

**Mario A. Iannaccone**

**The Lefèvre D'Ovidio Family**  
**A Dynasty between the Ages**

**Book 3**



**This is the story of a family, the Lefèvre D'Ovidio, that was so important in Ancien Régime France, in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, in unified Italy and beyond in the 20th century. More than a novel, this is a thrilling story, brought to light for the first time in recent years through painstaking research on almost unpublished sources, which has revealed what time has inexplicably hidden.**





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**Chapters 1-11**

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Cover: Gioacchino La Pira, *I giardini del Palazzo Reale di Chiaia*,  
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LEFEBVRE



LEX DECUS LABOR





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## Chapter 1

### The post-unification crisis First phase

#### The *Amministrazione* after Unity

With the advent of the Unification of Italy, the old administration, then the Company, had become an institution in Naples. First Charles, then Ernesto, had attended the frequent meetings held at the elegant headquarters on the pier in Via del Piliero. Relatives and acquaintances had joined the company, and the meetings often turned into convivial gatherings in the many nearby restaurants. As time went by, the number of ships increased and was constantly renewed, so that ordinary and extraordinary meetings were held. But for some time, the fate of the company had become increasingly uncertain. The administration owned six steamers of greater tonnage than the six and five owned by Rubattino and Florio respectively. In those years, as in the case of the *Maria Cristina*, there were increasing difficulties in paying suppliers and repairers. At a certain point, an unthinkable problem arose: the survival of the company. The director, by law, was being attacked jointly and severally by creditors with such a crescendo that the situation became untenable. As if that were not enough, the war began. In October 1860, the Sorrento was seized by Garibaldi's provisional government to tow a brig carrying passengers to Genoa.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Domenico Laviano has been removed from his post as Inspector General of the Post Office, removing any remaining possibility of

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<sup>1</sup> *Gazzetta del popolo*, Naples, No. 280, 9 October 1860, p. 721.

receiving this service from the government.<sup>2</sup>

At the first meeting after the unification of the old administration, now the Shipping Company of the Two Sicilies, on 30 December 1861, Ernesto Lefèbvre held 6 of the 940 shares issued. A few weeks later, he acquired another 3, or about 1%, and then a few more, until he had about 9,000 ducats, to which must be added the 65,000 ducats borrowed in 1852. The Catalano-De Berner and Lefèbvre families were in fact the largest shareholders. The Compagnia promoted several bond buying campaigns during these months, but it is easy to understand that it became increasingly difficult for them to succeed, also because of the war, the collapse of the Kingdom and the changes in power.

Another serious problem that had stifled the Society was its inability to obtain permanent services from the State, both postal and transport, although efforts had been made in this direction after the interregnum of 1856-1857. The situation on this front had definitely deteriorated. The transport promised by the newly united Kingdom of Italy was not granted. Its administrators protested when they discovered that some northern shipping companies, particularly Genoese and with Piedmontese capital, were obtaining conventions for postal transport from which the southern companies were excluded. Controversy raged and protests were made through official channels and public statements. The company urged its contact in Genoa, Giulio Degrossi, to act. He kept the Neapolitans informed of developments by travelling between Genoa and Turin. Basically, the Director of Posts and Telegraphs of the Piedmontese Ministry believed that the company was in a difficult situation: it was, but the situation became untenable after 1860. He therefore preferred to exclude it from the tenders and entrust the service to Piedmontese companies. The managers responded by presenting the figures from their last balance sheet for 1860, which was still positive. Despite the evidence, nothing could be done. The Piedmontese government treated Naples as a colony.<sup>3</sup> This statement may be

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<sup>2</sup> *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, 1935, p. 388.

<sup>3</sup> This is today historical evidence that is difficult to refute. One can at best compare classical and critical interpretations. One has to wonder whether



nuanced, articulated, but it is hard to escape this impression when reading the rich bibliography on the southern economy in the immediate post-unification period. Other similar negotiations in other sectors ended in nothing, and the lack of expected orders began to seriously deteriorate the company's profit and loss accounts.

In that year, due to other difficulties, the company's depleted coffers were no longer able to pay its various debts to bondholders, lenders and third parties. In particular, Ernesto Lefèbvre, Cavalier Enrico Catalano, the latter's daughter and sister-in-law, Gioacchino di Saluzzo, acting on behalf of his daughter Lucia, remained creditors of the company for large sums. In 1863, Saluzzo had granted a loan of around 30,000 ducats to the company's administrator. The meeting of 28 June 1864 denounced some of the main problems that, in addition to dwindling liquidity, were causing great difficulties for the company. The same meeting elected Prince Ferdinando Pignatelli Strongoli (son of Francesco) as president and Pietro Prota, a former soldier and officer in the Bourbon army, as secretary. But Baron Gaetano Labonia, a well-known Garibaldian, and Saluzzo, a Senator of the Kingdom, sat on the Council: it could not be assumed that the Company was a den of Bourbonists, as had been claimed. In any case, they had all sworn allegiance to the new king, so suspicion of pro-Bourbonism was unlikely. Saluzzo and Labonia showed how important the rulers of Naples were still involved in the affairs of the troubled shipping company.

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many flourishing companies, such as those under discussion, would have gone bankrupt or closed down without this treatment. For a comparison of the various interpretations of the Risorgimento, see at least Lucy Riall, *Il Risorgimento. Storia e interpretazioni*, Donzelli, Rome 2007; Rosario Romeo, *Risorgimento e capitalismo*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1959; Aldo Servidio, *L'imbroglione nazionale. Unità e unificazione dell'Italia (1860-2000)*, Guida, Naples 2002; Antonio Nicoletta, *'E furon detti Briganti...'. Mito e realtà della "Conquista del Sud"*, Rimini, Il Cerchio, 2001.

## The Polluce case again

In August and September 1841, in an operation without precedent in the history of deep-sea navigation, an attempt was made to rescue the Polluce, whose sinking point was marked by a cork float. The operation involved many ships (10), authorities and technicians. Technically, it was an almost impossible operation, given the state of the Polluce's hull, which had been torn open, and the depth of over 100 metres. After 40 days of work, the wreck was raised a few metres from the seabed, but the unpredictability of the weather meant that the operation had to be abandoned due to strong currents. Raffaele Rubattino - who, like Guerrazzi, was a coal miner - was in a hurry to salvage the wreck and its "enormous" contents, and the attempt cost him about 50% of the cost of the ship itself.<sup>4</sup> For this and other reasons - such as the fact that the ship was carrying gold that James Rothschild had ordered to be transported to Livorno - the sinking of the Polluce is a fascinating historical mystery that has never been solved. Perhaps the ship was carrying gold to finance early attempts at revolt and unification? Was the *Mongibello* really sent to sink the cargo that Rubattino was desperately trying to save? These are questions that go beyond the scope of this article. But it should be noted that they were considered and that there is some support for them. Perhaps this interpretation, better substantiated, could explain the undoubted hostility that the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore* experienced from the Genoese and the Savoy after the Unification. Other historical hypotheses assume the existence of a cargo of about 170,000 coins loaded in Naples and intercepted by Bourbon spies, which would have been a hypothetical financing of the Russian Consulate in Livorno for operations against the Kingdom: a hypothesis that is not very credible considering the good relations between the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the Russian Empire. Another hypothesis concerns the alleged existence of Rubattino's money from operations he did not wish to disclose. More credible today is the trail that leads to the English

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<sup>4</sup> Enrico Cappelletti - Gianluca Mirto, *L'oro dell'Elba*, cit., pp. 172-191.

