

NICCOLÒ SCOVAZZO DIRECTOR OF “LANCASTERIAN SCHOOLS” IN SICILY

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Il contributo esamina il percorso umano e professionale di un educatore ancora oggi poco conosciuto, l'abate Niccolò Scovazzo (Aidone 1783 - Palermo 1837) la cui vita fu interamente dedicata alla diffusione in Sicilia del metodo di mutuo insegnamento, metodologia didattica elaborata in Inghilterra agli inizi dell'Ottocento dal quacchero Joseph Lancaster, di cui fu propulsore ed attivo sostenitore. Autore di diversi *pamphlet* di carattere pedagogico-didattico, come il *Discorso sopra il mutuo insegnamento applicato al disegno lineare, alla lingua italiana, ed al progresso dell'aritmetica* (1835) e di scritti volti a promuovere l'istruzione femminile, come la memoria dal titolo *Della necessità d'istruzione morale ed intellettuale per le donne del popolo, e del modo di provvedervi in Palermo. Memoria diretta alle colte dame* (1836), allo Scovazzo si deve, dopo la nomina a direttore delle Scuole di Mutuo Insegnamento dell'isola da parte del sovrano del Regno delle Due Sicilie, Re Ferdinando I di Borbone, un'ampia, lodevole e “rivoluzionaria” azione di riforma dell'istruzione primaria siciliana, basata su un'ampia diffusione del metodo monitoriale e sulla messa a punto di iniziative volte a garantire l'uniformità dell'insegnamento ed a favorire l'accesso dei più poveri alle scuole di leggere e scrivere.

The work aims at investigating the personal and professional evolution of Abbot Niccolò Scovazzo (Aidone 1783 - Palermo 1837), an educator who is still known very little nowadays and who dedicated his entire life to spreading mutual instruction in Sicily. This didactic method became popular in the United Kingdom at the beginning of the XIXth century and was designed by Quaker Joseph Lancaster, whose theories were actively supported and promoted by Scovazzo. He was the author of several *pamphlets* focusing either on school and education, such as *Discorso sopra il mutuo insegnamento applicato al disegno lineare, alla lingua italiana, ed al progresso dell'aritmetica* (1835), or on the promotion of female education, such as the memoir called *Della necessità d'istruzione morale ed intellettuale per le donne del popolo, e del modo di provvedervi in Palermo. Memoria diretta alle colte dame* (1836). After being elected director of the Schools of Mutual Instruction on the island by the Bourbonic ruler of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, King Ferdinand I, Scovazzo carried out a large and impressive “revolutionary” reform of Sicilian primary education. Such changes were based on the widespread diffusion of the monitorial method, as well as the development of didactic initiatives aimed at guaranteeing an even education and at facilitating the attendance to schools of reading and writing among lower class students.

Parole chiave: Metodo lancasteriano, educazione popolare, Regno delle Due Sicilie, Sicilia, XIX secolo.

Key words: Mutual instruction, *popular education*, *Kingdom of Two Sicily*, *nineteenth century*.

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By means of analyzing documentary sources such as *memoirs* and *correspondence* kept in the State Archive of Palermo, the present work aims at investigating the personal and professional evolution of Abbot Niccolò Scovazzo (Aidone 1783 - Palermo 1837), an educator born in the small Sicilian village. Despite still being known very little nowadays, he dedicated his entire life to spreading in Sicily the *mutual instruction system*¹, a teaching method designed in the United Kingdom at the beginning of the XIXth century by Joseph Lancaster, whose theories were actively supported and promoted by Scovazzo.

As shown by his *memoirs* written around 1835, Scovazzo's relevant pedagogical reflection as well as his tangible educational practice as a school director in the Lancastrian Sicilian institutes – which he carried out without interruption in Palermo between 1819 and 1837 and which is supported by an imposing quantity of documents – both deserve the utmost attention for two reasons.

On the one hand, because, as a whole, they represent an essential source of meditation on Southern Italian popular education, more famous due to researches either based on stereotypes or compromised by an underlying ideology.

