

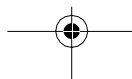
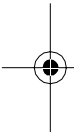
COSA NOSTRA

A History of the Sicilian Mafia

JOHN DICKIE



Cosa Nostra

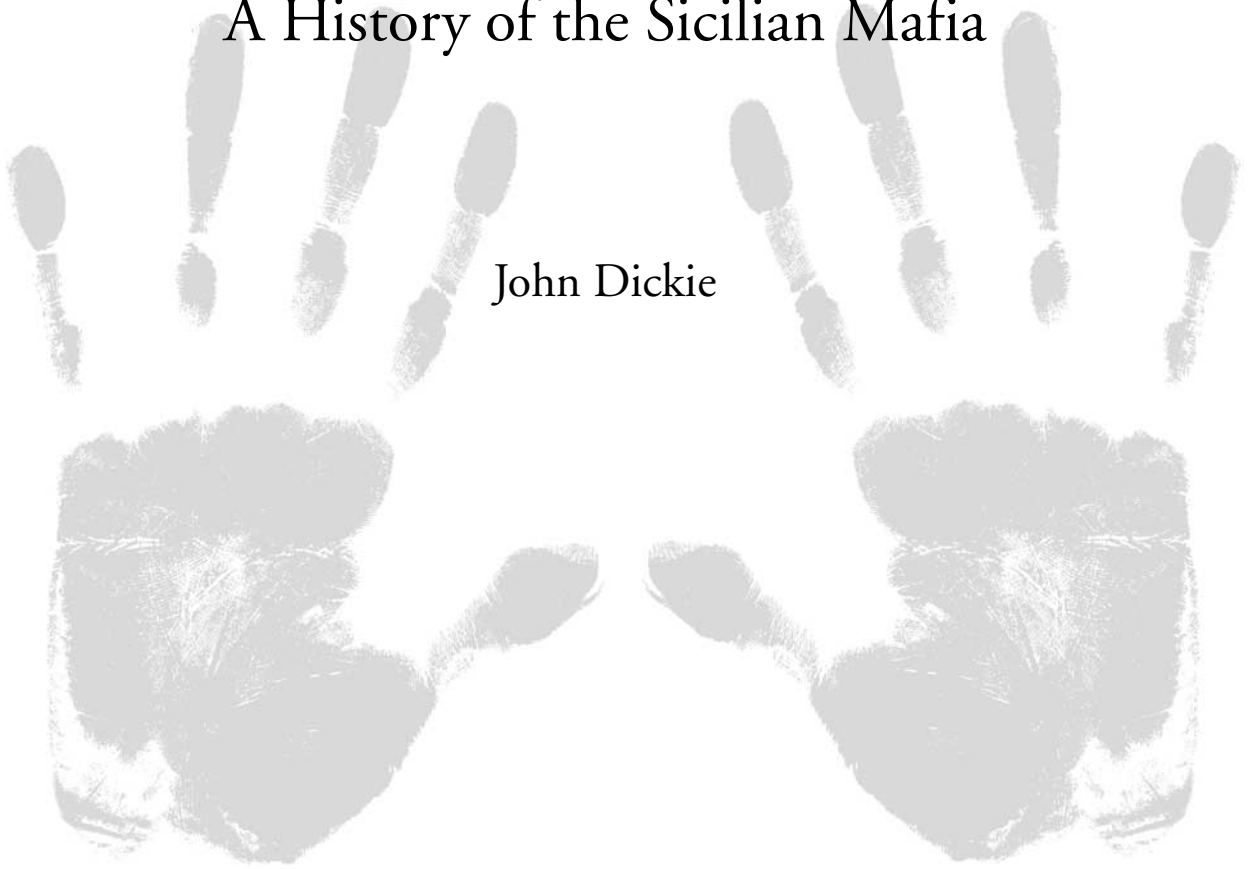


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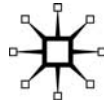
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John Dickie



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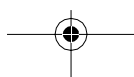
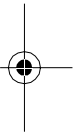
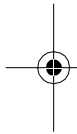
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Contents

Prologue 13

Introduction 21

Men of Honour 27

1. The Genesis of the Mafia 1860–1876 35
 Sicily's Two Colours • Dr Galati and the Lemon Garden • Initiation
 • Baron Turrisi Colonna and the 'Sect' • The Violence Industry •
 'The So-Called Maffia': How the Mafia Got its Name

2. The Mafia Enters the Italian System 1876–1890 69
 'An Instrument of Local Government' • The Favara Brotherhood:
 the Mafia in Sulphur Country • Primitives

3. Corruption in High Places 1890–1904 87
 A New Breed of Politician • The Sangiorgi Report •
 The Notarbartolo Murder

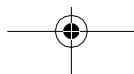
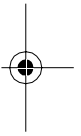
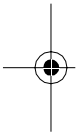
4. Socialism, Fascism, Mafia 1893–1943 131
 Corleone • The Man with Hair on His Heart

5. The Mafia Establishes Itself in America 1900–1941 161
 Joe Petrosino • Cola Gentile's America

6. War and Rebirth 1943–1950 191
 Don Calò and the Rebirth of the Honoured Society • Meet the
 Grecos • The Last Bandit

7. God, Concrete, Heroin, and Cosa Nostra 1950–1963 217
 The Early Life of Tommaso Buscetta • The Sack of Palermo • Joe
 Bananas Goes on Holiday

8. The 'First' Mafia War and its Consequences 1962–1969 241
 The Ciaculli Bomb • Like Chicago in the Twenties? The First Mafia
 War • The Antimafia • 'A Phenomenon of Collective Criminality'



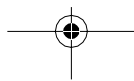
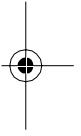
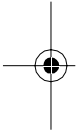


