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**The “aquiline race”.**  
**The Etruscans between Fascist racism,**  
**Nazi racism and the Catholic Church\***

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This article aims to demonstrate that the debate about the origin of the Etruscans can help identify the scientific and ideological inspiration behind Fascist racist theories and explain their relationship with the Catholic Church and Nazi forms of racism. In particular, I argue that the disagreements about the racial identity of the Etruscan people are exemplary of the distinction between “biological” racism and anti-Christian, non-biological racism. The article thus shows that Alfred Rosenberg’s negative representation of the Etruscans — aimed at denying the racial legitimacy of the Catholic Church — was adopted, in Italy, by anti-Christian Fascist philosophers such as Julius Evola and Giulio Cogni; the “biological” racist group behind the journal *La Difesa della Razza*, instead, promoted Eugen Fischer’s “Etruscologist” theory of the “aquiline race” to include the Etruscans in Italian racial history and avoid an ideological struggle with the Church.

**Key words:** Fascism, Nazism, Nationalism, Racism, Etruscans, Catholicism

In 1994, Mauro Raspanti proposed a division into three sub-groups of the “racisms of Fascism” that had marked the years between 1938 and 1943: biological racism, national racism and esoteric-traditionalist racism.<sup>1</sup> This tripartition went against the historiographic bipartition that Renzo De Felice had theorised in 1961, namely between the Nazi’s pseudo-scientific biological racism and Fascist spiritual-humanistic racism.<sup>2</sup> Compared to De Felice’s approach, which was progressively contested precisely from the 1990s onwards,<sup>3</sup> Raspanti

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<sup>1</sup> Mauro Raspanti, *I razzismi del fascismo*, in Centro Furio Jesi (ed.), *La menzogna della razza*, Bologna, Grafis, 1994, pp. 73-91.

<sup>2</sup> Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*, Turin, Einaudi, 2005 (first edition 1961), pp. 392-393; Patrick Bernhard, *The great divide? Notions of racism in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: new answers to an old problem*, “Journal of Modern Italian Studies”, 24, 1, 2019, pp. 97-114.

<sup>3</sup> See Michele Sarfatti, *Gli ebrei nell’Italia fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzione*, Turin, Einaudi, 2018 (first edition 2000).

ti's proposal highlighted the scientific and ideological divergences that had existed between the currents of Fascist racism, stressing their autonomy from the German models, and — at the same time — identifying different phases in their competition for hegemony over the management of racist and anti-Jewish cultural policies.<sup>4</sup> In this article, I aim to demonstrate that the case study of the Etruscans' origins can help identify the scientific and ideological inspiration behind the single racist currents of Fascist culture and explain their relationship with the Catholic Church and contemporary Nazi racism. In particular, I argue that the dissemination in Italy of an expression developed by the German anthropologist Eugen Fischer and used in the field of Etruscology, the “aquiline race”, was one of the pro-Catholic tactics used by Guido Landra's racist group in its competition with Alfred Rosenberg's anti-Etruscan and anti-Christian theories, adopted in Italy by exponents of non-biological racism such as Giulio Cogni and Julius Evola.

In ancient and modern times, many doubts have arisen about the Etruscans' origins and language. Consequently, their identity has long been the subject of the most diverse ideological interpretations. Nineteenth-century writers, politicians and scientists analysed the Etruscan question in the spirit of the Risorgimento, in a variety of reflections on the origins of the Italian nation; already in this era, scholars used racialised, anthropological and craniological categories in their historical and scientific explorations of the Etruscans' identity, and taking a nationalist stance.<sup>5</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, the issue entered a broader anthropological debate on the racial characteristics of the Italian nation, from which different interpretations emerged: while some considered the Etruscans to be an Aryan population, others thought they represented the Mediterranean race.<sup>6</sup> The debate continued during the

<sup>4</sup> See Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy*, London, Routledge, 2002; Francesco Cassata, “*La Difesa della razza*”. *Politica, ideologia e immagine del razzismo fascista*, Turin, Einaudi, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Maria-Laurence Haack, *Alla ricerca dei crani etruschi: gli antropologi italiani e gli Etruschi (1841-1911)*, in Giuseppe Maria Della Fina (ed.), *Gli etruschi nella cultura e nell'immaginario del mondo moderno*, Rome, Quasar, 2017, pp. 105-130; Salvatore Rigione, *Sulle tracce di una mitografia italiana della razza nella rincorsa coloniale*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2020, pp. 93-94; Edoardo Marcello Barsotti, *Race and Risorgimento: An unexplored chapter of Italian history*, “*Journal of Modern Italian Studies*”, 25, 3, 2020, pp. 273-294.

<sup>6</sup> A well-known advocate of the first interpretation was Giosuè Carducci. See Laura Fournier-Finocchiaro, *Giosuè Carducci et la construction de la nation italienne*, Caen, Presses universitaires de Caen, 2006, pp. 60-76; Laura Fournier-Finocchiaro, “*Les sublimes idéaux de notre race*”: *Carducci et le mythe aryen*, in Aurélien Aramini, Elena Bovo (eds.), *La pensée de la race en Italie. Du romantisme au fascisme*, Besançon, Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2018, pp. 57-72; Mauro Raspanti, “*Noi, nobile razza ariana*”. *Giosuè Carducci e il mito ariano*, “*Razzismo & Modernità*”, 1, 1, January-June 2001, pp. 26-55. The main advocate of the second interpretation is Giuseppe Sergi: see Fedra Pizzato, *Per una storia antropologica della nazione. Giuseppe Sergi e il mito della razza mediterranea nella costruzione culturale dello stato unitario italiano e nella competizione politica europea (1880-1919)*, “*Storia del pensiero*

Fascist period, when the political evolution of nationalism and racism accompanied the institutionalisation of Etruscology and its development within the more general and pervasive Fascist myth of “Romanness”.<sup>7</sup> Under the regime, the Italian Etruscologists dealt extensively with the question of the Etruscans’ origins; although they failed to reach an agreement, they started from a shared nationalist approach that saw the Etruscans as a de facto Italic and racially Mediterranean population.<sup>8</sup> When, in the second half of the 1930s, Mussolini and the regime’s leaders established an Aryan and anti-Semitic cultural policy, in parallel with the country’s diplomatic and ideological convergence with Nazi Germany, the Etruscans too were used — like the entire history of Italy — in a range of racist discourses on antiquity that, depending on the ideological inspiration, either integrated them into an Italian Aryan identity or rejected them as a foreign body. Drawing on hitherto unexplored archival sources and scholarly work on the racist applications of Etruscan identity by Fascists and Nazis,<sup>9</sup> I will approach these uses of antiquity as an interpretative key that will enable me to reconstruct some aspects of the history of Fascist scientific racism.

politico”, 4, 1, 2015, pp. 25-51; Marie-Laurence Haack, *Crani etruschi vs crani romani? Il fascismo e l’antropologia degli etruschi* in Paola Salvatori (ed.), *Il fascismo e la storia*, Pisa, Edizioni della Normale, 2020, pp. 31-50.

<sup>7</sup> On the relationship between racism and the myth of Romanness, see Paola Salvatori, *Razza romana*, in Andrea Giardina, Fabrizio Pesando (eds.), *Roma caput mundi. Una città tra dominio e integrazione*, Milan, Electa, 2012, pp. 277-286; Alessandro Pagliara (ed.), *Antichistica italiana e leggi razziali*, Parma, Athenaeum, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Marie-Laurence Haack, Martin Miller (eds.), *La construction de l’étruscologie au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Actes des journées d’études internationales des 2 et 3 décembre 2013*, Amiens, Bordeaux, Ausonius, 2015; Marie-Laurence Haack, Martin Miller (eds.), *Les Étrusques au temps du fascisme et du nazisme. Actes des journées d’études internationales des 22 et 24 décembre 2014 (Amiens)*, Bordeaux, Ausonius, 2016 ; Marie-Laurence Haack, Martin Miller (eds.), *L’étruscologie dans l’Europe d’après-guerre. Actes des journées d’études internationales des 14 au 16 septembre 2015 (Amiens et Saint-Valéry-sur-Somme)*, Bordeaux, Ausonius, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> See Martin Miller, *Alfred Rosenberg, die Etrusker und die Romfrage*, in Marie-Laurence Haack, Martin Miller (eds.), *Les Étrusques au temps du fascisme et du nazisme*, cit., pp. 81-94; Marie-Laurence Haack, *The invention of the Etruscan “race”. E. Fischer, nazi geneticist, and the Etruscans*, “Quaderni di Storia”, 80, July-December 2014, pp. 256-261; Marie-Laurence Haack, *Les Étrusques dans l’idéologie national-socialiste. À propos du Mythe du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle d’Alfred Rosenberg*, “Revue historique”, 2015, 1, pp. 149-170 ; Marie-Laurence Haack, *Tanaquil et les chemises noires et brunes*, *Anabases*, 24, 2016, pp. 93-106; Marie-Laurence Haack, *Rome contre Tusca: les Étrusques dans l’œuvre de Giulio Evola*, in Philippe Foro (ed.), *L’Italie et l’Antiquité du Siècle des lumières à la chute du fascisme*, Toulouse, Presses Universitaires du Midi, 2017, pp. 265-278; Martina Piperno, *L’antichità “crudele”. Etruschi e Italici nella letteratura italiana del Novecento*, Rome, Carocci, 2020, pp. 53-55.

## Julius Evola, Giulio Cogni and the anti-Etruscan influence of Alfred Rosenberg

As Marie-Laurence Haack and Martin Miller have observed,<sup>10</sup> the Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946) contrasted the ancient Romans — considered racially Nordic — with the Etruscans of oriental origin. He did so in his work *Der Mythos des XX. Jahrhunderts*, written around 1925 and published in 1930, selling 1.3 million copies until 1944. In particular, Rosenberg gave a radically negative image of the Etruscans, denouncing the presence of two supposedly archetypal figures of their civilisation: the prostitute-sacerdote Tanaquil and the wizardlike figure of the haruspex, both accused of paedophilia, the ritual murder of children, human sacrifices, spreading superstitions based on the analysis of excrement, satanism, witchcraft and the worship of phallic symbols. The Nazi theorist also equated the Etruscans with the Jews, claiming that each considered itself a chosen people and that they differed from Greek and Indo-European cultures and were incapable of creating independently without imitating other cultures. This highly anti-Etruscan imagery drew inspiration directly from the work *Tusca*, published in 1922 by the German Indologist and Tibetologist Albert Grünwedel (1856-1935). Convinced that the Etruscan language derived from the Egyptian language, Grünwedel had sought to translate some important Etruscan texts, but he constantly ended up describing violent and obscene rituals.<sup>11</sup> Rosenberg believed in the reliability of Grünwedel's translations and used them to support one of the main arguments of his own work: that the Catholic Church had Etruscan and Jewish origins, and hence was racially and morally unrelated to the Aryan civilisation.<sup>12</sup> In fact, under the Nazi regime, Rosenberg joined the *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*, a movement that united non-Christian and neopagan religions in Germany.<sup>13</sup> Another member of this organisation was the German anthropologist Hans Friedrich Karl Günther (1891-1968), who was politically linked to Rosenberg.<sup>14</sup> Close to the *völkisch* and neopagan movement, in the

<sup>10</sup> See M. Miller, *Alfred Rosenberg, die Etrusker und die Romfrage*, cit.; M.L. Haack, *Les Étrusques dans l'idéologie national-socialiste*, cit.; M.L. Haack, *Tanaquil et les chemises noires et brunes*, cit.

