

Italian textbooks in Brazil: school material culture, transnational circulation and fascist ideology in Italian Schools Abroad*

Renata Brião de Castro
School of Education
University of São Paulo (Brazil)
recastro@usp.br

ABSTRACT: This study analyzes Italian textbooks produced for Italian schools abroad, focusing on those circulated in Brazil during fascism. It explores their covers, symbols, colors, and visual narratives as transnational propaganda tools to promote Italian culture. The research highlights textbooks' role in shaping school material culture, linking pedagogy, cultural policies, and fascist ideology. By examining these materials in a transnational context, the article contributes to understanding the relationship between materiality, ideology, and education.

EET/TEE KEYWORDS: School material culture; Fascist textbooks; Education and advertising; Book covers; Ideology in education; Brazil; XX Century.

Introduction

The study of textbooks and school publishers is a consolidated field in educational historiography¹, involving analyzes that address both the pedagogical aspects and the social, political and cultural contexts that influenced its

* This article is part of a research project that seeks to identify, catalogue and analyze the Italian textbooks that circulated in Italian schools in the South American context of the countries of Brazil and Argentina during the 20 years of fascist rule. This research was supported by The São Paulo research foundation (*Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo* – FAPESP n. 2023/16884-7 and FAPESP n. 2022/15183-2).

¹ R. Sani, A. Ascenzi, *Il libro per la scuola tra idealismo e fascismo: L'opera della Commissione centrale per l'esame dei libri di testo da Giuseppe Lombardo Radia ad Alessandro Melchiori (192-1928)*, Milano, Vita & Pensiero, 2005; Idd., *Il libro per la scuola nel ventennio fascista: la normativa sui libri di testo della Riforma Gentile alla fine della Seconda guerra mondiale (1923-1945)*, Macerata, Alfabetica Edizione, 2009; A. Barausse, *Il libro per la scuola*

production and circulation. Within this category of research, a particular segment refers to textbooks intended for Italian schools abroad², a theme that, although less explored, reveals the extent and complexity of an Italian educational project beyond Italian national borders. These books began to circulate in the so-called *Scuole italiane all'estero* since the late Nineteenth century,

dall'Unità al fascismo, La normativa sui libri di testo dalla legge Casati alla riforma Gentile (1861-1922), Macerata, Alfabetica Edizione, 2008; G. Chiosso, *Libri di scuola e mercato editoriale: Dal primo Ottocento alla Riforma Gentile*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2013; A. Barausse, *Nonostante tanto diluvio di libri scolastici: I libri di testo per le scuole elementari e le indagini ministeriali di Bargoni e Bonghi durante gli anni della Destra Stroica (1869-1875)*, Lecce-Rovato, Pensa Multimedia, 2018; C. Bittencourt, *Livros didáticos entre textos e imagens*, in C. Bittencourt (ed.), *O Saber histórico na sala de aula*, São Paulo, Contexto, 1997.

² A. Barausse, "Una impronta di italianità": os livros didáticos para as escolas étnicas italianas no Brasil entre o liberalismo e o fascismo, «Cadernos de História da Educação», vol. 18, n. 2, 2019, pp.329-350; Id., *Il libro per la scuola dall'Unità al fascismo. La normativa sui libri di testo dalla legge Casati alla riforma Gentile (1861-1922)*, cit.; Id., *Os livros escolares como instrumentos para a promoção da identidade nacional italiana no Brasil durante os primeiros anos do fascismo (1922 – 1925)*, «Revista História da Educação», vol. 20 n. 49, 2016, pp. 81-94; Id., *The construction of national identity in textbooks for italian schools abroad; the case of Brazil between the two World Wars*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. X, n. 1, 2015, pp. 425-461; P. Bianchini, *Pátria, raça e civilização. Instruções para uma emigração bem-sucedida nos manuais escolares italianos de Geografia entre o final do século XIX e o início do século XX*, «Cadernos de História da Educação», vol. 18, n. 2, 2019, pp. 309-328; R. Castro, *Pesquisa histórico-educativa e a imigração italiana: uma revisão dos estudos*, «Revista História da Educação», vol. 27, 2023, 2023, pp. 1-29; T. Luchese, *...libriccini, tutto l'amore che nutro per l'infanzia. Syllabaries written and printed in Brazil to the Italian ethnic schools (1906-1907)*, «History of education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 2, 2019, pp. 467-489; Ead., *'E não nos deixeis cair em tentação': livros de leitura religiosa do governo fascista para as escolas italianas no Brasil (anos 20 e 30 do século XX)*, «Cadernos de História da Educação», vol. 18, n. 2, 2019, pp. 368-385; Ead., *Da Itália ao Brasil: indícios da produção, circulação e consumo de livros de leitura (1875-1945)*, «História da Educação», vol. 21, n. 51, 2017, pp. 123-142; Ead., *Quando il Mondo era Roma?: livros escolares para fascistizar os italianos no exterior, o caso brasileiro (1922-1938)*, «Cadernos de História da Educação», vol. 21, n. 2, 2022, pp. 19-17; T. Luchese, A. Barausse, *Apresentação – Escolarização, livros escolares e movimentos migratórios*, «Cadernos de História da Educação», vol. 18, n. 2, 2019, pp. 305-308; T. Luchese, K. Vendramin, P. Ghellere, *Uma gramática de italiano impressa no Rio Grande do Sul: aproximações da história do livro escolar produzido para escolas italianas (1896)*, «Revista Brasileira de Alfabetização», vol. 1, n. 18, 2022, pp. 1-15; C. Panizzolo, *Livros de leitura e a construção da identidade nacional de crianças italianas e descendentes (São Paulo no início do século XX)*, «Revista Acta Scientiarum. Education», vol. 41, n. 1, 2019, pp. 45-86; Ead., *Livros escolares para a escola elementar italiana nos dois lados do Atlântico: o estudo do Libro d'appunti de Giovanni Soli (entre o final do século XIX e início do século XX)*, «Cadernos de História da Educação», vol. 21, n. 2, 2022, pp. 1-25; Ead., *Scuole italiane all'estero: a study on reading books circulating in Italian ethnical schools in Brazil (Late 19th and early 20th Century)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 2, 2019, pp. 447-466; C. Panizzolo, M. Warde, *Circulação transnacional de livros de leitura e de manuais pedagógicos (entre fins do século XIX e início do século XX) – Apresentação do dossiê*, «Cadernos de História da Educação», vol. 21, n. 1, 2022, pp. 1-22; R. Castro, *Livros didáticos italianos, propaganda fascista e a identidade italianidade no exterior: o manual didático I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*, «Revista Brasileira de História da Educação», vol. 25, n. 1, 2025, pp. 1-25.

following Italian migratory flows to different parts of the world. However, it was in the Fascist period that books abroad gained significant momentum³, becoming strategic tools to reinforce Italianness among emigrant communities, while promoting the regime's values and ideals. In particular, this article will deal with Italian textbooks that circulated in the Brazilian context, standing out due to the large Italian immigration flow that was destined for Brazil. These publications constituted an essential part of the effort to maintain and strengthen the cultural and linguistic connections between the emigrated Italian communities and their homeland, playing a central role in the Italian schools established in various regions of Brazil. During the fascist regime, textbooks also served as strategic tools to Italianize communities outside Italy⁴. Through these materials, the regime sought to preserve and reinforce Italian cultural identity, even in distant lands, while disseminating the ideals and values of fascism. In these *Scuole Italiane all'Estero*, present in several countries, textbooks were central instruments to connect the descendants of Italians to the motherland⁵. Far beyond their pedagogical content, these books carried symbolic messages, which exalted the greatness of Italy, glorified its Roman past, and promoted the ideals of obedience, discipline, and nationalism. Thus, the textbook became a cultural mediator⁶ that not only educated, but also shaped identities and reinforced ideological narratives.