9. The Origins of the Second Mafia War 1970–1982 259
 Rise of the Corleonesi: 1—Luciano Leggio (1943–1970) • Leonardo Vitale’s Spiritual Crisis • Death of a ‘Leftist Fanatic’: Peppino Impastato • Heroin: The Pizza Connection • Bankers, Masons, Tax Collectors, Mafiosi • Rise of the Corleonesi: 2—Towards the Mattanza (1970–1983)

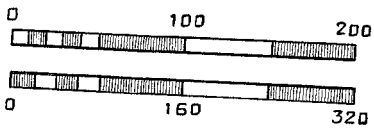
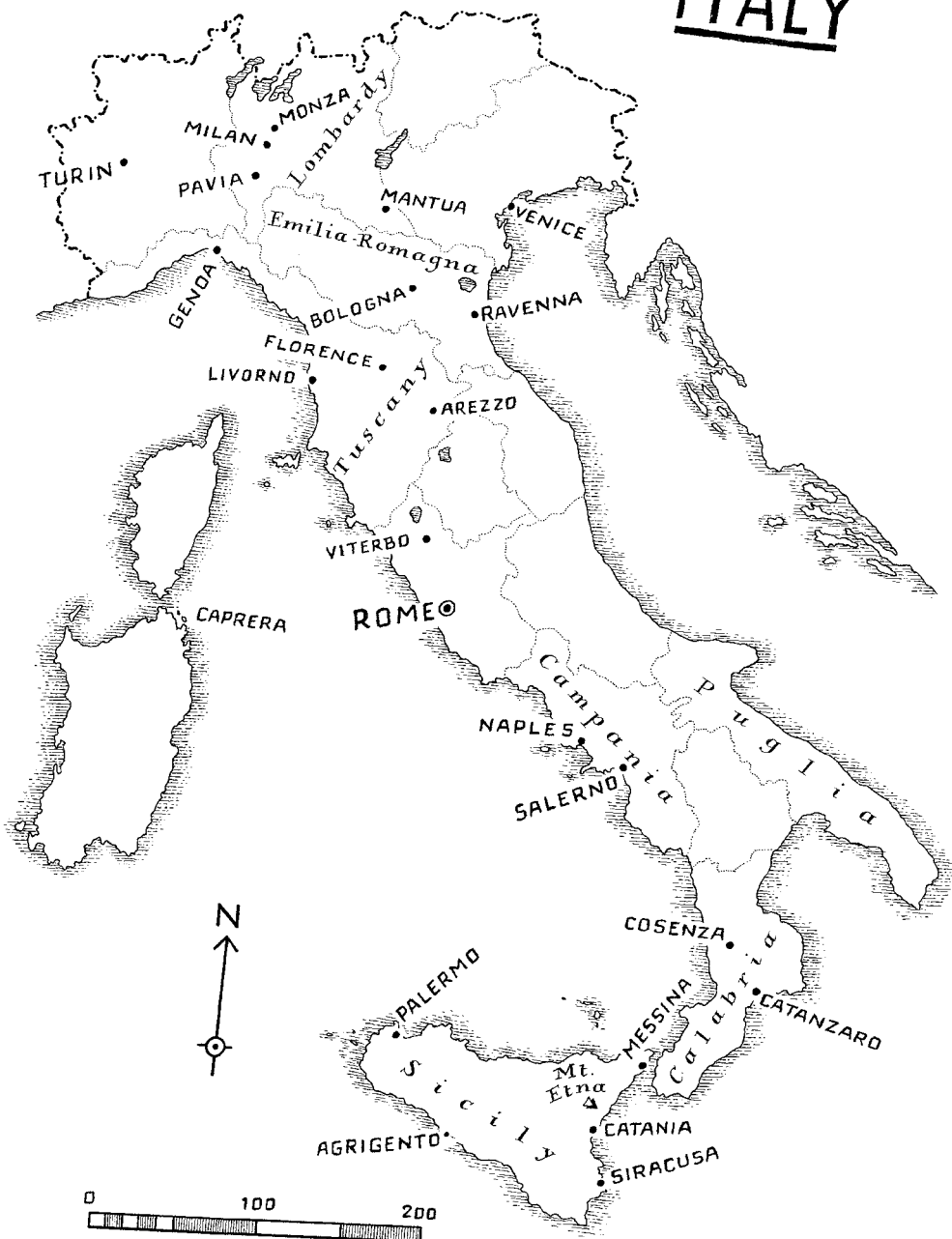
10. Terra Infidelium 1983–1992 293
 The Virtuous Minority • Eminent Corpses • Watching the Bullfight • The Fate of the Maxi-Trial •

