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Counting the Cost of War: the Great War's Economic Impact on Africa

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"Blessed be the Sultan and the Money of the Italian". The Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into War Expenditure on the Economic Management of Libyan Territories between 1913 and 1922

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Abstract

"Blessed be the Sultan and the Money of the Italian" was a significant idiom used in the 'Libyan' territories during the WWI and after the war. This term not only reveals the importance for local economies of the funds disbursed by the Italian state but also referred to the complex and confused administrative and management system of funding for Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. For this reason, starting from 1920 the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into War Expenditure made an important effort to elaborate also on the economic and administrative management of the 'Libyan territories'. Through the documentation collected and produced by the Commission itself, the author wants to contribute to the examination of the economic management of the WWI in the Libyan territories. Starting from the analysis of the Italian-Turkish war in the Italian state budget, the author identified the main management problems of the WWI in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, the responsibilities of the Italian colonial administrations and the criticalities of the cumbersome system of purchasing supplies. Drawing on a number of case studies, some of the numerous problems of the Italian administrative and economic management of the 'Libyan' territories from 1913 to 1922 are highlighted.

Keywords: Libya, WWI, Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into War Expenditure, management problems, economic dysfunctions.

The First World War represented for Italy an impressive military, productive and economic effort (Isnenghi, Rochat 2014; Gibelli 2005; Bartoloni 2003; Tomassini 1997).¹ The vast mobilization of all resources was made possible by a complex administrative-management body in charge of carrying out the new tasks and functions made necessary by the conflict. It is in this way that, among other things, the direct intervention in the economy of the State took shape (Melis 1989, 1997). It was meant to manage a war expenditure that, considering only the budgets between 1914/1915 and 1922/1923, can be calculated to have been 132,646,089,747.01 lire.² This management, however, had proved to be particularly problematic because of the substantial undue payments known to most as war profits (Ecca 2017a). It is no coincidence that in 1920 Giovanni Giolitti set up the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into War Expenditure (henceforth the Commission) to identify and recover such 'over profits' (Mazzonis 2002; Ecca 2017b). This investigative body was called upon to perform four extraordinary tasks: "(1) [...] verify the financial charges [...], for war expenditure, and they were provided; (2) [...] review the contracts [...] and payments of any kind [...]; (3) [...] establish [...] any moral, legal, administrative and political liability; (4) [...] propose measures to reinstate the Treasury".³

Although Giolitti's investigative body was mainly interested in the expenses incurred for the Italian-Austrian front, it also turned its attention to the expense items relating to the Italian colonies.⁴ In particular, it had long examined what happened in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, which the investigators themselves commonly called Libyan territories (Zaccaria 2019; Gerwarth, Manela 2014; Labanca 2012; Labanca 2007; Pellegrini, Bertinelli 1994). In this way, it offers an important opportunity to analyze the Italian economic management in those territories between 1913 and 1922. Until now scarcely used by colonial historians, the documentation collected and produced by the Commission allows analyzing the military, political, economic and administrative history of what was commonly considered the 'fourth shore of Italy'. However, what the papers on the 'Guerra nelle Colonie Libiche' - as the final report presented by the investigators was entitled - offer is also a partial vision of the economic organization of the Italian colonial machine, since it is profoundly influenced by the political aims of the mandate of the commissioners themselves: to gain the modernization of the Italian public body, above all, through a severe criticism of Nitti's decisions. It leads this work to integrate the most recent historiography on colonial administration (Berhe 2015; Clodomiro 2012; Martone 2002; Romano 1997; Pellegrini, Bertinelli 1994; Acquarone 1989; Filesi 1977) by including the analysis of some problems relating the main administrative aspects that characterized Italian economic management and the examination of the massive waste and squandering that had characterized it.

The Italian-Turkish war in the Italian state budget

It is not possible to understand the organization, the squandering, and profits perpetuated

in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica between 1913 and 1922 without first analyzing the previous management. The members of the Commission must have started from this finding in order to justify their investigations into the costs of the Italian-Turkish war.⁵ The logistics management of this conflict had mainly focused on the Direzione Generale d'Artiglieria e Genio del Ministero della Guerra (General Direction of Artillery and the Ministry of War Engineering), at the top of which there was Alfredo Dallolio, who was to be known to the national public during the Great War first as Undersecretary and then as Minister for Arms and Ammunition (Assenza 2010). Its main task was to provide the material necessary for the conflict, without prejudice to a balanced budget.