<sup>11</sup> M. Miller, *Alfred Rosenberg, die Etrusker und die Romfrage*, cit., pp. 82-84.

<sup>12</sup> M. Miller, *Alfred Rosenberg, die Etrusker und die Romfrage*, cit., pp. 81-94; Katarzyna Leszczyńska, *Hexen und Germanen. Das Interesse der Nationalsozialismus an der Geschichte der Hexenverfolgung*, Bielefeld, transcript, 2009, pp. 209-211.

<sup>13</sup> Édouard Conte, Cornelia Essner, *Culti di sangue. Antropologia del nazismo*, Rome, Carocci, 2000 (Italian translation, first edition 1995), pp. 36-37. See Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism. The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 256; Karla Poewe, *New Religions and the Nazis*, New York-London, Routledge, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> É. Conte, C. Essner, *Culti di sangue*, cit., p. 64; Johann Chapoutot, *Le nazisme et l'Antiquité*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2012 (first edition 2008), pp. 28-32.

1920s Günther became known as a theorist of Aryan racism, criticising the racial “denordification” (*Entnordung*) of the German people. Based on these positions, Günther polemicised against the nationalist and Catholic theorists of race, who advocated a German racial identity that was Lamarckian and not exclusively Nordic.<sup>15</sup> Günther, too, showed an interest in the Etruscans: in his 1929 book *Rassenkunde Europas*, he insisted on their oriental origins following his study of Etruscan funerary art and the craniological analyses by Giustiniano Nicolucci and Giuseppe Sergi. He concluded that the Etruscans’ Mediterranean side had grown in the period of their political decadence, according to an approach that attributed the end of civilisation to the *Entnordung*. He next dwelled on the Etruscans’ Middle Eastern nature, whose racial features were said to include an aptitude for trade, metalworking, superstition, cruelty and pederasty. Furthermore, Günther rejected the possibility that Dante, Giotto, Leonardo and Michelangelo could be considered heirs of the Etruscans.<sup>16</sup> Like Rosenberg, the German anthropologist took the most negative elements of his orientalist representation of the Etruscans from Grünwedel’s *Tusca*.<sup>17</sup>

The anti-Etruscan and anti-Christian theories of Grünwedel, Rosenberg and Günther did not remain undisputed in Nazi Germany, especially in Catholic circles. Tensions rose between the Holy See and Nazism as they disagreed on the Catholics’ political viability in Germany, compliance with the Concordat, Nazi eugenic policies, the Austrian question and the issue of racism and neopaganism, and on 7 February 1934, the Holy Office placed Rosenberg’s *Mythus* on the Index.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the Archbishop of Cologne (Karl Joseph Schulte) and — after his resignation — the Bishop of Münster (Clemens August von Galen) sponsored a working group of Catholic scholars coordinated by Wilhelm Neuss, a theologian and historian of the Catholic Church, in order to timely criticise the theses of the *Mythus*. The initiative resulted in the publication, at

<sup>15</sup> É. Conte, C. Essner, *Culti di sangue*, cit., pp. 57-82.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Friedrich Karl Günther, *Rassenkunde Europas*, München, Lechmann, 1929, pp. 161-164.

<sup>17</sup> H.F.K. Günther, *Rassenkunde Europas*, cit., p. 164n.

<sup>18</sup> See “La Civiltà Cattolica”, LXXXV, 1934, 1, pp. 543-544; Raimund Baumgärtner, *Weltanschauungskampf im Dritten Reich. Die Auseinandersetzung der Kirchen mit Alfred Rosenberg*, Mainz, Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1977; Barbara Raggi, Ruggero Taradel, *La segregazione amichevole. “La Civiltà Cattolica” e la questione ebraica 1850-1945*, Rome, Editori Riuniti, 2000; Peter Godman, *Hitler and the Vatican. Inside the secret archives that reveal the new story of the Nazis and the Church*, New York, Free Press, 2004, pp. 48-49; Hubert Wolf, *Il papa e il diavolo. Il Vaticano e il Terzo Reich*, Rome, Donzelli, 2008 (Italian translation), pp. 260-267; Tommaso Dell’Era, *Razza*, in Adriano Prosperi, Vincenzo Lavenia, John Tedeschi (eds.), *Dizionario storico dell’Inquisizione*, Pisa, Edizioni della Normale, 2010, vol. III, pp. 1300-1302; Dominik Burkard, *Die lehramtliche Verurteilung des “Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts”. Bestandteil einer kurialen Weltanschauungspolitik?*, in Raffaella Perin (ed.), *Pio XI nella crisi europea*, Venice, Edizioni Ca’ Foscari, 2015, pp. 15-36.

the end of 1934, of a collection of *Studien zum Mythos des XX. Jahrhunderts*.<sup>19</sup> Drawing on theories developed in the field of Etruscology, this work criticised the negative representation of the Etruscans, emphasising the scientific unreliability of Grünwedel's ideas.<sup>20</sup> In response to Rosenberg, the Catholic scholars expressed an actual apologia for the Etruscans, itself based on racial categories:

Now, more than ever, we are convinced of the influence of race on the formation of a people, its life and its works. If you wish to feel the Etruscan spirit, you must visit Florence! You will probably not find another city in Italy with a more pronounced character, and although it is difficult to trace the individual events and the works constructed here to the various racial, spiritual and generally cultural — or even accidental — influences, one can nonetheless see in the peculiarity of Florence something of the peculiarity of the Etruscan race. But where else can one find a stronger, more obstinate and lively people than in this city, capable of defeating emperors and popes thanks to its 50,000 inhabitants, simultaneously trades throughout the known world, has local craftsmanship, stubbornly tears itself apart in fratricidal wars, up to the point that the homes of the ancient and proud families are still forts and fortresses today, yet at the same time finds the spiritual strength and leisure time for cultural creations of the greatest importance?

The apologia concludes by claiming that the Florentines are still proud of their Tuscan and Roman past, and that Rosenberg is ultimately wrong.<sup>21</sup> On the question of the Etruscans' origins, the German Catholic scholars stress their doubts about Grünwedel and Rosenberg's convictions. At the same time, they seem to express a preference for the thesis of a northern — hence Aryan — origin of the Etruscans, citing numerous scholars of antiquity who support this theory and giving fewer citations in support of the orientalist thesis.<sup>22</sup> In reality, the Catholic preference for the Etruscans' northern origins clashes with Günther and Rosenberg's orientalist thesis, in the sense that it attributes an Indo-European racial identity to the Etruscans that is common to Greek, Roman and Germanic peoples. Hence, the pro-Etruscan response of Rosenberg's Catholic critics does not reflect an "anti-racist" stance, given that they share certain basic assumptions with the Nazis: the existence of races with their own physical and spiritual characteristics, a millennia-long continuity of these races, and the myth of the northern and Aryan origin of civilisation at large. What is really at stake, from an ideological point of view, is not racism but the Church's historical and racial evaluation, and thus the polit-

<sup>19</sup> M. Miller, *Alfred Rosenberg, die Etrusker und die Romfrage*, cit., pp. 85-87; R. Baumgärtner, *Weltanschauungskampf im Dritten Reich*, cit., pp. 154-168. On Von Galen, see H. Wolf, *Il papa e il diavolo*, cit., pp. 225-236.

<sup>20</sup> *Studien zum Mythos des XX. Jahrhunderts*, Köln, Bachem, 1935, pp. 8 e 8n. I am referring to the last edition of the *Studien*: R. Baumgärtner, *Weltanschauungskampf im Dritten Reich*, cit., p. 155 and pp. 156-157.

<sup>21</sup> *Studien zum Mythos des XX. Jahrhunderts*, cit., p. 10n. Translation mine.

<sup>22</sup> *Studien zum Mythos des XX. Jahrhunderts*, cit., p. 10. See K. Leszczyńska, *Hexen und Germanen*, cit., pp. 236-237.

ical legitimacy of Catholic action in German society. By defending the Etruscans from the negative portrayal of Grünwedel, Günther and Rosenberg, and by promoting the thesis of the Etruscans’ northern origin, the Catholics fought Rosenberg’s anti-clerical argument from the bottom up. The Nazi theorist responded to the criticism in 1935, reiterating Grünwedel’s ideas and calling the Catholic scholars who criticised him “obscurantists” (*Dunkelmänner*).<sup>23</sup> The Holy Office condemned this intervention, too.<sup>24</sup> However, the Nazi ideologist had by then managed to capitalise on his role in the new regime; even before he was put on the Index, on 24 January 1934, he had been appointed Hitler’s representative for the ideological supervision of the Nazi party and related associations.<sup>25</sup> In that same year, he also founded the so-called Amt Rosenberg, a cultural institute linked to the Nazi party that — inspired by the *Mythus* — financed racist research in the field of antiquity.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout 1934, as tensions over the Austrian question rose between Italy, the Holy See and Germany, Rosenberg’s anti-Etruscan theories also received criticism in Fascist culture and from the Italian Catholics.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, any possibility of translating the *Mythus* into Italian was excluded.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, Rosenberg’s ideas were promptly received in the thought of two Fascist philosophers with anti-Christian positions: Julius Evola and Giulio Cogni. From the 1920s onwards, Evola (1898-1974), in particular, became the spokesman of an esoteric traditionalism based on the Guénonian belief in an ancient tradition that Fascism should defend and restore to oppose the decadence of the West.<sup>29</sup> The Etruscans were initially included in this traditionalist identity. In 1927, in *Critica Fascista*, Evola proposed that Fascism poses itself as an “Anti-Europe”, hence in an anti-democratic, anti-bourgeois and anti-Christian sense,

<sup>23</sup> M. Miller, *Alfred Rosenberg, die Etrusker und die Romfrage*, cit., p. 88. See Alfred Rosenberg, *An die Dunkelmänner unserer Zeit, eine Antwort auf die Angriffe gegen den “Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts”*, München, Hoheneichen-Verlag, 1935.

<sup>24</sup> See “La Civiltà Cattolica” LXXXVI, 1935, 3, p. 318.

<sup>25</sup> M. Miller, *Alfred Rosenberg, die Etrusker und die Romfrage*, cit., p. 84; R. Baumgärtner, *Weltanschauungskampf im Dritten Reich*, cit., p. 154.

<sup>26</sup> See Reinhard Bollmus, *Das Amt Rosenberg und seine Gegner. Zum Machtkampf im nationalsozialistischen Herrschaftssystem*, Stuttgart, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1970. Günther also adhered to the Amt Rosenberg: É. Conte, C. Essner, *Culti di sangue*, cit., p. 64.

<sup>27</sup> See T. Salvotti, *Razzismo religioso e politico*, “L’Universale”, IV, 13-14, July 1934, p. 4; Guido Manacorda, *Rosenberg e il mito della razza*, “Il Frontespizio”, November 1934, p. 3; M. Barbera S.I. [Mario Barbera], *Mito razzista anticristiano*, “La Civiltà Cattolica”, LXXXV, 1934, 1, 3 February 1934, pp. 243-244.

<sup>28</sup> See Giorgio Fabre, *Il razzismo del duce. Mussolini dal ministero dell’Interno alla Repubblica sociale italiana*, Rome, Carocci, 2021, pp. 144-145.

