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ITALIAN PIONEERS

Colonial propaganda and geographic explorations

Alberto Cauli

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ABSTRACT

Scholarship in the field of Italian geographic explorations has mainly focused on expeditions that took place before fascism. This thesis analyses the relationship between fascism and geographic explorations, through a biographical reconstruction of three great figures of explorers who were active during the fascist period: the Duke of Abruzzi, the Duke of Spoleto and Ardito Desio. With the help of archival documents concerning actual economic and political support to the explores, I take into consideration the role played by central government, the contributions of various institutions, both public and private, such as banks, expansionist societies, commercial and mining companies and local councils, which were involved in financing explorations and colonial enterprises. Thus, this thesis shows how the regime exploited the personalities and explorative voyages of the explorers in terms of colonial propaganda and as representatives of its foreign expansionist policy. The propaganda apparatus portrayed explorers as ‘national heroes’, who contributed to the construction of a ‘new and greater Italy’. The regime aimed to enhance national prestige by glorifying their daring explorative enterprises and pursued the enhancement of its colonial possessions by supporting scientific missions in the Italian colonies.
To Emanuela, who supported my explorations.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

| ABSTRACT | i |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iii |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | iv |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |

## CHAPTER I

Explorers, explorations and colonial entanglements. An overview from Massawa to fascism.

- *Agents of Colonialism. Geographic Societies and Explorers.* 19
- *Explorers and the press.* 23
- *The golden age of Italian colonialism: conquests and defeats.* 25
- *The Adwa’s legacy. The crisis of the Geographic Society.* 28
- *Exploration and conquest of Libya.* 30
- *Fascism comes to power. A new foreign policy.* 34
- *Mussolini as Prime Minister.* 39
- *A new representation of Italy.* 42
- *Making Italy an international power: explorations and national prestige.* 44

## CHAPTER II

Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta, the Duke of Abruzzi. Explorer and fascist colonizer.

**Part 1 - The Explorer.**

- *Family history, the Navy and the Italian Alpine Club.* 53
- *The expedition to Alaska.* 59
- *The North Pole expedition.* 64
- *Pascoli and D’Annunzio: the poetic representation of the North Pole expedition.* 77
- *The diplomatic naval missions (1903-1905 and 1907).* 82
- *The Rwenzori exploration (1906).* 85
- *The Karakorum climbing expedition (1909).* 91
- *The Duke at war (1911-1912 and 1915-1918).* 96

**Part 2 - The Colonizer.**

- *A new agricultural project in Somalia.* 102
The foundation of the «Società Agricola Italo-Somala» - SAIS. 106

The SAIS and the Somalis: agreements with the local populations over lands. 111

Fascism and Luigi Amedeo of Savoia. 114

The SAIS conforms to the fascist colonial system. The use of forced labor within its consortium. 121

The 1927 political mission in Ethiopia and the Duke’s last geographic expedition along the Uebi-Scebeli river in 1928. 127

The Duke of Abruzzi’s death. 133

CHAPTER III 137

Aimone of Savoia-Aosta, the Duke of Spoleto. Explorer and ‘King who never was’. 143

Dealing with fascist policy: royal rank, national prestige, political missions and explorations. 144

The war and missions in Transcaucasia, South America, China and Romania. 149

The South American naval mission (1920-1921). 151

The Chinese mission (1922-1923). 155

The political mission in Romania (1926). 155

The 1929 expedition to Karakorum. 157

Commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Italian victory in the First World War. 163

A new plan for the expedition. 171

Publication and disclosure of the scientific results. 157

‘The King who never was’: Aimone of Savoia as a tool of fascist foreign policy in the Balkans. 176

The general context. 176

The Croatian proposal for an Italian King of the Independent State of Croatia. 182

Ambiguity and conspiracy: Aimone of Savoia’s tangled relationship with the regime. 182

CHAPTER IV 188

Ardito Desio: geologist and explorer. The scientific side of fascist colonial policy. 191

The war and the missions to the Dodecanese archipelago. 194

The African explorations: Giarabub, Kufra and Fezzan. 197

The mission to Giarabub. 197

The expedition to Kufra. 197
The exploration of Fezzan.  198

The Libyan period.  

Under Italo Balbo’s governorship.  200

The search for oil.  204

Support from the «Azienda Generale Petroli Italiana» for Desio’s research.  206

Mining Missions in Ethiopia and Albania.

Desio in Western Ethiopia.  210

Platinum research in Albania.  212

Desio and fascism: a relationship of mutual convenience between science and policy.  214

BIBLIOGRAPHY  220
Introduction

This thesis analyses the relationships between fascism and geographic explorations, a topic that historiography has investigated only marginally. Studies on exploration and colonialism primarily focused on the late modern period, the so-called ‘age of the great explorations’ (from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century), and arrive to touch the pre-fascist period. Among these works are those by Francesco Surdich, *Le grandi scoperte geografiche e la nascita del colonialismo* (1975), *Esplorazioni geografiche e sviluppo del colonialismo nell’età della rivoluzione industriale* (1979), *L’esplorazione italiana dell’Africa* (1982); and Attilio Brilli, one of the most important experts in travel literature, such as *Dove finiscono le mappe. Storie di esplorazione e di conquista* (2012), *Mercanti avventurieri. Storie di viaggi e di commerci* (2013) and *Il grande racconto dei viaggi d’esplorazione, di conquista e d’avventura* (2015). Among the works in the field of colonial studies some of the most notable are Angelo Del Boca’s *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale* (1975-1984) and *Gli Italiani in Libia* (1986-1987); and Nicola Labanca’s *Oltremare. Storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana* (2002).

These studies resulted in a quite thorough historiography of the explorations of the pre-fascist period and provided a historical reconstruction of Italian colonialism, which explained how Italy became a colonial power. However, further studies needed to be conducted on the explorations that occurred during Italy’s fascist era.¹ Thus, my thesis

¹ Among these is the essay *Le spedizioni scientifiche italiane in Africa Orientale e in Libia durante il periodo fascista* by Francesco Surdich, in the book edited by Angelo Del Boca, *Le guerre coloniali del fascismo* (2008). The essay provides a summarised history of the explorative missions that occurred in the fascist Italian colonies.
examines the relationship between the regime and geographical explorations through the biographical reconstruction of the careers of three Italian explorers who were active during the fascist period: Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta (also known as the Duke of Abruzzi), Aimone of Savoia-Aosta (the Duke of Spoleto) and Ardito Desio. To describe, interpret and explain the link between geographic explorations and fascist colonial policy, I used the biographies of these pioneers as a window to view how fascism exploited their personalities and enterprises to realize its expansionist policies.

The use of chosen biographies as a means to illustrate the relationships between power and explorers reflects Renzo De Felice’s method, who argued that scrutinizing the biography of an important person allows a better understanding of the epoch in which he acted. Studying less significant individuals does not achieve a similar result, because the biographical analysis of a prominent person also provides a knowledge and an understanding of the situations where he lived and worked. This historiographic approach directed my choice in identifying the Duke of Abruzzi, the Duke of Spoleto and Ardito Desio as principal figures in fascist explorations, due to their accomplishments and the fame they gained in the international explorative environment of that time.

In reconstructing the explorers’ biographies, I also based my research on the analysis conducted by Surdich, who emphasized the prominent role of the geographic societies in making geography a functional science for expansionism as well as examining the relationship between the explorer and colonial propaganda. According to Surdich, the geographic societies were fundamental to morally and ideologically ‘justifying’ the expansionist policies undertaken by the European colonial powers to the

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public. The relationship of mutual convenience between governments and these societies created the necessary consensus for the financing of the explorations and military conquests from the state’s budget. With regard to the figure of the explorer, Surdich observed how the colonial propaganda popularized the explorer as a national hero, able to overcome the difficulties encountered in unexplored territories, whose explorative enterprises fostered the idealised notion of his country’s greatness. The status of ‘hero’ could change to ‘martyr’ if the explorer died while carrying out his ‘mission’. Thus, explorers became an educative model for public opinion, especially for the younger generations. Propaganda exploited explorers’ deaths to emphasize the barbarism of indigenous populations, who were held responsible for their killings, in contrast with the civilized nature of Europeans. Consequently, the explorer underwent a mythization process, becoming a symbol of values such as national pride and patriotism.

However, the glorification of explorers not only related to those who acted between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, but also included those who accomplished great explorations in earlier centuries. As Attilio Brilli argued, explorers like Ferdinando Magellano or James Cook, who were respectively killed by indigenous peoples in the Philippines and Hawaii, have been glorified by Western ideology, which interpreted their explorative voyages as civilizing missions that spread the idea of progress. According to Brilli, the great explorations have always had a remarkable ideological importance for Western societies because of their contribution to the construction of the ‘national epic’.

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3 Surdich, 2. 1.
4 Ibid. 8, 9 and 61.
and Labanca’s pioneering works are the background to my first chapter which reconstructs the phases of Italian colonialism, from its beginnings through to fascism.

By the end of the 1870s most of the world had already been explored and several colonial trading posts and outposts had been established along the maritime routes that had existed for hundreds of years. The world map featured European colonial possessions in Asia, the Americas and Oceania, but only a few territories in Africa, mainly located in the coastal areas. However, the rise of the United States of America and Japan as new imperial powers drastically reduced the prominent role played by the ‘Old Continent’ in exploring and conquering territories in the extra-European continents.6 Thus, by the 1880s, the main destination for European geographic explorations became Africa’s inland territories. This turn marked a new European expansion that culminated in the Berlin Conference of 1884, which regulated Africa’s colonization by European powers. In this context the geographic societies, which had blossomed in earlier decades in cities such as Paris (1821), Berlin (1828), London (1830), Saint Petersburg (1845), New York (1851), Geneva (1858) and Florence (1867), notably increased and turned their interests from a knowledge of the geography to colonial conquest.7

In their new role as ‘vehicles of penetration’, the geographic societies took the first step in exploring unexplored and unconquered territories, as they planned expeditions and appointed scientists and explorers to lead missions on their behalf. The real intent of the explorations was not so much to know the unknown but, as the president


of the Geographic Society of Paris, Camille Clément de La Roncière-Le Noury clearly stated in 1874 at the Chamber of Commerce of Paris, while analysing the collaboration between the Chamber and the Society, and referring to past explorations and colonizations since Christopher Columbus:

The explorations and geographical discoveries that ensued over time were not inspired by mere curiosity. The discovery of America, the continued exploration of inland Africa, and the search for a passage to the North Pole pursued a political or commercial goal, along with the scientific one.³⁸

When in the 1890s European countries became mass consumption societies, they began the search for new commercial channels to export their products and import overseas goods. Economic reasons spurred and supported the explorative voyages, which were often followed by occupation and conquest, creating a complex of overseas possessions. Colonies increasingly specialized in producing a few primary products for export to the global market. In this system Africa represented a huge source of raw materials, which were essential for the industrialized economies of European nations.³⁹

In this general view, I focus primarily on the relationship between the colonial policies of pre-fascist governments and the role of the expansionist societies in supporting geographic explorations; I provide an overview of fascist colonial policy, showing how explorations and explorers represented an essential part of its fulfilment. The regime glorified both its coeval explorers and colonial pioneers and those who lived in previous decades. Fascist propaganda depicted them as national heroes and the embodiment of the new Italian, who Mussolini intended to create.¹⁰

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In the three following chapters, respectively dedicated to the figures of the Duke of Abruzzi, the Duke of Spoleto and Ardito Desio, while describing their explorative voyages I explain how and why fascism supported their explorations; which institutions, both public and private, were involved in their financing; and what attitudes the explorers adopted towards Mussolini’s regime. I start with a literature review of the biographical works to compare their data with mine which derived from my analysis of archival records. My analysis also provided some useful information to reconstructing some parts of the explorers’ lives, which previous authors overlooked.

The second chapter reconstructs and analyses the biography of Luigi Amedeo of Savoia, a *trait d’union* between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, whose explorations took place from 1897 to 1928. I divide the chapter into two parts: *The explorer* and *The colonizer*. The first section analyses his explorations and naval missions accomplished in the pre-fascist period, such as the conquest of Mount Saint Elias in Alaska (1897), his attempt to reach the North Pole (1899-1900), the conquest of the Rwenzori mountain chain in Central Africa (1906) and the attempt to conquer K2 in the Himalayan chain (1909). These explorations reflected the tendency to explore places with no practical purposes in terms of colonial expansion or geographic discovery, which typified the decades from the 1890s to 1910s, as Hobsbawm observed in *The Age of Empire*. Rather, the explorations represented a form of ‘athletic endeavour’ based mainly on personal or national competition.\footnote{Hobsbawm. 13.}

In this interpretation, the search for national prestige and the political exploitation of the explorer’s achievements were permanent features in the Duke’s expeditions and naval missions that occurred in the pre-fascist period. In particular, his polar expedition
provided clear evidence of the relationship between power and the explorer, as well as depicting the ‘personal competition’ emphasized by Hobsbawm. The monarchy indeed intended exploiting the Duke’s fame by supporting his voyages to recoup its prestige, which had been drastically blemished by the colonial defeat at Adwa (1896) and ten years of political scandals and corruption, which affected the nation.\textsuperscript{12} In contrast, the Duke could compete in the ‘international race’ to reach the North Pole against explorers from different countries.

Once fascism came to power, it inherited from the preceding liberal governments the tendency to search for national prestige by promoting daring enterprises. However, Mussolini’s regime increased this trend, using its impressive propaganda apparatus, considering it an important part of its policy to build a ‘new Italy’, stronger and equal to the most industrialized powers.\textsuperscript{13} Fascism also ‘inherited’ the Duke of Abruzzi’s international fame, which it exploited for its colonial propaganda, defining him as the forerunner and the full embodiment of the new Italian.\textsuperscript{14} These concepts were at the base of the relationship between Luigi Amedeo of Savoia and the regime, which I analyse in the second section \textit{The colonizer}. In this part I examine his colonial activity in Somalia (1919-1933) through the actions of his \textit{Società Agricola Italo-Somala} (1919), which according to the Duke’s perspective would develop a farming colony based on a joint-participation system between Somalis and Italians. Although this agricultural colonial company represented an important part in analysing his relationship with fascism, I also include his 1927 diplomatic mission to Ethiopia, designed by Mussolini to increase

\textsuperscript{12} Emilio Gentile, 1900. Inizia il secolo, (Bari: Laterza, 2013). (Kindle Locations 205-208). The most serious of these facts was the \textit{scandalo della Banca Romana} (Roman Bank scandal 1892-1894), which involved some politicians and bank directors, who were accused of illegal production of banknotes.
\textsuperscript{13} Forms of national and personal competition and the exploitation of explorations to achieve national prestige can be seen in Francesco De Pinedo’s and Ernesto Campanelli’s long-distance flight in 1925; Umberto Nobile’s polar flights in 1926 and 1928; the transatlantic \textit{Decennale} flight by Balbo; and the winning of the \textit{Blue Ribbon} by the ocean liner \textit{Rex} in 1933.
\textsuperscript{14} Mussolini. 315.
Italian penetration into that country. The mission was in fact the background to Luigi of Savoia’s last expedition: the exploration of the Wabi Shebelle river’s Ethiopian sector, in 1928, which resulted in a deeper knowledge of the river’s flowrate, fundamental to his farming colonization project in Somalia.

Most critical literature described his colonial activity hagiographically, interpreting his agricultural experiment as an example of ‘good colonialism’. Instead, as I have also stated in the specific essay *A colonizing agricultural company in Somalia: The Duke of Abruzzi’s «Società Agricola Italo-Somala» in the Italian Colonial Fascist System*, the Società’s activities impacted on Somalis and Somalia by transforming the traditional Somali agricultural system, based on subsistence farming, into a huge consortium. In addition, the Duke’s firm resorted to using forced labour to guarantee a constant flow of manpower. The semi-nomadic Somali peasants were forced to inhabit the lands ‘acquired’ by the Duke’s firm, which effectively limited the freedom of movement of local populations.  

Such considerations have been often overlooked, even by the most recent of the Duke’s biographers, who depicted Luigi of Savoia as a national hero for his explorations and a ‘merciful colonizer’, continuing the hagiographic representation that began in the pre-fascist period and strengthened during the regime. This attitude failed to recognize

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16 The popularization of the Duke of Abruzzi’s image related to various contexts in Italian society. For instance, in 1907, the *Navigazione Generale Italiana* (General Sailing Italian Company) built a line steamship named *Duca degli Abruzzi*, which sailed along the North and South Atlantic routes until begin scrapped in 1929. Noel Reginald Pixell Bonsor, *North Atlantic seaway. An illustrated history of the passenger services linking the Old World with the New*, 4 vols., vol. 3 (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1975). 1117. In 1908 the Italian Alpine Club named its mountain shelter in the Gran Sasso d’Italia (mt.2388, L’Aquila) after the Duke. "Agli albori del Novecento. Novant'anni della sezione di Roma del C.A.I. 1873/1963," *Rivista mensile del CAI* (1963). In 1933 the Italian Navy built the light cruiser *Duca degli Abruzzi*, which served until it was decommissioned in 1961. In the 1930s, it also increased the number of streets, squares and even schools known as *Duca degli Abruzzi*, such as the Royal Technical Institute
he was part of the western society that arose between the nineteenth and twentieth century, whose mentality was racist and imperialist and legitimated colonial conquests in the name of ‘exporting’ the progress and modernity of its culture to those countries considered backward and inhabited by inferior races, compared with those from the ‘white nations’.17

Thus, a typical representation of the Duke still emphasizes and exploits his image of ‘national hero’, as demonstrated by the media’s periodic interest in celebrating the various anniversaries of his achievements. The most publicized was the expedition to the North Pole, organized by the famous Italian showman Mike Bongiorno in 2001, to celebrate the centennial of the expedition led by the Duke of Abruzzi. The commemorative expedition was entirely sponsored by the Italian broadcasting company Mediaset, which provided live coverage of some phases on television.18 However, it also engendered journalistic interest in minor aspects of the famous Duke’s enterprise, as revealed in an article issued by the main Italian sports pages La Gazzetta dello Sport, which compared the diet followed by the Duke and his companion with that of modern climbers.19 Furthermore, in 2009 the Italian newspaper La Repubblica commemorated the centennial of Luigi of Savoia’s climbing expedition to the Himalaya, publishing a story of his life that concluded by emphasizing how his ‘revolutionary activity’ in Africa


18 Carlo Brambilla, "Polo Nord, cent’anni dopo in diretta l’esploratore Mike," La Repubblica, 8 marzo 2001. Among the members of the centenary expedition, the Italian Research National Council (CNR) sent its researchers, who took a sample of the polar ice to examine it and determine the effect of pollution over the Polar icefields. Marco Saporiti, Canale 5. La storia, i personaggi, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Milano: Cerebro Editore, 2009). 269, 270.

19 Davide Cremona Camilletti and Lorenzo Somenzini, "Com’è cambiato il menù di chi va al Polo Nord? Come si alimentavano i membri della storica spedizione al Polo Nord compiuta dal Duca degli Abruzzi nel 1900 e cosa mangeranno Mike Bongiorno e i suoi compagni nel corso della prossima spedizione?," La Gazzetta dello Sport, 7 aprile 2001.
‘astounded the somnolent Somalia colony.’

Finally, in 2017, the newspaper La Stampa issued an article which celebrated the hundred and twentieth anniversary of the Duke’s conquest of Mount Saint Elias.

In the third chapter, I reconstruct and analyze the biography of Aimone of Savoia-Aosta, the Duke of Spoleto, who was an Admiral of the Italian Navy, explorer and a nephew of the Duke of Abruzzi. His life has been little investigated compared, for instance, with that of his uncle and the few existing studies on him, published between 1978 and 2006, focus on his designation as King of Croatia, under the name of Tomislav II (though he never effectively took the throne), as part of the political plan established in May 1941 between Mussolini, Vittorio Emanuele III and Ante Pavelić, who proclaimed the Independent State of Croatia on 10 April 1941. According to the existing studies, the Duke’s political involvement in the fascist expansionist policy for the Balkans represents his link with fascism.

Instead, I note that his relationship with fascism was also based on other political matters, which included diplomatic missions and a geographic exploration. To explain how fascism exploited his achievements I firstly retrace his life from the post-First World War period to 1926; then I describe his geographic expedition to Karakorum (Himalaya) in 1929 and finally analyze his designation as King of the Independent State of Croatia. At the beginning of his career as a naval officer, in the aftermath of the First World War, Aimone of Savoia took part in two important political-diplomatic missions: in

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20 Stefano Malatesta, "Duca degli Abruzzi. La leggenda del Re scalatore " La Repubblica, 6 dicembre 2009.
22 His involvement as King of Croatia was analyzed by Stevan Pavlowitch in his essay The King who never was: An instance of Italian involvement in Croatia, 1941-3 (1978); Gian Nicola Amoretti in his book La vicenda Italo-Croata nei documenti di Aimone di Savoia (1941-1943) (1979); Oddone Talpo in his Aimone di Savoia, Re di Croazia. Una figura da rivalutare (1980), and by Giulio Vignoli in his book Il sovrano sconosciuto: Tomislavo II Re di Croazia (2006).
Transcaucasia (1919-1920) and South America (1920-1921). Thus, once fascism came to power, he was appointed to lead a political mission to China (1922-1923) and another to Romania (1926). The analysis of these expeditions showed a common feature between the foreign policy undertaken by the liberal government and the fascist one: exploiting his royal rank to gain relevant political information and increase Italian national prestige abroad.

The Transcaucasian and South American missions clearly confirmed this attitude, because the government respectively aimed to increase local governments’ attention to the mission through the Duke’s presence as its representative, in order to gain for Italy the opportunity to exploit the copious local mineral resources. The expedition to South America also showed the government’s intention to use the presence of a member of the Royal House to establish stronger diplomatic relationships with the local authorities and reinforce the connection between the Italian communities of Brazil and Argentina with the homeland. To understand this aspect, it is noteworthy that at that time, the Italian government often used to appoint Navy commanders or high-ranking Army officers as its diplomatic representatives, who despite the official nature of their role, could not increase the political prestige of a mission as successfully as the presence of a member of the Royal House. This explains why Aimone of Savoia, and prior to him his uncle Luigi Amedeo, participated in various political missions abroad: their direct lineage from the royal dynasty undoubtedly increased the relevance of a mission.

This political ‘exploitation’ of Royal Family members also typified the Duke of Spoleto’s expeditions to China and Romania. In the first, Aimone of Savoia led an explorative mission to the inland areas of the Chinese southern provinces to gain information on the local political context from the Italian missionaries serving there. The mission to Romania aimed to strengthen Italian prestige in the Danubian region, which
Mussolini intended pursuing by exploiting the Duke’s royal rank. According to *il Duce*, Aimone of Savoia’s presence would contribute to gaining official international recognition of Italian political interests in Romania and consolidate the relationship between the two countries.

With regard to the 1929 geographic exploration of Karakorum, its reconstruction represents an unreleased part of his biography, because the historiography has fundamentally ignored it. In contrast, I took it into full consideration as part of the fascist programme to promote national prestige by undertaking daring enterprises. The organization of this expedition also demonstrated the involvement of private institutions in its financing and how the regime dealt with it. The exploration was initially conceived as a climbing expedition focused on conquering K2 and giving Italy the world altitude record, but due to financial and logistic difficulties, the climbing goal was eventually transformed into a scientific one. This considerably reduced its political importance, which resulted in an ambiguous attitude from Mussolini, as he did not adequately support the promotion of the expedition or the diffusion of its scientific results, thus reducing even its scientific significance.

Finally, I examine his complicated involvement in the ‘Italian-Croatian’ matter and his secret attempt to overthrow Mussolini and the regime by the end of 1942. This analysis highlights the contradictory approach of Aimone of Savoia to Mussolini’s plan to establish a monarchy in Croatia to achieve stronger penetration of that country. He publicly declared himself eager to accept his designation, while privately he completely opposed this political intent. I interpret his attitude as an attempt to buy time and try to convince, unsuccessfully, both the King and Mussolini to release him from his appointment. To support his ‘strategy’, the Duke provided monthly political reports on Croatia addressed to *il Duce* and Vittorio Emanuele III, which stated the unsuitability of
Italy’s involvement in the Croatian context, where Germany instigated an anti-Italian policy among some members of Pavelić’s government, although Hitler’s government claimed to recognize Croatia as an Italian sphere of influence.

This political involvement of the Duke, who was faced with determination by both Mussolini and the King to continue to support the ‘Croatian monarchical project’, and the Italian military defeats in North Africa and in the Russian front, convinced the Duke to develop, at the end of 1942, a secret plan to overthrow the regime, dissociate Italy from the alliance with Germany and redeem the image of the monarchy, which had been drastically compromised by fascism.

In the fourth and last chapter, *Ardito Desio: geologist and explorer: the scientific side of fascist colonial policy*, I reconstruct and analyze the biography of the famous Italian explorer and scientist Ardito Desio, who I define as the ‘scientific side’ of the relationship between fascism and exploration. With this definition I emphasize that fascism pursued a different political aim in exploiting his explorations, compared with what it sought through the Duke of Abruzzi and the Duke of Spoleto’s expeditions. Indeed, as I previously mentioned, the regime primarily exploited their personalities and expeditions to gain prestige or increase the political significance of diplomatic missions. Desio’s explorations would develop efficient projects for enhancing the exploitation of overseas territories, especially in agriculture and in the extraction of raw materials.

Fascism considered scientific research fundamental in realizing its colonial plans and Desio endorsed the involvement of science in supporting Italy’s colonial policies. My biographical reconstruction shows how Desio achieved a prominent role in the field of scientific research as applied to colonial policy, due to his expertise and his strong connections with the most important representatives of the fascist establishment.
Therefore, I define the relationship between the regime and the explorer as mutual convenience: fascism appropriated Desio’s expertise for its colonial purposes, while he benefitted from the regime by receiving several appointments that helped to increase his fame as a scientist and allowed him to publish several scientific papers related to the Italian colonies.

To explain this ‘success’ and his connection with the regime, I divide my reconstruction into two main sections: *The African explorations* and *The Libyan period*, in which I respectively analyze his explorations between the 1920s and 1930s, such as the expeditions to the Dodecanese archipelago, Jaghbub and Fezzan; and his scientific activity in Libya from 1934 under Italo Balbo’s governorship (1934-1940), which allowed him to discover oil in the Libyan subsoil. In the first part I draw attention to Desio’s connections with the most important scholars in the geographic field, such as Carlo De Stefani, Nicola Vacchelli and Olinto Marinelli, who played a vital role in introducing him to the scientific and explorative environment, in which the Italian Geographic Society mastered the organization of geographic explorations. I consider this aspect essential in explaining why Desio had a key part in the most important Italian geographic expeditions to Africa during the fascist period, such as the Jaghbub oasis exploration (1926) and those carried out in Fezzan (1932-1935).

These experiences and his skilled geological knowledge made him one of the most important explorers in the 1930s, but beyond his scientific expertise (which is still acknowledged by the international scientific community for his prominent contributions to geological studies), even more important was his committed adherence to fascism, which he joined before the March on Rome, although in his autobiography he downplayed this aspect.23 I examine this strong involvement with the regime in the second section of the chapter by analyzing his friendship with Italo Balbo. My study of
their correspondence clearly demonstrated how the fascist leader’s support of Desio’s research strengthened his connections with power, making the geologist-explorer a ‘benchmark’ in the fascist scientific environment.

Conclusions and findings of my research are to be found within the progression of the arguments in each chapter of my thesis.

Chapter

I

Explorers, explorations and colonial entanglements.

An overview from Massawa to fascism.

In March 1970 the trimonthly journal *Africa*, issued by the *Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente* (IsIAO), published an article to commemorate the centennial of the ‘purchase of Assab Bay’ in 1869. The author, Enrico de Leone, provided a quote from Giuseppe Mazzini, in which the famous Italian patriot and politician argued that Europe had an obligation to civilize African nations. Mazzini claimed that if France was entitled to rule Morocco, then Italy should govern Tunisia due to its proximity to Italian shores. Tunis, Tripoli and Cyrenaica belonged to that part of Africa which was included in the European system. This view shows how some Italian activists and politicians believed that the unification of Italy was not their final purpose. In fact, unifying the country represented the most efficient way to lead Italians in the ‘scramble for civilization’ carried out by the European powers and let them recommence their mission of civilizing the world, as their ancestors had done in
Despite these pre-unification overseas ambitions, Italy only began its colonial experience a decade later, following unification.

On 15 November 1869, the missionary Giuseppe Sapeto and the maritime entrepreneur Raffaele Rubattino bought a 4-mile-long portion of Eritrean territory on the western side, from Mount Ganga to Lumah Cape, from the sultans Ibrahim and Hassan ben Ahmad. The idea of purchasing Assab Bay was also supported by the search for new markets created by the opening of the Suez Canal, which established a new, shorter route to the Far East. Groups of maritime traders, like Rubattino’s shipping company, aimed to found commercial companies to export local materials to those lands lying on the new commercial routes created by the Canal.

Merchants and maritime entrepreneurs represented the advocacy groups who promoted expansionist programmes and solicited the government to firmly undertake an expansionist policy to avoid the alienation of Italian trade routes by those passing through the Canal. They were a small part of society but exerted a great deal of pressure on the government, influencing Italian overseas policy in the 1880s. The fledgling Kingdom of Italy still had to solve many problems related to unification.

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2 Sapeto and Rubattino acted as private investors, concealing the interest of the Italian government in this area. Sapeto was appointed by the Prime Minister, Federico Luigi Menabrea, and the Minister of the Navy, Augusto Riboty, to explore the Red Sea’s shores. Before leaving, Sapeto signed an agreement in which he declared that the Italian government appointed him to buy beaches, ports and natural harbours that could be useful for the establishment of commercial outposts. Angelo Del Bocca, Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Dall’Unità alla marcia su Roma, vol. 1 (Milano: Mondadori, 2001). 36,37.
3 Ibid, 33.
4 Giuliano Manzari and Paolo Alberini, "La partecipazione dei militari italiani alle esplorazioni geografiche del diciannovesimo secolo," Informazioni della Difesa 2007. 53. Private companies and entrepreneurs who had commercial interests overseas and managed the maritime trades promoted market surveys to discover the most suitable and profitable goods that could be commercialised via the new markets of the Red Sea and South-East Asia, which had been brought closer by the Suez Canal. Daniele Natili, Un programma coloniale. La Società Geografica Italiana e le origini dell’espansione in Etiopia (1867-1884) (Roma: Gangemi Editore, 2008). 15.
such as the ‘Capture of Rome’ (1870)⁶ and had to deal with a weakened economy, inherited from the independence wars. Such problems were the main concerns of Italian politicians, and they arose while other European powers were updating their previous colonial possessions. This background emphasises how Italy was belatedly ‘building’ its colonial experience.

Concepts such as colonialism and imperialism were low priorities in Italian foreign policy in the three decades following unification. Initially the government focused on obtaining official recognition by other European States; then in the 1870s Italy aimed to play a role as defender of the international status quo,⁷ avoiding the threat of wars with other powers. Finally, in the 1880s the government oriented its foreign policy towards overseas interests.⁸ Thus, in 1882 Assab Bay officially became an Italian possession as Rubattino’s shipping company sold the concession to the Italian government. This event marked the official beginning of Italian colonialism.⁹ With the Berlin Conference (1884-1885),¹⁰ interest in imperialism increased in Italy, as the meeting re-shaped the existing colonial map of Africa and reaffirmed the spheres of influence of the European countries. However, Italy did not hold any colonies in Africa on which to base its expansionist goals; rather the

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⁶ The full unification of Italy occurred in 1870 through the ‘Capture of Rome’, when Italian troops entered Rome as the outcome of the Franco-Prussian War. Thanks to the outbreak of the war (19 July 1870), France was forced to withdraw its garrison from Rome, providing a great opportunity for the Italian government to occupy the city. The ‘Capture of Rome’ was possible after the Battle of Sedan (1 September), in which Napoleon III was captured and the French Republic was proclaimed few days later. Italian soldiers assaulted the city, conquering it on 20 September. William Simpson and Martin Jones, Europe 1783-1914 (New York: Routledge, 2015). 217-219.
⁷ The government sought overseas possessions where it could establish penal colonies and deport criminals and bandits, who increased in number as a result of the government’s struggle against brigandry in southern Italy. Alessandro Aruffo, Il colonialismo italiano. Da Crispi a Mussolini (Roma: Datanews Editrice, 2010). 24.
⁸ Labanca. 16-18, 49.
⁹ Aruffo. 27.
¹⁰ Italy was not initially invited to participate in the Berlin Conference, and it was only after the persistence of the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pasquale Stanislao Mancini, that the German Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck was persuaded to let Italy take part. However, Italy was just an observer at the Conference, like the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Sweden, Denmark, the Ottoman Empire and Russia. Giancarlo Giordano, Cilindri e feluche. La politica estera dell’Italia dopo l’Unita’ (Roma: Aracne, 2008). 263.
government aimed to seek national prestige to insert the country into the ‘circle’ of the great powers.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Agents of Colonialism. Geographic Societies and Explorers}

Ship-owners and merchants were an elite group in Italian society as they essentially represented the mercantile bourgeoisie of Northern Italy and the maritime trade groups.\textsuperscript{12} However, they can also be considered one of the first expansionist groups, who encouraged geographical exploration. This ‘economic elite’ stoked the expansionist debate, stimulating the government to undertake an overseas policy. Thus, in this political climate the \textit{Reale Società Geografica Italiana} (Royal Italian Geographic Society) was founded in Florence in 1867. Later other societies were established, such as the \textit{Società d’Esplorazione Commerciale in Africa} (Society for Commercial Exploration in Africa), founded in Milan in 1879, and the \textit{Club Africano d’Italia} (Italian African Club) founded in Naples in 1880, which became the \textit{Società Africana d’Italia} (African Society of Italy) in 1882. Italy followed the European trend of the nineteenth century in which the main European countries had established geographical societies between the 1820s and the 1860s. In 1821 the \textit{Société de Géographie} was established in Paris; in 1828 Berlin set up its own geographic society and two years later the Royal Geographic Society was founded in London. In 1856 the \textit{Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft} was founded in Vienna.\textsuperscript{13} The nineteenth century could be defined as ‘the century of the Geographic Societies’ due to the large number of geographic or expansionist societies established. These societies promoted commercial activities in those countries where expansionism was

\textsuperscript{11} Aruffo. 30.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 25.
\textsuperscript{13} Natili. 52n.
oriented; they also acted as advocacy groups, influencing their governments to continue expansionism, and they aimed to ‘educate’ public opinion about the utility of colonialism.\textsuperscript{14}  

The Italian Geographic Society’s membership reflected the elitist environment in which it was founded. Many politicians and aristocrats, maritime trade entrepreneurs and members of the military establishment joined the society, bringing the necessary financial support to allow it to influence government policy in terms of expansionism and colonialism. By contrast, scholars and scientists made up only 10\% of the membership.\textsuperscript{15} With the development of the geographic and commercial societies, geographic explorations began to be planned on a large scale, as they could rely on economic and logistical support from the societies and the government. This context favoured an expansionist policy based on establishing so-called \textit{coloni di popolamento} (population colonies),\textsuperscript{16} where commercial interests and the exploitation of raw materials merged.\textsuperscript{17} Italy adopted this colonial policy in all its overseas possessions (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Libya), believing it to be a solution to the economic crisis facing the country at that time, and an alternative to demographic growth.\textsuperscript{18} The foundation of population colonies was endorsed from Crispi’s expansionist period until the rise of fascism. The regime tried to target the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{14} Valeria Deplano, "Educare all’oltremare. La Società Africana d’Italia e il colonialismo fascista," \textit{RiME, Rivista dell’Istituto di Storia dell’Europa Mediterranea}, no. 9 (2012). 82.  
\textsuperscript{16} The \textit{coloni di popolamento} intended to colonise and inhabit a territory by making the settlers sedentary. These colonies differed from those called \textit{coloni di sfruttamento} (exploitation colonies), in which the colonisers exploited both the indigenous population and the natural resources of the colonized place.  
\textsuperscript{17} Aruffo. 27.  
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 29.}
flow of Italian emigration to colonial possessions where settlements that Italians could permanently inhabit could be established.\textsuperscript{19}

The 1870s represented a landmark in exploration. Thereafter, expeditions carried out by ‘lone explorers’, who acted without resources in unknown territories, were replaced by those organised on a large scale and supported by interest groups. In this new context, explorers became the fundamental component, and the Italian Geographic Society was the most important representative of the expansionist lobbies. It supplied financial (mainly by launching public subscriptions) and logistical aid to expeditions. This new approach was also enriched by the endorsement of commercial societies, the Savoia Royal Family, military entrepreneurs, and a sector of the press, all of which considered explorers’ achievements as an acquisition of rights over the explored territories.\textsuperscript{20} In 1876, the Geographic Society planned the first large-scale Italian expedition by launching a public subscription to collect the necessary funds. The mission aimed to explore the Shewa (\textit{Scioa}) region and was led by the marquise Orazio Antinori, who was also a member of the society.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20} Angelo Del Boca, \textit{La nostra Africa: nel racconto di cinquanta italiani che l'hanno percorsa, esplorata e amata} (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2003): 27-33
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Dall’Unità alla marcia su Roma}, 1. 57-63. The expedition represented one of the first contacts between Italy and Ethiopia, but the very first step was made by Menelik, the ras of the Scioa region. He desperately sought to establish good relations with the Christian European countries to gain political recognition for his kingdom and receive weapons from them. Menelik needed European aid to continue his war against the Ethiopian emperor Johannes IV, in order to overthrow him and rule the country. Thus, the ras sent two diplomatic missions to Vittorio Emanuele II, King of Italy, which were respectively led by the Abuna Abba Michael (1872) and Pietro Arnoux (1876). Abba Michael brought Abyssinian handicraft goods and local products to Vittorio Emanuele II and depicted Ethiopia as a prosperous region with a range of opportunities for the development of commercial activities. However, Abba Michael’s account misrepresented the real potential of the country, even though he fuelled the idea of setting up a great geographic expedition to Ethiopia in the minds of the management of the Geographic Society. Arnoux’s mission failed even before reaching Italy as it was attacked in Zeila by the local emir, who pillaged the caravan.
The organization of the expedition reveals the real intentions of the Geographic Society in establishing commercial treaties with the Shewa region and shows its premeditated aim to conceal these interests with scientific purposes, such as the contribution to the discovery of the source of the Nile, a landmark in the study of Africa’s hydrography at that time.\textsuperscript{22} Also, the explorers acted in the same way as the Geographic Society, as demonstrated in a letter from Odoardo Beccari, a famous Italian explorer and naturalist, to his friend Antinori. Beccari considered the Shewa’s exploration to be an important support to the Italian presence in Eastern Africa. Thus, he recommended Antinori should explore the most convenient routes to connect the southern Abyssinian inlands with Assab, envisaging the development of commercial exchanges between the two locations.\textsuperscript{23}

The press, along with the Geographic Society, had an important role in propagandizing the expedition. It depicted the mission as a matter of national prestige, emphasising the results that could be achieved.\textsuperscript{24} The expedition effectively became a matter of national prestige, once the Geographic Society rejected the offer of the Royal Geographic Society of London to affiliate an Italian member to Charles Gordon’s expedition to the high Nile region, which the British were organising at that time. The British proposal would have relegated the Italians to a secondary role, while the Geographic Society aimed to organise its own mission entirely composed of Italians. Thus, the press and the Geographic Society put pressure on the government to back a ‘national expedition’. Finally, King Vittorio Emanuele II made

\textsuperscript{22} Natili. 89-94.  
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 91, 92  
\textsuperscript{24} Carazzi. 61, 62
the national expedition official, by appointing Antinori to visit Menelik in regard to the previous diplomatic mission led by his ambassador.25

**Explorers and the press**

Between the 1870s and 1880s, the press played an increasing role in promoting the expansionist debate, which had its roots in previous decades. At that time, popular interest in unexplored places began to increase due to the large number of explorers, scientists and travellers who presented accounts of the lands they had visited and depicted exotic images of them. Such ‘travel literature’ and its large-scale diffusion through the press contributed to the sensationalization of exploration26. With the spread of a ‘culture of exploration’ the stereotype of the explorer became increasingly entrenched in the collective consciousness. Explorers were “pioneers if they succeeded or even heroes if they died” during their explorations.27 The diffusion of the explorative culture, using explorers’ accounts, aimed to “educate the public to accept the stabilization and continuance of the Italian colonial adventure in a positive manner.”28 An example of how the press participated in the colonial and expansionist debate is given by the *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* and *L’Esploratore: Giornale di viaggi e geografia commerciale*, respectively issued by the Italian Geographic Society and *Società d’esplorazione commerciale in Africa* of

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25 Natili. 89-92
27 Del Boca, *La nostra Africa: nel racconto di cinquanta italiani che l’hanno percorsa, esplorata e amata*. 27.
Milan. The founders of *L’Esploratore* were Manfredo Camperio and the missionary Daniele Comboni. Camperio was an explorer and a member of the Italian Geographic Society as well as being a founder of the Milanese Exploration Society.

The significant difference between the two newspapers was the language they adopted: the *Bollettino* preferred a scientific style, targeting specialised readers, while the *Esploratore*’s language was much more accessible even to those who were not scientists or geographers. Camperio was a tenacious colonialist who encouraged the Italian government to conquer colonies in strategic areas of the globe. He stoked the expansionist debate through his journal, where he published several articles based on the accounts of the explorer-reporters in several continents. Thus, Camperio reached a greater number of readers, informing them about the final purposes of the explorations, such as earning Italy influence in places that were sources of raw materials, or establishing Italian dominance in certain markets. These aspects were his ‘educational’ goal developed through the cultural environment he created with his magazine behind the *Società di Esplorazione Commerciale in Africa*. Conversely, the *Bollettino* was an elite journal; it reached a very limited number of readers who mostly belonged to the scientific community of the Geographic Society. The journal

29 The monthly magazine was established in July 1877. Camperio popularized travel literature by building a network of correspondence in which Italian explorers sent his journal their own accounts from the countries they were travelling in. Stefano Mazzotti, *Esploratori perduti. Storie dimenticate di naturalisti italiani di fine Ottocento* (Torino: Codice Edizioni, 2011). xxi.

30 Ibid, xxi.

31 Anna Kemény Milanini, *La Società d’Esplorazione Commerciale in Africa e la politica coloniale (1879-1914)* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1973). 11. The *Società di Esplorazione Commerciale in Africa* represented the economic interests of the Milanese financial-industrial establishment. Among the founders were bankers and textile and chemical industrialists. Milan represented the most industrialised part of Italy and the missions of its exploration society were mainly focused on offering support for those companies interested in establishing commercial relations with the African market. However, the Milanese exploration society oriented itself towards the Americas, the destination of an increasing number of Italian emigrants. The various geographic destinations where the society directed its interests reflected the contrast between the financial-industrial establishments of Milan and Rome, where the power was strongly centralised, and the government aimed to focus on exploring Africa. This created a division between the *Società di Esplorazione Commerciale in Africa* and the *Società Geografica Italiana*, which tried to be the ‘official voice’ of the government with regard to colonial policy. Giancarlo Monina, *Il consenso coloniale. Le Società Geografiche e l’Istituto Coloniale Italiano (1896-1914)* (Roma: Carocci Editore, 2002). 32, 33.
also reported the status of some scientific studies, the most recent discoveries in geographic fields, and provided a detailed chronicle (maintaining a scientific approach) of the meetings of the Society.

The expansionist societies also maintained their elitist status by organising ad hoc conferences to discuss new expeditions or the results of previous explorations. These meetings were addressed to an audience that came from the upper levels of Italian society. Receiving an invitation to attend these meetings was recognition of being an important person in Italian society. The most outstanding conferences were those organized by the Italian Geographical Society. Two of them were particularly noteworthy because of the reputation of the speakers: the first was held by Prince Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta, Duke of Abruzzi, to present the results of his North Pole exploration (1900), while the other involved Prince Scipione Borghese, who presented an account of his 1907 automotive expedition from Beijing to Paris.32

**The golden age of Italian colonialism: conquests and defeats**

In the 1880s and 1890s the exploration societies had immense influence in propagandising and supporting new colonial conquests that influenced Italian expansionist policies.33 Italy achieved its most significant expansionist goals: the conquest of Eritrea, entry to Abyssinia and the acquisition of some regions of Somalia. Through the extension of Italian control over Eritrea, which was officially declared an Italian colony on 1 January 1890, Italy began the penetration of Abyssinia by encroachments over those Eritrean territories that were effectively

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32 Ibid, 141, 142.
33 Giancarlo Monina defined the period between the 1880s and 1890s as the ‘golden age’ of Italian colonialism in his *Il consenso coloniale: Le Società geografiche e l’Istituto Coloniale Italiano (1896-1914)*, 9,10.
controlled by the Ethiopian empire. It was in this context that Italian colonial troops suffered a serious defeat at Dogali in 1887, which marked the beginning of what would be a long period of hostility between Italy and Ethiopia (it ended only in 1936 when fascist Italy defeated the Abyssinians and Mussolini proclaimed the Italian Empire).\textsuperscript{34} In the following decade, Italians invaded the northern Ethiopian region of Tigrè, where they built fortifications and carried out military raids to establish control. The invasion of that region led to the disastrous defeat at Adwa in 1896.\textsuperscript{35}

The Italian expansion into Somalia began in 1884, when Pasquale Stanislao Mancini, Minister of Foreign Affairs, appointed the explorer Antonio Cecchi to lead a commercial mission to Zanzibar, whose sultan ruled over the Somali coastal regions and ports. The government officially described Cecchi’s expedition as a mission in support of Colonel Tancredi Saletta’s military expedition corps, which was sent to the Red Sea in order to occupy Massawa (1885).\textsuperscript{36} Cecchi signed a commercial treaty with the sultan and then moved to Somalia to explore the area surrounding the mouth of the Juba river and investigate the possibility of establishing an Italian protectorate in the area.\textsuperscript{37} Cecchi’s exploration was the result of an

\textsuperscript{34} During the occupation of Eritrea, Italians moved from Massaua to the inland regions, where they established the stronghold of Saati in a territory under the control of the Ethiopian empire. On 25 January 1887, ras Alula assaulted and besieged the fort, but the Italians held on. Despite the failure of the assault, the Italians were left with very few munitions and supplies. Thus, the Italian command sent 548 soldiers with extra food and munitions to reinforce the presidio. However, on 26 January the Alula’s troops intercepted and ambushed the Italian column, killing 430 Italians. The political result of what was called the ‘Massacre of Dogali’ was the creation of open enmity between Italians and the emperor of Ethiopia, Johannes IV. Erlich Haggai, "Alula, ‘the Son of Qubi’: A ‘King's Man’ in Ethiopia, 1875–1897," \textit{The Journal of African History} 15, no. 2 (1974): 269.

\textsuperscript{35} For a detailed account of the Italian invasion of Tigrè, see Del Boca, \textit{Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Dall'Unità alla marcia Su Roma}, 1. 531-565. In December 1895, Tigrè combined with the Italian colony of Eritrea. In this region Italians had some scattered garrisons, such as those of Amba Alagi and Macallè. Ethiopians, led by Ras Maconnèn, attacked the Amba Alagi fort, overwhelming the Italians, then besieged the fort of Macallè, which surrendered two months later. After several diplomatic attempts to end the enmity, on 1 March 1896 the Italians decided to attack the Ethiopians in Adwa but they were defeated (Italy had about 7,000 casualties) by the Abyssinian troops. Ibid, 644-683.

\textsuperscript{36} Aruffò. 42.

\textsuperscript{37} Cecchi was chosen because of his knowledge of the southern Ethiopian area and because he was one of the most passionate supporters of the colonization of Somalia. Del Boca, \textit{Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Dall'Unità alla marcia Su Roma}, 1. 235.
international policy undertaken by Italy, in which Great Britain supported the Italian expeditions to counteract the rising French influence over the Red Sea (England had established its protectorate over Egypt and aimed to keep its supremacy over the routes developed since the opening of the Suez Canal) and German intentions to occupy the Juba and Majeerteen’s ports. The British support for the Italian colonial aims in these areas was convenient for Great Britain’s overseas policy because Italy was a weaker power compared with France and Germany.

In 1889, the Italian government established its own protectorates over the two sultanates of Hobyo (Obbia) and Majeerteen (Migiurtina), respectively located in the southern and northern parts of the country. Once Italy controlled the protectorates, it began to occupy the regions between the ports of Kismayo, Barawa, Merka, Mogadishu and Uarscheich, located in the Benadir region. In this context, the Italian Navy played a key role, as the government sent warships to establish relationships with the local chiefs in order to gain possession of the lands. However, the Navy did not merely provide ships to carry on explorative programme; it also provided men. This was the environment in which naval officer and explorer Vittorio Bottego operated, leading two African expeditions between 1892 and 1896. Bottego, as analysed by the historian Alessandro Aruffo in his Il Colonialismo Italiano (2010), distinguished himself for the violence and cruelty he inflicted on the indigenous

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38 Ibid, 234.
39 Ibid, 234.
40 Del Boca, Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale. Dall'unità Alla Marcia Su Roma, 1. 416.
people. Despite his criminal methods, Bottego was depicted as a national hero and is still memorialised in streets and squares bearing his name all over Italy. In 1897, he was posthumously awarded a gold medal for military ‘valour’ for his ‘heroic’ death in Equatorial Africa, because he led “a scientific-military expedition through unexplored countries”, which were “inhabited by hostile and aggressive peoples.” Faced with these ‘difficulties’, Bottego “showed remarkable bravery attacking the enemy with only 86 men, who fought against one thousand locals. He died heroically, wounded in the breast and head.” Bottego dedicated much energy to “building forts along the Ethiopian border and signing alliances with the Galla people against those from the Scioa.”

