



Mario A. Iannaccone

THE POWER OF WATER

**History of the Lefèbvre family's
Manifatture del Fibreno
and its impact on culture and industry
in Terra di Lavoro
(1818-1918)**

BOOK 2

This book tells the centuries-old story of the Manifatture del Fibreno. It reconstructs the impact of this factory, which exploited the power of water in an unprecedented way, becoming in a few years a huge industry that transformed the economy of the Liri Valley, its culture and its local society, introducing an industrial and working-class model of society that allowed a development that set this area apart from all the surrounding areas. The Lefèbvre's factory was built in a place that had been known for centuries by artists and writers who went there in search of the memories of Caius Marius and Marcus Tullius Cicero. It made the area famous.

This unpublished research makes a significant contribution to our knowledge of the society and industry of Terra di Lavoro, an important province of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.



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December 2023

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L'isola di Sora (1789). Oil on canvas 1024x662.

CONTENTS

Book 2

Chap. 1 - The debate	p. 7
Chap. 2 - Continuation	43
Chap. 3 - The interior spaces of the Manifatture del Fibren	61
Chap. 4 - Machine equipment	71
Chap. 5 - Pistolegno	89
Chap. 6 - Soffondo	103
Chap. 7 - The competitors	115
Chap. 8 - The second Half of the Century	123
Chap. 9 - A conditional investiture	135
Chap. 10 - A slow sunset	157
Chap. 11 - The decline of the Manifatture del Fibreno	165
Chap. 12 - Final crisis	181
Chap. 13 - The new rights	199
Chap. 14 - The situation of the paper mills at the beginning of the 20th century	207
Chap. 15 - Diatribes	217
Chap. 16 - The House of Ghosts	235
Chap. 17 - The Manifatture del Fibreno in XX century	253
Chap. 18 - A missed opportunity	261
Appendix	265
Bibliography	269
Index	285

Chapter 1

The debate

As we know, the quadrilateral formed by Isola, Sora, Carnello and Arpino, with the memories linked to its most famous sons, Caius Marius and Marcus Tullius Cicero, made this land a kind of extension of the Roman Ager, not least because it was inhabited by very ancient peoples who were part of the first structure of the Roman Res Publica. For a long time after the foundation of the Manifatture del Fibreno, the economy of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, despite its ups and downs, continued to develop and the paper mills of Isola continued to produce records that are punctually recorded in the *Annali delle Due Sicilie*. In 1839, the Società di Terra di Lavoro (1810-1866), an association dedicated to promoting scientific, economic, technological and agricultural progress, appointed the French businessman a corresponding member in recognition of his technical activities. The members of the Society were very interested in the paper-making processes carried out in the factory, which at the time represented the most innovative aspect of the Kingdom's industries, along with gas lighting, the textile sector, some mechanical factories such as Zino & Henry and steam navigation. The Società di Terra di Lavoro had its headquarters in Caserta, the capital of the province, which in 1818 was divided into the districts of Caserta, Gaeta, Sora, Piedimonte Matese and Nola. It was probably the most important society for economic and material progress in southern Italy and its exact name was Società Agricola di Terra di Lavoro (Agricultural Society of the Land of Work), founded by royal decree on 16 February 1810 by Joachim Murat with the aim of protecting agriculture and industry. Agriculture was still considered to be the main wealth, and indeed it was, as the statistics

showed, especially for cereals, oil, hides, but also wool. The Society's offices were set up in the various provinces of the kingdom; they had a light structure, with a permanent secretary and 12 ordinary members chosen from among the most influential landowners, appointed directly by the sovereign. Each seat was required by law to create an agricultural garden to encourage the introduction of new crops.¹ It struggled to get off the ground, mainly because of wars, conflicts and changes of government. Some of its members took part in the uprisings of 1820-1821, as the libertarian-Jacobin ideology characterised the first phase of its history. After a further hiatus, it resumed its activities in 1824 with Canon Francesco Ricciardi (1783-1841) as permanent secretary and Pietro's brother Gaetano Colletta as president, who published the first volume of the Society's proceedings.² When Colletta left the presidency, he was replaced by Francesco Verde (?-1860), who found the institution in a state of semi-abandonment at the end of the 1830s and sought new collaborators. The Society was reorganised, welcoming members with monarchical and moderate views and, in 1839, a number of industrialists who had proved to be particularly courageous, innovative and well informed about events abroad. They were the Italians Lorenzo Zino and Raffaele Sava, the Frenchman Charles Lefèbvre and the Swiss Jean-Jacques Egg. What they all had in common was that they were "innovators", entrepreneurs who, with their own money or with the help of the state, had "brought" large industries to southern Italy, equipped with the most modern facilities of the time. Egg owned a cotton mill in Piedimonte Matese with no 1286 workers. In 1840, Raffaele Sava was the owner of a cotton mill with a mechanical spinning machine in Caserta, founded with the help of the state.³ Textile

¹ Lepre Aurelio, *Studi sul Regno di Napoli nel decennio francese (1806-1915)*, Napoli, Liguori 1985; La Volpe G., *Gioachino Murat, Re di Napoli: amministrazioni e riforme economiche (1808-1815)* in «Nuova Rivista Storica», Milano, Soc. Editrice Dante Alighieri, anno XIV, fasc. VI, novembre-dicembre 1930, pp. 538-559; anno XV, fasc. I-II, gennaio-aprile 1931, pp. 124-141.

² *Ibidem*, p. 35.

³ ASN, Archivio Borbone, v. 2156, *Cenno sull'origine e progresso della*

plants then tended to be very large factories: demand was high, the manual component was important, and the technology was older and more proven than in paper production, which was considered a more modern sector requiring more sophisticated technology. Egg had set up his factory in 1812 on the site of a Carmelite convent – the Carmelites, as a contemplative order, were the most affected by Murat's measures – just like Beranger and Lefèbvre, and then expanded the company to meet the enormous demand in the kingdom.



Zino, Lefèbvre, Egg and Sava were considered to be the four greatest industrialists in the kingdom at the time, and their impressions, expressed in short reports or guided tours of their factories, were much appreciated by the members, who also appreciated the government's initiatives and the king's good administration. Lefèbvre and Egg attracted the best technicians from European centres to their factories,

fabbrica di panni istituita dal signor Raffaele Sava in Santa Caterina a Formello per sovrane concessioni s.d..

thus becoming centres of technical culture and training centres. We know from André-Isidore and Rosanne's notes that, for most of the 19th century, the Manifatture del Fibreno welcomed the children of its technicians, and not only those, for an apprenticeship in the field that could last up to a year.

To return to the Società Terra di Lavoro, it was a candidate to become "the first economic institution in the vast province", with ambitious plans to publish a periodical, promote modern agriculture, introduce new agricultural tools such as the Tuscan plough, the grubber, the harrow, the weeder and the hydraulic sieve – produced by the Zino & Henry factory in Naples – and steam machines.⁴ Francesco Verde was an energetic advocate of the development of manufacturing and therefore asked the four industrial partners for concise but eloquent statistics. In 1840, the bulletin, thanks to members Lefèbvre, Egg, Sava and also Manna published the first statistical study of the Kingdom: *Elementi di statistica industriale della provincia di Terra di Lavoro nel 1840*.⁵ It was a short text made up of figures and tables describing the state of the Bourbon industries, with statistical data on breakdowns. Individual members contributed mainly to those sectors in which they had expertise. Manna was a landowner and wool producer in the Arpino area, but also a textile manufacturer in Isola, who was to experience a dramatic bankruptcy in the following years, becoming a creditor of Lefèbvre. From 1842 onwards, one of the members of the association, Giuseppe Lostritto, tried to create a modern savings bank and 'Monti Frumentari', following the model of the one created in 1724 by the former Archbishop of Benevento, Pietro Francesco Orsini (1649-1730).⁶ The members were interested in the transfer of technology through journals and physical visits of technicians to plants and industries as was the case in the enterprises of Sava, Egg and Lefèbvre. In 1845, the Society succeeded in opening a small library in Caserta to

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 44-45.

⁶ He has become Pope Benedict XIII (1724-1730), v. Fortunato Giustino, *I monti frumentari nelle province napoletane*, in *Mezzogiorno e lo Stato italiano*, I, Laterza, Bari 1911, pp. 38-49.

promote the economically prevalent agronomic culture. By 1839, it had achieved its greatest success: converting the publication of the Proceedings into a periodical, 'La Campania Industriale' (first issue in 1840 with 32 pages, 550 copies), which featured news, suggestions, insights. In 1855, the circulation increased to 750 copies and was sent to all 233 municipalities in the Terra di Lavoro. The first issue was directed by Giovanni Sannicola and had an extensive and qualified collaboration.⁷ Up to 1866, 58 issues would be published.

Membership of the society was by royal decree and in 1840 the 250 associates and correspondents were almost all men of science, historians, men of letters and specialised technicians; entrepreneurs, on the other hand, were only the five named.⁸ Charles' correspondences, of a technical-industrial nature, show how personally involved he was in the mill to such an extent that he became an acknowledged expert in paper converting processes, in the use of different types of equipment and in hydraulic power generation techniques of which his mill offered a remarkable example. Over the years, he had begun to study the characteristics of paper production, proposing innovations that came from the suggestions of his technicians.⁹

Later, liberals such as Pellegrino Rossi (1787-1848) and Antonio Scialoja (1817-1877) also contributed to the paper. Among the articles were denunciations of the living and working conditions in certain areas of the kingdom and the misery of childhood. The editor also followed

⁷ Marra Alessandro, *La Società economica di Terra di Lavoro*, cit., pp. 52-56.

⁸ Palmieri Walter, *I soci della società economica di Terra di Lavoro (1810-1860)*, Quaderno ISSM n. 142, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Napoli 2009, p. 8.

⁹ The Terra di Lavoro (sometimes 'Terra del Lavoro') is today a historical-geographical region divided between Lazio, Campania and Molise, but it has been a real administrative unit with its own institutions since the Middle Ages with the Kingdom of Sicily (12th century). Under the Kingdom of Naples (1806) it became a Province and within it the administrative subdivision of the Sora district was maintained, governed by an Intendant of the Sora district. The province of Terra di Lavoro was maintained in the following decades, even if, little by little, municipalities and territories were transferred to newly created provinces (Avellino, Frosinone, etc.). It was finally abolished in 1927.

up the publication of the articles with calls to improve the living conditions of the poor.¹⁰

But Charles Lefèbvre, together with some other industrialists of the time, had become a key player in the process of changing the landscape of the Liri valley. In the Liri-Fibreno basin, hydraulic energy was used to transform domestic production into a modern industrial system, and the process was rapid. But what were the consequences and what were the perceptions of the observers of the time?¹¹ As we know, the action took place after Ferdinand's Enlightenment reforms, Napoleonic law and anti-feudal reformism had transformed the use of inland waters, bringing them closer to ancient Roman law and classifying them as nobody's property (*proprietas nullius*). Freed from the constraints of feudalism, water became an open-access resource that could be appropriated by individual landowners and mill owners. As elsewhere, the private appropriation of the river soon revealed its contradictions: rather than increasing the overall efficiency of the economic system, it generated a high level of litigation and conflict between economic actors and high transaction costs. In the long run, it led to inefficient use of energy, overcrowding of the river banks, obstruction and, finally, an increase in the frequency and destructiveness of floods.

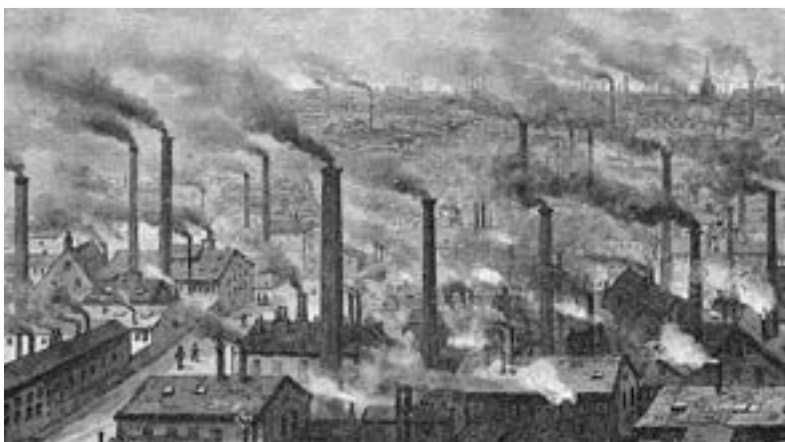
In the last decades of the 19th century, agrarian capitalism, i.e. crop expansion, deforestation, intensive cultivation, had spread throughout the kingdom, causing great environmental instability in this area, but not only. When it reached Sora, the Liri River brought with it sediments resulting from soil erosion in the mountains of the upper valleys, where deforestation was in full swing. In addition, the water flow was obstructed by a system of closures and individual plots of land

¹⁰ Marra Alessandro, cit., pp. 58-60. As a curiosity, it may be mentioned that Antonio Scialoja's son, Vittorio, is said to have been a teacher of one of Charles' descendants, Antonio Lefèbvre D'Ovidio (1913-2011), testifying to the continuity of the entrepreneurial and intellectual classes of the Meridione.

¹¹ Barca Stefania, *A "Natural" Capitalism. Water and the Making of the Industrial Landscape*, in *Nature and History in Modern Italy*, cur. Donald Worster, Ohio University press, Athens, Ohio 2010, pp. 215-230.

delimited by wells, stone embankments, barriers, diversions, dams, canals and structures that caused flooding. In the 19th century, dozens of major floods were recorded, in addition to the normal annual floods that occurred mainly in autumn. Sora and Isola began to live in a permanent state of emergency, with some episodes of major destruction.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe the emergence of a new consciousness, dominated by the capitalist industrial vision of water as a product of changing social causes. In the case of the Liri Valley, the new perception of the environment was modelled on the revision of the narrative of the industrial landscape, which was no longer seen as contradictory, alien to historical and natural landscapes; nor as the bearer of contradictions in people's lives, of pollution or ugliness. All these problems, which did exist, were hidden or simply not seen during the first phase of the industrial revolution in the area, also because the dozens of important visitors who saw the Zino and especially the Lefèbvre found themselves in front of very famous factories that were decidedly modern but managed to hide or absorb the contradictions of the industrial transformation. This is clear from the accounts of those who visited them or passed them on their way to Isola from Naples or Rome; many of these travellers had already, in the 1830s and 1840s, visited industrial settlements similar to the factories of Manchester, Liverpool or even Lowell (Boston) or the industrial towns of Belgium. Isola del Liri was compared to Manchester, incongruously and significantly, as we shall see. But Isola did not have the anti-human ugliness of Manchester: was hyperbole, but meaningful hyperbole.



Liverpool in a typical 19th century view.

Situated on the road between Naples and Rome, not far from the abbeys of Montecassino, Casamari and San Domenico, the area of Sora has always been a favourite destination for European travellers interested in antiquity and the Middle Ages, who left numerous descriptions and travelogues. We have seen, in the case of Carnello and Santa Maria delle Forme or Isola, how there are paintings and illustrations that show the interest of artists in these places long before the industrial settlements. The same writers, painters and men of culture continued to visit these places and began to integrate the new structures into the historical and natural landscape, almost disregarding them or considering them as an organic part of the landscape. This singular phenomenon is particularly evident in the case of the Lefèbvre industries, which appear in so many travel accounts.



Isola del Liri, 1830. Ernst Fries.

The view painted in 1830 by the German Ernst Fries (1801-1833), who was one of Lefèbvre's guests, shows that this painter did not see or care about the technological innovations in the area. He painted a conventional view of the island, in its medieval structure, with the Boncompagni castle visible, the church of San Lorenzo, the road coming from the east under the high cliffs leading to Isola superiore. The population is always dressed in traditional clothes. There is no sign of modernity, although the Lefèbvre were well established and in other places, such as Belgium and France, the factories were already present in the paintings.

In order to understand the stages of this process, which marked the arrival of liberal ideology in Italy, even in its visible form, it is worth considering the establishment of the Cartiera del Liri, an industrial complex built in 1843 that had all the hallmarks of modernity and that penetrated a still rural landscape. By the middle of the century, the paper mill already looked like the picture below. It could not be

integrated into Arcadian and Romantic visions, it was something radically different, a rupture. The argument here is that the Lefèbvre was an exception.



Società Cartiere Meridionali ex Cartiere del Liri, about 1890.

By fortuitous and ideal conditions, but also by will, the Lefèbvre industries did not have that violent visual impact that offended the aesthetic sensibilities of travellers: they were hidden by a large building of neoclassical forms, the façade of a church, a baroque monastery or vegetation. For smaller industries embedded in historic structures, such as the Lambert or Manna, this was obvious. Charles Lefèbvre, on the other hand, is mentioned in dozens of these accounts as a new type of man who managed to balance nature and culture, antiquity and modernity in his work.

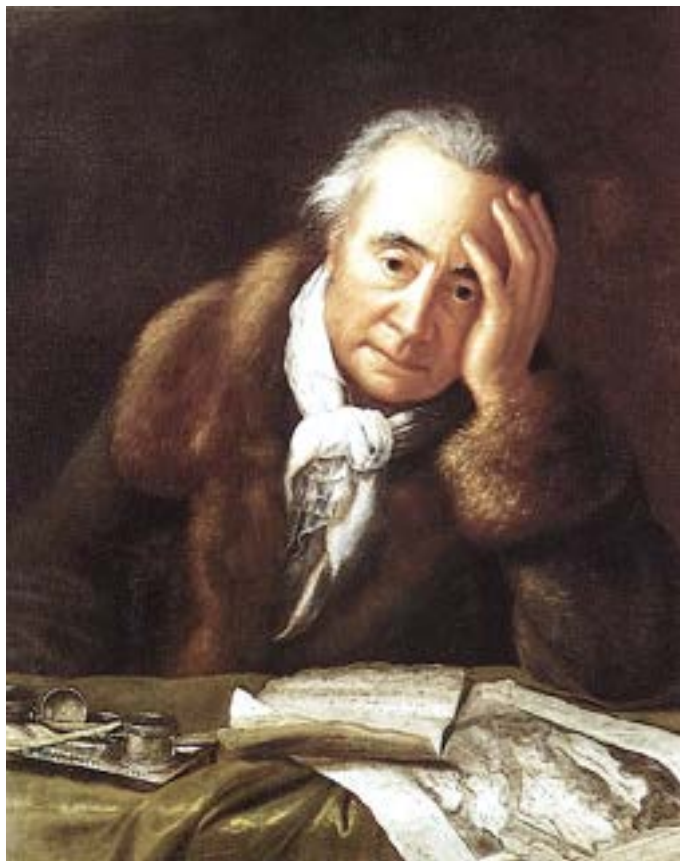
In this regard, it is useful to look at accounts from just before the arrival of the Industrial Revolution to examine the change in perception and sensitivity to the first factories. Let us start with the case of the Swiss naturalist Carl Ulysses von Salis-Marschlins (1760-1818) who travelled through the valley in the early years of the French Revolution and depicted the local landscape as dominated by the feudal castle and

erected on a cliff between two waterfalls: a vision that perfectly suited his ideas as an Enlightenment man. Surrounding the village were well-cultivated hills and dense forests of deciduous trees. This is how Isola appears to us in many paintings of the late 18th and early 19th century: the cliff, the waterfalls, the olive groves, the woods.

The Liri was described as complementing this beautiful scenery, the surrounding countryside appeared as one of those delightful places whose beauty was rare even in Italy. Regarding the local people, the traveller noted their quiet and idyllic life, only lamenting the opportunities they had missed to develop the local wool industry.

We descended within an hour to Isola, a small town on the Garigliano. The Liri of the ancients. [...]. Nothing could be more truly romantic than the site of the old castle of Isola, for which security reasons caused its location at the highest point of an island formed by the Garigliano. After a tranquil course, that river there splits into two clear branches, one of which plunges over a perpendicular row of rocks, while the other flows over a sloping, rocky bed and rushes, its waters churning to finally join the stream. The reunited waters then resume their placid course [...].¹²

¹² Salis-Marschlins Carl Ulysses von, *Travels through various provinces of the Kingdom of Naples in 1789*, Londra 1795.



Carl Ulysses von Salis-Marschlins, naturalist.

The naturalist calls the river Garigliano, which at this height is commonly called Liri, and immediately notices the high location of the castle, sheltered from the flow of the river. This type of observation would become recurrent for travellers who, descending from what is now Isola Superiore, along the 'Cascatelle' and Remorici – where the Lefèbvre establishments were to be built – encountered the castle and the division of the river into two branches to form 'the island', which

rejoined further south. Then the traveller, evidently arriving from Isola and moving towards Sora, encounters San Domenico and Ciceronian sites.

Since the Villa of San Domenico, with a convent occupying the site of one of Cicero's villas, is not far from Isola, we made a pilgrimage there on foot. The beauty and surroundings are flooded with water on one side by the Garigliano and bordered by gentle hills, while on the other side the eye penetrates at length into a wide and fertile valley, from which the Fibreno River emerges, which forms two branches before joining the Liri. Between which were the gardens of that celebrated orator [...].¹³

This second passage in the author's description is also typical, borrowed from *Cicero's Laws*: it would be repeated in many other descriptions and travelogues in the following century. Salis-Marschlins then moved on to Carnello. Here it is even more evident, as mentioned at the beginning of this research, that those who wanted to set up industry in these areas, like Lefèbvre and Zino, occupied places where the memory of the past was so strong that it drove out the present and made it invisible. At one point in this passage, not quoted here, the Swiss naturalist complains that the superstitious and ignorant Dominican friars – a leitmotif of the Enlightenment and the Protestants – occupy the place where the great Cicero had lived. As for artisanal and agricultural activities, Salis-Marschlins found them decadent and, in the usual Enlightenment fashion, attributed them to "Catholic superstition". This was in 1789 or just before. We do not know how he judged decadence, perhaps on the basis of passages from Cicero, who considered his native land to be rich and industrious. But that is how it appeared – rich and industrious – to other visitors who passed through in those years, or shortly afterwards, with less prejudice.

An interesting case concerns the elderly abbot Domenico Romanelli (1756-1819) who received in 1819, while travelling from Naples to Montecassino, a view of the place painted by a local painter.¹⁴ When

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Romanelli Domenico, *Viaggio da Napoli a Monte-Casino ed alla celebre*

the abbot arrived in the Liri Valley, he found a place already undergoing fundamental political, social and environmental changes. The construction of a good road linking the town to Naples had begun. The exploitation of the water, as we know, had been temporarily given in concession to the municipal corporation, which had rented the mills to the wool merchants of Arpino. After the arrival of the French army and the terrible massacre of 1799, we have a few years of silence about which the sources known today are silent. What did the local population think of the massacre of 1799? What did they think of the French who continued to visit these areas and set up first artisanal and then industrial factories? Most left behind confusion and hatred that did not end up in written works. In 1809, during the French Decade, the first paper mill was set up in Isola, in the Boncompagni Castle, followed by the wool industry. Abbot Romanelli's voyage is one of the first testimonies of the emergence of the industrial landscape in the Liri Valley, and indeed in the whole of southern Italy, at the beginning of the 19th century. In Sora, he described an active and industrious population that lived very well thanks to wool production and agriculture. He did not see the economic 'degradation' that the enlightened eye of the Swiss Salis-Marschlins probably observed even where there was none.

Nevertheless, Romanelli's attention was captured by the sight of the largest and most impressive waterfall and, in general, by the beauty of the place, which appeared to him as an enchanted island with abundant citrus groves, surrounded by a varied landscape and rich vegetation. He then searched the banks of the Fibreno river for Cicero's birthplace, stopping to reflect on the ruins. Walking along the road between Isola and Sora, on the eastern bank of the Liri, the author stopped to admire an unexpected landscape. Along the cultivated fields and orchards, he saw many new houses, canals and wells, as well as many industrial and craft activities.

cascata d'acqua nell'isola di Sora dell'abate Domenico Romanelli, Angelo Trani, Napoli 1819.



Duke of Sora's Palace in Isola (1791) by Richard Colt Hoare.

So wrote abbot Romanelli:

From Arpino the next day, I travelled two hours to the island of Sora. This small island is so called because it is surrounded by two large canals of the Liri, which then merge into a single volume. It is entered by two bridges called Porta di Napoli and Porta di Roma. I found an active and hardworking population living comfortably on crafts and agriculture. As soon as I arrived there, I was greeted by a most magnificent and imposing sight. The river Liri, abundant in water and flowing swiftly along its course, meets an enormous rock from which it is divided into two branches. On this rock there is a magnificent royal palace with a tower, isolated on either side by the two branches of the river. The two great channels of the Liri, which flow from it at great depths, form two magnificent waterfalls, the like of which cannot be found anywhere else in the world.¹⁵

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

Richard Colt Hoare (1758-1838) had depicted the place in 1791, when it was still the seat of the Duchy, and it was the same as the Abbot saw it 30 years later. He had done this in a watercolour which was later engraved and circulated throughout Europe as part of a series of views of the area. It shows the water reservoir on the cliff of the Duke of Sora's palace, before one of the branches falls into the Cascata Grande and the other into the Cascata Valcatoio.

The first channel plunges perpendicularly into a gorge 100 palms deep and 60 palms wide, and the other, to the west, runs swiftly along a sloping plane about 600 palms deep and as many palms wide. A perpetual iris, when the sun shines, shimmers in an arc among many sprays, flakes, fringes and minute particles of water, deceiving the observer and making him think he is on an enchanted island or in the gardens of Armida. The surrounding green gardens with their citrus fruits, laurels and exquisite fruits add to the charm of this place. The nearby mountain range and pleasant hills offer playful distances, contrasting shadows, perspectives and varied scenes. These natural beauties of the island of Sora attract a large number of landscape painters all day long to depict such beautiful, varied and noble views of nature. The most beautiful viewpoint is from the mountain known as San Giovenale. There you can see the most beautiful perspective of the two waterfalls, with the royal palace like a castle in the middle. Another charming landscape is formed by the southern branch of the Liri, which, before rejoining the other, splits again to form a new island. Here, then, is a blissful land, where everything exhales the comfort, the grateful pleasure and the original beauty that nature has scattered there. I was so surprised that, after walking here and there, I could not tear myself away from these famous places.¹⁶

¹⁶ *Ibidem.*



Duke of Sora's Palace in Isola (1791), Richard Colt Hoare.

Romanelli evokes the enchanted garden of Armida from Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* and describes a blissful land of great natural beauty where prodigal nature has scattered all her graces



Duke of Sora's Palace in Isola (1791), Richard Colt Hoare.

He then turned his attention to other places where he saw the first traces of industry: he did not see the Manifatture del Fibreno, which was already very active, because it was hidden in the structures of the monastery and the church. This is an indirect but significant testimony to the fact that Beranger's work, although he spent money on machinery and the first buildings, was not so obvious and did not change the physical structure of the places. In fact, the first major changes took place in 1824, with the construction of the sheds next to the church, which had not even been mentioned in any written documents.

The abbot meets a young man who invites him to continue his visit.

As luck would have it, I found a young draughtsman there who was drawing various plans and views of it, and I had him draw the two famous waterfalls, with the palace in the middle, which I keep at home as one of the most grateful views of our kingdom. Finally, to complete my journey, I had to go a little further to see the Fibreno river, so praised by Cicero, when it joins the Liri and makes it colder. In all the distance I travelled to get there, I saw

nothing but cultivated fields and gardens, many new dwellings built for woolen mills, canals and waterways that could be directed wherever one wished, and many factories of useful and sought-after arts.¹⁷



Valcatoio waterfall, 1840. Raffaele Carelli.

The Valcatoio waterfall has also long been a favourite *locus* for painters and illustrators, from Hackert to the end of the 19th century. Above, a view by Raffaele Carelli from 1840 shows how construction had begun and the landscape had changed by the early years of the century. Houses began to be built around the waterfall.

The Valcatoio, together with the Cascata Grande, originally formed an island of foam surrounding the old town and the Boncompagni Castle. Today the area is completely built up and unrecognisable, and above all the Valcatoio waterfall has been harnessed to produce electricity, effectively drying up its fall. At the time, however, it was described by travellers as spectacular, on a par with the Cascata Grande.

¹⁷ Romanelli Domenico, *ibidem*, pp. 117-121.

Arriving at the confluence of the Liri and Fibreno rivers, Romanelli made a surprising discovery: before the confluence, the Fibreno divides into two branches. One of these divides into two small islands: on one of them is the ancient monastery of San Domenico, Romanelli's original destination, since the monastery is believed to be the birthplace of Cicero.

I arrived at the mouth of the Fibreno river by the same new road that was inaugurated in 1795 by General Don Giuseppe Parisi from the island of Sora, along the eastern bank of the Liri river. Here a new spectacle surprised my senses. Before the Fibreno joins the Liri, it divides into two branches, one of which is called Phorcique Marsici lacus latices, Pitoniumque flumen sub terram se volvens [...].

The lake and the river are also cold, so much so that Cicero said that the Fibreno made the Liri colder, and under the small land of Lecce, in a cave, one hears a terrible murmur of water flowing underground. It divides into another branch, forming two small islands. On one of them, the smaller one, there is a ruined monastery with a church dedicated to San Domenico Abbate. It is generally believed that this was the paternal villa of the Tulli family, and this is confirmed by the many ancient ruins that can still be seen in the area.¹⁸

The place described by Romanelli was well known, illustrated several times some twenty years earlier by Richard Colt Hoare's widely circulated engravings depicting it as wild. And San Domenico appeared surrounded by water because at that time it actually formed an island.

¹⁸ *Ibidem.*



San Domenico (1791). Richard Colt Hoare.

Further on, the abbot turns to see the new mills that had been established there since 1806 and were well developed by 1819, where wool and paper were manufactured at Carnello.

I paused for a moment to look at it and at the new woollen factories that had been built there, and then I turned towards another nearby islet called Carnello. It is said that this other small island, formed by two branches of the same Fibreno river, took its name from the blood shed there by Christian martyrs during the violent times of persecution.¹⁹

¹⁹ *Ibidem.*



San Domenico Monastery (1791). Richard Colt Hoare.

On Carnello Romanelli reports what was known from local sources: it had been a place of massacre and burial of ancient Christians. Next to this memory, marked by the church of Santa Restituta and ancient artefacts and ruins, one could see the industrial innovations of the time.



San Domenico church and monastery today.

I stayed there for a while to see the paper mills, the valkyries and the mills that had been built there, and then the ruins of antiquities, from which came the other opinion that this, and not that, was the happy island where the Tulli had their villa and where Marcus Cicero was born.²⁰

After observing the signs of work and the workshops, but unfortunately without going into detail, he reports another opinion, according to which Carnello itself, and not San Domenico, hid the ruins of the most famous villa of antiquity, the one where the great orator spent his leisure time and wrote. In this respect – whether it is true or a rhetorical invention is of little importance - the discussion is carried on by a native of Isola, a cultured man, who defends the opinion just mentioned with some arguments:

After carefully observing the two islands, San Domenico and Carnello, and with Cicero's books in my hand, I set out to decide which of the two could boast and display its glory. As luck would have it, in Carnello I met a well-

²⁰ *Ibidem.*

educated young man from the island of Sora, with whom we immediately discussed this very important matter. He was quite convinced that Cicero's native villa was on the islet of Carnello, and he thought it would be a classic error for anyone to recognise it as the islet of San Domenico [...] we have, he said, a very clear passage from Cicero in his book of laws, in which he mentions this, and not the other, islet as his native villa. But which one, I asked, and which passage? Listen to it, he replied, because if you look at it carefully, you cannot but agree with me about the true location of his villa.²¹

The young scholar reads to the elderly abbot a passage from Cicero's *De Legibus* that relates a dialogue between his friend Atticus and the orator's brother, Quintus, as they walk on the road out of Arpino.²² Cicero promised Atticus to show him his father's villa, which stood on a small island in the Fibreno: a pleasant place where the river divided into two equal parts, forming a small island before flowing into the Liri, making it colder. According to the young islander, this description applies to Carnello and not to San Domenico, where, after the island, the Fibreno, instead of joining, flows into the Liri in three branches. The young man quotes various authorities, more or less important: Febonius, historian of the Marsi, Pacichelli, Cavelli and others. After listening to him, Romanelli disagreed. He explains that in an earlier passage of the same *De Legibus*, Book I, the villa of Cicero is mentioned, where, walking along a bank among poplars, Cicero, together with Quintus and Atticus, arrives at the villa avita and the Arpinate fund. At the beginning of the second book, Atticus wants to stop at an island that already appears in the Fibreno. Romanelli explains that, coming from Arpino and always following the banks of the Liri, the first island one encounters is San Domenico and not Carnello.²³

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² "Sed ventum in insulam est. Hac vero nihil est amoenius. Etenim hoc quasi rostro finditur Fibrenus, et divisus aequaliter in duas partes latera haec adluit, rapideque dilapsus cito in unum confluit, et tantum complectitur quod satis sit modicae palaestrae loci". *De Legibus*, lib. XI. Cit. in Romanelli, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

²³ Romanelli Domenico, *ibidem*, pp. 121-131.



Liri river in Carnello area.

In the latter place, however, there was probably another family villa called Amaltea, where the great orator retired to study. It was therefore concluded that Carnello was the site of Cicero's villa Amaltea.

The engraving above shows a view of the Liri near Carnello. The area of the Tower of Fullonica, which is a recurring feature in reproductions of this area, does not appear in the image because, in the illustrator's view, it is to the right, outside the frame. What we see, however, is a confluence or convergence of several branches, which in this area occurs at Carnello, San Domenico or after Isola, but this is not the case. The real confluence between the Fibreno, which comes from the east, and the Liri, which comes from the Roveto valley, is where San Domenico stands today. In the nineteenth century two islands were clearly visible, one at Carnello and the other at San Domenico, and this could cause debate among historians and geographers. In this area, rich in waterways, there were several river islands, all of which attracted visitors and were the destination of excursions by industrialists and

guests of the Lefèbvre family, as we learn from the diary of the industrialist's wife.

In the second decade of the century, in and along the agricultural and literary landscape of the Liri, a new industrial landscape was taking shape, slowly and not always perceived as such. The mills that caught the eye of Abbot Romanelli were the first industrial complexes of the paper industry, transformed from the older, smaller ones, with the appearance of artisan workshops. In 1819, he also saw Santa Maria delle Forme, which had enriched its water rights by drawing water from the Fibreno River with a canal that at the time served the monks' mills, a canal enlarged by Beranger, but which the abbot did not consider alien to the landscape.

A few years earlier, as we know, the original layout of the Carnello mills had been extended with some buildings built on the small island in the middle of the river, which over time became silted up and lost its island character. The mills that the abbot visited in San Domenico were also part of the monastery and therefore archaic in appearance, and the same can be said of another industry established in 1816 in the former convent of San Francesco, near Isola Liri, where in 1812 he had obtained a concession for a small textile factory run by Gioacchino Manna. It was a small and inconspicuous factory employing perhaps fifteen workers. 10 years later, Manna built a factory with a second wool mill with 15 spinning machines and 45 workers. The new factory was valued at 5,000 ducats.²⁴

²⁴ De Matteo Luigi. *Un'economia alle strette nel Mediterraneo*, Edizioni Scientifiche italiane, Napoli 2013, pp. 142-144. On the history of Manna see also De Matteo Luigi, *Governo, credito e industria laniera*, Naples at the institute's headquarters 1984, pp. 60-102; e *Il sotto intendente all'intendente*, Sora 23 luglio 1830. ASC, IB, AC 2359.



Sant'Antonio church in Isola del Liri.
Here was the Opificio Manna in 1812.

They were still small, workshop-sized factories. Even Santa Maria delle Forme, which was destined to become a large factory, was very similar in 1819 to what it had been ten or twenty years before. As you walked past, you could see the interventions, a wall, the animation of a factory, the noise of machines, but it was still not an invasive presence. The changes that had taken place inside, the work of the machines that had come from France, were not felt by the abbot. Perhaps he passed by at a time when the factory was closed, but the fact remains that there was industry there, and that fact was known but not recorded.

However, the peculiar location of these first industries in the valley makes it clear that something revolutionary had happened in the area. Romanelli does not specify what it was, perhaps because it was already known, but industrialisation, or machinism as it was called at the time, had arrived. The suppression of many monastic orders, which over the centuries had used the water for grinding grain, tanning hides or farming, had 'liberated' the rights of use from their control and that of the city's guilds, in order to transfer them to private entrepreneurs, often foreigners, the bearers of interests emanating directly from the Kingdom's capital. Since the new liberal order considered entrepreneurs as part of a movement of utility for the nation, these goods were

therefore considered free, even if they were not free. This change in the conception of the right to use water was at the origin of the industrial revolution in the basin.

According to the new laws, the "liberated" water was made available to the public, which was not the public as we understand it today, and indeed, in this public conception, not everyone could use it. It was necessary to have the resources to make the necessary investments to turn this water into a source of industrial energy. This was not done, as elsewhere, by consortia or associations of small artisans, but by the use of concentrated capital.

Despite Romanelli's portrayal of the mills as a natural product, almost as natural as the landscape, industrial capitalism in the Liri Valley had brought about violent and sudden changes, heralded by a bloody war of invasion. This was not without dramatic consequences: families thrown onto the pavement, religious people displaced by the hundreds, families forced to emigrate or wander. Farmers and peasants who had relied on centuries-old relationships with monastic orders found themselves overnight in a legal and judicial vacuum. Rights were renegotiated with the new authorities, but not always successfully. The massacres perpetrated by foreign soldiers some twenty years earlier had also given rise to a new kind of banditry, initially formed for ideological reasons and religious resistance - these bandits had been 'expelled' from their lands - the insurgencies, but then replaced by a real, criminal banditry.

The periphery of the Liri Valley was part of the great stage of the Napoleonic wars that shook the whole of Europe. It is no coincidence that in Civita d'Antino, just beyond the mouth of the Roveto Valley to the north of Sora and a few kilometres south of Isola, in Fontechiari, where the Lefèvre family had bought some land, there were two Napoleonic cemeteries with French soldiers and soldiers of the Grande Armée. The main impact of imperial rule on the local way of life was the introduction of economic freedoms relating to the liberalisation of land and water. These changes were ultimately accepted and celebrated by the highest authorities of the Kingdom of Naples, even after the end of French rule. In short, in the eyes of contemporary observers, change

was inevitable: it was the march of progress. The enthusiastic descriptions of Isola as a place of economic freedom, of progress, of life in harmony with nature, were eloquent testimony to this new credo. The case of the Manifatture del Fibreno and the paper and wool factories in Carnello, but also the factories of the Boncompagni Castle or the Manna family in Isola, reinforced this narrative.

In 1829, ten years after Abbot Romanelli's visit, other testimonies were recorded: those of Raffale Carelli, a painter, and of Domenico Cuciniello and Lorenzo Bianchi, historians, writers and journalists. The former, whom we have already met, was the author, among other things, of *La cascata del Liri*, reproduced in one of the volumes of the beautiful *Viaggio pittorico nel Regno delle Due Sicilie* (Pictorial Journey in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies), accompanied by his pictures. He commented on the richness of the water of the waterfall that moved the wheels and cylinders for the production of wool, "which at that time honoured the ancient palace of the Dukes of Sora, which the government donated to the industry of the nation".²⁵ It was stated that the lands of the Dukes of Sora had been sold by the Boncompagni to the government and that the government had donated them 'to the nation', i.e. to the common good, which could make the best use of them for the people. Water, for civilised nations that use it to their advantage, is a source of wealth and power for many kinds of machines, Carelli continued, and progress would be the ability to harness the great potential of a river to improve the common prosperity, the strength of industry and the wealth of the whole community.

The authors of the work portrayed the Liri and the Fibreno as rivers that spread so much power, energy and wealth with their humour that it became impossible to say whether their fame was linked more to history and the natural beauty they formed, or to the usefulness they had for the industriousness of men. Utility became their beauty, and history remained a mute witness to progress, no longer the ultimate value.

²⁵ Carelli Raffaele, "Cascata del Fibreno", in *Viaggio pittorico nel Regno delle Due Sicilie dedicato a sua maestà il re Francesco I*, First ed., Domenico Cuciniello e Lorenzo Bianchi, Napoli 1829, p. 35.

These were significant changes in mentality: utility blessed the people who lived on the banks of these rivers. This also explains the fame of the Lefèbvre factories: the owners knew how to enhance nature, culture and industry with a clever strategy of hospitality that involved hundreds of people from all nations. The authors of the voyage describe the course of the Liri as far as the island of Carnello, where the river narrows between gentle cascades and is reduced to a small pond, from which it splits into channels, forming many small islands connected by rural bridges. The beauty of the place deserves a careful description.

The whole place looks like a very precious garden, created more by art than by nature, and its main ornament is a long, winding, charming boulevard that offers one of those walks that are now called romantic. Thousands of varied and enchanting vistas await you... before passing through the Canale delle Forme, as if heralding its great waterfall, the Liri gleefully breaks between descending rocks, arranged with peculiar regularity in the form of five steps, and trees and shrubs full of foliage. The water, which rushes back and forth, rumbles, foams and spreads out in white waves, finally unites in a wide, short and regular waterfall.²⁶

The authors created here an icon of the national path towards industrialisation, where art, natural history and technological progress were inseparable (although there is some confusion between a stretch of the Liri and the Canale delle Forme). As if, in this happy district, beauty could never be separated from the usefulness of the waters that moved the wheels and cylinders of the wool industry that adorned the ancient ducal palace.

But when Cuciniello and Bianchi wrote and Carelli illustrated, the area had already undergone considerable changes. The construction of the sluices, the intakes of the Fibreno, the walled Canale delle Forme, the extension of the Lefèbvre factory with at least two large sheds, the construction of the factory next to the Zino wool mill, and many other smaller works already completed, were the first effects on the environment.

²⁶ Carelli Raffaele, "*Cascata del Fibreno*", cit., p. 36.

These latter reports were a far cry from the views and descriptions of the Swiss naturalist Hoare some 40 years earlier. In between was the Industrial Revolution, the era of machinism that was beginning to unleash its power. But this was a time when the Romantic sublime could still integrate industry and culture, economy and natural landscape, without excessive problems of logic or ideology. Carelli's views, which adorn the three beautiful volumes of the *Pictorial Journey*, bear witness to this. Cuciniello and Bianchi, in their description of the castle of Isola transformed into a factory, refer to the changes in power that gave rise to the process of industrialisation in the valley.



Isola del Liri, Cascata del Valcatoio (19th cent. About 1828),
Raffaele Carelli.

The authors describe one of the "national" industries by referring to the textile industry in Sant'Antonio owned by Gioacchino Manna, one of the most powerful industrialists in the valley. One detail that cannot be overlooked in Carelli's painting of 1828 is the smoke coming from

the chimney of the Boncompagni Castle, a trace of one of the factories that operated there: the castle smokes because of industry, not because of the presence of feudal lords.

This narrative of the industrial landscape was well aware of the interplay of social forces within this local environment and aimed to legitimise the power arrangements now in place. It did so by installing energy within a natural order that was also symbolically dominant and restored by politicians. The Liri and the Fibreno, reclaimed from feudal ownership and wisely redirected by the government towards possible use in private industry, along with the many other smaller rivers such as the Magnene, could thus develop their full beauty and usefulness and contribute to the glory of the nation.



Detail of the previous painting.
The Boncompagni Castle.

This also explains the exceptional attention that was paid to these industries, especially the larger ones that were also visited by kings. But while Zino little lent himself to the cultural game of reusing the landscape, Lefèvre took full advantage of that ideology that was both industrial and romantic.