<sup>29</sup> On Julius Evola, see Francesco Germinario, *Razza del sangue, razza dello spirito: Julius Evola, l’antisemitismo e il nazionalsocialismo, 1930-43*, Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 2001; Francesco Cassata, *A destra del fascismo. Profilo politico di Julius Evola*, Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 2003; Paul Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, London-New York, Routledge, 2011.

embodying “the resurrection of the archaic Mediterranean tradition, of that epic and magical tradition, older even than the Aryan [tradition], which derived from itself the Egyptian, Chaldean, Ancient Greek civilisation, and even more mysterious and remote ones, [...], Sumerian, Etruscan, that of which Mycenae and the Balearic Islands bear the traces”.<sup>30</sup> Evola thus takes up the definition of his collaborator Arturo Reghini, “pagan imperialism”,<sup>31</sup> and formulates a “Mediterranean tradition” that would include the Etruscans, which he contrasts with a “Semitic tradition imported from the exotic soil of Palestine” and represented by Christianity.<sup>32</sup> In 1928, he developed these theories in an essay called precisely “Imperialismo pagano” (Pagan imperialism), where he indicated the need for Fascism to return to the “Mediterranean tradition”. The enemies of traditionalism also included Christianity, which he considered in the Nietzschean sense of a religion of slaves: “[T]he greatest cause of the decline of the West”, corrupter of the Roman Empire and then, in the Lutheran version, of the “race of blond Germanic barbarians”.<sup>33</sup> Evola even placed Christianity at the basis of liberalism and socialism, characterising it racially as a “Semitic contamination”.<sup>34</sup> Using almost the same words as in the article of 1927, the philosopher again placed the Etruscan civilisation among the original matrices of the “Mediterranean tradition” that Fascism was meant to restore.<sup>35</sup>

From at least 1930 onwards, though, Evola began to radically reconsider his thought in a highly anti-Etruscan sense, owing mainly to the influence of Rosenberg and the nineteenth-century Swiss historian and anthropologist Johann Jakob Bachofen, theorist of the “matriarchy” or “maternal right” (*Mutterrecht*) of the Etruscans, whom he considered oriental and opposed to the Romans, of Nordic origin.<sup>36</sup> In early 1930, Evola publicly expressed his interest in German racist theories.<sup>37</sup> In particular, he recorded a renewed interest in Bachofen, from whom he borrowed the opposition between uranic masculine and telluric feminine civilisations, and included the matriarchal Etruscans among the latter. According to Evola, “many elements” of Bachofen’s “Etruscologist” interpretation were still valid in 1930, and in July of that year he published — in his journal, *La Torre* — a translated extract from

<sup>30</sup> Cited in F. Cassata, *A destra del fascismo*, cit., p. 30 (first edition “Critica Fascista”, 15 June 1927).

<sup>31</sup> See Arturo Reghini, *Imperialismo pagano*, “Atanòr”, I, 3 March 1924, pp. 69-95 (first edition “Salamandra”, January-February 1914).

<sup>32</sup> Cited in F. Cassata, *A destra del fascismo*, cit., p. 33.

<sup>33</sup> Julius Evola, *Imperialismo pagano. Il fascismo dinanzi al pericolo euro-cristiano*, Todi-Rome, Atanòr, 1928, pp. 11-14.

<sup>34</sup> J. Evola, *Imperialismo pagano*, cit., p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> J. Evola, *Imperialismo pagano*, cit., p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> See Peter Davies, *Myth, Matriarchy and Modernity. Johann Jakob Bachofen in German Culture, 1860-1945*, Berlin-New York, De Gruyter, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Julius Evola, *Aspetti del movimento culturale della Germania contemporanea*, “Nuova Antologia”, 1 January 1930, pp. 83-97.



Bachofen’s *Die Sage von Tanaquil* (1870), on the racial and cultural contrast between Etruscans and Romans.<sup>38</sup> In November 1930, Evola wrote a critical review of Rosenberg’s recently published *Mythus*, preferring Bachofen’s theories instead.<sup>39</sup> His objections to the author of the *Mythus* derived from a traditionalist assumption: in Evola’s view, Rosenberg was still too nationalistic and open to industrial modernity, whereas a more explicit “revolt” was needed against the Anglo-Saxon, American and Semitic modern civilisations.<sup>40</sup> It is, then, possible to date the beginning of Evola’s interest in German racism and anti-Etruscan theories to 1930. Referring to Rosenberg’s *Mythus* and Bachofen, in 1932 Evola described the figure of the Etruscan queen Tanaquil as a “type of Semitic royal woman”, considering the Etruscans matriarchal people,<sup>41</sup> and claiming that they practised a “chthonic-democratic plebeian religion” that was counterposed to Aryan cults.<sup>42</sup> The traditionalist philosopher also adopted Grünwedel’s anti-Etruscan imagery, which he probably discovered through Rosenberg, attributing an “orgiastic, demonic and witch-like aspect” to the Etruscan religion. For these reasons, Evola presented the expulsion of the Tarquins from Rome as a Nordic aristocratic revolt against the democratic regime of the telluric Etruscans.<sup>43</sup> A demonstration of the influence of German racism and the consequent anti-Etruscan turn can be found in the German edition of “Pagan imperialism”, published in 1933, where Evola eliminated the references to the “Mediterranean tradition” and to the Etruscans that he had made in 1927 and 1928. For the German public, Evola now spoke of an Aryan, “primordial Nordic-Solar tradition” and denounced the “semitisation” of the Greco-Roman Nordic world,<sup>44</sup> in a clear parallelism with German Aryan racism.

Evola’s relationship with Rosenberg was not linear, as ideological influence alternated with distrust and criticism. In May 1934, after the Catholic Church had placed the *Mythus* on the Index, Evola defended Rosenberg by presenting him as “the principal theorist of the Nazi movement”,<sup>45</sup> and wrote that his work contained “courageous ideas, which we sincerely appreciate, in the same way

<sup>38</sup> *La donna regale e la nascita di Roma*, “La Torre”, I, 9, July 1930, pp. 6-7.

<sup>39</sup> Julius Evola, *Il “Mito” del nuovo Nazionalismo Tedesco*, “Vita Nova”, VI, 11, November 1930, pp. 930-934. See Marie-Laurence Haack, *Rome contre Tusca*, cit.

<sup>40</sup> J. Evola, *Il “Mito” del nuovo Nazionalismo Tedesco*, cit., p. 933.

<sup>41</sup> Julius Evola, *Il simbolo aristocratico romano e la disfatta classica dell’Aventino*, in Julius Evola, *La nobiltà della stirpe (1932-1938). La difesa della razza (1939-1942)*, Rome, Fondazione Julius Evola, 2002, pp. 84-86 (first edition. “La nobiltà della stirpe”, November-December 1932).

<sup>42</sup> J. Evola, *Il simbolo aristocratico romano*, cit., p. 87.

<sup>43</sup> J. Evola, *Il simbolo aristocratico romano*, cit., pp. 88-89.

<sup>44</sup> Julius Evola, *Heidnischer Imperialismus*, in Julius Evola, *Imperialismo pagano nelle edizioni italiana e tedesca*, Rome, Edizioni Mediterranee, 2004, pp. 193-199 (Italian translation, first edition 1933).

<sup>45</sup> Julius Evola, *La lotta nazionalsocialista per la “visione del mondo”*, “Bibliografia fascista”, XII, 5, May 1934, p. 360.

that he took an interest in similar ideas that we had defended in Italy”.<sup>46</sup> For his part, Evola advocated an aristocratic, imperialist and racist political ideal, criticising the more “Jacobin” (i.e. nationalist and populist) aspects of Nazism. For this reason, he hoped that Rosenberg would not give in to political compromises and impose his anti-Christianism on Germany without reducing his racism to a biological matter.<sup>47</sup> However, the private information that the political police had gathered seems to suggest that Evola doubted Rosenberg’s actual revolutionary force; in June 1934, that is, a month after publishing the article, Evola expressed his disappointment with Nazi neopaganism, which he still considered too nationalistic.<sup>48</sup> The following year, Evola hoped that Rosenberg would be able to rid himself of his ideological errors and materialist tendencies, a condition he considered to be the basis of any “fruitful cultural collaboration”.<sup>49</sup>

Caught between sympathy for and mistrust of Rosenberg, from 1932 onwards, Evola integrated the anti-Etruscan theories of Bachofen, Grünwedel and Rosenberg himself into his essays and journalistic publications, where he exalted the Nordic Aryan race: in *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno* (Revolt against the modern world, 1934),<sup>50</sup> in his column “Diorama Filosofico” for *Il Regime Fascista*,<sup>51</sup> in *Il mito del sangue* (The myth of the blood, 1937),<sup>52</sup> where he contested the historical-religious and irrationalist studies of Eugenio Giovannetti and Giovanni Antonio Colonna di Cesarò,<sup>53</sup> in Giovanni Preziosi’s journal *La Vita Italiana*,<sup>54</sup> in *La Difesa della Razza*,<sup>55</sup>

<sup>46</sup> J. Evola, *La lotta nazionalsocialista per la “visione del mondo”*, cit., p. 363.

<sup>47</sup> J. Evola, *La lotta nazionalsocialista per la “visione del mondo”*, cit., p. 365.

<sup>48</sup> Information dated June 1934, in ACS, Ministero dell’Interno, Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione polizia politica, Fascicoli personali (1926-1944), b. 467, f. “Evola Jules-Giulio Cesare”.

<sup>49</sup> Julius Evola, *Paradossi dei tempi: paganesimo nazista = illuminismo liberale*, “Lo Stato”, VI, 7, July 1935, p. 531.

<sup>50</sup> Julius Evola, *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*, Milan, Hoepli, 1934, pp. 343, sg.

<sup>51</sup> Julius Evola, *Roma contro Tusca*, “Il Regime Fascista”, 15 March 1935.

<sup>52</sup> Julius Evola, *Il mito del sangue*, Milan, Hoepli, 1937, pp. 171-172. Evola explains Rosenberg’s ideas on the Etruscans to the Italian audience at pages 184-186.

<sup>53</sup> Julius Evola, *Cesare vivo?*, “Lo Stato”, IX, 2, February 1938, pp. 103-107; Julius Evola, *Sulla storia “sotterranea” di Roma*, “La vita italiana”, February 1939, pp. 191-200.

<sup>54</sup> Julius Evola, *Guerra occulta nell’antichità. Roma, i “Libri Sibillini” e l’ebraismo*, “La vita italiana”, September 1939, pp. 313-319 (see Julius Evola, *I libri sibillini*, “La Difesa della razza”, 5 February 1941); Julius Evola, *Circa lo spirito della civiltà romana*, “La vita italiana”, December 1940, p. 611n. Here, on his own negative interpretation of the Etruscans, Evola refers to *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*, although he admits that “similar ideas, albeit in a predominantly political use (in the bad, modern sense of the word)” can be found in Rosenberg’s *Mythus*.

