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## SOME REMARKS ON BENITO MUSSOLINI'S SPEECH *ROMA ANTICA SUL MARE*

Benito Amilcare Andrea Mussolini (1883–1945) is a well-known person. His private life and political activities have attracted interest of a large number of researchers. Numerous biographies<sup>1</sup> of the leader of the Italian fascist movement have been written and various topics related to that figure are the subject of a vast number of publications<sup>2</sup> that could fill entire libraries. The years of Mussolini's activity in public life, including his role as Italy's prime minister in 1922–1943, have resulted in a large number of political publications and speeches.<sup>3</sup> Of note is the fact that the speeches of the Italian dictator include a lecture titled *Ancient Rome at Sea (Roma antica sul mare)*. It was given on 5 October 1926 at the inauguration of the Italian University for Foreigners in Perugia (*Regia Università Italiana per Stranieri, Perugia*). This institution had been established in 1925 and specialized in teaching, research, and promotion of the Italian language and culture in all its forms, especially literature, art, and history.<sup>4</sup> The University continues its mission nowadays.

The choice of the subject matter of the speech which Mussolini addressed to people gathered at the *Palazzo dei Priori* in Perugia was not accidental. Making Italy the main power in the Mediterranean Sea was a very important element of the Italian leader's policy. His recollection of the glorious events from distant past was an excellent way to create a vision of restoration of the *Imperium Romanum*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The list of biographies is provided by Milza (1999), 948–949.

<sup>2</sup> An extensive list of references has been compiled in Nelis (2011), 173–242.

<sup>3</sup> See editions: Piccoli, Ravasio (1934–1939); Susmel, Susmel (1951–1963–1978–1980).

<sup>4</sup> See *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia*, n. 271/1925: Regio Decreto – Legge 29 ottobre 1925, n. 1965.

<sup>5</sup> See more: Scott (1932); Giardina, Vauchez (2000), 212–296; Nelis (2011); Nelis (2012).

It must be emphasized that in its publications and speeches, the Fascist leader referred to issues associated with the sea on many occasions. Even before he seized power, in an article titled *Navigare necesse!* published on 1 January 1920 in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, he clearly asserted the fundamental importance of the sea to Italy's future. "Instead of a cross, we would like to see an anchor or a sail in the national emblem", stated Mussolini and added: "It is absurd not to dash onto sea lanes because the sea surrounds us on three sides."<sup>6</sup> In the same periodical, in an article titled *Ciò che rimane e ciò che verrà* dated 13 November 1920, Mussolini emphasized that Italians should not become hypnotized by the Adriatic Sea or some of its islands or shores. He recalled that there is another large sea of which the Adriatic Sea is only a humble bay. The larger sea is the Mediterranean Sea which Mussolini believed to be the area for Italy's expansion.<sup>7</sup> The idea to restore the Italian state's past greatness, which included control of the Mediterranean Sea and Rome's leading role in the civilization of Western Europe, was clearly expressed in the speech *Il fascismo e i problemi della politica estera italiana*, delivered by the Fascist leader on 6 February 1921 in Trieste.<sup>8</sup> Symptomatic words were also spoken by Mussolini on 4 October 1922 in Milan (*Dal malinconico tramonto liberale all'aurora fascista della nuova Italia*), where he clearly stated the need to make the Mediterranean Sea "our lake" (*lago nostro*).<sup>9</sup> This was a direct reference to the practice of ancient Romans to refer to the Mediterranean Sea as *mare nostrum* (see Philipp, 1936).