In this sense, the narrative of the industrial landscape had appropriated the language of history and literature and brought it into a broader social

discourse that included economic and environmental change. Another text from a few years later is significant, when the industrial structure of the Zino paper mills is complete and the Lefèvre mills are known to be state-of-the-art. A mention of the endless machine can be found in the account of the painter Étienne-Jean Delécluze (1781-1863), already quoted and contained in his memoirs, *Souvenirs de Soixante Années* published in 1862 or in the *Extraits* that had many editions. While in the *Impressions romaines* he speaks of Isola, of Lefèvre's factory, of the beauty of the places.²⁷



Étienne-Jean Delécluze, pupil of David, portrayed here by Ingres in 1856.

In 1836, the *Poliorama pittoresco*, a popular cultural magazine in Naples that devoted many articles to the area, published a description of the Isola di Sora that seems to us a veritable manifesto of the new

²⁷ Delécluze Étienne-Jean, *Impressions romain*, Robert Baschet, Parigi 1942, p. 29.

economic liberalism and the prosperity it had brought. And yet this landscape, described as a sunny valley with pleasant hills, small waterfalls and gentle cultivated slopes, became the prelude to the deep thunder, the roar of the falling water, the incessant beating of the gullies working the rags.

The author of the article was an anonymous 'Englishman' who travelled to the Liri Valley in 1836, when the industry had grown even larger. This is his account:

At 9 a.m. I arrived at the famous waterfalls of the island (called Sora), perhaps even more beautiful than those of Tivoli. The Liri and Fibreno Rivers, after mixing their waters for a short distance, reach the Tower, which dominates the city, through a narrow riverbed, where they divide into two branches: the left one rushes down a rocky slope that reflects its limpid water with increasing speed; the right one rushes vertically from enormous heights, producing a roar so deafening that the voice of the person next to it can hardly be heard. My Byron would have called it an inferno of water. The dazzling sun vibrated its rays on the waves at the point where they began their leap, making them resemble rays of gold and silver. Indeed, the great masses of water fell with incredible rapidity, and from such a high fall they were reduced, as it were, to silvery dust, and as soon as they touched the rocks of the bottom, which rose again and melted into rain and clouds of light, the wind scattered them here and there. I began to draw the wonderful scene; but remembering that the famous Hackert had painted it, I refrained from beginning the work.

I was already near Cicero's villa, half a mile from the island; so I went up the river by the consular road, feeling in my heart involuntary feelings of homage and sadness. I had with me the works of that great man, so I wanted to see how he described his house in the Book of Laws, and to my surprise I found the Fibreno still spreading out in two equal branches through a small island covered with trees, where he used to retire when he had some special work to do; the clarity and speed of the murmuring water flowing through a stony bed, the shade and green of its banks shaded by tall poplars, and above all the thundering waterfall in the Liri, which presented a beautiful scene.²⁸

²⁸ *Frammento del viaggio di un inglese nel Regno di Napoli*, Poliorama Pittoresco, Anno I, Semestre I, Tipografia Litografia del Poliorama Pittoresco,

The article conjures up contradictory images of nostalgia, memory and change, but also of romantic ecstasy and industrial production. Waterfalls are described as 'famous', and indeed they were, becoming the subject of so many important English, French, Italian and German painters. For the first time in the century, the beauty of waterfalls was depicted in both its natural characteristics and its industrial, artificial, mechanical character. The Picturesque of the period consisted of both. Quoting Lord Byron, who described the cataract as a sublime *hell of waters*, the author portrayed it as a natural setting in which the industrious and active population of a small town moved. It is not clear whether the author of this piece was actually an Englishman.

Napoli 1836, pp. 302-303.

Chapter 2

Continuation

Another author worthy of mention is Antonio Fazzini, who also saw the principles of political economy, considered the sublime science of the 18th century, finally reach their sacred goal in the production of paper and woollen cloth. The old tower of the Ducal Palace was a witness to these changes, no longer the scene of feudal oppression, but a workshop of ingenuity and justice, where industry and mechanical arts worked together for production. The author, who was allowed to enter Palazzo Boncompagni, wandered through the labyrinth of staircases of the ancient palace and its rooms, passing several times through the dark underground rooms where the thunder of water and the echo of monotonous fullonic machines resounded. Then he walked to the foot of the second waterfall, where the water, with its fury and foam, lay on a lonely and silent bed of sand. There, at the end of his literary tour, Isola Liri became "one of the most romantic lands in the kingdom".²⁹ The machines in the mills have been dismantled, although a few millstones remain, such as the one in the official images of the castle, now used for representation and ceremonies. The language of political economy and the language of the sublime mix again, but in a special way in this text, to forge a new vision of the landscape that tells a story of progress, from feudalism to industry, from the idyllic rural landscape of the past – still visible – to the industrious city.

There were no real contradictions in this vision, no aesthetic contrasts that disturbed the Romantic sensibility. What is more, the beauty of the harmony achieved was enhanced by the fact that the new

²⁹ Fazzini Antonio, *Isola di Sora*, Poliorama Pittoresco, Anno I, Semestre II, Tipografia Litografia del Poliorama Pittoresco, Napoli 1836, p. 91.

factories were inserted into ancient structures, as in the case of the Boncompagni Castle, the Monastery of the Forme, St. Anthony's or the landscape seen from venerable ruins such as Carnello with the ancient church of Santa Restituta.

The most striking effect of this narrative is its ability to naturalise social and environmental changes, hiding the oppressive character of industrialisation in nature, but also in human relationships. In the damp and noisy dungeons of the Ducal Palace, ruled by the new industrial masters Lambert and Manna, which Fazzini visited, there were workers working in poor conditions. This place, once a symbol of feudal power, was now the stage for a more modern form of time management, that of factory work, where hundreds of women, men and children were forced to follow the rhythm of the monotonous beating of water-powered machines, as was the case in the castle. Fazzini found this fascinating, almost like the music of the new age.

Moreover, water itself was subject to a process of domination, since this palace was only one of dozens of mechanised sites concentrated along a short strip of the river basin to take advantage of the local availability of energy. Technology had managed to harness the hydraulic power of both flowing water and water heated by steam boilers in ever more ingenious and complex ways, opening up new, unprecedented possibilities that Fazzini looked forward to with wonder and anticipation.³⁰ One can study the evolution of this vision of political economy by observing the calm and reassuring language of landscape or pastoral narrative in other texts written in the same period. And it is surprising, as mentioned at the beginning, how many such texts existed and how they were present in the visits to obligatory "places" such as Carnello, le Forme, San Domenico, the "little waterfalls" later incorporated into the Lefèbvre Park, or the second Manna wool mill in San Francesco.

In 1845, on the occasion of the International Conference of Scientists held in Naples, the economist Matteo de Augustinis (1799-1845) took this process of transliteration to its logical conclusion by

³⁰ Barca Stefania, *Enclosing Water*, cit., 2010, p. 79.

defining Isola Liri as the "Manchester of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies", a nickname that was to last for centuries and that did not really fit the situation: Manchester was a hell of coke and fumes, furnaces and huge factories, the symbol of oppression that inspired Marx and Engels. Fazzini wanted to symbolise its modernity.

To tell the truth, the Liri Valley is a huge and almost unique factory; there are so many houses and workshops and so many industrial plants where every kind of cloth and paper is prepared and produced. The roar and splash of those enchanting waterfalls and cascades; the murmur of the water, broken and distorted at every moment, and yet made querulous and foamy; the confused squeaking of machines and wheels; the sight of the worshipped water turned into a thousand colours by the variety of dyes; the collection of endless wools and cloths, of rags and piles of paper; the jumble of carts and wagons in every street, in every direction; everything you see around you tells you that you are in the valley of work and industry, as well as in the valley of leisure, rest and study. It is not surprising, then, that its textiles and papers are used both in Sicily and elsewhere. To tell the truth, if not ten, at least eight twelfths of the cloth and beaver consumed in this kingdom, which are not at all coarse and native, are produced in the said industrious valley, and are commonly called d'Arpino, from the name of the country which surpasses all the others in manufacture. Nor should it be otherwise with paper, with this difference, that if Liri beats Fibreno, and Arpino beats Sora and Isola for cloth, the latter win for paper.³¹

De Augustinis was an advocate of liberalism and fought for the abolition of the tariffs and taxes that hindered early progress. Between 1844 and 1845 he got into trouble for his too radical liberal ideas and was imprisoned for several months before being released. This lecture at the Accademia Pontaniana was his last contribution before his sudden death, probably from a heart attack, in October 1845. In the Liri Valley

³¹ De Augustinis Matteo, *Della Valle del Liri e delle sue industrie*, in *Agli scienziati d'Italia del VII Congresso* (ibid. 1845); a good article about his figure and his works is: Parente Luigi, *Ideologia politica e realtà sociale nell'attività pubblicistica di Matteo de Augustinis*, in «Archivio storico per le provincie napoletane», s. 3, XI (1973), pp. 29-137.

he saw the miracle of a 'liberal' industry, with all the limitations of the time. There, the "confused squeaking of machines and wheels" recalled the "valley of work and industry", as it had been in "idleness, rest and study". There is therefore no solution of continuity.

After describing the primacies of Arpino and Isola and the industrious life of the towns of the Liri Valley, which had previously been mainly agricultural, De Augustinis mentions for the first time the industrialists Courier, Pulsinelli, Zino, Lefèbvre, Sorvillo, Meuricoffre – financiers and industrialists – and the pure industrialists such as Ciccodicola, Manna, Visocchi, who were to be the protagonists of the area's industrial economy for over a century. And he points out the primacy of the Lefèbvre paper mill, "the first in Italy".

And it would be a mistake to think that the mills we are talking about are small, modest and without machines. Speaking of paper mills, the Fibreno paper mill in Lefèbvre is now recognised as the first in Italy and not inferior to the biggest and best in Europe; the range of paper qualities, colours, sizes and prices is wide and varied. The quantity of these papers is truly staggering. Rivals, and in some respects similar, are the paper mills of the Sorvillo and Meuricroffe companies, and of Courier and Co. The wool mills of Pulsinelli and Zino have for many years been confirming the quantity and quality of their production, with ordinary fabrics and good cloths for the middle and working classes (they do not produce wools of extra quality), which can clearly affirm, not in today's who can contrast them, the supremacy in the whole kingdom and in the whole Italian peninsula. [...] the permanent market of 30 million people will allow the reduction of tariffs, the lowering of prices, the improvement of quality and will raise this unique valley in Italy to the height of its prosperity, to the highest level of manufacturing industry. The number of factories in the whole of the Liri Valley, including the neighbouring Atina Valley, where the Melfi River flows, is no less than 24 first and second class factories, 15 of which are wool mills and 9 paper mills. Among the wool mills, those of Pulsinelli, Zino, Ciccodicola and Manna stand out; among the paper mills, those of Lefèbvre, Sorvillo, Courier, Visocchi and others.³²

³² *Ibidem.*

De Augustinis was very well informed and, had he not died a few months later, would probably have written other interesting texts on the factories of the Liri-Fibreno valley and nearby Menfi. From the way he writes, it seems that he visited the Manifatture del Fibreno, whose characteristics and samples he knew. Later, in the same text, he mentions the 32 cloth factories in Arpino with their 7,000 employees, which, together with related industries, employ $\frac{3}{4}$ of the population. The economist's description of these areas for his foreign colleagues is a celebration of the industrial landscape in its most artificial form and a powerful and rare exercise in environmental reinvention. For him, the valley had become like a giant factory, with so many buildings and workshops and so much mechanised industry. The noise and the splashing water, the confused squeaking of machines and wheels, the sight of the exploited water coloured in a thousand shades by the variety of dyes, the meeting of wools, cloths, rags and piles of paper are for him a new kind of beauty, and the coloured water is not perceived as pollution. And then the chase in the streets of carts and wagons going in all directions tells us that this is the valley of work and industry, as it was in the past of idleness, rest and study.

Here we see an evolution of the narrative of progress and environmental and social transformation. In just a few sentences, the author succeeds in transforming the poisonous effects of the factories into a sign of increased ability to dominate nature, sanctioning the definitive closure of the previous idleness – as if agriculture had led to idleness – which has been replaced by work.³³

In the process of transferring the ideas of political economy to the narrative of the industrial landscape, water was subjected to an ever-increasing process of dematerialisation, turning it into an abstract, mechanical and atomised commodity that temporarily lost its landscape-making qualities. The Liri and the Fibreno were now compared to the gold mines of the New World because, in the scientific

³³ Barca Stefania, *A "Natural" Capitalism. Water and the Making of the Industrial Landscape*, in *Nature and History in Modern Italy*, cur. Donald Worster, Ohio University press, Athens, Ohio 2010. pp. 224-225.

terms of economic science, they produced more value than the latter when they set machines in motion in profitable sectors such as paper.



Ferdinand Gregorovius.

This can be seen in the words of the German historian Ferdinand Gregorovius (1821-1891), who travelled through the Naples area and the Liri Valley between 1854 and 1855, meeting Charles Lefèbvre and becoming his guest. In one of his books, he tells the rather romantic story of how he arrived in the city with no money and, using the power of the water to extract pure gold, transformed the banks of the Liri into an Eldorado, eventually gaining the title of Count and leaving his son Ernesto an industry and many millions of ducats. This story reminds us that he called the Forme canal the "golden rod", a locution attested several times by his nephew André-Isidore Lefèbvre, recalling the gold metaphor. Obviously, Lefèbvre transferred this metaphor to Gregorovius in a meeting and dialogue that is not better specified.

Gregorovius was at the time the leading German historian specialising in Italy, which he travelled all over for some twenty years,

leaving many volumes of travel reports. What he wrote about Lefèbvre and the Fibreno factory is very significant, both for the weight of the character and the account he left us and deserves to be quoted in full because it is the most detailed description among those left by so many travellers.

Having lost precious time in this way, I could hardly see Isola at sunset, as night was already falling. This small village is located on a beautiful island in the Liri, shaded by many plants. At the far end of the island, the emerald waters of the river cascade down like a waterfall. Above the island rises a cliff about 80 feet high, with the ruins of an ancient castle on top. The sound of the water can be heard from afar, and as you approach, the view is enlivened by the river itself and the many canals that flow into it, irrigating gardens populated by beautiful plane and pine trees, rich in the wonderful vegetation of southern countries when bathed by water.

Here the river is already swollen, because just above it it receives the tribute of the Fibreno; nor does it only serve to make the fields fertile, but it also gives movement to several cloth and paper factories that employ several thousand workers, thus spreading wealth and prosperity in the region.

Both Isola and Sora are industrial towns, and the good road that links them is lined with factories, small villas and gardens. It is an oasis of wonderful cultivation that has sprung up since the beginning of this century, and it is a pleasure to finally find the spectacle of human activity in these regions, so beautiful and so neglected.

By the light of the full moon I went to Sora, barely an hour's journey away, on a *char-à-banc*, as the Neapolitan carts are called, with a French word, because this is where the use of these one-horse carts begins, and as in Naples, the poor nag is driven at a gallop by a whip. The moonlight makes this road, already beautiful, and all these modern buildings even more beautiful, because the prosperity of Sora and Isola dates back only to the beginning of this century; today it makes a deep impression on those who come from the Roman provinces, where everything is ancient, where everything belongs to the papacy, to history, where the dark and obscure towns that come down from the mountains date back to the times of Janus and Evander. Today's factories, mostly made of paper, grandly built according to the best modern systems, owe their origin to the French of Murat's time and, above all, to a certain Le Febvre, who, having come here poor, found a veritable Eldorado on the banks of the

Liri and succeeded in extracting pure gold from the power of its waters. He bequeathed these factories and several millions to his son. The King of Naples, I think it was Ferdinand II, gave this family the title of Counts, a title which they had well deserved; for a district which is not very cultivated owes its rich life to the inventive talent of a foreigner, which will not disappear, but will probably increase. The sight of what human activity can do is always a source of great satisfaction, even where there are frequent examples of it, as in England, in Germany, in France; everyone can therefore imagine the impression it makes on those who visit the Kingdom of Naples, where such activity is unfortunately rare.

The Le Febvre paper mill in Liri and the other in Fibreno are two large buildings. It is a pleasure to see this crowd of workers intent on making, I would almost say melting, paper; for all that liquid pulp flows like a dense river of milk and, passing over heated cylinders, it unwinds into an endless white strip, ready to receive the writer's thoughts. It is impossible to see this white river flowing without thinking of the many uses of this marvellous material that dominates life and is called playing cards, photographs, love letters and in so many other forms that unite or divide life!

Not far from Isola, I stayed in a villa whose kind owner took me to the Count's park, a park that can easily compete with those of Roman villas. Of course, the Doria or Borghese princes might have envied Count Le Febvre's abundance of water, which did not have to be created by art, because a branch of the Fibreno flows through his woods, first rushing from rock to rock, with small waterfalls, and then widening into a calm and charming little lake. Its banks are full of splendid plants, pleasant meadows; there are shady paths, secluded corners, flowers in abundance; this park is, in a word, a little Tivoli, a nymph's paradise, where it would be a real enchantment to stroll, to rest, to read and to imagine freely.³⁴

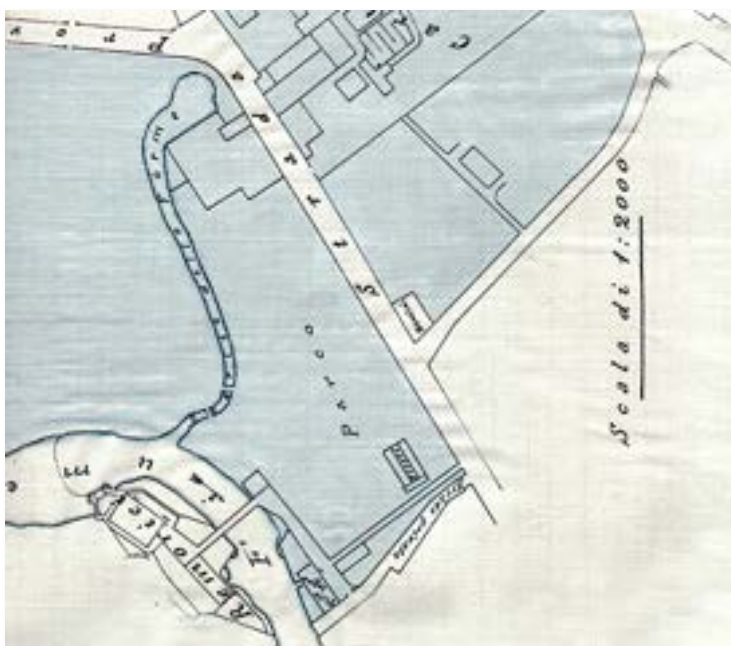
The language of the industrial sublime is still employed here to describe the magnificent buildings of Lefèbvre's two factories and the gardens of his villa that ran along the banks of the Liri.

³⁴ Gregorovius Ferdinand, *Passeggiate per l'Italia*, trad. it., I, Carboni Editore, Roma 1906, pp. 218-221.



Villa d'Este in Tivoli.

Seeing these gardens enriched with canals, pathways, waterways, secluded corners, so much so that they resemble a small Tivoli, a paradise of water lilies, Gregorovius makes it a celebration of industrial dominance over water. It may seem an exaggeration – the Villa d'Este at Tivoli was associated with one of the most famous Renaissance gardens in history, all fountains, waterfalls and gushes – but it was a believable perception. Moreover, constant in Rosanne Lefèbvre's *Journal* was the record of her guests' amazement at the water features that she called cascades: waterfalls that came from many sides and were the beauty of the garden and the richness of the establishment. She, and others, called them 'cascades'.



Additions to the factory and the Lefèbvre Park.

One of the maps drawn at the end of the 19th century, during the negotiations for the sale of the factory, shows that the Lefèbvre Park continued beyond the provincial road, then Tavernanuova, sloping down towards the river Liri, and that its romantic variety was therefore much greater than one might think, literally surrounding the factory, certainly the Soffondo and the Remorici Pistolegno. The comparison made by Gregorovius between the park of the Cascatelle and the waters of Tivoli is echoed in a 19th century Italian school painting of Tivoli.



View of Isola del Liri with waterfall (19th century),
long interpreted as View of Tivoli.

Well, until recently, probably because of some similarity, this landscape by an unknown painter was called *Veduta di Isola del Liri con cascata* (*View of Isola del Liri with Waterfall*). It almost seems that Gregorovius knew this work and that its misattribution influenced him.



Magnene stream that flows through the still existing portion of the Lefèbvre Park.

To return to Gregorovius' description, it can be considered the summa of the landscape narrative of the Liri Valley. In his eyes, the basin was an enchanted place and the river, with its meandering course, deep green water and banks of tall poplars, already mentioned by Cicero, was compared to a river in Germany. Its banks were enchanting, making a melodious, dreamy sound on that sunny day when Gregorovius passed by on the unpaved but well-maintained provincial road. The trees were still numerous, the buildings scarce, and there was certainly the smell of the countryside: medieval Italy, of the towns and castles that Gregorovius had studied and loved so much, and of the emerging industry, did not seem at odds in Monsieur Lefèbvre's factory. The town now had a good paved road linking it directly to Naples, with

post stations and refreshment points, and a modern industrial life, and they all coexisted in harmony.

Travelling along the Liri in the direction of Isola, the author discovered the presence of the industrial elite, indicated by the splendid villas – at that time he could only meet the Lefèbvre family – and the industrial workshops that could be seen through the trees. Although the traveller was more attracted by the beauty of the landscape, the lush vegetation typical of the south, the sound of waterfalls and rapids, the sight of countless canals, called 'forms', that harnessed the water, he observed how the abundant water flowing around Isola powered various industries. Reading his account, one understands that he visited the factory where he met Charles or, more likely, Ernesto. And in the factory, the great historian was amazed to see 'the crowd of workers' almost melting the paper as 'the liquid pulp flows like a thick stream of milk and, passing over heated cylinders, unwinds into an endless white strip, ready to receive the writer's thought'.³⁵

The image becomes poetic, lyrical, full of wonder.

³⁵ *Ibidem.*



View of Palazzo Lefèvre coming from Isola.

Arriving from Isola, the palace appeared as it does today: flanked on the left by tall trees, after a long road with orchards, bordered on one side by a low wall and on the other by a row of buildings.

Coming from the opposite direction, towards Sora or Carnello, the palace appeared even more majestic: a gate bordered the garden and the façade began on the left with the entrance to the former convent, built in classical style, and the rest in the same style concealed the industrial installations.



View of Palazzo Lefèbvre coming from Sora-Carnello.

For a long time this part was left free, with a simple gate, bordered by plants. The beautiful garden is a leitmotif noted by travellers. Through the cast-iron gate, carriages parked at the front of the palace entered. Thus the harmony between nature, history and industry appeared particularly pronounced even to eyes as attentive as those of Gregorovius.

His account, which speaks of a crowd of workers and describes, in 1855, the continuous machine in operation, with its white paste, shows us the Manifatture del Fibreno at the height of its splendour, when Charles is still alive and the administrator is Ernesto.



Palazzo Lefèbvre with the 'chalet' in the foreground.

The last section of the palace, in the foreground of the photograph, known as the Châlet, was built in 1855-56 together with the Villa and the San Carlo factory. Built in a more modest style than the neoclassical style of the rest of the palace, it was used to house the staff and escorts of important guests. Behind one side of the cloister, around which the rooms of Lefèbvre's servants were arranged, is the large Stracceria room, built in 1845. From there you could hear the chatter of the rag-pickers. On the ground floor of this building there was a storeroom and later, probably not very noisy, ash sifters and washing machines. As for the cloister, it should be seen as a familiar passageway between the different wings of the building and the factory.



Cloister, part of the Lefèbvre residence behind which stands the tall Stracceria building built in 1830.

Chapter 3

The interior spaces of the Manifatture del Fibreno

Gradually, the building was stripped of the romantic sublimity in which Romanelli and Gregorovius had placed it. But never completely, because the park around the palace, the Cascatelle park around the Soffondo and the garden around the villa remained intact, as well as the extensive orchards in the Sora and Carnello areas. In the second half of the century, the Ciccodicola factory arrived to spoil the view of the Cascatelle Park, with its ungainly, high forms, built in an unfortunate position to take advantage of the Remorici waterfall. It was destined for a quick end with the collapse that reduced it to a ruin that for many years had to disturb the sublime natural atmosphere when guests visited the properties of Ernesto and his son Francesco.

Behind the Forme, other warehouses were built, as well as a very large, specialised division, the Fabbrica San Carlo, built on industrial modules, which contemporaries described as "gigantic". It was a modern building in concept and architecture and housed large machinery, but you had to drive through orchards and groves to get there. This still prevented Dickensian imaginings, but it was a thoroughly modern building, clearly visible from the nearby heights.

By the middle of the century, Isola superiore was beginning to resemble a village. Palazzo Ciccodicola was built on the road leading to the factory, half destroyed in the 1915 earthquake. Houses and council flats, built with the help or at the behest of the industrialists, gave rise to a real working-class district, which continued to spread towards Sora. Travellers began to look at the new factories, such as the Cartiera del Liri and also San Carlo, with a different eye. For this

reason, the factory of Santa Maria delle Forme – the inscription "Fibreno" on the former convent building was added at the beginning of the 20th century – retained its charm longer than others. Travelling along the provincial road in the second half of the 19th century, the traveller would have seen a long neoclassical building, Baroque structures and certainly heard the thud of water-powered machines. But the 'ugly industrial' remained hidden. It was not the harsh landscape of modern factories, belching black smoke, as described in Dickens' novels printed by the Stamperia del Fibreno.

What about the installations? We know that when they reached their maximum expansion and power, the Forme alone were animated by 19 water-driven turbines, and two of these were connected to the two paper machines that had been installed over time, one in the large shed next to the church and one in the first space of the Soffondo. A third turbine set in motion a powerful defibrating machine located next to the paper machine in the factory whose space still exists. The other 16 turbines gave energy to all the other departments. The energy came, as we know, almost exclusively from the Canale delle Forme, which had been improved and upgraded. Today it stands with the successive improvements made between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th when the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali took over ownership. The following picture shows the beginning of the Canale delle Forme.



Water intake from the Fibreno River of the Forme.

The impressiveness of the Canale delle Forme water intake is still visible today; at certain times, when the river was in flood, the two Fibreno intakes took about 1/3 of the river's flow, conveying it to the factories, first to San Carlo and then to S. Maria delle Forme, with a double return, via a safe route.



Canale delle Forme, hidden by vegetation and raised throughout its course by about 1.5 metres above the ground.

The next picture shows the arrival of the Forme Canal at the factory. A residue of water still fills it but there is no current. At the time of its use, it was very fast and capacious and carried enough power to move all the hydraulically powered machines.



Canale delle Forme: final segment.

The incoming water was channelled under a tunnel, where it already powered a number of machines, and then filled a cistern at the back of the factory, elevated above the rest of the building and slightly sloping towards the river. This created an ideal situation for its use. Until the arrival of electricity, it was not necessary to build dams or reservoirs as large as the expensive ones that animated the Cartiera del Liri.



Canale delle Forme near the factory.

The water tank was of course equipped with filters to remove the last impurities and carefully monitored because an unexpected colour, perhaps due to an accidental spillage during the course of the canal, could ruin the whiteness of the paper.



Fibreno water storage cistern.

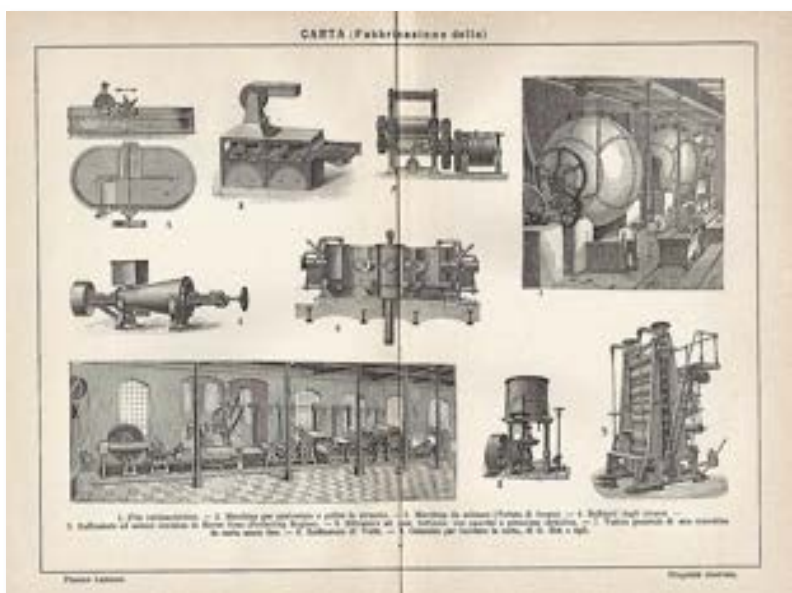
The cistern at the back of the convent and church that stored the water contained a very fine filtering mesh that stopped leaves and other impurities collected in the canal that could spoil the paper yield.



Map of the whole area of the Manifatture del Fibreno, 1907.
Collezione Fratelli Iafrate. Isola del Liri.

We know that around 1860 the Manifatture del Fibreno had 35 large and small rooms housing the machinery on the upper floor, and at least 4 more in the soffondo.

Over the decades, appraisals and reports have described the machinery as it was in 1870. The figure below shows the machinery in use.

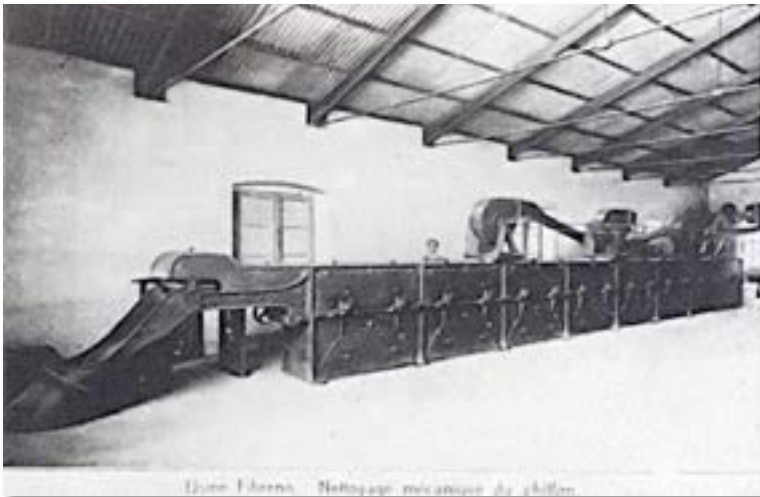


Machines at the Manifatture del Fibreno.

Chapter 4

Machine equipment

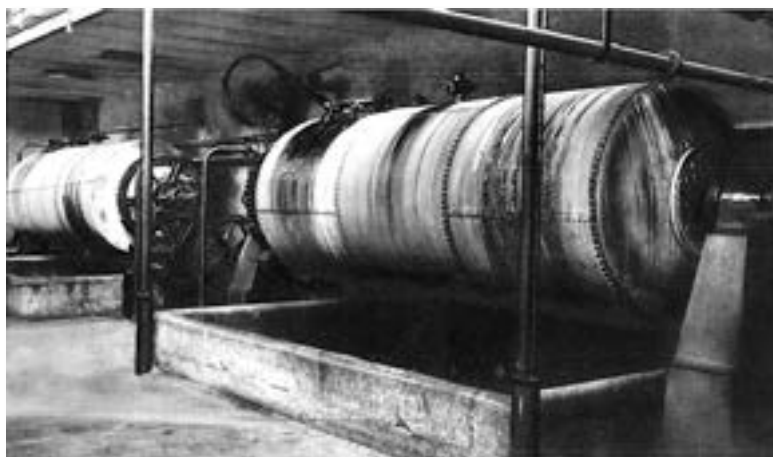
The flat endless paper machine was located in the room next to the rag factory (room 12). In the main factory was a very large crags cutting machine, equipped with a feeding and loading roller, a tank and a rotating mechanism that cut the rags and started the first stages of defibration. In another room was the Ash Beating Machine, a long machine that separated the ash from the dust, with moving parts moved by shafts and belts, located in room 30. All these operations were carried out immediately after sorting, which took place in the Stracceria (rags selection department) (room 5).



Rag-cleaning or Dusting machine,
Manifatture del Fibreno.

In the basement, at the level of the tunnel that led to the Soffondo rooms, there was a “molazza per fogliazzi” (room 33), a real double-headed grinding wheel that crushed the raw material for paper – wood or rags – and made it suitable for moulding. It was joined by half a dozen Dutch tubs, which were used for a similar purpose.

These machines were in operation for several hours a day and therefore had to be driven by a worker and constantly lubricated and greased to prevent friction in the gears. The factory also had three leachers, two cylindrical and one spherical. The leaching process (or solid-liquid extraction) took place in large cylindrical tanks – located in room 16 – which separated the soluble components from the solid mass using a chemical solvent component. In the Fibreno-Forme plant, some large digesters were installed, as shown in the following photograph published in the book *Le grandi industrie italiane* (p. 5).³⁶



The two large cylindrical leachers of the Manifatture del Fibreno.

³⁶ *Le grandi industrie italiane*. Gruppo Società Cartiere Meridionali, Milano 1927, p. 5.

Behind the former convent, the old stones and elegance of the renovation gave way to sheds. The layout was made so that the noisiest work was further away from the manor house.



Backyard passage from the ancient cloister to the manufacturing area.

In the picture, industrial buildings can be glimpsed to the left and right, which housed the less noisy machinery, given their proximity to the Lefèbvre house, such as the clothes washing machines. At the back is the row of sheds all alike, which is also clearly visible in the 1905 image, where paper was packed and shipped; later, they were connected to a system of vehicles on rails that could be hooked up to railway convoys.

There were also a number of drying cylinders in which the pulp was dried to the right degree and these were also located in the Soffondo premises. In another room was another paper machine, called Continuous or Endless Machine No. 5.



Large shed behind the church.

Sheds such as the one shown in the photograph, which was very long and had high windows, allowed light to be used until late in the day.



Map detail Manifatture del Fibreno.

Behind the cloister, through a passage that had previously led to the orchards, one reached the factory and the clearings where a dozen or so buildings for industrial use had been constructed. They were structures of various sizes, at least two of which were large enough to hold paper machines in the installations made during the 1850s.



Sheds mid-19th century. Manifatture del Fibreno.

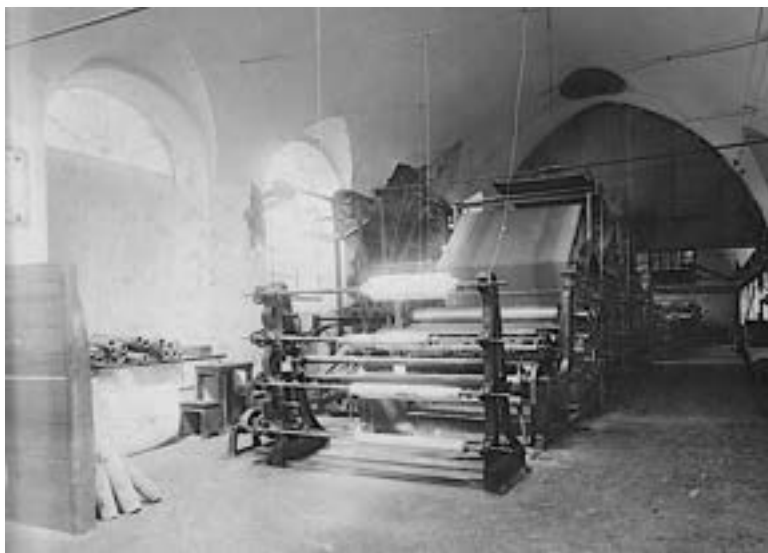


Cartiera del Fibreno (Forme) – Grinding Machines.

One of the low buildings rebuilt at the turn of the century housed grinding machines identical to those used at Boimond, pictured above.

The factory also had half a dozen refiners, some satin finishers and minor equipment.

The Soffondo, which comprised rooms 36-39, was occupied by 16 perfected Dutch fraying stacks or tanks (rooms 38 and 39), which were set in motion by a shaft running through a technical tunnel. Unfortunately, these installations have been dismantled and today only parts of the tanks embedded in the floor can be seen. According to a description written in 1899, the transmission parts of the turbines and mills, which were driven by the Canale delle Forme, passed through various holes and mini-tunnels dug in the wall, some of which are still visible. The environment must have been very noisy. Even at the end of the century, the four machines of the Fibreno and Carnello were still working, although in need of maintenance.



Flat Endless Machine.

The flat machines existed as we know since 1826, one at Carnello and a second at Fibreno were installed in 1839, two more were added in the following decades.



Macchina continua in tondo (Continuous machine in the round).

In room no. 38, in the Soffondo, a circular (semi-continuous) machine was in operation. The model photographed comes from the decommissioning of the Cartiere Meridionali mills, which had several of them in their Isola mills, including the Forme-Fibreno plant. It was driven by a pair of bevel gears, which in turn were moved by a horizontal transmission driven by an Armengrad. Room 38 was located on the upper floor of the Soffondo and was fed by two streams of water from the Fibreno.



Sieving machine located on the ground floor of the Stracceria.

The sieving machine installed on the ground floor of the Stracceria (room 5) was intended to free the rags already sorted by type from further dust and foreign elements. It was equipped with a conveyor belt that passed through a tunnel where the rags were subjected to very strong jets of air.



Manifatture del Fibreno. Another Dusting machine.

The picture above shows another dusting machine located in one of the first sheds built next to the church and still close to the Stracceria.³⁷ It should be noted that when a machine was replaced, it was not always installed in the same place, so the factory's production cycle changed several times.

Others washed with water, but the concept was the same: before reaching the Soffondo defibrators, the rags had to be dusted and washed to ensure a suitable raw material for defibration and reduction to pulp. The screening and refining of rags was further improved in the 1860s and 1870s. As always, different grades of rag corresponded to different grades of paper. Once selected and separated, the rags were cleaned a second time using tumblers, wolfers and beaters, and then shredded in the shredder.

³⁷ The photograph was taken at the time of the lease of the Cartiere Meridionali in 1903.



Fabriano paper mill. Stracceria. The layout of the stalls is identical to that of the Manifatture del Fibreno.

The arrangement of the workbenches of the cartare (central Italy) or stracciarole (Isola area) was standardised in the main Italian paper mills; one can see in the photograph reproduced above, taken in 1905 in a Fedrigoni paper mill in Fabriano, how the workstations were identical.³⁸

The rag women first sorted the woollen rags from the vegetable rags. They then used small knives to remove anything that was not vegetable fibre, such as nails, buttons, rubber, pieces of iron and other objects. They were exposed to occupational diseases because they were in contact with rags of unknown origin, sold wholesale by merchants who traded in large quantities and who, in the case of the Manifatture del Fibreno, came from Naples, although it is known that they sometimes came from Livorno or Marseilles. They were selected according to

³⁸ Castagnari Gianfranco, *Le cartare di Fabriano. Società, donne e lavoro nei tempi della città della Carta*, Fondazione Gianfranco Fedrigoni, Fabriano 2013.

fibre, texture, colour and feel. The finest and most delicate rags were reserved for the production of lighter paper, stamp paper and cigarette paper. Wool was not needed, it required a different type of processing to make pannolenci, which was not produced in Isola and was therefore sold or burnt. Animal fibres were therefore discarded, burned: for this reason the factory had at least one oven to destroy harmful or useless residues. There is no evidence that a Stracceria as large as the one in Forme existed in Carnello, so it is likely that the raw material arrived at the factory already sorted.

Local stories tell us that the stracciarole or ragwomen were curious: sometimes they found chains, money, bracelets, a letter with stamps.³⁹ But those clothes came from people who may have died in epidemics or infectious diseases, hospitals, prisons. Since they did not know the mechanisms of transmission of infection – this was before Pasteur's discovery – they had no protection such as gloves or masks to protect themselves from excrement, spit, blood and therefore bacteria or pests. Occupational diseases were therefore very frequent and were generally infectious diseases, even cholera.

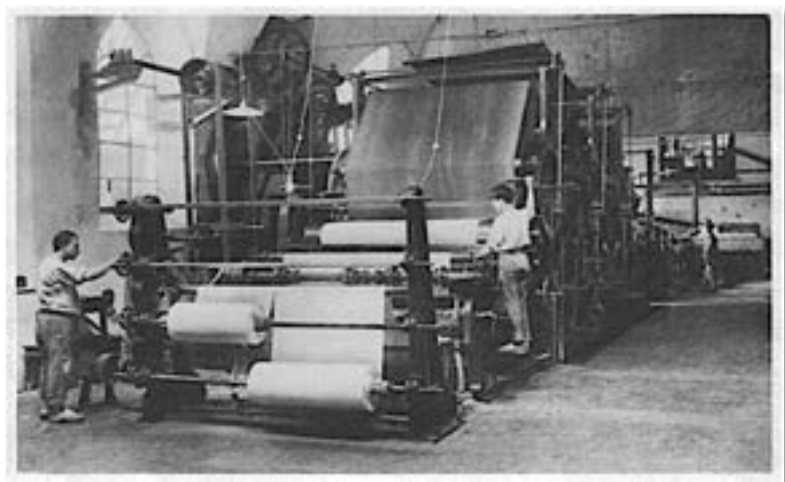
Only after manual selection was the raw material purified. The rags were leached under pressure with lime, or soda, in spherical or cylindrical kettles, rotating autoclaves heated by steam: the kettles. Once the rags were boiled, they were unstructured, crumbly, dark and very smelly, according to those who had seen the material. At that time they were scooped up in wheelbarrows or carried on conveyor belts into the Dutch tubs.

³⁹ Tales made to me in 2020 by Bruno Ceroli, local historian.



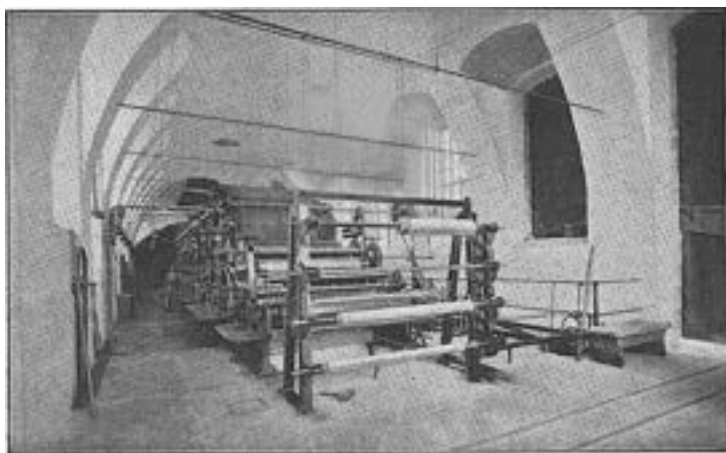
Kettle in use in the paper mills of the Manifatture del Fibreno.
Now on display in a square in Isola del Liri.

The Dutch tubs would rinse the rags for 2 or 3 hours and then, once they had lost their coarseness, their rust-brown colour, chlorine would be introduced and the chemical agent would be allowed to work; the pulp would begin to whiten as the drum continued to grind it finer and finer. The Dutch had very sharp blades that shredded the ashes to a paste. They consisted of a drum, a wooden cylinder with steel blades.



Manifatture del Fibreno. Flat paper machine.

At the Manifatture del Fibreno there was also a flat machine for the production of cigarette paper, a very thin, printable paper. Printing was then carried out in the San Carlo factory where there were machines that handled large formats with many colours. Machine No. 5 was dedicated to the production of cigarette paper.



Manifatture del Fibreno. Flat paper machine.



The flat machine hall of the Manifatture del Fibreno next to the Stracceria. Today the premises of the Lefèbvre Restaurant (from the restaurant's website).



Dusting rags.



Drive wheel.

Chapter 5

Pistolegno

In the 1850s, a workshop-factory for the production of mechanical pulp was built next to the Soffondo mill. After many experiments with wood, mainly poplar, and other plant materials such as seaweed, the technology for producing paper from this raw material had become mature and practical.