Italian schools in Brazil emerged as a response to intense Italian immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which established significant communities in several Brazilian states with a special emphasis on the states of São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul⁷. These schools not only met the educational demands of the communities but also reflected a transnational project to strengthen Italianness. It was through these schools that textbooks sent directly from Italy circulated, which brought the cultural and ideological marks of the fascist regime. These books were used to teach not only traditional disciplines, but also to convey nationalist values, exalt the Italian homeland,

³ G. Ciampi, *Le scuole italiane all'estero*, in V. Pellegrini (ed.), *Amministrazione centrale e diplomazia italiana (1919-1943): fonti e problemi*, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1998, pp. 115-122.

⁴ Barausse, *Os livros escolares como instrumentos para a promoção da identidade nacional italiana no Brasil durante os primeiros anos do fascismo (1922 – 1925)*, cit.

⁵ Id., *Chamas da educação nacional e do sentimento pátrio: as escolas italianas no Rio Grande do Sul da colonização ao final do século 19 (1875-1898)*, «Revista História da Educação», vol. 21, n. 51, 2017, pp. 41-85.

⁶ P. Bourdieu, *A distinção: crítica social do julgamento*, São Paulo, Edusp, 2007; R. Chartier, *A ordem dos livros: leitores, autores e bibliotecas na Europa entre os séculos XIV e XVIII*, Brasília, Editora UNB, 1994; C. Ginzburg, *Miti, emblemi, spie: morfologia e storia*, Torino, Einaudi, 1986.

⁷ Barausse, *Chamas da educação nacional e do sentimento pátrio: as escolas italianas no Rio Grande do Sul da colonização ao final do século 19 (1875-1898)*, cit.; Castro, *A pesquisa histórico-educativa e a imigração italiana: uma revisão dos estudos*, cit.

and shape identities aligned with fascist ideals. The geographical distribution of the schools reflected the concentration of Italian immigrants in rural and urban areas, creating networks for the circulation of teaching materials that connected these communities to Italy⁸.

During the *fascist era*, in Brazil, the use of these books was particularly significant and controversial: at the same time that the Italian government encouraged, produced and sent the textbooks that should circulate in Italian schools in Brazil, the Brazilian government with President Getúlio Vargas, especially during the so-called *Estado Novo* period (1937-1945), imposed significant restrictions on the use of languages other than Portuguese and on the curriculum of these schools, forcing them to adapt or operate informally, in this sense, although it cannot be said that Italian schools were extinct, they, at the very least, needed to reinvent themselves. These school institutions lived on the threshold of these two policies⁹. Thus, although with difficulties, these Italian textbooks had an intense circulation in Brazil and, therefore, were part of the school material culture of these educational institutions, in this scenario this article aims to analyze the Italian textbooks produced during the fascist regime as part of the school material culture, focusing on their covers, exploring their symbols, colors and visual narratives as tools of a transnational political propaganda. This article, therefore, combines a theoretical and empirical approach: theoretically, it explores these materials from the perspective of school material culture and the transnational circulation of fascist ideology, while empirically discussing and exemplifying their characteristics through the detailed analysis of their covers, highlighting visual and symbolic elements that reflect the ideology of the time. In this sense, the analysis of these materials allows not only to understand the educational dynamics of the period, but also to explore how elements of the school material culture contribute to shaping identities and social practices. To this end, the structure of the article is organized into three main sections. The first presents the theoretical bases of school material culture, highlighting authors and fundamental concepts. Next, the typology of Italian textbooks is discussed, with emphasis on their material, symbolic and contextual characteristics. Finally, selected specimens are analyzed to demonstrate how these materials operated in educational practice. Thus, we seek to contribute to a broader understanding of the role of the transnational circulation of school objects in the history of Brazilian and Italian education.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ F. Franchini, *Entre Vargas e Mussolini: A nacionalização do Instituto Médio Ítalo – Brasileiro “Dante Alighieri”*, Master Thesis, School of Education (Supervisor: D. Vidal), São Paulo, Universidade de São Paulo, a.a. 2015.

1. *The school material culture: theoretical bases*

School material culture has been widely studied in the history of education¹⁰, with investigations that analyze objects such as furniture, notebooks, uniforms and textbooks. These studies have contributed significantly to the understanding of how material elements influence pedagogical practices and reflect the social and cultural dynamics of different historical periods. The material elements not only reflect pedagogical practices, but also reveal cultural, political and economic values of an era. Roberto Sani, in preface to the book *Cultura materiale della scuola in prospettiva storica: scritture e possibilità* writes that:

Per giungere poi alla più recente storia della cultura materiale della scuola, che ha posto al centro dell'indagine aspetti e strumenti quali: l'editoria specializzata e i libri di testo, la stampa periodica per gli insegnanti, i quaderni di scuola, le Biblioteche di classe e d'istituto, gli archivi scolastici, i laboratori e gabinetti scientifici, le suppellettili, fino alla strumentazione scientifica, alle carte geografie, ai cartelloni murali e ai numerosi altri ausili e supporti didattici per l'insegnamento¹¹.

Among these artifacts, textbooks occupy precisely a prominent place, as they combine materiality and textual content, configuring themselves as instruments for the transmission of knowledge and, often, for the reinforcement of ideologies. These books not only conveyed pedagogical content but also played a key role in shaping national identities and spreading regime-aligned political values. In addition, their use in Italian schools abroad illustrates how these materials were mobilized in transnational contexts¹², configuring a dy-

¹⁰ A. Choppin, *Les manuels scolaires: Histoire et actualité*, «Revue Française de Pédagogie», vol. 11, n. 2, 1992, pp. 57-72; M. Lawn, I. Grosvenor (edd.), *Materialities of Schooling: Design, Technology, Objects, Routines*, Oxford, Routledge, 2005; A. Escolano, *Materiales para una historia cultural de la escuela*, «Historia de la Educación», vol. 5, n. 2, 2001, pp. 43-61; R. Souza, *Cultura material escolar: A escrita da história da escola e de seus sujeitos*, Campinas, Autores Associados, 2010.

¹¹ R. Sani, *Prefazione all'edizione italiana*, in V. Gaspar, G. Souza, C. Castro (edd.), *Cultura materiale della scuola in prospettiva storica: scritture e possibilità*, São Luís, Editora EDUFMA, 2023, pp. 9.

¹² M. Caruso, *Globalization, Mass Education and Technical Education in Transnational Perspective*, Oxford, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; J. Droux, R. Hofstetter, *Border-Crossing in Education: Historical Perspectives on Transnational Connections and Circulations*, London, Routledge, 2017; E. Fuchs, *History of Education beyond the Nation? Trends in Historical and Educational Scholarship*, in B. Bagghi, E. Fuchs, K. Rousmaniere (edd.), *Connecting histories of education: transnational and cross-cultural exchanges in (post)colonial education*, New York, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2014; M. Lawn, *Um conhecimento complexo: o historiador da educação e as circulações transfronteiriças*, «Revista Brasileira de História da Educação», vol. 14, n. 1, 2014, pp. 127-144; G. Ossenbach, M. del Pozo, *Postcolonial models, cultural transfers and transnational perspectives in Latin America: a research agenda*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 47, n. 5, 2011, pp. 579-600; T. Popkewitz, *Cosmopolitanism and the Age of School Reform: Science, Education, and Making Society by Making the Child*, New York, Routledge, 2011; D.

namic of cultural and educational circulation. In this case, these materials were fundamental instruments in the dissemination of Italian cultural and political values among immigrant communities, playing a strategic role in the construction of Italian national identities abroad.

The school material culture, as a theoretical field, seeks to understand the objects and practices that mediate the relationships between teaching and learning. We can highlight, as a fundamental reference, the studies of Dominique Julia, with the article *La culture scolaire comme objet historique*¹³. Successive studies followed this one, seeking to deepen the historical, cultural and material dimensions that cross school environments in different historical and geographical contexts. School material culture is defined as the set of objects, spaces, texts, images and technologies that constitute the material environment of the school and that play an essential role in the configuration of educational practices and social representations about education¹⁴.