On the other hand, these considerations can be generally extended to the working dynamics of literacy in the Mediterranean area as well as of several “hidden” Southern Italian educations, which are still today unknown².

¹ Cfr. M. Caruso (a cura di) (2015), *Classroom Struggle. Organizing Elementary School Teaching in the 19th Century*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang Edition; Id. (2013), *Cheap, suitable, promising: monitorial schooling and the challenge of mass education in early liberal Spain (1808-1823)*, in “Bordón: Revista de Pedagogía”, Madrid, vol. 65, n. 4, pp. 33-45; Id. (2004), *Locating Educational Authority: teaching monitors, educational meanings and the importing of pedagogical models. Spain and the German States in the Nineteenth Century*, in *Educational Policy Borrowing. Historical perspectives* (a cura di D. Phillips & K. Ochs), Oxford, Symposium Books, pp. 59-88; M. Caruso, E. Roldan Vera (2005), *Pluralizing Meanings: The Monitorial System of Education in Latin America in the Early Nineteenth Century* in «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 41, n. 6, dic., pp. 645-654; N. De Gabriel (1987), *Escolarización y sistemas de enseñanza*, in «Historia de la educación», 6, pp. 209-227; R. Rayman (1981), *Joseph Lancaster's Monitorial System of Instruction and American Indian Education, 1815-1838* in «History of Education Quarterly», 21, 4, pp. 395-409.

² On education in Southern Italy before the Unification can be seen: S. Agresta (1992), *L'istruzione nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia (1806-1860)*, Messina, Samperi; Id. (1995), *L'istruzione in Sicilia*, Messina, Samperi; *Istruzione e scolarità nella Sicilia del primo Ottocento. Fonti documentarie* (2004), Messina, Società Messinese di Storia Patria; S. Agresta, C. Sindoni (2012), *Scuole, Maestri e Metodi nella Sicilia borbonica (1817-1860)*, Lecce-Rovato, PensaMultimedia; S. Agresta, C. Sindoni (2016), *Scuole, Maestri e Maestre nelle Calabrie borboniche (1817-1860)*, vol. I, Calabria Ulteriore Prima, Lecce-Rovato, PensaMultimedia; V. Bosna (2001), *Ludovico Vuoli e la diffusione del “metodo normale” nel Regno di Napoli*, Cacucci, Bari; M. Lupo (1999), *Istruzione, economia e società nel Mezzogiorno preunitario: note per una ricerca*, in *Risorse umane e Mezzogiorno. Istruzione, recupero e formazione tra '700 e '800*, a cura di I. Zilli, Napoli, ESI, pp. 1-60; Id. (2002), *La pubblica istruzione nel Mezzogiorno durante l'Ottocento borbonico: elementi per una rivisitazione storiografica (1815-1860)*, in *Le istituzioni scolastiche in Italia dall'età moderna al futuro*, a cura di G. Gili - M. Lupo - I. Zilli, Napoli, ESI, pp. 121-141; Id. (2005), *Tra le provvide cure di Sua Maestà. Stato e scuola nel mezzogiorno tra Settecento e Ottocento*, Bologna, Il Mulino; A. Pagano (2004), *Scuole e Maestri nel Sud. Dal 1816 al 1880*, Pensa MultiMedia, Lecce; T. Russo (1995), *Culture e scuole in Basilicata nell'Ottocento*, Franco Angeli, Milano; R. Sani (2011), *Sub specie educationis. Studi e ricerche su istruzione, istituzioni scolastiche e processi culturali e formative nell'Italia contemporanea*, Macerata, eum, pp. 27-52; C. Sindoni (2018), *Gregorio Aracri e l'istituzione delle scuole normali nella Calabria Ulteriore attraverso I documenti della Cassa Sacra (1787-1792)*, in *Itaca. In viaggio tra Storia, Scuola ed Educazione. Studi in onore di Salvatore Agresta* (a cura di C. Sindoni), Pensa Multimedia, Lecce-Rovato, pp. 319-348; Id. (2013), *Angelo Maria Vita e la funzione dei direttori delle Scuole centrali di metodo di Sicilia (1823-1846)*, Messina, Samperi; A. Tanturri (2013), “L'arcano amore della sapienza”.

