

## Christopher Duggan, the mafia and Fascism

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This article starts by discussing aspects of Christopher Duggan's first book *La mafia durante il fascismo*, published in 1986, whose main topic was the anti-mafia campaign led by the prefect Cesare Mori in the latter half of the 1920s. The book's distinctive features were its rigorous historical approach and use of archival sources: these set it apart from most other work on these topics at the time, when the idea that the mafia could be subjected to historical research had not yet been properly established. In its central thesis Duggan's book was influenced by previous interpretations of the mafia, then still widely shared, that denied its nature as a structured organisation. Duggan argued here that Fascism used accusations of mafia involvement essentially as a way of attacking its political opponents. The final part of the article presents key aspects of a newer area of research on the mafia and Fascism, the 1930s, when a new campaign to suppress the mafia was not made use of for propaganda purposes.

**Keywords:** Christopher Duggan; mafia; Fascism

### History and the mafia

The main topic of Christopher Duggan's *La mafia durante il fascismo* is the anti-mafia campaign that the Fascist regime entrusted to the prefect Cesare Mori during the second half of the 1920s. This book was published by Rubbettino in Italian in 1986, when Duggan was not yet 30; an English version, rewritten and updated, appeared just three years later (Duggan 1986, 1989). The work was the outcome of doctoral research at the University of Oxford under the supervision of Denis Mack Smith, who provided a preface for the Italian edition. Duggan drew on a wealth of archival material, held not just in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome but also in the Archivio di Stato in Pavia, where Mori's private papers are located. He was the first to use these in a systematic way since the journalist Arrigo Petacco had published a very successful biography of the prefect some ten years earlier (1975), also the basis for a film. Duggan's book does more than reconstruct the general features of Mori's action against the mafia in Sicily: in its first section, it also sets out to provide a picture of the first phase of Fascism on the island, which at the start was certainly not one of the locations where it was most firmly established (Duggan 1986, 1–37; 1989, 95–119).

It can in fact be said, without forcing the comparison, that with *La mafia durante il fascismo* Duggan achieved the same sort of results, at least in terms of method, as the most innovative Italian historiography of the mafia during the same period. Within the context of a more general revival of research on Sicily and the South that was demolishing the tired old paradigms (Barone 2003), a new generation of Italian scholars had engaged in an arduous challenge: to write about the mafia without abandoning the tools of the historian. Until that point, the mafia had seldom been

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the subject of genuine historical research that addressed it in a sufficiently structured way and reconstructed the specific environments in which it was established. Treatment of this theme was often poorly grounded in reality and confined to the reiteration of a fund of recurring stereotypes, or left to anthropological and culturalist approaches. From this latter perspective, on the academic front, there had been widespread acceptance of the interpretation offered by the German sociologist Henner Hess (1970), who had rejected the existence of the mafia as a structured organisation and had instead related it back to behaviour and close relational networks. The change in perspective on structured approaches to the mafia phenomenon could already be clearly seen in many of the essays in the volume on Sicily published in 1987 by Einaudi, as part of its series on Italy's regions: this brought together a group of scholars who were subsequently at the forefront of research in this area, including Giuseppe Barone, Salvatore Lupo, Rosario Mangiameli, Paolo Pezzino and Nino Recupero (Aymard and Giarrizzo 1987). Lupo's *Storia della mafia* (1993) provides an early and important summary of this phase of research activity. Aside from these works of history, and not by coincidence, the same period saw the emergence of research on the mafia within the field of sociology, such as the work by Raimondo Catanzaro (1988) and Diego Gambetta (1992), which proved to be very important for our understanding of this complex phenomenon when it jettisoned the idea that it was the expression of a primitive and backward society.