Rothschilds, who, according to the cargo documents, were carrying valuables (and a lawyer for the Queen of England was interested in the case), probably destined for political operations that had their head office in the Liberal or Carbonara community of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. In fact, this cargo was of interest to many: another attempt was made to recover the money in 1859, and others in the following decades until 1982 and perhaps beyond.<sup>5</sup>

### Extreme remedies

The total number of shares at that time was 321 and the number of valid votes 125. Money was sought for the Capri and other debts. In vain. The good Neapolitan society was no longer willing to invest in the company. In addition, on 20 and 21 February and 27 and 28 March, the port of Naples was hit by a strong storm with extremely violent winds that damaged many ships, including two of the company's vessels moored in Via Piliero. In particular, the *Vesuvio* had suffered the breakage of the starboard halyard and the molinello or paddle box, i.e. the sails, a mast and expensive mechanical mechanisms. The damage was estimated at 38,510.34 lire (9062.88 ducats) and it was necessary to repair this boat in order to continue the repairs on the *Capri*. As liquidity was scarce, it was announced that further debts had been contracted by acquiring loans on the market, for a total of 120,106 lire (28,261 ducats) from 1 January 1864. Of the company's six ships at the time (*Capri*, *Vesuvio*, *Sorrento*, *Amalfi*, *Francesco I*, *Mongibello*), two were laid up. In order to pay the debts incurred, it was decided to issue new bonds for 120,000 lire, both for repairs and for the payment of debts due.<sup>6</sup> In the meantime, as we shall see, the board of directors concluded an agreement to sell two more steamers, the *Sorrento* and the

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<sup>5</sup> Enrico Cappelletti-Gianluca Mirto, *L'oro dell'Elba*, cit., pp. 228-232. The issue is complex, dealt with in many books from time to time and here, as mentioned, can only be touched upon.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

*Amalfi*, to the detriment of three creditors in particular: Ernesto Lefèbvre, Enrico Catalano, his daughter Luisa and his sister-in-law Marianna De Berner.

The meeting of 28 November 1864 was convened a few months before the bankruptcy.<sup>7</sup> Two members of the Neapolitan upper class, Prince Marino Doria d'Angri (1827-1905) and Baron Labonia, were appointed president and secretary of the meeting. The dramatic report was read by the latter, who, in his words, mixed hope with difficulty, but made no secret of the desperate situation. At the beginning of November, after a long period of repairs, the *Capri* resumed its service on the Marseilles-Palermo route, a route also followed at the time by the *Vesuvio* and the *Mongibello*. The Baron praised the efficiency of these ships, which carried passengers, goods and mail, and, he added polemically, "without being obliged to receive compensation from the State". In fact, the official postal service had been entrusted for years to Florio, who was able to buy new boats with the money he received. Every attempt to lease the boats to the government had failed, despite the director's efforts. A contract was then announced with the Società di Industrie Meccaniche (the Macry & Soci) for the repair and maintenance of the steamships, so that the company's own workshops, which had become too expensive, could be closed. An attempt to sell boats in Tunis and Marseilles was also announced, but was unsuccessful. A total of 274 bonds had been sold and the repair of the *Capri* had been completed. At the time, the boat was found to have obvious internal damage: Labonia criticised the CEO for failing to return the company to the situation it had been in during previous crises, the last of which was in 1857. The latter, Federico Stolte, resigned, now disheartened.<sup>8</sup> This rich Neapolitan businessman, very industrious, belonged to a prominent family of German origin. His adventure in maritime affairs ended there for the time being.

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<sup>7</sup> *Compagnia di Navigazione delle Due Sicilie. Estratto delle deliberazioni dell'adunanza generale straordinaria degli azionisti nella tornata del 28 novembre 1864*, Napoli 1864.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

In 1864 and 1865, protests against cheques and bills of exchange began. Director Augusto Sideri personally risked arrest for the company's debts. At the general meeting of 18 November 1864, the project of chartering the two propeller steamers Sorrento and Amalfi to a Marseille company was discussed. At a subsequent meeting on 25 January 1865, the board announced that the managing director had begun negotiations to sell the *Mongibello* to Marseille. It was expected to fetch 200,000 lire. All that was obtained was a loan of 117,000 lire - although more was hoped for - from *Clerc & Soci* of Marseilles in exchange for an 'insurance' - a form of preventive and non-enforceable attachment - on *Pompei* and *Mongibello*.<sup>9</sup>

The Marseille company agreed to pay for various routes and to provide some cash, but in a limited way compared to the Neapolitan company's needs. The board also announced that it had begun negotiations for the sale of the *Stromboli* and the *Amalfi* (renamed the *Sorrento*) and had received offers of 80,000 lire for the former and 100,000 lire (a much lower figure than the loans from Ernesto Lefèbvre, De Berner and Catalano) for the latter, offers that were expected to be accepted, subject to the necessary approval of the shareholders. However, the board of directors did not mention the privileged loan bonds inscribed on the two steamers in favour of Lefèbvre, Catalano and De Berner: a ten-year legal battle would ensue.

The lack of prospects, the deafness of the government, the impossibility of obtaining new capital in Naples and Marseilles, forced the sale or abandonment of all the steamships except the *Capri* and the *Vesuvio*, which were still profitable, and the abandonment of other lines, such as the Adriatic or the ports of the Middle East, or even the extension of the lines to Palermo. When the 400 ducats annual rent of the Officine expired, they took the opportunity to close them down, dismissing the technicians and clerks and keeping only one or two people for administrative duties.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 3-4.



## Gales

On 15 March 1865, a crowded and dramatic general meeting of shareholders met again in the company's premises at Vico Piliero 1 to hear the board's report on the state of affairs. The report revealed that the board had sold the *Stromboli* and the *Amalfi* for 180,000 lire (100,000 for the *Stromboli* and 80,000 for the *Amalfi*, now *Sorrento*) to Giuseppe (Joseph) Cartoux of Marseilles (we do not know his age, but he died around 1871) by a private deed executed in Naples on 15 February 1865. The latter is said to have lived in Naples at Strada Grottone di Palazzo no. 52, as a merchant of various sorts, married to a certain Elisabetta Fiedler (widowed in 1872). At this point the bondholders, expecting an injection of liquidity, demanded payment of their sums without mentioning the loan taken out by the lenders and arguing that their claims should be transferred to a third steamer, the wheel steamer *Vesuvio*. It is difficult to escape the suspicion, expressed by other historians, that Cartoux was a front man and made the purchase on behalf of others.<sup>11</sup>

By this time the two steamers were already in the port of Marseilles. The contract for the sale of the two steamers was concluded between 13 and 15 July 1864. Subsequently, the so-called 'clearing' of all claims and obligations was carried out by placing the ship 'under the flag', i.e. in the name of a certain Mr Tessier (probably another 'front man'), who had chartered the *Sorrento* for 15 months (at 4250 lire per month for the first year and 4675 for the following months) to sail from one side of the Mediterranean to the other. Only after this operation was the payment made.

After this turn of events, the board of directors resigned en bloc "for reasons of mere delicacy". Ernesto Lefèbvre, who felt that his rights had been seriously violated, tried to have himself elected as one of the new directors at the meeting of 9 April 1864, in order to play a more active role in the management of the company, but was defeated in the

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<sup>11</sup> *Fra Spazio e tempo: studi in onore di Giuseppe de Rosa*, II, Edizioni scientifiche italiane, Rome 1995, p. 281.

vote.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, protests and executions began to rain down on the company's directors. A liquidation committee had to be appointed. The list of candidates included René Degas (grandfather of the painter Edgar Degas), Federico Laviano del Tito, the Count of Montesantangelo, but also Federico Stolte, the Prince of Alessandria, the Count of Balsorano, the Duke of Cardinale, Gaetano Labonia, Augusto Sideri and Gioacchino di Saluzzo. Ernesto was appointed deputy director, while Angelo Persico was appointed director. In the following days, another meeting was held: it was admitted that it was impossible to pay a debt to Saluzzo and the bill of exchange had been protested. The 180,000 lire obtained from the sale of the *Stromboli* and *Sorrento* had not been enough, but with this money the debts and obligations to Mr Tessier, the Banca di Credito Italiano, Mr Stolte and Messrs Patania, Imperato and Degas had been settled.<sup>13</sup> At that point a dramatic conclusion was reached, namely that bankruptcy was inevitable.<sup>14</sup>

According to Lefèvre's lawyers, this "procedure" was irregular and certainly fraudulent, even if it had been carried out in accordance with law and custom, because it deprived Lefèvre, Catalano and the Berners of a large claim of their own. A few days after signing the deed of sale, the parties appeared before the notary Moreno in Naples and signed a contract dated 25 February 1866.<sup>15</sup> Gennaro de Riso asked whether the guarantees for various types of debt had been passed on to the Vesuvio. The answer was that they were guaranteed and that the two largest bondholders were Ernesto Lefèvre (8900 ducats, plus credit for the loan) and the Berner sisters (14,900 ducats, plus credit for the loan).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 183-184.