The examination of those financial years shows that these contrasting demands had led to an *institutional conflict*, in which the Ministry of War and Navy and, in some ways, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers itself, were involved.⁶ The two ministerial budgets were in fact characterized by a different articulation and the widespread use of accounting subterfuges. For example, examining the 1912/1913 financial year it is possible to notice that while the allocations for the Navy were counted in special chapters, those for the War were simply divided between *ordinary* and *extraordinary*.⁷ This general distribution had facilitated a distorted use of budget chapter 114 which was, in fact, used to partially renew the equipment of the troops stationed in the Peninsula, while providing for an allocation to the purchase of weapons and ammunition for colonial troops. The latter, in turn, had therefore turned over the decommissioned weapons to Italian military garrisons in Africa.⁸ It is clear that the overseas arrival of already technologically outdated supplies had risked, as the Commission itself pointed out with regard to certain aircrafts and airships sent to Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, jeopardising the outcome of the battles.⁹

It should also be specified that the war material sent to Tripolitania and Cyrenaica was not only *old* but also quantitatively insufficient. The Libyan Expeditionary Corps was in fact supplied mainly through simple orders demanded only according to the needs of the real departments and not following a real schedule, so that often the same warehouses were without stocks. It is no coincidence that, as Dallolio admitted, this production was "far below the consumption of many materials during the Libyan campaign".¹⁰

Go further? The Commission and the Libyan territories

The problems encountered in the economic management of the 1911-1912 war had reappeared even more strongly between 1915 and 1918, so much so as to be an interesting economic/industrial *fil rouge* between the two conflicts. In the case of the Great War, however, from the very first weeks, there had been a proliferation of mostly unofficial complaints and critics about the huge financial losses suffered.¹¹ These were collected after the war by the Commission, which decided to devote an entire section - Subcommission A -¹² to investigations into the *secret* expenditure made in

Albania, Palestine and Syria and those made for the colonies of Eritrea and Libya. It should be noted that, in this regard, its members were aware that they had to carry out 'political' tasks, as also stressed by one of its most important members, Ulderico Mazzolani (Storoni Piazza 2013): "Subcommission A has a more markedly political subject of investigation [...] [and for this reason] it would seem appropriate that the different tendencies in the way of judging the events, which led to the war, should be more equally represented".¹³ Despite the acceptance of Mazzolani's suggestion, at the fall of the fifth government Giolitti, Bonomi and Facta had, however, very soon demonstrated how wary they were of the investigations of the body wanted by Giolitti. Not to mention that, as far as the colonies were concerned, they risked undermining the prestige of the Italian institutions both among the local population and in relation to the other European powers.

The most striking case in this regard was the denial by Giuseppe Girardini, Minister of Colonies in Bonomi's government, of the right of the members of the Commission to consult the documents kept in the same Ministry¹⁴ and the denial to the investigators of the necessary visas to travel to Libyan territories.¹⁵ Girardini, in fact, claimed that, by investigating events beyond the border, the investigators were exceeding the limits of their mandate. Needless to state that the exception made appears to have been a pretext, since the law establishing the Commission did not imply any limitation of a territorial or temporal nature. Aware of this, the Commissioners themselves had judged this denial to be an act of outright *obstructionism*¹⁶ and therefore jointly decided to send their own delegation to Libya in any case.¹⁷

Thus, a growing institutional conflict between the Commission and the Ministry of Colonies was looming. The latter had, in fact, presented to Prime Minister Bonomi a memoir in which the Undersecretary for the Colonies Pier Gaetano Venino indicated "the absolute necessity that the commission [...] gives up on the journey. [...] The journey would be [...] pointless: but it would also be very harmful to the impression that the presence of a Commission of Inquiry [...] would arouse in Libya. The Commission wouldn't carry out the work in accordance with the mandate as all the elements of the investigation are in Italy [...]: *need to avoid travel*".¹⁸ This is how, on the 10th of January 1922, some members of the Commission, who arrived at the port of Naples, discovered that one of them - Ferraro - had not been granted a pass.¹⁹ Only in May of that same year did Ferraro finally manage to reach Benghazi where, however, the Regent would continue to obstruct his inspection work.²⁰

However, these obstacles had only anticipated the decision by Luigi Federzoni, the new Minister of Colonies of the first Mussolini's government, to definitively deny the investigators the consultation of ministerial documents. Federzoni motivated this position by citing problems of staff shortages and took the opportunity to remind the Commissioners that their work ended on the 31st of December of that same year.²¹ It is easy to understand what he implied: their investigation had to remain incomplete

because it collided with the fascist will to strengthen the myth of colonial Italy. For this reason, the investigators, in their final conclusion, were forced to state, referring to the investigations into Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, that "the investigations into the management of public money [...] were conducted through the most tiring difficulties, due to the many attempts at reticence made by uncertain witnesses and fearful state officials. [...] The reticence and obstacles all have the taste of personal defence".²²