The factory, called Pistolegno Remorici, was built on the banks of the River Liri and had three floors, the upper one – now inhabited – being used for cutting wood and feeding it into a shredder. It had taken Ernesto many years to decide on this step, which had never convinced Charles.

The process that made it possible to use wood to make paper was invented in 1844 by the German Federico Keller. The pulp was obtained by a simple mechanical defibration of the wood, by pressing the logs against a stone grindstone, rotating in the transverse direction of the fibres and partially immersed in a vat of water. The process had a high yield (up to 95% of the raw material) but produced a pulp that contained all the impurities of the wood, as the mechanical movement could not separate all the fibres. Finally, in the middle of the century, a paper of poor quality was obtained, but cheap and with good printability, which was considered particularly suitable for popular magazines that did not need to be stored for long periods.

At the beginning of the 1850s, it is known that the Manifatture del Fibreno had a press and a small section for this experimental type of production. In the years that followed, papermakers in various countries developed methods of using chemical reagents to remove impurities and encrusting substances that hold the cellulose fibres together. Industrially viable processes used soda, bisulphite, sulphate and sulphur

dioxide. The 'baking' process involved treating the wood with a solution called 'lye'. In the soda process (1857, Houghton process) the reagent used was a sodium hydroxide lye, while in the bisulphite process developed ten years later (1867, Tilghman process) the lye is an aqueous solution of calcium sulphite in which a small amount of free sulphur dioxide is dissolved. These were exactly the substances produced in the Lefèbvre chemical workshop in Bagnoli, which were added to the Lefèbvre industrial plants in those years.

The sulphate process developed in 1884 (the Dehl process) produced a paste that was particularly resistant to mechanical stress and was therefore called "kraft" ("strong"). This innovation was considered revolutionary because it made it possible to produce large quantities of paper of good quality, which meant that the flat machines could not be replaced, except perhaps for a few accessories. Ernesto then decided to invest in a factory to convert wood into pulp for paper or 'pesto'. A document from 1884 describes the reasons that led him to this decision.

The founding documents state that the Count of Balsorano, having decided to build a 'pulp mill', needed to increase the flow of water for the hydraulic motor that would drive it. Since the 'public water' to be used was to be taken from the Forme Canal, he had altimetric and pluviometric surveys carried out and a report drawn up in order to apply for and obtain the concession decree. The project report stated that the new factory would be built on the left bank of the Liri river, opposite the Ciccodicola wool mill. Its operation would be based on water coming from the Fibreno river, which, after driving the paper mill's motors, would be combined with a small amount of water coming from the Zino wool mill's canal, which would cross the Count's property and flow into the Liri river at the Cascatelle Park.

The new plant therefore used much of the same canals that ran through the Earl's land. However, the water that fed the purification plants that produced the final paste was excluded. Ernesto therefore had to increase the flow of the canal and build a dam to store the water upstream of the new factory. As all the work was being carried out on Lefèbvre's land, he was told that he did not need to make any

agreements with third parties or obtain any permits from the state or the authorities.

Two powerful defibration machines were installed in the factory. The methods, as we have seen, were different and required a lot of chemicals, both in the refining of the pulp and in the refining of the pulp from textile fibres, substances that came from the chemical industry in Bagnoli.



Upper floor of the Pistolegno now restored as a dwelling.

A document clearly lists the equipment of Remorici Pistolegno.

Inside this factory were:

- 1) two vertical defibrators enclosed in cast-iron boxes, each supporting four piston boxes with relative racks with cast-iron gears
- 2) two horizontal refiners, each consisting of two stones, one fixed and the other rotating;
- 3) a cast-iron calasper mounted on wooden boxes;
- 4) two pulp presses mounted on cast-iron frames and boxes;
- 5) an elevator to lift the pressed dough with an iron cage with cast-iron side uprights;
- 6) two 2m x 50cm masonry tanks for storing the piston
- 7) two vertical piston pumps driven by a pulley transmission;

8. two large tanks located underground in the factory for storing the waste water from the paste presses

9) a centrifugal pump to lift the sludge from these tanks and collect it with the pulp presses.

10) two horizontal double-acting cast-iron pumps to lift the production water, each with its own sheet-iron piping.

11) a wooden door next to the feed tank with a rack and a cast-iron valve for draining the water

12) a double chair with cogwheels, sprockets for operating the above door, a filter

13) a water filter consisting of three large tanks with their hatches

14) a dam containing the turbine

15) a double-walled grate made up of two hundred and fifty iron ribs, of which one hundred and twenty form the upper wall.

16) four wooden cones lined with wire cloth for the pulping process.⁴⁰

All the accesses passed through the Lefèbvre estate and a small part of the park was sacrificed and trees felled. Another access, wider and flanked by houses, was probably a right of way granted by the Ciccodicola family, who owned this part of the park. The factory was at the end of a road that crossed the Ciccodicola's land and led to a bridge that later collapsed and led to the factory.

⁴⁰ Rogito notaio Placidi 30 gennaio 1907.



A dirt road at that time used for access to the Remorici Pistolegno.

On one side of the road photographed above were pots used for filtering and drying the wood pesto. After this stage, the material was transported to the Soffondo.

The Pistolegno factory was built on three levels on a very steep slope. In addition to the upper entrance, there was a second entrance on the level close to the river.

The following picture shows the building with the base widened to withstand the flooding of the river, which could be very violent.



River side of the Pistolegno: note the impressiveness of the structure built to withstand the frequent flooding of the Liri.

The building was constructed in 1884 with large stones mixed with a very strong cement mortar. The following picture shows one side of the Pistolegno factory, where there is now access to the even lower part, where two large tanks and a centrifugal pump were located. Underground there were also impressive hydraulic works to move the water and a dam with a turbine to transmit the movement to the machines on the upper floors.

The water-driven wheels, which have now disappeared, generated considerable power capable of debarking and cutting wood into small pieces. The factory had at least three levels.



Western side of Remorici's Pistolegno factory.

Here, through another entrance, now closed, the trunks were transported and fed into powerful hydraulic machines that reduced them to pulp. The pulp or paste (pesto or 'pisto') was finally transported to the Soffondo via a downhill road and then through a tunnel that is now visible but closed. The paste arrived in the Dutch tanks of the Soffondo, where it was reduced to the right consistency by mechanical and chemical processes.

The factory is still a remarkable example of industrial archaeology. The masonry has not been touched, although the roof seems to have been rebuilt, while the two lower floors are almost empty or used for storage. The building shows very robust late 19th century forms. The large west-facing windows, which let in light until late in the day, are also noteworthy.

The following picture shows the factory from the side facing the Soffondo. The vegetation hides the fact that the building has a certain stateliness, with strong walls able to withstand considerable mechanical stress.



The Pistolegno from the side towards the Soffondo.

In the advertising plaque reproduced below, the Pistolegno in the management of the Cartiere Meridionali was advertised: one glimpses the large wheels that transmitted the motion, the turbines, the vertical shafts.



Although they belong to the period of the Cartiere Meridionali, the plants illustrated in this unfortunately ruined illustration card refer to the Pistolegno Remorici plant. Pulp became prevalent as early as the late 1980s for certain types of paper.

The following picture refers to a chipping machine that was located in the Isola Superiore mill of Cartiere Meridionali but was identical to the one installed in Pistolegno Remorici.



Chipper machine. Cartiere Meridionali. Four turbines can be seen behind.

From Pistolegno a road led down to a building, now painted the same historic colour as when it was built: light ochre. It led to a tunnel dug into the side of the river bank that led directly to the Soffondo. The wagons, which ran on rails, carried wood pulp, which was roughly crushed and reduced to a fibrous mass. Apart from the alterations made to create the dwellings, it can be said that the clearing, the road and, in general, the state of the buildings, although deteriorated, is that of the time. In particular, the access building to the gallery that led to the Soffondo is well preserved and the gallery itself is closed but not walled up.



Tunnel entrance. The tunnel connects the Pistolegno Remorici and Soffondo.



Connection tunnel between Pistolegno and Soffondo.

At the end of the tunnel, which seems to have had the function of covering and protecting the very steep embankment, we can see the gate leading to the clearing in front of the Soffondo. This space allowed the passage of wagons on rails, the same as in the Soffondo, which have been removed here.

The Lefèbvre estate lasted only a few years. After the death of Count Ernesto, family and financial problems, which had in fact been going on for years, led Francesco, who had become the administrator, to close down the entire factory in 1888; it is not clear whether this was due to a lack of orders or to a lack of liquidity to keep the factory running.

In any case, it was rented to the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali with a lease dated 21 December 1892, signed by Giulio Emery and Francesco Lefèbvre, and reopened at the beginning of 1893.⁴¹

Subsequently, the highly coveted and very expensive factory was leased to Gabriele De Caria's company from 1900 to 1906 and then again from 1907 to Cartiere Meridionali, which bought it.

⁴¹ *Contratto di Locazione alla Società Cartiere Meridionali della Cartiera del Fibreno da parte di Lefèbvre*, 21 dicembre 1892, (ex) Archivio Boimond Fald. 16, Cart. 45 AA.

leased to Cartiere Meridionali, the Fibreno mill was connected to a railway system that also linked it to the other mills.

The Mancini eventually bought the Palazzo dei Ciccodicola, which was always on the verge of bankruptcy due to debts incurred with the Lefèbvre family, languishing business and the collapse of their factory. The Mancini would build two more villas, one of which incorporated a 16th-century villa visible from the earliest paintings in the Isola Superiore area, when there was only the monastery.

We know from an expert's report of 1885 that 7 water intakes were in operation in the Boncompagni building that year, supplying motive power to four automatic spinning machines of 240 spindles each and 33 hand-operated looms.⁴² The Palazzo Ducale was then mortgaged by the Bank of Italy in 1883 to be sold in 1896 together with the nearby Villa Correa to Count Luigi Gaetani di Laurenzana, who lived in Piedimonte d'Alife, where the Egg factory was located. While the Polsinelli wool mill, which stood under the Isola Grande Cascade, closed in 1883; the Mazzetti Felt Factory, also housed in the Ducal Palace, lasted until 1922 when it made way for the Felt Factory on the Liri whose owner was Angelo Viscogliosi. The latter was also a partner in the Società per le forze Idrauliche del Liri (Society for Hydraulic Forces on the Liri) founded in 1866 and then a paper mill in Valcatoio, next to Palazzo Ducale.⁴³ This takes us to times long gone from the ones we are recounting, but it also tells us how lively the activity on Isola was at least until the end of the century.

⁴² Report by Giuseppe Castaldi, Chancellery of the Civil Court of Cassino, 10 settembre 1885.

⁴³ Lambert Carlo, *Memoria di Carlo Lambert fabbricante di panni in sostegno della sovrana concessione del palazzo ex Ducale nell'isola di Sora*, 1828; Magliocchetti Guido, *La cascata grande e il ramo sinistro del Liri*, 2004; Iafrate Amleto, *Opuscolo Illustrativo. Isola del Liri e le sue industrie*, Marzo 2018, pages not shown but after panel 27.

Chapter 6

Soffondo

There were several tunnels between the power station site, the Shape factory site and the Soffondo site, through which transmission shafts and pipes passed, and a tunnel where trolleys on rails were loaded and unloaded. One of these was served by a goods lift, which was replaced at the beginning of the 20th century when an inspection showed it to be inadequate. One of the most original structures of the Manifatture del Fibreno is the large extension of the Soffondo, largely built in 1830 and then adapted and completed over the next three decades, especially in the parts that were not visible, such as the pipes, tunnels and shafts that transmitted movement to the machines.

It should be remembered that part of the factory was under the road and collapses were possible. From the road, at the same level as the neo-Gothic church, a flight of steps led to the Cascatelle Park on one side and to the factory on the other, overlooking the Liri river, which in the first half of the 19th century had a much higher flow rate than in later times, when its water was less exploited.



Ruins of the Soffondo complex.

For the guests, however, the passage was not difficult: a system of stairs started from the side of the small church, multiplying the visit to the marvels of technology. Even if the Soffondo contained a less advanced piece of technology, the shafts that carried the motion that drove the rag weavers could be an interesting sight on their own, from a safe distance.



Tunnel from the Forme factory to the Soffondo (construction 1893-1905).

Constructed of solid materials, the building is much more imposing than it appears from street level, and it is not until you are at river level that you realise how robust it is. Consider that in height it covers the entire plane that in the picture above goes from river level to street level, and can be considered as a single multi-aisled building, high and wide. In fact, the church was practically built on its roof.

Inside it had rooms that housed machinery and installations of considerable size. The system of tunnels under the road was used for the passage of pipes, transmission shafts and walkways. The following picture shows another tunnel of earlier construction, which allowed the transport of materials with a trolley on rails and was connected to a goods lift.



Tunnel from the Forme factory to the Soffondo (construction 1829-1832).

The next picture shows the new tunnel, the construction of which took a long time due to constant lawsuits and was completed by Francesco Lefèbvre in 1905, before the complex was sold two years later. The construction of a wider and more comfortable tunnel, connected by stairs and passages to other service tunnels, to the Soffondo and to the Fibreno factory, had become a mandatory condition for the sale of the complex to the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali.



Opposite side of the new tunnel connecting Soffondo and the Forme factory (1893-1905).



Soffondo, lower level.

In the photo above, one can see the spaces divided into several bays that housed 16 large Dutch vats, kettles, pulpers and kneaders for vegetable fibre pesto made from rag but also for wood and cellulose pulp that came from the nearby Pistolegno plant served by a long tunnel. The next picture shows another space, on a higher level than this one, which housed plants that were unfortunately dismantled and resold as scrap iron



Soffondo, first floor.

In this case, as in the previous one, the wooden roofing has collapsed and has been replaced by steel walkways, which, according to the project for the restoration of the complex and the planned paper museum, attempted between 1995 and 1999 and unfortunately abandoned, should allow more practical and safer access to the premises.

Only a few remnants remain of the numerous installations and machines that worked in these rooms for around a hundred years, such as some tile-covered Dutch vats. There were wooden and copper vats, as well as more recent brick and tiled ones like these. Some are quite well preserved, although the iron parts (the rollers and blades) have been removed, as have the fittings and pipes that supplied them with water.



Soffondo, first floor. Dutch defibrating tub.

In the Dutch tub or 'Dutch defibrator' shown here, you can see the structure that allowed the material to be loaded from one side via a chute and removed from the other side after being treated by the blade system. The tiles, which guarantee total watertightness, show how much water was used: the tank operated at least 12 hours a day, if not 14, and was always full. As they were very noisy machines, they were conveniently located in a sheltered part of the factory.

The wall structures are still preserved because they are well built and very solid. In these rooms, the water from the Fibreno River flowed with great force through pipes that are still partly in place, still clean and pure, to maintain a clear mixture that did not alter the colour of the vegetable or wood pulp.



Service tunnel with piping.

The picture above shows a pipeline some thirty centimetres in diameter that has been patched several times to prevent collapses. The pipeline carried high-pressure water from Santa Maria delle Forme to the Soffondo to operate the defibrators and bleachers.



Soffondo, first floor. Dutch tub.

Among the equipment still recognisable and not removed in the Soffondo (some were certainly made of copper and this favoured their removal) are a kettle and two kneaders that had the function, the first, of preparing the material for the rags before the treatment on the Dutch tanks, according to the explanation given in another chapter, and the second of kneading and making uniform the dough before it was taken to the machines that formed the cellulose dough.



Mixer made from concrete.

The picture above shows the inside of a concrete mixer or kneader that was constantly filled with water. After this vigorous washing that whitened the boiled rags came the semi-final stage of defibration on the Dutch vats equipped with blades.



Water shutter in Soffondo.



Outer space. Soffondo.

Chapter 7

The competitors

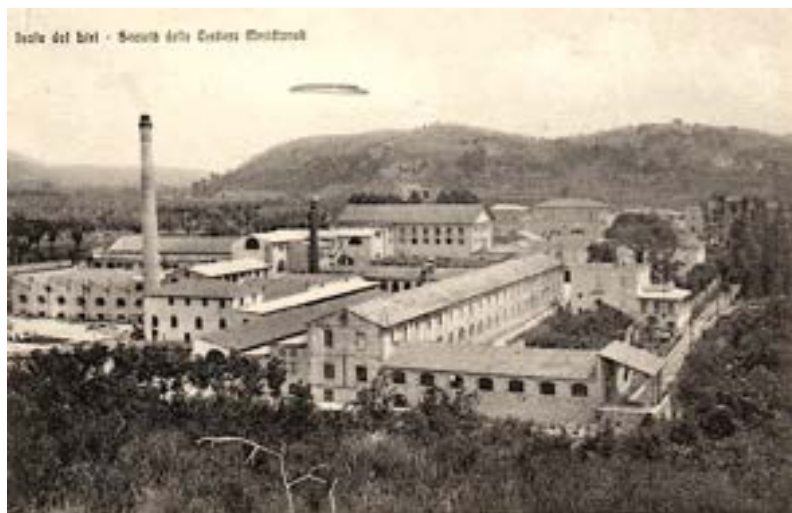
It is impossible to write the history of the Manifatture del Fibreno without taking into account the achievements of the factory that was to become its main competitor and that would eventually take over the Manifatture del Fibreno: the Cartiera del Liri. The figures involved were largely the same.

Initially, it was planned to build the factory in front of the Fibreno factory, in the Remorici area, but a change of heart led to the choice of a different plot of land, closer to the hill, which was sold by Francesco Roessinger and Sebastiana Lepreux on the Ammocito Lake estate, inherited from their father, Claude François Lepreux. They legally established the Liri paper mill on 12 June 1844 (notary Cacace), when the factory had already been built. At the same time a canal was built by Roessinger to fish in the Fibreno river.

The partners of the Liri paper mill were Napoleone Paquier, Natale Sorvillo, Carlo Carafa, Raffaele Barbaro de Simone, Francesco Roessinger, Pasquale Ciccodicola, Antonio Bucci, Francesco Rossi and Francesco Mezzanotte, with shares ranging from 1.5% of Bucci's capital to 24% for Sorvillo, 20% for Carafa and 10% for Napoleone Paquier. The banker Sorvillo, who was a partner in Meuricoffre & C. and Falconnet & C., became a director.

Many of these people were good friends of the Lefèbvres. Rosanne's diaries mention visits from Carafa, De Simone, Sorvillo and, of course, Ciccodicola, a family who would later become, as we know, her creditors. Napoleon Paquier was appointed director. This factory was also built with French technicians, in this case from Marseilles. The energy came from a canal in the Fibreno river. Paquier had a lot of powers, he was given a building to live in – which still exists today –

and a great deal of discretion in the use of fines and punishments, which already took this company, which had many shareholders and was a joint stock company, away from the paternalistic management of Lefèbvre, which gave more advantages to the workers. It is no coincidence that the first strikes at Isola del Liri took place at this factory and not at Lefèbvre.



The factory was accessed from the provincial road via two driveways on either side of the small church that had been built a few years earlier. The two driveways were surrounded by Roessinger's land on one side and Charles Lefèbvre's land on the other. In 1855, Roessinger sold the land to the manager of the paper mill in order to repay Lefèbvre the 6,000 ducats he had borrowed to give to his son. With the deed of sale, the paper mill was granted 'ownership' of an unspecified volume, according to the documents of the time, of the canal dug by Roessinger to draw water from the Fibreno.⁴⁴ In 1862,

⁴⁴ Notary Tombone's deed of sale of 11-12-1855. Quoted in Iafrate, p. 15. Copy deposited at ASL, Frosinone.

Sorvillo, who by then had become the sole owner of the Liri paper mill after purchasing all the shares of the partners, bought another fund from Enrico Roessinger for 15,000 ducats. By this time the paper mill had become very large, employing 500 workers, who were treated badly in many ways.

The mill was served by a dam which produced water to provide the power to run the machinery. In the winter of 1872, exceptional rainfall caused a flood of great force, destroying the dam. The damage was considerable and almost the entire mill site was flooded. It was no coincidence that the site had previously been called Lake Annocito: over the centuries it had often been flooded.

Sorvillo asked for the dam to be rebuilt, knowing full well that this water intake was not legitimate, both for the reasons already mentioned and because of the lack of clear rules in the then emerging jurisprudence. In particular, a law of 20 March 1865 and a decree of the following September 1868 seemed to have put the *Memorandum Zurlo* in order. Sorvillo's petition was dated 10 December 1872, in which he added that "the closure of the paper mill would put 500 workers on the street and it is useless for me to say what the consequences might be for public order".

On 20 April 1873, the Mayor published Natale Sorvillo's request, inviting all those interested to a visit on 10 May in the presence of the civil engineer who was to speak that day. In order to obtain permission for the reconstruction, it was necessary to comply with the new regulations and to obtain a licence, which Sorvillo did not have. It was also necessary to specify the dimensions of the new dam and to give assurances that no damage would be caused to the owners of the industrial plants located upstream of the dam. Gennaro, an engineer from Naples, was commissioned to carry out the technical calculations.

The cost of the dam was not very high, but it was necessary to build a covered canal from the intake to the paper mill. This latter work was very costly, but it would have guaranteed the preservation of the water for the irrigation of the surrounding land, as well as preventing the water from being polluted by heterogeneous matter that could endanger the paper-making process. This was also the period when the crisis of the Liri companies began. As we know, the Bourbon protectionist tariffs had

been abolished and this had led to the closure of important factories, especially in Naples. The unification of units of measurement and currency also caused difficulties for the southern entrepreneurial system, which had to adopt the metric system.

Sorvillo was in trouble. His paper mill produced about 25 *cantaie* (also called '*cantagli*' in the documents of the time) of paper and 3 *cantaie* of cardboard per day. The entrepreneur decided to create a new company and called on all his connections. Among them were Giuseppe Castel Cicala, President of the Bank of Naples, Oscar Meuricoffre, a banker, Antonio Allievi of the Banca Generale di Roma and Domenico Gallotti of the Società Generale Napolitana di Credito e Costruzioni. Also involved were bankers Angelo Alhaique and Giovanni Malinverni, as well as many other aristocratic merchants and entrepreneurs.

Among the shareholders in the new company was Francesco Roessinger, who sold him the land on which the paper mill was built and became a partner with 8.5% of the share capital. He was the holder of a right to draw water from the left bank of the Liri river, granted by the Prefect of Terra di Lavoro on 25 February 1869. On 3 April 1873, Francesco Roessinger and 39 other people went to the notary Giuseppe Amodio in Naples to set up a new company, the Società Anonima delle Cartiere Meridionali, which bought the Sorvillo mill on 7 July 1873. The agreed price was 600,000 Italian lire. It is interesting to note that the 1873 deed of sale describes the size of the factory.

The Liri paper mill, owned by Mr. Sorvillo, is situated on the consular road leading from Isola del Liri to Sora. This consular road leads to the factory and the other to the chapel, which is part of Mr. Sorvillo's property. The first of these roads is bordered by the canal that brings the water from the Fibreno river to the factory, and the entire surface of the factory is divided into two areas. The first is the actual area on which the factory buildings stand, surrounded by walls and bounded to the north by the land belonging to Mr. Roessinger and to the west by the second land belonging to Mr. Sorvillo. The second piece of land consists of arable land and scrubland and is bounded to the east by the boundary wall of the above area, to the west by the River Liri, to the north by the Roessinger-Singer property and to the north by the property of the Count of Balsorano. The existing buildings in the area described above constitute a

paper mill and are made up as follows a) a large building that housed the four paper-making machines and their accessories, as well as the leachers', blacksmiths' and carpenters' workshops; b) a room consisting of a ground floor for storage and an upper floor for living quarters; c) a room consisting of a ground floor for storage and an upper floor for living quarters; d) a room consisting of a ground floor for storage and an upper floor for living quarters; e) a room consisting of a ground floor and an upper floor for the director's quarters; d) various rooms, a ground floor and an upper floor for storage and school use; e) a room with storerooms on the ground floor; f) a room with steam boilers; g) another building for chapel use; h) finally, in the above area, there is a garden facing the director's house, with an annex behind the house itself.

In the second area of crops and shrubs there are: a) the canal for the water intake of the Liri river, which is the driving force of the factory; b) the canal for the discharge of the water from the factory back into the Liri river; c) the tank for purified water, which is brought here from the above-mentioned canal for the intake of the Fibreno river; d) a plantation of poplars on the banks of the Liri river and a plantation of fruit trees inside.

The shareholders divided a total of 10,000 shares, giving a share capital of 2.5 million lire. Some important shares were also bought by individuals and companies in Milan, such as the Banca Industriale Commerciale, Giulio Merati, Giulio Fioretti. Émile Grévenich, former director of the Lefèbvre paper mill, also participated. At the time of its incorporation, the company's head office was located in Naples. On 23 June 1883, the capital was increased to 1,500,000 lire, divided into 6,000 shares, by a deed of the notary Bonucci of Castellammare di Stabia.

If the Cartiera del Liri paper mill, founded in 1844, could have been one of the many operations carried out in Isola to exploit the location and create a real paper district, with international experts gathered in a small area and ideal physical and economic conditions, the financial power brought into play with the foundation of the Cartiere Meridionali in 1873 was something else. The old guard, made up of Nicola Sorvillo, but also Antonio Cilento and the Meuricoffre family, who belonged to

the generation of Charles and Ernesto and were part of the same immigrant or local elite as the entrepreneur-financiers of Naples, was joined by a group of shareholders, mainly financiers, who were far removed from the mills. Many of them came from the north of unified Italy, particularly from Milan and Turin. In the 20 years between 1873 and 1893, the Manifatture del Fibreno and the Cartiere Meridionali went through crises and were only saved by a large injection of capital. It was not by chance that in 1893, in Naples, at Strada San Giovanni Maggiore Pignatelli no. 18, in the presence of the notary Bonucci, a deed was signed to transfer the company's headquarters to Turin as of 1 January 1894. According to the report attached to the deed, the move was made necessary by the fact that the majority of the shareholders lived in the north and wished to bring their business closer to home. Another reason given was that the shares could be traded on the Turin market, which was more active than the Naples market. In fact, subsequent general meetings were held in Turin. There were many new shareholders that year, including Jules Blanc, Guglielmo de Filippis, Carmine de Chiara, Alfonso Rosselli, Augusto Bellisario, Ludovico Palumbo and Ferdinando Poppi. On 15 October 1893, the first ordinary general meeting in French was held in Turin. In 1899 the company moved to Villa Corea. During the last 20 years of the 19th century and the early years of the following century, more land was purchased to expand the factory.⁴⁵

On 19 May 1901, the Cartiere Meridionali also bought the Liri diversion and the buildings of the Ciccodicola wool mill, including the house and mill. By then, most of the buildings had collapsed and the rubble had covered much of the machinery, rendering it unusable. For this reason, the sale price was set at only 36,000 lire, with the water rights on the Liri River being of interest.

The company with which the purchase was concluded was headed by Jules Blanc, a Milan-born banker and owner of the Blanc Bank in Turin, with Carlo Poerio and Tito Luccichenti as deputy directors. The directors were Silvio Vendrame and Daniele Pisani, the latter of whom

⁴⁵ *La società delle cartiere Meridionali*, p. 39.

lived in Villa Lefèbvre at the time. In addition to Blanc, the company's directors included Edoardo Noyer, Emilio de Benedetti and Augusto Calligaris, all from Turin. On 5 September 1906, Cartiere Meridionali bought the Intra paper mill in Verbania. This was the prelude to the subsequent purchase of all the major paper mills and water supplies in the area between Sora and Isola.

Chapter 8

The second Half of the Century Arpino and Isola

However, the Manifatture del Fibreno had managed to avoid crises for a long time. At the time, it was unique in terms of organisation and management. Located in the social and productive context of an industrial district, it suffered when the health of the whole district, including Isola, Sora and Arpino, went into crisis. The period between 1860 and 1870 was very turbulent and painful. There were factory closures, clashes with neighbouring towns, the passage of troops and a rather chaotic period after the Unification. In the wool sector, while the small artisanal industry of Arpino survived by maintaining a strictly local dimension, living on its market relationship with Naples, the medium-sized industry of Arpino was hard hit by competition from the wool centres of Lombardy and Piedmont. Lower prices due to greater availability, higher production costs in Arpino compared to the large industries in the north, higher technological and raw material costs, but also the lack of capital and the absence of political and financial support led to a chain of bankruptcies immediately after the Unification. Between 1863 and 1873 there was a general collapse of many factories. The number of wool mills in Arpino fell from 38 to 27, and between 1873 and 1878 four of the largest wool factories in the Liri Valley closed. The production of the remaining factories fell to less than half of what it had been in 1860. This only affected the wool industry. Those that remained resisted by taking work to the new state.

Especially after unification, the fate of some centres took different paths. Until the first decades of the 19th century, Arpino was an

important centre for wool production in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and its situation, which guaranteed prosperity and at least protected it from misery - according to the concept of misery at that time - had lasted for several decades, also thanks to the quality of its products, the orders guaranteed to the Bourbon army and, of course, the protectionist regime of the Kingdom, which, although weakened after 1848, continued. In the years following the unification, the number of factories dwindled and the crisis began to affect even families. It can therefore be assumed that the crisis in the area began in Arpino, or at least that the crisis in the wool industry anticipated the industrial crisis that would later affect the paper industry.

The activity of carding and spinning wool, which required more modern machinery - as in the cotton mills of Sava and Egg - was still insignificant, and the processing that took place in Arpino was almost entirely manual, although not in every phase. There was only one large factory in the town, with three hydraulic engines and more than 200 workers; there were also a number of small artisan factories, each employing an average of 30 workers. The early medieval structure of the town centre, with its narrow, winding streets, did not allow for the construction of modern factories, and the plain seemed less suitable.

The woollen sector was more substantial, although it was almost identical to that of thirty years earlier, that is, 1830-1840, in terms of the number of factories, the equipment used and the number of workers employed. In Isola, on the other hand, three new factories had been built in the wool sector, equipped with hydraulic motors and employing over 300 workers, not counting the Zino di Carnello. However, the precariousness of the sector now seemed to be a structural fact. Unemployment returned, emigration abroad increased, and conflicts and protests became more frequent. Above all, the completely archaic nature of labour relations led to the unfair exploitation of workers, which the latter repeatedly denounced in petitions and written requests to the government authorities, especially on the eve of the crisis of the 1870s, a few years after unification.

In fact, in those years there were numerous episodes of protest against the owners' habit of withholding part of the workers' wages for

the strangest reasons, such as the organisation of festivals or deductions for insurance, which were not always paid and often turned out to be a pretext for paying less. The situation in Arpino came to a head in December 1877 with a large demonstration in the square, attended by more than two hundred workers. However, the forms of protest remained linked to the traditional context of social relations typical of the Ancien Régime and never had an organised character: there was no ideological infiltration of a socialist or communist nature, for example, as had happened elsewhere.

In a proclamation addressed to King Vittorio Emanuele II, the workers of Arpino denounced the fact that part of their wages was paid in food instead of money, and the existence of a system of work organisation, the "caporalato", controlled by the wool merchants, which was gradually impoverishing the entire population working in the sector. The denunciation was directed in particular at the small and medium-sized companies, which demanded to be treated on an equal footing with the large companies in the neighbouring region of Liri, both in the wool industry and in the paper industry, which had a more modern organisation and systems of worker protection, a kind of private welfare, however weak, which existed and was introduced by Lefèbvre. In Isola and Carnello, the entire organisation of work and the relationship between workers and owners responded to criteria linked to the ongoing process of mechanisation and a less rigid and blinkered view of production. The Arpino protest of 1877 was not followed up because the industrialists promised a lot, even if when the facts came out they did not keep their promises, and then the workers did not seem to have the organisational tools to change what was happening. Attempts to involve other sectors of workers in their struggle, such as those employed in the larger companies, particularly those in Isola, were unsuccessful at the time. The paper mill workers did not have the same demands as the wool workers because their conditions were better. This confirms the existence of a social structure that was still very role-bound and separate from the rest of society in the Liri Valley. Isola and Arpino, although geographically close, belonged to two different phases of social and industrial development. This situation is

also linked to the low level of mechanisation, which is confirmed by the evidence presented by the wool manufacturers of Cini and San Germano to the *Comitato di inchiesta industriale* in 1875, from which we can extract a number of indications about the real continuity and economic function of this industry in Arpino.

First of all, the willingness and diligence of the workers, combined with the knowledge that they only had hand looms in the factories, is highlighted. This is the key to understanding that this was an industry based on the extensive use of low-skilled labour, where many operations were manual and few used steam. There were also market problems in both the sale and supply of raw materials. The relationship with Naples as a commercial outlet and with Puglia as a reserve of raw materials remained almost exclusive. The acquisition of some new orders from the unified state, after the loss of large military supplies with the Bourbon state, had brought oxygen to the factories, but the advantages were not exploited with investments and improvements or with the search for new sources of supply and new markets. There was little attention or interest in technological improvements, which had been considerable in the sector at the end of the previous century. There were external interventions to improve the professionalism of the workers, but they were not exploited. In other words, no thought was given to bringing in competent technicians to improve the work processes, to improve the professionalism of the workers or to install machinery. Faced with the proposals of a committee that had been set up to try to open a technical school, they preferred to ask for the intervention of a single technician to come to Arpino under the supervision of the manufacturers to explain and instruct the workers. This single intervention, of short duration, could do little to change the situation. The technician came for a limited time and the knowledge he was able to transfer was not much: the technical school could have changed the situation completely.

Some very interesting elements emerged from the discussion regarding the relationship with Isola del Liri and commercial expectations. The requests made by the two manufacturers, Cini and San Germano, concerned both their location in terms of resources, the

market and the need for greater control and speed of rail transport, as well as the approval of a project submitted to the Ministry of Public Works to take water from the Liri river and send it to Arpino. This project, to be carried out with a powerful pump, technically possible at the time thanks to the energy generated by steam boilers, could have revitalised the entire sector and provided the energy needed to mechanise production. The pumping station was located to the south of Isola, so the islanders and the paper industry would not have objected. For various reasons, however, due to disputes, a lack of agreement and a common vision, the project was never realised and the wool industry gradually disappeared from Arpino. Today, its memory remains in the Wool Museum, unfortunately reduced to the cramped space of a church, with machinery placed in a way unsuitable for an exhibition, even if the courtesy and preparation of those who cared for and managed the museum with the few means at their disposal make up for it.



One of the large machines on display in the Arpino Wool Museum.

Another aspect that condemned the arpinate industry was the lack of commercial updating. The artisans did not send their products to the

exhibitions that were frequently held in Naples, Rome, Milan and abroad. There was neither the will nor the ability to participate. This was a very different situation from the internationality that was to be found just a few kilometres away in Isola, where first Lefèbvre and then Cartiere Meridionali had established themselves on the international markets, both east and west, as far away as the United States and Brazil.

The situation in the paper industry was therefore very different. Charles Lefèbvre, with his strategy of entrusting his company only to the most qualified technicians and engineers available on the foreign market (they did not exist on the Italian market), had forced the general quality of work and processes to rise from the outset, setting a standard that others would have to follow if they wanted to survive. The creation and success of the factory had set off a chain of effects that had in turn led to the creation of many other factories that were very different from the small ones that had been set up in the Boncompagni Castle or the much older ones that had been moved by the various canals of Carnello. They were replaced by large modern factories, starting with Giuseppe Mazio's Cartiera di Tritto (1819) and, of course, the Cartiera del Liri (1842). In the period following the Unification, eight paper mills operated on Isola, on average much larger than those on the peninsula, four of them with more than 400 workers, three with more than 130 and only one small one in Picinisco. In a few years there would be 19 paper mills (albeit of different types). In 2002, Michela Cigola carried out a groundbreaking study to catalogue the factories whose buildings still existed in the 20th century in the Terra di Lavoro district, including the Anitrella paper mill, which until 1861 was politically part of the Papal State, while geographically and by district it belonged to Terra di Lavoro, a province of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies until 1861.

The paper mill of S. Elia di Fiumerapido

Carnello paper mill (originally two)

Bartolomucci paper mill (Picinisco)

Anitrella paper mill (Monte S. Giovanni Campano)

Sora Paper Mill (Isola del Liri)

Fibreno Paper Mill (Isola)

Courrier Paper Mill (Isola)
Pelagalli Paper Mill (Aquino)
Visocchi Paper Mill (Atina)
Boimond Paper Mill (Isola)
Sorvillo Paper Mill (Isola)
Viscogliosi Paper Mill (Isola)
Costantini Paper Mill (Sora)
Eugenio Courier Paper Mill (Sora)
Cartiere Meridionali (Isola)
Tersigni Paper Mill (Fontana Liri)⁴⁶

There were 18 machines, of which 12 were paper machines (5 installed at the three Fibreno mill sites, later to become 4) and 26 drum machines, in addition to a large presence of the older but still valid Dutch 'pile' machines. Chemicals were used extensively, with increasing effectiveness, and production experiments continued with rag substitutes such as straw (for the production of so-called straw paper), but above all wood and then cellulose.

Each mill had machines for cutting and shaving paper and steam boilers for drying, with an articulated production of coarse, fine and extra-fine paper, an increasing percentage of which was exported to eastern countries such as Turkey, Russia, France, but also Mexico, the United States and Brazil, as mentioned above. Cardboard, cigarette paper, tissue paper and, to a lesser extent, straw paper, an inferior paper used for packaging, were also produced. The process of capitalist entrepreneurial rationalisation of the textile industry and the development of the mechanical paper industry were further accelerated by comparison with the domestic market and the new industrial structures in northern Italy.

On the whole, the paper industry was able to withstand the new reality thanks to the structure of the sector, its concentration and the fact

⁴⁶ Cigola Michela, *Le cartiere storiche del basso Lazio*, Francesco Ciolfi, Cassino 2002.

that in the Liri Valley the most advanced technological innovations continued to be introduced and the relationship with water as an energy source was adapted, with investments in increasingly sophisticated hydraulic works. Nevertheless, the crisis came, and the resistance of the paper mills of the Liri Valley is a phenomenon of resistance, adaptation and gradual, laborious integration into the new national panorama.

From the 1870s onwards, new financial and entrepreneurial players tended to enter the scene in the form of joint stock companies, as we have seen, with headquarters first in Naples and then in Rome or Turin. This allowed the largest of these industries to grow stronger, which was not necessarily good for the workers and led to growing discontent because the exploitation of labour was also accentuated. It was a slow process that would continue throughout the 1870s and 1880s.

Despite increasing difficulties, the old protagonists continued to resist with their constant efforts to modernise and diversify (Lefèbvre built other specialised factories such as San Carlo – which never received the recognition it deserved – and Pistolegno) and also to concentrate.

Both the machinery and the technologies used in the paper mills of the area were particularly advanced at the time of national unification. In the Liri Valley, despite the small number of paper mills, there were no less than 18 paper machines, compared to 16 in Piedmont, eight in Lombardy and four in Liguria. Twenty years later, in 1880, in the face of a considerable technological stability of the sector in the valley, the paper industry was nevertheless greatly reduced compared to the paper industry in other regions.

Regions	Factories		Machines	
	1880	1903	1880	1903
Piemonte	49	55	40	58
Lombardia	98	69	36	69
Veneto	59	37	5	35
Toscana	78	97	6	85
Campania	58	43	32	38

The table shows the number of Italian industries published in the *Annali di Statistias* in 1880, which confirms the importance of the southern paper mills in that year, but also seems to underline a much slower process of development compared to the progress of the sector in Piedmont and Lombardy. In addition, there were obstacles to the power of the paper industrialists, such as the awarding of state contracts for the supply of paper and printing mainly to Turin, Genoa and Florence instead of Naples. Both in a memorandum of 1861 and in discussions with the Industrial Investigation Committee more than a decade later, the paper manufacturers demanded a revision of the Piedmontese customs tariffs on the import of foreign paper and the export of rags. This was accompanied by demands for new infrastructure and production facilities in sectors related to the paper industry, such as chemicals, especially acids and kaolin. In addition to the demand for a railway to Sora, which in reality would not be completed until many years later, there was also an insistence on the need to establish chemical industries, perhaps managed by the state, and mechanical industries that would reduce technical costs with an internal supply of indispensable products such as kaolin. The railway was to link the district to Rome and Naples via Cassino, but as already mentioned, it was not completed until 1895.

As far as the chemical industry was concerned, the only serious attempt had been made by the Lefèbvre family, who founded an important chemical industry in Bagnoli in 1856. Despite the best of intentions, the quality of the installations and the calibre of the director in charge, the Frenchman Charles Alexandre Depérais, the company struggled to get off the ground, despite the opposition of the new government (which had tried to cancel the deed of sale of the land on which it was built). The Bagnoli Chemical Industry supplied the industries of the Liri Valley with kaolin, sulphuric acid and other leaching products necessary for the bleaching of paper, both for the bleaching of rags and, later, for the treatment of pulp. Although it supplied these products, it never really made a difference and was sold at the end of the century.

There was also a shortage of rags, and it was not until the 1870s that the industry was saved by a change in technology, with the use of wood pulp and cellulose materials. Even the tariff of 1878 did not provide a definitive solution. Another critical factor was that they responded to the increase in technical costs with a drastic and progressive reduction in wages, a course of action that could not fail to create social tensions in a region where class consciousness was becoming increasingly evident.

It was still the workers who, together with hydraulic power, made it possible to maintain a sufficient level of production to withstand the attacks of foreign competition, especially from the rapidly growing centres in Piedmont and Lombardy. In the 1870s, the Rossi paper mill in Arsiero accelerated its growth, and the Binda paper mill in Milan also acquired an exceptional production capacity for the time, especially after its reconstruction in 1871 following a fire, as did the Vaprio d'Adda paper mill. The report of the Ministry of the Interior's Commission of Inquiry into the strikes reads: 'The Commission found the worst condition of the workers in relation to their wages in the Liri valley... In the paper industry, the abundance of labour keeps wages very modest, but the continuity of work, the great sobriety of the workers and the paternal concern of the big industrialists for their workers create for the latter a state of relative well-being'.⁴⁷ A relative prosperity, therefore, and this is how it was perceived by the workers themselves: security, housing, medical care, insurance, in exchange for work that was often exhausting and tiring.

As far as the composition of the workforce is concerned, an extrapolation of the available data shows that at the beginning of the 1980s there were 924 adult male workers, 1074 adult female workers and 438 children employed at Isola del Liri alone. In the paper mills, women and children were generally employed in manual work, in the preparation of the raw material and in the preparation of the finished

⁴⁷ *Relazione presentata a sua eccellenza il Ministero dell'Interno nel mese di marzo 1879 dalla commissione di inchiesta sugli scioperi*, Roma 1885, p. 12; Stefano Merli, *op. cit.*, pp. 382 383.

product, according to a division of labour by department, which favoured the quantitative employment of these workers over the qualitative employment of adult men.

If we compare the composition of the labour force in Isola del Liri with the rest of the region and the province of Rome, we find further confirmation of the different productive structure in the valley. In Isola del Liri, in the twenty years between 1861 and 1881, between a third and a half of the population, to which must be added a percentage of immigrants from neighbouring towns, worked in the mechanical paper industry.

	Isola Liri	Roma	Campania	Regno
Working Men	38%	44,2%	40,2	42,8%
Working Women	44%	25,8%	39,5	41,2%
Lads	18%	17%	20,3	16%

The whole development, driven by the paper mills, ended up attracting around the industrial activities of the paper mills both the artisans of the town and the new worker-farmers from the surrounding small towns, including Arpino itself, which in the same period saw its urban population shrink because of the desire to settle near the new mills. It was a remarkable growth, a case study of great interest, which was to be undermined at the end of the 1870s by a serious economic crisis, mainly due to the unification process and the sudden end of customs protection.

