

The Political Portrait: Leadership, Image and Power, edited by Luciano Cheles and Alessandro Giaccone, New York and London, Routledge, 2020, 368 pp, €128.86 (hardback), ISBN 978-11-3805-423-3

The increasing interest of various scientific disciplines in visual communication and iconography is a consequence of the centrality and importance assumed by images in contemporary society. While the field initially managed to attract little attention beyond the ranks of scholars of art, since then the analysis of images and their components has progressively become central to other sectors, such as semiotics, communication, sociology, political science, and of course, history. In recent years, several works have been devoted to political portraits, analysing the use of images by the foremost political and institutional authorities - such as heads of state, presidents, kings and dictators - and by political candidates and party leaders. The book edited by Luciano Cheles, an expert in Renaissance iconography and visual propaganda, and Alessandro Giaccone offers a broad chronological and geographical perspective on the political portrait.

The seventeen chapters of the book analyse the evolution and the role of the political portrait in sixteen different nations. In addition to several European nations - Italy, France, Germany, Great Britain, Austria, Spain – the United States, the Soviet Union and Russia, nations on which several studies of the political portrait have focussed, the book also devotes chapters to the political portrait in more distant and less studied nations including China, Turkey, North Korea, Romania, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan.

The book documents the transformations that have occurred in the uses and meanings attributed to political portraits by institutions and politicians over the decades in relation to the changed political and social conditions, and the different national traditions and cultures.

The authors are drawn from a wide range of different disciplines. Together with professors of contemporary, social and design history, who are the most numerous, the book includes contributions by visual artists, political scientists, graphic designers, exhibition curators, and professors in the areas of architecture and design. Therefore, the peculiarity of the volume is that it integrates different competences, various political and geographical contexts and distant historical moments in a harmonious, multidisciplinary perspective and analysis of the role played by the political portrait.

No fewer than four chapters, placed in chronological order, consider the role and the evolution of the political portrait in Italy alone, probably due to the origins of the two editors. First, Maurizio Ridolfi's analysis of the 'well-developed publicity machine' of the Italian royal family looks at the dawn of political portraiture in Italy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Then, Alessandra Antola Swan reviews the use of images by Benito Mussolini, 'the first modern dictator to be promoted systematically using sophisticated techniques'. Third, Luciano Cheles highlights the remarkable continuities and the main discontinuities in the use of the political image in republican Italy, the regime that succeeded fascism, and the start of a new phase of the personalization of power in the 1980s. Finally, the other editor, Alessandro Giaccone, focuses on the evolution of the official portraits of the presidents of the Italian Republic and their reproduction in satire and comics.

Several chapters focus on the role and the use of the political portrait in current and past authoritarian regimes. Lucile Dreidemy analyses the controversial figure of the Austrian Chancellor, Engelbert Dolfuss, and his use of political portraits for the construction of a personality cult, and then, in democratic Austria, the role of satire and the redefinition of his image and role. Pierre Sorlin highlights the importance of photos and portraits in promoting the different public images, from the silent warrior to the benevolent grandfather, of the Spanish caudillo, Francisco Franco. Graeme Gill retraces the evolution of political portraiture in the Soviet Union and then in Russia during the long journey in the iconography of power from Vladimir Lenin to Vladimir Putin.

Looking at the other face of the communist hemisphere, Stefan Landsberger analyses the image of Mao Zedong, which evolved from an instrument for mobilizing millions of people 'to an icon that signifies and personifies the Chinese Communist Party regime'.

Mary Ginsberg explains the importance and the mechanisms of image construction in the Korean dynastic regime, from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il, up to Kim Jong Un, emphasising the strong emotional and behavioural aspects of Korean propaganda. Manuela Marin studies the Nicolae Ceausescu propaganda portraits and their use in posters, books, photos and newspapers, first for the fabrication of his cult of personality and then as a form of protest, shortly before the fall of the communist regime. In the last chapter dedicated to totalitarian regimes Florian Gottke focusses on defacing and destroying political portraits as a form of protest in Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan.

Moving to the democratic nations, Steve Seideman's chapter focusses on the portraits of US presidents and presidential candidates. This is a long list, one that extends from the official portraits of George Washington at the end of the eighteenth century to the first presidential meme and poster, produced in 2008 by the street artist Shephard Fairey for Barak Obama. Simon Downs suggests that British political iconography passed through a series of stages represented by the portraits of Winston Churchill, through Harold Wilson and Margaret Thatcher, to those of Tony Blair. Manja Wilkens focusses on the visual strategies used by the different German chancellors for the construction and reinforcement of different visions of the heads of government. In his second chapter, Luciano Cheles reviews the staging of French political power, retracing the evolution of the electoral posters and official portraits of French presidents and the role of the professionals behind them. Finally, Cristopher Wilson and Sinan Niyazioğlu analyse political portraiture in the early Turkish republic, built on the images of Kemal Atatürk and İsmet İnönü as two of the nation's founding fathers.

The book analyses the political portrait in its different forms, from the more commonly produced posters and portraits to statues, photographic portraits published in newspapers and magazines, and even satire and cartoons. All the chapters are illustrated using images and reproductions, and include twenty celebration portraits of US presidents in chapter 2, as well as three photos of their profanation and burning in Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan in chapter 17. If overall this constitutes a strength of *The Political Portrait*, in some cases, a larger number of images of those mentioned in the chapters would have been useful as these would have better illustrated the authors' analyses. Finally, it must be said that the decision to publish the images in black and white, clearly not the fault of the two editors, constitutes a limitation of what is otherwise an extremely important volume, since colours and their use represent a fundamental aspect of iconography.

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