This is the case of Niccolò Scovazzo, whose speculations and activities shows us a different angle of the South that, as far as the history of its educational institutions is concerned, is yet to be discovered.

1. School and public education in Southern Italy between the XVIIIth and the XIXth century

Before dwelling on the initiatives promoted by Scovazzo, it seems necessary to offer a brief overview of the educational situation in Southern Italy between the end of the XVIIIth century and the XIXth century.

During this period, the educational discourse was marked by a renovated interest in issues revolving around popular education and the concrete possibility of teaching reading and writing to the poorest classes, which aimed at making society more prosperous and morally organized.

This idea played a central role in several cultural elaborations of Southern intellectuals who, encouraged by the additional contemporary influence of Enlightenment, put a specific emphasis on *instruction* and *popular education* within more general considerations.

For instance, according to Abbot Antonio Genovesi from Naples, author of the *Lezioni di commercio o sia di economia civile* (1765-1767), instruction and popular education represent the ideal way to give new life to virtue and civilisation in the Kingdom of Naples.

On the contrary, as shown in the speculations of Gaetano Filangeri published in the IV volume of his work *La Scienza della legislazione* (1780), the respect towards social order depends on the possibility for “every individual within society” to be part “of education [...], albeit each one according to their own status and purpose”.

Sicily as well was not short of precious meditations on literacy-related issues, among which the ideas of Giovanni Agostino De Cosmi (1726-1810)³ particularly stand out. Passionate supporter of the reformative policy of Viceroy Domenico Caracciolo, De Cosmi claimed that popular schools were an essential premise for promoting and supporting any kind of social reform.

However, despite being met favourably by King Ferdinand III of Sicily, those ideas never turned into effective action because of the economic and social conditions of the two southern kingdoms, – the Kingdom of Naples and the Kingdom of Sicily, both under the Borbonic domination – which were significantly underdeveloped in those fields.

The situation did not improve even at a later period.

In fact, the measures adopted by the French in the Kingdom of Naples between 1806 and 1815 in favour of popular public schools, as well as the isolated actions taken in Sicily under the English protectorate, did not affect public education significantly enough. With the arrival of Italian Restoration (1815), a great part of the children belonging to lower classes were still entirely illiterate and usually worked in fields or

Il sistema scolastico del Mezzogiorno dal Decennio alle soglie dell'Unità nazionale (1806-1861), Milano, Unicopli; G. Trebisacce (2004), *Scuola e mezzogiorno prima e dopo l'Unità*, Jonia, Cosenza.

³ Cfr. C. Sindoni (2011), *Giovanni Agostino De Cosmi e la scuola popolare di Sicilia*, Samperi, Messina.

factories; otherwise, in the case of young girls, they were secluded in safe cloisters and colleges⁴.

2. Niccolò Scovazzo: a school for children of the lower classes

This is the context in which Niccolò Scovazzo elaborated his educational proposal in Sicily and began to show a passionate interest for the *mutual teaching method*.

Scovazzo was born in 1783 in Aidone, a small village in the Sicilian district of Caltanissetta⁵. He was the son of Lorenzo and Lucia Cordova; his mother belonged to a prominent aristocratic family boasting a connection to the ancient Roman lineage of the Colonna family. It must be reminded that Sicilian branch of the Colonna family enumerates one of the first captains of Emperor Frederick II, as well as several barons, dukes, deputies and senators of the Kingdom. Second-born after his brother Gaetano, who fulfilled important ministerial roles, Niccolò was firstly educated at the School of Capuchin Friars in Aidone and later in the College of Friars Minor in Catania, where he studied *Latin*, which he learned by translating several classic works, as well as *English, French, Literature, Biology, Mathematics* and *Theology*.

Furthermore, in Catania, he came in contact with the best Sicilian intelligentsia and Giovanni Agostino De Cosmi, supporter of the *normal teaching method*, with whom he formed a close friendship.