In the Liri Valley, the companies were operating from outdated facilities dating back to the 1890s, and suffered from the slow development of infrastructure, both in terms of communication routes and the transport entrusted to the railways, which were still inadequate. Above all, they were run by an entrepreneurial organisation that was still tied to production concepts with little risk appetite on the part of the majority of owners. All this led to a profound change in the

management and ownership structure of many companies. Manifatture del Fibreno was also caught up in this crisis, although in this case the cause was more to be found in the inability of the third generation of entrepreneurs to keep up with the times, the behaviour of one of Ernesto Lefèvre's sons, Carlo, and the financial difficulties of his other son, Francesco. Ernesto was very clever and preferred innovation to risk, but a series of circumstances, as already mentioned, did not prevent the crisis, which in any case worsened after his death.

The general changes, which also affected the Liri Valley, contributed to undermining the paternalistic organisation of the previous decades and to increasing discontent among the working population, especially in the years after 1880, when the founder's son left the management to his nephew. The working population began to equip itself with associative instruments capable of limiting the negative effects of the reorganisation of the sector and consolidating a project of class representation, in Marxist terms, inside and outside the factory. But it was in the Cartiere Meridionali factories that the disputes began.

Chapter 9

A conditional investiture

In order to understand how such a vast empire as the Lefèbvre Industries could find itself in difficulties during a period of renewed expansion, it is necessary to recall the events of the family, which the author has described in other volumes and which will be summarised here just enough to understand the issue of the sale of the Lefèbvre Industries to the Cartiere Meridionali, the sale of Carnello and then the re-establishment of the Manifatture del Fibreno without the participation of the family that had run it for 70 years, from 1818 to 1888.

As already mentioned, Ernesto had learnt how to run the company by working alongside his father since 1835. He was well respected, had good business skills, was well prepared and well known in international markets. He spoke several languages and kept abreast of technological progress throughout his life. Last but not least, unlike the wool industrialists of Arpino, Ernesto understood the importance of participating in national and international trade fairs. Having taken over the entire family business in 1854, during the last decade of the Bourbon monarchy and the first 15 years of the new regime, he was able to navigate skilfully. Between 1859 and 1865, despite his acceptance of the new king, he experienced personal problems when the Isola and its surroundings became a theatre of war and then of brigandage. This explains his absence from Italy for several years and the fact that his daughter Giulia was born in Paris, in the rue des Capucines. The Lefèbvre family had taken part in court life in Naples, in the Royal Palace, and it took a few years for them to be accepted by the new kingdom.

When he decided to leave the management of the paper mills and the other economic and financial activities of the family, he chose his eldest son, Carlo (1852-1921), then 25 years old (born in 1852), as manager. As the eldest son, he had the right to take this step, even though there were doubts among his acquaintances as to whether he was really capable of upholding the tradition established by his grandfather and continued by his father.

Although he had had the opportunity to receive an excellent education, he had not taken advantage of it. He did not complete his studies at the College of Monfalcone, nor at the French colleges to which he was sent for preparation. He knew foreign languages like his father Ernesto but was less present in the family business. André-Isidore blames him and describes his cousin Ernesto's sons, Carlo and Francesco (1856-1911), as capricious and incapable, guilty of making Ernesto suffer greatly. He also criticised his nieces Flavia and Giulia, but the criticism was mainly directed at the two boys. He also blames them for handing over the reins of the company to Carlo. Carlo, he said, had "studied painfully and did not know the ethics of work and discipline".

In 1877, at the age of seventy, Ernesto handed over the entire management of the company, including the financial management, to his son, giving him the right to sign and conclude contracts, to buy and sell. With the young man's background, it was foolhardy to hand over the reins of the Lefèbvre empire to a young man, but it had to be tried because it was the custom. However, Carlo's leadership was short-lived, for in 1878 he was forbidden by his father, for reasons we shall discuss. He then left Naples and went to live in Rome. In an edition of the 'Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia' of 1 July 1878, a house belonging to a 'Carlo Lefevre' is mentioned between Via Vasellari and Via Longarina in the Lungotevere area.⁴⁸ He then went to North America, where he stayed for some time, certainly many months. André-Isidore

⁴⁸ «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», 1 luglio 1878, p. 261. My question to the Civil Status Office in Naples, Historical Archives, detached section; years 1840-1860, November 2012.

tells us that on his return to Europe, after Milan and Nice, Carlo 'settled down in Paris in luxury', where he 'lived the life of a nabob on a four-horse chariot, buying, receiving, trading'. So he had settled in Paris, where he 'buys, receives and trades' and is engaged in some kind of activity. When he left Paris at the beginning of the decade, he left behind a large debt. From 1884 his presence in Naples is documented, although he remained on the fringes of the family and did not take part in its affairs. His father deprived him of any possibility of spending money by having him declared incompetent by the court of Naples. The effects of this document – which has been lost, but whose contents are well known – mainly affected Carlo's ability to spend, as he was unable to sign cheques, make investments in his own name or manage the family's assets. Naturally, he was also deprived of any managerial functions in the Manifatture del Fibreno. Between 1878 and 1885, the management returned to Ernesto. Further details of the affair can be found in the memoirs of the lawyer to whom Ernesto Lefèbvre's interests were entrusted: *Osservazioni in difesa del signor Ernesto Lefèbvre, conte di Balsorano, parte civile nel giudizio a carico di Enrico Catalano e altri per falsità di scritture di commercio*.⁴⁹

The lawyer writes that Ernesto had his son interdicted by the court in Naples in 1878.⁵⁰ This fact interested the newspapers of the time, such as 'Il Mattino' of Naples, but with great caution, so that we do not learn more from these brief articles than we find in this newspaper. Edoardo Scarfoglio and Matilde Serao, the leading journalists of the newspaper, were very close to the Lefèbvre family, especially to Flavia. After a few years, Ernesto changed his mind, at the insistence of his wife Teresa. He put his trust back in his son, who said he wanted to settle down. Indeed, on 11 April 1885, he went to the notary Carlo de Angelis and once again gave his son the mandate to administer and manage the Fibreno factories (including San Carlo, Carnello, Stamperia, Pistolegno

⁴⁹ Vastarini Cresi, *Osservazioni in difesa del signor Ernesto Lefèbvre, conte di Balsorano, parte civile nel giudizio a carico di Enrico Catalano e altri per falsità di scritture di commercio*, Roma, Tipografia della Camera dei Deputati (Stabilimenti del Fibreno), Roma 1886.

⁵⁰ Vastarini Cresi, *Osservazioni, cit.*, p 17.

and Chimica Bagnoli), with their annexes and dependencies, i.e. the warehouses and other services that surrounded the industrial complex. At that time, the Manifatture del Fibreno employed about 500 people in Isola alone, with a reduction of 100 compared to the previous decade due to increased mechanisation.



The lawyer Alfonso Vastarini-Chiesi.

With a subsequent deed, before the same notary, on 12 May he 'extended the faculties granted to the administration of his civil assets as well' and on 26 August he signed a third mandate, with which he added the faculty 'to perform all the financial acts and acts claimed by the needs of the administration and the treasury on securities and valuables'.⁵¹ In the course of that year, 1885, Carlo was forgiven everything, given full confidence and, as the eldest son, prepared to take over the reins of the Lefèbvre industrial, securities and financial empire. Ernesto was approaching 70 years of age and was counting on his son to take over at a time when the market was completely open and new

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 3-4.

players were replacing the old group of Neapolitan industrialists: new ideas, boldness, freshness were needed.

The Cartiere Lefèbvre, which were still in the vanguard of innovation, could have succeeded with a strong pulse. It was impossible for Ernesto, while Carlo was coming to his senses, to find someone who could manage and take decisions, even in financial matters. It must be remembered that the Manifatture del Fibreno was still a family business and it was not in Ernesto's mind, as it had not been in Charles', to have someone outside the family take decisions. For this reason, Carlo – and Francesco too – had put his father in a difficult position. As Vastarini Cresi writes, it did not take Count Ernesto long "to realise the grave error", for when "Carlo was put in a position to exercise the powers conferred on him", he did so "in such a way as to completely ruin a very flourishing industry, which was the pride of these provinces and the glory of those who had founded it". It may not have been the most flourishing, but it was certainly solid and not yet at a loss. If such a trust was not given to Francesco, as it was later to be, it was to restore his eldest son.

In a short time, Carlo defaulted on his suppliers, diverted money from the treasury, and sold the large deposits that constituted the dowry of the various establishments at less than cost. Among the 'mad dissipations' that Carlo indulged in, Vastarini Cresi mentions that of keeping no less than 37 horses in the stables and the project of 'designing the city of Carlopolis'. The wasteful passion for horses had already been denounced by André-Isidore and contrasted with the moderation of his father and grandfather. Ernesto first tried to get his son to renounce the powers he had abused in order to spare 'his father the shame of a re-enactment subject to necessary and widespread publicity', but his son did not listen, also because the knight Enrico Catalano, 'well known to the correctional justice system', had exerted a negative influence on him 'for 14 or 15 years'.⁵² This Catalan, an old acquaintance of the family, was elderly at the time, having been born around 1810. He had been hanging around the Lefèbvre family for many years, performing minor tasks. According to Vastarini Cresi, his

⁵² *Ibidem*.

constant interest was to look for opportunities to extract money. The Quaestor of Naples had described him as a 'knight of industry of the most dangerous kind because he was sufficiently educated, had courteous and urbane manners, and was easy and insinuating to talk to'.⁵³ Another witness, the lawyer and deputy Federico Grossi, asserted 'that he had never found or known in his life, either in reality or in the pages of books, even if they were novels, a more dangerous type than the self-styled knight Catalano Enrico'. He was, according to Vastarini, 'not the least cause of the misfortunes of the Balsorano household due to the absolutely inexplicable influence he had for years exercised over Carlo Lefèbvre'.⁵⁴ Vastarini Cresi seems to put all the blame on Catalano in order to take some of it off Carlo, who was seen as the victim of his older friend. In any case, towards the end of May 1886, Carlo sent a draft of the renunciation, in which he inserted an unacceptable clause (Vastarini Cresi does not specify which one), so that Ernesto, having overcome all his hesitations, withdrew his mandates *de jure* on 1 June 1886.

At that time it was revealed that Carlo had concluded a contract with a certain Giovanni Gessner by which, having received 200,000 lire from him as an interest-bearing deposit, he appointed him director of the Stabilimenti del Fibreno with an annual salary of 12,000 lire and 6% of the profits. On 27 May, he entrusted to Francesco Carignani, Duke of Tolve (1852-1887), his friend and colleague, the management and operation of the wallpaper warehouse of the Stabilimenti del Fibreno in Via Nazionale, Rome, for a period of nine years and without any consideration. On 30 May, for the same period, he granted Antonio Annicelli and Enrico Battinelli the management of the Fibreno wallpaper warehouse in Naples for an annual fee of 12,000 lire.⁵⁵ They were all front men.⁵⁶ In addition, Carlo drew up 21 bills of exchange

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 7. These three deals or contracts were declared null and void by the judge.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*. "Enrico Catalano's and Carlo Lefèbvre's 'implacable hatred' against the latter's relatives sounds like a licence from Vastarini-Cresi's harangue. The

with the apparent date of 27 January 1886 (a forged date) for a total value of 164,500 lire, all to the order of Enrico Catalano. These were endorsed on 26 October to a certain Giuseppe Jengo and presented for collection to the Società di Credito Meridionale, which in turn presented them to the Fibreno warehouse in Via Pignatelli 18, where they were not paid. Three days later, a protest was made: the non-payment of a bill of exchange and its forgery was, of course, a criminal offence and a scandal for the Lefèbvre family.⁵⁷

Hearing of this, Count Ernesto took the serious but necessary step of denouncing his son Carlo and Catalano for forging commercial invoices. In January 1887, two more false bills were presented to the same number of Roman merchants. The police established that Catalano was behind the operation, but the scandal that ensued was huge, as Manifatture del Fibreno was one of the largest and most prestigious companies in southern Italy. Investigations revealed that the bills of exchange apparently presented by the Cartiere administration had been issued after 1 June 1886, the date of the revocation of the mandates, and bore the forged date of 27 January. A blatant fraud.

We do not know Catalano's fate, although he was apparently imprisoned, but we do know that Carlo was sentenced in absentia. In 1887 he was deprived of all his signatory and administrative powers, disinherited and deprived of his right to inherit the title of Count of Balsorano.

At that time, the factories, already in crisis due to the economic situation and the decline in orders, were closed and then rented out. In 1888 an attempt was made to save the company by entrusting it to Ernesto's brother-in-law, Pedro Álvarez de Toledo, who had no experience in the field. In this context, the cousin indirectly alludes to the fact that the dissipation of both Carlo and Francesco was at the root

manoeuvres of the two accomplices seem inspired simply by reasons of interest.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 8-9. The story is also reconstructed in *Il diritto commerciale: rivista periodica e critica di giurisprudenza e legislazione*, Nistri, Pisa 1889, pp. 239-241.

of the weakening of the family's fortune: "Ernesto found in these two sons nothing but instruments to weaken his fortune, instead of being able to count on their submissive, obedient, hard-working and dedicated help".⁵⁸

The various lawsuits filed in 1886 and 1887 to defend the company's reputation, which had been sullied by Carlo's behaviour, suffered a major defeat in November 1888, when Ernesto Lefèbvre's appeal against the Banca Meridionale came to an end. After an initial civil judgment against Carlo and Catalano, Ernesto had tried to avoid paying a sum that was not due and was the result of fraud. The sum was not very large, Count Ernesto could afford it, but the family's honour was probably at stake. The promissory note presented to the Banca Meridionale had disappeared, but this was not considered to be an obstacle to the judgement and enforcement of the collection of the promissory note, imposed together with the provisional enforcement bond. The judge of the Court of Appeal of Naples, Giannatanasio, held that the judgment was valid because Carlo Lefèbvre, as Ernesto Lefèbvre's lawyer, had issued a promissory note dated 30 April 1886 in favour of Enrico Catalano, payable at the end of May 1887, endorsed to a certain Alfredo Gaston and then again to Catalano, who had discounted it at the Banca Meridionale, and that the latter, who had not been paid on the due date, had protested against it. The promissory note to which Ernesto had objected was confirmed, even though the endorsers had agreed before the commercial court to pay the bill. As the judgment against Catalano was still pending and the original bill had been lost, Ernesto applied for a stay of execution, which the court refused and ordered the Lefèbvre brothers, Catalano and Gaston, to pay 6,000 lire plus costs.

In the months that followed, Ernesto's health deteriorated, suffering from rheumatism that affected his heart, but the trial of his son must have caused him much grief. In 1890, when he seems to have ceased to be active, there are no other known public acts. Francesco, then very

⁵⁸ AB, 4483, vol. XII, p. 384.

young and on his way to becoming a party leader, was about to inherit the honour and burden of running the Lefèbvre empire in difficult times.

Very important in this regard is the Deed of Gift of 2 February 1887 from Ernesto Lefèbvre to his son Francesco.⁵⁹ This is mentioned elsewhere in this story because it marks the transfer of ownership of the mills to the youngest son. This deed of gift was linked to the dowries granted 15 years earlier to Flavia (married in 1872) and Giulia, who would marry in 1891 soon after the death of her father Ernesto. According to the customs of the time, an effect of the ancient majorat, the male son was left the patrimony comprising the main inheritance and the family assets so as not to disperse them. This donation also clearly decreed Carlo's exclusion from the inheritance, for the reasons already stated. Thus:

With this donation, his son Francesco received all the rustic and urban properties, including those for industrial use, that the donor owned in Isola del Liri, Sora, Arce, Arpino and Fontechiari, and all the rights deriving from the concession of the waters that animate the factories in Isola del Liri and Carnello, with the relative watercourses, canals and all kinds of structures used in these factories, especially for generating motive power.⁶⁰

The deed expressly mentions the donation of the paper mill in Fibreno "consisting of four floors and fifty-seven rooms", the annexed house in Fibreno "consisting of two floors and eighty-two rooms", the paper mill in Montemontano [the Carnello paper mill] "consisting of two floors and seven rooms", the house annexed to the Cartiera di Montemontano [Montemontano paper mill] 'consisting of one storey and four rooms', the stable in the Borgonuovo street 'consisting of one storey and one room', the house in the Santa Maria della Forme street

⁵⁹ *Atto di donazione, 2 febbraio 1887*, by notary Savona. Reproduced by kind permission of the lawyer Amleto Iafrate, present in copy at the Caserta Archives, its contents are also discussed in Iafrate Amleto ed Edmondo, *Gli stabilimenti del Fibreno*, ed. privata, Isola del Liri 2020, pp. 259-260.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

'consisting of three storeys and twelve rooms' and the workers' house in the Montemontano street 'consisting of two storeys'.

Ernesto also bequeathed to his son Francesco about thirty dwellings in Isola Superiore, starting with the Casino Palma "composed of two floors and ten rooms", the house in the contrada Borgonuovo "composed of three floors and eighteen rooms" and "another house in the same contrada of two floors and seven rooms". The twenty-five rooms of these two houses in the contrada Borgonuovo, i.e. near the factory, were part of the building plan to help the factory workers. Like the other houses, "the house in contrada Tombe in Carnello, composed of one floor and two rooms", the house in contrada Pagliarola, the house in contrada San Domenico "composed of two floors and two rooms". The building for the production of Pistolegno di Remorici, "composed of three floors", was then named. The donation included the small villa for residential use "composed of cellars, a ground floor with seven rooms, an upper floor with six rooms", a mezzanine in the attics of the six rooms, the four warehouses in front of the Cartiera della Forme, two to the right and two to the left of the small church called Santa Maria delle Forme, as well as the church itself and the house in Contrada Santa Maria delle Forme, the lower floor of which is used as a butcher's shop and the upper floor as a nursery school.⁶¹ We also learn that a house on Via Tavernanuova was used as a kindergarten and as a butcher's shop and probably a drug shop.

The same deed shows that Ernesto would still retain the management of the Manifatture del Fibreno. He also donated to his son 30,000 lire a year to be taken from the coffers of the factories and guaranteed him 12% of the net profits of the said factories. Francesco was also given the credit ('litigious') of the very long Ciccodicola case mentioned elsewhere in this story, which amounted to 59,342 lire at that time. In closing, he donated to him the furniture that was being inventoried and which was located in Palazzo Lefèbvre and would be sold in 1898 by Francesco himself. These objects had been purchased by Charles and Rosanne some 60 years earlier and were probably -

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 259-261.

excluding a few valuable pieces and certainly the paintings - in need of replacement. The furnishings of the Isola mansion consisted of:

38 chairs; 8 coat racks; 52 lamps and lamps; 2 bronze columns; 1 straw mat; 2 stoves; 12 canisters; 1 mattress; 17 cushions; 1 sideboard; 20 side tables and tables; 5 ottomans; 13 armchairs; 7 sofas; 1 palette bag; 1 iron gardener's box; 10 carpets; 5 clocks; 26 porcelain objects; 5 different cigar holders; 30 different boxes; 1 cigar lighter; 1 complete tea service; 1 complete dessert service; 1 porcelain plate service for 24 people; 24 crystal glasses; 1 set of cutlery for 24 people; 5 glove boxes; 1 glove holder; 6 coffee machines; 4 tin lids for plates; 82 kitchen utensils; 6 beds; 40 paintings.

The list is very long and includes religious objects, such as pictures of saints, a kneeler, crucifixes, as well as a piano, various instruments, an entire music library and much more. It would be really interesting to find out what those 40 paintings were.

Ernesto Lefèvre, the second Count of Balsorano, died in Naples on 15 March 1891 in the great Balsorano Palace, which the family had built as their Neapolitan residence shortly before Charles's ennoblement, and was buried in the family tomb in the Monumental Cemetery. As far as we know, his death was not sudden: the chronicles of the time describe him as ill and suffering, and in his last years he had rarely visited Isola, suffering from pains in his lower limbs. His cousin André-Isidore described him as increasingly afflicted by joint pains and rheumatism, and absent from the mud baths and spas of Switzerland, France and Ischia. There was also talk of gout, a concentration of uric acid that prevented him from walking. When he died, as we shall see, the Santa Maria delle Forme factory had been closed for a year and a half. These years had been marked by the deaths of two dear friends and relatives, family disputes, the closure of the factory and printing works, and the sale of other assets (including the large Polvica fund). In January 1887, André-Isidore, the cousin who had almost become a brother, died and was buried in the Père Lachaise cemetery in the Choquet tomb of his wife's family. Two years later, in 1889, he received

the news of the death of Raoul de Raigecourt, aged 85, who was buried at Vendôme alongside his first wife, Lucie de Leusse. His youngest daughter, Giulia, was preparing to marry Ruffo di Bagnara in November of that year, a wedding he was unable to attend. It was during these months that the Chiaia funicular, which linked Piazza Amedeo to the Vomero, was inaugurated next to his palace. Some parts of Naples were painstakingly modernised. Shortly after Ernesto's death, one of the symbols of modern Naples was inaugurated, the Galleria Umberto, a glass and iron structure similar to the one in Milan, although smaller.



Ernesto Lefèbvre.

The structure, designed by the Neapolitan Paolo Boubée (French names recur in Naples), housed the most famous *Café chantant* in Italy, the Salone Margherita, which was considered equal to similar venues in Paris. The Naples of the Bell'Époque was officially born just as Ernesto died.

Like his father, there is a portrait of him, a daguerreotype in the style of Grillet & Co. 'Photographes du Roi' who had an atelier at 23 Via Santa Lucia.⁶² The reproduction is of poor quality and, compared to his father, Ernesto appears more good-natured, less harsh. In all likelihood the portrait was taken at an earlier age than the one portraying his parent. Death prevented him from seeing the marriage between his daughter Giulia and Girolamo d'Aragona, Duke of Casalspro (1852-1911), celebrated on 25 November 1891 in Balsorano.⁶³ His mother Teresa, who would outlive her husband by more than 15 years, attended the wedding. Girolamo also came from an ancient family: his father was Luigi Acquaviva d'Aragona, 24th Duke of Atri (1812-1898), while his mother was Giulia Milazzi di Casalspro (1828-1863). Luigi Acquaviva d'Aragona had participated in the 1848 uprisings and in 1860 was commander of the National Guard in Naples. He was, in a sense, of the same party as Gioacchino di Saluzzo, the husband of Maria Luisa Lefèbvre. Like Saluzzo, Acquaviva was rewarded with the title of senator and was still a member of parliament 30 years after the unification.⁶⁴

⁶² During the Unification period, there were two ateliers of French photographers in Naples: that of E. le Jeune, located at Strada la Cavallerizza 7, in Chiaia (a side street of the main artery), and that of Grillet & Co., at Via Chiatamone no. 6 and Via Santa Lucia no. 23. These two photographers later joined the Grillet-June studio, at 23 Via Santa Lucia. Vintage photography catalogues contain dozens of photographs taken in Naples signed by these two craftsmen. None of those examined bears an identification mark. In the only two cases in which this is the case, they are not related to the Lefèbvre family group.

⁶³ Celebrated at the castle of Balsorano, the marriage was registered in Naples.

⁶⁴ Of the Acquaviva's four sons, two, including Girolamo, were infertile while Francesco (1851-1894), 16th duke of Nardò had Giulia (1887-1972), 25th duchess of Atri, 17th duchess of Nardò, who married Giustiniano Perrelli-Tomacelli-Filomarino in 1887, and had no children. More fortunate was Luigi

This new alliance, which linked the Lefèbvre family to a member of the liberal elite, was the continuation of a wise policy that, however, ran into difficulties at the end of the century due to the intemperance of the two sons. Ernesto's two daughters, Flavia and Giulia, had made excellent marriages from a 'political' point of view, but this had no effect on the business. Both Flavia's and Giulia's husbands took little or no interest in the Lefèbvre properties, as they were very wealthy people linked to their own noble dynasties. The men, on the other hand, were either unmarried, like Carlo - who had a natural son who was later recognised - or had no children, like Francesco, who had married a woman who did not belong to a wealthy or entrepreneurial family or who had any connection with power. For this reason, too, there was a lack of energy. The last generation of the Lefèbvre family either failed to attract capital to the manufactories or squandered it, like Carlo, or failed to take care of the business when it was in trouble, like Francesco. He continued the policy of his father and grandfather, who were convinced that the paper mills were a family affair, not a sector in which to invest alongside others such as gas, shipping or investment companies. The paper mills were to remain in the family, and this desire not to open up, not to seek liquid capital, investors to help the mills, did not pay off. Probably the Manifatture del Fibreno should have been transformed into a joint stock company by reducing the importance of Lefèbvre, but neither Ernesto nor Francesco thought of taking on partners. As a result, the Manifatture was unable to overcome the crisis.

The marriage between Giulia and Girolamo, which had begun under the best auspices of a union between two dynasties, was a failure, and this weighed heavily. Interdicted and disinherited, Carlo would not regain possession of part of his property until his brother's death, and he disappeared completely from any direct or indirect involvement with the paper mills. The interdict did not extinguish the title, but the rightful owner had to wait for the death of the titleholder before he could regain

Acquaviva's brother, Carlo (1822-1892), who had descendants who only recently died out with Fiorella Acquaviva (1922-2011).

it.⁶⁵ Carlo did, however, have a son, Carlo Ernesto (1878-1962), born to a woman whose name is known - she may have been a noblewoman of the same name - but whom he did not marry, and whose name was Antonietta Candida.

Meanwhile, Francesco entered politics in the party that supported Giovanni Giolitti and managed to get the family's Neapolitan printing house to print the official acts of the Chamber of Deputies for a while. It was one of the few things he was able to do for the family. As for the upbringing of Ernesto's children, who were in charge of the company, André-Isidore made some rather harsh comments in private:

The bad influence of his mother was no less fatal for Franz, the second son of my cousins from Naples. Gifted with a fundamentally superficial character, a mind full of fantasies and incessant moods, this man who, as a result of all the uselessness he had encountered in his life as a vagabond, did not seem to recognise the necessities imposed by a regulated life, who took no account of the time of payment, who preferred the scenes of the theatre to those of reason, and who finally crowned this period of dissipation, at the age of 22, with an unthinking marriage in which he experienced total detachment and a total lack of good advice; He who walked only by leaning on his sides so as not to fall at every step!⁶⁶

Much to his older cousin's disapproval, Francesco married at a very young age in 1877 to a girl he had fallen madly in love with, Gisèle. He may have led a 'life of idleness', but he was much more moderate than his brother when it came to gaining his father's confidence. His marriage was celebrated in mid-August 1877. He had probably met his bride in Nice, where he had lived with his brother for a long time after his twenties. Memoirs of the time allow us to reconstruct the broad outlines of the story of this love, thanks in particular to Marija Konstantinovna Baškircева (1858-1884), a Russian artist and acquaintance of the couple, who recalls in her diary, published posthumously in 1885, that the story of Gisèle Dubois van

⁶⁵ AB XIX, 4483, vol. XII, p. 327.

⁶⁶ AB XIX, 4483, vol. XII, pp. 383-384.

Waechtbaecker (1858-1925), an Austrian and the daughter of a poor family, and the rich and charming Franz, her contemporary, had moved the Neapolitan public. The two were in love and when Ernesto's proposal was initially rejected, she poisoned herself in a suicide attempt and was saved *in extremis*. Finally, Ernesto agreed to marry her. In March 1877, he called the story of the two young lovers the *légende vivante de Naple*.⁶⁷ According to André-Isidore, their love did not last when he experienced 'total detachment'. Nothing more is known, however, except that his real name, apart from the fancy name, must have been Wicker, as recorded in the funeral documents.

Having become the owner, Francesco printed a letterhead in which he established his residence on Isola del Liri Superiore. From then on he was less present in Naples, where in his youth, which was still close at hand when he was in his thirties or so, he was considered one of the best parties in the city, a fashionable *jeune monsieur*. For a while he was involved in political life, which often took him to Rome, while in Isola del Liri he was involved in the life of the community. Then, in the last twenty years of his short life, he fought to save the family business. He was careful to maintain good relations with the community of Isola del Liri and was even a member of the municipal council until 1903, on the eve of the Socialist triumph. Ernesto was careful not to exert too much influence when the interests of the entire community of Isola and Sora were at stake, and for this he was as popular as his father. When, for a time, he was a member of the municipal council of Isola del Liri (a post he held from 1870 to 1886), he refrained from opposing the council's decision (in 1885) not to allow the new Roccasecca-Sora

⁶⁷ Marija Konstantinovna Baškircева, *Journal Edition Integrale Sept 26 1877-Dec 21 1879*, Ed. L'Age d'Home, Losanna 1999, p. 5. It is Baškircева who indicates the two as being of the same age, although it appears from other sources that she was born in 1859. We know the date of death from the Concession File of the Lefèbvre family chapel where she, Francesco's widow, was buried on 17 January 1925. As for the name, the name Van Baecker is found in various genealogical directories, but the burial certificate shows the name Wicker, which is probably the correct one. And the name is rendered not as Gisella but as Gisela. Archivio storico del Cimitero di Poggioreale, Fasc. 44 - Inc. 23.

railway line to cross the family estate. This decision, if accepted, would have been detrimental to the community, depriving it of the benefits of the railway's passage. Carlo, in his capacity as administrator of the Cartiere del Fibreno paper mills, which, as we know, lasted only a short time, had submitted an alternative plan to the Ministry of Public Works, but Ernesto overturned this decision and abandoned the alternative plan: Carlo was undiplomatic and far from that 'paternalistic' spirit which may seem pejorative today but which, as we have seen, was in fact the typical management style of the best industrialists of the 19th century.

Francesco had the ability to maintain the altruistic or diplomatic style that had been his grandfather's and father's, at least in his capacity as councillor and mayor.⁶⁸ From the moment he took part in the administration of the municipality of Isola del Liri, he won the respect of the citizens. He is remembered in the local historiography for his involvement in institutions such as the Musical Society of Balsorano and the organisation of a band, for which he provided the purchase of instruments and uniforms. He also took an interest in other philanthropic matters, such as the construction of the new town hall at the beginning of the 20th century and then the pavements in the town, sometimes paying for them out of his own pocket. In 1900 he attended the commemoration of the assassination of King Umberto in Monza.⁶⁹

When the management of the mills was taken out of Carlo's hands, it was briefly entrusted to his son-in-law, Pedro Álvarez de Toledo, in 1887. He left almost immediately and the company passed into the hands of Francesco, who, on 18 August 1888, suspended all production activities and leased the mills and some of the buildings. Between 1888 and 1891, when the crisis in the paper industry was at its worst, Francesco relinquished his responsibilities in the municipal administration. As a result, the completion of the Arce-Sora section of

⁶⁸ Pinelli, Vincenzina *I Lefèbvres*, Quaderni di ricerca di Isola del Liri, Isola del Liri 1980, p. 9.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

the Roccasecca-Avezzano railway was delayed. After Ernesto's death in 1891, Francesco became involved in politics as a supporter of Giovanni Giolitti, probably in order to find new political alliances, as the old family alliances in Naples were coming to an end. He led the 1891-1892 election campaign. In June of that year he was elected Mayor of Isola del Liri, then he resigned, probably for reasons of expediency for the double office and, according to Vincenzina Pinelli, the population asked him to turn back.⁷⁰

At the end of that year, elections were held for the 18th legislature of the Kingdom of Italy (23 November 1892-8 May 1895) in which Francesco was elected as a Giolitti deputy. The legislature saw the Giolitti government followed by the Crispi government and ended in the spring of 1895. He was little active during his term of office, few speeches can be remembered. Vincenzina Pinelli writes:

The eldest son (sic) Francesco, who joined the administration at the elections of 1886, carried out his duties with great dedication and was repeatedly the object of expressions of deep esteem and lively gratitude for the interest and love he showed for our community.

After a few years of absence from public life, Francesco Lefèbvre returned to devote himself to philanthropic works and to the administration of public affairs, which seemed to him to be congenial. In June 1891, he was elected Mayor of Isola del Liri and, with his customary diligence, set to work to improve the town. However, the municipal elections of 10 July 1892 had to be cancelled because of irregularities, and on 17 October of the same year he informed the council that he had tendered his resignation to the Provincial Prefect. Following this decision, the Municipal Council, acting on behalf of the entire population, decided to appeal to the Prefect not to accept the resignation of the Mayor, who had done well for the many benefits he had brought to our municipality. Nevertheless, Francesco Lefèbvre was no longer mayor, although he continued to sit on the municipal council and promote initiatives for the benefit of the town throughout the following year.

This commitment, combined with the popularity of his name, led to his election as a Member of Parliament, to which he was elected by popular consensus in the 18th Legislature of the Kingdom of Italy. His parliamentary

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

duties kept him away from the municipal administration but did not prevent him from maintaining contact with the people of Isola, towards whom he was always generous with his interest and help.

Lefèbvre returned to the administrative structure in July 1899, but he was absent continuously until the meeting of 4 August 1900, which he, as a good conservative, could not miss, in order to associate himself with the words of the Mayor of Isola del Liri in the commemoration of the assassination of King Umberto I, and to propose that the Council be given an indefinite mandate to organise, with the decorum of the municipality, the honours to be paid to the beloved King.⁷¹

In the years that followed, the family maintained sufficient wealth to lead a comfortable life, even though they could no longer dispose of the largesse of previous decades. Flavia, who was widowed in 1891, was always travelling and lived in Paris with her son Illán; Francesco moved between Rome, Naples and holidays at the Balsorano castle and was the only one to see his nephew Illán; Carlo stayed in Paris for many years, returning in 1906, when the contract for the sale of Carnello was signed, when he was reported to be living in Rome. A nucleus of family members remained in Naples around old Teresa.

It should be added, to complete the picture, that when the Manifatture del Fibreno was leased, it was at a time of severe economic crisis for many sectors. Giolitti had been overwhelmed, on 15 December 1893, by the Banca Romana scandal, disavowed by large industrialists and landowners for his refusal to repress by force the protests that were sweeping the country (in particular the Sicilian Fasci) and for rumours of a possible introduction of a progressive income tax. After the Banca Romana scandal, numerous banks went bankrupt, including the Banco di Sconto e Sete (1892), the Banca Tiberina (1895), which had many interests in Naples, and the Banca Generale. Between 1893 and 1894 Credito Mobiliare also went bankrupt along with many other companies and minor banks.⁷²

⁷¹ Pinelli Vincenzina, *I Lefèbvre*, Isola del Liri, s.e. 1980.

⁷² AA.VV., *La formazione e lo sviluppo del sistema bancario in Europa e in Italia*, a cura di Anna Maria Galli, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1992, pp. 241-268.

The Banca Romana scandal, the trial of which took place in 1894, and the subsequent crisis of the Italian banking system were caused by the depression that began in 1887-1888, the creation of a real estate bubble and its subsequent bursting in 1892-1893, especially in Naples, where considerable investments had been made in the rehabilitation of certain districts following the cholera epidemic of 1884. This crisis, together with the well-known family events, meant a decrease in liquidity for the Lefèbvre paper mills, which could not count on bank loans when they could have. In the same years, almost all of the 9 historic mills that had existed in the paper district since the beginning of the century changed hands and were sold to larger companies. In 1893, the Banca d'Italia was created by the merger of the Banca Romana.

An eloquent symbol of the change of generations is the sale of the buildings built or bought in Naples. After renting out the paper mills in 1891 (Carnello) and 1892 (Forme), Palazzo Lefèbvre di Isola remained in the family, but the visitors who had been so numerous before the unification were no longer there: people had changed, customs had changed and, above all, Rosanne, who had died of cholera in 1856, was no longer there.

Almost at the same time, the opportunity arose to sell the huge Palazzo Balsorano in Via Crispi. It was not an easy operation, as the wealthy families of the Neapolitan capital were going through difficult times after the disruptions caused by the unification of Italy, and the huge palace was already worth millions of lire. Teresa Doria, Ernesto's widow, lived there for a few more years before moving to another residence in Riva di Chiaia, where she lived until the end of her life in 1907. The negotiations for the sale of the property, which began a few years after Ernesto's death, between 1894 and 1895, were concluded in 1898. The following year, the nuns of the Institute of the Sacred Heart moved their headquarters and the boarding school they ran into the large building, and in 1899 they started school activities.⁷³ There they

⁷³ It was the educational institute founded by the French Saint Maddalena Sofia Barat (1779-1865).

would remain until 1968, when the palace changed hands again. The many rooms of this building, its furnishings and decorations chosen by Rosanne and Teresa became the scene of the education of Neapolitan upper-class girls for some 70 years.

The unity of the Lefèbvre family, held together by Charles at the beginning of the century, seemed to have dissolved by then. Carlo kept moving between Paris, Rome and Naples.⁷⁴ Flavia divided her time between Paris, the castles and the French Riviera, and Luisa between Naples and her husband's estates. Neither of them took care of the businesses, by direct decision of their father, the daughters, by prohibition of Carlo. The sale of the palace marked the beginning of a new chapter. It had accompanied two generations of Lefèbvres from childhood to adulthood. In addition, in 1885 it still had one of the most beautiful views, as it stood in an isolated position next to the Villa Pignatelli Colonna with its vast garden. It was not until the end of the century, in the eighties, when the urban development of the area was completed, that the palace was surrounded by other buildings that blocked its view of the sea. Another family property, the Castle of Balsorano, passed directly from Ernesto to Illán, son of Flavia and her husband Pedro of Casafuerte. The transfer took place through a private deed.⁷⁵

During the eclipse represented by the figures of Carlo and Francesco, quite different from the energetic Ernest, the Lefèbvre family dropped out of the mainstream. Only Flavia is mentioned, who became a muse for artists and the animator of a cultural salon in those

⁷⁴ Professor Francesco Lefèbvre Capece Minutolo's memories of his grandfather Carlo Lefèbvre, collected by the author of these notes in spring 2011.

⁷⁵ The castle of Balsorano was later resold in 1929. Probably the circumstance known by the descendant Manfredi Lefèbvre D'Ovidio, that the castle was lost at gambling by Carlo, conceals a liquidation to Pedro de Toledo in exchange for his attempts to save the paper mills on a joint basis. The comital title was attached to the building and the transfer to the Álvarez de Toledo could only be justified as an act of grave necessity.

years, and for a few years, in Paris, she competed with other celebrities for the prestige of culture.



When the ownership of the establishments changed in 1907, the Villa Lefèvre became the Villa De Caria (later Pisani). On the right of this rear view is a portion of the Lefèvre park.

Chapter 10

A slow sunset

Wool industrialists versus paper industrialists

It was true that there was a systemic credit crunch, but it was also true that there was always a need for paper and someone would produce and sell it. The economic downturn of the 1890s, cyclically severe and moderate but with moments of recovery, overwhelmed first the wool companies and then the paper mills. In order to survive, production had to be increased in order to keep up with the competition, which was offering paper at lower and lower prices, thanks also to technological progress. Ernesto's opening of Pistolegno in 1884 was a strategically successful but belated attempt to restructure paper production. Further investment and modernisation did not follow. The skilled technical directors at the head of the various production units could not take the decisions that were centralised at the head of the family. They demanded modernisation that could not be delivered.

An emblematic case of this situation was the very long dispute at Ciccodicola. Overwhelmed by the crisis in their sector, the owners of the Remorici estates on the other side of the Liri, they were an entrepreneurial dynasty that had received a visit from Charles III of Spain and the Two Sicilies (1716-1788) in Arpino in 1744. Less than a century later, in 1828, the family had taken over the Ladislao Castle in Arpino, transforming it into the Ciccodicola Wool Mill and continuing their expansion along the Liri Valley, leaving behind their centuries-old industrial "fiefdom". In the same year as Charles Lefèbvre, Vincenzo Ciccodicola obtained a loan of 800 ducats from the king, which enabled him to import the most modern machinery from France. The wool mill became one of the most important in southern Italy and the Ciccodicola

family also worked to improve the infrastructure of the town, building a new road to replace the impassable medieval lanes that caused problems for the transport of goods. The large family, which lived in the west wing of the Ladislao castle, became famous in the south and opened new shops. Later, in 1844, Pasquale, Vincenzo Ciccodicola's brother, took it upon himself to allow the partners to exploit their own property (the Remorici) and set up a joint stock company called Cartiere del Liri, which we have already met. He met Charles, who helped him in 1854 by lending him cash. In return for this help, Ciccodicola allowed Charles to complete the hydraulic installations of the Cartiere del Fibreno by improving the canals and pipes for the discharge of the water from the Magnene through a fund belonging to Ciccodicola. It should be noted that the Liri paper mill was originally to be built opposite the Forme, on the other side of the river, but this option was abandoned.

Pasquale remained a creditor of the Lefèbvre family, and when his wool business began to fail, he was unable to repay his debts. In 1855, the crisis of the old Ciccodicola wool mill in Isola was in full swing. A judgement and an exchange of letters documented the existence of a considerable debt. After the death of Charles, Ernesto did not demand repayment so as not to jeopardise an ancient industry that was suffering from a sharp drop in orders for wool. The repayment of the sum borrowed in 1854 was thus delayed. Ernesto did not need the money at the time, but at some point, more than 20 years after the loan, he decided to protect himself legally. In 1874, after several out-of-court reminders, he applied to the Court of Arpino for the seizure and confiscation of the Ciccodicola wool mill and its mills, the most important of which was located in front of the Soffondo. The debt to be recovered was considerable for the time: 126,518 lire. The enforcement procedure, which would certainly have vindicated Lefèbvre, had become "desolate and peremptory", probably due to arguments and entreaties, and then suspended at the behest of the creditor, Count Ernesto, because it was impossible to collect the money without causing irreparable damage to the debtor. At that time there was a kind of dignity of the industrial class, an *esprit de corps*, which made it difficult for an entrepreneur,

especially at a time when the market was not yet depressed, to file for the bankruptcy of others or to have their assets expropriated. At the insistence of the Ciccodicola brothers, Ernesto was persuaded to sign a contract with suspensive clauses on 22 April 1875. He renounced the bankruptcy of the Ciccodicola brothers and offered to help them by giving them time to pay other creditors so that no one would attack their property. The creditors agreed to receive the money in instalments at an interest rate of 15% per annum for an unspecified number of years. He renounced the bankruptcy of the Ciccodicola brothers and offered to help them by giving them time to pay other creditors so that no one would attack their property. The creditors agreed to receive the money in instalments at an interest rate of 15% per annum for an unspecified number of years. After a further six years and other vicissitudes, Ernesto, in 1881, issued a writ of execution against the debtors ordering them to pay the full amount due, albeit without interest.⁷⁶

In 1884, the Ciccodicola accused Ernesto of not having fulfilled his obligations and of having taken advantage of their situation by using their land on the Remorici estate to build a water drainage tunnel and to build the San Carlo factory next to their property, finding support from the judge of the Arpino court, who agreed with them. For the question of the easement of water passage, the *Memorandum Zurlo* still applied, unloading the legal issues onto the entrepreneurs. The Ciccodicola and Lefèbvre properties had been close to each other for decades in an inextricable puzzle that stretched from Isola to Sora. The issue continued for many years. If Ernesto promoted other lawsuits, it was probably out of necessity rather than a matter of principle: things were also beginning to go wrong for the Cartiere del Fibreno and those 126,518 lire would have come in very handy. The obsolescence of the machines was becoming evident: some needed replacing, others needed constant repair and the roof was in poor condition. Meanwhile, the blows of the damage caused by Carlo were being felt. In 1888, a new lawsuit was filed. Francesco's presence in court was criticised by the

⁷⁶ *Ciccodicola contro Lefèbvre*, Archivio Fratelli Iafrate, Isola del Liri, pp. 2-7. The two curators were called Tito Cacace and Gennaro de Riso.

Ciccodicola's lawyers who insinuated poisonous words: 'A serious quarrel is pending between the Count of Balsorano and his son Carlo Lefèbvre, in whose presence the validity and legal effectiveness of the donation is highly questionable'.⁷⁷ But the insinuation did not stand because in that case Ernesto's reasons were well-founded.



Pasquale Ciccodicola, a very long legal dispute divided him and his sons from the Lefèbvre.