The legacy of Adwa. The crisis of the Geographic Society

The disaster of Adwa deeply shocked the Italian public, generating an overwhelming reaction against imperialism and expansionism, which forced Prime Minister Francesco Crispi to resign. The aftermath of the defeat at Adwa also involved the Geographic Society as it reflected Crispi’s expansionist policies. Crispi had generously financed the Society as long as its explorations also had political purposes in addition to ‘scientific’ ones. In the three decades following its foundation, the Italian Geographic Society contributed to the creation of a colonialist ideology by supporting several explorations, rather than dedicating itself to

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41 Aruffo also emphasised that although Bottego’s exploration had an orographic task, it concealed an anti-Ethiopian espionage mission. Bottego arranged an expeditionary corps made up of criminals imprisoned in Massua jail and unscrupulous Ascari of various ethnicities, who during their penetration of the western part of Somalia killed any indigenous people who tried to stop their ‘exploration’. Aruffo, 43, 44.
42 This is part of the official motivation for granting the gold medal to Bottego. It is reported in the official website of the Presidency of the Italian Republic, www.quirinale.it - “Le Onorificenze della Repubblica Italiana”. Website consulted on 20 May 2017.
43 Aruffo. 43.
44 Del Boca, Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Dall’Unità alla marcia su Roma, 1. 420.
undertaking a geographic study of the new Italian territory. This ‘ideological mission’ emphasised the Society’s weakness, as the government ascribed to it the responsibility for the failure of the expansionist policy.\textsuperscript{45}

The legacy of Adwa also turned Italian domestic policy into the so-called politica di raccoglimento undertaken by the governments that succeeded Crispi.\textsuperscript{46} This policy focused essentially on keeping a European balance between the powers, oriented to the Mediterranean area, rather than pursuing an African imperialistic policy. However, although the politica di raccoglimento contributed to the end of Crispi’s imperialist era, Italy did not give up on expansionism, as the international events of that period demonstrate. It kept the Eritrean colony and Somali possessions; it participated in the international naval mission sent to Crete in 1897; then, it sent a few contingents to China in 1900 as part of a bigger international military expedition. From such missions, Italy obtained the very small territorial concession of Tientsin.\textsuperscript{47} The Chinese mission showed that an expansionist policy was still significant for some of the ruling class, the Monarchy and those industrialists working in the iron, steel and shipping industries. However, in this decade the Italian overseas interest partially turned away from Eastern Africa and into the Mediterranean area.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{45} Carazzi. 178, 189, 190.
\textsuperscript{46} In the aftermath of the Adwa defeat, Antonio di Rudinì, the Prime Minister who succeeded to Francesco Crispi, adopted the politica di raccoglimento (consolidation policy), which was based on rejecting the expansionist policy adopted by the previous government. However, the policy specifically aimed to reorganize the Italian presence in Africa militarily and economically, rather than withdrawing it. If on one side Italy did not abandon its colonial possessions, on the other it did not extend them. Fulvio Cammarano, Storia dell’Italia liberale (Bari: Laterza, 2011). 144-146.
\textsuperscript{47} In the aftermath of the First Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895), the European powers and Russia tried to obtain Chinese naval bases to reinforce their sphere of influence. This emphasized the weakness of the Chinese imperial government, which was unable to resist foreign powers’ demands. This engendered the nationalist Boxer rebellion (1899-1901), in which rebels besieged the legations quarter of Beijing. As a consequence of the upheaval, the main foreign powers arranged an international expeditionary army corps comprised of Germans, Russians, French, British, Americans, Japanese, Austrians and Italians. These international forces occupied Beijing and forced China to make new concessions to them, in which Italy gained the very small concession of Tientsin. Giorgio Candeloro, Storia dell’Italia moderna. Il fascismo e le sue guerre, XI vols., vol. IX (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1989). 14, 15.
\textsuperscript{48} Monina. 26, 27.
new Italian expansionist interests would be focused on Libya, which in 1911 led to the Italian-Turkish War to conquer that country.

**Exploration and conquest of Libya**

In the 1880s, Italian colonial policy focused mainly on supporting the exploration and colonization of Eastern Africa. However, at the same time, a part of the expansionist debate indicated Libya as a new Italian colonial target, rather than continuing exploration and colonial attempts in Abyssinia or the Horn of Africa. Among these proponents was the already mentioned Manfredo Camperio, who played a prominent part in endorsing Libyan colonization. His experiences as an explorer and as the founder of both the *Società di Esplorazione Commerciale in Africa* and the magazine *L’Esploratore* show how the monarchy and the government used him to investigate the possibility of turning Italian expansionism towards Libya. The King of Italy, Umberto I, encouraged Camperio to undertake an exploration of Libya; this was initially suggested to the king by the German explorer Friedrich Gerhard Rohlfs, who visited Kufra’s oasis and the Benghazi region.\(^{49}\) Rohlfs acted on behalf of Germany and aimed to counteract France’s hegemony over Morocco and Tunisia in the Mediterranean by encouraging Italy to undertake expansionist efforts in Libya.

As Camperio officially operated on behalf of the *Società di Esplorazione Commerciale in Africa*, his ‘commercial journeys’ acted to conceal the Italian government’s expansionist interests in Libya. In doing so, Italy avoided any

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\(^{49}\) The German African Society appointed Rohlfs to visit the Libyan territories in 1878. Rohlfs acted as a ‘diplomatic’ agent and once he returned, he convinced King Umberto I to appoint Camperio to carry out an exploratory mission in the regions he had just visited. Kemény Milanini. 102, 103.
hypothetical diplomatic tensions with France. Camperio travelled across Tripolitania (1880) and Cyrenaica (1881) to collect commercial data by interviewing local merchants who traded with the inland territories. Camperio considered the data useful in planning future colonial enterprises in those areas. Being the director of L’Esploratore, Camperio advertised the Libyan expedition as a commercial survey in his magazine, but the commercial interest in Tripolitania concealed the real intention of Italian foreign policy: to gain new territories in North Africa and establish Italian settlements. Camperio gave two reasons for the need to explore Cyrenaica and exploit its ports: because Libya was closer to Italy compared to the Red Sea; and, primarily, because no other foreign powers had yet gained influence over Libya.

By the end of 1880, Camperio had met the Prime Minister, Benedetto Cairoli, to discuss the exploration plan for Cyrenaica. Thus, in January 1881, the government sponsored Camperio’s exploration with a contribution of 22,000 Lire (approximately €94,000). Camperio described the colonial goals of his mission in a letter he wrote to the ship-owner Raffaele Rubattino, who was his close friend. The letter clearly shows the government’s strong interest in Cyrenaica and how cautious its attitude was towards the colonization itself, since the exploration aimed at being a ‘peaceful occupation’:

We talked about Cyrenaica and we decided that I will ask the board of the Società di Esplorazione Commerciale in Africa to arrange and send an exploratory expedition [to Cyrenaica] next November. The expedition has three goals: 1) Establishing a commercial outpost in Benghazi; 2) Exploring the coastal region to find a place suitable for Italian colonists; and 3) Carrying out an archaeological exploration [...] As you can understand, the exploration aims to begin the peaceful occupation of Cyrenaica. Cairoli, Romanelli the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, [Luigi]

50 Ibid, 103, 104.
51 Ibid, 105.
52 Ibid, 107.
Bodio, and even more importantly, [Giacomo] Malvano and [Carlo Alberto] Maffei di Boglio support [the project] both morally and tangibly [...]. The government thinks of the consequences with regard to the French and the other [powers], but we are private operators [entrepreneurs] and we can work thinking about the future profit to society.

Two decades later, the Italian colonial interest in Libya increased because of the alteration in the geo-political balance within the Mediterranean. Italy tried to defend Libya from the colonial ambitions of the other European powers, but behind this government attitude were both the economic interests of the Banco di Roma, which had begun an economic penetration in the country, and the support of a large part of the Italian press. Italian diplomats had focused until then on preserving Libya as Italy’s own sphere of influence by recognizing French supremacy over Tunisia,

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53 Luigi Bodio was an economist and statistician, and president of the Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (Italian Statistical Office) in 1872. By 1876 he had conducted some statistical studies on Italian migration. Antonio Cappiello, "Luigi Bodio: Promoter of the political and high scientific mission of statistics and pioneer of the international statistical cooperation," Rivista Italiana di Economia, Demografia e Statistica - Italian Review of Economics, Demography and Statistics LXVIII, no. 3-4 July-December (2014). 199.

54 Giacomo Malvano was a highly ranked diplomatic official who directed the Department of Politic Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while Carlo Alberto Maffei di Boglio was the General Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1878 to 1881. Francesco Bartolotta, Parlamenti e governi d'Italia dal 1848 al 1970, II vols., vol. I (Roma: Vito Bianco Editore, 1970). 518.

55 Letter from Camperio to Rubattino, 10 October 1880, as reported in Kemény Milanini. 106

56 The role played by the Banco di Roma in the Italian-Turkish War discloses a tangled system of interests, which involved the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the government and the Banco itself. As Luigi de Rosa argued in his Introduzione storico-economica of the Banco di Roma's history, there was a concrete possibility that Italy would lose its economic presence in Libya, which the Banco had been constructing since 1907. This fear played a significant part in leading the government to declare war on Turkey. From 1907 to 1911, the Banco established branches in Libya, investing a very significant part of its capital in subsiding various economic operations that were conducted by Enrico Bresciani, the manager of the Tripoli branch. Bresciani, who was appointed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, not the bank, had to create a strong network of Italian interests that could justify Italy's ambitions for the country. By using this policy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs aimed to demonstrate to France, Great Britain and Russia how significant the Italian interests were in Libya, so that the other powers could not oppose a potential Italian conquest of the country if the Ottoman Empire tried to counter Italy's ambitions. However, by the end of 1908 some British-Turkish and French finance corporations were undertaking mining explorations in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. Bresciani asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to prevent these foreign companies exploiting the Libyan mining resources and excluding Italy. In this context, two exploratory-scientific missions were arranged in 1910 and 1911. The first was supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while the other was entirely financed by the Banco di Roma. Although Bresciani tirelessly worked to develop Italy's economic penetration of Libya, his ventures drastically affected the bank’s profits, causing the Banco’s management to decide to cede to foreign financial groups all activities in which the bank was involved. This would mean losing the Italian presence in Libya, with the result that the government would be unable to pursue its colonial ambitions. This scenario accelerated the decision to declare war against the Ottoman Empire. Luigi de Rosa, "Banco Di Roma (1880-1992) Introduzione Storico - Economica," ed. Banca di Roma - Archivio Storico (Roma: Banca di Roma - Archivio Storico, 2001). 32-34.
but when France began its penetration into Morocco, supported by an acquiescent Germany, it became more influential in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire, which ruled Libya, experienced several difficulties in the Balkan area that reduced its control over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, displaying it as a power in decline.

For all these reasons the ambitions over Libya led to military intervention. In supporting the invasion, the expansionist press played a key role, accusing the government of being unable to defend Italian interests in Libya (which were essentially the economic interests of the Banco di Roma) against the protests of the Ottoman government, which objected to the excessive Italian presence in its territory.\(^{57}\) However, some prominent politicians and journalists spoke against the war: among them were Gaetano Salvemini and Benito Mussolini. Salvemini described Libya as a huge ‘sand box’, emphasising the uselessness of conquering the country, while Mussolini firmly disapproved of Giolitti’s colonial enterprise, defining it as “an act of international brigandage”. As Del Boca wrote, this was the only time that Mussolini was against colonialism and defended Africa during his long career as a politician and statesman.\(^{58}\) On the other side, the expansionist propaganda insistently described Libya as a prosperous country full of natural resources.

The war took just one year, from 29 September 1911 to 18 October 1912, when the Ottoman Empire and Italy signed a peace treaty in Lausanne. The outcome of the Italian-Turkish War allowed Italy to annexe Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, to


control the Dodecanese islands and Rhodes.\(^59\) Despite the victorious outcome, Italians had to deal with a strong Arab resistance, which restricted their control to the coastal Libyan territories. Thus, from 1912 to the early 1930s, the government undertook a consolidation policy aiming to ‘reconquer’ those territories which the Arab resistance had regained. This policy was called *politica di riconquista*.\(^60\) The main difficulty in imposing an Italian presence was that of implementing a uniform colonial policy throughout Libya, without discerning the existing differences between the coastal and inland population, where the resistance was more persistent.\(^61\) Italy outlined an administrative map of its new colony by dividing Libya into three administrative districts: Tripolitania in the northwest, Cyrenaica in the northeast and Fezzan in the south.\(^62\) The unstable situation in the new colony even affected geographic explorations of its territories; the expeditions were limited to the coastal regions for security reasons. It demonstrated once again the weakness of Italian control and showed that Libya remained essentially unexplored.\(^63\) A new stamina for exploring Libya would arrive with fascism.

**Fascism comes to power. A new foreign policy**

The summer of 1914 marked the widest extent of Italian control over Libya.

From that point, Italian domination was gradually reduced to the coastal regions and

\(^{59}\) Although the treaty required that Italy removed its troops from the Dodecanese, the Italian government did not respect this article as revenge for the Arab guerrilla warfare against the Italian administration, and because it believed that Turkey fomented the war.


\(^{62}\) At the beginning of Italian domination, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were two different colonies, each with their own governors, who were respectively located in Tripoli and Benghazi. In 1934 the two colonies were finally unified by Governor Italo Balbo.

the situation did not change until fascism came to power. The outbreak of the First World War made the colonial situation even worse, because the government focused its military and economic resources on the European front without reinforcing and reconquering its colonial territories. The war also emphasised the difference between Italian colonialism and that of the other European colonial powers, such as France and Great Britain. Italy was unable to exploit its colonies as a source of men and materials for the war effort. The war marked a hiatus in the Italian expansionist process. It arose again after the war both within the right-wing parties, such as the nationalists and futurists, and the Italian diplomatic delegation that attended the Conference of Peace in Paris in 1919.

On the nationalist side, politicians and journalists like Alfredo Rocco and Francesco Coppola were the prominent voices who claimed colonial territories as war compensation. Rocco emphasised the need for Italy to undertake an imperialist foreign policy as a solution to the economic problems caused by the war. He particularly stated that Italy could become a global power through reasonable war compensations, which the defeated nations had to remit to Italy. Furthermore, colonial possessions could absorb many Italian emigrants and the colonies would supply Italy with raw materials such as cotton, oil and coal. Coppola emphasised that Italian participation in the war had been essential for economic, political and colonial purposes and this could now make Italy a great international power. The new

64 Dominioni. 636.
65 The main proponent of the policy that prevented troops defending and reconquering the colonial territories was General Luigi Cadorna, the Chief of Staff. In his opinion, sending troops to Libya undermined the main Italian front: the Carso region located in the Italian Alps, where Cadorna focused all his military strategy. Labanca. 125. He also stated that assembling a colonial corps exclusively to redeploy troops in Libya turned the army into a mere depot of men. This would have weakened not only the alpine front, but also the morale and homogeneity of the army as it would lose its cohesiveness. Gianni Rocca, Cadorna. Il generalissimo di Caporetto (Milano: Mondadori, 2004). 51.
66 Labanca. 125.
territorial compensations that Italy claimed included the possession of Cassala; the concession of British and France Somaliland; and the international recognition of Ethiopia as an exclusive Italian sphere of influence. These views fostered the idea that the most equitable peace for Italy was a so-called *pace di potenza* (a peace which made Italy stronger).^{67}

Rocco and Coppola’s theories reflected the colonial programme of the Italian Ministry of the Colonies in November 1914, when the government was considering the possibility of Italy deploying with the Triple Entente. The programme claimed the possession of Djibouti, Cassala, Kismayo and the annexation of the Giarabub territory. Italy based such colonial claims on the *Patto di Londra* (The London Treaty) and emphasized the closeness of those territories to existing Italian colonies.^{68} However, France and Great Britain considered the Italian claims a threat to their colonial interests in Djibouti and Egypt, respectively.^{69} Djibouti represented an important ‘strip of colonial possession’ to unify Somalia with Eritrea and then surround Ethiopia, where Italy tried to establish its exclusive influence.^{70} The allies rejected the Italian colonial claims, arguing the requests to be excessive, particularly those relating to Somaliland and Djibouti. The French and British opposition showed Italy’s weakness in relation to its allies, which was also confirmed by the allies’ attitude in considering the Italian victory over Austria and the Italian front as a matter of secondary importance in the final victory.

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^{68} From 26 April 1915, The London Treaty secretly tied Italy to the Triple Entente. Based on this treaty, Italy obtained Trentino, Alto Adige and Venezia Giulia as territorial compensations on its northern borders. Moreover, Italy gained a part of Dalmatia, sovereignty over the Dodecanese and the Albanian protectorate. The treaty also stated that Italy would totally replace the Ottoman Empire in Libya, by obtaining colonial possessions, once the geopolitical map of the Mediterranean (Balkans, Turkey and the Middle East) was altered at the end of the war.

^{69} Labanca. 123-125.

Italy came to the Paris Conference overestimating its international weight and its dream of conquering new colonies was shattered there. Until then, the imperial experience had captured wide but poor territories (Somalia, Eritrea, Libya). This ‘diplomatic defeat’ was the origin of the myth of the Vittoria mutilata (mutilated Victory),\textsuperscript{71} which fascism later depicted as one of the main obstacles to making Italy an international power. Mussolini believed in the possession of colonies as a fundamental part of building the ‘new Italy’. This status was only reached with the Abyssinian War\textsuperscript{72} that made Italy an imperial power akin to France and Great Britain.\textsuperscript{73}

Italian colonial policy and the role of the explorers did not undergo substantial changes in the transition from a liberal state to fascism. Explorers were essentially considered and represented as vital to the nation for acquiring colonial outposts for the motherland. Such views, by the end of the nineteenth century, emphasized the paternalistic aspects of exploration to justify the ‘civilizing mission’ of the explorers.\textsuperscript{74} Fascism added to this tendency with an increasingly racist perception of the local populations. Initially, the regime continued the policies adopted by previous governments since the 1880s, which were based on using violence to conquer territories and on disregarding local populations. Such policies had their roots in the notion of the superiority of the Italian race in relation to dominated races, and a refusal to merge with them. This racist mentality clearly appears in a confidential report from the naval officer Ruelle, who was also a commander of the Duke of Abruzzi, during a military mission along the Somali’s

\textsuperscript{71} Labanca. 127, 128.
\textsuperscript{72} De Felice defined the Italian-Ethiopian War as Mussolini’s political masterpiece. The war had a double meaning for him: its outcome determined his personal power and leadership as well as the image of Italy as a great power. Renzo De Felice, \textit{Mussolini il duce. Gli anni del consenso (1929-1936)} (Torino: Einaudi, 1974), 642.
\textsuperscript{73} Del Boca, \textit{Italiani, brava gente? Un mito duro a morire.} 195, 196.
\textsuperscript{74} Comberiati. 59, 60.
coasts in 1893. The gunboat *Volturno*, with the Duke on board, was sent to Benadir’s shores to suppress an uprising in the city of Merca.

The commander described the situation of the colony, emphasizing the precariousness of Italian control, which reflected Italy’s weak rule over the territory. According to Ruelle, the government had to use Italian manpower to cultivate the land to develop the Benadir region because he considered Somali to be “lazy, nomads and they think that farming work is a job for slaves”. Italian immigrants could be chosen from among those who “are annually leaving Italy”. However, he recommended that the newcomers “should never merge with the natives, [Italians] have to totally replace the locals. [Somali] must be driven to the extreme borders of the inland [areas]”. The report ended by pointing out that: “We have to be sure that our immigrants can live peacefully and work in those lands even before they leave Italy, without risk of being assaulted or defeated by the locals.” With this view of colonialism, fascism increased these concepts in its colonial policy, as well as intensifying the violence and the repressive methods it adopted to subjugate local populations (this attitude reached its peak during the Italian-Ethiopian War in 1935-1936). However, one important new development was the shaping of the state apparatus to reinforce a state presence in the colonies. The regime accused previous governments of being weak and too tolerant of local populations. It established total racial segregation between the rulers and the dominated local populations. The repressive new fascist methods benefitted from the use of new weaponries, which the military technology of the Great War had created: gas and chemical weapons.

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76 Aruffo. 61, 62.
77 This aspect has been investigated by Angelo Del Boca in his works *Italiani, brava gente?* (2005) and *I gas di Mussolini* (2007).
**Mussolini as Prime Minister**

At the beginning of his experience as Prime Minister, Mussolini essentially subordinated Italy’s foreign policy to the domestic one, which was affected by economic and financial problems inherited from the post-war period. He shaped his foreign policy excluding the fascist extremist fringes and requests from the most intransigent nationalists, whose suggestions Mussolini himself criticized as high-risk. In this phase, Mussolini has been defined as a ‘transformist’, because he made an agreement with the traditional political fronts, which led him to come to power. His attitude allowed him to exclude the most resolute fascist fringes. Despite his opportunistic attitude, he did not cancel imperialism (which he repeatedly emphasised before and after the March on Rome) from the fascist political programme. Instead he tried to attenuate the aggressive tone and the impatience of the nationalists. Before turning Italy into a great power, Italians needed to be made fascists. Such a process was achievable only in the long term and Mussolini recognised that. However, he simultaneously emphasised that there were still some ‘unsolved matters’ between Italy and its war allies, which compromised the Italian national prestige. He pointed to France and Great Britain as being responsible for preventing Italy from obtaining proper colonial compensation at the Conference of Paris. This was clear during his first speech as Prime Minister at the Chamber of Deputies on 16 November 1922:

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78 Radical nationalism was harshly criticized by the historian and liberal politician Guido de Ruggiero even before the March on Rome. In August 1922, de Ruggiero wrote an article that accused the nationalists of turning the political debate into a dualism based on ‘nation’ and ‘anti-nation’, ‘nationalism’ and ‘anti-nationalism’. De Ruggiero described the nationalists as assigning Italy only one mission: subjugating other nations to expand itself. Guido de Ruggiero, "Nazionalismo," in *Scritti politici* (1912-1926), ed. Renzo De Felice (Rocca San Casciano: Cappelli, 1963). 549-552.


Our foreign policy is based on full respect of the peace treaties, whether positive or not, and once they are signed and ratified, they must be respected […] We aim to undertake a fair policy which is also useful to our nation […] Today, Italy is important, and its importance must be recognised […] My thought is simple: nothing for nothing. Any nation that wants to be our friend must give us tangible proof of friendship. Fascist Italy […] does not want to put aside its war Allies. Rome agrees with Paris and London, but Italy must be able to request the Allies to conduct a thorough soul-searching, which they have not done since the armistice […] Our foreign policy, which respects the treaties and has a national usefulness […] cannot be an adventurous and imperialistic one.81

On 27 November 1922, Mussolini spoke to the Senate, where he reiterated his aims: he did not intend to undertake an “adventurous foreign policy, but neither would it be a defeatist one”. His words were cautious while he simultaneously underlined how it would have been hard to change the results obtained by previous governments:

My foreign policy will not be an adventurous policy, but neither will it be a defeatist one; of course, […] it is not possible, in a simple meeting, to erase a policy that is based on aspects from another period […] Our policy will not be the same one that imperialists followed to seek impossible results; however, it will not be a policy based on a negative precondition which excludes the use of force.82


82 Benito Mussolini. “Discorso per la seconda adunata del popolo italiano (5 maggio 1936),” in Discorsi, ed. Balbino Giuliano (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1936). 25. “Intendo di fare della politica estera che non sarà avventurosa, ma non sarà nemmeno rinunciataria; certo […] non si può cancellare in un colloquio […] una politica che è il risultato di altri elementi e di un altro periodo di tempo […] La nostra politica non sarà la politica degli imperialisti che cercano le cose impossibili; ma sarà una politica che non partirà sempre necessariamente da una pregiudiziale negativa, per cui non si dovrebbe mai ricorrere all’uso della forza.”
Despite Mussolini’s caution in explaining his foreign policy, he was convinced of the need to begin a new deal by adopting new methods, which were resolutely opposed to those undertaken by previous liberal governments.\textsuperscript{83} Mussolini seemed to demonstrate a certain competence in managing foreign policy through his attitude to the allies, while he truly was not fully aware of how to manage it.

According to De Felice, his approach had its roots in the aftermath of the March on Rome, when he shaped his first government. He aimed to be independent of both the most intransigent fascists and the nationalists, who wanted to appoint their leader Luigi Federzoni as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Although Mussolini lacked a clear view in terms of foreign policy, he preferred to keep the Ministry for himself in the meanwhile rather than appointing Federzoni as a Minister, because he considered the nationalist foreign policy too extreme.\textsuperscript{84} Mussolini’s foreign policy focused squarely on Africa and on Italian expansionism over the Mediterranean Sea. However, Mussolini stated that autonomy was quite impossible without making an agreement with France and Great Britain. Thus, Italy continued to orient its colonial policy toward the scheme previously outlined by the liberal governments, in which Great Britain considered Italian expansionism as a point of balance against French hegemony over Europe. The British never saw Italy as a dangerous rival in colonial matters. In contrast, the French attitude was completely different: it rejected any colonial claims from Rome because Paris aimed to establish its supremacy over a new European geo-political system, which prevented any possible new German pre-eminence over the continent. Furthermore, France was ideologically opposed to Italy, setting its democratic principles in contrast to fascism, which also resulted in France

\textsuperscript{83} Del Boca, \textit{Italiani, Brava Gente? Un mito duro a morire}. 153.
\textsuperscript{84} Renzo De Felice, \textit{Mussolini il fascista. La conquista del potere (1921-1925)} (Torino: Einaudi, 1966). 375.
welcoming several antifascists. The different positions of London and Paris showed that Italy was unlikely to achieve a hegemonic position among the European powers.85

**A new representation of Italy**

According to Mussolini’s political view, making a new Italy needed the creation of ‘new Italians’. It was thus necessary to undertake an ‘anthropological revolution’; a fundamental purpose both for fascism and, above all, for Mussolini’s ambition of greatness.86 The concept of an ‘anthropological revolution’ was not an *ex novo* fascist interpretation but had its roots in the first decade of the twentieth century. It rose to prominence during the First World War and became more popular once fascism came to power. As Emilio Gentile noted, the ‘myth of the new Italian’ was a concept conceived by imperialist nationalists and futurists. The nationalists aimed to create a new nation, which could compete in a global challenge based on war and focused on making a state that was both authoritarian and strong. Futurists wanted a new Italian who was violent, virile (in terms of loving fighting and conquest) and who approached the future by breaking with past traditions. Those who elaborated these theories considered the participation of Italy in the First World War an essential step in creating the new Italian, because the war itself was considered as the necessary chaos from which to generate a new order. Nationalist and futurist interpretations were also supported by revolutionary-syndicalism, although it was ideologically opposite to them. Syndicalism looked at the war as a social regeneration, whose final purpose was to create the new Italian. These groups

85 *Breve storia del fascismo*. 66, 67.
86 Gentile. 248.
merged to create interventionism, which acted as a link between the myth of revolution and the nation.

Benito Mussolini was among those who were attracted by this revolutionary view. He and other socialist companions declared themselves interventionists and supported the idea that Italy had to fight against Central Empires. Nationalists, futurists and revolutionary-syndicalists interpreted the war as a necessary ‘national rebirth’ to change the political, economic and social order of the nation as well as the Italian mentality. The feelings of camaraderie experienced in the trenches and the shared suffering rendered all soldiers equal. Such experiences generated new myths such as the glorification of those who died fighting ‘to defend the homeland’.

In such a mythology, the homeland represented the most important common good, whose defence was much more important than individual interests. In 1927, the philosopher Giovanni Gentile stated that Italy fought the war not to reclaim Trento, Trieste, Dalmatia or gain political advantage, but to make the nation stronger through the blood of those who died defending the common cause.

The war experience convinced veterans to be the interpreters and custodians of the national rebirth and the creation of the new Italian. They rejected the representation of a weak Italy and despised anyone who impeded the national revolution and the creation of new Italians. Such beliefs led them to fight, above all, liberals and socialists, as they were considered domestic enemies and a legacy from the past. Mussolini exploited their repulsion for the liberal political system and gathered them into the fledgling fascist movement. Thus, fascism’s base included

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87 Ibid, 242-246.
several veterans during its initial phase.\textsuperscript{89} Mussolini aimed to shape Italy into a new nation, but to achieve his purpose he needed to create “a new ruling class and a new generation of Italians.”\textsuperscript{90}

Although Mussolini seemed to be sure in expressing this proposal, four years after the March on Rome, he was still reiterating the need and the desire of fascism to create new Italians. The revolution would take a long time:

Comrades, Italy will be unrecognisable within the next ten years! We will change it, we will turn it into another country […] We will create the new Italian, he will not look like Italians of the past. They are the generations who fought in the war and they are truly fascists. Then these will be replaced by the new generations that we are currently educating and shaping like us […] You can trust me because I will lead you increasingly higher and further forward.\textsuperscript{91}

\textit{Making Italy an international power: explorations and national prestige}

The fascist plan for making Italy a new and greater power included undertaking an expansionist foreign policy and the search for national prestige through scientific explorations and daring enterprises of all kinds, such as aeronautical long-haul flights. To achieve this purpose, the regime encouraged, sponsored and lauded events like Francesco De Pinedo and Ernesto Campanelli’s 55,000 km-long flight from Rome to Australia and Japan (1925); Umberto Nobile’s polar expeditions (1926 and 1928), and the winning of the Blue Ribbon by the transatlantic liner \textit{Rex}, in 1933. The regime’s propaganda exploited these events to

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{89} Gentile. 247.
\item \textsuperscript{90} Renzo De Felice. \textit{Lo storico e il personaggio.} (Bari: Laterza, 2003). 100.
\item \textsuperscript{91} Mussolini, “Parole pronunziate ai lavoratori del reggiano (30 ottobre 1926).” 111, 112. “Fra dieci anni, o camerati, l’Italia sarà irrinconoscibile! Noi l’avremo trasformata, ne avremo fatta un’altra […] Creeremo l’italiano nuovo, un italiano che non rassomiglierà a quello di ieri. Sono le generazioni di coloro che hanno fatto la guerra e sono quindi intimamente fasciste. Poi verranno le generazioni che noi educhiamo oggi e creiamo a nostra immagine e somiglianza […] State tranquilli che io vi porterò sempre più in alto, sempre più avanti”.
\end{footnotes}
demonstrate Italian greatness. As for the scientific and geographic explorations, they were based on the idea of ‘knowing to colonise’. Fascism was aware that achieving a deeper knowledge of Italy’s overseas territories ensured stronger state control within the colonies and resulted in much greater exploitation of raw materials and agricultural improvement.

Thus, the regime supported new scientific explorations to support new plans for developing overseas possessions and establishing the cornerstones of its colonial policy. In the analysis of how Mussolini’s government supported the exploratory missions, a key role was played by Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta, who was depicted in propaganda as a valiant coloniser, able to turn the Somalian colony into a land “where [until now] it was not possible to identify a driveable road, it is now clear. The sick have a hospital; the children have a school; while women in labour have a special place to give birth. All this absolutely represents the [civilising] concept of Roman conquest.”

92 At the beginning of the twentieth century, awareness of Italian ‘colonial ignorance’ appeared even among colonial personnel during the First Colonial Congress of Asmara in Eritrea, in 1905. In his opening speech, the Italian governor Ferdinando Martini focused on this matter, as reported by Giuliano Cora, who was among the participants: “The governor’s speech was polemic and strongly ironic about Italian politics and public opinion. He remarked on Italian ignorance about Africa”. Giuliano Cora, “Ricordi del I° Congresso Coloniale in Asmara,” Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali 23, no. 4 (1956). 653. Cora eventually became the royal Superintendent-General following the signing of the Italian-Ethiopian friendship treaty in 1928. In the aftermath of First World War, the ‘colonial culture’ did not improve, as demonstrated at the Colonial Congress held in Rome in 1919. The meeting was convened to point out the situation of the Italian colonies in the post-war environment. The convention revealed the disastrous colonizaton attempt in Somalia, where by the end of 1921, only 656 Italians resided, representing the lowest percentage of Italian inhabitants in the four colonies. Del Boca, Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Dall’Unità alla marcia su Roma, 1. 867. This occurred even though since the very beginning of its control, the Italian government had focused on attracting settlers from Italy to develop colonial plantations along the Shebelle and Juba Rivers. Ioan M. Lewis, A modern history of the Somali. Nation and state in the Horn of Africa, 4 ed. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002). 92. The convention emphasized the fundamental importance of the Shebelle river for the Italian colonial programme, which was based on an extensive farming plan to be developed along the river’s banks. Thus, at the Congresso Coloniale the need emerged to explore the Uebi-Scabelli river as it was still almost completely unknown in its upper and middle sectors. A possible remedy for this situation was to undertake scientific studies on Somalia’s lakes and rivers to arrange agricultural and navigation projects. Del Boca, Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Dall’Unità alla marcia su Roma, 1. 868. The congress also focused on the general disorganization of Somalia, highlighting its semi-anarchic situation. Giampaolo Calchi Novati, “Studi e politica ai convegni coloniali del primo e del secondo dopoguerra,” Il Politico 55, no. 3 (1990). 503.

Aosta the title of hero in its “most meaningful and profound sense”, because he considered him “a pioneer and the embodiment of the new Italian.”

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94 Mussolini, "La commemorazione del Duca degli Abruzzi (20 marzo 1933)." 315.
Chapter

II

Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta, the Duke of Abruzzi.

Explorer and fascist colonizer.

Between the end of the nineteenth century and 1928, Prince Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta, also known as Luigi of Savoia or the Duke of Abruzzi, undertook several geographic explorations, which made him internationally popular. Today he is still considered the most prominent Italian explorer due to an extensive literature that has celebrated his various achievements.  

1 The first biography to be published was *Il Duca degli Abruzzi precuratore del fascismo* (1933) by Ugo Ascoli, who argued that Luigi of Savoia spent his entire life in service to the homeland, science and civilization. Ascoli also included Luigi of Savoia as one of those who honoured fascist Italy with their achievements.  

2 This was followed by *Il Duca degli Abruzzi e le sue imprese* (1937) by Adriano Augusto Michieli, who based his work on the accounts of the expeditions written by the Duke himself and on material issued posthumously by the Italian Navy archive in the late 1930s. Michieli portrayed Luigi Amedeo of Savoia as a modern hero, and compared him with Saint Domenico with regard to the meaning of his life. To support this, the author

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1 Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the Duke of Abruzzi has fascinated authors. Biographical interest in his personality spans more than seventy years and the most recent biography was published in 2010. There is no other Italian explorer to whom authors have devoted so much attention.

quoted Dante Alighieri, who had described Saint Domenico’s life as containing many premonitions of his future greatness.\textsuperscript{3} The same period saw the publication of \textit{Vita eroica del Duca degli Abruzzi} by Ettore Fabietti. This biography was the most hagiographic work: the author emphasised the human side of the Duke, describing him as “a tireless man, who did not need to rest because the field of human conquest was boundless.” Fabietti also used religious metaphors, describing the Duke as “the man whom the indigenous people trusted, because he had an Apostle’s face and they only needed to hear his voice to follow him.”\textsuperscript{4} These authors reflected their alignment with the regime and saturated their works with the rhetoric of that time.

Despite the fulsome exaggerations, these first biographies formed the basis for later works, such as \textit{La Somalia e l’opera del Duca degli Abruzzi} by Clelia Maino (1959), who focused on the Duke’s colonial experience in Somalia, although without analysing some important aspects of that colonizing programme, such as the use of the forced labour. Thus, in 1967, Giotto Dainelli published \textit{Il Duca degli Abruzzi. Le imprese dell’ultimo grande esploratore italiano}. It was a hagiographic biography, in which the author defined Luigi of Savoia as the most important Italian explorer, who raised Italy’s prestige among other nations through his explorations. From his nationalistic perspective, Dainelli urged Italians not to forget this historical figure. His rhetoric was due to Dainelli being a fascist, who remained nostalgic about the regime. His work reflected such feelings especially in the concluding sections of the biography, which Dainelli dedicated to the Duke of Abruzzi’s Somali years. The author recalled a post-war voyage to Somalia to visit the farming

consortium established by the Duke and to honour his grave, where he stood with his right
arm lifted in the fascist salute, because “it was the only salute worthy of him.”

Dainelli’s work was the last biography dedicated to the Duke until 1991, when Gigi
Speroni wrote Il Duca degli Abruzzi. The author described the Duke as a defender of human
rights in Africa. He even used Martin Luther King’s famous phrase “I have a dream”, to
emphasise that Luigi of Savoia’s dream was to make Africa a new America, but because
of the egotistical attitude of other colonial nations it was not possible to realise it. Speroni
also stated that while “European nations partitioned the Black Continent to exploit its
wealth”, Luigi Amedeo of Savoia went to Africa “to make the indigenous independent, to
teach them love for their land and show them how to turn it into fertile plots using modern
tools and knowledge from the most advanced agricultural countries”. According to Speroni,
the Duke’s attitude towards Somalis engendered a “new kind of colonialism, which is not
to be understood as a synonym for possession, but as a synergy between whites and
blacks.” In the 2010 edition, Speroni enriched his ‘messianic theory’, making a
comparison between the colonising ideas of Luigi Amedeo of Savoia and the words of Pope
Benedetto XVI at the FAO’s conference in 2009. The Pope essentially affirmed that
African populations should be involved in any decisions related to the use of their cultivable
lands. Speroni argued that Prince Luigi Amedeo was a forerunner of this perspective
because he had the same idea for African people in the 1920s.

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7 Ibid, 177
9 Speroni. i.
In 1997, Mirella Tenderini and Michael Shandrick published *The Duke of Abruzzi. An explorer’s life*. The authors declared their purpose was to bring to life Luigi of Savoia, although reconstructing his biography was a complex task because of the fragmentary nature of the official documents. This work did not analyse the relationship between the Duke and fascism. The authors, in fact, argued that the Duke “had always stayed on the margins of politics,” without opposing fascism, but also without approving Mussolini’s policies, however, as we shall see, this is not true.

A different aim was pursued by Reinhold Messner and Roberto Mantovani in *Il Duca dell’avventura. Le grandi esplorazioni di Luigi Amedeo di Savoia Duca degli Abruzzi* (2009). This was a compendium of the geographic explorations carried out by Luigi Amedeo of Savoia. The authors focused solely on his life as an explorer, without investigating his involvement with fascism. Although the Duke’s experience in Somalia was lightly examined, they defined the colonial experience as an enterprise based on fair collaboration with the local people, rather than being based on their exploitation. In their view, the Duke pursued the integration of different cultures and farming techniques to develop the colony’s agricultural capacities. According to Messner and Mantovani, this ‘new perspective’ encouraged the Duke to undertake his last exploration, which was a search for the source of the Uebi-Scebeli River within the Ethiopian Empire. The authors argued that Luigi of Savoia interpreted the expedition as a ‘proof of love’ towards the African continent. In fact, this last expedition was directly connected with the development of his farming village and had important political connections with the fascist

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regime, which aimed to re-establish a cordial relationship with Ethiopia to favour Italian economic penetration into the country.

The most recent biography is *Il principe esploratore: Luigi Amedeo di Savoia, Duca degli Abruzzi* (2010) by Pablo Dell’Osa. In his introduction, the author stated that the existing biographies were incomplete and sometimes contained inaccuracies, presenting his own work as the most complete biography of the Duke of Abruzzi. Dell’Osa provided a very accurate description of all the Duke’s life phases and explorations. The wealth of detail reflects the author’s stated intention of providing the known and previously unknown details of Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta’s life to those readers who had little or no knowledge of him.12 Although the author based his research on consistent archival documentation, he sometimes trusted the descriptions of Luigi of Savoia provided during the regime by earlier hagiographic biographers, such as Michieli e Fabietti. However, Dell’Osa stated how the colonial experience of the Duke was enlarged and managed by the fascist propaganda and argued that his involvement in fascism and its policies, such as the use of the forced labour within the colony, was undeniable.13 However, despite these vague considerations, his analysis did not accurately investigate the mutual relationship between the Duke and fascism.

The Duke’s life can be divided into two main phases: *The Explorer*, which analyses his explorations prior to the First World War, and *The Colonizer*, which focuses on his colonial experience in Somalia and analyses his relationship with the fascist regime. Many of the Duke’s biographies have described his Somali experience (1919-1933) as a ‘good example’ of colonialism, which was based on a mutual engagement between locals and Italians to enhance the development of farming in Somalia, without using violence or

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committing crimes against the local populations, as other explorers or colonizers did before him, including Vittorio Bottego and a number of Italian colonial officers in Libya.\textsuperscript{14} This kind of portrayal developed especially through the works by Fabietti, Michieli, Maino, Dainelli, Speroni and Tenderini and Shandrick. However, his decision not to use violent methods in colonising Somalia cannot support his portrayal as a ‘messiah’, who interpreted colonialism as a mission to emancipate indigenous people. Rather, he understood “how anachronistic Italian colonialism was, in terms of state inefficiency in administrating the colonies and how serious was the lack of special policies for developing overseas territories.”\textsuperscript{15} Thus, his colonial farming experiment represented a new interpretation of the Italian colonial system, not a refutation of colonialism itself. He accomplished his proposal by adopting a “capitalistic view totally different from the rapacious colonialism undertaken by the colonial companies that previously acted in Somalia.”\textsuperscript{16} Nonetheless, he exploited Somali farmers to pursue his plan to introduce industrial colonization to Somalia. In this context, Luigi of Savoia built a mutual relationship with fascism: he received significant economic support from the regime for his colonial farming village, while the propaganda machine presented him as a resourceful and faultless colonizer, and an embodiment of the colonial fascist system.

A thorough biography of the Duke also needs to analyse the context in which his experience as a colonizer developed. He lived during the Italian colonial period and played

\textsuperscript{14} As mentioned in the previous chapter, Vittorio Bottego conducted his explorations using violence and cruelty towards the local inhabitants he met on his way. Inhumane methods were also common among the Italian colonial officers, including General Giovanni Battista Ameglio, who frequently resorted to the hanging of Libyan rebels during his governorship. Angelo Del Boca, \textit{Gli italiani in Libia, Tripoli bel suol d'amore 1860-1922} (Milano: Mondadori, 1993), 238-242. The use of brutal methods within the colonial territories began quite early. At the end of 1887, Italians established the island of Nocra as a prison camp, located 55 kilometres off the Massawa coast. On the prison island, the Italian colonial administration sentenced local criminals and rebels to forced labour. The scarcity of water and the high climate temperatures made the punishment even harsher. \textit{Italiani, brava gente? Un mito duro a morire} (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2005). 80, 81.

\textsuperscript{15} Leone Iraci, “Per una demistificazione del colonialismo italiano: il caso della Somalia,” \textit{Terzo Mondo} 2, no. Marzo 1969. 64.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
a key role in the attempt to colonise Somalia, because he was part of the colonializing social system that prevailed at the time; this influenced his life and his achievements in Africa. The above-mentioned biographies did not analyse this context. Also, these works did not consider the implications of his social rank. He was a member of the Italian Royal Family and he had a privileged position in the society of that time. His royal relatives and elite acquaintances gave him an advantage in carrying out his explorations and, especially in the last part of his life, in finding the economic resources for realising his colonial proposal. It would have been almost impossible for a common person to have achieved the results gained by the Duke.

The Duke of Abruzzi: The Explorer

*Family history, the Navy and the Italian Alpine Club*

From 1720, the Savoia dynasty ruled over the Sardinian-Piedmontese Kingdom, which by 1861 became the Kingdom of Italy. Succession to the crown was based on the *Lex Salica* principle, which stated that the King’s first-born male offspring would become the heir to the throne, while the other sons were considered ‘cadets’. Thus, in 1845, the last King of the Sardo-Piedmontese Kingdom and first King of Italy, Vittorio Emanuele II, founded the cadet branch of Savoia-Aosta and designated his third son, Amedeo of Savoia, to be the first Duke of Aosta. Amedeo of Savoia was then named Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta and he was the father of Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta. The future Duke of Abruzzi was born on 29 January 1873, in Madrid, where his father was nominated King of Spain in 1871. However, the complex political situation of Spain forced his father to abdicate just

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17 The title Duke of Abruzzi was created by King Umberto I in 1890 for Luigi of Savoia, who acquired it after the death of his father Amedeo. The Savoia’s Royal House had a political connection with Spain dating from 1718, because Vittorio Amedeo II of Savoia, King of Piedmont, obtained Sardinia from the Bourbon dynasty in an exchange with Sicily. This gave the Savoias the right to aspire to the Spanish crown if the Bourbon dynasty...
two years later. He returned to Italy, where his sons undertook military careers in the Navy, as was traditional for the Savoia family. Once the Duke completed his Navy training programme in 1889, he began his military career, completing his first transoceanic journey on the vessel *Amerigo Vespucci*. The Navy’s custom of sailing overseas and visiting foreign ports had a dual purpose: being part of the Navy training programme for young officers and sailors, and carrying out political missions in those countries where Italy had consistent communities of emigrants and diplomatic representatives. Sending warships overseas was a common activity for the European colonial powers and aimed to protect their possessions and markets. Furthermore, the presence of warships in colonized countries was a demonstration of the power of the mother country, in addition to protecting the colonizers. In this scenario, the *Vespucci* was sent to Brazil, where a political rebellion had overthrown the monarchy proclaiming the republic. Italy aimed to protect its national interests in that country, where there was a huge community of Italian immigrants.

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lineage failed to produce male heirs. In 1833, the dying King Bourbon VII abolished the *Lex Salica*, as he had no male heir, and appointed his daughter Isabella II as the new Queen of Spain. This created a political confrontation between the conservative-monarchist wing and the republican one, which resulted in a civil war. The temporary government delegates offered the crown to Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen of Prussia, but France rejected this to avoid a Prussian reinforcement that would have threatened French supremacy. Thus, the Spanish delegates turned to Italy, where King Vittorio Emanuele II eagerly accepted, foreseeing a central role for Italy in preserving the European order, despite the youth of the Italian kingdom. From the Spanish point of view, the new king must be Catholic, belong to a strong dynasty to legitimize his presence in Madrid and accept the constitution of Spain. Finally, Vittorio Emanuele II proposed his son Amedeo as the new King of Spain. Gianni Oliva, *Duchi d'Aosta. I Savoia che non diventarono Re d'Italia* (Milano: Mondadori, 2003). 60-63.

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18 Ibid, 19, 20.
19 According to the Savoia family tradition, all the royal heirs had to undertake a military career. Usually, the first-born and the second were designated to the Army, while the third was designated to the Navy. By 1923 the foundation of the Air Force meant it was included as an option for military service for the Savoia heirs. The aim was to enlarge the presence of the Royal Family in all the available military Corps. (Duca delle Puglie Aimone di Savoia-Aosta, VI Duca d'Aosta interview by Alberto Cauli, 2/03/2016.
22 On this voyage, the Duke met the Navy officer Umberto Cagni, appointed as his aid-de-camp by the King. Cagni accompanied the Duke on several of his explorative missions.
In 1893, the Duke of Abruzzi embarked on the gunboat Volturno to take part in a political-military mission along the Somali coast. This was when he visited Somalia for the first time. The government sent the warship to Benadir’s shores to support the Italian Royal Navy ship Staffetta in suppressing an uprising that had occurred in the city of Merca and “punishing the butchers of its heroic and unfortunate crew.” In the precariousness following the turmoil, the local Bimal clan had triggered a riot against Italian domination and prevented the Italian commercial company Compagnia Filonardi succeeding the Zanzibar sultan in the administration of the Benadir territory, as stated in a pre-existing agreement between Italy and the sultan. Thus, the Staffetta bombed Merca to force the Bimal to surrender, but the situation degenerated and the Italian Navy lieutenant Maurizio Talmone was killed. During this period, Luigi Amedeo of Savoia visited the interior and cities of the Benadir region. Although he travelled incognito and did not have any official duties on behalf of the government, as often happened with royalty enlisted in the Army or Navy, he disembarked to pay homage to the Talmone’s grave.

The confidential report of that mission, written by the Duke’s commander Edoardo Ruelle, depicted the context in which Luigi of Savoia was acting. It revealed the political situation of Somalia and the Italian racist attitude towards Somalis. Ruelle emphasised the precariousness of the Compagnia Filonardi’s control of the colony, which reflected Italy’s
weakness in ruling over those territories. Although the mission took only a few days, Ruelle described the possession of Benadir as a serious task for Italy because new turmoil could arise at any time. He also specified that Benadir could be much more profitable in terms of commerce and agriculture compared with Eritrea, because of the fertility of the land and the abundance of cattle. However, export of inland products was difficult because of the inadequacy of the region’s ports for cargo vessels. Goods carried to the coastal cities could be stocked only on small piers, until the government built appropriate harbours. Ruelle also suggested using Italian manpower to cultivate the land and transport the products, because he described Somali as lazy nomads who considered farming work as a job for slaves. Italian immigrants could be chosen from among those who were annually leaving Italy. 29 He recommended that the newcomers “never merge with the natives; [Italians] have to totally replace the locals. [Somali] must be driven to the extreme borders of the inland [areas]”. The report eventually pointed out:

We have to be sure that our immigrants can peacefully live and work in these lands even before they leave Italy, without risk of being assaulted or defeated by the locals. The company must be strong and solid both to defend lives and offer jobs. I believe, instead, that only the ‘name’ of the company and Mr. Filonardi himself are here. 30

Between 1892 and 1901, Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta alternated his duties as a Navy officer with his mountaineering activities, which allowed him to climb various peaks in the Italian Alps, such as Mont Blanc, the Matterhorn and Monte Rosa. 31 The Duke was quite familiar with the alpine environment as the members of the Savoia Royal House had always spent part of the year in the alpine regions, where they undertook regular hiking

29 USMM, busta 2256, “Nave Volturno” - Rapporto di Navigazione del 1 dicembre 1893 e Missione lungo la costa del Benadir, pp. 12,13.
30 Ibid.
31 Oliva. 102.
trips. However, the climbing activity of Luigi of Savoia also reflected the political relationship between the monarchy and the Club Alpino Italiano (CAI or Italian Alpine Club). From its foundation in 1863, the CAI was deeply loyal to the Royal House, recognising their fundamental role in the Italian unification process. Paolo Lioy, the president of the CAI from 1885 to 1890, claimed that the relationship with the monarchy represented the “strength and respectability of the Club”, because the mountaineering was born in Italy in conjunction with the national independence. He romantically affirmed how Italian climbers felt in love with the Alps, which they recognized as the guardians of the homeland, since these included within the Italian territory after the unification process.

From this perspective, the CAI praised the royal family and acted as an interpreter of the patriotic pride that emerged, particularly with regard to the historic enemy of Italian unification: the neighbouring Austrian-Hungarian Empire. This attitude politicized the alpine borders by naming those peaks conquered for the first time after the most prominent Savoia Princesses and Queens (such as Iolanda and Margherita), which contrasted with the names given by Austrian climbers in honour of the Hapsburg Royal Family. In addition, the CAI named its alpine shelters after royal family members and nominated Kings and Dukes as honorary presidents of the Club. The strong relationship between the monarchy

32 The Bulletin of the Italian Alpine Club reports hikes carried out by Savoia family members since before the Italian unification, including the 1859 climbing expeditions of Umberto and Amedeo of Savoia, who were respectively the Duke of Abruzzi’s uncle and father. Francesco Ricci, "Re Umberto I," Bollettino del Club Alpino Italiano XXXIII, no. 66 (1900). III.