<sup>55</sup> Julius Evola, *Simboli eroici della tradizione ario-romana. L’Ascia*, in J. Evola, *La nobiltà della stirpe (1932-1938). La difesa della razza (1939-1942)*, cit., pp. 239-241 (first edition “La Difesa della razza”, 5 November 1940); Julius Evola, *Panorama razziale dell’Italia preromana*, in J. Evola, *La nobiltà della stirpe (1932-1938). La difesa della razza (1939-1942)*, cit., p. 291 (first edition in “La Difesa della razza”, 20 June 1941).

in *Sintesi di dottrina della razza* (Synthesis of the doctrine of race, 1941),<sup>56</sup> and in his negative reviews of the works of the Etruscologists Pericle Ducati and Massimo Pallottino.<sup>57</sup> Starting at least in 1934, Evola forged contacts with Nazi racism networks and exponents of the Austrian and German conservative right,<sup>58</sup> intervening in the German-language debate and acting as the promoter of a German-Italian, anti-Semitic and anti-communist convergence.<sup>59</sup> Between 1937 and 1938, Evola joined the Ahnenerbe institute founded by Walter Wüst and Heinrich Himmler, who — after some hesitation — accepted his collaboration.<sup>60</sup> In Italy, by contrast, the Ministry of Popular Culture ignored Evola’s offers of availability at least until the summer of 1941,<sup>61</sup> while the political police continued monitoring his political and cultural ties to Germany.<sup>62</sup>

However, in the Fascist context of the 1930s, another supporter of Rosenberg’s anti-Etruscan and anti-Christian theories emerged, initially destined to obtain a greater political success than Evola. In September 1935, at the beginning of the diplomatic convergence between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, Mussolini sent the consul Gino Scarpa to Germany. The mission included talks with Walter Gross, head of the Nazi party’s Rassenpolitisches Amt,<sup>63</sup> who would later declare that he and the consul had come to “a complete agreement on the fundamental principles” and that the Italian side had expressed a willingness to “introduce the biological racist approach in the Italian way of thinking and science”. Giulio Cogni (1908-1983), a philosophy professor from Siena and follower of Giovanni Gentile’s actual idealism, active first in France and then in Germany, was nominated for this initiative.<sup>64</sup> In fact, between 1934

<sup>56</sup> Julius Evola, *Sintesi di dottrina della razza*, Milan, Hoepli, 1941, pp. 156-160, 232.

<sup>57</sup> Julius Evola, *Recensione di P. Ducati*, “Come nacque Roma”, “Bibliografia fascista”, March 1941, pp. 208-210; Julius Evola, *Recensione di M. Pallottino*, “Etruscologia”, “Bibliografia fascista”, June 1942, pp. 397-400.

<sup>58</sup> Hans-Jürgen Lutzhöft, *Der Nordische Gedanke in Deutschland. 1920-1940*, Stuttgart, Klett, 1971, pp. 272-273; F. Cassata, *A destra del fascismo*, cit., p. 163.

<sup>59</sup> Horst Junginger, *From Buddha to Adolf Hitler: Walther Wüst and the aryan tradition*, in Horst Junginger (ed.), *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2008, pp. 127, sg.

<sup>60</sup> Horst Junginger, *From Buddha to Adolf Hitler*, cit., p. 133.

<sup>61</sup> Alfieri’s disapproval of Evola’s initiatives in Germany in July 1937; letter from Alfieri to Evola of 26 January 1939; letter from Pavolini to Bottai of 6 January 1941, in ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Gabinetto, Affari generali, b. 121, fasc. 759 “EVOLA Julius”.

<sup>62</sup> Report of 19 January 1939 by the political police; report of 20 October 1939 by the political police, in ACS, Ministero dell’Interno, Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione polizia politica, Fascicoli personali (1926-1944), b. 467, fasc. “Evola Jules — Giulio Cesare”.

<sup>63</sup> On Walter Gross and his office, see Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi conscience*, Cambridge, Mass., The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003; G. Fabre, *Il razzismo del duce*, cit., pp. 139-140.

<sup>64</sup> F. Cassata, “La Difesa della razza”, cit., p. 25. On Giulio Cogni, see Tommaso Dell’Era, *Giulio Cogni*, in A. Prosperi, V. Lavenia, J. Tedeschi (eds.), *Dizionario storico dell’Inquisizione*, cit., vol. I, pp. 343-346; Tommaso Dell’Era, *Giulio Cogni in Germania: il razzismo italiano tra*

and 1935, Cogni gained notoriety as a keen observer of German racism for the anti-Semitic and racist newspapers founded by Telesio Interlandi (1894-1965), *Il Tevere* and *Quadrivio*. In the *Quadrivio*, he proposed an idealist and anti-positivist racism,<sup>65</sup> whereas in *Nuovi studi di diritto, economia e politica* — the journal of another follower of Gentile, the philosopher Ugo Spirito — he expressed an interest in “Nordic racism” and the anti-Semitic and anti-Christian positions within Nazism, clarifying that he was mainly referring to Houston Stewart Chamberlain and Alfred Rosenberg.<sup>66</sup> After the conquest of Ethiopia, Cogni intensified his collaboration with Interlandi, claiming the interest of Fascist racism in Italian colonial policy and explicitly stating that he shared the ideas conveyed in Rosenberg’s *Mythus*.<sup>67</sup>

Giulio Cogni indeed proved to be an attentive reader of Rosenberg’s and Günther’s theories. In 1935, he gave the Italian public an account of German religious developments during Nazism, stating that he was in favour of the *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*. While criticising the definition of this current as “neopaganism”, he proposed an Italian application through the recovery of ancient Roman religiosity.<sup>68</sup> At this time, Telesio Interlandi introduced Cogni to Mussolini and the leaders of Fascist political culture, who were beginning to prepare the anti-Jewish persecution: the plan for collaboration with Dino Alfieri, the Minister of Popular Culture, dates back to 1936.<sup>69</sup> In his articles of this period, gathered in 1937 in an essay titled “I valori della stirpe italiana” (The values of the Italian race), Cogni asserted that — from a racial point of view — Italy represented a “*Nordic-Mediterranean synthesis*”,<sup>70</sup> and he rejected Giuseppe Sergi’s Mediterranean race theory.<sup>71</sup> He instead preferred the Nordicism of Günther, previously equated with a “Nordic Lombroso”,<sup>72</sup> although he maintained the original affinity between Nordic and Mediterranean people.<sup>73</sup> In the appendix, he reproduced a paper by Günther on the common Nordic origin of the Italians, the Germans and the ancient Greeks,<sup>74</sup>

*Ministero degli Esteri e Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda I*, “Giornale di Storia”, 25, 2017; Tommaso Dell’Era, *Giulio Cogni in Germania: il razzismo italiano tra Ministero degli Esteri e Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda II*, “Giornale di Storia”, 26, 2018.

<sup>65</sup> Giulio Cogni, *Razza e sangue*, “Quadrivio”, II, 22, 25 March 1934, pp. 1-2.

<sup>66</sup> Giulio Cogni, *Il mito del sangue nordico e Rosenberg*, “Nuovi studi di diritto, economia e politica”, VII, 4-5, July -October 1934, pp. 304-319.

<sup>67</sup> See Giulio Cogni, *Razza*, “Quadrivio”, IV, 38, 19 July 1936, pp. 1-2; Giulio Cogni, *Mito del XX secolo*, “Quadrivio”, IV, 45, 6 September 1936, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> Giulio Cogni, *La nuova religione tedesca*, “Quadrivio”, VIII, 4-6, July-December 1935, pp. 271-278.

<sup>69</sup> F. Cassata, “*La Difesa della razza*”, cit., pp. 24, sg.

<sup>70</sup> Giulio Cogni., *I valori della stirpe italiana*, Milan, Bocca, 1937, pp. VII-VIII.

<sup>71</sup> G. Cogni, *I valori della stirpe italiana*, cit., pp. 23-30.

<sup>72</sup> G. Cogni, *Il mito del sangue nordico e Rosenberg*, cit., p. 311.

<sup>73</sup> G. Cogni, *I valori della stirpe italiana*, cit., pp. 39, sg.

<sup>74</sup> G. Cogni, *I valori della stirpe italiana*, cit., pp. 159-174.

and he demonstrates that he was also familiar with Evola’s *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*.<sup>75</sup>

Drawing on Günther and Rosenberg, Cogni developed his own negative and anti-Christian interpretation of the Etruscans, whom he considered oriental and alien to the Nordic race.<sup>76</sup> He elaborated his evaluation of Etruscan civilisation in his book *Il Razzismo* (Racism), published in 1936 but conceived in previous years as an account of the main German theories and idealistic interpretations of racism, which he had discussed directly with Giovanni Gentile himself.<sup>77</sup> Although he again referred to Nazi racism, the *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung* and Rosenberg,<sup>78</sup> Cogni lamented the fact that, in Germany, racism had been framed in an anthropological and positivist sense, whereas its spiritual objectives had been delegated to scientists.<sup>79</sup> He remained cautious, though, about the potential Italian applications of Nazi racism. Thus, he wrote that the Jews in Italy were few and integrated into the nation: “[H]ere, leaving aside religious reasons, a Jewish question can no longer exist.”<sup>80</sup> He went on to analyse ancient history, making a distinction between “Nordic or solar” and “Semitic and Semitising” civilisations, among which he included that of the Etruscans. From this perspective, Semitic civilisations would be characterised by passivity, fanaticism and an instinctive nature, “the supremacy of subterranean realms, of unbridled passion, [and] worship of mysterious transcendent powers”. Cogni also quoted Bachofen when he argued that these were matriarchal civilisations.<sup>81</sup> In particular, he considered the Etruscan people “spiritually inferior”, “related to Middle Eastern civilisations” and devoted exclusively to luxury and vice. Here, Cogni underlined the non-Indo-European character of the Etruscan language; he added that, “having disappeared as a race, these people mixed with the other Italic peoples, slightly corrupting their purity” until the victory of the northern Romans over the Etruscans allowed the rise of Rome.<sup>82</sup> Cogni furthermore quoted Rosenberg on the Semitic and Etruscan origins of Catholic religiosity, locating the roots of medieval spirituality and witchcraft in the activities of the Etruscan haruspices.<sup>83</sup> In this way, the Etruscans could be considered Semitic and matriarchal, and linked to a mysterious and negative image with an anti-Semitic and anti-Christian function. Consid-

<sup>75</sup> G. Cogni, *I valori della stirpe italiana*, cit., p. 112.

<sup>76</sup> G. Cogni, *I valori della stirpe italiana*, cit., pp. 211-212n e 224-226.

<sup>77</sup> T. Dell’Era, *Giulio Cogni*, cit.

<sup>78</sup> Giulio Cogni, *Il Razzismo*, Milan, Bocca, 1937 (first edition 1936), pp. 86, sg. The 1937 reprint differs from the first version — which was already circulating in 1936 — only in the introduction: See Giovanni Rota, *Intellettuale, dittatura, razzismo di Stato*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2008, p. 27 n.

<sup>79</sup> G. Cogni, *Il Razzismo*, cit., p. 109.

<sup>80</sup> G. Cogni, *Il Razzismo*, cit., p. 158.

<sup>81</sup> G. Cogni, *Il Razzismo*, cit., pp. 178-179.

<sup>82</sup> G. Cogni, *Il Razzismo*, cit., p. 189.

<sup>83</sup> G. Cogni, *Il Razzismo*, cit., p. 205.

ering his submissive reception of Rosenberg's anti-Etruscan theories, in this phase Cogni should be considered — alongside Evola — as one of the main Italian supporters of the German racist theories that the Fascist leaders were following with interest.

