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*Urban crime during the Risorgimento*

In recent decades, the framework of studies on crime and marginality in Italy has been enriched by several studies that have not only underscored the 19th century's fundamental importance for the creation of modern systems of repression but have also highlighted the differed scope and variety of criminal events that permeated the variegated realities of the Italian peninsula<sup>1</sup>. Although all the Italian regions shared specific long-standing social scourges and pauperism phenomena typical of an agricultural society of the 19th century, criminality maintained peculiar features specific to each of these realities that were determined by many factors, such as socio-economic situation, demographic size, location and, not least, the caesuras produced by historical and political events. Even the intellectuals of the time noticed and questioned the considerable differences in criminal activities between relatively neighbouring territories or under the authority of the same state power. These questions would explode in all their evidence when the process of national unification was completed. When confronted with the significant challenges that violence and disorder posed to the new unified state, authorities focused primarily on the central and southern regions and islands at the centre of extensive brigandage or, later, on certain urban realities such as Naples, where organised crime was already present<sup>2</sup>. Public order problems in northern Italy, which were much smaller in size and scope, went unnoticed, and only in recent times has historians' focus shifted towards

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<sup>1</sup> J.A. Davis, *Conflict and Control: Law and Order in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Italy*, London 1988. See in general the bibliography edited by CEPOC: <https://www.cepoc.it/materiali/bibliografia-nota>.

<sup>2</sup> To learn more about Post-unification Italian brigandage, consult: A. Capone (cur.), *La prima guerra italiana. Forze e pratiche di sicurezza contro il brigantaggio nel Mezzogiorno*, Roma 2023; C. Pinto, *La guerra per il Mezzogiorno. Italiani, borbonici e briganti, 1860-1870*, Roma 2019; G. Tatasciore, *Briganti d'Italia. Storia di un immaginario romantico*, Roma 2022. About Naples: F. Barbagallo, *Storia della camorra*, Roma 2010; A. Fiore, *Camorra e polizia nella Napoli borbonica*, Napoli 2019; M. Marmo, *Il coltello e il mercato. La camorra prima e dopo l'Unità*, Roma 2011. About Sicily: F. Benigno, *La mala setta. Alle origini di mafia e camorra, 1859-1878*, Torino 2015; S. Lupo, *Storia della mafia. Dalle origini ai giorni nostri*, Roma 1993.

this topic<sup>3</sup>, bringing a fresh perspective to the study of crime during the 19th century in Italy. Nonetheless, Turin's specific case offers multiple points of interest. On the one hand, the ancient capital of the Kingdom of Sardinia is a valuable and rich observatory for studying crime in urban realities of the Po Valley area, thanks to its well-preserved police archives. On the other hand, the brief and extraordinary political season the city experienced in the middle of the century as the "command centre" for the national unification movement resulted in significant societal changes that reverberated on criminality. Moreover, it was mainly in Turin that the Kingdom of Sardinia's ruling class inaugurated and tested the effectiveness of those institutions and law enforcement policies later transferred to the newly unified state<sup>4</sup>.

When, in the spring of 1814, Victor Emmanuel I returned to Piedmont and restored Turin as the Kingdom of Sardinia's capital, the city was very different from the fully industrial city it would have become at the end of the century and later in the twentieth century. Except for the walls, torn down during the fifteen years of French rule, on the surface, the city appeared the same as in the previous century: a capital city of secondary importance and modest size, surrounded by a vast countryside composed mainly of fields, meadows, moors, and woods and dotted with a series of small hamlets and numerous isolated farmsteads. Its economy was essentially based on its status as the centre of power and state administration<sup>5</sup>. The presence of the court, the nobility, the high bureaucracy, and the most important religious institutions exerted a strong appeal, creating around the city a swarm of services and businesses that thrived because of their proximity to the elites. In all statistics compiled in the first half of the nineteenth century, workers in the service sector (servants, servers, cooks, and coachmen) occupied first place in terms of numbers employed, involving around 10 % of Turin's population, followed at some distance by merchants and shopkeepers.

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<sup>3</sup> To learn more about Bologna, consult: S.C. Hughes, *Crime, disorder and the Risorgimento: The Politics of Policing in Bologna*, Cambridge 2002; J. Dunnage, *The Italian Police and the Rise of Fascism: a case study of the province of Bologna, 1897-1925*, Westport 1997.