<sup>13</sup> *Compagnia di Navigazione delle Due Sicilie. Extract of the resolutions of the extraordinary general meeting of shareholders at the session of 15 March 1865*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> ASN, Tribunale di Commercio, Atti depositati. *I creditori a cambio marittimo su' vapori Sorrento e Stromboli contro il signor Cartoux*, 20 September 1866, Napoli 1866, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

Another meeting was called for 1 May 1865, the last one, to prepare the documents for the handover of the books to the Court.

### **A long legal case**

As it turned out, in 1865, Gennaro de Riso and Ernesto Lefèbvre resigned from their positions in the company and filed a lawsuit, the former as lawyer and the latter as plaintiff, as soon as they became aware of what was happening at a shareholders' meeting. De Riso, a good friend of Ernesto Lefèbvre, belonged to a wealthy Neapolitan family of lawyers and professionals. They protested against the proceedings and demanded that the purchaser pay them back. A lawsuit was brought by the Count of Balsorano, Enrico Catalano, Marianna and Luisa de Berner on one side and Giuseppe Cartoux on the other. The summons was issued on 3 August 1865. Shortly afterwards, Gioacchino, acting on behalf of his youngest daughter, joined the case. He had other open cases with the company: he was suing for the repayment of bonds, but above all for a loan of 7,000 ducats that had been protested in March 1865. The lawsuits pitted two groups of Neapolitan notables against each other: the Count of Montesantangelo and Ilario Degas, on the one hand, and Lefèbvre and Saluzzo, on the other. The legal battle was bitter, costly and lasted over a decade. Judging by the tone of various documents, most of which are now preserved in the State Archives in Naples, it is likely that personal relationships were at stake. The sums at stake were enormous, as was the bankruptcy of a company that employed hundreds of people but had already gone bankrupt before Lefèbvre and Saluzzo's lawsuit.

However, the case was brought against Giuseppe Cartoux, who was ordered to pay the sums owed to him as a creditor of the *Sorrento* and *Stromboli* steamers, i.e. to the Count of Balsorano for 23,375 lire on the *Sorrento* and six on the *Stromboli*, and to Messrs. Catalano and De Berner for 57,375 lire, for fifteen bonds on the *Sorrento* and twelve on the *Stromboli*. The applicants also claimed interest on these sums and

the costs of the proceedings. Gioacchino di Saluzzo was added to the main petition, demanding the payment of four bonds held by his younger daughter Lucia, daughter of Maria Luisa Lefèbvre. Cartoux defended himself by having his lawyers argue that the plaintiffs had no privileged claims on the ships Sorrento and Stromboli because they had consented to the sale by transferring their rights to the Vesuvius and because the buyer had cleared the ships of all privileged claims. In this case, reference was made to an article of maritime law (Laws of Exception, art. 199), according to which ships that had sailed to other ports in the name of another shipowner for more than 60 days and without the objection of the owners or creditors could be transferred to their ownership. In the light of these reasons, counsel for the petitioners then asked: "If the shipowner has a ship built without his own means, and borrows it from others, and uses the money to make this purchase, would we deny the lender the right to be reimbursed with privilege from the thing purchased with his means?"<sup>17</sup>

Lefèbvre's lawyers protested that the letters of 1852 and 1853 expressly granted their clients the privilege of the special administration of the money used to purchase the Sorrento and the Stromboli, without which the company would not have been able to buy the steamers. This credit privilege was not only authorised by law, but was also formally accepted by the party concerned and published in the registry of the commercial court. The creditors were granted the privilege, which gave them a special mortgage on the hull, tools, machinery and fittings of the new steamers; a mortgage that was privileged over any other credit, because they had provided the money to build the ships. Ernesto had not agreed to the sale proposed by the company's board of directors, which had instead been approved by the members' meeting, members who were, however, debtors. Lefèbvre intervened in the meeting of 25 January 1865, when the sale was authorised, but as a creditor, because he had signed the company's resolution with the clause that he *'reserved the right to assert his privileged creditor rights on the steamers that*

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

were being sold'.<sup>18</sup> When Mr Cartoux became the purchaser of the ships, he had some knowledge of the resolution authorising the sale and found Lefèbvre's reservation written on it. It was pointed out that, according to the agreement, the ship had left the port of Naples in the name and at the risk of Cartoux, where its former owner was and where the creditors lived. The latter should have immediately objected to the departure: but the creditors, who were not part of the direct management of the company and were lenders, could not know that a ship had left in order to "rectify the deficiencies".<sup>19</sup> Not even the usual notices in the newspapers or at the gates of the city of Naples were put up. As a result, the steamships never returned to Naples, as certified by the commander of the port of Naples.<sup>20</sup>

Despite good reasons, Lefèbvre and Partners lost the case in the first instance. The first section of the Commercial Court of Naples found in favour of the creditor and exonerated the main managers and directors from any liability. The court also rejected the possibility of holding Serra, Pignone del Carretto, Laviano, Labonia, Cartoux, Degas and others jointly and severally liable. Lefèbvre and associates lost the case not because the existence of the claim was disputed, but because it was not claimed before the company went bankrupt. The question of which privileged loans were to be repaid first and which were not was therefore disputed; it was stated that at the time of the company's bankruptcy, declared on 25 November 1865, the Stromboli and the Sorrento had already been sold (in January of that year). The two steamers were therefore not part of the bankruptcy assets.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16. "For the purpose of executing the purge of any obligation or credit, privileged or unsecured, it is agreed that the price will only be paid after two months counting from the day on which the law declares the purge to have taken place according to the different cases indicated in articles 199 and 200 of the laws of exception. *Ibid*, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>21</sup> The point of the case revolved at length around the interpretation to be given to certain lines of the Laws of Exception in force in the early years of Unity, but later amended, which attributed to ships the status of immovable and not

The claim was rejected on the grounds that the loan for a "real estate" acquired by the bankrupt company, which was subject to the risks of the business according to the rules of the so-called "maritime exchange", could not be included among the privileged claims. This claim was therefore subject to the risks of the sea. The procedural history continued. The last document relating to the dispute is dated 1874. It is Lefèbvre, by Saluzzo and Catalano against the heir of Cartoux, an appeal whose text was printed by the Stamperia del Fibreno. Giuseppe Cartoux had died, probably in 1870. His wife, Elisabetta Fiedler, was sued. According to the records, neither Lefèbvre nor any of the others ever received their money back, as there are no other documents to prove that the case continued. Gioacchino of Saluzzo died in the same year, 1874.<sup>22</sup>

Known for his choleric temperament and the violent passion with which he approached his business affairs, Gioacchino was involved in another parallel dispute, already mentioned, against two partners of the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore nel Regno delle Due Sicilie* in the years between 1863 and his death. On 25 November 1863, he had imprudently lent the then director Angelo Prota and the managing partner Domenico Laviano 29,750 lire (7,000 ducats) for the 'repair' of the steamship *Capri*, which had been damaged in a storm in the port.

