



Rome and the World - The World in Rome. the Politics of International Culture, 1911-2011

Peter Rietbergen

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In his new book, Dutch cultural historian Peter Rietbergen turns to the politics of international culture in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Rome. Specifically, he addresses the question why and how, since the foundation of the Italian state in 1861, Rome has sought to retain and, indeed, even enlarge its traditional role as the 'mother town' of the culture of mankind, and, also, why and how so many of the world's nations have established their own cultural presence there. Rietbergen argues that over the past 150 years, in order to gain an international position the successive regimes of the new state - Liberal, Fascist, Christian Democrat, etc - wanted to revitalize the age-long interaction between the "Capital of the World" and the many, increasingly self-conscious national cultures of European and other states. To do so, the various Italian governments attracted international institutions to Rome, organized a 'universal exhibition' there in 1911, and, from the 1920s onwards, actively furthered the foundation of foreign cultural academies that today number nearly 20, both European and non-European - a concentration unique in the world. Most of these acts of (inter-)national cultural politics have taken place in one specific area, the Valle Giulia - an area that was, interestingly, not part of the old town, but offered the possibilities of a cultural perspective orientated towards a dynamic, modern future rather than to a traditional, almost petrified past. Indeed, to stress Italy's vitality, the Valle was chosen to house a number of newly-founded national institutions that allowed the country to make its own mark there, precisely amidst the palatial abodes of foreign cultures. Fascinatingly, from the late 19th century onwards, this part of Rome also has become the location of a multitude of imposing statues hailing the greatness of non-Italian cultural heroes. People walking there will see, amongst many others, Bolivar, Byron, Firdausi, Gogol, Hugo, Pushkin, Siemkiewicz, Garcilaso de la Vega "el Inca", and so on. No one yet has asked why all these men are so conspicuously represented in the park that surrounds the obviously propagandistic buildings of various foreign cultural establishments. The stories behind these choices are revealing. Rietbergen even uncovers the hidden link between the continuous gifts of statues to the Valle and Italy's growing energy needs. For the first time ever, this study unravels the complex policies that both Italy and the many other nations involved have developed over the past 150 years to stake their claim as heirs to and guardians of Rome's eternal greatness, using the Valle Giulia as their arena. In doing so, Rietbergen also analyzes the resulting tensions that yet stress the importance of 'soft power' in the relationships between states. Last but not least, he suggests that the papacy which, of course, continues to present Rome as the capital of its universal Church, has sought to make itself visible in this 'valley of culture and scholarship' as well. A huge basilica was built there in the 1950s, and Opus Dei has been allowed to establish its headquarters on the top of the hill overlooking it. On the basis of an astonishingly wide range of sources - textual, visual and ritual - and with the help of numerous illustrations, Rietbergen shows that the Valle Giulia is an extraordinary "Lieu de Mémoire", an outstanding symbol of cultural memory in which the unique relationship between Rome and the world becomes visible. Table of Contents Introduction Prologue 1. A villa above the valley 2. A valley of the arts 3. A valley of studies 4. A valley of academies 5. A valley of statues 6. A valley of battles Epilogue Index

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