<sup>4</sup> To learn more about Italian police history, consult: A. Azzarelli, *Polizia, crimine e ordine pubblico in epoca liberale. Il modello nazionale e il caso della Sicilia di fine Ottocento (1861-1914)*, Soveria Mannelli 2025; R.B. Jensen, *Liberty and Order: The Theory and Practice of Italian Public Security Policy, 1848 to the Crisis of the 1890s*, New York 1991; G. Tosatti, *Storia del Ministero dell'Interno. Dall'Unità alla regionalizzazione*, Bologna 2009.

<sup>5</sup> A.L. Cardoza - G.W. Symcox, *A history of Turin*, Torino 2006, pp. 167-168.

The more properly productive sector, on the other hand, was limited and showed almost no trace of those signs of development that connoted other more developed areas of northern Europe: apart from a very few large or medium-sized industries for the most part linked to the world of weaving or the large state monopolies, almost all processing maintained an artisanal nature, dispersed in a myriad of tiny workshops.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the extensive countryside surrounding the city not only represented a rich reservoir of food resources for the capital's inhabitants, but also gave many municipal areas a distinct rural character.

Accordingly, Turin's underworld of the early nineteenth century maintained the characteristics of an Old Regime agricultural society that had not yet been touched by massive industrialisation. Bloodshed was sporadic, burglary was numerically insignificant, while there was a clear prevalence of petty crimes such as street theft, pickpocketing, and swindling passers-by<sup>7</sup>. This criminality, perceived by contemporaries as more annoying than dangerous, was fuelled by the ubiquitous phenomena of vagrancy and begging, which, starting from the countryside, found their most active catalyst in Turin<sup>8</sup>. As much as the Savoyard authorities tried to thwart any unauthorised movement on their territory, they could do little to hinder these mass movements, which were connatural to the rural reality of Piedmont, marked by endemic poverty and, in many areas, by small property heavily subjected to economic downturns. According to the statistics of the time, which cannot be considered accurate, in the 1840s, there were 450,00 destitute people in the Sardinian state with a ratio of nine per hundred inhabitants, higher than in England, France, Austria, Spain and Portugal<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, for the peasants in the environs of Turin, once their work in the fields was over, it was customary to move temporarily to the city to seek a way to survive the winter season. Many, especially men and adults, managed to find some fallback work. However, for those unable to pick up a temporary job (due to health, age, gender or lack of professional skills concerns), there was nothing left but to rely on public and private charity or more or less legal expedients to survive.

Whereas crime in the city was generally not very dangerous, the situation in the countryside was far more turbulent. Even though the

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<sup>6</sup> G. Gozzini, *Ceti e gruppi sociali nella Torino napoleonica*, in U. Levra (cur.), *Storia di Torino. La città nel Risorgimento (1798-1864)*, Torino 2000, VI, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> A. Bosio, *Torino fuorilegge. Criminalità, ordine pubblico e giustizia nel Risorgimento*, Milano 2019, pp. 80-100.

<sup>8</sup> U. Levra, *L'altro volto di Torino risorgimentale 1814-1848*, Torino 1988, p. 51.

<sup>9</sup> Ivi, pp. 56-68.

fifteen years of French rule had wiped out the large bands of brigands that infested Piedmont, especially its southern area, the degree of instability remained high throughout the early years of the Restoration<sup>10</sup>. Even when the situation stabilised, armed robberies, when not outright acts of brigandage, were frequent in the countryside and reached as far as the gates of the capital. In particular, the so-called Pian dei Boschi, a small plateau on the Turin hillside, and the bridge's surroundings over the Sangone river near Moncalieri were poorly frequented, especially at night.<sup>11</sup> Although fragmented, statistics compiled since the 1830s confirm the extent of these dangers. The crime of «grassazione», the name at the time for armed robbery, occupied the third place, after theft and brawling, among the most frequent crimes in the Kingdom of Sardinia and, despite the hefty penalties, it probably enjoyed a certain margin of impunity considering the not very high number of individuals convicted annually<sup>12</sup>. Similarly, the sixty-four murders and attempted murders recorded in Piedmont, Liguria, and Savoy in 1832, while considerably lower than those reported in Sardinia or any province of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, certainly did not give the impression of a pacified society or one where violence was confined to a few sporadic episodes.<sup>13</sup>

To cope with this problematic situation, the House of Savoy, within a few months of their return to Piedmont, opted for a continuation of the Napoleonic police apparatus. A corps of Royal Carabiners replaced the transalpine Gendarmerie, with identical composition and tasks, and the new Ministry of Police, essentially a copy of the Napoleonic «Ministère de la Police», was established<sup>14</sup>. Although the uprisings of 1821 later led to the abolition of the Ministry, the French-style police system was maintained. In Turin, it went alongside the Vicariato, a very ancient municipal office that Victor Emmanuel I had immediately restored upon his return to the capital at the “ideologically purest moment” of the Restoration in

<sup>10</sup> M. Broers, *Napoleonic imperialism and the Savoyard monarchy 1773-1821. State building in Piedmont*, New York 1997.