As a result of the so-called March on Rome (*Marcia su Roma*), organized by Mussolini in late October 1922, he was appointed Italy's prime minister by King Victor Emanuel III. In the period of over ten years between Mussolini's ascension to power and his lecture in Perugia, various issues related to Italy's maritime policy were quite frequently included in the Italian leader's statements. When presenting the tenets of his government's new foreign policy (*La nuova politica estera*), on 16 February 1923, he stated firmly: "We must have the courage to say that

<sup>6</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1954), vol. XIV: *Dalla marcia di Ronchi al secondo Congresso dei Fasci (14 settembre 1919 – 25 maggio 1920)*, 231: "Che l'Italia di domani debba «navigare» va diventando verità acquisita alla coscienza italiana: non la croce vorremmo vedere sullo stemma nazionale ma un'ancora o una vela. È assurdo non gettarsi sulle vie del mare quando il mare ci circonda da tre parti."

<sup>7</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1955), vol. XVI: *Dal Trattato di Rapallo al primo discorso alla Camera (13 novembre 1920 – 21 giugno 1921)*, 6: "(...) gli italiani non devono ipnotizzarsi nell'Adriatico o in alcune isole o sponde dell'Adriatico. C'è anche – se non ci inganniamo – un vasto mare di cui l'Adriatico è un modesto golfo e che si chiama Mediterraneo, nel quale le possibilità vive dell'espansione italiana sono fortissimo."

<sup>8</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1955), vol. XVI, 159: "È destino che il Mediterraneo torni nostro. È destino che Roma torni ad essere la città direttrice della civiltà in tutto l'Occidente d'Europa. Innalziamo la bandiera dell'impero, del nostro imperialismo, che non dev'essere confuso con quello di marcia prussiana o inglese."

<sup>9</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1956), vol. XVIII: *Dalla Conferenza di Cannes alla Marcia su Roma (14 gennaio 1922 – 30 ottobre 1922)*, 439: "(...) proiettando gli italiani come una forza unica verso i compiti mondiali facendo del Mediterraneo il lago nostro alleandoci cioè con quelli che nel Mediterraneo vivono ed espellendo coloro che del Mediterraneo sono i parassiti." See also Mack Smith (1976), 16; Milza (1999), 424.

Italy must not be nailed forever to one sea, even if it is the Adriatic Sea. Besides the Adriatic Sea there is also the Mediterranean Sea and other seas that may be of interest to us."<sup>10</sup> These words were confirmed by Mussolini's speech *Al popolo di Firenze*, given at the *Palazzo Vecchio* in Florence on 19 June of the same year, in which Mussolini said: "We want the sea not to be a stricture that limits our ability to live and to develop, but rather a road to our necessary global expansion."<sup>11</sup> The Italian prime minister did not limit his activity to verbal declarations but also took steps to implement specific designs of his government's maritime policy. As an example, one could cite development of the shipbuilding industry, both for the merchant marine and for the navy (Krzywiec, 1935).

Mussolini was also aware of the importance of Italy's maritime commerce. In the speech *Al popolo di Catania*, which he gave on 11 May 1924 from the balcony of the *Palazzo Municipale*, he put very strong emphasis on the need to restore Italian's love for the sea. It must be noted that the Italian prime minister quoted some famous words: *vivere non necesse, sed navigare necesse est*.<sup>12</sup> According to the Greek writer Plutarch (*Plutarchus*), those words had been spoken by Pompey the Great (*Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus*) in 56 BC when he was in charge of Rome's commercial shipping. He sailed to Sicily, Sardinia, and Africa to fetch grain. Before he sailed back with the grain, a storm started and the shipmasters were hesitant to depart. Then he boarded a ship and demanded that the anchor be lifted screaming: "Sailing is necessary, living is not necessary!"<sup>13</sup> The issue of maritime commerce was also discussed by Mussolini on 5 October 1924. In the speech he gave within the walls of *Università Bocconi* in Milan during the inauguration of the *Congresso nazionale dei dottori in scienze economiche e commerciali*, he recalled that it was the sea – as life experience indicated – that could bring happiness and wealth to Italians.<sup>14</sup> In his speech *Noi siamo mediterranei*, given on 8 April 1926 on board the ship *Cavour* anchored in the vicinity of Fiumicino, he firmly stated: "We are bound to the Mediterranean Sea and our destiny has always been and will always be linked to the sea."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1956), vol. XIX: *Dalla Marcia su Roma al viaggio negli Abruzzi (31 ottobre 1922 – 22 agosto 1923)*, 146: "Bisogna avere il coraggio di dire che l'Italia non può eternamente rimanere inchiodata in un solo mare, sia pur esso il mare Adriatico. Oltre il mare Adriatico c'è il Mediterraneo, e ci sono altri mari che possono interessarci."

