

How many books and notebooks could Gramsci keep in his cell in Turi prison?

Nerio Naldi

Università di Roma La Sapienza, nerio.naldi@uniroma1.it

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Abstract

This article presents evidence on how many books and notebooks Antonio Gramsci was allowed to keep in his cell – two issues of obvious importance to any research on Gramsci's biography and writings. The number of books will be considered first. Information collected in this area will then lead the analysis of the number of notebooks he could keep in the cell. Important information will emerge from documents produced during the 1930s by detainees, prison officers or other authorities, but also from a testimony by Gustavo Trombetti which remained virtually unknown for seventy years and by a fresh reading of testimonies by other detainees. In the case of the notebooks, information gathered by the editors of the *Quaderni del carcere* will also play an important role. What we present is an abridged version of *Nuove fonti sul numero di libri e quaderni che Gramsci poteva tenere in cella*, but we also put forward new arguments regarding the number of notebooks on which Gramsci seems to have worked during each single month of his detention in Turi, the occasions when his work may have been interrupted by prison authorities and a decision possibly taken by Mussolini in autumn 1932 that could have allowed Gramsci to continue writing his notebooks while the same concession was withdrawn to other political detainees.

Keywords

Antonio Gramsci, Prison, Biography, Books, Notebooks, *Prison Notebooks*

Quanti libri e quaderni poteva tenere Gramsci nella sua cella nel carcere di Turi?

Abstract

Questo articolo presenta dati relativi al numero di libri e quaderni che Antonio Gramsci era autorizzato a tenere nella sua cella – due aspetti di evidente importanza per qualsiasi ricerca sulla biografia e gli scritti di Gramsci. Si prenderà in esame innanzitutto il numero dei libri. Le informazioni raccolte in questo ambito condurranno poi all'analisi del numero di quaderni che poteva tenere in cella. Informazioni importanti emergeranno dai documenti prodotti negli anni Trenta da detenuti, agenti penitenziari o altre autorità, ma anche da una testimonianza di Gustavo Trombetti rimasta praticamente sconosciuta per settant'anni e da una rilettura delle testimonianze di altri detenuti. Nel caso dei quaderni, anche le informazioni raccolte dai curatori dei *Quaderni del carcere* avranno un ruolo importante. Quella che presentiamo è una versione abbreviata di *Nuove fonti sul numero di libri e quaderni che Gramsci poteva tenere in cella*, ma proponiamo anche nuove argomentazioni riguardo al numero di quaderni su cui Gramsci sembra aver lavorato durante ogni singolo mese della sua detenzione a Turi, alle occasioni in cui il suo lavoro potrebbe essere stato interrotto dalle autorità carcerarie e a una decisione forse presa da Mussolini nell'autunno del 1932 che avrebbe potuto consentire a Gramsci di continuare a scrivere sui suoi quaderni mentre la stessa concessione veniva revocata ad altri detenuti politici.

Keywords

Antonio Gramsci, Carcere, Biografia, Libri, Quaderni, *Quaderni del carcere*

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1. Books in the cell

Antonio Gramsci was imprisoned in Turi from 19 July 1928 to 19 November 1933. In those years the main source of prison regulations (*Regolamento carcerario*) provided that inmates could read books from the prison libraries and books received from outside approved and endorsed by prison officials, but it did not set precise limits on the number of volumes that could be kept in the cell.¹

An analysis aimed at ascertaining how many books Gramsci was allowed to keep in his cell may distinguish the years he spent in Turi into sub-periods.

1.1. Summer 1928 to Autumn 1930

A letter written to Tatiana Schucht on 3 November 1928 is the earliest source relevant to identify the limitations on the number of books Gramsci could keep in the cell during the first two years he spent in Turi, when the prison directors had been Gerlando Parmegiani and Giuseppe Galtieri:²

From Rome I received a box of books [...] I have not yet been able to get them, because I have others to read and more than a certain number I cannot have in my cell.³

Few weeks later, in early January 1929, shortly after her first visit to Turi, Tatiana wrote:

¹ These provisions were contained in Articles 269 and 400 of the *Regolamento* in force from 1891 to 1931 and in Article 140 of the *Regolamento* in force since 1931 («Gazzetta Ufficiale», n. 138, 15 June 1891, p. 1 and «Gazzetta Ufficiale», n. 147, 27 June 1931, *Supplemento ordinario*, pp. 31-88; <https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:regio.decreto:1891-02-01;260> and <https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:regio.decreto:1931-06-18;787>).

² Between Parmegiani's death (16 March 1929) and Galtieri's arrival (31 May 1929), the functions of director of the prison were carried out by the prison accountant, Andrea Amaducci.

³ *LC*, p. 304. All translations are mine.

[Anything Gramsci] may have is put in the prison warehouse where all the prisoner's stuff is kept. Linen, books, personal effects. In the cell, the detainee can only have one change of linen and a limited number of books.⁴

The meaning of the phrases *a certain number* and *a limited number* were not otherwise explained and other clues are not available. However, lacking evidence to the contrary, it can be assumed that the rules applied by prison directors Parmegiani and Galtieri were the same as those applied by director Vito Azzariti during the first months he spent in Turi (he arrived on 25 November 1930). In this case, as we shall presently see, some pieces of information are available.

1.2. Autumn 1930 to summer 1932

Certainly referring to a period very close to Azzariti's arrival is a testimony by Giovanni Lay, who was detained in Turi from September 1930 to July 1931.⁵ The testimony suggests that the number of books Gramsci was allowed to keep in his cell was relatively large:

Gramsci was alone, in a small cell measuring three by two and a half metres. There was a small bed, a small writing table and a stool. The floor was full of books, but there were also books on the bed and on the table when he was writing.⁶

As we shall see, other sources confirm that in the months that Lay spent in Turi the prison directors allowed to keep books in the cells with a certain latitude. But to provide support to this hypothesis we must start by illustrating an episode which marked a discontinuity in that praxis and caused the introduction of significant restrictions. On 23 May 1931, the director of Turi prison informed the DGIPP that he had just discovered that Sandro Pertini (from December 1930 to November 1931, the future president of the Italian Republic was detained in Turi), probably bribing a guard, had managed to smuggle a letter addressed to France into Turi post office.⁷ Following that dis-

⁴ Report to PcdI's *Centro estero* (GSL, p. 1422).

⁵ ACS, MGG, Lai G. (for the special abbreviations used in this text please refer to the list at the end of this article).

⁶ G. Lay, *Io, comunista. Dal carcere con Gramsci all'impegno antifascista*, ed. by G. Lay and L. Lay, Cagliari, Tema, 2006, p. 38. Large parts of Lay's testimony, but not the sentence just quoted, were published in G. Lay, *Colloqui con Gramsci nel carcere di Turi*, «Rinascita», XXII, 1965, n. 18, pp. 21-22.

⁷ Unless otherwise stated, information on the episode is taken from documents kept in ACS,

covery, the director introduced extraordinary surveillance, but kept the detainees in the dark about what had brought the new measures about. Correspondence between the director himself and the DG-IPP tell us that the most important measures were a ban on receiving from families «foreign books and magazines, especially French»,⁸ the arrival of a police officer: «Inspector General P.S. Comm. Ottavio Scalone», who was to conduct «confidential investigations»,⁹ more general restrictions on the books sent to detainees, which could only be received «directly from the bookshops»¹⁰ and, as we shall see, the transfer of several political detainees to other prisons.

Having located the time when certain restrictions were introduced, we can approach documents which show that also the possibility of keeping books in the cells was limited, but not suspended, and which illuminate the state of affairs in the preceding months.

