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The Fascist internment system in Albania and Italy (1940-1943). First stages of research

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Special Issue

**Face Up. Faces from the past. The fight
for freedom and democracy in Albania
during the regime of Enver Hoxha**

A cura di / Edited by

Michele Rabà - Gaetano Sabatini

RiMe 14/V n.s. (June 2024)

Special Issue

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The fight for freedom and democracy in Albania
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The Fascist internment system in Albania and Italy (1940-1943). First stages of research

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Riassunto

L'articolo analizzerà la prima fase della ricerca sull'occupazione italiana dell'Albania. L'obiettivo dello studio è quello di evidenziare alcuni aspetti dell'occupazione fascista del Paese: in particolare, la cooperazione esistente nel campo della repressione dei ribelli albanesi. Le fonti per la presente ricerca hanno incluso le collezioni archivistiche conservate dall'Archivio centrale dello Stato. In una seconda fase, verranno aggiunti, ove possibile, i documenti militari conservati presso l'Archivio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito a Roma, nonché i documenti dell'Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri. Particolare attenzione sarà data al sistema di internamento fascista nei territori del Regno d'Italia, in una fase particolare dell'esperienza bellica italiana e dell'occupazione del Regno d'Albania.

Parole chiave

Seconda guerra mondiale; Occupazione militare; Campi di internamento; Reti fasciste internazionali; Collaborazionismo; Repressione della Resistenza

Abstract

The article will analyze the first phase of research concerning the Italian occupation of Albania. The aim of the study is to highlight some aspects of the fascist occupation of the country: in particular, the cooperation existing in the field of repression of Albanian rebels. The sources for the present research included archival collections kept by the Archivio centrale dello Stato. In a second phase, military documents, kept at the Historical Archive of the Army General Staff in Rome, will be added, where possible, as well as papers from the Historical Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Special attention will be given to the fascist internment system within the territories of the Kingdom of Italy, in a particular phase of the Italian wartime experience and the occupation of the Kingdom of Albania.

Keywords

World War II; Military occupation; Internment camps; International fascist networks; Collaborationism; Repression of Resistance

1. Introduction. - 2. Objectives and phases of the occupation and the Italian repressive system. - 3. Insight into Albanian civilian and military internment in Italy and initial findings. - 4. Bibliography. - 5. Curriculum vitae.

1. Introduction

This paper presents the methodology and initial results of research dedicated to certain aspects of the Italian occupation of Albania. The study aims to highlight characteristics of the fascist government of the country, describing the different phases experienced by the occupiers and the population. The research compares the experiences of Italian military and political personnel cohabiting with Albanian officials, from the perspectives of both the occupied and the occupier. Cooperation and collaboration between the two sides can be traced back to the Great War and the economic and military agreements of the late 1920s (Basciani, 2022, pp. 50-54. Fischer, 2002, pp. 43-45.), although the military occupation of 1939 and the subsequent conditions on the Greek front marked an initial and obvious discontinuity in relations between the two nations.

For diplomatic, political and economic reasons, Mussolini's government, encouraged by Ciano, chose to maintain an indigenous administration in the management of the territory. This administration was headed by an Albanian government and included 'duplicate' bodies and agencies in relation to the regime's structures¹. The system of provinces, headed by Albanian personnel on the directives of the Italian authorities, was maintained in a similar form. The decision to establish an Albanian 'collaborationist' government led, as we can anticipate, to a general complication in the management of some of the most serious issues related to the contemporary world conflict, such as rationing, the management and exploitation of the territorial resources of the occupied territories, the conscription of the population for military or labour purposes, the maintenance of public order, repression or agreements with resistance movements. The documents describe the weakness and lack of legitimacy of the Tirana government as obvious obstacles to the effective management of Albanian resources.

¹ This was the case of the Albanian Militia and the PNFA, the Albanian fascist party that maintained a peculiar cohabitation with the PNF federation in Tirana, cfr. Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero degli Interni, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, Ispettorato Generale di PS presso la Luogotenenza del re in Albania, b. 7, f. PNFA. (ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, IGPS presso la Luogotenenza del re a Tirana).