<sup>11</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1956), vol. XIX, 278: "(...) vogliamo che il mare non sia una cintura contro la nostra vitalità, ma invece la strada per la nostra necessaria espansione nel mondo."

<sup>12</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1956), vol. XX: *Dal viaggio negli Abruzzi al delitto Matteotti (23 agosto 1923 – 13 giugno 1924)*, 269: "O popolo di Catania marinara! Dobbiamo tornare ad amare il mare, a sentire la ebbrezza del mare, poichè *vivere non necesse, sed navigare necesse est*."

<sup>13</sup> Plut. *Vit. Pomp.* 50, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1956), vol. XXI: *Dal delitto Matteotti all'attentato Zaniboni (14 giugno 1924 – 4 novembre 1925)*, 101: "(...) se è vero che noi siamo circondati dal mare e che tutti i nostri problemi di rifornimenti dipendono in gran parte dal mare, e dal mare, come già ci venne la vita, potrà anche venirci la fortuna e la prosperità."

<sup>15</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1957), vol. XXII: *Dall'attentato Zaniboni al discorso dell'Ascensione (5 novembre 1925 –*

One can clearly see that the broadly defined sea-related issues were a very important element of Mussolini's political plans. Mussolini's speech *Roma antica sul mare* (Susmel, Susmel, 1957, vol. XXII, 213–227),<sup>16</sup> given in 1926, must not be analyzed only in historical terms. This is because it was a part of the Fascist *romanità* myth and constituted a continuation of explicit articulation of Italy's strategic objectives in sea-related matters addressed to the Italian society and to the entire world.

In his speech, the Italian dictator focused on the maritime history of ancient Rome, starting from the period of the Roman Kings and ending in the third century after Christ. The author focused most of all on a description of the numerous sea battles fought by Romans, the peace treaties that Rome signed with its neighbors, and the organization and development of the Roman naval fleet. The contents of the lecture included details concerning various social and legal matters, as well as references to Roman public law. Mussolini started his speech by asking the following fundamental questions: Was the ancient Rome also famous at sea? Was Rome also a maritime power? Was the Roman Empire also a maritime empire? The answers to all those questions were affirmative. Mussolini added that without controlling the sea, Rome would not have become an empire and would not have been able to remain an empire because it had to subjugate numerous nations across the sea and was able to reach many conquered areas much quicker by sea. Another question was: Did Rome conduct maritime commerce before the Punic Wars? The answer that *Il Duce* gave to that question was also affirmative.

After a short introduction, the Italian leader described Rome's maritime history in the period of the Roman Kings. Mussolini informed the audience that the Mediterranean Sea was controlled both militarily and commercially by Etruscans, Greeks, Syracusans, and most of all Carthaginians. Rome, as Mussolini said, "did not give any vital signs at sea" (Susmel, Susmel, 1956, vol. XXII, 214). He made a reference to the publication by the historian Ettore Pais to list the main reasons why Romans attached greater importance to land than to sea (Pais, 1913–1920).

He spent a significant amount of time discussing the First Punic War (264–241 BC). He remarked that before the war, Rome's position had changed as it gained a "wider breathing space at sea." This happened because Rome conquered cities that already conducted maritime commerce and had a fleet and ship crews. The leader of Fascist Italy provided many details associated with Rome's actions intended to defend its coast. He mentioned that Rome established numerous colonies that performed military functions. He also spoke about establishment of

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26 maggio 1927), 112: "Noi siamo mediterranei ed il nostro destino, senza copiare alcuno, è stato e sarà sempre sul mare. Per la gloriosa Marina italiana: Eia! Eia! Alalà!"