Let us start with a petition that Bruno Tosin (he arrived in Turi on 14 December 1930 and was moved to Ancona on 5 July 1931) addressed to Mussolini on 22 June 1931, when he evidently did not know that in a few days he would have been transferred to another prison. Tosin declared that he had previously obtained permission by Turi prison director to keep «notebooks, pencils and a certain quantity of books» in his cell, but that «following recent dispositions, almost all his books and notebooks have been withdrawn, so as to make it impossible for him to continue regular study».¹¹ The *recent dispositions* were certainly those that had followed the discovery of Pertini's letter, and it is significant that prison officers withdrew only part of the books and notebooks Tosin had been allowed to keep in his cell (*almost all*). What the director of Turi prison wrote on To-

MGG, Pertini A.

⁸ Director of Turi prison to DGIPP, 23 May 1931.

⁹ Ciphred telegram from the DGIPP to director of Turi prison, 10 June 1931. On 11 September, informing Sraffa of what Carlo Gramsci had told her about his last conversation with his brother, Tatiana wrote: «Serious things have happened there recently that have led to Nino [Antonio Gramsci] being placed under special surveillance, with the corresponding preliminary search etc.» (T. Schucht to P. Sraffa, 11 September 1931, FG, AAG, Carte P. Sraffa).

¹⁰ A. Gramsci to T. Schucht, 15 June 1931 (*LC*, p. 593).

¹¹ ACS, MGG, Tosin B. (see also B. Tosin, *Con Gramsci*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1976, p. 106; M. Paulesu Quercioli, *Gramsci vivo nelle testimonianze dei suoi contemporanei*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1977, p. 230; B. Tosin, *Rapporto di Bruno Tosin alla direzione del PCI sulla detenzione di Gramsci a Turi di Bari*, in *Antonio Gramsci. I giorni del carcere. Un film come storia*, ed. by C. Mangini and L. Del Fra, Milano, Edizioni Ottaviano, 1979, pp. 151-52).

sin's petition confirms the hypothesis that in Turi, until May 1931, detainees were allowed to keep in the cell a number of books and notebooks commensurate with the needs of their study and certainly larger than a few units:

To his desire to keep with him notebooks, pencils and books necessary to continue his studies, this Direction has always tried to adhere as far as possible. However, Tosin, who was constantly receiving books and journals, wanted to keep a very large number of them with him. And since this made searches difficult and could therefore cause inconvenience, this Direction considered it appropriate to limit the number of books and magazines that the above-mentioned detainee could keep with him.¹²

The latter communication also suggests that concessions previously granted to Tosin did not follow a strict rule uniformly applied to all prisoners and that, similarly, the subsequent restrictions may also have been differentiated – this is consistent with a testimony by Ercole Piacentini, who spent more than six years in Turi prison (from 1926 until November 1932):¹³

Towards the end of my stay in Turi, because of these imprudences and useless gestures [attempts to get letters out and buy newspapers through the guards] we were reduced to the point that the prison director had forbidden the circulation of books and magazines among the inmates. Gramsci nevertheless managed to wrest from the director permission to give them not only to him but also to me and [Giuseppe] Ceresa. This was useful to him when at a certain point a kind of inspector from the Ministry arrived in the prison and Gramsci lived in fear that the inspector would go and check his books and papers. But even those at the Oвра were so ignorant that they never asked themselves: does he write, but what does he write? This inspector, however, ordered that no more than three books could be kept in the cell. This would have prevented Gramsci from proceeding with his studies. Fortunately, however, the guards applied the order strictly. So we all three went down to the warehouse and while Ceresa and I entertained the guard, Gramsci looked for the books he was interested in and put three on Ceresa's shelf and three on mine. Thus we were able to take away nine books that he was interested in. Afterwards, Gramsci went down alone so as not to arouse

¹² Director of Turi Prison to DGIPP, 16 July 1931 (ACS, MGG, Tosin B). As, in the meanwhile, Tosin had been transferred to the prison in Ancona, the director of that prison was also asked to comment on his request. He wrote: «all politicians perhaps have too many [books]» (director of Ancona prison to DGIPP, 14 August 1931, ACS, MGG, Tosin B).

¹³ ACS, CPC, Piacentini E. See also C. Bermani, *Gramsci raccontato*, Roma, Edizioni Associate, 1987, p. 164.

suspicion and kept putting the books that interested him on our shelves. So the next day we would go and get them for him.¹⁴

The dating of the episodes referred to in this testimony is not obvious, but prohibition of the «circulation of books and magazines among prisoners», which Gramsci, at least in part, managed to avoid, may have been one of the measures decided immediately after the discovery of Pertini's letter. Consistently with what we have inferred from Tosin's petition, the prohibition mentioned by Piacentini, rather than as a total suspension of the possibility of reading in the cell, may be understood as a limitation of book arrivals and of access to prison warehouse and as a prohibition for prisoners to exchange books with each other.¹⁵ The reference to the «inspector from the Ministry» who arrived in Turi «at a certain point» and «ordered that no more than three books could be kept in the cell» may indicate the arrival of inspector Ottavio Scalone, which occurred about three weeks after the introduction of the earliest restrictive measures – and if Scalone had brought to three the number of books that political detainees could keep in the cell, it can be assumed that before his arrival (i.e., not only before the 23 May discovery of Pertini's letter, but also after

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 177-78. See also Lay, *Colloqui con Gramsci nel carcere di Turi*, cit., p. 22; M. Garuglieri, *Ricordo di Gramsci*, «Società», II, 1946, pp. 699-700. Francioni, being unaware of the May-June 1931 incident, interpreted Piacentini's testimony as referring to episodes which had taken place in 1932 (G. Francioni, *Proposte per una nuova edizione dei «Quaderni del carcere»*, «IG Informazioni. Trimestrale della Fondazione Istituto Gramsci di Roma», IV, 1992, pp. 147-59; G. Francioni, *Il bauletto inglese. Appunti per una storia dei «Quaderni» di Gramsci*, «Studi storici», XXX, 1992, p. 724). But there is no evidence of two episodes occurring in 1932 within a short distance of each other such as those mentioned by Piacentini. Aurelio Fontana, who was in Turi from 14 November 1931 to October 1934 (ACS, MGG and CPC, Fontana A.), reported a search by «three OVRA inspectors» that took place «in the spring of 1932» and isolation measures introduced in the «autumn of 1932» (A. Fontana, *Cinque aneddoti della vita carceraria di Antonio Gramsci*, «Rinascita», IX, 1952, n. 3, pp. 170-71), but it may be argued that he was referring to the searches of July 1932 referred to below in this Section and in Section 1.3. and to isolation measures decided between August and October 1933 (see N. Naldi, *Nuove fonti sul numero di libri e quaderni che Gramsci poteva tenere in cella*, «Gramsciana», VIII-IX, 2023, pp. 13-53: 15-16, 21-23).

¹⁵ In November 1933, replying to an application submitted by Gustavo Trombetti, the DG-IPP reiterated that the exchange of «books, magazines and newspapers with other political prisoners [...] was expressly forbidden by circular No. 367 of 3 October 1932» (DGIPP to director of Turi prison, 30 November 1933, ACS, MGG, Trombetti G.). It may therefore be assumed that before October 1932 such exchanges were generally allowed. A testimony by Bruno Tosin confirms that in Turi at least up to spring 1931 exchange of books between inmates was permitted: «[Gramsci] abounds in advice and suggestions for my reading and studies and also lends me journals and books, of which he is, however, very jealous and from which he always reluctantly detaches himself, even if only for short days» (Tosin, *Con Gramsci*, cit., p. 101).

that day), that number was significantly greater. On the other hand, as Piacentini had arrived at Turi prison in 1926 and remained there until 19 November 1932, the phrase «towards the end of my stay in Turi» can match the description of events that took place in mid-1931. This interpretation is also consistent with Gramsci's letters following the one already mentioned of 15 June 1931 – i.e. with the hypothesis that, at least in his case, the May-June 1931 restrictions were neither drastic nor long lasting. In those letters Gramsci told Tatiana of his readings and asked to be sent Italian and foreign books and journals. On 29 June he wrote about British journals. On 18 August, having received the new *Regolamento carcerario*, he wrote that he was preparing to request «one or more political newspapers». He presented his request at the beginning of October and after a couple of weeks he received «Corriere della Sera». On 19 October he also asked Tatiana to buy a book, read it and then send it to him¹⁶ – in all likelihood the general restrictions on receiving books only from bookshops had already been lifted.¹⁷

Finally, the hypothesis that the restrictions introduced in May-June 1931 were short-lived is supported by a January 1952 testimony by Gustavo Trombetti. Trombetti had arrived in Turi in May 1932,¹⁸ but it is reasonable to assume that his 1952 testimony described the generality of the years Gramsci had spent in Turi up to the inspections of summer 1932. That testimony was used by Giuseppe Carbone in his article on the books Gramsci had in prison, but Carbone did not explain precisely how he had acquired the information he was re-

¹⁶ LC, p. 667.

