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**Horse riding and Fascism: did Mussolini manage to
fascistize it and use it for its propaganda?**

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Anno Accademico: 2019/2020

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To my family...
“...Plus est en vous”

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Abstract

The question that we are going to answer is whether Benito Mussolini was able to fascistize or not horse riding in order to use it as a fascist propaganda as he has done with other sports. Therefore, this thesis will show the main protagonists involved in this particular historical period and how they have affected the history and destiny of horse riding and, indirectly, of Fascism.

In order to carry out this research, many researches were made based on books and online journals about the history of fascism and horse riding to then arrive to fully analyze their relations and the importance of this sport for Mussolini.

In the end, we can conclude that even if Mussolini tried with all his means to fascistize horse riding and use it for his fascist propaganda he didn't make it.

Historical Context

The fascist regime aimed to be totalitarian and present in every aspect of daily life. Fascists might not even have a coherent doctrine, but it is certainly a powerful doctrine. They had built a new state and a new economy.

They created a new *Élite* with a vigorous body and strong mind to spread civilization and order throughout the Mediterranean as the Romans did.

The word “Duce” came from the Latin *dux* and the “Fasci Littori” were the symbol of the power of the State, the Militia and youth associations were organized according to a pseudo-Roman hierarchy with subdivisions—legions, cohorts, centuries.

According to this view, press and cinema were not only censored but strongly directed and financed by the regime, meanwhile sports became the capstone to create a new warrior race.

In these years, the pilot Tazio Nuvolari embodied the spirit of the empire with his great bravery and ability driving his car during the spectacular car race called “Mille Miglia” that crossed the country from Brescia to Rome and vice versa.

Italo Balbo flew the Atlantic and a surprising number of fascist leaders were aviators. Even skiing became very popular. Cycling, then, became a mass sport with patriotic implications: the “Giro d’Italia” was a way to unify the country.

Football became a great passion of the Italians. In 1934 there was also a great propaganda triumph: Italy not only hosted the World Cup, but won it. The duce himself was present at the final delivering the medals to his victorious team. In 1936 the Italians won the Olympic Championship and in 1938 they triumphed again in the World Cup. Sport’s successes contributed greatly to help the regime’s propaganda. In those years, Mussolini riding a horse or swimming, skiing, driving a car or an airplane were the most present images in the Italian’s eyes.

«I like horses, [...] I like to practice in the open air, and I like the emotions of galloping and jumping», said Mussolini in an interview with an American journalist (Dall’Ongaro 1927-28, 11).

«This one-hour ride [...] keeps me in perfect physical condition. [...] And after the ride, I feel strong in the body, in all its parts, in its muscles, in its fibers, in its nerves, - supremely prepared to face the serious responsibilities that my office demands and imposes on me».¹

The image of the Duce therefore had this primary function: to be immediately visible and comprehensible to the masses. High in the saddle among the people on foot, Mussolini was undoubtedly visible to all. It evoked

¹ Sica, Beatrice. 2014. *Il Duce E Il Popolo-Cavallo: Politica, Pedagogia E Propaganda Nell’Immagine Di Mussolini Condottiero*. pdf. <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10067688/1/BSica%20-%20Duce%20e%20popolo%20cavallo%20FINAL%204REF.pdf>.

an image of order, discipline, courage, military value, ability to command, daring, battle, momentum, speed of action, conquest, victory in everybody like the chivalry did for centuries.

Introduction

This thesis aims to analyze the relationship between horse riding and the Italian fascist era. More specifically, whether or not Mussolini fascistized horse riding for his propaganda. Fascism emerged in Europe after World War I when numerous individuals longed for public solidarity and solid administration. In Italy, Benito Mussolini used his charisma to set up a powerful extremist state. The term "fascism" was coined in 1919 by Mussolini to portray his political movement. The symbol he chose were the ancient Roman fasces which were a heap of poles tied around a hatchet in order to represent the strength of Rome.

In the past, the ability to tame horses has always been considered a necessary characteristic to gain notoriety and power. Therefore, the army that owned the best riders and the strongest horses had a significant advantage over their rivalry. Mussolini used sports as a tool for the fascist propaganda and aimed at doing the same with horse riding.

Since the mid-twenties, the Duce promoted all sports related to horse riding in order to increase their popularity and built in San Siro a new and modern hippodrome for the trotters. Moreover, he gave the order to build in Rome the so-called "Foro Mussolini" instituted for Costante D'Inzeo, one of his trusted men whose sons, Piero and Raimondo, had a fundamental role in the Italian horse riding. Today, this building is the famous "Foro Italico", university and venue of the "Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano" (CONI).

Mussolini invested a lot in trotting, a discipline born in America and considered more popular because it contrasted with the regal style of galloping, invented by the British. The energies of the Duce were not wasted: for a decade, Milanese jockeys and thoroughbreds traveled the world ringing one success after another. Horse racing, which had its temple in the Milanese racecourses, maintained an independent discipline, managing to break away from the CONI, which under Fascism coordinated the organization of all sports.

In 1932, the Fascist Government instituted the "*Unione Nazionale Incremento Razze Equine*" (U.N.I.R.E) and this was considered to be a big turning point in the history of the Italian horse riding. Consequently, this led to a careful modernization politic carried out by the fascists who, between 1926 and 1935, reorganized the Italian sport institutions strengthening the executive bodies.

In the mid-1930s, there's been a change of plans as the U.N.I.R.E becomes, as cited by the Professor Enrico Landoni, "the Cinderella of sports". Mussolini abandons horse riding and no longer goes to the hippodrome nor publicly supports it. The change is explained, in the approach of the war, by the need of the Duce to break away from a sport that has always been linked to the British tradition, not only in terminology but also in traditions.

In order to understand whether or not Mussolini fascistize horse riding we will proceed as follows: the first chapter of this thesis will analyze the post-war reorganization and the "*questione ippica*" which was a central issue of the Italian horse riding. The secondo chapter will be the heart of this thesis as it is entitled "horse riding and the fascist regime". Here, we will see the influence of Mussolini and what his regime did to bring

horse riding on their side. Last but not least, in the third chapter we will see the final conclusions drawn out of this research.

Chapter 1- the post-war reorganization of the army and the ‘*questione ippica*’.

1.1 Historical background.

The Italian case in the prompt post-war European political display was the one with the highest relevance. On the one hand, because the crisis of the political organizations was settled through the establishment of the fundamentalist system. On the other, also because of its “mutilated victory” in World War One as Italy was a winner of army but a loser of diplomacy as it left the seat in Versailles, renouncing to the benefits gained from war, given that it wasn’t treated as a winner. Therefore, this led to the subsequent disarray and to the last crisis of the liberal organizations and the consolidation and victory of Fascism drove by Benito Mussolini (1883-1945).

In 1933 the establishment of the gentlemen riders of Italy was the culmination of an extraordinary and intense season, which, even if it was characterized by the developments and the brilliant results of the work carried out by the Italian army, actually began between the end of the Great War and the advent of fascism in an atmosphere of deep unease for those same units of excellence and cavalry officers in particular. The strong downsizing of the cavalry ranks was part of the policy of normalization and transition to peace launched by the Nitti Ministry, which had to deal first with the problem of demobilization and then with the delicate situation of the drastic compression of military expenditure being absolutely necessary to ensure the overall renewal of the life of the nation. In fact, for this Government and then for the fifth Giolitti Ministry, the two-fold need arose to avoid humiliation for the veterans and especially the generals of the supreme command. Anyway, it carried out an action of profound renewal regarding the cultural and strategic path of the training of senior officers and on the recruitment procedure, as fascists in particular had expressed their will to have an armed nation². Moreover, they wanted to take on board the demands defended mostly by the socialist movement who were in favor of a significant reduction in the duration of the military service and a drastic diminishment in the power of conditioning, exercised by military summits on the country’s civil and political institutions, in the economic policy choices related to the armed forces³. However, to break this fragile political settlement, just two months after the entry into force of the military order, assembled with difficulty by Nitti who was hoping of being able to synthesize the contrasting claims of opposing pressure groups, was the chairman of the council. Therefore, prompted by the dramatic budgetary demands, Nitti was forced to ask General Albricci to make important adjustments to the organization of the armed forces. These adjustments regarded a further reduction in the various

² *Circa una Nazione Armata Tipo Italiano*, memorandum redatto dalla Commissione Consultiva per l’Ordinamento del R. Esercito(R.D. 25 luglio 1920), in AUSSME, fondo L3, cartella 92.