33 The CAI was established by Quintino Sella and its foundation followed the trend of Europe of that time, where alpine clubs had been established in the most important European capitals. Sella also emphasised how the Alps represented for Italy ‘the guardians of the Motherland’, thus giving the Italian Alpine Club a national and political meaning. Alessandro Pastore, Alpinismo e storia d’Italia. Dall’Unità alla Resistenza (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003). 18.

34 Paolo Lioy, "Dall’alto," Bollettino del Club Alpino Italiano XVIII, no. 51 (1884). IV.

35 Pastore. 69.

36 The Italian Alpine Club included as its honorary presidents Tommaso of Savoia, Duke of Genova (1869), King Umberto I (1875), King Vittorio Emanuele II (1876) and Vittorio Emanuele III (1900). The highest European alpine shelter, located on Gnifetti’s peak, Monte Rosa, was dedicated to Queen Margherita. Stefano Morosini, Sulle vette della patria. politica, guerra e nazione nel club alpino italiano 1863-1922. (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2009). 53.
and the CAI was also emphasised in its official bulletin, which often celebrated the Royal House. In this context, the Duke of Abruzzi was elected as a perpetual member of the CAI’s Turin section and the Club’s bulletin reported his mountaineering exploits. The magazine emphasized the Duke’s “genuine passion for alpinism,” which contributed to increasing the prestige of the CAI thanks to his association with it.\footnote{According the CAI’s policy, instituted by its president Antonio Grober, all sections had to present a report containing the most important achievements of their members at the end of each year. With regards to this habit, Francesco Gonnella, the secretary of the Turin section and the Duke’s climbing partner, reported in 1892: “Dear Grober, as I was asked I report you, President of the Club, the account of the most important ascents of H.R.H. Prince Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta, Duke of Abruzzi, perpetual member of the [CAI’s] Turin section, which he achieved during his remarkable climbing campaign […] You could commence [our annual meeting] by presenting in your annual report the very important achievements of a Prince of the Savoia Dynasty.” Francesco Gonella, “Ascensioni del Duca degli Abruzzi,” Bollettino del Club Alpino Italiano, no. 59 (1892). 2 and 42.}

These first climbing experiences of Luigi of Savoia were celebrated by the press. Particularly, the famous weekly magazine \textit{La Domenica del Corriere} dedicated its front page to him to celebrate his ascent of Mont Blanc: “On 5 August, the Duke of Abruzzi was the first to conquer a peak of Mont Blanc, which was believed to be inaccessible.”\footnote{Achille Beltrame, “Il Duca degli Abruzzi conquista per primo, il 5 agosto, un picco creduto inaccessibile nel Monte Bianco,” \textit{La Domenica del Corriere} (1901). \textit{La Domenica del Corriere} was a very popular weekly magazine issued by one of the most important Italian newspapers, \textit{Il Corriere della Sera}. The purpose of \textit{La Domenica del Corriere} was to illustrate the most important events occurring in the world. The magazine used to illustrate the most important events on its front page, to make them known to its readers. The most famous illustrator was Achille Beltrame, who also drew the Duke’s successive enterprises.} The Duke was a genuinely passionate climber, as demonstrated by the successful climbing expeditions he carried out in areas other than the Italian Alps, but he was also a representative of the political relationship between Italian alpinism and the monarchy.\footnote{The monarchy was a constant presence in Italian alpinism, especially during the reign of Umberto I, who usually delegated his relatives to attend the official ceremonies of the CAI. In 1894, the Duke of Abruzzi himself took part in the CAI’s national congress on behalf of the King. In 1888, the monarch also made generous donations to the Club, he personally donated to the CAI Lire 1,000 (approximately € 4,500) and pledged two prizes of Lire 500 each (approximately € 2,200 each) to the CAI section which most distinguished itself in mountaineering activities. Ricci. viii. In 1896, Luigi Amedeo of Savoia contributed Lire 5,000 (approximately €22,500) to build an observatory in the Rifugio Regina Margherita (Queen Margherita’s shelter), while the Queen donated Lire 4,000 (approximately €17,800). In addition to these contributions, the CAI sponsored Lire 3,000 (approximately €13,400) and the Ministry for Industry, Commerce and Agriculture contributed Lire 9,000 (approximately €40,000). C.A.I., “I Rifugi Del C.A.I.,” ibid., no. 70 (1904-1905). 112, 113.}
The expedition to Alaska

In 1897 and 1899, Luigi Amedeo of Savoia organized two great extra-European expeditions: the conquest of Mount Saint Elias (5,489 metres) on the Canadian-Alaskan border and a daring attempt to reach the North Pole using dog sledges. These expeditions gained the Duke worldwide fame, both because of his royal rank and the fact that the chosen destinations were unconquered, despite previous attempts carried out by other expeditions. The Italian and international press popularized these expeditions through several articles and accounts, while the monarchy aimed to exploit these enterprises to revamp both its prestige and the international image of Italy, which had been dramatically compromised by domestic political difficulties and the disastrous defeat in the Battle of Adwa (1896). This was why it was mainly the King who financed the Alaskan expedition.

The Alaskan mountaineering expedition developed as an alternative to climbing a Himalayan peak, which Luigi of Savoia initially targeted during his transoceanic voyage on the warship Cristoforo Colombo, in January 1895. With the Duke on that voyage were Umberto Cagni, his aid-de-camp, and Filippo De Filippi. In the Colombo’s Indian stop-over, they travelled inland, visiting Lahore, Delhi, Agra, Benares and the closest Himalayan stations. On 30 January 1895, they could arrived in Darjeeling, where they observed

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40 The so-called Crisi di fine secolo (a serious political and institutional crisis that culminated with the murder of King Umberto in 1900) was caused by the fact that Italy needed to undertake a modernization process based on a series of social policies, such as a new fiscal policy, the financing of new infrastructures, the enlargement of the public education system and the reduction of military and colonial costs. However, the conservative forces, the industrialists and the military establishment opposed these left wing-supported deep changes. Giovanni Sabatucci and Vittorio Vidotto, Il mondo contemporaneo. Dal 1848 ad oggi (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2008). 225. In addition to these difficulties, the colonial defeat at Adwa increased public opposition to the government and its colonial policy. The people vehemently accused the Prime Minister Francesco Crispi and the King of being responsible for undertaking a useless colonial policy. Oliva. 105-107.

41 Tenderini and Shandrick. 29, 30.

42 They took part in various of Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta’s explorations; De Filippi wrote the official accounts of several expeditions, while Cagni became famous as the man who reached the highest latitude during the North Pole 1899-1900’s expedition. The Cristoforo Colombo’s world circumnavigation voyage included stop-overs in India, China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada. USMM, busta 2106, “Nave C. Colombo”, Istruzioni di navigazione del 26 ottobre 1894, p.1.

Kangchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world (8,856 metres). In the introduction to the official account of the Alaskan expedition, De Filippi attributed the Duke’s long-standing interest in climbing a Himalayan peak to the viewing of Kangchenjunga and his ‘admiration for its magnificence’. In 1896, it was proposed to climb Nanga Parbat (Kashmir), as Luigi of Savoia saw it as a tribute to the death of the famous British climber Albert Frederick Mummery, who died while ascending the mountain in 1895. However, during the planning of the expedition an outbreak of plague occurred in India, forcing the Duke to turn “for consolation to Mount Saint Elias.”

However, the ascent of Saint Elias was not a mere ‘consolation’. It seems likely that this expedition was already partially designed by Luigi of Savoia after the Colombo stopped in Vancouver, where he intentionally collected some information about the mountain through Charles Fay. Fay knew about Luigi of Savoia’s climbing achievements and encouraged him to carry out his proposal. However, behind Fay’s enthusiasm was his intention to develop mountaineering in North America, which the American government

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44 Stefano Ardito, _La grande avventura. Filippo De Filippi e la sua spedizione attraverso le montagne dell’Asia (1913-1914)_ (Milano: Corbaccio, 2013). 27, 28.
45 Mummery had been a close friend of the Duke and his climbing partner in the ascent of the Matterhorn (1894). Filippo De Filippi, _La Spedizione di S.A.R. il Duca degli Abruzzi al Monte Sant’Elia (Alaska) 1897_ (Milano: Hoepli, 1900). 2
47 Charles Fay was one of the most prominent founders of the _Appalachian Mountain Club_. spent some in years in Europe because of his academic studies; here he established ties both with the Italian and British alpine environment and with the foremost climbers, such as the Duke and the mountain photographer Vittorio Sella. This relationship increased once Fay became secretary of the _Appalachian Mountain Club_. Maurice Isserman, _Continental Divide. A history of American mountaineering_ (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016). 137.
48 Tenderini and Shandrick. 32. Once the expedition was underway, the Duke had the support of the American topographer Mark Brickell Kerr, who participated in an expedition organised by the American Geographical Survey in 1891. Kerr’s exploration was the last one, chronologically, before Luigi of Savoia carried out his expedition. Despite his failure, Kerr collected data on Saint Elias’ glaciers, which provided fundamental support for the Duke in developing his route to reach the peak. Chris Jones, _Climbing in North America_ (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1997). 53.
regarded as risky.\textsuperscript{49} Thus, a new attempt to conquer Mount Saint Elias would have contributed significantly to this goal.

A few days before Luigi of Savoia left Italy for America, another expedition led by the American explorer Henry Bryant began an attempt to conquer the mountain.\textsuperscript{50} This demonstrated that Mount Saint Elias represented an ambitious climbing goal for several nations. The event persuaded the Duke’s biographers Fabietti, Michieli and Dainelli to describe the conquest of Saint Elias as a national matter between Americans and Italians, with Luigi of Savoia determined to win the ‘race to Saint Elias’ for Italy. Fabietti suggested that Luigi of Savoia wanted to make the name of Italy echo round the world,\textsuperscript{51} while Michieli emphasized the Duke’s confidence in succeeding in the enterprise, despite the competition from the American expedition.\textsuperscript{52} Dainelli argued that Luigi of Savoia was aware of the progress made by the American explorer and he wanted to be in competition with him, but “the advanced knowledge and spirit of discipline of the Duke led Italians to carry on [their attempt] in any case and never retreat.”\textsuperscript{53}

The expedition began on 17 May 1897. The Duke’s party spent several weeks moving forward “among endless glaciers, travelling more than 200 km on icefields, carrying all the supplies and luggage on their own shoulders or on sledges.”\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{49} Isserman. 145. The relationship between Fay and Luigi Amedeo of Savoia also showed his ties with the international mountaineering fraternity, in which alpine clubs from different countries exchanged information related to the current climbing proposals of their members. Alpinism was a somewhat elitist environment due to the high cost of equipment and the need for adequate leisure time to practice it. These features prevented many people from engaging in it; thus, the alpine club members were mainly the aristocracy, the high-bourgeoisie and nobles. Pastore. 34 and Morosini. 43-45. This exclusivity helped the Duke in collecting the necessary information to plan his climbing expeditions. Thus, once he returned to Italy and the outbreak of the plague affected his plans in India, he understandably turned his attention to Alaska, where he had already collected information during his stay in Vancouver.

\textsuperscript{50} The news about the Bryant’s expedition reached the Duke of Abruzzi through correspondence from the U.S. De Filippi. 4. It is reasonable to believe this information came from the American contacts established by the Duke in the months preceding his departure to Alaska.

\textsuperscript{51} Fabietti. 15, 16.

\textsuperscript{52} Michieli. 33.

\textsuperscript{53} Dainelli. 36 and 62.

\textsuperscript{54} De Filippi. xii, xiii. Luigi of Savoia personally chose every member of the expeditionary team and appointed Vittorio Sella, with his assistant Erminio Botta, to be the official photographer for the expedition.
expectations of this journey continued to rise: it was an arduous mountaineering trial which thrilled the international alpine community, while from the Duke’s point of view, it was, above all, a matter of national prestige. The reputation of his Royal House depended on his success. Vittorio Sella provided a description of those expectations in a letter to his wife stressing how:

It would have been better if the Duke had travelled to Alaska incognito [...], without creating so many expectations around his enterprise. Now, if we are not able to climb this blessed Saint Elias [...] everybody will say that his expedition failed.  

On 31 July, after thirty-eight days of marching, the Duke and his companions reached the summit of Saint Elias. De Filippi recorded in his notes that moment, indicating how the guides, who led the approach, left the way to the Duke of Abruzzi so he could be the first to reach the top and unfold a small tricolour flag tied to an ice axe. The Duke named some glaciers and other peaks Savoia, Colombo, Quintino Sella, Lucania and Bona, according to the mountaineering custom related to peaks conquered for the first time. His achievement was lauded by the Italian and international press, which assured the Duke

Sella had already gained a reputation in Italy for having documented the climb by Queen Margherita of Savoia to ‘Punta Gnifetti’ on Mount Rosa, in 1893. Tenderini and Shandrick: 32. The other members were Umberto Cagni, Francesco Gonnella from the Turin CAI section, Filippo De Filippi and four alpine guides from Valle d’Aosta, the Italian alpine region: Giuseppe Petigax, Lorenzo Croux, Antonio Maquignaz and Andrea Pellissier. The Duke recruited the alpine guides from Valle d’Aosta, as their fame was internationally known because some of them had served in various international expeditions. In the official book, De Filippi reported that many people wondered if recruiting Italian guides to explore mountains different from the Italian Alps had been a wise decision. However, the author affirmed that approaching glaciers required the same technique in the Alps and in all other mountains. De Filippi: xv, xvi. This gained the attention of the American alpine environment and it was even reported in The New York Times, which also emphasised that the Duke intended to donate “the whole profit from the sale of the Italian edition of [the book’s expedition], together with all royalties and rights on foreign editions to an insurance fund for Italian guides”. “Books of travel. Duke of Abruzzi’s ascent of St. Elias,” The New York Times, 6 October 1900.

55 “Se il Duca si fosse deciso a viaggiare in incognito, nell’andata in Alaska, avrebbe fatto molto meglio, a mio avviso [...] non avrebbe eccitato un’aspettazione così grande circa la sua impresa. Ora se non riusciamo a salire quel bendetto Sant’Elia [...] tutti diranno che la sua spedizione ha fatto fiasco.” Archivio Fondazione Sella, “fondo Vittorio”, Biella, as reported in Dell’Osa. 109.

56 The Duke chose these names to honour: The Royal Family; the Italian sailor Christopher Columbus; Quintino Sella, the founder of the CAI; the Lucania, which was the ocean liner that carried him and his companions from Italy to America; and his schooner Bona that he used for yachting races. De Filippi: 148, 164, 168, 169.

57 On 5 September 1897, the Italian weekly magazine La Tribuna Illustrata dedicated its front page to the Duke of Abruzzi’s enterprises, depicting him and his companions on the top of the mountain, surrounding an
international recognition; so much so that the official book of the expedition *La Spedizione di S.A.R. il Duca degli Abruzzi al Monte Sant’Elia (Alaska) 1897* was published in an English translation in 1900, as *The Ascent of Mount St Elias*. Furthermore, the British geographic-mountaineering societies invited the Duke to present an account of the expedition, illustrated by De Filippi. It was an important recognition for Luigi of Savoia because the invitation came from the renowned British climbing fraternity. The international attention devoted to the Duke’s enterprise allowed him to emphasise his achievement in terms of national pride, since the conquest of Mt Saint Elias had been an ambitious climbing goal, especially for British and American alpinists.\(^{58}\) As he personally specified in a telegram sent to the CAI’s branch in Turin: “The ascent of Saint Elias was achieved on 31 July […] The Italian expedition is the first and the only one that has reached the summit of the mountain.”\(^{59}\)

Later in 1967 Dainelli claimed that the practical organization of the expedition did not have the support of public institutions, politics and culture, and was solely possible thanks to “the strong will of a young Prince, who aimed for Italian affirmation in a global race, where Italy established itself as a modern, strong and civil nation.”\(^{60}\) His portrayal misrepresented the real origins of the Alaskan expedition. For instance, he did not mention the political context in which the Duke’s proposal was endorsed by the King; neither did

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\(^{58}\) Dell’Osa. 106.

\(^{59}\) Telegram by Luigi of Savoia to the CAI’s section of Turin.”L’ascensione del Monte Sant’Elia nell’Alaska compiuta dal Duca degli Abruzzi,” *Rivista mensile del Club Alpino Italiano*, August 1897. 281.

\(^{60}\) Dainelli. 78.
he state that the expedition was economically supported not only by the King, but also by the Club Alpino Italiano and by the Duke himself.61

The North Pole expedition

Before the Duke of Abruzzi’s North Pole expedition (1899-1900), explorations of the Arctic region essentially focused on searching for the famed ‘Northwest Passage’ for commercial purposes. Its discovery would have considerably reduced the sailing time from Europe to Asia and avoided the need to round the notorious Cape Horn. However, by the 1890s the original commercial purpose had turned into a challenge to conquer the North Pole, seen as a place still untouched by humans. In this context, on 18 April 1895, the Norwegian Fridtjof Nansen achieved a northernmost point at a latitude of 86°14’. This was a record, as none of the previous expeditions had reached so far north.62 Five years later, the Duke of Abruzzi beat Nansen’s record, but his expedition also marked the end of the ‘polar explorative season’ based essentially on using ships and dog sledges.63

The reasons that led Luigi of Savoia to undertake his polar expeditions have been interpreted in different ways by various biographers and authors. The Duke himself asserted that his goal “was to sail as far to the north as possible along the coastline and then travel on sledges towards the Pole”, whose conquest “was a noble idea, which won for Italy the first place among the nations which have approached nearest to the Pole.”64 However, the geographer Luigi Hugues contrasted this purpose in his Le esplorazioni polari nel secolo XIX. He clearly affirmed that Luigi of Savoia aimed to carry out a geographic exploration

61 Mario Giussani, Il Duca esploratore (Torino: SAIE, 1958), as quoted in Dell'Osa. 106.
62 Tenderini and Shandrick. 48.
in the still unknown northern region of Franz Joseph Land, instead of reaching the North Pole.\textsuperscript{65}

In contrast, Fabietti, Ascoli, Michieli and Dainelli relied on the ‘nationalistic approach’ emphasized in the Duke’s version. These biographers all attributed a patriotic meaning to the polar enterprise. According to Fabietti, the Duke aimed to take a step forward compared with the previous polar expeditions, to place Italy ahead in the great polar race. Thus, he put his name and that of Italy at stake to demonstrate Italian greatness to the world.\textsuperscript{66} Ascoli asserted that the world admired the ‘young Prince of Savoia’ as the most skilful person to lead an expedition, which demonstrated Italian bravery in the desolate Arctic lands.\textsuperscript{67} In yet another approach, Michieli argued that reaching the North Pole represented the natural consequence of the conquest of Saint Elias, because that enterprise increased ‘the natural passion’ of the Duke to accomplish risky enterprises and his desire to fly the Italian flag more widely.\textsuperscript{68} Finally, Dainelli emphasised how the Duke’s desire to undertake his audacious project was due to the failure of the previous attempts, which offered him the opportunity to be the first Italian to pursue the polar goal.\textsuperscript{69}

Although these hagiographic biographies were published in the 1930s and in 1967, even one of the most recent biographies of the Duke, by Tenderini and Shandrick, continued to emphasize the search for national prestige as the main reason for undertaking the polar expedition.\textsuperscript{70} It was not a mere race among the nations to be the first in conquering an untouched place; it had a clear political meaning for the monarchy, which aimed to recoup its prestige, above all in Italy,\textsuperscript{71} which was still dealing with the political difficulties

\textsuperscript{65} Luigi Hugues, \textit{Le esplorazioni polari nel secolo XIX} (Milano: Hoepli, 1901). 325.
\textsuperscript{66} Fabietti. 55.
\textsuperscript{67} Ascoli. 15.
\textsuperscript{68} Michieli. 53.
\textsuperscript{69} Dainelli. 109, 110.
\textsuperscript{70} Tenderini and Shandrick. 51.
\textsuperscript{71} Brevini. 282.
that had arisen since the organization of the Alaskan expedition. In May 1898, the image of the Royal House appeared even more compromised than in 1897, because of the violent reaction adopted by the government to repress a popular uprising in Milan against the high cost of living. This situation represented the acme of unpopularity for the monarchy; thus, King Umberto I saw a real possibility to reacquire royalty’s lost prestige by tying the name of the Royal House to an enterprise conducted by a member of the Royal Family. In practical terms, it resulted in the King sponsoring the Duke’s expedition with Lire 922,000 (approximately €4,000,000), which was a huge amount of money at that time. It is worth noting that only a royal family member could carry out such an expedition, in terms of both the high costs and the serious political context. These conditions would have prevented any private citizen or entrepreneur from organizing or supporting a Polar voyage at that time.

However, financing the expedition represented a serious risk for the Savoia dynasty: The King entrusted the image of the Royal House and Italy to an enterprise whose outcome was unpredictable; therefore, its failure could further jeopardize the already compromised prestige of the monarchy. This possibility engendered doubts about the utility of the enterprise among some politicians, such as Domenico Farini, the former president of the Senate, who stated in his Diario di fine secolo that the polar expedition appeared to be an initiative of the Duke to search for personal fame:

On 8 May the Duke of Abruzzi left for the discovery of the North Pole. It is a daring voyage; the King maybe did not allow him to undertake it […] he seems to be impatient to demonstrate he is worthy of a throne. He is a daring and tenacious mountaineer, who was the first to climb Alaska. He wishes for fame and

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72 The Milanese people protested the increase of the price of bread and King Umberto I appointed the army to repress the uprising. Thus, General Fiorenzo Bava Beccaris ordered the artillery to shoot at the crowd. As a reward for putting the uprising down, the King awarded Bava Beccaris a medal and nominated him a senator of the kingdom. Brevini. 282.
to gain popularity [...] Who knows what he is thinking? [...] Maybe he is thinking about the uncertain [political] conditions of Italy.”

The initial reaction of the King to the Arctic expedition came out even in the international press: such as, The Kalgoorlie Miner, an Australian newspaper, which reported that the King supported nearly the whole cost of the expedition, despite his strongly opposition to the voyage. The newspaper also emphasized that it was the first time in history that a Royal Prince engaged in such a daring pursuit. According to Dell’Osa, it was Nansen’s account of his polar voyage that inspired Luigi Amedeo of Savoia to undertake his own daring Arctic exploration. However, Nansen’s ‘influence’ may have been less profound, although the Duke took into consideration the new methods developed by the Norwegian to approach the North Pole. The Duke’s interest in Polar exploration could instead date back to before the Alaskan expedition. This evidence can be retraced in his relationship with the prestigious Royal Harwich Yacht Club of Suffolk, where he was a familiar figure due to the participation of his yacht Bona in the Harwich Regatta for some years, in which it won various prizes. Since 1857, the Harwich Club had been famous for its involvement in Arctic expeditions and by the 1870s, this involvement was further promoted in explorations carried out by “Captain George Nares (1875-1876), Prince

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76 “Another Polar Expedition,” The Kalgoorlie Miner 12 June 1899. 2.
77 Dell'Osa. 138.
78 In January 1899, Luigi Amedeo of Savoia met Nansen to discuss the organization of the expedition. Nansen advised Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta to purchase a whaler to be readapted for Arctic sailing and explained how to obtain dogs and sledges. Tenderini and Shandrick. 80 and Dell'Osa. 147.
79 On 6 June 1898, the Duke was elected a member of the Club. “Royal Harwich Yacht Club Committee minutes”, 1898, Royal Harwich Yacht Club historical archive, Suffolk, Ipswich.
80 The Bona took part in 1897 and 1898 in various races, challenging the Meteor II, the German Emperor’s schooner. In 1898 and 1899, the Duke also won the prestigious Queen’s Cup race (which is still one of the oldest cups in world yachting, also known as the 50-guinea cup). These sporting achievements also represented an opportunity to increase the prestige of the Italian monarchy among the crowned heads of Europe. For instance, the Duke’s victory over the Meteor II forced the emperor to admit his defeat before the European Royal Houses. Frank Hussey, The Royal Harwich. A short history of the Rhyc (Ipswich: Boydell Press, 1972). 92-95.
Luigi di Savoia in 1898, and Scott’s first expedition to the South in 1900. This would suggest the Duke had acquired knowledge about polar expeditions through his acquaintance with the Harwich environment, instead of being ‘only’ influenced by Nansen’s account.

Chronological analysis of the events supports this hypothesis: firstly, Nansen came back from his polar journey in June 1896, while the Duke was serving as a navy officer on board the *Cristoforo Colombo*, which returned to Italy only in January 1897. He then spent the following months meticulously organizing the Alaskan expedition (which began on 17 May 1897). Because of the commitment required for such a task, it would have been quite unlikely that he would have been focusing at the same time on Nansen’s account and consequently elaborating a new proposal for a polar expedition. Instead, the Duke visited Nansen later, in January 1899, to discuss with him an already elaborated proposal and take his advice.

The Duke’s plan diverged from that of Nansen, who took three years wandering over the ice fields before returning, while Luigi of Savoia spent only sixteen months in the Arctic. The Duke stated that despite his desire to reach the North Pole “was ardent, it was not, however, strong enough to induce me to remain for some years in those solitary and icy regions.” This version contrasted with the hagiographic representation given by Fabietti, who claimed the Duke wanted to be successful whatever the cost, even if he and his party did not return.

Luigi of Savoia declared that the conquest of the North Pole did not involve any commercial or material advantages; it was a challenge between nature and mankind based

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81 In 1857, the ship *Fox* “set off for the Arctic wearing Royal Harwich Yacht Club colours” to search for Franklin’s expedition. “History of the Club,” Royal Harwich Yacht Club, [www.royalharwichyachtclub.co.uk](http://www.royalharwichyachtclub.co.uk).
82 The Duke was on board the *Cristoforo Colombo* for a circumnavigation journey from 16 October 1894 to 1 January 1897. USMM, “Stato di Servizio di S.A.R. Luigi Amedeo di Savoia Duca degli Abruzzi”, p.3.
83 Luigi Amedeo of Savoy, Cagni, and Cavalli Molinelli. 10.
84 Fabietti. 55.
essentially on bravery, will and perseverance. Despite this ‘romantic’ representation, the expedition had a precise political meaning in terms of propaganda for the monarchy. The Royal House could easily exploit the Duke’s reputation, since he had already gained international fame due to his previous Alaskan achievement. Indeed, the Italian press contributed to popularizing the expedition, making a great media event of it.

*La Stampa* played a key role in this context because of its exclusive correspondence from Norway, the Duke’s point of departure on his expedition. On 28 May 1899, the newspaper emphasized the national prestige of the expedition, as an ‘Italian prince’ was carrying out a daring venture, which represented a very important event for the entire civilized world. It published a map of the Arctic region to make the places visited by the Duke familiar to the collective imagination:

> Arctic geography is on everyone’s lips these days, because of the great interest caused in the country by the polar expedition of the Duke of Abruzzi. Thus, we aim to please our readers by publishing a map of the Polar regions […] Readers will find the places often mentioned these days related to the expedition […] With the help of this map, they can easily understand the Duke’s plan.

While *The New York Times* provided an account of the Duke’s personality, depicting him as ‘an adventurous spirit’ and the most popular princes of all members of the Savoia Royal House, whose polar expedition was followed ‘with the sincerest of good wishes by all Italians.’ However, his polar journey engendered even a polemic debate in the international press. On 4 March 1898 the German newspaper *Vossische Zeitung* had appeared sceptical about the success of an expedition planned “in the country [Italy] of the oranges” defining the Duke of Abruzzi as a “new kind of Columbus”, and his Polar

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85 Audisio and Garimoldi. 13.
86 Brevini. 283.
enterprise as an attempt carried out by “hotheads”. According to the newspaper, the most suitable people to carry out an Arctic exploration were “Scandinavians, British, Germans, Russians and Americans.” Thus, the Corriere della Sera vigorously defended Italian national pride and the image of the Duke from the German criticism emphasizing how the ‘Italian hotheads’ had already discovered many lands and seas and the Duke of Abruzzi was not going to announce to the world, he wanted to evangelize Eskimos and polar bears “with the typical exaltation that distinguishes the Vossische.” 

This controversy also revealed that the Duke’s proposal for the North Pole was publicly known at least since the beginning of 1898, despite Michieli argued in his Duke’s biography that the plan was secretly carried out and those who had to know about the project were informed about its final details just before departing. The Arctic voyage began on 7 May 1899, with the explorers travelling from Turin to Christiania (Oslo), where the explorers arrived at the beginning of June. Their journey then continued on board the Stella Polare (Polar Star), an old Norwegian whaling ship, which the Duke specifically bought and readapted for sailing in the icy seas, according to Nansen’s suggestions. However, reaching the North Pole was also a matter of national prestige to several other nations, and when the Italians began their journey toward the Arctic, three other expeditions had already left for the North Pole, led respectively by the Americans Robert Edwin Peary,
Walter Wellman, and the Norwegian Otto Sverdrup, who had also been the commander of Nansen’s ship.94

The Duke’s proposal involved approaching the North Pole on the ice using sledges. He arranged three detachments, departing on 15 February and predicting their return between 15 and 20 May. However, on 23 December, Cagni, with the Duke, undertook a training session with the sledges and the dogs near the camp, but due to the darkness they fell into a crevasse, remaining in the ice for about fifteen minutes. This exposure to temperatures of approximately -30°C, even for a very short time, caused serious frostbite to two fingers of the Duke’s left hand and to Cagni’s right hand. One month later, the doctor, Cavalli Molinelli, amputated two phalanges from the Duke’s left hand, while Cagni recovered.95 The accident prevented the Duke to lead the expedition and he was forced to cede command to Umberto Cagni. Finally, the three teams departed on 11 March. According to the plan, the first detachments would return after completing a 12-day march, the second after 20 days, while the third would try to reach the Pole.96 Later, during the fascist period, Ettore Fabietti rhetorically described Cagni’s team as “tools of the nation” used in the polar race between nations, where Italy was determined to gain the maximum honour, although it was the last to join the race.97

Cagni and his squad proceeded towards the Pole. Their return was expected on 29 May, but on 10 June they had still not arrived. Luigi of Savoia seemed to be resigned to the dramatic situation, and wrote in the official book of the expedition: “I have full confidence in Captain Cagni’s endurance, in his perseverance, and in his talent for surmounting

94 Ibid. 53.
95 Dell'Osa. 159-161.
96 The first group consisted of Querini, Ollier and Stökkel, the Norwegian ship’s engineer, while Cavalli Molinelli, Cardenti and Savoye composed the second team; Cagni, Petigax, Fenoillet and Canepa formed the final one. Brevini. 285, 286.
97 Fabietti. 100.
obstacles, but there are limits to everything." Cagni’s team eventually returned to the base camp on the evening of 23 June:

While making our soup, we hear our dogs bark. We think at first that a bear is approaching […] What is our surprise when we see in the distance a sledge coming rapidly towards us! […] all my fears vanish when Andreas calls out: “Cagni has come back!” and when I ask «With his companions?» «Yes, and he has reached 86°34’» Cardenti and I give a cheer. All my anxiety is dispelled by the joy I feel at the return of our comrades, who have gone to the highest latitude yet reached.99

Cagni and his team spent 104 days on the ice pack and were forced to start killing the dogs to feed themselves and the remaining dogs. Only nine dogs survived of the forty-eight they had at the beginning of the journey, which was the minimum number of animals for pulling a sledge.100 The expedition reached the latitude of 86°34’, which marked a new record, beating Nansen’s previous latitude. This remained undefeated until 1909, when Robert Peary eventually conquered the North Pole. The official account of the expedition revealed how hard Cagni’s journey was, despite Fabietti hagiographically stating how Cagni was encouraged to continue by ‘an overpowering desire’ to deliver to the Duke and the world the announcement of an Italian victory, rather than taking care of himself and his companions.101

The return of the Duke of Abruzzi and his companions echoed worldwide, as demonstrated by several articles published both in Italy and America. The Italian press particularly celebrated the Duke’s enterprise, emphasizing the new latitude record gained and describing how Italians welcomed the explorers’ return.102 Congratulations also came

98 Luigi Amedeo of Savoy, Cagni, and Cavalli Molinelli. 261.
99 Ibid. 266.
100 Dell’Osa. 172.
101 Fabietti. 176.
102 Particularly, Il Corriere della Sera and La Stampa reported the story of the expedition as well as the accounts of the honours received by the Duke, who many Italian cities nominated as an honorary citizen. See “Dopo il ritorno dal Polo Nord,” Il Corriere della Sera, 20 September 1900. and Augusto Ferrero, “Entusiastiche accoglienze al Duca degli Abruzzi ritornante in Italia. Le vicende della spedizione polare,” La Stampa, 15 September 1900.
from Nansen and the Russian press through the *Corriere della Sera*. The Norwegian explorer praised the Duke as “a follower of the noble traditions of Marco Polo and Cristoforo Colombo” and thanks to his achievement “Italy can spread its [glory] over all the world, although serious sorrow has struck it.” The reference was to King Umberto I’s killing on 29 July 1900. A similar concept was reported in the Russian newspaper *Novosti*, which emphasised how the Duke waved the Italian flag in the outer limit of the world and his enterprise added a ‘new glory’ to the glorious tradition of explorations gained by the Italian explorers like Marco Polo, Caboto, Cristoforo Colombo and Amerigo Vespucci.

Among these international recognitions, the *Corriere* observed how the Austrian press did not praise in any way the Duke of Abruzzi’s expedition and neither did it inform its readers about the results obtained. 103

The *Corriere*’s attitude reflected the Italian anti-Austrian and anti-German feeling engendered by the mutual ambiguity of their diplomatic relationships. The newspaper depicted the North Pole expedition as a matter of national prestige and it promptly emphasised how the Italian allies (Austria and Germany, as previously noted) ignored the importance of its outcome or had even been doubtful about its success. 104 Despite the press depicting the expedition as a total success, the Duke failed in his main goal of conquering

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103 *“La spedizione italiana al Polo,” Il Corriere della Sera*, 14 September 1900.
104 From 1882, Italy was allied with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the Triple Alliance. However, by 1897 the Italian government undertook a reconciliation policy with France, which during Crispi’s cabinet had been considered an enemy of Italian foreign policy. Despite the various renewals of the Triple Alliance (1887, 1891 and 1896), the relationship between Italy and its allies was based on a mutual suspiciousness. The difficulties of the Triple Alliance emerged from its second renewal (1887). For example, Austria complained that Italy’s occupation of Massawa (1885) occurred without informing Vienna and was favoured by the British diplomacy. There were also irredentist matters regarding Trento, Trieste and Dalmatia, which animated Italian anti-Austrian feeling and worried Germany and Austria. Luigi Albertini, *Le origini della guerra del 1914*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1942). 14 and Arthur James May, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1867-1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951). 406-414.
Furthermore, by 29 July 1900, as Vittorio Emanuele III became the new King of Italy, this anti-Austrian feeling increased. The new King was cautious towards Austria. In such a political scenario, Luigi Albertini, the director of the *Corriere della Sera*, who harboured an anti-Austrian feeling, reflected his view on the newspaper’s policy. On the Triple Alliance and the Italian-French reconciliation see Alan John Percivale Tylor, *The struggle for mastery in Europe 1848-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961). 272-276, 312, 313 and Giancarlo Giordano, *Cilindri e feluche. La politica estera dell’Italia dopo l’Unità* (Roma: Aracne, 2008). 351-373.
the North Pole. Instead, his expedition represented a further step in the race to reach the decisive 90° of latitude, in which Luigi Amedeo of Savoia temporarily replaced Nansen and a few years later the American Robert Edwin Peary replaced him. The failure of the expedition enlivened a debate within the polar exploration environment, as revealed in an interview by Luigi Barzini with Peary in 1908. Peary gave his opinion on what prevented Luigi of Savoia reaching the Pole. His analysis depicted the Duke as too self-confident in planning the Arctic exploration.

According to Peary, several reasons prevented the Duke of Abruzzi’s expedition reaching the Pole; such as the ship was old and it probably would be destroyed if exposed to another winter. This impeded the Duke from staying until the following winter to try again. In addition, acquiring experience in Arctic voyages was a slow process, therefore it was impossible to be successful at the first attempt. Also, the Italians lacked dogs, this fact stopped Cagni on his way toward the Pole. Finally, Peary stressed that another mistake was to choose alpine guides instead of Eskimos to accomplish the long hard march on the pack. Peary had already twice attempted the conquest of the Pole. His interview was conducted on the eve of his third voyage, which was the successful one. In comparison, Luigi of Savoia organised his polar expedition based only on his previous Alaskan exploration. In addition, the Duke clearly stated in his official account that he would not spend more than one winter in the Arctic region. In reality, attempting the conquest of the Pole required much more time, as Peary demonstrated.

105 Barzini was one of the most famous Italian journalists. At that time, he was the Corriere della Sera’s special correspondent in New York.
106 Luigi Barzini, “La spedizione Peary verso il Polo,” Il Corriere della Sera, 6 July 1908.
107 However, this voyage engendered a polemic debate with Frederick Albert Cook, who had previously participated in Peary’s second polar voyage in 1891. Cook argued he had conquered the North Pole in 1908, one year prior to the third Peary expedition. The dualism between Peary and Cook animated the geographic-exploration American environment for a long time.
However, biographers like Michieli and Dainelli, instead of representing the real outcome of the expedition, focused on other aspects. They argued that “The expedition was not agonistic but scientific,” due to the large collection of scientific and astronomic data made by the explorers, for whom the “foremost results were geographic and naturalistic, as demonstrated [in their] several accounts regarding the seas and lands visited, which enriched the official book.” They turned the scientific aspects into the main goal of the expedition, to depict the Italians as victorious in another way. Luigi Amedeo of Savoia was partially interested in gathering scientific data, but the expedition was mainly a sporting enterprise with an explicit ideological meaning. In addition, it could propagandize the image of Italy as a great nation, able to compete equally with other nations in the race to the Pole. It is hard to believe that the same result could be obtained by undertaking a mere scientific expedition. Dainelli emphatically noted this concept as he described the enterprise as a “total victory of Italy with regard to the North Pole”, which came thanks to the Duke of Abruzzi’s determination, “who allowed Italy to excel in the international race over the other nations, despite it being the last to join it.”

Public opinion acknowledged the Duke’s achievement as a national undertaking. On their side, Luigi of Savoia and Umberto Cagni largely contributed to building this interpretation through the official book of the expedition, *On the «Polar Star» in the Arctic Sea*. They described the voyage as a task pursued on behalf of the whole nation, instead of having undertaken it as a group of explorers. Various parts of the book refer to the image of the King being understood as representative of the whole nation; also, the descriptions of some scenes instil a patriotic feeling. For instance, when the Duke greeted the squads

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108 Michieli. 82.  
109 Brevini. 282.  
110 Dainelli. 137 and 174.  
111 Brevini. 287.
leaving for the first attempt, he three times repeated «Long live the King!» or Cagni, when he reached the latitude of 86°34', stated «Long live Italy! Long live the King! Long live the Duke of Abruzzi!» while tying the Italian flag. He emphasised how his exclamations made “more brilliant the crown of Savoy!” because they were uttered over the endless eternal ice. This emphasis reached its peak in the description of sighting the base camp on the horizon:

An increasing fervour [led us] to tie the flag to a stick [in the] kayak, [because] We wished to arrive with our flag flying, in order that our comrades would draw the conclusion that we were all in good health and did not return in defeat.\textsuperscript{112}

Whilst these patriotic references could capture readers’ imaginations, it was the literature and the editorial industry that significantly popularized the expedition. A significant example of that was given by the book, \textit{La «Stella Polare» e il suo viaggio avventuroso} (1900) by Emilio Salgàri. He was commissioned to write the book two days after the expedition returned to Italy (16 September) so that it could be sold prior to Christmas of 1900. It became part of the copious popular culture production that surrounded the enterprise.\textsuperscript{113} Salgàri was already familiar with the subject because of his previous novels set in the polar regions, but in addition to his creativity, he used the information reported in several journalistic accounts issued during the Duke’s expedition to write his novel.\textsuperscript{114} Although Donath pursued commercial purposes, he explicitly requested Salgàri to laud the patriotic side of the Duke’s venture, which should appear as a glorification of Italian prestige and of the Duke, but it should also be a stimulus for the younger generation to undertake other daring enterprises.\textsuperscript{115} This was why the book

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{112}] Luigi Amedeo of Savoy, Cagni, and Cavalli Molinelli. 203, 483.
\item[\textsuperscript{113}] Brevini. 290.
\item[\textsuperscript{114}] Salgàri’s books set in the Arctic and Antarctic regions were \textit{I pescatori di balene} (1894); \textit{Al Polo Australe in velocipede} (1895); \textit{Le avventure di Padre Crespel nel Labrador} (1896); \textit{Nel paese dei ghiacci} (1896); \textit{Al Polo Nord} (1898); \textit{I minatori dell’Alaska} (1900).
\item[\textsuperscript{115}] Donath to Salgàri as reported in Brevini. 290.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
abounded in glorification of the monarchy. Salgàri defined Luigi of Savoia as an “intrepid young prince from the valiant lineage of Savoy”, who was famous everywhere.116

Despite the glorification of his image and that of the monarchy, Luigi of Savoia was not happy with the publication of La «Stella Polare» e il suo viaggio avventuroso. From his point of view, the book confused the public, who apparently took the novel as his official account, although it was only published in 1903. Therefore, in the introduction of his work, Salgàri had to specify it was not the official account of the expedition,117 which the Duke and his collaborators were writing “to address it to the scientists.” Furthermore, the author clarified his tale was based on the reports issued by the Duke to the press and his purpose was to praise e of the many glorious daring enterprises achieved by the Savoia.118

**Pascoli and D’Annunzio: the poetic representation of the North Pole expedition**

The echo of the North Pole expedition fascinated also poets like Giovanni Pascoli and Gabriele D’Annunzio, who glorified the polar voyage in their works. Pascoli composed the hymns *Al Duca degli Abruzzi e i suoi compagni* and *A Umberto Cagni* in the summer

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116 Emilio Salgari, "La «Stella Polare» e il suo viaggio avventuroso (Verso l’Artide con la «Stella Polare»)," ed. Nico Lorenzutti, *Romanzi tra i ghiacci* (ROH Press, 2014). Salgàri had already emphasized the image of the Royal House and the Duke himself in his previous book Al Polo Nord, which Donath published in 1898 when the North Pole expedition had first been heralded. In the final part of Al Polo Nord, the author referred to the Duke’s previous mountaineering achievements to praise his qualities and described him as a “lucky and daring climber who was the first to wave the tricolour flag over the huge Saint Elias’ peak, which was believed to be inaccessible.” Thus, the book concluded with a patriotic wish for the forthcoming Arctic expedition: “Undoubtedly, there will be arduous obstacles to overcome […] but the courage and the unique astuteness of the young Duke may contribute to success […] We hope the ensign held by Savoy’s prince will go beyond and its colours may wave to the boreal winds at the Pole.” "Al Polo Nord," ed. Nico Lorenzutti, *Romanzi tra i ghiacci* (ROH Press, 2014).

117 Brevini. 291, 292.

118 Salgàri’s introduction, as reported in Brevini, 291, 292. Scholars like Claudio Gallo and Caterina Lombardo revised the ‘dispute’ between the author and the Duke, as they argued that, on behalf of Luigi of Savoia, Cagni essentially invited Salgàri to be present at a law firm in Turin, probably as a legal warning. However, there is no evidence of any verdict issued by any tribunal, which would prove the existence of a lawsuit. Claudio Gallo and Caterina Lombardo, "La Vertenza Tra Il Capitano Cagni E Lo Scrittore Emilio Salgari. Note Sulla Corrispondenza Con Laura Carrara Cagni," *Il Corsaro Nero*, no. 17 (2012). 44. Thus, the disagreement only resulted in modifying the original title of the book in *Notizie sul viaggio della «Stella Polare»*, with the caption «collected by Emilio Salgàri». Brevini. 292.
of 1900; while D’Annunzio wrote *La canzone di Umberto Cagni* in 1912. Pascoli had been interested in the polar explorations since 1897, when he composed the poem *Andrée*, dedicated to the Norwegian explorer Salomon August Andrée, who dramatically tried to reach the Pole using an aerostat. In that work, the poet represented the explorer as a hero, who managed the difficulties with optimism, although he eventually died during the exploration.\(^{120}\) Later, in 1906, this and the two poems related to the Duke’s expedition were gathered in a volume titled *Odi e Inni* (Odes and Hymns). It also contained various other poems composed between 1897 and 1905, which particularly celebrated men and glorious events in Italian history. As Mario Pazzaglia observed, in those years and until 1911, Pascoli attributed an ethical and political meaning to the poetry, which he represented as a celebrative genre. This interpretation led him to glorify the Duke of Abruzzi and Umberto Cagni as the personification of the virtues of the Italian people.\(^{121}\) The poet described Cagni as a “pilot of heroes” who led and encouraged a “handful of heroes” tormented by starvation and cold to pursue their aim.\(^{122}\) Pascoli ‘exploited’ this image of Cagni and his companions’ bravery to represent Italian valour.\(^{123}\)

This celebrative poetic genre allowed Pascoli to embody the role of *il poeta Vate* (the Prophet poet), who had a civil duty to indicate Italians’ future path through the analysis of coeval historical events, such as colonial undertakings and daring polar enterprises.\(^{124}\)


\(^{120}\) Ibid., 171, 172.


\(^{123}\) Biagini. 225, 226.

\(^{124}\) Giovanni Capecchi, “Giovanni Pascoli,” in *Atlante dei movimenti culturali dell’Emilia-Romagna dall’Ottocento al contemporaneo*, ed. Luigi Weber and Piero Pieri (Bologna: CLUEB, 2010). 88, 89. This attitude reached its peak in 1911, when Pascoli supported the Italian intervention in Libya against the Ottoman Empire. On 2 November, he publicly delivered his famous speech *La Grande Proletaria si è mossa*, in which he interpreted the conquest of Libya as a necessary civilising mission. In his view, the new lands were a desert due to the negligence and nomadism of its local populations; therefore Italy contributed, through the annexation of those territories, to the civilization of those peoples. This imperialistic concept also reflected the political views of the poet, who was both socialist and nationalist: he metaphorically envisaged Italy as
The Duke’s polar journey fascinated Pascoli so much that he worked on *Al Duca degli Abruzzi e i suoi compagni* at least from August 1900, when the expedition was still in progress. To compose his verses, he collected information about the Pole and the expedition to reconstruct the environment visited by the Duke of Abruzzi, as he stated in a letter to his friend Gabriele Briganti:

I desperately need to have the book by Nansen «Tra i ghiacci» […] I also need to know the name of Luigi of Savoia’s ship […] I want to gather some information [about those places] as I have never been to the Pole.\(^{125}\)

Pascoli also declared how this poem and the following *A Umberto Cagni* emphasised the “heroic circumstances” in which the polar journey took place. However, he regretted that the Italian flag planted by Cagni returned with the expedition instead of being left in the icefield, as it could have reached the Pole by drifting over the icepack.\(^{126}\) In his interpretation, the Italian flag planted in a latitude never reached before symbolized the triumph of all Italian people, who wandered in search of new lands to conquer.\(^{127}\)

According to Aida Apostolico, Pascoli and his interpretation of the North Pole enterprise should be also related to his literary critique of Dante’s *Divina Commedia*. In this context, Pascoli compared the difficulty of interpreting Dante’s thoughts with the adversities met by the explorers who aimed to reach the North Pole. He metaphorically represented the geographic Pole as the highest point of understanding of Dante’s poetry, which he defined as his ‘literary enterprise’.\(^{128}\) This parallelism was engendered at the end of the 1890s, after Pascoli had spent six years studying and analysing Dante’s seminal

\(^{125}\) Letter by Pascoli to Gabriele Briganti, 3 August 1900, as reported in Biagini. 225.


\(^{127}\) Biagini. 225.

work, a period that coincided with the various Polar conquest attempts (Nansen in 1893-1895, Andréé in 1897 and the Duke of Abruzzi in 1899-1900). Thus in 1898, Pascoli claimed to have found “the Pole of the Dantesque world interpretation.”

While Pascoli celebrated the Duke of Abruzzi and Umberto Cagni, Gabriele D’Annunzio focused mainly on Cagni, dedicating to him the poem La Canzone di Umberto Cagni, which glorified both his colonial enterprise at the Libyan beach of Bu Meliana nearby Tripoli (where he led the landing of the Italian troops during the Italian-Turkish War) and his polar achievement. In D’Annunzio’s interpretation, Cagni embodied the concept of the Nietzschean Übermensch mixed with elements from ancient Greek-Roman culture and the Renaissance because he represented the masculine stereotype based on bravery and honour, who expressed these qualities through his actions and the accomplishment of daring enterprises: the North Pole exploration and the wartime actions in Libya.