<sup>11</sup> A. Bosio, *Torino fuorilegge*, cit., p. 114.

<sup>12</sup> U. Levra, *L'altro volto di Torino risorgimentale 1814-1848*, cit., p. 51.

<sup>13</sup> State Archives of Turin (from now AST), *Alta Polizia*, Miscellanea di atti: stati del personale di polizia (1818-39), mazzo 413: stato numerico d'alcuni fra li delitti più gravi, che si commisero nelle Provincie di Terraferma durante l'anno 1832, estratto dalle Relazioni ebdomadarie.

<sup>14</sup> M. Broers, *De la Gendarmerie Impériale a la Carabiniere Reale. L'expérience policière piémontaise, premier exemple d'exportation du modèle français*, in J.N. Luc (cur.), *Gendarmerie, état et société au 19. Siècle. Actes du colloque organisé les 10 et 11 mars 2000 par le centre de recherches en histoire du XIXème siècle*, Paris 2002, pp. 401-409.

Piedmont<sup>15</sup>. This office had managed law and order in the city since the Middle Ages and, despite an extensive remit ranging from the control of markets to hygiene and building planning, had a small force of a few dozen men, which was nevertheless sufficient for a city of such modest size as the one of Turin in 1814<sup>16</sup>.

This static scenario underwent gradual changes over the following decades. The main reason was the sustained population growth that Turin experienced over fifty years: the city went from 84,000 inhabitants in 1814 to 136,000 in 1848, with a growth that exceeded the increase in residents of the entire previous century, and then literally exploded during the pre-unification decade, reaching in a few years the symbolic quota of two hundred thousand inhabitants. This population explosion devastated the poorer urban classes as the city's productive and economic structure failed to develop at the same rate, thus producing a constant excess of labour supply that was impossible to absorb<sup>17</sup>. Even the economic boom of the 1850s had little effect on the living conditions of the humble classes. In Turin, these problems were accentuated by the lack of a serious urban planning policy. The residential areas built during the Restoration were reserved for the propertied classes, while the poorer inhabitants were crammed into overcrowded neighbourhoods with poor hygienic conditions<sup>18</sup>. Real pockets of poverty and marginalisation became easily observable in some parts of the old city and the new working-class neighbourhoods that emerged around the city. Moschino was the most striking example: born on the banks of the Po as a modest fisherman and boatman's quarter and named for its proximity to the city's sewage drains («Moschin» in Piedmontese means gnat), during the nineteenth century, it turned into a receptacle for prostitutes and miserable people. Soon, in the collective imagination, the small district became a dangerous slum where even the police dared not enter at night. Although this reputation was greatly exaggerated, the municipal council decided on its complete

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<sup>15</sup> The definition in M. Broers, *L'ordine pubblico nella prima Restaurazione 1814-20*, in *Ombre e luci della Restaurazione in Piemonte. Trasformazioni e continuità istituzionali nei territori del Regno di Sardegna*, Roma 1997, p. 135.

<sup>16</sup> To learn more about Vicariato, consult: D. Balani, *Il vicario tra città e stato. L'ordine pubblico e l'annona nella Torino del Settecento*, Torino 1987; A. Bosio, *Un'istituzione di Antico Regime tra Restaurazione e riforme carlo-albertine: il Vicariato di Torino (1814-1848)*, in «Annali della Fondazione Einaudi», XLVII (2013), pp. 109-151.

<sup>17</sup> U. Levra, *L'altro volto di Torino risorgimentale 1814-1848*, cit., p. 64.

