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*Cagliari's prisons in the liberal age:  
between administration and revolts*

*Research into the history of the prison population in Italy, and more specifically in Sardinia, has always been made difficult by the lack of information in prison archives. Historians have mostly looked at institutional issues, prison models, construction typologies and legal and philosophical aspects concerning the concept of punishment and its expiation. This essay aims to investigate the prison population in Cagliari in liberal Italy, looking at the different institutions in the city through documents preserved mainly in the Central State Archive and the State Archive of Cagliari. The documents show the complicated history of prisons in Sardinia, characterized by the presence of agricultural penal colonies that served both punitive and productive functions within the penal system.*

SUMMARY: Introduction – 1. Cagliari's prisons in the liberal age – 2. The 1906 Uprisings in the Cagliari Area – Conclusions.

*Introduction*

Research into the history of the prison population in Italy, and especially in Sardinia, has always been made difficult by the lack of information in prison archives. Historians have mostly looked at institutional issues, prison models, construction typologies and legal and philosophical aspects concerning the concept of punishment and its expiation<sup>1</sup>. This essay aims

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<sup>1</sup> The following, among many, have been useful in this work: L. Antonelli (ed.), *Carceri, carcerieri, carcerati. Dall'antico regime all'Ottocento*, Soveria Mannelli, 2006; M. Beltrani Scalia, *La riforma penitenziaria in Italia: studi e proposte*, Rome 1879; A. Borzacchiello, *La grande Riforma, breve storia dell'irrisolta questione carceraria*, in «Rassegna penitenziaria e criminologica», n. 2-3 (2005), pp. 2-75; A. Capelli, *La buona compagnia: utopia e realtà carceraria nell'Italia del Risorgimento*, Milan 1988; G.B. Cocco, C. Giannatasio (ed.), *Historical Prisons. Studi e proposte per il riuso del patrimonio carcerario dismesso della Sardegna*, Reggio Calabria 2013; F. De Angelis, S. Torge, *La realtà invisibile. Breve storia del diritto penitenziario dagli Stati preunitari ad oggi*, in L. Pace - S. Santucci, G. Serges (ed.), *Momenti di storia della giustizia. Materiali di un seminario*, Rome 2011, pp. 9-35; C.G. De Vito, *Camosci e girachiavi: storia del carcere in Italia, 1943-2007*, Rome-Bari, 2009; M. Di Sivo, *Il braccio del tribunale: birri e carceri a Roma tra Cinque e Seicento*, in M.R. Di Simone (ed.), *La giustizia dello Stato pontificio in età moderna: atti del convegno di studi, Roma, 9-10 aprile 2010*, Rome 2011, pp. 259-266; D. Melossi, M. Pavarini, *Carcere e fabbrica: alle origini del sistema penitenziario*, Bologna 2018; M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Paris 1975; M. Gibson, *Ai margini della cit-*

to investigate the prison population in Cagliari in liberal Italy, looking at the different institutions in the city through documents preserved mainly in the Central State Archive<sup>2</sup> and the National Archive of Cagliari<sup>3</sup>.

*tadinanza: le detenute dopo l'Unità italiana (1860-1915)*, in «Storia delle donne», 3, a (2007), pp. 187–207; G. Geltner, *La prigionie medievale: una storia sociale*, Rome, 2012; R. Giulianelli, *L'industria carceraria in Italia: lavoro e produzione nelle prigioni da Giolitti a Mussolini*, Milan 2008; M. Gibson, *The Everyday Life of Inmates: Alternative Sources for Italian Prison History*, in «Meridiana», 101 (2021), pp. 23–40; M. Gibson, *Le prigioni italiane nell'età del positivismo (1861-1914)*, Rome 2022; G. Neppi Modona, *Carcere e società civile dall'Unità a Giolitti*, Rivoli 1999; V. Ruggiero, *Criminalità e pena nelle utopie classiche e in quelle libertarie*, in «La Società degli individui», 48 (2013), pp. 7–22; S. Trombetta, *Punizione e carità: carceri femminili nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Bologna 2004.