³ Vincenzo Gallinari, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-217. L’esercito italiano da Vittorio Veneto a Mussolini, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2006, pp. 78-100.

expenditure chapters and a progressive reduction in the number of officials in service whose role and consistency were safeguarded by the Minister for War.

1.2 The Albricci Reform.

Alberico Albricci was a general of the army who had arranged a Supreme Commission for the Defense of the State. Moreover, he instituted the Council of Inspectors placed under the command of the General Inspector of the Army, appointed in the person of Armando Diaz, who gathered the General Inspectors of the Arms of Infantry, Cavalry, Artillery and Engineers⁴. The creation of these new structures, characterized by the presence of a large number of superior officers of the undisputed centrality over the generals, was therefore functional to the objective of rewarding in some way the leaders of the victorious army. In addition to some inevitable changes, the fundamental structure was reinforced, whose absolute incompatibility with the economic needs and political problems of the Government became absolutely evident at the beginning of 1920. While the proposal for an overall review of the military system recently approved is totally inadmissible, with particular reference to the cancellation of all the inspections he strongly desired and the retirement of a large number of senior officers. Albricci then resigned as Minister of War and was substituted by a civilian, Ivanoe Bonomi. This rotation, on the one hand represents a significant gesture of courage on the part of Nitti, who, at a time of great difficulty, tried to defend the primacy of politics by demonstrating that only through the disinterest and spirit of service of an authoritative representative of the ruling class of the kingdom and its government would be able to solve, for the benefit of the entire national community, the serious problem of the reorganization of the armed forces. On the other, the definitive rupture of any possible relationship with the most backward sectors of the army, which felt threatened in some way by the attitude and intentions of the government, and by the political forces ready to exploit resentments, frustrations and expectations within the country⁵. This led Bonomi to the reception of the new military order⁶ with the decisive technical support of the Minister of the Treasury, Luigi Luzzatti which became operational due to the entry into force of the Decree of the 20 of April in 1920 number 451.

Unlike the Albricci reform, the scheme drawn up by the new Minister of War would effectively meet the economic and financial needs of the government which aimed to reduce the monthly expenditure on the army. Once again, however, the major cuts concerned the cavalry, whose regiments, belonging to four brigade commands in turn dependent on the command of the only confirmed division, were in fact further

⁴ Vincenzo Gallinari, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

⁵ Giorgio Rochat, *L'esercito italiano da Vittorio Veneto a Mussolini*, cit., pp. 96-100.

⁶ AUSSME, fondo L3, cartella 92.

reduced to twelve⁷. Bonomi himself, on the other hand, in the report annexed to the text of the decree submitted to the King, had focused attention on the urgency of a drastic containment of expenditure on the management of horse arms being more expensive than the other applicants. This was due to a longer training period justified also by the change in the strategic needs of the army within which it would have been absolutely necessary to rethink the role of the cavalry⁸. Inevitable consequence of this policy of austerity realized with extreme pragmatism by Bonomi was the development of a heated controversy orchestrated very skillfully by the fascist movement against Nitti and his allies. They were accused of having sacrificed on the altar of public finance the honor of the homeland and the fighters and of wanting to support the anti-national demands supported by the socialist movement⁹. Moreover, during those months, the progressive yielding of the program of the fascist propaganda of many senior officers of the army was also outlined and it felt betrayed and humiliated by the choices made by the liberal ruling class especially by Nitti and Giolitti, on which were pinned the javelins of Mussolini¹⁰. The inclusion of the Duke of Victory within the new government, apparently supported by the King, should have been at the same time the clearest proof of the accession of Vittorio Veneto's army to the new political course inaugurated in the country by the Fascist National Party and an element of guarantee and protection of the established order and liberal institutions, in strict compliance with which Benito Mussolini could deploy his own action of renewal¹¹. Trusting, therefore, in the capacity to neutralize the subversive charge of fascist propaganda and to channel in the tradition of the post-unification parliamentary political the ambitious Mussolini program, Armando Diaz preceded in just two months the launch of a new military order¹², which aimed to somehow restore the structure of the armed forces prior to the entry into force of the Albricci reform, by remedying to the damage caused by Ivanoe Bonomi's policy. Thus, a substantial increase in the budget for the armed forces was immediately ordered¹³. Even the Diaz system, designed precisely to compensate all sections of the army for the humiliations suffered in the four years following the end of the Great War, therefore dealt a blow to the expectation of a fair recognition expressed by all the main officers of this Army, of which none, not even the fascists, evidently thought possible an overall revival, as demonstrated by the fascist military order launched in March 1926 by Mussolini himself, as Minister of War¹⁴. It should therefore be emphasized that the advent of fascism did not in any way

⁷ Vincenzo Gallinari, *op. cit.*, pp. 262-267.

⁸ Vincenzo Gallinari, *op. cit.*, pp. 254-258.

⁹ *Discorso Inaugurale al secondo congresso dei Fasci*, in *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, a cura di Edoardo e Duilio Susmel, vol. 14, *Dalla marcia di Ronchi al secondo Congresso dei Fasci: 14 settembre 1919- 25 maggio 1920*, La Fenice, Firenze 1954, pp. 466-471.

¹⁰ Giorgio Rochat, *L'esercito italiano da Vittorio Veneto a Mussolini*, cit., p.203

¹¹ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista. La conquista del potere 1921-1925*, Einaudi, Torino 1966, pp. 432-436.

¹² AUSSME, fondo L3, cartelle 92 e 93. Si veda inoltre Emilio Canevari, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 98-122

¹³ Ministero della Difesa, *L'Esercito Italiano tra la prima e la seconda guerra mondiale: novembre 1918- giugno 1940*, Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Ufficio Storico, Roma 1954, p. 210.

¹⁴ *Ordinamento dell'Esercito 1926: progetti di legge relativi*. AUSSME, fondo L3, cartella 94.

determine the discontinuity advocated by the cavalry in the army's management policy and it helped to stem the deep discouragement that had spread among all its units, following the entry into force of the Bonomi Order, which had reduced to 12 the total number of his regiments and had above all made a drastic cut in their quadrupled endowments.

1.3 Luigi Ajroldi di Robbiate and the "questione ippica"

Luigi Ajroldi di Robbiate was a cavalry general but he is remembered in particular because he is considered to be the true link between the old and the new generation of management and the most authoritative interlocutor of the nascent regime which, especially since the early 1930s, chose to follow up many of the proposals he suggested. Having actually learned the depth and delicacy of the ongoing debate between the ranks of the army, for the Mussolini government it became inevitable to open a channel of privileged communication with some of its most authoritative officers as it would have been very useful here for him and his government to give the impression that serious about rearranging and expanding cavalry. The work of this new body officially began on December 17 in 1923 and was positively influenced by the extraordinary activism of Ajroldi, whose proposals concerned especially the new armament of the cavalry units¹⁵. Although not immediately accepted by the government and Mussolini, who was the new minister of war, they prepared the ground for the profound innovations introduced by Federico Baistrocchi in the Italian army and among the cavalry regiments in particular during the 1930s with the advent of armored vehicles and the motorization of the units¹⁶. During the 1920s, however, the influence exerted by the cavalry officers on the choices made by the Mussolini ministry, in terms of strategic and military policy, was very modest. Therefore, having become aware of the impracticability of any conditioning from a purely military point of view, the cavalry decided to carve out an absolutely central role and space in the ongoing debate on the development prospects of the national economy, bringing to the attention of the new ruling class of the country the urgency of the issue of the "questione ippica", which, until then, had been neglected both in the aspects of closer military relevance and also from the agricultural and zootechnical point of view. It was once again Luigi Ajroldi of Robbiate, in the role of inspector of the equestrian veterinary service of the ministry of war, to put itself in absolute evidence. He was in fact the real architect of the regeneration of horse breeding in Italy of the overall reorganization of this important sector of the national economy, implemented between the 1920s and the 1930s of the regime. Thanks to this, he was able to start an effective relationship of collaboration, without ever giving up the autonomy of judgment and above all the freedom to criticize the same choices made at the beginning by the Mussolini government, whose substantial lack of interest in the issue of the "questione ippica" was, moreover, part

¹⁵ ASM, fondo Ajroldi di Robbiate, *Nuovo ordinamento dell'Esercito. Appunti relativi ad una moderna organizzazione della Cavalleria*, cartella 41.

