

Isaia Sales, Simona Melorio, *Storia dell'Italia corrotta*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2019, pp. 320.

This book's courageous title announces the perspective taken by its authors: not an account of a series of incidents in which corruption rises to the surface, but the contextualization of these events in a

theory that sees corruption as a systematic, recurring feature of the history of Italy. The authors pose the question: "Why did what happened keep on happening?"

It keeps on happening because corruption becomes a habit, a sort of unwritten "institutional praxis", exercised casually first of all by those with political, bureaucratic and entrepreneurial privileges. It is therefore ingrained in public action, and presents itself, quite apart from state rules, as one of the "best" options by which to establish alliances among parties and win power. But it is also the royal road to obtaining public procurement contracts or enjoying excellent relations with the public administration, for example. In general, such behaviour does not raise concern about the negative consequences that may spring from adopting crooked practices. The complicity between the corrupter and the corrupted – a clearly mafia-style feature – means that we coexist with a number of "shady deals" that go unpunished as a whole, rarely triggering anything beyond light sanctions. In short, corruption is not the result of degenerations and deviations in the course of Italian history, but is, rather, an integral part of it (as the authors clearly show) and has accompanied Italy since the country's unification, albeit with varying intensity.

In this perspective, the book makes quick work of the cliché that southerners are naturally more inclined than others to corrupt and be corrupted, of the claim that corruption survives only in backward economies, of the justification that honesty is an obstacle to the efficient management of activities in modern society. Sales and Melorio demonstrate that these are based on spurious motives, in the service of the "ideology of corruption". The problem, however, is more complex: the predominance of illegal behaviour is the outcome of a clear historical process in which a polymorphous conception of the state developed, one still able to condition the country's identity today. Here we come to a crucial point: on the one hand, the state must guarantee everything, "from the cradle to the grave", a notion established in Italy especially with Fascism after the onset of the Great Depression; on the other

hand, there is the desire for autonomy, leading to a pronounced indifference towards the state, with the development of alternative systems, as is plainly shown by organized crime and tax evasion. These processes unfolded in harmony with Italy's development during the 1900s, which made it one of the world's great success stories. What we have, therefore, is a weak state, burdened with endless obligations yet unloved; a state which, despite undergoing significant changes, remains distant in the public's perception. There is a persistent lack of awareness that the state is above all a community: this is the key concept that emerges clearly from the pages of this book, both as a denunciation and as an answer to the destructive power of corruption, rightly highlighting the importance of the civic role of history.

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