<sup>16</sup> Mussolini's speech was first published in *Il Popolo d'Italia* (6 ottobre 1926, n. 238, p. 1–2), and then in the form of a separate book, which then saw multiple reprints before the start of World War II, e.g.: Milano 1926; Palermo 1926; Roma 1926; Spoleto 1926; Mantova 1926, 1927, 1929.

the *duumviri navales*<sup>17</sup> and appointment of four quaestors (*quaestores classici*) just before the war with Carthage.<sup>18</sup> Mussolini concluded that all those steps constituted implementation of the Senate's plan that included Rome's independence at sea, breakup of the maritime alliance with Taranto, closing the Adriatic Sea to ships sailing from Epirus, and the elimination of Carthaginian dominance. In his speech, Mussolini made a reference to the opinion of Theodor Mommsen, an outstanding researcher of antiquity and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1902, whose monumental work *Römische Geschichte*, was a source of information for the Italian leader.<sup>19</sup>

*Il Duce* also discussed the relations between Rome and Carthage. When discussing the first treaty between Rome and Carthage, concluded as early as 509 BC, Mussolini referred to a long text from a work by the Greek historian Polybius.<sup>20</sup> In Mussolini's opinion, it was indicative of the fact that Romans had a limited sphere of activities at sea but, on the other hand, it showed that the powerful Carthage had to reckon even then with Rome. By mentioning the account of the Roman historian Livy (*Titus Livius*),<sup>21</sup> he also discussed another treaty between Rome and Carthage, concluded in 348 BC, which regulated maritime trade and sailing. At the end of his speech, he mentioned the treaty dating back to 306 BC, which imposed strict limitations on Rome's sailing and prohibited Rome from conducting trade in Africa and Sardinia.<sup>22</sup>

Researchers studying Roman law would find it interesting that the Italian prime minister's comments related to the immediate cause of the First Punic War. When discussing the situation during the siege of Messana and the expectation of Mamertines to receive help from Rome, he informed that the relevant decision was delegated by the Roman Senate to the Centuriate Assembly (*comitia centuriata*), who decided to send relief to Messana, which marked the start of a regular war between Rome and Carthage.

Mussolini discussed the course of important sea battles (Mylae, Ecnomus) and familiarized the audience with the way combat was conducted, the number of ships, and the losses suffered by the sides in the conflict. He also emphasized the merits of the Roman commanders. When summarizing the results of the First Punic War, he clearly stated that "war proves Rome's power also at sea" (Susmel, Susmel, 1956, vol. XXII, 223). *Il Duce* criticized T. Mommsen who, in his opinion,

<sup>17</sup> Instituted in 311 BC, they took care of the needs of the fleet and commanded a patrol force for the defence of the coast, see Berger (1953), 446 (s.v. *Duumviri navales*).

<sup>18</sup> Instituted in 267 BC, they held positions in administration of the Roman navy; for more details see: Wesener (1963), 818–819; Harris (1976), 92.

<sup>19</sup> Mommsen (1874), 413–417. It is puzzling that Mussolini listed three known seats of the *quaestores classici*: Ostia, Brindisi, and Rimini. Mommsen clearly indicated Ostia, Caes in Campania, and Rimini, and added that the fourth seat was unknown – Mommsen (1874), 416.

<sup>20</sup> Polyb. 3.22.

<sup>21</sup> Livy, *Per.* 7.27.2.

<sup>22</sup> Polyb. 3.24; Livy, *Per.* 9.43.26.

reduced the merits of Rome and presented the way that Rome conducted naval war in a negative light. It must be mentioned that the German historian blamed Rome mostly for its failure to adopt a clear strategy, lack of appropriate fleet and ship crews, incompetence of the commanders, and their frequent changes. He also stated that the factors that contributed to Rome's eventual victory were the favor of the gods, the energy of its citizens and, most importantly, the errors made by the enemy (Mommsen, 1874, 534–537). It should be emphasized, however, that in addition to words of great admiration for Rome's achievements, Mussolini was able to remark on the conflict's negative consequences for Rome, namely the loss of 700 ships, reduction of its population by nearly 1/6, and the depreciation of the Roman currency.