¹⁶ Paolo Mattucci, *Federico Baistrocchi sottosegretario (1933-1936)*, Paganini, Firenze 2006, pp. 27-46.

of a framework of perfect continuity with the recent past. The initiative taken by the fascist party on this front was in fact characterized, according to Ajroldi, of the same serious limitations that had characterized the wretched policy of downsizing and progressive disposal of the national equestrian heritage launched by the Nitti ministries, to which he had not hesitated to make precise and detailed observations. This was based on the fundamental assumption that horse breeding should have been, especially in peacetime, an extraordinarily important resource for the development of the country, not only from a military point of view, but above all from a more strictly economic perspective. The fact that horse riding is an important reality within the national agricultural sector is known and unanimously shared, but not until the end of the First World War, when it was decided to strongly question the role played until then by the department responsible for agriculture, in collaboration with the Minister of War, on the national horse breeding front. Therefore, Ajroldi di Robbiate should be recognized with having succeeded in: raising awareness of the problem among the country's leaders, placing at the center of the debate the country's economic development prospects and its new agricultural structure and, lastly, the quantitative and qualitative increase of the equine breeds. This was a turning point destined, moreover, to deeply affect also the veterinary sciences on the zootechnics, in which it took in fact an interesting discussion between three different sides: the growing number of supporters of the new guidelines proposed by such authoritative sectors of the Italian army, the conservatives and finally the sceptics who, by not sharing many of the ideas expressed by Ajroldi, considered it necessary to subject them to a severe critical scrutiny, in order to be able to adapt them to the real needs of the different agricultural areas of the country. In this context, it is important to take in consideration the letter sent on May 24 in 1920 from Ajroldi of Robbiate to the new Minister of War, Giulio Rodinò, in order to urge the overall review of the policy of the downsizing and the progressive decommissioning of the horse breeding depots managed by the Minister of War, initiated by the Nitti government. Moreover, also to avoid the risk of a total disengagement of the State, that, in its view, it could not have entrusted private individuals without the necessary financial resources and adequate technical and cultural training with the task of raising the future of Italian horse-racing, still so heavily dependent on the import of quadrupeds from Russia, the United States, France, Great Britain and Hungary. In fact, the head of the Equestrian Inspectorate of the Minister of War wrote: "Before the war, horse breeding depots were just enough to supply quadrupeds of only cavalry regiments. For the artillery, for the royal carabinieri, for the military school and for the officers of horse arms, they looked abroad. Now following the current reduction of the cavalry, the deposits will be exuberant to the future needs of the Army, but can instead be used for the purpose of freeing the state to look for them abroad. Therefore, they would be used to house also the foals suitable for other armies, in the current number of their needs. The extensive distributions made by the private breeders of mares ideal to the reproduction of the light and heavy coastal horse, of the mule of big size for artillery, and of the saddle horses for the officers, give sure confidence, as stated above, that there won't be anymore the need to look abroad.

[...] In view of these considerations, it is recognized that horse breeding depots should be kept even if they represent a considerable expense for the Treasury, since they would always be convenient given the purposes for which they are used, that is to the increase and improvement of equine production in the country and the independence of the horses from abroad, at least for the horses needed by the army.’’¹⁷ The definitive emancipation of Italy from the sad role of being the main European country importer of quadrupeds became the fundamental objective of the work carried out with great commitment in the first half of the 1920s by Ajroldi di Robbiate. He worked to create the conditions for a rapid return of the Italian horse breeding to the splendor of the time when our products were envied by all rulers of the world. Furthermore, very few States, at that time, could count on the microclimatic and environmental conditions adapted to the breeding of horses while in which our country, except some specific regions, could count. It was therefore needed to find the necessary economic, human and cultural resources to ensure the rebirth of the Italian horse.

1.4 Ajroldi di Robbiate, Meloni and the breeding in Sardinia.

It was not easy, therefore, to announce the activity of rebuilding the complex chain of equine breeding, which was hoped to be soon relaunched, without, however, having available operational solutions or intervention protocols in some way already verified. Thus, began an intense season of work characterized by an extraordinary creative impulse, involving the experimentation of new veterinary techniques. Furthermore, they were supported by Ajroldi deep experience and by his remarkable competence who was covering the double role of Inspectors of the Equestrian Service and Veterinarian of the Ministry of War and President of the Society for the Italian Horse. It is precisely this institution, which was then effectively absorbed by the Italian Federation of Equestrian Sports (FISE), preserving in reality all its extraordinary heritage of knowledge and traditions. It plays a very important role, both from the bureaucratic point of view and from the organizational one which is more from a cultural perspective, on the front of the overall revival of the national horse breeding, transforming its own press, the journal “Il Cavallo Italiano” (the Italian horse), in an authoritative and important forum for discussion and debate for the leading experts of the typical national movement, of which the society for the Italian horse was in fact one of the highest expressions. It embodied, above all, the history of Italian riding, deeply renewed and placed at the center of the international sports firmament by Federico Gabrielli, whose important mentor, Luigi Berta, was its first president between 1911 and 1914. Even more important, from the point of view of innovation, was actually the start of an intense research, theoretical and practical, aimed at the increase of the local horse breed and the production of the best Italian horses in Sardinia which, even if it has always been a breeding

¹⁷ ASM, fondo di Ajroldi di Robbiate, *Relazione a S. E. il Ministro*, 24 maggio 1920, cartella 39.

ground, only between the end of the First World War and the mid-20s acquired the title of horse region par excellence in virtue of the rigorous work set up on site by Airoidi. Here the president of the company for the Italian horse in fact transformed the old depot stallions of Ozieri in a real center of excellence where he began the testing and verification of new possible crossings between local horses and others with Arabian, oriental and English blood. It was thought that these operations could make a decisive contribution to the strength of the Sardinian breed and, at the same time, encourage the finding of a precise equestrian address, that is the discovery of the genetic makeup more compatible with the characteristics of the horse of the Sardinian environment. The best test of the theories elaborated by the engaged specialists was found in the so-called functional tests, that Airoidi of Robbiate introduced in 1921 for the first time in the Sardinian territory and, subsequently, in the national equestrian panorama, as a valid tool for verifying the actual quality of animals produced and reared in a specific area of the country. In this perspective, they were in fact compared to the performance obtained in the race over different distances and all the horses were born from different blood crossings to assess the actual degree of adaptation to the territory and reliability from the reproductive point of view. The need to have a safe and equipped space within which to organize these tests led to the realization of the Chilivani racecourse, a small fraction of the municipality of Ozieri, which even today hosts important galloping meetings and represents the fundamental reference point of the main district of the Country, characterized by the presence of the largest Mediterranean horsetrail, able to connect Alghero with Badde 'e Salighes. The results of these tests carried out directly on the field, induced Airoidi to give a precise oriental Arabic orientation to the production which was, however, since 1922, completely supplanted by the English one, at least until the mid-1930s. The new diplomacy of the thoroughbred was then outlined and here Ajroldi could really put to good use his extraordinary competence thanks to which he had been confirmed in the positions of Inspector of the Army's Equestrian Service and President of the Italian Horse Society by the new fascist government. Thanks to his autonomy of judgment, Ajroldi was completely immune from the dangerous desire to please at all costs the nascent regime, in fact, between 1925 and 1926 in particular, he did not hesitate to criticize The Decree of 6 September 1923, No 2125. Given that, in his opinion, this Decree profoundly changed the organizational and management structure of the stallion depots. These observations were then internally developed by Airoidi within a very important memorandum entitled "the equestrian problem", which represented a very effective analysis of the national equestrian landscape. Moreover, this included a harsh criticism of the initiatives taken on this front by the fascist government, which had done nothing, from its point of view, to distinguish itself from previous liberal ministries. Additionally, it constituted a genuine programmatic manifesto, including concrete proposals for the solution of the very serious problems that characterized Italian horse breeding. The importance of the equestrian problem has not escaped past governments that with laws, provisions, encouragement, always tried to start the issue towards the solution. Nevertheless, government action was always uncertain and fragmentary intended to favor or oppose the