<sup>18</sup> A.L. Cardoza - G.W. Symcox, *A history of Turin*, cit., pp. 177-178.

demolition in 1872.<sup>19</sup>

In the absence of an efficient system of public charity, the immiseration of the working classes mainly affected groups who were traditionally most exposed to adverse circumstances, such as single women and young people without protections or valid family networks. From the 1830s, there was a considerable increase in the number of prostitutes and, especially from the following decade, a significant reduction in the average age of people arrested. In Turin, the proportion of prostitutes arrested under the age of twenty-one, which was the age set for becoming of age in the Kingdom of Sardinia, grew from 29 % to 39 %. Of this group, almost one-fifth were under sixteen, while male minors arrested rose from 33 % in 1833 to 40 % in 1846. The change was, however, primarily qualitative: crimes such as theft and pickpocketing began to be more frequent than transgressions such as begging and vagrancy<sup>20</sup>. For much of the Restoration, the response of the Savoyard authorities was latent. Charles Albert decided to address these issues by reforming the state prison system and opening the *Generala*, a correctional institution specifically for juvenile inmates. Nevertheless, the results obtained from these reforms fell short of expectations<sup>21</sup>. Turin continued to be traversed by young girls who prostituted themselves or gangs of boys involved in street crime, even after being interned several times in the correctional facility. Much more successful, however, were the solutions devised by Catholic circles that made Turin an extraordinary laboratory of charity, where successful initiatives were inaugurated and later exported all over the world. In 1846, in an area on the outskirts of Turin, in Valdocco, the priest Don Giovanni Bosco founded the first oratory intended for «abandoned, precarious and dangerous» young people. This experiment was the birth of the Salesian Congregation, a movement that would exert a strong modernising influence on the world of Catholic associationism<sup>22</sup>. In another suburban area of the city, in Borgo Dora, a decade earlier, the Marquise Giulia Falletti di Barolo had begun her charitable activities toward prostitutes and abandoned girls. Similarly, in the popular neighbourhood of San Donato in 1859, another Piedmontese aristocrat, Francesco Faà di Bruno, founded the *Opera di Santa Zita*, a shelter for servicewomen, a category of workers traditionally

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<sup>19</sup> M. D'Amuri, *Le case per il popolo a Torino. Dibattiti e realizzazioni (1849-1915)*, Torino 2006, pp. 47-51.

<sup>20</sup> A. Bosio, *Torino fuorilegge*, cit., pp. 237-238 e p. 274.

<sup>21</sup> R. Audisio, *La "Generala" di Torino. Esposte, discoli, minori corrigendi (1785-1850)*, Santena 1987.

<sup>22</sup> P. Stella, *Don Bosco*, Bologna 2001.

very vulnerable and «in danger»<sup>23</sup>.

The growing hardship of Turin's weaker sections of the population was inevitably reflected in the scale of crime. Although shortly before the start of the 1848 revolutions Charles Albert had been persuaded to restructure the entire police apparatus by abolishing the obsolete Vicariato, centralising the police and increasing the personnel of public safety forces, for much of the 1850s and the following decade the new police of the Kingdom of Sardinia struggled to contain the growing disorder in the capital. While in the countryside, the general improvement of the road network facilitated control of rural areas by gradually reducing the number of robbery assaults and eliminating the last bands of brigands, the situation in the city worsened dramatically. In a memoir from the summer of 1860, attorney Carlo Cerva drew similarities between Turin and the gloomy descriptions of Industrial Revolution cities:

In this most remarkable City, although education, thanks to the care of the Government or the Administrative Authorities, has been widespread since 1848 to these days, depravity is still present in the lower segment of the society on a day-to-day basis. And truth be told, have we not long witnessed such misdeeds that aroused horror, terror, and fear in its peaceful inhabitants? [...] If not everything can be secured, there is, however, a way to assure the citizens of the tranquillity of their existence and the preservation of their property. Thanks to the railroads, robberies are no longer as frequent as in the past. Nevertheless, assaults with homicides do still happen, even in Turin itself, and what marvels the most the city's good people is the audacity of thefts committed in public stores, which are completely ransacked in the heart of the town, and in front of the eyes of the police<sup>24</sup>.

Although the absence of precise statistics cannot substantiate these gloomy impressions, there is no doubt that between the 1840s and the 1850s, precisely at a time when the city was stepping on its key role in the Risorgimento, Turin's criminality adopted new and far more problematic and turbulent features than the measly and erratic crime of previous centuries. Cerva's memoir reported the appearance of professional criminals, especially among housebreakers and burglars. During the Restoration, those who had engaged in crime professionally were mainly

<sup>23</sup> To learn more about Giulia Falletti di Barolo, consult: S. Trombetta, *Punizione e carità. Carceri femminili nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Bologna 2004, pp. 63-100.

