Book Reviews

Jonathan Dunnage, *Mussolini's Policemen: Behaviour, Ideology and Institutional Culture in Representation and Practice* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2012).

Jonathan Dunnage's study of Mussolini's policemen focuses on the 'regular police' of the Ministry of the Interior and to a much lesser extent on the more numerous *Carabinieri* of the War Ministry, the rough equivalents of the *Schutzpolizei* and *Gendarmerie* (the urban and rural branches) within the German Order Police. Strangely, he refers to the *Carabinieri* as the 'military police,' presumably because they were housed within the War Ministry, though they were certainly not the equivalent of American MPs or German *Feldgendarmerie*, whose primary task was policing within the armed forces. Deliberately omitted are the political police (OVRA) and internal intelligence agency (POLPOL)—Italy's rough equivalents of the German Security Police and Security Service (Sipo-SD). The questions that dominate this thoroughly researched study of the institutional culture and personnel policies of the regular police are to what degree were the regular police 'fascisticized' under the Mussolini regime, and how did this affect their behavior not only after 1922 but also after 1945. The less explicit question that inevitably hovers in the background is, of course, in what ways were Mussolini's regular policemen similar and different from Hitler's.

Suffering from a long-term 'professional malaise' and 'Cinderella status' that was caused by inadequate support from the government, low professional standards, and the 'mistrust' of the population (owing to their role in repressing strikes and demonstrations), the regular police generally turned a 'blind eye' to the violence of the *squadristi* [Blackshirts] and then welcomed the advent of the Mussolini regime. Not surprisingly, the police had every incentive to support the creation of a police state that increased both their power and immunity while diminishing the individual rights of citizens. But the regular police were neither transformed nor thoroughly modernized despite official rhetoric to the contrary. Complaints even by regime's own internal

investigators over pervasive incompetence, indiscipline, and corruption continued unabated.

Most importantly, the regular police were not subjected to the same systematic and intensive centralization, ‘fascisticization,’ and militarization as their German counterpart. The Chief of Police Arturo Bocchini was no Himmler or Heydrich, and the autonomy of the regular police from the Fascist Party was preserved in order to use it as a check against local Party indiscipline and corruption. Insofar as fascists infiltrated the regular police, it was through the continuation of the pre-existing but debilitating culture of patronage and clientage that now favored ‘first hour’ fascists in the 1920s and a new generation of ardent young fascists in the 1930s at the expense of merit and professionalism.

The regular policemen never became instruments of mass deportation and mass killing along the lines of the German Order Police, at least not internally. But Dunnage is clear that they exercised effective political surveillance and repression within Italy, and were fully capable of committing horrific atrocities against Slavs in the Yugoslav borderlands Italy hoped to make its own (as well as in the colonial territories of Ethiopia and Libya). They did not match their Nazi counterparts in crime or efficiency, but they were not benign.

Police corruption, defeatism, and disassociation from the Fascist regime accelerated with the increasing likelihood of Italy’s military defeat. With no deep-seated loyalty or ideological commitment to Fascism on the part of the regular police, Bocchini’s successor Carmine Senise could join other disaffected Italian leaders in abandoning Mussolini in 1943. Among police caught in the German-occupied areas, desertion or evasion was rife. In the immediate post-war period, the 1943–45 interlude helped the police to gloss over their earlier repressive actions on behalf of the Mussolini regime, avoid significant purging and reform, and continue behavior based on their own anti-Left, anti-union, homophobic, and anti-democratic traditions that pre-dated 1922. Real professionalization and democratization of the Italian police would occur only gradually over the following decades.

Dunnage touches only briefly on two aspects of the story that might have been more fully explored. The first is the quantitative dimension. In the early 1930s the *Carabinieri* were reduced from 65,000 to 50,000, and in the late 1930s the regular police of the Interior Ministry numbered less than 20,000. In comparison the German Order Police numbered 130,000 in 1939 and mushroomed to 244,500 by mid-1940. Quite simply, the Fascist regime did not commit remotely similar resources and manpower to policing as its Nazi counterpart. And Dunnage notes briefly that in comparison to Germany the Italian police received relatively few denunciations because they were generally

mistrusted by the population. Thus one significant reason for the difference in intensity of the two police states was that the Italians chose not to police themselves.

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