Given his interest towards literacy-related issues and his meeting with De Cosmi, who had been entrusted with administering normal schools in the Kingdom of Sicily in 1810, Scovazzo was induced to move to Naples in 1817. There, he attended the Lancastrian school established by the King on September 29 in Real Albergo dei Poveri, where he could learn the method; afterwards, he was appointed *General director of the Lancastrian method in Sicily* for the schools on the island.

We will here briefly remind that the *mutual teaching method*, also known as *Monitorial* or *Lancastrian method*, was designed by Joseph Lancaster. It was first described in 1803 in a pamphlet called *Improvements in Education as it respects the Industrious Classes of the Community*, which was later fully translated in Italian under the title *Sistema inglese d'Istruzione ossia Raccolta de' miglioramenti e delle invenzioni poste in pratica nelle scuole reali d'Inghilterra di G. Lancaster e Piano di educazione pe' fanciulli poveri secondo I metodi combinati del dottor Bell e del predetto Sig. Lancaster* in Milan in 1816⁶ and published in Naples in 1819⁷.

Having been exposed to the inadequacy of the teaching methods used in classes with a high number of pupils, Lancaster gradually developed a system aimed at fostering the literacy process of that part of the population which, after the development of manufacturing, was increasingly becoming the primary focus and interest of philanthropists. Initially tested in the school of Southwark, Lancaster's method was based

⁴ Cfr. S. Agresta (1992), *L'istruzione nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia (1806-1860)*, cit., pp. 1-59.

⁵ Cfr. F. Minolfi (1841), *Di Niccola Scovazzo ovvero dell'insegnamento popolare. Discorso di Filippo Minolfi*, dalla Stamperia di Francesco Lao, Palermo.

⁶ It was printed by Stamperia Sonzogno e Compagni.

⁷ *Manuale del sistema di Bell e Lancaster o Mutuo e simultaneo insegnamento di leggere, scrivere, conteggiare, e lavorare di ago nelle scuole elementari. Opera tradotta dall'inglese e comentata dal direttore del metodo Ab. Francesco Mastrotti* (1819), Napoli, dalla tipografia di Luigi Nobile.

on the principle of *suitability* and *reciprocity* of already educated students who acted as teachers towards the less cultured ones.

This system allowed a high number of students to have access to instructions and to be educated under the guide of a single teacher, thus saving a “substantial amount of money”; the economic factor is not to be neglected if one considers the meager finances that the greater part of contemporary administrations granted to popular public education.

Students were divided in eight classes to learn *reading* and *writing* and in ten classes to study *arithmetic*; furthermore, the Lancastrian method involved the same number of *needlework* classes for young girls.

This system had a widespread diffusion and the method was initially adopted by the schools of the Duchy of Parma, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, the Papal States, the Duchy of and, as mentioned above, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies⁸.

In spite of the legislation issued in 1819 establishing its adoption “in the most populated cities of the Kingdom”, the *Regolamento per le scuole primarie de' fanciulli di Napoli, e del Regno* of December 21, 1819⁹, the method did not know a large diffusion in the continental part of the territories under the Borbonic domination, especially after the dreadful Revolutions of 1820. The method was in fact seen as a possible cause of a precocious and harmful attitude to control in children and, therefore, it was deemed as dangerous for its potential of spreading revolutionary thoughts.

On the contrary, the mutual teaching method found a more fertile ground in Sicily thanks to the awareness of the *Commissione di Pubblica Istruzione ed Educazione*, an institution which was entrusted by the King with administrating all the schools on the island.