<sup>2</sup> The collections consulted at the Central State Archives (henceforth ACS) were: Ministry of the Interior - Directorate General for Prisons and Reformers - General Archives (MININT, DGCR, AG): the documentation stored in this collection provided a part of the correspondence between the directors of the judicial prisons of Buoncammino, the penal colony of San Bartolomeo and the Casa di Pena Intermedia di Castiadas with the Prefecture of Cagliari and the Direzione Generale Carcere e Riformatori for the period between the 1890s and the first two decades of the 20th century. The most frequently treated topics include administrative issues related to the supply of goods and services for the prison complexes, cash statements on the receipts of work and outgoings for the management of the intermediate penal home in Castiadas, work and renovations in connection with the Civil Engineers (mainly for the judicial prisons in Buoncammino, San Bartolomeo, Isili, Oristano and Lanusei), and the management of the agrarian space and agro-forestry activities in Castiadas. Some folders are dedicated to the interpretation of prison regulations, with particular reference to punishments and permits. There are also references to the work of the visiting commissions, evasions and patronage societies; Ministero della Giustizia - Direzione Generale Istituti di prevenzione e di pena - General Archive (MINGIUS, DGIPP, AG): the documentation collected in this archive concerns the production of the intermediate penal houses of San Bartolomeo and Castiadas (including salt production) and their sale on the market through the auction system; the assignment of works to contractors for the maintenance and renovation of the prison buildings. There are also documents on the situation of the administrative staff of the prisons in Cagliari and Castiadas; Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce - Directorate General for Agriculture: this collection contains the reports of the agronomists of the intermediate penal home in Castiadas (as well as those of other institutes, including Pianosa) regarding farming, inspections and operation (administration, supplies of agricultural equipment and instruments, personnel).

<sup>3</sup> The following collections were consulted in the State Archives of Cagliari (ASCA): Intendenza Generale (IG): the documents stored in this archive dating back mostly to the first half of the 19th century and mainly concern administrative and management acts, lists of prisoners, costs for the maintenance of prisoners, and reports with prison procurement contractors; Prefettura: the papers collected in the fonds date mainly from the second half of the 19th century, although there are evident interruptions for the period between the 1870s and 1880s. These are administrative documents concerning the maintenance of the prisons, convocations of the supervisory boards, statements of the

The many documents that have been found and looked at have shown that the history of Sardinian prisons is quite complicated. One of the most important things about it is the large number of agricultural prisons<sup>4</sup>, used not only to punish people but also to create new landscapes, by the government, in areas that they thought to be needed to be fixed up (not only from an environmental point of view but also in terms of the human component) and to be transformed into productive areas, in an ideal continuation of the eighteenth-century thinking that observers from outside the island projected towards Turin and other European courts: the image of an empty countryside, devoid of dwellings and farms, a space for errant and chaotic pastoralism. It is no coincidence that some of the island's penal colonies were planned and built in moorlands that had already been the subject of previous, more or less successful, attempts at internal colonisation: such as Sarcidano or Salto di Quirra-Colostrai area (the latter was tried on for colonization attempt in the second half of the 18th century by Cavalier Pietro Mameli)<sup>5</sup>.

The establishment of penal colonies also touched the city of Cagliari, with the San Bartolomeo penal colony, which served as a prison, an agricultural enterprise and a source of labour for salt harvesting and processing over the years<sup>6</sup>.

Here, we intend to talk about some general problems concerning the condition of the prison population in Cagliari at the turn of the century. The documentation examined offers an initial reconstruction of

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patronage society, communications concerning transfers, evasions, deaths of prisoners; Buoncammino - Carte sciolte (BCM, CS): the documents are complementary to the fonds of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice, the Prefecture and the General Intendency. These are documents relating to the prison's internal administration (restructuring and expansion work on the buildings, reports on prisoners and supervisory personnel, reports on religious and educational services, relations with other agencies and institutions). The Altavista fund kept at the State Archives in Rome was also consulted where two photographic albums, presumably dating back to the first decade of the 20th century, illustrating the structures of the penal colonies of Castiadas and San Bartolomeo.

<sup>4</sup> S. Puddu, *Sotto l'azzurra volta del Cielo: disciplina territoriale e colonie penali agricole*, in «Rassegna di architettura e urbanistica», 150 (3/2016), pp. 106-113; S. Puddu, *From common land to farmhouses: agricultural penal colonies and the project of modern rurality in Sardinia, Italy*, in «The Journal of Architecture», 28 (7/2023), pp. 1184-1213.

<sup>5</sup> R. Ibba, *Paesaggi immaginati. Visioni del paesaggio rurale sardo nel Settecento*, in C. Tosco, G. Bonini (ed.) *Il paesaggio agrario italiano. Sessant'anni di trasformazioni da Emilio Sereni a oggi (1961-2021)*, Rome 2023, pp. 575-583; G. Salice, *Il mare degli altri: colonie di popolamento del Regno di Sardegna (XVIII secolo)*, CNR: Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea, Cagliari 2023.