The main obstacle to the racist cultural policy that Mussolini intended to entrust to Cogni came from the Catholic Church's reaction to German racism, as had happened in 1934 and 1935. Not unlike Rosenberg's and Evola's theories, the negative representation of the Etruscans that Cogni promoted effectively contributed to denying the racial legitimacy of Catholicism. Three months after Pope Pius XI's encyclical "Mit brennender Sorge", aimed at denouncing the anti-Christian tendencies of Nazism at the height of the tensions between the Holy See and the German regime,<sup>84</sup> in June 1937 the Holy Office placed Cogni's *Il Razzismo* on the Index, condemning it for being "full of Rosenberg's ideas" and "the first attempt of Germanic racism to also enter the ranks of Fascism".<sup>85</sup> From Germany, the Aryanists openly supported Cogni, while his writings were hosted by Günther's journal, *Rasse*.<sup>86</sup> Faced with the Church's resistance, Mussolini nevertheless chose not to use Cogni for the political and cultural definition of Fascist racism after all. Consequently, the philosopher's political success waned and the regime's interest in him declined.<sup>87</sup>

### ***La Difesa della Razza* and the reception of Eugen Fischer's "Etruscologist" theory**

Following another mediation attempt by Interlandi, at the beginning of 1938 Mussolini and the Minister of Popular Culture Alfieri invited the young anthropologist Guido Landra (1913-1980) to prepare an Aryan and anti-Semitic cultural policy that was no longer inspired by Rosenbergian and potentially anti-Christian theories, as in the case of Cogni, but based on a scientific and Mendelian heredity approach.<sup>88</sup> From the outset, this new approach was marked by a general openness to the Etruscan identity as a propaganda tool. Between February and June 1938, Landra prepared 10 propaganda points drawing on Mussolini and Alfieri's indications, in collaboration with a

<sup>84</sup> Giovanni Miccoli, *I dilemmi e i silenzi di Pio XII. Vaticano, Seconda guerra mondiale e Shoah*, Milan, Rizzoli, 2000, p. 159; R. Taradel, B. Raggi, *La segregazione amichevole*, cit., p. 73; H. Wolf, *Il papa e il diavolo*, cit., pp. 279-287; Fabrice Bouthillon, Marie Levant (eds.), *Pie XI. Un pape contre le nazisme? L'encyclique Mit brennender Sorge*, Brest, Éditions Dialogues, 2016.

<sup>85</sup> G. Miccoli, *I dilemmi e i silenzi di Pio XII*, cit., p. 28; F. Cassata, "La Difesa della razza", cit., p. 29; T. Dell'Era, *Giulio Cogni*, cit.

<sup>86</sup> H.J. Luthhöft, *Der Nordische Gedanke in Deutschland*, cit., pp. 273-274.

<sup>87</sup> F. Cassata, "La Difesa della razza", cit., pp. 29-30.

<sup>88</sup> A. Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy*, cit., pp. 66-68; F. Cassata, "La Difesa della razza", cit., p. 38.

committee that also included the anthropologist Lidio Cipriani, a scholar of Etruscan craniology.<sup>89</sup> A member of the Fascist party, Cipriani was an assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Florence and director of the National Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in the same city.<sup>90</sup> The proposals that Cipriani sent Landra for the racist propaganda — meant to convince the “simplest minds” by “striking their imagination and possibly their hearts” — also contained Etruscan material: a photo of an Etruscan bust from the third century BC, excavated in Orvieto, which resembled “the Mother of Our Sovereign”. Cipriani wrote that it was necessary “to lead the simplest minds to connect, at a glance, the racial characteristics of the ancient peoples of Italy with those of today, and to understand how they have remained unchanged over the millennia”.<sup>91</sup> The Etruscans were therefore included in the racist projects of Guido Landra’s group, which did not reproduce Rosenberg’s anti-Etruscan and anti-Christian theory.

Already in February 1938, Mussolini ordered Landra to set up “a scientific committee for the study and organisation of the racial campaign”; in June, it was called the “Study office”, and subsequently the “Race office” of the Ministry of Popular Culture, of which Landra was put in charge.<sup>92</sup> Along with the publication — on 14 July 1938 — of the Aryan and biological handbook that would later become known as the “Manifesto della razza” (Manifesto of Race) as well as the launch of Telesio Interlandi’s fortnightly *La Difesa della Razza*,<sup>93</sup> on 5 August, Landra’s direction of the Race office marked the hegemony of “biological” racism over the cultural policy of Fascist racism.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Lidio Cipriani, *Su alcuni crani etruschi della Marsiliana*, “Studi Etruschi”, I, 1927, pp. 391-405; Comitato Permanente per l’Etruria (Ente per le Attività Toscane), *Atti del primo congresso internazionale etrusco*, Florence, Rinascimento del libro, 1929, p. 264; Lidio Cipriani, *Struttura e proporzioni degli arti in scheletri di tombe etrusche*, “Studi Etruschi”, III, 1929, p. 368. On Lidio Cipriani see Francesco Surdich, *Cipriani, Lidio*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Rome, Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 1981, vol. 25; Orlando Paris, *Il discorso scientifico e la costruzione dell’altro. Il razzismo biologico di Lidio Cipriani*, Pisa, Pacini, 2017.

<sup>90</sup> Memo on Cipriani’s CV, in ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Gabinetto, Affari generali, b. 151, fasc. 1026 “Ufficio Razza. Fascicoli di collaboratori”, s.fasc. “Cipriani Lidio, Firenze”; Sandra Puccini, *L’Antropologia a Roma tra Giuseppe e Sergio Sergi*, “Rivista di Antropologia”, LXXI, 2, 1993, p. 239.

<sup>91</sup> Allegato III, in ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Gabinetto, Affari generali, b. 151, fasc. 1026 “Ufficio Razza. Fascicoli di collaboratori”, s.fasc. “Cipriani Lidio, Firenze”.

<sup>92</sup> F. Cassata, “*La Difesa della razza*”, cit., p. 38.

<sup>93</sup> See R. De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*, cit., pp. 555-556.

<sup>94</sup> M. Raspanti, *I razzismi del fascismo*, cit.; Giorgio Israel, Pietro Nastasi, *Scienza e razza nell’Italia fascista*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1998; Aaron Gillette, *The origins of the ‘Manifesto of racial scientists’*, “Journal of Modern Italian Studies”, 6, 2001, 3, pp. 305-323; Aaron Gillette, *Guido Landra and the office of racial studies in fascist Italy*, “Holocaust and genocide studies”, 3, 2002, pp. 357-375; A. Gillette, *Racial theories in fascist Italy*, cit.; Roberto Maiocchi, *Scienza e fascismo*, Rome, Carocci, 2004; F. Cassata, “*La Difesa della razza*”, cit.; Giorgio Israel, *Il fascismo e la razza. La scienza e le politiche razziali del regime*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2010;

Cogni wrote to the Race office, offering to translate Rosenberg's *Mythus* into Italian. On 17 November 1938, the Race office wrote to the Minister of Popular Culture advising against the offer. The letter in question is particularly helpful to reconstruct the relations between the factions of Italian racism, the German factions and the Catholic Church.

A translation in Italian of Rosenberg's *Myth of the twentieth century* is not recommended for various reasons.

Sure enough, while containing important chapters on various aspects of racial issues, Rosenberg's book is in essence the most striking attack that the Catholic Church has suffered since Luther. Its translation, at a time when the Fascist racial policy is in full swing, could lead us into very dangerous territory.

The Race office openly advised against the translation of the *Mythus* and the collaboration with Cogni to preserve the political balance on which the consensus around Fascist racism was based:

[T]he ultimate consequence would be an open struggle between the Regime and the Church in Italy.

Even those Catholic sectors that have until now made a clear distinction between Italian and German racism would fatally develop a hostile attitude towards us.

Furthermore, the letter reveals an understanding of the internal composition of German racism: "It should also be added that, in Germany, the ideas of the Rosenberg Myth currently do not fully identify with the direction nowadays given to that racial policy but rather represent a trend, the importance of which has declined in recent times."<sup>95</sup> Landra and his "biological" collaborators therefore showed an awareness of the balances that had to be taken into account within Italian society. Italian "biological" racists, too, kept Rosenberg's ideas — already criticised in Nazi Germany — at a distance in the name of a compromise with the more nationalist "Catholic sectors" that had adhered to Fascist racism, which could never accept the influence of anti-Christian theories. The same political concerns may explain the reticence of the Ministry of Popular Culture, in the same period, to accept Evola's offers of collaboration prior to the summer of 1941, and then again when the philosopher — in collaboration with Alberto Luchini — managed to get closer to Mussolini after the spring of 1942.<sup>96</sup> In particular, it was Dino Alfieri — the coordinator of the "Manifesto della razza" — who intervened on several occasions to distance

Annalisa Capristo, *Scienze e razzismo*, in Francesco Cassata, Claudio Pogliano (eds.), *Storia d'Italia. Annali 26, Scienze e cultura dell'Italia unita*, Turin, Einaudi, 2011, pp. 241-263; G. Fabre, *Il razzismo del duce*, cit., pp. 172-181.

<sup>95</sup> Letter from the Race office to the minister of 17 November 1938, in ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Gabinetto, Affari generali, b. 151, fasc. 1026 "Ufficio Razza. Fascicoli di collaboratori", s.fasc. "Prof. Cogni Giulio. Siena".

<sup>96</sup> M. Raspanti, *I razzismi del fascismo*, cit.; F. Cassata, "La Difesa della razza", cit., p. 98.



himself from Evola and his ideas,<sup>97</sup> first as a minister and then as Italian ambassador to the Holy See and Berlin.<sup>98</sup> This confirms the concern of the promoters of Fascist biological racism to maintain a balance between the positions of the Catholic Church and those of the Nazis.

The Etruscans were, then, caught in the rivalry between racist factions, representing an element of ideological division and a symbol of the racists' relationship with Catholicism. In the course of its five years of activity (1938-1943), *La Difesa della Razza* published numerous articles on Etruscan themes that — except for Evola's writings for the journal — all aimed at integrating the Etruscans into Italian racial identity, without accepting the anti-Christian implications of Rosenberg's anti-Etruscan theories.<sup>99</sup> Most of them tended to support the inclusion of the Etruscans in the Aryan race, or at least in a “Mediterranean” version of it: this was the case of the contributions by Arrigo Solmi, Minister of Grace and Justice,<sup>100</sup> Francesco Callari,<sup>101</sup> Emilio Villa,<sup>102</sup> Armando Tosti,<sup>103</sup> Paolo Guidotti,<sup>104</sup> Paolo Rubiu,<sup>105</sup> Ugo Rellini,<sup>106</sup> Massimo Scaligero,<sup>107</sup> and Aldo Modica.<sup>108</sup> The journal's editorial secretary, Giorgio Almirante, was also interested in the Etruscans; he had already promoted racist and anti-Semitic articles on ancient Rome in *La Difesa della Razza*,<sup>109</sup> as well as the slogan that presented racism as a “nationalism enhanced by five hundred per

<sup>97</sup> Alfieri's disapproval of Evola's initiatives in Germany in July 1937; letter from Alfieri to Evola of 26 January 1939; letter from Pavolini to Bottai of 6 January 1941; reply from Celso Luciano to Alfieri of 9 September 1941, in ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Gabinetto, Affari generali, b. 121, f. 759 “EVOLA Julius”.

<sup>98</sup> See Pietro Pastorelli, *Alfieri, Edoardo (Dino)*, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, Rome, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1988, vol. 34.

<sup>99</sup> See Julius Evola, *La nobiltà della stirpe (1932-1938). La difesa della razza (1939-1942)*, Fondazione Julius Evola, Rome, 2002.

<sup>100</sup> Arrigo Solmi, *L'unità etnica della nazione italiana nella storia*, “La Difesa della razza”, I, 1, 5 August 1938, pp. 8-11.