The main accounting and management problems

Despite these limitations, the Commission was able to verify the main accounting and management criticalities that had characterized the Italian colonial administration of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. The investigators had in fact tried to answer, albeit indirectly, an interesting question concerning the motivation for the spread of a new and symptomatic proverb in the Libyan territories between 1915 and 1918: "blessed be the sultan. And the money of the Italian".²³

The popularity of this way of saying implies various considerations, most of which lead back to the fact that the local population had understood how much the administrative, management and accounting disorder that characterized the Italian financial management of the Libyan territories could bring important personal advantages. In the same way, this phrase lowered the propaganda veil which tended to portray exclusively in a positive and uncritical way the colonial organization and bureaucracy.²⁴

46 According to the Commission, there had been, in fact, countless donations of public money, in the form of prebends or donations, to the local population for "political reasons, *i.e.* to suppress their status as belligerents or rather rebels". However, the Commissioners had also found that almost all those who had received such donations had subsequently betrayed. They wrote: "Everyone has seen that every indigenous person who receives money, threatens or commits treason, to receive more. Everyone criticizes the Government with harsh words: everyone hopes for a change of method".²⁵

The investigators, not surprisingly, focused their investigations precisely on the method. Looking closely at the Ministry of War and its Treasurer's office, they discovered that it was making substantial undue expenses through unreported receipts. It appeared, in fact, that many officers used to attach the same report to various purchase files, of which only one copy, often incomplete, was eventually delivered "to the various audit offices and [...] the Court of Auditors".²⁶ This meant that subsequent checks were carried out from time to time, with the result that there was no possibility of control.²⁷

The consultation of ministerial budgets also enabled the Commissioners to answer a first important question: how much did the First World War cost in the African colonies? Considering the financial years between 1914 and 1922, the total amount was 1,442,050,700 Italian lire.²⁸ This estimate was obtained taking into account what was declared by the Ministry of War for colonial operations, by the Navy Department for cruising and stationing ships, by the Ministry of the Colonies for military expenses

and by local administrations regarding secret, confidential or political expenses, as well as those paid for subsidies and contributions to the local population.²⁹ Moreover, two other items of expenditure were taken into account: that relating to the value of the losses of materials purchased before the war, calculated on the basis of the amounts determined in the purchase contracts, and that relating to the cost of defending the colony of Eritrea.³⁰ In a more accurate analysis, it also appears that most of this expenditure was borne by the Ministry of Colonies which, alone, had allocated a whopping 1,023,510,700.00 Italian lire, subdivided into the relative financial years which were more limited precisely during and because of the Great War. Most of these allocations had been used for Tripolitania and Cyrenaica and it is probably for this reason that the investigators had devoted themselves almost exclusively to "Libyan expenditures", unlike those made in Eritrea.³¹ The only exception was the important investigation into the Società Anonima Conserve Alimentari Luigi Torrigiani (Zaccaria 2018), which was suspected of having defrauded the Treasury in an important order of canned meat.³²

Chart 1: Expenses of the Ministry of the Colonies (1914–1922)

Financial year	Ordinary military Expenditures (Italian lire)	Extraordinary military expenditures (Italian lire)
1914–1915	39.228.200	92.000.000
1915–1916	39.982.000	92.000.000
1916–1917	39.928.200	75.000.000
1917–1918	40.701.200	70.000.000
1918–1919	40.701.200	70.000.000
1919–1920	41.432.500	88.115.400
1920–1921	41.250.000	– ³³
1921–1922	66.775.100	7.726.000
1922–1923	131.600.700	46.370.000
Total	482.299.300	541.211.400

Source: FR, I, p. 532

The Italian administrations of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica

A closer examination of the Commission's documentation shows that waste and irregularities were mainly due to two administrative nodes: a defective planning of services and a disorganization of territorial powers. Favoured by the emergency regime dictated by the war, the management chaos was often due to the widespread practice

of bypassing the ordinary bureaucracy. The latter, on the other hand, underwent a reduction in its staff, who were increasingly called upon to face numerous critical issues requiring immediate and extraordinary expenses that were difficult to account for. This explains the fact that, for example, the Tripoli and Benghazi Police Headquarters did not have their respective Boards of Directors, as required by law, and that several metropolitan departments operating in the Libyan territories continued to depend, both in terms of management and finance, on the major bodies existing in Italy. This meant, on the one hand, that there were no control and supervision bodies able to monitor the work of civil and military officers and, on the other hand, that it was impossible to regulate all administrative and accounting actions on the spot.³⁴