One of the main merits of Duggan's book, therefore, is that he managed to detect these upheavals and to enter an arena where research on the mafia was shifting its approach. A contributory factor here was the fact that as a young English research student, during stays in Sicily, Duggan had had the opportunity to share his ideas with some of the scholars mentioned earlier. From the start, his research had evoked much interest and some of his early findings were published in an important Sicilian history journal (1982). As regards his approach to the crushing repression of the mafia intended by Fascism in the second half of the 1920s, it is clear that in his book Duggan succeeded in establishing a basic analytical framework, achieving results that were greatly superior to previous work on the mafia and Fascism, apart from that by Petacco; earlier publications had for the most part concentrated on the figure of the prefect Mori (Porto 1977). More than 30 years on from the publication of the book by this English historian, however, it inevitably has various features that need to be revised and clarified. Since that initial period of research on the topic, many contributions have been published, in particular by a research group in Palermo coordinated by Lupo, whose earliest and most important outputs included a special issue of the journal *Meridiana* ('Mafia e fascismo' 2008). It should also be noted that after the publication of *La mafia durante il fascismo* Duggan did not return to this topic, abandoning social history and preferring instead to devote himself to more traditional works on the political history of modern Italy, such as a monumental biography of Francesco Crispi (Duggan 2000).

One issue to be highlighted relates to the archival sources. As already indicated, their use is one of the notable features that distinguished Duggan's book from other works that had previously addressed the same theme. This was, and obviously still is, a crucial issue, as only the reference to sources, when submitted to appropriate critical evaluation, can give scientific respectability to a topic that otherwise lends itself to reconstructions tinged with mythology and conspiracy theory. With this in mind, it should be noted that a wealth of documentation, largely conserved in Palermo's branch of the Archivio di Stato, became available after the book had been published, due to the expiry of time limits determined by Italian legislation. In particular, this related to material from the trials that took place during Mori's anti-mafia campaign, thus simultaneously allowing for a broader field of vision and enabling a much deeper investigation of the judicial aspect of the entire operation. In this respect, by contrast, Duggan had necessarily been limited to

press accounts of the trials to which the regime had given the greatest emphasis in its propaganda, and in particular to proceedings against the mafia bandits in the mountainous Madonie area and the ‘*mafia interprovinciale*’, as it was termed, of Mistretta (Duggan 1986, 199–228; 1989, 132–163). As a result, he was led not only into underestimating their overall number – at only 15, rather than several dozen – but also into examining some cases that might actually be regarded as far from representative. Above all this was because the trials that he analysed, which must have had a particular significance in terms of propaganda, were among the few that concluded with heavy sentences. In most of the other trials the penalties given were instead mild, often just for the charge of criminal association and not for the specific crimes that the accused had possibly committed, such as homicide and extortion; those imprisoned were also subsequently subject to a general amnesty in 1932. The regime’s primary objective during the court proceedings phase of the anti-mafia campaign was to show the public that there was a particular criminal group which after being identified had also been punished. Moreover, trials like those relating to the Madonie area and Mistretta do not seem entirely suited to conveying that complexity of linkage between economic, political and social features that characterised the mafia; this could be seen much better from subsequent archival research on the documentation of proceedings relating to the outlying quarters of Palermo, and also in regard to the towns and villages closest to the provincial capital such as Villabate, Bagheria, Corleone and Piana dei Greci (Coco 2013a; Patti 2014).

Secondly, Duggan was unable to consult the wealth of documentation relating to the 1930s, also mostly conserved in Palermo. This was generated by a body with the title ‘*Ispettorato generale di pubblica sicurezza per la Sicilia*’ (Police Inspectorate for Sicily), which was charged with responsibility for a second anti-mafia campaign that started in 1933 and ran until 1939 (Coco and Patti 2010). In this case it was not remotely possible to make do with reconstructions from press coverage, because the environment for this new operation was completely different from that of the earlier period: whereas in the 1920s the regime had made a significant investment in propaganda regarding the battle against the mafia, now, by Mussolini’s order, the word ‘mafia’ was no longer supposed to be used in public and political debate or in the newspapers. The official version, in fact, was that the phenomenon had been completely and definitively eradicated by Mori’s operation, and this sat within a more general rhetoric in which people could now ‘sleep with their doors open’ under Fascism. In order to address the new emergency, the *Ispettorato* was therefore modelled on the bodies for political investigation, such as the secret police OVRA, that were created on the initiative of the police chief Arturo Bocchini during that period. These were intended to operate by gathering intelligence; an example of their methods was the systematic use of informers, who, just like those placed within political opposition groups, were supposed to provide information from within the mafia gangs themselves (Coco 2017).