<sup>6</sup> S. Pira (ed.), *Storia del commercio del sale tra Mediterraneo e Atlantico*, Cagliari 1997.

the situation of the prison population in Cagliari between the end of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century, through which an attempt will be made to give both a diachronic order and a thematic subdivision to the documents concerning the city prisons, the judicial prisons of Buoncammino and the penal colony of San Bartolomeo.

### 1. *Cagliari's prisons in the liberal age*

After unification, it was necessary to wait the establishment and organization of the two ministries entrusted with the administration of prisons (Interior and Grace and Justice), in order to see the production of the first documentation useful for the reconstruction of both Cagliari and national prison history. An early statistical and management framework is provided by the report of the Director General of Prisons, Martino Beltrani Scalia, which collects the periodic reports compiled by the various inspectors engaged in the supervision of penal institutions.

The report reveals that in 1878 there were 325 prison establishments in Italy, including penitentiary institutes, reformatories and mandamental prisons, with a constant average annual population of approximately 40,000 prisoners awaiting trial and 32,000 convicted prisoners. Some of the penal establishments organised productive activities that employed 26,000 convicts in various arts and crafts, while approximately 6,000 did not engage in any work.

A series of elements, as indicated in the directors' reports, present a rather bleak picture of the post-unification Italian prison system. Firstly, the buildings are generally in a state of abandonment and poor maintenance. Secondly, supply contracts with external firms (especially for food and clothing) are not managed with the necessary care. Thirdly, the health service is remarkably inadequate, considering that in many institutes even the infirmary is lacking. Fourthly, religious assistance and education are often absent, being limited to the celebration of Sunday Mass. Finally, due to structural and personnel shortages, it is almost always very difficult to apply ministerial regulations<sup>7</sup>. Beltrani Scalia is of the opinion that a prison reform is necessary, with the objective of ensuring that punishment is applied for all those "who deserve it". On the other hand, the Director

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<sup>7</sup> M. Beltrani-Scalia, *Relazione del direttore generale e degli ispettori delle carceri per gli anni 1878-1883*, cit., pp. 15-27.

General has asserted the necessity of reducing the population of judicial prisons as much as possible and establish agricultural penal colonies in various regions of Italy, designated for the employment of convicts hailing from rural areas<sup>8</sup>.

The construction or adaptation of prisons in cellular form was prescribed by Law No. 1653 of January 28, 1864. This functional configuration was designed to isolate prisoners in order to prevent communication between them. Notwithstanding the establishment of a dedicated Building Division, created by the government with the objective of augmenting the number of penal institutions and transferring inmates from judicial prisons, with the aim of enhancing the general conditions of detention, the limited positive effects in the years following unification were confined to the adaptation of judicial prisons with the separation of the criminal section being the only notable development<sup>9</sup>.

The prisons in Cagliari are situated within the 4th district (a district of Rome), overseen by Inspector Aristide Bernabò Silorata. The report indicates that the buildings of San Pancrazio and Elefante are in reasonable condition, while the other sites are considered to be in a satisfactory situation. In contrast to San Pancrazio, which remains organised in dormitories, Buoncammino and San Benedetto have a cellular system. The latter is not enclosed by a wall, unlike the Elefante, Buoncammino and San Benedetto facilities. The inspector reiterates, as in previous years, the need to separate prisoners still awaiting trial from those who have been condemned, as well as the advisability of increasing cell imprisonment. The extension of the Buoncammino prison, a project that has been in progress for many years, will enable the concentration of all the inmates dispersed among the other branch prisons in the city.

From a medical standpoint, the prison population in Cagliari exhibits an average sickness rate of 5 per cent, which is equivalent to the rates observed in Camerino, Macerata and Spoleto. This figure stands at one point above the national average of 4 per cent, while the percentage of working prisoners within the overall prison population is 48 per cent, 10 points lower than the national percentage.

Notwithstanding certain issues, including rudimentary sanitation facilities, the penal colonies of Castiadas and Isili demonstrate notable productivity in economic activities. However, the most significant production is associated with the San Bartolomeo penal colony for

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<sup>8</sup> Ivi, p. 82.

<sup>9</sup> Ivi, pp. 102-105.

the Società Concessionaria delle Saline di Sardegna, where inmates are engaged in the extraction and transportation of salt.