During the fascist occupation, the autonomy of certain local authorities also became a source of suspicion and doubt about the loyalty of the Albanian state structure. This suspicion became more pronounced during the occupation's critical phases.

In addition, Italian administration in Albania was marked by the complex of swindles, thefts and embezzlements of the so-called 'Ciano system', the set of bodies set up to administer the Albanian territory and dependent on the king's Lieutenants in the capital.

At a lower level, the set of sentences that affected the military serving in Albania and the workers of the 'mobilized' companies (*società mobilitate*) presents a negative image towards Italian military administration². In April 1939, this hybrid system of administration led to a series of conflicts between the Italian and Albanian authorities. It is worth noting that the Italian Public Security (*Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza*) documentation did not give much importance to the internal religious divisions within Albania. However, these divisions were discussed in some rare conversations between agencies, by other ministries than the Interior, and in particular the Foreign Office³. A selection of microfilm consisting of several hundred titles of journals, monographs, novels and plays dealing with Albanian culture and tradition is also available at the Central State Archives (*Archivio Centrale dello Stato*)⁴.

Here we focus on the control and internment system of the Mussolini regime between 1939 and 1943, the year in which, after Italy's surrender to the Anglo-American armies, the territories annexed or occupied by the Royal Army (*Regio Esercito*) came under the control of the Wehrmacht.

² The Tirana Territorial Military Court and the set of sentences for the years 1940-41 saw a majority (7/10) of Italian names among the defendants, often under arrest for charges of theft, embezzlement and fraud against the military administration, cfr. ACS, *Tribunali militari di guerra e territoriali, Seconda guerra mondiale, Albania (1939-1943), Sentenze (1941-43)*, bb. 1-3.

³ For a comprehensive examination of Albania's religious and cultural characteristics, see Morozzo della Rocca, 1990.

⁴ *Nuclei documentali in copia presso l'ACS, Allied Control Commission, Joint Allied Intelligence Agency, T/586-3, Albania.*

2. Objectives and phases of the occupation and the Italian repressive system

In the following, we will describe the different phases of the Italian occupation of Albania in the light of the fascist system of repression. Beginning in 1939, the Italian government aimed to establish cooperation with the local elites for propaganda purposes. This approach has been described as 'imperial' in more recent historiography⁵. The policy of establishing links with the Albanian elite was aimed primarily at exploiting local mineral resources, such as chromium, which would become essential to the Italian war industry, whereas the amount of Albanian oil extracted after 1939, despite the exaggerations of some pre-invasion technical studies, would prove to be totally insufficient for the war needs of the Kingdom of Italy (Fischer, 2002, p. 53)⁶. The establishment of an unsupported executive and the overriding monarchical institutional framework, dependent on the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, did not seem to hinder a first moment of development of the country; on the other hand, this expansive phase was paid for with the sacrifice of any political rights and the increasing marginalisation of the Albanian population from the highest levels of the national economy; we can assume that this phase ended both for military reasons, such as the defeats on the Greek front, and for decisions in the economic sphere. In the early stages of 1940, some poor choices in the monetary field led to an inflationary spiral that began to erode the relationship between the occupiers and the population. Prices almost doubled in just six months (a 77-80% increase in the cost of foodstuffs compared to 1938, in November 1939), led by the imposition of a poor exchange rate for the local currency system (Fischer, 2002, pp. 53ss).

During the following autumn, the Greek invasion and counter-offensive took place in the middle of Albanian territory, which led to the downfall of the imperial image of Fascist Italy. Following the failure of Mussolini's parallel war, an organized and growing resistance against fascist forces drew the attention of the Italian army, as documented in the war diaries. Between January and December 1941, officials from the Ministry of the Interior, the Carabinieri, and the SIM (military intelligence services) reported that they had imposed special surveillance

⁵ See the fundamental work of Rodogno, 2007 and the recent Basciani, 2022. Regarding studies on the Italian occupation of Albania, different historiographical indications come from Halimi, 2017 Available at <https://journals.openedition.org/diacronie/6211> and Trani, 2007.

⁶ On the questions related to the Italian war industry, see Rochat, 2005.