It follows from this that any discussion of the mafia and Fascism cannot really come to a proper conclusion, as it does in Duggan’s book, with the end of the Mori anti-mafia campaign, marked by the prefect’s recall to Rome and his appointment as a senator in 1929. There was, instead, a subsequent phase, which helps us to better understand and assess both the earlier period and the one that followed. If in fact we were to place our trust in the regime’s rhetoric, and not to examine the fresh outbreak of mafia activity in the 1930s, it would be difficult to explain the environment that was created in Sicily in the period after the Second World War. The demolition of the cliché wherein Fascism defeated the mafia through Mori in the 1920s, a cliché which has in fact continued to be difficult to put to rest, has then supported the questioning of a similarly resistant cliché, strongly promoted by the new phase of historiography whose development started in the 1980s, in which the mafia was essentially re-established in Sicily as a consequence of the landing of Anglo-American forces in July 1943 (Mangiameli 1987, 548–561; Lupo 2008, 138–148; Patti 2013, 105–112).

### The political use of the Mori operation

The issue of the increased availability of archival sources for reconstructing the evolution of the mafia phenomenon during the Fascist *ventennio*, and of its relations with the regime, brings us to a second reflection regarding Duggan's book, relating to its central thesis. From his reconstruction, the idea emerges strongly that the charge of mafia involvement was essentially a tool that Fascism used to attack its political opponents. This line of interpretation was still influenced by approaches like that of Hess, while attempting a problematic reconciliation with the contrary evidence that was emerging from archival research. For Duggan it therefore followed that the end of the anti-mafia campaign necessarily also meant an end to the issue of the mafia itself. In this regard, the final quotation in the Italian version of the book seems emblematic: "Did they never tell you," said a Sicilian marquis to a French journalist who asked him whether there were still any *mafiosi* left in Sicily in 1934, "that Mori took them all away with him?" (Duggan 1986, 251). Moreover, Mack Smith's preface to the book observed that in the second half of the nineteenth century there had already been attempts to explain the difficulty that the new Italian state was having in managing unruly Sicily, at its periphery, by using 'the idea of a criminal conspiracy' (Mack Smith 1986, vii). He continued:

[I]n the early 1870s the Sicilian problem was attributed to 'la cosiddetta Maffia od associazione malandrinesca' ['the "Maffia" or brigand association']. Contemporary observers often had difficulty finding evidence of this organisation, and their difficulties were shared by the researchers who came later. Despite this, the conviction that a vast criminal association does exist has persisted until our own times. (Mack Smith 1986, vii–viii)

For this reason, in the Fascist period just as earlier, any revelations about the mafia's internal structure were deemed 'far from impartial' and thus not to be taken too seriously, as also were those 'by some of the current *pentiti*' (Mack Smith 1986, viii): explicit reference was thus made to the context of the mid-1980s in which Duggan's book was published. At that point the Italian state, now a democratic regime rather than a dictatorship, was moving towards determined action in regard to the mafia. The previous years had seen the '*seconda guerra di mafia*' ('second mafia war'), as it was described, an unprecedented battle between the criminal gangs of western Sicily which had a clear outcome in the rise of the Corleone clans and an estimated death toll of about a thousand. In the same period, moreover, the *mafiosi* had stepped up their activity in relation to state institutions and had started to carry out an extended series of '*omicidi eccellenti*' (murders of public figures): in 1982, those killed included the prefect of Palermo Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa and the regional secretary of the Italian Communist Party Pio La Torre. Thanks to the innovative investigation methods of a specialised pool of magistrates, however, hundreds of the protagonists of this period of violence had been brought to trial, and it was actually in 1986 that proceedings opened in the mass trial, known as the '*maxiprocesso*,' which took place in the purpose-built '*aula bunker*' (reinforced courtroom) at the Ucciardone prison in Palermo. A key part was played in this by the '*pentiti*' (repentant terrorists), gang members who had decided to make statements revealing the mafia's organisation and internal structure, who were given this name in order to make the link with the *pentiti* from the political terrorism of the 1970s. Among these men, Tommaso Buscetta took on a particularly important role. This was something new, as the mafia had never before been so clearly identified as a real organisation with a specific way of operating (Stajano 1986). In consequence it had never been hit as hard as at that point, and was certainly hit in a much more effective manner than when subjected to the highly publicised Mori operation of the 1920s. For Mack Smith, however, and probably for Duggan too, the story seemed much the same as ever, as 'from time to time somebody would come forward, revealing the alleged structure of the mafia' (1986, viii).