interests of regions, bodies or exponents and was more focused on details instead of tackling the problem as a whole and solving it radically. There are three essential points on the issue: the production of the horse, its breeding and its demonstrations. The identification of this very serious criticality induced Ajroldi to propose in these terms the constitution of a single center for the elaboration and implementation of the policies of increase of the Italian horse breeds. “Any law, any provision, like all those adopted by successive governments in the past decades will not produce the desired effect until the problem is dealt with within its essential part. Until it is disciplined and all the strengths are converged in order to cause all the wheels of this complex machine to be driven by a single impulse and move harmoniously. The only means to achieve this, is the unification of all typical services with the creation of a General Horse Riding Direction. Only in this way will it be possible to cancel all the interferences, to eliminate all antithesis forces and to create the necessary basis for a harmonious and profitable action”¹⁸. Advanced in the 1926 and in fact implemented by the regime only in 1932, with the constitution, employed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, of the U.N.I.R.E, this proposal really contributed in a decisive way to the overall reorganization of the national horse riding movement which still today is in fact organized in the ways and forms indicated in this memorandum of Ajroldi. Here, then, we must undoubtedly point out his merit of having laid the basic conditions for the modernization of the revival of an entire economic sector, closely connected, moreover, to the history, culture and local traditions of our country. Precisely in this regard, Ajroldi was convinced that only a single national center for the coordination of public initiatives in support of horse-breeding could ensure the balanced development of the different regional breeds to respond effectively to the needs of the territory as part of a truly forward-looking and wide-ranging vision. Pisa, Santa Maria Capua Vetere, Catania and Ozieri in particular constituted finally the fundamental points of reference for the production of the saddle horse, able to satisfy without doubt the need of the cavalry but also that of the sports circuit¹⁹. On this front, during the 1930s, Sardinia became the leading region for the entire movement, in which there was a lively debate on the prospects of development of breeding and especially on the direction it intended to give to the production techniques of the Sardinian horse that, since 1921, Ajroldi had wanted to improve, resorting to the Oriental Arabic blood. This gave rise to a precise guideline, fully shared by the national authorities, but not entirely appreciated by local breeders and by some technicians and experts on the island, who complained to Ajroldi an unjustifiable rage against the English thoroughbred, that until 1910 had been the fundamental point of reference for the Sardinian breeding, from which, at the beginning of the 1920s, had been effectively banned. To lead this front of the rebels, which became really consistent only after the retirement and the final disappearance of General Ajroldi, occurred in 1937, was Deodato Meloni, eminent zootechnical, great landowner and authoritative leader of the Italian federation equestrian sports, particularly loved by all Sardinian hippophilic.

¹⁸ ASM, fondo Ajroldi di Robbiate, *il problema ippico*, cartella 41.

¹⁹ Giuseppe Servetto, *il problema ippico in italia sotto il punto di vista militare*, pp. 13-16.

The extraordinary work of analysis and research conducted by Meloni on the activity carried out, since 1874, at the stallion depot in Ozieri on the reproductive and technical performance of Sardinian horses allow the entire stud book to be recognized. This, therefore decisively favored the development of a more pragmatic and concrete approach to the real problems of national horse breeding and the definitive overcoming of some old schematism, which, although they have provided reliable and valid points of reference for certain breeders, especially at the time of the greatest crisis experienced by the Italian horse racing industry after the Great War, have not always served their cause. It is therefore possible to conclude that the process of methodological and technical revision to which Meloni has subjected the extraordinary lesson of Ajroldi not only ensured the compatibility of this knowledge with the needs of a continuous movement evolution, but it has further enhanced its importance for the fate of the national economy, in the eyes of the regime, which has had to work hard to fully grasp it.

Chapter 2: Horse riding and the fascist regime.

2.1 The importance of the trotter for the fascist government.

Carrying out a broad survey of the policy implemented by the fascist institutions on the front of the typical sport is undoubtedly a very difficult task. From this point of view, it should first of all be pointed out that, since 1922, the fascist party attempted to tackle and damage the national equestrian movement in order to influence its values, history and traditions. This would have given an advantage to the fascist propaganda, in the same way that Mussolini has been able to contaminate the world of gymnastics, exploiting the wake of its progressive politicization started in conjunction with the development of the national movement of the Libyan war. On the equestrian front, the greater possibilities of penetration were immediately identified within the disarticulated and popular circuit of trotting races which unlike the exclusive, noble, urban sector of galloping, it was an expression of that provincial rural Italy, in which fascism had found its vital center, even though in a large city like Milan it had the effective center of coordination of the movement. From the Lombard capital, which was also the seat of the newspaper founded by Mussolini, “Il Trotto”, and later destined to become an organ of the fascist party, this process of contamination of a sector began, which soon became very receptive to major and sensitive political issues instrumentally ridden by fascism, such as: the reintegration of veterans into the life of the country, the overall conversion of the Italian productive system, the management of social conflict and the problem of collective reworking of the recent war experience. It should not be surprising, however, that some of these issues have found ample space, since the first issue, which appeared on July 1, 1922, in the first equestrian magazine directly and explicitly committed to the enhancement of trotting races. The new magazine soon began to be characterized also by a fierce controversy against the protagonists of the galloping races and the owners of pure blood in particular, representative, according to “Il Trotto”, of an obsolete culture, dangerously exotic and exclusive. Moreover, the Monzese socialists took sides in favor of another totally anti-popular sport, motor racing, dominated by huge economic interests, had approved the construction of the authordom created. In the opinion of the new horse riding newspaper, “only to give new impetus to the engine sport in Italy”²⁰. At this stage, however, the galloping sector was undoubtedly the preferred target of this new journal. Thus, in announcing the new opening of the “Ippodromo delle Bettole di Varese”, the newspaper attributed a polemical meaning, completely absent in reality, to the courageous choice made by the Varese company to increase horse racing with the aim of enhancing the autonomy of the local horse racing circuit without any support from Milan in the management of this plant. In perfect coherence with this iconoclastic fury, “Il Trotto” also led a hard campaign against the vices, the defects and the people, that, in its opinion, caused damage to the breeding of the half-breed and

²⁰ *Il vecchio trottingman a San Siro*, in “Il Trotto”, a. I, n. 1, 1 luglio 1922

to the development of the circuit of the trot races. In this climate, the newspaper greeted with pleasure the appearance, among the ranks of the national movement, of a new acronym, the “Associazione Trotistica Italiana” (ATI)²¹, but destined to turn very soon into a meteor, determined to fight to radically transform the structure, the competences and the ruling class of the highest institution of the sector²², led, at that time, by a group of people including Felice Ferri. The latter in particular represented the point of intersection between the more than legitimate sports battle and the violent political controversy instrumentally ridden by the magazine, a little more than a week after the seizure of power by Benito Mussolini. In fact, the ideal scapegoat for this situation of obvious difficulty for the proposed body of the management of trotting races and consequently the best victim to be sacrificed in the name of the new fascist equestrian movement was its historic socialist militancy, considered to be dangerous for the fate of Fascist Italy. Therefore in this context of vulgarity, tension and violence, at the beginning of 1923, matured the forced resignation of the highest governing body of the Italian Equestrian Union and of the former councilor of the “Economato della Giunta Caldara”²³.

Later on, with Ferri defenestrated and replaced within the Italian equestrian union by Giuseppe Sesana, whose memory would later be named the Montecatini racecourse of his property, officially began the fascistization of the Italian trotting, which actually coincided with a period of great turmoil for the entire sector, affected by the disappearance of the first generation of pioneers and the development of new forms of trade associations, especially among farmers. The relocation of the competences of the State in the field of equine production is therefore conceived by the Fascist government with the dual aim of enhancing the specificity of each equestrian zone of the country and facilitating, in the context of breeding, the development of new guidelines more in tune with the real needs of the territory, as requested by the operators of the sector. Filled with modernity and pragmatism, this decree actually sanctioned the suppression of the direct intervention of the State in a strategic sector for the fate of the national economy such as horse breeding, of which Mussolini’s government was evidently not so interested in strengthening the important functions of public utility and services now linked to it. For example, the organization of public mount or the increase in the overall endowment of selected public mares but instead they preferred to enhance the spectacular aspect, useful especially for propaganda purposes, or the sports finalization. For this reason, the president of the council, having become aware of the very serious economic difficulties that were causing the prevention of the national company to continue the management of the historic plant of Turro²⁴ and the risk of the disappearance of trotting from the undisputed capital of Italian horse racing, decided to intervene in person, entrusting the SIRE with the dual task of building a new

²¹ *L’Assemblea dell’ATI a Montecatini*, in “Il Trotto”, a. I, n. 9, 26 agosto 1922.