The objective of the prison administration is to encourage inmates to engage in productive activities, with the aim of counteracting idleness and ensuring the period of their prison sentence is utilised constructively. However, the inspector noted several deficiencies in the system in Cagliari. Firstly, regulations were not being adhered to, for example, the distribution of so-called venal food. Secondly, new admissions to the penal baths were not placed in solitary confinement as required by the regulations of 7 March 1878. Thirdly, the categorisation according to the nature of the offence they had committed was not implemented. Finally, it should be noted that a significant challenge was encountered in the enforcement of nocturnal silence. Indeed, it was also observed that inmates proceeded to their duties in groups, rather than being paired up.

It is widely acknowledged that the Buoncammino prison commenced definitive operations in the latter half of the 1890s, following an extended period of gestation that encompassed proposals, projects, and realisation, dating back to 1854. The new structure would gradually replace all the other places of detention and punishment present in Cagliari in the modern and early contemporary age: in particular, the prisons of San Pancrazio and the so-called Palazzo delle Seziato in Castello.

The inspector laments the absence of a uniform and coordinated penal system in Italy during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a development that impeded the implementation of central administrative initiatives. Evidence of this, for Bernabò Silorata, is illustrated by the perpetuation of criminal activity and recidivism, which indicates that the present approach to punishment is inadequate for the reduction of crime<sup>10</sup>.

Following the completion of the expansion of Buoncammino, which was to become a judicial prison (with the closure of the other prison facilities within the city), and the transformation of the San Bartolomeo penal baths into an intermediate penal home, the situation of Cagliari's prison facilities in the liberal age stabilised, although problems of overcrowding and prisoner management continued to manifest themselves in the first decades of the 20th century.

The penal establishment of San Bartolomeo, which was established in the 1840s for the purpose of incarcerating convicts who would work in the nearby Molentargius-Poetto salt pans, was transferred from the administration of the Royal Navy to that of the Ministry of the Interior.

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<sup>10</sup> Ivi, pp. 387-438.

Consequently, it evolved into an agricultural colony, while maintaining its historical responsibility of supplying labour to the Royal State Salines.

The penal colony farm is located in a region that in the 18th century was cultivated as a vineyard by the city's monastic orders (Carmelites, Jesuits, Franciscans). This area was subsequently replaced in the 19th century by the agricultural enterprises of the city's bourgeoisie, which resulted in the establishment of the now-lost landscape of the peri-urban grapevine<sup>11</sup>. Vine cultivation persisted as a salient feature of the region, as evidenced by the documentation of agronomist Giuseppe Cusmano (responsible for the San Bartolomeo and Castiadas colonies). In 1908, Cusmano documented the introduction of American vines for new plantings, a measure undertaken in response to the diseases that had afflicted the native vines<sup>12</sup>.

The San Bartolomeo penal colony also experienced discord with the Saline Company, despite its role in providing labour for salt processing. The colony's director submitted a petition requesting authorisation to utilise the land for livestock grazing between the first and second Poetto towers. However, the Saline management declined the request, stressing the imperative of adhering to the 1903 accord that delineated the penal colony's boundaries as extending to the initial tower on the beach<sup>13</sup>.

Collaboration with the penal colony assumed a more proactive character in conjunction with the army: for instance, in 1924, a tract of land adjacent to the Royal Salt Pans was granted for the construction of a riding camp for officers. General Gastone Rossi expressed his gratitude to the administration of the penal colony and issued a directive to the officers, instructing them to refrain from extending their exercises beyond the designated boundaries<sup>14</sup>.

An analysis of documentation pertaining to the Cagliari prison system during the late 19th and early 20th centuries reveals the nature of penal institution life at that time. This information was exchanged between the prison administration, the prefecture and the relevant ministries. The

<sup>11</sup> G.G. Ortu, *Ager et urbs. Trame di luogo nella Sardegna medievale e moderna*, Cagliari 2014.

<sup>12</sup> ASCA, BCM, CS, b 138, f. 893 e b. 154, f. 1077.

<sup>13</sup> ASCA, BCM, CS, b. 88, f. 458. In ASC, MININT, DGCR, AG, b. 285, There is a planimetric and topographic map, dated January 4, 1914, of the state-owned lands granted to the prison administration under the agreement of February 14, 1863. The Ministry of the Interior requests clarification regarding the boundaries of the area under the jurisdiction of the intermediate penal institution, especially in light of the construction of the Poetto tramway by Vinalcool, the company owned by entrepreneur Amsicora Capra.

<sup>14</sup> ASCA, BCM, CS, b. 88, f. 458.

film is characterised by its depiction of intricate scenarios, including the dynamics between inmates, guards, and medical personnel; interactions with external suppliers and other administrative entities; and instances of staff resistance against management practices that are perceived as inadequate or degrading.