¹⁷ Having identified the events that took place in Turi in May-June 1931 we may reconsider the testimony where Ezio Riboldi (detained in Turi from autumn 1930 to the beginning of July 1931) stated that in May 1931 Gramsci received a British journal (probably the «Labour Monthly» or the «Manchester Guardian Weekly») with some information about the Sixth Congress of the PcdI jotted down in invisible ink (E. Riboldi, *Vicende socialiste. Trent'anni di storia italiana nei ricordi di un deputato massimalista*, Milano, Edizioni Azione Comune, 1964, pp. 182-83). That such a message had reached Gramsci before the discovery of Pertini's letter would be consistent with the concerns reported by Piacentini («Gramsci lived in fear that the inspector would go and check his books and papers»), but we may doubt Gramsci would have provided Riboldi with such an information. We may rather assume that what Riboldi described was not a message written in invisible ink but part of an article printed in the journal. Otherwise, we should assume either that Gramsci was so lucky that prison and police officers did not notice the message or that he had made it disappear before their searched his belongings.

¹⁸ Trombetti had been arrested on 14 July 1931 and sentenced to ten years imprisonment on 8 April 1932. He arrived in Turi on 14 May 1932 and from March to mid-November 1933 he was placed in Gramsci's cell. He was released on 14 July 1934 (ACS, MGG, Trombetti G.).

porting.¹⁹ Now we know that on 5 January 1952 Carbone had written Trombetti asking him a number of questions – one of them was the following: «How many books at most was [Gramsci] allowed to have with him in his cell?»²⁰ – and that three weeks later Trombetti replied:

Until 1933, the number [of books that could be kept in the cell] was practically unlimited, then we had a visit from three officials from the ministry (or the O.V.R.A.) who subjected us to meticulous searches, then they segregated us all, and among the oppressive measures taken on this occasion was the prohibition to keep in the cell, for each prisoner, no more than four books, excluding dictionaries, grammar books, etc. So even Gramsci kept only four books with him in addition to dictionaries.²¹

Chronological reference «until 1933» could have meant *until the end of 1932*, but it was inaccurate: the «visit from three officials» recalled by Trombetti, as we shall see in the next Section, had taken place in July 1932. But the most interesting fact is that the number of books that a prisoner could keep in his cell before that visit was described as «practically unlimited». This confirms our interpretation of testimonies and documents examined so far: for several years, perhaps until July 1932, political prisoners in Turi, and perhaps in all Italian prisons, were allowed to keep books in their cells with a certain latitude. In summer 1931 in Turi there was an interlude in which more restrictive rules were applied, but those restrictions, as we have seen, can be assumed to have been soon relaxed and, not unlikely, Trombetti knew little or nothing of the 1931 episode. The sentence «until 1933 [*recte*: July 1932] the number [of books that could be kept in the cell] was practically unlimited» can therefore be accepted. In other testimonies, Trombetti – who arrived in Turi in May 1932 – did not distinguish between an early phase in which the number of books that could be kept in the cell was «practically unlimited» and a later phase in which a limit of

¹⁹ See also G. Carbone, *I libri del carcere di Antonio Gramsci*, «Movimento operaio», IV, 1952, n. 4, pp. 640-89: 648 and Francioni, *Proposte per una nuova edizione dei «Quaderni del carcere»*, cit., pp. 150 and 152. For the history of this testimony see Naldi, *Nuove fonti sul numero di libri e quaderni che Gramsci poteva tenere in cella*, cit., pp. 16, 25-27.

²⁰ G. Carbone to G. Trombetti, 5 January 1952 (FB, Fondo Gustavo Trombetti; carbon copy in FG, AAG, fascicolo Platone).

²¹ G. Trombetti to G. Carbone, 28 January 1952 (FG, AAG, fascicolo Platone; carbon copy in FB, Fondo Gustavo Trombetti). It is worth noting that, while Carbone's question was focused on Gramsci, Trombetti's answer considered the generality of political prisoners.

four books was imposed,²² but the sources we have examined so far and additional information that will be presently considered confirm that on this aspect Trombetti's most precise testimony is that contained in his January 1952 letter to Carbone.

1.3. *The inspections of July 1932*

The succession of events recalled by Trombetti in 1952 and the importance of the July 1932 inspections can be better understood by examining some other sources.

First of all, we may recall that studies carried out by Fulvia Sannia documented how from 1931, from Basel, the communist militant Adamo Zanelli (pseudonym *Jean*) attempted to organize a clandestine correspondence between communists detained in various Italian prisons and PcdI's *Centro estero*.²³ In March 1932 some of those communications were discovered by Italian police and more careful control of the prisoners' correspondence followed. In July a series of searches were carried out in almost every Italian prison which counted a substantial number of communist detainees.²⁴ Inmates in Turi prison do seem to have been identified by police authorities as active in Zanelli's network,²⁵ but available documents suggest that they were nevertheless subjected to careful controls, searches and restrictive measures.

For a general appreciation of those inspections and measures, it is interesting to report what Enrico Tulli (a communist detained in Pallanza prison) wrote on 23 July 1932 in a petition addressed to Mussolini:

²² G. Trombetti, *In cella con la matricola 4760 (Detenuto politico Antonio Gramsci)*, «Rinascita», III, 1946, n. 9, p. 233; G. Trombetti, *In carcere con Gramsci*, «IG Informazioni. Trimestrale della Fondazione Istituto Gramsci di Roma», IV, 1992, p. 80; Paulesu Quercioli, *Gramsci vivo nelle testimonianze dei suoi contemporanei*, cit., p. 238.

²³ F. Sannia, *I detenuti comunisti nelle carceri fasciste e il partito: una corrispondenza clandestina (1930-1935)*, «Passato e Presente», XII, 1994, pp. 146-47.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 151.

²⁵ If some had been, or had attempted to be, perhaps it had happened only in 1931. Tosin recalled having sent two messages to *Centro Estero*, first at the suggestion of other communist prisoners and then of Gramsci himself, but both messages remained unanswered (Tosin, *Con Gramsci*, cit., pp. 100-1; Paulesu Quercioli, *Gramsci vivo nelle testimonianze dei suoi contemporanei*, cit., p. 229; Tosin, *Rapporto di Bruno Tosin alla direzione del PCI sulla detenzione di Gramsci a Turi di Bari*, cit., pp. 150-51). Fontana, who was moved to Turi in November 1931, recalled how Gramsci refused to receive an address, brought by an inmate from Lecce prison, which, according to the bearer, could have been used to establish a connection with *Centro Estero* (Fontana, *Cinque aneddoti della vita carceraria di Antonio Gramsci*, cit., p. 171).

In January [1932], a ministerial order unexpectedly revoked the authorisation to read political newspapers, a concession that had been conditioned by rules, the observance of which the undersigned never interrupted.

Upon a justified request for reinstatement of the benefit, the ban is lifted, however, subject to further restrictions such as: a) subscription to the newspaper «Il Popolo d'Italia» to the exclusion of all others; b) segregation. [...]

May. Another ministerial order revoking the concession to read the newspaper to political convicts «and to those among the convicts of common law who had the possibility of contact with the former».