The Lefèbvre's lawyers filed another lawsuit in November 1888 at the Court of Cassino, in which they demanded that the Ciccodicola pay their debt without further excuses.⁷⁸ For other reasons, of form rather than substance, this case was also rejected, plunging the Lefèbvre into exasperation. Until a decisive case was filed by the lawyer at the Court

⁷⁷ *Ciccodicola contro Lefèbvre*, Archivio Fratelli Iafrate, Isola del Liri, p. 14.

⁷⁸ *Causa Lefèbvre contro fratelli Ciccodicola*, avvocati Tito di Giulio e Benedetto Nicoletti, novembre 1888, Tribunale di Cassino, Archivio Fratelli Iafrate, Isola del Liri.

of Appeal in Naples. The case of *Count Francesco Lefèbvre against Roberto, Alfonso, Ernesto, Eduardo and Luigi Ciccodicola* on 20 November 1889 was won by Francesco; this is deduced from the fact that the Ciccodicola's debt was later found to have been reduced, although a considerable amount was still outstanding in the year 1918, i.e. 54 years after the Ciccodicola's had received the loan from Charles. In 1918, Carlo Lefèbvre still owed 20,000 lire.

In 1901, a disastrous landslide destroyed the Ciccodicola's paper mill, which was located in front of the Soffondo, a little further downstream, just astride the course of the Liri: 'In the midst of a great dust storm, it was seen that the factory had almost collapsed. Someone spoke of sabotage (insurance issues?), but nothing was ever ascertained. The ruins remained standing for about 20 years.



The Ciccodicola factory, opposite the Lefèbvre Park, on the other bank of the Liri, in ruins after its partial collapse in 1901.

The workers said that when they had closed the gates everything was fine. The wool mill produced cloths for barracks and religious institutions, such as the Redemptorists of Verona. Thus, all commerce

in that factory was wiped out forever, which made it impossible for the Lefèbvre family to fully recover their credit.

The previous photograph shows a building at least five storeys high, a bridge (the Remorici bridge that passed next to the Pistolegno) and a house. Today the ruins, opposite the Lefèbvre Pistolegno, are almost completely hidden by vegetation. The following photograph shows the ruins of the villa inhabited by the factory manager.



Ruins of Villa Ciccodicola.

After the above-mentioned deed of gift of February 1888, the only signatures that appear on the documents of the Manifatture del Fibreno are those of Francesco. On that date, the Forme factory ceased production and was put on the market for rent. The property was undivided, although it could be rented to different parties.⁷⁹ There are no reports of workers' mobilisations in that year, yet the factory came

⁷⁹ *Rogito Notaio Ferdinando Savona di Sora*, 11 febbraio 1887, registered by notary Luigi Cancelli in Pescosolido (Sora, 21 maggio 1887, n. 447).

to a standstill for a few years, causing much anguish and trouble for local families. Activity would not resume until early 1893.



Valcatoio waterfall today.

Chapter 11

The decline of the Manifatture del Fibreno

Keeping up with the times was essential, but the machines were getting bigger and more expensive. To make matters worse, many of these machines were still running on steam or gas when the first electric machines began to appear. By 1880, the crisis that had begun in 1870 had eased, but in the Liri Valley, where all the conditions for the development of the paper industry remained in place (abundant water and now specialised labour), the complete abolition of the tariff and customs regime that had kept raw material prices low and paper prices high, and increased national and international competition, caused a general liquidity crisis, just when technological changes made it necessary to replace the machines.⁸⁰

We know that around 1880 the cash flows of all paper mills had become more problematic. In that very year, the results of a state enquiry into the working conditions of minors in Italian industry were published. The document was circulated under the title *Inchiesta sugli operai nelle fabbriche* and the author was Alberto Errera (1842-1894), who denounced the working conditions of minors throughout the paper mill industry.⁸¹ Errera was known for producing a large number of studies over the years and was often accused of eclecticism and superficiality. Nevertheless, he had a strong influence on public opinion and led to the enactment of laws that, on the one hand, moved towards compulsory education for minors and, on the other, banned work for

⁸⁰ The historical archive of the Manifatture del Fibreno and its successor companies was found recently, in 2018, but is not yet catalogued.

⁸¹ Alberto Errera, *Inchiesta sugli operai nelle fabbriche*, Tipografia Elzeviriana, Roma 1879.

minors up to the age of 14⁸² In the Manifatture del Fibreno paper mills, out of 600 workers one hundred were minors. Like many entrepreneurs of his time – it was an idea that was particularly widespread in England, Belgium and France – Ernesto had defended child labour as a measure against idleness, but the laws were changing, introducing protection for the weakest, and so a new regulation against child labour was designed and came into force on 11 February 1886. A gradual entry into force of the new regulations was requested in order to prevent the need to change or replace personnel within a short period of time from creating an additional element of crisis for the paper mills. Various reasons inspired this request, not least the shortage of labour in that part of Terra di Lavoro where the mills were numerous and most of the adults and women were employed. But the request was not listened to and no exceptions were granted.

In the meantime, political conflict increased: the socialists gained more and more power by increasing their group within the municipal council to the point of expressing a mayor in 1908. We know that, at one point, the construction of a road linking the Sora station with the Isola-Sora road was proposed, which was to pass through the Lefèbvre lands. That road would have benefited a private citizen, the owner of the Cartiere Meridionali, to the detriment of the Lefèbvre. Francesco expressed his position and then walked out of the courtroom to avoid pressure, but the people were with him and the road was not built.

When the activities of the Stabilimento del Fibreno were suspended in 1888 – with immediate alarm in the city due to the loss of the jobs of around 600 people – the interest of the Cartiere Meridionali came to the fore, a company that, to the detriment of its name, had its base, as we have seen, in the centre of Savoy power, Turin. Within a few years, The Southern Cartiere Meridionali came to buy some of the largest and most glorious paper mills in the Fibreno district, a district that continued to exist until the 1970s.

⁸² Polsi Alberto, S.v. *Errera, Alberto* in «Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani» - Vol. 43 (Roma, 1993).

On 21 December 1892, the witnesses Giuseppe Levi, Giuseppe Olivitti and Giuseppe Calabritto, all from Naples, met in front of the notary Giovanni Bonucci at 6 Via Maddalena in Naples. With them appeared Francesco Lefèbvre 'domiciled in Isola del Liri' and Giulio Emery (1904) from Naples, domiciled for office reasons in the old premises of the Lefèbvre printing works in Strada San Giovanni Maggiore Pignatelli 18, and signed the lease.



Coupon of the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali
Established in Napoli on 27 April 1873.

Emery was at the time managing director of the Società Anonima delle Cartiere Meridionali, based in Turin, with a fully paid-up capital of 1,500,000 lire. Francesco Lefèbvre stated that the factory was equipped with '4 endless paper making machines' (a special fifth was located in San Carlo) and 'all the other machines for the preparation of pulp and the finishing of paper', and then 'buildings, engines, yards, canals, the house already occupied by the technical directors and the special premises for the administration'. The house referred to was Villa Louise, the name given to the old house in Palma when it was occupied for many years by Amédée Montgolfier's family. This deed granted the lease of the property, which is shown in its parts on a map attached to

the deed along with a 'descriptive record'. We have already mentioned the lease, but it is worth looking at it in detail here. It was granted for 15 years, from 1 January 1893 to the end of December 1907. The price was agreed to be 20,000 lire per annum, of which the first 5 annuities were paid by 19 bills of exchange of 5,000 lire each in advance, due every 3 months.⁸³ Emery was at the time managing director of the Società Anonima delle Cartiere Meridionali, based in Turin, with a fully paid-up capital of 1,500,000 lire. Francesco Lefèbvre stated that the factory was equipped with "4 paper machines" (a special fifth was located in San Carlo) and "all the other machines for the preparation of pulp and the finishing of paper", then "buildings, engines, yards, canals, the house already occupied by the technical directors and the special premises for the administration". The house referred to was Villa Louise, the name given to the old house in Palma when it was occupied for many years by Amédée Montgolfier's family. This deed granted the lease of the property, which is shown in its parts on a map attached to the deed along with a 'descriptive record'. We have already mentioned the lease, but it is worth looking at it in detail here. It was granted for 15 years, from 1 January 1893 to the end of December 1907. The price was agreed to be 20,000 lire per annum, of which the first 5 annuities were to be paid by 19 bills of exchange of 5,000 lire each in advance, due every 3 months. The shutdown lasted about four years, from November 1888 to January 1893. The articles on the use of the water that powered the factory are very detailed. Charles Lefèbvre had built his water intake in the Fibreno without asking for any concessions, because no one asked him for anything: it was his right at the time to use public water, according to the Zurlo memorandum. It was not uncommon for paper mills to rent out industrial installations, although it is unlikely that an installation of this size had ever been rented out in the past: it was usually a small or medium-sized factory. The problem of water intake was not solved until later decades.

⁸³ Executive copy of the Deed dated 21 December 1892, notary Giovanni Bonucci, p. 4.

It was found that there had been minimal maintenance of the buildings and machines in recent years, just to prevent the metal components from rusting and oxidising. According to the Cartiere Meridionali's lawyers, the structure and machinery, and especially the roofs of the building, had suffered damage during the years of downtime, years that were also very rainy. As for the contract, it is worth remembering, it made no mention of pre-emption or purchase rights; it was formally an industrial lease contract.

The Società delle Cartiere Meridionali reserves the right to provide, at its own expense, any additions, extensions and improvements to its offices and machinery that may prove necessary, with Mr. Francesco Lefèbvre of Balsorano being obliged to carry out promptly, at his own expense, at any time, only those works that may be necessary to guarantee the stability of the buildings and waterproofing of the roofs.⁸⁴

It was precisely the precise definition of the reciprocal obligations that was to be the cause of an ongoing dispute between the lessee and the leaseholder for years to come, often with dramatic climaxes, and which led to Lefèbvre's constant outgoings. The latter, burdened with other problems, including family ones – the return of his disenfranchised brother Carlo certainly put him under pressure – was unable to meet the expenses and sold the building, certainly at a lower price than the market, with a conditional deed in 1903 and a sale at the end of the lease in 1907. Lefèbvre asked that the external name of the company not be changed and that it remain in writing: *Stabilimento del Fibreno*. The pride of belonging to the family that had made the factory great would not let him down. It was called "del Fibreno", even though the river that flowed in front of it was the Liri, because it was the water of this river that had made the factory rich over the years. Francesco granted the use of the water for a flow of no less than two and a half cubic metres per second.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

The lease contains a curiosity: in December 1892, the factory was equipped with an electrical system with 70 light bulbs, which the tenant was allowed to use. In article 13, Lefèbvre promised to extend the tunnel under the provincial road within six months to improve the connection between the Fibreno factory and Soffondo. There was already a tunnel, but it was considered to be too narrow and prone to infiltration; it used a half-century-old hoist that was unsafe and had insufficient load-bearing capacity.

This tunnel, as we shall see, led to a costly legal battle between the owner and the leaseholder. In addition, the owner was contractually obliged to pay a compensation of 50,000 lire in cash if he requested a reduction in the duration of the lease. This indemnity, especially as it was 'cash' and not linked to guarantees or other forms of financing, would effectively prevent others from buying the company. The administrator of the factory on behalf of Lefèbvre was named in the contract as Mr. Pasquale La Costa, a figure who then disappeared.

In 1894, Francesco Lefèbvre, in a deed signed before a notary, entrusted the lawyers Emilio Tabacchi and Achille Bosisio with the administration of his property "in order to settle the debts that burden his estate". In order to obtain liquidity more quickly, Francesco asked a bank, the Società Assicurazioni Diverse, to discount two bills of 10,000 lire each, which were then exchanged for four bills of 5,000 lire each.⁸⁵ Two of these 5,000 lire bills of exchange were paid in 1897 while two others, dated 1898, were tied to the payment of future rents by Cartiere Meridionali. The two administrators, taking advantage of Francesco's difficult situation, demanded full control over the count's money movements and warned the bank against paying those bills to the count, thus putting him in serious difficulty. This led to a lawsuit, expensive for his slender pocket, in which Francesco demanded compliance with the agreement from the two trustees and the Società Assicurazioni Diverse.⁸⁶ It was the second lawsuit between him and the Bosisio and

⁸⁵ By a deed signed before a notary Carnevale on 5 october 1897.

⁸⁶ Tribunale Civile di Napoli, *Il sig. Conte Francesco Lefèbvre contro la Società Assicurazioni Diverse e i signori Achille Bosisio ed Emilio Tabacchi...*

Tabacchi couple; the first had arisen when the two had stopped paying the count a monthly payment of 2000 lira for his current expenses. The two managed the interests of the 'estate' and carried out their mandate with extreme freedom, even going against Francesco's daily interests. We do not know whether pressure from others, for example Francesco's family, played a role in this behaviour.⁸⁷

The non-payment of the monthly payment to Francesco had led to serious consequences, but more serious was another fact: the two, claiming to have run out of cash, had failed to pay taxes on behalf of the Lefèbvre, as per their instructions, causing him to default on his taxes. It was the first time this had happened in Lefèbvre's history. The two, acting more in their own interest than that of their 'client' had obtained a mortgage of 600,000 lire on the entire Lefèbvre property, a figure that included assets worth many millions of lire at the time: Palazzo Manso Lefèbvre in Naples, a large palace on the Riviera di Chiaia, various flats in Naples, the Fibreno warehouses in Naples and Rome, Palazzo Lefèbvre in Isola del Liri, the Carnello factory, the San Carlo factory, Industrie Chimiche Lefèbvre, as well as agricultural land and shares in companies.

However, they had not drawn on the loan obtained with this mortgage to pay the taxes. For its part, the Società di Assicurazioni Diverse, on the advice of the two, had refused the count any liquidity, even though the two promissory notes of 10,000 lire were guaranteed by the lease of the Cartiere Meridionali. The matter became even more complicated and risky when a certain Ippolito Dumoret, Lefèbvre's creditor in a complicated case of assigned debts involving the Cartiere Meridionali, entered the dispute. The Turin company was served with a summons by Dumoret, who wanted to seize Lefèbvre's assets, and failed to pay its rent to Assicurazioni Diverse, which in turn failed to pay Lefèbvre the money due. The result was financial ruin and disgrace for Francesco, which must have cost him dearly. The silence of the

Avvocato Giuseppe Archivolti, Napoli 8 febbraio 1898, pp. 5-8.

⁸⁷ The documents do not allow us to understand how the position of the two consultants was formed.

sources, the loss – or at least the current impossibility – of tracing letters and documents relating to family relations between brothers and sisters, do not allow us to understand the attitude of the two sisters, both of whom were very rich, towards Francesco: Giulia Lefèbvre of Casalaspro and Flavia Lefèbvre of Casafuerte. They apparently did not help him. So says his lawyer:

The fact of the various insurances had its inevitable disastrous consequences. While Count Francesco Lefèbvre, in order to partially avoid the serious damage caused to him by his ill-advised agents, had already concluded the aforementioned transaction to pay the tax collector, to provide for the most urgent needs of his property and the necessities of life of his family, he was left without help and without money, he was left rich and had to see the vile tax collector cross his threshold and seize his furniture in the interest of the tax authorities. And the tax collector did not limit himself to confiscating the furniture, but also wanted to inconvenience one of the count's tenants, the Society for Southern Paper Mills. This deserving company, which saw the dispute between the Count and his tenants as an opportunity to do its own thing and to pull the chestnut out of the fire with the paw of others, was hit by an act of obstruction or deliberate distraint of third parties by the desired creditor, Dumoret.⁸⁸

The seizure had been carried out by the Sora tax collector, a creditor of the overdue sums of unpaid land taxes relating to the various Lefèbvre estates in the municipality of Sora. He entered the house, in Palazzo Lefèbvre, seizing the furniture that was certainly dear to Francesco's memory because it had been purchased by his grandfather and father, those that had appeared in Ernesto's 1887 donation to his son. Bosisio and Tabacchi, through a lawsuit brought against Lefèbvre on 27 June 1894 by the notary Guidi of Naples, demanded that the count be stripped of his ability to administer his property even though he was, as the count's lawyer explained, "neither interdicted nor bankrupt" (probably referring to his brother Carlo who was). The lawyer also ironically pointed out the position of the managers of the Società delle

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

Cartiere Meridionali (ironically defined as 'benemerita'), who found a way to take advantage of the strife that had arisen between the count and his agents by imposing the best conditions for their own management.

In fact, these situations, added to others, showed how much, in just a few years, the Lefèbvre situation had been compromised. Above all, the seizure of furniture, paintings and precious objects must have weighed heavily, which partly explains the dispersion of a collection that must have been conspicuous.

On 25 August 1895, the lease was renewed for the Carnello paper mill, which had been rented in 1891 to the De Caria company, which was in partnership with Silvio Avitabile, Enrica Roessinger's husband. Francesco Lefèbvre also leased the Pistolegno mill in Remorici, which had been built 10 years earlier on three floors and was used for debarking, cutting and pulping poplar wood.⁸⁹ An important new industrial reality was temporarily established here around the De Caria-Avitabile partners, who had also rented Lorenzo Zino's factory.

On 29 July 1900 he also rented to Gabriele De Caria the villa, now known as De Caria, with the Scuderia and part of an orchard bordering the park of Palazzo Balsorano. The rent was quite high, 27,500 lire, then 30,000. The contract also provided for the construction of a water divider to divide the flow of the Forme Canal into two independent canals. The cost of this work was estimated at 42,000 lire. In this case, however, the De Caria company was asked to advance the rent instalments, bringing the total to between 70,000 and 80,000 lire, in order to pay Ippolito Dumoret and prevent the villa from being seized. The villa was later sold to the owner of the Lanificio Pisani, a factory at the foot of the Cascata Grande in Isola.

Francesco lived from one advance to the next and had to juggle a very complicated situation of debts and credits, a real chess game. He

⁸⁹ Mancini Stefano M., *Il caso della "Fibreno" ad Isola del Liri: da convento a fabbrica a complesso da salvaguardare*. In «Bollettino dell'Associazione per l'Archeologia Industriale - Centro Documentazione e Ricerca per il Mezzogiorno», nn. 10-12, pp. 7-18, Ivi, p. 17.

could no longer rely on the large sums of money that had made his grandfather's and his father's entrepreneurial lives so happy. Charles and Ernesto had lived through periods of economic expansion for the one and conservation for the other. Now the environment was different; the dwindling or disappearing income caused Francesco another problem: the premises he rented were ageing, the machinery was becoming obsolete, the rent he charged was tending to shrink. He did not have the means to repair the roofs, which was also his responsibility under the contract. From this point of view, it must be said that Francesco played his cards skilfully, as far as he could.

In this situation, he was constantly exposed to dramatic real estate foreclosures by Dumoret, but also by Luisa De Caria, for example (9 November 1897), who ordered him to pay a debt with an unexpected writ of execution. He also had to face other expenses. The Società delle Cartiere Meridionali was building a tunnel for which he was responsible and demanded the balance of 4,000 lire for the first part of the work. The work had begun in July 1893, more than six months after the start of the contract, and so the director of the mills, Giulio Emery, asked him to pay the bill.⁹⁰ In the end, Francesco asked not to pay for that work, after taking his time, but this cost him a quarter's rent, 5,000 lire, which was withheld from him.

The years of the De Caria, Avitabile and Società delle Cartiere Meridionali leases were full of bitterness for Francesco, who was trying to cope with a compromised situation: he was unable to renew the machinery, which was now considered obsolete, and San Carlo was temporarily shut down.

The G. De Caria paper mill got off to a good start but suffered a setback with Gabriele's early death. However, it survived competition from the Cartiere Meridionali, labour disputes, strikes, conflicts with the socialist government and the paper workers' league, the terrible crisis of 1907 and the Second World War. In 1923 it still employed 700

⁹⁰ *Lettera di Giulio Emery al Signor Francesco Lefèbvre di Balsorano*, 8 luglio 1893. Iafrate Brothers Archive, Isola del Liri.

workers, but a drop in orders and a serious liquidity crisis led to its bankruptcy and closure.⁹¹ According to a nephew, Bruno De Caria, the Carnello paper mill still produced between 1,200 and 1,500 quintals of paper a day for the main newspapers in Rome and Milan, and between 1919 and 1922, in the early post-war period, it was the only paper mill in Italy to have such a production (but this is hard to admit if we think, for example, of the Vaprio d'Adda and Binda di Conca Fallata paper mills). Paper was very expensive, it was a precious commodity in those years and convoys were often robbed. The workers, who according to De Caria numbered 2,000, were forced to live in the factory at certain times. When De Caria died, Attilio Consalvo was appointed president and, even in times of crisis, he spent huge sums on renovating the buildings. Three years later, in 1927, the situation had deteriorated even further.⁹²

At the end of this period when the entire complex passed to the C.R.D.M (Cartiere Riunite Donzelli e Meridionali) company, the machinery was dismantled and taken to Forme, where production continued for a few more years. But already after the war, part of the buildings, and certainly Carnello, were abandoned and then demolished.

This book is dedicated to the Manifatture del Fibreno paper factory and not to the related Fabbrica San Carlo, to which a separate volume has been dedicated, but it is good to give some details of this one as well because it is closely intertwined with the history of the first two: all specialised divisions of the same factory which, however, had different outcomes. We know that for many years, the director of the San Carlo factory was Oreste Ricci, who took it over on 22 March 1892 after about three years of inactivity. His brief management preceded that of Cartiere Meridionali, which began at the end of 1892.

⁹¹ ASC, *Pref. Gab.*, b. 33, fs. 360, *Relazione del prefetto al presidente del Consiglio*, 24 giugno 1923.

⁹² Questura, b. 238, fs. 379, *Il commissario aggiunto di P. S. di Isola Liri al questore di Caserta*, 17 gennaio 1927.

Mr. Oreste Ricci has taken over the management of the Fibreno paper mill, which belongs to me. Mr Ricci's particular abilities and the services he has rendered me over the years have made him my preferred choice to continue the commercial traditions of this paper mill to the satisfaction of my old and respected customers, to whose trust I now recommend him.

The Fibreno mills are proud to have introduced the paper industry to this region. Created and managed by my family for almost a century, they have kept pace with progress, both in the production of writing and printing paper for the famous typographies of Naples and Rome, and in the manufacture of chemical products and upholstery paper.

My special attention will be paid to the ever increasing development of my upholstery paper factory, which in the last ten years has reached a primary importance for the artistic and mechanical improvements introduced, which have allowed me to face the foreign competition with national pride, while I propose to offer my customers ever greater facilities, both for the variety of designs and the richness of the assortment, and for the convenience of the prices.⁹³

The letter was written four months after Ernesto Lefèvre's death by his son Francesco, who had taken over the management of the whole complex, leasing the *Forme* factory to Ricci, the *Carnello* factory to Gabriele De Caria and the *Forme* and then *Pistolegno* factories to Giulio Emery of *Cartiere Meridionali*. The upholstery factory remained active and Ricci took over its management. Another letter in the Turin State Archives (a copy of which is in the *Iafrate brothers'* collection), apparently addressed to customers and signed by Ricci, reads as follows

I have the honour to inform you that I have taken over the *Cartiera del Fibreno* and my company will be called *Oreste Ricci - Esercizio della Cartiera del Fibreno*. The experience that I have acquired in 27 years of work in the sector, which I am now carrying out on my own account, entrusts me with the task of taking the best care in carrying out the orders that will be entrusted to me, in order to merit the full satisfaction of my customers.

⁹³ I was able to reproduce the letter in the year 2018 from the *Iafrate Brothers Archives*.

With the request that you acknowledge my signature, I remain yours in the highest esteem.⁹⁴

The letter confirms that Oreste Ricci was indeed the production manager of a factory in the Fibreno complex from 1865 to 1892. The fact that he used the letterhead of the wallpaper factory for the private contract makes it clear that he was the director of San Carlo from its foundation until 1892, i.e. for exactly 27 years, and that he wanted to take over the entire Fibreno complex, with the exception of Carnello. This contract, or promise of contract – there is no notarial deed – lasted only a few months, however, because a more prominent offer was made by the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali, to which the entire complex, except for San Carlo, was leased.

With a contract dated 20 May 1892, the San Carlo factory was entrusted to the Avitabile company for three years in return for a payment of 30,000 lire (40,000 had been offered). Shortly before the end of the first three-year period, Lefèbvre asked for an advance payment of two years' rent, from 20 May 1895 to 20 May 1897.⁹⁵ The Avitabile firm gave the count 55,000 lire (although they made it appear to be 80,000 so as not to reveal that it was an advance due to the count's lack of liquidity). After Ditta Avitabile, the Veronese Emilio Weiss, Count of Valbranca (1847-1923), husband of Countess Caterina Lucernari (1857-1903) of the Lucernari Counts of the paper mill of the same name, took over, apparently out of mutual dissatisfaction with the relationship. Weiss had been director of the Santa Maria delle Forme factory for some time under the management of Cartiere Meridionali. For reasons that remain unclear, this agreement did not come to fruition. It seems that Weiss had reimbursed the Avitabiles for their advance payment and then, when the contract was terminated, he demanded the return of 55,000 lire from Lefèbvre. Somehow the parties came to an

⁹⁴ Archivio di Stato di Torino, Atti Privati, 1897.

⁹⁵ Copies are kept at the State Archives in Frosinone and other copies of the same contracts are part of the Iafrate Collection cited in Edmondo Iafrate-Amleto Iafrate, *Gli stabilimenti del Fibreno*, by the authors, Isola del Liri 2020, p. 174 e ssg.

agreement when Weiss paid a further 27,500 lire and held the lease for 1 year until 1896, but he did not get the 55,000 lire back.⁹⁶ At the end of the year, Count Weiss sold the factory and demanded payment for the agreed improvements, but Lefèbvre replied that they had been granted in exchange for an extension of the contract for another four years.

At this point, the factory was closed without the Count having paid the rent, and the matter was referred to the court, which exempted Weiss from having to pay Lefèbvre any money. The factory therefore remained closed from 1896 to 1910.⁹⁷ It was only in that year that it was partly leased to Federico Augusto Ostrogovich, an engineer and inventor, son of a famous chemist from Florence, Adrian, who had been teaching for many years at the University of Clunj in Transylvania and had a studio in Florence. He was also the son-in-law of the director of the Cartiere Meridionali.⁹⁸ He kept it for less than four years because after the earthquake in January 1915, the building was unusable. He then moved with his wife Maria Vendrame – daughter of another director of the Cartiere Meridionali – to Bologna. News about San Carlo comes to us from a bulletin of the Chamber of Labour.

The first Italian cigarette paper leaflet factory, recently set up by the Augusto Ostrogovich company, employs 90 workers (3 adults, 63 adults and 21 girls). As this is a new industry for Italy, the wages for the first year of operation vary between 0.90 and 1.10 lire for the 22 pieceworkers who fold and glue the wrappers. The other categories of workers receive a fixed wage,

⁹⁶ Archivio di Stato di Roma, reg. 45, serie 1 n. 8116, Atti privati (1896).

⁹⁷ Edmondo Iafrate - Amleto Iafrate, *op. cit.* p. 176.

⁹⁸ Elsewhere, but without proof, there is mention of a contract from 1910. Certainly in 1912 the factory was leased. In 1912, he filed an invention of his own and named his initiative *Prima fabbrica italiana di libretti da sigarette, settembre 1912*. Archivio Centrale dello Stato. Regno d'Italia. Ministero Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio. Ufficio della proprietà intellettuale. Vol. 11, n. 12806; On Father Adriano Ostrogovich, from Lecce of Montenegrin origin, see Fontani Marco - Orna Mary Virginia - Costa Mariagrazia, *Chimica e chimici a Firenze, dall'ultimo dei Medici al padre del Centro Europeo di risonanze magnetiche*, Firenze 2015, *passim*.

ranging from 40 to 70 cents for girls and 70 to 80 cents for adults, for 10 hours of work a day. On 18 May, the entire workforce, with the exception of three adults and the teacher, went on strike to demand the lifting of a 10-day disciplinary suspension imposed on one worker. The company reduced the suspension to three days, but on 21 May, insisting that the workers go on strike, cancelled it altogether. Work was not resumed until the 27th, however, as machinery had broken down in the meantime. The strikers were supported by the Chamber of Labour, which distributed 100 lire in subsidies collected as subscriptions from the sub-prefect, the Chamber of Labour and the company.⁹⁹

We note that there were 87 women and girls (under the age of 14) employed and only three workers on the only paper and flat printing machine in operation at the time.

These rapid changes in management illustrate how the fortunes of the Manifatture del Fibreno and its various units, *Forme e Soffondo*, *Pistolegno Remorici*, *Carnello* and *San Carlo*, were inextricably linked, and how a small group of wealthy industrialists and financiers vied for control of the great factory that still appealed to so many.

The engineer De Rogatis, who carried out an expert inspection of the factory in 1915, found that the machinery was old and had not been maintained for several years. A sad end, hastened by the earthquake that severely damaged the building and destroyed the machinery. The factory was demolished at the end of the First World War. All the staff lost their jobs.

In the meantime, between Carlo's second deprivation and the entrustment to Francesco, the Lefèvre complex in Bagnoli was entrusted on 18 January 1887 to the management of Pietro della Posta, Duke of Civitella, a procurator with full powers.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps - but there is no proof - it was sold or leased to Arthur Walter, an American engineer of outstanding ability who devoted himself to the production of refined sulphur and then to the booming chemical fertiliser business. The transition probably took place the following year, in 1888. Even at

⁹⁹ *Sindacato e corporazione. Bollettino del lavoro e della previdenza sociale, informazioni corporative* v. XVIII, Roma 1913, p. 51.

¹⁰⁰ *Archivio di Stato di Napoli, contratti di società*, vol. 22.

the end of the 19th century, the Walter factory (with which the Austrian Walter Finkler was associated) appears isolated in the countryside in the few existing photographs. From 1903, it was surrounded by new infrastructure and buildings. It was the first nucleus of what was to become, through various stages, ILVA di Bagnoli.¹⁰¹ The Cartiere Meridionali never sourced their supplies from Chimica Lefèbvre, they purchased the necessary bleaching products from northern Italy and had them shipped in by train.

¹⁰¹ As of 2020, after the fire of 2013, the remaining documentary complex of the City of Science, with the history of the factories active there, has still not been catalogued, even though it was 'poured', i.e. moved, to the Archive in 2016. Its heading is Archivio di Stato di Napoli, *Fabbrica interconsorziale dei concimi e prodotti chimici della Campania*, XX sec. Stanza 168.

Chapter 12

Final crisis

The commercial crisis after 1870 exposed the structural limits of local entrepreneurship, which had difficulty shipping its products and remaining competitive, and favoured a situation of gradual deterioration in the condition of the workers, as well as the growth of class consciousness and an antagonistic movement. The first effect of the crisis was to provoke a change, initially only in management, but later also in ownership. The practice of renting out factories, which had been pioneered in the area by Count Lucernari and was widespread in other regions of Italy, spread like wildfire at the end of the century. After the case of Sorvillo, who sold the Liri paper mill to a group of northern financiers and entrepreneurs in 1873, the smaller paper mills of Picinisco and Sant'Elia di Fiumerapido went bankrupt.

At this point a new entrepreneurial class emerged, which not only took over the management of the existing mills but also built new ones, concentrating on the production of pulp and cardboard, which had also been started by Lefèbvre. A former director such as Gabriele De Caria, as we have seen, bought the Carnello and the villa opposite the Fibreno factory, while former textile industrialists such as Emilio Boimond decided to change sectors. It was mainly northern companies with international capital that intervened. Technological growth and the move to paper production based on the pulp system, which replaced the use of rags, as well as changes in business style, had a profound impact on social life and the relationship between capital and labour. Lefèbvre's paternalistic system was dismantled by the new management, partly because of the different education and ideology of the new owners.

The new owners did not inherit the structures as a family asset, nor the ideological apparatus behind the symbolic role of paternalistic management. This was a legacy of the 19th century, which had functioned until the relationship between owners and workers was mediated by overly complex and indirect management structures. The ideology of the paternalistic entrepreneur had been passed on from Charles to Ernesto and also to Francesco, despite the changing environment. The new bosses and managers emphasised the disciplinary organisation of work according to what were perceived as more modern canons, introducing much stricter rules, written down in detail, enforced by overseers, with dismissals and fines, which the Lefèbvre did not practise. This system was associated with the new "modern" model: production decoupled from the social context, less personalised management.

The economic crisis and growing unemployment, on the other hand, led to general discontent among the workers, which helped to expose the weakness of the paternalistic system, which was no longer viable in this new context, and gave rise to a general drive to redefine class relations both inside and outside the factory. In a report sent to the Prefect of Caserta, the Minister of the Interior and the Provincial Chamber of Commerce, the Mayor of Isola del Liri reconstructed the social situation, the condition of the workers and a large part of the population during the years of the crisis of 1876-1878, which coincided, among other things, with the first crisis at Lefèbvre due to conflicts between families. The mayor called for urgent measures to be taken to revive industrial activity and guarantee new jobs in order to prevent the disputes from escalating into real strikes.¹⁰²

Considering that the workers of Isola del Liri and many of the neighbouring towns, such as Fontana Liri and even Sora, relied on factory work as their only source of income, and that this work, which had been plentiful in the paper mills up to that point, was tending to disappear, the number of families in poverty, separated from rural life,

¹⁰² ASF, Sottoprefettura di Sora, B. 550 *Condizioni delle classi operaie. Relazione del sindaco di Isola del Liri del 14 settembre 1878.*

increased. This was compounded by a downward trend not only in real but also in nominal wages, which did not exceed one lira and 20 cents for adult men, while they remained below 50 cents for women and children. This disparity was justified by the fact that the work of adult men was more skilled than that of women and children and required specific training.

However, children were forced to work under the same conditions as adult men, i.e. 12 hours in winter and 14 hours in summer. This figure for working hours is taken from the oral and written evidence given to the Industrial Inquiry Committee in the above-mentioned Committee proceedings.¹⁰³ The previous average was between 11 and 12 hours a day throughout the year, and no more. Moreover, the general rise in the cost of living coincided with an increase in rents and a fall in wages, but also with a process of productive restructuring and the displacement of labour, especially women and children, which ultimately led to drastic cuts in the working family's budget. The above-mentioned *Atti della giunta per l'inchiesta agraria* (acts of the Agrarian Enquiry Board) also contain data from the 1881 and 1901 censuses.¹⁰⁴

The reduction in employment also had a negative impact on the process of intellectual and technical growth of the working population. In fact, the reduction in employment also limited the entry of young apprentices into the factory, who could take advantage of the training activities in the larger factories to acquire a solid professionalism that they could then sell in emigration.¹⁰⁵

Overall, the hygienic and food conditions of the workers in the large Isola factories could not be described as bad. However, there were considerable differences between nuclei of workers and there were distinctions between factories. On the one hand, workers in the large Lefèbvre and Cartiere del Liri paper mills enjoyed better treatment, on the other hand, workers in small factories with less than 100 workers where the social responsibility of the entrepreneur was less. Among the

¹⁰³ *Atti del comitato d'inchiesta industriale*, cit., V. I, p. VIII, p. 3 ssg.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*. Vol. VIII, Campania.

¹⁰⁵ *Atti del comitato*, cit., p. 5; ASF SSB 550.

former many enjoyed specific accommodation and services due to their status as workers in those paper mills, the others lived in the village or in the countryside. It had long been convenient to employ entire families in the factories, while the labour force of the other companies was more casual and varied. These differences were superimposed on the more strictly wage-related differences related to qualification; the latter, in fact, had very little effect, because the range of wages was quite narrow: apart from specialised technicians, operators of the most complex machines, maintenance workers and engineers, who were few in number, most workers were forced into repetitive actions.

The government interventions required, first as tax cuts and then in terms of credit and technology, were aimed at boosting wages and alleviating a worrying unemployment that was rising. To give even a general idea of the processes that were taking place in those years, one can compare some data on employment from 1873 to 1875 with that consolidated in 1889 when the crisis was coming to an end and the new productive organisation of the paper industry was complete. It can then be seen how, between 1873 and 1878, employment in Isola del Liri was distributed as follows: 175 men, 924 women, 1074 children of whom 438 were under the age of 14. In 1889, it can be seen that the number of men employed in Isola del Liri had fallen to 744 and women had halved or just over halved to 516 and children under the age of 14 to only 23.

Alongside a sharp reduction in absolute numbers, it was above all women and children's labour that underwent a drastic downsizing, linked in part to the new wood pulp processing, which employed only adult males, and in part to technological improvements and the increasing use of machines for each stage of the process, the control of which required more robust and experienced workers. This dynamic is confirmed by the composition of the workforce in some factories: at the Liri paper mill between 1873 and 1889 the workers employed fell in total from 600 to 403, in this proportion: adult males from 380 to 199; women from 244 to 120 and children from 100 to only 2.

In the Manifatture del Fibreno there was a similar trend, with respect to composition, while the overall number remained more or less

stationary; this confirms the greater stability of employment in a factory strongly conditioned by privileged relations for the workers, privileges that were a residue of paternalism at least until Ernesto was the owner, that is, until 1888. The number of workers rose from 500 to 507, 250 of whom were adult males compared to 150 in 1873, 244 women compared to 275 and 13 children compared to 75. These figures indicate the company's good health at this time, and the trace of technological investments and new machinery do not foreshadow the serious crisis that broke out in 1887-1888 and make us realise how contingent facts really did play a significant role, wiping out the investments and renewals implemented by Ernesto up to 1884.

A very different discourse must be made for the factories peripheral to Isola, such as the one in Atina, run by a branch of the Visocchi family, or the one in Sant'Elia Fiumerapido, where the ratio of men to women tended to go in the opposite direction precisely because a traditional production system and greater dependence on manual labour remained, resulting in a higher cost of the finished product to the customer. In Atina, an overall reduction in the workforce from 1873 to 1889 of 29 workers was distributed as follows: 18 males, 8 females and 3 children.

At the Lanni paper mill in Sant'Elia Fiumerapido, 20 men and 50 women were added to the workforce during the same period. Under the blows of this economic but also social reorganisation, which affected some marginal workers more directly involved in the company changes, the first signs of class consciousness matured. In Atina, in Sant'Elia, in Monte San Giovanni Campano, the link between the countryside and the factory was very strong, so that the reduction in wages and employment did not hit families as hard as in Isola del Liri, an urban centre with modern characteristics, where factory work was the only means of subsistence after the abandonment of agricultural work.

If the first to be laid off were the commuters, the newly recruited or those linked to small, mainly manual factories, as the economic situation worsened and orders declined, the workers' nuclei linked to industrial paternalism were also affected by the changing relations in the factory. Paternalism guaranteed the worker and was based on the

conviction that the boss was good and cared for the welfare of his workers, providing them with housing, social services and wages in exchange for an absolute willingness to work.

On the contrary, the new system of relations in the factory, introduced above all by the new managers and bosses of the Cartiere Meridionali, which had nothing to do with paternalism and was based purely on the logic of finance and profit, created insecurity among the workers of Isola del Liri, and this feeling was exacerbated by the first consequences of the overproduction crisis at the end of the decade and the beginning of the 20th century. In addition to a reduction in wages, there was a more widespread use of piecework, a reduction in the number of days worked and, above all, a stricter control of workers' behaviour by the management, which made more frequent use of measures such as suspension or outright dismissal. It was against this new way of doing things, this different freedom of action, this uncomfortable and uncompensated modernity, that the workers' protest began to grow. In fact, paternalism was based on an exchange between the time spent in the factory with the security of wages and the security of continuity of production guaranteed to the entrepreneurs.

The economic crisis, the transformation of the company, the disintegration of the paternalist system, the deterioration of living conditions, the misunderstandings between the employers and the workers – who were then called "proletarians" in the literature of the time – and the worsening of the disciplinary system in the factory, all of this influenced the collective social process of the growth of a class consciousness that tended to move away from the system of paternalist protection. This process leads to the identification of an opponent. It is a long and articulated process that is consolidated in successive moments both inside and outside the workplace. At this point, it is worth mentioning a specific event that is particularly suited to understanding the contemporaneity between these economic and cultural changes and the birth of a class movement. This was the first major strike at the Liri paper mill, which took place in 1882 and involved all the workers.

The suspension of work by some of the workers was accompanied by a prolonged protest by the factory workers on 16 and 17 October 1882. The significance of this event has been highlighted in various studies. Firstly, it is clear that the myth of the businessman as a good father was overcome at this stage. It was the beginning of what was called at the time the 'realisation' by the workers of their 'antagonistic' role as a social force that could put pressure on the management to assert their rights.

The company's response was the confirmation of the work suspension and finally the dismissal of three workers for irregularities found in the work.

This is how it was recounted in a document of the time:

On the 16th itself, the workers decided to go on strike when the brigade of 43 workers was to enter work at 04:00 in the afternoon, and at the same time replace another one from work and thus all be in the factory yard at the same time.

The signal for the execution of that division was a flag that was improvised with paper in national colours, which was raised on the roof of the factory by the workers who were inside to warn those who were to come in to replace them. They all gathered in the courtyard and shouted demanding that the three dismissed workers there be allowed back to work. The women workers also joined in this uproar, bringing the number of mutineers to over 400. Faced with this inconvenience, the director then tried to pacify tempers by promising that the wish expressed would be granted.

The following morning, the brigade of 40 workmen was to enter, including the three dismissed workers mentioned above, but the porter did not allow them to enter because the director had not given orders to do so. They, aided by the others, entered despite the prohibition and went to work at the place they had previously occupied. The repeated technical director saw at around 8 a.m. the presence of these workers, on whom he had not yet made a proper decision, and went to the director's office, explaining that it was not appropriate for them to be admitted for bullying as they had done. The management then called the three workers in and temporarily suspended them, giving them a subsidy of 10 lire. But as they were leaving, as they crossed the courtyard, about 50 workers came up to them, making them stay and return the 10 lire.

The uproar of this incident attracted the other workers who were in the factory and in a moment they gathered in a mutiny shouting over 400 of them outside the director, meanwhile (...) some went to divert the motive waters in the steam boiler thus stopping the whole operation of the factory while some others met the director in a tunnel and punched him.¹⁰⁶

It is clear that this is not an off-the-cuff protest, but a well-planned, studied protest movement aimed at challenging the company's management. It is not just a matter of solidarity with fellow workers who have probably been punished too harshly, but a real decision to question what the company has established by identifying itself as a social counterpart. The struggle is not a sudden protest by a few workers, as in the weavers' revolts in Arpino in the 1860s or in the 1870s, but a collective response based on ideological reflection. Nor is it a defensive action, but rather an offensive one. Shouting 'out the editor' means accusing and opposing a clearly identified opponent. It is a social action organised and discussed outside the factory, involving many workers; hence the decision to intervene at the time of the shift change, when both teams are present. The ability of the organisation to impose the refusal to take money from the management in order to divide the workers in their collective response is striking.

The action of experienced leaders with charisma and authority within the workers' organisation is evident. There are in fact foremen, older workers, all between 35 and 40 years old, all from Isola del Liri. It is a homogeneous group that enjoys the respect and trust of all the workers, a trust that is consolidated both inside and outside the factories and that is strengthened by the way of life and the family relations that develop in the area surrounding the Cartiera del Liri; a nucleus that distributes the tasks, defines the tactics, the moments of action, the places of protest, the tasks and the roles of the different groups.

As soon as the management's attempt to renege on the promises made the day before was exposed, sabotage actions to block production activity were immediately launched and entrusted to specific people

¹⁰⁶ ASF, B. 552, *Sciopero cartiere*.

whom the police were able to identify. The women physically occupied the centre of the factory and fought the police, occupying the courtyard and shouting. It was at this moment that the separation of ownership and management of the production activity was reaffirmed. But this is not a question of opposing the new in defence of the past. While opposing the new disciplinary systems of control, a collective consciousness seems to prevail: the collapse of paternalism must be responded to with a new protagonism. The disappearance of the shield built up by the old owner families, such as the Lefèbvres, in this case Ernesto and Francesco, who were unable to resist the gradual transfer of the company, revealed to the workers their true situation. They suddenly found themselves defenceless and deprived of the reassuring rituals that the paternalistic factory had offered their fathers and grandfathers: processions, Easter rites, festivals, communal sharing.