The conditions of the prisoners and their claims, as well as the work and management of the staff, are monitored by the supervisory councils. However, the reports of these councils are very few and discontinuous in time, as had already been seen in previous decades. The situation pertaining to the city's prison population at the close of the 19th century must not have appeared satisfactory to the visiting commission that inspected the institutes in 1898. The extant correspondence indicates that the Patronage Society, under the leadership of Gavino Nieddu, was found to be inadequately fulfilling its designated role in the care of both prisoners and those being released<sup>15</sup>.

In June 1909, Inspector Eugenio Sampò made several grave observations regarding the conduct of the staff at the Buoncammino judicial prison. The observations recorded and the inmates' grievances revealed certain facts that were considered to be of a worrying nature. Firstly, it is important to note that the chaplain, Don Pietro Desogus, who is responsible for the education of juvenile detainees, has interrupted the school service. In addition to this, he is also accused of distributing cigar pieces to the minors, with the intention of ingratiating himself and avoiding complaints.

Concerning the correspondence, it was reported by a number of prisoners that the incoming mail register was not being maintained in an orderly fashion. Furthermore, it was stated that the postmen would open the letters before delivery, a practice which should have taken place only in the presence of the head warder, in front of the recipient prisoner. Sampò (2023) reports several issues relating to overcrowding, which have arisen due to the large number of inmates who have been compelled to be held in cell segregation. In light of this, Sampò considers it beneficial to release inmates who are approaching the conclusion of their sentences. The structure is suboptimally illuminated, particularly within the guards' quarters and the circular section. The walkway is both uncomfortable and challenging to navigate. The inspector posited that it would be necessary to augment the contingent of guards with four additional units. In

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<sup>15</sup> ACS, MININT, DGCR, AG, b. 81, Letter from the Minister of the Interior to the Prefect of Cagliari, June 30, 1898. In the same letter, the establishment of a reformatory is once again proposed.

conclusion, the prisoners have raised concerns regarding the inequitable allocation of provisions and the substandard nature of the supplies.<sup>16</sup>

The following year, Inspector Cardoso visited the San Bartolomeo intermediate penal home, where he noted a general improvement in services compared to previous inspections, largely attributable to the efforts of the director Ernesto Bosa and the archivist Raffaele Speranza, who was also entrusted with the maintenance of the registers of convicts. In the period following the inspection in April 1910, the prefect offered the director a formal commendation for the maintenance of the registers, with particular reference to the sanitary register<sup>17</sup>.

In the same year, the Buoncammino structure was also inspected again. On this occasion, the inspectors issued a warning to the health director, Lazzaro Trincas. The inspectors found him guilty of two counts. Firstly, they found that he did not ensure that sick prisoners followed an adequate diet. Secondly, they found that he allowed them to purchase surplus food without exercising sufficient control over this process.<sup>18</sup>

In the final days of December 1912, an unidentified report was submitted to the General Directorate of Prisons and Reformatories, a division of the Ministry of the Interior. In the aforementioned letter, the director of the Buoncammino judicial prison is accused of having transformed the structure into a brothel and a mental asylum, where the inmates are dirty and barefoot. It has been asserted that the health service was also subject to negligence. The infirmary pharmacy was found to be stocked with Epsom salt and iodine tincture, which were deemed to be ineffective in combating the cholera epidemic that was underway at the time.

The writers, above all, take issue with the director's excessive leniency towards the prisoners while he reprimands the officers: "a disgrace for our beautiful civilized Italy", they conclude.

The letter is taken from a correspondence published in *La Verità*, a newspaper published in Livorno, which dedicates a significant amount of space to the situation in the Cagliari prison, in particular to the poor sanitary conditions. In a letter dated 4 January 1913, the director provides a detailed response to each point raised. He recalls how, upon his arrival, the facility was in a state of complete anarchy. The guards exhibited lack

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<sup>16</sup> ACS, MINGIUS, DGIPP, AG, b. 106, Report by Inspector Eugenio Sampò on the judicial prisons of Cagliari, June 10, 1909.

<sup>17</sup> ACS, MINGIUS, DGIPP, AG, b. 106, Report by Inspector Cardoso to the intermediate penal institution of San Bartolomeo, April 2, 1910.