The Fascist internment system

measures on approximately 21,000 Albanians. Of these, 5,600 were interned in concentration camps or confined to special zones, which were modelled on the Fascist and Savoy surveillance and internment system. The material consequences of the failures of this administrative system will be evident in the entire occupation, which since the winter of 1941 has been marked by a series of sabotages, explosive and non-explosive attacks (such as the failed attempt on the life of Victor Emmanuel III in January 1941), assassinations and ambushes on soldiers and officials of the Kingdom of Italy⁷. The Albanian government's fragility may have undermined its credibility with the population, given the succession of vicious criminal acts of reprisal commanded by the Italians and Albanian military and paramilitary formations. This conduct became particularly notorious during the Kruja government, especially for the acts of reprisal against partisans and the population of the southern regions and the Ioannina area. From 1942 onwards, it became common practice to attribute responsibility for attacks to the community living within 1,500 meters of the site of the event, especially in the annexed territories following the German occupation of Yugoslavia and Greece.

It is worth noting that similar rules were imposed by the Wehrmacht on Italian civilians and partisans two years later. Anyone found with weapons, either in hand or at home, could be killed on the spot. The preference for internment was given to heads of families, including elderly ones, who lived at the sites of partisan attacks. The rules of internment pertained to political offences committed by the local population, such as armed insurrection, organization or participation in subversive groups and associations, and bomb attacks against the occupier's forces. Additionally, incitement to desert compulsory labour or military conscription was also considered a political offence. The 'ancillary' reprisal measures could affect the entire population of the area between the ages of 16 and 60, who were effectively held hostage in order to prevent further partisan attacks. In Albania, from the winter of 1941-42 onwards, the same radical regulations that had been approved in the territories of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia were imposed to an increasing extent in an attempt to deal with the resistance movement. According to different scholars, the 'Circular 3 C' of 1 March 1942, infamous for its provisions for the radical repression of rebels in the Balkans, was implemented in every context touched by the Italian occupation, except for southern France (Rodogno, 2003, pp. 416-434; Borgomaneri, 2006; Aga Rossi,

⁷ Rodogno, 2003, pp. 101-114, 202-208 and chart n. 51; Lory, 2016, pp. 380-390.

Giusti, 2011). The circular, issued by General Roatta, commander of the Second Army deployed in Slovenia and Dalmatia, became infamous for giving officers wide latitude on anti-partisan operations, often resulting in catastrophic consequences for entire communities. On 16 February 1943, General Renzo Dalmazzo, the superior commander of the armed forces in Albania, wrote to the command of the IX and XXV Army Corps in the Shkodra and Kosovo sectors. The regulations stated that “valid men arrested in the village centers of revolt must be kept available to be sent to concentration camps for possible subsequent reprisals” (Rodogno, 2003, pp. 183-185, 416-434).

A notable case of internment policy in the Balkans was that of Pirzio Biroli, commander of the armed forces in Montenegro, who was indicted after the war for war crimes in his area of command. In the summer of 1941, following the Montenegrin partisan insurrection, the general allowed his officers and soldiers to destroy the houses closest to the insurrection sites, deport every adult male in the community, and execute any suspected partisans on the spot. This policy resulted in thousands of Montenegrins being sent to Albanian concentration camps. The following year, the general acknowledged the negative consequences of this strategy, which proved to be totally ineffective against the rebellion. He then ordered the establishment of a review commission, consisting of both civil and military personnel, to review the case of each internee from 1941 and determine whether the punishment was justified.

As a result, 3,000 former internees were permitted to return to Montenegro from the Albanian camps. In contrast, between 3 and 5,000 Montenegrins, often suspected rebels and their families, remained within the borders of Albania. Additionally, 1,597 Albanian prisoners of war, who were interned after the invasion, were to be released by December 1942 according to agreements with the Albanian government⁸.

Starting in the summer of 1942, the number of Albanian internees increased due to the rise of resistance activity, which became more organised, and the subsequent radicalisation of Italian repression. There are at least four known internment camps for partisan fighters: Berat, Ghermani, Kavaje, and Shjiak. In addition, two internment locations have been identified: Shiroka in the northeastern regions and Berat, which temporarily housed 150 Jews, probably Montenegrins.