July. An inspector from Rome has arrived. In the course of no less than five searches carried out in twenty-four hours on the persons and in the cubicles of political prisoners, this official orders the confiscation of all books, grammar books, vocabularies, notebooks written and intact, and pencil.

No contravention, however venial, is alleged against the undersigned; and let there be no doubt as to the diligence and thoroughness of the examination to which all his things were subjected.

Therefore, neither the books – all of historical or literary or philosophical interest, all authorised, some of them bearing the visa of five different prisons – nor some issues of «Gerarchia» and «Critica Fascista» are returned. Not otherwise is it of pencil and notebooks.

I would like to point out to Your Excellency that *Regolamento* allows the prisoner to keep up to four books with him. Prison directions, having taken into account greatest needs and qualification of individuals, have powers to extend this number. [...] let [the undersigned] have back his pencils and paper and books, at least as many as *Regolamento* allows.²⁶

Tulli's petition offers important information. First of all, it refers to ministerial orders issued between January and May 1932 that had suspend-

²⁶ E. Tulli to B. Mussolini, 23 July 1932 (ACS, MGG, Tulli E.). That new restrictions had been imposed in July 1932 is confirmed by an application dated 18 August 1932 addressed to Mussolini by Ezio Riboldi, from the Civitavecchia prison. Riboldi stated that from December 1928 until July 1932 he had been allowed to have books and magazines, but «now everything has been taken away from me, I am condemned to the most humiliating idleness, except for reading elementary books that in truth serve me less than nothing» (ACS, MGG, Riboldi E.). The director of the Civitavecchia prison did not send the request to the DGIPP until 22 November, when he accompanied it with a letter from which we may also gather that a DGIPP order of 9 July 1932 stated that «political prisoners were not allowed to read anything other than books from the prison library» (the protocol number of that letter – No. 110917 – suggests that it was specifically addressed to the Civitavecchia prison, but from the same letter it also appears that circular 360 and circular 367 – dated 10 September and 3 October 1932 – are indicated with protocol numbers different from those by which they are otherwise known: 119178 and 121861 instead of 360 and 367; this leads to the hypothesis that the establishment in the Civitavecchia prison of a special section for political prisoners had meant that general circulars regarding political prisoners were sent to this prison with a specific declination).

ed or reduced the concession to receive newspapers.²⁷ However, given that Gramsci's correspondence shows that approximately in the same period he had access to «Corriere della Sera»,²⁸ we must presume that, if what Tulli had been told was true, the orders in question had allowed for powers of autonomous decision by prison directors or by higher authorities. Secondly, Tulli's petition confirms that in July 1932 political prisoners had been subjected to searches and restrictions and tells us that, prior to July 1932, he and other political prisoners had been able to keep grammars, dictionaries, a rather large number of books, journals and notebooks (both written and blank) in their cells. Thirdly, according to Tulli, official regulations stated that a prisoner could keep in his cell four books but that prison directors were entitled to increase that number (as we know that no such limit is mentioned either in the *Regolamento carcerario* in force at that time or in the previous one, we can assume that that provision was contained in a supplement unknown to us).²⁹

If we turn to evidence directly originated by Gramsci, we may see that on 9 May 1932 he wrote to Tatiana:

From now on, this rule must be absolutely adhered to: that if I need any books, I will point them out myself. The books sent to me have not been delivered; for each one I would have to make an application to the Ministry, which is absurd as well as tedious.³⁰

A month later, on 6 June, after having asked Tatiana to renew his subscription to «Corriere della Sera» for three months, Gramsci deleted those very sentences.³¹ He gave some explanation on 19 June: «I did not suspend my subscription to “Corriere” on my own initiative: permission to read daily newspapers was suspended, that's all».³²

²⁷ Only one of those orders is known to us: order No. 299 of 5 April 1932, which stipulated that newspapers and magazines had to reach prisoners only by subscription («Rivista di diritto penitenziario», a. III, 1932, p. 427).

²⁸ A. Gramsci to T. Schucht, 5 and 19 October 1931, 14 and 28 December 1931 and 14 March 1932 (*LC*, pp. 659, 667, 700, 706, 752).

²⁹ The number of four books, plus dictionaries and grammars, is also mentioned in a November 1933 petition where Trombetti asked «to be able to keep in his cell, in addition to the four ordinary books, a German-Italian and an Italian-French dictionary and in addition an almanac, a geographical atlas, an Italian grammar and a German grammar. Total 6 plus the four ordinary books = 10 books» (G. Trombetti to DGIPP, 20 November 1933, ACS, MGG, Trombetti G.).

³⁰ *LC*, p. 784.

³¹ *LC*, pp. 798 and 800.

³² *LC*, p. 805. Umberto Terracini, in a message written in invisible ink, informed his wife of

However, those restrictions were not coupled with other drastic limitations. In fact, from Gramsci's letters of 13, 19 and 27 June it is clear that the journals he had been authorised to receive reached him regularly. Moreover, on 13 June he wrote to his brother Carlo asking him to send Tatiana some of the books he had given him on 16 May.³³ Evidently, he did not think that such a request would arouse any suspicion in prison authorities. But by mid-July, the restrictions had become stricter. On 12 July Gramsci wrote to Tatiana:

I have not been able to read any of your letters this week. A registered letter from you has certainly arrived, because it was opened in my presence to see if it contained any valuables, but it has not yet been delivered to me. Dearest, several times I have written to you that you often do not fully realise what my conditions of existence are and that you forget what a prisoner is [...] I therefore think it useful to insist once again, warning you: 1° That in your letters it is good that you do not speak to me about anything other than family matters, in the clearest and most perspicuous form possible. Of course you must think that clarity must be such not only for you, but for anyone else who may read the letter, without knowing the facts to which you refer; clear means precisely that you do not present anything that may appear not to be so. - 2° That you cannot send me anything other than linen. Not that I wish to have linen items. It is a general warning: I can receive nothing from outside, neither foodstuffs, nor tobacco or papers, nor medicines or any other object.³⁴

Most likely in the days leading up to 12 July also the political detainees in Turi prison were subjected to searches, which we can assume were followed by the restrictions indicated by Gramsci and by the seizure of some of Tatiana's letters. Tatiana, in turn, was very quickly capable of sending Sraffa an essentially correct interpretation of what Gramsci had reported:

You may have already heard that there were incidents somewhere that led to extraordinary restrictive measures. Nino also mentions this. I have heard from elsewhere that there will be some who will be referred to Tribunale Speciale because correspondence has been discovered in books and magazines.³⁵

the searches that took place on 2 July 1932 in Castelfranco prison and of a suspension of newspaper reading dating to 1 June 1932 (see U. Terracini, *Sulla svolta. Carteggio clandestino dal carcere 1930-31-32*, Milano, La Pietra, 1975, p. 85).

³³ *LC*, pp. 802-9.

³⁴ *LC*, p. 814.

³⁵ T. Schucht to P. Sraffa, 29 July 1932 (*LTG*, pp. 80-81).

Basically, Gramsci gave her the same explanation when she visited him in January 1933: «Nino said that they suppressed the daily newspaper because communications by means of economic advertisements were discovered, as in wartime, for espionage».³⁶

1.4. Two crucial dates: May-June 1931 and July 1932

To sum up, we can assume that from summer 1928, when he arrived in Turi, until May-June 1931, the number of books Gramsci was allowed to keep in his cell was quite large. Then, in May-June 1931, following the discovery of Pertini's attempt to send a letter clandestinely to France, stricter measures were introduced, but the available evidence suggest that a total prohibition to keep books in the cell was not established. Most likely, a number of milder measures were introduced: the number of books in the cell was reduced, access to books stored in the warehouse was denied, exchange of books among prisoners was prohibited, foreign books and journals were banned. Shortly later, the books in the cell seems to have been limited to the number of three. But we can assume that most of those measures had been relatively short-lived and that Gramsci managed to be partially exempted from the very beginning. After the removal of those measures, the concession to keep books in the cell may have not been restored to the initial degree of latitude, but we may presume that it was set at a number significantly larger than four.