The new owners are rarely seen in the factory and are distant names, the new directors are people who have come from outside, from the north, from the Turin area. They are technicians or financiers who have entered this environment with a different, cold breeze, but also in a different economic and social situation than in 1810. Initially, the Lamberts, Berangers and Lefèbvre found a peasant and traditional society in which the factory did not upset the balance, but even reinstated the old aristocratic or lordly systems (the factories were located in the ducal palace or monastery and the lords lived in palaces).

Both in the forms of organisation of the strike and in other details, we seem to detect traces of a political project linked to an autonomous association of workers concentrated in one factory, which was initially difficult to extend to other factories. The defeat came with the arrival of the Carabinieri and immediately the imbalance of power outside the factory became apparent. The police carried out an investigation, which was handed over to the management, which decided on the dismissals by crushing the movement and maintaining order for several days with an armed garrison.

During the strike of 1882, a modern organisational and social process was identified, linked to the changes that had taken place inside and outside the paper mills, changes that were understood by the

workers but not by the local social and political forces, which, when called upon, intervened by proposing paternalistic mediations: the magnanimity of the boss to which the affection and loyalty of the workers had to correspond.

The conditions of the paper industry, the emergence of a social question, the change in the relationship between the workers and the organisation of production led the entrepreneurs of the sector to seek forms of solidarity and exchange of information and knowledge. In 1888, the *Associazione dei fabbricatori di carta e arti affini del Regno d'Italia* was founded in Milan and published a bulletin. Its members included many northern manufacturers such as Pigna, Cartiere Meridionali, whose director was also a member of the board, Mr Pasquale Scotto, the Coccoli brothers from Isola del Liri and the Visocchi brothers from Atina. Lefèbvre, who had stopped production in those years, does not appear.¹⁰⁷

One of the aims of the association was to achieve greater economic weight at national level and to exert constant pressure at ministerial, governmental and institutional level. The Association published a bulletin, the first issue of which explicitly referred to a series of contacts with chambers of commerce, ministries, government directorates-general and individual parliamentarians. The Bulletin devoted considerable space to customs tariffs and problems relating to rail and maritime transport. The Bulletin also published statistical data on industrial structure, production, technology, employment, trade and the tax burden.

At the same time, the workers, aware of the inadequacy of the previous forms of representation, such as the Mutual Aid Society and the Charity Congregations, which had also played a very important role in artisan society, began a process of revision that would lead them first to exclude the employers from the governing bodies and then to attempt to change their objectives and practices. They thought about new

¹⁰⁷ *Atti dell'Associazione dei fabbricatori di carta ed arti affini del Regno d'Italia*. Adunanza dell'11 marzo 1888. In: "Bollettino dell'Associazione dei fabbricatori di carta e arti affini del Regno d'Italia", I, agosto 1888, 1, pp. 13-14.

organisations, looking in particular at the French experience. The economic crisis, which had not yet been overcome, meant that the charitable contributions available to these associations were no longer sufficient. The management, dependent on ecclesiastical and seigniorial circles, gave way to a "paternalism" that was now considered inappropriate for the times. These were the mixed associations which, in a similar situation in Spain, were called 'yellow' associations to distinguish them from the 'red' (socialist) and 'white' associations (run exclusively by businessmen or even Catholic leagues).



Sora, 1920. Its factories were all concentrated in the hamlets of Carnello and Isola del Liri.

The crisis of this welfare system and the increase in the number of workers excluded from productive activity, together with the spread of socialist ideology by young professionals and students linked to the Neapolitan world, favoured self-organisation outside the traditional representative structures. After the strike at the Liri paper mill, the last years of the century and the first of the next, before and after the war, witnessed other episodes that indicated a growing ferment. With the change in the economic situation and the renewed vigour of the paper

industry after the crises of the 1870s and at the end of the century (crises are cyclical, moreover, some years of expansion are followed by some years of crisis), stimulated by the new climate of growth and the new political and cultural climate, the claiming power of what was now called the "Isola proletariat" was consolidated.

The close ties between the city, Naples and Campania socialism, through people like Nardone and Vincenzo Giovannone, allowed the movement, which had not yet found an apparatus and an association to refer to, to be ideologically cemented. At the beginning of the new century, the 'Lega di resistenza degli operai cartai di Isola del Liri' (Resistance League of the Paperworkers of Isola del Liri) was founded in response to the now mature and conscious need of the local workers to defend themselves against demands that they considered no longer acceptable. The Lega was founded on 10 November 1901 and emerged as the result of an articulated process at both company and social level. In fact, for more than a year, actions had been taking place in the companies to obtain wage increases and recognition as an organised counterpart, while socialist propaganda was spreading inside and outside the factories.

At the end of the 19th century, industries were organised according to modern rules. They were not yet 'Taylorist', but they did use time and motion calculations, and kept precise records of operations and absences. Supervision became much harsher, and fines, suspensions, a rude way of giving orders, almost borrowed from the army, worsened living conditions in the factories. The loosening of the relationship between bosses and workers was fundamental. If the environment became more healthy, at least in the larger factories and in some departments, the human climate deteriorated, not least because of the ever-increasing investments demanded by investors who had no direct contact with the workers, as was the case with the Berangers, the Lefèbvre, the Zinos. Stefano Merlin, in one of his books on the life of the workers in the Liri Valley, quotes: "Even the workers' guts have to comply with the paper mill's rules".

This life, both inside and outside the factory, was marked by the rhythms of work, and everything related to work was governed by

regulations that regulated the conditions of employment, the duration of work, the method of payment, dismissal and welfare. The most extensive part concerned disciplinary rules and fines, which dictated compulsory behaviour and obligations and determined the workers' entire day. The working day was fixed at 12 hours but could be extended at will.

Hours of work were almost always based on the quantity of product produced, and paper mills were one of the industrial activities that obtained an exemption from the law prohibiting holiday work, justified by the production process and also by the need to supply newspapers and periodicals with paper. Workers were paid by the day or by the piece, depending on the type of work. The method of payment and the length of the day were common to many other industries, the difference being the environment in which the work was done: the fast pace of the paper machine made the day non-stop, and working with water, steam or acids left permanent marks on the body.

The factory, as we know, revolutionised social and family relations; the whole life of the working family was determined by the rhythms of the factory. In the mornings, a flood of people would go to work with all the children, even babies, if they could not leave them with anyone. At the factory, the children were given to the women who looked after them. This happened first in the Lefèbvre factories, in special rooms in Via Tavernanuova, and then in the Cartiere Meridionali, inside the factory. The nurseries organised by these factories were intended to enable the workers to work and, with a few exceptions, were not open to the outside world.

In the evening, after 12 hours of work, everyone returned to the village. At some point, to avoid a long walk in the dark and possibly in the cold and rain, workers' houses were built. The Lefèbvre family owned about twenty dwellings, housing perhaps a hundred or more people. They were located in Borgonuovo, close to the factory, and were certainly rented at subsidised rates or leased at a symbolic price. Those of the Cartiere Meridionali are still clearly visible today. After a certain hour, in the evening, the streets would empty. They would all disappear, retreat, never to be seen again. This testimony, which dates

back to the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, is a good illustration of what life was like on Isola del Liri after the growth of the factories and the development of industrial employment, followed by the expansion of the paper industry and related industries.

The expansion of the pulp production departments, together with more stringent laws on female and child labour, contributed to a change in the composition of the workforce: the number of adult male workers rose from 622 in 1863 to 1874 in 1903, while in the same period the number of women rose from 731 to 998 and the number of boys from 109 to 131.¹⁰⁸ However, if the trend was positive and steady for adult men, it was more mixed for women and children. Then, apart from one year of severe crisis (1907), the industrial statistics show an increase in both the number of mills and the number of employees. In 1903, compared to 1863, the increase in paper mills was three times greater: in the Isola area, they rose from 6 to 21, and the number of workers doubled from 1,462 to 3,003.

In 1906-1907 a crisis of overproduction hit the sector hard.¹⁰⁹ There was no shortage of protests even at the dawn of the new century. Despite the defeat of 1888, which deeply affected the history of the working class in Isola del Liri, a decade later the conflicts resumed. In 1900, mobilisation involved several factories and the paperworkers formed an organisation capable of officially representing them on a contractual level.¹¹⁰ On 3 December 1901, a few days after the Workers' League was set up, strikes were organised by the rag-pickers at the Cartiere Meridionali, by those at the Liri Paper Mill, and immediately afterwards by workers at the Forme after the dismissal of a worker.¹¹¹ Further strikes followed at De Caria.

¹⁰⁸ I derive this information from an interview Alfredo Martini gave to Edoardo Mancinella in Isola Liri on 1 November 1976, which refers to the early 1900s and is quoted in inverted commas in the book, pp. 82-83.

¹⁰⁹ Pepe Adolfo, *Lotta di classe e crisi industriale in Italia*, Milano 1978.

¹¹⁰ Esta Antonio, *Le origini del movimento socialista in Ciociaria*, Sid/IGM, Roma 1969, pp. 61-64.

¹¹¹ Fraioli Romeo, *Storie del frusinate*, 9 novembre 2009, in <https://www.unoetne.it/radici/storie-del-frusinate/item/9026-1901-la-rivolta->

The crisis aggravated the conflict, reducing contractual margins and leading to closures and redundancies. In the early months of 1906, the crisis began at the Questa paper mill (located near the Valcatoio waterfall, just downstream from Remorici) and at Roessinger: three redundancies were made in February and the precarious situation continued until December, with continuous work stoppages and repercussions on wages. In August, all the workers at Roessinger went on strike against further redundancies. The crisis of overproduction was aggravated by the lack of water in the rivers, reduced working hours and the suspension of workers in the same department for one week at a time. These measures were agreed with the union leaders of the League. Nevertheless, Questa and Roessinger closed down in 1907 and only reopened with new capital in 1911, when the industry resumed.

By 1910 and 1920, Isola del Liri had become a real factory town. From a working-class suburb of Sora, it was on its way to becoming the most important industrial centre in the area, and already at the end of the 19th century, with a greater volume of technological investment, the entire structure of the paper industry took on more precise characteristics in terms of work organisation. Each paper mill was made up of four departments: the machinery department, which included the boilers, the hydraulic steam machines for energy supply, where male workers were employed and paid a high wage; the rag department, where, as the name suggests, the raw material was prepared and where women worked; the production department, which included the entire production process from the rag to the paper machine and where adult and young workers were employed; and the finishing department, where the remaining female workers were concentrated.¹¹² Alongside these activities that we could call traditional, there was an increase in the number of pulp manufacturing departments that required little labour compared to the high fixed capital employed. Wood pulp production took off at Pistolegno Remorici and then at Cartiere

delle-stracciarole-alle-cartiere-meridionali-di-isola-del-liri.html.

¹¹² Martini Alfredo, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-84.

Meridionali where it was filmed in a 1910 documentary produced by Cines (the original of which is in Bologna).



Wood Treatment. Documentary Cines, 1910 (Bologna), filmed partly at the Cartiera del Liri mill and partly at the Cartiera delle Forme mill, at that time both part of the Gruppo Cartiere Meridionali.

An important role was played in 1907 by the socialist municipal administration, which supported the redundant workers with subsidies, guaranteed construction work quotas for the less qualified and migration to workshops and paper mills, in France and Switzerland, for the specialised workers.

It is no coincidence that it was in 1907 that a right of pre-emption was signed for the Manifatture del Fibreno at the Cartiere Meridionali with a contract *sub conditione* that became effective two years later. Francesco Lefèbvre had given himself two more years to take the company back if conditions improved, if the industry that had been in crisis for a few years started up again when the lease expired.

In many respects, 1907 truly appears to be a pivotal year. The crisis was very violent. Many workers left the factories to go into

construction, many women returned to work in the fields or to activities such as spinning textiles at home.

The reduction in the workforce in the paper industry in the Liri Valley following the great crisis of 1907 was as much as 30%, going from 3003 workers employed in 1903 to 2165 in 1911.



Wood Treatment. Cines documentary, 1910
(Bologna), detail of a frame.

During this first decade, however, the workers won general improvements in pay and discipline, reduced workloads, shorter working hours and greater concessions on holidays and night rest. The federation was also recognised and, over time, succeeded in winning further wage increases and in fighting the unilateral repressive measures of the companies; it also obtained a greater willingness on the part of the bosses to make concessions in exchange for less conflict. In this phase, the profound differences between companies are becoming more pronounced. The variety of jobs, the size of the company or paper mill, its geographical or market position counted for a lot.

The transition from piecework to continuous work dates back to this period, first in large companies and only later in smaller ones. While in

the Cartiere Meridionali the high use of machinery and modern work organisation tended to favour the overall productivity of the departments, in many small mills there was a measurable relationship between the worker and the quantity of material produced, and this could lead to conflict. There were also differences in working hours, which ranged from 10 to 12 hours in 1907 to fewer hours in 1911. The size and geographical location of the companies increasingly influenced the workers' ability to fight. It was the larger Isola mills that were the first to reduce the working day to 10 hours and the first to allow women to work non-stop in the Stracceria.

In the smaller paper mills, such as Boimond or Scotto di Sant'Elia Fiumerapido, the working hours were not reduced until 1911.

Chapter 13

The new rights

As the early years of the lease of the Manifatture de Fibreno were running, and also in order to overcome the resistance and doubts of the tenant company's lawyers who wanted to clarify what the Lefèbvre's water rights on the Fibreno River were, the process of reorganising the water rights was undertaken. This process took place in several places during the latter part of the century.

Local industrialists and land owners had not agreed with the State to safeguard their access to water. As Stefania Barca explains in *Enclosing Water*, these were lawsuits pitting individuals, private citizens, against other private citizens. They were all fighting to obtain the right to withdraw and use public water by referring to private law. One episode, as already mentioned, took place around the Carnello locality and factories.¹¹³ A government decree in 1884 ordered the compilation of a national list of public waters and those who used them. Just 10 years later, the government issued a specification to enforce the law and help the prefect complete the information that would allow the law to be fully applied. The Public Water Specification required all users to register their water intakes with the local civil engineering office.

The industrialists' response to the new law was characteristic: they did not feel obliged to register their water rights, as they had been acquired more than 30 years earlier. Without the willingness of individual users to cooperate, the State had no real control over the situation of national waters. Nor did the prefects, either because they knew too well how the users would react or because they agreed that water should remain free and unrestricted for industrialists. This

¹¹³ Stefania Barca, in *Enclosing Water. Nature and Political Economy in a Mediterranean Valley (1796-1916)*, *The White Paper Horse*, Cambridge 2010.

apparent institutional balance was broken by a series of circumstances. In Carnello, Francesco Lefèbvre and his heir Zino faced off against a number of other industrialists, such as Ciccodicola, Roessinger, Viscogliosi, Gemmiti and the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali, who sued them for damages and asked the prefect to check the legal status of their water intake. The attempt to take control of the Fibreno River was therefore a private initiative, not a State one.

At the request of the industrialists, the Prefect sent two civil engineers to determine the legal uses of the water and how much water was being used. He also wanted to assess whether the masonry and hydraulic works met the criteria laid down by law and whether they were proportionate to the legitimate use of the water. In short, he had to assess whether they were causing harm to other users. Obviously, all the water users in Carnello had to be involved, so the Prefect ordered that the status of the plaintiffs should also be checked to ensure that they had legal standing. Thus began a long and complex legal battle, centred on the technical difficulties of measurement and water. For the state, the Carnello dispute was an opportunity to try to regulate the use of water throughout the area, which was no easy task.

On the morning of 18 May 1896, a small group of water users, each accompanied by an expert and a lawyer, gathered on the banks of the Fibreno, near the Zino and Lefèbvre factories, next to Santa Reparata, and thus began the visit of the engineers Mezzacapo and Silvestrini, who had to fill in a questionnaire and draw up a report. After the initial formalities, the lawyers of the Zino family claimed that their clients were not holders of temporary concessions, but of a right of dominion over the Fibreno, deriving from previously acquired titles, i.e. ancient possessions and secular uses, which naturally included the Boncompagni. From this point of view, Lefèbvre's lawyers followed a very similar line of defence, and from then on the case was based on private law and used that language.

All the parties to the case demanded an audit of the state of the water and its use to ensure that everything was legal. Obviously, at that time, everything was done without exact measurements, but with pragmatic evaluations, such as the productivity of the machines, or even with

mathematical measurements that did not clarify the horsepower (easier to measure in a steam turbine). Somehow the industrialists of the Liri Valley thought that the water they used was public, that is, free, and that the State was only responsible for managing the water and not for the relations between individual owners. At the same time, they were looking for a technical solution, because they were still operating in a legal vacuum. When Francesco Lefèbvre rented his factory, the tenants asked him how much could be taken from the Carnello intakes from time to time, and they wanted assurances because the value of the factory and its present and future productivity depended on it. There was no sure, scientific criterion for assessing all this, only custom and usage, which was constantly undermined by lawsuits that periodically pitted users against each other.

The industrialists were aware that the river was a finite physical entity where each user affected the quantity and quality of water available to others. They were all aware of their physical interdependence within the limited environment of the riverbed, which was subject to many variables. Their main problem was to find a clear definition of each other's rights and how to share the river's wealth. What they expected from the engineers sent by the government was a precise measurement of the amount of water to which each was entitled, both legally and materially, taking into account the situation of the river and the existing hydraulic works. Lefèbvre and Zino, for example, asked the engineers for technical advice on a private agreement that their predecessors had signed in 1848 for the management of a small dam at Carnello. This agreement, now fifty years old, had been contested on all sides, but they hoped that the engineers would be able to clarify which changes in the physical state of the river were due to human intervention and which to natural causes, such as variations in rainfall or environmental changes upstream, even though they were well aware that the river they were drawing from was very different from the one their ancestors had exploited. They wanted a clear, scientific, mathematical record of the current situation so that it could be included in official documents and used in the event of future disputes.

For the engineers, the possibility of precisely measuring the flow and the litres of water that pass through the river, either on average or at different times of the year, was a way of overcoming the uncertainty created by the old legal rights, rights that were contestable because they derived from the old agreements, signed in times when hydraulic power was an indeterminate entity and not the sum of hydraulic horsepower. Those involved in the initiative wanted to overcome the uncertainty and eliminate the possibility of further abuse. For the government, water metering was a way of establishing effective control over the nation's rivers without upsetting old local balances. The government's authority over water was to be based on the scientific method of hydraulic engineering, as opposed to legal rhetoric, agreements that were centuries old and stemmed from a different set of laws, agreements that were favoured by local users.

In this way, old property rights were not formally contested, but measured, demarcated, limited and brought under State control. A mathematically objective knowledge of rivers, expressed in the language of hydrodynamics, was still a long way off. It was not only desired by the technicians, industrialists and engineers who came to Carnello, it was a necessary condition for more efficient mechanisation of work and for the regulation of water and water users.

Moreover, measuring the flow of a river that had been so exploited and transformed over the previous decades was almost impossible due to its constant variations. The two engineers, after having determined with great difficulty the height of the reservoirs and the water level at various points on the river bed and at the dams, as well as the flow in the various stretches, had to admit that the water level on the third day seemed to be 5 cm higher than on the second day, and that these variations were frequent within the same day due to the intermittent use of the machines. There was therefore no technical solution for determining the water and hydraulic power of the users at Carnello. For this reason, the work of the engineers had to be periodically interrupted in order to verify the measurements already included in the documents proving the rights of use.

When the engineers made their third visit to Carnello on 18 June, the inevitable happened. Lefèbvre's lawyers objected to Ciccodicola's claim of legitimacy because their client had been the first to make such a claim concerning water. Ciccodicola replied that they were prepared to pay a fine if that was the reason for preferring Lefèbvre's claim, and Lefèbvre also contested the Courier's lawyers' claim. He threatened legal action and submitted new documents to prove his rights. Francesco Lefèbvre had just started a 15-year lease on the paper mill and it was imperative that he defend his drawing rights against any dispute, otherwise Cartiere Meridionali might challenge the terms of the lease.

Ciccodicola then announced his counter-affirmation of any documents his rival might produce. Zino's lawyers, for their part, insisted on the perfect legality of their client's property and rights, as well as his full dominion over the river. Mrs. Gemmiti, the only woman personally involved in the dispute, presented her lawyers with a written statement based on an agreement signed in 1876. According to this agreement, her mill was guaranteed a certain amount of water power, even during the dry season. She insisted that the agreement should be honoured, even though it was insufficient for the flow of water available at the time, which had decreased compared to the water available in the past. This led to a reduction in the effective capacity of his machines, which broke down or could not be started at low water levels because they were oversized for flows that were no longer available. As the lawyer explained, Mrs. Gemmiti could not be asked to replace her machines with new ones because she had the right to use her water rights as she wished, and because this possible cost was not imposed on her by the State but by a private agreement. The Ministry of Public Works had guaranteed water purchase permits for more water than was actually available, leaving Gemmiti's mill completely dry. While the lady rejected the availability and capacity of a technical solution to install newer and more efficient machines, the lawyers opted for a financial solution, proposing to charge a sum for each day that the Gemmiti mill was not working.

At the end of the third day, completely overwhelmed by the lawyers, the two engineers gave up. Although they said they could not do it, they allowed the parties to submit further documents by a certain date and to respond to them at a later date. Then nothing was done. It was avoided that further documents would be submitted at the next inspection. The confrontation between the parties ended in a general agreement. The Carnello industrialists placed their documents in the family archives. Other mediations took place over the next 20 years. The impossible attempt to enclose the waterways in individual plots of land would keep these people busy for a long time to come, until hydroelectric power stations replaced the old machines. Later, on the river, water was trapped in very different power generation networks.

In the Liri Valley, the use of water resources was a reaction to the previous feudal and communal regime, but it did not lead to efficient resource management in either environmental or economic terms. Exclusive property rights over water were asserted, but transaction and environmental costs were very high, and remained so throughout the century. Entrepreneurs acted as private owners of water, imagining it as a natural capital to be used freely. The Liri-Fibreno basin was not an open access system but a common resource. An important incentive for individuals to cooperate is the clear perception of interdependence in the relations between actors and between them and the resources. As we have already seen, this awareness was lacking in the Liri Valley industry, unlike in the Po basin. They did not see themselves as a community, but as individuals who made a profit and acted accordingly. Their concept of water ownership contradicted the nature of the river, whose essence is flow, movement and interdependence. Hydropower is produced by the flow of water in machines that produce energy. It is a flow, not a store of energy. Of course, the river could be fenced off and the water stored in order to make energy production stable and measurable. This kind of appropriation would lead to control of large stretches of the river by an entity, usually a company or a government agency in a natural monopoly situation. In this way, the water would be allowed to flow only at the rate necessary to produce energy for the benefit of the same agents who are in charge of or enjoy the concession.

But neither the mill owners of the Liri Valley, nor the Bourbons, nor the Savoy government wanted this kind of domination. They all believed in Locke's notion of economic freedom and national wealth, and had left behind hundreds of years of domination in the form of feudal rule. They imagined and practised their own individual freedom of action, in which there was simply not enough room for the production of efficiency in both economic and ecological terms.

Individuals attempted to maximise their share of energy by using resources to the maximum, obstructing the river bed with stones or wooden barriers, or even installing machinery along the river at the expense of the water flow and the community. Modifications of the river and riverbed in a resource owned by many individuals are extremely counterproductive because they follow a very narrow view of the system and have negative consequences for the productivity of the resource and the agents involved.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Barca Stefania, *Enclosing Water*, cit., pp. 111-115.

Chapter 14

The situation of the paper mills at the beginning of the 20th century

In early 1886 there had been a strike that was immediately broken at the Courier factory in Sora and this was followed, as we know, by the founding of the Association of Papermakers and Related Arts of the Kingdom of Italy in 1888. After the events we have already seen, on 10 November 1901 the League of Resistance of the paperworkers of Isola del Liri was founded.¹¹⁵ Since the previous year, there had been various actions and demands to the companies for wage increases and recognition in the form of productivity bonuses, and socialist propaganda had spread inside and outside the factories. In October 1901, a month before the league was founded, there had been a strike at the Loffredo foundry in Isola del Liri for a pay rise, and a resistance league had been formed among the workers there, which was not recognised by the boss. In the same year, 1901, there was also unrest at the Cartiere Meridionali: 79 women from the Stracceria department and others from the Fibreno department went on strike to protest against the management for certain labour resolutions. Francesco Lefèvre was not called in as a party because he was the tenant of the factory: the director, Giulio Emery, was called in. Bernardo Nardone from Arce and Pietro Giovannone from Isola presented themselves as leaders of these groups of workers and handed over documents demanding better working hours and wages.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Esta Antonio, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹¹⁶ Martini Alfredo, *Biografia di una classe operaia. I cartai della Valle del Liri*, Bulzoni, Roma 1984, pp. 71-72.

It is hard to believe that the workers' crisis, particularly at the Fibreno-Forme in 1901, was not linked to the control regulations imposed by the new management. Both the strikes at the Cartiere Meridionali in 1901 as well as those at the Courier paper mill and the Cerasoli foundry in 1902 are precise resistances to attempts by company management to increase the workload. In the case of the rag-and-bone mills, they objected to an increased workload due to new work regulations. They then demanded wage increases; in the case of Courier the struggle arose in response to the dismissal of 9 workers, in the case of Cerasoli the workers countered with 43 days of strike against an attempt to impose a compulsory wage freeze for two years. All these strikes lasted a long time, 10 and 11 days the first two, and as many as 43 days the third. They also saw a high number of participants. This showed that we had entered a new era, with increasingly violent struggles between workers and management, redundancies, loss of wages and reduction of working hours. Already in 1902, the League represented more than 2000 workers employed in almost all the factories in the Sora district and in Anitrella. Subsequently, the League also gained consensus among the workers in the induced industries throughout the area and at the same time the traditional forms of assistance and paternalism that had survived up to that time were definitively put into crisis.¹¹⁷

A very violent conflict took place in the G. De Caria paper mills from November 1901 to May 1902. At first, the workers wanted to block an initiative by the boss who, in order to oppose the growth of the League of Resistance, set up a Mutual Aid Society directed by him and annoyed the League. The disagreements persisted over the following months and exploded when it came to organising the traditional religious festival on the first Sunday in May. The workers affiliated to the League number 150 out of the 180 employed and demand the return of the fund intended for the religious festival with which they intend to finance celebrations on 1 May instead. The clash is such that it leads to

¹¹⁷ ASF, SS, b. 569, *Società della classe operaia*. Martini, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

the suppression of the religious festival and the reimbursement of any share of the fund to the individual workers.

Isola del Liri at the beginning of the 20th century was not the same as it had been twenty years earlier. The workers' struggle in these early years of the century focused on working conditions, the recognition of the Resistance League, the boycott of religious festivals and the interclass mutual aid society. The industrialists reacted in different ways. De Caria, while complaining to the prefect about the problems caused by the workers in the factory, maintained a detached attitude, while the managers of Cartiere Meridionali and Courier took harsh disciplinary measures against the protesters.¹¹⁸

After Dionisio Courier's death in 1889, his son Eugenio took the reins of the company, but proved unable to continue the work undertaken by his grandfather and father. In April 1902, following the dismissal of eight workers, all the workers went on strike along with 200 others from the San Domenico paper mill, which belonged to the Courier brothers themselves.¹¹⁹ The workers' committee that met with the management made precise demands for a reduction in working hours and an increase in wages. Eugenio Courier promised to accept the workers' demands and promised the return of the dismissed workers; but the promise was not fulfilled and the strike began again. His intransigent attitude, encouraged by the other industrialists, led him to refuse any negotiations and finally dismissed all the striking staff. The strike did not end until 23 April, also thanks to the conciliatory work of the authorities. In June 1903, a telegram from the sub-prefect of Sora informed the Prefect of Caserta of the closure of an important paper mill in Isola del Liri:

«This morning Eugenio Courier closed its two paper mills in Isola and San Domenico following its bankruptcy declaration. No accidents. 300 workers remain unemployed. Bankruptcy was declared by the court at the request of

¹¹⁸ ASF, SS, b. 574, 1878-1922, Fascicolo sciopero; Martini Alfredo, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75.

¹¹⁹ *La luce* 5 e 12 gennaio 1902. Movimento operaio. Isola del Liri e Archivio di Stato di Frosinone, Sottoprefettura di Sora, busta 552.

the creditor Boimond for a bill of exchange that had expired by twelve thousand lire. It is to be hoped that the declaration of bankruptcy will be revoked, as there has been a disagreement between the two companies, which were formerly partners in a cellulose making factory (Pistolegno)».¹²⁰

Even more precise was the commander of the Royal Carabinieri Division in Caserta who, in turn, in several notes, the first of which dated 12 June 1903, informed the Prefect of the province that:

«The industrialist Eugenio Courier, owner of the San Domenico paper mill and another in Isola del Liri Superiore, has declared bankruptcy because a bill of exchange for 12,000 lire has been protested against him by the local landowner Boimond Emilio, and it is said that other creditors resident elsewhere have done the same. Yesterday morning, about 300 workers were left without work, and a committee of six of them went to Sora in large numbers and presented themselves to the Sub-Prefect, asking him to intercede with his offices so that the creditors could come to an agreement with the industrialist Courier as soon as possible and thus obtain the immediate reopening of the two paper mills. They then retired to their homes».¹²¹

A second note from the same commander sent to the Prefect of Caserta on 19 June 1903 informed that:

«On 16 August, about 200 workers from the Courier Eugenio paper mills, which had been closed due to the well-known bankruptcy, went in groups to Sora, and a commission of them went first to the creditor Boimond Emilio and then to the local sub-prefect, asking them to do everything possible to ensure that the two mills were reopened as soon as possible, because if this state of affairs continued, they would not know how to feed their families. The pleading authority informed the Commission that on the 24th of this month the Courier's creditors would meet at the Court of Cassino to grant them a

¹²⁰ Archivio di Stato di Frosinone, Sottoprefettura di Sora, b. 535, *Agitazione operaia in Carnello, Isola del Liri e San Domenico*, 1902. The strikes and bankruptcies had a national echo. Milan's *Corriere della Sera* reported on 22 February 1903.

¹²¹ Archivio di Stato di Frosinone, Prefettura Gabinetto, b. 21, fasc. 200, *Fallimento della Cartiera Courier di Isola del Liri 1903*, 22 giugno 1903.

moratorium, and if this was granted, as was hoped, on the 25th or 26th of this month the said paper mills would be reopened. The workers all returned peacefully to their respective homes without the slightest incident. The police continue to be vigilant and I have made appropriate recommendations in this regard».

The fight had become fierce: Boimond had brought about the closure of Courier with his demand for payment of his credit, something Ernesto Lefèvre had not done years earlier with his credit against Ciccodicola. In general, the environment and competition had become more competitive.

A note dated 22 June 1903 informed that:

«The 300 workers of the Courier paper mill are calm, as the Sub-Prefect of Sora has arranged for a fund of 1,200 lire, the remainder of a subscription made in favour of the workers of the Questa paper mill that burnt down last year, to be distributed among those who are currently unemployed. A subscription has also been opened among industrialists to help these workers, and it is hoped that the government, to which Mr. Grossi has appealed for a subsidy, will do something».¹²²

And then:

«On the 24th of the month, a meeting of the creditors of the bankrupt Courier Eugenio took place at the Court of Cassino. They granted him a moratorium with 80 votes in favour and 3 against, but no sooner than next Tuesday a similar sentence will be passed. So far, calm reigns among the unemployed workers and it is hoped that Mr. Courier will reopen the factories next Wednesday».¹²³

¹²² Archivio di Stato di Frosinone, Prefettura Gabinetto, b. 21, fasc. 200, *Fallimento della Cartiera Courier di Isola del Liri 1903*, 22 giugno 1903.

¹²³ *Ibidem*, giugno 1903.

On 9 July 1903, the sub-prefect of Sora informed the Prefect of Caserta that:

«The industrialist Courier Eugenio, having obtained a moratorium by a ruling of the Court of Cassino, yesterday reopened the paper mill in the hamlet of San Domenico (Sora) to work, but only for the wallpaper department, employing 29 workers. It is hoped that in a few days the remaining unemployed will be put back to work. So far calm reigns, nor is public order expected to be disturbed by the workers themselves».

It is a fact that in 1911, the then municipal administration of Isola del Liri rented the building from the Società Bancaria Ticinese, the Courriers' creditor, for use as a primary school.¹²⁴



In 1911, the bankrupt Courier paper mill run by the son of a technical director brought to Isola by Charles Lefèbvre was converted into a school.

¹²⁴ Aldo Di Biasio, *La questione meridionale in Terra di Lavoro: 1800-1900*, Napoli 1976; Mancini Stefano Manlio, *Un esempio di unità tipologica fabbrica-villa nell'industria cartaria meridionale: la fabbrica Courier ad Isola del Liri nel XIX secolo*, in *Trasformazioni industriali nella Media Valle del Liri in età contemporanea. Atti del ciclo di conferenze tenute in Sora, I.T.C. "C. Baronio"*, novembre 1984-aprile 1985.

In the “Stracceria” of the Manifatture del Fibreno there was a notice that was a mixture of flattery and threats. The management that had written the text said that it was concerned about the welfare of the workers, who should be considered as one with the interests of the company and called on the workers to be grateful to the bosses, not to argue and not to associate with irresponsible people who disturbed the peace and production. He proposed a company climate based on calm and discipline, but he countered with a veiled threat: "The responsible behaviour of a few will only harm the workers, because the company will be forced to close down and put many of them out on the street".¹²⁵

The resistance of the industrialists to accepting a workers' organisation as a counterpart would persist for many years and would only fall in the face of the recognition of the workers' movement.

Until 1909, the year of the fall of the socialist junta in Isola del Liri, there was a consolidation of trade union and political structures linked to the factory workers. The new leagues of bricklayers, metallurgists and peasants strengthened the local Chamber of Labour and supported its political and trade union action. The Consumers' Cooperative, which was set up in those years, aimed to overthrow another paternalistic structure built by Lefèbvre and maintained by the Cartiere Meridionali: the shops, the butcher's shop and the factory shops. For a long time they were seen as a practical way of helping the workers by allowing them to buy goods at a reduced price, but in the new ideological climate they were seen as an instrument of control and a way for the company to recover part of their wages.

In the districts of Isola Superiore, Carnello and San Domenico, propaganda, meetings and public rallies were organised. The success of the socialists in the elections of 1902 and 1907 had important consequences for the social life of the workers. In 1908, Giovannone became the first socialist mayor, marking a decisive change in the cultural, social and political life of the city. During the years of socialist rule, the conflict in the factories subsided. The municipality and various trade union bodies began to play a precise role in safeguarding workers'

¹²⁵ Martini Alfredo, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

rights and conditions, favouring conciliatory attitudes. The industrialists themselves had to negotiate with the local authorities over the availability of energy and the development of public services. Moments of agreement were also found in times of crisis, such as between 1907 and 1909, when the municipality took action to defend jobs by launching construction sites for public works of a social nature, such as new schools and hospital extensions.

During these years, the problems between socialist administrators and trade union organisers escalated. In the 1908 provincial elections, the conflict between Nardone and Giovannone over who should represent the workers exploded. The latter's victory established Giovannone as the representative of the moderate and reformist – but strongly anti-clerical – current, and Nardone's dismissal. Giovannone led to a radicalisation of socialist policy on certain specific issues, such as anti-clericalism, on which there seemed to be no identity of views. The trade unionists closest to the daily lives of the workers wanted to tone down the polemics, unlike the intellectuals close to Giovannone. The controversy over the murder of the anarchist Ferrer in Spain and the anticlerical campaign of the administration provoked a reaction that was thought to be directed and coordinated by some industrialists but was probably spontaneous. The danger that the controversy would degenerate into violence led the Sub-Prefect to declare a state of siege and remove the Socialist junta by arresting Giovannone himself.

The release of the former mayor was celebrated by a large demonstration attended by over 3000 workers, but the municipality was now lost and we were heading for more difficult years for that political party. In the years leading up to the Great War, the paper mill workers sought to consolidate their political gains by improving working conditions and strengthening their companies in order to counteract the company restructuring and redundancies.¹²⁶ The so-called 'red two-year period' in Ciociaria, which had its centre between Sora and Isola.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Martini, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79.

¹²⁷ Federico Maurizio, *Il biennio rosso in Ciociaria (1919-1920), il movimento operaio e contadino dei circondari di Frosinone e Sora tra il dopoguerra e il*

At this point, Francesco Lefèbvre's resignation must be read in a different light from that given by Pinelli or the early biographers of the Liri Valley paper industry. In addition to financial problems, he was faced with a new kind of political problem that his father and grandfather had not known: the air had changed too much. Now that he was a leaseholder of the mill and no longer its manager, he was able to distance himself from the social conflicts that came with a very different style of management to that which his family had practised.

fascismo, Eda, Sora 1985.

Chapter 15

Diatribes

During the fifteen years that Francesco Lefèbvre managed the lease of the mills to the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali, the latter's management was also interested in the land owned by the Count's family, since the waterways that supplied energy to the factory ran through it. Throughout the complicated vicissitudes of litigation, trials and expert opinions, the Turin company's lawyers wondered about the extent of the Lefèbvre's land holdings that were not connected to or adjacent to the Isola property. Charles and Ernesto's purchases of much of the land were part of a long-term policy of securing water supplies to avoid possible claims by third parties to water rights. In other cases, the land appears to have been purchased for agricultural purposes, such as a plot of land in Fontichiari, where a Napoleonic cemetery had been established in 1838 – late in the year – where French soldiers were buried.

In February 1897, the then director of the paper mills, the engineer Giulio Emery, asked Lefèbvre orally for information on the size of the land holdings. This was a few months after the meeting with the state engineers in Carnello and the other owners mentioned above. Emery was naturally interested in studying and investigating the question of water intakes and canals. It turned out that the family owned a certain amount of land between Isola del Liri and Sora, which was no longer part of the Lefèbvre estate, having been sold or ceded to the Turin company to pay off certain debts.¹²⁸ Those properties had been acquired to make the estate continuous, without splitting it up, guaranteeing

¹²⁸ *Amministrazione Francesco Lefèbvre di Balsorano*, Isola Liri Superiore, 20 marzo 1897. Iafate Brothers Archive, Isola del Liri.

cultivation and water passage. Above all, Charles tried to unify the various estates into a single property from Isola Superiore to Carnello. Due to the unwillingness of some landowners to sell, this project was only partially successful. The 1897 list mentions five plots, not counting those in Isola:

Fondo Selva, 24 hectares: cultivated, planted with trees and vines.

Fondo Villa, tomoli 50: cultivated, planted with vines, arboretum, olive grove.

Carnello land, tomoli 7: cultivated, planted with trees and vines.

Fondo Ponte Tapino, tomoli 8: cultivated, vineyard, olive grove, Fontechiari.

Ponte Tapino woodland, tomoli 80: part chestnut, part oak, Fontechiari.

The two Bosco Tapino bottoms are close to the Fibreno and Posta Fibreno lakes and their location suggests that they may have been acquired to secure other water intakes for energy. Fondo Selva and Fondo Villa were also close to the course of the canal. Four good plots of land were, however, used as vineyards and olive groves, and a fifth is part chestnut and part oak woodland. All of them, as mentioned, were in the vicinity of the water intake of the Fibreno or in the course of the canal.

The first deed showing an intention to sell and not to rent the Fibreno Plant (Santa Maria delle Forme, Soffondo and Pistolegno Remorici) is evidenced by a deed dated 25 January 1903 signed in front of the notary Vallauri of Turin. This agreement had been preceded by some dramatic developments of which we know a few episodes and which testify to the growing tension between Francesco and Turin society during the last years of the century.¹²⁹ On 11 June 1900, Francesco Lefèbvre went to the headquarters of the Cartiere Meridionali in Turin to discuss serious matters with an executive, probably Cavaliere Vendrame or Attilio Colombo himself: “I do not want to believe your demeanour is a premeditated prelude to a mischievous mystification of my interests”.¹³⁰ Five days later, on 16 June 1900, Francesco again

¹²⁹ *Copia Conforme d'inventario dei locali e macchinari della cartiera del Fibreno*, p. 102. Iafate Brothers Archive, Isola del Liri Superiore (f. 597).

¹³⁰ *Telegramma inviato da Torino a Isola Liri da Francesco Lefèbvre*, 11

telegraphed the management of the paper mills: Came Turin believing to find you. Seen Blanc... who rightly refuses to discuss without your presence. Please come soon. I await you. Telegraph me'.¹³¹ The tone is dry, he hints at subjects we can imagine: he says that serious matters need to be discussed, probably foreclosures, real estate executions. Francesco lived in Palazzo di Isola, where he was mayor at the time, and had a close view of the management of the factory. We know that during these months the two parties argued about the re-roofing, about the danger of the collapse of the older parts of the factory, which then occurred, about the digging of the tunnel promised in the 1892 contract and still delayed, and about other matters concerning the safety of the factory.

The construction of the tunnel under the road proved to be a very expensive undertaking. Lefèbvre had promised this in the 1892 contract but was unable to start work due to a lack of liquidity. In 1894, as we have seen, 5,000 lire were withheld from his rent as an advance on the work, and then the work stopped. The Court of Cassino, in a judgement confirmed on 1 October 1898, awarded the works for the construction of the tunnel to the engineer Giuseppe Rinonapoli and, in a judgement of 20 February 1899, the works for the repair of the roofs – two issues that had been debated for years and both included in the contract – to the engineer Francesco Chioccarelli, for a total of around 3,000 lire for the last part of the works alone. But the final amount was to be much higher.

The Società delle Cartiere Meridionali had commissioned the work to excavate the tunnel, stabilise some parts of the factory, and re-waterproof and re-cover the roofs. The costs were to be borne by Lefèbvre, who, as he repeatedly said, did not have the money. In fact, the cost of the tunnel proved to be very high, as did the cost of the roofing, so much so that he declared that 'the compensation for the damage claimed' for the lack of work was 'an exorbitant sum'. In

giugno 1900. Iafate Brothers Archive, Isola del Liri.

¹³¹ *Telegram sent from Turin to Isola Liri by Francesco Lefèbvre*, 16 giugno 1900. Iafate Brothers Archive Isola del Liri.

addition to the cost of the work, as we shall see, there were estimates of the damage caused by 'accidents' of various kinds, including the deterioration of the materials, and all of this was put on his bill. Lefèbvre asked to see the invoices of the payments made by the management and to see the real usefulness of the work carried out by the engineers Rinonapoli and Chioccarelli, but this was denied him, probably because of the bad relations he had with his tenants. One day, Lefèbvre announced that he would personally go to the factory with his engineer and his lawyer to carry out the inspection. This inspection took place, but it was of little use; he could not dispute anything.