Recently, an economic dimension has been inserted into the elements of school material culture, through which school objects not only mediate pedagogical practices, but also reflect dynamics of production, circulation and consumption that reveal the economic and political structures of an era, factors such as production costs, access to materials and distribution networks influence the materiality of school objects and, consequently, educational practices¹⁵. One of the central aspects of school material culture is its interdisciplinary approach, which combines elements of history, sociology and anthropology to understand how school objects are conceived, used and resignified in different contexts. From this perspective, materiality is not a neutral aspect, but rather loaded with meanings that interact with the pedagogical contents and with the subjects who use them. In the case of textbooks for Italian schools abroad, they not only served educational/school objectives, but also played a propagandist role, reinforcing values such as nationalism, discipline and obedience in Italian communities abroad¹⁶. In addition, the circulation of these books in Italian schools abroad reveals the transnational dimension of school material culture.

The study of textbooks, therefore, goes beyond the analysis of textual content. Researchers highlight the importance of considering textbooks as cultural products that reflect and shape educational practices and social represen-

Vidal (ed.), *Sujeitos e artefatos: territórios de uma história transnacional da educação*, Fino Traço, Belo Horizonte, 2020.

¹³ D. Julia, *La culture scolaire comme objet historique*, «Histoire de l'Éducation», vol. 1, n. 38, 1988, pp. 1-33.

¹⁴ A. Escolano Benito, *Historia ilustrada de la escuela*, Barcelona, Editorial Ariel, 1997.

¹⁵ V. Diana, W. Alcântara, *História econômica da escola: Uma abordagem antropológica em circuito transnacional (1870-1910)*, São Paulo, Unesp, 2024.

¹⁶ Castro, *Livros didáticos italianos, propaganda fascista e a identidade italianidade no exterior: o manual didático I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*, cit.

tations¹⁷. This perspective allows a more complex and integrated look at the function of textbooks. By investigating them, it is possible to unveil not only pedagogical practices and educational policies, but also the cultural and social dynamics that influence education. The analysis of textbooks that circulated in Italian schools abroad during the fascist period, in particular, offers valuable subsidies to understand the intersections between education, politics and national identity, highlighting the relevance of these materials for studies on textbooks in authoritarian contexts and the transnational circulation of these ideals.

2. Textbooks and Italian schools abroad

The context in which these Italian textbooks circulated in Brazil is intrinsically linked to the intense Italian migratory flow to the country, especially between the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century. Italian emigration acquired very significant numerical figures: «between 1876 and 1885, more than one million Italians applied for expatriation, more than two million did so in the following decade and more than four million, between 1896 and 1905», between the years 1870 and 1970, approximately 26 million people left Italy¹⁸. The American continent received the most Italian immigrants between 1876 and 1925, with regard to countries, the United States received the most Italians, followed by Argentina and Brazil¹⁹. Italy transferred to Brazil, in less than twenty years, more than one million people²⁰, between the years 1819 and 1947, so the Italian emigration to Brazil was a chapter in the history of emigration in Italy²¹. The process of mass international mobility, which began in the second half of the nineteenth century, involved numerous groups of Italians, this phenomenon arose from the convergence of two distinct dynamics: on the one hand, the Brazilian ruling elites sought alternative solutions to replace slave labor; on the other, sectors of the Italian ruling classes were committed to creating new opportunities for the popular strata, given the socioeconomic backwardness and the crises that

¹⁷ R. Chartier, *A ordem dos livros: leitores, autores e bibliotecas na Europa entre os séculos XIV e XVIII*, Brasília, Editora da UNB, 2017; A. Choppin, *Histoire des manuels scolaires*, Paris, Éditions Retz, 2004.

¹⁸ D. Gabbaccia, *Emigranti: Le diaspora degli italiani dal Medioevo a oggi*, Torino, Einaudi, 2003, p. 68.

¹⁹ C. Emigrazione, *Annuario statistico della emigrazione italiana dal 1876 al 1925*, Roma, L'universale, tipografia Poliglota, 1926.

²⁰ F. Cenni, *Italianos no Brasil: "Andiamo in'Merica"*, São Paulo, Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 2011.

²¹ E. Franzina, *La terra ritrovata. Storiografia e memoria della prima immigrazione in Brasile*, Genova, Stefano Termanini Editore, 2014.

affected the country²². The Italian emigration, motivated by economic, social and political factors, resulted in a broad diaspora²³ that found in Brazil one of its main destinations. In this scenario, the creation of Italian schools was a central strategy to preserve national identity and promote social cohesion among emigrants, and textbooks played a key role in this process, functioning as a material link between Italians abroad and their homeland. These Italian schools²⁴ were the quintessential places where Italian textbooks circulated. The main reforms began, more consistently, at the end of the nineteenth century, specifically in 1889 with the government of Francesco Crispi and the first law made by him²⁵. Other determinations followed, such as the one prepared by Minister Prinetti in 1901, which created the *Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione*²⁶. In the period of Italian fascism, new laws and regulations emerged for Italians outside the homeland and the sending of textbooks to schoolchildren. The most radical and intense measures were precisely at that moment²⁷. In this scenario, textbooks were used to boost the circulation of fascist ideas outside Italy, because: «of course, it would not be possible to conquer youth without fascizing the school world, which was achieved through a rigid control of books [...] and the imposition, from 1930, of single and mandatory texts in primary courses», in this sense, one of the main fascist actions was the sending of new textbooks²⁸, the production of these manuals should comply with some criteria²⁹: «the production of these new texts was adapted to the strategy of the fascist leaders aimed at introducing, in countries with a strong Italian presence, a massive propaganda aimed at producing the 'new Italian' sponsored by fascism [...]»³⁰.

In this scenario, Italian textbooks aimed at Italian schools abroad played

²² Barausse, *Chamas da educação nacional e do sentimento pátrio: as escolas italianas no Rio Grande do Sul da colonização ao final do século 19 (1875-1898)*, cit.

²³ Gabbaccia, *Emigranti: Le diaspore degli italiani dal Medioevo a oggi*, cit.

²⁴ P. Salvetti, *Le scuole italiane all'estero*, in P. Bevilacqua, A. De Clementi, E. Franzina (edd.), *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana: arrivi*, Roma, Donzelli, 2002, pp. 501-549; G. Floriani, *Scuole italiane all'estero: cento anni di storia*. Roma, Armando Editore, 1974; Ciampi, *Le scuole italiane all'estero*, in V. Pellegrini, (edd.), *Amministrazione centrale e diplomazia italiana (1919-1943): fonti e problemi*, cit. The article published in 2023 by the magazine *História da Educação* shows the distribution of research on Italian schools in Brazil, as well as the authors who conduct them, for this see: Castro, *Pesquisa histórico-educativa e a imigração italiana: uma revisão dos estudos*, cit.

²⁵ Floriani, *Scuole italiane all'estero: cento anni di storia*, Roma, Armando Editore, 1974; Ciampi, *Le scuole italiane all'estero*, cit.

²⁶ M. D'Alessio, *Preparatory courses addressed to «special» teachers for training Italian migrants in the early twentieth century*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 2, 2019, pp. 491-508.

²⁷ Ciampi, *Le scuole italiane all'estero*, cit.

²⁸ A. Trento, *Italian Fascism*, São Paulo, Editora Ática, 1982, p. 48.

²⁹ Salvetti, *Le scuole italiane all'estero*, cit.

³⁰ M. Pretelli, *Il fascismo e gli italiani all'estero*, Bologna, Clueb, 2010, pp. 123-138.

a strategic role in maintaining cultural identity and spreading fascist ideology among Italian immigrant communities. The main function of these books was to ensure that Italian children, even living in foreign countries, received an education aligned with the cultural, linguistic and ideological values of the motherland. In addition to offering content such as reading, grammar, history and mathematics, the texts emphasized Italian nationalism, the exaltation of Benito Mussolini's figure and the ideals of fascism, Italian history was presented in a glorified way, highlighting historical figures and events that reinforced Italy's narrative of greatness³¹. At the same time, disciplines such as geography incorporated maps that emphasized the expansionist project of the regime, including colonial territories in Africa. Italian schools abroad served as anchor points to preserve Italianness among immigrant communities³². In this context, textbooks assumed a symbolic dimension: they were at the same time teaching tools and objects, cultural mediators, which connected these communities to the distant homeland.