³⁶ T. Schucht to P. Sraffa, 11 February 1933 (*LTG*, p. 239). In the same letter, Tatiana also mentioned restrictions and searches and the sending of her own letters to the DGIPP as caused by a different suspicion: «Croce's book, *Europa*, was not given to him because of a word in my letter mentioning my wish to have a review of this book, they immediately believed that articles by Nino were actually printed in Moscow. Consequently there were searches, which in truth yielded no results, but in the meantime six of my letters were sent to the Ministry» (*LTG*, p. 238). Croce's book was *Storia d'Europa nel secolo decimonono*, which had been sent to Gramsci in the spring of 1932. However, it is unlikely that the real reason for the decision to withhold that volume was the one Tatiana reported to Sraffa. The letter in which Tatiana announced Gramsci that that book had been sent to him and asked him to write a review of it to help her in her own work was dated 12 April and it is unlikely that prison officers, had they harboured the suspicion that Gramsci's writings were to be published in Moscow, would have allowed him to send Tatiana long letters about Croce until early June, and would have given him Tatiana's replies. Much more likely, prison officers focussed on Tatiana's letters and on her request for a review only in July, when inspectors arrived and the correspondence conserved by political prisoners was checked. Then some of Tatiana's previous letters were seized (but they were returned after an examination by the Ministry of the Interior Interior – Ministry of the Interior to DGIPP, 26 July 1932, ACS, MGG, Gramsci A.). The earlier impound of Croce's book could have been an effect of the already mentioned general measures introduced in spring, immediately after the first discovery of the *Jean's* correspondence.

The four-book rule was in force when Gramsci was transferred to Civitavecchia, but it seems to have been applied only since July 1932. Yet, that limit appears to have been formally introduced with an earlier provision which, most probably, left a margin of discretion to prison directors. Having said this, we may add that the actual meaning of any limit on the number of books that a detainee was allowed to keep in the cell depended on how often one could go to the prison warehouse to return some books and ask for others. According to Trombetti's testimony, «between the requests to change books and the summons to the warehouse, sometimes weeks would pass by».³⁷ This makes it understandable the importance Piacentini attached to the subterfuge put in place in favour of Gramsci to allow him to multiply by three the number of books he could have at his disposal and the importance Trombetti attached to the possibility of hiding books in the cell.³⁸

2. Notebooks in the cell

The letters Gramsci wrote on 14 and 28 January 1929 tell us that in that month he was given permission to write in his cell.³⁹ At least two requests to this effect had been submitted by his mother and by his brother Carlo and on 2 January 1929 the DGIPP entrusted the decision to the director of Turi prison, with an invitation to define the question «within the limits of the regulations, interpreted with a sense of humanity».⁴⁰ The requests had taken into account Article 325 of the *Regolamento carcerario* in force at the time, which stipulated that in order to be allowed to write in the cell, a prisoner had to be in his cell alone (this had already been obtained by Gramsci in August 1928).⁴¹ The

³⁷ Trombetti, *In carcere con Gramsci*, cit., p. 80. On 12 August 1929 Gramsci wrote to his mother: «I haven't shipped my books yet because it's not up to me to do or not to do these things: I have permission to ship, but there's a delay in doing so because the guard in the warehouse is very busy» (*LC*, pp. 399-400). On 6 February 1934, in a petition addressed to the Minister of Justice, Ignio Borin wrote from Civitavecchia prison: «When you want to obtain books deposited in the warehouse (permitted books) in order to get them, it is necessary to submit at least five or six requests or ask for a hearing. Sometimes the requests go unanswered» (ACS, MGG, Borin I.).

³⁸ Paulesu Quercioli, *Gramsci vivo nelle testimonianze dei suoi contemporanei*, cit., p. 238. See also Bermani, *Gramsci raccontato*, cit., pp. 177-78.

³⁹ *LC*, pp. 321 and 326.

⁴⁰ Draft letter from DGIPP to director of Turi prison, 2 January 1929 (ACS, MGG, Gramsci A.). See also Giuseppina Marcias to B. Mussolini, 25 August 1928 (ACS, CPC, Gramsci A.); Carlo Gramsci to Minister of Justice, 17 December 1928 (ACS, MGG, Gramsci A.); Carlo to T. Schucht, 11 November 1928, AAG, Carte Tatiana Schucht).

⁴¹ A. Gramsci to T. Schucht, 27 August 1928 (*LC*, p. 285).

same article also stipulated that the paper available to the detainee had to «have a special stamp» and that the sheets «be numbered» and «never used for correspondence». Two months later, urged by the DGIPP to summarise the measures he had taken, the director of Turi prison wrote: «He was alone in a good room, I provided him with a small table and a stool and allowed him at his own expense to stock up on ink, pens, pencils and notebooks duly numbered and checked by me».⁴²

In order to approach the issue of the number of notebooks that Gramsci was allowed to keep in his cell during his imprisonment in Turi, we may refer to the reconstruction already developed with regard to the number of books and supplement it with information derived from petitions and other documents produced during the 1930s, from testimonies dating to the decades following the end of WWII and from content and structure of Gramsci's notebooks.

2.1. *Petitions and other documents*

Let us start with prisoners' petitions and other documents dating to the 1930s. First of all, as we have already seen in Section 1.2., on 22 June 1931 Tosin addressed Mussolini stating that he had been previously allowed to keep «notebooks, pencils and a certain quantity of books» in his cell, but that «following recent dispositions, almost all his books and notebooks were withdrawn».⁴³ The *recent dispositions* were certainly the measures enacted in Turi prison in May-June 1931 after the discovery of the letter Pertini had tried to smuggle to France, and it is significant that on that occasion only part of Tosin's books and notebooks (*almost all*) had been withdrawn – which implies that prior to those restrictions the number of both books and notebooks he was allowed to keep in his cell had been relatively large. Equally significant is the fact that Tosin also asked Mussolini to intervene so that

he could be isolated and allowed to have what needed to write: – pen, inkwell, ink [and] to keep in his cell with him a number of notebooks and books necessary for his studies, as well as grammars and dictionaries of foreign languages.⁴⁴

⁴² Director of Turi Prison to DGIPP, 8 March 1929 (ACS, MGG, Gramsci A.). The decision was not changed when the new *Regolamento carcerario* entered into force, although the latter did not contain any provisions concerning the possibility of writing in the cell.

⁴³ ACS, MGG, Tosin B.

⁴⁴ ACS, MGG, Tosin B.

Asking to be placed in solitary confinement, he most likely hoped to regain what he had been granted some months earlier. We may assume that at that time he had been given permission to write in the cell even if he was not alone; and that when that concession was withdrawn, he had been left some notebooks, but not pen and ink or pencil, and solitary confinement had been presented to him as an unavoidable necessity in order to be allowed to write in the cell.⁴⁵ Commenting on Tosin's request, the director of Turi prison, as we have already seen, stated that he had always been very open to his requests.⁴⁶ This suggests that, prior to the entry into force of the *Regolamento carcerario* of June 1931 (which provided nothing in relation to the possibility of writing in the cell), the DGIPP had issued an order that reaffirmed some provisions of the old regulations, but gave significant powers of discretion to prison directors.

These deductions are confirmed by Tulli's petition of 23 July 1932.⁴⁷ A year after the new *Regolamento carcerario* had come into force, Tulli in Pallanza prison was keeping in his cell more than four books and no less than two notebooks and he believed such a situation (apparently for both books and notebooks) complied with rules unknown to us.