From this perspective, D’Annunzio elaborated two images of Italy: one was essentially made by mediocre and vile men, while the other, defined as ‘heroic Italy’, was

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130 Biagini, 182, 183.
131 The poem was published for the first time on 24 December 1911 in the Corriere della Sera. Sandro Gentili and Isabella Nardi, La grande illusione. Opinione pubblica e mass-media al tempo della guerra di Libia (Perugia: Morlacchi Editore, 2009). 366. It was part of the book titled Merope. Canti della Guerra d’oltremare, which D’Annunzio wrote to celebrate the Italian-Turkish War for the conquest of Libya. In his volume, the poet rhetorically praised heroes originating from epic poetry, comparing them with the protagonists of the colonial war. D’Annunzio argued the Libyan war was a right war to recoup the supremacy of the Italian population along the Mediterranean shores where they had already spread, in an ancient past as Latin peoples, culture, beauty and justice. Filippo Caburlotto, "D’annunzio, La Latinità Del Mediterraneo E Il Mito Della Riconquista,” California Italian Studies 1, no. 1 (2010). 2,3.
133 It was a concept elaborated by George Mosse, who argued how the ‘real man’ had to be brave and intrepid without showing his emotions, especially when he dealt with difficulties. George Lachmann Mosse, L’immagine dell’uomo. Lo stereotipo maschile nell’epoca Moderna (Torino: Einaudi, 1997). 31, as reported in Antonio Storace, "Cagni, D’Annunzio e «La più grande Italia». I rapporti tra D’Annunzio e Umberto Cagni, militare eroico e avventuroso, celebrati nelle «Canzoni delle gesta d’oltremare» e nel «Notturno»," Rassegna Dannunziana XVIII, no. 38, Dicembre (2000). 35.
shaped by men who could achieve daring endeavours, challenged nature with their adventurous enterprises and undertook colonial conquests. In this coalescence of superuomini, D’Annunzio placed himself with Cagni, identifying an affinity with him: the poet represented himself as the superhuman artist, as the aesthete, who glorified beauty and beautiful enterprises, and who also interpreted the role of Vate; while the Duke’s lieutenant embodied those who achieved such ventures, thanks to his superhuman qualities.134

As Antonio Storace noted, D’Annunzio understood Umberto Cagni as a kind of ‘new man’ who contributed to building an image of a greater Italy through the tribulations and successes experienced during the polar expedition. These characteristics appeared, for instance, in the coolness of Cagni and his companions in dealing with the dangerous and unstable icepack, which threatened to swallow their sledges;135 or in Cagni’s description as provided by the Duke himself: “A valiant leader of resolute men who craved to gain glory for Italy by reaching the Pole, despite the difficulties.”136 This portrayed Cagni as a national hero, who moved towards the highest latitude not only to gain personal fame, but to gain glory for all of Italy. Such concept was primarily emphasized by the Duke in his speech delivered at the Italian Geographic Society on 14 January 1901:

Italy has gained a place of honour in the centuries-old [polar] race among the Nations, despite it being its debut and the last to join the race. I wish that the same success will place our flag in other remarkable enterprises where Italy will take part, also [I hope] our Nation will be the first or at least be an example for the others.137

134 Storace. 36.
135 Luigi Amedeo di Savoia, Umberto Cagni, and Achille Cavalli Molinelli, La «Stella Polare» Nel Mare Artico (Milano: Hoepli, 1903). 339, and Storace. 35.
136 Luigi Amedeo di Savoia, Cagni, and Cavalli Molinelli. 163.
Thus, according to D’Annunzio, the Duke of Abruzzi and Cagni worked to build Italy’s greatness and embodied the ambition to establish Italian supremacy through their ventures. D’Annunzio especially emphasized Cagni’s perseverance, who despite adversities continued his journey to engrave the name of Italy further north than the latitude reached by Nansen. The poet also considered Cagni as someone who could help to engender a new Italy, due to his contribution to the final victory in the battle of Bu Meliana, which D’Annunzio rhetorically considered the onset of the new Italian greatness.

The diplomatic naval missions (1903-1905 and 1907)

In the aftermath of the Arctic expedition, Luigi Amedeo of Savoia resumed his duties as a Naval officer. In 1902, he received the command of the ship Liguria to undertake a circumnavigation voyage between 1903 and 1905. In 1907, he commanded the ship Varese and carried out a representative mission on behalf of the government and the Navy in the United States and Canada. Dainelli argued that the Liguria’s command was related to the Polar expedition, which had resulted in international fame for the Duke. According to the biographer, the government aimed to reinvigorate Italy’s national prestige among overseas Italian communities, since the country’s image had been internationally undermined because of domestic political problems and the failure of its colonial policy. Luigi of Savoia embodied the image of a stronger Italy, because of his exploration successes and fame. This had the potential to reawaken immigrants’ pride in being Italian. The naval missions represented an interesting part of the Duke’s life, because

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138 “It is not necessary to live, but sculpting our name beyond that point: this is necessary.” Gabriele D’Annunzio, “La canzone di Umberto Cagni,” ed. Annamaria Andreoli and Niva Lorenzini, Merópe (Milano: Mondadori, 2013).
139 Storace. 38.
140 Dainelli. 175, 176
they revealed his political role in informing the Italian Government of the political situation of the countries visited, the conditions prevailing in Italian communities and providing military information on the weaponry adopted by foreign Navies, which the Liguria met during its voyage.\footnote{USMM, “Nave Liguria” – Consiglio Superiore di Marina, seduta del 10 luglio 1905. The Liguria’s cruise took 597 days of sailing, from the 29 August 1903 to 18 April 1905.}

It was a duty for the Navy’s commanders to gather political and military information during their overseas cruises, but Luigi Amedeo of Savoia emphasised that sending warships overseas represented a matter of national prestige, because the presence of vessels and its crews and officers depicted a different representation of Italians to Americans, who used to see them as immigrants and as the poorest and the worst part of the Italian population. According to the Duke, the presence of Italian warships made stronger the connection between the immigrants and the homeland as well as providing impartial information on the Italian colony to the government through the commanders’ reports.\footnote{USMM, “Nave Liguria” – Rapporto di Navigazione, 10 novembre 1903.}

The visit to New Orleans particularly showed this political side, since the Duke found himself involved in the contrast between the Italian consul and the Italian community of that city.\footnote{Ibid. The Italian consul Giuseppe Saint Martin stated that Italians (approximately 18,000 people) were apparently disliked by the Americans; many of them were considered related to the mafia, because they were from Sicily. Saint Martin also highlighted how Antonino Patorno, the president of the Italian association of the city, was disliked by the local authorities because he was believed to be the boss of the mafia. The Duke investigated the situation, discovering that Italians disliked the consul because of his lack of concern for their interests in New Orleans, while Patorno was considered the most influential person among the Italians. The Mayor of New Orleans confirmed to the Duke that there were no contrasts between Americans and Italians in the city. Luigi Amedeo of Savoia knew that the Italian residents aimed to send a written request to the Italian government to dismiss the consul, but the Duke discouraged Patorno from undertaking written action against the consul. He emphasised that it was better to keep the matter ‘secret’, in order not to damage the image of the Italian colony in New Orleans. Consequently, the Duke sent a report to the government suggesting the dismissal of the consul.}

Luigi of Savoia also emphasised how Italians had to become Americans citizens in order to achieve social integration and obtain the right to vote, without compromising their original nationality. However, behind the Duke’s ‘philanthropic’ ideas was the political plan of King Vittorio Emanuele III, who exploited the Duke’s influential
image to convince the thousands of Italian-American citizens, especially those living in New York, to vote “for policies favourable to Italy.”  

The report showed the American racist attitude towards Italians at that time, because the Americans distinguished categories of manpower based on race; they considered the Italian workers more suitable than Negros to work in cotton and sugar cultivation. This ‘racial discrimination’ was disliked by the Duke because, from his own racist point of view, it was not “very gratifying for [Italians] to be considered secondary to the negro.”

At the end of his mission, Luigi of Savoia returned to Italy and received the congratulations of the Minister of Foreign Affairs for the accuracy of his reports, especially for those related to the events that had occurred in New Orleans.

The second naval mission occurred from 4 May to 8 August 1907. The purpose of this new voyage was to participate in the celebration of the tricentennial of the foundation of the United States of America. To this purpose, the American government organised an international exhibition in Jamestown, where it invited the world’s nations to send part of their fleets as naval and military representatives to take part in the celebration.

The Italian government sent its warships Varese and Etruria and appointed the Duke of Abruzzi to lead the Navy contingent. Once again, the choice was not casual, because the Duke was quite popular in the United States. The Italian ambassador in Washington, Edmondo

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144 Tenderini and Shandrick, 91.
146 Ibid, Consiglio Superiore di Marina, seduta del 10 luglio 1905.
147 USMM, “Nave Varese” - Lettera del Ministro degli Esteri al Ministro della Marina - Feste di Hampton Roads, 20 maggio 1907. The celebrations took place at the Hampton Road port, where the American Navy organised some regattas among the Japanese, Italian, Austro-Hungarian and American crews. The sailors of Varese and Etruria won all the competitions, increasing the prestige of the Italian naval delegation.
148 Furthermore, by March 1903, his fame notably increased because the American Geographical Society awarded him the prestigious Cullum Geographical Medal for his Arctic accomplishment, while the local press repeatedly emphasised his explorative achievements. The prize is one of the oldest awards established by the American Geographical Society, which awards those people “who distinguish themselves in geographical discoveries or in the advancement of geographical science.” Luigi Amedeo of Savoia received the prize from the hands of Robert Edwin Peary, who announced during the ceremony his own North Pole expedition, declaring that his aim was to reach a further latitude compared with that achieved by the Italians.
Mayor des Planches, eagerly reported these perceptions to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.\textsuperscript{149}

During his stay in New York, the Duke also promoted his official book of the North Pole expedition, \textit{On the Polar Star in the Arctic Sea}.\textsuperscript{150} This confirmed the Duke’s connection with the international geographic community, where his reputation was widely recognized. Later in 1906, his fame was further boosted by his last climbing achievement: the conquest of Rwenzori mountain in Africa.\textsuperscript{151} This shows how the Duke was seen as an outstanding ‘ambassador’ for Italy, who supported the efforts of the monarchy to portray Italy as a significant nation among the other powers. In addition, the international celebration for the tricentennial of the United States offered an important chance to the Navy to increase its prestige due to the presence of Luigi of Savoia, and the Ministry of the Navy valued his ability to encourage the enlistment of Italian citizens living in the United States.\textsuperscript{152}

\textbf{The Rwenzori exploration (1906)}

On 3 January 1906, the \textit{Corriere della Sera} stated that Luigi Amedeo of Savoia was planning an ascent of the highest peak of the Rwenzori mountains in Central Africa. The

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\item \textsuperscript{149} USMM, “Nave Varese” – Lettera della Regia Ambasciata d’Italia a Washington al Ministero Affari Esteri, 13 febbraio 1907.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Tenderini and Shandrick, 71.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Rwenzori is located on the border between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was known as \textit{The Mountains of the Moon} (according to the definition attributed by the ancient geographer Ptolemy), or as \textit{King of the Clouds}, namely \textit{Rwenzori}, which means \textit{Rain-maker} in the local language of Bantù. The geographic international environment conventionally adopted \textit{Rwenzori} as the official name of the mountains. The first glimpse was attributed to the Italian explorer Romolo Gessi in 1876, who noticed the snowy mountain chain during his explorative journey along Lake Albert. Filippo De Filippi, \textit{Rwenzori. An account of the expedition of H.R.H. Prince Luigi Amedeo of Savoy Duke of the Abruzzi} (New York: Dutton & Company, 1908), 195, 196.
\item \textsuperscript{152} USMM, “Nave Varese”, Lettera del Ministro della Marina Carlo Mirabello a S.A.R. Duca degli Abruzzi comandante della Regia Nave «Varese», istruzioni di campagna, 12 marzo 1907.
\end{itemize}
newspaper also emphasised that several unsuccessful attempts had already been made. At that time, the geographic knowledge of Rwenzori was quite scarce and the geographic data related to its orography were somewhat inaccurate. Mountaineering aims had prevailed over geographic ones, and a number of European climbers had competed to reach the summit.

Some biographers argued that the Duke decided to undertake his expedition because he was influenced by ‘the romantic challenge’ launched by the explorer Stanley during a conference he held at the Royal Geographic Society in 1901. However, the reason for undertaking the conquest of Rwenzori can be retraced to the Italian political context of that time. In the 1910s, as Emilio Gentile observed in his La Grande Italia; il mito della nazione nel XX secolo, Italy undertook liberal reforms based on social and economic improvements, which made the state apparatus more democratic compared with the authoritarian policies that marked the last decade of the nineteenth century, while it also increased its national prestige in the international context. These developments partially reduced the popular opposition to the state and the monarchy that had marked the 1890s (especially during the Duke’s expeditions to Alaska and the North Pole). At the same time, the image of the new King Vittorio Emanuele III helped to build a slightly patriotic feeling around the monarchy,

153 “Un’ascensione alpina del Duca degli Abruzzi nell’Africa Centrale,” Il Corriere della Sera, 3 January 1906. Among these attempts were those undertaken by the popular British climbers Douglas Freshfield and Arnold Louis Mumm. The name Rwenzori was applied to the mountains by Henry Morton Stanley, who observed the chain during his 1888 rescue expedition of Emin Pascià, governor of Equatoria, when the Mahdist Revolt threatened his governorship. Between 1889 and 1906, twenty-one expeditions failed in attempts to climb Rwenzori’s peaks, but since 1900, the frequency of such explorative journeys increased an access way to the mountain was discovered. De Filippi, Ruwenzori. An account of the expedition of H.R.H. Prince Luigi Amedeo of Savoy Duke of the Abruzzi, 20, 21.

154 Messner and Mantovani. 19.

155 The Scottish-American explorer emphasised that Rwenzori represented the most important climbing and geographic unsolved problem at that time; therefore he wished that a passionate climber had the chance to explore, study and conquer those mysterious mountains. The Duke’s biographers Dell’Osa. 185, Fabietti. 247, Speroni. 89, 90, Tenderini and Shandrick. 72-74, argued that Stanley’s announcement was decisive in stimulating the Duke to organize his African expedition. Speroni even affirmed that “Stanley called [metaphorically] the Duke from a thousand kilometres away to achieve the enterprise which he [Stanley] had not been able to pursue”. Speroni. 90. Fabietti wrote that Stanley’s invitation was irresistible to the Duke’s personality, since he used to act wherever there was danger or a challenge. Fabietti. 247.

as he appeared rather different from the authoritarian figure of his predecessor Umberto I.\textsuperscript{157}

Although increasing in popularity, the Royal House still needed to consolidate its image and the Rwenzori expedition seemed a good opportunity to enlarge its prestige. The conquest of the African mountain was also portrayed as a ‘race’ between the Italians and the British to be the first to reach the summit of the mountain.\textsuperscript{158} Evidence of this competitive attitude is found in the Duke’s correspondence with Vittorio Sella (1905), and in the diary of the British climber Alexander F. R. Wollaston (1906). The very short time that elapsed between the Duke’s return from his naval mission (April 1905) and the letter he sent to Sella in June 1905, inviting him to take part in a new expedition,\textsuperscript{159} demonstrated that he had already envisaged a new explorative journey to Rwenzori, while he was still away from Italy. Despite his absence from the mountaineering scene, due to his naval duties, he was kept informed about the climbing attempts that occurred in the Rwenzori mountains. However, interest in the African mountains increased while the Duke was organising his expedition, as Filippo De Filippi later reported in the official account.\textsuperscript{160}

The Duke was particularly concerned about the British expedition of Douglas William Freshfield, from the Alpine Club, and Arnold Louis Mumm. They had planned to attempt Rwenzori in autumn 1906 but having learned that Luigi of Savoia was arranging

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid, 18, 19.

\textsuperscript{158} It is worth noting that Italy at that time was a ‘competitive nation’, due to the series of daring enterprises accomplished in rapid order between the 1890s and 1910s, including the Duke’s expeditions in Alaska (1897), the North Pole exploration (1900) and the Beijing-Paris automobile race (1907) won by Prince Scipione Borghese (although he privately participated in the race without any government involvement). Sergio Romano, \textit{Storia D’Italia Dal Risorgimento Ai Nostri Giorni} (Milano: Longanesi, 1998). 199.

\textsuperscript{159} Tenderini and Shandrick reported that Sella “was flattered to receive the Duke’s invitation to join the expedition as photographer” in June 1905. Tenderini and Shandrick. 74.

\textsuperscript{160} “[A]t the end of 1905, interest in Ruwenzori seemed suddenly to reawaken. Thus, it happened that at the very moment when H.R.H. the Duke of the Abruzzi was forming his plan for an expedition in this region, and at the beginning of 1906, when he had actually taken measures for carrying it into effect […] the range was already being attacked by determined mountain climbers bent upon rending the veil of mystery which had so long shrouded its secret.” De Filippi, \textit{Ruwenzori. An account of the expedition of H.R.H. Prince Luigi Amedeo of Savoy Duke of the Abruzzi}. 16, 17.
his expedition, they brought forward their departure to November 1905. The Duke commented in a letter to Sella that he hoped the British failed in their attempt, but he also suspended his project until he knew the outcome: “It is always like that, for years nobody thought of the Mountains of the Moon, now everybody is rushing to go there.”  

Later in January 1906, the British Museum organised a new exploration of the Rwenzori region, which mainly focused on collecting fauna and botanic data. Despite the scientific purpose, among the members was the British climber Alexander F. R. Wollaston, who tried to reach the summit in February, without success. In April 1906, he made another attempt, but this also failed. However, he identified a possible way to reach the summit, while the Duke’s expedition was approaching the region. Wollaston reported his concern about the Duke’s arrival in his diary, revealing the existence of a mountaineering race between the British and the Italians. Also, he explained why the Duke might be successful: “We are hoping to get round there before the Duke of the Abruzzi comes [but] At present we are absolutely stuck, as the British Museum will not send funds, and without them we cannot move.” Instead, Luigi of Savoia could rely on monetary resources from the Royal House, which allowed him to set up a perfect organization. This difference pointed to the Duke’s likely success and made Wollaston frustrated: “I am inclined to curse all royal dukes and wish they would stop at home.”

161 Letter from Luigi of Savoia to Vittorio Sella, as reported in Tenderini and Shandrick. 75.
164 Henry Johnston, "Ruwenzori and central Africa," Nature 81, no. 2071 (1909). 32. Due to reliable economic resources, the Duke could arrange a formidable team, in terms of a huge number of porters. No other previous explorer could do that; the structure of the expedition was based on the Himalayan model (in which climbers prepared their attempt by enlisting many porters). Bere. 489. According to Wollaston, the Duke’s party was “the greatest crowd of Europeans that was ever seen here [in the Rwenzori]. With their splendid equipment and European porters, they should have no difficulty in climbing all the big peaks.” Wollaston. 90.
165 Ibid. 87.
Despite the mountaineering competition, by June 1906 Wollaston gave up his climbing attempts and met the Duke to give him “all possible information about the mountains.”\textsuperscript{166} Later in 1933 Wollaston’s behaviour led Henry Newbolt to describe him and Luigi of Savoia as competitors in a new kind of international competition, in which “the national rivalry, the desire to be the first at the goal, calls forth a helpful rather than a hostile feeling.” The author also observed that whoever succeeded in the Rwenzori ascent represented a collective success for the whole mountaineering community. Thus, he depicted the race between Wollaston and the Duke as “a tale of chivalry and courtesy throughout.”\textsuperscript{167}

Wollaston affirmed that Luigi of Savoia knew many British climbers and between them there was plenty to talk about. This proved the Duke’s connection with the British mountaineering community and showed that he was being kept informed about happenings in the international alpine context. However, Wollaston also admitted: “I wish they had not come this year, as I should dearly like to have been first on the highest peak.”\textsuperscript{168} This statement showed, once again, that conquering Rwenzori’s summit was a matter of national and personal prestige for both the Italians and the British.

For his part, the Duke attended to preparatory tasks in January 1906 by involving the Italian ambassador in London in consulting the British government. This request had a dual purpose: gaining approval for his explorative journey, since the Rwenzori region lay within British colonial territory, and obtaining logistic and political support.\textsuperscript{169} The British Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sir Edward Grey, ensured the support of the Colonial Office

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid, 90.
\textsuperscript{168} Wollaston. 90.
\textsuperscript{169} Archivio Storico Ministero Affari Esteri, Roma, Ministero Africa Italiana Vol. II 1859-1945, b.179/1, “Spedizione Duca degli Abruzzi al Rewenzori” - Letter from the Italian ambassador in London to the Italian Minister of the Foreign Affairs, 1 February 1906. Henceforth ASMAE.
for the expedition, asserting that it would do everything practicable to contribute to its success.\textsuperscript{170}

The expedition began on 16 April and on 10 June 1906 the Duke fulfilled his aim. His success depended both on the large economic resources he had at his disposal and the choice to undertake the final assault during the summer season, when good weather was more frequent. Decades later, the Alpine Journal indicated this aspect as fundamental in the Italians’ success.\textsuperscript{171} The victorious outcome was recognized internationally, as demonstrated by the several press accounts issued in the aftermath of the expedition.\textsuperscript{172} The \textit{Corriere della Sera} emphasised the conference organised by the Italian Geographic Society in Rome on 7 January 1907, where the Duke illustrated the results and presented the story of the expedition. The article focused particularly on the presence of King Vittorio Emanuele III, Queen Elena and the Queen Mother, Margherita of Savoia.\textsuperscript{173}

Finally, on 14 January the Royal Geographic Society of London welcomed the Duke of Abruzzi with a conference honoured by the presence of the King Edward VII. In addition, the Royal Geographic Society renamed a peak of Rwenzori as «Mount Luigi di Savoia», although the Duke had already named it «Mount Thomson» in honour of the explorer Joseph Thomson. However, the members of the Royal Geographic Society observed that Thomson “had never seen” the Rwenzori as he “explored a different African

\textsuperscript{170} ASMAE, ibid, “Letter from Sir Edward Grey to the Italian Minister of the Foreign Affairs”, 8 May 1906. Grey specifically appointed the Acting Commissioner for Uganda Protectorate to place “the conduct [of the expedition] in the hands of the Società Coloniale Italiana [a commercial firm from Milan operating in those regions] which has had considerable mercantile experience in the country and should be particularly efficient for the purpose.”

\textsuperscript{171} Bere. 489.

\textsuperscript{172} The New York Times celebrated Luigi of Savoia’s daring enterprise, dedicating him two special issues in 1906 and 1908. These special accounts were reported as “Duke of the Abruzzi conquers the Mountains of the Moon. First authentic account of the perilous expedition which reached the summits of the Ruwenzori far in the mysterious Heart of Africa,” The New York Times, 7 October 1906, and “Abruzzi’s conquest of lofty Ruwenzori,” The New York Times, 15 November 1906.

\textsuperscript{173} “La conferenza del Duca degli Abruzzi a Roma sulla spedizione al Ruwenzori,” Il Corriere della Sera, 8 gennaio 1907.
region.” Thus, they convinced the Duke to name the mountain after himself. The success was associated with the image of the Royal House. The Duke dedicated the official book of the expedition to “Her Majesty the Queen dowager of Italy Margherita di Savoia,” who had personally donated the Duke an Italian flag embroidered with the inspiring motto «Dare and Hope» (Ardisci e Spera), invented by the Queen herself. On the other hand, the Duke also needed to thank Great Britain for the diplomatic support received and named the two highest peaks of Rwenzori as Peak Margherita (5,125 meters) and Peak Alexandra (5,105 meters) to honour the Queen Mother and the British Queen respectively, because the memory of the two nations could be handed down to posterity in Italy and in England, which “in its marvellous colonial expansion carries civilization to the slopes of these remote mountains.” The Duke’s colonial mentality emerged in his statement. He was convinced that European powers had to bring ‘civilization’ to the backward African territories, which was at the base of his colonial farming consortium in Somalia established in 1920.

**The Karakorum climbing expedition (1909)**

In 1909 Luigi Amedeo of Savoia led an expedition in the Western Himalayas, which represented the first Italian attempt to climb the second highest mountain on earth: K2 (8611 metres). In this biographical reconstruction of the Duke of Abruzzi, the Himalayan explorative journey can be considered as a turning point between the two phases described at the beginning: *The Explorer* and *The Colonizer*. In the following decade (1910-1918) he

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174 Dell'Osa, 204.
176 Ibid, 185
177 K2 is located in the Karakorum chain and was conquered for the first time in 1954 by another Italian expedition, led by the geologist Ardito Desio.
could no longer organize new explorations because of his commitment to the Italian-Turkish War (1911-1912) and the First World War (1915-1918).

The Duke decided to attempt to climb K2 in the aftermath of his diplomatic mission in the United States. According to the press at that time, especially in America, the Duke arranged his new explorative expedition because the Royal House strongly objected to his proposed marriage to the wealthy American Kathrine Elkins, forcing him to end their romance.\textsuperscript{178} This version continued until 1913. In contrast, the biographers Michieli and Dainelli attributed the expedition to the Duke’s desire to reconsider his original proposal of 1895: climbing a Himalayan peak to honour the death of his climbing friend Mummery.\textsuperscript{179} However, there is no evidence for this motivation in the Duke’s official account of the expedition. Instead, the explanation for undertaking an expedition to Karakorum followed the climbing trend of that time to explore the so-called ‘Third Pole’, where the international mountaineering community was increasingly focusing its attention.\textsuperscript{180} Conquering K2 represented a very remarkable achievement, but above all, it would be a great accomplishment in terms of national prestige for Italy.\textsuperscript{181}

Luigi of Savoia was kept informed about the new alpinist-explorative goals through his relationship with the international mountaineering fraternity, where he benefitted from outstanding recognition due to his previous achievements and his royal rank. However, it was the connection with the British climbing community that had a prominent role in the

\textsuperscript{179} Michieli. 113 and Dainelli. 238.
\textsuperscript{180} The metaphorical concept of the ‘Third Pole’ was used to include all the highest mountains in the Himalayas and the Karakorum, once “the veil of mystery which shrouded the North and South Poles has been lifted”. Thus, the attention of the explorers increasingly turned to the Himalayan region. Gunter Dyrenfurth, Oskar, \textit{To the Third Pole. The history of the high Himalaya} (London: Werner Laurie, 1955). xiii.
\textsuperscript{181} The last attempt dated back to 1902, when an international expedition led by Oskar Eckenstein and Aleister Crowley and composed of British, Austrians and Swiss failed. They reached an altitude of 6,500 metres.
organization of the Himalayan expedition. The Duke relied on his friendship with King Edward VII to obtain the diplomatic assistance and logistic support needed for arranging his explorative journey. Above all, he could benefit from the political entanglement between Great Britain and Russia around the Tibet region, which eventually led the two countries to sign the Anglo-Russian Treaty on 31 August 1907. It declared Tibet a buffer-state, where Britain and Russia protected its neutrality without interfering in its internal policies.

However, this diplomatic scenario ‘interfered’ with the British mountaineers’ proposals to climb in the Himalayas. They had been the most persistent in ‘the race to the Third Pole’, as demonstrated by the attitude of the Viceroy of India, George Curzon, who exhorted the Royal Geographic Society and the Alpine Club to arrange a joint expedition to conquer K2 or even Everest. This idea contrasted with the policy followed by the Secretary of State for India, John Morely, who considered the Everest explorations as an infringement of the Anglo-Russian agreement. Morely aimed mainly to preserve the diplomatic balance between the two countries over that region. Curzon was eventually...

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182 At that time, expeditions to Himalaya used to cross the British part of the region to reach the mountains, because the Nepalese government forbade access to Europeans from its side. This is why the Nepalese slope remained essentially unknown till 1950. Dyhrenfurth. 8. Evidence of the friendship between Luigi of Savoia and the King can be found in the Duke’s travels in Ireland and Scotland in 1907, where he presented an account of the Rwenzori expedition at the Scottish Royal Geographical Society in Glasgow, in December. At that meeting, King Edward VII was in the audience, although he had already participated in the previous London’s conference, which focused on the same topic. Moreover, the King cancelled his previous commitments to be present in Glasgow. This led the biographers Tenderini and Shandrick to claim that King Edward’s presence in Scotland was not a mere matter of royal etiquette and mutual respect related to the royal rank of the Duke; rather it should be understood as a demonstration of the close friendship existing between them. According to this interpretation, the Duke could easily obtain the necessary support for his expedition directly from the King. Tenderini and Shandrick, The Duke of the Abruzzi. An explorer’s life. 87.

183 Tylor. 442, 443.

184 Curzon emphasised the national pride deriving from such an enterprise. He considered it “unjustifiable that as we are climbers and pioneers par excellence, we do not fulfil an organized and scientific attempt to conquer both peaks [since] they are mainly widespread within the territory under the control of Great Britain”, Letter by Curzon to Douglas Freshfield chairman of the Royal Geographic Society, Alpine Club Archive, London as reported by Peter Firstbrook, Scomparsi sull’Everest. Il mistero della spedizione Mallory-Irvine (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2010). 67.
forced to abandon his proposal, despite it representing an important achievement for Great
Britain in terms of national prestige.\textsuperscript{185}

This situation favoured the Duke of Abruzzi in obtaining the support of Edward
VII’s government for his expedition: the British renounced their climbing projects because
of their diplomatic interests in the Tibetan region, while Luigi Amedeo of Savoia could act
without creating political implications since his exploration was organized and sponsored
by Italians.\textsuperscript{186} The involvement of the British government appeared in a letter the Duke sent
to Vittorio Sella on 6 January 1908 to invite him to take part in this expedition:

   My dearest Sella, the British government would approve [an expedition] to K2; in fact, it would help
   an expedition heading to those regions. It would be my intention to depart at the end of March with the aim
   of being on the slopes of the mountain in June. The expedition would have only a climbing goal; reaching the
   peak of K2 or, if such an aim is unreachable, we will focus on another mountain nearby […] Would you like
to be the photographer [for the expedition]?\textsuperscript{187}

   Despite the meticulous preparations, the expedition did not pursue its first goal of
climbing K2, due to bad weather conditions. The Duke also tried to achieve his second
choice, the Bride Peak because it was the next highest peak (7654 metres) and was still
unconquered. Thus, on 18 July the Duke and his guides conducted a final assault on the

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid, 68.
\textsuperscript{186} The Duke’s expeditionary team was composed of his new aid-de-camp Federico Negrotto di Cambiaso,
Sella and his assistant Botta, and the alpine guides Giuseppe and Lorenzo Petigax, who had already taken
part in a previous explorative journey with Luigi Amedeo of Savoia and participated in another Himalayan
expedition in 1903. In addition, there were the brothers Alessio and Enrico Brocherel, who took part in two
other Karakorum expeditions in 1905 and 1907. Finally, Emilio Brocherel, Alberto Savoie and Ernesto
Bareux completed the team, while Filippo De Filippi was appointed as the official doctor, and this time, the
official reporter of the expedition. Filippo De Filippi, \textit{Karakoram and Western Himalaya 1909. An account
of the expedition of H.R.H. Prince Luigi Amedeo of Savoy Duke of the Abruzzi} (New York: Dutton &
\textsuperscript{187} Archivio Fondazione Sella, fondo Vittorio, Biella, “Letter from Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta to Vittorio
Sella”, as reported in Dell'Osa, \textit{Il principe esploratore. Luigi Amedeo di Savoia, Duca degli Abruzzi}. 240 and
473n.
summit, but bad weather again prevented success. However, the Italians reached 7498 metres and attained a new altitude record, missing the summit by just 156 metres.188

In September 1909, the expedition returned to Italy. The main goal of the expedition was a failure, but the national press and later some hagiographic biographers, such as Michieli and Dainelli, represented the altitude record and the collateral collection of scientific data as the main and fully successful goals of the Karakorum exploration. In contrast, the Duke personally admitted his climbing defeat in a letter to Alfred Holmes, a prominent member of the Alpine Club, in which he exclusively attributed his failure to the bad weather.189 However, in the preface of the official book, he expressed the hope that his effort would be useful to future Himalayan explorers.190 Despite the unquestionable evidence, the Italian newspaper La Stampa triumphantly portrayed the Duke of Abruzzi, who “pursued his goal of beating the altitude record whatever the outcome of the expedition.”191 Il Corriere della Sera even claimed that the main goal of the expedition was not the climbing one, but rather studying the effects of high altitudes on the human body.192

These misrepresentations reflected the attitude of preserving national pride as embodied by the Duke’s performances. In addition to the press, the Italian Alpine Club adopted the same behaviour, praising Luigi of Savoia profusely. It mainly lauded the scientific aspects of the expedition as if they were the main goals and minimised the climbing aspects. In its official periodical, the Club argued that every Italian, particularly those who were alpinists, could be proud of the new victory of the Duke, who embodied

191 “Mentre si attende il ritorno del Duca degli Abruzzi,” La Stampa, 10 September 1909.
192 “La spedizione del Duca degli Abruzzi nel Karakoram,” Il Corriere della Sera, 30 March 1912.
the glorious traditions of his Royal House. This hagiographic representation also reflected the strong relationship between the monarchy and the Italian Alpine Club, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. Decades later the works of Michieli and Dainelli continued to misrepresent the real events. The first described the Duke as a daring man, who hazarded where others did not; while Dainelli lauded his competitive spirit as an additional value in his explorations, because “wherever others fought for a new conquest he wanted to participate in the fighting, and he eventually emerged as the winner.”

**The Duke at war (1911-1912 and 1915-1918)**

In the aftermath of the Himalayan expedition, Luigi Amedeo of Savoia resumed his naval duties and was promoted to the rank of rear admiral. At the beginning of the Italian-Turkish War, he was appointed Commander in charge of the Torpedoing Fleet (*Ispettore delle Siluranti*) in the Adriatic Sea. The naval war operations revealed the disagreement between politicians and the military in terms of conducting the hostilities. The Duke played a key role in the Navy’s quarrel with the government, due to his high Navy rank. He embodied the Navy’s ambition to be crucial in the war by carrying out naval actions, which could also increase its prestige. In this context, the Adriatic Sea represented, for the Italian Navy, the most important scenario of the naval war. On the political side, Italy ensured that European powers contained the conflict within the Libyan regions of the

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194 Michieli. 123.
195 Dainelli. 290.
197 At that time, the Navy represented the core of the Italian offensive strategy in case of war. Its supremacy over the Army was due to various consistent investments that had modernized the fleet, turning it into an innovative military corps. Thus, the Italian-Turkish War was an important occasion for the Navy to redeem its prestige, which had been undermined by the naval battles that occurred during the Unification process, such as the defeat in the battle of Lissa (1866). Sergio Romano, *La quarta sponda. Dalla guerra di Libia alle rivolte arabe*, (Milano: Longanesi, 2015). 988, 989.
Ottoman Empire, emphasizing the military importance of the Adriatic Sea, where Austria controlled the Balkan regions and feared that Italy might take possession of Albania as a result of war.\textsuperscript{198}

In the days prior to the war, the Duke’s duty consisted of patrolling the Greek-Albanese coast, where Italian intelligence reported the presence of some Turkish warships. On 27 September, the Admiral in chief ordered the Duke to sink these warships in case they left their harbours; but two days later, the Minister of the Navy ordered him not to commit any act of war, since hostilities had not yet been officially declared. The Italian government was waiting for the deadline of the ultimatum sent to the Turkish government.\textsuperscript{199} Despite this order, the Duke confirmed the first order to his officers, which resulted in hitting a number of Turkish ships that were away from their ports. His decision provoked governmental complaints, which accused one of Luigi of Savoia’s officers, Biscaretti di Ruffia, of attacking the enemy before the official outbreak of the war, although he had only obeyed the Duke.\textsuperscript{200}

The Duke’s conduct also had diplomatic implications because Austria strongly protested to the Italian government about these military actions. The Austrian complaints resulted in the cessation of attacks along the Greek-Albanese shores, and the government also limited the Duke’s intervention to halt enemy ships within the Adriatic. Nevertheless, Luigi of Savoia sent Biscaretti to explore the port of San Giovanni di Medua (Albania), where the Turkish involved him in fighting. This new ‘accident’ forced the Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti to dismiss Biscaretti, due to the difficulty of dismissing the Duke because

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid, 990-1022.  
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid, 1069.  
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid, 1014.
Austria reacted by deploying some of its warships at the Bay of Kotor (Bocche di Cattaro, Southwestern Montenegro).

The Duke’s attitude reflected the Navy’s aim to impose a more belligerent strategy than the government in the Adriatic Sea, justifying its intervention as a protection of the Italian coasts and preventing Turkey from sending convoys to Tripolitania. These reasons actually overestimated the Turkish fleet, which was quite obsolete and inefficient compared with the Italian one. The Italian Navy thus sought brilliant successes rather than following the strategic policy decided upon by the government. On his side, Luigi Amedeo of Savoia tried to force the government to accept his war strategy by exploiting his royal rank. His dissatisfaction increased when Giolitti attributed to the Army the main role in conducting the war, reducing the autonomy of the Navy.

This evidence was scarcely analysed or was totally overlooked by some of the Duke’s biographers, such as Michieli, who instead praised Luigi of Savoia for his personal initiatives, while censuring the government’s attitude of being too acquiescent towards Austria. Michieli’s interpretation reflected the fascist attitude of his time, in which the previous liberal government was considered as weak and incapable of defending Italy’s national interests.

The Duke’s behaviour in the Italian-Turkish War had some implications for his career. He was promoted to the rank of Vice Admiral on 12 May 1912, but he was assigned to command the Navy base in La Spezia. This task precluded him actively sailing except for a few ordinary missions, since his attitude had provoked some diplomatic friction.

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201 Ibid, 1049.
202 Ibid, 1030, 1305.
203 Oliva. 122-124.
204 Michieli. 135, 136.
between the Italian government and Austria. However, with the outbreak of the First World War, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Entente fleet and assigned again to the Adriatic Sea. Once again, his behaviour relating to military operations contrasted with the strategy elaborated by the Ministry of the Navy and the Navy General Staff.

The Duke essentially based his war plan on using dreadnoughts to attack the Balkan coast and force the Austro-Hungarian Kriegsmarine to engage in battle in the open sea. In contrast, the official strategy stated by his chief, Admiral Paolo Thaon di Revel, was based on “increasingly reducing the use of battleships, because of the rapid development of new assault vehicles, such as motor torpedoing-boats, submarines and airplanes.” This policy aimed to protect the dreadnoughts within the ports and accomplish rapid and more insidious actions instead of engaging in huge naval battles. The Duke disregarded this order and carried out offensive actions on the Balkan coasts, using the great battleships. In July 1915, his decision caused the sinking of two of the most important heavy Italian cruisers, which the Kriegsmarine torpedoed. In addition, two dreadnoughts docked in the ports of Taranto and Brindisi were gravely damaged due to the inadequate protection provided by the rest of the fleet, which was being used by the Duke.

Luigi of Savoia still believed in an old naval tradition in which the great battleships played a crucial role in war. His attitude reached its acme in December 1916, when the most prestigious Italian battleship Regina Margherita sank after being blown up at the entrance to the port in Valona (Albania). As a political consequence of this accident, in

addition to the previous events in Taranto and Brindisi, Thoan di Revel and Leonardo Viale, Minister of the Navy, were forced to resign.\textsuperscript{209}

Despite these vicissitudes, the Duke of Abruzzi was confirmed in his role until 1917, when the government and the new Minister of the Navy, Camillo Corsi eventually dismissed Luigi Amedeo of Savoia from his duty, despite his popularity and his royal lineage.\textsuperscript{210} It is worth noting that General Enrico Caviglia reported this fact in his diary, emphasising that the Duke was essentially dismissed from his office because of a disagreement with Corsi (who was at that time the Duke’s chief of staff). Luigi of Savoia sent a letter to the Minister Viale requesting him to dismiss Corsi, but the request came in the aftermath of Viale’s resignation, once Corsi had become the new Minister. “He found the Duke’s letter and [logically] dismissed him.”\textsuperscript{211}

Many of the Duke’s biographies overlooked this aspect of his life, while an important representation of the Duke’s mindset related to those years emerged during the fascist regime in Gennaro Pagano di Melito’s \textit{Il Principe marinaro} (1934). He portrayed the Duke of Abruzzi as ‘arrogant’; a man who did not accept complaints about his decisions, even when they were clearly debatable. During the war, his attitude led him to adopt an offensive strategy on a large scale, despite real events demonstrating the failure of such tactics.\textsuperscript{212} This portrayal of the Duke differed significantly from those provided by Ascoli, Michieli, Fabietti and Dainelli, who attributed his dismissal to various other reasons, such as the contrasts between politicians and military chiefs, the resentment of the allies who

\textsuperscript{210} Oliva, \textit{Combattere. Dagli arditi ai marò, storia dei corpi speciali italiani}. 92, 93.
\textsuperscript{211} Caviglia. 114.
\textsuperscript{212} Gennaro Pagano di Melito, \textit{Il Principe marinaro} (Roma: Ardita, 1934), as reported in Dell’Osa, \textit{Il principe esploratore. Luigi Amedeo di Savoia, Duca degli Abruzzi}. 303.
aimed to command the war in the Adriatic Sea, and the different interpretation of war strategies between the allies and the Italians.\textsuperscript{213}

As a consequence of his dismissal, the Duke resigned from the Navy and retreated to private life without participating in the official celebrations of the final victory.\textsuperscript{214} This was concealed by one of his biographers, Ugo Ascoli, who in 1933 wrote that the Duke left the Navy because of poor health.\textsuperscript{215} In contrast, Fabietti and Michieli exploited his resignation to exalt his ability in successfully conducting an impressive naval rescue operation between December 1915 and February 1916: the evacuation of the defeated Serbian Army, which the Austro-Hungarians threatened on the Balkan coasts.\textsuperscript{216} Fabietti lionized the human side of the Duke, who although involved in war “saved souls rather than killing” and depicted him as the scapegoat for the unsuccessful Italian naval strategy.\textsuperscript{217} Michieli emphasised how the Duke accomplished the rescue operation essentially without receiving any fundamental support from the allies.\textsuperscript{218} Later in the 2000s, historians such as Richard James Bosworth, Angelo Del Boca and the biographer Pablo Dell’Osa argued that the conflicts between Luigi Amedeo of Savoia and the Navy, in addition to the impossibility of marrying Kathrine Elkins for dynastic reasons, convinced him to leave Italy for Somalia, where he established a farming village.\textsuperscript{219}

However, Gianni Oliva revised this version, noting that the Duke did not marry Kathrine Elkins because their love story ended, rather than being the subject of a decision

\textsuperscript{213} Michieli, 147. and Dainelli, 294.
\textsuperscript{214} Oliva, Com battere. Dagli arditi ai marò, storia dei corpi speciali italiani. 93.
\textsuperscript{215} Ascoli, 29.
\textsuperscript{216} USMM, b.1442, “S.A.R. il Duca degli Abruzzi Comandante in Capo dell’Armata navale e il salvataggio dell’Esercito Serbo.”
\textsuperscript{217} Fabietti, 292 and 297.
\textsuperscript{218} Michieli, 142-144.
by the Royal House. He could autonomously make decisions due to his personality, and he could have exploited the example of relatives, who had already married partners who were not from the nobility.\textsuperscript{220} Therefore, his resignation from the Navy was the main thing that convinced the Duke of Abruzzi to leave Italy for Africa. Paradoxically, before leaving, he received a letter from the Minister of the Navy, who thanked him for the duties performed throughout his career and wished him full success in his future enterprises that “will gain new prestige for the Dynasty [of Savoia] and the homeland.”\textsuperscript{221}

The Duke of Abruzzi: The Colonizer

\textit{A new agricultural project in Somalia}

By Autumn 1918, Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta had settled himself in Somalia, where he aimed to realize a farming project along the Shebelle River\textsuperscript{222} through the foundation of an \textit{ad hoc} agricultural firm: the \textit{Società Agricola Italo-Somala} (Italian-Somali Agricultural Society or SAIS). Somalia was a quiet territory where uprisings were not as frequent as in the other Italian possessions, “partly because the Somali, unlike the Libyans and Ethiopians, did not have easy access to European weapons.”\textsuperscript{223} Despite its peaceful situation, the country remained somewhat undeveloped in terms of infrastructure, which facilitated trade and job opportunities; in addition, there were no private investors who supported the commercial development of the colony or settlers to populate it. By the end of 1921, only 656 Italians lived in Somalia, representing the lowest percentage of

\textsuperscript{220} Oliva, \textit{Duchi d'Aosta. I Savoia che non diventarono Re d'Italia}. 116, 117.
\textsuperscript{221} USMM, Biografie, “S.A.R. il Duca degli Abruzzi”, Dispensa dalle funzioni di Ammiraglio - letter from the Minister of the Navy to Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta, 30 luglio 1919.
\textsuperscript{222} The Somali spelling of the river is \textit{Webi Shabeelle} and \textit{Uebi-Scebeli} in Italian. In this work Shebelle and Uebi-Scebeli will be used interchangeably.
Italian colonists in all Italian possessions,\textsuperscript{224} despite the government’s efforts focused on attracting settlers to develop colonial plantations along the Shebelle and Juba rivers.\textsuperscript{225}

Somalia was then the most backward of the Italian colonies and awareness of this emerged at the \textit{Congresso Coloniale} (Colonial Congress) of Rome in 1919, where politicians and supporters of colonialism rallied to discuss the general Italian colonial situation in the aftermath of the Great War. The convention emphasized the fundamental importance of the Shebelle river in the Italian colonial programme, which was essentially based on an extensive farming plan to be developed along the river’s banks. The \textit{Congresso Coloniale} also pointed out the need to explore the Uebi-Scebeli river, since it was still almost completely unknown in its upper and middle sectors. A solution to this problem was to undertake scientific studies on Somalia’s lakes and rivers in order to develop agricultural and navigation projects.\textsuperscript{226} The congress also emphasised the general disorganization of Somalia, which was defined as a semi-anarchic situation.\textsuperscript{227} At the beginning of the 1920s, Italy effectively controlled only the coastal areas surrounding Benadir, although since 1889, it had held a protectorate over the sultanates of Mijjertein (\textit{Migiurtinia}) and Hobyo (\textit{Obbia}), respectively located in northern and southern Italian Somaliland.

The rise of fascism brought some changes in Italian colonial policy in terms of reinforcing both the state’s presence in the colonies and its commitment towards their administration. One example was the state farming consortium at Genale, which Mussolini’s government tried to make more profitable under the governorship of Cesare

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\textsuperscript{224} Del Boca, \textit{Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Dall’Unità alla marcia su Roma}, 1. 867.
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Maria De Vecchi (1923-1928). Thus, from a wider perspective of enhancing all of its colonial possessions, the regime also supported the experimental farming project elaborated by Luigi Amedeo of Savoia, which had its core in the Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi or Villabruzzi. As will be analysed in the next paragraphs, the relationship between the Duke of Abruzzi and fascism essentially resulted in the government providing generous state loans to his firm, although it was a private enterprise to be considered almost as a coexisting ‘counterpart’ of the state consortium established in Genale. In this context, the regime appropriated the experience of the SAIS to exploit it in terms of colonial propaganda, while popularizing Luigi Amedeo of Savoia as an icon of fascist colonial policy.

The Duke turned his attention to agriculture from 1903, as revealed in his correspondence with Vittorio Sella, who gave him some suggestions concerning the initial

228 In 1912, the Italian agronomist Romolo Onor, in charge of the colonial agrarian service, elaborated a reclamation project focused on the Genale plateau (40,000 hectares) located in the southern sector of Uebi-Scebeli river. His work turned Genale into a state experimental farming consortium. Angelo Del Boca, Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell'impero, 4 vols., vol. 2 (Milano: Mondadori, 2001). 78-81. However, when fascism came to power, the state consortium was not very profitable. The situation changed in 1923, when Mussolini dismissed the liberal governor, Carlo Rivieri, and appointed Cesare Maria De Vecchi as the new governor. De Vecchi tried to make Genale more profitable: he continued the reclamation works, partitioned the land and assigned parcels of it to colonists who benefitted from government support in terms of land, water, and local manpower. De Vecchi was an influential fascist as he had been one of the Quadrumviro of the March on Rome and was also the leader of the Turin fascists, but Mussolini sent him to Somalia in order to control his boisterous character. De Vecchi was speaking against industrial power, creating some problems for Mussolini, who was focused on finding national and international approval for fascism. Ibid, 51 and 81, 82.

Luigi Goglia and Fabio Grassi described De Vecchi as a man with a mediocre mentality typical of the squadrista, who aimed to be remembered as the ‘creator of fascist Somalia’. Luigi Goglia and Fabio Grassi, Il colonialismo italiano da Adua all'impero (Bari: Laterza, 1981). 230. While, the historian Anthony Mockler argued that De Vecchi had more ability than he was generally credited with, as he re-organized the quite chaotic pre-fascist colonial system in Somalia, unifying (through military conquests) two protectorates and one semi-colony established by the previous administrative system into one. Thus, at the end of his governorship he had achieved all his goals. Anthony Mockler, Haile Selassie’s War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). 31.

229 In 1910, the government appointed the Italian agronomist Romolo Onor as the agricultural consultant for Somalia. Onor carried out several experimental studies on the agricultural potential of Somalia, which helped to establish the Azienda Sperimentale di Genale along the Uebi-Shebeli river in 1912. Loredana Polezzi, “Description, appropriation, transformation: Fascist rhetoric and colonial nature,” Modern Italy 19, no. 3 (2014). 293. Onor’s work was part of the government colonial programme to promote agriculture in Somalia. Del Boca, Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Dall’Unità alla marcia su Roma, 1. 830.

230 Polezzi. 294.
works to undertake in Somalia.\textsuperscript{231} In September 1918, he returned to Somalia after assembling a team of a few technicians and agronomists (including Giuseppe Scassellati-Sforzolini, one of the most competent agronomists from the \textit{Istituto Agricolo Coloniale} of Florence).\textsuperscript{232} They spent five months touring the whole colony, where the experts studied the flow rate of the Uebi-Scebeli river and analysed the land in order to identify which areas could be best cultivated. In 1919, the Duke presented to the Minister for the Colonies Luigi Rossi, his plan, the results of the explorative mission and his final project: the future farming company would reclaim the land surrounding the region of the Middle Shebelle, near the current Jowhar village on the Uebi-Scebeli river. The area was 130 kilometres from Mogadishu, could be easily irrigated using the river, and was inhabited by a large Somali clan who had farmed the land for a long time.\textsuperscript{233}

The Duke strongly believed that industrial farming development in Somalia was possible only if the government dedicated much more attention to the specific needs of the colony. He supported the idea that private investors with their own assets should contribute to the development of the rural areas of the colony.\textsuperscript{234} This represented the establishment of a new agricultural system in Italian colonialism. To support his view, the Duke prioritized the actions that the government had to undertake to ensure the establishment of a farming company in Somalia. The proposal, addressed to the Ministry for the Colonies, emphasised the carelessness of the government towards Italian Somaliland:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{231} In those years, Sella had reclaimed a huge plateau in Sardinia, where today there still exists a very important winery (the Sella & Mosca). The correspondence between the Duke and Sella was reported by Ernesto Milanese, "Tra Sardegna e Somalia: Storia di due bonifiche nella corrispondenza fra il Duca degli Abruzzi e Vittorio Sella" (paper presented at the Accademia dei Gergofili, Firenze, 8 June 1995). 215-219.
  \item \textsuperscript{233} Del Boca, \textit{Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Dall'Unità alla marcia su Roma}, 1, 870.
  \item \textsuperscript{234} Fondazione Sella onlus, Biella, Fondo Vittorio Sella. Serie Patrimoniale – Affari, m. 1, f. 1, “Relazione Somalia”, IV parte, 1919-1920, p.1.
\end{itemize}
The existing financial issues in Somalia make it impossible to establish a farm. [I refer to] the lack of currency within the Colony […] the natives who work in the Colony should be paid daily. The Society has to be able to make these payments and find the necessary currency of the country through the government or some bank […] It is necessary to issue enough currency in silver coins or notes as long as the natives accept such a form of money; it is also essential to open a Banca d’Italia branch […] The persistence of this situation is a moral and economic disaster both for the government and private investors.235

The Duke considered the currency matter one of the main problems that had to be solved. The government had also failed to provide harbour infrastructures, road maintenance and a telegraphic network. Regarding the condition of the roads, the Duke pointed out their fundamental importance in linking the fertile agricultural inland regions to the harbours, from which all farm product had to be exported.236 In the new farming system elaborated by the Duke, his private company exploited the Somali lands by using governmental preferential treatment, including land concessions, special rates for water usage to irrigate the land, exemption from government bonds pending on the lands and transfer to the company from the government of some surplus war equipment, such as tractors, which would be useful for agricultural work.