The Commission also found that relations between the various local administrations as well as those between the latter and the Ministry of the Colonies were chaotic and confused (Berhe 2015). Giolitti's investigative body pointed out that between 1915 and 1918 four different systems were in force in the Italian colonies at the same time: 1) the regulation for metropolitan troops, issued by the Ministry of War; 2) the regulation for Libyan troops, issued by the Ministry of Colonies; 3) the accounting regulation for Eritrea, issued by the Ministry of War; 4) the accounting regulation for Somalia, issued by the Ministry of War.³⁵

A single address, as well as a single body to regulate the action of the colonies themselves were missing. The lack of centralised coordination and control was due, according to the investigators, mainly to the fact that the Ministry of War and the Colonies carried out a continuous reshuffling of competences. The Commissioners pointed out that the Ministry of the Colonies used to charge the other with the responsibility of organizing and monitoring public services, despite the fact that Article 3 of Royal Decree no. 1205 of the 20th November 1912 had established that "the competence of the Ministry of the Colonies includes all the interests and public services of the colonies without distinction".³⁶ The most harmful effects of this chaotic management were, however, especially found in the relations between the Ministry of Colonies and each governors, despite the fact that their respective powers and functions were already well defined by RD n. 39 of the 9th of January 1913. This provision established that the Ministry of Colonies had to set the political objectives, the modalities for their achievement and determine the possible establishment of the necessary bodies. Whereas, the various governors had the task of implementing the ministerial directives through the means at their disposal and directing politics and local administrations.³⁷ This is where, according to the investigators, another problem lurked, since the Ministry of Colonies seemed to be accustomed to direct "even small local politics, dealing with small business [...], even directly with the most eminent natives; thus leaving too little freedom to the governors and many times disregarding them".³⁸ This ministerial activism was facilitated by the principle of administrative continuity thanks to which Colosimo had led the Ministry

for much of the First World War but which was not applied to local offices, often characterized by a deep discontinuity. It is no coincidence that between 1911 and 1922 in the Libyan territories alone there were as many as sixteen different governors.³⁹

Cost price and stock-taking price

All the local administrations of the Libyan territories depended on the 'Truppe Oltremare' (overseas troops) office in Taranto, dependent on the Ministry of War, for the supply of material. This, however, did not directly manage the supplies destined for them but sold them to the Ministry of Colonies, which acted as an intermediary. This transfer was regulated by Royal Decree no. 245 of the 22nd of January 1914, which stated that "the amount of the materials transferred and the expenses incurred will be reimbursed by the Ministry of the Colonies to the Ministry of War".⁴⁰ This legal provision had been supplemented by the Ministry of War through numerous circulars issued for the entire duration of the conflict. These were the documents by which the transfer prices were determined, generally equal to cost prices and ceiling prices in force in the home market.⁴¹ This is the umpteenth fundamental knot identified by the Commission in order to understand how waste and profit were made. The transfer prices were in fact different from the stock-taking prices, which in turn were established by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers through a periodical publication called "Nomenclator".

Chart 2: Price changes between Nomenclator and cost

Products	Stock-taking price	Cost price
	<i>Lire/quintal</i>	<i>Lire/quintal</i>
Wheat flour	31	140
Pasta	60	170
Rice	44	190
Sugar	150	572
Coffee	270	1.700
Cheese	1.300	2.000
Cracker	44	180
Beans	50	150
Hay	10,50	50

Source: Approximate figures for the financial year 1921-1922 (ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 27, f. 265).

Although it was not possible to calculate the exact quantity of goods sold at the value established by the Nomenclator, it is clear that this practice, adopted from 1914/1915 onwards, had greatly contributed to generating continuous and countless remissions in the Treasury. It is no coincidence that the investigators claimed in this regard that "the Libyan colony costs a large sum [...] but this sum is excluded from the scrutiny of the Parliament, because it is only included in a small part in the budget of the Ministry of the Colonies".⁴² Therefore, most of these losses are recorded in the accounts of the Ministry of War, but they have not been recorded in a specific balance sheet item. This again made the annual reports of this last Ministry approximate and those of the Colonies irregular, at least in the recording of administrative costs. Not having investigated in depth who had benefited most from these economic dysfunctions, the investigators generically identified the local population as the category that had benefited most from these accounting artifices, being able to purchase goods and basic necessities at low cost. This is therefore a chapter in the analysis of Italian economic management in Libya yet to be studied and written, even if from the papers collected and produced by the Commission it seems likely that the main beneficiaries of these malfunctions were the Italian soldiers and the indigenous elites involved in the same administrative management.⁴³

Local investigations during the war

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The first allegations of squandering had thus led in March 1915 to a first investigation conducted by Major General Cassinis into the Directorates of Commissariat in Tripoli and Benghazi but which was interrupted after only six months due to the repatriation of his manager.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it was resumed two years later.