2.2. *Circolare riservata No. 360 and a clue to an intervention by Mussolini*

As we have seen, specific restrictions were certainly introduced in July 1932, when, after the discovery of clandestine correspondence directed to PcdI's *Centro estero*, inspections and searches were carried out in almost all prisons with substantial groups of communist detainees. On that occasion, it can be assumed that restrictive measures were imposed by the inspectors themselves and that those measures varied from one prison to another. We have already considered the episode having regard to the number of books inmates could keep in their cells. Turning to notebooks, we may assume that in some cases, as shown by

⁴⁵ That in Turi prison before the 23 May 1931 discovery of Pertini's letter even prisoners who were not alone were allowed to write in their cells finds support in a testimony by Athos Lisa, who probably arrived there in September 1930 and remained until 9 October 1931: «having asked permission to use the pen and inkpot, I was sent to another dormitory where Riboldi, Lai and Pertini were already; or else they were sent there later» (A. Lisa, *Memorie. In carcere con Gramsci*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1973, p. 74; see also Tosin, *Con Gramsci*, cit., 1976, p. 99 and C. Bermani, *Gramsci in carcere a Turi nel 1932. Conversazione con Aldo Magnani*, «L'impegno», XI, 1991, p. 7).

⁴⁶ See Section 1.2. above.

⁴⁷ See Section 1.3. above.

Tulli's 23 July 1932 petition, inspectors introduced a total prohibitions to write in the cell.⁴⁸ In other cases the number of notebooks that could be kept in the cells seems to have been reduced, while the concession to write does not seem to have been revoked – this may be what happened to Gramsci, as can be inferred from individual paragraphs in his notebooks.⁴⁹ But on 10 September 1932 a DGIPP order excluded the possibility of writing in the cells for all political prisoners in any prison. The order was delivered by *Circolare riservata No. 360*, which expressly forbade political prisoners from keeping writing instruments in their cells. References to that *Circolare* can be seen in communications kept in the CPC and MGG files in the names of political detainees Giorgio Amendola, Riccardo Bauer, Vittorio Foa, Ernesto Rossi, Nello Tarquandi and Mario Vinciguerra. The analysis of those files offers interesting insights, even though the text of *Circolare No. 360* is not extant.

First of all, we may note that the chronological succession of events put forward above is confirmed by correspondence concerning the requests for authorisation to write in the cells that Giorgio Amendola, Riccardo Bauer and Ernesto Rossi submitted to the Ministry of Justice and that Bauer's father also submitted to Alessandro Chiavolini, then secretary to the Prime Minister (i. e., secretary to Mussolini himself, in one of his various capacities). Despite the stiffening that can be assumed to have followed the inspections made at the beginning of July, Amendola's and Rossi's requests were met with surprising ease. They had sent their petitions (from Rome and Piacenza prisons, respectively) early in August and favourable answers came by the end of the same month. But on 5 November the director of Piacenza prison wrote to DGIPP to ascertain whether after *Circolare riservata No. 360* of 10 September the concession made to Rossi had to be revoked. The answer to this letter is not extant, but from a March 1934 document it can be assumed that the concession was in fact revoked.⁵⁰ Particularly interesting is the way the same *Circolare No. 360* is mentioned in Riccardo Bauer's MGG file. In August 1931 Bauer had been given permission to write in his cell, but that permission had been subsequently revoked. Indeed, at the end

⁴⁸ See Section 1.3. above.

⁴⁹ G. Cospito, *Verso l'edizione critica e integrale dei «Quaderni del carcere»*, «Studi storici», LII, 2011, n. 4, pp. 896-904: 898, 901-4.

⁵⁰ Director of Piacenza Prison to DGIPP, 5 November 1932 and Director of Rome Prison to DGIPP, 12 March 1934 (ACS, MGG, Rossi E.).

of July 1932, from Alessandria prison, Bauer seems to have asked once more to be allowed to write in his cell. On 8 August DGIPP replied negatively.⁵¹ In November 1932 and June 1933 his father approached Alessandro Chiavolini repeating the same request. Once again, the outcome was disappointing, but a communication from DGIPP to Chiavolini dating to June 1933 allows us to gather new information:

It is not possible [...] to permit Bauer to have means of writing at his disposal, this being forbidden to all political prisoners. Only for some of them there were very special concessions from H. E. the Head of Government.⁵²

The prohibition referred to certainly followed from *Circolare riservata No. 360*, but we know of no document showing concessions granted by Mussolini to political prisoners to allow them writing in their cells. Yet, as we are to give credence to what the DGIPP had communicated to Chiavolini, we must assume that the director of Turi prison, after receiving *Circolare riservata No. 360*, approached the DGIPP in relation to Gramsci exactly in the same terms as the director of Piacenza prisons had done for Rossi. But in Gramsci's case the answer must have been positive and – we may presume – decided by Mussolini.⁵³ This, as we shall see in the next Section, may have occurred between September and November 1932.

The existence of «very special concessions from H. E. the Head of Government» regarding the possibility of writing in prison is confirmed by the extant notebooks in which Edoardo D'Onofrio and Bruno Tosin (five by D'Onofrio and four by Tosin) wrote when they were in the Civitavecchia prison, that is, between the summer of 1932 and the summer of 1935. These notebooks were specifically produced to be given to the inmates and their covers were set to contain the prisoner's name, surname, identification number, and the dates when the notebook was

⁵¹ See correspondence dating to July-October 1932 which involved Riccardo Bauer, the director of Alessandria prison and DGIPP (ACS, MGG, Bauer R.).

⁵² DGIPP to Alessandro Chiavolini, s.d. [June 1933] (ACS, MGG, Bauer R.; see also, in the same file, DGIPP to Ministry of the Interior, 12 January 1934 and Chief of Police to Pietro Tacchi Venturi, 21 May 1934).

⁵³ This presumption supports the hypothesis that it was during this period that Mussolini read some of Gramsci's notebooks (see N. Naldi, *I quaderni di Gramsci furono visti da Mussolini?*, «International Gramsci Journal», vol. 5, 2023, n. 1, pp. 64-75). On the other hand, it is well known that virtually no decision of some import concerning Gramsci was taken without Mussolini's approval.

delivered and withdrawn.⁵⁴ D'Onofrio's notebooks were delivered to him on 15 and 22 January 1933, 10 November 1933 and 4 July 1934 (the date of 22 January 1933 appears on two notebooks). Tosin's notebooks were delivered to him on 6 April 1933, 23 January 1934 and 19 February 1935 (the date of 23 January 1934 appears on two notebooks). These dates and the lack of information about when the notebooks were withdrawn suggest that they were all kept by the prisoners until their release.⁵⁵ In any case, it is interesting to note that on 22 July 1933 Tosin's parents asked the DGIPP that their son be «allowed to keep with him a certain number of notebooks (8-10), a pen and inkwell and, possibly, also a small table» – it can be assumed that this request was inspired by Tosin himself and that it was not too far from what he believed could be granted to him or from what had been granted to him in Turi.⁵⁶

2.3. Information from the Prison Notebooks: how many notebooks in the cell?

The editors of the facsimile edition of Gramsci's notebooks and Cospito's essay *Verso l'edizione critica e integrale dei «Quaderni del carcere»*⁵⁷ provide information on the months when each paragraph of each notebook was written that allows us to distinguish four main periods in Gramsci's writing activity in Turi prison and associate them to different sets of notebooks:

- February 1929-May 1930 (notebooks 1, 2, 9, A, B and C);
- May 1930-May 1932 (notebooks 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, B and D);
- May 1932-March 1933 (notebooks 2, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16);⁵⁸
- March-November 1933 (notebooks 2, 9, 10, 13, 15 and 17).

⁵⁴ The following inscriptions (in Italian) are printed on their covers: «NOTEBOOK | of the detainee | of born | *Delivered on* | *Collected on* | (contains 50 pages) | IT IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN TO REMOVE PAGES | ROMA | TIPO-LITOGRAFIA DELLE MANTELLATE | YEAR 1932 – X». Such measures may have been conceived for illiterate prisoners (articles 136 and 137 of the 1931 *Regolamento carcerario* required them to attend primary education classes) and in some ways extended to political detainees.

