

From: How Fascism Ruled Women, Italy 1922-1945, Victoria De Grazia, 1992

pp. 258-259: The ... organization ANFAL [National Fascist Association of Women Artists and Degree Holders], was by the mid-1930s, in terms of following and political visibility, the most important female cultural grouping under the dictatorship. Founded in 1929 by Roman women, including Adelina Pertici Pontecorvo (who hosted its inaugural meeting at her salon in Palazzo Altieri), it was led through most of the next decade by its main promoter and president, **Maria Castellani**. The very model of the modern fascist woman, Castellani, who was then in her early thirties, had been trained in mathematics, and she had numerous contacts abroad, especially in the United States, where she had studied, and in Geneva, where she had headed the League of Nations' accounting office. Her decision to found the organization was stimulated by the visit of the American representative of the International Professional Women's Organization to Italy in 1927. The inauguration of both the Rome and Milanese sections in 1929 was made to coincide with receptions in honor of Alice Garrett, wife of the new United States ambassador to Italy and a member of the parent organization. An excellent propagandist for the regime who possessed a "vivacious and enthusiastic temperament", Castellani earned the full confidence of Giuseppe Bottai, then Undersecretary of the Corporations. In February 1930, he charged her group with representing professional women in the National Fascist Syndicate of Professionals and Artists. With already eighty sections in 1934, ANFAL promoted a nationwide network of "cultivated women", reaching out into smaller centers, to bring together women who previously – and perhaps still – felt that flight to the big towns alone would liberate them from the torpid provincialism of small-town life. Craft fairs, painting expositions, and conferences thus created "a healthy atmosphere of female engagement and collaboration with the mighty fascist cultural activity." Thereby, such gatherings promoted greater self-awareness about the mean of being" Italian women".

p. 280: From 1935 to the outbreak of World War II, no women's group was more activist than the several-thousand-member Fascist National Association of Women Artists and Degree Holders. Under the leadership of **Maria Castellani**, ANFAL was authorized to form squads of volunteers specialized in technical services, first aid, propaganda, transportation, and policing. But, women "aspire to something more", Castellani affirmed, boasting of the numbers of women already employed in industry, the professions, and state administration. In particular they aspired to specialize in occupations traditionally described as male so as to assure that as many men as possible would be available for frontline duty!