographical void from the ideologically crucial perspective of classical studies.

Dario Barbera's book traces the history of five case studies of epuration trials against fascist archaeologists: Giulio Quirino Giglioli, Roberto Paribeni, Evaristo Breccia, Carlo Anti, and Biagio Pace. Except for short biographical notes, and two works focused on Carlo Anti<sup>3</sup>, this new book is the first to directly focus on the topic of the epuration of these Italian archaeologists. And Barbera explains that in every case, within a few years, the epuration attempt ultimately failed, except for

the 1945 exclusion of Giglioli, Paribeni, Breccia, and Anti from the restored *Accademia dei Lincei*. Such a historiographical reconstruction is achieved through the punctual analysis of original judicial sources regarding epuration trials, most of which come from the archival collections of the *Archivio Centrale dello Stato* in Rome. Several original documents are even transcribed and attached as three appendixes to the final part of the book, thus providing a useful anthology of previously unpublished sources on the trials of the five archaeologists. As for the historiographical interpretation, by following five individual stories, the author argues for the existence of a general post-war tendency: the ultimate dismantling and failure of the epuration process was the final product of the competition between Christian-democratic, communist, and liberal academics to “Catholicize”, “democratize”, or “liberalize” post-fascist classical studies. Moreover, the defeat of radical interpretations of antifascist epuration, and the Christian-democratic hegemony over Italian institutions, did not imply the mere restoration of fascism in universities, but, on the contrary, the start of a new era, that of the Cold War. Even if many topics are still to be deciphered, such as the role of racism and colonial ideology in this transitional context, Barbera's interpretation is a convincing and valid scientific acquisition in a still understudied historiographical field.

---

*fascismo e la storia* (Pisa 2020); Simona Troilo, *Pietre d'oltremare. Scavare, conservare, immaginare l'impero (1899–1940)* (Roma – Bari 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Elena Ghedini, Federico Biondani, *Carlo Anti* (Villafranca di Verona 1990); Centro per la storia dell'Università di Padova (ed.), *Carlo Anti. Giornate di studio nel centenario della nascita* (Trieste 1992).

However, this book needs to be discussed beyond its valid scientific contribution and contextualized within a larger historiographical tendency. Whereas studies on the fascist uses of antiquity have traditionally been characterized, since the 1970s, by Marxist or broadly antifascist approaches, this work on such a controversial theme is inspired by a different philosophy. In the preface of the book, Barbera sees the postwar epuration trials as “part of the more general, metaphorical, trial held by modernity against classical studies and their claim to be, among all forms of knowledge, the foundation of Western primacy as authority of tradition and art of memory”<sup>4</sup>. According to this perspective, judicial antifascism against fascist classicists is considered as a form of “suicide of the West”: modernity, “technocracy”<sup>5</sup>, and postmodernism, along with an allegedly moralistic and intolerant antifascism, are individuated by the author as the main responsible for the post-war, and current, decline of the traditional interpretation of classical studies. It won’t, therefore, come as a surprise that Barbera considers the epuration trials as a mere form of ideological vengeance exerted by judicial means by the political beneficiaries of

the Allied victory against the losing faction<sup>6</sup>. More precisely, the author considers such a moralistic vengeance close to the customs of “certain Amazonian tribes of cannibals in perennial reciprocal dispute”<sup>7</sup>, thus implicitly unworthy of modern and properly civilized European élites – among which his preference explicitly goes to the Western German case, rather simplistically identified in Jaspers’ *Schuldfrage*, and considered as a more equilibrated and human way to deal with a totalitarian past<sup>8</sup>. Lastly, the critique of antifascist intransigence goes along with that of the Resistance, and with anti-communist tropes: the Resistance is considered as the “savage” and violent version of judicial epuration<sup>9</sup>, and even the 1970s first historiographical enquiries on the professional continuity of former fascists in post-war institutions appear to him as a form of antifascist ideological bigotry, not far from the contemporary attempt at physically eliminating ex- and neo-fascists by left-wing terrorists<sup>10</sup>.

Such quotes show how much the theme of the post-fascist transition can still be divisive in Italian classical studies. During the epuration years

<sup>4</sup> Dario Barbera, *Processo al Classico. L’epurazione dell’archeologia fascista* (Pisa 2022), 12. All quotes are translated from Italian by me.

<sup>5</sup> Barbera (2022), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Barbera (2022), 37.