The Inspectorate Office of Logistics Services of the Ministry of War had in fact requested, in its very confidential report of the 2nd of July 1917 "compiled [...] with a large amount of evidence", a second investigation, this time covering the entire military administration. In that document it was stated that "in Libya, public money had been deeply mismanaged by the guilt, wilful misconduct and negligence of many of those who were meant to protect the interests of the Treasury".⁴⁵ Having obtained the support of the two Ministries most potentially involved - War and Colonies -, General Adolfo Tettoni⁴⁶ was sent to this end. He thus launched an articulated analysis ranging from observations on military conduct to economic, administrative, accounting and logistical surveys.⁴⁷ In his summary report, presented on 25 December 1918, Tettoni could thus certify that "the abuses and irregularities found, unfortunately, do not constitute accidental and sporadic episodes; but instead represent the manifestations of a seriously ill body, and the index of a system that does not conform to the principles of honesty. A system that had full development in the period of decadence experienced by the colony from 1915 onwards. [...] The continuous repetition of deplorable facts, even in the last few days during my investigation - he concluded - convinced me of

the extent and depth of the evil and the urgent need for a radical work of purge and repression".⁴⁸

These serious conclusions set the whole national political machine in motion. On 11 December 1918, even before the official presentation of this document, the Minister of the Colonies, Colosimo, wrote to the President of the Council announcing his intention to appoint a commission of inquiry with full powers; on 4 January 1919 Tettoni, having returned to Italy, privately met Colosimo and anticipated his accusations to General Giovanni Ameglio, former governor of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica (Berhe 2015);⁴⁹ not too many days later, Tettoni agreed with the Minister of War, Zupelli, to send his documents to the judicial authority. The latter had the task of sifting and completing them and, if necessary, appointing the Senate of the Kingdom of Italy to deliver a judgement on General Ameglio, who was a member of it. This procedure was only temporarily suspended, at the time of the change of the Ministry of War from Zupelli to Caviglia. In this way, Ameglio was allowed to challenge the accusations made by Tettoni. Therefore, after agreement between the Minister of the Colonies, the Minister of War and General Military Attorneys, the mandate to complete Tettoni's investigation was given to Giovanni Appiani, the Councillor of Cassation.⁵⁰ The result was a constant correspondence between the two, in which the first seemed to try to "smooth out" the accusations of the second. This *querelle* was definitively interrupted only on 20 March 1919, when Tettoni lodged a formal complaint against General Ameglio, "as well as other people dependent on him",⁵¹ in the Senate of the Kingdom of Italy. Exactly one year after he turned himself to the High Court of Justice, the Permanent Commission of Instruction of the same Senate declared that the facts ascribed to the high military exponent did not constitute a crime.⁵² This is how, even though he was criminally acquitted, the Commission inherited the delicate task of providing a judgement on the man (who died in 1921) and his work. Therefore, Giolitti's investigative body carried out a vast and profound political criticism of both the Ameglio's administration and the conduct of the war in the Libyan territories.

Leaving aside the examination of this last aspect,⁵³ although interesting but not part of the objectives of this work, the articulate judgement of the investigators on Ameglio's work emerges. Also because their evaluation had probably been deeply influenced by the changed political context in which the Commission had found itself operating in the last weeks of its activity.⁵⁴ The investigators, therefore, only hinted at their final negative opinion of the entire colonial bureaucratic-administrative body. This radical change of perspective - in which it was the nation, its offices and the management methods adopted that were subject to criticism - was reinforced by the fact that, for the first time, it was the state that investigated itself (Crocella 1999).

Malfunctions in material management and war services

How did the malfunctions in the management of the material and war services actually occur? It is possible to answer this question by listing some cases identified by the