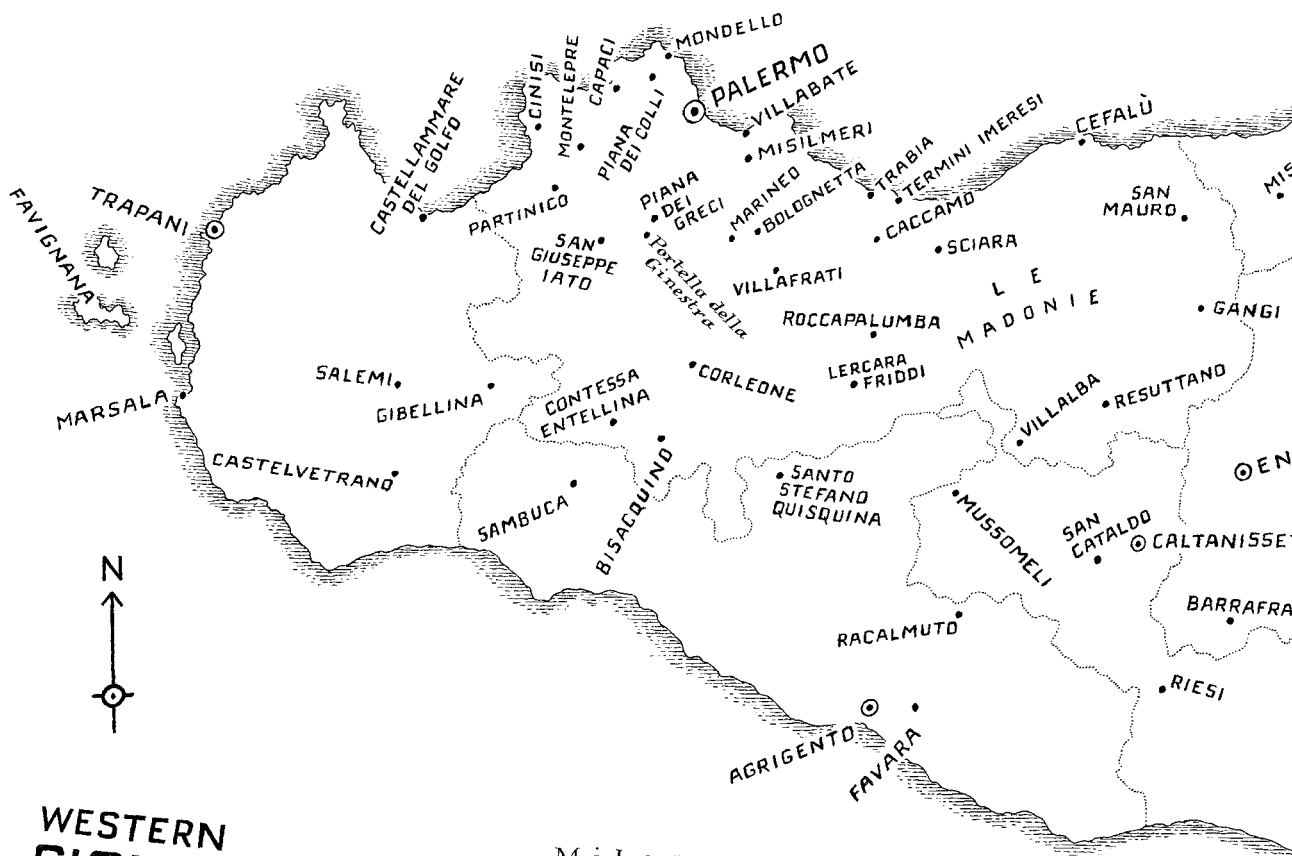
11. Bombs and Submersion 1992–2003 311
 Totò Riina’s Villa • After Capaci • ‘Uncle Giulio’ • Enter the Tractor • The Major-Domo and the Ad Man

Acknowledgements 339
 Picture Acknowledgements 342
 Bibliography 343
 Notes on Sources 355
 Index 361

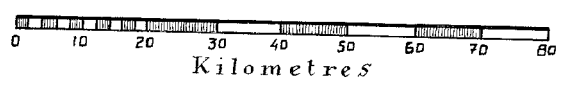


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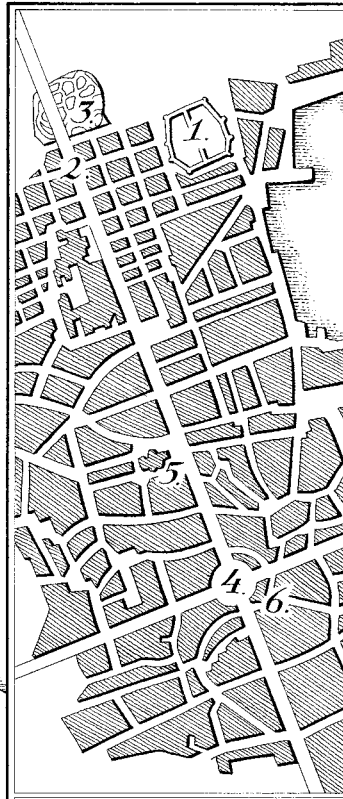
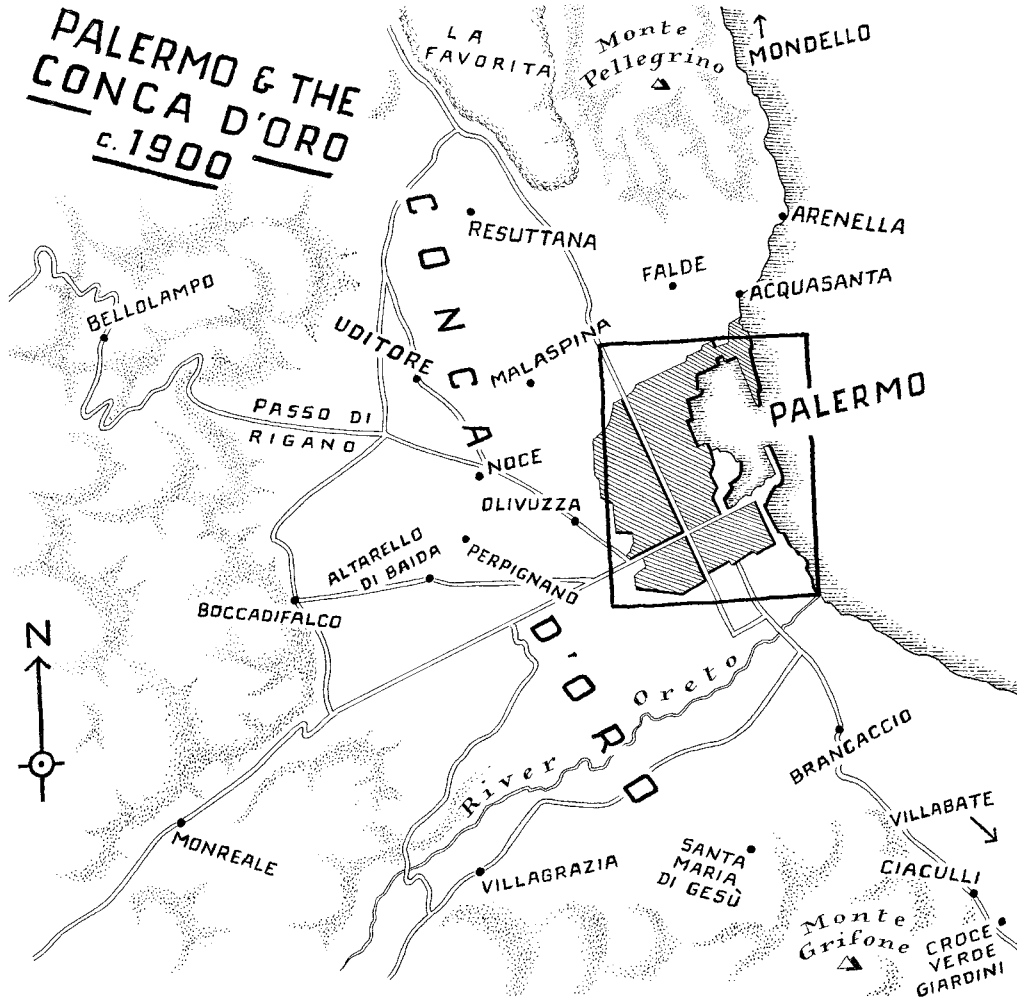