<sup>18</sup> ACS, MINGIUS, DGIPP, AG, b. 106, Report on the inspection of the judicial prisons of Buoncammino, April 2, 1910.

of discipline, demonstrated non-compliance with orders, vacated their designed posts, exited the premises without authorisation, and utilised sick leave in excess of the prescribed limits. Francesco Sarta, a guard accused of receiving spit from an inmate, was transferred from the infirmary due to allegations of misappropriation of medicines. In reference to the treatment of inmates, director Sassi draw attention to the malfunctioning of the welfare company, as previously reported. Consequently, he has made every effort to provide assistance particularly to juvenile inmates who are often abandoned by their relatives. Moreover, there was no insurrection by the inmates, but only protests by the minors themselves. In light of the persistent cholera outbreak, the director decided to enhance air circulation by opening select windows, while maintaining the restriction of communication between inmates. Finally, correspondence is delivered promptly: mail received during the evening is delivered the following morning at 8 a.m. Punishments and disciplinary measures applied to both inmates and guards have always been of a lenient nature, with no instances of excessive severity. Sassi suspects that a proportion of officers may be responsible of discontent, however but asserts: “My function is to redeem and not only to repress”<sup>19</sup>.

The matter was only closed after a visit to the Buoncammino prison in April 1913 by Inspector Maldacea, who wrote a detailed report. Firstly, it important to note that there was no evidence to suggest that any specific outrages, such as spitting, had been committed against the guards. The prisoners did not voice any objections to the walking, with the exception of one day when the activity was curtailed due to rain. It has been reported that concerns with regards to the organisation of the distribution of food. The air circulation system proposed by the director was found to be an effective measure in combating the cholera epidemic, which, notably, did not result in any infections within the prison. With regard to correspondence, the deputy chief Mercuriale sought to improperly consult the register of the prisoners’ mail that is kept available in the commander’s office. The postal service is delivered regularly and the postman often remaining at the premises after his designated working hours. The food is of a satisfactory quality, and the infirmary functions adequately. Maldacea is harsher with the guards: he accuses the head guard Pulichicchio of exhibiting preferential treatment towards certain officers in the rotation of shifts and assignments. The inspector concludes

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<sup>19</sup> ACS, MINGIUS, DGIPP, AG, b. 424, Letter from the director of the judicial prisons of Buoncammino to the Minister of the Interior, Cagliari, January 4, 1913.

by reiterating that the accusations published in *La Verità*, in conjunction with the anonymous appeal sent to the ministry, were orchestrated with the intent of undermining the credibility of the director<sup>20</sup>.

## 2. *The 1906 Uprisings in the Cagliari Area*

The living conditions in the prisons of Cagliari were difficult, and certain events further compounded an already fragile system. In 1907, a series of rebellions by prisoners were documented, mainly due to overcrowding and substandard nutrition<sup>21</sup>. These revolts were initiated by those who had been apprehended during the May 1906 uprisings, which erupted in Cagliari and the southern regions of the island (Quartu Sant'Elena, Pirri, Monserrato, Villasalto, and Gonnese). The protests emerged within a prevailing atmosphere of social discontent, caused by the escalating cost of living and involved confrontations between two factions: one expressing support for Mayor Ottone Bacaredda's administration and the other in opposition. From the city, the protests disseminated to the surrounding towns. The agitation was spearheaded by the female workers of the Tobacco Factory, who convened in an assembly on May 13. From the outset, the reaction of the public forces — which were extensively deployed in the city streets — was evident. Tensions escalated in the following days with the declaration of a general strike and the first violent acts against tax collection offices. Prefect Onorato Germonio's response was characterised by its strength and effectiveness. The social unrest resulted in the resignation of Bacaredda's council. In a final attempt at mediation, the council proposed the creation of two free markets in Piazza Carmine and the Terrapieno<sup>22</sup>.

Between 15 and 16 May, the populations of towns around Cagliari rose up, targeting symbols of bourgeois progress such as the stations and tracks of the Campidano Tramway— which was owned by entrepreneur and politician Luigi Merello—and the wine establishments of Amsicora Capra. Tax offices and municipal buildings were also attacked. In Pirri, 23 individuals were indicted on charges encompassing damage, burglary, and

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<sup>20</sup> ACS, MINGIUS, DGIPP, AG, b. 424, Report by Inspector Maldacea on the judicial prisons of Buoncammino, April 18, 1913.

<sup>21</sup> ASCA, BCM, CS, b. 264, f. 1987, Important events 1906-1907.