At the time of the *maxiprocesso* the role of the *pentiti* had in fact been the subject of heated debate, and a cross-party civil rights grouping had expressed serious doubts over the appropriateness of using this sort of source: the 'Buscetta theorem' regarding how the mafia functioned, they argued, would certainly lead to miscarriages of justice, as had happened in the case of the television presenter Enzo Tortora and his alleged links to the Camorra (Lupo 2007, 19–25). Within this grouping should be mentioned the writer Leonardo Sciascia, who had previously been in the vanguard of protests about the mafia phenomenon with novels such as *Il giorno della civetta* (1961) that addressed this theme. Sciascia, who often took distinctive individual positions on issues, was suspicious of the media uproar that had developed around the *maxiprocesso* and its protagonists; he too expressed his doubts over this issue and in fact quoted Duggan's book as an exemplification of his thinking, in a now celebrated article published in *Il Corriere della Sera* with the title 'I professionisti dell'antimafia' (1987). He had not dismissed theories such as that of Hess, which as mentioned had had a significant influence on the interpretative approach taken by Duggan, and he had even written the preface to the Italian edition of Hess's book (Sciascia 1973). This was perhaps because he thought that these theories could elevate mafia affairs to the level of a paradigm, as a symbol of perennial corruption and criminality. In what Sciascia felt was the climate of a witch-hunt, Duggan's book thus became his starting point for a warning that the anti-mafia might be an instrument of power not just under a dictatorship but also within a democracy.

To illustrate the degree to which the charge of mafia connections could have consequences on the political front, Duggan made particular use of the case of Alfredo Cucco, the provincial secretary of the Fascist Party (PNF) in Palermo. Cucco, a hardline Fascist aligned with the faction that looked to Roberto Farinacci for leadership, fell into disgrace during Mori's anti-mafia campaign in the wake of accusations that he had links to mafia gangs in the province of Palermo (Di Figlia 2007). According to Duggan, the whole affair could be traced back to the growing personal rivalry between the two men. Mori was affected both by his mania for being in the limelight and by his ongoing concerns about being hated by the hardliners, whose path he had obstructed when he was still at the prefecture in Bologna (Duggan 1986, 119–120; 1989, 123–124). Moreover, the alarm bells must have been ringing for him due to the fact that within a short space of time both the Chief of Police Francesco Crispo Moncada and the Minister for the Interior Luigi Federzoni, his protectors, had been replaced. In Duggan's view, Mori thus wanted to seize the initiative and eliminate the Fascist hardliner located closest to him, who happened to be Cucco. It was also true, however, that with Farinacci replaced as the PNF national secretary by Augusto Turati, a sort of purge of some of the former's followers was taking place throughout Italy. As a result Mussolini, although Mori's attack on Palermo Fascism 'had been the result of a personal initiative' (Duggan 1986, 128; 1989, 179) ultimately did not condemn his actions. That these charges served a particular purpose, Duggan argued, could be demonstrated simply by considering the fact that in the early 1930s, after the conclusion of the Mori operation, the erstwhile party secretary of Palermo was completely absolved in the proceedings brought against him, in which, in any case, the accusations only related to administrative and professional irregularities.

The accusation of mafia association certainly may have been exploited for other purposes, relating to the political struggle between factions, as can be seen in the fact that one of the documents listing the charges against Cucco was drawn up by Roberto Paternostro, the heir to an important family of Palermo lawyers and one of his opponents within the provincial capital's Fascist Party (Di Figlia 2007, 95–98). However, this in itself does not mean that the mafia was not still, and even primarily, a network of criminal groups that was deeply established within

the nerve centres of society in central and western Sicily: a possibility that in Duggan's book at this point seems to be of limited interest. More generally, there is no doubt that with the anti-mafia campaign the Fascist regime set itself political objectives, including a demonstration of the strength and presence of the state in Sicily by concluding another great work like the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes and the 'battle for wheat', and by achieving the defeat of the mafia, something that had been pursued without success for so many years under the Liberal regime. However, alongside this desire to develop a particular image, as the restorer of order, there was the actual need to address a real problem of public unrest that particularly related to the central and western parts of the island and resulted from the chaos that had developed after the conclusion of the Great War.