The Italian dictator spent a little less time discussing the Second Punic War (218–201 BC) and talked with delight about Rome's victory and the terms of the Tunis peace (201 BC) imposed on Carthage, which he listed carefully. Later in his speech, he emphasized the fact that after Carthage's loss of power, the Mediterranean Sea became a "Roman lake" (*lago romano*). Also, the Italian prime minister said that: "Rome's maritime history has no more of such glorious pages" (Susmel, Susmel, 1956, vol. XXII, 226). However, Mussolini considered the fight of Pompey the Great against pirates to be a very important event. It is worth noting that in 67 BC, as a result of the initiative of the plebeian tribune Aulus Gabinius, a law was adopted (*lex Gabinia de uno imperatore contra praedones constituendo*, also sometimes titled *lex Gabinia de bello piratico*) to regulate actions intended to eliminate pirates from the Mediterranean Sea. The commander of the campaign was Pompey the Great, who was given extensive powers (see more Tarwacka, 2009, 43–55). *Il Duce* emphasized that the victorious fight against pirates was completed in less than three months thanks to the excellent position of the Roman fleet.<sup>23</sup> Also, he took note of the famous battle of Actium (31 BC) which had a great impact on the history of the Roman state.

The maritime history of Rome in the time of the Empire could not, in the opinion of the Italian leader, boast great deeds. Without giving any specific details, he mentioned several events, including the expedition of Germanicus and his victory over the Teutones, the construction of the Ostia port during the reign of Emperor Claudius, and the latter's introduction of laws regulating grain trade, construction of the Civitavecchia port, and expansion of the Ancona port during the rule of Trajan, as well as the naval victories of Severus and Claudius II.

Mussolini's words ending the speech in Perugia were very symptomatic: "Thus, it can be concluded, that Rome was also powerful at sea and that this power was the result of long sacrifices, steadfast perseverance, and firm will. Those values were important yesterday and will be important tomorrow and always." It is clear that those words were an arc spanning the glorious part of

<sup>23</sup> Plut. *Vit. Pomp.* 26.3–4 and 28.1–2.

Rome and the vision of a glorious future of Italy (Rancati, 1939). *Il Duce's* speech, which was over one hour long, was received by the audience with enthusiasm. Many persons congratulated him and expressed their admiration of his genius and profound thinking (Susmel, Susmel, 1956, vol. XXII, 227). Among them, there was the Italian historian of antiquity and senator E. Pais who, as A. Giardina suspected, helped Mussolini prepare the lecture (Giardina, Vauchez, 2000, 249–250). The Fascist leader often cited his works: Pais (1913–1920); Pais (1915). Moreover, as Mussolini mentioned at the start of his speech, he also used the following works<sup>24</sup>: G. Luzzato, *Storia del commercio*, vol. I: *Dall'antichità al Rinascimento*, Florence 1914; F. Corazzini, *Osservazioni sopra una nuova storia generale della marina militare*, Catania 1892; T. Frank, *Storia economica di Roma dalle origini alla fine della repubblica*, transl. by B. Lavagnini, Florence 1924; G. Ferrero, C. Barbagallo, *Roma antica*, vol. I–III, Florence 1921–1922; G. De Sanctis, *Storia dei Romani*, vol. III: *Letà delle guerre puniche*, vol. I–II, Turin 1916–1917; A. Köster, *Das antike Seewesen*, Berlin 1923; A.V. Vecchi, *Storia generale della marina militare*, vol. I–II, Florence 1892; L. Homo, *L'Italie primitive et les débuts de l'impérialisme romain*, Paris 1925; T. Mommsen, *Storia di Roma antica*, new Italian translation based on the latest German edition by L. Di San Giusto, edited by E. Pais, vol. I–III, Turin 1925. A majority of them are works written in the Italian language, but some had been written in French and German. Mussolini knew French well<sup>25</sup> but his German was much worse.<sup>26</sup> It is noteworthy that, as the speech indicates, Mussolini did not use the original Mommsen's work in German, but instead used the Italian translation.<sup>27</sup>