In addition, the method spread thanks to Scovazzo's hard work; upon his return from Naples, he proceeded to test this system in his hometown of Aidone, where he created a class of approximately 350 pupils, including a great number of poor children who spoke the Gallo-Italic dialect, typical of that area. After that, Scovazzo was appointed “General director of the Lancastrian method in Sicily” by King Ferdinand I and, starting

⁸ Cfr. A. Ascenzi, G. Fattori (2006), *L'alfabeto e il catechismo. La diffusione delle scuole di mutuo insegnamento nello Stato Pontificio (1819-1830)*, Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, Pisa-Roma; A. Bianchi (ed.) (2012), *L'istruzione in Italia tra 700 e 800. Da Milano a Napoli: casi regionali e tendenze nazionali*, La Scuola, Brescia; M. Caruso (ed.) (2015), *Classroom Struggle. Organizing Elementary School Teaching in the 19th Century*, cit.; A. Gaudio (2001), *Educazione e scuola nella Toscana dell'Ottocento*, La Scuola, Brescia; M. Piseri (2007), *La legislazione per l'istruzione primaria nella Lombardia tra Sette e Ottocento*, in A. Bianchi (ed.) *L'istruzione in Italia tra Sette e Ottocento. Lombardia, Veneto, Umbria*, La Scuola, Brescia, pp. 83-111; S. Polenghi (ed.) (2012), *La scuola degli Asburgo. Pedagogia e formazione degli insegnanti tra il Danubio e il Po (1773-1918)*, Società Editrice Internazionale, Torino; F. Pruneri, F. Sani (2008), *L'educazione nel mediterraneo nordoccidentale*, Vita & Pensiero, Milano; C. Sindoni (2018), *Leggere e scrivere nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia (1815-1860)*, in “Quaderni di Intercultura”, X, pp. 56-78; Id. (2016), *Il “sistema monitoriale” in Sicilia*, in “Rivista di Storia dell'Educazione”, Anno III, 2, pp. 95-106; Id. (2015); Id. (2015), *Influenze inglesi nella scuola popolare ottocentesca. Alcune note sull'introduzione del metodo di Joseph Lancaster in Sicilia*, in “Quaderni di Intercultura”, anno VII, pp. 101-116; X. Toscani (1994), *La politica lancasteriana nel Regno Lombardo-Veneto*, in L. Pazzaglia (ed.), *Chiesa e prospettive educative in Italia tra Restaurazione e Unificazione*, La Scuola Editrice, Brescia, pp. 317-354; R. Sani (2011), *Sub specie educationis. Studi e ricerche su istruzione, istituzioni scolastiche e processi culturali e formativi nell'Italia contemporanea*, eum, Macerata.

⁹ Cfr. *Collezione delle Leggi, de' Decreti e di altri Atti riguardanti la pubblica istruzione promulgati nella Reame di Napoli dall'anno 1806 in poi*, Stamperia e Cartiere del Fibreno, Napoli, 1861, vol. I (1806-1820), pp. 532-537.

from August 1819, he became director of a mutual teaching school in Palermo, established in the Ponticello oratory and in the outskirts of the city¹⁰.

The school in Ponticello had a great success and was attended by several aspiring teachers who, after receiving theoretical lessons and undergoing a suitable period of training, were nominated directors of Lancastrian schools in the main Sicilian cities. There, an equal number of *mutual teaching schools* for the education of teachers were founded in every district (Caltanissetta, Catania, Messina, Trapani, Siracusa and Girgenti)¹¹.

Further sustained by specific regulations issued by the *Commissione di Pubblica Istruzione ed Educazione* which aimed at establishing new district schools of model, so as to instruct professionals and teachers-to-be in the method, such a “virtuous circle” soon had a positive impact on the diffusion of mutual teaching schools in Sicily.

As a *teacher, instructor and director*, Scovazzo continuously urged institutions of any level to take care of common *people*.

In this regard, in August 1835, he made an interesting speech at Science and Humane Letters Academy which was later published with the title *Discorso sopra il metodo di mutuo insegnamento applicato al disegno lineare delle scienze e belle lettere* (*Speech on the mutual teaching method applied to Linear Drawing, Sciences and Humane Letters*)¹².

In his *Discorso*, Scovazzo endorsed the utmost necessity of “instructing, educating and enlightening the people” since it was from this action that

any common good originated and, without its regulations, all measures aimed at a generalised wealth, as well as the harsh punishments, the gallows and any other constraining method, would be to no avail.