**WESTERN
SICILY**



**PALERMO & THE
CONCA D'ORO
c. 1900**



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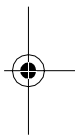
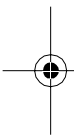
Disclaimer

As will quickly become evident, these pages inevitably refer to serious allegations relating to certain individuals. It is essential therefore that no one should read the book without keeping the following points in mind:

Mafia Families and blood families are distinct entities. The fact that one or several members of any blood family mentioned in this book are initiated into the mafia in no way entails that their relatives by birth or marriage are affiliates of the mafia, working in its interests, or are even aware that their relatives are or were affiliated. Indeed, since Cosa Nostra is a secret organization, it has a rule that its members must not tell their blood family members anything about its affairs. For the same reason, *a fortiori*, it should not be inferred that any descendants of now dead individuals about whom suspicions of complicity with the mafia are raised in this book are in any way themselves complicit.

Throughout their history, the Sicilian mafia and the American mafia have established relationships with individual business people, politicians and members of organizations such as trade unions and companies. Equally, both the Sicilian and the American mafias have established relationships with companies, trade unions, political parties or groups within those parties. The available historical evidence strongly suggests that one of the primary characteristics of those relationships is their variety. For example, in cases in which protection money is paid to the mafia, the organizations and individuals involved may be entirely innocent victims of extortion, or willing collaborators with organized crime. Comments about such organizations and individuals in this book are in no way intended to prejudge the specific nature of single cases in this regard. Nor should it be inferred that such organizations and individuals that have, at one time, had a relationship with the mafia continue to do so. Furthermore, no inference should be drawn from what is written in this book about any organizations and individuals whose names, by pure coincidence, happen to be the same as those mentioned here.

This book, like many other studies of the mafia, identifies a broad historical pattern in which members of the mafia have tended to escape prosecution more often than would be expected. Within this broad pattern, individual cases have very





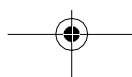
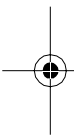
varied characteristics; there are by no means always grounds for suspicion of any wrongdoing or incompetence on the part of any members of law enforcement agencies, members of the judiciary, witnesses or jurors. Accordingly no inference about any such wrongdoing or incompetence should be drawn unless explicitly stated.

Many people throughout history have denied the existence of the mafia or sought to downplay its influence. Very many of these people were speaking and acting in perfectly good faith. Similarly, many people have expressed honest, reasonable, and sometimes absolutely justified doubts about the reliability of evidence from individual mafia *pentiti* (defectors) or *pentiti* collectively. In the absence of explicit statements to the contrary in these pages, no inference should be made about a person's complicity with the mafia merely from the fact that someone is reported as denying or downplaying the existence of the mafia or expressing doubts about *pentiti* of the kind outlined.

In instances where, as related in these pages, members of the mafia met in hotels, restaurants, shops or other public places, no inference should be made that the proprietors, management or staff of the places mentioned were in any way complicit with the mafia, or aware of the meeting, of the criminal calibre of participants in the meeting, or of the criminal nature of the business conducted at the meeting.

For practical reasons it has not been possible to interview all of the people still living whose spoken words are quoted here from written sources such as interviews in books and newspapers. In each case the author has made an assumption that the words in such books and newspapers have been transcribed with accuracy and good faith.

Some of the judicial proceedings mentioned may have progressed to a new stage, with different results, since the time this book was written and published.





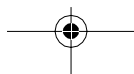
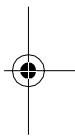
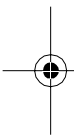
Prologue

Two stories, two days in May, separated by a century of history. Each story—the first a melodramatic fiction, the second a tragic reality—reveals something important about the Sicilian mafia, and about why, at last, the history of the mafia can now be written.