²² *La crisi del trotting. Ma chi è? e L’Appello*, in “Il Trotto”, a. I, n. 19, 26 ottobre 1922.

²³ Maurizio Punzo, *La Giunta Caldara. L’amministrazione comunale di Milano negli anni 1914-1920*, Cariplo-Laterza, Milano 1986, p. 75.

²⁴ *Il carnet del vecchio trottingam*, in “Il Trotto”, a. III, n. 2, 2 febbraio 1924.

racecourse and to extend to the trotting the jurisdiction exercised on the Milanese horse racing circuit. Thus "Il Trotto" made official the news of the imminent transfer to San Siro of the Trotter, which was the result of the providential interest of the Head of Government and of the disinterested help given by Count Turati. A few months later, Benito Mussolini changed the course of all things, the very glorious association led by the Count Turati had thus transformed, according to the periodical directed by Moroni, from greedy, uncouth and arrogant organization, capable of exerting an intolerable hegemony over the entire national equestrian movement, in a "sure beacon towards which all will and all energies must confidently strive for the achievement of tomorrow"²⁵.

2.2 Mussolini and the fascist journal "Il Trotto".

With perfect timing, the point of view of "Il Trotto" also changed radically with regard to the circuit of Monza which was able to play a fundamental and essential role in the wonderful citadel of sport built around the splendid villa and embellished by the new presence of the Mirabello racecourse. This was the result of the generous work of the "Società Incoraggiamento Razze Equine" (SIRE) in support of the national horse riding and on the eve of its official inauguration the newspaper wrote: "this is a century of sport. And after the magnificent racetrack, here is the hippodrome"²⁶. The realization of the new Monzese plant represents, in the equestrian field, the first significant result of the monumental strategy launched in 1923 by the Mussolini government as within the framework of sports and propaganda the policies strongly focused on the construction of innovative structures which were able to express the greatness of the prestige of the new fascist Italy. On this front, Paolo Vieti Pioli undoubtedly became the main point of reference for the regime who, in fact, commissioned the design of many plants still essential today especially for the smooth conduct of horse racing. In addition to the Mirabello racecourse and the San Siro gallop, one of the works must surely be remembered is the highly desired trotter which was built a few meters away from the sports temple of the SIRE and officially inaugurated on November 15, 1925²⁷. The opening of this new and very important plant, conceived between numerous difficulties of logistic economic order and under the threat of the definitive disappearance of the races of half-breed of the capital of the Italian horse racing, for the fascist government represented a success of extraordinary political and propagandistic importance. Mussolini was convinced to make a direct intervention of public institutions in support of the spread of trot, a healthy, popular sport, linked to the agricultural traditions of the country and therefore very useful also the cause of the rural campaign. In this climate there was therefore a proliferation of new small plants which arose far from the large urban wings between Reggio Emilia, Prato, Civitanova Marche, Ravenna and Cesena in particular, that still today represent a very important place not

²⁵ *Lo sport del trotto a Milano nel suo domani*, in "Il Trotto", a. III, n. 22, 31 maggio 1924.

²⁶ *L'inaugurazione della nuova pista al Mirabello di Monza*, in "Il Trotto", a. IV, n. 13, 21 marzo 1925.

²⁷ *Inaugurando*, in "Il Trotto", a. IV, n. 51, 14 novembre 1925.

only for the national equestrian circuit but also for being the theater of the prestigious European Championship. The rescue of this important sport contributed to the overall strengthening of the Emilia-Romagna equestrian circuit which was the backbone of a constantly evolving movement and capable of finally taking root within an important urban center like Rome, and, later, to return to the splendors of the past in Bologna and Naples. The merit of the arrival of the great trot in the capital of the kingdom must be ascribed above all to Salvatore Spinelli, founder of the equestrian society Villa Glori, who worked for the realization, at the Parioli, of the homonymous hippodrome, officially inaugurated on December 8, 1925²⁸, with the decisive support and lively participation of the Mussolini government. This glorious association became one of the privileged interlocutors of the regime, starting from 1927 in particular, thanks to the correspondence between The Council of Ministers' Presidency and the Council of Ministers' Presidency. The development of this relation was, however, destined to positively revolutionize the technical and organizational structure of the Italian section which finally came to have its own derby and some tests of absolute international importance, like the “Premio Littorio” and the “Premio Importazione”. Nevertheless, the level of collaboration was not sudden in fact the fascist authorities decided to strengthen it only following a preliminary phase of investigation into the account of the newly formed equestrian society, started by Mussolini himself and concluded positively from the Prefect of Rome. According to this positive feedback, the Duce in person therefore did not fail in guaranteeing its presence at the trotter racecourse in particular occasions and through substantial funding for the organization and the purchase of substantial awards, on the occasion of the Littorio prize for example. Furthermore, the regime’s open support for the praiseworthy activity carried out by Villa Glori, which, together with the SIRE of Milan and the glorious association responsible for the management of the renewed Capannelle racecourse, thus became one of the leading realities of the national horse racing circuit. Therefore, in this period of time, Rome began to seriously compete with Milan for the title of the Italian capital of horse racing as they could both count on two splendid systems entered in function almost simultaneously but considered differently by the government. Certainly, in virtue of a personal predilection for trotting races and most likely because of a strong intolerance towards the tradition considered substantially impermeable to fascist values, Mussolini showed on several occasions his substantial indifference to the galloping meeting organized by the racing club in Rome. It was not until January 1929, however, that the overall reorganization of the trot sector came to an end, coinciding with the official baptism in Bologna, point of reference for the numerous operators of the circuit that in the Emilia-Romagna area had its own coordination center, the “National Association of Breeders of Trotting Horse” (ANACT)²⁹. The birth of this new partnership was in fact the culmination of an intense season of contacts, relations, exchanges and even controversy between operators in a sector eager, in general, both to please the superior hierarchies and to overcome the objective

²⁸ *I due nuovi grandiosi ippodromi di Roma*, in “Il Trotto”, a. IV, n. 38, 14 agosto 1925.

²⁹ *Unione Ippica Italiana. Atti Ufficiali*, in “Il Trotto”, a. VIII, n. 6, 22 gennaio 1929.

difficulties of coordination and organization, to find a stable and well-ordered framework in order to be available for the regime, contributing decisively to the economic development of the country. The specific contribution of the horse racing sector in this respect would certainly have been enhanced by the overall modernization, in fascist terms, of the national breeding, in which the ANACT in fact was expected to introduce standards, customs, deadlines and techniques destined to last in time after a long period essentially characterized by spontaneity and the individual initiative of the various owners, technicians and breeders. In this regard, was very important the official inclusion of the newly formed association within the powerful National Fascist Confederation of farmers within the corporate economic system, of which the trot sector wanted to be a direct expression. Moreover, also the launching of specific and rigorous statistical monitoring and technical evaluation activities, the carrying out of a census of the national equestrian stock and the adoption of extremely strict rules concerning the registration of the trotter, of which, however, every year, from 1930, under Articles 37 of the Association Regulation, the ANACT was to organize a national exhibition. Called by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, under the high patronage of the head of government and organized by stallion depots and by the national fascist union of agricultural technicians, the first national horse show took place in Rome between 8 and 16 October. It was in fact presented in these terms of the regime, in the commemorative volume of the event: "the event has the aim to highlight the first results achieved by the action carried out by the fascist government, in the equestrian field, during the past decade. It wants to be, therefore, a solemn affirmation of conscious and enlightened industriousness, not a sterile race. The breeders that will participate with their subjects, chosen with care from the best produced in our country, will allow visitors to get an exact and complete idea of the address followed in the individual areas, for the different productions, in the work of reconstitution and improvement. Preference will be given to the equipment of special riding penalties for the horses selected, in view of the fact that this initiative is of fundamental importance. This will enable us to make a clear assessment of the work carried out and the systems adopted, in order to draw up a standard for the future"³⁰. To give vent to his resentment, arguing the need for an overall radical reorganization of the UNIRE, which, in his opinion, had failed completely on the coordination of the different players in the national horse riding, was Piero Dodi³¹, still probably moved by *dolor ripulsae* for the replacement with Carlo Giubilei at the head of the Society for the Italian horse³². Together with him in reality, in this context characterized by the development of centrifugal thrusts and polemic cues, many were to take a position against the institutions in charge of the management of the Italian horse riding circuit and denounced a situation of serious abandonment. Here, the breeders of the thoroughbred were

³⁰ Landoni, E., 2010. *U.N.I.R.E. L'ippica Italiana*. Milano: L'ornitorinco, pp.162

³¹ Piero Dodi, L'ippica di domani e i compiti dell'UNIRE, in "Cavalli e Corse", a. XX, n. 112, 17 settembre 1941.