<sup>24</sup> AST, *Materie economiche*, Polizia in genere, mazzo 11, f. Polizia anno 1860: Dell'Amministrazione di Pubblica Sicurezza. Considerazione del causidico Carlo Cerva.

pickpockets or street hustlers, while criminals acting in an organised manner were rare. Since the 1850s, partially thanks to technological improvements and metallurgy developments that made burglary tools decidedly more effective, the number of gangs targeting apartments or stores increased<sup>25</sup>. For many affluent families, finding their homes in Turin burgled after brief absences from the city became a sad habit, especially upon returning from summer holiday. Some of these burglars greatly affected public opinion at the time: the names of Giuseppe Pavia, Pietro Bontempo, Giovanni Chianale, and especially Antonio Bruno, known as «Cit ëd Vanchija», the latter still not completely forgotten today, filled the pages of the judicial chronicles for weeks, both for the number of crimes committed and the magnitude of the thefts, often in the apartments of some of wealthiest and most important families of the city.

The second element underscored by Cervà's memoir was the sharp increase in violent crime, including not only homicides but also other forms of violence and intimidation, in clear contrast with the first decades of the century. Muggings, once almost exclusively confined to country roads, began to occur in the city centre as well, especially at night, and those that ended in injury or even murder were not uncommon<sup>26</sup>. The long avenues that encircled the city, the narrow streets of the old town, and the dark and foul-smelling alleys of Borgo Dora became places to stay away from, not only to avoid encountering some particularly pushy beggars. The increase in violence and bloodshed was evident. In the 1860s, the annual homicide rate in Turin fluctuated between seven and eleven murders per hundred thousand inhabitants. This rate, while lower than that of cities in central and southern Italy, was far higher than that of cities such as London and Paris, which were perceived as particularly dangerous at the time<sup>27</sup>. However, the increase in bloodshed, more than due to muggings, was primarily the consequence of the deterioration of a micro-conflict that had already marked Turin's working classes for centuries. The custom of going around armed with knives and the habit of spending free time getting drunk in Turin's hundreds of taverns were annually the cause of riots, brawls, and murders. However, these incidents increased exponentially with the city's population growth and the general worsening living conditions of the working class<sup>28</sup>. Towards the end of

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<sup>25</sup> A. Bosio, *Torino fuorilegge*, cit., pp. 388-389.

<sup>26</sup> Ivi, pp. 392-395.

<sup>27</sup> Ivi, p. 395.

<sup>28</sup> Ivi, pp. 395-401.

the 1830s, police's attention began to focus on gangs of young workers who spent the evenings of public holidays in taverns or brothels and then roamed the streets shouting, insulting passersby, and sometimes assaulting and raping prostitutes or young women. In the complex political situation of those decades, the Sardinian authorities feared that, following the example of France, these youth gangs called in Piedmontese «còche» would become politicised in a radical sense, as a report by the Vicariato in 1842 suggested:

There is continuous surveillance that my Office must conduct on the artisan classes for fear that the illicit Communist sects and similar, which are increasingly spreading among workers, especially in the south of France, in the neighbouring cantons of Switzerland, and other Italian territories close to us, may take root here. The said fears are well-founded, and the necessity of the surveillance mentioned above is proved by the recent discovery of artisans and youths' associations, who, once under the name of either Cocca del Gambero, Cocca di Po or Cocca di Portanuova, occasionally disturb the good order of this Dominant, and by the greater number of foreign workers, mainly Swiss and French, who have been appearing here for some time<sup>29</sup>.

For this reason, the Savoy ruling class was convinced that «that great devilry» of industrialisation should be avoided, as it would have refreshed the nascent social malaise and brought to small-scale Piedmont «the misery, the turmoil, the violence of the workers in Manchester and Leeds»<sup>30</sup>. Even when, in the 1850s, the growing economic development of the Savoyard state led to the emergence of an embryonic industrial sector active mainly in the field of metallurgy, the governing class, and Cavour in the first place, persisted in the opinion that Piedmont should remain a primarily agricultural country<sup>31</sup>. This conviction became even more widespread after the failure of the revolutions of 1848, when the Kingdom of Sardinia, the only country in the Italian peninsula to have retained its constitution, became the destination for tens of thousands of exiles

<sup>29</sup> AST, *Materie economiche*, Vicariato di Torino, mazzo 4, f. Vicariato anno 1841: lettera del vicario al primo segretario di Stato per gli affari dell'Interno e delle Regie Finanze, 4 gennaio 1842.

<sup>30</sup> L. Ligorio, *Le grandi manifatture e l'industria casalinga*, in «Letture di famiglia», 13 July 1843, n. 28, p. 217.