The first story was introduced to the world at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome on 17 May 1890 at what many people believe was the most successful opera première of all time. Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* ('rustic chivalry') put plangent melody at the service of a simple tale of jealousy, honour, and vengeance set among the peasants of Sicily. It was greeted with wild enthusiasm. There were thirty curtain calls; the Queen of Italy was present and apparently applauded all evening. *Cavalleria* rapidly became an international hit. A few months after that night in Rome, Mascagni wrote to a friend that his one-act opera had made him, at the age of twenty-six, rich for life.

Everyone knows at least some of the music of *Cavalleria rusticana*, and everyone recognizes its associations with Sicily. Its intermezzo is played over the famous slow-motion title sequence of *Raging Bull*, Martin Scorsese's dissection of Italian-American machismo, pride and jealousy. The opera also runs through Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather Part III*. In the climactic scene, a mafia killer disguised as a priest stalks his victim through the sumptuous Teatro Massimo in Palermo as *Cavalleria* is performed on stage. Don Michael Corleone's son is singing the lead tenor role of Turiddu. At the end of the film, the intermezzo makes a return to accompany the solitary death of the aged don played by Al Pacino.

What is less well known about *Cavalleria* is that its story is the purest, most anodyne form of a myth about Sicily and the mafia, a myth that was something akin to the official ideology of the Sicilian mafia for nearly a century and a half. The mafia was not an organization, it was believed, but a sense of defiant pride and honour, rooted deep in the identity of every Sicilian. The notion of 'rustic chivalry' stood square against the idea that the mafia might even have a history worthy of the name.





Today, it is impossible to tell the story of the mafia without reckoning with the power of that same myth.

The second story takes us to a hill above the road that leads back towards Palermo from the city's airport. It is nearly 6 P.M. on 23 May 1992 and Giovanni Brusca, a stocky, bearded young man of honour, is watching a short stretch of motorway just before the turn-off to the small town of Capaci. At that point his men have used a skateboard to fill a drainage pipe with thirteen small barrels containing nearly 400 kilos of explosives.

A few metres behind Brusca, another, older mafioso is smoking and talking on his mobile phone. Abruptly, he breaks off and leans forward to look at the road through a telescope propped on a stool. When he sees a convoy of three cars approach the spot, he hisses, 'Vai!' ('Go on!') Nothing happens. 'Vai!' he urges again.

Brusca has noticed that the convoy is travelling more slowly than expected. He waits for brief seconds that seem interminable, even allowing the cars to pass an old fridge that he has placed by the roadside as a marker. Only when he hears a third, almost panicked 'Vai!' from behind him does he press the switch.

There is a deep, tripping drum roll of detonations. A colossal explosion tears upwards through the tarmac, hurling the first car into the air. It lands sixty or seventy metres away in a field of olive trees. The second car is a white, bulletproof Fiat Croma; its engine is blown away and the car crashes, shattered, into the deep crater. The third is damaged but intact.

The victims of the explosion were leading antimafia investigating magistrate Giovanni Falcone and his wife (in the white Fiat Croma), and three members of their escort (in the lead car). In murdering Falcone, the Sicilian mafia rid itself of its most dangerous enemy, the symbol of the fight against it.

The Capaci bomb brought Italy to a standstill. Most people remember exactly where they were when they heard the news, and in its aftermath several public figures declared themselves ashamed to be Italian. To some, the tragedy at Capaci was the supreme demonstration of the mafia's arrogance and power. Yet the attack also marked the demise of the myth crystallized in *Cavalleria rusticana*; the mafia's official ideology was now officially bankrupt. It is no coincidence that the first credible history of the mafia ever to be written in Italian was only published after Capaci.



The little love-triangle narrative that is *Cavalleria rusticana* reaches its climax in a Sicilian town square when the tough cart driver, Alfio, refuses a drink offered by a young soldier, Turiddu. No explicit accusations are exchanged, but both men know that this little slight will have deadly consequences, for Alfio has been told that Turiddu has dishonest intentions towards his wife. A whole primitive value system is compressed into their brief exchange. Both men recognize that honour has been offended, that vendetta is a right, and that a duel is the only way to settle the debt. As custom dictates, the two embrace and Turiddu grips Alfio's right ear between his teeth as a sign that the challenge has been accepted. Turiddu tearfully kisses his mother farewell and leaves the stage to meet Alfio in a nearby orchard. Then, from a distance, comes a woman's shriek, 'Turiddu has been killed!' The curtain drops as the peasants wail in dismay.

Mascagni, who was from Tuscany, had never been to Sicily when he set the *Cavalleria* story to music. In rehearsal the tenor changed the words of his opening song because the librettists, both from Mascagni's home town, had not been able to make it sound Sicilian enough. But it mattered little. Sicily—or at least a certain image of it—was in fashion in 1890. What the audience at the Teatro Costanzi expected—and got—was the picturesque island as packaged for them by their illustrated magazines: an exotic land of sun and passion inhabited by brooding, dark-skinned peasants.

In 1890, the mafia was already a murderous and sophisticated criminal association with powerful political connections and an international reach. In the Sicilian capital, Palermo, local politicians were engaged in banking and share fraud, and were stealing urban renewal funds allocated to municipal government; among them were mafiosi. Yet the widespread image of the mafia was very different. Mascagni's audience would have viewed Turiddu, and particularly the cart driver Alfio—for all the countrified pathos of their tale—not just as typical Sicilians, but as typical mafiosi. For 'mafia' was widely taken to refer not to an organization, but to a mixture of violent passion and 'Arabic' pride that supposedly dictated Sicilian behaviour. 'Mafia', as viewed by many, was a primitive notion of honour, a rudimentary code of chivalry obeyed by the backward people of the Sicilian countryside.