⁸ The data are reported in Capogreco, 2003 and 2019, pp. 229-231, Rodogno, 2003, chart n. 51; Conti, 2011, pp. 153-159.

The Fascist internment system

According to Capogreco, Rodogno, and Conti, an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 Albanian citizens were interned and guarded for 'political' reasons or to be included in 'work battalions' in 1942 and early 1943. It is worth noting that at least 5,000 of them were of non-Albanian ethnicity or origin. The Italian armed forces managed the known camps, led by the King's Lieutenancy, with the Royal Carabinieri's deployment and only partial cooperation from the local prefect. The political internment camps' superior management was carried out by the offices subordinate to Galeazzo Ciano's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Regarding the management of public order, the armed forces were increasingly numerous but less effective in countering guerrilla warfare between 1942 and 1943. They were accompanied by the Public Security Services of the Ministry of the Interior, which were in a competitive position with respect to the army services. Additionally, the Information Offices of the Militia, attached to the 9th Italian Army in Albania, had their own intelligence services (the UPI). The conflict between these centres of power, to which the Albanian administrative structure was added, became an increasingly damaging factor in maintaining control over the territory. The replacement of Jacomoni with Pariani and the initial agreements with some of the armed resistance movements resulted in a temporary truce during the winter of 1942-43 (Collotti, 1987, pp. 236-238). During the following spring and summer, there was a resurgence of the Italian anti-partisan struggle. The methods and strategies used were increasingly similar to the Reich's anti-rebel operations. This led to a response from the Albanian communist National liberation movement and, in part, from the nationalist 'Balli Kombëtar'. In July 1943, the Italian Royal Army committed war crimes in Albania, including the massacre of Mallakasha, named after the old district of Mallakaster. The fall of Mussolini and the disintegration of the army in the following September led to a partial but violent *redde rationem* with the Italians and the collaborationist authorities by the Albanian partisans; The subsequent German invasion forced the entire population to face the dramatic choice of collaborating with the new National-socialist masters or opposing them with arms (Fischer, 2004, pp. 146-148, Stramaccioni, 2018, p. 84).

A brief mention must be made of the Jewish question. In theory, the immigration and residence of members of Jewish communities in 'Greater Albania' (understood as the extension of the nation's borders after May 1941) was forbidden by order of Lieutenant General Jacomoni. It is worth noting that neither Italian nor Albanian officials were particularly strict in observing the rule, also because the Albanian Jewish population numbered only a few hundred members. The Public

Security documentation in Albania rarely mentions the Jewish population, and only does so after the partial annexation of Kosovo. Specifically, the Information Service of the Royal Army (SIM) reported dozens of Serbian citizens of the Jewish faith who crossed the borders of the areas occupied by the Wehrmacht in the Mitrovica region or came from the Romanian border to reach 'Italian Kosovo'.

The transit of Jewish refugees from Serbia and Romania through Kosovo, who travel to Albania with a simple identity card or travel document issued by our consular authorities in Serbia, is reported quite frequently. They generally head for Pristina, from where they go to other Albanian centres, justifying their journey with the need to reach their relatives there. Since these are undesirable elements removed from territories occupied by the Germans or fallen under the strictness of the Romanian racial law, it is suggested that the permits in question should be restricted in order to prevent the entry into Albania of unknown elements who might carry out activities contrary to our purposes⁹.

Some high-ranking Italian officers managed to prevent the deportation of several hundred people from Albanian and former Yugoslav territories, despite National Socialist pressure to hand over Balkan Jews. It is important to note that these officers did not have humanitarian intentions. The attitude expressed in this statement should be considered in the context of the competence conflict between the Axis authorities and the will of the Italian armed forces to defend their own role and sphere of influence in the territories beyond the Adriatic. In some instances, officers and commands worked closely together to capture and deport individuals, as was the case in Croatia and in areas of Bosnia under Italian control. With regards to camps dedicated to the internment of Jews, we have mentioned the camp of Berat, which housed 150 Jews from Cimmeria and Montenegro; Kruje and Kavaje and the camp of Pristina were also included, for a total of 500 Jews interned among the Kosovars or from the territories of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Scholars generally agree that the Albanian population provided limited collaboration in the denunciation and arrest of Jews, both within and outside the country's borders in 1939. After the conflict, an estimate indicated that fewer than 80 Jewish men and women in Kosovo died as a result of violence or internment (Lory, 2016, pp. 383-389). However, the internment strategy initially