This dispute was completely separate from the one between Ernesto Lefèbvre and the Catalano-De Berner group. The loan granted by Saluzzo was for 15 months and five days and should have been paid by the end of February 1865, but by that time the company was already in bad shape and the sum was not paid.

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movable property.

<sup>22</sup> The next stage in the affair took place on 10 August 1868 when Gennaro de Riso filed a new petition, which re-discussed the whole matter: the claim of Lefèbvre and associates was admitted but the rules for the alienation of a vessel had to be revised. The case had several hearings during the autumn of 1868 and January 1869 but was again rejected. Again, Lefèbvre and partners filed an application for annulment in 1871. Rejected again and for the same reasons in 1874.

Not even the craftsmen who had refitted the *Capri* were paid, and they in turn sued the company, which found itself in a concentric firestorm of demands for repayment of debts. A protest was lodged and the Marquis Gioacchino di Saluzzo demanded repayment of the sum. In the meantime, the directors of the company had changed, and the unfortunate one was Angelo Persico, who was protested on 2 March 1865 in his capacity as director of the company, and on the following 7 March he was ordered to appear to pay the sum of 29,750 lire, also with personal money.<sup>23</sup> Saluzzo also demanded his arrest for debt, if necessary.

However, a few days later, before the end of November that year, the company was declared bankrupt and the entire dispute was handed over to the liquidators.

## Consequences

In 1858, the Italian government had decided to award the state postal service to the Rubattino & Florio company until 1865, so the Neapolitan company, crushed by competition and without any hope of winning contracts, closed down in 1865 due to bankruptcy. Before the inevitable bankruptcy, the director of the Navigation Company of the Two Sicilies, Mr Laviano, manager of the Royal Post Office, requested and obtained a last, useless and perhaps humiliating meeting at the Ministry in Turin to support the Genoese agent Degrossi. As usual, he was told that consideration was being given to awarding the contract to a single company. Much to Laviano's surprise, he later learnt that the contracts had in fact been divided among several companies, but all of them from the north, particularly Genoa.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, a liquidation commission was set up, which decided to

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<sup>23</sup> ASN, Deed of 7 March 1865.

<sup>24</sup> Luigi de Matteo, *Noi della Meridionale Italia*, cit., 182. See also Lamberto Radogna, *Storia della marina mercantile delle Due Sicilie (1734-1860)*, Mursia 1982.



dismiss all the employees and crews of the boats with effect from 30 September.<sup>25</sup> Angelo Persico was appointed custodian of the steamships until their sale on 15 November. The first auction was abandoned or did not take place (it is not clear), but by the end of the year most of the company's assets had been sold. Indeed, the bankruptcy hearings continued throughout 1866 and 1867. Until, at the hearing on 9 July 1867, the Court of Cassation in Rome declared inadmissible all the appeals that had been lodged in the meantime in a last-ditch attempt to save what could be saved. The remaining assets of the company were therefore definitively liquidated and the company ceased to exist.<sup>26</sup>

According to Luigi de Matteo, Naples and the Mezzogiorno "lost an active and competitive company", a company "endowed with substantial capital and the expression of consolidated entrepreneurial skills", and which, unlike the three subsidised companies in the north, was a joint stock company, i.e. it had a structure suitable for expansion, with widespread share ownership, and was not a company concentrated in a few hands.<sup>27</sup> In fact, a study of the company's accounts from 1840 to 1860 shows that its shareholders were increasingly numerous and belonged to the cream of Neapolitan society. Perhaps the company was disadvantaged because it was judged to be pro-Bourbon? This is what is written in the book dedicated to the Florio company.<sup>28</sup> This dynastic nostalgia certainly existed, but it was not widespread among the company's protagonists, who were mostly businessmen. It is more likely that the other companies had better political referents. In the end, the fate of this promising company was also sacrificed to inappropriate lobbying.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, its collapse had a depressing effect on the Neapolitan economy.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 202.

<sup>26</sup> *La Legge. Monitore giudiziario e amministrativo del Regno d'Italia*, Martedì 6 agosto n. 63 (anno VII) 1867, Roma, pp. 750-751.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 206-207.

<sup>28</sup> Orazio Cancila, *I Florio. Storia di una dinastia imprenditoriale*, Milan, Bompiani 2008, pp. 120-125 et seq.

<sup>29</sup> Lamberto Radogna, *Storia della marina mercantile delle Due Sicilie (1734-1860)*, Mursia 1982, p. 56 ff. and p. 119 ff. *Milan*,

In September 1865, hundreds of labourers, porters, sailors, maintenance mechanics, shipboard and transport personnel lost their jobs. Hundreds more lost their jobs in the workshops, where regular refits were carried out. Several thousand people, including those in the support industries, were reduced to poverty. Many of them were forced to emigrate on the steamships that began to leave for America.

The company's steamships continued to operate for a few dozen years until they were dismantled, usually before 1914, because they were too obsolete. Unlike the Neapolitan Company, its closest competitor, the *Compagnia Siciliana dei Battelli a Vapore*, founded in 1840 by Vincenzo Florio and his associates, managed to survive the pre- and post-unification period, partly because it was granted a lucrative contract for the transport of mail by the Bourbon Kingdom and also by the unified government of the Kingdom of Italy.

It also had a majority shareholder who used the money earned from the flourishing Marsala trade; the Florio family invested a lot of money and managed the company directly, allowing it to expand to the point where, in 1881, it merged with another company that had expanded in the meantime, Rubattino of Genoa.

The history of the former Sicard, then *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore nel Regno delle Due Sicilie*, is highly significant in terms of the characteristics of the transport industry in the Bourbon capital: on the one hand, attentive to modernisation, on the other, dependent on foreign technology and, moreover, squeezed by liquidity constraints. However, it has often been pointed out that the total number of Bourbon ships tripled between 1818 and 1860, and at the time of unification represented 40 per cent of all Italian shipping. This was, of course, partly due to geography: much of the Lombardy-Venetia region could not participate in this competition, but Genoa could.

To sum up, a recent author points out that technology was dependent on foreign countries and, apart from the cases of companies that used steamers with propellers or wheels, most of them continued to use sails well after 1860; on the other hand, the average tonnage was rather low, many ships had wooden hulls and most of the vessels were used for cabotage or fishing. Moreover, due to historical circumstances and the

growing importance of Atlantic and Pacific trade, the Bourbon Navy began to find itself behind the times and cut off from the main international trade routes. However, as it turned out, the same shortcomings of the Bourbon Navy could also be attributed to the Italian navy in general.<sup>30</sup>

As has already been noted, for example by Luigi de Matteo, the *Compagnia di Navigazione a Vapore* was at the time of its closure, or at least shortly before it, Italy's largest shipowner in terms of tonnage (excluding warships, of course). Its six steamers still in service at the time of unification had a net tonnage of over 1800, compared with 1329 for the six smaller Rubattino ships.<sup>31</sup> Immediately after came *Florio & C.*

The allied industries, as already mentioned, were considerable. The Pietrarsa shipyards, which maintained and repaired ships and also built boilers, employed 800 workers, most of them specialists. In the same years, the Castellammare di Stabia shipyards employed no less than 3,400 workers, including skilled workers, labourers and clerks, figures that allowed a comparison with the Genoa shipyards.<sup>32</sup>

## **The Shipping Company of the Kingdom and Southern Italy**

The eventful history of the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore* is unique in the history of shipping companies in the South. What was unprecedented was its ability to attract investors for share (bond) placements, which in 1840 involved about 200 people and at

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<sup>30</sup> Maurizio Lupo, *Il calzare di piombo: materiali di ricerca sul mutamento tecnologico* Franco Angeli, Milano 2017, p. 45. In general, the contribution by P. Frascani, *A vela e a vapore, Economie, culture e istituzioni del mare in Italia nell'Ottocento*, Donzelli, Roma 2001, is interesting.