Commission, such as the sale of 6,135 blankets, which the consignor of the clothing warehouse in Tripoli had deemed no longer usable, but which were in good condition; the sale of 300 quintals of hay by the Commissariat of Benghazi at the price of 4.50 lire per quintal, even if it was still possible to use it for bedding and its cost was therefore over 12 lire; the habit of many officers to take large quantities of "khaki cloth" to give to people outside the militia, naturally withholding the proceeds for themselves; the purchase in January 1916 by the Governorate of Tripoli of 30,000 quintals of esparto grass for quadrupeds, unusable for this purpose; the continuous misuse of military vehicles, so much so that the Ministry of War was forced to issue numerous disciplinary measures.⁵⁵ The investigators also verified that such practices had continued even at the end of the First World War, when the remnants of war were no longer needed.⁵⁶ The colonial offices had to recover and sell countless materials, suffice it to say that in 1918 the expeditionary Corps in Libya alone had abandoned, according to the estimates of the same Commission, as many as 415 vehicles in Tripoli and large quantities of timber, lubricants and work tools. In Benghazi, vice versa, the same expeditionary Corps had left 62 other trucks, 400 spare discs, 4 locomotives and about 136,100 boxes of Torrigiani concentrated dressing, which contained almost 6,500,000 food rations.⁵⁷ The procedures of alienation, however, were excessively slow compared to the necessary rapidity due, above all, to the articulated bureaucratic process which involved ten different institutions.⁵⁸ This babel ended up also hindering the correct communication between the bodies concerned, as in the case of the war materials in Tripolitania that the Ferrovie dello Stato (the Italian national railway service) had sold to the Agricultural Cooperative Society between the mutilated and the invalids of war, while at the same time the Intendenza Oltremare of Taranto had suggested to send them to Cyrenaica.⁵⁹ Overall, according to the prudent estimates of the Management of the Engineer's Office, this stolidity had caused a tax loss of about nine million Italian lire, having led to sales even at one twentieth of the original value of the liquidated material.⁶⁰

Conclusions

Between 1913 and 1922, the management and economic organization of the colonial machine in the Libyan territories had peculiarities such as to convince the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on war expenses to focus its attention also on what had happened in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. The criticalities identified by the investigators were numerous but mostly due to three fundamental structural problems: the submissiveness of the governors to ministerial powers, the lack of cohesion between the various authorities and the absence of clear and defined local policy guidelines. These factors had led to squandering which, in turn, not only had damaged the public Treasury but also compromised the colonial administration.

The Commission had identified several *culprits* for the waste and dysfunction that had characterized the Italian colonial administration in the Libyan territories. However,

it had also stated that "an arid list of small individuals more or less responsible, accompanied by a more or less dosed form of disapproval"⁶¹ was essentially useless. His inquiry had therefore focused mainly on the activities of the Ministries of War and especially of the Colonies, whose "responsibility [...] appeared to be of unquestionable seriousness: since its actions, its omissions almost always caused irreparable moral damage and considerable economic loss".⁶² The investigative body wanted by Giolitti had identified in the decisions taken by the Ministry of Colonies the responsibility for the dysfunctions of the economic management of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. The Commission, not by chance, in December 1922 presented a proposal of an exclusively political nature such as the abolition of the Ministry of the Colonies. Since this act is one of the most courageous ever carried out by the investigators, it seems necessary to quote some of their final considerations: "And this measure [the suppression of the Ministry] is necessary both for political and administrative reasons and for economic reasons. The Colonial Administration does not have a body of its own, made of homogeneous elements, and living an autonomous life. It, instead, draws fractionally [*sic!*] from other bodies of the State, the elements for its function".⁶³ Aware of making a proposal radically contrary to the current Fascist political will, the commissioners denounced as their last act the administrative unsustainability of the entire colonial management and the uselessness of a special Ministry. That is probably also why their report was hidden to the Parliament and kept secret for the whole Mussolini's era. Beyond the political proposal and more generally speaking, it is possible to see how the bureaucratic chaos characterizing the entire economic management of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica had seriously undermined the results of the Italian economic effort. This was an undoubtedly a common phenomenon that had occurred at the same time in the territory of the Peninsula and which had demonstrated for the first time how unprepared the Italian management body was to manage such complex and articulated events. The remoteness from central offices, the lack of an effective control and surveillance body and the absence of a proper allocation of individual administrative functions had certainly contributed to this. It is not known how much the defective organisation of the single services and the disorganization of the various powers that occurred between 1913 and 1922 influenced the Italian colonial management in the following years, but it is clear that, at the beginning of the Fascist twenty-year period, this was unable to resolve its problems. In a sort of permanent and karstic conflict between the political and military offices, it emerges how the lack of clear indications from the various governments in the economic management represented one of the main, and unresolved, *vulnus* of the entire organization of the Libyan colonies.

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NOTES:

1 - The bibliography on the different mobilization experiences is practically endless. Not being able to deal with it fully here, I will only touch upon some of the fundamental contributions on the war effort, on educational policies, on women's mobilization, on industrial mobilization.

2 - See Chamber of Deputies, *Atti Parlamentari. Legislatura XXVI, Sessione 1921-23*, Documents, Drafts of Laws and Reports, *Relazione finale Commissione Spese di guerra* (henceforth FR), I, p. 13.

3 - Law 18 of July 1920, n. 999, art. 1.