<sup>101</sup> Francesco Callari, *Perché ariani*, “La Difesa della razza”, I, 4, 20 September 1938, p. 20.

<sup>102</sup> Emilio Villa, *Arianità della lingua etrusca*, “La Difesa della razza”, I, 5, 5 October 1938, p. 20.

<sup>103</sup> Armando Tosti, *Gli Ebrei e la morale borghese*, “La Difesa della razza”, I, 6, 20 October 1938, p. 60.

<sup>104</sup> Paolo Guidotti, *Cesare Balbo strenuo difensore della razza*, “La Difesa della razza”, II, 6, 20 January 1939, p. 28.

<sup>105</sup> Paolo Rubiu, *Gente sarda antisemita*, “La Difesa della razza”, II, 10, 20 March 1939, p. 31.

<sup>106</sup> Ugo Rellini, *Continuità della razza e della cultura primitiva in Italia*, “La Difesa della razza”, II, 2, 20 November 1938, pp. 15-17.

<sup>107</sup> Massimo Scaligero, *Omogeneità e continuità della razza italiana*, “La Difesa della razza”, II, 15, 5 June 1939, pp. 38-40; Massimo Scaligero, *Il volto autentico della civiltà mediterranea*, “La Difesa della razza”, V, 18, 20 July 1942, pp. 14-16.

<sup>108</sup> Aldo Modica, *La scrittura e la razza italica*, “La Difesa della razza”, III, 8, 20 February 1940, pp. 38-41.

<sup>109</sup> Giorgio Almirante, *L'editto di Caracalla. Un semibarbaro spiana la via ai barbari*, “La Difesa della razza”, I, 1, 5 August 1938, pp. 27-29; Giorgio Almirante, *Roma antica e i giudei*, “La Difesa della razza”, I, 3, 5 September 1938, pp. 27-30.

cent”.<sup>110</sup> He next discussed Littoria and the Agro Pontino, in a series of articles that offered a racial analysis of the Italian regions. After arguing that a new race was being born in the Pontine colonies, he suggested that the Volscians and Etruscans had already drained the Pontine plain by founding Terracina: “The first drainage works, the remnants of which are still visible today, should be attributed to the Etruscans. In fact, the Etruscans have a reputation for being excellent drainers; in Tuscany, too, there are traces of similar works by these people.” Almirante is referring to the ancient historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the theorist of the Italic autochthony of the Etruscans, to the local historian Arturo Bianchini, to Karl Julius Beloch and to Gaetano De Sanctis, a supporter of the thesis of the Etruscans’ northern origin. The claim of an Etruscan technical heritage clearly went hand in hand with the Etruscans’ inclusion in the Italian racial identity. Nevertheless, Almirante argued that Rome eventually brought about the Aryan, racial unification of Italy.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, in 1942, the editors of *La Difesa della Razza* reported a discussion with a reader about the Etruscans. The “camerata” Piero Saponi, from the Ligurian city of Imperia, asked for an opinion on the issue cover of another journal, the *Rivista di studi liguri* (published by the International Institute of Ligurian Studies in Bordighera). The cover depicted a map of Italy in the sixth century BC where the Germans were indicated as occupying the entire Po valley, while the Ligurians were confined to the area of present-day Liguria. The editors replied that this was an inaccurate representation because the Po Valley had been colonised by the Etruscans before the arrival of the Celts: “The Etruscans remained in the Po Valley pushing north until the beginning of the fifth century BC, and many inscriptions bear witness to this.” They thus conveyed an autochthonic conception of the Etruscans, who were believed to come from central Italy, not from the north. In fact, the editors added that the Etruscans — unlike the Italic peoples — were not part of the “Indo-European peoples”, and cited the works of scholars such as Patroni, Brizio, Ducati, Pallottino and Devoto, who all confirmed Giuseppe Miceli’s nineteenth-century ideas. Despite the preference for autochthonism over the northern origin thesis, this position again clearly advocated the Etruscans’ inclusion within the Italian nation and race.<sup>112</sup>

Other than publishing pro-Etruscan interventions, *La Difesa della Razza* also promoted an editorial line aimed at explicitly disseminating anthropological studies that integrated the Etruscans into the Italian racial identity. This is the case of the programmatic reception and discussion of Eugen Fischer’s “Etruscologist” theory, whose analysis can offer a useful perspective on the

<sup>110</sup> Giorgio Almirante, *Né con 98 né con 998*, “La Difesa della razza”, I, 6, 20 October 1938, p. 48.

<sup>111</sup> Giorgio Almirante, *Viaggio razziale per l’Italia. Littoria e l’Agro Pontino*, “La Difesa della razza”, III, 12, 20 April 1940, pp. 17-18.

<sup>112</sup> *Questionario*, “La Difesa della razza”, VI, 4, 20 December 1942, p. 22.

scientific inspiration behind Fascist biological racism and the Guido Landra group’s political tactics concerning the Catholic Church.

Eugen Fischer (1874-1967) was a doctor, anthropologist and eugenicist, and one of the leading exponents of German scientific racism in the 1930s. His 1908 study on the “Rehoboth bastards” in Germany’s African colonies had earned him the reputation of being a supporter of Mendelian hereditarianism in the field of interbreeding between human races. After the First World War and until 1926, he had been a member of the right-wing nationalist party *Deutschnationale Volkspartei*, participating in the politically transversal movement of racial hygiene. In 1926, he became the director of the new Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut für Anthropologie, menschliche Erblehre und Eugenik, which was launched on 1 October 1927 to coordinate interdisciplinary research aimed at implementing eugenic state policies. In this context, Fischer had tried to remain independent from politics by collaborating with Catholic, Protestant and nationalist eugenicists. Nevertheless, he exposed himself as a critic of Hans Friedrich Karl Günther’s Nordicist racism, not unlike his student Karl Saller,<sup>113</sup> a doctor and member of the Nazi SA as well as a nationalist theorist of the racial classification of all Germans into a homogeneous *deutsche Rasse*.<sup>114</sup> A Catholic from southern Germany, Fischer defined himself as a prototype of the Dinaric race and also theorised that the Germans belonged to a Germanic race that was not exclusively Nordic.<sup>115</sup> Yet, despite his disagreements with Günther, Fischer also collaborated with him, sharing an interest in the racist theories of Gobineau and Chamberlain and showing an ability to maintain links with all political factions.<sup>116</sup> After the Nazis seized power, Fischer tried to maintain margins of scientific autonomy, criticising the absolute value of racial purity and making anthropological distinctions between Eastern Jews, whom he considered inferior, and Western Jews.<sup>117</sup>

Having become the target of controversy in 1933 and 1934, contemporaneously with the controversy between nationalists and Nordicists within Nazi racism,<sup>118</sup> Fischer eventually aligned himself with the new regime and anti-Semitism, continuing to direct the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut under the political supervision of Walter Gross, head of the Rassenpolitisches Amt. From this moment onwards, the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut took on a central role in the Nazis’ racial and eugenic policy, training doctors and SS men in scientific matters, advising the regime and spreading eugenic propaganda. Thanks

<sup>113</sup> Hans-Walter Schmuhl, *The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for anthropology, human heredity and eugenics, 1927-1945. Crossing boundaries*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2008, pp. 25-28.

<sup>114</sup> H.W. Schmuhl, *The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute*, cit., p. 85; É. Conte, C. Essner, *Culti di sangue*, cit., pp. 70, sg.

<sup>115</sup> M.L. Haack, *The invention of the Etruscan “race”*, cit.

<sup>116</sup> H.W. Schmuhl, *The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute*, cit., pp. 113-114.

<sup>117</sup> H.W. Schmuhl, *The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute*, cit., pp. 120-121.

<sup>118</sup> É. Conte, C. Essner, *Culti di sangue*, cit., pp. 57-82.

to the political importance of his scientific position and theories, from 1934 onwards, the Nazi regime presented Fischer as one of the leading names in German scientific racism, promoting positions that were different from those of Günther and Rosenberg. In July 1934, Fischer and Gross attended the International Congress of Anthropology and Ethnology in London; in 1935, Gross entered the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut's direction while following the first negotiations on the German-Italian racist convergence.<sup>119</sup> In 1937, Rudolf Hess appointed Fischer as the German representative at the Second International Congress of Anthropology and Ethnology in Copenhagen, which he attended in August 1938, again together with Gross.<sup>120</sup> That same year, in the context of the Italian-German convergence and the promotion of Italian biological racism, Fischer imposed himself as a point of reference for Guido Landra's group. Thus, as the German anthropologist held conferences in Italy on German racism, in spring 1938 he came into contact with Landra as he was developing — together with Mussolini and Alfieri — the aforementioned “Manifesto della razza”. From that moment on, Landra indicated Fischer as his scientific model and renounced his own education, which had been influenced by Giuseppe Sergi's Mediterranean race theory, visiting anthropological institutes in Germany. It is no coincidence that Fischer was very critical of Italian scholars: he considered Sergio Sergi and the majority of Italian anthropologists as Jews, and he looked favourably on the growth of anti-Semitism in Italian universities, even trying — with the help of Gross — to mediate in favour of Landra's academic career, but without success.<sup>121</sup> Fischer's influence on the young Italian scholar during the elaboration of Fascist “biological” racism is therefore a fact that must not be underestimated, and which finds confirmation in the contents conveyed by *La Difesa della Razza*.

In 1938, the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut funded one of Fischer's trips to Italy, during which he decided to study the racial composition of the Etruscans.<sup>122</sup> The results of the research were presented at the Academy of Sciences in Berlin, in December 1938, and published the following year in the form of two articles. Fischer observed and photographed Etruscan human representations of both pictorial and sculptural nature in Bologna, Florence and Tarquinia, which he analysed and then compared with the phenotypes of races known in the field of anthropology. In particular, he focused on the Etruscans' facial features and nose. After comparing the depictions with oriental, Mediterranean and Nordic phenotypes, Fischer concluded that the Etruscans did not belong to

<sup>119</sup> H.W. Schmuhl, *The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute*, cit., p. 137.

<sup>120</sup> M.L. Haack, *The invention of the Etruscan “race”*, cit., p. 258.

<sup>121</sup> A. Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy*, cit., pp. 68-69; F. Cassata, “*La Difesa della razza*”, cit., p. 200; H.W. Schmuhl, *The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute*, cit., p. 314; G. Fabre, *Il razzismo del duce*, cit., p. 372.

<sup>122</sup> H.W. Schmuhl, *The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute*, cit., p. 169.

any known race and that they represented an ethnic group in itself. He called this group the “aquiline race”, because of the aquiline nose that he felt was a characteristic element of the Etruscans and of Tuscans like Dante. The German anthropologist specifically evoked the studies of his Italian colleague Fabio Frassetto, a scholar of Etruscan craniology. Together with Giuseppe Sergi, Frassetto had attended the exhumation of the medieval poet’s remains on the occasion of the sixth centenary of his death,<sup>123</sup> and in a 1933 study he defined Dante’s nose as “convex or aquiline” and stated that his skull had “forms that were not uncommon in Etruscan skulls”, attributing both the poet and the Etruscans to the Mediterranean race described by Giuseppe Sergi.<sup>124</sup> Fischer also claimed to have seen living examples of Etruscans in Tuscany, Lazio and Umbria. Interestingly, he traced the origins of this race back to the Indo-European civilisation, even if he claimed that the Etruscans completed their “racial formation” in central Italy.<sup>125</sup> This de facto inclusion of the Etruscans in the Aryan identity by the Catholic scholar is consistent with the Italian and German Catholics’ criticism of Rosenberg. Given Fischer’s vicinity to Landra, this interpretation of the Etruscans — so distant from the orientalist and anti-Christian version of Rosenberg, Evola and Cogni — was readily accepted by the group of Italian “biological” racists.