According to him, such goal should be pursued by means of adopting the mutual teaching method, which was considered as an actual “applied morality course”. In fact, attending a mutual teaching school allowed the people to become

enlightened, hardworking, peaceful and mellow, [able to recognize] the rightfulness of the law and to follow it not out of feat, but out of belief.

Further in his *Discorso*, exhibiting a great clarity of mind, Scovazzo identifies the causes preventing Sicilian mutual teaching schools to achieve a greater diffusion and attendance.

Firstly, the biggest issue was the poor economic conditions oppressing families, thus causing a deep reluctance to send the children to school, either due to the impossibility of “offering them appropriate clothes and shoes” and to the preconceived idea that schools “were only aimed at upper classes”.

¹⁰ ASPa, *Ministero e Real Segreteria di Stato presso il Luogotenente - Interno*, 39.

¹¹ ASPa, *Commissione di Pubblica Istruzione ed Educazione, Rapporti, 1° Ripartimento* (1822/25), 32 e *Suppliche*, 184; ASPa, *Commissione di Pubblica Istruzione ed Educazione, Registro di Consulte, 3° Ripartimento* (1817/24), 19 and *1° Ripartimento, Affari Generali Diversi, Palermo* (1820), 144. ASCt, *Intendenza borbonica, Distretto di Caltagirone, Scuole primarie, Precettori, Varie* (1833/53), 664; *Comuni della provincia, Affari diversi, Scuole secondarie* (1833/60), b. 690. ASTp, *Intendenza di Trapani, Pubblica Istruzione, Disposizioni generali* (1839/52), b. 1248.

¹² Palermo, Grafeo, 1835.

Secondly, Scovazzo finds another major obstacle in child labor: as he claims in his *Discorso*, “a poor man’s greatest treasure are his children”, whose work was essential to contribute to the meager family income, even though by a small amount.

In addition, poverty hindered the possibility of a different and better future for the lower classes. As we can read in the *Discorso*:

the need for sustenance will force children to leave school as soon as they will have started learning about basic grammar and declensions; nor there will be a power strong enough to keep them from being reclaimed by such an impelling necessity.

Afterwards, Scovazzo identifies a number of other issues such as the teachers’ insufficient education and salary, the shocking use of corporal punishment and the abstractness of classes.

In order to solve those problems, the author pragmatically suggests the creation of a school that suited the people’s needs better, that was in a hurry and did not waste time, a school that did not focus on “overlong methods” which were only useful in learning a language or a science and, as a consequence, not for the working class.

In other words, Scovazzo puts forward the idea of a school preparing children “to life’s common practices”; hence his idea of adopting reading books translated in the *Sicilian dialect* in Lancastrian schools. In contrast to other Italian realities these texts made classes more approachable and understandable for the children of the lower classes.

3. Mutual teaching method in schools of *Linear Drawing and for young girls*

Always in his *Discorso*, Scovazzo suggests the application of the mutual teaching method to *drawing*, in particular to *linear drawing*, an art which was considered “essential for any social class” and necessary for a great number of working positions, including craftsmen.

Indeed, *linear drawing* was the point of departure in any manufacturing process: starting from some common straight lines, parallel or perpendicular angles, polygons and polyhedrons they could be able to design “everyday objects such as soup bowls, bottles, tables, chairs, coaches and many other artifacts”.

The conclusions drawn by Scovazzo did not derive from abstract reasoning; on the contrary, they are based on the real observations carried out in the *School of Linear Drawing, Sicilian Geography and Metric System* in Catania, operating according to Lancaster’s method and efficiently directed by one of his smartest students, Mario Coltraro, starting from 1820¹³.

Besides the attention and interest shown towards common people, the director also put special attention to the education of young girls.

In fact, he was committed to extending the use of the mutual teaching method to *Collegi di Maria*, religious institutions founded by Cardinal Pietro Marcellino Corradini aimed at educating and instructing young girls¹⁴.

One year before his sudden death by cholera, in a *Memoir* written in 1836 and called *Della necessità d’istruzione morale ed intellettuale per le donne del popolo, e del modo*

¹³ ASCt, *Intendenza borbonica, Distretto di Caltagirone, Scuole primarie* (1824/52), 665.