<sup>22</sup> A. Boscolo, *I moti del 1906 in Sardegna*, in «Studi sardi», 8 (1948), pp. 259-276.

the destruction of tram tracks. In the nearby Monserrato, 28 individuals were confronted with analogous charges. In Quartu Sant'Elena, 25 citizens were accused of violence and threats against the mayor and municipal council. The insurgents demanded the immediate cessation of the taxation on beef and the establishment of a fixed prices for the beef (36 cents per 400 grams) and mutton (25 cents per 400 grams). A group of 35 individuals proceeded to the local tax office, where they burned and destroyed documents, and assaulted municipal secretary Cav. Felice Maxia and office head Raffaele Accardo. In nearby town of Quartucciu, 50 individuals gathered with the intention of demolishing the tramway and setting alight the municipal tax office. In Selargius, 44 citizens engaged in acts of civil disobedience by destroying tax documents and setting fire to the tram station<sup>23</sup>.

The arrests that occurred during this period resulted in an overcrowding of the Buoncammino prison, with inmates awaiting trial demanding their release. Records show that in 1906, 52 people were detained for the Cagliari events and 71 for the San Vito uprisings. In January 1907, a simulated suicide in a cell provided the pretext for a revolt aimed at securing release. A sense of discontent began to manifest among inmates: in June 1907, this discontent was initially directed by Giovanni Ghiani towards the minor Ernesto Mundula, and subsequently towards the commander Busonera. Ghiani, a native of Cagliari, was later assaulted by other inmates, which was an act of retaliation. The prison administration has expressed concerns regarding the shortage of personnel required to undertake inmates searches, especially in the aftermath of court hearings. During such instances, inmates are known to come into contact with relatives and acquaintances who provide them with contraband, often in the form of bundles containing offensive tools<sup>24</sup>.

Protests in judicial prisons continued in the following years: in April 1908, an inmate named Efisio Laconi became enraged and was placed in solitary confinement as a result<sup>25</sup>. Subsequently, there were reports of further acts of defiance on the part of Raffaele Casu, and of Francesco Orry being the wounded by Erminio Arrais. In addition, there was an account of Efisio Ena attempting suicide<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> ASCA, Court of Cagliari, Criminal Sentences 1907, folders 494, 495, 497, 501, 502, 503.

<sup>24</sup> ASCA, BCM, CS, b. 264, f. 1987 Important events 1906-1907.

<sup>25</sup> ASCA, BCM, CS, b. 264, f. 1996, Important events 1907-1908.

<sup>26</sup> ASCA, BCM, CS, b. 264, f. 1992, Important events 1910-1911.

In October 1915, a protest was organised by inmates at the Buoncammino prison. The protest contained by the cooperation of inmates Cimbro Usai and Francesco Piras—both close to being released—and the deployment of 20 additional carabinieri and 50 soldiers by the police chief. A publication by Commendatore Giovanni Battista Avallone was circulated among the inmates, proposing the rehabilitation of prisoners by sending them to the front in the war against Austria. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of inmates expressed their opposition to the prospect of being transferred to the penal colony of San Bartolomeo, where they would be compelled to engage in agricultural and saltworks labour<sup>27</sup>.

As previously mentioned, a significant aspect of the San Bartolomeo colony was its contribution of labour to the Royal Saltworks. The number of convicts assigned to these tasks varied according to season and the requirements of salt harvesting. In 1891, the penal house accommodated 1,300 convicts (a number that decreased in later years due to the opening of Buoncammino), and between 700 and 800 men were required for salt collection. The conditions were extremely challenging: work was primarily conducted during the summer months, involving the loading of salt onto ships and the removal of salt crusts using tools such as hoes, in an environment characterised by standing water. The prisoners exhibited signs of various ailments, including wounds, ulcers, and sunstroke. As demonstrated in Figure 1, the number of workdays recorded increased from 122,605 in 1907 to 125,806 in 1908 and 143,320 in 1909.

It is evident that the challenging nature of the working conditions resulted in a series of demonstrations during those years. The prison administration, represented by Inspector General Sampò, sought to mediate with Central Inspector of Monopolies Corner to ease the workload. In March 1907, a new agreement was ratified for salt collection, cleaning, and transport, which included minor increments in remuneration for both workers and involved agents. In August 1907, a re-definition of loading procedures was implemented, with measures introduced with the aim of limiting violent acts by convicts against free personnel of the Finance Administration. This was achieved through increased joint oversight by saltworks and prison officers<sup>28</sup>.

Notwithstanding the evident inconsistencies, statistical data pertaining to the prison population of San Bartolomeo offer a reasonably precise representation of the inmates' professions, origins, and activities. The

<sup>27</sup> ASCA, BCM, CS, b. 49, f. 182, Letter to the Prefecture of Cagliari, October 20, 1910.