The materiality of these textbooks deserves to be highlighted, as it not only complements the textual content, but also plays a significant role in the transmission of cultural, ideological and aesthetic values. Many of these books had carefully designed covers, with images that conveyed the values of the fascist regime. Visual elements such as Italian flags, colonial maps, Roman busts and references to the Roman Empire were recurrent, reinforcing the connection between Fascist Italy and its glorious past. In addition, the quality of the paper and graphic design reflected the regime's efforts to project an image of cultural progress and sophistication. The books of the Fascist period sent to Italian schools abroad had, decisively, a higher graphic quality than those sent in the previous period. In the school context, these works can be classified into distinct categories, such as reading books, history manuals, grammars and religious texts, each with specific material and symbolic characteristics. Reading books, for example, played a central role in children's upbringing, combining moralizing stories with patriotic messages. These books often used simple language, accompanied by illustrations that reinforced values such as discipline, work and devotion to the homeland. The use of national symbols, such as the Italian flag and the images of historical figures, was recurrent, highlighting the intention to shape identities aligned with the fascist regime. History manuals, on the other hand, emphasized glorifying narratives of the Italian past, presenting historical events and characters as national heroes. These texts often excluded critical perspectives and were structured to extol Italy's role as a powerful, unified nation. Italian grammars, in turn, were fundamental instru-

³¹ Castro, *Livros didáticos italianos, propaganda fascista e a identidade italiana no exterior: o manual didático I fatti degli italiani e dell'Italia*, cit.

³² T. Luchese, *O processo escolar entre imigrantes italianos no Rio Grande do Sul*, Caxias do Sul, EducS, 2012.

ments for the preservation of the language among Italian communities abroad. In Brazil, for example, Italian grammars were used to reinforce linguistic and cultural ties with Italy, in addition, of course, to teach the formal norm of the Italian language. Religious texts constituted another significant typology, especially in confessional schools. These books combined biblical teachings with political messages, often aligned with the guidelines of the fascist regime. The circulation of these textbooks in Brazil reveals a transnational dimension of this school material culture.

To enter the study of school material culture, this article will use as an example the covers of Italian textbooks produced during the fascist period. The cover, as an element of first interaction with the material, carries symbols, colors, typographies and images that condense political and cultural messages, often serving as a visual summary of the content and intentions of the teaching material. Through them, the covers that students and teachers have the first contact with the textbook, establishing an initial connection that can arouse interest, anticipate the content and transmit symbolic and ideological messages. Several authors have highlighted the relevance of covers in studies of school material culture³³. By studying the covers of textbooks as part of the school material culture, this article seeks to explore the visual and symbolic strategies employed to establish connections between the pedagogical content and the ideological guidelines of the time. The analysis of the typology of Italian textbooks of the fascist period reveals that these materials were not limited to transmitting educational content, but played an active role in the formation of cultural and political identities. Finally, the typology presented also illustrates the complexity and scope of the school material culture, which goes beyond the purely functional usage of objects. The Italian textbooks analyzed in this article offer a clear example of how material, symbolic, and pedagogical elements interact to shape not only national school practices but also broader cultural dynamics. The importance of deepening specific elements that constitute these materials is also highlighted.

³³ A. Escolano Benito, *Historia ilustrada de la escuela*, Barcelona, Editorial Ariel, 2001. A. Viñao Frago, *Os espaços e os tempos escolares: materialidade, representações e práticas*, «Educação em Revista», vol. 24, n. 3, 2008, pp. 15-34; R. Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1994; L. Pazzaglia, *L'editoria scolastica e la propaganda fascista: le copertine dei libri di testo come strumento ideologico*, Milano, Vita & Pensiero, 2003, pp. 125-145.

3. *The covers of fascist textbooks: ideology and aesthetics*

The textbooks which circulated in Italian schools abroad have already been the subject of some analysis in the context of the history of Italian and Brazilian education³⁴. However, the perspective of school material culture, which focuses on objects as historical and educational testimonies, is still little applied to this category of books. For this article, we specifically chose a close look at the covers of textbooks, which play a central role in the visual and symbolic communication of materials, in view of their potential, as they were certainly made to pass on the ideas that the regime understood as important to be disseminated in Italian communities abroad.

It is certainly not possible here to analyze all the covers of all the Italian textbooks that this project studies. First, we opted for those titles that had a circulation in Brazil, then we proceeded in a way that covered a diverse typology, such as history books, reading books, literature, religion, science, geography books.

We also sought to contemplate several years *within the fascist ventennio*, as well as to study book covers from different publishers, diverse authors and primary school years. The covers of these books visually reinforced the values and narratives conveyed by the texts, the presence of Italian national symbols, such as the flag, fasces and historical figures, contrasted with the absence of explicit references to the Brazilian context, reinforcing the idea of exclusive belonging to the motherland.

Textbooks are understood as cultural artifacts that reflect the power dynamics and ideological intentions of an era³⁵. In the context of Italian schools in Brazil, these works take on a particular meaning: for children born on Brazilian territory but descended from Italians, these covers loaded with Italian symbologies had a deep and sometimes ambivalent meaning: on the one hand, they functioned as a powerful link with the homeland of their parents and grandparents, reinforcing the cultural and emotional connection with Italy, on the other hand, these covers also served as a tool for building identity in a context in which these children were immersed in a diverse Brazilian culture and often distant from Italian values and traditions. For them, these graphic representations acted as a symbolic bridge between the family past and the present lived in Brazil, establishing a space for identity negotiation. This visual

³⁴ Escolano, *Historia ilustrada de la escuela*, cit.; Viñao Frago, *Os espaços e os tempos escolares: materialidade, representações e práticas*, cit.; C. Bittencourt, *Livro didático e saber escolar*, cit.; Chartier, *A ordem dos livros: leitores, autores e bibliotecas na Europa Moderna*, cit.; A. Escolano, A. Viñao Frago, *Las culturas de la enseñanza: tradiciones escolares y cultura material*, Madrid, Morata, 2005; M. Hilsdorf, *Livro didático: história e memória*, São Paulo, Edições Loyola, 2004.

³⁵ A. Escolano, *La cultura material de la escuela: espacio, texto e imagen*, Madrid, Editorial Laertes, 1997.

bridge not only reaffirmed Italy's cultural heritage but also introduced the ideals and values of the fascist regime subtly and effectively, shaping perceptions of patriotism and social hierarchy.

Moreover, for many of these children, who had possibly never visited Italy, the images and symbols on the covers of textbooks offered an idealized and romanticized view of what it meant to be Italian. This created a sense of Italianness³⁶ shaped not only by family narratives but also by the interests of the fascist regime, which sought to consolidate its ideological influence even beyond Italy's borders³⁷. Thus, these covers were not just graphic representations; they carried significant symbolic and political weight, shaping both cultural identity and children's perceptions of their place in the world.

In this context, the selection of the specimens analyzed for this contribution reflects this symbolic richness. The table below lists the 10 copies selected for this contribution:

Table 1. List of Italian textbooks that circulated in Italian schools abroad

Scuole Italiane all'estero (ed.). <i>Sole d'Italia: letture classe 5</i> , Verona, A. Mondadori, 1932
C. Bagagli, <i>Letture prima classe</i> . Roma, Libreria dello Stato, 1929
Scuole Italiane all'estero (ed.). <i>Aritmetica e scienze per la 4. classe elementare</i> , Verona, A. Mondadori, 1935
Scuole Italiane all'estero (ed.). <i>Storia e geografia per la 4. classe elementare</i> , Verona, A. Mondadori, 1938.
G. Fanciulli, <i>Letture di religione (per le scuole elementari all'estero)</i> , vol. 1., per le classe 2. and 3, Verona, A. Mondadori, 1935.
G. Fanciulli, <i>Glorie D'Italia: Libro per la gioventù italiana sotto ogni Cielo</i> , Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale, 1929.
G. Fanciulli, <i>Alza Bandiera!</i> , Firenze, Casa Editrice Marzocco, 1939.
V. Gaiba, N. Oddi, <i>Il libro della prima classe</i> , Bergamo, La Libreria dello Stato, 1940.
O. Ginesi, <i>Patria lontana! Patria Diletta!</i> , Milano, Casa Editrice Cartoccino Monza, 1929.
Volpe, Gioacchino, <i>Il Risorgimento dell'Italia</i> , Roma, Arti Grafiche Alfieri and Lacroix, 1934.