³² *Unione Nazionale per l'Incremento delle Razze Equine (UNIRE). Comunicato*, in "Lo Sportivo", a. XXX, n. 3467, 28-29 december 1936.

accused of having prevented the perfect adherence of the sector to the political and economic directives of the regime, preventing its complete fascistization.

1.3 Paolo Orsi Vangelli, Federico Tesio and Benito Mussolini.

Faced with the objective impossibility of positively affecting a sports circuit substantially abandoned by the higher hierarchies, who were in fact working on the option of the progressive cancellation of the technical bodies of horse riding, Paolo Orsi Vangelli had no choice but to resign from the role of special commissioner of the U.N.I.R.E.³³ after having fulfilled the mandate received in the best possible way, ensuring adequate funding for the sector, by rationalizing the betting system, preserving in particular its autonomy. The urgency felt by Orsi Vangelli was evidently not understood by Mussolini. So, the disillusioned breeder from Romagna had no other choice than abandoning the work undertaken in the hope of resolving the dramatic fate of the national equestrian circuit after the failure of Acquarone. He had to put an end to the short season of direct collaboration with the regime, which was now preparing to order the abolition of bets and to impose, from October 1, 1942, the suspension of all activities in the racecourses still in operation³⁴. Against this measure, made by the fascist government which officially sanctioned the definitive abandonment of horse racing its own destiny, Federico Tesio, evidently preparing to assume the leading role of a movement now in disarray, tried to oppose with all his might, under the illusion of being able to find in the Duce a really sensitive interlocutor the fate of the extraordinary human, cultural, technical and sporting heritage built by the leaders of the circuit the first national. A few days after its entry into force, breaking the proverbial reserve, he wrote to Mussolini, begging him to go back on his steps: "I beg you with all the fascist soul not to forget my words: the suspension of the races means, if not death, certainly fifty years of lethargy of an Italian activity great success. We'll be the last. We had to and we could be the first. One solution can be found"³⁵. To find it, fortunately, was Tesio, who, faced with the disinterest then the collapse of the regime, managed to ensure the Italian horse riding, despite countless difficulties and problems, a future of glory and success.

³³ *Il nuovo presidente dell'UNIRE*, in "Cavalli e Corse", a. XXI, n. 81, 15 luglio 1942.

³⁴ Aldo Monticelli, *Risorgere*, in "Cavalli e Corse", a. XXII, n. 112, 16 ottobre 1942.

³⁵ *Landoni, E., 2010. U.N.I.R.E. L'ippica Italiana*. Milano: L'ornitorinco, pp. 180.

Chapter 3: the reasons why fascism couldn't control horse riding.

Investigating the causes that led to the non-perfect adherence of horse riding to the spirit of fascism and to its deepest propaganda ideological essence, is without doubt a very difficult task. The Italian equestrian circuit would have had serious difficulties in guaranteeing that perfect unity of views, perspectives and motivations, absolutely necessary for the realization of a strictly hierarchical organizational structure. Anyway, the full fascistization of horse riding was obstacolated by first of all the complexity, the plurality and the heterogeneity of its components, in turn divided within two sectors, trot the gallop, completely irreducible, in virtue also of histories and traditions absolutely different, to a monocentric and autocratic design. It is therefore immediately obvious that there has been an enormous gap which widened over the years, especially since the establishment of the union between this world and the CONI, within which Starace effectively succeeded in achieving a perfect suture between Sport and the National Fascist Party. He required all federations to organize their technical activity and carry out the various administrative tasks, no longer within the solar calendar, but with respect for the fascist one, since every act had to be an act carried out in the name of fascist Italy and it would have been necessary to adapt all the needs to the necessities of the party. To facilitate in an extraordinarily important way the fascistization of the various sports federations were the men that Starace used to realize his own operational scheme, aimed at the total submission of sport to the life and needs of the party. While the U.N.I.R.E. struggled over the financial envelope, linked, under Article 13 of its statute, Starace was able to obtain an increase from 500,000 to 700,000 lire of the annual amount requested by the Ministry of Corporations and to double the total amount granted with the same frequency from the Ministry of Finance, which amounted to 1.500.000 lire. The highest federal leaders were to consider themselves the most loyal militiamen of the Duce who was the first sportsman of Italy. They were the protagonists and authors of a revolutionary plan, intended to make our Country the leading Nation of the world sports movement. According to the importance of the delicacy of these missions, the government should therefore have granted the athletes a public recognition, in order to emphasize the prestige and centrality of the role they held within the fascist society. Thus, it was the Duce that decided to establish new prizes: the Medals to the Athletic value of gold, silver and bronze, and the Stars to the Merit of Spirit, to the athletes, technicians or managers who most distinguished during the sports season. In full respect of the ambitious program developed by Starace, however, the Italian horse riding remained substantially separated from this economic circuit. Not even the granting of a specific recognition for its best representatives, such as equestrian merit, introduced however, only in 1937³⁶, helped to change a situation characterized by a merely superficial fascistization of its national circuit. The concern with which the

³⁶ *Benemeriti dell'Ippica*, in "Lo Sportivo", cit.

President of UNIRE, Luigi Ajroldi di Robbiate, on 26 April 1935 addressed his superior, the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, seems to have been clearly explained within this framework, urging him, in view of an imminent reintegration of the national equestrian circuit within the federal bodies placed under the CONI. Ajroldi called for a purely formal and superficial fascistization of the national equestrian circuit, for which the fundamental referents would always have remained the UNIRE and the Ministry of Agriculture. He considered therefore necessary a simple administrative bureaucratic reconfiguration of the relations between the maximum sporting institution of the country and the technical organism of coordination of the horse riding which was being averted from the secretary of the National Fascist Party. The strong man of the regime could not in fact be satisfied with a mere retouching to the organizational legal framework, within which were in fact defined not only the details of the specific distinct competences reserved to the CONI and the UNIRE, but also the fundamental aspects of their competing powers, exercised mainly with regard to the organization and coordination of horse competitions and the activity carried out by the company for the Italian horse³⁷. Knowing, therefore, that it is not possible to order all of a sudden the overturning of a very delicate, subtle and complex legal technical balance, characterized by the presence of specific weights and counterweights, Starace thought to act in stages and then began his own reform work, modifying, favoring the CONI, the rules regarding the prerogatives of control and guidance on equestrian sports. The main result of this work of a diplomatic political nature, which naturally involved Benito Mussolini, was the launch of the Decree of 14 August 1936, intended to change again, to the advantage of the CONI, the order of the union, whose statutes had already been amended three years earlier. As a result of this new measure, the regime thus decided to give the four horse riding technicians an Italian denomination and to definitively remove from UNIRE the powers exercised until then through the Society for the Italian Horse. However, not satisfied for this partial victory, which left open the question of the autonomous existence of CONI of the national equestrian circuit, Starace tried to decisively get rid of the UNIRE, by submitting directly to the Duce the request of its definitive passage to the dependencies of the maximum sporting institution of the country.

Even within a hierarchical and authoritarian framework, according to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry there was in fact a principle of legality that no one, not even the secretary of the National Fascist Party, however dependent on the Duce, could violate.