*The foundation of the «Società Agricola Italo-Somala» - SAIS*

In the aftermath of the Somali expedition, the Duke of Abruzzi held a conference in Milan on 9 September 1920 with some Milanese financial and industrial representatives,

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235 “La questione monetaria nella Somalia Italiana oggi è tale da rendere impossibile lo sviluppo di una azienda agricola [Mi riferisco] alla mancanza di moneta nella Colonia […] L’indigeno che lavora in Colonia deve essere pagato giornalmente. La Società deve perciò essere sicura di trovare, in primo tempo, presso il governo, o presso qualche Istituto bancario, la moneta del paese necessaria per far fronte ai pagamenti […] È necessario perciò […] mettere in circolazione una sufficiente quantità di valuta argentea o cartacea, quest’ultima che venga però accolta favorevolmente dagli indigeni, e che si apra ufficialmente la succursale della Banca d’Italia […] Il perdurare di questa situazione è un disastro morale ed economico per il Governo e per i privati.” Ibid, p.2,3.

236 Ibid, p. 3. Roads needed maintenance, especially during the rainy season, as the heavy rains systematically destroyed some of them.
where he illustrated his purposes and described the necessary steps to establish his private agricultural company. On this occasion, he gained their endorsement and they endowed the new firm with 2,000,000 Lire in stocks\(^{237}\) (approximately € 2,245,000).\(^{238}\) Luigi Amedeo of Savoia portrayed the explored area of Somalia as fertile, especially in those regions near the two main rivers of the Italian colony: the Giuba river and the Uebi-Scebeli river. However, although the Giuba was bigger than the Uebi-Scebeli, the Duke considered the area surrounding the Uebi-Scebeli as the most suitable place to found his farming village in terms of costs:

In 1919, we decided on the Scebeli because I understood that building a dam, embankments and digging the irrigation channels was harder on the Giuba, because of its flowrate, than on the Scebeli. Enhancing the Giuba required more manpower than the Scebeli to carry out the same works. Only Societies with great financial resources can cooperate to achieve the Giuba’s improvement, while a Society would need less resources to improve the Scebeli flowrate.\(^{239}\)

At the beginning of its activity, the Società Agricola Italo-Somala was mainly financed by the major Italian banks, including the Banco di Roma, Banca Commerciale Italiana, Banca Italiana di Sconto and Credito Italiano.\(^{240}\) During the fascist regime, the banks progressively reduced their endorsement and the state became the main financer of the firm. Behind this attitude was firstly the Duke’s connection, due to his royal rank, with the Italian financing environment and the government (this last aspect will be extensively explained in the following pages).

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\(^{237}\) "La conferenza di S.A.R. il Duca degli Abruzzi," La Perseveranza, 10 Settembre 1920.

\(^{238}\) The Lira was the Italian currency until 2002. All the conversions from Lira to Euro included in this thesis are based on the reassessment coefficients chart available at [www.infodata.ilsole24ore.com](http://www.infodata.ilsole24ore.com). The Euro amounts are expressed in parentheses and follow the Lira amounts.

\(^{239}\) "Nel 1919 ci siamo fermati sullo Scebeli avendo constato che maggiori erano sul Giuba le difficoltà da superare nella costruzione di opere fluviali data la sua maggiore portata. Lo stesso dicasi per la mano d’opera, di cui si richiederebbe, per la messa in valore del Giuba, una quantità rilevante. Perciò il problema del Giuba […] non può essere tentato che mediante l’opera di Società provviste di mezzi molto più grandi di quelli che dovrebbe impiegare una costituenda Società per la messa in valore delle terre nello Scebeli." "La conferenza di S.A.R. il Duca degli Abruzzi."

\(^{240}\) Archivio Storico Unicredit-Banco di Roma, Milano, b.VIII.2.1.22.21, “Agricola Italo Somala”, ottobre 1920. Henceforth ASUBR. These banks and the Duke himself, as the president, also formed the financial promotion committee of the society.
analysed in the following paragraphs), which the Duke regularly informed about the works in Somalia, as revealed in a letter addressed to the Prime Minister, Luigi Facta, in February 1922. The *Banco di Roma* was the most important backer of the SAIS in this phase. It sponsored the society with 1,000,000 Lire (approximately € 1,123,000). It was a very significant amount of money, despite the international economic crisis prevailing at that time, but it also reflected the *Banco di Roma*’s policy, undertaken in the post-war period, to extend its sphere of influence across Italy and abroad by opening new branches, especially in Turkey, Egypt, Palestine and Syria. In September 1920, the Duke’s relationships with the Italian finance establishment allowed the SAIS to collect 18,000,000 Lire of capital (approximately € 20,204,600). However, the company needed capital of 24,000,000 Lire (approximately € 26,940,000) to start its operations, divided into 48,000 stocks of 500 Lire each (approximately € 560). The Duke himself contributed personally by purchasing 2,000,000 Lire in stocks (approximately € 2,245,000). These data strongly revised the image of the Duke depicted by Gino Pollaci in 1936, who argued that Luigi Amedeo of Savoia financed his firm mainly by investing his own capital.

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241 Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Roma, PCM 1921, f. 3, sf. 17, Letter from Ghiotti to the Prime Minister Luigi Facta, 22 February 1922. The Duke’s secretary, Colonel Ghiotti wrote to the Prime Minister to demand an appointment in order to update him on the “highly patriotic work undertaken by the Duke of Abruzzi in Somalia.” Henceforth ACS.

242 ASUBR, “Comitato Esecutivo 1920”, Verbale Comitato Direttivo, 17 settembre 1920, pp. 18,19.

243 The branching out of the *Banco di Roma* was based on financing new companies that operated both in Italy and abroad, such as the SAIS. In 1920, the bank opened 43 bureaus. However, the SAIS was not the only company to benefit from the economic support of the *Banco di Roma*, which also financed the *Società Anonima Industrie Telefoniche Italiane* with 15,000,000 Lire (approximately € 16,840,000) and other firms operating in the colonies, such as the *Società Romana di Colonizzazione in Somalia*, *Società Coloniale Africa Occidentale*, and *Società Industriale e Commerciale dell’Africa Occidentale*. Luigi de Rosa, "Banco Di Roma (1880-1992) Introduzione Storico - Economica," ed. Banca di Roma - Archivio Storico (Roma: Banca di Roma - Archivio Storico, 2001). 39 and *Storia del Banco di Roma*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Roma: Banco di Roma, 1981). 224 and 465. Thus, the *Banco di Roma* played a key role in supporting the commercial and industrial activities of Italy at that time, as all these financing operations demonstrate. This trend was emphasized at the annual meeting of the stockholders of the bank on 18 March 1921 in Milan: “According to our tradition […] we financed various Italian industrial and commercial sectors. We have strongly supported the establishment of new companies or we have increased the capital of those already existing.” in ASUBR, “Relazioni e Bilancio 1920”, Esercizio XXVI, 18 marzo 1921, p.11.

244 Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti. 37.

245 Pollacci. iv.
While the crowdfunding for the SAIS progressed, the Duke expressed his satisfaction in a letter to Vittorio Sella, in which he observed that investing in Somalia was a profitable activity, unless “one day even the negro people decide to go on strike.” This short excerpt reveals the colonialist and racist mentality of Luigi Amedeo of Savoia, although various biographical works dedicated to him do not scrutinize this aspect. The Duke considered it unthinkable that indigenous workers could have the right to strike.

In addition to the funds collected within Italy, the Duke tried to find additional capital among the overseas branches of the Banco di Roma via the endorsement of the chairman of the bank, Carlo Santucci, especially in Egypt and in the Middle-Eastern branches. Although Santucci tried to persuade overseas investors to fund the SAIS through the directors of the Banco’s branches, exploiting the Duke’s royal rank and his reputation, his efforts failed due to the economic crisis affecting the international economy. Reference to this can be seen in the letter sent by the director of the Cairo branch to Santucci:

[In] the current situation [it] is extremely hard to collect new subscriptions […] However, I hope to convince the Egyptian Sultan to abundantly support the fundraising. He has a remarkable devotion to our Royal Family and especially admires H.R.H. the Duke of Abruzzi.

Despite these difficulties, the Società Agricola Italo-Somala was officially established in November 1920, in Milan, and the Duke was appointed as its first chairman. According to its statute, the company had a corporate headquarters and an administrative

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246 “Sono più che convinto – a meno che un giorno i neri non si mettano pur loro a scioperare – che il denaro impiegato in Somalia non sarà male impiegato.” Letter from Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta to Vittorio Sella, 12 August 1920, as reported in Michieli. 155.
247 Ibid, 156. Letter from the Duke to Vittorio Sella, 17 August 1920. The Duke held various conferences in Milan, Turin, Genoa and Venice, where he illustrated his farming project to encourage economic subscriptions to his proposal.
248 ASUBR, b.VIII.2.1.22.21, “Agricola Italo Somala” - Letter from Vannucci, the director of the Cairo’s branch to the chairman, 1 October 1920. The letter reported how the search for capital also involved the Banca Commerciale Italiana, which funded the SAIS with 500,000 Lire (approximately € 561,240), and a network of Italian industrialists, who were interested in cotton production and in the extraction of tannin from mimosa plants found in Somalia. Tannin was a basic material for tannery factories. There was also a network of German entrepreneurs producing leather that were involved in the financing campaign for the company.
office located respectively in Mogadishu and Milan. The purposes of the SAIS were: enhancing the Scidle region, located along the Uebi-Scebeli river; turning the existing cultivations into industrial farming production, able to support the Mother Country with Somali products and eventually developing those lands; building and then renting or selling any real estate; and finally, undertaking commercial, industrial and financing operations related to the enhancement of the Scidle region. The company was intended to exist until 31 December 1970, unless a general meeting of the Society decided to extend its duration.\footnote{ASUBR, busta VIII. 2.1.22.21, “Agricola Italo Somala”, Statuto \textit{Società Agricola Italo Somala}, Capitolo I, pp. 3, 4.}

Thus, between 1921 and 1923, the SAIS built the essential structures for the future farming village, which was named \textit{Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi} or \textit{Villabruzzi}, in honour of the Duke of Abruzzi, and it was officially inaugurated on 14 June 1922.\footnote{Clelia Maino, \textit{La Somalia e l’opera del Duca degli Abruzzi} (Roma: Istituto Italiano per l’Africa, 1959). 87.} The Uebi-Scebeli river underwent hydraulic adjustments to irrigate the first parcels of land. The first aim of the SAIS was to cultivate 6,000 hectares of the 16,000 hectares of available land, allocating the remaining space for zootechnic and livestock purposes, in agreement with the agronomic project carried out by Giuseppe Scassellati-Sforzolini during the 1918-1919 expedition. The SAIS’s activities focused specifically on planting: a) cotton to be exported; b) sugar cane and tobacco in initial quantities relating to local needs; and c) corn and sesame to feed the Somali who inhabited the rural district. The area was divided into big farms and then into small parcels, where groups of workers were gathered according to their original hometowns. This approach was believed to be necessary to avoid unrest among workers from different tribes or villages.\footnote{Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti. 29.}
In her *La Somalia e l’opera del Duca degli Abruzzi* (1959), Clelia Maino argued the Duke’s intention was to create the most important farming colony that Italy had ever possessed. He conceived the colony as a modern independent village with a hospital, a Catholic church and a mosque, schools, a hotel, a cinema, a post office, a bazaar, a pharmacy, meteorological stations, and two different graveyards (Catholic and Muslim). Maino did not mention that the SAIS only built a mosque, a grocery store and some drinkable water-wells, after the Somalis gathered themselves in communities of 60 or 80 shelters. This solution aimed to encourage the Somali workers to settle in the area by establishing small villages according to their ethnicity. The company eventually built houses for them. The declared purpose of these enhancements provided to the local tribes was to force them to inhabit the lands where they worked. This attitude reflected the persistent problem of manpower availability, which had always affected the Italian colonizers.

*The SAIS and the Somalis: agreements with the local populations over lands*

Once the Duke’s expedition identified the most suitable area for establishing the consortium, his technicians analysed the land and studied the rural populations who inhabited those territories. In this survey, the agronomist Scassellati-Sforzolini counted the existing villages and identified which ethnic groups lived there. Finally, he divided the collected data in terms of age, gender and other demographic factors. The survey focused both on territories chosen to establish the experimental farming colony and on those that could be included later within the area of the consortium. As a result, the agronomist

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252 Maino, 89.  
254 Labanca, 318.
counted 23,000 people divided between 49 villages, but only 1,800 of them lived within the area of the potential land claim and were also farmers.\textsuperscript{255} The purpose of the survey was to conduct a census of the population to understand how much manpower these tribes could supply both for the preparative works, such as reclaiming the land, tillage and deforestation, and for the proper agricultural works that would follow the initial set-up phase. Scassellati-Sforzolini’s work emphasized that availability of the necessary local manpower was the main problem facing the future company.

The next step was how to obtain the land for establishing the consortium. The Duke based his idea on a mutual collaboration between Italians and Somalis: the Italians would supply the necessary capital and technical direction of the works, while the Somalis would supply the manpower. From this perspective, the Duke of Abruzzi also explained the matter of land ownership: “The land remains the property of the indigenous tribes and the society has a joint participation with them as well as investing a large amount of money to redeem and cultivate it.”\textsuperscript{256} This represented a real innovation in the Italian colonial system, because the society directly received the land from the tribes by signing treaties, rather than receiving it from the colonial government, as the other Italian concessionaires did. The Duke needed to establish cordial relations with the local chiefs to negotiate the joint concession of the lands on a long-term basis.\textsuperscript{257}

The treaty for land possession included two agreements elaborated by the Duke himself: the \textit{patto} (pact) and the \textit{vincolo} (commitment). The \textit{patto} stated that Somalis contributed via their manpower to the hydraulic works along the Uebi-Scebeli river. This allowed control of the flow rate, guaranteeing advantages for the villages located both

\textsuperscript{255} Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti. 28, 29.
\textsuperscript{256} Fondazione Sella Onlus, Biella, Fondo Vittorio Sella. Serie Patrimoniale – Affari, m. 1, f. 1, “Relazione Somalia”, IV parte, 1919-1920, p.5.
within and outside the reclaimed lands. The *vincolo* specified that those who signed the agreement with the society could not sign similar treaties with other companies. With this provision, the SAIS became the exclusive recipient of the lands, acquiring approximately 30,000 hectares for the duration of the treaty, enabling it to plan its activities on a long-term basis. In addition to these agreements, the SAIS acquired the lands located on the left bank of the Uebi-Scebeli directly from the Somalis. This was another innovation since a private enterprise became the owner of 16,000 hectares previously the property of 20,000 Somalis.

These aspects impacted on colonial Somalia: firstly, the SAIS turned a traditional subsistence agricultural system into an industrial-scale farming production, which was totally unknown to Somali farmers until then. Also, the land agreements significantly limited Somalis, since they were forced to stay and work in the territories ceded to the company, even after the initial works had ended. Although they remained the owners of the land, this was evidently only in theory. As Donatella Strangio noted, this approach can be defined as both promoting slavery and paternalistic.

The Duke of Abruzzi’s thinking was largely influenced by the agronomist Romolo Onor, who outlined a new method for exploiting Somali land in a profitable manner. For this purpose, Onor elaborated a new system: the so-called *compartecipazione* (joint participation). The state operated with private investors to establish agricultural consortiums, where Somalis cultivated crops for commercial purposes and for local

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258 Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti. 40.
259 Ibid, 42. The acquired lands were in the meander of the Balguri and Balano. The SAIS bought the Balguri territory to establish a village destined for European settlers and for building the headquarters of the consortium, while the Balano area was intended for plantations.
261 Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell'impero*, 2. 82.
262 Strangio. 81.
consumption. On the other hand, the colonial government provided the local workers with agricultural and medical services and with an export market for the commercial crops they farmed, instead of paying them wages. Onor argued that the failure of Somalian colonization was essentially due to inadequate investment. He also believed that the government had to entrust the management of the agricultural companies to the indigenous population. From this perspective, the Duke’s society represented a novelty in Italian farming colonization of Somalia, as it applied Onor’s agrarian studies in a huge area where no other agrarian experiments had previously been carried out.

**Fascism and Luigi Amedeo of Savoia**

In their biographical work, Tenderini and Shandrick depicted the Duke of Abruzzi as remaining “always on the margins of politics”; his relationship with fascism was not openly opposed, “but neither did he approve of Mussolini’s policy.” Therefore, fascists “honoured the Duke for his achievements” but, due to his ‘tepid’ support for the regime, “they stopped short of claiming him as a fascist hero.” However, authors like Ascoli (1933), Pollaci (1936), Michieli and Fabietti (1937), who were deeply fascist, represented the Duke as the model of the fascist colonizer, who brought civilization to wild lands, making them inhabitable. Ascoli lauded him as a victor in Africa, because his society “replaced the forests, which had been dens for wild beasts and reptiles, with cultivated camps, roads and railways, where the indigenous and the Italians lived in prosperity.”

Pollaci defined Luigi of Savoia as a keen supporter of the fascist revolution and as a pioneer

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266 Ascoli. 30.
of the new Italian greatness established overseas by fascism. He romantically stated that the Duke’s ‘great love’ for Africa was the basis for undertaking one of the greatest agricultural transformations ever achieved in the African continent.\textsuperscript{267} Finally, Michieli summarised the Duke’s colonial enterprise in the Latin motto \textit{Ense et Aratro} (with the sword and the plough). He emphasised how the settlement works replaced “the brush and the marsh with the \textit{agger} and \textit{graticulum} [ancient Roman terms related to agriculture], the brushwood was attacked by the ploughshares and a new land appeared.”\textsuperscript{268} These rhetoric representations, enriched by Latin words like \textit{ense}, \textit{agger} and \textit{graticulum}, recalled the fascist symbolism related to the reclaiming of the lands. The same words are found in an excerpt of Mussolini’s speech in 1934, when he inaugurated the city of Littoria (the current city of Latina), which was founded as the result of a huge reclamation project.\textsuperscript{269}

However, the most hagiographic biographer of the Duke was Fabietti, who argued that Luigi of Savoia came to Somalia because his destiny was ‘from the prow to the plough’; to serve that part of humanity living far away from civilized lifestyles. Furthermore, the Duke would demonstrate how the Somali lands would be useful to the national economy once reclaimed.\textsuperscript{270} Fabietti also portrayed the Duke as being dedicated to Italy’s destiny, in terms of colonial conquests. He lauded the farming enterprise as a victorious battle, where “the land defeated the desert [and] because [he] gave bread to those human flocks of poor people, showing Italy its destiny.”\textsuperscript{271}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{267} Pollacci, iv.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{268} Michieli, 149 and 157.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{269} On 18 December 1934, Littoria was officially inaugurated. In his opening speech, Mussolini stated: “The plough digs a groove, but the sword defends it. And the ploughshare and the blade are made of tempered steel like the faith in our hearts.” – “È l’aratro che traccia il solco, ma è la spada che lo difende. E il vomere e la lama sono entrambi di acciaio temprato come la fede dei nostri cuori.”}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{270} Fabietti, 304.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{271} Ibid, 8.}
\end{footnotes}
From these representations, it would be hard to believe that fascists stopped claiming the duke as a ‘fascist hero’. Instead, the regime praised his image and encouraged the publication of biographies dedicated to praising him. Furthermore, in 1930, the regime awarded the gold medal for colonization to the Duke, which was the most important prize granted to those who distinguished themselves for colonial activities. Two further facts demonstrate the close relationship between fascism and the Duke. In 1930, he was nominated as a member of the Reale Accademia d’Italia (Royal Italian Academy) for the scientific results of his explorations. Being a member of this institution meant belonging to the most important group of intellectuals and scientists who endorsed the regime. Then, in 1931, Mussolini personally appointed the Duke as chairman of the Società di Navigazione «Italia» (Sailing Society «Italia»), which represented the national ocean liner company. Behind the Duke’s appointment was Mussolini’s political aim to improve the ocean-going passenger transport system with the support of the Royal House.

The correspondence between the Duke, Mussolini and various Ministries about his colonial activity in Somalia reveals that his relationship with the fascist regime was both strong and mutual. In March 1927, Luigi Amedeo of Savoia informed Mussolini of the need to create special medical schools, where colonial doctors could study the tropical diseases that affected the African colonial environment. Il Duce endorsed the request and

272 ACS, PCM 1928-1930, f.14, sf.2, Letter from Vanino to Mussolini, 28 February 1930. The Duke received the medal on 9 March 1930. The prize was awarded by the Istituto Coloniale Fascista (Fascist Colonial Institute), which proposed the conferees to the Ministry for the Colonies. The president of the Institute, Pier Gaetano Vanino, asked Mussolini to be present in order to gain prestige for the Institute itself and for the ceremony, in which the Duke personally participated.

273 In 1926, Mussolini established the Reale Accademia d’Italia to gather the best Italian scientists and intellectuals from all fields of the sciences and humanities. Its purpose was to promote the sciences, but it also had a political meaning, because it rallied all intellectuals who endorsed fascism. The Italian Academy was the fascist counterpart of the prestigious Accademia dei Lincei, which declared itself openly anti-fascist and the regime eventually suppressed it. The Lincei was re-established only in 1944 after suppressing the Accademia d’Italia. Raffaella Simili and Giovanni Paoloni, eds., Per una storia del Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Bari: Laterza, 2001). 111.

274 Giovanni Sbisà, I colossi del mare (Genova: Fratelli Frilli, 2004), as reported in Dell'Osa, Il principe esploratore. Luigi Amedeo di Savoia, Duca degli Abruzzi. 398.
established a special committee to solve this problem.\textsuperscript{275} With regard to the SAIS, the government played a key role in economically supporting the Duke’s company. On his side, Luigi of Savoia openly thanked Mussolini “for favouring the colonization of Somalia [through] the government interest.”\textsuperscript{276}

The significant financing from the government for the SAIS’s activities was necessary to ensure the survival of the company, as it was faced with an escalation of estimated expenditures over the first years of its existence. Thus, the society needed to increase its capital and ask for extra funds from the government to support the additional costs. To this purpose, the Ministry for the Colonies provided the Società Agricola Italo-Somala a loan of 20,000,000 Lire (approximately € 19,000,000), in November 1922. On 29 May 1923, the Duke himself applied for financial aid from the Consiglio Superiore Coloniale (High Colonial Council),\textsuperscript{277} as the SAIS needed to increase its government loan by a further 10,000,000 Lire and the total loan became 30,000,000 Lire (approximately € 29,000,000). The Consiglio Superiore Coloniale justified the remarkable amount as necessary “to carry out a colonizing programme on the massive scale [that the society] is currently conducting through good organization and leadership.”\textsuperscript{278} The SAIS stated it would use the new loan to supply the Italian national market with up to 10,000 quintals of cotton per annum by building seven new farms within its Somali land concession.\textsuperscript{279} Thus,

\textsuperscript{275} ACS, PCM 1927, f.5, sf.1, Letter by Fedele to Ministero dell’Interno and to the Prime Minister, 22 March 1927. Mussolini ordered Pietro Fedele, the Minister of Education, to establish a special committee to understand how to establish the special medical schools based on the Duke’s suggestions. This process involved the Ministries of Education, the Colonies and the Navy.

\textsuperscript{276} ACS, PCM 1928-1930, f.17, sf.3, Telegrams from Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta to Mussolini, 8 January and 28 November 1927. The Duke used to inform Mussolini about the decisions adopted by the SAIS’s management, such as the approval of the balance.

\textsuperscript{277} The Consiglio Superiore Coloniale was a branch of the Ministry for the Colonies. It was divided into three departments, among which was the Department for Financial and Economic Affairs for the colonies. According to bureaucratic procedure, all financial requests from colonial companies had to be sent to the local Colonial Government, then to the Ministry for the Colonies, which eventually sent the application to the Consiglio Superiore Coloniale.


\textsuperscript{279} Ibid.
the SAIS increased its capital from 24,000,000 to 32,000,000 Lire (approximately €
28,800,000) as part of its new financial plan. In April 1923, the Banca Commerciale
Italiana, the Banca Nazionale di Credito and the Banco di Roma created an ad hoc banking
committee to support the SAIS’s capital increase, which was also sponsored by some
industrial societies, private investors and other minor banks. On that occasion, the Banco
di Roma contributed 500,000 Lire (approximately € 480,000).280 As Luigi de Rosa argued
in his Il Banco di Roma 1880-1992, the involvement of these banks was strategic because
“they aimed to earn rights from their shareholdings, rather than contributing to the
industrial development of the country.”281

On the other hand, the state created a special fund for ‘colonial purposes’ to support
those companies that operated in colonial activities. The Ministry of Finance and the
Ministry of the Colonies budgeted 35,000,000 Lire (approximately € 33,600,000) to supply
government assistance to those societies committed to overseas commercial, agricultural
and reclamation activities. In this context, the SAIS had preferential treatment from the
government in terms of significant economic support, although it was just one of a number
of private companies operating in Somalia in colonial activities, the rest of which received
only minor funding.282 Due to the consistency of the state loans granted to the SAIS, the
Ministries of Finance and of the Colonies again increased the funds for colonial purposes

282 ASMAE, Ministero Africa Italiana Vol.I 1857-1939, b.89/17, f. 66, Relazione del Governatore Giovanni
Cerrina Feroni al Ministero delle Colonie, “Imprese ed Aziende agrarie, industriali e commerciali in
Somalia”, 16 giugno 1920. Among the societies operating in Somalia was the Società Romana di
Colonizzazione in Somalia (est. 1909). It was based in Margherita (Italian Somaliland) and by 1922 in
Mogadishu. The Società Romana was one of the first companies to attempt cotton cultivation in the Juba region. It received 5,000 ha of land from the government and in 1909, it was also financed with 360,000 Lire
(approximately € 1,517,000).
Later the Società Romana di Colonizzazione in Somalia “became one the most important sister companies of
the SAIS, especially in banana production.” Strangio. 93.
up to 45,000,000 Lire (approximately € 43,200,000), irrespective of applications for financial assistance presented by other societies.\textsuperscript{283}

In 1925, the SAIS again increased its capital from 32,000,000 to 35,000,000 Lire (approximately € 28,900,000) by requesting the support of the bank committee, which guaranteed the previous capital increase in 1923. The Duke of Abruzzi and some sugar industrialists, who were interested in the SAIS’s activities, financed the capital increase with 1,300,000 Lire (approximately € 1,000,000),\textsuperscript{284} while the remaining part was provided by the Banca Nazionale di Credito, the Banco di Roma (which respectively contributed 500,000 and 300,000 Lire, approximately € 413,000 and 248,000), the Credito Italiano and the Banca Commerciale Italiana.\textsuperscript{285} By this time the banks reduced their support in the new capital increase because the company had received consistent government financial aid, although they considered the SAIS’s activities to be profitable in the long term. However, banking participation in the SAIS’s economic life was in deference to Luigi Amedeo of Savoia, as Alberto Lodolo, the general director of the Credito Italiano, emphasised in a letter addressed to Carlo Vitali, the managing director of the Banco di Roma.\textsuperscript{286}

With these contributions, the SIAS built some hydraulic infrastructures (such as irrigation channels) in the colony and it declared them works of public utility. In this sense, the colonial government became the owner of the infrastructure built by the society. In fact, the Duke could even ‘complain’ to the Ministry of the Colonies and Mussolini about the

\textsuperscript{283} ASMAE, Ministero Africa Italiana Vol.V, b.3, Archivio Consiglio Superiore Coloniale, Relazione per il Ministro delle Colonie, “Istanza della Società Agricola Italo-Somala per aumento di mutuo da 20 a 30 milioni”, 31 luglio 1923.
\textsuperscript{284} ASUBR, Comitato Esecutivo, “Aumento di capitale della Società Agricola Italo-Somala”, 26 giugno 1925. The 1,300,000 Lire was split between the sugar industrialists, who deposited 750,000 Lire in stocks, the Duke of Abruzzi who personally acquired 1,000 stocks paying 500,000 Lire, and the director of the SAIS in Mogadishu, Francesco Bertonelli, who bought 50,000 Lire in stocks. Bertonelli was also a team member of the Duke’s 1919 Somali expedition. Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti. 24.
\textsuperscript{285} ASUBR, b.VIII.2.1.29.79, “Agricola Italo-Somala.”
\textsuperscript{286} Ibid, Letter from Alberto Lodolo to Carlo Vitali, 6 June 1925.
attitude of the colonial government, which delayed payment because of lack of money. The Duke’s complaints resulted in the central government providing an extra Lire 14,000,000 (approximately €10,705,000 divided over three years) to the colonial administration. In this matter a key role was played by Pietro Lanza di Scalea, Minister of the Colonies, who endorsed Luigi of Savoia’s request and asked Mussolini for his final approval. In 1927, the Duke again relied on Mussolini’s support; this was when *il Duce* approved his new request for a financial contribution to complete some works begun by the SAIS, despite the cautious attitude of Giuseppe Volpi, Minister of the Economy, who argued that the government had already sponsored “approximately Lire 50,000,000 [€38,000,000] for the colonization activity carried out by [the SAIS]” and because of the unceasing requests from “the SAIS to postpone the restitution of the loan previously granted.”

In addition to these requests, the Duke presented to the government a plan for a railway project to link Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi with Mogadishu, the closest port, 113 kilometres away. At that time, Somalia had only 29 kilometres of railway from the coastal area to the Afoi village (which was the junction point inland, near the Uebi-Scebeli river). In January 1927, the government approved the Duke’s request and on 15 September a new railway line joined the Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi with the existing railway. Such infrastructure became essential to move the huge quantity of SAIS’s outputs. It is not surprising that the government approved the Duke’s request: he could easily demonstrate the results achieved by his society. From the beginning of its operations to 1927, the SAIS had carried 350,000 quintals of materials and goods using camels, trucks and boats (which

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the SAIS specifically adapted for sailing the Uebi-Scebeli river). No other companies had moved such a quantity of materials and outputs as those managed by the SAIS.\textsuperscript{290}

\textbf{The SAIS conforms to the fascist colonial system. The use of forced labour within its consortium}

The SAIS’s activity in Somalia reveals additional and important evidence that the relationship between Luigi of Savoia and fascism was strong and mutual. The company’s tendency to resort to forced labour in its consortium demonstrates it essentially conformed to the fascist colonial system, which often used compulsory indigenous manpower to carry out agricultural works. The workforce mainly consisted of nomadic populations, who used to return to their hometowns as soon as they had health problems, had earned sufficient money, or became homesick. This created a lack of manpower, which often occurred during the harvesting season, affecting both the work schedules of the company and the Duke’s original plan to settle up to 6,000 Somali farmers within the SAIS’s concessions.\textsuperscript{291} Eventually, fewer than 2,500 decided to stay.\textsuperscript{292} This is in contrast with Michieli, who in his biography of the Duke stated that “his overpowering tenacity had built villages for 3,000 families of indigenous workers.”\textsuperscript{293} The SAIS needed to permanently settle local manpower within its claimed lands because it relied on these workers to accomplish its aims on a long-term basis.\textsuperscript{294}

From this perspective, the Duke was not different from other colonizers, who dealt with similar difficulties in other land concessions. From the beginning of the SAIS’s

\textsuperscript{290} Del Boca, Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell’impero, 2. 85.
\textsuperscript{291} Strangio. 80.
\textsuperscript{292} Del Boca, Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell’impero, 2. 83.
\textsuperscript{293} Michieli. 171.
\textsuperscript{294} Labanca. 318.
activity, he was aware of the necessity to have at his disposal a consistent number of workers. His correspondence with the Minister for the Internal Affairs, Luigi Federzoni, reveals this attitude and displays how the Duke complained about the lack of cooperation of the indigenous population with the company’s work. He solicited the intervention of the government in solving the situation, which he considered disastrous for the entire development of the colony:

The third farm will open this year as per schedule. However, the preparation of the fourth farm depends on the available workforce […] The government and the SAIS helped the chief [of the local tribes] during the 1921 famine, offering jobs and food to [their populations]. However, today the harvests are copious and the chiefs have to cooperate, using their influence, to ensure a minimal percentage of manpower to the government or the SAIS, in order to start the necessary works. The government should let them understand [the need] with a few examples […] But, I believe that convincing those peoples to work through [mere] persuasion is useless, [especially] if they have food. It will be unsuccessful and the whole enhancement of this colony will be problematic.295

This aspect was revised or even ignored by some of the Duke’s post-fascist biographers, such as Maino, who emphasised that the Duke recognized land ownership by the local inhabitants,296 although they could not fully exploit their lands because they were required to work for the company. Dainelli also did not discuss the matter of forced labour, perhaps because it contrasted with the righteous image of the Duke of Abruzzi that he presented. The same attitude was adopted by Alfio Berretta in his Con Amedeo d’Aosta in Africa Orientale Italiana in pace e in guerra, in which he dedicated an entire chapter to the Duke’s colonial enterprise in Somalia. He hagiographically attributed the transformation of Somalia from an “arid and desert [region, into] a flourishing one”297 to the Duke’s will

295 ACS, “Archivio Federzoni”, f.42, letter from Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta to Luigi Federzoni, 1 April 1924.
296 Maino. 129.
and the work of the SAIS. These interpretations contributed to a view of the SAIS as a
‘good example of colonialism’, because, as noted by Leone Iraci, the company was the
most modern and technological enterprise in Somalia, which undertook a capitalistic form
of colonialism that differed from the marauding colonialism carried out by other
companies, such as Filonardi and Benadir.298

Thus, in 1924, the SAIS asked for the colonial government’s support to obtain a
source of long-lasting manpower for its agricultural works, which fundamentally meant
resorting to forced labour. The request was based on declaring the company’s operations
as ‘works of public utility’ since it was regarded as ‘fair’ to use a compulsory workforce
for such projects.299 In practical terms, the villages located in the surrounding area of Jowar
were forced to supply monthly manpower to the SAIS.300 However, the forced labour did
not improve the SAIS’s conditions of production, and from 1930, the Duke’s company was
forced to recruit an additional workforce from Southern Ethiopia. This matter also shows
the political influence and connections of Luigi Amedeo of Savoia with the Ethiopian
Empire.

The Duke signed an agreement with the Ethiopian ras of the Sciaveli region to
ensure a supply of manpower to the SAIS from that area. The main support for this
operation came from the sultan Olol Dinle, who was a loyal ally of Italy and regularly
betrayed the Imperial government of Addis Ababa.301 With the support of other sultans

298 Iraci. 64.
299 On 28 June 1930, the Geneva Convention n. 29 concerning forced labour was adopted. Article 2 stated
that a nation could use forced labour in particular situations, such as: building structures of military
importance; works related to special events such as earthquakes, floods, famines, or epidemic diseases; or
works of public utility. However, this last clause was adopted even before 1930, especially by those nations
that had colonial possessions.
300 Del Boca, Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell’impero, 2. 84.
301 Ibid, 73 and 83, 84. The Sciaveli were an ethnic group who inhabited the border between Somalia and
Ethiopia, along the middle and high sectors of the Uebi-Scelbi river. Although Olol Dinle declared his
loyalty to the Ethiopian Empire, he disliked the Ethiopians and regularly betrayed the government of Addis
Ababa in favour of the Italians, as well as ruling ruthlessly over his territory.
from surrounding areas, the Duke undertook a large-scale recruitment process that meant it “was necessary to build a transit camp for the workers in Mustahil, with an infirmary with a doctor and a Zaptiè station to control the flow of the workers.” This ‘medical service’ essentially provided “a meticulous quality control [of the manpower] as the transient workers are accurately examined before continuing their journey towards the workplaces.” Furthermore, the displacement of the workers from their home villages to the SAIS consortium was scheduled and organised in two groups during the year: “the first from June to September and the second from November to March.”

The colonial administration politically exploited the relationship between the Duke and the local sultans of the Sciaveli region because of its contribution to establishing a peaceful situation between each other and along the Italian colonial borders. According to an Italian political-military report about the Somali situation issued in February 1930, the colonial government lauded the servility demonstrated by Olol Dinle (who was considered the most important among the chiefs) as “an excellent sign”, since he asked the Italian authorities for “permission to build some silos […] in Mustahil to store some of his agricultural products [and put them] under the control of our border troops.” With regard to the Ethiopian workers, the account ascribed their relocation within Italian Somaliland to the internal situation of Ethiopia. Specifically, these tribes preferred to ‘embrace the protection’ of the Italian colonial administration rather than staying under the control of Addis Ababa. In this political process Luigi Amedeo of Savoia played a key role; he invited the chiefs of the Durbe and Carenle tribes in Mogadishu to discuss their settlement. The outcome of this meeting resulted in them accepting that “the Italian government settled

303 Ibid, p.6, 7.
them in the Lower Shebeli area, possibly at the *Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi.* This agreement benefitted both the Duke, who relied on a new wave of manpower for his consortium, and the colonial government, which increased its dominion over new tribes.

Despite the efforts of Luigi of Savoia, recruiting manpower remained a serious problem, which affected the whole colony. The reason lay essentially in the habits of Somalis, who were mostly nomads; few tribes undertook agricultural activity because they considered it less important than livestock and warfare activities. Only a few tribes were dedicated to cultivating the land, and then only for their personal needs, while an industrial farming project such as that elaborated by the Duke of Abruzzi needed considerable manpower. From the first agrarian mission, undertaken in 1919, the Duke did not ignore the pre-existing scarcity of agricultural workers in the regions he visited. As a result, he temporarily hired Arab and Eritrean manpower to carry out the preparatory work to establish the consortium. In these conditions, the purpose of the joint-participation system between the local tribes and the SAIS was to settle the workers on the land to increase the number of available workers. This contrasted remarkably with the ‘religious’ Duke depicted by Fabietti in his hagiographic work. Fabietti argued that the agreement between the local inhabitants and Luigi of Savoia was made possible because:

He instilled in those miserable people […] in those reluctant souls a light of hope” for improving their life conditions through “a pact of alliance with the Prince […] He was the man with an Apostle’s face, and they just needed to hear and look at him to trust him.

However, the SAIS’s colonial approach, based on obtaining land from the local clans and signing treaties with them, represented an innovation in the fascist colonial

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305 Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti. 55.
306 Ibid.
307 Fabietti. 306.
These approaches led the government to apply the SAIS’s labour contract even in the state consortium of Genale, where the continuing hostile relationship between Italian settlers and local workers undermined farming production. Clelia Maino enthusiastically emphasised this aspect, defining it as remarkable because a private company provided the government with a solution adaptable to the whole colony. Although Genale adopted the SAIS’s contract, the working situation did not improve, as the regional commissioner of Merca, Del Re, reported to Guido Corni, the governor of Somalia: “The problem of manpower is persistent and omnipresent [and] the method of recruitment has only solved temporarily the situation.” The commissioner indicated the Italian concessionaries as the main cause of the hostile relationship between them and the local workers. These problems made the colonial government unable to settle workers within the concessions because the employers did not respect the contracts with their employees. In an attempt to find a solution to this problem, the administration issued two different labour agreements called *Contratto di Colonia* (Colonial Agreement) and *Contratto Annuale di Lavoro* (Annual Labour Agreement) to improve the working conditions of the local farmers. There was already a so-called *Contratto Agricolo Bertello* that protected the indigenous peasants, but the tenant farmers made arbitrary interpretations of it to take advantage of the local population.

The *Contratto Annuale di Lavoro* issued for Genale’s workers envisaged that the concession holders ceded to each worker a parcel of land in good condition, as well as
accommodation suitable for the needs of the worker.\textsuperscript{312} These conditions partially replicated those adopted within the SAIS consortium and underlined the fascist racist concept of that time: “The indigenous worker must respect the tenant of the concession because he is a dependent worker and also because ‘the white’ represents the race that rules over the country in order to lead it toward a better future.”\textsuperscript{313}

\textit{The 1927 political mission in Ethiopia and the Duke’s last geographic expedition along the Uebi-Scebeli river in 1928}

The agricultural Italian colonial programme in Somalia had always had its core in the Uebi-Scebeli river, but there was neither information about the river’s source (located within the Ethiopian territory) nor a precise map of its course. Beginning in April 1918, the Italian Geographic Society proposed a geographic expedition within Ethiopian territory to discover the Uebi-Scebeli’s source. In their biography of the Duke, Tenderini and Shandrick wrongly attributed this expedition to Luigi Amedeo of Savoia. According to the authors, he asked the Ministry of the Colonies and the Italian Geographic Society to sponsor his mission.\textsuperscript{314} This misrepresentation was due to the concurrence of the proposed exploration with the Duke’s first agrarian expedition in Somalia, in 1919, which targeted a

\textsuperscript{312} ASMAE, Archivio di Personalità – Guido Corni 1928-1931, b.24, “Relazione del Commissario regionale di Merca al governatore Guido Corni”, p.8.
\textsuperscript{313} Ibid, “Circolare del Commissario regionale Del Re ai Concessionari di Genale”, 26 agosto 1929, p.2. The letter also established the rights and duties both for the concessionaries and the indigenous workers. Among the clauses were: a) the worker had to work six days per week; b) Friday was the day off and the concession holder could not demand any labour from the worker, unless he volunteered to work, in which case he had to be paid one Lira above his normal wage. On the other hand: a) the concessioners had to pay their employees each Thursday evening; b) daily wages were calculated at 3.50, 2.50 and 2 Lire (approximately € 3.10, 2.30, 1.80) respectively for men, women and boys; c) the concession holder had to pay workers in advance if they needed it; and d) all workers who needed medical care had to be seen at the clinics in Genale, Uagadi and Goluin. If the doctor declared the worker to be in good health, he was forced to stay on the farm for as many days as he had lost in going to the clinic and coming back. Finally, the concession holders were to report any offences made by workers to the authorities instead of reacting themselves.
\textsuperscript{314} Tenderini and Shandrick, \textit{The Duke of the Abruzzi. An explorer’s life}. 148.
different location.\textsuperscript{315} Further evidence of how these expeditions differed was contained in a recommendation letter sent by Ugo Da Como, Minister for the War Pensions, to Luigi Rossi (appointed as the new Minister for the Colonies in 1919) to support the candidacy of a person who intended taking part in the Duke’s Uebi-Scebeli expedition. Rossi replied specifying the expedition mentioned was organised by the Italian Geographic Society.\textsuperscript{316}

However, the exploration proposed by the Italian Geographic Society did not eventually take place, while the agronomic mission of Luigi of Savoia was carried out in the targeted area where he would found his consortium. The Duke had aimed to explore the course of the river since the middle of the 1920s, as he needed to study its flow rate, which was fundamental to irrigating his farming colony. However, he could only realize this proposal in 1928, after he led a diplomatic-political mission to the court of Ras Tafari (the future Emperor Hailè Selassie) in Ethiopia.\textsuperscript{317} This undertaking was part of the Italian colonial policy for establishing economic penetration in Abyssinia. Italy had pursued this policy since 1906, when it signed a triple agreement with Great Britain and France to protect the entirety of the Ethiopian Empire and preserve their respective interests over that country. This reveals how from its beginnings, fascism essentially exploited the colonial projects acquired by the liberal state.

Once Mussolini was in power, Italy increasingly aimed to make Ethiopia its own exclusive sphere of influence. This political project found a concrete initiative in 1925,\textsuperscript{318}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{315} ASMAE, Ministero Africa Italiana, Vol.I, b.89.15, f.59, 59bis, Letter from Baccari, on behalf of the Italian Geographic Society to Camillo De Camillis, Governor of Eritrea, 24 September 1919. Concerning to this aspect, the Italian Geographical Society issued an official account to clarify the confusion: “H.R.H is completely unconnected to the scientific mission along the middle and the high sector of the Uebi-Scebeli, because he aims to explore the course [of the river] within the territory of our colony [while the Italian Geographic Society is organising] an exploration of the Uebi-Scebeli in the Ethiopian territory.”}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{316} Ibid, Letter from Da Como to Rossi, 11 September 1919 and Letter by Rossi to Da Como, September 1919.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{317} The mission’s purpose was to realize the ‘Italian-Ethiopian Cordial Agreement’ (Trattato d’amicizia Italo-Etiopico) and Ras Tafari allowed the Duke to undertake his exploration of the Uebi-Scebeli, during his diplomatic visit. Del Boca, Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell’impero, 2. 85.}
when Great Britain secretly attempted to revise the 1906 agreement, excluding France.\(^{318}\)

In 1926, despite the negotiation between London and Rome being supposedly secret, the British Prime Minister Chamberlain informed his parliament and the Ethiopian government about the new agreement with Italy. Thus, Ethiopia worried about its independence, although the Italian ambassador in Addis Ababa stated the ‘genuine’ intentions of Italy to reassure Ras Tafari. The situation increasingly jeopardized the relationship between Italy and Ethiopia to the extent that on 19 June 1926, Ras Tafari decided to involve the League of Nations to obtain international support, which favoured his country.\(^{319}\)

Mussolini decided to postpone the prearranged diplomatic voyage of the Duke of Abruzzi to Addis Ababa, as he had been asked to return the visit that Ras Tafari had made to Italy during his European journey in 1924. Luigi Amedeo of Savoia obeyed Mussolini, who politically exploited the image of the Duke, as clearly revealed in a telegram sent by Mussolini to him to arrange the diplomatic mission in Addis Ababa, on 3 December 1926:

> The Minister Plenipotentiary in Addis Ababa reports an improvement of the Italian-Abyssinian relationship and commented that Ras Tafari insistently asked him if and when the visit of Y.R.H. should take place, because the Ras would really welcome such a visit […] Y.R.H. should remember our agreement in which I supposed your visit could take place next March, only if the [political] situation was clear and no other difficulties occurred […] I consider the visit of Y.R.H. very useful to consolidate the improvement of the Italo-Abyssinian relationship, which would help our political action in Ethiopia.\(^{320}\)

> The diplomatic mission took eventually place in May 1927 to the satisfaction of both Il Duce and the Duke: Mussolini aimed to achieve Italian economic penetration in

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\(^{318}\) Ibid, 129. The British government aimed to build a dam on Lake Tana, but its negotiations with Ethiopia were unsuccessful; thus, it decided to join Italy in order to put pressure on the Ethiopian government. On the other side, Italian interests were based on recognising Ethiopia as its own sphere of influence and building a railway from Eritrea to Somalia through Ethiopia.

\(^{319}\) Ibid, 130, 131.

\(^{320}\) ASMAE, Documenti Diplomatici Italiani, Settima Serie Vol. IV, doc. 511, Telegram from Mussolini to S.A.R. Luigi di Savoia through Cesare Maria De Vecchi, Governor of Somalia, 3 December 1926.
Ethiopia, starting from Eritrea, which included the construction of a road from Assab to Dessié, replacing a previous proposal for building a railway. The mission also supplied political and military information about the country, demonstrating that Italy aimed to conquer Ethiopia sooner or later. On the other side, Luigi Amedeo of Savoia benefitted from his journey to obtain Ras Tafari’s authorization for exploring the Uebi-Shebeli river and gained logistic support for the expedition, which included an armed escort of Ethiopian knights and fifty local people to facilitate the transport of goods. However, he also played a key role in accomplishing the fascist policy of facilitating and preserving the relationship between the two countries. As reported in an official account of the journey, the Duke depicted his mission in Djibouti (at that time it was French territory) as a private event: “to avoid the French authorities over-emphasising the welcome [for the Duke], reducing the value and the importance of the visit, which was instead exclusively addressed to the Abyssinian Court.” The evidence shows the Duke’s strong involvement with fascist colonial policy and contrasts with the arguments of Daniele Maria Pegorari in his introduction to Uebi Scebeli – Diario di tenda e cammino della spedizione del Duca degli Abruzzi in Etiopia (1928-1929), written by Vito Cosimo Basile, a member of the expedition. Pegorari stated the Duke “unintentionally found himself in the middle of a military and politic strategy.”

Fascist propaganda emphasised the Duke of Abruzzi’s visit as a turning point between two epochs in Ethiopia, because Ras Tafari and the Empress radically changed the

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321 In 1926, Dino Grandi, the Undersecretary of the Foreign Affairs, suggested turning the original plan of building a railway into a road. Mussolini approved the new proposal, but he downgraded Ras Tafari’s ambition to obtain access to the sea, conceding him only a simple free zone. Del Boca, Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell’impero, 2. 132, 134.
322 Dell’Osa, Il principe esploratore. Luigi Amedeo di Savoia, Duca degli Abruzzi. 370.
traditional style of welcoming European missions.\textsuperscript{325} The Ethiopian government did its utmost to make the visit of the Duke a special event by providing sumptuous ceremonies.\textsuperscript{326} Fabietti hagiographically attributed the lavish functions to “the Abyssinian pride in greeting a royal prince.”\textsuperscript{327} However, these events represented the Ethiopian political scenario of that time. The Abyssinians’ attitude could not exclusively be attributed to honouring a ‘royal guest’; it was rather the result of Ras Tafari’s effort to break the centuries-old isolation of his country. He was an open-minded sovereign, as Del Boca argued in his seminal work \textit{Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale}, who travelled across Europe, where he was fascinated by some aspects of the European life-style, which he tried to ‘replicate’ in his country, in accordance with his progressive policies to modernize Ethiopia.\textsuperscript{328}

The commander of the ship \textit{Venezia}, Luigi Ornati, who was in the Italian delegation with the Duke, defined the new Abyssinian habits as proof of their assimilation of European customs, especially those relating to how to arrange official ceremonies.\textsuperscript{329} On the other hand, Ras Tafari exploited the visit of the Duke to display the military force of his country by organizing colossal troop parades, “which involved approximately 100,000 men. Many of them carried European military equipment and dressed in European style.” These parades rallied almost all the troops of the Ethiopian chiefs, who came from different regions. According to Ornati, this military showcase demonstrated the intention of the Abyssinian government “to emphasise its imposing military force, as a warning to those strangers and Europeans who would aim to threaten the entirety of Ethiopia [and] although

\textsuperscript{325} Massimo Rava, “Col Duca degli Abruzzi ad Addis Abeba,” \textit{L’Illustrazione Italiana}, 26 June 1927.
\textsuperscript{326} Dell’Osa, \textit{Il principe esploratore. Luigi Amedeo di Savoia, Duca degli Abruzzi}. 371.
\textsuperscript{327} Fabietti. 320.
\textsuperscript{328} Del Boca outlined a detailed profile of Ras Tafari in his Angelo Del Boca, “L’irresistibile ascesa di Ras Tafari,” in \textit{Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell’impero} (Milano: Mondari, 2001).
\textsuperscript{329} USMM, “Missione R.N. Venezia”, b.1706 - Missione di S.A.R. il Duca degli Abruzzi presso la Corte Etiopica, Official report by Commander Luigi Ornati to the Navy Chief of Staff, p.8.
disagreement often prevails among the chiefs, they appeared well united in opposition against strangers, who they [considered] as a common enemy.”  