The eugenicist’s first interactions with the Fascist biological racism group began at an early stage; already in the issue of 5 November 1938, the editorial board of *La Difesa della Razza* published a letter from Fischer in which he confirmed that he had subscribed the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut to the journal and praised the Italian racist campaign.<sup>126</sup> However, it was mainly Giuseppe Pensabene, a Palermo architect and art critic,<sup>127</sup> who disseminated Fischer’s theories on the Etruscans via Interlandi’s journal, starting with the issue of 20 March 1939. In previous years, Pensabene had already been active as a racist theorist and interpreter of Etruscan identity for Interlandi’s *Quadrivio*; there he had alternated positive judgements on the Etruscans, whom he assimilated to the Romans,<sup>128</sup> with a pro-Nazi column on racial issues co-authored with the

<sup>123</sup> Fabio Frassetto, Giuseppe Sergi, *Esame antropologico delle ossa di Dante nel VI Centenario della sua morte*, “Rivista di Antropologia”, XXVI, 1924-1925, pp. 3, sg. See Comitato Permanente per l’Etruria (Ente per le Attività Toscane), *Atti del primo congresso internazionale etrusco*, cit., p. 262; Fabio Frassetto, *Crania etrusca. Le forme craniche degli Etruschi e il problema delle origini etrusche*, “Rivista di Antropologia”, XXIX, 1930-1932, p. 463.

<sup>124</sup> Fabio Frassetto, *Dantis ossa. La forma corporea di Dante*, Bologna, R. Università di Bologna, 1933, pp. 24 and 77.

<sup>125</sup> M.L. Haack, *The invention of the Etruscan “race”*, cit., pp. 268-280.

<sup>126</sup> *Di pari passo con gli amici italiani*, “La Difesa della razza”, II, 1, 5 November 1938, p. 46.

<sup>127</sup> F. Cassata, “La Difesa della razza”, cit., p. 8.

<sup>128</sup> Giuseppe Pensabene, *Originalità della scultura romana*, “Quadrivio”, III, 38, 21 July 1935, pp. 1-2; Giuseppe Pensabene, *L’ultima fase della scultura antica*, “Quadrivio”, III, 39, 28 July 1935, p. 4.

South Tyrolean journalist Helmut Gasteiner,<sup>129</sup> in which he disseminated the anti-Etruscan theories of Grünwedel, Günther and Rosenberg.<sup>130</sup> In *La Difesa della Razza*, on the other hand, Pensabene followed in Fischer's footsteps as he engaged in a racial appropriation of Etruscan identity, writing under the pseudonym of "G. Dell'Isola".<sup>131</sup> According to the art critic, "the question of the origin of the Etruscans is not simply a historical curiosity for us Italians, but a vital starting point to fully understand the civilisation of ancient Italy and the Renaissance". Anthropology was considered the key to interpreting the problem of "[studying] the racial character" of the Etruscans. Pensabene explicitly presented Fischer's theories as works of scientific "objectivity", based on "positive elements" and in contrast to the "ease with which Rosemberg [*sic*], for example, without any positive element, had issued statements and judgments that, although very widespread, we could not possibly share". After quoting passages by Fischer on the "living Etruscans" of contemporary Italian cities, accompanied by photos and drawings made by Fischer himself, Pensabene argued that the aquiline race "had already been in central Italy ever since the Neolithic age; long before the Aryans arrived on the peninsula". According to him, the Etruscans were not oriental but perhaps Indo-Europeans who were later absorbed by the aquiline race. Nevertheless, he added the following: "[W]hat in ancient times was called Etruscan civilisation, and later resurfaced as the Tuscan civilisation of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, was entirely the achievement of the primitive race."<sup>132</sup>

Two weeks later, in the issue of 5 April 1939, Pensabene continued his reflections, arguing for the primacy of the "Mediterranean Aryans" (i.e. ancient Greeks and "Italic peoples of all times") in art. He recalled that the Etruscans were not Mediterranean Aryans but, "as has by now been demonstrated", formed an autonomous race present only in central Italy, which owed its "unmistakable physiognomy" to both the Etruscans and the Mediterraneans. Pensabene affirmed that Italian art must remain faithful to the Mediterranean Aryan race, of which Etruscan art is considered an original product:

The Mediterranean and the Etruscan races are therefore the only two races to which, since time immemorial, we owe our excellence in the figurative arts. What has been achieved in Europe in this field depends — directly or indirectly — on them. Lastly, the Renaissance is due to one and the other, which have remained intact. And since Italy is always the homeland

<sup>129</sup> F. Cassata, "La Difesa della razza", cit., p. 33.

<sup>130</sup> See H.G., G.P. [Helmut Gasteiner, Giuseppe Pensabene], *La composizione razzistica del popolo italiano*, "Quadrivio", V, 14, 31 January 1937, p. 5; H.G., G.P., *Il popolo eletto sorge all'orizzonte della nazione italiana*, "Quadrivio", V, 16, 14 February 1937, p. 3; H.G., G.P., *L'urbanesimo e la razza*, "Quadrivio", V, 19, 7 March 1937, p. 2; H.G., G.P., *La razza e l'ambiente*, "Quadrivio", V, 25, 18 April 1937, p. 6.

<sup>131</sup> F. Cassata, "La Difesa della razza", cit., p. 296.

<sup>132</sup> G. Dell'Isola [Giuseppe Pensabene], *La razza aquilina*, "La Difesa della razza", II, 10, 20 March 1939, pp. 8-10.

of these races, sooner or later their natural artistic supremacy will inevitably flourish here. Nor should we forget that, even after the Renaissance ended, in a time when political and economic decadence seemed to have further depressed the life of our country, the constant persistence of both sufficed to maintain our supremacy.<sup>133</sup>

Pensabene’s reception of Fischer’s studies is therefore explicit, as was his rejection of Rosenberg’s theories, which he himself had helped to disseminate along with Helmut Gasteiner. In fact, although he did not directly integrate the Etruscans into the Aryan identity, Pensabene aligned them with the Aryan-Mediterranean race and thus claimed that they were among the progenitors of the Italian race and art. Even in his later articles, Pensabene continued to consider Etruria a “great manifestation” of classic Italy and claim its legacy against the bourgeois and internationalist interpretations of the history of Italy.<sup>134</sup> Gasteiner, by contrast, still seemed to count the Etruscans among the matriarchal Mediterranean civilisations, even if he did not openly return to this subject.<sup>135</sup>

*La Difesa della Razza* continued to disseminate Fischer’s theories. An exchange of opinions between a reader and the editors, in the issue of 5 October 1939, offers an interesting example of the way Interlandi and Landra’s group interpreted the Etruscans. A reader from the Tuscan city of Livorno asked the editors to recommend “a good book on pre-Roman Italy” that contained information on races. They recommended two texts by Giambattista Vico, *De Antiquissima Italorum Sapientia* (On the Ancient Wisdom of the Italians) and *Scienza Nuova* (New Science), Vincenzo Cuoco’s *Platone in Italia* (Plato in Italy), Giuseppe Micali’s *Italia avanti il dominio dei Romani* (Italy before the Roman domination) and two works by the Etruscologist Pericle Ducati, *L’Italia antica* (Ancient Italy) and *Etruria antica* (Ancient Etruria). The reader also asked another question: “In a map of Italy, in a room dedicated to Etruria of a large museum in Berlin, it says that the Etruscans are not Indo-Germanic. What is your opinion?” The editors expressly rejected the reader’s doubts as they would make the Etruscans a foreign body in Italian racial history:

Apart from the fact that you should not get fixated on these definitions of Indo-Germanic and Indo-European, which only indicate what they can contain; apart from the fact that many German scientists considered the Etruscans to be Indo-European; I can tell you now that others have changed their minds too, and that Eugenio Fischer made a statement on this matter to the Academy of Sciences in Berlin.

The editors also referred the reader to the article on the aquiline race by G. Dell’Isola/Pensabene:

<sup>133</sup> G. Dell’Isola, *La razza nell’arte*, “La Difesa della razza”, II, 11, 5 April 1939, pp. 21-22.

<sup>134</sup> G. Dell’Isola, *Storia d’Italia dal punto di vista italiano*, “La Difesa della razza”, III, 4, 20 December 1939, p. 27.

<sup>135</sup> Elio [sic] Gasteiner, *Psicologia razziale*, “La Difesa della razza”, III, 5, 5 January 1940, p. 19.

After all, we need only to look at Etruscan painting and sculpture, [at] Roman sculpture, to consider Rome's religion and monarchy, to observe an Etruscan face and Dante's face, Etruscan art and Renaissance art, to compare both to Greek art in order to understand that Etruria is the matrix of Rome.

To a further question from the reader about an English edition of Günther's work, the editors gave the following reply: "We believe that this is the English translation of *Rassenkunde Europas* by Günther himself, a German work that is backward and certainly wrong as far as Italy is concerned. I do not think we should give it any consideration."<sup>136</sup> The position of *La Difesa della Razza* on the Etruscans — regardless of the different points of view — was therefore openly inspired by Fischer's ideas and in contrast to those of Günther and Rosenberg. This way, it could continue to claim that the Etruscan identity was at the roots of the Italian race and deny that it was an oriental or Semitic import, thus avoiding the issue of Catholicism. Although the "biological" racist discourse was inspired by scientific theories, in the colloquial dialogue with the reader the journal invited him not to get stuck on technical matters and to trust the ethnic continuity between Etruria, Rome and modern Italy.

In the issue of 5 January 1940, another Tuscan reader sent the editorial office an article on the Etruscans taken from an unspecified Italian journal, expressly asking for a comment from Claudio Calosso, whose article he had read in *La Difesa della Razza*. In this article, published on 20 October 1939, Calosso had theorised a "close Mediterranean unity", distinct from the Camites and the Semites and more akin to the peoples of central and northern Europe, which would have included Italy since antiquity. Calosso addressed the question of the Etruscans' origins from this Aryan-Mediterranean perspective but without finding a solution, even though he supported the autochthonic thesis. Nevertheless, he linked the Etruscan problem to the Mediterranean identity, which he considered similar to the Aryan one.<sup>137</sup> Two months later, the reader received an unsigned reply from the editors of *La Difesa della Razza*, who explained that Calosso's article on the Etruscans took into account an unpublished nineteenth-century study by Father Camillo Tarquini, a supporter of the idea that there was an affinity between the Etruscan and the Jewish language. For the editors of *La Difesa della Razza*, it was only one of many vain attempts to decipher the Etruscan language:

It is useless to reconstruct the history of these attempts to explain a language, of which we have insufficient documentation. The mystery of the language is not the mystery of the Etruscan nation, which represented an important part of the Roman monarchy. Etruscan art is enough for us, and the Etruscan background of Tuscan Renaissance art is enough to understand that this is not Semitic blood. The comparison of those images is enough for us.

<sup>136</sup> See "La Difesa della razza", II, 23, 5 October 1939, p. 44.

<sup>137</sup> Claudio Calosso, *L'unità mediterranea*, "La Difesa della razza", II, 24, 20 October 1939, pp. 12-13.