In this respect, it is important to take a broader view, in both geographical and chronological terms, in order to give a more balanced picture. In regard to geography, it is necessary not to limit considerations exclusively to the Palermo area, or even just to Sicily, in which the clash between the two strong characters of Mori and Cucco might be seen as the only really significant element. As already mentioned, the Cucco case could in fact be compared with the experiences of many other radicals who had been followers of Farinacci elsewhere in Italy at the time of the change in direction overseen by Turati: these men were purged as a result of various sorts of charge, often deriving from anonymous reports, as was typical of Fascism at its height. In Sicily, these charges necessarily took the form of accusations of links to the mafia; beyond their rhetorical construction and the use that was made of this, these accusations may have had more than just a grain of truth. This was in fact the case with Cucco, whose absolution in court did not mean that there were no links with mafia gangs in the Palermo area, as seems to have been the case for example during the national elections of 1924 (Di Figlia 2007, 57–72). Moreover, the clash between Cucco and Mori was much more than just a personal event, one which Duggan strongly emphasised. It should also be understood within a more general dynamic: the conflict that was being played out in almost all Italy's provinces between the prefect and the party secretary, especially after Mussolini had issued a circular in which he confirmed the authority of the former over the latter. Thus the Sicilian case should not be considered just in terms of its specific additional issue of the mafia, but should be related to its position as one of the outlying areas of the Italian peninsula in a problematic relationship with the Roman centre (Corner and Galimi 2014).

If we now broaden our perspective in terms of time and consider a period longer than the 20 years of Fascist rule, we can see that the political use made of the issue had been very marked ever since the first appearances of the mafia phenomenon in the second half of the nineteenth century (Benigno 2015). However, this does not negate the many early references to the real existence of organised criminal groups. In other words, if it is the case that in the course of over a hundred years there had been various attempts to reveal the mafia's structure from the inside, as Mack Smith himself acknowledged in his preface, it must surely mean that they cannot always be entirely dismissed as the product of an individual's invention or, even less so, of the invention of the police authorities in their quest for a criminal association to be attacked. The longer-term perspective, and the fact that an extraordinary continuity can be observed in features such as descriptions of the ritual oath, ought to give rise to reasonable doubts at the very least. The revelations in the 1980s by Buscetta, like those of any other *pentito* or informant before him, are obviously not all to be taken as gospel truth; they must be treated in the same way as other sources and subjected to critical evaluation. In this specific case, for example, Buscetta had the tendency to portray himself, somewhat improbably, as the traditional good *mafioso* of times gone by who had no idea what the drug trade was, and maintained that the only genuinely bad people were the Corleonesi (who were his mortal enemies due to their eradication of his family during the



mafia war). At the same time, however, other parts of Buscetta's account were central to the success of the *maxiprocesso*. This was discussed by Giovanni Falcone:

Before Buscetta we had only a superficial knowledge of the Mafia phenomenon. With him we began to look inside it. He gave us confirmation of its structure, its recruiting methods and its *raison d'être*. But above all he gave us a broad, far-reaching global vision of the organisation. He gave us the essential keys to the interpretation of the Mafia, a language, a code. For us he was like a language teacher who could enable us to go to Turkey without having to communicate by gestures. (Falcone 1992, 23–24)

### A new field of research: the 1930s

In my view, we can get a very good understanding of the coexistence of these two aspects – the actual existence of distinct criminal groups, with their rigid structures, and the way in which the battle against them could be presented and exaggerated – by examining some of the episodes of the 1930s, and in particular those related to the *Ispettorato generale di pubblica sicurezza per la Sicilia*. As already mentioned, this period fell completely outside Duggan's analysis, but in recent years it has been one of the main areas for research into the mafia and Fascism (Coco and Patti 2010; Coco 2013b; Coco 2017, 82–99). The head of the *Ispettorato* was Giuseppe Gueli, a Sicilian officer who had served under Mori, from whom he inherited a whole series of practices and repressive methods that had been tried out during the earlier period and were then further developed. After this service in Sicily, Gueli was to be charged with other sensitive special services, including the harsh repression of the Slovenian, Croat and Italian Resistance in Venezia Giulia during the Second World War and the custody of Mussolini in the Gran Sasso area in August and September 1943 (Coco 2013c). When he became head of the Sicilian police unit, Gueli established direct communication with Bocchini, at the national police headquarters, so that he could give him regular information on the developments of the new anti-mafia operation. This centralising practice was shared by all the senior officials of this type, such as the chiefs of the OVRA; in a repressive system like Italian Fascism, which tended to become increasingly chaotic through the multiplication of bodies with overlapping and often conflicting responsibilities, there was a desire to maintain a certain degree of efficiency in some of the services regarded as essential by cutting out the intermediate levels.