⁹ Report 25 November 1941 of the Military Information Service (SIM) to the DGPS, in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, Divisione Affari Generali e Riservati (DAGR), Massime, b. 74, f. "Albania" A/14.

implemented by Mussolini's forces could be exploited by the German armed forces and police in the phase following 8 September 1943, with devastating consequences for the Jewish population of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

3. Insight into Albanian civilian and military internment in Italy and initial findings

Prior to the attempted invasion of Greece, which marked a turning point in the Italian occupation of Albania, military intelligence and interior services addressed the issue of Albanian military personnel present within Italy's borders. The unification of the two kingdoms under Victor Emmanuel III created uncertainty regarding the management of Albanian subjects entering the metropolitan territory. Albanian military personnel were able to move freely between the Kingdom of Italy and Albania without the need for a declaration of residence or passport endorsement. This was due to the equal rights of military personnel. However, the border militia and port authority of the Apulian provinces regularly detained the Albanian officers themselves, causing delays. The Albanian personnel in Italy mostly cooperated directly with the Royal Army, and some officers settled within the peninsula to attend training courses during the initial phase of cooperation with the Zog government. After the occupation, the number of Albanian military personnel in Italy increased. Additionally, more students and lecturers from Albania came to study and collaborate at Italian universities within the metropolitan area. As the military situation on the Greek front worsened and Germany intervened following the change of government in Yugoslavia, conditions for the Italian personnel in occupied Albania took a radical turn for the worse. From the end of 1942, the freedom of movement between kingdoms for Albanian officers in Italy was restricted by the reintroduction of the visa requirement for passports and the obligation to declare place of residence on entry¹⁰.

Regarding Albanian political and military internees, the DGPS reports from the summer of 1941 revealed a growing instability in the region due to increased armed resistance activity. During this period, the first significant attacks against Albanian officials of the kingdom occurred, particularly outside major urban centres. In addition, during this time, the Italian police authorities implemented

¹⁰ Report 19 July 1943, in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, b. 7, f. 1 "Viaggi cittadini albanesi in Italia".

stricter controls over Albanian personnel both in Italy and abroad. The DGPS exposed the issue of visas for incoming and outgoing officers during this period, and there was also increased attention given to the internment system. In 1942, the Ministry of Interior liaison offices with the Lieutenancy in Tirana sent several reports regarding groups of ‘undesirables’ to be deported from Albania to internment camps or locations within the borders of the Kingdom of Italy. The DGPS was responsible for civil war internment within the national borders, unlike in Albania. Since 1942, Albanian officials have faced difficulties in selecting suitable locations and camps due to the instability of the occupied territories beyond the Adriatic.

Since 1942, Albanian officials have faced difficulties in selecting suitable locations and camps due to the instability of the occupied territories beyond the Adriatic. Since 1942, Albanian officials have faced difficulties in selecting suitable locations and camps due to the instability of the occupied territories beyond the Adriatic. Requests for expatriation from Tirana have become increasingly pressing and demanding. The Ministry of the Interior’s incomplete documentation only hints at the extent of the problem, without providing complete lists and figures on Albania. However, related events can provide a clearer understanding of the challenges faced by Italian officials and the Albanian population during that time. In April 1942, a significant number of ‘undesirable Kosovar intellectuals’ were selected due to their disloyalty or potential threat to public order in the area. Italy had control over most of the territories in present-day Kosovo, except for the region around Mitrovica, which was occupied by the Wehrmacht in Serbia. The deportation order affected 560, or 581¹¹, intellectuals, professors, journalists and students. They were to be confined to specific locations, with at least two hundred of them being sent to the island of Ponza (LT). Others were to be sent to internment camps in the central and southern provinces of the Italian peninsula. The groups of Kosovar intellectuals were transported in different convoys between Albania and the port of Brindisi, and the documentation on them was interrupted in May 1942, when all the deportees seemed to have arrived in Italy, and only the discussions on their distribution among the different camps and internment sites continued; in little more than two months, given the problems of counting the internees, the

¹¹ The discrepancy is repeated in a series of telegrams and reports exchanged between the Ministry of the Interior and individual prefectures in ACS, Min Int DGPS, DAGR, massime, b.110, f. 16, sf. “internamento sudditi albanesi”.