The textbooks analyzed in this study were found in four important collections that stand out as fundamental references for research on textbooks and school material culture. The first is the *Centro di documentazione e ricerca sulla storia del libro scolastico e della letteratura per l'infanzia* (Cesco), lo-

³⁶ O. Truzzi, *Italianidade no interior paulista: percursos e descaminhos de uma identidade étnica (1880 – 1950)*, São Paulo, UNESP, 2016.

³⁷ J. Bertonha, *Entre Mussolini e Plínio Salgado: o fascismo italiano, o integralismo e o problema dos descendentes de italianos no Brasil*, «Revista Brasileira de História», vol. 21, n. 40, 2011, pp. 57-71.

cated at the Università degli Studi di Macerata. The second is the *Museo della Scuola e dell'Educazione "Mauro Laeng"* (MuSEd), of the Università degli Studi di Roma Tre. Additionally, the *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze* and the *Centro de Memória do Colégio Dante Alighieri* in São Paulo, Brazil, also hold relevant collections that were consulted for this research. These archives provide not only access to highly relevant primary sources but also an academic context that favors the critical and interdisciplinary analysis of materials, significantly contributing to the advancement of research on textbooks, especially in the fascist period.

The books chosen cover a variety of school subjects, such as reading, mathematics, science, history, geography and religion, demonstrating the fascist regime's systematic effort to structure an integral education that incorporated technical and humanistic content aligned with nationalist ideology. Publications such as those of Giuseppe Fanciulli (*Glorie d'Italia* and *Alza Bandiera!*)³⁸ and Clementina Bagagli (*Lecture* series for several series)³⁹ and Gioacchino Volpe (*Il Risorgimento italiano*)⁴⁰ illustrate the importance of renowned authors in the composition of this educational and political project. In addition, the years of publication of the works, ranging from 1929 to 1940, allow us to observe the changes and adaptations in content and visual messages throughout the fascist period.

Visually, the covers represent a rich field of study for their graphic diversity, from realistic and colorful illustrations, as in *Il libro della prima classe*⁴¹, to geometric and modernist compositions, as in *Aritmetica and scienze per la 4. classe elementare*⁴².

The inclusion of symbolic elements, such as the eagle, the fascio littorio, the Italian flag and historical figures, underscores the ideological dimension of these publications. The covers were not merely decorative; they played an active role in building a collective imaginary that exalted Italy's glorious past and promoted the values of fascism. This visual richness allows us to investigate how symbols and colors were mobilized to reinforce cultural and political identities. The selection also sought to contemplate the multiplicity of contexts in which these books were produced and used. Included are works intended for early and advanced series, published by prestigious publishers such as A. Mondadori, R. Bemporad & Figlio Editore and Società Editrice Internazionale. These materials highlight the complexity of the fascist educational project, which went beyond the classroom, seeking to shape the behavior and mentality of new generations of Italians abroad. Thus, the analysis of these covers

³⁸ G. Fanciulli, *Alza Bandiera!*, Firenze, Casa Editrice Marzocco, 1939.

³⁹ C. Bagagli, *Lecture prima classe*, Roma, Libreria dello Stato, 1929.

⁴⁰ G. Volpe, *Il Risorgimento dell'Italia*, Roma, Arti Grafiche Alfieri and Lacroix, 1934.

⁴¹ V. Gaiba, N. Oddi, *Il libro della prima classe*, Bergamo, La Libreria dello Stato, 1940.

⁴² Scuole Italiane all'estero (ed.). *Aritmetica e scienze per la 4. classe elementare*, Verona, A. Mondadori, 1935.



Pic. 1. Cover of the book by C. Bagagli, *Lettture Classe Prima*, 1929 (Centro de Memória, Colégio Dante Alighieri, São Paulo)



Pic. 2. Cover of the book by Scuole italiane all'estero, *Aritmetica e Scienze per la IV Classe Elementare*, 1935 (Museo della Scuola e dell'Educazione "Mauro Laeng", Università degli Studi di Roma Tre)

not only enriches the study of school material culture, but also enlightens on the role of textbooks as multifaceted instruments of cultural and ideological propaganda.

The educational materials analyzed, published between 1929 and 1940, represent a forceful expression of the cultural policy of the Italian fascist regime, especially in relation to Italian communities abroad. The integration between education and political advertising is evident both in the topics covered and in the graphic elements present on the covers and illustrations.

The titles analyzed cover a variety of disciplines, including reading, history, geography, mathematics, science, and religion. Among the most striking examples are *sole d'Italia: letture classe V* (1932)⁴³, which celebrates the Italian nation through literary and historical texts and *Letture di religione* (1935)⁴⁴, by Giuseppe Fanciulli, which combines religious doctrine with elements of exaltation of the fascist regime. History and geography also played a key role in constructing a narrative that legitimized the fascist regime and reinforced the idea of Italian cultural superiority.

Books such as *Storia e Geografia per la IV Classe Elementare* (1938)⁴⁵ and *Il Risorgimento dell'Italia* (1934)⁴⁶ present a glorified view of the Italian past, connecting the historical achievements of the Roman era to the imperialist project of fascism. In these works, maps, images of monuments and heroic narratives converge to exalt the greatness of the nation, and the civilizing mission attributed to Italy. Another aspect worth noting is the aesthetic character of these materials.

The covers and illustrations are full of fascist symbology, including fasces, eagles, flags and images that recall the unity and strength of the Italian people. For example, the cover of *Alza Bandiera!* (1940)⁴⁷, also by Giuseppe Fanciulli, uses vibrant colors and heraldic elements to evoke feelings of patriotism and devotion to the homeland. *Il Libro della Prima Classe* (1940)⁴⁸ portrays children reading under a flowering tree, next to an Italian flag, suggesting a harmonious relationship between childhood and national values.

These materials also reflect the regime's efforts to consolidate a unique and homogeneous identity among Italians living abroad. The dissemination of textbooks such as *Glorie d'Italia* (1929)⁴⁹ and *Patria lontana! Patria Diletta!*

⁴³ Scuole Italiane all'estero (ed.), *Sole d'Italia: letture classe 5*, Verona, A. Mondadori, 1932.

⁴⁴ G. Fanciulli, *Letture di religione (per le scuole elementari all'estero)*, vol. 1., per le classi 2. e 3., Verona, A. Mondadori, 1935.

⁴⁵ Scuole Italiane all'estero (ed.), *Storia e geografia per la 4. classe elementare*, Verona, A. Mondadori, 1938.

⁴⁶ Gioacchino, *Il Risorgimento dell'Italia*, cit.