<sup>31</sup> Luigi de Matteo, *Noi della meridionale Italia*, cit., p. 149 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Luigi de Rosa, *Iniziativa e capitale straniero nell'industria metalmeccanica del Mezzogiorno 1840-1904*, Giannini, Naples 1969, p. 63. From the data reported by De Rosa, it appears that the railway and naval metalworking factories in Naples had the same numbers as the workshops in Sampierdarena.

least sixty family groups. The numbers varied, but at times reached over 300 people. The fact that half of them were French confirms the importance of this nationality for the Neapolitan city. Naples had strong links with the French Midi, with Montpellier, but above all with the great port of Marseille. Then there was the French Decade, which, although it had its dark sides, also had very positive aspects in terms of technical and bureaucratic modernisation, which were then permanently absorbed. But the aforementioned tariff concessions, which encouraged steamship transport, also benefited a Sicilian entrepreneur, Vincenzo Florio (1799-1864), a merchant active in various sectors, from tobacco to wine, whose story has been told in studies and books. Florio is today much better known than the pioneering capitalists of Neapolitan society. In the case of Sicily, the foreigners who were most interested in doing business on the island were the British. They had their military and commercial stronghold in Malta, but they did not despise the Italian island, which could supply products much in demand by the British. They kept the island for the extraction of sulphur, which they could obtain in abundance and at low prices thanks to an agreement from which the Kingdom tried to free itself on several occasions, but also for wine, Marsala in particular. In 1840 Florio joined forces with the wealthy Englishman Benjamin Ingham (1810-1872) to set up a shipping company.

*The Società dei battelli a vapore siciliana* was founded by Florio and Ingham, his partner in many businesses, with a smaller group of investors than the Neapolitan company (120 partners) and a capital of 35,000 onze (about 210,000 ducats). The declared aim was to break the monopoly of the Neapolitan companies, especially in the transport between Sicily and the continent. The company ordered the construction of its first ship in England, in the shipyards of Greenwich. The 150-horsepower steamer Palermo arrived in the port of Palermo on 27 September 1841. For several years, the company survived by breaking even. There was, after all, a centuries-old rivalry between Naples and Palermo, which would become even more pronounced in 1848 and later with the unification, partly favoured by the Sicilian nobility.

In 1847, Florio bought and delivered the *Indépendent* to Palermo under the French flag. When he dropped anchor in Palermo, he was in the midst of revolution. Thus, in 1848, the revolutionary government seized the *Palermo* but not the *Indépendent*. At that time, the first company was closed and opened the *Impresa Ingham e Florio per la navigazione a vapore dei piroscafi siciliani*. When the revolt was over, the ship, renamed the *Diligente*, began its voyages around Sicily. In 1851 Florio ordered the construction of the *Corriere Siciliano* at the Thompson shipyards in Glasgow. It was a 250-horsepower steamer able to carry a hundred passengers in first and second class. It began to sail the Palermo-Marseilles route, calling at the same ports as the ships of the Neapolitan company. In 1856, unlike the Neapolitan company, the Sicilian company succeeded in concluding an agreement with the Bourbon government for the transport of soldiers and material, in return for an annual payment of 7,500 ducats; it then managed to obtain the postal service in Sicily with good margins. Why Florio succeeded where the Neapolitan company failed is not entirely clear. Indeed, while Naples had acquired the know-how for building iron hulls and boilers from the Pietrarsa workshops, Palermo was still completely dependent on England. Thanks to favourable political contacts (which the Neapolitan company did not have), Florio was able to obtain the coveted concession for the postal service between Naples and Sicily, with an advance of 30,000 ducats per year, a service that was then extended for another 6 years for the same amount. With this money he bought new ships: first the *Etna* and then the *Eclettico*.

The *Eclettico*, in particular, gave the company a considerable competitive advantage, as it travelled at the then exceptional speed of 13 knots. During the war, the Bourbons chartered the Florio ships, equipping them with cannons to guard the Sicilian coast. They were then requisitioned by Garibaldi in the operations following the landing of the Thousand. When they returned to the Florios, only the *Etna* was unserviceable and irreparably ruined and was therefore sunk. By then the company had five boats: the *Diligente*, the *Corriere Postale*, the *Archimede* and the *Eclettico*. During the post-unification period, Florio

became increasingly prosperous until it became a large shipping company with dozens of boats and ships by the end of the century.

## The Royal Fleet

In 1836, after taking away the monopoly of steam navigation with an exclusive port of call from the then Naples Navigation Company, King Ferdinand II created the *Delegazione Reale dei Pacchetti a Vapore* with the aim of establishing a regular service for the transport of mail and passengers particularly with Sicily. From that moment on, Sicard knew it had a competitor. The King himself had decided that the small shipping company, which had been created with his help, would have to stand on its own feet in the market; it would have to make wise managerial choices. He began by managing two wooden wheeled ships bought in England, the *Nettuno* and the *Ferdinando II*. The latter in particular is well documented. Built between 1833 and 1834 at the behest of the King at the Union Dock shipyards in London, it had a very high funnel to facilitate sailing in windy weather. These steamships were later joined by the English steam schooner *Santa Wenefreda*. After a few years of service in the country of construction, she caught fire, was sold for a good price and then partially rebuilt in Castellammare.

Finally, in 1839, the *Delegazione Reale dei Pacchetti a Vapore* was abolished for lack of profit and the three ships were incorporated into the Royal Navy where they continued to serve as a link between Naples and Sicily.<sup>33</sup> A year later, in 1840, the King purchased three steamers, the *Nettuno*, the *Lilibeo* and the *Peloro*, in order to organise regular transport of mail, travellers and goods. This service was entrusted to the General Administration of Posts and Procures, under the Ministry of Public Works. The service was inaugurated in 1842 and was expanded

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<sup>33</sup> The ship was later incorporated into the navy of the Kingdom of Sardinia and then into the united navy, after undergoing various improvements, and was finally dismantled in 1861. She previously had a rated power of 180 horsepower, after a refit 330.

the following year, when three more steamships were purchased, again in England: the *Rondine*, the *Antilope* and the *Argonauta*; two others were purchased in France, the *Palinuro* and the *Misero*, both used exclusively for the postal transport of state documents. In 1846, the postal service between Naples, the ports of Calabria and Sicily was put out to tender and won by *VicesVinci & Co.* of Naples for the Naples-Messina route and by the small shipowner Adolfo Hornbostel for the Naples-Palermo and Palermo-Messina route (and not vice versa). The latter had his offices at Strada Piliero No. 8, next to the headquarters of the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore*. There followed bitter legal issues that lasted several months until Hornbostel was able to start work in 1847.

However, the service was not regular and in 1848 both conventions reverted to the state.<sup>34</sup> As already mentioned, in 1856, the service was briefly entrusted to the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore nel Regno delle Due Sicilie* (1856-1857) until, in 1858, it went to the Florio group for 7 years with a total financing of 210,000 ducats.

## **Willingness for independence**

In 1835 a number of steamships had been bought in England for the Royal Fleet, harbour dredgers like the *Vulcano*, whose engines were built in the fireworks workshop founded in 1830 in Torre Annunziata by the Scottish-born Captain William Robinson (1772-1836). After serving in the British Army, he was appointed director of the Royal Armoury and died in 1836 during a cholera epidemic that particularly affected Castellammare.<sup>35</sup> Between 1840 and 1849, the Castellammare di Stabia shipyard (formerly the Royal Arsenal) was refurbished with machinery purchased in England to adapt it to the new draught of the

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<sup>34</sup> Vittorio Giura, *Contributo alla storia della navigazione a vapore nel Regno delle Due Sicilie*, cit., pp. 720-727.