4 - The Commission itself also examined the military conduct of conflicts in the Italian colonies and, in particular, in Libya, a theme which is not the subject of this work. See FR, I, pp. 526-531 and, above all, Historical Archives Chamber of Deputies, *Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulle spese di guerra* (henceforth ASCD, *Spese di guerra*), b. 25, f. 257; b. 26, f. 258.

5 - The Commission focused its work mainly on elements directly related to the management of the years following the fourth government of its founding father.

6 - This clash emerged above all in the Mixed Supreme Commission for the Defence of the State, the body responsible for coordinating activities relating to the war in Libya. See for example Chamber of Deputies, *Legisl. XX, 1° sessione, Discussioni*, vol. III, p. 2800 where Giolitti, addressing the Ministry of War, claimed that "the presumable financial situation for the year 1912-1913 is not easy [...]. I recommend to the Hon. Colleague not to ask for larger allocations to the expense items [...]" (Chamber of Deputies, *Legisl. XX, 1° sessione, Discussioni*, vol. III, p. 2800).

7 - This was an atavistic problem of the two administrations, as emerged in 1901 when it was stated that "[...] the law enforcement agencies, scientific cabinets, etc. represent many doubles. Carboni bought the Navy in large quantities; Carboni bought the War in small quantities with very different prices and rules [*sic!*]; and so another infinity of raw materials. The Navy has one food service; the Army has another; both administrations using methods that have done their time" (Chamber of Deputies, *Legisl. XX, 1° sessione, Discussioni*, vol. III, p. 2811).

8 - Museo Centrale del Risorgimento di Roma (hereinafter referred to as MCRR), *Fondo Dallolio*, b. 945, f. 5, 1.3, p. 5, letter from Spingardi to Giolitti dated 29 April 1913.

9 - FR, I, p. 250.

10 - MCRR, *Fondo Dallolio*, b. 960, f. 4, 1.2.

11 - See in this respect ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 25, f. 255.

12 - ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 7, f. 31, Minutes II, 21 September 1920, p. 4, which transposed Article 5 of the law establishing the Commission, which provided for the division into working groups.

13 - ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 7, f. 31, Minutes, III, 22 September 1920, pp. 1-2. Subcommittee A was the only one to have seven Commissioners, stressing the importance of the tasks and issues it had to investigate.

14 - ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 7, f. 32, c.32, minutes of the XVI sitting of Subcommittee A.

15 - These were the two main instruments with which the Commissioners were equipped and which, in carrying out their other investigations, made extensive use of.

16 - Cfr. ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 7, f. 32, c. 32, minutes of the 16th session of Subcommittee A, where all the events related to the investigations on the Italian colonies in Africa were reconstructed. Italicized words are underlined in the original document.

17 - Minutes of the XI sitting of Subcommittee A.

18 - Central Archives of the State, Presidency of the Council of Ministers - European Warfare (from now on ACS, PCM-GE), 19-22-9, b. 188, f. "Various Affairs", memorial of 23rd December 1923. In the original document the italics are underlined.

19 - ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 7, f. 32, c. 31 e ss., which also included the new reply from the President of Subcommittee A, who reiterated "that the powers of the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission were higher and did not admit any obstacles".

20 - Minutes of the 22nd sitting of Subcommittee A of the 27th of May 1922, Item 39, Ibid.

21 - See ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 5, f. 26, letter n. 3256 of the 23rd of November 1922 sent by Federzoni to the "Hon. Ulderico Mazzolani President of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the War [*sic!*]". Thus, incorrectly reporting the name of the Commission itself, probably in order to underline once again the fully political character of this dispute.

22 - FR, I, p. 524. In the original document the words in italics are underlined.

23 - ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 27, f. 263.