Once the diplomatic mission ended, the Duke organized his Uebi-Scebeli exploration, which took place from October 1928 to February 1929. As mentioned above, this expedition aimed to identify the source of the Uebi-Scebeli and its flow-rate, but it also had another interesting goal: the Duke aimed to recruit manpower from the tribes met during his explorations, for the SAIS consortium. This involved signing pacts with those local chiefs located along the exploration’s route, who provided workforces to the SAIS from their tribes. This condition was part of the ‘logistic’ assistance previously granted to Luigi of Savoia by Ras Tafari during the Italian diplomatic mission in Addis Ababa. These events confirmed that Somalia needed manpower and, since the Duke’s proposal to establish cordial relationships with Somali farmers in exchange for providing a workforce had partially failed, he had to search for workers further from the colony.

The Governor General of Italian Somaliland, Maurizio Rava (1931-1935) emphasised how these indigenous workers ‘voluntarily’ came to the SAIS consortium. In reality, it is hard to believe that these peasants could oppose their local chiefs, because the existing relationship between tribal members and their chief was based on an absolute subjection. For instance, the relationship involved providing the chief with food, accommodation and slaves, whenever he visited their territory. At that time, Ethiopia still based its economy mainly on slavery, although Ras Tafari had begun to abolish it. The local chiefs were deeply loyal to him in exchange for preserving their own personal control

over their tribes, but the Ras was essentially the uncontested ruler of the country. Furthermore, the several honours offered to the Duke by the local chiefs during his Uebi-Scebeli voyage reflect these Ethiopian power dynamics, rather than being mere spontaneous ‘act[s] of deference to H.R.H.’

At the beginning of February 1929, the mission returned to Somalia. It had discovered the source of the Uebi-Scebeli river on 12 November 1928 and had collected valuable geographical data for charting the position of the river. The Italian colonial authorities praised this outcome, while Luigi Amedeo of Savoia emphasised the importance and the utility of his accomplishment in relation to the Italian possessions. He argued that his exploration needed to be carried out by Italians, because they had colonized the main part of the Uebi-Scebeli’s banks. From the Duke’s perspective, the Italian colonies would benefit from his geographic discoveries in terms of better hydrographical knowledge of the river, which could be useful for agricultural development. Later in 1935, the new map of the river elaborated by the *Istituto Geografico Militare* (Military Geographic Institute) revealed its utility during the military operations of the Italian-Ethiopian War. Finally, the data collected by the Duke’s exploration over an area of 1,400 kilometres found practical use once Ethiopia became officially an Italian possession.

**The Duke of Abruzzi’s death**

In February 1933, Luigi Amedeo of Savoia returned to Somalia after having spent a period in Italy. He was aware of his long-standing serious health conditions and on 18

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334 Basile, 96.
336 Pollacci, vi.
March he died at the Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi. All his biographers agreed that he decided to go to die in his village, perhaps because there is no evidence to support other reasons. However, one thing is certain: none of the Royal Family went to Somalia from Italy to take part in his burial service; King Vittorio Emanuele III visited his grave only in 1934.\textsuperscript{337} The governor of Somalia, Maurizio Rava, arranged to cover the coffin with the Italian flag and, according to the fascist style, during the burial at the Villaggio, he “shouted the name «Luigi di Savoia, Duca degli Abruzzi», while one thousand other voices replied «Presente!»”\textsuperscript{338} Fascism praised the fact that the Duke died in his village to emphasise his link with Italian fascist colonialism, which Mussolini defined in his obituary as an ‘arduous battle’ devoted to the greatness of Italy:

Going to die in those places where he fought an arduous battle represents several presages, which reveal […] the coherence of his spirit that was always devoted to the greatness and prestige of the homeland.

The memory of the Duke of Abruzzi will be engraved in the minds of the Italian people for ever.\textsuperscript{339}

Fascism glorified the image of the Duke of Abruzzi, portraying him as the embodiment of the new Italian, as Mussolini himself declared in his remembrance before the Senate:

Today, this figure of sailor, explorer, pioneer, scientist [with] his glorious events is delivered to history […] He represented the forerunner and the full embodiment of the new Italian […] He deserved the title of Hero in the full meaning of the word […] He showed his soul even in dying, as he asked to stay in the Somali land, which he made fecund through his constant sacrifice with daily and humble work.\textsuperscript{340}

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\textsuperscript{337} Dell'Osa, Il principe esploratore. Luigi Amedeo di Savoia, Duca degli Abruzzi. 408.

\textsuperscript{338} Ibid, 408. The account of the Duke’s death was published by Maurizio Rava in La Gazzetta del Popolo e della sera on 21 March 1933.

\textsuperscript{339} USMM, “Biografie storiche – il Duca degli Abruzzi” - Il Duca degli Abruzzi è morto in terra Italiana d’oltremare. The Duke’s obituary was sent by Mussolini to the Count of Turin, brother of Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta, and published in Il Giornale d’Italia.

\end{flushleft}
The regime appropriated the image of the Duke of Abruzzi to construct the ‘myth of the hero’ to hand down his achievements as a model for younger generations, whom fascism aimed to reshape. The fascist propaganda acted in various ways to pursue this purpose, including the work of authors like Fabietti, Michieli and Ascoli, who contributed significantly to emphasising the connection between Luigi Amedeo of Savoia and fascism. Fabietti defined the Duke’s colonial enterprise as a model for fascism, to inspire the ‘new generation’ of Italians to extend it to the rest of the empire.\textsuperscript{341} Michieli associated the Duke with the national prestige of Italy. He highlighted how the Duke, through his work, showed Italy how to teach other nations via the diffusion of Roman civilization, which was ‘the greatest and the brightest’ of all the civilizations.\textsuperscript{342} Finally, Ugo Ascoli rhetorically identified the Duke of Abruzzi as the forerunner of fascism, because “he opened for humanity and the Homeland new ways of prosperity and strength […] He was one of those who highly honoured the name of Fascist Italy, showing it the way towards power and glory.”\textsuperscript{343}

A further representation of how fascism exploited the image of the Duke, especially in terms of his colonial enterprise, was also given by Corrado Zoli, the former governor of Eritrea and President of the Royal Italian Geographic Society. Zoli provided an account published by \textit{L’Illustrazione Italiana} to commemorate the Duke. According to his personal testimony, in the aftermath of the March on Rome in 1922, Luigi of Savoia came to the office of the Minister for the Colonies, Federzoni, to support his colonial efforts achieved through the SAIS’s activities: “He talked to Federzoni and he said «Now, we can finally breathe…» Of course! He was talking about the triumph of fascism… He obtained

\textsuperscript{341} Fabietti. 313.  
\textsuperscript{342} Michieli. 210.  
\textsuperscript{343} Ascoli. 34, 35.
everything he asked for, as usual, because he did not ask for himself […] but for the
generous Somali land and for the good name of Italy.”

These laudatory representations became part of the fascist colonial narrative as the
regime appropriated the experience of the SAIS. According to the historians Labanca
and Bosworth, the government mainly identified its colonial programme with the
development of the Genale consortium. However, by the middle of the 1920s, this trend
began to change because the regime increasingly supported and sponsored the Duke’s
agricultural activities via his Società Agricola Italo-Somala, as the documentation analysed
in the previous pages has demonstrated. Since the Duke’s village was fully operative, the
propaganda exploited its image “to popularise the representation of overseas territories and
support the popularity of the colonial enterprise.” In this way, the figure of the Duke of
Abruzzi was easily adapted to the political needs of the propaganda, which tied his name
to the colonial enterprise as a successful model of fascist colonialism.

The fascist heritage associated with the image of the Duke in Somalia was still
present in 1967, when Giotto Dainelli published his biography of the Duke. The author
concluded his work by emphasising how the Duke went to Somalia not to be in exile, but
to work in a land where modern human civilization could flourish. In his conclusion, the
author became nostalgic, as he narrated in the third person his personal experience in
Somalia in the post-war period. He went to the SAIS’s location as a ‘pilgrimage’ to honour
the grave of Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta, who he greeted with his right arm lifted in the
fascist salute, because the Duke deserved that kind of salute.

345 Polezzi. 294.
346 Labanca. 317, 318 and Bosworth. 375.
347 Polezzi. 294.
348 Dainelli. 296.
349 Ibid. 331.
Chapter III

Aimone of Savoia-Aosta, the Duke of Spoleto.

Explorer and ‘King who never was’.

Aimone of Savoia-Aosta (1900-1948), also known as the Duke of Spoleto, was a member of the Savoia-Aosta cadet branch of the Italian Royal Family, an Admiral and explorer, appointed as King of Croatia, although he never effectively took the throne. He remains relatively unknown and little studied compared with another explorer, his uncle the Duke of Abruzzi, whose life and explorations have been analysed by various scholars and described by several biographers. The few studies on him were published between 1978 and 2006 and mainly analyzed his designation as King of the Independent State of Croatia, proclaimed by Ante Pavelić during the spring of 1941.

In 1978, the Serbian historian Stevan Pavlowitch was the first to be interested in Aimone of Savoia. In his article, The King who never was: An instance of Italian involvement in Croatia, 1941-3, Pavlowitch described how Mussolini aimed to break up Yugoslavia through the Croatian Revolutionary Rebel Organization, also known as the Movement of the Ustaša (rebels, insurgents) founded by Pavelić. Mussolini wanted the Ustaša to facilitate Italy’s penetration of the Balkans to create its spazio vitale, while Pavelić aimed to obtain the military and financial support of fascist Italy to turn Croatia
into an independent state.\textsuperscript{1} In January 1940, Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Mussolini’s son-in-law, guaranteed Pavelić Italian military support in sustaining an uprising in Croatia and the consequent proclamation of independence. Ciano’s goal was to establish a strong political relationship between Italy and the fledgling Croatian state. He therefore proposed to Pavelić a “monarchical form of government for the future Croatian state, linked to Italy by a personal union on the Albanian model.”\textsuperscript{2} According to Pavlowitch, the Duke was not happy about his appointment, as demonstrated in his founding of the \textit{Ufficio Croazia}, which collected political information related to the domestic situation of that country.\textsuperscript{3} As will be discussed later, Aimone of Savoia sent this information to the King and Mussolini to point out the difficulties he would encounter in a country where the population did not want an Italian prince to be their new King.\textsuperscript{4}

In 1979 Gian Nicola Amoretti published \textit{La vicenda Italo-Croata nei documenti di Aimone di Savoia (1941-1943)}, a book entirely based on the Duke of Spoleto’s reports issued between August 1941 and August 1943, which were partially analysed by Pavlowitch in his earlier article.\textsuperscript{5} For the first time, Amoretti published all the reports in full, showing how the information collected by the so-called \textit{Ufficio Croazia} came from a complex net of informers established between the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs, the \textit{SIM} (Servizio Informazioni Militari del Regio Esercito) or Royal Italian Army Intelligence

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\textsuperscript{1} Stevan K. Pavlowitch, “The King who never was: an instance of Italian involvement in Croatia, 1941-3,” \textit{European studies review} 8 (1978). 465.

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid. The expression “Albania model” indicated a state that was not annexed to Italy but was linked to Rome through the King Vittorio Emanuele III (who in 1939 was named Vittorio Emanuele III Re d’Italia, Imperatore d’Etiopia e Re d’Albania as a result of the Italian occupation of Albania). The fascist regime essentially turned Albania into an Italian protectorate, where Mussolini established an Albanian Fascist Party (PFA) to create the same dualism between the state and the party existing in Italy. In this political scheme, he could play the arbiter’s role he held in Italy, in Albania as well. Thus, the country became a territorial possession to which large numbers of Italian emigrants were sent. Davide Rodogno, \textit{Fascism’s European empire. Italian occupation during the Second World War} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). 57, 58.

\textsuperscript{3} Pavlowitch. 468.

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid. 468-474.


\end{footnotesize}
Service) and some people close to the Duke, who were deployed in Croatia. Amoretti argued that Aimone of Savoia rejected the idea of becoming King of Croatia because he saw that this ‘royal project’ resulted from a superficial and ambiguous agreement between Mussolini and Pavelić, which would eventually discredit the Savoia Dynasty and Italy. Nevertheless the Duke obeyed King Vittorio Emanuele III’s decision in respect of the dynastic rules. This emphasizes the Duke’s quite detached attitude to the regime: Aimone was not keen to deal with political entanglements because he primarily regarded himself as a naval officer and, as we will see, his assignation to the Croatian throne forced him to resign from the Navy.

In 1980 Oddone Talpo published *Aimone di Savoia, Re di Croazia. Una figura da rivalutare*, which emphasised that the Duke of Spoleto’s appointment as King of Croatia was part of Pavelić’s strategy to reacquire the city of Split from Italy, although Mussolini considered it an Italian possession whose transfer to Croatia was non-negotiable. Talpo also claimed that the Duke’s appointment as king gave little benefit to Italy because of the strong German military and economic influence over the Independent State of Croatia. Talpo’s research revealed that the Duke was aware of the difficulties in the Croatian domestic situation once he received his royal appointment and that the foundation of the

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6 Ibid, xviii, xix.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
10 Regarding the German influence in Croatia, on 30 May 1941 Ciano noted in his diary Mussolini’s outburst over the situation. “Mussolini had a violent outburst against the Germans because of their intrusiveness in the [policy] of Zagreb - «They leave us quiet» he said «They must remember that we lost an empire because of them. I have a thorn in my heart when I think of France keeping its empire intact despite its defeat, while we lost ours» [...] He was very devoted to Ethiopia, which he used to define as «the Pearl of the Regime», and to the years 1935 and 1936, which he defined as «the romantic years of Fascism».” Galeazzo Ciano, “Diario 1937-1943,” in *Galeazzo Ciano. Diario 1937-1943, ed. Renzo De Felice* (Milano: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1996).
Ufficio Croazia, with its periodic political reports, reflected the seriousness of the situation in which Aimone of Savoia was embroiled.\\footnote{11}{Talpo. 67, 68.}

In 2006 the historian Giulio Vignoli published Il sovrano sconosciuto. Tomislavo II Re di Croazia. According to Mario Cervi, the aim of this biography “was to rediscover a prince from the House of Savoia, who was forgotten by history.”\\footnote{12}{Mario Cervi, "Aimone di Savoia, il principe che non volle farsi re," Il Giornale, 3 Novembre 2006.} Vignoli argued that historians had paid little attention to Aimone of Savoia and his Balkan adventures for two main reasons. Firstly, the Duke was not very popular in Italian public life, at least until his appointment as King of Croatia; and secondly, Italian scholars had little interest in Balkan history after the Second World War.\\footnote{13}{Giulio Vignoli, Il sovrano sconosciuto. Tomislavo II re di Croazia (Milano: Mursia, 2006). 5.} Vignoli affirmed that la vicenda Italo-Croata (the Italian-Croatian matter) reflected the relationship between the regime and the monarchy. Mussolini exploited the prestige of the monarchy to increase that of fascist Italy. He wanted to tie the monarchy to fascism by assigning the Croatian crown to a Savoia prince. To support this political aim, Mussolini had already given King Vittorio Emanuele III the titles of Ethiopian Emperor (1936) and King of Albania (1939).\\footnote{14}{Ibid, 44.}

Mussolini did not give any suggestion about which member of the Royal House should be designated King of the Independent State of Croatia. He simply needed a member of the Savoia Dynasty to turn Croatia into an Italian satellite state.\\footnote{15}{Vignoli. 45.} According to Vignoli, the King initially intended to give the Croatian throne to Aimone’s elder brother, Amedeo of Savoia, the Duke of Aosta. However, this proposal was put aside because from 1937, Amedeo was the Viceroy of Ethiopia and Governor General of Italian Eastern Africa.\\footnote{16}{Ibid, 43. Amedeo of Savoia was very popular in Italy, due to his heroic resistance in the battle of Amba Alagi in 1941, before being defeated by the British. His behaviour persuaded the enemy commanders to grant him and his soldiers the honours of war. Amedeo died on 3 March 1942 in a British prison camp in Kenya. After his death, the title of Duke of Aosta was transferred to his brother Aimone, who became the fourth Duke of Aosta.}
Vignoli also claimed how the Duke of Aosta’s fame and his personality overshadowed that of his younger brother. This was why biographers and authors mainly focused their research on Amedeo and overlooked the Duke of Spoleto’s biography. Researchers often extracted information about Aimone from his brother’s biographies.\(^\text{17}\)

The historians Pavlowitch, Amoretti, Talpo and Vignoli expressed different opinions concerning the role played by Aimone of Savoia as designated King of Croatia. However, they seem to provide a kind of ‘rehabilitation’ of the Duke of Spoleto with regard to his relationship with fascist foreign policy. The title of Talpo’s work confirmed such leanings. It defined Aimone of Savoia as “a figure who needs to be re-evaluated”, while Pavlowitch depicted him as “the King who never was.” A possible explanation for this trend could be that the authors used information reported in Ciano’s diary, which essentially described Aimone of Savoia as a \textit{bon vivant} and an incompetent and disinterested person with regard to political life. Ciano wrote: “He haunts restaurants and taverns and he gets drunk” or “Aquarone [the Minister of the Royal House] talks to me about the Duke of Spoleto: he does not care about Croatia, he wants money and only money. I think it will be useful giving some money to him. I will eventually suggest to il Duce to give him a hundred thousand lire per month.”\(^\text{18}\)

Pavlowitch defined the Duke as “a naval man with no political experience,”\(^\text{19}\) but he eventually recognised that by the end of 1942, the Duke was one of the few who “was not afraid to tell the truth to Mussolini and, indeed, to contemplate armed action against him.”\(^\text{20}\) Amoretti agreed with the Serbian historian on this last opinion, while he rejected

\(^{17}\) Ibid, 72.
\(^{18}\) Ciano. Diary entries 17 November 1941 and 9 January 1942.
\(^{19}\) Pavlowitch. 471.
\(^{20}\) Ibid, 482. As will be discussed later, Pavlowitch referred to the attempt carried out by Aimone of Savoia to establish a diplomatic channel with the British and separate Italy from Germany by signing a peace settlement. He declared himself ready to lead a military uprising to overthrow Mussolini.
the first one.\textsuperscript{21} Talpo argued that Ciano’s diary entries were based on indirect information reported to him by other people, and that instead the Duke was aware of his role and ready to take office, as demonstrated by his efforts to acquire a meticulous knowledge of the Croatian situation.\textsuperscript{22} According to Vignoli, Aimone of Savoia did his best to avoid becoming the King of Croatia, despite the fact that King Vittorio Emanuele III had officially accepted Pavelić’s offer of the Croatian crown.\textsuperscript{23} The detailed political reports elaborated in Aimone’s \textit{Ufficio Croazia} were part of his plan to reject taking office as Croatian monarch, since they described the domestic situation of the Balkans as both serious and unclear in terms of advantages for Italy.

An additional contribution to the biographical reconstruction of Aimone of Savoia came from Ferdinando Sanfelice di Monteforte in 2009, who dedicated one chapter of his book \textit{I Savoia e il mare} to the Duke of Spoleto. Sanfelice di Monteforte focused mainly on his activities as a naval officer from 1912 to 1945. He analyzed the Duke’s personality through the political relationships that linked the members of the Royal House with the Royal Italian Navy (\textit{Regia Marina}). His study reveals how the presence of some Savoia princes within the Navy increased the importance of the duties the \textit{Regia Marina} had to fulfil. These included “Displaying [the Italian] flag to favour and protect [Italian] trade” during the colonial expansion; “The necessity of displaying the flag during typical diplomatic naval missions”; and “protecting compatriots who lived overseas, especially those settled in North and South America or Australia.”\textsuperscript{24} The presence of warships represented the link between the communities of emigrants and their homeland, as also demonstrated by the diplomatic-naval missions led by the Duke of Abruzzi and analysed

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\item \textsuperscript{21} Amoretti. xvii and xix.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Talpo. 68 and 91.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Pavelić offered the Crown of Croatia on 18 May 1941, when he officially met King Vittorio Emanuele III at the Quirinal palace in Rome.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ferdinando Sanfelice di Monteforte, \textit{I Savoia e il mare} (Catanzaro: Rubbettino Editore, 2009). 11, 12.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
in the previous chapter. Thus, at that time, the Navy’s ships carried out official diplomatic visits, because the Navy was the only ‘institution’ to have the appropriate ships to undertake long-distance transoceanic voyages.

**Dealing with fascist policy: royal rank, national prestige, political missions and explorations**

The works discussed above interpreted the Italian-Croatian matter as the Duke of Spoleto’s involvement in fascist policy. However, this cannot be considered as the only event illustrating such a relationship, although it represents a consistent part of it. Other evidence of Aimone of Savoia’s entanglement with the regime can be found by analysing his participation in a naval-diplomatic expedition to China (1923), a representative mission in Romania (1926) and the geographic exploration to Karakorum, which he led in 1929. These facts demonstrate how fascism politically exploited the image of Aimone of Savoia. This attitude was not in fact a feature solely of Mussolini’s regime, because previous liberal governments had also exploited the Duke for political purposes, at least in two important missions: in Transcaucasia (1919-1920) and in South America (1921), in which Aimone of Savoia participated as a naval officer. These expeditions also displayed the ambivalent attitude of the government and the Navy, which effectively gave the Duke a marginal role, although they considered his presence as a member of the Royal Family fundamental to developing Italian overseas interests.

Fascism conferred on Aimone of Savoia a primary role both to increase national prestige, as demonstrated his leading part in the Himalayan expedition, and to realize its

25 The Transcaucasian region includes Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.
political predominance in the Balkans, as emphasized in his designation as King of Croatia. Mussolini aimed to exploit the monarchy through the Duke’s royal rank to obtain increased prestige for his foreign policy, although *il Duce* privately did not regard Aimone of Savoia highly, as we will see later. For his part, by the end of 1942, the Duke plotted against Mussolini, as he tried to develop a secret plan to overthrow him and the regime, with the support of the allied forces. In that context, which represented the end of his relationship with fascism, the Duke of Spoleto aimed to dissociate Italy from its alliance with Germany in a desperate attempt to redeem the image of the monarchy, which had been compromised by fascism.

**The war and missions in Transcaucasia, South America, China and Romania**

Aimeone of Savoia-Aosta was born on 9 March 1900, in Turin. He was the second child of Hélene d’Orleans and Emanuele Filiberto of Savoia-Aosta. In September 1912, he was enlisted in the Navy, attending courses at the *Regia Accademia Navale di Livorno* (Royal Naval Academy of Livorno), from which he graduated in May 1916 as a *guardiamarina*. He fought in the First World War and in 1917 he was promoted to junior lieutenant. On 24 October in the same year, the Italian Army was beaten in Caporetto, which resulted in a chaotic general retreat. In the aftermath of the defeat, the Army Chief of General Staff ordered the evacuation of Venice, but the Navy firmly opposed this decision and assumed the defence of the whole lagoon sector. This required the creation of

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27 Emanuele Filiberto of Savoia-Aosta was the brother of the Duke of Abruzzi. During the First World War he was the commander of the Third Army Corps, earning the nicknames *The undefeated Duke* or *The Duke of Victory*. His Corps was indeed among those few to remain unbeaten at Caporetto’s defeat in 1917 and contributed to the victorious final battle of Vittorio Veneto.

a special corps composed of Navy soldiers who operated on land, the so-called *fanti di marina* (naval infantry). The Duke of Spoleto applied to join this special corps, but his application was rejected. Therefore, he applied to become a cadet pilot in the aviation corps, which the Navy was establishing, and in June 1918 he was made chief of a seaplane squadron. At that time, the Air Force was expanding rapidly, although it was not yet an independent corps. The Duke became an aviation expert and in the aftermath of the war he was sent abroad on a number of diplomatic missions.

His first was in Transcaucasia (1919-1920). This expedition had a military purpose and was part of the complex geopolitical agreements that emerged from the Peace Conference in Paris. In fact, the mission entirely depended on the Italian delegation at the Conference. In September 1918, the collapse of the Eastern European front brought about the end of the Ottoman Empire, which was forced to sign the armistice. Among the armistice clauses were the Ottoman withdrawal from Caucasus and ‘the right’ for the Entente powers to intervene in the political situation in the Armenian provinces. This change in the political-military balance allowed an expeditionary British corps to occupy the city of Baku (Azerbaijan). However, at the beginning of 1919, the British government decided that its Transcaucasian occupation was too onerous for the advantages that could be obtained from keeping the region.

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30 The Air Force became an independent Force only in 1923, under the aegis of fascism. The Duke’s experience mainly came from his war activity since he fought in 40 missions between the end of 1917 and the end of the war in 1918. Ibid. 250.
31 Concerning Transcaucasia; in the aftermath of the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks forced Russia to withdraw from the war. The armistice of Brest-Litovsk resulted in the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Transcaucasian area, exposing it to Ottoman occupation. Thus, the local representatives of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan established a common government to impede both a Turkish invasion and a hypothetical Russian move supported by the Bolsheviks. Daniel Pommier Vincelli and Andrea Carteny, La Repubblica Democratica dell'Azerbaigian: I documenti militari italiani (1919-1920) (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2012). 16, 17.
33 Pommier Vincelli and Carteny. 25.
ordered the withdrawal of troops and asked the Italian government to organise its own expeditionary corps to replace the British one. Therefore, in March 1919, the Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando and Lloyd George arranged for a handover from the British to the Italians in the Caucasus.\textsuperscript{34}

The military duty of the expedition was to calculate how many troops were needed for an effective occupation of the region; from a political perspective, the mission had to establish relationships with local governments to allow Italy to exploit the copious local mineral resources, such as oil.\textsuperscript{35} Although Orlando accepted the ‘British offer’, he expressed his doubts about the political convenience of undertaking a military expedition in Transcaucasia to the Minister of the Colonies, Gaspare Colosimo:

\begin{quote}
I am doubtful because the temptation is high and the risk too. Those territories represent «the promised land» for Italy in terms of raw materials, since we lack oil, coal, iron, manganese, lead and silver. A very informed source told me that the wealth of those lands is greater than the total Italian war expenditure. [However, I also understand] the political difficulties if we venture into the entangled Russian situation. [Despite this] we have an important opportunity to supply Italy with essential raw materials.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

Although Italy was one of the four victorious powers at the end of the war, it undertook a very ambitious foreign policy considering its financial means. This discrepancy emerged in various international contexts (from the Caucasus to the African colonies), where the government often underestimated what it needed to achieve.\textsuperscript{37} The military mission was part of this Italian commitment in various scenarios. It was led by Colonel Melchiade Gabba and composed of Army and Navy officers, who had to collect political and military information on the Transcaucasian region. The mission acted as a

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 26.
\textsuperscript{35} Sale, 87.
\textsuperscript{36} Letter from the Prime Minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando to Gaspare Colosimo, Minister for the Colonies, 24 March 1919, as reported in Daniel Pommier Vincelli and Andrea Carteny in La Repubblica Democratica dell'Azerbaigian: I documenti militari italiani (1919-1920), 26.
\textsuperscript{37} Pommier Vincelli and Carteny, 27.
representative of the Italian government to the Georgian, Armenian and Azarbaijani authorities.\(^{38}\) Aimone of Savoia was among the selected naval officers because his royal rank increased local governments’ attention to the mission.\(^{39}\)

The documentation analysed to reconstruct this segment of the Duke’s biography does not provide a deeper knowledge of the role played by Aimone of Savoia in the expedition. Even the study *La missione militare italiana in Transcaucasia 1919-1920*, published by Ilaria Maria Sale in 2007, does not reveal additional information about the Duke’s role, although this work is the most detailed with regard to the Italian expedition. Sale merely reported that Aimone of Savoia took part in an expedition to study some coalfields in Georgia, in 1919; but this was part of the general programme of the Italian mission.\(^{40}\) These observations confirm he probably had no operative role, and his presence was merely related to increasing the prestige of the military expedition. The Duke’s political exploitation was apparent in two further missions in Egypt and Japan during the winter of 1919. The first aimed to develop an air route between Italy and its colonies Eritrea and Somalia through Egypt, as Great Britain aspired to create an air hub in Cairo to link Egypt with the British possessions in South Africa, India and Australia.\(^{41}\) Aimone of Savoia was chosen for a dual purpose: his standing as a member of the Royal Family, and his expertise in the aeronautical field. However, the mission was suspended in November 1919, due to other political matters.\(^{42}\)

At the same time the Ministry of Railway and Maritime Transport, which included the Director General for Aviation, proposed Aimone of Savoia for another mission in Japan.

\(^{39}\) *La Repubblica Democratica dell’Azerbaigian: I documenti militari italiani (1919-1920)*. 43, 44.
\(^{40}\) Sale. 144.
\(^{41}\) Sanfelice di Monteforte. 251.
\(^{42}\) Ibid, 252.
According to the Ministry, the nineteen-year-old Duke should become the new aeronautical attaché at the Italian Embassy in Tokyo. The decision was based once again on his aviation experience and his royal rank, which could facilitate a diplomatic relationship between the two governments more successfully than by appointing an officer with a longer career.\footnote{Ibid, 251.} In effect, the new appointment was part of a wider project of the Directorate General, which aimed to make the Air Force independent to give it equality with the Army and the Navy, but these two Forces firmly opposed the transformation of the Air Force into an independent corps. Its creation suggested the setting up of new staff with personnel from the Army and the Navy. In addition, Army and Navy funding was reduced to finance the fledgling Air Force and the prestige of the two existing forces was threatened.\footnote{Ibid, 253.}

Thus, Aimone of Savoia found himself entangled in a complex rivalry between the Ministry of Transport and the Navy. On one side, the Ministry of Transport aimed to recruit the Duke to the new Air Force because his presence could greatly benefit the establishment of the new corps, in terms of prestige and propaganda. On the other, the Ministry of the Navy did not want to ‘cede’ their own men, especially the prestigious ones, to favour the establishment of the Air Force. Officially, Aimone of Savoia’s appointment as the aeronautical attaché in Tokyo reflected the Italian policy of developing commercial relationships in the aeronautical field with Japan,\footnote{At the end of 1919, the Italian government financed Arturo Ferrarin and Guido Masiero’s flight from Rome to Tokyo to promote its aeronautical interests in Japan, providing Lire 20,080,000 (approximately €30,000,000). Then, in 1925, the aviators Francesco De Pinedo and Ernesto Campanelli made a flight from Rome to Melbourne, Tokyo and back. In their Japanese stops, the local authorities warmly welcomed them; even the Emperor received the pilots in Tokyo, as a demonstration of the long friendship between Italy and Japan. Alberto Cau, Ernesato Campanelli: Vita e imprese di un trasvolatore (Sassari: Carlo Delfino Editore, 2008). 27 and 88, 89.} whose diplomatic relations with Italy were becoming increasingly strong.\footnote{In the First World War, Japan was part of the Triple Entente and included among the four great warring powers (Italy, the United States, France and Great Britain), which at the Peace Conference of Paris accused Germany of being responsible for the war. Thus, at the Conference, Japan asked for formal recognition of equality with the white populations of the great powers. Oliviero Frattolillo and Salvatore Oliviero, “La}
Duke to participate in this mission, emphasising the need for him to embark on the *Libia* to undertake a voyage to South America to improve his professional skills. The refusal was a Navy attempt to obstruct the establishment of the Air Force.\footnote{Sanfelice di Monteforte. 254.}

**The South American naval mission (1920-1921)**

The proposed naval mission was postponed until May 1920 and the dreadnought *Roma* replaced the ship *Libia*.\footnote{USMM, “R.N. Roma”, Istruzioni di campagna – Crociera in Sud America. The South America mission took place from May 1920 to January 1921.} The copious documentation related to this mission reveals the contradictory attitude adopted by the *Regia Marina* towards Aimone of Savoia. On one side, the Minister of the Navy, Giovanni Sechi indicated to the commander of the *Roma*, Augusto Capon, that “H.R.H. has no mission or appointment resulting from his royal rank: he is equal to the other officers.” However, Capon could decide to give “in the interest of the mission, the opportunity to let H.R.H. take part in celebrations or political events that can be useful with his royal rank.”\footnote{Ibid, Lettera del Ministro della Marina al comandante della nave del 9 aprile 1920, p.2, 3.} In effect, the South American mission was not a mere training cruise to improve the skills of young officers like Aimone of Savoia, and sailors who had been hurriedly trained during the war. It had political and propagandistic purposes, especially towards Brazil, where a huge Italian community had settled.\footnote{Ibid, p.3.}

The first goal of the mission was to develop “a clever propaganda of Italianness” in those cities where the dreadnought stopped.\footnote{Ibid, p.4.} According to Sechi, the voyage increased diplomatic giapponese di fronte alla Prima Guerra Mondiale: dalla dichiarazione alle “Ventuno Domande”, *Eunomia, Rivista semestrale di Storia e Politica Internazionali* IV, no. 2 (2015), 200 and 219. Italy supported the approval of the Japanese request and this decision positively influenced the diplomatic relationship between the two countries. Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice: the politics and diplomacy of racial discrimination* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1988). 90.
Italian prestige among the Italian immigrants. Capon and his officers had to establish cordial relationships with the local political and military authorities, including those of former enemy countries, if met during the stopovers. Particular attention had to be paid to visiting the Italian communities, especially those containing immigrants who came back to Italy to fight in the war. From this perspective, the presence of Aimone of Savoia imparted a special meaning to meetings with the veterans, because he was a member of the Royal House. He reinvigorated the link between Italy and its veterans, who particularly felt the homeland’s neglect of them. This relationship was based on the image of King Vittorio Emanuele III, who restored the Savoia tradition of having the King as the head of the Army during the war, thanks to his visits to the front and his habit of wearing Italian army uniform.

Although the Duke’s presence was considered very important to establish relationships both with Italian communities and local authorities, he did not take part in the tours of the Italian colonies located in the Brazilian interior, which Capon and his Vice Commander Giordano carried out. There is no evidence of his presence in the several and detailed reports of those trips. The only evidence of his attendance is related to the arrival of the ship in Rio de Janeiro and his visit to Epitácio Pessoa, the Brazilian president. On 1 August the dreadnought came into the port of Rio and, according to the report of Commander Capon, it was welcomed by several boats crowded with Italian immigrants who cheered the Roma and the Duke. This reception contrasted with the information provided by the Italian embassy to Capon concerning the presence of Aimone of Savoia. The embassy pointed out that Brazil had abolished all aristocratic titles because it was a

52 Ibid.
53 Sanfelice di Monteforte. 257.
54 Amoretti. xviii.
republic and for this reason, the presence of a royal member on board would not elicit a passionate reaction. However, Capon affirmed: “Everything related to the nobles and regality here engenders a greater appeal than [in Italy].”

Nevertheless, the Duke still had an informal representative role, and his commander, once again adopting an ambivalent approach, was cautious to “not reduce the enthusiasm raised among the Italians by the Duke’s visit.”

Capon adopted a different attitude when he and Aimone of Savoia visited President Pessoa. In such circumstances, the Duke was the official representative of the government and the King of Italy, so the meeting had a genuine diplomatic meaning. Despite this, the Brazilian government did not emphasise the event, causing complaints from Capon, who now underlined the importance of a member of the Italian Royal Family as the representative of the King and the government. Following the visit to Brazil, the Roma sailed to Uruguay and Argentina, where the Duke officially visited the President of the Republic, and the Italian community welcomed him with great honours. At the end of December, Aimone of Savoia was repatriated, due to new naval needs. After a short training with the submarine squadron, the Duke embarked on the gunboat Sebastiano Caboto, which patrolled the Chinese seas.

**The Chinese mission (1922-1923)**

At the end of 1922, the Italian government sent a representative mission to the southern provinces of China. According to the Naval High Command, the purpose of the

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57 Ibid, p.2.
58 Ibid, p.3.
60 Sanfelice di Monteforte. 257, 258.
61 USMM, “R.N. Caboto”, Rapporto delle navigazioni, p.13. The most important stops were Shanghai, Tientsin, Hong Kong, Macao and Canton.
expedition was “displaying our flag in those territories and the interest of our government in compatriots who live there.” The official report, written by Giuseppe Viganoni, commander of the Caboto, clearly revealed how the Duke of Spoleto’s presence was of fundamental political importance, because of his royal rank (although he was officially on board as a lieutenant rather than a royal prince). As an example, in Hong Kong, the Caboto’s officers met the local authorities and the presence of the Duke gave more prestige to the representative and social relationships. His presence increased the significance of the relations with the British military and political authorities, which facilitated the meeting between the most important commercial and industrial personalities of Hong Kong and Aimone of Savoia. The next stop in Canton had different purposes: “Knowing the Italians who lived there, visiting the Italian religious Salesian mission located in Shiu-Chow [Chiu-Chow] and displaying [Italian naval strength] to the Chinese authorities of that province.”

This visit was a response to the political instability of the region, where the warships gave moral support to Italian compatriots and demonstrated to the local population that European Armed Forces protected European interests.

In March 1923, the Duke led an exploration to the southern provinces of Kwang-Tong and Hunan to visit the Italian religious missions. This expedition also provided the fascist government with important information on the natural resources of those regions. In addition, at the beginning of February, a reconnaissance squad carried out a hurried visit to the Salesian mission of Shiu-Chow before the Duke’s departure, because “since 1918, no Italian political or military authority [had] visited those friars to demonstrate government

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63 Ibid.
64 Ibid, p.3.
65 The Duke of Spoleto led the expedition to Shiu-Chow. He also wrote a detailed account of his travels, which he undertook with Adalberto Mariano, his officer on duty. Later in 1928 Mariano became famous for his participation in Umberto Nobile’s polar expedition with the dirigible Italia. He was one of the few survivors of the crash of the dirigible on the ice field.
interest in their work.” The expedition was undertaken in a somewhat complex political scenario, due to the events following the 1911 Chinese revolution, which led Sun Yat-Sen to proclaim the Chinese Republic in 1912, endorsed by the majority of the Chinese southern provinces. However, at its beginning, the Republic was politically quite unstable and subject to constant turmoil.

Thus, the Italian government tried to protect its missionaries who worked in Canton and in inland China, using the Navy. Due to the precarious conditions in those territories, Viganoni decided to send some officers “to avoid H.R.H. venturing into the inland areas.” These officers also had to collect information on the political situation of those territories from the friars and interview them to understand what was occurring locally. This confirmed the leading role played by the missionaries in providing political information to their governments. This first mission “was very useful to reinvigorate national pride among those friars.” In reality, Viganoni’s concerns were exaggerated because the missionaries denied the risks and “were saddened to be unable to welcome H.R.H.” This was why Viganoni arranged a second visit to Shiu-Chow on 7 and 8 February with Aimone of Savoia. The missionaries warmly welcomed the Duke, but this expedition revealed, above

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69 Ibid, 407. In the aftermath of the Second Opium War (1856-1860), France guaranteed the protection of all Catholic missionaries located in China, regardless of their nationalities. However, this commitment increasingly reduced up to 1884, due to the Tonkin War between France and China. In this context, Italy had necessarily to protect its missionaries. This need also reflected their political role and power. Indeed, since the Boxer Revolt (1899-1901), as Fabio Fattore argued, every time European intervened in China, often to ‘avenge’ the death of some missionary, the religious orders obtained new benefits for ‘their’ territories from the local authorities. This is why they represented an easy target for Chinese reprisals. Therefore, the distant European governments sent their fleets to protect their missions. Fabio Fattore, Gli italiani che invasero la Cina. Cronache di guerra 1900-1901 (Milano: Sugarco Edizioni, 2008). 56, 57.
all, the political role both of the Navy and the friars in those regions, as reported by Viganoni.72

On 6 March, the Duke of Spoleto led his expedition to the inland regions of Kwang-Tong and Hunan. He emphasised the key role played by the missionaries in the local context and their influence on the inhabitants. In particular, he underlined how the people settled within the mission considered his expedition an important “form of interest in [themselves]” This perception contributed, for example, to increasing the number of pupils attending the mission’s primary school “from 40 to 102 just two weeks after [my] visit. This fact demonstrates how the inhabitants pay significant attention to what happens near their mission.”73

The Duke also observed that the Hunan region was “one of the richest provinces of China” where the coalfields were abundant “and almost unexploited, due to the [unfamiliarity] of the indigenous [population] with modern extraction processes.”74 Above all, Aimone of Savoia emphasised the Italian absence from the exploitation of the available iron, copper and silver, compared with the significant presence of other powers, such as Germany, Great Britain, the United States and Japan.75 According to the Duke’s findings, Italy should ‘exploit’ the presence and the work of its missionaries to undertake commercial penetration. The religious missions also contributed to increasing Italian national prestige, because “many good Italians [carry on] the work of civilization and faith in those far away and inaccessible places, which makes their country greater and more appreciated.”76

72 Ibid, p.10, 11.
74 Ibid, p.11.
76 Ibid, p.17. The Duke ended his mission on 2 April in Han-Kow (Hankou).
The political mission in Romania (1926)

In March 1925 Italy increased its influence over Albania through signing an economic agreement with its government. This fact resulted in Yugoslavia’s protests, which aimed to establish its predominance over the Balkan and Danubian regions. Thus, Mussolini tried to build a diplomatic relationship with Romania to counter the Yugoslavian claims. Such proposal arose in July 1926 when General Alexandru Averescu, the Romanian Prime Minister, who considered himself as a ‘friend of fascist Italy’, asked Mussolini for Italian support in acknowledging Romania’s possession of the Bessarabia region to the detriment of Russia.\(^{77}\)

However, Mussolini was quite cautious about accepting Averescu’s request because it could jeopardize the Italian-Soviet relationship, which \textit{il Duce} did not intend to compromise.\(^{78}\) Furthermore, Mussolini accused the Romanian government of acting with France to sign a commercial pact; therefore he subordinated Italian support of the Romanian claims to obtaining clarification from the Bucharest government of its foreign policy, undertaken with France, in addition to gaining some commercial compensation.\(^{79}\)

At the same time Mussolini declared his intention “to meet General Averescu to discuss the Bessarabian matter” and, to emphasize the importance of the negotiation, he also proposed to arrange “a visit of an Italian prince [in Bucharest] and, in turn, the Romanian Royal Family [would visit Rome].”\(^{80}\)

\(^{77}\) Tonino Fabbri, \textit{Fascismo e bolscevismo. Le relazioni nei documenti diplomatici italo-russi} (Padova: Libreriauniversitaria.it, 2013). 60.

\(^{78}\) Archivio Storico del Ministero Affari Esteri, Roma, Documenti Diplomatici Italiani (DDI), Settima serie, Vol. IV, doc. n° 379, telegram from Mussolini to the Italian Minister Plenipotentiary in Bucharest, 23 luglio 1926, p. 287. Henceforth ASMAE.

\(^{79}\) Fabbri, 61.

\(^{80}\) ASMAE, DDI, Settima serie, Vol. IV, doc. n° 379, telegram from Mussolini to the Italian Minister Plenipotentiary in Bucharest, 23 luglio 1926, p. 288.
According to Mussolini, public acceptance of the Romanian claim over Bessarabia represented a strengthening of Italian prestige in the Danubian region, as well as consolidating the power of Averescu, who had showed his admiration for fascist Italy. Thus, in September 1926 he declared he was inclined to approve the Romanian request and appointed the Duke of Spoleto and General Pietro Badoglio, the Italian Chief of Staff, to participated in a diplomatic mission in Bucharest. Mussolini’s choice to involve Aimone of Savoia in the fascist foreign policy demonstrated his intention to exploit the royal rank of the Duke to achieve official recognition of his political plan in Romania. Moreover, the Duke’s presence also contributed to normalizing the relationship between the two countries, following a prior issue that occurred in June, related to an Italian loan of 200 million lire (approximately €153,000,000) granted to the Bucharest government, which persuaded Mussolini to recall the Italian ambassador to Rome and deny King Ferdinand of Romania permission to undertake a pre-convened visit in Italy.81

However, the Italian diplomatic mission caused Russian protests. Moscow’s government considered Italian approval of the Romanian claims unacceptable, because it argued Bessarabia was still part of its territory.82 Resentment specifically arose in the Russian press in November while the Duke and Badoglio were in Bucharest. The Soviet newspapers ridiculed their visit and compared them with two famous Italian carnival masks: Harlequin and Pulcinella, respectively embodied by Aimone of Savoia and Badoglio. The Russian press aimed to minimise the importance of the mission and stressed that Italy would not gain any useful results despite the high rank of its representatives.83

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82 Fabbri. 62-65.
83 ASMAE, DDI, Settima serie, Vol. IV, doc. n° 491, telegram from the Italian ambassador in Moscow to Mussolini, 20 novembre 1926, p. 379.
Despite these statements, in January 1927 Carlo Durazzo, the Italian Minister Plenipotentiary in Bucharest, reported to Mussolini that the Duke and Badoglio’s diplomatic mission was successful and represented the latest diplomatic success gained by Italy “since General Averescu came to power in April.” These achievements also included a previous Italian-Romanian economic agreement established in June and a ‘pact of friendship and commercial exchanges’ signed in September. Finally, Durazzo considered the visit of the Duke of Spoleto to the Romanian court an important progress “in removing any misunderstandings relating to the failed of the pre-arranged visit to Rome by Romanian royalty.” Durazzo also affirmed that these events increased Italian prestige in that part of Europe, “which has been observed by other foreign diplomats [in Bucharest], who promptly informed their governments of our successes.”\(^84\) However, an opposite account issued Pompeo Bodrero, the Italian Minister Plenipotentiary in Yugoslavia, who reported that the Duke and Badoglio’s mission in Bucharest did not engender any enthusiasm in Belgrade. It rather confirmed and increased Yugoslavian suspicions about Italian intentions in preventing the Yugoslavian supremacy in the Balkans.\(^85\)

The 1929 expedition to Karakorum

*Commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Italian victory in the First World War*

From the beginning of the twentieth century until the First World War, nationalist trends spread over Europe and so-called ‘modernist nationalism’ developed in Italy. It aimed to create a strong national awareness to prepare Italy for the international

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\(^{84}\) Ibid, doc. n° 593, telegram from the Italian Minister Plenipotentiary in Bucharest to Mussolini, 30 gennaio 1927, p. 465.

\(^{85}\) Ibid, doc. n° 493, telegram from the Italian Minister Plenipotentiary in Belgrade to Mussolini, 21 novembre 1926, p. 383.
In fact, such nationalism dated back to the Risorgimento and was based on the concept of making new Italians for a new Italy. Modernist nationalism developed through the socio-political war legacy and once fascism rose to power, it was lionized by the regime. Fascism, indeed, built its political view of national regeneration on the concept of undertaking an ‘anthropological revolution’.

According to Mussolini, civil society had to be totally politicized and absorbed into the bureaucratic state apparatus. Creating and lauding a new Italian identity and culture, fascism aimed to build a new image of Italy as a great power, populated by new, stronger Italians compared with those of past generations. In 1925, at the congress of the National Fascist Party (PNF), Mussolini stated: “I see a class of inventors pursuing the secret mysteries, a class of great captains of industry, great explorers, and great rulers.”

Fascism also produced a new national culture based on commemorating some characteristic Italian fascist cornerstones, such as the anniversary of the March on Rome (28 October) and Italy’s victory in the First World War (4 November). They were official state events for which the party organized huge military parades and war veterans’ gatherings, where Italians wore the fascist uniform.

In this context, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the 4 November victory, the City of Milan promoted two geographic explorations: Umberto Nobile’s voyage to the North Pole (1928) and the Duke of Spoleto’s Karakorum expedition. The promotion of these explorations also reflected the trend of the 1920s, in which Italy promoted, in rapid

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89 Gentile, "The Fascist anthropological revolution." 27.
order, a series of important explorations and aerial voyages that contributed to presenting a new national image to the world. In 1920, the aviation aces of the First World War, Arturo Ferrarin and Guido Masiero, completed a flight from Rome to Tokyo. In 1925 Francesco De Pinedo and Ernesto Campanelli were the first Europeans to reach Australia by air, and in 1926 Nobile and Amundsen were the first human beings to fly over the North Pole. Then, in 1927, De Pinedo carried out the *Crociera Aerea delle due Americhe*, which was a transatlantic round-trip flight to Brazil and the United States, during which the aviator also flew over some unexplored parts of Brazil.\footnote{\textit{L'Aerotecnica, “La crociera aerea dell'Atlanticodel comandante De Pinedo,” L'Aerotecnica. Giornali ed atti dell'Associazione Italiana di Aerotecnica} II (1927). 61.}

Finally, Nobile and his Italian crew returned to the North Pole to conduct scientific research on board the dirigible *Italia*. Undoubtedly, ‘aviation was innovating all human activities’ in this decade and Italy played a key role in this scenario.\footnote{Umberto Nobile, “The dirigible and polar exploration,” in \textit{Problems of polar research}, ed. W. L. G. Joerg (New York: American Geographical Society, 1928). 419.} However, before earning its own ‘space’ in the skies, Italy had also focused on expeditions in the Karakorum region in the Himalayas, even before the rise of fascism, due to the Duke of Abruzzi’s Karakorum exploration in 1909\footnote{For an account see the previous chapter pages 72-76.} and that of Filippo de Filippi and Giotto Dainelli in 1913-1914. Thus, during the regime, these expeditions were exploited to claim a kind of ‘Italian priority’ over those places in terms of organizing new climbing expeditions. This motivated three Italian climbers from the *Club Alpino Accademico Italiano* (Italian Academic Alpine Club or CAAI);\footnote{The *Club Alpino Accademico Italiano* (CAAI) was established in 1904 as a part of the *Club Alpino Italiano* (CAI). The CAAI gathered the strongest Italian mountaineers, who used to climb the mountains without the help of local guides.} Gaetano Polvara, Giovanni Albertini and Vittorio Ponti. By the end of 1926 in Milan, they had designed a new Karakorum expedition proposal, which outlined the necessity of organizing an entirely Italian expedition “to continue what His Royal
Highness Luigi of Savoia did in 1909 as a valiant pioneer in that wild region, where he brought the bright signs of our Italy.”