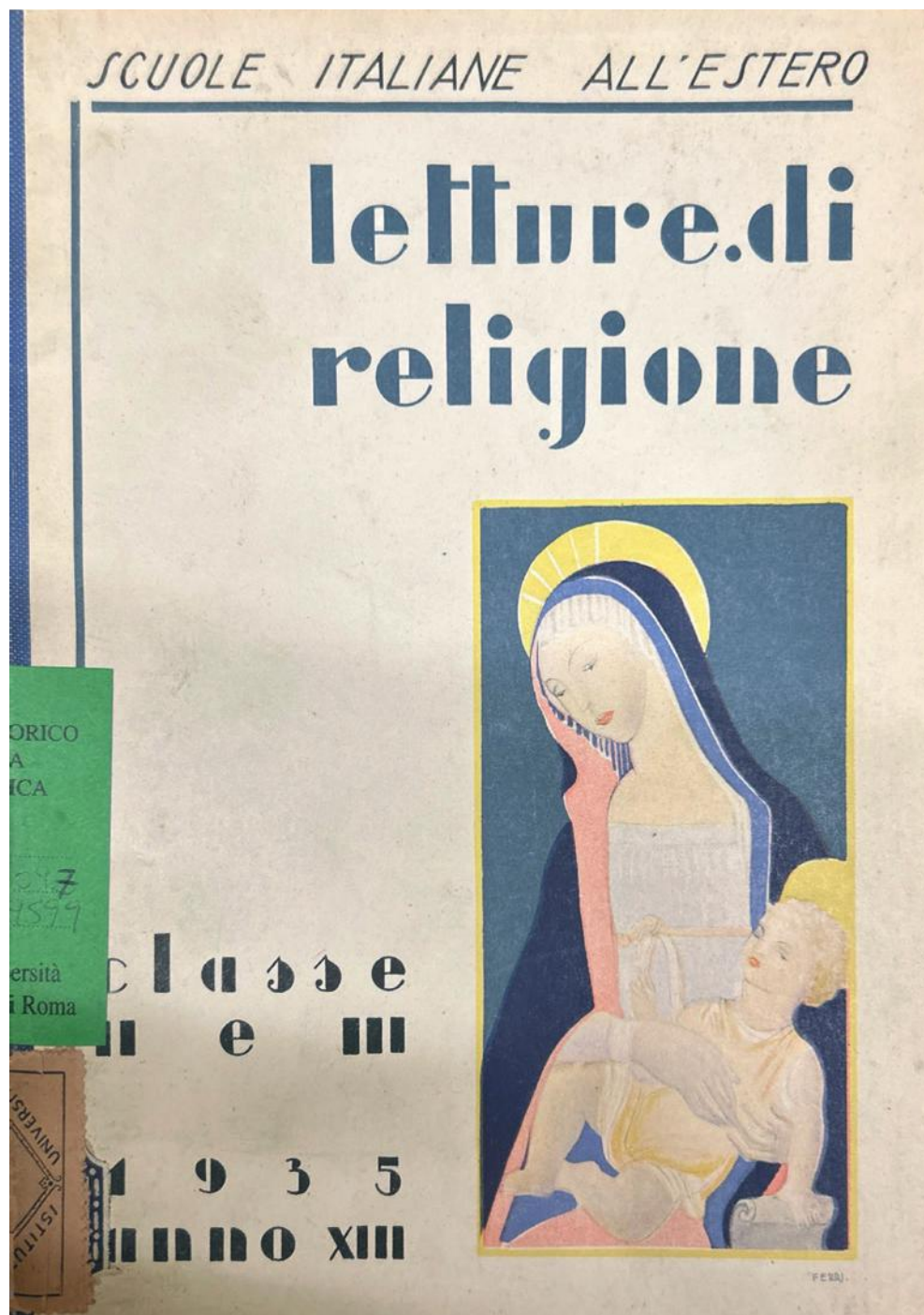
⁴⁷ Fanciulli, *Alza Bandiera!*, cit.

⁴⁸ Gaiba, Oddi, *Il libro della prima classe*, cit.

⁴⁹ G. Fanciulli, *Glorie D'Italia: Libro per la gioventù italiana sotto ogni Cielo*, Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale, 1929.



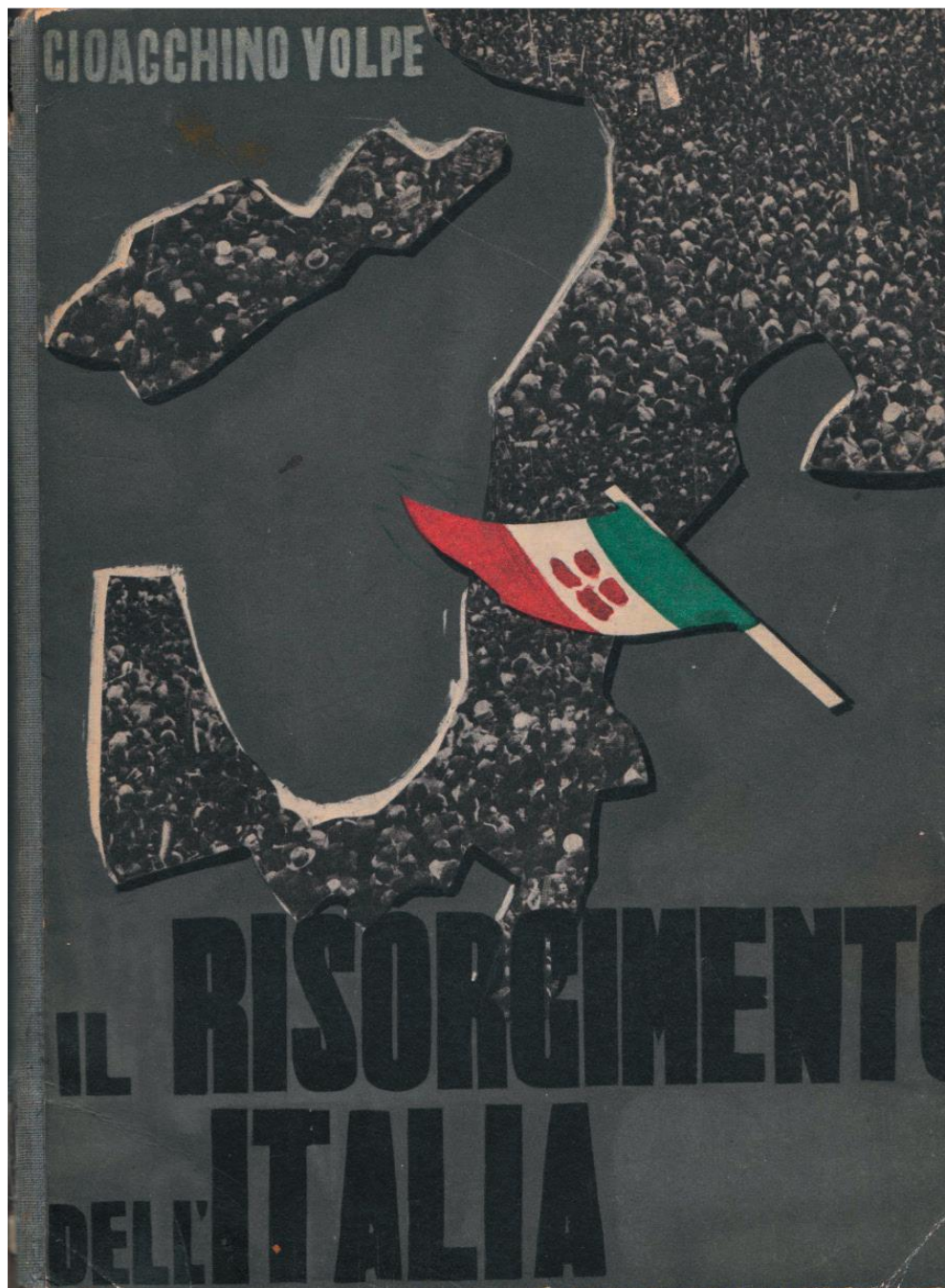
Pic. 3. Cover of the book by Scuole italiane all'estero, *Sole d'Italia. Letture per la Classe V*, 1932. (Museo della Scuola e dell'Educazione "Mauro Laeng", Università degli Studi di Roma Tre)