- 24 - Much of the documentation (ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 25, f. 257; b. 26, f. 258 and f. 260) refers to the dyscrasia between the promoted image of the Libyan territories and their actual condition. The final report presented by Subcommittee A, once again probably influenced by the Italian political situation, is more nuanced.
- 25 - FR, I, p. 538. It should be noted, however, that it was impossible to collect additional evidence because such expenses had been classified by the Ministry of the Colonies itself as "secret" and "political", so neither had they been included in specific reports nor had a list been drawn up of those who, having received money and/or gifts, had taken up arms against the Italians.
- 26 - FR, I, p. 145.
- 27 - This lack of documentation was an obstacle to the work of the investigators themselves, who were thus deprived of the possibility of submitting systematic findings.
- 28 - This sum has been calculated on the basis of the documentation in ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 1, ff. 1-2 "*Financial cost of the war*", f. 3 "*Final accounts from 1913-'14 to 1919-'20. Bill of Law. Revenue and expenditure for the financial year (1913-'14; 1914-'15; 1915-'16; 1916-'17; 1917-'18; 1918-'19; 1919-'20)*" and f. 6 "*Preliminary notes to the budget estimate of revenue and expenditure for the financial year (1920-'21; 1921-'22; 1922-'23). Changes to the budget estimates of Ferrovie dello Stato for the financial year 1921-'22. Bill*" summarised in FR, I, pp. 532-534.
- 29 - This last item of expenditure was presumably only related to the Libyan territories for the information, espionage, propaganda and resignation services of the 'indigenous', including the wages of their officials. It is interesting to note that this amount was recorded among the costs of the conflict, as it was equated to "enticement to submission and not as remuneration for a service rendered in the ordinary administration of the Colony". Not to mention that it was "notorious that in the past almost all the indigenous officers paid by us betrayed us by switching to the rebels" (ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 25, f. 257).
- 30 - ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 25, f. 256. These costs were calculated only over the period 1915 and 1919 and were separated from the other costs as Eritrea was not considered a military operation area.
- 31 - The Commission's observations on the management of the colony of Eritrea mainly concerned the behaviour of certain local officers and employees and, more generally, the expenditure made on those territories (see ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 25, f. 256).
- 32 - See ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 25, f. 256.
- 33 - In the financial year 1920-1921, the Ministry of the Colonies abolished the extraordinary allocation on the ground that, with the return to conditions of peace, the need for extraordinary expenses ceased to exist.
- 34 - See FR, I, pp. 536-542.
- 35 - See ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 27, f. 265.
- 36 - Law 1205 of 20 November 1912, art. 3.
- 37 - Law 39 of 9 January 1913.
- 38 - FR, I, p. 549.
- 39 - To underline this criticality, the investigators listed in the final report the names and period of activity of each representative (FR, I, p. 549).
- 40 - Law 245 of 22 January 1914, art. 5.
- 41 - Among the exceptions there were the provisions of Circular No 20300-19900 of 24 December 1919 which stated that when supplies were purchased by civilian entities, such as Ferrovie dello Stato (the Italian national railway service), the transfer prices increased by 30% to compensate the soldiers for the costs incurred for loading and unloading, storage and transport.
- 42 - FR, I, p. 535.
- 43 - See for example ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 25, f. 257, where the emoluments paid to indigenous elites are analysed without obtaining the expected results.
- 44 - See ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 25, f. 257.
- 45 - FR, I, p. 536.
- 46 - Head of the General Directorate of Logistics and Administrative Services of the Ministry of War, his testimonies have been fundamental to several Commission investigations such as the one on the "panno grigio-verde" (ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 6, f. 10) relating to the replacement of the military fabric regulations.
- 47 - See ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 26, f. 258.
- 48 - ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 25, f. 257.
- 49 - See his biography at <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-ameglio>.

- 50 - ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 26, ff. 257, 258 e 260.
- 51 - FR, I, p. 537.
- 52 - See ASCD. *Spese di guerra*, b. 26, f. 258.
- 53 - See on this subject ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 26, ff. 258 e 260.
- 54 - "General Ameglio, however impulsive and authoritarian and very protective to those who asked for it, [...] was integral and superior to any suspicion in his private life [...] was surrounded by some elements that often worked in his name, abusing the trust obtained" (FR, I, p. 537). The same positive judgment had also been pronounced in favour of Alfredo Dallolio (Ecca 2017a: 25-26).
- 55 - ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 26, f. 258 and in particular b. 27, f. 265.
- 56 - The liquidation of remnants of war was a common problem to the entire military administration, so much so that the Commission had to devote numerous investigations to it (see in particular ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 137, ff. 927, 928, 930, 932 and 935; b. 138, ff. 938).
- 57 - See ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 26, f. 259 where the contents of the Intendenza Truppe Oltremare warehouses in Taranto and Naples are also described in detail. There were more than 1,200 crates of sanitary material abandoned after the war.
- 58 - They were the consignors of the various warehouses and the higher hierarchical authorities, the governors of the various colonial regions, the Ministry of the Colonies, the Ministry of War, the Ministry of Finance, the Winding-up Committee for war management, the General Accounting Office of the State, the General Directorate of the Ferrovie dello Stato, the Technical Administrative Commission for sales and the Expert Committee for second-hand goods (see in this regard ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 142, f. 949).
- 59 - ASCD, *Spese di guerra*, b. 140, f. 946.
- 60 - FR, I, p. 539, referring to the material used by the Garioni expedition of November 1918.
- 61 - FR, I, p. 550.
- 62 - FR, I, p. 550.
- 63 - FR, I, pp. 554-555.

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