<sup>7</sup> Barbera (2022), 39.

<sup>8</sup> Barbera (2022), 27–28.

<sup>9</sup> Barbera (2022), 35–39.

<sup>10</sup> Barbera (2022), 26.

(1943–1948), the critique of trials was originally a typical stance of “anti-antifascist” supporters of the *Uomo Qualunque* movement, sympathizers of conservative parties, and of course neo-fascists. Already in that period, such discontent for any radical defascistization of Italian society was at the base of the gradual political dismantling, since 1945 and ultimately in 1948, of the whole epuration process, also with the contribution of left-wing parties in search for electoral consensus and a political pacification of the country. Something similar, of course, occurred in those same years in West Germany as well, and it must be historically explained also by recurring to the new Cold War context, in which an effective purge of former fascists was regarded as counterproductive from an anti-communist perspective. As for Republican Italy, the negative memory of the epuration trials, as well as of the Resistance and any radical antifascist institutional project, has since been a typical feature of post-war right-wing identity, along with an “anti-antifascist” and revisionist, when not overtly neo-fascist, inclination. In 2022 – the hundredth anniversary of Mussolini’s rise to power, and months before the election of the most right-wing oriented Italian post-war government – a long-due book on the attempted epuration of fascist archaeologists is finally published, in a scientific series of a renowned publishing house, but it has precisely that “anti-

antifascist” and revisionist aim. How come? My suggestion is that Barbera’s interpretation currently intercepts the widespread conservative fears of a new “*processo al Classico*”, which is allegedly threatened by the so-called “cancel culture” against traditional, Western classical studies, in the name of antiracism, democratization, and decolonization of the disciplines. The accusation of ideological bigotry and intolerance, moved by the author to 20<sup>th</sup>-century antifascist intellectuals and judges, is the same that in Italy is growingly directed against the current international claims for a more inclusive renovation of Classics. How much such a conservative historiographical tendency represents a significant and hegemonical trend, or instead just a rearguard battle against the call for a change of scientific and political approaches, is of course an open question. But it could be useful to keep that in mind while reading Barbera’s book.

### Table of contents

*Prefazione* (p. 11)

#### *Capitolo 1*

I conti con il passato classico (p. 15); Antichisti italiani e ideologie del Novecento (p. 15); L’eredità dell’archeologia fascista (p. 20); Mito di Roma, tecnocrazia, continuità dello Stato (p. 22); *Schuldfrage*, intellettuali ed epurazione (p. 26); Processi identitari (p. 36).

*Capitolo 2*

Un bianco fiore nella palude (p. 41); Giulio Quirino Giglioli (p. 41); *Pax romana*: la vittoria democristiana (p. 55); Cattolicizzare il Classico (p. 62).

*Capitolo 3*

Fischia il vento fra le aule (p. 69); Roberto Paribeni (p. 69); Evaristo Breccia (p. 74); Carlo Anti (p. 78); *Libido adsentandi*: la sconfitta comunista (p. 83); Democratizzare il Classico (p. 93).

*Capitolo 4*

Battaglia nella torre d'avorio (p. 99); La questione lincea (p. 99); Biagio Pace (p. 106); *Excellens in arte*: la mediazione liberale (p. 113); Liberalizzare il Classico (p. 116).

*Capitolo 5*

All'ombra di Giano (p. 127); Archeologia dell'identità: neo-, anti-, post- (p. 127); La ricostruzione del Classico (p. 129); Dall'epurazione alla guerra fredda (p. 132).

*Appendice I*

Il processo Giglioli (p. 137)

*Appendice II*

I processi Paribeni, Breccia e Anti (p. 163)

*Appendice III*

Il processo Pace e la questione lincea (p. 209)

*Abbreviazioni e archivi* (p. 233)

*Bibliografia* (p. 235)

*Indice dei nomi* (p. 257)

Preview URL: <http://www.edizioniets.com/scheda.asp?n=-9788846762191&from=homepage>

---

Andrea Avalli

Scuola Superiore di Studi Storici

Università degli Studi della Repubblica di San Marino

[a.avalli@studio.unirsm.sm](mailto:a.avalli@studio.unirsm.sm)

**Suggested citation**

Avalli, Andrea: Review of Dario Barbera: Processo al Classico. L'epurazione dell'archeologia fascista. In: *thersites* 16 (2023), pp. 168–172. <https://doi.org/10.34679/thersites.vol16.233>