In their confidential reports, most of which are conserved in the 'Questura' collection in the Archivio di Stato in Palermo, Gueli and his men informed Bocchini not only of the fact that mafia groups continued to exist in the 1930s despite their supposed complete annihilation in the regime's propaganda, but also that they had in fact quickly reorganised after the repressive onslaught. Midway through the decade, it could thus be confirmed that they had resumed full activity, as could be seen from the noticeable increase in crimes that could typically be attributed to these groups. A particularly systematic and detailed description was made of their internal structure, in the wake of the many statements obtained from the mafia's own members: these were summarised within one of the *Ispettorato*'s main reports, on the mafia of the Palermo area, which was compiled in 1938. *Mafiosi* had always talked to the authorities in confidence; however, these statements were no longer sporadic and anonymous, as they had been in the past, but were regular and, in particular, formally recorded. Almost all the accounts were in agreement that the fundamental unit, which related to a specific criminal group with authority over a specific piece of territory, was called a '*famiglia*' (family). At its head was a '*capo*' (also known as a '*rappresentante*' or '*presidente*'), and it was divided into smaller groups called '*diecine*' (tens). Members were known as '*soci*', '*fratelli*' or '*uomini d'onore*' ('members', 'brothers' or 'men of honour'), and to become part of the organisation they had to take an oath sworn on their own blood, shed by pricking one of their fingers with a pin. Finally, some statements also mentioned the term '*commissione*', a higher

body responsible for coordination between the different *famiglie* and capable of settling potential disputes (Coco and Patti 2010, 25–34).

In regard to descriptions of this kind, at least two general points can be considered. First, there is a striking resemblance, especially in terms of terminology, to the disclosures made by the *pentiti* of more recent times, and particularly that of Buscetta to Falcone in 1984. Second, it is also very interesting that the reorganisation of the mafia along these lines was apparently happening at much the same time as the reorganisation across the Atlantic, to a degree that suggests some mutual influence. Both were taking place after phases of colossal upheaval within the criminal world. In Sicily there had been Mori's anti-mafia campaign: over and above its intentions in terms of propaganda, this had inflicted a severe blow to the mafia gangs, which at that point no longer had the freedom of movement that they had enjoyed previously. Over in America, there had been the devastating conflict of the 'Castellammarese war' of 1930–1931 between alliances led by Joe Masseria and Salvatore Maranzano. It was Maranzano, emerging victorious from this, who then tried to move towards a reorganisation in which the 'family' constituted the basic unit, but it was not long before he was killed by Lucky Luciano, probably because of his excessive personal ambition. This correspondence can be seen as further evidence for the theories of Salvatore Lupo, who has recently focused his attention on the relations between mafia groups on opposite shores of the Atlantic; in his view, 'the two Mafias evolved in an ongoing process of interconnection and hybridization within an intercontinental network that linked individuals, interests, ideas, and places' (2015, 2).

The reasons for this outpouring of statements at precisely this point – the years 1937 and 1938 – can be related to the new context in which the *Ispettorato* was performing its duties: one in which police bodies were increasingly using a mixture of violence, not especially blatant but skilfully used and therefore effective, and well-developed networks of informants who were systematically rewarded. Moreover, the archival documentation now available tells us fairly clearly how both these types of methodology were used by the *Ispettorato*. We actually have information about a series of suspicious deaths of detainees, during mafia investigations, in various police cells in central and western Sicily; although the police attributed these to suicide, in all probability they resulted from the torture inflicted during interrogations. In addition, we know about the existence of lists of informers who were well-known associates of the mafia, including Giuseppe Bonanno (also known as 'Joe Bananas'), with the corresponding sums of money that each was paid. The way in which these findings were presented, in the *Ispettorato*'s report on the Palermo mafia mentioned earlier, seems particularly revealing. The officers who wrote this, possibly including Gueli himself, distanced themselves very carefully from exclusively culturalist interpretations of the mafia, and explained how the *mafiosi*, starting from a solid organisational base, were able to weave complex networks of relationships:

The mafia, which is not just a state of mind or a mentality but promotes both of these from a properly organised base, divided into '*famiglie*' and '*dicine*' as they are known, with formally elected '*capi*' or '*rappresentanti*' and with the '*fratelli*' undertaking an oath of unbreakable loyalty and secrecy, ceremonially sworn on their own blood flowing from their pricked finger, had been resuming its way of criminal activity, and had been trying once again to pollute every branch of the public and economic activity of the region. (Coco and Patti 2010, 63–64)

The same report also gave space to the question of how hard information should be presented. The message that Gueli and his men wanted to convey to their superiors was that the mafia, with such a strong structure, could be compared to any other subversive organisation. They were putting into action a mechanism that could be described as the totalitarian construction of the enemy. This is particularly clear from a section of the report in which the mafia was put on the same level as anti-Fascism and freemasonry, in a kind of roundup of the regime's opponents



(Coco and Patti 2010, 61). When faced with this kind of statement, we can ask some questions. Going back to the issues I discussed before analysing some of the features of Duggan's book, what was the nature of the relationship between concrete facts and the manner in which they were represented? In the specific case of the *Ispettorato*'s report, were the facts manipulated in order to make the mafia groups appear to be something more organised and united, and therefore more dangerous to the regime? Or rather, can we believe that the witness statements that provide the basis for the officials' description of such a structure, even if obtained by the use of coercion or payment, are essentially truthful?

In my view, the two levels also coexist in this case. On the one side, we might think that the *Ispettorato*'s officers intended to present the object of their repressive action so that it appeared to be as dangerous as possible for the regime. Above all, they needed to give themselves legitimacy and justify the very existence of this special unit, which certainly represented a notable expense for its parent body, Sicily's central police headquarters. In addition, they would have wanted to present their action against the mafia as more effective than the previous approach: moreover, despite the fact that Gueli had had his training in the Mori school, there was no shortage in the reports of negative references and attacks on the shortcomings of Mori's operations. On the other side, while acknowledging these issues, it should also be said that when the descriptions of the internal structure of mafia groups in the 1930s are assessed within the wider time frame, they are consistent with a developmental line that starts in the 1860s and 1870s, passes through the descriptions provided by Buscetta in particular, and arrives in the present day. We can therefore conclude that the description given by the men of the *Ispettorato* largely corresponded to the actual facts and that ultimately it was not significantly distorted, but may have been aligned with a very well-defined repressive schema: that of a totalitarian regime whose tendency was to fit mafia groups into its model of the subversive organisation.

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## Italian summary

Il saggio inizia discutendo alcuni aspetti del primo libro di Christopher Duggan, *La mafia durante il fascismo*, pubblicato nel 1986. L'argomento principale del libro era la campagna antimafia che il regime fascista aveva affidato al prefetto Cesare Mori nella seconda metà degli anni Venti. I suoi tratti distintivi erano la rigorosa impostazione storica e l'uso di fonti archivistiche. Questi elementi erano in quel momento comuni a pochi altri lavori su questi temi, dal momento che non si era ancora pienamente affermata l'idea che la mafia potesse essere trattata come l'oggetto di una ricerca di storia. Del resto, lo stesso libro nella sua tesi di fondo scontava l'influenza di precedenti letture del fenomeno, che ancora erano largamente condivise nel panorama scientifico, che negavano il carattere di organizzazione strutturata della mafia. Nella fattispecie, Duggan sosteneva che l'accusa di mafia fosse in sostanza uno strumento del fascismo per colpire i propri avversari politici. Nella parte conclusiva del saggio, infine, vengono presentati alcuni degli elementi principali di uno dei nuovi orizzonti di ricerca su mafia e fascismo, gli anni Trenta, periodo in cui avvenne una nuova, e molto meno propagandata, repressione del fenomeno.