Public Security officials managed to complete the deportation of the Kosovar intellectuals.

From the summer of 1942, the DGPS began delaying or rejecting internment orders for even a few dozen individuals considered undesirable. This issue prompted the prefectures in Italy to prepare for the expansion of existing concentration camps and the opening of new internment sites. Italian prefectures frequently found themselves unable to fulfil the requests from the Lieutenancy in Tirana, which were often beyond their capacity¹². In one instance, Foreign Minister Ciano was inconvenienced to achieve a favourable outcome¹³.

In December, Ciano had already described the Albanian public order as uncontrollable.

I cannot refrain from pointing out to you that the public security situation in Albania (...) is such that it is recommended, at least for the time being, to remove those elements (...) that have become dangerous or particularly suspicious in political terms¹⁴.

The DGPS responded to Mussolini's son-in-law regarding the internment of 220 Albanian citizens in Italy, as requested in the letter.

Your Excellency,

I inform you that the availability of places in the concentration camps, as a result of the continuous influx of internees from the new provinces and occupied territories, is almost completely exhausted.

However, bearing in mind the special reasons given, I will make arrangements for the two hundred Albanian internees to be placed in the remaining vacant places¹⁵.

¹² Memo from the Ministry of the Interior dated 12 April 1943, reporting 10,666 internees in Italian camps, 8451 confined in supervised locations. Reference is made to the possibility of adding between 2,000 and 2,700 more places in the camps with the construction of new facilities by the summer of the same year, in ACS, Min Int DGPS, DAGR, maximum, b.110, f. 16. In ivi also the report of 11 April 1943 limiting the entry into the Ionian Islands to 20 new internees.

¹³ ACS, Min Int DGPS, DAGR, *massime*, b.110, f. 16.

¹⁴ Ciano wrote to the Police chief Senise on the 31st of December 1942, in ACS, Min Int DGPS, DAGR, *massime*, b.110, f. 16, sf. 'internamento sudditi albanesi'

¹⁵ DGPS reply to Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano, 7 January 1943, in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, *massime*, b. 110, f. 16, sf. "internamento Albanesi".

In the same month, 1597 Albanian military personnel who had been interned in Italy for some time were expected to return to their homeland and the borders of Albania. This likely resulted in the need for Public Security officials to find new accommodations for political and civilian internees in Italian camps after the military internment camps were emptied (Rodogno, pp. 416-419, chart n. 51). The increase in armed actions against the Italian army, Albanian armed militias, and religiously connoted communities in certain areas of the kingdom posed an inextricable problem for the occupiers and their system of repression and control of the territory (Morozzo della Rocca, 1990, pp. 104-106; Stramaccioni, 2018, p. 87). Significantly, from April '43, the DGPS invites its informers attached to the Tirana Lieutenancy to draw up lists of notable personalities, beys, Zoggist politicians, particularly those who had survived in their role after the Italian occupation, Albanian professors and intellectuals who were against Italy. The files related to individual Albanian personalities contain useful information, but do not provide precise details on the fate of dissidents who were considered a threat to the home front¹⁶. The cooperation and cohabitation between Italian and Albanian personnel became increasingly tense. The year 1943 began with a period of relative calm in the Royal Army's anti-rebel struggle. In January, the Albanian resistance appeared to have slowed down its action, possibly due to the harsh weather.

However, the truce was short-lived (Burgwyn, 2012, pp. 48-56). Starting in the spring, the Tirana territorial court began proving an increasing number of 'desertions in the presence of the enemy' cases. This term refers to the defection within the rebel groups of former Albanian soldiers serving in the Royal Army, in the Albanian fascist militia or in other units of the same armed forces. In the first few months of the year, 11 capital sentences were passed, out of a total of about 20 indicted persons, all of them fugitives¹⁷.

¹⁶ "Elenchi di personalità che per precedenti morali e politici sono da considerarsi nocive o pericolose" in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, IGPS presso la Luogotenenza del re in Albania, b. 8, f. 29.