In order to reiterate its signature position to the *potiri summa rerum* clearly explained and attempted by Starace, a few days after the publication in "official gazette" of the Decree 14 August 1936, concerning the order of the highest horse riding situation, Rossoni wrote to the Duce, trusting in the definitive closure of the story stating that with this decree was considered the definitively settled this special branch of activity. Faced with the clarity of its arguments, Mussolini could only send back to the sender the request

³⁷ ASM, fondo Ajroldi di Robbiate, *Lettera n. 210 di P/R*, cartella 41.

for the transfer of the UNIRE to the National Olympic Committee, after having received, in the meantime, also the opinion of the Undersecretary of War and Chief of Staff Federico Baistrocchi³⁸. He wrote about his perplexity about a measure designed to dangerously call into question the specific powers of control and guidance exercised by the Ministry of War in the equestrian field and thus to threaten the integrity of the asset's country equine. Even Baistrocchi opted not so much for the defense of the status quo, but rather for the respect of the specificity and diversity of contributions and confidences, which, although within a structure as authoritarian overall as the fascist government, they should continue to be the distinguishing feature of the regime. Mussolini, who at the end had to put an embankment to his most diligent collaborator, found himself therefore to assist from a privileged perspective, in a condition, however, of substantial impotence, the fierce clash between the ranks of the highest hierarchs for responsibilities attributable mainly to Achille Starace, which was finally defeated. To be defeated was above all his monocentric and hierarchical vision of the Italian sports movement, within which the opponents of the powerful party secretary managed to keep a very small margin of autonomy and freedom to the horse riding circuit. Anyway, this was extremely important as it was intended to ensure a prospect of further growth and new successes, although perhaps in a completely unconscious way. Precisely in the light of this reconstruction it emerges rather clearly that, in the horse riding context, the highest governmental authorities have very rarely operated on the basis of a genuine sporting passion and a real technical interest, considering the cause of the regime to be more useful and so they overcame its actual organizational needs favoring their political propaganda. The reasons for the extraordinary success of Italian horse riding during the years of fascism cannot therefore be ascribed to the coordination capacity of the regime, which, as we have seen, was unable to allow the UNIRE to operate efficiently. On the contrary, it seems that they have to be attributed to the winning mentality, the vast technical competence and a political, social and cultural formation distant light years from the propaganda, have contributed to the glorious history of a sport, which still today, beyond the very strong economic interests remains an expression of the qualities of jockeys, coaches, breeders and owners, on the one hand, and the temperament and potential of the horse athlete, on the other.

³⁸ Paolo Matucci, *Federico Baistrocchi sottosegretario (1933-1936)*, cit., pp. 8-46.

Conclusion

At this point, it is indeed necessary to answer the question we asked ourselves at the beginning of this dissertation; namely, did Mussolini manage to fascistize horse riding and use it for its propaganda? As we have been discussing in the course of this thesis, we can conclude that Mussolini tried in every possible way to control horse riding but he didn't accomplish his mission. Among the things Mussolini has done in this field we can remember: the construction of the "Foro Mussolini", now called Foro Italico and, in 1932, the Fascist Government instituted the "*Unione Nazionale Incremento Razze Equine*" (U.N.I.R.E), considered to be a big turning point in the history of the Italian horse riding. Mussolini invested a lot in trotting, the activity he enjoyed the most as it contrasted with the galloping invented by the British. However, Mussolini never showed interest in the importance of the "questione ippica" which regarded the scarce level of breeding in Italy that was the cause of the importation of horses in our Country. Anyway, the "questione ippica" was then faced by General Ajroldi who succeeded in: raising awareness of the problem among the country's leaders, placing at the center of the debate the country's economic development prospects and its new agricultural structure and, lastly, the quantitative and qualitative increase of the equine breeds. Another important actor that was named during the course of this thesis is Giuseppe Sesana under whom began the fascistization of the Italian trotting but, anyway, the full fascistization of horse riding was obstructed by first of all the complexity, the plurality and the heterogeneity of its components, in turn divided within two sectors, trot and the gallop, completely irreducible, in virtue also of histories and traditions absolutely different, to a monocentric and autocratic design. Therefore, that's why Mussolini gave up its idea of fascistization of this sport. The reasons for the extraordinary success of Italian horse riding during the years of fascism cannot therefore be ascribed to the coordination capacity of the regime, which, as we have seen, was unable to allow the UNIRE to operate efficiently. On the contrary, it seems that they have to be attributed to the winning mentality, the vast technical competence and a political, social and cultural formation distant light years from the propaganda, have contributed to the glorious history of a sport, which still today, beyond the very strong economic interests remains an expression of the qualities of jockeys, coaches, breeders and owners, on the one hand, and the temperament and potential of the horse athlete, on the other. To conclude, Mussolini tried and accomplished to fascistize all the Italian sports, such as cycling and gymnastics, and used them in favor of its fascist propaganda to keep Fascism going. Nevertheless, he didn't manage to penetrate through horse riding institutions and its ancient traditions so we can conclude that the fascistization of this sport is one of Mussolini's failures.

Appendix

In the picture you can see Benito Mussolini while practicing horse riding.



Fig. 1 “Così L'Italia Fascio-Sportiva Stregò Anche Gli Stati Uniti.”, March 10, 2012. <https://giorgiogaias.wordpress.com/2012/03/10/cosi-litalia-fascio-sportiva-strego-anche-gli-stati-uniti/amp/>.



Fig. 2 “Ritratto Di Benito Mussolini a Cavallo.” Trentino Cultura. Accessed September 30, 2020. <https://www.cultura.trentino.it/Fotografia-Storica/Ritratto-di-Benito-Mussolini-a-cavallo>.

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Riassunto in Italiano

Questa tesi mira ad analizzare il rapporto in Italia tra l'equitazione e l'epoca fascista.

Più specificamente, si analizzerà se Mussolini riuscì nell'intento di fascistizzare l'equitazione per la sua propaganda. Il fascismo è emerso in Europa dopo la prima guerra mondiale, quando numerosi individui desideravano la solidarietà pubblica e una solida amministrazione statale.

In Italia, Benito Mussolini usò il suo carisma per creare un potente stato totalitario.

Il termine "fascismo" fu coniato nel 1919 da Mussolini per ritrarre il suo movimento politico.

Il simbolo che scelse furono gli antichi fasci romani che erano un mucchio di pali legati intorno ad un' accetta per rappresentare la forza ed il potere dello Stato.

Il fascismo si proponeva di essere presente in ogni aspetto della vita quotidiana italiana.

Esso predicava una solidarietà nazionale. Per raggiungere questo obiettivo si doveva mobilitare tutto il popolo. Era quindi necessario mantenere al massimo livello il morale e lo spirito combattivo delle masse. Per far ciò, tra i vari strumenti a disposizione, le attività sportive ebbero un ruolo molto rilevante. Per capire se Mussolini riuscì nel suo intento di coinvolgere anche l'equitazione nella sua azione propagandistica, si procederà come segue.

Il primo capitolo di questa tesi analizzerà il passaggio dall'Italia liberale al regime fascista e la Questione Ippica. Il capitolo secondo analizzerà il rapporto tra l'equitazione e il regime fascista.

Ultimo, ma non meno importante, è il terzo capitolo, in cui verificheremo se Mussolini ha realizzato il suo piano di fascistizzazione dell'equitazione.

Capitolo 1

La rapida ascesa del fascismo fu la conseguenza della grave situazione interna del primo dopoguerra e della delusione per la "vittoria mutilata".

Il fascismo trovò consensi nei nuovi ceti e nelle aspirazioni della piccola borghesia, facendo leva sull'insoddisfazione dei nazionalisti italiani. Nella conferenza di Versailles del 1919, l'Italia chiese il rispetto del trattato di Londra del 1915 (Trento, Trieste, il Tirolo fino al Brennero l'Istria e la Dalmazia). La maggior parte di queste richieste furono accolte, ma l'Italia subì uno smacco clamoroso quando il presidente Americano Wilson rifiutò di concedere la Dalmazia e Fiume, pur essendo vincitrice. Altre importanti ragioni che favorirono il crollo del regime liberale e l'ascesa del fascismo furono i problemi economici, derivati dalla incapacità delle attività industriali di gestire la riconversione dalla economia di guerra in economia di pace, il malcontento dei reduci, che ebbero un difficile reinserimento nella vita politica e sociale del paese.

l'agricoltura incontrò momenti di profonda crisi: i soldati che tornavano si aspettavano 'la terra dei contadini'; spesso riuscivano a compararla facilmente, spaventando i proprietari terrieri, altre volte occupando indebitamente e con la forza i terreni. La mancanza di un quadro politico stabile e di uno schieramento

compatto e di maggioranza, unito alle precedenti problematiche, permise al regime fascista una rapida e incontrollata ascesa. In meno di quattro anni, Benito Mussolini, capo dei fascisti, diventò presidente del consiglio e, dopo poco, anche le istituzioni liberali si dissolsero. Il fascismo predicava una solidarietà nazionale. Per raggiungere questo obiettivo si doveva mobilitare tutto il popolo.