But what is incredible is that an Italian newspaper is caught by the yearning to be Semitic precisely when Germanic studies on the aquiline race have discovered a rich documentation in the sculpture of Etruscan portraits.

The reply went on to quote (in Italian) Fischer’s passage on “living Etruscans”, and concluded by stating that the question of the Etruscans’ race was “a fundamental question of Italian civilisation”.<sup>138</sup> The solution to this racial problem was not sought in linguistics but in Fischer’s anthropology and, ultimately, in the belief in a racial continuity between the Etruscans and modern Italy. The importance of the Etruscan question for “biological” racists lies in the inclusion of the Etruscans in the Italian, Aryan or Aryan-Mediterranean racial identity, to prevent them from being declared a foreign — and potentially Semitic — body in the Italian race, or as an anti-Christian polemical argument. In his subsequent interventions, Calosso explicitly argued for the Etruscans’ inclusion in Aryanism.<sup>139</sup>

Another interpreter of the Etruscan identity who drew inspiration from Fischer was Ottorino Gurrieri, a journalist and art historian from the central region of Umbria.<sup>140</sup> Already in the issue of 5 January 1939, Gurrieri stated that the Etruscans did not come from the East, but were “Italic peoples who arose from the evolution of nuclei in Umbrian and central zones”. He argued for a continuity of the “Italic race” throughout the centuries, a real “ethnic and racial unity” of Aryan nature that would have enabled an Italian resurrection in the modern and contemporary age.<sup>141</sup> In 1941, Gurrieri picked up the question of the Etruscans again, citing Fischer’s work and Dell’Isola/Pensabene’s article on the “autochthonous and pure” aquiline race. Gurrieri wrote that the Etruscans and the Romans, albeit racially derived from “a single lineage”, merged and gave birth to a “common type”: the “Italic” and “Aquiline” type. In particular, he considered Dante a perfect example of the aquiline racial type that was “closest to the Fischerian theory”, namely an “archaic-Etruscan” race; in his opinion, the medieval poet was “the type, or rather, the archetype, of the Italian who, beyond the Latin era, also dates back to the Etruscan and archaic origins” — one of the “great aquiline [types]”.<sup>142</sup>

Fischer himself also published a contribution on scientific racism in *La Difesa della Razza*. In the editors’ presentation, it is said that the scholar made “repeated trips to Italy between 1935 and 1938 to study the question of the

<sup>138</sup> *La razza aquilina*, “La Difesa della razza”, III, 5, 5 January 1940, p. 46.

<sup>139</sup> Claudio Calosso, *La civiltà minoico-cicladica*, “La Difesa della razza”, IV, 23, 5 October 1941, pp. 18-22.

<sup>140</sup> F. Cassata, “*La Difesa della razza*”, cit., p. 299.

<sup>141</sup> Ottorino Gurrieri, *Unità della razza dagli Etruschi al Rinascimento*, “La Difesa della razza”, II, 5, 5 January 1939, p. 16.

<sup>142</sup> Ottorino Gurrieri, *Genio artistico della nostra razza*, “La Difesa della razza”, IV, 13, 5 May 1941, pp. 10-11.

Etruscans” and, in particular, “the race of the Etruscans”. Fischer promoted a type of anthropology among the “biological” racists that was not only physical — following a positivist model — but also genetic, inspired by Mendel’s laws of heredity: race was a human group united by genes and by the same biological inheritance. By contrast, he criticised Lamarckian theory for being “the Jewish theory of the environment”.<sup>143</sup> Landra also intervened in the journal to praise the work of his teacher Fischer. In the issue of 5 April 1940, he mentioned Fabio Frassetto’s work on Dante’s bones, which he presented at conferences in Germany and Cracow in 1938. In particular, Landra recalled a lecture given at the University of Berlin:

This conference finally put an end to the many rumours that had once circulated about the racial features of our most esteemed poet. The great anthropologist Eugenio [*sic*] Fischer, with whom we spoke about the matter, strongly praised Frassetto’s study and, based on it, gained new insights to investigate the problem of the origin of the Etruscans.<sup>144</sup>

In another article of the same year, in which he praised the cultural role of *La Difesa della Razza*, Landra wrote: “We must still credit our journal for having brought to the Italian reader’s knowledge the most recent results on the problem of the Etruscans’ origins. The article on the ‘aquiline race’ that appeared in this journal has represented a real clarification of this important problem”.<sup>145</sup> In 1941, Interlandi’s *Tevere* published a public account by Landra of his talks with Fischer on the subject of the aquiline race, which took place during his visit to Berlin in February. For readers of the Fascist newspaper, Landra presented Fischer as “the world’s leading anthropologist and scholar of racial problems. To him we owe the conversion of an outdated anthropology into the modern biology of human races”. Exaggerating the very extent of Fischer’s scientific and political consensus among German anthropologists, Landra claimed that he had an “enormous” degree of authority and an almost unanimously recognised scientific hegemony in Germany, such that he could simply be considered “the representative of German science”. The Italian anthropologist also underlined Fischer’s role in Nazi racial policy, describing him as a very influential collaborator of Walter Gross’s Rassenpolitisches Amt. In the *Tevere*, in particular, Landra presented Fischer’s ideas on the aquiline race as innovative and fundamental for the formulation of Italian racism, which was alternative both to Sergi’s — and national-racist — Mediterraneanism and to the Aryanism promoted by Rosenberg and his followers. In fact,

<sup>143</sup> Eugenio [*sic*] Fischer, *La realtà della razza*, “La Difesa della razza”, III, 1, 5 November 1939, pp. 11-17. For a popularisation of Fischer’s work, see “La Difesa della razza” III, 10.

<sup>144</sup> Guido Landra, *Gli studi razziali a Bologna*, “La Difesa della razza”, III, 11, 5 April 1940, p. 16.

<sup>145</sup> Guido Landra, *Due anni di razzismo italiano*, “La Difesa della razza”, III, 17, 5 July 1940, p. 17.

he presented the aquiline race as an autochthonous racial grouping of central-northern Italy that presented “intermediate” traits between the “Nordics” and the “Mediterraneans”, and as the creator of an “Italian civilisation”. Landra considered this theory a scientific confirmation of the position he had expressed in the “Manifesto della razza”, namely of the existence of an autonomous Italian race:

The Etruscans, who have had such a strong influence on the population of Italy, belonged to the aquiline race. Fischer does not fully exclude the possibility that the Etruscans also underwent Levantine influences, but these must have been minimal and not such as to affect the racial structure of Italy.

At this point, it is very interesting to recall the fact that Rosenberg, in his famous book, had firmly stated that the Etruscans were Levantine and that Italy’s true civilisation was only of Nordic origin. Fischer told us that he had recently had a conversation with Rosenberg on this subject and that Rosenberg ended up agreeing that the new data Fischer himself had highlighted rendered his discussion of the Etruscan question outdated.

Finally, in conversation with Landra, Fischer was said to have denied that he is a “materialist” and an advocate of the non-existence of the soul, or that his hereditary racial theories could lead to “a form of biological determinism in contrast to Fascist and National Socialist ethics”. Interestingly, the Italian scholar explained his German teacher’s position by drawing a parallel between science and religion: “[J]ust as the free will of the Church is reconciled with Providence, so the will remains intact alongside the laws of heredity.”<sup>146</sup> Thus, in addition to emphasising the political importance of the theory of the aquiline race, Landra also defended Fischer’s biological racism against accusations of irreconcilability with Fascist and Catholic ethics.

## Conclusion

Through the systematic divulgation of Eugen Fischer’s theories, the Fascist group of “biological” racists avoided the anti-Etruscan denigrations of Rosenberg, Evola and Cogni that were loaded with anti-Christian implications, instead integrating the Etruscans — considered Indo-Europeans — into the Italian race. The “aquiline race” theory thus served as a scientific formula aimed at denying the presence of foreign bodies in the history of the Italian race and avoiding an ideological clash with the Catholic Church. In this sense, it could be read as a symbol of the pro-Catholic tactics of the “biological” group. However, this tactic failed to produce a lasting equilibrium. If, in the spring of 1942, Landra’s group and the Catholic hierarchies actually seemed to have found a political convergence capable of countering the “esoteric-

<sup>146</sup> Guido Landra, *A colloquio con E. Fischer*, “Il Tevere”, 4-5 February 1941, p. 3.

traditionalist” hegemony over racist cultural policy,<sup>147</sup> the fall of the regime in the following year seemed to put an end to the complex dialectic between Italian “biological” racists and the Church, given the removal of the former from positions of power.<sup>148</sup> As for the origin of the Etruscans, the interpretation that gained the most ground in the post-war period was that of Massimo Pallottino, a scholar with a Catholic formation who was close to the “national-racist” faction of Giacomo Acerbo.<sup>149</sup> In 1947, Pallottino stated that he considered Fischer’s ideas “pure amateurish fantasies” that were “outside the scientific method”.<sup>150</sup> Hence, the “aquiline race” thesis did not seem to have any following in post-fascist Italy, limiting its success to the years of state racism and the pro-Catholic tactics of Landra’s group. While remaining in a minority position in Italian culture, albeit hegemonic in the neo-fascist context, Julius Evola would continue to promote his racist, anti-Etruscan beliefs.<sup>151</sup>

To gain a better understanding of the transnational dynamics of scientific racism between 1938 and 1943, further research would be necessary on the Holy See and the German side of the affair: for example, on the financing of Fischer’s “Etruscologist” research and the Nazis’ political and cultural interests in turning the Catholic eugenicist into a point of reference for Italian biological racism, in a sense hostile to Rosenberg and functional to the search for a balance with the Catholic Church. Regarding Italy, my analysis of the political use of the Etruscans in *La Difesa della Razza* ultimately offers a new perspective on the Italian-German dimension and an explanation of the scientific and ideological inspirations as well as the political tactics of Fascist biological racism.

<sup>147</sup> F. Cassata, “*La Difesa della razza*”, cit., p. 82. For a different interpretation, see G. Fabre, *Il razzismo del duce*, p. 385.

<sup>148</sup> Obviously, this does not put an end to the existence of non-biological racist and anti-Semitic positions in the Catholic hierarchy: see Renato Moro, *La Chiesa e lo sterminio degli ebrei*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2002, pp. 197-198; Elena Mazzini, *L’antiebraismo cattolico dopo la Shoah. Tradizioni e culture nell’Italia del secondo dopoguerra (1945-1974)*, Rome, Viella, 2012.

<sup>149</sup> His appreciation of Acerbo’s theories is expressed in *Etruscologia*, Milan, Hoepli, 1942, p. 26n. On Massimo Pallottino see Filippo Delpino, *Appunti per una biografia intellettuale di Massimo Pallottino*, in Laura Michetti (ed.), *Massimo Pallottino a dieci anni dalla scomparsa. Atti dell’Incontro di Studio. Roma, 10-11 novembre 2005*, Rome, Quasar, 2007, pp. 1-27; Marco Minoja, *Massimo Pallottino*, in Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, *Dizionario biografico dei Soprintendenti Archeologi (1904-1974)*, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2012, pp. 581-587.

<sup>150</sup> Massimo Pallottino, *L’origine degli Etruschi*, Rome, Tumminelli, 1947, pp. 12 e 131.

<sup>151</sup> See Julius Evola, *Gli uomini e le rovine* in Julius Evola, *Gli uomini e le rovine e Orientamenti*, Rome, Edizioni Mediterranee, 2001 (first edition 1953), p. 195.