¹⁷ In the sentences of the military court in Tirana, the desertion of Albanian elements employed in the arms of the two kingdoms led to a minimum penalty of 10 years of military imprisonment. On the other hand, 'desertion in the presence of the enemy' implies a change of camp in favour of the rebels. In this sense, the minimum sanction was 30 years military imprisonment or life imprisonment, but in the vast majority of cases (19:1 for 1943), the outcome of the trials was the 'death penalty by firing squad to

In March of the same year, General Pariani replaced Jacomoni as the king's Lieutenant due to accusations of incompetence stemming from the rebellious situation and widespread malfeasance in the management of economic entities operating in Albania. The decision may also be connected to Mussolini's wish to replace several ministerial and military leaders during a crucial phase of the European war. The process of changing personnel had already begun in January and would eventually result in Ciano's replacement as Foreign Minister the following month.

Pariani faced the initial phase of a widespread insurrection, which became particularly intense in the border regions with the former kingdom of Greece, Macedonia, and Kosovo, as well as on the border with Montenegro.

In April 1943, the Public Security offices attached to the Lieutenancy reported.

The need to remove from Albania, in one way or another, all the most dangerous elements - amounting to about a thousand - who, in the near future, we might see, with weapons in their hands, at the head of the rebellion preparing against us, became more and more urgent¹⁸.

During the spring that followed, Pariani attempted to drastically change the approach to handling the rebellion. This was done through a series of large-scale round-ups, which tragically culminated in the Mallakasha massacre of July 1943. As a result, dozens of villages were destroyed and hundreds of civilians and partisans were killed (Stramaccioni, 2018, p. 87).

Accompanied by rumours about the dramatic conditions for captured rebels, responsibility for which fell on the regular armed forces and some SIM officers (Conti, 2011, pp. 154-156), the tightening of repression created negative impressions among the population of the capital.

In May 1942, a group of communist rebels were executed in Tirana's square on Pariani's orders. The sentence was not issued by the ordinary territorial Courts mentioned above, but rather by the Special State Defence Court, following counter-guerrilla actions organised by the Lieutenant. On 15 May, six partisans were hanged in a central square in Tirana. The event had a depressing effect on the

the chest', see below. Judgments collected in ACS, Military war and territorial courts, Second World War, Albania (1939-1943), Judgments (1941-43), b. 7.

¹⁸ Communication from the DGPS to the Tirana Lieutenancy of 12 April 1943, in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, massime, b. 110, f. 16, sf. "Internamento di Albanesi".

citizens, particularly due to the young age of some of the rebels. After the macabre spectacle, teachers in Tirana decided to take their pupils out of the classrooms as a sign of mourning¹⁹. The hanging of a well-known Albanian resistance leader, Hysen Kabashi, was postponed for «reasons of public order» exactly two months later, on 15 July²⁰.

During the summer of 1943, reports emerged regarding the population's negative perception of the Italian occupier's apparatus and the credibility of the Italo-Albanian union. There were several attacks against government representatives, economic and administrative officials²¹, and members of the MFA who were associated with the Italian MVSN and the Fascist Party of Albania (PNFA)²². Additionally, news of the mass repatriation of the families of Italian officers stationed in Tirana and Scutari surfaced.

The repatriation of the families left a «bad impression» even «among Italy's best sympathizers»²³.

At the same time, a large number of information selected by the Italian agents in Albania described the military situation in the south of the country as uncontrollable, with ambushes and attacks on the Royal Army soldiers becoming increasingly serious. The feeling of the higher commands sent to Tirana was therefore that they were on the verge of a widespread and serious uprising on Albanian territory, which would lead to large-scale operations against the Italian army. The tragic food conditions in the region were regularly confirmed by DGPS

¹⁹ Report 14 June 1943, in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, IGPS presso la Luogotenenza del re in Albania, b. 5, f. 1.

²⁰ Report 31 July 1943, in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, IGPS presso la Luogotenenza del re in Albania, b. 5, f. 3; see the entire folder n. 6 in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, IGPS presso la Luogotenenza del re in Albania, b. 7.