The Italian leader's lecture is important first of all to people who study Mussolini's political activity. It can also be of interest to historians of antiquity and researchers studying Roman law. The content of the speech is largely filled with historical substance, which is by no means surprising. The author used professional publications on various matters, which are often cited. It may also be noted that *Il Duce* did not limit his speech to merely acquainting the audience with the maritime history of ancient Rome, but also expressed his own opinions about the events. He also expressed opinions that contradicted the opinions of authors of some works. Specialists who study the laws of ancient Rome have identified several parts of the speech *Roma antica sul mare* where legal matters are discussed. The Italian dictator did not quote legal sources, such as the Digest (*Digesta*) or the Code of Justinian (*Codex Iustinianus*), but he did cite ancient readers who dis-

<sup>24</sup> Publications with Mussolini's speech contain only the names of the authors and the titles of their works (often incomplete). However, they do not contain information about the place and the year of publication of the works. This data has been added by the author of this article.

<sup>25</sup> He even worked as a teacher of that language at a private school in Oneglia, see Fermi (1961), 61; Borucki (1995), 19.

<sup>26</sup> He learned those languages during his stay in Switzerland when he was a young man, see Monelli (1968), 35.

<sup>27</sup> It was probably T. Mommsen, *Storia di Roma antica*, new Italian translation based on the latest German edition by L. Di San Giusto, edited by E. Pais, E. Pais, vol. I–III, Turin 1925.

cussed legal matters in their works. When discussing the treaties between Rome and Carthage, Mussolini quoted a large paragraph from the works of Polybius and availed himself of information from the works of Livy. However, publications containing the speech in question do not contain information on where the contents of the works of the aforementioned writers can be found. Researchers studying Roman law will certainly take note of information concerning the establishment of the *duumviri navales* and the *quaestores classici*. However, the author of the speech did not explain what the tasks of those officials were. He focused a little more on the Centuriate Assembly (*comitia centuriata*) and the campaign against pirates led by Pompey the Great. The Italian prime minister also discussed the important matter of the distribution of grain in Rome (*frumentationes*). He mentioned the relevant measures taken by Gaius Gracchus and the changes made by Julius Caesar. *Il Duce* also provided details regarding the number of persons entitled to grain in different periods, in accordance with the data contained in scientific publications (Humbert, 1896).

Mussolini's lecture also had a propaganda aspect. The leader of the Italian Fascists intended to restore the past glory of the *Empire*. On various occasions, he eagerly mentioned the prominent role of Rome throughout the history of the world (Scott, 1932, 464). He also emphasized the great importance of Roman law.<sup>28</sup> In Mussolini's opinion: "without the sheets of Rome's history, the entire world history would be awfully mutilated and a large part of the contemporary world would be incomprehensible."<sup>29</sup> In her book on the dictator, Laura Fermi stated that: "He dreamt of an Italy to whom it was 'fated' that the Mediterranean Sea 'our lake' and its inclosing shores, should return; and of a Rome that would again impart 'its civilization, its great juridical civilization, as solid as its monuments, to the entire world'" (Fermi, 1961, 217–218). Reference to the memory of the naval power of the ancient Rome went along with all actions taken by the leader of Fascist Italy, whose main objective was restoration of the past glory of the Roman Empire. It is worth mentioning that the imperial propaganda made a fairly substantial impact on the architecture of Rome and other Italian cities (Painter, 2007; Żyromski, 2009 – especially Part IV: *The fascist Rome*, 182–212).<sup>30</sup> The myth of *romanità* was also manifested in the adoption of multiple symbols and rites, official celebration of the Birth of Rome (*Natale di Roma*) on 21 April, and bimillennial

<sup>28</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1954), vol. XV: *Dal secondo Congresso dei Fasci al Trattato di Rapallo (26 maggio 1920 – 12 novembre 1920)*, 217: "Roma è il nome che riempie tutta la storia per venti secoli. Roma dà il segnale della civiltà universale; Roma che traccia strade, segna confini e che dà al mondo le leggi eterne dell'immutabile suo diritto."