⁵⁵ A 1976 memoir by Tosin mentions his writing in Civitavecchia prison and seems to hint at a daily distribution and collection of the notebooks (Tosin, *Con Gramsci*, cit., pp. 116-19).

⁵⁶ ACS, MGG, Tosin B.

⁵⁷ *QC* [anast.], vols. 2-18, *Datazione*; Cospito, *Verso l'edizione critica e integrale dei «Quaderni del carcere»*, cit., pp. 896-904.

⁵⁸ Notebooks 1, 7 and 8, from which paragraphs were copied or reworked probably at this time into notebooks 10, 11, 13 and 16, should be added to the notebooks already mentioned.

The same sources also suggest that in every month within each of the first three periods (i.e., until March 1933) Gramsci worked on about three to six notebooks. This, combined with information on the number of notebooks that detainees were allowed to keep in their cells and on the frequency with which they could go to prison warehouses,⁵⁹ leads us to suppose that until March 1933 Gramsci was allowed to keep in his cell, approximately, three or four notebooks.⁶⁰ On the other hand, after March 1933 he seems to have worked on no more than two or three notebooks in each month. If we extrapolate as we have done for the periods up to March 1933, we may suppose that during the last nine months of his detention in Turi Gramsci was allowed to keep in the cell approximately one or two notebooks. This is confirmed by Trombetti's testimonies. According to Trombetti, when, after the dramatic health crisis which hit Gramsci on 7 March 1933, he was placed in Gramsci's own cell to assist him, considering that Gramsci was sharing the cell with another inmate and that the latter was not allowed to have pen and paper with him, the prison director decided to take away Gramsci's authorisation as well, but the latter managed to obtain permission to have ink, pen and a notebook for one or two hours a day.⁶¹

2.4. Information from the Prison Notebooks: forced interruptions in Gramsci's work?

Recalling the succession of events that we have examined in Sections 1.1.-1.4. and 2.1.-2.3., we may also consider the possibility that the episodes of May-June 1931 and July 1932 influenced the development of Gramsci's work.

⁵⁹ See Sections 1.4., 2.1. and 2.2. above.

⁶⁰ It has been argued that the limit of four books recalled by Trombetti in various testimonies, would have been imposed on Gramsci as the maximum overall number of books and notebooks that he could keep in his cell (*QT* pp. 840-41; *QC* [anast.], vol. 1, p. 45). However, as we have seen, various documents confirm that a maximum limit of four books was active only from July 1932 and that – in any case – dictionaries and grammars were added to those four books. The very information concerning dictionaries and grammars deeply weakens the supposition that *four* was to include also notebooks – even more so because the latter did not depend on the concession to read in the cell, but on a concession to write in the cell.

⁶¹ G. Trombetti, *Piantone di Gramsci nel carcere di Turi*, «Rinascita», XXII, 1965, n. 18, p. 32 and Trombetti, *In carcere con Gramsci*, cit., p. 74; see also Francioni, *Proposte per una nuova edizione dei «Quaderni del carcere»*, cit., pp. 158-59; *QC* [anast.], vol. 1, pp. 48-50 and Cospito, *Verso l'edizione critica e integrale dei «Quaderni del carcere»*, cit., p. 892.

The May-June 1931 episode corresponds to a peculiarity of Notebook 7. According to the editors of Gramsci's notebooks, Gramsci started it approximately in May 1930 translating an anthology of texts by Marx,⁶² but that translation was «abandoned in trunk» early in the summer of 1931.⁶³

We know that other translations were also abandoned by Gramsci in June 1929, in autumn 1929 and in June 1930. In those periods no special restriction or prohibition seems to have been issued by police authorities, but Gramsci had been suffering for hot weather, migranies and lack of sleep (in June 1929 and in June 1930, when some of the translations in Notebook C were interrupted) and for the deep irritation he felt when Tatiana informed him of a meeting with Adelmo Niccolaj, his lawyer in the 1928 trial (in autumn 1929, when a translation in Notebook 9 was interrupted).⁶⁴ In the case of Marx's anthology, however, Cospito has argued that the interruption was due to the fact that its final part, compared to most of the others Gramsci had already translated from the same book, was more removed from the focus of his interests.⁶⁵ Yet, knowing of the restrictive measures that followed the discovery of the letter that Pertini had attempted to send to France, it is also legitimate to consider the possibility that in the case of Notebook 7 the translation was abandoned because prison authorities, which on that occasion seem to have been particularly suspicious of foreign books and journals, decided to impound Marx's anthology, if not Gramsci's notebooks, pen and ink as well.⁶⁶ This hypothesis is also supported by the following facts: no paragraphs in other notebooks seem to be specifically attributable to the period June-September 1931;⁶⁷ in August Gramsci seems to have resumed work on the very Notebook 7 writing miscellaneous notes just in the line next to the one where the translation was interrupted: «without solution of continuity [...] but with different *ductus*».⁶⁸ It seems there-

⁶² *QT*, p. 885; *QC* [anast.], vol. 10, p. 3 and vol. 8, p. 3; Cospito, *Verso l'edizione critica e integrale dei «Quaderni del carcere»*, cit., pp. 896 and 900.

⁶³ *QC* [anast.], vol. 10, p. 3 (see also *QT*, p. 885).

⁶⁴ An interrupted translation can also be recognized in Notebook B, but we have no clue to identify the moment when that happened. It may also be stressed that Gramsci left unfinished also many of his notes (see *QT*, p. 15).

⁶⁵ *QT*, p. 28.

⁶⁶ See Sections 1.1. and 2.1. above.

⁶⁷ Cospito, *Verso l'edizione critica e integrale dei «Quaderni del carcere»*, cit., pp. 896-900.

⁶⁸ *QT*, p. 885, *QC* [anast.], vol. 10, p. 3.

fore plausible to assume that Gramsci, despite the new restrictions, after a relatively short interval was allowed to resume his writing, perhaps with a reduced number of notebooks or with just a single one. All this may have induced him to spare the use of paper and to make his handwriting more easily readable to prison officers – what was described by the editors with the phrases «without solution of continuity»⁶⁹ and «with different *ductus*».⁷⁰

As we have already argued considering the number of books kept in the cell, also the restrictions on writing introduced in summer 1931 must have been relatively short-lived. This is confirmed by a letter Gramsci wrote to Tatiana on 22 February 1932 answering to her request to prepare a summary of his reflections on the history of Italian intellectuals:

As for the small notes I have written on Italian intellectuals, I don't really know where to start: they are scattered in a series of notebooks, mixed up with various other notes and I should first collect them all together to put them in order. This work weighs heavily on me, because I too often have migraines that do not allow me the necessary concentration: also practically speaking, it is very tiring because of the way and the restrictions in which one has to work. If you can, send me some notebooks, but not like the ones you sent me some time ago, which are awkward and too big: you should choose normal-sized notebooks, like the school ones, and with not too many pages, 40-50 at the most, so that they do not necessarily turn into increasingly awkward miscellaneous notebooks. I would like to have these small notebooks precisely to tidy up these notes, dividing them by subject and thus arranging them; this will help me passing the time and will be useful to me personally to achieve a certain intellectual order.⁷¹

The notes that Gramsci had in mind to collect were spread over a dozen notebooks, but this, despite «the way and the restrictions in which [Gramsci had] to work», did not make reordering impossible. Furthermore, the request to receive notebooks containing relatively few pages each is consistent with the idea that he could keep a relatively large number of notebooks in the cell.⁷² Indeed, shortly afterwards

⁶⁹ This is the only instance where Gramsci abandoned a translation and continued writing «without solution of continuity» (i.e., leaving no empty lines). In other cases he left one or more empty pages.

⁷⁰ The difference in *ductus* amounts to the handwriting being slightly larger.

⁷¹ *LC*, pp. 738-39.