²¹ Informants report several attacks against bank managers, employees of the Banco di Napoli and the offices of the National Bank of Albania, in *ivi*.

²² Report of 28 June 1943 on the arson attack against the PNFA headquarters in Tirana; the PNFA, due to «anti-national» infiltrations and the widespread malfeasance of its hierarchs within its local federal structure had been reformed in July 1943, pending an internal reorganisation which is generally dealt with in the documents of the same month, see reports of 6 July 1943 and 21 June 1943, signed by the federal Pizzirani, both in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, IGPS presso la Luogotenenza del re in Albania, b.7, f. 37.

²³ Report 7 July 1943 in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, IGPS presso la Luogotenenza del re in Albania, b. 5, f. 1.

The Fascist internment system

informants, who often pointed the finger at the illicit food exchange and resale systems and the entire Albanian rationing and food supply system²⁴. The attitudes of the Albanian rulers, their weak influence on the population and the accusations of double-dealing, often unspoken by Italian officials, participated in creating a widespread climate of suspicion in the kingdom's Lieutenantcy in Tirana and in the fascist military and police commands.

The urgency to relieve the Albanian military internment camps of the most dangerous presence became more and more pressing with the prospect of a generalised insurrection by nationalist and communist partisan bands. Awaiting the tragic days that would overwhelm the regime and the entire kingdom, an unstable and terrifying climate of expectation seemed to reign in Albania. Since May 1943, officials from the Ministry of the Interior had been insistently requesting information about the number of internees and residents in the provinces of the kingdom. The replies sent by the prefectures refer, in an almost total manner, to political internees, mostly communists, family members of rebels and spies; the lists also refer to Albanian residents in Italy not restricted to the camps, and seem to pay almost spasmodic attention to some categories, considered dangerous to the stability of the kingdom, such as students and university professors²⁵; in part, therefore, the desire to relieve the camps of elements considered dangerous led to limited results, both before and after the fall of the Fascist regime. In the period following Mussolini's arrest, a last remnant of information about the Albanian men and women living within the borders of the kingdom is finally presented by the papers of the DGPS, in its republican guise²⁶. The Albanians living in Italy, if not interned, could in fact have decided to enrol in the new National Republican Army or attempt to return to their homeland, by then partly occupied by the Wehrmacht and in the grip of post-Armistice instability²⁷. There is no further news on the matter, which, conversely, does not seem to have brought any improvement for the Social Republic's armed forces.

²⁴ Report 31 May 1944 in ACS, DGPS, DAGR, IGPS presso la Luogotenenza del re in Albania, b. 5, f. 4.

²⁵ See the lists kept in Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, b. 7, ff. 'Albanians resident in Italy' by province.

²⁶ Ministry of the Interior (RSI) report of 10 December 1943 in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, Massime, b. 74.

²⁷ Ministry of the Interior (RSI) report of 10 December 1943 in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, Massime, b. 74.

For all other internees, whether political or military, the chaos of the period after 8 September 1943 seems to keep more complete information hidden, due to archival destruction and documentary dispersion²⁸.

Only future research could shed clearer light on the fate of the Albanian internees in Italy and in the territory of the Kingdom of Albania. In conclusion, further research on collaborationism, or rather on the cooperation between Italian and Albanian authorities and populations during the first three years of the war, could shed a clearer light on the power relations that existed between occupied and occupiers during the world war, even in the eccentric cohabitation of the monarchical union between the kingdoms; furthermore, research should not incur any moral judgement on the concept of ‘collaborationism’, which is still partly tied to the legal definition that the Italian military penal code of war reserves for it. The hope is to be able to rely on a general reorganisation of the documents held by certain conservation institutions and the opening of hitherto inaccessible funds. The intention is to place studies on the Italian occupations of invaded territories in the historical context of the Nazi-Fascist domination of Europe, in an interpretation that has recently been initiated by a few, albeit competent, scholars.

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²⁸ There is incomplete information on Albanian citizens interned in the camps in the province of Arezzo (Renicci-Anghiari military camp); there is also some notes on the military prison in Gaeta, and the special jail in S. Stefano (LT) and on internment locations such as Ponza (LT); these are taken from ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, massime, b. 15, f. 69.

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