<sup>31</sup> R. Audisio, *La "Generalà" di Torino*, cit., pp. 91-110. About other Italian states: J.A. Davis, *Conflict and Control*, cit., pp. 171-172.

from other Italian and European states. These migratory waves, initially more tolerated than favoured by the Savoyard authorities, turned out to be fundamental to the destiny of the Kingdom of Sardinia: the exiles contributed significantly to the «Italianization» of the country's political and cultural life, influencing public debate, facilitating the consolidation of the constitutional system, and promoting the program of national unification<sup>32</sup>. In Turin, many writers, academics, and political figures from other Italian states found not only hospitality and lucrative employment in newspapers, at the university and in the thriving publishing industry, but also contributed significantly to the renewal of the city's life by giving it a more cosmopolitan atmosphere. However, among the thousands of exiles who settled in the capital of the Kingdom of Sardinia, only a small percentage enjoyed such privileged treatment. Most of the exiles came from the world of crafts or trade, and without special safety nets, their integration into the social and economic fabric of the city was complex<sup>33</sup>. Despite the assistance and support provided by the democratic left in the name of belonging to the common Italian homeland, precarious housing, significant problems of job placement, constant economic dependence on subsidies, and poor social rootedness in the city represented the everyday life of many emigrants. The Piedmontese government's attitude accentuated these problems, as it was open to favouring the integration of exiles supporting the Cavourian line but inflexible in striking down those suspected of republican ideas with convictions or police measures<sup>34</sup>. Moreover, the mass arrival of people regarded as foreigners was not viewed favourably by a large section of Turin society. The reactionary opposition openly claimed that Italian emigration to Piedmont was «a real power» as well as the leading cause for crime growth<sup>35</sup>. Especially the Lombards, who, for geographical reasons, accounted for the largest share of political emigrants, were particularly disliked and became synonymous with untrustworthy and dangerous people<sup>36</sup>. Although the charges against the political refugees were exaggerated, the number of «Italians» who had to deal with Savoyard justice was, however, not insignificant. Among all those accused of crimes committed in the capital and tried by the Corte d'Appello di Torino between 1848 and 1860, those born outside

<sup>32</sup> A.L. Cardoza - G.W. Symcox, *A history of Turin*, cit., p. 189.

<sup>33</sup> E. De Fort, *Esuli e migranti nel Regno Sardo. Per una storia sociale e politica del Risorgimento*, Torino 2022, pp.125-131.

<sup>34</sup> Ivi, pp. 74-81.

<sup>35</sup> G. Briano, *I piemontesi e gli emigrati*, Torino 1857.

<sup>36</sup> E. De Fort, *Esuli e migranti nel Regno Sardo.*, cit., p. 334.

Piedmont rose to 13 % when, in the statistics of previous decades, they were scarce. Between 1861 and 1864, in those few years when Turin was the capital of the Kingdom of Italy, they even exceeded 20 %<sup>37</sup>.

In this rapidly changing reality, the introduction of press freedom, established definitively in the Constitution, profoundly affected the Kingdom of Sardinia. In a very short time, a strong public opinion emerged, which not only demanded to be informed about parliamentary debates, but was also interested in learning about the most minute aspects of everyday reality, often just for entertainment reasons. The world of crime and the lower classes, which had begun to fascinate literate society already during the Restoration and was brought to the fore with the publication of Eugène Sue's «Les Mystères de Paris» in 1842-43, became a subject of discussion and romance in daily life<sup>38</sup>. A vast production of judicial chronicles, novels, flysheets, feuilletons, and plays sprang up in Turin that elevated the criminal figure to their disturbing and fascinating protagonist, often mixing crime news with commercial needs or political polemic purposes. Sue's text was also adapted for the Piedmontese capital, and nowadays, at least two «Misteri di Torino» are known (published in 1849 and 1880), one of which was written by journalist Giuseppe Antonio Giustina, well known in the city for his judicial chronicles. His production, which lasted almost forty years, focused on major crime events in the town in the second half of the 19th century and enjoyed a fair amount of success. Some cases went directly from the courtroom to Parliament or government salons. The so-called «Cocca scandal», an affair whose contours are still partly obscure today, is perhaps the most emblematic example. It all began in May 1858 with the arrest of 20-year-old ribbon maker Vincenzo Cibolla for a petty theft. During his detention, Cibolla confessed that he and other accomplices had participated in several serious crimes that had taken place years earlier and remained hitherto unsolved, including some muggings and the murder of a nine-year-old girl who was raped and strangled in January 1857. At the end of the trial, which ended in the spring of 1860, Cibolla admitted his participation in two other murders, including that of two butchers in their home during an attempted robbery that, according to his revelations, had been planned by a high-ranking police officer, Filippo Curletti, at that time in charge of important political affairs in the southern Italian provinces newly annexed

<sup>37</sup> A. Bosio, *Torino fuorilegge*, cit., p. 382.