The three mountaineers sent their project to Mussolini for his approval, highlighting the fact that the German-Austrian Alpine Club had tried to organize a similar expedition to the Karakoram in 1925, asking them to take part, but the proposal did not come to fruition. Thus, they requested governmental support and reiterated that at the same time Great Britain and Germany were aiming to conduct new expeditions to the Karakoram. They suggested that these proposals undermined the Italian tradition of exploration in the Karakoram region. From a propagandistic point of view, the mountaineers strongly believed that “the new Fascist Italy was able to achieve a scientific-mountaineering expedition over the glacial regions, as Nobile’s daring polar flight previously demonstrated.” The organizers sent their proposal to the Prefetto of Milan, who sent it to Mussolini assuring him of the reliability of the proposal and its proposers. This aspect revealed that Mussolini needed reassurance before granting his approval to support such a daring undertaking.

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96 Ibid, p.2.
97 Even before this proposal, Mussolini had been quite cautious in supporting daring undertakings, especially at the beginning of his rule, because of the precariousness of his political power. Until 1924 the internal situation of the PNF threatened his role as charismatic leader and uncontested Duce. Emilio Gentile, The struggle for modernity. Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publisher, 2003). 95. His leadership within the party was experiencing a serious crisis that jeopardized fascism itself. The situation became even more complicated as a result of Matteotti’s murder. Thus, it is no wonder that Mussolini was cautious in granting governmental support in organizing daring enterprises like explorations or long-distance flights. The failure of such undertakings could compromise national prestige. This attitude appeared twice between 1924 and 1925: the first was when the marquise De Pinedo presented his proposal for his 55,000 km flight with Marshal Campanelli. In a desperate attempt to find the necessary financial support to carry out his plan, he promised to repay the entire cost of the seaplane in the event of failure and promised that his heirs would pay for the cost of the plane if he did not come back. This solution allowed De Pinedo to undertake his flight and present his project to Mussolini for his final approval. Nobile himself, in his book Ali sul Polo; Storia della conquista aerea dell’Artide (1975), published decades
The climbing project regarded the Karakorum as a very important area in terms of exploration and alpinism because it was dominated by the peak K2. A successful ascent of K2 would result in great fame for the expedition. On the other hand, an attempt to climb Everest was totally excluded because the Lhasa government forbade access to Everest for political and religious reasons.98 These factors contributed to choosing the Karakorum as the exploration’s goal. The estimated cost was lire 650,000 (approximately €370,000), which would partially be recouped by the sale of editorial and commercial rights. The Karakorum expedition was part of a wider exploration programme inspired by Nobile’s successful 1926 polar flight.99 However, that expedition was possible thanks to the support of foreign assets.100 This encouraged the three mountaineers and a few Milanese citizens to represent the Karakorum expedition as a worthy celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Italian victory. This plan also included Nobile’s new polar flight. The proposers included Ernesto Belloni, the Podestà of Milan, in organizing the explorations.101 He also involved the Reale Società Geografica Italiana to present the plan for the expeditions to Mussolini to obtain his approval. The RSGI and the Club Alpino Italiano were to carry out all the logistical aspects of the expeditions.102

From this point until the end of 1927, the organization of the two expeditions progressed together. With regard to the Karakorum exploration, the municipality of Milan

after Fascism’s downfall, revealed Mussolini as a politician who had never been interested in polar exploration. Umberto Nobile, *Ali sul Polo. Storia della conquista aerea dell’Artide* (Milano: Mursia, 1975). 186. “The successful enterprise was an excellent opportunity for propaganda for the Fascist government, as the dirigible was designed by an Italian, and other Italians contributed to making the flight.” *Posso dire la verità. Storia inedita della spedizione polare dell’«Italia»* (Milano: Mondadori, 1945). 38.
100 It was entirely sponsored by the Norwegian Aero Club. Nobile, *Ali sul Polo. Storia della conquista aerea dell’Artide*. 119.
101 In 1926, Fascism replaced the elected mayors of Italian municipalities with personnel loyal to the regime, called Podestà.
and the *Società Geografica Italiana* involved the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose undersecretary, Dino Grandi, consulted the British government’s representative in India, as the expedition would pass through these territories and needed to request all possible assistance from the local authorities. He also informed the RSGI of Mussolini’s approval for the expedition.\(^{103}\) However, the government did not ensure, at that time, any funds to support the expedition, as revealed in a letter from Italo Balbo to Belloni, in which he advised the *Podestà* to collect the necessary funds for the two expeditions by involving banks and private commercial companies.\(^{104}\)

On 18 October 1927, Belloni established an *ad hoc* finance committee to collect the funds. Thus, on 7 November 1927, the municipality of Milan signed a special agreement with the RSGI, in which Milan granted the *Società Geografica* the sum of 3.5 million lire (approximately €2,175,000), as a contribution to the organization of the expeditions.\(^{105}\) The finance committee was the key to organizing the expeditions. It was closely connected to the government because its members included representatives of the most important Italian newspapers, politicians and bankers. They included Arnaldo Mussolini, *il Duce*’s brother and the editor-in-chief of *Il Popolo d’Italia*, the newspaper founded by Benito Mussolini, which was also the official voice of the regime; *Il Corriere della Sera*, which was the main Italian newspaper; and Mario Giampaoli, who was the PNF federal secretary in Milan and had also been among the founders of the fascist movement in 1919. Banks including the *Banca Commerciale Italiana*, *Credito Italiano*, *Banco Ambrosiano* and *Banco di Roma* were also represented on the committee. Moreover, organisations promoting the expeditions included the Milanese universities *Regia Università* and *Commerciale*

\(^{103}\) Archivio Civico di Milano, Milano, Fondo Segreteria Generale, f.133/1935, Letter from Dino Grandi to the RSGI, 30 September 1927. Henceforth ACM.

\(^{104}\) Ibid, “Spedizione Artica – Nulla osta del Duce”, Letter from Balbo to Belloni, 12 October 1927. Belloni had involved Balbo to obtain Mussolini’s approval for the polar expedition, because at that time, Balbo was the undersecretary for the *Regia Aeronautica*.

\(^{105}\) ASGI, “Verbali Direttivo”, Registro 11, Seduta del 12 luglio 1927, p.143.
Bocconi, and the Club Alpino Italiano. The banks and the city of Milan were the expedition’s main financers; but funds also came from the King, Vittorio Emanuele III, who provided lire 50,000 (approximately €33,500), on behalf of the Savoia family, and other lesser banks and private commercial companies.

A new plan for the expedition

By the end of 1927 the two expeditions’ organizational paths had begun to follow different time frames. Nobile’s polar flight preparations were already at an advanced stage compared with those of the Karakorum expedition, whose organizational plan faced some difficulties within the Società Geografica. Complications arose when Giotto Dainelli withdrew from the exploratory mission. He had been appointed by the municipality of Milan as commander-in-chief, since he was one of the main experts on the Himalayan region. He resigned for two reasons: firstly, he had doubts about the mountaineering part of the programme, as he stated in a letter to Belloni:

According to somebody we should change our goal and persist in climbing Everest. That is unacceptable because the preparations to explore one region are different for exploring another […] We should not declare our goal is the peak of K2, or any other peak, as the mountaineering tradition usually does. If we do not reach the peak, people will consider the expedition to have failed. We should present our expedition just as a scientific and explorative mission […] towards the Baltoro glacier region.

106 ACM, Fondo Segreteria Generale, f.133/1935, “Sottoscrizioni del Generale Nobile al Polo e di S.A.R. il Duca di Spoleto al Caracorum”. The municipality allocated lire 400,000 (approximately €335,000), while the Banca Commerciale Italiana and Credito Italiano contributed respectively lire 250,000 and lire 150,000 (in total approximately €250,000).
107 Archivio Storico Civico e Biblioteca Trivulziana di Milano, Milano, Fondo Rivolta, b.46, “Elenco sottoscrittori Spedizione al Caracorum”. Henceforth ASCBT.
108 The Arctic exploration project had an advantage in the experience of the previous polar flight conducted in 1926; moreover, it had the support of the Ministero dell’Aeronautica, which supplied the airship and the crew.
The second reason was his disagreement with Gaetano Polvara: “[Polvara] He does not seem to recognize me as commander-in-chief although it is my exclusive right to supervise everything […] while he thinks he can do everything.”\(^{110}\) Dainelli referred to their different views of the expedition, with Polvara insisting on attempting the ascent of K2; this was the main cause of disagreement between them. On 17 November 1927, the *Società Geografica’s* board committee accepted Dainelli’s resignation and his withdrawal contributed to postponing the departure date until March 1929.\(^{111}\)

Despite this problem, the RSGI and the CAI confirmed their desire to find a solution,\(^{112}\) which resulted in appointing the Duke of Spoleto as the new leader of the expedition. Aimone of Savoia knew that the RSGI and the CAI were organizing an expedition in the Karakorum, thus he asked to take part as the photographer.\(^{113}\) The finance committee saw in the Duke’s request an opportunity to solve the problem of the expedition leadership. Thus, it appointed him as the new commander-in-chief of the expedition. This decision gave the RSGI the approval of King Vittorio Emanuel III, who expressed his satisfaction with “the choice of the young Prince as commander of the expedition [especially because this kind of enterprises] honour the homeland and contribute to increasing its prosperity in any field.”\(^{114}\)

The Duke eagerly accepted the position and the organization of the expedition could make progress. His presence, via his royal rank, assured wider exposure for the exploration than Dainelli’s leadership. Furthermore, the King’s statement reflected how the monarchy could increase its prestige through the exploration (despite the small contribution granted by the King). The Savoia name was thus once again associated with Italian exploration, as

\(^{110}\) Ibid, Letter from Dainelli to Giovanni Roncagli, RSGI Vice President, 2 November 1927.  
\(^{111}\) Ibid, Letter from Roncagli to the Italian Minister of the Foreign Affairs, 3 December 1927, p.4.  
\(^{112}\) Ibid, Letter from Roncagli to Dainelli, 17 November 1927.  
\(^{114}\) ACM, Fondo Segreteria Generale, f.133/1935, Letter from Roncagli to Belloni, 1 December 1927.
had happened decades earlier through Luigi Amedeo di Savoia’s expeditions. The Duke personally chose the team members, among whom was the person appointed vice-commander, Colonel Mario Cugia, who was a senior officer in the Navy and an expert scholar in geodetic and geophysical surveys. The expedition also had the scientific collaboration of Ardito Desio, who had been the geologist on some scientific missions with Cugia at the Giarabub oasis.

As soon as the expedition was made public, several mountaineers and scholars applied to take part in the mission. Arguably, taking part in the expedition was an excellent opportunity to gain personal prestige, as candidates made their applications with the support of important politicians such as Alessandro Melchiori, the national Vice Secretary of the PNF; Alessandro Chiavolini, Mussolini’s personal assistant and the man who was closest to him; and Giorgio Guglielmi di Vulci, the Vice President of the Camera dei Deputati. Some candidates declared their fascist beliefs or previous scientific and mountaineering experiences to increase their chances of selection. However, the choice of team members was the exclusive decision of the Duke and many applications were rejected.

On 6 May 1928, Aimone of Savoia and Cugia presented the expedition’s scientific programme at the meeting of the RSGI:

The geographic-mountaineering expedition in Central Asia […] aims to add new knowledge on the Caracorum’s region […] the expedition I will have the honour to lead has its own goal in reaching the area dominated by K2 […] Himalaya is of particular interest from a geodetic point of view […] Once we have passed Skardu, we will begin research on gravity and carry out some geomagnetic surveys […] We will

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116 In 1926, the Società Geografica Italiana organized a geological and geographic expedition to Marmarica and Giarabub (Libya), appointing Desio and Cugia to conduct geological research.
118 Ibid, Letters from Belloni to Melchiori, Chiavolini and Guglielmi di Vulci, 2 April, 12 April, 17 May 1928.
conduct these studies step by step with the geological and meteorological researches, especially related to studying the glaciers.\textsuperscript{119}

The President of the RSGI, Pietro Lanza di Scalea, emphasised how this expedition linked to the previous Italian explorations of the Karakorum, among which was “one conducted by another member of the Royal House of Savoia [the Duke of Abruzzi].”\textsuperscript{120} The Duke of Abruzzi’s ‘legacy’ in terms of mountaineering goals was recalled by Arturo Andreoletti, who was a famous climber and the secretary of the finance Committee. He asserted that Italians had to challenge the British mountaineers attempting the K2 climb because Italy held priority over that mountain, thanks to the Duke of Abruzzi’s earlier ascent, reaching 7,500 meters and creating a new altitude record in 1909.\textsuperscript{121} Andreoletti’s statement reaffirmed how the expedition aimed to gain national prestige, particularly by breaking British mountaineering supremacy in the Himalayas.

In fact, the leaders of the expedition were quite vague about the climbing goals. They merely affirmed that the climbers would attempt to ascend some of the most important Karakorum peaks.\textsuperscript{122} However, by 19 October 1928, the new president of the Società Geografica Italiana, Nicola Vacchelli, decided to cancel the mountaineering proposal and reduce the team members from 16 to 12 to avoid the entire expedition being cancelled.\textsuperscript{123} According to Biagio Gabardi, the General Accountant of the municipality of Milan, the total budget for the Karakorum expedition had to be lire 1,500,000 (approximately €1,000,000); the city of Milan could not afford any other extra costs because the polar expedition’s costs had doubled. However, the Duke of Spoleto stated that cancelling the

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{120} Ibid, p.168.
\bibitem{122} Ibid, “Parole pronunciate da S.A.R. il Duca di Spoleto presso la Reale Società Geografica il 6 maggio 1928”, p.3.
\end{thebibliography}
mountaineering plan was disrespectful toward the Italian Alpine Club, which had conceived the entire expedition.\textsuperscript{124}

The government became involved in finding a solution. Aimone di Savoia talked to Mussolini to obtain a financial contribution from the government to avoid the cancellation of the exploration. According to the Duke, “this aspect would jeopardize the image of Italy in Great Britain” because the British already knew Italy was preparing an expedition to the Karakorum and expected to conduct new studies based on the scientific data collected by the Italians.\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Il Duce} agreed with the Duke to continue the exploration and even to retain the climbing goal. Mussolini stated that “a successful mountaineering result would benefit the mass psychology of those who usually ignore the scientific results.”\textsuperscript{126} Despite his support for the Duke’s view, Mussolini did not actually grant any contribution from the government and the Duke was forced to resize the proposal.\textsuperscript{127}

Thus, the expedition was divided into two groups: a scientific team and a mountaineering squad.\textsuperscript{128} The Duke and Cugia organized the logistical programme following suggestions from the explorer Filippo De Filippi. He knew the Himalayas well and suggested that Aimone di Savoia should hire a British caravan leader instead of the selected Umberto Balestreri. However, the RSGI disagreed with this advice because according to the preliminary agreement signed with the city of Milan, all the participants

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\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} The first team consisted of Aimone di Savoia, Cugia, Desio, Ludovico di Caporiacco, who was appointed to collect zoological and botanic data, and Gino Allegri, as the doctor for the expedition and responsible for collecting the anthropological data. The second squad included Umberto Balestreri as the caravan’s leader, Vittorio Ponti and Giuseppe Chiardola as climbers (Chiardola was also a topography assistant), Leone Bron and Evaristo Croux as alpine guides, Angelo Anfossi as radio telegrapher and Massimo Terzano as photographer and cameraman, sent by the \textit{Ente Nazionale per la Cinematografia} (National Film Agency or ENACI). According to the agreement between the organizational committee of the expedition and ENACI, the national film agency had the exclusive rights to make the official film of the expedition.
had to be Italians. This aspect preserved the Italian-ness of the expedition. The expedition to the Karakorum caused interest even in the Regia Aeronautica, which for the first time proposed to support the scientific mission with an aerial service. The purposes of this proposal were: a) flying over the area targeted by the expedition to take aerial photos; b) providing logistical support to the climbers in their attempt to reach the prechosen peaks; and c) carrying out a rescue mission in the event of part of the expedition being isolated, then signalling its geographic position. This proposal was eventually not realized because the mountaineering plan was cancelled.

While the preparations for the Karakorum expedition proceeded, Nobile’s airship Italia began its polar flight on 15 April 1928. Unfortunately, on 25 May, the dirigible crashed on the ice pack. Six crew members died and their bodies were never found. The survivors were found only on 12 July after a large international rescue operation. The Italia’s tragedy deeply shocked the Italian public and Amundsen himself took part in the rescue mission, during which his plane disappeared over the Barents Sea. The massive rescue operation demonstrated how well Nobile was known and appreciated throughout the world. The tragedy further delayed the Karakorum expedition’s organization because “the fundraising was stopped due to a new campaign fund launched among the citizens to rescue the [Italia] survivors.”

The documentation demonstrates that Nobile’s tragedy had a long-lasting effect and its results involved all of Milan’s citizens (in fact all the Italian public were convinced by the press to anxiously follow the tragedy and subsequent rescue attempts). Mussolini was concerned about the public’s political judgment of Nobile’s tragedy and wrote a letter to

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129 ASGI, “Verbali Direttivo”, Registro 11, Seduta del 22 febbraio 1928, pp. 155, 156.
130 ACM, Fondo Segreteria Generale, f.133/1935, Letter from Lando Ferretti, Secretary of the Fascist Journalists Regional Union to Belloni, 22 May 1928.
De Capitani d’Arzago asking him to postpone *sine die* the expedition. Furthermore, as Ardito Desio affirmed in his *Le vie della sete, dei ghiacci e dell’oro*, the dirigible Italia’s disaster contributed to permanently removing the mountaineering goal from the aims of the Duke of Spoleto’s scientific expedition.

Climbing a previously unconquered Himalayan peak just a few months after the North Pole catastrophe could compromise national prestige if it resulted in further tragedy. However, as was reported at a preparatory meeting held on 19 October 1928, lack of money was the reason for removing the climbing goal. Subsequently, on 29 November 1929, the Duke affirmed, during the first public conference organized by the *Società Geografica Italiana* after the conclusion of the expedition, that the mountaineering target had been withdrawn because of the scarcity of knowledge about the journey’s difficulties. Thus, the Duke’s statement excluded the dirigible Italia’s tragedy as the main cause for resizing his Karakorum exploration but highlighted the difficulties encountered in approaching the Himalayan region. Probably the way Desio reported the situation some years later, after the Second World War, could not have been made public in 1929 for political and propagandistic reasons.

Between 1928 and 1929, the Karakorum expedition’s fundraising started again. The municipality of Milan advanced the funds for the expedition to the finance committee, while the RSGI provided money from its committee whenever required for logistical purposes. Thus, the city of Milan asked all the backers who joined the fundraising to help

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132 ACS, PCM 1934-36, f.3, sf. 2/4, Letter From Mussolini to De Capitani d’Arzago, 15 October 1928. “Caro De Capitani, leggo sui giornali dei tuoi colloqui per la spedizione sul Caracorum. Credo che il pubblico italiano in genere e milanese in particolare, vedrebbe volentieri il rinvio sine die della spedizione stessa. È tempo questo di raccogliimento finanziario e morale.”


refund their contribution as a municipality. This system did not guarantee immediate financial liquidity for the finance committee. The main sponsors were public institutions and private companies, which followed different time frames to withdraw money from their accounts.\textsuperscript{136} Eventually, the municipality involved even the Ministero dell’Interno, asking the Consiglio Provinciale dell’Economia to deposit the lire 200,000 previously guaranteed for both expeditions.\textsuperscript{137} Furthermore, the correspondence between the Podestà and various institutions reveals how such financial systems took so much time that the city of Milan was still trying to recoup the money it had advanced in 1933.\textsuperscript{138}

At the beginning of May 1928, the Duke of Spoleto, with Cugia, Balestreri and Anfossi, carried out a preliminary journey to the Himalayas. It was the first part of the entire expedition, during which they stored some logistic materials at Askolè, which was the last civilized village near the area where the base camp would be set up. The Duke wrote: “It represents the starting point for patrolling the areas we will explore. I will study all the conditions that characterize those places to have a better knowledge of the difficulties that we could face during our expedition [in 1929].”\textsuperscript{139} On 2 February 1929 the entire expedition officially began. However, the Duke, with Cugia and Anfossi, left Italy in January “to prepare all the topographic tools at the Survey of India and to organize the caravans […] Thus, on 18 March all the others team members disembarked at Bombay and two days later we were all gathered together in Srinagar.”\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{136} ACM, Fondo Segreteria Generale, f.133/1935, Correspondence between La Rinascente, Cotonificio Crespi, Linificio e Canapificio Nazionale with the Podestà of Milan, 1 February, 20 February and 11 June 1929.


\textsuperscript{138} Ibid, Correspondence between the Podestà of Milan with the RSGI, 20 June and 28 June 1933.

\textsuperscript{139} ASGI, “Verbali Direttivo”, Registro 11, Seduta del 6 maggio 1928, p.167.

\textsuperscript{140} Aimone di Savoia-Aosta and Ardito Desio, La spedizione geografica italiana al Karakorum (Milano: Arti Grafiche Bertarelli, 1936). 9, 10.
The explorers carried out all their commitments and scientific research projects. In particular, they mapped and surveyed the Baltoro glacier. Aimone di Savoia explored the Golden Throne passage, reaching an altitude of 6,800 meters. By the end of July, the expedition retreated towards Baltoro to begin the return trip. The Karakorum mission took approximately seven months, ending on 24 October. The Società Geografica Italiana organized a conference on 29 November in which the Duke presented some of the scientific results obtained during the expedition.\textsuperscript{141}

**Publication and disclosure of the scientific results**

To recoup part of the allocated budget, the committee had signed journalistic rights agreements with the newspapers *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Popolo d’Italia* and it had also appointed the *Ente Nazionale per la Cinematografia* or ENACI (Italian National Film Agency) to make and broadcast the official film of the expedition and the photographic reports.\textsuperscript{142} The team members signed a special disciplinary code to protect these copyrights, in which everybody pledges to not take photos, do drawings or give news (even in private correspondence) about the expedition, and to not give interviews or make public speeches.\textsuperscript{143} The finance committee also dealt with the protection of the expedition’s reputation, as revealed in the Duke of Spoleto’s private report sent to the Podestà De Capitani d’Arzago. “During an exploration in the Shaksgam valley, while the mission carried out its research activities, its chief Dr Balestreri guided it badly. Thus, I was regretfully forced to repatriate him immediately because of his behaviour.”\textsuperscript{144} Apparently,

\textsuperscript{142} ACM, Fondo Segreteria Generale, f.133/1935, “Patto disciplinare per operatore cinematografico”, p.2.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, “Spedizione Caracorum – Convenzione tra i membri partecipanti e il Comitato Finanziatore”, 5 gennaio 1929, pp.2, 3.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid, Letter from Aimone of Savoia to Podestà of Milan, 10 August 1929.
this matter was sufficiently serious that the commissioner of the RSGI, Nicola Vacchelli, recommended to the Podestà to withdraw it from the official report and to avoid indiscretions or journalistic articles on such matter.  

The finance committee encountered new difficulties in promoting the results of the expedition. The foreign press dedicated little attention to the story of the exploration. A larger propaganda effort abroad would have raised the Savoias’ prestige as they could associate their name with that of the expedition. Propaganda for the exploration represented a key point for the finance committee because the income from the copyrighted sales in Italy and abroad depended upon it. The estimated revenues were approximately one million lire, which would be used to recoup the organizational costs.

These difficulties worried the new Podestà of Milan, Marcello Visconti di Modrone, who informed Vacchelli that some French newspapers were interested in publishing a detailed account of the Duke’s conference. These articles would contribute to reducing the remarkable debt of the municipality. Visconti di Modrone authorized several conferences with the Club Alpino’s sections and fascist cultural associations, where the team members illustrated the Karakorum expedition’s story, with the aim of compensating for the overdraft.

The publicity for the exploration was also delayed because the ENACI procrastinated with the release of the film both in Italy and abroad. The municipality of Milan and the RSGI tried to resolve the situation created by the ENACI by involving Dino Alfieri and Giuseppe Bottai, who were respectively the Undersecretary and the Ministro

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145 Ibid, Letter from Vacchelli to De Capitani d’Arzago, 3 October 1929.
146 Ibid, Letter from De Capitani d’Arzago to Vacchelli, 9 October 1929.
148 Ibid, Letter from Visconti di Modrone to Vacchelli, 14 February 1930.
149 Ibid.
delle Corporazioni. According to Visconti di Modrone and the RSGI, the ENACI had seriously damaged the expedition’s image. Thus, it was necessary to rescind its contract or the damage could be even more serious. The RSGI primarily accused the ENACI to not display any interest in producing the official film, which had been distributed only in a few Italian cities.

In addition to this, the distribution was not advertised resulting in a further reduction of the potential audience. The low profit received confirmed the minimal commitment of the Ente Nazionale per la Cinematografia to distributing the film. Later in 1933 Corrado Zoli, who succeeded Vacchelli in the presidency of the RSGI, and the Duke of Spoleto tried to involve Mussolini for financing the publication of the results and printing a topographic map of Karakorum. However, the request was denied by the economic governmental offices, because the estimated costs of the expedition had in the meantime increased by lire 60,000 on the pre-allocated budget of lire 1,600,000.

According to Zoli, Italy jeopardized the ‘Italianness’ of the results by procrastinating over the publication of the official book of the expedition. This undermined national prestige and the image of the Società Geografica, which had supervised the mission. Zoli remarked that various foreign scientific expeditions had been undertaken through Himalaya and Karakorum, and that publication of the results would influence, sooner or later, the importance of the studies conducted by Italians. He also stressed that

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150 Ibid, Letter from the secretary of the RSGI to the Podestà of Milan, 12 April 1930.
151 Ibid, Letter from Visconti di Modrone to Vacchelli, 2 April 1930. The attitude of the Ente Nazionale per la Cinematografia reflected the reform undertaken by the government with regard to the film national agency. As revealed in the same letter, at that time fascism was modifying the ENACI by removing any commercial activities from its business. The realization and screening of the expedition film was among these activities, which was then delayed due to the complex bureaucratic situation.
152 Ibid, Letter from Corrado Zoli to the Podestà of Milan, 20 June 1933.
153 Ibid, Letter from the Podestà of Milan to the president of the RSGI, 20 June 1930.
publication of the results gained by the Duke’s expedition would justify the huge amount spent on its organization.\footnote{Ibid, Letter from Corrado Zoli to the Podestà of Milan, 6 March 1933.}

On 26 August 1933, Zoli emphasized that Italy had already missed two important opportunities to display its accomplishments in the Karakorum: in 1930, when the conference to celebrate the centennial of the British Association for the Advancement of Science took place, and in 1931 at the International Geographic Congress of Paris. These were very important scientific gatherings where the Società Geografica Italiana aimed to present the scientific results from the investigations in the Karakorum region. The financial complications had reduced the impact of the expedition, both in the public forum and the international scientific community.\footnote{Ibid, Letter from Zoli to the Podestà of Milan, 26 August 1933.} The procedures ended with a new round of fundraising to collect money for the publication of the official book, to which the Banco di Napoli contributed lire 5,000 (approximately €4,000).\footnote{ASCBT, Fondo Rivolta, b.46, Letter from RSGI to Editorial Company Arte e storia, 4 March 1935.} Ardito Desio informed the Duke of Spoleto about this new proposal and assured him he was personally dealing with the matter to avoid a new delay.\footnote{Archivio Ardito Desio e Emanuela Desio, Roma, “Lettere Aimone-Desio 1930-1934”, f.17, E1, Letter from Ardito Desio to Aimone of Savoia, 3 April 1933.}

In 1936, La Spedizione Geografica Italiana al Karakorum, the official book of the expedition, written by Aimone di Savoia and Ardito Desio, was finally published. The Duke had asked Desio to use an impersonal writing style, without extolling either the expedition or its members. Aimone di Savoia only permitted praise for the people of the Karakorum, the coolies and Shikary.\footnote{Ibid, Letter from Aimone of Savoia to Ardito Desio, 23 January 1931.} On 15 June 1939, the municipality of Milan
declared “all the financing procedures of the Arctic expedition and Caracorum exploration have ended.”\textsuperscript{159}

The Duke of Spoleto’s Karakorum expedition was thus realized through the merging of the fascist government with the city of Milan, the Società Geografica Italiana, the Club Alpino Italiano and the most important Italian banks. The municipality of Milan played a key role because it paid most of the necessary funds in advance, while the CAI and the RSGI supervised the logistical organization. In doing so, the RSGI confirmed its predominance in managing geographical explorations. Its relationship with the government contributed to obtaining Mussolini’s approval for the expedition. Nevertheless, \textit{il Duce} had a cautious approach towards such undertakings. He demanded preliminary information on how and by whom the expedition was organized before releasing his endorsement. He was not keen on supporting enterprises that had an undefined outcome, due to the difficulty of the goal, because their hypothetical failure could compromise national prestige.

Mussolini’s ambivalent attitude and the lack of money drastically reduced the impact of the expedition at that time, contributing to creating limited interest among historians even today in both the Karakorum exploration and Aimone of Savoia. Once the finance committee was forced to eliminate the mountaineering part of the proposal because of the excessive costs, \textit{il Duce} did not provide a financial governmental contribution, although he knew that a successful climbing goal could be exploited in terms of propaganda. Furthermore, the government had little interest in enhancing and disclosing the scientific results: it did not take part in the controversy between the city of Milan, the RSGI and the ENACI for the distribution of the film; nor did it support the immediate publication of the official book.

\textsuperscript{159} ASCBT, “Finanziamento Spedizioni Artica e Caracorum – Chiusura della relativa contabilità”, determinazione del Comune di Milano, 15 giugno 1939.
‘The King who never was’: Aimone of Savoia as a tool of fascist foreign policy in the Balkans

The general context

By 1924 Mussolini was aiming to establish Italian supremacy over the eastern side of the Adriatic Sea.\textsuperscript{160} Fascist propaganda emphasised that there were unresolved political issues between Italy and Yugoslavia. These included the rivalry to control Albania, the annexation of Dalmatia to the Kingdom of Italy and the role of Yugoslavia in South-eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{161} Mussolini hoped to break up the Kingdom of Yugoslavia by exploiting the ethnic disagreements existing within the country.\textsuperscript{162} To achieve his purpose, in 1927, he undertook a pervasive political campaign against the government of Belgrade to support conspiratorial radical right movements (such as the Albanian rebels and Macedonian terrorism).\textsuperscript{163} This strategy also included fascist support for Ante Pavelić’s Ustaša movement, which aimed to create an independent state in Croatia through an armed revolution.\textsuperscript{164}

However, on the eve of the Second World War, Germany economically penetrated the Balkans, contrasting with the increasing Italian interest in establishing hegemony over Yugoslavia and Greece. Mussolini considered this an obstacle to realizing fascist expansionism in those countries, despite Hitler declaring Germany’s lack of interest in that

\textsuperscript{160} Alberto Becherelli, \textit{Italia e Stato Indipendente Croato, 1941-1943} (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2012). 15, 16.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid, 17.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid, Mussolini was not the first to consider exploiting the ethnic Yugoslavian disagreements to the advantage of Italian interests. In 1919, the Italian government and the Chief of General Staff of the Army considered undertaking the same strategy. The difference was that in 1924, Italian interest in the secessionist movements notably increased.
\textsuperscript{163} Giuseppe Motta, "The birth of Yugoslavia. A vision from Italy (1918-20)," in \textit{Serbian-Italian relations: History and modern times} ed. Srđan Rudić, Antonello Biagini, and Biljana Vučetić (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade, 2015).
\textsuperscript{164} Becherelli. 16, 17.
region and recognizing it as an Italian sphere of influence.\textsuperscript{165} The context of Yugoslavia dramatically changed with the outbreak of war. Germany supported its neutrality, aiming to exploit its raw materials to support its war efforts; Italy instead wanted to reduce German economic hegemony by endorsing Pavelić’s seditious plan. For Mussolini, such a strategy favoured Italian political penetration.\textsuperscript{166} As Ciano revealed in his diary, the Italian intervention should appear to be a consequence of a Croatian request to intervene.\textsuperscript{167} The Italian strategy was based initially on creating a monetary and customs union between the two countries and, once the Italian penetration was concrete, Croatia became a ‘personal union’ with the Kingdom of Italy.\textsuperscript{168} On 10 May 1940 Pavelić declared that the domestic Croatian situation had progressed toward insurrection, then Mussolini considered undertaking an Italian military action at the beginning of June. Instead, three days later, he decided to join the war and postponed the intervention in Croatia at the beginning of September,\textsuperscript{169} despite Hitler disagreeing with his decision because it altered the status quo in the Balkans, jeopardizing German supplies.\textsuperscript{170}

\textit{The Croatian proposal for an Italian King of the Independent State of Croatia}

At the beginning of 1941 Yugoslavia was political divided into two groups: the Croats, who supported the expansionist policy of Rome and Berlin; and the Serbian nationalists, who contested the German influence in their country. Hitler guaranteed German support for the independence of Croatia, while Pavelić assured Mussolini of the Ustaša loyalty to fascist Italy, although he expressed his political difficulties in accepting

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\textsuperscript{165} Ibid, 28.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{167} Ciano. Diary entry on 22 January 1940.
\textsuperscript{168} Becherelli. 29. In a ‘personal union’ regime, the two countries had the same King as leader of both nations.
\textsuperscript{169} Ciano. Diary entries on 10 and 13 May 1940.
\textsuperscript{170} Becherelli. 32, 33.
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Italian claims over Dalmatia. Nevertheless, the *Poglavnik* (leader) also guaranteed Mussolini his commitment to convincing the Croatians to accept the Italian claims, emphasising the advantages of establishing a personal union with Italy.\(^{171}\) As will be discussed later, this led to the Duke of Spoleto being declared King of Croatia.

On 6 April 1941, the Axis forces invaded Yugoslavia with the support of the Croatian separatists.\(^{172}\) The Yugoslavian defeat caused the partition of the country into three different sectors respectively controlled by Italians, Germans and Croatians. Italy acquired the majority of Dalmatia including the cities of Zara, Split, Sibenik and Knin. Croatia had two choices: annexing a coastal area in exchange for establishing a personal union with the Kingdom of Italy or becoming an independent state without receiving any coastal territorial concession.\(^{173}\) On 10 April, Slavko Kvternik,\(^{174}\) the closest collaborator of Pavelić (who was still in Italy), proclaimed the *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* (NDH or *Independent State of Croatia*) in Zagreb. Thus, on 15 April, Pavelić returned to Croatia and took office as the leader of the new state.\(^{175}\)

The relationship between Mussolini and Pavelić was mutual convenience: Mussolini needed the Ustaša leader to implement Italian interests in Croatia while the *Poglavnik* needed *il Duce* to effectively take power in Zagreb.\(^{176}\) In the aftermath of Pavelić’s return, Mussolini worked to implement the promises made by the Croatian dictator (the resolution of the Dalmatian matter and the establishment of a personal union between Croatia and Italy).\(^{177}\) Despite his ambitions, *il Duce* was aware that Pavelić could return to Zagreb since the Germans controlled the city; therefore, the establishment of the

\(^{171}\) Ibid., 36-45.
\(^{172}\) Ibid., 47.
\(^{173}\) Ibid., 53.
\(^{174}\) Later Pavelić appointed Kvternik as Minister of the Defense and Chief of General Staff of the NDH.
\(^{175}\) Becherelli, 54 and 57.
\(^{176}\) Pavlowitch, 466.
\(^{177}\) Ibid.
NDH occurred because of Germany rather than Italy.\(^{178}\) This situation made Italy weaker compared with Germany, although in 1939 Joachim Von Ribbentrop, the Reich’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, had declared that Italy had a ‘free hand’ over Croatia. Later, this declaration was reduced to a ‘political disinterest’ toward the Balkan country, although Germany did not reduce its economic penetration.\(^{179}\) On 25 April 1941, Ciano met Pavelić in Ljubljana to actualize the annexation of the Dalmatian territory from Fiume (the current city of Rijeka) to Kotor (Ciano alternatively proposed to annex the so-called ‘historical part’ of Dalmatia as mentioned in the Pact of London of 1915), as well as offering him a political agreement which formally put Croatia under Italian control.\(^{180}\)

It was at this time that the solution emerged of establishing a monarchy in Croatia instead of undertaking a personal union with Italy. *Il Duce* approved this new solution, but the city of Spilt represented a crucial point in the negotiations. Indeed, both dictators considered Split as ‘nonassignable’. The *Poglavnik* emphasised that ceding the city to Italy would force him to resign, causing the collapse of the pro-Italian system. The issue of monarchy resulted in offering the crown to a prince of the Savoia Dynasty.\(^{181}\) On 30 April, Ciano informed King Vittorio Emanuele III of Pavelić’s proposal to turn Croatia into a kingdom by assigning the crown to a prince of the Italian Royal House.\(^{182}\) Mussolini took a step back regarding the issue of Split. He ordered Raffaele Casertano, the Italian chargé d'affaires in Zagreb, to “insist [to obtain] Split, but without disrupting the [relationship with Croatia].”\(^{183}\) *Il Duce* was forced to moderate his view for two reasons: to avoid exacerbating

\(^{178}\) Vignoli. 48.
\(^{180}\) Ciano. Diary entry on 24 April 1941.
\(^{181}\) Ibid, diary entries on 26, 28 and 29 April 1941.
\(^{182}\) Pavlowitch. 466.
\(^{183}\) Ciano. Diary entry on 30 April 1941.

179
diplomatic relations with the NDH; and preventing Pavelić embracing German policy as a result of rejecting his claims.  

King Vittorio Emanuele III appointed Aimone of Savoia to the Croatian throne under the name of King Tomislav II. However, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Ciano reported in his diary that Vittorio Emanuele wanted to choose Aimone’s brother, Amedeo of Aosta, Viceroy of Ethiopia. Instead, Vignoli argued that the King appointed the Duke of Spoleto according to the succession order to the throne and the importance of rank within the Royal Family. Thus, the first in the hierarchy was Umberto, but he was obviously excluded as King Vittorio Emanuele’s successor, followed by Amedeo of Aosta, who was also Governor General of Eastern Italian Africa; and then Aimone. Mussolini did not think much of the Duke of Spoleto, to the extent that in May 1940, he described him as “an authentic semi-mental defective”, while praising his brother Amedeo because of his “modesty and high military expertise.” From the fascist perspective, Aimone of Savoia represented a mere political tool for realizing Italian interests in the Balkans. On 18 May 1941, Pavelić officially offered the crown of the Croatian Kingdom to the King of Italy through the so-called Accordi di Roma (The Treaties of Rome).

According to Becherelli, Aimone of Savoia was aware of the political opportunism behind his appointment as King of Croatia. On 7 June, Pavelić himself disclosed it in a

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184 De Felice, 1. 383.
185 Ciano. Diary entry on 30 April 1941.
186 Vignoli, 46.
188 Ciano. Diary entry on 14 May 1941.
189 Such agreements were based on a previous meeting in Monfalcone (Gorizia) on 7 May between Mussolini and Pavelić. In Monfalcone, the Poglavnik agreed to annexing Split to Italy, while il Duce acknowledged Zagreb to be mainly inhabited by Croatians and allowed Pavelić to establish a city council entirely composed of Croatians. Once the agreements were ratified on 18 May, Italy annexed the main part of Dalmatia, including the cities of Zara and Split; it also established a customs union with Croatia and the crown was assigned to a prince from the Savoia Family. Becherelli. 93.
conversation with Hitler, explaining that the appointment of a member of the Italian Royal Family was an expedient to facilitate the independence of Croatia.\textsuperscript{190} This revealed that fascism had little influence on the Croatian policy, despite Mussolini aiming to turn the country into an Italian sphere of influence; it was Germany that exerted the real control over the fledgling NDH. Furthermore, the \textit{Accordi di Roma} did not mention monarchy as the constitutional form of the new state; in the treaty Croatia was formally cited as \textit{Independent State of Croatia} instead of \textit{Kingdom of Croatia}.\textsuperscript{191} Thus, Aimone of Savoia was King of a state that did not constitutionally include a monarchy. His appointment also showed the Croatian attitude to politically exploiting his status as a member of the Royal Family. Pavelić believed that appointing an Italian prince as monarch of his independent state favoured the reassessment of the borders between Italy and Croatia, as well as gaining Split for his country. For Mussolini, an Italian king as leader of the NDH contributed to achieving Italian economic and commercial penetration and eventually turning Croatia into a satellite state of Italy.\textsuperscript{192} Some weeks prior to his visit to Rome, Pavelić sent a telegram to Mussolini, which clearly stated his purpose of reacquiring the city of Split through the appointment of the Duke of Spoleto:

\textit{Duce!} I know that the Italian flag that was used to cover the body of the finest Italian hero, Giovanni Randaccio, is waving now on the castle of Split [...] Since H.M. the King of Italy has accepted [our] crown through the designation of H.R.H. the Duke of Spoleto as the founder of the new Croatian dynasty, I believe that this flag, together with the city of Split, could be offered as your donation to [the Duke] our King. It would become an inalienable good of the crown.\textsuperscript{193}

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid, 94.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid, 95.
\textsuperscript{192} Vignoli, 52.
\textsuperscript{193} Telegram from Pavelić to Mussolini, 5 May 1941, as reported in Talpo. 62. However, as previously mentioned, Split was eventually annexed to Italy through the \textit{Accordi di Roma}.
Ambiguity and conspiracy: Aimone of Savoia’s tangled relationship with the regime

The appointment of the Duke of Spoleto as King of Croatia clearly reveals Mussolini’s intention to politically exploit Aimone of Savoia as a member of the Royal Family to increase Italian dominance in that country. Mussolini believed he could achieve a stronger penetration of Croatia by establishing a monarchy led by the Duke but, as Ciano recorded in his diary, he was also aware that the German presence in the country represented the most serious obstacle to realizing this plan. In addition, the fascist propaganda needed to popularize Aimone of Savoia as he was quite unknown to the Croatian people. To achieve this, the Italian authorities in Zagreb issued some portraits which depicted him dressed in Navy uniform, but such action failed. Thus, Eugenio Coselschi, the PNF representative in the city, suggested promoting the Duke’s activities related to his explorations and other aspects of his life to promote his public image.

Despite these difficulties, Mussolini persisted in carrying out his ‘Croatian monarchical plan’, which Aimone of Savoia dealt with ambivalently. He refused to go to ‘his’ new kingdom, and he considered acceptance of the ‘Croatian throne’ a mere act of compliance with Vittorio Emanuele III’s will. Evidence of this can be found in the diary of the countess Matilde de Bellergarde, the lady-in-waiting of Aimone’s wife, who described the Duke’s appointment as a deep torment for him, but he did not complain because it was the King’s order and he had to obey. Thus, Aimone’s opposition can be interpreted as a ‘private matter’ over-ruled by the rigorous rules of the Royal House, based on absolute obedience to the head of the dynasty, while he publicly adopted an opposite attitude; just a few days prior to his official appointment, during a meeting with Ciano, the

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194 Ciano. Diary entry on 10 June 1941.
195 Talpo. 63, 64.
196 Becherelli. 95.
197 Matilde de Bellergarde, diary entry on 17 May 1941, as reported in Vignoli. 83.
Duke declared he was proud to be designated King of Croatia and stated his intention to appoint Raffaele Guariglia, one of the most expert Italian diplomats, as political advisor for his office.\textsuperscript{198} It is hard to believe that Aimone of Savoia could have openly expressed to Ciano his aversion to his involvement in the fascist plan to increase Italian dominance in Croatia. He probably attempted to buy time to find a solution, aiming to release himself from the situation.

According to Pavlowitch and Amoretti, the Duke tried to convince the King and Mussolini to review his appointment. In his report to Vittorio Emanuele, Aimone of Savoia focused on the Croatian political situation, including the crimes perpetrated by the Ustaša on the population,\textsuperscript{198} and on how his presence in Croatia did not favour Italian interests, because there was no historical connection between the Savoia dynasty and the Croatian Independent State. This could easily make the monarchy unpopular or even lead to it being overthrown.\textsuperscript{199} Amoretti argued that the Duke foresaw that his appointment as King of Croatia would eventually undermine Italian prestige and that of the Royal House, because it was the result of an ambiguous and precipitous agreement between Mussolini and Pavelić.\textsuperscript{200} However, the Duke’s statements could be interpreted as a ‘strategy’ to influence Vittorio Emanuele to review his decision by raising these most sensitive points, which could appear strictly connected with the prestige of the monarchy, rather than being considered a political analysis of how the situation had arisen. However, the Duke did not succeed in his plan because the King merely “recommended him to deal composedly with the appointment.”\textsuperscript{201}

\textsuperscript{198} Pavlowitch. 473.
\textsuperscript{199} Account to Mussolini as reported in Talpo. 70-72.
\textsuperscript{200} Amoretti. xix.
Thus, he expressed his doubts to Mussolini, emphasising that the actions of an Italian king could not contain the German penetration of Croatia, which included continuous anti-Italian propaganda, supported by some of Pavelić’s ministries and instigated by the Germans.\textsuperscript{202} It is noteworthy that the Duke tried to ‘influence’ Mussolini to reconsider his political plan, using the same considerations that \textit{il Duce} expressed to Ciano in the meeting on 10 June 1941 (as stated above). On 23 June the Duke delivered his report to Mussolini. Such a very short time would suggest that Aimone of Savoia was probably informed of Mussolini’s concerns about the German presence in Croatia and he intended to exploit this information to make his request more incisive. The analysis of his \textit{rapporto al Duce} clearly demonstrates the Duke’s ambiguous and incoherent attitude in dealing with Mussolini’s political plan. Indeed, while attempting to avoid designation as King of Croatia, Aimone of Savoia astoundingly proposed to Mussolini that he should be initially appointed as ‘reigning’ to postpone his official appointment until the relationship between the Croatian local authorities, the population and the designated king were normalized. Also, he asked to establish an own political cabinet, the so-called \textit{Ufficio Croazia}, to collect political information on the country, which produced monthly reports named \textit{Punti Stimati}.\textsuperscript{203}

There is no further evidence of why the Duke acted in such a contradictory manner. A possible interpretation could be that he had envisaged the King’s and Mussolini’s opposition to his request to be released from the designation, which came less than one month after the official King’s announcement accepting the ‘crown of Croatia’. Thus, he elaborated a ‘long-term strategy’, based on establishing his \textit{Ufficio Croazia}. He probably believed he could convince the King and Mussolini to suspend, sooner or later, the

\textsuperscript{202} Account to Mussolini as reported in Talpo. 70-72.
\textsuperscript{203} Talpo, 73.
‘Croatian monarchical project’ through his *Punti Stimati*, which constantly reported the worsening of the political situation in Croatia.\(^{204}\) This allowed him to disentangle himself from further involvement in fascist foreign policy and to focus on rehabilitating the image of the monarchy, which was increasingly compromised by its support to the regime.

Aimone of Savoia had probably understood, by June 1941, that fascism would not survive for long and that the monarchy was unlikely to redeem its image without trying to disown the Italian-German alliance and get out of the war. These concerns became tangible at the end of 1942, due to the Italian defeats experienced in North Africa and on the Russian front, which further exacerbated the domestic political situation. The Duke elaborated a plan for overthrowing fascism, dissociating Italy from Germany and creating a new government in Sardinia. His plan to depose Mussolini represented a tangible attempt to modify the situation and preserve the monarchy as an institutional form in post-fascist Italy. According to Renzo De Felice, the Duke secretly established diplomatic contacts with the British in Geneva, in December, through Alessandro Marieni Saredo, the Italian Vice-Consul and his very close friend.\(^{205}\) However, Mario Toscano in his *Dal 25 luglio all’8 settembre* (1966), argued the Duke conceived his insurrectional plan in the spring of 1942, reporting to Marieni that “Italy should get out of the war as soon as possible, and it must dissociate its responsibilities from those of the Germans. [We should find] a way to negotiate with the Anglo-Americans.”\(^{206}\)

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\(^{204}\) “Punto Stimato IV alla fine di novembre 1941”, as reported in Amoretti. 35. The Duke particularly emphasized the increasingly minor Italian influence over the local government compared with that of Germany, the existing contrasts within the Ustaša regime divided into pro-Italian and pro-German parties, and the necessity to defend both national prestige and that of the Savoia dynasty. With regard to this point, Aimone of Savoia argued that the Italian government should renounce its claim to the Croatian crown because the local regime did not have support from its parliament for the establishment of a monarchy.


The secret diplomatic contacts continued until the fall of fascism, especially thanks to the British, who considered his proposal politically and militarily interesting.\textsuperscript{207} At this stage, the Allies proposed to establish a free government following Mussolini’s fall and identified Sardinia as the most suitable location; because it was an island it was easier to defend when installing a new government. There, a member of the Royal Family could appoint a new government. Thus, the Duke requested further guarantees from the Allies, such as what treatment Italy would receive at the peace conference and how the Allies would support this military Italian action.\textsuperscript{208} However, the British government did not reply to these solicitations and the Duke’s plan was withdrawn without real political and military support from the Allies, while Mussolini was dismissed on 25 July 1943. Toscano argued that the Duke of Spoleto acted under the approval of Vittorio Emanuele III and his attempt even influenced the King’s decision to arrest \textit{il Duce} (once he received a vote of no confidence from the \textit{Gran Consiglio del Fascismo}) and appoint General Pietro Badoglio as the new Prime Minister.\textsuperscript{209} Instead De Felice contested this interpretation, because there was no evidence or documentation that proved the King’s support for the Duke’s negotiations.\textsuperscript{210}

In the aftermath of the armistice, Aimone of Savoia moved to Brindisi, in Southern Italy, where he joined the rest of the Royal Family and the government of Badoglio. In this new location, he reorganized the special units for submarine attacks, the so-called \textit{Mariassalto}, within the Navy of the South Kingdom (\textit{Marina del Regno del Sud}). His units became co-belligerent with the Allies against the Germans and those units of the Italian

\textsuperscript{207} Ibid, 164. According to the British intelligence, Aimone of Savoia was ready to conduct a military insurrection against Mussolini and the regime in return for some guarantees issued to Italy from all the allied powers, such as maintaining the monarchy in Italy at the end of the war and organizing an Anglo-American landing of troops on the Italian peninsula.

\textsuperscript{208} Ibid, 165.

\textsuperscript{209} Ibid, 167.