<sup>35</sup> *Speech delivered at the funeral of Guglielmo Robinson*, Stamperia di Guerra, Naples 1837.

ships: progress in boiler construction and power transmission had made it possible to build wider and longer steamships. As early as 1843, a 300-horsepower frigate, the *Ercole*, was launched, followed by the *Archimede*, the *Carlo III* and the *Sannita*. They were all steam frigates with heavy armaments (pirofregate) for the navy. The Neapolitan shipyard continued to be used for the repair and maintenance of the sailing fleet and for the construction of the small navy. But the sovereign felt the need to free himself from the foreign yoke, as machinery and engineers came from England and France. After Robinson's death, the fireworks workshop was moved to the Royal Palace. In 1840, work began on the construction of Pietrarsa, near Portici, the Royal Fireworks Factory, which by 1841 employed more than 200 workers. Carlo Filangieri founded a school there to train not only machinists, but also future builders of boilers and mechanical vehicles in the management of steam ships. The factory produced steam engines for ships and later for the railways and, together with the private *Officine dei Granili*, played an important role in the early industrialisation of Naples. In 1851 the pirofregata *Ettore Fieramosca* was built in Castellammare, with an engine built in Pietrarsa, the first ship built entirely in Naples, which remained in service until 1883.

## **La Calabro-Sicula**

In the aftermath of the liberalisation decided by the King in 1839, a company was also created to connect Naples with the south of the Kingdom. That very same year, the King had the short text *Sulla Navigazione a Vapore delle Calabrie* published, in which he called for better connections between the capital and the Calabrian ports, especially Reggio Calabria. The initiative came from Andrea de Martino, a pilot on the *Ferdinando I* and *Franescos I*, thus trained on the ships of the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore delle Due Sicilie*. De Martino, after leaving the company for which he worked, acquiring valuable skills on the new type of ships at the time, in 1840



founded the *Società di Navigazione di Battelli a Vapore nel Mediterraneo* di Andrea de Martino and Associati. He armed the ship *Vesuvio* (it had the same name as the other ship, also called *Vesuvio*, owned by the *Amministrazione*), which he had Raffaele Cafiero command, and between 1840 and 1842 organised voyages between Naples, Tropea, Messina and Palermo. When De Martino died in 1842, the company *VicesVinci & Co.* was established in Naples, which armed the *Vesuvio*, later renamed *Polifemos* to emphasise the company's elective Sicilianity, and the *Duca di Calabria*. These ships connected Naples to Messina, stopping in Calabria. In 1846 the company commissioned an English shipyard to build the iron-hulled propeller steamer *Giglio delle onde*, the first with a propeller in the kingdom. The fate of the *Polifemo* shows that many new players are entering the steam transport market in the Kingdom. At the end of 1845, in fact, the steamer was chartered and used by Raffaele Rubattino's company in Genoa but was owned by Domenico Ferrante, director of the *Società Rassicuratrice Rischi marittimi* in Naples.

In 1849 the *Polifemo* and the *Duca di Calabria* took over armed services from the *Società Calabro-Sicula*.<sup>36</sup> The *Duca di Calabria* was owned by Domenico Benucci, the first Sicard partner who had a small ship-owning company in Via Piliero No. 19. As for the *Società Calabro-Sicula*, it still survived a few years after 1862, administered by the director of the joint-stock shipping company *Urania*, Carlo Cacace, a company that had its headquarters at 16 Via Piliero.<sup>37</sup> This street, elegant and wide at the time, before becoming an alley between two concrete coves, was the real heart of the Neapolitan shipowners' business. During the 1848 uprisings in Sicily, the steamships of the *Calabro-Sicula* were requisitioned by the Bourbon army to transport troops. Business was quite good and in 1854 it was decided to purchase the *Calabrese*. In 1856 the *Polifemo* underwent a refit and continued sailing under the name *Ercole*. The company survived the Unification

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<sup>36</sup> *Newspaper of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies*, second half of 1849.

<sup>37</sup> *Italian Almanac for the Year 1862*, p. 2.

and continued for some years.<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that in those same years the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore*, despite its long history, was struggling to find shareholders. Had it not been saved by the loan from Lefèbvre, Catalano and De Berner, which enabled it to purchase two new steamers, it would probably not have survived beyond that year. The attempt to set up new companies hoping to make money on the Neapolitan market therefore seems unrealistic. Such an attempt was made in 1853 by Giuseppe Cianelli, a Neapolitan shipping agent with an office in Largo San Ferdinando 48, who founded Giuseppe Cianelli & C. with three English-built propeller steamers, the *Elba*, the *Partenope* and the *Newa*.<sup>39</sup>

In 1855 the company became a limited partnership under the name of *Giuseppe Cianelli & C. Vapori ad Elica* and continued to operate two steamers, the *Elba* and the *Partenope*. In 1860, the elderly Cianelli retired and the company was taken over by a partner, Francesco de la Tour, who had been an active shareholder in the limited partnership with his entire family and who founded the *Società dei vapori ad elica napoletani del conte Francesco de la Tour* with the same ships as Cianelli. In 1860 the two steamers were requisitioned to transport troops to Sicily. When they returned to service, the newcomers found it impossible to compete with the Florio. The company was liquidated in 1864.<sup>40</sup>

In 1842, the *Società di Navigazione di Domenico Bellini ed Enrico Quadri* founded in Naples, obtained a concession for the route between the Sicilies and the Americas Sicily and America, but the project was abandoned due to numerous difficulties. It was taken up again in 1852 by Luigi and Salvatore de Pace, owners of sailing ships covering various Mediterranean routes, who formed the *Siculo-Transatlantica*

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<sup>38</sup> In 1850, an attempt was made in Naples to set up a propeller boat company called *Società anonima per la navigazione dei piroscafi con elice*, but it did not find any shareholders. Carlo Perfetto, *Vicende della Marina mercantile a vapore*, p. 64 ff.

<sup>39</sup> *Almanacco reale del Regno delle Due Sicilie per l'anno bisestile 1840*, Stamperia Reale Napoli 1840, p. 375.

<sup>40</sup> Lamberto Radogna, *Storia della Marina mercantile*, pp. 99-101.

company. They armed the steamship *Sicilia*, built in Glasgow, and in 1854 made the first voyage to New York in 26 days (not a few, when sailing ships could take 15). The steamer was commanded by a member of a famous family of ship captains, Ferdinando Cafiero. The 1854 voyage was the only one made because it was found that there was no margin for profit in view of the considerable risks.<sup>41</sup>

However, between 18 and 20 May 1854 alone, 20,000 Italian emigrants landed in New York. When the crisis in the south worsened after the unification and after 1873, the flow was channelled by companies organised on large transport ships. At that point, many of the shareholders of the defunct *Amministrazione* who had bought shares in the *Società Industriale Partenopea* also entered the business. It brought tens of thousands of emigrants to Ellis Island, New York, especially in the 1860s and 1870s, and offered a complete expatriation service, including document preparation, finding a job, an apartment, a social safety net and a loan.