Nor was this just a misunderstanding propagated by supercilious northern Italians. Seven years after the staggering success of Mascagni's opera, a precocious Sicilian sociologist, Alfredo Niceforo, wrote *Contemporary Barbarian Italy*, a study of southern Italy's 'backward races'. Niceforo gave a pejorative colouring to some *Cavalleria*-style commonplaces about the Sicilian psyche: 'Sicilian man . . . eternally

has rebellion and the unbounded passion of his own ego in his bloodstream—the *mafioso* in a nutshell.’ Niceforo, *Cavalleria rusticana*, and much of Italian culture at that time systematically confuse Sicilians and the mafia. Since then, generations of observers, whether Sicilians, Italians, or foreigners, have made the same mistake, blurring any clear distinction between the mafia and what one English travel writer of the 1960s called the ‘primeval mentality’ of the ‘Sicilian subconscious’.

Sicilian culture was for too long confused with *mafiosità* (‘mafia-ness’), and that confusion served the interests of organized crime. Needless to say, it was a great help to the illegal organization known as the mafia when people thought it did not exist. ‘There is no secret criminal society,’ the argument went; ‘that is just a conspiracy theory dreamed up by people who do not understand the way Sicilians think.’ Countless writers have rehashed the same misguided argument: that centuries of invasion have made Sicilians suspicious of outsiders, and so they naturally prefer to settle disputes among themselves without involving the police or the courts.

Smudging the line between the mafia and Sicilians could also make legal measures against the mob look futile. If the supposedly primitive Sicilian mentality was to blame, how could the mafia be prosecuted, short of putting the whole island in the dock? ‘Tutti colpevoli, nessuno colpevole,’ as the Italian saying has it: ‘If everyone is guilty, no one is guilty.’

The mafia had great success in peddling this family of falsehoods for a century and a half. The most insidious effect was simply to create muddle and doubt. As a result the existence of the mafia remained no more than a suspicion, a theory, a point of view—until surprisingly recently. And the notion of writing a history of the ‘mafia mentality’ often seemed pointless, hardly more worthwhile than writing a history of Gallic flair or the British stiff upper lip.



We owe it to Falcone and his colleagues if the myth of rustic chivalry has now, at last, been dispelled. The story of the Capaci bomb began in the early 1980s when, in less than two years, as many as 1,000 people were murdered—men of honour, their relatives and friends, police, and innocent bystanders. People were shot down in the street, or taken to secret locations to be strangled; their bodies were dissolved in acid, buried in concrete, dumped in the sea, or cut up and fed to the pigs. This was the bloodiest mafia conflict in history, but it was not a war; it was a campaign of extermination. The perpetrators were an alliance of mafiosi grouped around the leadership of the Corleone mafia. They were using secret death squads to hunt

down their enemies and establish a well-nigh dictatorial power over the mafia across Sicily.

Among the victims of the slaughter were two sons, a brother, a nephew, a brother-in-law, and a son-in-law of a well-connected man of honour, Tommaso Buscetta. The papers dubbed him the 'boss of two worlds' because of his interests on both sides of the Atlantic. When the Corleonesi mounted their assault, neither of his worlds was safe for him any more. Buscetta was arrested in Brazil. When he was extradited to Italy, he tried to commit suicide by swallowing the strychnine he always kept with him. He survived the attempt—just. On recovering, Buscetta decided to tell what he knew about the secret society into which he had been initiated when he was seventeen. And it was to Giovanni Falcone, and to him alone, that he wanted to speak.

Falcone was the bright son of a middle-class family from the then crumbling la Kalsa area of central Palermo. He once said that he had breathed in the smell of mafia since he was a boy. At the local Catholic youth club he played table tennis with Tommaso Spadaro, later to become a notorious mafioso and heroin trafficker. Falcone's family insulated him from these influences, bringing him up under a code of duty, church, and patriotism.

Falcone's early career as an investigating magistrate was in the bankruptcy court, where he developed his skills in hunting down obscure financial records. These skills became the first ingredient in what came to be known as the 'Falcone method' of mafia investigation. It was first applied to a big heroin smuggling case in 1980 after Falcone was transferred to the criminal investigative office in Palermo. In 1982, Falcone secured seventy-four convictions in the heroin case: a prodigious success on an island where the terrorizing of witnesses, judges, and juries had caused the failure of innumerable previous prosecutions.

Buscetta provided Falcone for the first time with access to the Sicilian mafia from the inside. 'For us he was like a language professor who allows you to go to Turkey without having to communicate with your hands,' said Falcone. In many hours of interviews with Buscetta, Falcone and his team developed their understanding of the organization, and patiently mapped the connections between faces, names, and crimes. They assembled a completely new picture of its command structure, methods, and mindset.

It is hard now to realize how much was *not* known about the mafia before Tommaso Buscetta sat down with Giovanni Falcone. The first revelation was the name given to the organization by its members: Cosa Nostra—'our thing'. Until then, even the few investigators and police who had taken this name seriously had assumed that it only applied to the American mob.

Buscetta also told Falcone about Cosa Nostra's pyramidal command structure. The soldiers at the lowest level are supervised in groups of ten or so by a *capodecina* (head of ten). Each *capodecina* reports upwards to the elected boss of a local gang or 'Family', who is flanked by a deputy and one or more *consiglieri* (advisers). Three families with adjoining territories are organized into a *mandamento* (district). The head of each *mandamento* is a member of the Commission, Cosa Nostra's parliament or board of management for the province of Palermo. In theory, above this provincial level there is a regional body made up of mafia bosses from the whole of Sicily. But in practice Palermo dominates the Sicilian mafia: nearly 50 per cent of the approximately 100 Families in Sicily have their territory in Palermo and its province, and the boss of the Palermo Commission has a leadership role within the Sicilian mafia as a whole.