<sup>29</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1958), vol. XXV: *Dal dodicesimo anniversario della fondazione dei Fasci al Patto a quarto (24 marzo 1931 – 7 giugno 1933)*, 85: "Basta pensare che senza le pagine della storia di Roma, tutta la storia universale sarebbe terribilmente mutilata e gran parte del mondo contemporaneo sarebbe incomprendibile."

<sup>30</sup> Works in Polish include also: Szydłowski (1935); Żyromski (2004); Burno (2011); Burno (2016), with literature cited therein.



anniversaries of birth of famous figures such as Virgil, Horace, and Augustus (see more Nelis, 2011, 86–120). Many Italian researchers studying Roman law were involved in the propagation of this myth (Wołodkiewicz, 1996, 262–263). Practices intended to shape certain attitudes were not limited to government policy but were also present in various areas of public life of the ordinary citizens. In my opinion, the words of the French writer and journalist René Benjamin are worthy of note, as he gave the following account of his meeting with the Italian dictator: “Looking at Mussolini, I saw the Roman law, the Romans’ conquests, I saw the heavy but wise architecture from the most beautiful era of Rome. I saw the greatness that would never stop inspiring admiration. It was reborn in Mussolini” (Benjamin, 1939, 171).

The successive years of *Il Duce’s* public activity were a continuation of his great power ambitions. As Denis Mack Smith noted: “already in the mid-1920s, contingency plans were prepared for a possible occupation of Ethiopia, and by 1928 the revival of imperialism and militarism was stated with pride to be virtually an accomplished fact” (Mack Smith, 1976, 16). The leader of the Italian Fascists made statements about maritime policy on many occasions. In the speech *Sintesi del regime*, which he gave on 18 March 1934 in Rome, he emphasized that the entire Italy is located near the sea and its historical objectives are Asia and Africa. It was there that he saw the main points that must kindle Italians’ interest and the will to act.<sup>31</sup> He justified the planned conquest of Africa by the need to ensure appropriate living conditions to the Italian people. He considered this to be completely natural and compared it to the conquests of the ancient Rome (Borucki, 1995, 109). After the Italian forces occupied Ethiopia,<sup>32</sup> in the evening of 9 May 1936 in Rome, Mussolini announced the creation of a new Fascist empire.<sup>33</sup> His statements on matters related to the sea were clearly materialistic. In his speech of 1 November 1936 in Milan, he stated: “If for others the Mediterranean Sea is the road, for Italians it is the life.”<sup>34</sup> In the foreword to the January 1937 issue of the periodical *Rivista Maritima*, he once more emphasized the fact that “Italy is an island surrounded by the sea and the sea can be a free way of life or a chain of slavery.”<sup>35</sup> Later, on 26 March 1939, in Rome, he firmly emphasized: “Geographically, historically, politically, and militarily, the Mediterranean Sea is a living space

<sup>31</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1958), vol. XXVI: *Dal Patto di Quattro all’inaugurazione della Provincia di Littoria (8 giugno 1933 – 18 dicembre 1934)*, 190: “Tutta l’Italia è sul mare” and 191: “Gli obiettivi storici dell’Italia hanno due nomi: Asia ed Africa. Sud ed Oriente sono i punti cardinali che devono suscitare l’interesse e la volontà degli italiani.”

<sup>32</sup> The circumstances and the course of the war in Ethiopia are discussed by Mack Smith (1976), 59–81.