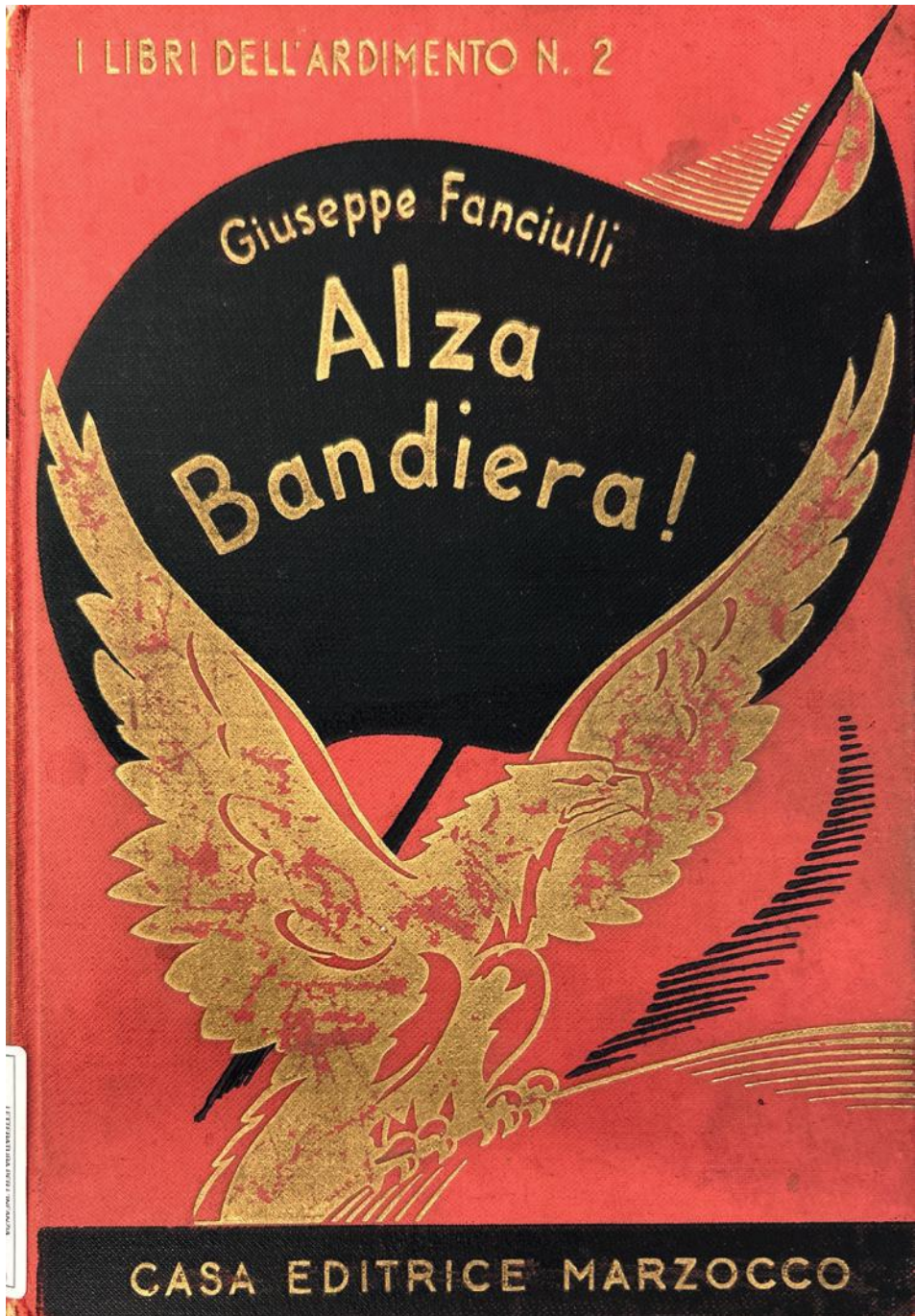
Pic. 4. Cover of the book by G. Fanciulli, *Letture di religione*, 1935 (Museo della Scuola e dell'Educazione "Mauro Laeng", Università degli Studi di Roma Tre)



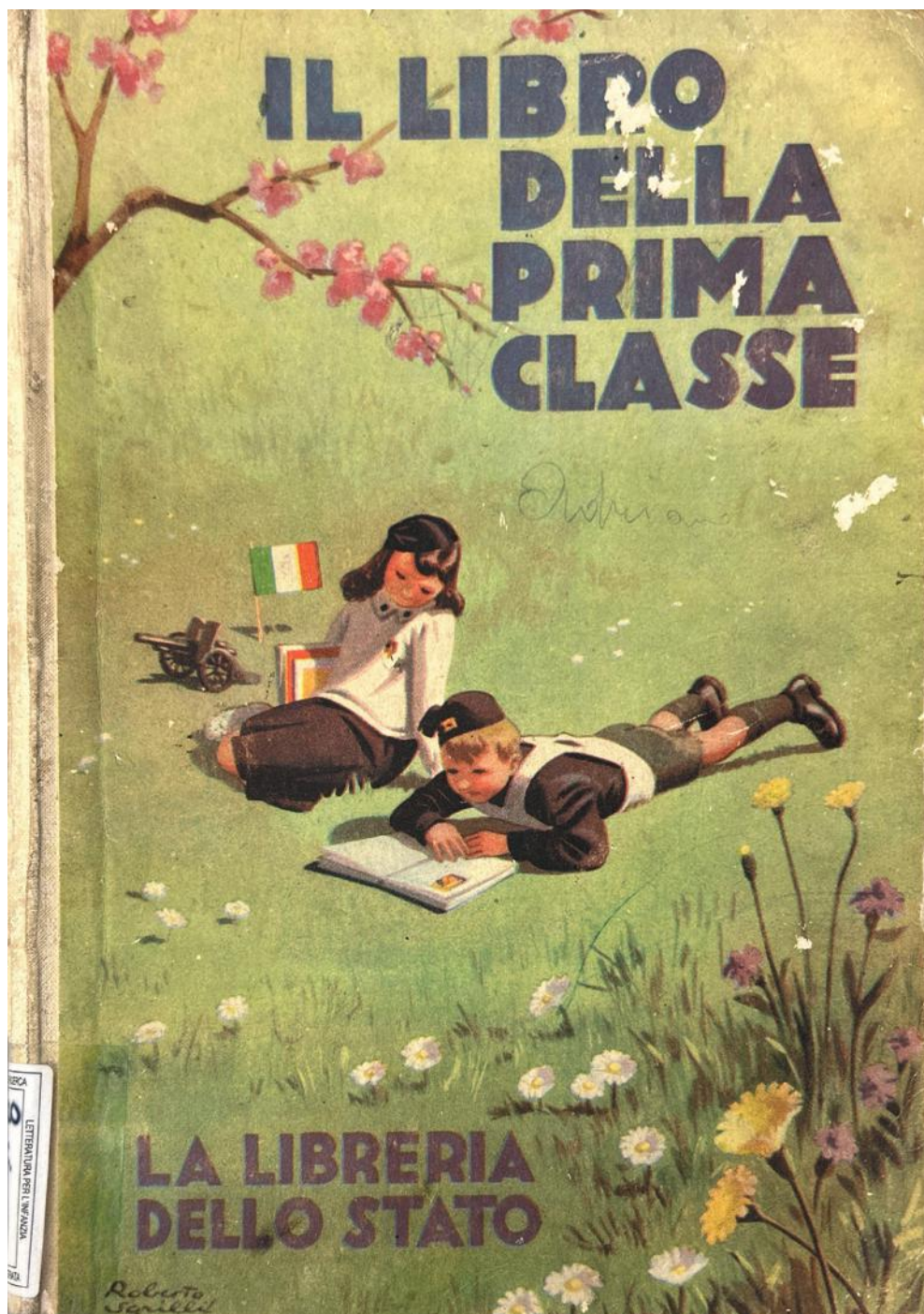
Pic. 5. Cover of the book by Scuole italiane all'estero, *Storia e Geografia per la IV Classe Elementare*, 1938 (Museo della Scuola e dell'Educazione "Mauro Laeng", Università degli Studi di Roma Tre)



Pic. 6. Cover of the book by, G. Volpe, *Il Risorgimento dell'Italia*, 1934 (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze)



Pic. 7. Cover of the book by G. Fanciulli, *Alza Bandiera!*, 1939 (Centro di documentazione e ricerca sulla storia del libro scolastico e della letteratura per l'infanzia, Università degli Studi di Macerata)



Pic. 8. Cover of the book by V. Gaiba and N. Oddi, *Il Libro della Prima Classe*, 1940 (Museo della Scuola e dell'Educazione "Mauro Laeng", Università degli Studi di Roma Tre)

(1929)⁵⁰ reinforced the cultural and emotional connection with Italy, even in distant lands. The themes addressed, often loaded with symbolism, sought to build a sense of belonging and loyalty to the fascist regime, while promoting the use of the Italian language as a unifying element.