At the time of Buscetta's revelations, some 5,000 men of honour were members of a single criminal organization. Significant murders—of policemen, politicians, or other mafiosi—had to be approved and planned at the highest level to make sure that they were compatible with the organization's overall strategy. With the aim of creating stability, the Commission also issued rulings on disputes within the families and *mandamenti* over which it presided. This level of internal discipline astonished investigators.

'The boss of two worlds' also knew the American Cosa Nostra well. He told Falcone that the Sicilian mafia, and the American mafia to which it had given birth, had a similar structure. But they were separate organizations; being a member in Sicily did not mean that you also became a member in the US. The strong links between the two were blood and business ties rather than organizational ones.

Other men of honour followed Buscetta's example as they turned to the state for protection from the Corleonesi and their death squads. Together with his close colleague Paolo Borsellino, Falcone meticulously checked their testimonies and assembled 8,607 pages of evidence—the prosecution case for the famous 'maxi-trial', which was held in a specially built bombproof bunker courthouse in Palermo.

On 16 December 1987, after proceedings lasting twenty-two months, the judge in the maxi-trial handed down guilty verdicts on 342 mafiosi and sentenced them to a total of 2,665 years in prison. Just as importantly, what sceptics had dismissed as the 'Buscetta theorem' on the structure of Cosa Nostra had withstood a stiff judicial examination.

Final legal confirmation of the Buscetta theorem had to wait until January 1992 when, contrary to Cosa Nostra's hopes and expectations, the Court of Cassation—Italy's Supreme Court—set a seal on the initial verdicts. It was the worst legal defeat

the Sicilian mafia had ever suffered. In response, the Corleonesi put their death squads on the trail of the investigating magistrates. Falcone was murdered within a few months of the verdict. Less than two months after Falcone's death, disbelief and indignation swept across Italy once more when Paolo Borsellino and five members of his escort were killed by a massive car bomb outside his mother's house.

The tragic deaths of Falcone and Borsellino had profound effects that are still unfolding today. The first of those effects was simply to reinforce the fact that the antimafia magistrates had won a momentous victory; the existence of a centralized criminal organization called Cosa Nostra is no longer just a theory.

If Cosa Nostra exists, then it has a history; and if it has a history then, as Falcone often said, it had a beginning and it will have an end. Because of the work of Falcone, Borsellino, and their colleagues, as well as the collapse of the cluster of untruths surrounding the notion of 'rustic chivalry', historians can now research the history of the mafia with more confidence and insight than has ever been the case.

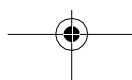
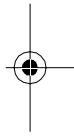
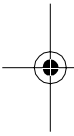
As the reality about Cosa Nostra emerged through Buscetta's testimony and the maxi-trial, a few historians, most of them Sicilians, took their cue from the investigating magistrates: they began to look back at neglected records and unearth new evidence. A whole field of study was slowly opening up. Then, in 1992, when the Court of Cassation's verdict confirmed the Buscetta theorem—and in so doing triggered the murders of Falcone and Borsellino—writing the history of the mafia suddenly became far more than an academic pursuit: it was now part of an urgent imperative to understand a deadly threat to society, and to show the remaining antimafia magistrates that they were not alone in their struggle.

A pioneering history of the Sicilian mafia was published in Italian the following year. It was updated in 1996, and further discoveries have been made since then. The drive to tell the mafia's story has progressed in tandem with the drive to combat Cosa Nostra in the wake of the atrocities of 1992. In Sicily, history counts.

It may also count for something if the history of the mafia is told to the world beyond Italy. While Falcone's epic confrontation with Cosa Nostra in the 1980s became the subject of some superb accounts in English, the totally new perspective on the mafia's history that Falcone opened up remains almost totally unknown. This book is the first history of the Sicilian mafia, from its origins to the present day, to be written in any language other than Italian. It presents the findings of the latest research and tells the story of the mafia as the Italian specialists now tell it. It also contains some completely new findings. What has emerged in the last few years is



a much fuller historical description of the Sicilian mafia than was thought possible even a short time ago. A picture that used to be drawn in the fuzzy lines of sociological jargon—'mentalities', 'para-state functions', 'violent mediators'—now contains real people, places, dates, and crimes. And the clearer the picture becomes, the more disturbing are its implications: a secret society that has murder as its very *raison d'être* has been an integral part of the way Italy has been run since the middle of the nineteenth century.





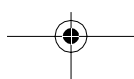
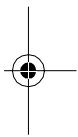
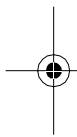
Introduction

‘Mafia’ is now one of a long list of words—like ‘pizza’, ‘spaghetti’, ‘opera’, and ‘disaster’—that Italian has given to many other languages across the world. It is commonly applied to criminals far beyond Sicily and the United States, which are the places where the mafia in the strict sense is based. ‘Mafia’ has become an umbrella label for a whole world panoply of gangs—Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Chechen, Albanian, Turkish, and so on—that have little or nothing to do with the Sicilian original.

There are other criminal associations based in other regions of southern Italy, and all of them are sometimes called ‘mafia’: the Sacra Corona Unita, in Puglia (the heel of the Italian boot); the ‘Ndrangheta, in Calabria (the toe); and the Camorra, in the city of Naples and its environs (located on the shin). These other associations all have a fascinating history of their own—one of them, the Camorra, is a little older than the mafia—but they will only be touched on here when relevant to the history of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra. The reason is simply that no other Italian illegal society is nearly as powerful, as well organized, or as successful as the mafia. It is not by chance that it is this Sicilian word that has become the most widely used.