## The Rubattino

Another important steamship company was founded in Genoa in 1838, the *De Luchi, Rubattino & C.*, with the chartered steamship *Colombo*, which remained in the north of the Bourbon Kingdom on the fast line Genoa-Livorno.<sup>42</sup> In 1839, a second entity was founded, the *Società in accomandita per la navigazione a vapore sul Mediterraneo*, which covered Naples, Livorno and Civitavecchia. The company's share capital came mainly from wealthy Milanese. The first steamships owned by the company were the *Dante*, the *Virgilio* the *Castore* and the *Polluce*. After the accident in 1841, the company lost half of its share capital. In 1844, the company became *Compagnia Rubattino* and overcame the crisis. In that year it had six steamships. The *Lombardo*

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 114-118,

<sup>42</sup> Giorgio Doria, *Debiti e gloria, la Compagnia di Rubattino, 1839-1881*, Marietti, Genoa 1990, p. 20.

and the *San Giorgio* were added to those already owned and others were chartered in the months of greatest traffic. Rubattino also did business in other sectors but his fortune was to belong to the political party that supported the Unification of Italy. It was he who supplied Carlo Pisacane (1810-1857) with ships for his enterprise, and who chartered the *Piemonte* and *Lombardo* to Giuseppe Garibaldi. It was one of three companies to obtain postal concessions, along with the *Periano* and Florio's *Società dei Vapori Postali*. The *Lombardo* had also come into the interest of Augusto Viollier on behalf of the shipping company he chaired. He had tried to buy it in 1844, but the deal had fallen through. The boat had thus come into the possession of the Sardinian steamship company (Rubattino) in 1845.<sup>43</sup> It was saved by the state from bankruptcy in 1869.<sup>44</sup> The company was rescued several times and after the development of the railways the era of profitable concessions also came to an end. However Rubattino realised the importance of the Middle Eastern routes and extended the Genoa-Livorno line to Alexandria and Porto Said (as far as Bombay, 1870). In 1873 the limited partnership had a new receivership that, however, resulted in a rescue that allowed it to start operations and merge in 1881 with *Navigazione Generale Italiana*, forming with it the *Flotte Riunite Florio & Rubattino*.

### **Gioacchino di Saluzzo Senator of the Kingdom**

Of all the members of the family, it was Gioacchino di Saluzzo who was most rewarded by the new regime. The new government, also in order to contribute to a fairer distribution of representatives from the various parts of the new Kingdom of Italy, sought personalities to include in the lists of candidates for the new Parliament, who were appointed ex officio as Senators. In drawing up the lists, particular

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<sup>43</sup> *Annals of Jurisprudence. Decisions of the Supreme Court*, 1848. Anno decimo, Florence, Nicolai 1848, p. 448.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 132-135.

attention was paid to activists, now 'patriots', of middle-class or aristocratic origin, who had participated in various ways 'with a variety of dedication and sacrifice, in the pre-unification and unification movement, in the cultural and scientific movement, in the legal profession, and in the high magistracy and the high offices of the army and navy', as the official government notes on the appointment of the new senators put it.

With the notes of 3 and 18 January, signed by the King's lieutenant and Costantino Nigra, who presided over the Council of Ministers in the Provisional Government, and with the telegrams of 17 and 18 January from Prince Eugenio di Carignano, who had replaced Farini, the names of the personalities from the Neapolitan provinces to be presented to the Senate were sent to Turin.<sup>45</sup>

Among these, apart from Saluzzo, were only personalities of rank, census and nobility: Gennaro Bellelli (1812-1864), Raffaele Bonelli (1819-1903), Pasquale Catalano Gonzaga di Cirella (1800-1869), Andrea Colonna di Stigliano (1820-1872), Gioacchino Colonna di Stigliano (1809-1900), Francesco Maria Correale di Terranova (1801-1884), Giovanni di Fondi de Sangro (1804-1871), Vincenzo Strongoli Pignatelli (1808-1881), Giuseppe Gallone di Nociglia (1819-1898), Alfonso Barracco (1810-1890), Enrico Gagliardi (1820-1891), Rodolfo d'Afflitto (1809-1872) and Domenico Genoino di Lanciano (1814-1869).

Of this group of neo-Neapolitans, or at least of the former Bourbon Kingdom, only one, Gennaro Bellelli, had been a guest of the Lefèbvre's at Isola when he was 20 years old, apart from Saluzzo of course. The others were not part of Charles and Ernesto's circle of friends. In this part of the story, we can already see that Costantino Nigra was a friend of Francesco D'Ovidio (1849-1925), who was to become the father-in-law of Ernesto Lefèbvre's grandson, Carlo Ernesto. The Lefèbvres were excluded from the first representation of the former Bourbon South in

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<sup>45</sup> Luigi Perla, *Fonti e memorie. Contributo alla storia del Senato del Regno: le nomine per la categoria ventesima*, "Rassegna storica del Risorgimento", Città di Castello 1962 pp. 383-447. *Ibid*, p. 420.

Turin. In the new Parliament, the Lefèbvre family and the interests associated with it were no longer represented, apart from Gioacchino, who was rather estranged from the family. Moreover, only 5 or 6 of those appointed were Neapolitans and lived in Naples. The 13 appointees acquired a weight in the southern provinces that they had not had before, to the detriment of those who had remained loyal to the Bourbons. The Lefèbvres, who had accepted the new course without first supporting anti-Bourbon initiatives, were left in peace.

### **The departure of the Rothschilds (1863)**

One of the signs of a city's decline is the moment when finance, what is now called 'high finance', abandons it. This was the case when the largest financial company of the second half of the 19th century, the Rothschild banking house, abandoned its commitments in Naples after the unification. Naples, which would continue to play an important role and could be considered a metropolis with its 550,000 inhabitants, was increasingly excluded from the great political and economic games. In particular, Calmann Carl de Rothschild (1788-1855), a good friend of Charles, was linked to the city and lived there for some 25 years until his death. The two families had joint holdings in joint stock companies such as the *Compagnia di Navigazione delle Due Sicilie* (from which the Rothschilds had previously withdrawn) and the *Società Lionese* (liquidated in 1840). It was Calmann's son Carl Adolphe (1823-1900) who left Naples in 1863 after liquidating all his interests. They left Villa Pignatelli, where they had lived for about 40 years and where their office had been installed.

The reasons for this abandonment are obvious: Naples was already on its way to decadence, and even if the crisis was not yet overt, all the economic indicators made it clear that it was just beginning and would not end soon. The dramatic phenomenon of emigration had already begun. The city was gradually being cut off from the main trade routes and investors were leaving. Although, as we shall see, there was no lack

of attempts to reverse the trend.

It did not happen suddenly, the process took at least a decade, but the decision of the Rothschilds, who now had offices on every continent, is very significant. The Rothschilds in Naples had dominated the oil market, but in the last Bourbon period they had to face competition from the Pavoncellis, probably from the wealthy Giuseppe Pavoncelli (1836-1910), who after the unification became one of the richest landowners, especially in the Tavoliere delle Puglie, and who had entered the same market. In addition, two other families, the Minasi & Arlotta intermediaries, who were among the landowners who also carried out credit activities but were not specialised, had gained power by undermining the so-called Rothschild "dictatorship", which had dominated unchallenged for decades in certain areas.<sup>46</sup>

These last reasons, added to the first ones, favoured the sale of Villa Pignatelli to the Monteleone family. Baron Adolphe moved to Paris with his wife, whom he married in 1850, Baroness Caroline Julie Rothschild (1830-1907), from the German branch of the same family. She was to become friends with Flavia Lefèbvre, Ernest's daughter.<sup>47</sup>

## **Diversification: the 'Officine dei Granili'**

Returning to Naples in May 1863, after his first long absence, and finding a calmer situation, Ernesto resumed his activities, first of all deciding to exit investments that no longer guaranteed the expected dividends. Another diversification initiative implemented by Ernesto (when his father was still there) was the purchase of a share in the *Industrie Meccaniche Zino, Henry & Compagni* (also known as *Officine dei Granili*), one of the most interesting industrial concerns in the kingdom. Lorenzo Zino, the founder, was the owner of a textile factory in Carnello which stood next to that of the Lefèbvre family and

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<sup>46</sup> Maria Luisa Cavalcanti, *Economia*. La Campania, Guida, Naples 2006, pp. 85-87.

<sup>47</sup> Gino Doria, *I palazzi di Napoli*, Banco di Napoli, Naples 1896, p. 164.

was a good friend of Charles and Rosanne, so much so that we often find him mentioned in the *Journal* as a guest at Isola.

In 1834, the *Industrie Meccaniche of Zino* and associates began producing spare parts for textile looms with François Henry, a Parisian engineer who had been transplanted to Naples for many years. The first factory was located in the Capodimonte caves. Later, enlarging and employing 150 people, the factory began to produce textile machines in full, moving its facilities to Ponte della Maddalena, near the Granili. Lefèbvre acquired the first shares as early as 1834. He was a minority shareholder (he stood for 'comrades' or 'partners') but his investment must have been considerable, no less than 10,000 ducats.