<sup>33</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1959), vol. XXVII: *Dall’inaugurazione della Provincia di Littoria alla proclamazione dell’Impero (19 dicembre 1934 – 9 maggio 1936)*, 268–269. See also Milza (1999), 678–681.

<sup>34</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1959), vol. XXVIII: *Dalla proclamazione dell’Impero al viaggio in Germania (10 maggio 1936 – 30 settembre 1937)*, 71: “Se per gli altri il Mediterraneo è una strada, per noi Italiani è la vita.”

<sup>35</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1959), vol. XXVIII, 96: “(...) l’Italia è un’isola circondata dal mare e che il mare – quel determinato mare – può essere una via libera di vita o una catena di schiavitù.”

for Italy and when we say the Mediterranean Sea, we naturally include also the bay called the Adriatic Sea in which the interests of Italy are supreme";<sup>36</sup> not much later, in his speech *Al popolo di Cosenza* on 30 March 1939, he added: "Italy does not intend to remain a prisoner in the Mediterranean Sea."<sup>37</sup>

An analysis of Mussolini's political activity leads to the conclusion that he considered questions of maritime policy to be immensely important for the future of Italy. The glorious sheets of ancient Rome's maritime history were used by *Il Duce* in the fascist historical policy that was based on a combination of the imperial past with the vision of a new Italy. In the publication *La dottrina del Fascismo*, Mussolini clearly emphasized that Fascism was a historical concept. He also pointed to the great importance of tradition in the memories, language, customs, and norms of social life.<sup>38</sup> He considered tradition to be one of the greatest spiritual strengths of nations that was a continuous and uninterrupted creation of their soul. He emphasized: "A state is not only the present, but also the past and, most of all, the future."<sup>39</sup> It was in this spirit that his famous speech *Roma antica sul mare* was given. Glorification of the achievements of ancient Romans in naval operations which ensured their control of the Mediterranean Sea basin was to constitute a solid foundation for the construction of a new Italian state. That state was to have the status of a maritime empire. This was to be achieved by way of an armed conflict. This is because the doctrine of Fascism did not assume the possibility or usefulness of everlasting peace whilst rejecting pacifism. The consequences of Mussolini's policies became evident during World War II.

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<sup>36</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1959), vol. XXIX: *Dal viaggio in Germania all'intervento dell'Italia nella seconda guerra mondiale (1 ottobre 1937 – 10 giugno 1940)*, 252: "(...) geograficamente, storicamente, politicamente, militarmente il Mediterraneo è uno spazio vitale (*la moltitudine grida: «È nostro!»*) per l'Italia e, quando diciamo Mediterraneo, vi includiamo naturalmente anche quel golfo che si chiama Adriatico e nel quale gli interessi dell'Italia sono preminenti."

<sup>37</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1959), vol. XXIX, 255: "(...) l'Italia non intende affatto di rimanere prigioniera nel Mediterraneo."

<sup>38</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1961), vol. XXXIV: *Il mio diario di guerra (1915–1917); La dottrina del Fascismo (1932); Vita di Arnaldo (1932); Parlo con Bruno (1941); Pensieri Pontini e Sardi (1943); Storia di un anno (1944, Il tempo di Bastone e della Carota)*, 118: "Il fascismo è una concezione storica... Donde il gran valore della tradizione nelle memorie, nella lingua, nei costumi, nelle norme del vivere sociale."

<sup>39</sup> Susmel, Susmel (1961), vol. XXXIV, 129: "Lo Stato non è soltanto presente, ma è anche passato e soprattutto future."

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**SOME REMARKS ON BENITO MUSSOLINI'S SPEECH  
*ROMA ANTICA SUL MARE***

The purpose of this article is to analyse Benito Mussolini's speech titled *Roma antica sul mare* given on 5 October 1926 in Perugia. The Fascist leader referred on many occasions to issues associated with the sea. Making Italy the main power on the Mediterranean Sea was a very important element of the Italian leader's policy. His recollection of glorious events from distant past was an excellent way to create a vision of the restoration of the Roman Empire.