After the first request for work on the tunnel on 8 July 1893 (6 months after the factory had been rented), various invoices submitted by the engineer Ferdinando de Rosa between 1898 and 1899 on the progress of work on the tunnel showed a relentless increase in the cost of the work, which at first seemed insignificant. But Lefèbvre could not object, and the work was supervised by a judicial expert to comply with a decision of the Naples Court of Appeal of April 1898. The cost of extending the tunnel was 4,400 lire on 23 July 1898, plus a further 279.20 lire on 20 August 1898, the date on which the contractor received an advance payment of 4,000 lire. Work had to continue throughout the summer of 1898, for by 19 September the bill had risen to an impressive 13,000 lire. Rinonapoli himself stated that he had received the sum of 9,500 lire as the balance of an invoice issued in 1894 for the excavation of the first part of the tunnel, which had apparently been interrupted when Lefèbvre declared himself unable to pay. The total therefore exceeded 22,500 lire, more than a year's rent for the Santa Maria delle Forme factory. If we add this to the other 5,000 lire withheld by the Cartiere Meridionali as an advance on the first part of the work, we arrive at at least 27,500 lire: a considerable sum. Obviously, when Francesco promised in 1892 to dig the tunnel at his own expense, he had either been badly advised by his technicians or, more likely, he had not made an expert assessment, underestimating a

job to be carried out in a treacherous, yielding and water-soaked terrain.¹³²

What Lefèbvre could not foresee was that the Italian State, in modernising some of its regulations, such as the prevention of accidents and the obligation to provide for the health and safety of workers, began to impose the installation of barriers, acoustic warning devices, flashing lights and gratings, as well as other more onerous devices such as extractor hoods, the cost of which fell to the owners of the buildings. A law of 12 March 1898 (later amended) also introduced compulsory accident insurance. Charles and Ernesto had already guaranteed accident insurance for their employees, but on their own initiative, this time the insurance was compulsory for everyone and the contracts to be concluded with the insurance companies were more stringent. Other accident prevention regulations followed in the summer of 1899, which excluded exemptions or deferrals. For this reason, the management of the Cartiere Meridionali, aware of the legislative work being carried out by parliamentary commissions and experts, called in an expert who, on 7 January 1899, after a thorough visit to the mills, gave precise indications of the measures to be taken to comply with the regulations. Measures which, of course, all fell on the shoulders of the owners of the buildings and machinery. Even if there were exceptions or the possibility of delaying these works, the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali did not intend to make use of them.

The expert came from the Associazione degli Industriali d'Italia per Prevenire gli Infortuni (Association of Italian Industrialists to Prevent Accidents), based in Milan, a non-profit association set up in 1894 and at the origin of occupational safety regulations. He delivered his report to the management of the Cartiere Meridionali urging a series of interventions to improve the safety of the factory's environments; some

¹³² These invoices are copied authenticated at the back of the book *Copia Conforme di inventario dei locali e macchinari dello stabilimento della cartiera del Fibreno*, pp. 103-108. Iafrate Brothers Archive, Isola del Liri (ff. copia da 506).

of them were costly and at the centre was always the tunnel, which in that 1899 was still unfinished.¹³³ So warned the 1899 report on p. 11:

With regard to the freight elevators, it is not considered appropriate to prescribe any modifications to the existing equipment, since the work that will allow them to be taken out of service by activating an underground ramp in the tunnel under construction has been found to be well advanced. However, should unforeseen circumstances continue to prevent the use of the new means of transport for some time to come, we would ask your Management Board to draw the attention of the Association to the fact that it would be absolutely necessary to proceed not only with radical modifications to the lifts, which do not meet the most basic safety requirements, but also with a more rational design of the transport routes for the material to be lifted, which, due to their tortuous nature and inadequate lighting, could be the cause of minor accidents.¹³⁴

The reminder and warning to Lefèbvre was obvious. Today the tunnel can be seen built, still solid. It is quite wide and the hoist, rusty and no longer functional, is still in place. In the report, the Milanese company that certified and brought the factories up to standard, according to the new legal provisions, had indicated a series of interventions of varying cost, apart from the tunnel, but costly if adopted all together: in practice, all the moving parts of the machines had to be closed or protected with gates or reinforcements, the execution of which was ultimately a cost that was not quantified exactly, but high and all attributable to Lefèbvre, who however refused to meet those costs.

¹³³ *Stabilimento n. 199 B. Associazione degli Industriali d'Italia per Prevenire gli Infortuni, Milano 7 gennaio 1899*. Visit report made on 21 December 1898.

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*.



One of the tunnels built by Francis Lefèbvre reinforced in 1899.

The picture above shows one of the old service tunnels with tracks, the widest of those built during the 1829-1830 extensions, described in the surveys of the time and in engineer Vitali's analysis of 1898 as cramped and unsuitable for the new dimensions of the plant, and therefore reinforced in 1899.

As for the new tunnel, which was to be completely excavated, on 21 October 1901, Francesco Lefèbvre, knowing that the tunnel was still under construction, but more to stall for time, while he was denied an inspection of the factory, sent a deed to Mr. Jules Blanc, at that time managing director of Cartiere Meridionali. It was an injunction to show documents and premises.¹³⁵

In 1898 and 1899, the management of the paper mills had also insisted on the repair of the roofs and had sent a series of letters, which are still on file, to various mills in the area, asking whether it was

¹³⁵ *Atto manoscritto* 21-10-1901. Iafate Brothers Archive, Isola del Liri.

customary for the owners to repair the roofs: not only was it customary, but the law imposed the repair and extraordinary maintenance of the roofs on the owner and not on the tenant, as is still the case today. In November 1898, the management commissioned an expert report from the Reale Istituto Tecnico Superiore di Milano - Laboratorio Carta, to determine the extent to which the factory's roofs were leaking and causing damp and mould in the rag warehouses. The analyses carried out confirmed – albeit pro forma – that the rags stored in these conditions deteriorated more quickly and produced paper of inferior quality. The report, signed by Dr. Guido Vitali of Milan, went so far as to quantify the damage, or at least make it possible to quantify it: "In conclusion, we believe that we are entitled to state that the rags stored in a damp state for a period of about one month can undergo such deterioration as to cause a considerable reduction in the percentage yield of leached and bleached fibre, a reduction which, in our case and in circumstances that were not the most favourable for the formulation, was 11.03% for the dirty white rags and 12.22% for the coloured rags".¹³⁶

This analysis, together with other documents, formed an indictment of Lefèbvre's omissions to be used in the various disputes, the first of which was an order to the Count to repair the roofs. The cost of the intervention would be included in the Turin company's accounts receivable.

Almost as if to confirm the deplorable state of the factory's roofs, in April of the following year, an engineer called Francesco Mazza, aged 53, who had been hired by Chioccarelli, ventured onto one of the damp roofs and stepped on a beam that had given way, causing him to fall from a height of five metres. The man, who was immediately rescued, was battered and suffered a broken leg and collarbone, but was safe. He was questioned on 26 April 1899 by the Pretore del Mandamento di Sora, who went to a room in the Stabilimento del Fibreno where he had been hospitalised and found him "lying in bed". "He replied that he had

¹³⁶ Regio Istituto Tecnico Superiore - Laboratorio della carta, Analisi di G. Vitali, Milano 5-8 novembre 1898, pp. 8-9. Iafate Brothers Archive.

received the order from Chioccharelli 'in execution of a sentence passed by the Court of Naples'. The Società delle Cartiere Meridionali intended to carry out the work and then have Lefèbvre pay for it. So the engineer Mazza entered room 12, used for the Ferri depot, and climbed up a ladder to the roof, which was in a very bad state, also "due to poor construction" dating back to "the beginning of the century". And while he was trying to work out what to do with the roof's 'framework' and set foot on the roof, the whole thing 'collapsed'. Engineer Mazza admitted that he had been careless. But this fact reinforced the reasons why Cartiere Meridionali had asked Lefèbvre to repair the roof, as was his duty. All the costs of the engineer's recovery and convalescence were charged to the debt owed to Francesco Lefèbvre by the Meridionale paper mill company.¹³⁷

The Società delle Cartiere Meridionali, which now controlled some of the most prestigious paper mills in the Isola del Liri and Sora area and which had considerable resources and means at its disposal to keep these factories in optimum production conditions, carried out further modifications, renewing the machinery and the electrical system, rebuilding the roofs and digging a tunnel. The deficit that Francesco had accumulated made this sale inevitable, as regaining full control of the factory would have been more of a problem than an advantage for him. It was impossible for him to buy back the machines and pay for the improvements the company had made. Not to mention that the boiling over of the workers' situation would probably have made it difficult for him to avoid strikes and machine stoppages, even if he had wanted to resume direct management of the factory.

Not that Francesco had been idle during these years: he had indeed been looking for buyers and had found a few candidates. If we look at one of these offers, we can see that there were many difficulties in the sale. There was, for example, a sub-contract in which a businessman called Grimaldi asked for the right of first refusal on the factory if the

¹³⁷ *Estratto dall'originale conservato nella Cancelleria di Sora, Relazione del Pretore, 26 aprile 1899, p. 4.* Iafrate Brothers Archive, Isola del Liri, file 676.

Società delle Cartiere Meridionali returned the property at the end of the lease: the *Contratto di compravendita stabili subordinato a condizione sospensiva* drawn up between Lefèbvre and Cavalier Cesare Grimaldi. The latter, like the owners of the Cartiere Meridionali, was from Turin, although he was born in Venice. The deed was drawn up in 1902, about a year before the natural expiry of the lease, in the presence of the lawyer Archivolti, Francesco's confidant. Grimaldi declared his interest in the factory, on which, it is stated, "more than one real estate injunction is transcribed", threatening the property. It was for this reason that Lefèbvre joined cav, 'with the intention of preventing the threatened expropriation from taking full effect'. Cesare Grimaldi's request' (p. 2). Francesco thus preferred to sell before the expropriation deeds, which were more than one and which could also be enforced by the tax authorities, became enforceable due to a judgement expected from the Court of Cassino. In the document signed by Lefèbvre and Grimaldi, there were several provisions that had been transcribed by the Conservatoria delle Ipoteche di Santa Maria Capua Vetere and were therefore awaiting a judgement. Thus, Francesco was obliged to sell the building, the machinery and the goods leased to the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali (Bonucci deed of 21 December 1892), as well as the 30 hydraulic horsepower of water, once the property had been "cleared" of any pendency.

The building is briefly described as having four storeys (the two storeys of the forme and the two storeys of the soffondo) and 37 rooms, made up of the rest of the factory, excluding the living quarters, which, in addition to Palazzo Lefèbvre, included the former convent around the square courtyard. Grimaldi and Lefèbvre agreed on the considerable sum of 500,000 lire for the sale, from which had to be deducted 40,368.17 lire in debts owed by the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali to Lefèbvre for work carried out (roofing, waterproofing, repair of collapses, calculated in 1901), bringing the value to 459,731.80 lire. The sale, according to the contract, was to take place by auction, during a morning session of the Turin Stock Exchange.¹³⁸ The two agree that:

¹³⁸ *Contratto di Compravendita. Subordinata a condizione sospensiva*, cit., p. 9.

"In the hypothesis that the approval of the magistrate should fail and that the auction of the property sold should be overtaxed and others should be affected, Mr. Cavalier Grimaldi shall therefore, by express agreement, have no right against Count Lefèbvre" (p. 11). Grimaldi did not commit himself, but was only obliged to buy if the best conditions were met, i.e. that the magistrate authorised the cancellation of the mortgage and any threat of expropriation before the transfer of ownership.

This contract ('instrument') was registered in Chieri on 23 February 1902 before the notary Vito Vallauri, the same notary who, a year later, on 25 January 1903, finalised the sale of the Stabilimento del Fibreno to the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali. This second contract, a preliminary sale, stabilised the presence of the Cartiere Meridionali at the Stabilimento del Fibreno in Santa Maria delle Forme, leaving certain outstanding issues (mortgages, writs of execution and expropriation) to be resolved, and it was only when these had been settled, and Lefèbvre was fully convinced of the move, that full ownership was transferred to the Turin-based company, then controlled by the Colombo family, in 1907.

Among other things, the company undertook to pay Lefèbvre a monthly pension of 7,000 lire, which he did not enjoy for long, dying a few years after the transfer, and which was probably paid as a fraction to his wife Gisèle. The deed also included the Pistolegno Remorici factory, which had been damaged by the earthquake but which it was hoped would be rebuilt.

At this point, the fate of Carnello and that of the Fibreno, Forme, Soffondo and Pistolegno Remorici complex were forever separated. The latter was sold with a deed dated 18 August 1907 and occupied by the company then run by the knight Vendrame. From the legal correspondence of those early years of the 20th century we learn that the De Caria company, thanks to a clause in the contract, had used the Pistolegno Remorici factory for 3 years plus 3, from 1900 to 1906, occupying it until the end of 1906. Then it left and let in the company led by Vendrame. This was followed by a bitter exchange of jokes and new tensions, as evidenced by a letter sent by Francesco Lefèbvre to

the management of Cartiere Meridionali, complaining that the factory – which contained powerful machines that Meridionali did not have at the time – had not been paid for immediately:

I note that while you gentlemen know how to claim your rights, you do not care to fulfil your duties. In fact, I note that although you have had the delivery of the Remorici factory for four days, you have not thought of paying the house rent as it was strictly stipulated.¹³⁹

It was an outburst that came at the end of the long dispute that had made the relationship between the managers of Cartiere Meridionali and Lefèbvre so difficult. The sum paid in the end, once the mortgages had been removed and the debts paid off, was 200,000 lire, which was exacted by the lawyer Achille Bosisio and then paid to Lefèbvre at the end of the mortgage cancellation procedures, so he probably received a smaller sum. Making each operation more painful was the fact that in those years Francesco lived in Isola del Liri with his wife, where he had taken up residence. It was the same period in which, when he could, he took refuge in the Balsorano Castle owned by his cousin but of which he evidently had the availability.

This was the end of some of the sales, while the Carnello factory, which had been leased to the company G. De Caria & Avitabile and bought by the latter in 1909, continued to operate. Gabriele De Caria's company also bought the buildings of the Zino wool mill and, in 1906, the villa where he set up the administrative centre of his industries and his home.¹⁴⁰ The events of this sale are less complex than those of the Santa Maria delle Forme factory. Gabriele De Caria, who had been renting the complex since 1893, bought it by associating a life annuity, i.e. a lease, to Lefèbvre with the stipulation of 5 May 1909, but the completion took place the following 18 July 1909, with a deed from the

¹³⁹ *Lettere di Francesco Lefèbvre alla Società delle Cartiere Meridionali*, 3 gennaio 1907. Iafate Brothers Archive.

¹⁴⁰ Bartolomucci Enzo, *Il cav. Gabriele De Caria*, in *Il ponte*, Officina della Cultura 2010, without number.

notary Buratti. As already mentioned, it would last until 1923 when the complex was purchased by the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali and remained in operation until the Second World War. Again on 17 March of the same year, Avvocato Archivolti issued a writ of summons to the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali instructing it not to pay Lefèbvre the sums connected with the sale (excluding 200,000 lire tied up in a mortgage) as he boasted a credit of 8,167 lire that he had advanced to the count but which had not been returned to him.¹⁴¹

The Stabilimento San Carlo, whose activities had stopped in 1888, remained in the family's ownership. As we have seen, the factory had been rented several times to continue printing wallpaper, special papers and tissue, and cigarette paper. The last lease was in 1910, already mentioned, when Augusto Ugo Ostrogovich took it over – not all but part of it – from 16 July 1910.¹⁴² In May 1911 he patented (Ministry of Industry, Intellectual Property Office) special four-colour cigarette paper booklets. He also rented the Villa Pisani for a while, investing a lot of money in it and enlarging it with a progressive structure on the ground floor front. He created two side rooms, an entrance hall and a large terrace and decorated them with paper decorations, probably one of the last creations of the San Carlo factory. The activities of Mr. Ostrogovich, who had rented the factory at a low price, came to an end with the earthquake of 13 January 1915. It did not cause any deaths among the workers in the factory – which was empty that morning – but it put an end to the Florentine's entrepreneurial adventure and to the life of the San Carlo factory itself.

With the Cartiere del Carnello, De Caria also obtained the right to draw water from the Fibreno river, according to the deeds issued in

¹⁴¹ *Lettera di Giuseppe Archivolti a Jules Blanc* SCM, 17 marzo 1908. Iafate Brothers Archive.

¹⁴² *Chimica e chimici a Firenze: dall'ultimo dei Medici al Padre del Centro Europeo di Risonanze Magnetiche*, curr. Marco Fontani, Mary Virginia Orna, Mariagrazia Costa, University of Firenze Press, Firenze 2015, pp. 45-47.

favour of Lefèbvre on 2 June 1825, although this did not protect him from disputes with other owners and industrialists. Several attempts were made to resolve the problems of water extraction from 1898 onwards, when Zino and Lefèbvre were confronted by the lawyers of Cartiere Meridionali, Ciccodicola, Roessinger and others, apparently to defend the rights of the tenant De Caria. Together with Carnello, 7 hectares of land (equivalent to 90 reeds, a local measure) were sold, because the factories were always linked to a surplus of land around them, which guaranteed the maintenance or control of the passage of water. The De Caria factory, with hundreds of workers, combined the buildings of the Zino wool mill with those of the Lefèbvre paper mill, forming a remarkable paper pole that resisted crises until its sale and beyond. As mentioned above, the factory produced paper of excellent quality. After about 120 years of activity, the mill ended its history when it was severely damaged during the massive bombing of 1944.



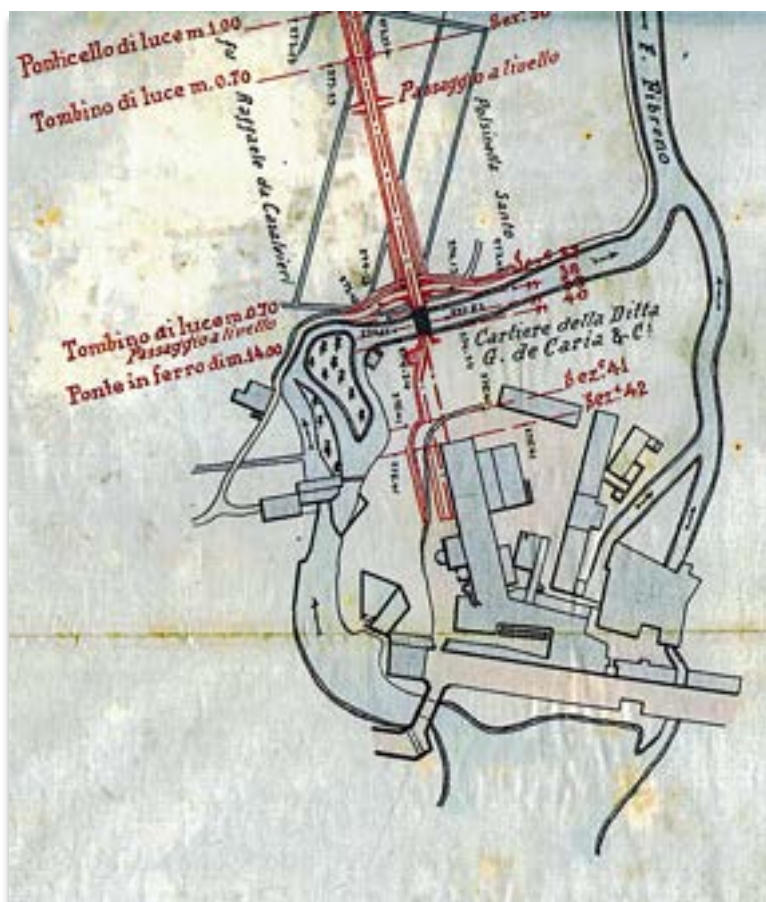
In this 1940 cadastral map, today's central Piazza Boncompagni was still called Piazza Teresa Doria.

There were a number of old issues that needed to be resolved in order to make the 1903 cession, which had been suspended until 1907, effectively enforceable. These included the question of water rights, which had been settled by private agreements between Lefèbvre and Zino, Degas & Co. and between Lefèbvre and the Ciccodicola and others. The state was not a party to these agreements, as the Zurlo Memorandum makes clear. It was a deed of the Court of Cassino in 1905, cited by Amleto Iafrate, that made it possible to settle questions

that had been the subject of constant litigation (Rogito Sorvillo, 10 March 1827; Rogito Spiridione Papacosta, 10 October 1857), since it was not at all certain who had the right to draw water. The very technical issue is well summarised by Stefania Barca in the above-mentioned book *Enclosing Water* (2010). Charles had been the first to use this outlet and no one had dared to challenge him, because at that time the State allowed the owner of land overlooking a watercourse to draw water as long as it did not damage the 'common good'.

The 1905 deed allowed Lefèbvre to use both intakes of the Carnello, instead of having only an alternative right to divert water upstream or downstream of Molino Zino. This removed an obstacle that had previously threatened the 1903 sale, which could have been cancelled, as it settled a long-standing legal question of water rights and gave the Cartiere Meridionali a guarantee that they would be able to safely draw the abundant water. The final formalities were completed in 1906 and the transfer of ownership was completed the following year.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Iafrate Amleto, *Isola del Liri e le sue industrie. Profili storici e note critiche, Isola del Liri*, marzo 2018, p. 35.



The De Caria & Avitabile factory. A copy is kept in the State Archives in Frosinone, a copy is in the Fratelli Iafrate Collection, Isola del Liri.

The map above clearly shows how the former Zino wool mill and Lefèbvre's Carnello factory were merged into a single paper mill that used all the water in the area. The inlets are visible on the left. You can also see the iron bridge that allowed the connection to the railway, part of the same type of connections that had been built in recent years at the Lefèbvre and Cartiere Meridionali factories.

The owner of the Lefèbvre complex for a short time, Carlo, who lived most of the year in Naples, was not involved in all these events,

and the lack of interest of the sisters in the years of the most serious conflicts between Francesco and the Cartiere Meridionali is also evident. For example, Flavia Lefèbvre, Marchioness of Casafuerte, whose attachment to Isola del Liri was weak - the small hospital called Sala Flavia was not a tribute to her, but to an aunt who had died in 1843 - had lived on the international jet-set since her marriage, between St. Petersburg and Paris, and then, when she was married, between St. Petersburg and Paris. When the possibility of a sale arose, her tuberculosis entered its final stage and, after a series of stays in nursing homes and sanatoriums, she died in Nervi in 1905, assisted by her son Illán, and was buried there.

On 20 October 1910, at the age of 55, Francesco Lefèbvre died suddenly, probably from a worsening of the tuberculosis from which two of his paternal aunts had suffered. He had sought treatment in San Vito Romano, a town not far from Isola. His wife, the Countess Gisella, was left to manage the rest of the estate. This woman, described as beautiful, sweet, but soon overwhelmed by a life that was not easy, had begun her love affair with Francesco in a melodramatic way, with an attempted suicide: his family did not like her. It was only after this serious incident that the family allowed Francesco to marry her at a very young age.

Chapter 16

The House of Ghosts

Family portrait at the turn of the century

When Francesco died, his brother Carlo, sister Giulia and mother Teresa Doria gathered for the funeral Mass at the church of San Lorenzo in Naples together with his widow Gisella, who, in the years that followed, continued to frequent the village and the castle of Balsorano, which was bequeathed to Illán Álvarez de Toledo, his brother-in-law. The Franco-Austrian who entered the family through a stroke of the head of Francesco, a passion, is still remembered by the inhabitants of Balsorano as a fairytale figure, the 'Countess Gisella'. In March 1911, Teresa Doria D'Angri also died, at the age of 85, in Naples, in a rented house, in the palazzo overlooking the Via di Chiaia, which had been built over 70 years earlier by her father. With his death, the last heirs sold Isola's properties.

Teresa's grandchildren had experienced the Petit Paris in a much more detached way: they were Neapolitan citizens and it is to be believed that they did not like that old palace full of memories. Childhood memories they must have retained, certainly, because they had lived there for a few summers, but it is equally certain that after 1860, after the start of the War of Independence, Teresa and Ernesto frequented the palace little and their children Carlo, Francesco, Flavia and Giulia less. Of the children of the gilded couple who had honeymooned in the United States, the 50-year-old Giulia, a rich noblewoman, and then Carlo, a penniless wanderer, remained alive.

But the one who had the right to manage the estate was Francesco's widow, Gisella, as she had the title of administratrix appointed by the

Court of Naples. Isola's property was vast and cost a lot in real estate and land taxes. On the other hand, it was no longer possible to recover much due to the state of abandonment except at great expense. The most valuable asset was the San Carlo factory, valued at over 200,000 lire. By a cruel twist of fate, it was precisely that which was irreparably damaged by the earthquake of 1915, in the months in which appraisals were being made for the division of the estate.

Between 1892 and 1910, Francesco and Gisella Lefèbvre lived for long periods in Palazzo Lefèbvre on Isola, also known as Palazzo Ernesto. Parts of the building were rented out to outsiders: a social club, the post office. The upper floor had been divided into two apartments some twenty years earlier, and the right-hand part, which corresponded to the former convent, had become the home of Francesco and his wife. After 1910 it was certainly still their home, and they lived in Naples with the lawyer Archivolti until they could afford to pay him. Years after her husband's death, she continued to live on Isola, where she is still remembered as "Countess Gisella", melancholy and lonely, in the memories of the islanders and of those of Balsorano, where she was often the guest of her nephew Illán. In 1918, however, when the estate was put up for sale, she returned to Naples. She signed herself Gisèle Dubois von Wechbaecker. In August 1914, she commissioned the engineer Alberto de Rogatis of Naples to carry out a complete inventory of all the rooms and properties of the Lefèbvre estate that had come under her management, with the exception of Carlo. Ernesto's eldest son established his legal residence in Via Loggia dei Pisani, in a small but elegant house. The Neapolitan engineer left us a 350-page handwritten volume that gives us a minute, very technical and precise description of the properties as they were in 1915, which allows us to imagine the rooms when they were empty, as well as other properties. It also gives an idea of the state, organisation and size of the Stabilimento San Carlo, the last of the Lefèbvre establishments.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ *Divisione eredità del conte Francesco Lefèbvre. Ingegnere Alberto de Rogatis, 1915.* Iafate Brothers Archive, Isola del Liri.

Shortly before the appraisal, the heirs met in Naples, in the office of the lawyer Archivolti, where De Rogatis took an oath guaranteeing to report truthfully what he had seen. Present were Gisèle and Illán Álvarez de Toledo, who had never dealt with that inheritance, and 'Mr. Lefèbvre', that is, Carlo, by then Count of Balsorano. Until then, he had remained outside the inheritance: he appears occasionally, in some documents, mostly mentioned as a witness; he also appears as a pretender to the inheritance. He took no action until 1917-1918, when he was the last heir. His father's disqualification had never been lifted due to his death in 1891 and he therefore found himself in the final status of disinherited with a judicial stamp.

On 9 September 1914, after taking an early morning train from Naples, the engineer De Rogatis arrived at the Isola del Liri Superiore and was then driven in a buggy to the palazzo 'in contrada le Forme or Borgo Nuovo'. Gisele (sic) von Wachbecker (sic), the engineer Ettore Gandieri, the wife's trusted expert, and the lawyer Ernesto Fortunato were present. On 9, 10 and 11 September, De Rogatis began his visit by writing down everything he saw, step by step, in a large notebook.

Palazzo Lefèbvre was then a lonely and deserted place where, according to the inhabitants of Isola del Liri, children came to play and steal pears and apples from the vast orchards that were still tended. In the first half of the century, the area was called the "great palace" and the "mysterious" forest, a place of games and adventures. The whole of the English-style park around the Palace and inside the walls was uncultivated, but the Meridionale paper mills kept the Soffondo and the factory in full operation. The De Caria part was well maintained, with flower beds, small orchards, an orangery, a coach house and a fountain.

All the corridors and staircases leading from the palace to the Stabilimento del Fibreno were bricked up or closed with thick wooden planks whitewashed with lime. De Rogatis began by walking the length and breadth of the property, taking external measurements and briefly entering the buildings. On his first visit, the Countess warned him that the property was burdened with various mortgages and disputed debts; the situation was rather complicated. So the technician decided to take

his time and examine the voluminous files of documents, plans, land registry deeds, notarial deeds, the 1903 deed of agreement and the 1907 sale documents, which were important for understanding the exact demarcation of the property with the neighbouring factory, which was in full swing. After a first external inspection, he announced a break, which he planned to last a few weeks, time to study the documents and make copies, and to resume shortly after the Christmas holidays. However, for serious reasons beyond his control, the delay was to last much longer, almost a year.

On the 13th of January 1915, the whole area from Isola to Avezzano was shaken by a very violent earthquake, which caused extensive damage and collapses in the towns of Isola Inferiore and Superiore, even destroying Sora and the castle of Balsorano. Other buildings on the Isola estate were also seriously damaged: the San Carlo factory, the Trianon, the farmhouses, the Vaccheria and other buildings. When the aftershocks subsided and the refugees camped on Isola were evacuated, De Rogatis resumed his work. On 8 July 1915, he returned, got the keys and began his visits to the buildings, which continued throughout August until the survey was completed. When he had finished his calculations, he had all his notes copied in 3 copies by a typist and it was only in April 1916 that he presented the report to his heirs, together with the draft division of the property.

The reading took place in Naples. The earthquake and neglect had reduced the value of the vast estate. Gisella was slowly sinking into a dignified, middle-class poverty, and this sale would not save her. We know from a deed dated 20 April 1918 that she had to rely on legal aid in the last years of her life, and her finances were already in a mess during the war. She was living on the last of her husband's money. Carlo, however, did not accept the results of the De Rogatis valuation, which he felt had greatly reduced the value of the properties. Before we look at what the Lefèbvre family's last inheritance was, let us take a closer look at the Neapolitan engineer's valuation.

The San Carlo plant after the earthquake

The report describes, with some admiration for its size, the great San Carlo factory, almost 160 metres long and 30 metres wide, connected to the Isola-Sora-Arpino railway line. It was also served by both the Canale delle Forme and the Canale Magnene for the production of energy and the movement of machinery. In his description, De Rogatis describes the factory as huge, very well built, but damaged by the earthquake. According to him, it was possible to save it with a lot of money. It was different from the Santa Maria delle Forme factory: it was built at a different time, according to modern criteria, designed for wallpaper production, a long, modern building. Unfortunately, it was also very damaged. The windows, frames, glass, doors, roofs, first floors, roofs and all the printing equipment were badly damaged. De Rogatis notes that a building under construction during the winter of 1914-1915, measuring 11.50 metres by 6 metres, was almost completely destroyed. It was an improvement made by the tenant, Ostrogovich, a cigarette paper manufacturer, who was forced to abandon the factory and cease operations because of the earthquake. The factory was separated from the Canale delle Forme by a walkway about two metres wide, which ran along the canal and was anchored to the ground by 30 tie rods made of steel chains to withstand the stresses of the huge 24-colour wallpaper printing presses, which were not operating at the time.¹⁴⁵ Some parts of the building were destroyed and collapsed, as were several parts of the roof and many of the external canopies used to store semi-finished or packaged goods. Nothing was lost, however: according to De Rogatis, the factory could be reopened at a cost of a few thousand lire, or about 10,000 euros. He later estimates many other minor expenses, such as glass and window frames, without quantifying them. The eastern side was particularly badly damaged and, according to De Rogatis, could only be saved by using special funds for reconstruction.

¹⁴⁵ *Perizia de Rogatis*, Unpublished, Iafrate Collection, p. 42.

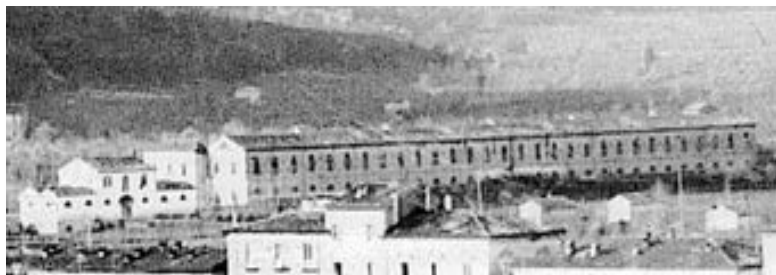
The large factory housed the printing presses, which were largely destroyed or damaged by the earthquake. However, according to De Rogatis, the Canale delle Forme and the turbine, which was still able to produce electricity and, above all, movement, represented a remarkable value for the complex, an "asset" that should not be underestimated: the hydraulic systems, the transmission structures of the movement, the underground spaces that contained the gear structures and the axles that supported the movement had remained intact. The Canale delle Forme, magnificently built because for Charles it had to last for generations, had not been damaged by the force of the earthquake and did not leak, thus guaranteeing the flow of water to the Fibreno factory. According to De Rogatis's description, the factory's caretaker's house was also badly damaged, mainly by water infiltration and the collapse of the roof. As for the machinery, the expensive equipment purchased by Ernesto Lefèvre, who had made the mill the pride of the paper empire, and which was still considered very valuable at the beginning of the last decade of the previous century, was now unusable.

The machinery, which had been handed over to Mr. Ostrogovich in 1910 as a result of the earthquake of 1915, had become unusable: 'most of it was old and in a poor state of repair due to the neglect in which it had been kept'. The abandonment occurred mainly in the months following the earthquake: dust, debris, water and fallen concrete structures had torn apart the machinery on the ground and upper floors. The collapses had rendered them 'almost completely useless for the purposes for which they were intended', encrusting them with debris, breaking them, rusting them. By April 1916, almost a year and a half after the earthquake, nothing had been done to repair the roofs.

The engineer's tour continued with a visit to the agricultural estates and the three farmhouses, all damaged but still occupied by their inhabitants. Given the relative simplicity of their structures, De Rogatis considered them easily salvageable, and also judged that they were being rented out too cheaply. In fact, Charles and Ernesto were not interested in making a profit from these peasant rents; it was enough for them to have well-maintained and productive estates. Farming did not

stop during these months: fruit and vegetables continued to be grown and probably supplied to Countess Gisella. The structure of these funds (with the exception of the Fondo San Germano, which was sold at an unknown date) remained the same as decided by Charles and remained so until they were abolished after the Second World War.

On the other hand, the damage to the Trianon villa, which had been used for years as a residence for the factory managers, was very serious. It was devastated over its entire width of 40 metres and its three bodies. The roof and the first floor had completely collapsed, destroying all its contents, which must have been refined and expensive: paintings, furniture, wallpaper, floors. As always, De Rogatis focuses on the structures rather than the contents and does not mention them. It was practically irreparable, damaged in its supporting structures and on the ground floor. It was demolished immediately after the Second World War because it was considered unsafe and dangerous for the children who played there. Together with the Villa De Caria-Pisani, this small villa was a good asset because, as a valuable building, it was always rented at an attractive price. Of all the buildings that belonged to the Lefèbvres and were part of their life during the Âge d'or, the Villino Trianon remained the most elusive for a long time, but today we can say that it has been identified: it appears, blurred, in the photograph below.



To the left of the long building of the San Carlo paper mill is the Trianon cottage where the various directors of the Forme paper mill lived. Although it does not stand out well in the photo, it was a separate building.

In the autumn of 1915, Alberto de Rogatis was informed by Countess Lefèbvre, in her capacity as 'administrator of the estate', that a ruling by the Court of Cassino ordered the sale of that machinery, which was old even before it was damaged, 'at the current prices of old metal'. Evidently, some creditor preferred to realise immediately rather than wait years to sell an obsolete piece of machinery. So the factory, De Rogatis observed, 'remained bare of any processing machinery' to the extent that - he closed hastily - 'there is no need to talk about it any further'. Evidently the removal work was carried out between De Rogatis' first and second visit. The motor machinery, the turbine and the mill that set the axles in motion, which constituted the greatest value of the factory at that time, remained active. The presence of a water intake, of a canal with a sufficiently strong current on that route could guarantee, possibly, a reconstruction of the factory in the future. The situation would change within a decade when the machinery would begin to be driven entirely by electricity, as would happen to the machinery at the Fibreno factory.

On pages 110, 111 and 112 of his report, the engineer certifies the importance of motive power by describing the channels and calculating their hydraulic force. De Rogatis walks through the empty, dusty rooms of this huge house, full of rubble and mould. He is distant, but in some rooms he is able to feel a certain aesthetic surprise at the refinement that can still be seen. Palazzo Lefèbvre was then called Palazzo Ernesto, a name given by Francesco in honour of his father, who died in 1891. De Rogatis defines it as a stately building with a surface area of about 1,200 square metres, divided into two parts: the new part of the palace, built in 1829-1830, and the part formerly occupied by the convent. It was still surrounded by a "pleasant park" with many valuable plants and shrubs and some centuries-old plane trees.

We learn that a part of the building, the one overlooking what was then Corso Garibaldi (now Via Taverna Nuova), was rented to a family - the Countess lived on the other side of the building - and two rooms on the ground floor, one to a private club and the other to the post office of Isola del Liri Superiore. De Rogatis, although not very sensitive to art and beauty, realised that it was a building of great value. Today it

has been largely restored, the exterior has been restored according to the original plan, and the value can be seen in the details, the exterior decorations, the cast-iron railings, the marble still present in the interiors, the architectural design and the materials with which Charles built the house, sparing no expense. When De Rogatis saw it, the building was in a very dilapidated state, but the engineer mentions several times the undefined 'decorations' in paint that covered the walls: 'ornaments and figures' and 'human figures' that went from the precious 'marble base' (skirting board) to the ceiling. These can only be large paintings stretched on paper and cardboard and stuck to the walls, as can be seen today in the interiors of the Villa Pisani.¹⁴⁶

Unfortunately, by the time of the De Rogatis, a large part of these 'ornaments and figures' had been destroyed by mould, detached debris and serious water infiltration caused by holes and 'down pipes' coming down from the roof, which had been damaged by the recent earthquake. These openings in several places in the roof certainly did not exist until seven years earlier, when one of the two apartments was still inhabited by Francesco and Gisella. As a result, these figurative cycles, unfortunately entrusted to such an unyielding material, were completely lost. On the other hand, every detail of the house, such as the doors, the marble profiles, the ornate cast-iron balustrades, the Calabrian green marble, the pink marble, the chestnut doors, the chestnut balustrades and handrails, the *trompe l'oeil*, the floors, are of great value, even if they are ruined. The apartment was empty of furniture, except for a couple of Chinese-style tiled stoves, but the luxury was evident.

The main drawing room, where Rosanne's dances had been held for decades, was magnificent, with a spectacular view of the still intact park. De Rogatis, with an engineer's eye, defined the park as a trapezoidal plot grafted onto a rectangular one. The house was then equipped with plumbing, 'English' toilets, hot water and an electrical system with light bulb connections. There were two kitchens: a smaller one on the first floor and a large one on the ground floor, connected by a lift. On the ground floor, De Rogatis also notices an icebox, below

¹⁴⁶ Perizia de Rogatis, *cit.*, p. 152.

street level, where blocks of ice brought from the nearby mountains were stored throughout the summer. In particular, the large kitchen on the ground floor, which had been the pride of Rosanne's home until 60 years ago, was in a deplorable state in 1915 due to water ingress. Beneath it, the Magnene continued to flow in abundance. Next to the salon was a billiard room, whose magnificent table had already been moved to Villa De Caria, where it still stands today. Here the old luxury is more visible together with the recent ruin:

Going back to the salon and passing through the second of these rooms on the left, one enters the second large room on the street side, formerly used as a billiard room, with two balconies overlooking the public street, with shutters similar to those of the salon, and with a marble table and other objects forming, as mentioned above, a single balcony with the salon rooms. The Venetian flooring, similar to that of the salon, has a slight lesion in the normal direction of the façade wall, which extends over the arch of the first balcony room and on the opposite wall and slightly into the vault (p. 155).

Marble plank' refers to balconies made of single blocks of marble. The third floor, as was customary in patrician houses of the time, housed small rooms for servants. The main building was flanked by a newer one, called the 'Châlet' of 26.5x6.80 m, rather independent and located at the bottom of the main building, lower down. This was probably built by Ernesto Lefèbvre around 1855, together with the present Villa Nota-Pisani. Also attached to the building is a large 13.50 metre by 8 metre Stable with long sides facing east and west, a shed and a carriage wash, all partly damaged and in need of repair. Equipment that would soon become useless, if we consider that shortly afterwards carriages would be replaced by cars, even though few cars were still to be seen at Isola.

De Rogatis also mentions an already mentioned building of a certain size, the Vaccheria, which rose two storeys high because in addition to the cows it housed the caretakers' quarters; it was a square building measuring 13 metres on a side in which the caretaker's house was spacious and included workshops. In its heyday it housed at least 20

dairy cows. With that high-quality milk, fresh cheese was produced, of which Palazzo Lefèbvre made abundant use.

To come back to Carlo Lefèbvre, after the legal ups and downs between 1885 and 1889 with the family companies, the quarrels, the reconciliations, the lawyers and the courts, he disappeared from the management of the Fibreno factory and from the family business in general. Misfortunes, excesses, loves and vices made him a nomad, a traveller, for many years. When we no longer find traces of him in Isola del Liri, we record his passage to Rome, Paris, Nice, Menton, Milan and Sanremo.

Where he got the money for this life, which was certainly not accessible to everyone, we do not know, since he was not officially entitled to a monthly allowance and was excluded from signing and administering any part of the estate. Before the storm he may have saved some money, he could certainly have borrowed it, but we can easily imagine that his mother Teresa sent him some help. When he returned to Naples, before his son Carlo Ernesto was recognised as his own, which happened in 1899, he took a house in via Loggia dei Pisani as his home. This apartment was (and still is) in the Quartiere Porto, a bourgeois neighbourhood that underwent a great architectural and urban transformation in the 19th century, with the construction of many villas.

There are no pictures of him next to his son Carlo Ernesto, with whom he must have had a relationship since he recognised him in 1899. Carlo Ernesto had married Antonio D'Ovidio's daughter Elvira in 1909, thus beginning a new family history, as his children would be called with the double surname Lefèbvre D'Ovidio, and he never entered into the inheritance issues of the time. By the time the division of the inheritance was discussed, he already had three children.

The fourth generation of Lefèbvre's, who had emigrated to Italy, had no contact with the old factory that had generated money and wealth for a century. The recognition in 1899 was an act that was not only the duty of a father, but also the need to preserve the Lefèbvre dynasty, which had been so fruitful in the past. At that moment, its survival was entrusted to this boy alone.

On 29 April 1911, in Vico San Giacomo, before the notary Vincenzo Sanseverino of Naples and some friends of the family (Giuseppe Lagard and Carmine Picard), Carlo certified that he owed the lawyer Archivolti of Livorno 20,000 lire. In the document he declares that he is indebted to him, but that he has been unable to pay the debt; a debt whose nature, how it arose and why it is owed is not specified.¹⁴⁷ The meeting was convened a month and a half after the "misfortune" that occurred "on the 11th of March 1911" when Countess Teresa Doria D'Angri, his mother, died, making it necessary to discuss certain matters relating to the inheritance left by the old lady. She had left part of her estate to her children and to her son Francesco, who had died before her. To this sum were added undefined "dotali ragioni", entrusted to the administration of Carlo's sister, the Duchess Giulia Lefèbvre Casalaspro, "already a judicial administrator", and a donation she had left to her brother in 1886. Since Carlo Lefèbvre owed the Archivolti 6500 lire, he left his inheritance of 20,000 lire to the Archivolti 'up to the amount of his debt, paying them the difference'.

The document shows that Archivolti accepted the proposal and the two parties agreed in a private letter. The reasons for this strange agreement on the part of Carlo Lefèbvre, who entrusted 20,000 lire for a debt of 6500, and who was more used to running away from creditors, will be explained later. We note that Teresa left nothing to Carlo, but that Carlo could inherit Francesco's share.

We come to 1916, when the plan for the division of inheritance between the rightful claimants drawn up by De Rogatis was discussed. For the purposes of the division of the inheritance, the 'major asset' constituted by the San Carlo industrial plant was detached, since it was judged 'indivisible, especially for its endowment of hydraulic power'. The Liri Valley and the Sora area had prospered for centuries precisely because of the abundance of water, and that plant, although damaged, was in a particularly favourable situation for the exploitation of motive

¹⁴⁷ *Cessione di eredità per lire 20.000 ad Avvocato Archivolti*, 1911. Iafrate Brothers Archive. Isola del Liri.

power. The value of San Carlo was estimated by De Rogatis as more than half of the entire property, which should be divided into 9 parts of equal value.