<sup>38</sup> R. Villa, *Percezione e consumo del crimine nella società dell'Ottocento*, in U. Levra (cur.), *La scienza e la colpa. Crimini criminali criminologi: un volto dell'Ottocento*, Milano 1985, pp. 153-158.

to the Kingdom of Sardinia. The escape of Curletti, who hastily repaired abroad and became a fugitive, scandalised the public opinion, and the newspapers of the time took advantage of this case to accuse the police and the highest ranks of the Ministry of the Interior of having allied with an imaginary society of criminals called Cocca. Although the existence of this criminal organisation was never verified and was probably an invention inspired by the recurring «còche» riots, the trial that followed ended with long prison sentences and even a death sentence. Curletti, recognised as the instigator of the attack, was sentenced in absentia to 20 years of hard labour. The clamour caused by the sentence was later heightened by the mysterious appearance of a pamphlet entitled «Revelations for J. A., former secret agent of the Count of Cavour», which described the events of the Unification as the result of machinations and intrigues. The pamphlet, whose probable author was recognised in Curletti, soon became a crucial text of reactionary propaganda, and is still read in pro-Bourbon circles<sup>39</sup>.

The climate of intense cultural vivacity that Turin experienced during the Risorgimento suddenly ended with the capital transfer to Florence in September 1864. It was a traumatic event that eroded the city's identity. For centuries, Turin had identified itself as the capital of the House of Savoy. The heavy economic crisis caused by the relocation of the parliament, court, and all government offices further exacerbated this crisis. Despite Cavour's reforms, Turin had remained a centre of consumption with little productive activity, and the elevation of its status to the nation's capital had only accentuated these characteristics. In September 1864, one-seventh of the working population found employment in the public sector, while an additional 20 %, consisting of shopkeepers, artisans, construction tradespeople, and domestic servants, provided services to the various branches of government and state institutions<sup>40</sup>. The exodus of the wealthiest and most dynamic groups linked to state institutions had a painful impact on the lower and middle classes and workers who had benefited from close contact with these elites: many artisans, small merchants and luxury-goods producers went out of business, while the loss of jobs indiscriminately affected employees, domestic servants, construction workers and manual labourers in the railroad and armament plants. The population, which had grown dramatically in the previous

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<sup>39</sup> A. Bosio, *Torino fuorilegge*, cit., pp. 407-411. Another summary of the story can be found in F. Benigno, *La mala setta*, cit., pp. 11-16.

<sup>40</sup> A.L. Cardoza - G.W. Symcox, *A history of Turin*, cit., pp. 197-198.

decade to over 220.000, fell within a few years to 191.500<sup>41</sup>. There is not enough evidence to argue that the situation of precariousness and widespread poverty following the capital's relocation produced an increase in crime in the city, as the city council itself claimed, going so far as to call for urgent measures in December 1868 and again in the summer of 1869. However, some criminal episodes of undoubted gravity contributed to this impression, nourished by the gloomy outlook the city's elite saw around them. It was precisely during this period that the aforementioned «Cit ëd Vanchija» and his gang of burglars fulfilled their criminal parable, which, almost in deference to the ending of an appendix novel, ended with the capture of the «Cit»'s companions and his escape abroad where he never made any further news about himself. Whether the criminal affair of the «Cit» was the most noteworthy of the century in Turin is hard to say: it was undoubtedly the one, together with the previously mentioned trial of the Cocca, that most impressed literary writers, including the extremely popular writer of appendix novels Carolina Invernizio, who drew inspiration from him for one of her most famous novels, «Il segreto di un bandito», published in 1898 thirty years after the events.<sup>42</sup>

At the beginning of the 1870s, Turin had downsized to become a large provincial city. The municipal administration realised that the only option for the city was to gradually embark on the industrial development that had hitherto been so feared for social reasons. After the initial drop, Turin showed signs of a modest revival and grew faster than the rest of the Peninsula, although less than other large cities like Milan. The renewed demographic growth could be witnessed by the change in employment opportunities and the gradual expansion of the city's industrial economy. Between 1871 and 1881, the ranks of domestic workers and artisans continued to shrink while the number of people employed in manufacturing rose by 44 %, accounting for nearly half of the increase in total population<sup>43</sup>. Despite its industrial growth, throughout the 19th century, Turin remained exempt from the episodes of protest and bloody repression recorded in other European cities, and the image of the worker ready to use violence to subvert order remained a latent anxiety. In the Piedmontese city, these anxieties were condensed into the figure of the «Barabbas», «fake worker» who «spits, insults, beats, stabs», «a continuous,

<sup>41</sup> Ivi, pp. 198-199.