⁷² The words used by Gramsci also imply that the bipartitions or tripartitions he often applied to the pages within his notebooks (see *QT* pp. 840-41) were not necessarily a reaction to

Gramsci started his *quaderni speciali* (notebooks 10, 11, 12, 13 and 16), where he copied and re-elaborated paragraphs already written in notebooks 1, 4, 7, 8 and 9 – a work which entailed the simultaneous presence in his cell of at least two notebooks, or, as argued by Francioni, of even four notebooks.⁷³

Also the second critical episode we have identified – the inspections of July 1932 and their consequences – could correspond to a change in Gramsci's writing style and a subsequent temporary interruption of work on the notebooks, which may have taken place in October 1932.

The change in writing style can be recognized through an observation made by Gerratana as early as 1967. According to Gerratana, the reworking that took place with the compilation of the special notebooks saw the replacement of more explicit expressions with others more attentive to prison surveillance: «the language in these cases became more allusive, and sometimes even convoluted, with the use of verbal expedients». This would materialize in the replacement of terms such as Marxism and historical materialism and the names of Marx and Engels with references to the philosophy of praxis and its founders and could be recognized in the transcription of some paragraphs from Notebook 4 to Notebook 11, probably between July and August 1932 or in the months immediately following.⁷⁴ The more allusive language would therefore follow the inspections and restrictions of early July 1932.

The same inspections may have caused a full interruption of Gramsci's writing in October 1932. Considering the information put forward by Cospito, in fact, in September-November 1932 Gramsci seems to have written only few paragraphs of notebooks 4 and 9 and no paragraph can be explicitly attributed to October.⁷⁵

the impossibility of keeping in his cell a number of notebooks sufficient to cover the variety of topics he was dealing with. More likely, they seem to have been an effect of his desire to avoid leaving unused large parts of notebooks which contained between one hundred and two hundred pages.

⁷³ Francioni, *Il bauletto inglese. Appunti per una storia dei «Quaderni» di Gramsci*, cit., pp. 737-39.

⁷⁴ V. Gerratana, *Punti di riferimento per un'edizione critica dei «Quaderni del carcere»*, «Critica marxista», Quaderno n. 3, 1967, pp. 255-56; V. Gerratana, *Inediti dai «Quaderni del carcere»*, «Rinascita», XXIV, 1967, n. 15, p. 16; Cospito, *Verso l'edizione critica e integrale dei «Quaderni del carcere»*, cit., p. 904.

⁷⁵ Cospito, *Verso l'edizione critica e integrale dei «Quaderni del carcere»*, cit., pp. 898, 901-4 (according to Cospito, between September and November 1932 Gramsci may have written some paragraphs in notebooks 10, 11 and 13, but those paragraphs are only mentioned as potentially written in longer intervals which include those months – none of them is specifically attributed

This may have been an effect of *Circolare riservata* of 10 September 1932, already considered in Section 2.2., which prohibited writing in the cell to all political prisoners. Sometime between mid-September and October the director of Turi prison may have suspended Gramsci's concession and asked DGIPP if that *Circolare* had to be applied also to Gramsci's case – very much like the director of Piacenza prison did on 5 November with regard to Ernesto Rossi. Gramsci may then have benefitted from a decision with which Mussolini exempted him from the prohibition.⁷⁶ In this regard, however, it must also be remembered that at that time Gramsci had been particularly shaken by two facts – first came the news that Tatiana, without waiting for his explicit authorisation, had asked the DGIPP that he was examined by a doctor chosen by his family; later came the news that the awaited amnesty would not allow him to regain freedom in a relatively short time.⁷⁷ Also these events could have caused him to pause or reduce writing on his notebooks.

2.5. Four crucial times: May-June 1931, July and September 1932, March 1933

The present attempt to identify the number of notebooks that Gramsci was allowed to keep in his cell in Turi prison was started trying to understand the broad outline of the concessions with which some detainees, in Turi and in other prisons, were allowed to write in their cells. Subsequently, adding information more directly pertinent to Gramsci's case, including the collation of evidence on the months when the individual paragraphs of his notebooks were written, we have concluded that up to March 1933 the number of notebooks that he was allowed to keep in his cell can be assumed to have been generally close to four.

This result is consistent with some regularities in the way Gramsci used his notebooks – in particular with the fact that new notebooks seems to have been given to him in small batches, that he tended to ask for new notebooks only when he had filled the ones previously

to one of the months between September and November 1932).

⁷⁶ The same may have happened with regard to Civitavecchia prison where a sort of model experiment for political detainees had been set up. We have already mentioned D'Onofrio's and Tosin's notebooks kept at ACS and FG; the cases of Renzo Rendi and Emilio Sereni are mentioned in Naldi, *Nuove fonti sul numero di libri e quaderni che Gramsci poteva tenere in cella*, cit., p. 39, note 72.

⁷⁷ See Gramsci's letters to Tatiana written between 12 September and 5 December 1932.

given to him, that he immediately began writing in at least one of the new notebooks, that he moved from a notebook he had already filled to a new one devoted to the same field of study and that on some occasions he concluded a note writing in a different notebook.⁷⁸

Furthermore, the result is consistent with the observation that, at least since spring 1932, when he began to compile the so-called *quaderni speciali*, Gramsci must have had in his cell a number of notebooks ranging at least from two to four. On the other hand, the same result is not in conflict with the observation that some notes reveal that Gramsci, while writing them, did not have with him another notebook in which he had already dealt with the same subject. Nor does it contrast with the idea that in some cases the partitions he introduced in some notebooks suggest that he could keep in his cell only a limited number of notebooks.⁷⁹ Indeed, we did argue that Gramsci could have kept in his cell a number of notebooks that may have been close to four – we did not argue that he could keep all his notebooks in his cell.

We have also argued that the number of notebooks Gramsci was allowed to keep in his cell underwent significant changes as a result of a series of events. First, we can assume that that number was reduced in May-June 1931 and July 1932. Second, we can assume that other significant changes took place in September-October 1932 and in spring 1933, after Trombetti was moved in Gramsci's cell. If it seems that until May-June 1931 in Turi prison the permission to write in the cell and the availability of notebooks were regulated with a certain latitude, as in the case of books, a tightening probably occurred after 23 May 1931, following the identification of a letter that Pertini had tried to send illegally abroad. On that occasion, Gramsci may have been forced to stop writing in his cell, but perhaps the concession was revoked only to those who shared the cell with others while Gramsci only suffered of minor limitations. However, any restriction on both writing and reading, at least in Gramsci's case, seems to have been followed by a relaxation that substantially restored the conditions prior to June 1931. Further restrictions were certainly decided in July 1932. At first, it can be assumed that the number of notebooks that

⁷⁸ *QT*, pp. 838-39, 842, 844-45, 881; *QC* [anast.], vol. 1, pp. 48-50; Cospito, *Verso l'edizione critica e integrale dei «Quaderni del carcere»*, cit., p. 892.

⁷⁹ *QT*, p. 880, *QC* [anast.], vol. 1, p. 51.

Gramsci was allowed to keep in his cell was only reduced, but *Circolare riservata* No. 360 of 10 September 1932 totally excluded writing in the cell for all political prisoners. Gramsci's case, however, may have been among the exceptions that seems to have been approved by Mussolini himself. For this reason he may have been allowed to continue writing and keeping about four notebooks in his cell. On the other hand, from spring 1933 until the end of his detention in Turi, the prison director, considering the presence in the same cell of another prisoner who was not allowed to write, at first revoked also Gramsci's permission, then allowed the latter to have ink, pen and a notebook in the cell, or two at most, and only for one or two hours a day.

Abbreviations

AAG: Archivio Antonio Gramsci, Fondazione Gramsci, Rome

ACS: Archivio Centrale dello Stato

CPC: Casellario Politico Centrale

DGIPP: Direzione Generale degli Istituti di Prevenzione e di Pena

FG: Fondo Gramsci, Fondazione Gramsci, Rome

MGG: Ministero di Grazia e Giustizia

PcdI: Partito comunista d'Italia