\textsuperscript{210} De Felice, \textit{Mussolini l'alleato. Crisi e agonja del regime}, 2. n2, 1165.
Navy which had joined the *Republica Sociale Italiana*. Once the war ended, the resulting institutional referendum in 1946 decreed the end of the monarchy in Italy and the new Italian government exiled all male members of the Royal Family. Therefore, Umberto II, meanwhile succeeded to the King Vittorio Emanuele III, ordered to his male relatives to leave Italy. The Duke of Spoleto obeyed the order and went into exile in Buenos Aires, which he had visited during his mission with the dreadnought *Roma* in 1921. He died there on 29 January 1948. Ironically, Pavelić also went into exile in Buenos Aires in 1946, where he established a kind of Croatian shadow-government before surviving an assassination attempt and moving to Spain, where he eventually died in 1959.

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211 Sanfelice di Monteforte. 277-281.
212 Ibid, 286.
213 Becherelli. 327
Chapter

IV

Ardito Desio: geologist and explorer.

The scientific side of fascist colonial policy.

Ardito Desio (1897-2001) was one of the most important Italian explorers and geologists of the twentieth century. He was born in Palmanova, a small town in Northern Italy, on 18 April 1897. During his long life, he undertook several explorations, travelling from the Aegean archipelago to Africa, the Middle East, Asia and the South Pole. He was also an internationally famous academic scholar, who conducted several geological studies and published more than 400 scientific works (including articles, books, and essays). 1 He founded the first academic course in geological sciences, which was established at the University of Milan in 1942. 2 However, in Italy his name mainly remains linked to the finding of oil in Libya between 1937 and 1938, and leading an Italian climbing expedition to the conquest of K2, the second highest mountain in the world, in 1954.

Despite his long ‘career’ as an explorer, authors and historians have dedicated very few biographical studies to him, compared to the attention given to many of his

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contemporaries, such as the Duke of Abruzzi. The only biography dedicated to him is *Ardito Desio. Dal K2 all’Antartide, al deserto del Sahara, vita e avventure del grande geologo esploratore e sciienziato friulano*, published in 2002 by Giuliana V. Fantuz. This work was based on Desio’s autobiography *Sulle vie della sete, dei ghicci e dell’oro* (1987). Fantuz celebrated Desio as someone who “contributed to making the world better known to the rest of the world.” Her approach was quite hagiographic and could be due to the fact that Fantuz, like Desio, is from Friuli. Furthermore, her work was published one year after Desio’s death to commemorate his life. This explains why the author gathered in her book various accounts expressly written by some of his colleagues, friends and collaborators. She also included numerous photos of Desio’s explorations, which made the biography a sort of photographic memoir.

In the same year, the academic journal *Rivista italiana di paleontologia e stratigrafia*, edited by the University of Milan, published an article to commemorate Desio’s life. The author, geologist Maurizio Gaetani, focused on outlining Ardito Desio’s life, stressing his studies in palaeontology and stratigraphy as well his ties to the journal. However, biographical information about Desio is fundamentally derived from his own books, which provide an account of his explorations and his scientific investigations, including *Rodi e le isole italiane dell'Egeo* (1928); *La Spedizione Geografica Italiana al Karakorum* (1936, as co-author with the Duke of Spoleto); *Il Sahara italiano: il Tibesti nord orientale* (1942, 2006); and *La conquista del K2, seconda cima del mondo* (1954). His actual autobiographies are *Sulle vie della sete: Esplorazioni sahariane* (1950) and *Sulle vie della sete, dei ghicci e

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dell’oro (1987), which included various accounts of his life until the 1980s. Finally, in 2005, Sulle vie della sete, dei ghicci e dell’oro. Avventure straordinarie di un geologo was released as a new edition of the 1987 publication.

This chapter focuses on reconstructing his relationship with fascism by analysing his explorations between the 1920s and 1930s. Desio was one of the scientific protagonists of those decades, which marked the full involvement of science in serving fascism to enhance the Italian colonies. Upon the foundation of the empire in 1936, the bond between science and the regime strengthened. In fascist colonial policy, scientific research was considered fundamental to develop Italy’s overseas territories. This attitude was embodied by institutions such as the Reale Accademia d’Italia (Royal Italian Academy), the Reale Società Geografica Italiana (Royal Italian Geographic Society or RSGI) and a large part of the Italian scientific academic environment. Desio dealt with both of these institutions and belonged to the academic community. The role of science in supporting colonialism was clearly explained in 1938 by the zoologist Edoardo Zavattari, who asserted that science contributed significantly to “the economic conquest of the empire.” According to Zavattari the conquest of an overseas domain was based on two consecutive phases: military occupation, followed by the enhancement and exploitation of the occupied territory, where scientific research revealed how best to undertake that exploitation. Desio, Zavattari and other scientists indicated how the colonial possessions could be exploited through the results of their explorations.

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However, analysis of Desio’s explorations also reveals how the RSGI’s explorative activity in the colonies was subordinated to the will of the military colonial authorities, despite its ‘monopoly’ in the field of geographic exploration. In the Italian colonies, the military governors were the real decision-makers, who authorized and supported expeditions, and sometimes the colonial government even organized its own scientific missions, which overlapped those planned by the *Società Geografica*.

**The war and the missions to the Dodecanese archipelago**

In 1914, while attending high school in Udine, Ardito Desio took part in the debates about Italy’s participation in the First World War that animated public opinion. In 1915, Italian political unrest convinced the seventeen-year-old Desio to enlist as a volunteer. Although he was still under age, he was able to join the *Battaglione Volontari Ciclisti* (Cyclist Volunteers Battalion) because one of his friends forged his father’s signature on the enlistment papers. Later, in 1916 he was assigned to the Alpine Corps and in November 1917 he was captured by the Austrians and sent to a Prisoner of War camp near Linz (Austria). During his war experience in the Alpine Corps, Desio met Italo Balbo, who later became one of the most prominent fascist leaders and the governor general of Libya. Their friendship became closer in the post-war period during their years of study at the University in Florence, where they alternated academic commitments with military duties. As will be discussed later, by 1934 Desio had benefitted significantly from this relationship with Balbo,

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7 Ibid, 51, 52.
8 Ibid, 66.
who, once appointed governor general of Libya, entrusted Desio with developing a large scientific research programme in an attempt to enhance the colony.

In 1920 Desio graduated in Natural Sciences from the University of Florence. His ‘career’ as an explorer and scientist began in 1922, when his professor, Carlo De Stefani, one of the most important Italian geologists of that time, appointed him to conduct a geological survey in the Dodecanese islands. At that time, the Aegean archipelago was under Italian control as established by the Treaty of Sèvres (1920). In fact, Italy had occupied the Dodecanese since 1912 as a result of the Italian-Turkish War to conquer Libya. However, at the beginning of its occupation, the Italian government did not focus particularly on enhancing the possession; rather it prioritised military control and the establishment of a naval base to patrol that area of the Mediterranean. However, in 1914, the government began to claim the Italianness of these territories by sending an archaeological mission to Rhodes, which excavated evidence of the Hellenic and Roman past of the island.9 This attitude of assimilation increased further once fascism came to power: in addition to the archaeological studies, the new government built various infrastructures and enforced a military presence across the islands to consolidate the Italian position in that Mediterranean sector, in order to increase national prestige.10 The archipelago became strategically important in fascist foreign policy, which considered it a new direction for expansion towards the east, along with other factors that oriented colonial policy towards the Horn of Africa and the Balkans.11 Thus, from this perspective, a deeper knowledge of the Dodecanese contributed to understanding how the territory could be exploited.

10 Ibid, 143.
Desio undertook two study missions in the islands: the first was from September 1922 to February 1923, while the other took place from June to October 1924. During his second voyage Desio met the Duke of Spoleto for the first time; the Duke commanded the torpedo boat Cassiopea, and transported the geologist across the archipelago. As analysed in the previous chapter, later in 1929 the Duke appointed Desio to lead the scientific part of the exploration of Karakorum. The Dodecanese missions were financed by various institutions such as the Reale Accademia dei Lincei, which provided Lire 1,000 (approximately €950), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Royal Italian Geographic Society, the Royal Geological Survey and the Istituto Agricolo Coloniale Italiano of Florence (Agricultural Italian Colonial Institute, which was the most important institution for agricultural studies relating to the Italian overseas colonies). Desio could also rely on logistical assistance provided by the Italian governor of Rhodes and the Italian Navy to move from one island to another in order to carry out his studies.

Desio focused mainly on how the Dodecanese could be enhanced in terms of farming exploitation. As a geologist, he claimed that the agricultural development of the territory depended on its geological landform and climate. His studies were published in various issues of L’Agricoltura Coloniale, the official magazine of the Agricultural Italian Colonial Institute. These accounts also showed his ‘colonial leanings’ in how to improve agriculture in the Aegean archipelago. Desio observed that farming work was underdeveloped because of being carried out using old methods, although some territories had promising agrarian

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12 Desio, Sulle vie della sete, dei ghiacci e dell’oro. 70, 79 and 84.
13 Ibid, 81.
14 Ibid, 70.
15 "Le potenzialità agricole delle isole del Dodecaneso e i suoi rapporti con la costituzione geologica," L’Agricoltura coloniale 1923. 209.
potential. To solve this problem, he suggested undertaking “good agricultural propaganda” by ‘importing’ Italian farmers, who could teach the indigenous peasants new farming techniques supported by more modern equipment. Furthermore, the presence of Italian farmers would obviate the lack of manpower, even though the migration of Italian peasants had to be limited in numbers to assure them sufficient profit to encourage them to settle there on a long-term basis.17

The African explorations: Jaghbub, Kufra and Fezzan

The mission to Giarabub

During his stay in Rhodes, Desio was ‘recommended’ by Carlo De Stefani to General Nicola Vacchelli and Olinto Marinelli for the provision of logistical support. Vacchelli and Marinelli were two of the most prominent Italian geographers of the time. Vacchelli was the director of the Istituto Geografico Militare (Italian Geographic Military Institute or IGM) and later acted as president of the RSGI, while Marinelli had written the Atlante dei tipi geografici, published by the IGM, and was the director of the Rivista Geografica Italiana, the official magazine of the Società di Studi Geografici e Coloniali.18 This kind of relationship with the academic environment, in addition to his geological expertise, made Desio quite familiar in the most important Italian institutions in the field of geographic exploration. Thus, it is reasonable to suppose that such ‘endorsements’ contributed to Desio’s appointment to conduct the geographic exploration to the Libyan Jaghbub Oasis (Giarabub in Italian), which the RSGI planned in September 1926.

17 Ibid, 345 and 378.
18 Sulle vie della sete, dei ghiacci e dell’oro. 72.
This expedition came under the new colonial policy undertaken by Mussolini in Libya, in the aftermath of Jaghbub’s acquisition. Since April 1920, the Italians and the British had discussed the delineation of Libya’s eastern borders, and possession of the Oasis represented the core of the matter. Finally, the two countries agreed to include Jaghbub within the Italian colonial territory in exchange for granting Egypt, which was a British protectorate, the Bay of Sollum. However, once Egypt declared its independence in 1922, it retracted the Italian-British agreement and declared it was unable to cede Jaghbub to Italy. The situation was solved on 6 December 1925 through a new agreement between the two countries, which eventually brought Mussolini to order the occupation of the Oasis on 1 February 1926. Following the Jaghbub’s annexation, the government planned a series of scientific explorations to determine which natural resources could be exploited. The use of scientific research to pursue colonial exploitation in Libya was not a peculiarity introduced by fascism; it dated back to the aftermath of the Italian-Turkish War as the liberal governments undertook various research missions within Libyan territories. The regime merely increased these explorations, prioritizing geological, agrarian and hydrological research. Overall, from 1913 to 1939, Italy sent twelve scientific missions to Libya and Ardito Desio led three of them.

The RSGI played a key role in these expeditions. It contributed to building “a collective sense of Italy’s imperial status” by disseminating the results of the explorations in scientific articles, books and journals. Its strong connection with the regime became apparent during the Giornata Coloniale (Colonial Day) held in April 1926, where the most

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20 Ibid, 13. Letter from Mussolini to Pietro Lanza di Scalea, Minister of the Colonies, 10 January 1926.
21 Ibid, 271.
outstanding members of the RSGI publicly praised fascist colonial policy. This tendency was reflected in the composition of the RSGI’s Board, which included members of the fascist government, such as Pietro Lanza di Scalea and Corrado Zoli, who were respectively Minister of the Colonies and Governor of Jubaland (Somalia) and later governor of Eritrea and president of the Società Geografica. The increasing ‘ politicization’ of the RSGI marked a new approach in planning explorations, which was based on involving the commercial and industrial sector in supporting its explorative activities. This was evident in June 1926, when the RSGI appointed Desio to conduct a geological and geographic mission to the Jaghbub Oasis. In accordance with this attitude, Desio’s mission was sponsored with Lire 60,000 (approximately €46,000) from the Federazione Nazionale degli Industriali Fascisti and Federazione Nazionale dei Tessili (National Federations of Fascist Industrialists and Textile Industrialists). According to the Board of the RSGI, the involvement of these institutions represented “the first sign of [the] future policy undertaken by the Society.”

Desio stressed how the explorations in Libya in the 1920s largely relied on logistic assistance provided by the military authorities because the expeditions explored recently conquered territories, where revolts against the Italian occupation were still in progress. The military protected the explorers, who carried out their surveys accompanied by the military forces that patrolled the inland areas. In January 1927, Desio reported to the Royal Italian Geographic Society that he had found some brackish water sources under the soil in the oasis

25 Ibid, p.91. The two unions sponsored Lire 30,000 each.
26 ASGI, “Verbali Direttivo”, registro n.11, p.92, riunione del 25 giugno 1926.
27 Desio, Sulle vie della sete, dei ghiacci e dell’oro. 92-94.
near Jaghbub. The discovery excited the Board of the RSGI, which saw possibilities of establishing farming activities in the near future.\textsuperscript{29} Upon Desio’s return to Milan, he went back to his job as curator of the \textit{Museo Civico di Storia Naturale} and was involved in the organization of the above mentioned climbing-scientific expedition to Karakorum led by the Duke of Spoleto, which eventually took place in 1929.

\textit{The expedition to Kufra}

In 1931 Desio took part in a new Libyan expedition to the Kufra oasis group located in south-eastern Cyrenaica. The exploration was organized by the \textit{Fondazione Alessandro Volta}, a branch of the \textit{Reale Accademia d’Italia}. The scientist Guglielmo Marconi, president of the \textit{Accademia}, chose Desio to lead the expedition, which the \textit{Fondazione} sponsored with Lire 20,000 (approximately €20,000).\textsuperscript{30} The mission aimed to acquire scientific knowledge of those Libyan territories recently conquered by Italian troops. In his letter Marconi emphasized this aspect in pompous fascist rhetoric, stressing how the scientific results would honour Italian science by studying those regions where “the abnegation and the value of our Italian colonial troops is still evident as much as the civilizing strength of our Government.”\textsuperscript{31}

The expedition to Kufra received strong military assistance, as previously occurred in Jaghbub. The explorers depended completely on the military authorities, who authorized the

\textsuperscript{29} ASGI, “Verbali Direttivo”, registro n.11, pp.96, 97, riunione del 8 gennaio 1927.
\textsuperscript{30} Archivio Ardito Desio e Emanuela Desio, Roma, b.70-bis, f.B, Letter from Marconi to Desio, 8 May 1931. Henceforth ADED.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
exploration and provided provisions and an armed escort along the route.\textsuperscript{32} The mission took place from July to October, covering approximately 4,000 kilometres. It was also the last exploration led by Europeans across the Libyan Sahara.\textsuperscript{33} The main goal was to study the territories near Kufra with regard to geography, geology and natural sciences. During their stay at the oasis, Desio and his collaborators mapped the local crops and conducted a census of the indigenous population, which revealed the Arabs’ low regard for farming work. This attitude was based on the conviction that the Italian occupation would improve their living conditions, rather than dedicating themselves to agriculture.\textsuperscript{34} In 1932 the \textit{Reale Accademia d’Italia} published \textit{La spedizione della Reale Accademia d’Italia nel deserto libico}, which was the final report of the Kufra expedition, in its official journal the \textit{Nuova Antologia}. Desio lauded the military conquest of those territories achieved by “the strong guidelines brought by the fascist government.” He considered the conquest as a precondition to obtaining a complete knowledge of the region and its natural resources, which were essentials for launching a new era for the colony and its economic development.\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{The exploration of Fezzan}

Between 1932 and 1935, the RSGI elaborated a multidisciplinary research programme consisting of seven scientific missions to Fezzan, the southwestern Libyan region. The Geographic Society nominated Amedeo of Aosta, the Duke of Puglie and elder

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} ADED, “Carteggio Missione Cufra”, b.70-bis, f.D. Desio emphasized this fact in an account of the voyage. He appreciated the assistance received from General Rodolfo Graziani, Vice-Governor of Cyrenaica, who was generous in providing the expedition with vehicles, camels and provisions through the military depots and the support of the colonial government.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Desio, \textit{Sulle vie della sete, dei ghiacci e dell’oro}. 145.
\item \textsuperscript{34} “La spedizione della Reale Accademia d’Italia nel deserto lìbico,” \textit{Nuova Antologia}, no. April (1932). 308 and 312.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid. 320.
\end{itemize}
brother of the Duke of Spoleto, as the leader of this ambitious scientific project.\textsuperscript{36} Fezzan was the first inland region of Libya to be occupied by Italians; this may explain why Italy dedicated so much attention to gaining knowledge of that territory. In April 1932, the RSGI appointed Desio and the academic scholars Paolo Vinassa de Regny, Giuseppe Stefanini and Riccardo Toniolo to plan the geological part of the Fezzan exploration. They claimed a need to undertake new research because the study of Fezzan had been very limited since the Ottoman domination. It could not make significant progress due to the subsequent Italian-Turkish War and resulting rebellions against the Italian occupation. In addition, the scientists noted that a new explorative mission would give Italy equal ranking with France in terms of geological knowledge of the colony, because of the ongoing geological studies pursued by the French in their colony, Algeria.\textsuperscript{37}

Finally, Desio and his colleagues aspired to compare their studies with those undertaken by the French in order to obtain a more complete geological map from French Algeria to Italian Cyrenaica and the Libyan desert.\textsuperscript{38} The continuous study of the Italian Sahara represented a scientific and political matter, as stressed by Armando Mauguini, director of the \textit{Istituto Agricolo Coloniale}, who argued the possibility of installing some permanent Italian research centres in the desert, along the lines of those established by France.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, p.2.
\textsuperscript{39} ASGI, “Schemi dei progetti e missioni”, b.88, f.13, Letter from Armando Maugini to the RSGI, 25 May 1932.
However, the prearranged Fezzan exploration overlapped with that organized by Marshal Pietro Badoglio, who ran the Colonial Government of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. In March 1931 Badoglio had announced ‘his’ exploration during the Geological Conference in Tripoli, and appointed Desio to lead it.\textsuperscript{40} This fact reveals two important aspects: the autonomy of the military colonial authority in organizing its explorations, despite the RSGI exerting a prominent role in the explorative field, and the prominence of Desio in this environment. To avoid overlap of the two expeditions, Badoglio asked the RSGI to postpone its mission from Autumn 1932 to February 1933. In supporting his request, he declared that overlapping the missions would create various logistic difficulties and emphasized how the postponement of the RSGI’s mission would benefit the exploration itself, because the data collected by Desio could be later used as scientific support for the other expedition.\textsuperscript{41} Finally, the exploration patronized by the RSGI began on 16 July 1935. Desio and his assistant Cesare Chiesa travelled approximately 3,500 kilometres.\textsuperscript{42} The mission obtained logistical support from the Colonial Government of Libya, which assured the RSGI it would provide the explorers with vehicles to enable them to move easily across the desert.\textsuperscript{43}

The Libyan period

\textit{Under Italo Balbo’s governorship}

In 1934 Balbo, as Governor General of Libya, launched a new colonial policy based on establishing a full state shareholding to achieve full colonization, rather than exploiting

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, Letter from Badoglio to Nicola Vacchelli, president of the RSGI, 15 July 1932, p.1.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, p.2.

\textsuperscript{42} ASGI, “Missione Desio-Chiesa”, b.87, f.10, Letter from Desio to the President of the RSGI, 29 January 1935.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, Letter from the General Governor of Tripolitania to the RSGI, 22 June 1935.
private economic investments as his predecessors had done.\textsuperscript{44} The regime assured him of strong political and economic support to realize this policy.\textsuperscript{45} However, Balbo was not the first fascist governor to demand a massive economic state intervention in Libya from the central government; between 1925 and 1927, Governor Emilio De Bono had fruitlessly solicited Rome to grant his colonial government economic support.\textsuperscript{46}

Balbo, like De Bono, was a fascist from the very beginning (they were two of the four \textit{Quadriumviri}, who led the March on Rome in 1922). He joined fascism in 1921 and became the leader of the \textit{squadrismo} (which based on using paramilitary squads to intimidate the political rivals) in Emilia-Romagna. In 1922, in the months prior to the March on Rome, he distinguished himself by leading several violent actions against socialists and communists. In July his squads attacked the city of Ravenna, where he destroyed the headquarters of the local socialist co-op; while in August he tried to occupy the city of Parma.\textsuperscript{47} Due to his \textit{squadristiche} actions, he became one of the most charismatic leaders, who contributed to Mussolini’s success\textsuperscript{48} in the March. The future \textit{Duce} had designated Balbo as one of the \textit{quadriumviri} of the March on Rome and appointed him to choose two more \textit{quadriumviri} (Cesare Maria De Vecchi and Emilio De Bono).\textsuperscript{49} Balbo gained an international reputation as a result of his transoceanic flights accomplished in the early 1930s, but because of his increasing fame, Mussolini eventually considered him a ‘rival’ who could overshadow his own image and decided to remove him from the domestic scene by appointing him Governor

\begin{itemize}
\item Del Boca, \textit{Gli italiani in Libia. Dal fascismo a Gheddafi}. 51-54.
\item Del Boca, \textit{Gli italiani in Libia. Dal fascismo a Gheddafi}. 77.
\item Bertoldi, \textit{Camicia nera. Fatti e misfatti di un ventennio italiano}. 85.
\end{itemize}
of Libya. Once Balbo took up his new office, he used his strong personality to obtain a certain autonomy from Rome in ruling Libya.\textsuperscript{50} Balbo strongly believed that the colony could thrive only through state intervention. His efforts to create a farming development culminated in the founding of the \textit{Ente per la Colonizzazione della Cirenaica}, a parastatal organization, with the purpose of relocating a huge number of unemployed Italians, with their families, to Libya, where they had to cultivate allotted parcels of land. Later in 1935 Balbo extended this system to Tripolitania, renaming the \textit{Ente per la Colonizzazione della Cirenaica} as \textit{Ente per la Colonizzazione della Libia}.\textsuperscript{51}

Balbo aimed to make the agrarian colonization fully efficient. To achieve this purpose, he appointed Desio to continue the search for groundwater and carry on the existing studies related to the exploitation of carnallite, a hydrated potassium-magnesium mineral used to produce fertilizers. The return of Desio to Libya to undertake these new explorative and scientific activities under Balbo’s governorship reveals a strong relationship between them. In his autobiography Desio described it as a long-standing friendship, emphasizing that Balbo required his presence in Tripoli to discuss the mining potentiality of Libya, due to his expertise in Libyan geology.\textsuperscript{52} However, this aspect revealed the nepotistic relationship between political power and the explorer. Balbo used all his power to favour his ‘old friend’ in conducting scientific research in Libya; he also assigned various leading roles to Desio, which culminated in entrusting him with the elaboration and conduction of the most important research project: the search for oil, as will be analysed below. Furthermore, in 1937 Balbo appointed Desio to lead a ‘permanent mission’, which had trucks at its disposal.

\begin{thebibliography}{52}
\bibitem{Segrè} Segrè. 293-300.
\bibitem{Desio} Desio, \textit{Sulle vie della sete, dei ghiacci e dell’oro}. 196, 197.
\end{thebibliography}
for easy movement across the desert, and a mobile analytical laboratory. No explorer before him had benefited from such logistical assistance in carrying out his research.\textsuperscript{53}

In 1936 Balbo appointed Desio curator of the newly established \textit{Museo di storia naturale di Tripoli} (Museum of Natural History of Tripoli). The foundation of the museum was strictly connected to the results obtained by the scientific missions previously undertaken in Libya between 1932 and 1935. These expeditions had collected numerous fossils, which the explorers used to send to the Italian museums depending on their field of specialization. For example, the zoological museum of Genoa collected the zoological relics, Rome the ethnographic ones, and Milan, where Desio worked, received geological material.\textsuperscript{54} Balbo diverted these activities, believing that all the scientific collections should be showcased in Libya rather than spreading them between museums in the motherland. However, his attitude also had a political goal, since he conceived the museum as an institution accessible to everyone; both the Italian colonists and tourists who visited Italian Libya.\textsuperscript{55} This aspect was essential to Balbo for popularizing his image and increasing colonial propaganda.\textsuperscript{56} In his eyes, the museum was a cultural project that included both a scientific and a social function. Desio, as a scientist, completely agreed with Balbo and organized the museum in different sections depending on the nature of the collections.\textsuperscript{57}

In July 1936, Balbo entrusted Desio with a new expedition: flying over the Tibesti Massif (located in the middle of the Sahara) and carrying out geographic reconnaissance. The governor needed to make an aerial inspection of the southern borders of Libya following the

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 88.
\textsuperscript{56} Rochat. 264.
\textsuperscript{57} Falcucci. 89.
conclusion of the Italian-French Agreements, the so-called *Accordi Mussolini-Laval*, signed by *Il Duce* and Pierre Laval, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, in Rome on 7 January 1935.\(^{58}\) The flight began on 22 July 1936 and covered approximately 5,000 kilometres. On board with Balbo were Desio and Zanetto Scola-Camerini, a representative of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and head of Balbo’s cabinet.\(^{59}\) The itinerary included various oases and military outposts established in the middle of the desert, such as Gat, Kufra and Murzuch. Desio collected geological evidence and geographic information from these places, while Scola-Camerini dealt with the political and diplomatic side of the expedition.\(^{60}\)

**The search for oil**

In 1912 the Italians discovered some traces of oil at Sidi el Mesri, in Tripolitania, while drilling a water well. This event marked the beginning of the Italian interest in searching for oil in Libya. Later, in February 1923, Mussolini gathered his cabinet to decide which policy the fascist government would adopt regarding the oil matter and how to develop an intensive mining exploration programme both in Italy and in the colonies.\(^{61}\) Mussolini appointed Luigi Federzoni, the Minister of the Colonies, to report on the reality of the presence of oil in Libya. His account stressed that the evidence available to the Italian government was inconsistent, being the result of research focused on searching for ground

\(^{58}\) The agreement was at the base of the Italian conquest of Ethiopia; it essentially stated the French *désistement* on the African country in return for solving some political matters such as making an arrangement over the Libyan borders and the Italians renouncing control over Tunisia. Richard James Boon Bosworth, *Mussolini* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010), 241, 242 and Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il duce. Gli anni del consenso (1929-1936)* (Torino: Einaudi, 1974), 398.

\(^{59}\) Segrè. 378.

\(^{60}\) Desio, *Sulle vie della sete, dei ghiacci e dell’oro*. 171 and 175.

water. He emphasised that a more intensive survey could demonstrate the potential presence and reliability of oil deposits. Nevertheless, the fascist government eventually prioritized the research for phosphates, useful for farming work, instead of that for oil. This decision also represented a matter of national interest as the government aimed to make Italy and Libya independent from France for phosphate supplies, which France had discovered in its colonies of Tunisia and Algeria.62

In March 1936, Balbo invited Desio to Tripoli to plan a broad research programme to enhance the colony. It included the search for water and identifying which mineral resources could definitely be found and exploited in the Libyan subsoil.63 Thus, in May 1937, the colonial geological survey of Libya informed Desio it had discovered a few traces of hydrocarbons while drilling a water well in Tagiura, 12 kilometres from Tripoli.64 The ‘accidental’ discovery created new stamina in the oil exploration field. Desio stated that the traces needed a detailed analysis to establish the consistency of hydrocarbon deposits.65 However, Balbo was cautious about authorizing further surveys because the chemical analysis revealed the presence of methane; he also specified that the main purpose of the research was to find water, although he confided to Desio his hope for discovering “something better than water” such as oil. Desio had held the same idea for some time, as he revealed to Balbo, and insisted on undertaking appropriate research, which could confirm the presence of oil.66

62 Ibid, 74.
63 Desio, Sulle vie della sete, dei ghiacci e dell’oro. 198, 199.
65 Ibid, Correspondence between Desio and Balbo, Letter from Desio to Balbo, 19 May 1937.
Support from the «Azienda Generale Petroli Italiana» for Desio’s research

In July 1937, new evidence of oil arose during drilling for a water well in Mellaha, called pozzo n. 8, near Tripoli.\textsuperscript{67} The importance of this new finding convinced Desio and Balbo to involve the Azienda Generale Italiana Petroli (AGIP), the state agency specializing in oil research, in supporting the mining research programme in Libya. AGIP would contribute to cutting the cost of the scientific programme by providing qualified personnel and appropriate equipment. Thus, on 14 July, the president of AGIP, Umberto Puppini, confirmed the company’s interest in undertaking a preliminary survey.\textsuperscript{68} A scientific committee was established, led by Desio, which also included two AGIP consultants, Michele Gortani and Carlo Migliorini, to identify the most suitable location for starting the explorative survey.\textsuperscript{69} Balbo informed Mussolini, who ordered Puppini to develop a research plan for the area surrounding Tripoli.\textsuperscript{70}

Although Balbo approved the involvement of AGIP, he confided to Desio: “Do you think AGIP could be useful for this research? You should thoroughly study its organization.”\textsuperscript{71} It is hard to interpret Balbo’s cautious attitude because of a lack of further documentation, but it could be supposed he did not want to fail in this project, which if successful, would tie his name to a sensational enhancement of the colony. Furthermore, Balbo’s confidential statement to Desio emphasizes his prominent role in scientific matters, which potentially conflicted with political ones. The governor totally relied on the geologist, so much so that he nominated him as the representative of the Libyan Government on the

\textsuperscript{67} Angelo Rampini, L’Agi in Africa (1935-1941) (San Donato Milanese: Agip - Centro documentazione e informazione 1987), 90.
\textsuperscript{68} ADED, b.60, f.A, Letter from Puppini to Desio, 14 July 1937.
\textsuperscript{69} Rampini. 92.
\textsuperscript{70} Telegram from Mussolini to Puppini, 4 August 1937, as reported in Rampini. 91.
\textsuperscript{71} ADED, b.60, f.A, Letter from Balbo to Desio, 25 July 1937.
above-mentioned scientific committee.\textsuperscript{72} In September 1937, the preliminary survey identified Tripoli’s Gefara region as the most suitable area for beginning the drilling works.\textsuperscript{73} The development of the research programme cost Lire 5,700,000 (approximately €5,580,000) and was expected to take at least two years.\textsuperscript{74} Although Il Duce approved AGIP’s work in Libya, he did not establish any ad hoc state funding to sponsor further operations. Balbo only provided logistical support for AGIP’s personnel.\textsuperscript{75} Thus AGIP essentially financed the entire project from its own economic resources.

Such a commitment in terms of financing and time also contrasted with Mussolini’s imperial dreams; he prioritized the enhancement of the 	extit{Africa Orientale Italiana} (Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia) established upon the conquest of Ethiopia in 1936. He intended to provide Abyssinia with great state support, to the detriment of the Libyan research. This attitude reflected the Italian colonial mentality of that time, which considered the possession of a colonial empire a matter of national prestige, rather than an attempt to enhance the colonies. It is noteworthy that between 1935 and 1939 the policy of gaining national prestige resulted in spending 48 billion Lire (which was twice the normal state balance) to conquer Ethiopia, participate in the Civil Spanish War and prepare Italy for the Second World War.\textsuperscript{76} Mussolini considered Abyssinia as ‘the pearl of the regime’;\textsuperscript{77} therefore from 1937 the government appointed AGIP to undertake wide-ranging petroleum research in Ethiopia, despite the lack of infrastructure and the vastness of the territory where they were

\textsuperscript{72} ADED, b.60, f.A, Letter from Balbo to Desio, 19 August 1937.
\textsuperscript{73} Giacinto Mascia, "La nascita e lo sviluppo dell’Azienda Generale Italiana Petroli (Agip) negli anni fra le due guerre (1926-1940)" (Cagliari, 2013). 318.
\textsuperscript{74} Archivio Storico ENI, Roma, Fondo AGIP, b.359, “Promemoria sulle ricerche petroliere in Libia”, Letter from Desio to AGIP, 22 June 1938, pp.1-2. Henceforth, ASENl.
\textsuperscript{75} ADED, b.60, f.A, Letter from Balbo to Puppini.
\textsuperscript{76} Rochat. 259, 261.
undertaking the research.\textsuperscript{78} This attitude did not eventually produce any acceptable result, but the regime’s priorities had partially undermined the project elaborated by Desio and caused an irreparable delay in finding oil in Libya.

Due to these priorities, Desio and AGIP could only count on a marginal budget for their research. AGIP asked the Ministry of Finance to withdraw 1 million Lire from the budget allocated to undertake petroleum research in Italy and in March 1938, the drilling works in Libya finally started.\textsuperscript{79} However, in April the Ministry of Italian Africa informed AGIP that the British had found some evidence of petroleum in Marsa Matruh, near the Egyptian side of Marmarica region. The Ministry based its statement on an article published in the Egyptian newspaper \textit{El Ahram}.\textsuperscript{80} Thus, Desio suggested extending the exploration to the whole colony as he considered oil could be found even on the Italian side, since the entire area of Marmarica had an identical geological profile in both the Egyptian and Italian parts. Later in November, the AGIP drilling works revealed some traces of hydrocarbons.\textsuperscript{81}

The Italians were not the only ones involved in the search for oil in North Africa: as revealed by a document found in AGIP’s historical archive, in Libya there were at least six American oil companies and Tripoli’s Chamber of Commerce held their corporate information. The Italians gathered information relating to the trustworthiness, assets and potential of these firms.\textsuperscript{82} The existence of this kind of information suggests an attempt to establish a hypothetical collaboration between the Americans and Italy in the search for oil.

\textsuperscript{78} Mascia. 324.
\textsuperscript{79} ASENl, b.359, Fondo AGIP, “Promemoria sulle ricerche eseguite dall’AGIP in Libia e su quelle programmate”, 8 November 1939, p.1.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, Letter from the Ministry of the Italian Africa to AGIP, 12 April 1938.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, “Promemoria sulle ricerche petrolifere in Libia”, Letter from Desio to Puppini, 22 June 1938, Allegato 1, pp.3-4.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, The American Oil Companies were: Oasis Oil Co. of Libya, Continental oil Co., Amerada Petroleum Company, Libyan American Oil Co., Mobile Oil of Canada Ltd. and Nelson Bunker Hunt.
According to Augusto Villa, the Americans tried to establish such a proposal in 1936 by offering their equipment and logistical support to the *Azienda Italiana Petroli Albania* (Albanian Petroleum Italian Company), a subsidiary company of AGIP, to undertake oil surveys in Libya. However, the offer was rejected because it was considered a matter of national pride.³³ Later, in 1992, the former Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti confirmed this ‘nationalist’ attitude, revealing how Renzo Piga, an AGIP executive, promoted contracting drilling activities “to specialized foreign firms”. Piga was “reprimanded for nauseating distrust in the nation’s mechanical industry.”³⁴

The strong interest in Libyan oil research showed by foreign companies demonstrated that North Africa merited deeper mining surveys, rather than focusing the main state efforts on Ethiopia. In 1940 Desio affirmed that the presence of hydrocarbons in Libya could be possible; but only further research could prove it. Desio strongly believed the presence of oil had an economic and political importance for Italy and remarked that the existence of hydrocarbons can be easily determined due to the simplicity of the geological stratigraphy of these territories.³⁵ The outbreak of the Second World War suspended all Italian research in Libya. Later, in the 1950s, various foreign oil companies, especially American ones, based their explorations on Desio’s studies, which allowed them to localize the oil deposits and undertake exploitation. In 1955, North American, British, French and Germans oil companies took part in the scramble to obtain the best mining concessions issued by the independent

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³⁵ ASEN1, Fondo AGIP, b.360, “Programma di esplorazione geo-petrolifera della Libia”, 29 February 1940.
government of Libya. Ironically, Italy, which had essentially opened the way for it thanks to Desio and the AGIP’s studies, was absent from this ‘race’. 86

Mining Missions in Ethiopia and Albania

Desio in Western Ethiopia

Mussolini aimed to build a fascist empire through the participation of all the Italian people, who had to create a ‘new Italy overseas’. The empire had to be an ‘empire of people’ and was based on a demographic colonization and on exploiting the natural resources in those regions where human settlement was not feasible. 87 In Mussolini’s imperial project, science was to ‘offer’ its contribution to the foundation and development of the empire. An example was the establishment of the Study Centre for Eastern Africa as a branch of the Accademia d’Italia, whose duties were to study the various regions of the empire according to the needs of the Ministry of the Colonies. 88

Among the scientific studies it demanded in Ethiopia, fascism fostered those related to the exploitation of mining resources strategic to the support of the national policy of autarky (self-sufficiency), although the Italians had little knowledge of the Abyssinian subsoil. 89 At that time, geo-mining research focused mainly on gold and platinum, due to the previous studies and findings of the explorer Alberto Prasso in 1905, in Western Ethiopia.

86 Desio, Sulle vie della sete, dei ghiacci e dell’oro. 206, 207.
Italy could also rely on the mining concessions given to Prasso by Ras Menelik II in 1909, which granted him exploitation of the deposits for fifty years. In this perspective, the regime promoted the establishment of some ad hoc state mining agencies, such as PRASSO and the Società Anonima Per le Imprese Etiopiche (SAPIE) with its subsidiary company the Società Mineraria Italo-Tedesca (SMIT), which was appointed to undertake geo-mining studies over the regions of Wallega and Beni Sciangul. However, these firms had a chronic shortage of competent technicians, including geologists and mining engineers, whom the new colonial apparatus tended to recruit from those already operating in Libya, such as Ardito Desio.

In September 1937, SAPIE recruited Desio as a senior geological consultant to carry out various mining prospecting operations. Desio did not have detailed knowledge of how to undertake gold and platinum prospecting, but the company sent him to Jubdo (in the Oromia region of Ethiopia), where a deposit of dunite (the rock containing platinum) had been discovered, to investigate the presence of other deposits and also conduct a search for coal. According to the agreement between SAPIE and Desio, he negotiated his role as Capo dei Servizi Geologico e Minerari (Head of the Geological and Mining Departments) as involving three missions during the winters of 1937, 1938 and 1939 respectively. The

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92 Maiocchi. 136.
95 Ibid. The third mission did not take place because of the outbreak of the Second World War and on 27 June 1940, the SAPIE cancelled its contract with Desio.
geologist would earn Lire 30,200 (approximately between €29,600 and €26,300) annually. At that time this represented a huge amount of money compared with the average annual wages earned by a general worker or a civil servant, which were respectively between Lire 3,600 and 4,800 and approximately Lire 9,600. This gives an idea of how much money the government, through its parastatal companies, allocated for scientific consultancy work in mining research in Ethiopia.

Desio’s Ethiopian experience also provides evidence of Italy’s weak control of the inland territories of its ‘empire’, in that security concerns for the explorations, due to continuous rebel attacks, applied along the explorative routes. This insecurity represented a serious obstacle to the progress of the expeditions and the explorers could only proceed if escorted by armed guards. Desio reported that he adopted a military strategy to protect his caravan, relying on the defensive tactics he learned during his training as an officer at military school. Despite his ‘military competence’, the SAPIE was aware of these difficulties and it recruited armed escorts in loco.

Platinum research in Albania

In April 1939 Italy occupied Albania. Behind this new Italian territorial conquest lay various political reasons: firstly, Mussolini aimed to recoup a prestigious role for fascist Italy in Europe, since the German conquest of Czechoslovakia had weakened Italy’s image in

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96 Archivio del Ministero dell’Economia e Finanza, Roma, Dipartimento Regioneria dello Stato, Ispettorato Generale di Finanza, Ufficio XV, Letter from the President of SAPIE to Desio, 29 October 1937.
97 Desio, Sulle vie della sete, dei ghiacci e dell’oro. 228.
98 Fadda. 77.
Europe, especially with the French and British; thus, the occupation could favour Italian control over the Adriatic Sea and, above all, counteract German supremacy over the Balkan region. Also, the conquest of Albania allowed Italy to exploit its mining sector, whose products were extremely important in supporting Italy’s autarkic policy. Mussolini was aware that Albanian raw materials could be essential in the event of war; therefore the regime focused on mineral exploitation during the military occupation. As in Ethiopia, Italy tried to support this policy by establishing various ad hoc companies, especially in the mining and industrial research fields, such as the Società Anonima Italo-Albanese (SAMIA), Azienda Minerali Metalici Italiani (AMMI) and the Ferro-Albania company (Ferralba).

In the summer of 1939, Desio was appointed to undertake geological prospecting to determine the presence of platinum deposits in Albania. Thus, in August 1940 he toured northern Albania by car, in regions where a previous survey had identified a few dunite deposits. Desio carried out some preliminary prospecting, which showed favourable conditions for proceeding to the extraction of platinum. As Desio stated in his autobiography, he reported the results of his studies to Francesco Jacomoni, the Italian governor headquartered in Tirana, who seemed to be interested in facilitating the platinum research, despite the logistical difficulties resulting from the military operations still in progress. Thus, at the beginning of September, after arranging a research team in Milan, Desio and his collaborators returned to Albania to carry out some geological prospecting in

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102 Desio, Sulle vie della sete, dei ghiacci e dell’oro. 241.
the Puka region, where they found some evidence of dunite. The research continued until October, when Desio returned to Milan to attend to his academic duties at the university. Although the mining evidence gave positive indications for continuing investigation of the dunite deposits, the scientific programme ceased because of the war, since Mussolini had launched a military campaign against Greece on 28 October.104

Desio and fascism: a relationship of mutual convenience between science and policy

Desio’s biographical reconstruction, from the early 1920s to 1940, has showed which was his relationship with fascism. Desio was a fascist from the very beginning; as he stated, he joined the Fasci di Combattimento in the aftermath of the First World War, because he was embittered about the political situation of post-war Italy. He “proudly rejected those who repudiated the sense of the Motherland, ridiculing those who had fought to make it greater.”105 At that time Desio could be essentially considered a nationalist, who found in the rise of fascism the concrete fulfilment of the expectations of the veterans, such as worship of the Homeland based on comradeship, and the establishment of a new social order that reaffirmed the supremacy of the nation.106

However, he also affirmed that he could not continue to be an activist due to his scientific expeditions, which kept him away from Italy for long periods, so much so that he remained outside the Fascist Party until 1931,107 when the regime issued a special law that forced all academic professors to swear their loyalty to fascism, otherwise they would be

104 Ibid, 246.
105 Desio, Sulle vie della sete, dei ghiacci e dell’oro. 367.
107 Desio. 367.
dismissed. However, it is hard to believe in his ‘temporal disinterest’ towards the regime or accept that his involvement with it was somewhat aloof. He did probably not participate in political meetings, but he actively operated in different institutions which fascism had engulfed, or *fascistizzate*, such as the RSGI, where Desio was very well known, as the analysis of the various expeditions have previously demonstrated. These relationships favoured his presence in the most important explorations undertaken in the Italian colonies at that time, where he could rely on a strong relationship with the military administration of Libya. An evidence of this rapport is the letter sent from General Rodolfo Graziani, Vice Governor of Cyrenaica, to invite Desio to the colony to carry out geological studies “at the expense of the government whenever he likes.”

The ‘predominance’ of Desio in the North Africa explorations is particularly evident in Fezzan’s expedition of 1932, as Desio was simultaneously involved in two missions planned by the RSGI and by General Badoglio, the military governor of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. This fact produced complaints by the scholar Giuseppe Stefanini, a member, like Desio, of the RSGI mission, who considered Desio’s participation in both missions as a de-escalation of the RSGI’s. However, Desio downrated the importance of the governmental mission, defining it as an excursion rather than a proper exploration, due to its brevity (it would take just one month). For this reason, it could not affect the scientific program elaborated by Stefanini, Desio himself, and their colleagues Toniolo and Vinassa de Regny. Furthermore, he claimed that Badoglio could authorize the publication of the data collected

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108 ADED, b.70bis-B, Letter from Graziani to Desio, 10 March 1932.
in the excursion to enrich the final volume dedicated to the Fezzan missions undertaken by the RSGI.\textsuperscript{110}

Particular attention must be paid to the years Desio spent in Libya under the governorship of Balbo, where he regularly returned each summer to carry out his research. His friendship with the governor undoubtedly facilitated his work via significant logistic assistance, such as the use of a plane to accomplish the missions in the desert; thanks to Balbo, Desio could also travel by airplane from Italy to the colony each time he needed to be there. The governor then appointed him curator of the Museum of Tripoli and entrusted to Desio the coordination of the entire oil research programme, with the support of the AGIP. While in Libya, Desio took ‘a temporary break’ to participate in the research for platinum in Ethiopia. Once again, he was simultaneously in different explorative contexts. He had reached a prominent role in the ‘scientific side’ of the fascist exploration, to the extent that Balbo complained about his ‘absences’ from the Libyan context.\textsuperscript{111}

However, during the Ethiopian experience, Desio faced some difficulties with the SAPIE, which engendered some complaints from the company. He wanted to be present in this explorative context and accepted the SAPIE’s offer, but his academic duties made his commitment discontinuous despite the contract signed with the company. In 1937, to find a solution, the SAPIE proposed, in agreement with Desio, his transfer from the Ministry of National Education to the Ministry of Italian Africa to make him more independent and ensure a stable collaboration with the company, but the request was rejected.\textsuperscript{112} Desio indeed, as were other academic personnel, was employed by the National Education Ministry, whose

\begin{footnotes}
\item[110] ASGI, b.87, f.2, “Missione Fezzan Stefanini-Castiglioni-Desio”, Letters from Desio to Vacchelli, 30 July and 28 August 1932.
\item[111] Desio, \textit{Sulle vie della sete, dei ghiacci e dell’oro}, 239.
\item[112] Letter from Marescalchi to Desio, 8 December 1937, as reported in Fadda. 76.
\end{footnotes}
Minister authorized their participation in overseas explorative missions. Arguably, due to requests from many professors, since 1935 the Ministry had limited these participations to the academic vacations to avoid alterations in the regular teaching programs. In effect, the SAPIE noticed that Desio’s several commitments could not satisfy the company’s expectations in terms of producing concrete research results. This disgruntlement reached its acme in September 1939, when Desio stated his unavailability to take part in a new explorative mission planned by the SAPIE. Consequently, the company decided to arrange “severance pay once he has produced an exhaustive account of the [progress] of the research” and asked him to indicate other technicians (geologists or mining engineers), who could conduct the mining surveys to obviate his absences. These aspects show how Desio’s activity in Ethiopia was partially subordinated to the company’s work schedule, while in Libya he benefited from a high degree of autonomy in regard to the development of the scientific research, because of his friendship with Balbo. Desio was a ‘benchmark’ in the fascist scientific-explorative environment. He was considered an important person because of his expertise and his powerful political friendships, as demonstrated by two further examples.

On 6 September 1939, Remo Piga, the administrative executive of AGIP asked Desio to recommend an engineer to Balbo in order to exempt him from military service as he could be destined in Libya for working; while, on 8 December Piga asked Desio to provide AGIP with names of new geologists to employ in Libya, Italian Eastern Africa and Italy. Desio held almost a ‘monopoly’ over the Italian geological sector; he was certainly one of the most

113 ASGI, b.87, f.10, “Viaggi di professori all’Estero”, Letter from the Minister of the National Education to the Deans of the Italian Universities, 24 February 1935.
114 AMEF, Letter from Desio to Marescalchi, 27 September 1939.
115 AMEF, Telegram from Desio to the SAPIE’s Executive Council, 9 October 1939 and letter from SAPIE to Desio, 3 November 1939.
116 ADED, b.60B, Letters from Piga to Desio, 26 September and 8 December 1939.
important authorities in this environment. However, it is difficult to accept he was ‘the only one’ who could deal with matters such as supporting the AGIP to find new qualified personnel. All these considerations lead to defining his relationship with fascism as ‘mutual’ because he benefitted from the regime, receiving several scientific appointments, while it exploited his expertise for colonial purposes.

The war interrupted all Desio’s explorative activities and by 1942 he lived between Milan and Val Brembana (near Bergamo), where he sheltered with his family after the allies bombarded Milan. In the same year he founded the National Association of Italian Geologists (ANGI) and established the first academic programme in Geology, which graduated students in Geological Sciences. This proposal reflected his desire to make geology an independent discipline in the sciences, and it confirmed his fundamental influence in that field. Once fascism collapsed and Italy signed the armistice with the Allied Forces, the new government issued a special decree to purge those civil servants, state executives and academic professors, who had ‘unworthily’ served the state by their acceptance and support of the fascist regime; obtained promotions strictly connected with political credit; participated in the foundation of the Fasci di Combattimento in 1919; or taken part in the March on Rome in 1922. Desio was involved in this legal process undertaken by both the University of Milan and the Istituto Lombardo Accademia di Scienze e Lettere. In July 1945, Desio and other academic personnel received a special form, on which they had to list and explain all activities they had undertaken that could potentially be linked with fascism. In December the special committee for the purging of the Istituto issued its verdict: Desio was sentenced for

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having been a *squadrista* and an ante-March fascist, in addition to his participation in fascist policy. He was suspended from the *Istituto* until 22 June 1946, when the Italian government issued a general amnesty to rehabilitate a number of Italians who had been compromised by fascism. Due to this new law, Desio returned to the University of Milan in March 1947 and in May 1949 he was officially readmitted to the *Istituto Lombardo*.\(^{119}\)

His career continued as an academic professor and scientist and, on 31 July 1954, after assembling an Italian climbing team and elaborating an expeditionary plan, he led the first expedition to conquer K2 in the Himalayan region. However, academia was his main interest, as demonstrated by the several scientific books and essays he published contributing to the progress of geological studies. Even today his works form the basis of modern knowledge of geology. In 1963 he was also among the promoters of the law that established the *Ordine Nazionale dei Geologi Italiani* (the Italian Professional Order for Geologists), becoming its first president. On 12 December 2001, Ardito Desio died at the age of 104.

\(^{119}\) Ibid, 149, 156, 157(n).
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