The covers of Italian textbooks intended for schools abroad feature a strong presence of national symbols, designed to reinforce Italian cultural identity among students. Elements such as the Capitoline Wolf, often depicted with Romulus and Remus, evoke the mythical foundation of Rome, connecting children to Italy's ancestral history. The Italian flag also emerges as a constant symbol, representing patriotism and the unbreakable bond with the motherland. In addition, the *fascio littorio*, discreetly inserted in some covers, reflects the ideological influence of the fascist regime, marking the time when these didactic materials circulated and projecting the values promoted by the State.

Another aspect evident in the covers is the emphasis on modernity and progress, translated by representations of airplanes, metal towers and geometric grids. These visual elements symbolize technical-scientific advancement and dynamism, associating Italy with a modern and constantly developing nation. This aesthetic not only conveys a message of innovation, but also reinforces the role of the state in driving modernity and positioning Italy on the global stage. The contrast between classic and modern, present in the fusion of traditional architectural elements such as columns and porticoes with icons of technology and science, creates a visual narrative that balances tradition and progress, reaffirming Italian cultural identity.

In addition, many covers feature bucolic scenes that represent childhood as an idealized period of purity and serenity. The illustrations, which show children in school uniforms surrounded by flowers and lawns, highlight the connection with nature and recall the simplicity of everyday life. This visual choice suggests that the formation of future generations must be anchored not only in knowledge, but also in the interaction with nature. Children, often portrayed reading or studying, reinforce the centrality of textbooks in the educational process.

The graphic aesthetics of the covers also play a crucial role in visual communication. The use of clean lines, geometric fonts and a carefully selected color palette, often dominated by red, green and white, establishes a nationalist visual identity that dialogues directly with the colors of the Italian flag. This choice creates an immediate visual link with Italy, while the contrasts between light and dark tones give depth and prominence to the main elements. This cohesive visual approach reflects the modernist tendencies of the time, aligning with the aesthetic guidelines of the fascist regime.

Religion also occupies a central place on the covers, with stylized depic-

⁵⁰ O. Ginesi, *Patria lontana! Patria Diletta!*, Milano, Casa Editrice Cartoccino Monza, 1929.



Pic. 9. Cover of the book by G. Fanciulli, *Glorie d'Italia*, 1929 (Centro di documentazione e ricerca sulla storia del libro scolastico e della letteratura per l'infanzia, Università degli Studi di Macerata)



Pic. 10. Cover of the book by O. Ginesi, *Patria lontana! Patria diletta!*, 1929 (Centro di documentazione e ricerca sulla storia del libro scolastico e della letteratura per l'infanzia, Università degli Studi di Macerata)

tions of Christian figures such as Mary and the Child Jesus conveying a message of faith and spirituality. These images reinforce morality and Christian values as pillars of Italian children's upbringing, connecting national identity to religion. The presence of crosses and other Christian symbols, although discreet, underscores the role of religion in legitimizing the cultural identity promoted by the fascist regime.

Finally, covers often highlight the geographic and global dimension of textbooks, using terrestrial globes, stylized maps, and maritime elements to reinforce the idea of Italian cultural expansion. These representations not only connect students to the world through geography, but also symbolize the reach of Italian schools abroad, positioning Italy as an influential cultural center that transcends its borders.

In considering these visual and symbolic aspects, the covers of Italian textbooks go beyond mere aesthetic elements: they become ideological and pedagogical instruments that articulate the relationship between culture, national identity and education. These characteristics reinforce the relevance of these materials in the analysis of school material culture, providing a broader understanding of the context in which they were produced and used. These elements reflect the pedagogical and ideological intention of the covers, which aim not only to attract the eye, but also to convey subliminal messages of cultural identity, moral values and loyalty to the homeland. The uniformity of these elements demonstrates the coordinated effort to align education with the political-cultural project of fascism, especially in contexts of emigration.

The selected books therefore represent much more than simple pedagogical tools. They are historical testimonies of a time when education was instrumentalized to serve political and ideological goals. By exploring these materials, it is possible to understand how the fascist regime used school and textbooks as vehicles for propaganda and how these elements contributed to shaping the educational experience of Italian communities abroad.

Some Last Considerations

This article aimed to analyze the Italian textbooks produced during the fascist regime for circulation in Italian schools abroad, with special attention to the titles circulated in Brazil. Through an approach that combined theory and empirical analysis, we explored how these materials not only fulfilled their pedagogical function, but also served as ideological propaganda tools, highlighting their covers as central elements of school material culture. By connecting the visual and symbolic characteristics of these books to the historical and political context of the time, the study revealed the relevance of these textbooks as mediators between fascist ideals and educational practices

in overseas contexts. The importance of this research lies in the expansion of discussions on school material culture, by introducing the analysis of covers as an aspect hitherto little explored in studies on Italian textbooks abroad.

The analysis of Italian textbooks of the fascist period, especially through their covers, revealed a complex intertwining between materiality, pedagogy and ideology. These materials were not merely educational instruments, but also acted as vehicles for political propaganda, reflecting the values and ambitions of the fascist regime both in Italy's internal context and in its diaspora. Through colors, symbols, figures and graphic compositions, textbook covers conveyed messages carefully designed to shape children's perceptions and reinforce Italian cultural and political identity.

Fascism used education as one of its main tools for building a society aligned with its ideals. Textbooks, along with other instruments of school material culture, played a key role in this project. The covers analyzed in this article illustrate how the visual materiality of these objects was mobilized to engage young students in narratives of patriotism, discipline and devotion to the homeland. The aesthetics of many of these covers, which ranged between geometric modernism and classical iconography, reflected the contradictions and ambitions of the regime, which simultaneously sought to project an image of modernity and legitimize itself through its connection with the glorious past of Ancient Rome.

The thematic and visual diversity of the covers – covering subjects such as history, geography, reading, religion and science – also highlighted the amplitude of the regime's educational strategies. When considering the books intended for the *Scuole Italiane all'Esterio*, it is possible to realize how these materials also played a strategic role in maintaining cultural and political ties between Italian communities abroad and the homeland. The covers, with their images of national flags, maps and symbols, reinforced the idea of belonging and identity, even in distant geographical contexts. The idealization of the motherland as a protective and guiding figure is present in several covers that show the regime's effort to preserve Italianity among the descendants of immigrants. In addition, the study of textbook covers as part of school material culture revealed the importance of considering the materiality of these objects in a broader perspective. The covers not only reflected the ideological intentions of the regime, but also worked as cultural mediators between textual content and users. The interaction between teachers, students, and books was undoubtedly influenced by these visual choices, which shaped educational perceptions and experiences in the fascist period. By approaching these covers from the perspective of school material culture, it was possible to broaden the understanding of how seemingly simple objects can carry complex and multifaceted meanings. The focus on materiality also opens the way for future researches that can investigate other aspects of textbooks, such as their internal illustrations, typographic choices or even the editorial processes that

influenced their production. When addressing the relationship between school culture and Italian textbooks in Brazil, it is evident that these materials were more than simple pedagogical instruments. They were part of a larger political-cultural project, in which education was used as a tool to shape identities and strengthen transnational ties. This analysis reinforces the importance of considering school culture as a dynamic and multifaceted field, in which material objects, pedagogical practices and historical contexts intertwine to produce meanings and influence generations. The study of the relationship between school culture and Italian textbooks in Brazil reaffirms the importance of understanding education as a field of cultural and political disputes. In the Brazilian case, Italian textbooks stand out as concrete examples of how school material culture can be mobilized to strengthen transnational identities and promote ideological values, while dialoguing with local contexts marked by cultural and political tensions. Finally, the analysis presented here reinforces the need to study education as a field that transcends formal teaching and includes the interactions between objects, subjects and ideologies. The Italian textbooks of the fascist period, as cultural products, are concrete examples of how education can be mobilized to serve broad and ambitious political projects. By examining their covers, we were able to access not only the aesthetics and values of the regime, but also the strategies of power that have shaped entire generations, both within Italy and beyond its borders.