The expert therefore proposed to sell the plant 'at public auction, together with the motive power and the areas of industrial land aggregated to it' at the estimated price 'in 219,222 lire'.¹⁴⁸ The fact that the building was not sold at this price may be due either to the fact that Cartiere Meridionali did not want to have a competitor so close by or, more likely, to the fact that the damage to the building was greater than De Rogatis himself had estimated. The value of the entire property, including the San Carlo, was estimated at 394,812 lire, which, after deducting the value of the industrial plant of 219,222 lire, amounted to 175,590 lire. Not much by today's standards, and not enough for Carlo Lefèbvre, who contested the valuation with the intention of having it redone. For De Rogatis, the very valuable Palazzo Lefèbvre was merely an appendage to a now defunct industrial structure. There were other issues to consider. After several rulings by the Court of Cassino (20 and 27 October 1911; 17 June and 2 July 1913), it appeared that one third of Count Francesco Lefèbvre's estate was to go to his mother, Teresa Doria (who died later in 1911), represented by Giulia Lefèbvre, Illán Álvarez de Toledo and the lawyer Giuseppe Archivolti, the latter being the assignee of Carlo Lefèbvre, according to the private deed of 1911; one third to the surviving spouse, Gisèle von Waechtbaecker; and the last third to Giulia Lefèbvre, Illán Álvarez de Toledo and their youngest son, Alvaro Álvarez de Toledo, who was the heir of Carlo Lefèbvre.

At this point, the expert divided the total amount into 9 shares, each corresponding to the sum of 19,510 lire, according to rational and equitable criteria, taking into account the need to give part of the farm and land and part of the palace to all the heirs. This division was announced by the lawyer Vincenzo Terribile, who cited a court decision that confirmed it. Obviously, it was one thing to establish a value and divide it up, and another to find buyers who would buy the property en bloc. Those were war years, the crisis had been biting for many years.

¹⁴⁸ *Progetto divisione proprietà*, De Rogatis, pp. 314-315.

And it was not easy: the juiciest part of the estate was now sold and the other, San Carlo, was in ruins, the roofs half collapsed, full of bulky machinery. Years went by in which Carlo tried to sell the property to the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali.

Carlo Lefèbvre and the Società delle Cartiere meridionali

In 1917, the inheritance had not yet taken place due to a lack of buyers. Thus, on 8 January 1917, Achille Colombo, president of the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali in Turin, received a letter from Jules Blanc of Naples, an executive of the same company who had long lived in Isola. He wrote that he had met Carlo Lefèbvre in Sanremo, who had made him some dubious proposals. What did Carlo Lefèbvre have to do with the inheritance, since he had sold his entire share to the lawyer Archivolti? He had something to do with it, because the transfer was a sham and was only intended to keep his share from being seized by a creditor.

The meeting between Blanc and Lefèbvre in Sanremo was therefore to remain confidential. The Cartiere Meridionali had shown an interest in buying the rest of the property and the land, in order to gain complete control of the waterworks and the water flow, and to rebuild the San Carlo factory with its hydraulic power. Carlo explained to Blanc that the deed of transfer could not take effect while a lawsuit he had filed to annul engineer De Rogatis' report was pending. He explained that he was entitled to almost half of the entire property: 4/9. That is, 2/9 to his sister Giulia Lefèbvre and 1/9 to Illán di Casafuerte, since both had renounced their inheritance in his favour. For them it was only a few pennies. Moreover, Carlo claimed that another 1/9, attributed to the lawyer Archivolti, of whom he was the assignee, was actually his, since the lawyer was the assignee *pro forma*.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ *Jules Blanc ad Attilio Colombo*, Torino 1917. Iafate Brothers Archive, Isola del Liri.

Carlo declared that he could not say more because all the secrets of the case had been deposited in the hands of the lawyer Pasquale Mollica of Naples and Mr. Guido Rizzi, his friend. He then stated that he supported the idea of selling all the parts that could be divided to Cartiere Meridionali en bloc. Blanc had explained that the San Carlo plant and the land were not really of interest to the Cartiere Meridionali. But, evidently, if he had agreed to meet Lefèbvre in Sanremo, there must have been some interest, perhaps in the Canale delle Forme property and Palazzo Balsorano.

Carlo communicated his condition: the sums were to be paid undivided. However, it was evident, even from the tenor of Blanc's comments, that Lefèbvre's attitude was not considered acceptable, and that there were still cases pending, albeit smaller than in the past, blocking further attempts at agreement between the parties. Blanc further observed that Carlo Lefèbvre was almost a fool, an unreliable person who blindly trusted the opinions of one Guido Rizzi, a person whose title is not mentioned but who was neither a notary, nor a lawyer, nor a professional.



The factories of Cartiere Meridionali in the years of the acquisition of Manifatture del Fibreno: bottom right, the Forme factories.

Ten days later, the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali received from the lawyer Pasquale Mollica a kind of proposal from Carlo Lefèbvre which, however, as it was formulated, had little chance of being accepted. The lawyer, writing in a bizarre way, announced that 'As vicar-general of Signore Conte Carlo Lefèbvre di Balsorano' and by a mandate drawn up by the notary Roverio Stefano in Sanremo (18 March 1915), he was putting forward proposals for a sale. He therefore proposed a settlement for the property of the late Count Francesco Lefèbvre of Balsorano.

I undertake to take over the shares of the other co-heirs. These shares, as well as my own, must be free from existing debts and other encumbrances. The price I ask for the whole property is at least 350,000 lire; if I do not succeed in the aforesaid intention of taking over the shares of the other co-heirs, I undertake to sell the shares of the aforesaid Count of Balsorano to your company at the relative price of the same shares in proportion to the aforesaid request; I declare that the aforesaid shares are at present four, although this does not appear to be the case: That is, one share is the share transferred to Mr. Archivolti, who instead (at the time of the last meeting) holds a share in the property of the Count of Balsorano. Mr. Archivolti, who instead (contrary to what your lawyers Terribile and Colombo have observed) still belongs to the Count of Balsorano. Another share was transferred to the same by the sister of the Duchess of Casalapro, Donna Giulia Lefèbvre, by deed of notary Guidi Comm. Francesco of Rome. The other two shares went to me and to the Marquis Illán of Casafuerte and to the Duchess Giulia, as heirs of their mother.¹⁵⁰

It is unclear whether the transaction in any way infringed the rights of Gisella, who was the principal legal heir to the entire estate, but Carlo must have played his cards right. Lawyer Mollica agreed to provide anyone who asked with all the documents proving his claims. The offer was made on the condition that the lawyer would be able to do everything he had promised within the month of May 1917, and that the

¹⁵⁰ *Ibidem.*

proposal of acceptance should reach the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali no later than 15 February (of 1918).

He then gave the company until 30 June 1917 to purchase the four shares he claimed to own. In addition to the 350,000 lire, the company was asked to pay a further 10,000 lire as compensation (for unspecified reasons) to Mrs. Emma Guidorizzi (perhaps the wife of this 'Guido Rizzo') if the whole property was sold.

This extravagant proposal was not taken up and the property was nevertheless sold in its entirety between 1907 and 1918, as we shall see.

Chapter 17

The Manifatture del Fibreno in XX century

On 15 February 1917, and by subsequent deeds in 1918, Cartiere Meridionali bought the Vadurso paper mill, which was then in receivership. The paper mill had been founded in February 1904 by Francesco Matera together with the Roessinger brothers and Silvio Avitabile, husband of Enrica Roessinger and partner of De Caria in Carnello, in the company Roessinger & Avitabile. Cavalier Daniele Pisani (1863-1945) was appointed technical director. Born in Sant'Elia Fiumerapido, he had worked at the historic Maffizzoli paper mill in Toscolano Maderno and at the Grottaferrata paper mill before becoming technical director of Meridionali.¹⁵¹

Achille Colombo was its administrative director. Both had a mandate issued by engineer De Benedetti, managing director of Cartiere Meridionali. In 1918, the company acquired the remaining part of the Lefèbvre property. The transaction was registered by notary Sanseverino on 2 May 1918.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ *Giornale di Storia Contemporanea*, Luigi Pellegrini editore, Cosenza IX, 1-2 (2006). His namesake nephew, Daniele Pisani (-2017) was to become director of the Ippolito e Pisani wool mill of which he was a director together with Enrico Nota.

¹⁵² The original of the deed given to the Cartiere Meridionali is preserved in the Fratelli Iafrate Collection in Isola del Liri, and the first page is reproduced in *La società delle cartiere meridionali. Gli stabilimenti di Isola del Liri*, p. 59. The Iafrate family recalls that, as we know, the land in question came to Francesco as a gift from his father Ernesto (deed of 11 February 1887, notary Savona of Sora, countersigned by notary Cancelli on 28 February 1887). The debt of 203,000 lire owed to Ippolito Dumuret (mortgage of 17 September 1887) was deducted from the sale price, and debts arising from unfavourable judgments were paid. The mortgages in favour of the Luciano brothers, who

Of this sum, Carlo took 3/9, about 700 lire, enough to live comfortably, to buy a small villa in Posillipo and to live the life of a gentleman in the last years of his life, which would end in 1921. Gisella Lefèbvre died in Naples in 1925 and was buried in the family chapel in the monumental cemetery of Poggioreale.

Formally, Carlo sold everything to the lawyer Archivolti, who was his front man, for 350,000 lire less expenses. This was a lower figure than the 394,812 of the De Rogatis report, which included the value of the industrial plant and of San Carlo and its associated funds, i.e. the rustic fund called Strada dei Gelsi leading to San Carlo, the Vicenne land, the ruins of the Trianon villa 'destroyed' by the Marsica earthquake and then the park adjacent to the said fund; the rustic fund called San Carlo and, of course, the Palazzo Lefèbvre with its stables. The purchase also included the former San Carlo factory, partly in ruins, consisting of a large building on the ground and upper floors, with an adjoining engine powered by the waters of the Forme Canal, and finally a plot of land beyond the railway line.

It was the canal that seemed most interesting to Cartiere Meridionali at the time. After 30 years of neglect, the San Carlo factory was finally demolished. Over time, Cartiere Meridionali sold off the land that was no longer needed for its operations, including agricultural land that had been earmarked for housing. The Forme Canal has never been touched, except for the irrigation of certain parts of its course. The turbine and machinery that served San Carlo, which were underground, have either been removed or, according to local historian Bruno Ceroli, may still be in place below street level. The fruit trees were gradually cut down

had mortgaged the building known as Zincone, the Remorici factory, the small church between the factory and the provincial road, and other debts to Gabriele Montuoro, Miss Enrichetta Milani, Federico de Nozza, Gerardo Carillo, Gaetano Uga, Giuseppe and Ottavio Cappellozza, Pompilio Astone and others, were cancelled. Count Francesco Lefevre also transferred the Remorici mill and its annexes to Cartiere Meridionali by a deed of 30 January 1907, drawn up by notary Placidi.

during the 1950s and 1960s (as testified by various recollections of locals who remember that they were still flourishing at that time and were the subject of children's raids until the early 1950s) to make way for private houses, car parks, roads and sports grounds.

In 1920 the share capital of the Cartiere Meridionali was increased to four million lire, and in 1921 Messrs. Angelo and Luigi Viscogliosi, through the legal representative commendatore Pisani, sold to the Cartiere Meridionali, by public will and notary deed, a piece of land in the Valcatoio area, adjacent to the Remorici workshop.



Further expansion took place in 1921 when Cartiere Meridionali took possession of 7,000 shares in Cartiera Valvassori Valle di Lanzo, a joint stock company founded in 1870, with a factory in Germagnano (Turin).¹⁵³ It was at this point that the future owners of Cartiere

¹⁵³ Iafrate, *Le Cartiere Meridionali*, *op. cit.*, p. 60. The Iafrate brothers infer from a report of the Società Idroelettrica Valle del Liri that they owned 3,000 shares in Cartiere Meridionali.

Meridionali came into the picture, since the dam on the Stura River that powered Valvassori had been built by the Stura Hydroelectric Company, whose directors included Emilio De Benedetti (1873-1956), his brother Benedetto, the lawyer Emilio Colombo and other minority shareholders, all from Piedmont. In particular, Emilio De Benedetti, an engineer who had studied at the Polytechnics of Milan and Turin, was considered an important entrepreneur who belonged to the Piedmontese circle, which also included the Agnelli and Olivetti families.¹⁵⁴

Cartiere Meridionali and Cartiere Valvassori were thus linked, and in a passage from the minutes of the shareholders' meeting of 20 December 1919 we read that "Chairman De Benedetti intended to divide the areas to be exploited into southern and northern zones". He restructured the commercial organisation by entrusting the management of the south, from Rome downwards, to Cartiere Meridionali, while the commercial commission for the north was given to Valvassori.

It was at the Valvassori mill that the young Beniamino Donzelli was trained, and he went on to work at the Maslianico mill and later at the Binda mill. In 1927 the head office was moved from Turin to Rome.

In 1929 the share capital was increased to 19 million lire. Also in 1929, Cartiere Meridionali, represented by the engineer Emilio De Benedetti, chairman of the board of directors, incorporated Società Esercizio Cartiere Meridionali, a joint stock company based in Rome and founded in 1923 with a capital of 30 million lire. In 1927, Società Esercizio Cartiere Meridionali controlled the Valvassori Valle di Lanzo paper mill and held a large stake in Società Elettrica e Gas di Roma (capital 160 million), the largest electricity company in the region.¹⁵⁵ This also managed the Società Energia Sorelle, which was building a

¹⁵⁴ Abrate Mario, *La lotta sindacale nell'industrializzazione in Italia 1906-1926*, Milano 1967, *ad nomen*. E. De Benedetti, *Problemi attuali dell'industria della carta in Italia*, in Ministero dell'Economia nazionale, *Atti del Consiglio superiore dell'Economia nazionale*, 1a sessione - giugno 1924, Roma 1925, pp. 3, 44-51; 2a sessione - maggio 1925, *ibid.* 1926, pp. 3, 11, 75, 119.

¹⁵⁵ In 1870, the Vecco-Valvassori paper mill was built (later Valvassori Franco, then Burgo, then part of the Spinoglio Group), which also worked for the State Mint and employed hundreds of people until the early 2000s.

hydroelectric plant on the Liri river, and the Società Idroelettrica Stura, which had a plant under construction in Germagnano. Network infrastructure finance was taking an interest in paper, as had happened a century earlier when the same Lefèbvre had been among the founders of the first gas lighting company in Italy.

On 21 March 1930, Rome-based Cartiera Aniene also joined the Cartiere Meridionali group. Later, in 1935, the Germagnano mill was leased to Luigi Burgo's Società Anonima Cartiere Burgo.¹⁵⁶

In 1937, the Isola del Liri plant (including the various production units) covered an area of 500,000 square metres, of which more than 50,000 were covered by buildings. The paper machines produced almost all types of paper, from cardboard to 10-gram cigarette paper, and the group's daily production exceeded 1,000 quintals. The mills at Isola del Liri employed 1,500 workers and 60 clerks. Around 6,000 horsepower provided the hydraulic power for the engine, while the surplus was used in electric boilers to produce steam. The Cartiere Meridionali built powerful plants for the production of pulp from poplar and fir wood, employing 200 workers. There was still some production of pulp from rags to make up for the lack of pulp needed in difficult times. At that time, the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali was part of a very complex group that included the Società Finanziamenti Industriali, based in Rome, the Società Anonima per le Forze Idrauliche del Liri, the Società Operazioni Finanziarie Industriali, the Società Liri, the Società Meridionali Spa, based in Naples, the general representative of the Cartiere Meridionali and the Società per la Fabbricazione di Cellulosa, based in Rome.

With the enactment of the racial laws in 1938, the directors of the time were forced to resign and even to emigrate to avoid possible deportation. Emilio De Benedetti was the first to leave, abandoning his posts and the country. He was followed on 22 December 1938 by his brother Benedetto and then by Guido Foligno. In 1939 Ernesto Cirila was president of Cartiera Aniene, Franco Zeni vice-president and

¹⁵⁶ Act recorded in Turin on 19 September 1935, n. 2286, vol. 355.

Cesare Pedrini, Filiberto Battistello and Count Guido Fenaroli councillors. Eight years later, in 1946, Emilio returned to Italy to take over the presidency of some of the Group's companies, such as Cartiera di Germagnano, and died in 1956.

The protagonists of the post-De Benedetti period were Cavalier Ferruccio Gilberti and Senator Beniamino Donzelli, one of the leading figures in the Italian paper industry, who had already been entrusted with important functions 20 years earlier and who joined Cartiere Meridionali as General Manager in 1941.

At the time, the Cartiera del Liri was the largest paper mill in the south of Italy, made up of the former Lefèbvre and Meridionali plants. During the war, the Mulazzi and Trituratori buildings, the transformation cabin and the 6th paper machine hall with the attached vats, stacks and installations connected to the 8th paper machine were destroyed. During this period the mill employed about 1250 workers.



Beniamino Donzelli.

On 12 July 1943, together with the joint stock company, many buildings and land were added to the Cartiere Meridionali properties, including the area in which the water intakes of the Carnello paper mill

were located; the former Zino mill; the area of land enclosed between the Fibreno river, the Carnello ex Lefèbvre municipal road, the railway junction and the Isola del Liri railway station; the hydraulic works of the former Mazzetti hydroelectric power station; the hydraulic works of the former Counts; the new hydroelectric power station known as 'ex Sarra'; the Manna or Valcatoio power station; the land annexed to the Valcatoio power station and the entire Carnello paper mill. At this point, with the exception of the Boimond, a medium-sized paper mill located near San Domenico and the Trito Paper Mill, the major plants between Sora and Isola and the power stations and water intakes had merged into one large group, unifying the Isola 'city-industry' in a corporate sense.

This industry and other assets were administered by Beniamino Donzelli until 1952 and then by the Gilberti family and remained virtually unchanged until 1967, when the Cartiere Meridionali company ceased to exist with the deed of merger of 30 November 1967 drawn up by the notary Zanuso and was incorporated into the Società Cartiere Beniamino Donzelli. After that, the group was renamed Società Cartiere Beniamino Donzelli e Cartiere Meridionali (SCBD and CM) and its registered office was established in Milan at 16 Via Senato. In 1969 the incorporating company took the name Cartiere Riunite Donzelli e Meridionali. This company also owned the Toscolano del Garda paper mill, the Barletta paper mill, the Besozzo paper mill, the Gemona paper mill and the Sant'Angelo di Romagna paper mill. The intention was ambitious, but too many companies caused the Isola del Liri mill to fail and it began to experience difficult times. Restructuring was needed, more care for the paper market, but there were also constant trade union demands and difficult decisions to be made by the management. In 1975, the balance sheet was at a loss and production had fallen by 35 per cent compared to the previous year's quotas. In 1982, the Court of Monza placed the company under extraordinary administration, but in 1987 it was closed down for good.

Chapter 18

A missed opportunity

Since 1987, the structures of both the Soffondo and the paper mills, which had been abandoned for years, have slowly begun to decay. It is a pity that such an interesting site, still in use until recently, as the Lefèbvre paper mills in Santa Maria delle Forme, has never been turned into a paper museum, but an attempt has been made, and the person who tried to make it happen tells us about it: Bruno Magliocchetti, former mayor of Isola del Liri from 1993 to 1999. This is how the story is told by the former Mayor.¹⁵⁷

On 5 March 1995, two ANAS workers came to my office at the municipality to tell me that on the SS. 82 road, near the old Lefèbvre paper factory, a sinkhole had opened up, revealing a long tunnel. I had heard in the past about an old underground factory, so I was immediately accompanied by the commander of the municipal police, Bruno Palombo, and the head of the technical office, geom. Fernando Viscogliosi, to inspect the site. After passing through the tunnel, I was greeted by a fantastic sight. I immediately had a happy intuition: this area could be bought by the Municipality and, properly restored, could become the most evocative MUSEUM OF PAPER IN ITALY, also because the ancient ruin is framed by a beautiful waterfall, the third in Isola del Liri, and a lush river park.

Said and done! Once the preparatory work had been completed, and having read the Lazio Regional Programme, published in BURL No. 19 of 10 July 1995, which, under Measure 1.3 of Objective 2, authorised funding from the European Structural Funds for the "restoration of degraded sites and disused artefacts", the Municipal Council approved the general preliminary project for the "Museum of Industrial Archaeology - European Centre for Paper

¹⁵⁷ Accessed 20 February 2022 at <http://www.lirinense.it/432122381>

Civilization" with Resolution No. 74 of 7 October 1996, which was declared immediately enforceable.

The Municipality of Isola del Liri received a grant of 3,743,500,000 lire (80% non-repayable) for the reclamation of the site and a grant of 3,500,000,000 lire (80% non-repayable) for the restoration.

When the work was almost finished, only the furniture and some minor details were missing, my government fell.

The left-wing government that took over from mine renounced the final funding and culpably abandoned the old Lefèbvre Paper Mill - Paper Museum to neglect and the devastating actions of vandals, returning the old mill to the status of a 'ruin'.

The lack of administrative continuity and the deliberate renunciation of the final funding for the construction of the largest and most impressive paper museum in Italy constitute serious damage to the public purse, the report says.¹⁵⁸

Magliocchetti belonged to the Italian Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Italiano, a right wing party) and therefore, when a left-wing administration took over, he denounces, it renounced the last funding and, 'culpably, abandoned the old Cartiera Lefèbvre - Paper Museum to neglect and the devastating action of vandals, returning the old mill to the status of a 'ruin'. It is not the purpose of this writing to investigate the reasons for the abandonment or to reconstruct the controversy, but we must testify that the attempt was there and it was serious, and that it was then abandoned probably for reasons of political struggle. It was never taken up again by subsequent administrations - as far as we know - and today, unfortunately, the Soffondo, which had been the subject of an important section of the interventions, has almost returned to the state of ruins even though it has been equipped with metal stairs and walkway that are still valid and practicable if cleared of vegetation.¹⁵⁹ Instead, the structures have continued to deteriorate. Magliocchetti is right, it seems to us, to denounce the fact that the deliberate renunciation

¹⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁹ <https://www.linchiestaquotidiano.it/news/2018/03/06/la-cartiera-lefebvre-di-isola-liri-riportata-alla-luce-nel-1/20669?>

of the final funding to create the largest and most impressive paper museum in Italy represents a serious financial loss. Moreover, the damage is there.

There are paper museums in Italy, but they are generally small, old mills, such as those in the Garda, Brescia and Milan areas, in Veneto and Piedmont, or even on the Amalfi coast. The old large factories in the north have been demolished, while the structure of the Cartiera del Liri is almost ruined or semi-ruined. Some of the original structure of other paper mills, such as Boimond, or the building that housed Mancini, remain, but that of the Lefèbvre paper mills would have been unique, both for its location – the "sink" of the Liri river – and for the size and importance of the factory, which made the history of the paper industry in Italy and which could be largely reconstructed. At Isola Liri, a large flat machine from the 1930s Boimond paper mill has been preserved.

Appendix

Citazione a comparire per il Conte Ernesto Lefèbvre, dinanzi al Tribunale Civile di Terra di lavoro, 22 ottobre 1827, Archivio Boimond, Fald. 13, Cart. 8AA

(Oggi in collezione privata)

L'anno 1827 il giorno 22 di ottobre. A istanza del signor D. Claudio Francesco Lepreux di nazione francese e domiciliato in Napoli Vico Sergente Maggiore n. 3, io Luigi del Vecchio, usciere presso il Tribunale Civile di Napoli, domiciliato strada Pignasecca n. 18, ho dichiarato al signor D. Carlo Lefèbvre negoziante francese, domiciliato in Napoli strada Riviera di Chiaia n. 267 – quanto segue.

Con istrumento del 15 marzo 1817, pel notaio D. Filippo de Luca (re.to in Napoli, burò I Atti Civili il 19 detto al lib. 1° vol. 85 – Fol. 36, Cas. 45 per d.to 1,20) l'istante signor Lepreux acquistò dal sig. Luigi Properio Lemaire numero trentaquattro fondi rustici ed urbani siti nelle pertinenze dell'Isola, Arpino e Castelluccio, che all'anzidetto signor Lemaire erano stati venduti dalla signora Margherita Dovillet con atto autentico del 9 agosto 1816, ricevuto dal notaio D. Raffaele Sorvillo (reg. in Napoli il 10 d. burò 2° Atti civili fol. 48 - cas. 1° vol. 178 per D.ti 240), la quale li aveva comprati dall'abolita Amministrazione delle registature e dei Demanii con istromento del 5 ottobre 1814, presso il notaio D. Emanuele Caputo (reg. in Napoli burò 2 Atti Civili, il 8 detto al fol. 53 – v. Cas. 3, vol. 142 per L. 1139,40). Priacché seguisce (sic) la vendita sopradetta a favore dell'istante, il Signor Lemaire trovavasi di aver locato i divisati trentaquattro fondi al Signor Augusto Viollier, per anni cinque dal 9 agosto 1816, in virtù di pubblica scrittura stipulata dall'anzidetto notaio Sorvillo (registrato in Napoli il 19, burò, 2 Atti Civili fol. 48, cas. 6 vol. 178 – per D.ti 16). Essendo spirato tale affitto in agosto 1821, sotto il giorno 20 del mese istesso con carta sinallagmatica (registrato in Napoli alle 2 aff. Il 21 settembre 1821, fo. 24; Cas. 1, vol. 51 n. 8998 – per 30) si conchiuse tra i procuratori dell'istante, e il nominato signore Viollier una nuova locazione da durare per altri cinque anni sino a tutto agosto 1826. Non era decorso

ancora questo termine quando il signor Viollier scomparve dal Regno di Napoli, ed il signor Lefèbvre, suo socio nello stabilimento delle Cartiera dell'isola di Sora, continuò egli nella locazione fino alla data di agosto 1826, in cui si rese compiuto il quinquennio dell'indicato secondo affitto. A quest'epoca il detto. Signor Lefèbvre avrebbe dovuto rilasciare i fondi affittati, ma perché gli giovava di ritenerli per non essere distratto delle pregiudizievolissime innovazioni che vi si erano fatte, e che si sono proseguite a fare, promosse l'eccezione di non essere congedato in tempo utile, e volle continuare un altro anno. Ad evitare cuistioni gli fu permesso; affinché però non sorgesse di nuovo la pretenzione istessa, in data del 21 giugno corrente anno, gli fu intimato il formale congedo. Sperava l'istante che dopo di ciò non si sarebbero suscitate altre controversie, ma essendosi portato sopraluogo per ricevere la consegna dei propri fondi, gli agenti del signor Lefèbvre hanno consegnato solo trentatrè dei medesimi, ricusando di restituire il trentesimo quarto, e propriamente quello di tomoli quattro denominato Vicenna descritto al. 6 dell'istrumento di acquisto della signora Dovillet, sotto all'insussistente pretesto che al signor Lefèbvre appartenga – stava verificando inoltre l'istante, che una porzione del detto fondo, si è occupato con delle fabbriche costruitevi, e che tanto in esso quanto nell'altro fondo denominato pure Vienne, volgarmente Vicenne grande, dell'estensione di tomoli 36 e canne 11 descritto al numero quinto dell'indicato istrumento di acquisto nonché sul terreno Carnello di tomoli tre notato al numero undici, si sono aperti dei canali per dare il passaggio alle acque che animano la Cartiera del Fibreno. E si sono fermati nei medesimi due portelloni colle fabbriche rispettive per moderarle. Dippiù che nell'antica forma esistente sul terreno Vicenna grande siasi immerso un nuovo volume di acque tirato dal muraglione dei mulini di Carnello, che attraversando sul fondo, e penetrando lateralmente in esso, vi produce sensibilmente danno. Finalmente che nel fondo denominato Vicennola rimpetto alla Cartiera, si è tagliato il terreno nella lunghezza di palmi centocinquanta, e nella larghezza di palmi otto, per ingrandire la strada, che dal lato opposto si è occupato con delle nuove fabbriche. In vista di tanta innovazione e abusi, l'istante ricevendosi la consegna di trentatrè fondi compresi

sull'affitto, formalmente protestò con atto dell'uscieri Nonnile di Sora in data del 5 settembre corrente (reg. in Sora il di med. Al lib. 4° - vol. II, fol. 80 v. num. p. 982 cas. 7) pel rifiuto della restituzione del fondo Vicenna di tomoli 4 per la servitù imposte, e per le innovazioni, ed usurpazioni commesse, facendo riverbero delle sue ragioni per sperimentarle in giudizio regolare. Volendo ora servirsi dei suoi diritti, lo sopradetto usciere sulla istanza come sopra ha citato il detto signor Carlo Lefèbvre a comparire nel termine di otto giorni, oltre l'aumento legale in ragione della distanza, innanzi al Tribunale Civile della provincia di Terra di Lavoro in S. Maria Maggiore per sentirsi condannare

1° a lasciare all'istante il terreno di tomolo quattro denominato Vicenna in pertinenza dell'isola confinante coi beni degli eredi del signor Domenico Segneri, gli eredi di D. Giacinto Marselle, il Canonico dell'Isola e l'antico giardino mirato dei soppressi carmelitani, una con tutti i frutti, dal 1 settembre corrente anno.

2° a togliere e demolire a tutte sue spese, giusto l'articolo 480 delle leggi civili, le costruzioni di fabbrica, che abusivamente sono state fatte.

3° a chiudere nel detto terreno, e negli altri denominati Vicenna grande e Carnello anche in tenimento dell'isola tutti i nuovi canali che vi sono stati aperti ed i due portelloni colle fabbriche corrispondenti che vi ci sono stabiliti; lasciando il terreno Vicenna di tomolo 4, ed il terreno Carnello liberi di qualunque servitù; ed il terreno Vicenne grande colla sola forma antica, che riceveva lo scopo del lago Trommoletto – in contrario sia autorizzato l'istante ad eseguirlo a tutte spese del convenuto

4° a riportare all'antico stato il volume dell'acqua che si è immesso nell'antica forma del detto terreno Vicenna grande prendendola dai molini di Carnello.

5° a ripristinare il tagliamento dei palmi 150 di lunghezza, e palmi otto di larghezza del terreno Vicennola rimpetto alla Cartiera. 6° a rifondere tutti i danni ed interessi, ed alle spese di giudizio – l'istante riserva espressamente le sue ragioni per l'esazione dell'estaglio scaduto a tutto agosto ultimo, e per le altre innovazioni e usurpazioni che potrebbero in seguito scovrirsi, ed ogni altro suo diritto e ragione senza

pregiudizio alcuno. Gli ho dichiarato che il signor D. Camm Delia avvocato e patrocinatore presso detto Tribunale ivi domiciliato procederà per lo istante le copie del presente atto unito all'istromento del 15 marzo 1817, e quello del 5 ottobre 1814, ed all'altro del 9 agosto 1816, nonché al foglio privato del 20 agosto 1821, in esso enunciato, collezionato e firmato è stato da me lasciato al domicilio di detto Signor Lefèbvre, consegnato a persona sua familiare come ha detto. L'importo di gna 20 oltre le spese. La presente è di carta scritta n. 15 – firmato – del vecchio N, 94709 – Reg.to in Napoli li 30 ottobre 1827 – Libro 4 vol. 736 – vol. 14 casella 2 ricevuto gna 20.

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INDEX

- Acquaviva d'Aragona, Luigi, 147
 Agnelli (family), 256
 Alhaique, Angelo, 118
 Allievi, Antonio, 118
 Álvarez de Toledo Fiocca, Alvaro, 247
 Álvarez de Toledo y Acuña, Illán, 153, 155, 234-237, 247, 248, 250
 Álvarez de Toledo y Acuña, Pedro, 141, 151, 155
 Amodio, Giuseppe, 118
 Annicelli, Antonio, 140
 Aragona Ruffo Bagnara, Girolamo d', 147, 148
 Archivolti, Giuseppe, 226, 229, 236, 237, 246-248, 250, 254
 Atticus, Titus Pomponius, 30
 Avitabile (family), 174, 177
 Avitabile, Silvio, 173, 253

 Barca, Stefania, 199, 232
 Baškircева, Marija Konstantinovna, 149
 Battinelli, Enrico, 140
 Battistello, Filiberto, 258
 Bellisario, Augusto, 120
 Benedict XIII (Orsini, Pietro Francesco), Pope, 10
 Beranger (family), 189, 192
 Beranger, Charles-Antoine, 9, 24, 32
 Bianchi, Lorenzo, 35-37
 Blanc, Jules, 120, 121, 219, 223, 248, 249
 Boimond, Emilio, 181, 210, 211
 Boncompagni (family), 35, 102, 200

 Bonucci, Giovanni, 119, 120, 167, 226
 Bosisio, Achille, 170, 172, 228
 Boubée, Paolo, 147
 Bourbons (dynasty), 205
 Bucci, Antonio, 115
 Burgo, Luigi, 257
 Byron, George Gordon, 40, 41

 Cacace, Tito, 115
 Calabritto, Giuseppe, 167
 Calligaris, Augusto, 121
 Candida, Antonietta, 149
 Carafa, Carlo, 115
 Carelli, Raffaele, 25, 35-37
 Carignani, Francesco, 140
 Castel Cicala, Giuseppe, 118
 Catalano, Enrico, 137, 139-142
 Ceroli, Bruno, 254
 Charles III of Bourbon-Spain, 157
 Chioccarelli, Francesco, 219, 220, 224, 225
 Choquet (family), 145
 Ciccodicola (family), 46, 90, 101, 102, 115, 144, 157-161, 200, 211, 231
 Ciccodicola, Alfonso, 161
 Ciccodicola, Eduardo, 161
 Ciccodicola, Ernesto, 161
 Ciccodicola, Luigi, 161
 Ciccodicola, Pasquale, 115, 158, 159, 203, 211
 Ciccodicola, Roberto, 161
 Ciccodicola, Vincenzo, 157-159
 Cicero, Marcus Tullius, 7, 19, 20, 24, 26, 29-31, 40, 54
 Cigola, Michela, 128
 Cilento, Antonio, 119
 Cini (family), 126

- Ciria, Ernesto, 257
 Coccoli (brothers), 190
 Colletta, Gaetano, 8
 Colletta, Pietro, 8
 Colombo (family), 227
 Colombo, Achille, 248, 250, 253
 Colombo, Attilio, 218
 Colombo, Emilio, 256
 Consalvo, Attilio, 175
 Courier (family), 203, 209
 Courier, Dionisio, 209
 Courier, Eugenio, 209-212
 Crispi, Francesco, 152
 Cuciniello, Domenico, 35-37

 D'Ovidio, Antonio, 245
 D'Ovidio, Elvira, 245
 De Angelis, Carlo, 137
 De Augustinis, Matteo, 44-47
 De Benedetti (family), 258
 De Benedetti, Benedetto, 256, 257
 De Benedetti, Emilio, 121, 253, 256-258
 De Caria (family), 174, 237
 De Caria, Bruno, 175
 De Caria, Gabriele, 100, 173-176, 181, 228-230, 253
 De Caria, Luisa, 174
 De Chiara, Carmine, 120
 De Filippis, Guglielmo, 120
 De Rogatis, Alberto, 179, 236-244, 246-248, 254
 De Rosa, Ferdinando, 220
 De Simone, Raffaele Barbaro, 115
 Delécluze, Étienne-Jean, 39
 Della Posta, Pietro, 179
 Depérais, Charles Alexandre, 131
 Dickens, Charles, 62

 Donzelli, Beniamino, 256, 258, 259
 Doria d'Angri, Teresa, *see* Lefèbvre, Teresa
 Dumoret, Ippolito, 171-174

 Egg, Jean-Jacques, 8-10, 102, 124
 Emery, Giulio, 100, 167, 168, 174, 207, 217
 Engels, Friedrich, 45
 Errera, Alberto, 165

 Fazzini, Antonio, 43-45
 Febonio, Muzio, 30
 Fenaroli, Guido, 258
 Ferdinand II of Bourbon, 50
 Ferdinand IV of Bourbon, 12
 Ferrer Guardia, Francisco, 214
 Finkler, Walter, 180
 Fioretti, Giulio, 119
 Foligno, Guido, 257
 Fortunato, Ernesto, 237
 Fries, Ernst, 15

 Gaetani di Laurenzana, Luigi, 102
 Gallotti, Domenico, 118
 Gandieri, Ettore, 237
 Gaston, Alfredo, 142
 Gemmiti (family), 200, 203
 Gessner, Giovanni, 140
 Gilberti (family), 259
 Gilberti, Ferruccio, 258
 Giolitti, Giovanni, 149, 152, 153
 Giovannone, Pietro, 207
 Giovannone, Vincenzo, 192, 213, 214
 Gregorovius, Ferdinand, 48, 51-54, 57, 61
 Grévenich, Émile, 119
 Grimaldi, Cesare, 225-227

- Grossi, Federico, 140, 211
 Guidi, Francesco, 172, 250
 Guidorizzi, Emma, 251
- Hackert, Jakob Philipp, 25, 40
 Hoare, Richard Colt, 22, 26, 37
- Iafrate, Amleto, 178, 231
 Iafrate, Edmondo, 178
- Jengo, Giuseppe, 141
- Keller, Federico, 89
- La Costa, Pasquale, 170
 Lagard, Giuseppe, 246
 Lambert (family), 189
 Lambert, Charles, 44
 Lefèbvre, Francesco Ernesto, 48, 55, 57, 61, 89, 90, 100, 120, 134-152, 154, 155, 157-160, 166, 172, 176, 182, 185, 189, 211, 221, 235, 236, 240, 244
 Lefèbvre, Louise «Luisa», see Saluzzo, Louise «Luisa»
 Lefèbvre, André-Isidore, 10, 48, 136, 139, 145, 149
 Lefèbvre (family), 15, 18, 32, 34, 55, 74, 90, 92, 100, 102, 115, 116, 125, 131, 135-139, 141, 148, 155, 158-160, 162, 166, 167, 169-173, 181, 182, 189, 192, 193, 199, 203, 213, 217, 233, 236, 238, 241, 245, 253, 257
 Lefèbvre Álvarez de Toledo y Acuña, Flavia, 136, 137, 143, 148, 153, 155, 172, 234, 235
 Lefèbvre d'Aragona Ruffo Bagnara, Giulia, 135, 136, 143, 146-148, 172, 235, 246-248, 250
- Lefèbvre D'Ovidio (family), 245
 Lefèbvre, Charles-Flavien «Carlo», 8-12, 16, 19, 38, 39, 46, 48-50, 54, 55, 57, 58, 89, 90, 116, 118, 120, 128, 139, 143-145, 155, 157, 158, 161, 168, 174, 182, 217, 218, 221, 232, 240, 241, 243
 Lefèbvre, Rose Anne «Rosanne», 10, 51, 115, 144, 154, 155, 243, 244
 Lefèbvre, Carlo Ernesto, 149, 245
 Lefèbvre, Carlo, 134, 136-143, 148, 149, 151, 153, 155, 159-161, 169, 172, 179, 233, 235-238, 245-250, 254
 Lefèbvre, Francesco «Franz», 61, 100, 106, 134, 136, 139, 141-144, 148-153, 159, 161, 162, 166-174, 176-179, 182, 189, 193, 196, 200, 201, 203, 207, 215, 217-232, 234-236, 242, 243, 246, 247, 250
 Lefèbvre, Teresa, 137, 147, 153-155, 235, 245-247
 Lepreux Roessinger, Sebastiana, 115
 Lepreux, François Claude, 115
 Leusse Raigecourt-Gournay, Lucie, 146
 Levi, Giuseppe, 167
 Locke, John, 205
 Lostritto, Giuseppe, 10
 Luccichenti, Tito, 120
 Lucernari Weiss, Caterina, 177
 Lucernari, Francesco, 181
- Magliocchetti, Bruno, 261, 262
 Malinverni, Giovanni, 118
 Mancini (family), 101, 102

- Manna (family), 35
 Manna, Gioacchino, 10, 32, 37, 44, 46
 Marius, Caius, 7
 Marx, Karl Heinrich, 45
 Matera, Francesco, 253
 Mazio, Giuseppe, 128
 Mazza, Francesco, 224, 225
 Merati, Giulio, 119
 Merlin, Stefano, 192
 Meuricoffre (family), 119
 Meuricoffre, Achille, 46
 Meuricoffre, Oscar, 118
 Mezzanotte, Francesco, 115
 Milazzi Acquaviva d'Aragona, Giulia, 147
 Mollica, Pasquale, 249, 250
 Montgolfier (family), 167, 168
 Montgolfier, Amédée Louis de, 167, 168
 Mulazzi (family), 258
 Murat, Joachim, 7, 9, 49

 Nardone, Bernardo, 192, 207, 214
 Noyer, Edoardo, 121

 Olivetti (family), 256
 Olvitti, Giuseppe, 167
 Orsini, Pietro Francesco, see Benedict XIII (Orsini, Pietro Francesco), Pope
 Ostrogovich, Adrian, 178
 Ostrogovich, Augusto Ugo, 229, 239, 240
 Ostrogovich, Federico Augusto, 178

 Pacichelli, Giovan Battista, 30
 Palombo, Bruno, 261
 Palumbo, Ludovico, 120

 Paquier, Antonio Napoleone, 115
 Parisi, Giuseppe, 26
 Pasteur, Louis, 83
 Pedrini, Cesare, 258
 Picard, Carmine, 246
 Pinelli, Vincenzina, 152, 215
 Pisani, Daniele, 120, 253, 255
 Poerio, Carlo, 120
 Polsinelli, Angelo, 46
 Polsinelli, Giuseppe, 46
 Poppi, Ferdinando, 120

 Raigecourt-Gournay, Raoul Boisgelin de, 146
 Ricci, Oreste, 175-177
 Ricciardi, Francesco, 8
 Rinonapoli, Giuseppe, 219, 220
 Rizzi, Guido, 249, 251
 Roessinger (family), 200
 Roessinger Avitabile, Enrica, 173, 253
 Roessinger, Enrico, 117, 253
 Roessinger, Francesco, 115, 116, 118, 253
 Romanelli, Domenico, 19-21, 23, 26, 28, 30, 32-35, 61
 Rosselli, Alfonso, 120
 Rossi, Francesco, 115
 Rossi, Pellegrino, 11
 Roverio, Stefano, 250

 Salis-Marschlins, Carl Ulysses von, 16, 19, 20
 Saluzzo, Gioacchino di, 147
 Saluzzo, Louise «Luisa» di, 147, 155
 San Germano (family), 126
 Sannicola, Giovanni, 11
 Sanseverino, Vincenzo, 246, 253
 Sava, Raffaele, 8-10, 124

Savoy (dynasty), 205
 Scarfoglio, Edoardo, 137
 Scialoja, Antonio, 11
 Scotto, Pasquale, 190
 Serao, Matilde, 137
 Sorvillo, Natale, 46, 115, 117, 118, 180, 232
 Sorvillo, Nicola, 119

 Tabacchi, Emilio, 170-172
 Tasso, Torquato, 23
 Terribile, Vincenzo, 247, 250
 Trituratori (family), 258
 Tulli (family), 26, 29

 Umberto I of Savoy, 151, 153

 Vallauri, Vito, 218, 227
 Vastarini-Cresi, Alfonso, 139, 140
 Vendrame Ostrogovich, Maria, 178
 Vendrame, Silvio, 120, 218, 227
 Verde, Francesco, 8, 10
 Viscogliosi (family), 200
 Viscogliosi, Angelo, 102, 255
 Viscogliosi, Fernando, 261
 Viscogliosi, Luigi, 255
 Visocchi (brothers), 190
 Visocchi (family), 46, 185
 Vitali, Guido, 223, 224
 Vittorio Emanuele II of Savoy, 125

 Waechtbaecker Dubois
 Lefèbvre, Gisèle «Gisella», 149, 150, 227, 234-238, 241-243, 247, 250, 254
 Walter, Arthur, 179
 Weiss, Emilio, 177, 178

 Zeni, Franco, 257

 Zino (family), 193, 200
 Zino, Lorenzo, 8, 9, 19, 38, 46, 173, 200, 201, 203, 230, 231

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