This book is selective in that it is a history of the mafia of Sicily. Some of the most famous American mafiosi, men like Lucky Luciano and Al Capone, also people these pages because the history of the Sicilian mafia cannot be told without also telling the story of the American mafia to which it gave birth. The United States has been a thriving environment for organized criminals over the past two centuries, but only a part of organized crime in the US has been mafia crime. Accordingly, the American mafia is here placed in its proper and most illuminating perspective. It is only when viewed from the coast of a small, triangular island in the Mediterranean that the history of the mafia in the USA, at least in its early stages, can begin to make sense.

The mafia of Sicily pursues power and money by cultivating the art of killing people and getting away with it, and by organizing itself in a unique way that combines the attributes of a shadow state, an illegal business, and a sworn secret society like the Freemasons.





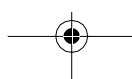
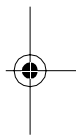
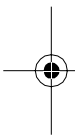
Cosa Nostra is like a state because it aims to control territory. With the agreement of the mafia as a whole, each mafia Family (the Italian word used through much of the mafia's history is *cosca*) exercises a shadow government over the people within its territory. Protection rackets are for a mafia Family what taxes are for a legal government. There is a difference, in that the mafia tries to 'tax' all economic activity, whether it is legal or illegal: retailers and robbers alike pay what is known as the *pizzo*. A mafioso may well end up protecting both the owner of a car showroom and the gang of car thieves who prey on him. So the only party absolutely guaranteed to benefit from any given protection deal is the mafia. Like a state, the mafia also arrogates to itself the power of life and death over its subjects. But the mafia is not an alternative government; it exists by infiltrating the legal state and twisting it to its own purposes.

Cosa Nostra is a business because it tries to make a profit—albeit by intimidation. But it rarely clears large margins from its 'governmental' activities. Most of the income from protection rackets tends to get ploughed back into maintaining its murder capability: it buys lawyers, judges, policemen, journalists, politicians, and casual labour, and it supports mafiosi unlucky enough to end up in prison. Cosa Nostra pays these overheads in order to build what some 'mafologists' think of as a brand of intimidation. The mafia brand can be deployed in all sorts of markets, like construction fraud or tobacco smuggling. As a general rule, the more treacherous, violent, and profitable a market is—the obvious case is narcotics trafficking and dealing—the more mafiosi who enter that market benefit from having a world-renowned and utterly reliable brand of blood-curdling intimidation behind them.

Cosa Nostra is an exclusive secret society because it needs to select its affiliates very carefully and impose restrictions on their behaviour in return for the benefits of membership. The chief demands that Cosa Nostra makes of its members are that they be discreet, obedient, and ruthlessly violent.

The history of this organization is fascinating in its own right. But the history of the mafia cannot *just* be about the mafia, about the deeds of men of honour. Before Falcone and Borsellino, a great many other people died fighting the mafia. Some of them are characters in the drama recounted here, because an integral part of the story of the mafia is the tale of its struggle with the Sicilians and others who have opposed it from the outset. The mafia's story also embraces the people who, for an assortment of motives ranging from rational fear, through political cynicism, to downright complicity, have favoured the organization's cause.

But even a history of the mafia that included all these things would still leave many questions unanswered. Because everyone outside Italy knows what the mafia



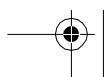
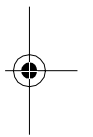
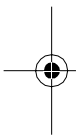


is, or at least thinks they do, it still seems baffling that it took until 1992 for the true nature of the Sicilian mafia to be confirmed. How could an illegal organization remain so powerful and so difficult to understand for so long? Part of the explanation was a lack of evidence. The mafia survived and prospered because it intimidated witnesses, and confounded or corrupted the police and courts. All too often in the past, the authorities (and so, after them, the historians) were left to count the dead bodies and wonder what strange logic underlay all the bloodshed.

The problem was even more deep-seated; indeed, it went to the heart of the Italian system of government. At the very least, the Italian state has been extremely absent-minded about the Sicilian mafia over the past century and more. On the few occasions when an understanding of the mafia penetrated government institutions, it was swiftly forgotten. And even when it was remembered for a while, it was not put to good use. Italy repeatedly missed opportunities to grasp some of the truths that judges Falcone and Borsellino finally paid with their lives to prove. The mafia was a secret hidden in plain view. For that reason, Italy's recurring failure to understand the mafia makes for a much richer story than would be the case if it were all down to some cloak-and-dagger conspiracy by a few individuals bent on keeping the truth concealed. For that reason too, as well as being a history of the mafia, this book is a history of Italy's failure to comprehend and combat what was visible all the while.

There are plenty of contemporary examples that suggest that Italy's deeply rooted mafia problem is still very much alive. At the time of writing, the President of the Sicilian Region is under investigation for links with the mafia—he denies any wrongdoing. Another high-profile mafia case involves the advertising executive who in 1993 founded Forza Italia, the political party of the current Prime Minister, media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi. A recent mafia defector has alleged that there were high-level meetings to seal a pact between Cosa Nostra and Forza Italia. The allegations are strongly denied and one should not rush to draw conclusions about these individual cases, neither of which has reached a definitive verdict. But as well as raising eyebrows, they also raise historical questions about how Italy managed to get itself into such a predicament.

The historians who first attempted to answer those questions in the wake of Buscetta's evidence quickly made a remarkable find that only deepened the mystery of why Italy had failed properly to understand the mafia before. Buscetta was, in fact, far from the first man of honour to break the mafia's famous code of silence known as *omertà*; he was not even the first to be believed when he did so. There have been mafia informants for almost as long as there have been mafiosi. In addition, there existed from the outset a furtive and often intimate dialogue



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