<sup>28</sup> ACS, MINGIUS, DGIPP, AG, b. 41.

facility under discussion contained nine common dormitories for 660 inmates, nine solitary confinement and punishment cells, five infirmary rooms for 42 patients, four workshops with 30 workstations, one bathtub, and five shower rooms between 1914 and 1916. The majority of inmates were transferred from other prisons, predominantly from outside Sardinia (with the majority hailing from Sicily, Campania, Apulia, and Lazio). Notably, approximately two-thirds of the inmates were serving sentences exceeding 10 years. Over half were serving the final years of their sentence in this intermediate penal house near the saltworks. The predominant age group was 30–40 years, and approximately half of the sample had completed elementary education or were literate. A survey conducted at the time of admission revealed that one-third of the subjects themselves to be farmers. Upon release, however, there was an increase in the number of individuals employed as salt workers, labourers and porters— all of whom were engaged in activities related to the production of the intermediate penal house<sup>29</sup>. From a health perspective, the most prevalent diagnoses were infectious diseases, particularly affecting the digestive system, and skin conditions—likely burns and irritations caused by the prolonged exposure to the saltworks.

*Table 1* – Trends in the Prison Population of San Bartolomeo 1914–1916<sup>30</sup>

Year	Inmates on January 1st	Admitted During the Year	Released During the Year	Remaining on December 31st	Outdoor Workdays / Wages Paid
1914	537	172	217	492	189,943 / 165,448.44
1915	492	266	317	441	164,263 / 161,379.49
1916	441	152	144	449	161,835 / 146,944.05

As of 31 December 1920, there prison population stood at 354 inmates, 45 of whom had been convicted by military tribunals. The total number of releases (the majority of which were due to transfers to other institutions or amnesty and pardon) was 182, including 26 military prisoners. Of the inmates who remained during the year, 157 declared themselves as farmers at the time of their admission, while 194 became salt workers during their incarceration. The total number of workdays

<sup>29</sup> ASCA, BCM, CS, b. 193, f. 1461.

<sup>30</sup> Author's analysis based on data extracted from ASCA, BCM, CS, box 193, file 1461.

decreased to 122,978, with the gross wages amounting to 142,250.58 lire (of which the majority was spent on extra food rations, with a value of 108,346.03 lire)<sup>31</sup>. The decline in working hours was partly due to the mechanization of labour in the saltworks.

### *Conclusions*

Notwithstanding the challenges posed by a voluminous yet frequently incomplete documentation, it remains feasible to delineate certain aspects that depict the status of the prison population in Cagliari during the 19th and 20th centuries. Firstly, the structural problem of the buildings is evident: until the end of the 19th century, Cagliari's prisons were distributed across multiple facilities organized according to the principles of the Ancien Régime. Ministries and the Prefecture repeatedly recommended the separation of inmates awaiting trial (who constituted the majority of the prison population) from those who had already been convicted of a crime. However, the limited space and an organizational system that was still based more on dormitories than cells prevented the real application of regulations aimed at avoiding contact between inmates. The management of supplies, particularly food, emerged as a pivotal issue in the communication between different levels of government. The substandard quality and quantity of rations stood in stark contrast to the stringent control over food imposed by inmates' families and the additional food procured, especially by those with higher incomes. The issue of inmate labor was a key focal point of the study. In judicial prisons inmates were employed to a limited extent in internal services. San Bartolomeo, with its 'salt convicts,' utilized the majority of the prison labour force, drawing from the inmates of Buoncammino and Castiadas during the salt harvesting season. The intermediate penal house of San Bartolomeo appeared to be more centralized than other facilities, at least until the first two decades of the 20th century. The internal context of the prison remains ambiguous due to the paucity of reports from oversight commissions and can only be partially inferred from notes on escapes, suicides, and revolts. Evidence suggests that the reform attempts initiated by the central government in the 1880s — including Beltrani Scalia's reorganization of internal administration and control mechanisms

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<sup>31</sup> ASCA, BCM, CS, b. 172, f. 1301.

entrusted to inspectors, as well as the collection of statistical data — were implemented slowly and with difficulty implementation in Cagliari's prisons. Unanticipated occurrences, such as the 1906 riots that resulted in the apprehension of hundreds of men and women, exerted pressure on the penal institutions (including the recently expanded Buoncammino prison), further compounded by the limited number of prison guards. The challenges experienced by prisoners, particularly with regard to their visual perception, were a recurring theme during the initial two decades of the 20th century. These difficulties served as a reflection of the living conditions within the prison environment.