Era quindi necessario mantenere al massimo livello il morale e lo spirito combattivo delle masse.

Per far ciò, tra i vari strumenti a disposizione, le attività sportive ebbero un ruolo molto rilevante.

Mussolini fu il primo uomo politico a dare di sé un'immagine di uomo sportivo.

Furono promossi tutti gli sport, compresa l'equitazione.

Durante il fascismo ci fu un'importante fase di sviluppo per l'ippica e gli sport equestri, che si concluse nel 1923 con la complessiva ristrutturazione dell'Esercito ed un radicale ripensamento del ruolo svolto al suo interno dall'Arma di Cavalleria. Luigi Ajroldi di Robbiate, nel ruolo di ispettore del servizio veterinario equestre del ministero della guerra, si pose in assoluta evidenza.

Fu infatti il vero artefice della rigenerazione dell'allevamento equino in Italia, della riorganizzazione complessiva di questo importante settore dell'economia nazionale, attuata tra gli anni Venti e Trenta del regime. Il fascismo si trovò a condividere l'urgenza di una razionalizzazione degli allevamenti, in grado di contribuire al prestigio della Nazione. Mussolini ordinò tra il 1926 ed il 1928 il forzato inserimento dell'equitazione all'interno del CONI (Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano), salvo doverne poi riconoscere l'incompatibilità con le altre federazioni sportive.

I suoi quattro enti tecnici nel 1932 vennero infatti posti alle dipendenze della neonata Unione Nazionale Italiana Incremento Razze Equine (UNIRE), che, pur dovendo scendere a patti, tra il 1933 ed il 1936, con il CONI, si dimostrò comunque capace di difendere le proprie prerogative tecniche e di salvaguardare l'autonomia dei proprietari e degli allevatori di cavalli da corsa.

L'ippica fu, quindi, sostanzialmente in grado di preservare la propria libertà, in nome di una storia nobile e gloriosa, riuscendo addirittura ad impedire l'inserimento dei suoi quattro enti tecnici nel rigido meccanismo delle Corporazioni. L'ippica si mantenne una disciplina indipendente, riuscendo persino a smarcarsi dal Coni, che sotto il Fascismo coordinava l'organizzazione di tutti gli sport.

CAPITOLO 2

Il fascismo puntò sullo sport per l' 'elevazione fisica e morale degli italiani' e il movimento sportivo fu valorizzato e utilizzato anche per fini propagandistici.

Lo sport venne utilizzato come uno dei veicoli fondamentali per la formazione del consenso.

Sul fronte equestre, le maggiori possibilità di penetrazione furono immediatamente individuate all'interno del circuito popolare delle corse al trotto che, a differenza del settore esclusivo, nobile, urbano del galoppo, era espressione di quell'Italia rurale di provincia, in cui il fascismo aveva trovato il suo centro vitale. Dalla metà degli anni Venti, il Duce si spese personalmente per incrementare gli sport equestri e Documenti dell'Archivio di Stato, dell'Archivio di Milano e dell'Ufficio storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, raccontano di come Mussolini stabilì la costruzione di un nuovo e più moderno ippodromo per il trotto, disciplina nata in America e considerata più popolare perché si contrapponeva al regale stile del galoppo, inventato dagli inglesi.

Il 1° luglio 1922 nasce “Il Trotto”, che il primo periodico ippico direttamente impegnato sul fronte della valorizzazione delle corse al trotto. Il nuovo giornale iniziò ben presto a caratterizzarsi anche per una grande polemica contro i protagonisti delle corse al galoppo e proprietari di purosangue, rappresentanti di una cultura obsoleta, estranea al cuore pulsante della nuova vita della Nazione.

Il duce in persona non mancò di garantire la propria presenza al trotter in particolari ricorrenze ed attraverso cospicui finanziamenti per l'organizzazione delle gare e l'acquisto di coppe e riconoscimenti. La realizzazione del nuovo impianto dello stabilimento di Monza rappresenta, in campo equestre, il primo risultato significativo della monumentale strategia lanciata nel 1923 dal governo Mussolini, finalizzata alla realizzazione di grandi impianti sportivi

in grado di esprimere la grandezza del prestigio della nuova Italia fascista.

CAPITOLO 3

A metà degli anni Trenta, ci fu un incredibile cambio di rotta da parte del regime fascista: l'Unione nazionale italiana diventa la Cenerentola degli sport. Mussolini l'abbandona, non si reca più all'ippodromo né lo sostiene pubblicamente.

Tale cambiamento si spiega, nell'approssimarsi del conflitto bellico, con la necessità del Duce di smarcarsi da uno sport che da sempre è legato alla tradizione britannica, non solo nella terminologia ma anche nelle tradizioni. Conoscere le cause che hanno portato alla non perfetta aderenza dell'equitazione allo spirito del fascismo, alla sua più profonda essenza ideologica di propaganda, è senza dubbio un compito molto difficile. Il circuito equestre italiano non poteva garantire una perfetta unità di vedute, prospettive e motivazioni, assolutamente necessaria per la realizzazione di una struttura organizzativa strettamente gerarchica. La fascistizzazione integrale dell'equitazione non fu possibile per la complessità, la pluralità e l'eterogeneità delle sue componenti, divise nei due settori di trotto e galoppo. È quindi evidente l'enorme divario che si è ampliato nel corso degli anni, soprattutto dopo l'istituzione dell'UNIRE, tra il mondo dell'equitazione e il CONI, entro cui Starace, presidente del Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano, riuscirà effettivamente a realizzare una sutura perfetta tra gli altri sport e il Partito Nazionale Fascista.

Ajroldi chiese una fascistizzazione puramente formale e superficiale del circuito equestre nazionale, ma non fu possibile. Ci fu anche il tentativo del CONI di trasferire l'UNIRE alle sue dipendenze, che fallì. La questione fu sottoposta all'attenzione di Mussolini, che, sentito anche il parere del Sottosegretario alla Guerra nonché Capo di Stato Maggiore, Federico Baistrocchi, diede parere sfavorevole. Fu sconfitta la visione onnicomprensiva e gerarchica del movimento sportivo italiano, al cui interno il circuito ippico nazionale riuscì a mantenere un piccolo, ma estremamente importante margine di autonomia. I motivi dello straordinario successo dell'equitazione italiana negli anni del fascismo non possono quindi essere attribuiti alla capacità di coordinamento del regime, che, come abbiamo visto, non era sostanzialmente in grado di riunire efficacemente i diversi componenti all'interno di un'unica struttura e quindi di garantire le condizioni necessarie per operare in modo efficiente. Al contrario, sembra che la mentalità vincente, la vasta competenza tecnica e una formazione politica, sociale e culturale distanti anni luce dalla propaganda, hanno contribuito alla gloriosa storia di uno sport, che ancora oggi, al di là dei fortissimi interessi economici, rimane espressione delle qualità di singoli fantini, allenatori, allevatori e proprietari, da un lato, e del temperamento e potenziale del cavallo atleta, dall'altro.

Conclusione

Le conclusioni mettono in evidenza le motivazioni per cui il regime fascista decise, dopo alcuni sterili tentativi, di non annoverare l'equitazione tra gli sport di regime.

Gli sport equestri nell'Italia fascista non erano organicamente strutturati ma rispondevano piuttosto a tradizioni locali con radici antiche e difficilmente asservibili alle necessità di una forma di governo dittatoriale in cui la necessità di una regola comune era requisito essenziale. Inoltre, i costi di gestione erano sostanzialmente più elevati rispetto a sport come l'atletica, il calcio e la ginnastica.

Ciononostante, l'equitazione ebbe notevole impulso su tutto il territorio nazionale ed, al di là dei forti interessi economici, legati soprattutto al commercio dei cavalli, rimase espressione della passione e dell'abilità di proprietari e cavalieri, caratteristiche che ancora oggi caratterizzano il mondo dell'equitazione nel nostro paese.