¹⁴ ASPa, *Commissione di Pubblica Istruzione ed Educazione*, 22.

*di provvedervi in Palermo. Memoria diretta alle colte dame e signore palermitane (On the necessity of morally and intellectually educating women of lower classes and on the ways of arranging for it)*¹⁵, Scovazzo incited Sicilian noblewomen to help the less privileged ones by privately subsidizing schools and institutes, which were often left in a state of degradation if not abandonment, and by always introducing the mutual teaching method whenever possible.

In his *Memoir*, under the inspiration of the successful English and French experiments, Scovazzo stressed the necessity of keeping Sicilian young girls in “a state of uninterrupted activity”, alternating exercises of reading, writing and arithmetic with manual labor such as needlework.

By doing this, he also promoted the creation of extra classes for illiterate adult women. This proposal is highly remarkable if one considers that nineteenth-century Sicily did not experience the habit of female education. In fact, in addition to being considered useless, literacy was seen as potentially dangerous because it could expose women to the so-called “vices” of society, as well as to a stronger moral corruption.

All of the initiatives carried out by Scovazzo in favour of the education and literacy of young girls are worthwhile and creditable; he introduced the mutual teaching method in the six *Collegi di Maria* in Palermo in 1820 ()¹⁶, he managed to successfully introduce it in other Sicilian colleges of such kind (1828)¹⁷ and he encouraged the institution of a *Central Lancastrian school for young girls* in Trapani (1825)¹⁸.

Furthermore, Scovazzo promoted the elaboration of specific textbooks to be used in Lancastrian schools; in 1835, for example, he even edited his own Catechism for children, the *Catechismo di religione per le scuole di mutuo insegnamento* printed in Palermo by Tipografia De Luca.

Conclusions

The English experiment carried out by Joseph Lancaster vastly influenced Sicilian education, even though it is not possible to state that such influence similarly affected the island and its literacy rate in a positive way.

Being the main supporter of the mutual teaching method, Scovazzo was fully aware that the social and economic conditions in Sicily were not equivalent to the ones in the United Kingdom.

As a matter of fact, nineteenth-century Sicily was structured on an archaic agrarian society based on feudalism, where poor families could not afford to educate their children in schools and, even worse, were forced to make them work to earn a salary, however small.

It must be equally remembered that, in spite of its moderate diffusion, the Lancastrian method did not always truly adhere to Lancaster’s principles. In fact, as shown by the sources here investigated, schools completely lacked the right equipment

¹⁵ *Della necessità d’istruzione morale ed intellettuale per le donne del popolo, e del modo di provvedervi in Palermo. Memoria diretta alle colte dame e signore palermitane* (1836), Palermo, Stamperia Spampinato.

¹⁶ ASPa, *Commissione di Pubblica Istruzione ed Educazione*, 22.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

and spaces in order to apply the method correctly.

However, this did not diminish in any way the intense activity performed by Niccolò Scovazzo when promoting Joseph Lancaster's method, whose benefits were to be reaped long after his death.

Scovazzo's work and ideas, including the unrealized project of instituting some nursery schools on the island, will be taken into consideration by numerous teachers of both sexes, even in private schools, by the nineteenth-century Sicilian intelligentsia and by liberals, supporters of the Italian Risorgimento.

Specifically these latter, after the Italian Unification and under the new ruling family of Savoia, were now showing a certain interest towards Niccolò Scovazzo's point of view as well as towards the education of the masses which, put into perspective, was also useful to win their electoral consensus.

It is not by chance that, in the eve of Italian Unification in 1860, the following words written by Scovazzo were quoted by a famous liberal of their time:

Istruite e moralizzate il vostro popolo, se vero fuoco di carità di patria vi scalda il petto¹⁹.

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¹⁹ *Educate and moralise your people, if the true fire of patriotism burns in your hearts.*

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Abbreviations

- ASCt = State Archive of Catania
ASPa = State Archive of Palermo
ASTp = State Archive of Trapani