



Pathology/Biology Section - 2013

G96 A Review on Italian Mafia Homicides: “Men of Honor” and Ritual Crimes

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The goal of this presentation is to present typical homicide modalities practiced by organized crime syndicates in Italy. The killing styles operated by prominent criminal organizations vary from one group to the next, and it could be argued that different cultures, dependent upon geographical location, affect criminal behavior. Some forms of homicide are quite particular and their significance is still very often misunderstood.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by influencing the judicial history of Italy through illustrating scenarios relating to Italian Mafia murders and a unique collection of images.

Homicides perpetrated by organized criminal groups are typically very brutal in nature. They often involve “special rituals” charged with symbolic meaning, which may be more or less explicit, depending on the chosen manner of execution and on the victim. Throughout the world, the term “mafia” is associated with organized criminal groups of Italian origin; these hierarchically arranged family groups are controlled by high-ranking members who make the decisions which are then passed down the hierarchy to other members of the family. The Mafia is not a single group or gang but it is made up of many families that have, at times, fought each other in bitter, bloody gang wars. At other times, they have cooperated in the interest of greater profits, sometimes even serving on a “Commission” responsible for making decisions that affect all the families. It could be argued that Italian organized crime is not comparable to any other existing forms of criminal activity. Criminal associations such as the *Camorra*, originating from the region of Campania, *Cosa Nostra* based in Sicily, the *Ndrangheta* of Calabria, and the *Sacra Corona Unita* whose native land is the region of Puglia, are largely responsible for the development of different kinds of organized crime, not only in Italy, but with tentacles reaching outside the country. The culture and traditions of the different regions of origin affect the chosen modes of execution. This study moves through a preliminary narrative of the history and origins of each criminal organization, their main illegal activities, and finally onto some of the typical homicidal modalities, amply documented with a rich and varied collection of photographic material gathered during the investigation of crime scenes and from autopsies.

A specific case of a Calabrian mafia-related homicide is execution perpetrated by a single shotgun shot to the head followed by the deliberate concealment of the victims body, or the use of caustic substances to erase or modify features (facial), thus rendering the cadaver unrecognizable. In the cases presented, cadavers wore gloves to preserve fingerprints to aid in identification. The Apulian Mafia (the *Sacra Corona Unita*) has a similar operating technique; after shooting their victims, the corpse is buried in an abandoned area. This study looks at the case of four decomposed corpses discovered in cars plunged into ravines. In other cases, shooting is followed by charring of the body, making it impossible to recognize the victim without the use of genetic investigation. Radiological investigations (X-rays, MSCT) performed before autopsies are indispensable for the detection of bullets. Multiple cases of *incaprettamento* (homicidal ligature strangulation) are also presented in this study. This particular ritual can be considered the hallmark of the Sicilian Mafia (*Cosa Nostra*). The victims wrists and ankles are pulled together behind his back, and an additional rope is tied around the neck and attached to the bindings in such a way that any attempt to free himself from this unnatural, contorted position will eventually provoke death by self-strangulation. One of the reasons for this homicidal mode is for the ease of transporting the corpse, which is often found inside the trunk of the car used for transportation.

Murder techniques used by the local mafia in the Gargano, a geographical area in the north of Apulia were also described. Here the manner of execution is characterized by the explosion of multiple shots from firearms (shotguns), some of which exploded in the face, serving the double purpose of killing the victim and simultaneously scarring the body, which would later be seen by relatives.

Italian Mafia, Homicide Modalities, Lupara Bianca