<sup>42</sup> A. Bosio, *Le còche torinesi tra realtà storica e miti letterari*, in «Studi Piemontesi», XLI, (giugno 2012), pp. 85-93.

<sup>43</sup> A.L. Cardoza - G.W. Symcox, *A history of Turin*, cit., p. 200.

living protest against society and against those who are better off than him»: an anarchist with no political conscience whose figure, as the years passed by and social unrest faded, was even incorporated into the city's folklore<sup>44</sup>. The loss of national political centrality also reduced attention to the city's public order problems, which were not comparable to those in central and southern Italy<sup>45</sup>. In the last thirty years of the century, crime in Turin was of no particular concern: the city's statistics recorded an evident prevalence of crimes against property compared to episodes of violence, limited above all to brawls and drunken stabbings, while more serious crimes, including robberies or the most severe marginalisation processes, such as the one of juvenile delinquency, were gradually contained thanks to the initiatives of the previous decades and the strengthening of the police<sup>46</sup>. Apart from a few exceptions, even prominent burglary figures were no longer heard of, and for a trial comparable in scale and clamour to those of the 1850s-1860s, it would be necessary to wait until 1903 when the gang of Francesco Bassino and Paolo Cavalla, also known as the «gang of the fifty-five», perpetrators of almost eighty burglaries in a few years, would be tried in court. The provincialisation of the city was reflected in the city's underworld: while in the 1850s and 1860s, the number of defendants from regions other than Piedmont had been significant, from the 1870s onwards, it decreased enormously, becoming insignificant in the following decade<sup>47</sup>. However, in a different field, crime in Turin remained the focus of national attention. In 1876, the young university professor Cesare Lombroso moved to Turin, finding fertile ground for his original studies on atavism in the Piedmontese capital. His repeated visits to Turin's prisons would provide a wealth of material flowing into the Museum of Criminal Anthropology. At the same time, his study of the Turin cases of Luigia Sola and Giovanni Cavaglià, known as «Fusil», the authors of the murder of her lover and employer, respectively, was central to the elaboration of theories of the delinquent man and woman<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> G. Saragat, *I «barabba» in Torino*, in «Archivio per lo studio delle tradizioni popolari», XVII (1898), pp. 156-158.

<sup>45</sup> J.A. Davis, *Conflict and Control*, cit, especially pp. 1-187.

<sup>46</sup> I. Villar, *Criminalità e emarginazione*, in U. Levra (cur.), *Storia di Torino. Da capitale politica a capitale industriale (1864-1915)*, Torino 2001, VII, pp. 345-362

<sup>47</sup> A. Bosio, *Torino fuorilegge*, cit., p. 382.

<sup>48</sup> To learn more about Lombroso, consult: L. Azara - L. Tedesco (cur.), *La donna delinquente e la prostituta. L'eredità di Lombroso nella cultura e nella società italiane*, Roma 2019; D. Frigessi, *Cesare Lombroso*, Torino 2003; P. Mazzarello, *Il darwinista infedele. Lombroso e l'evoluzione*, Milano 2024; S. Montaldo, *Donne delinquenti. Il genere e la*

The tendency, however, to recognise in the physiognomy the traces of a deviant personality dated back a long time before, as confirmed by the many descriptions of delinquents that appeared in the judicial chronicles of previous decades:

Carlo Bernocco is 27 years and a few months old. He is rather tall in stature and coarse features; he looks more like a manual worker, as is commonly said, than a gentle and mannered servant. Although it has been three years since he was imprisoned, he is not as pale as his other companions. His strong complexion and the brown skin colour overcome or at least conceal his prison sufferings. [...] His face, singularly oval, is covered by a very rare chestnut-coloured beard, and is distorted by highly developed zygomatic bones and large dark circles. His eyes are grey and glittering, and his eyelids blink frequently, apparently due to a muscular contraction. He stares, pays close attention to the speaker, and remains motionless. His gaze is distorted: at first glance, he looks stupid to those who stare at him, but they are quickly convinced otherwise when they hear him speak<sup>49</sup>.

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*nascita della criminologia*, Roma 2019; L. Sansone, *La galassia Lombroso*, Roma 2022.

<sup>49</sup> *Corte d'Assisie in Torino*, in «Gazzetta Piemontese», 20 February 1870.