The workshops began to build machines of all kinds: paper, textile and boilermaking machines. The company continued to expand and in 1842 it began to build railway carriages. In 1855, Lorenzo Zino was succeeded by Gregorio Macry, a Calabrian, and the company became *Zino, Henry & Soci* (July 1855). The Lefèbvre family retained its shareholding after this change. Of the 72 shares, Zino held 12 shares for 24,000 ducats, ahead of Francis Henry (6 shares for 12,000 ducats) and the 'Count of Balsorano' (6 shares for 12,000 ducats).<sup>48</sup> Zino, Henry and Lefèbvre controlled 66% of the company (48 shares), with 8 other shareholders holding the remaining 24.

It was decided to increase the number of shares to 120, with 48 shares of 2,000 ducats each to be purchased by Charles and Macry. At this point the majority shareholders were Zino, Henry and Charles Lefèbvre. The commitment was therefore considerable, and in the last stages of his life Charles was very much involved in the activities of the historic mechanical engineering factory. A clause obliged the partners to remain in the company for ten years (1855-1865), but this commitment was not renewed when the contract expired in 1855 and Ernesto retired in mid-1865.

The tariff revolution and the entry of certain industries into the liberal economy in the second half of the century had made it no longer

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<sup>48</sup> *Società in Accomandita Zino, Henry & C.*, Extract from the minutes of 28 June 1855, Naples 1855.



advantageous for the shareholders to maintain such a structure. Moreover, the Savoy did nothing to expand or modernise the plants, which required public investment to remain in operation.

### **The Lefèbvre paper mills immediately after Unity**

Just before Unity, at a time when the Bourbon Kingdom still enjoyed a degree of tariff protection, the factory employed 550 people and covered an area of 12,000 square metres. It was still booming, and shortly after Unity it was granted exclusivity in the production of wallpaper, a production that had been greatly improved in the meantime. In a document dated 1861 and first mentioned by the historian Massimo Petrocchi, the industrial data of the Cartiere del Fibreno at the end of the 1850s show how flourishing these industries were.

The factories consumed around 1,608,000 kilos of raw materials, i.e. rags and cordage, as well as chemicals, dyes and wood to produce the steam that powered some of the machinery.<sup>49</sup> Approximately 1,130,000 metres of paper were produced each year in a wide variety of grades. At the beginning of the Unification period, the paper mills were still flourishing and the increase in production forced several changes. In 1861, thanks to Ernesto's British connections, the Lefèbvre mills supplied paper to the *London Daily Telegraph*.<sup>50</sup>

### **The vicissitudes of the Navigation Company**

At the first meeting of the *Compagnia di Navigazione delle Due Sicilie* (CNDS), held on 30 December 1861, the new Count of

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<sup>49</sup> After Unification, the Law of 28 July 1860 extended the metric system to all territories annexed to the Kingdom of Naples.

<sup>50</sup> Michela Cigola, *Le cartiere storiche del basso Lazio*, Ciolfi, Cassino 2002, p. 64.

Balsorano, Ernesto Lefèbvre, held 6 of the 940 shares placed. A few weeks later, he acquired another 3, or about 1%, but it must be remembered that there were many shareholders. In short, it was what we would now call a diffuse share placement, in which Lefèbvre played a prominent role because of his social position.

In the year that had just passed, there had been a disappointment in that the *Compagnia* had not been able to obtain the contracted transport services from the newly united Kingdom of Italy. Its administrators protested when they discovered that some northern shipping companies, especially those from Genoa and with Piedmontese capital, were obtaining conventions for the transport of mail from which the southern companies were completely excluded. The controversy raged and protests were made through official channels and public statements, which continued for several years. The *Compagnia* appointed its own representative in Genoa, Giulio Degrossi, a man of long experience who had been working in maritime transport since around 1830. He kept the Neapolitans informed of developments by travelling between Genoa and Turin. Essentially, the Piedmontese ministry's director of postal and telegraphic services believed - or pretended to believe - that the company was in dire straits. For this reason, he preferred to exclude it from tenders and entrust the service to Piedmontese companies.

The *Compagnia's* directors responded by presenting the figures from its last balance sheet in 1860, which were positive. Despite the evidence, nothing could be done. The Piedmontese government treated Naples and its industries as if they were colonies to be exploited.<sup>51</sup> This statement can be nuanced and articulated, and distinctions can be made,

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<sup>51</sup> This is today historical evidence that is difficult to refute. One can at best compare classical and critical interpretations. One has to wonder whether many flourishing companies, such as those under discussion, would have gone bankrupt or closed down without this treatment. For a comparison of the various interpretations of the Risorgimento, see at least Lucy Riall, *Il Risorgimento. Storia e interpretazioni*, Donzelli, Rome 2007; Rosario Romeo, *Risorgimento e capitalismo*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1959; Aldo Servidio, *L'imbroglione nazionale. Unità e unificazione dell'Italia (1860-2000)*, Naples, Guida 2002; Antonio Nicoletta, *'E furon detti Briganti...'. Mito e realtà della "Conquista del Sud"*, Rimini, Il Cerchio, 2001.

but it is hard to escape this impression when perusing the rich bibliography on the southern economy in the immediate post-unification period. Similar negotiations in other sectors ended in stalemate, and the lack of expected orders began to seriously affect company profit and loss accounts.

The director of the *Compagnia di Navigazione delle Due Sicilie*, Mr Laviano, also requested and obtained several meetings at the Ministry, in Turin, but got nothing concrete. He was always answered that it was being considered to grant only one company the contracted services. Much to Laviano's surprise, he later learnt that, in fact, the conventions had been divided among several companies, but all of them from the north, particularly Genoa.<sup>52</sup> At the meeting of 9 April 1864, Ernesto tried to get himself elected as one of the new directors, in order to play a more active role in the management of a company that, due to unfortunate circumstances and the wishes of the central government, was accumulating an increasingly precarious debt situation: he was defeated in the vote.<sup>53</sup>

The task facing the new administrators was a difficult one. Extraordinary meetings were convened in 1864 and 1865 to discuss the best way to deal with the *Compagnia's* debt situation, caused by the abolition of the concessions, which it would have been natural to entrust to a Neapolitan rather than a Genoese company. In the end, liquidators were appointed (one of them was Gioacchino di Saluzzo), but they could not prevent the company from going bankrupt in September 1865. According to Luigi de Matteo, the *Compagnia* deprived Naples and the Mezzogiorno of "an active and competitive company", a company "endowed with considerable capital and the expression of consolidated entrepreneurial skills", and which, unlike the three subsidised companies in the north, was a joint stock company, i.e. it had a structure suitable for expansion, widespread share ownership and was

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<sup>52</sup> Luigi de Matteo, *Noi della Meridionale Italia*, cit., 182. See also Lamberto Randogna,

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 183-184.

not a company concentrated in a few hands.<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps it had been disfavoured because it had been judged pro-Bourbon (rightly or wrongly, but it is natural that many of the shareholders were still linked to the old king), more likely to benefit other companies, those closest to the government and who enjoyed excellent political contacts. Ultimately, the fate of the promising *Compagnia di Navigazione del Regno delle Due Sicilie* had been sacrificed by unfair lobbying. Moreover, its collapse had a depressing effect on the economy of the whole of southern Italy and Campania, as it employed hundreds of people and hundreds, if not thousands, more in related industries in Naples alone. The company also had a considerable international reputation. In September 1865, hundreds of workers, porters, sailors, maintenance mechanics, shipboard and transport personnel lost their jobs. Hundreds more lost their jobs in the shipyards, where regular refits were carried out. Many thousands were impoverished and forced to emigrate on the steamships that began to leave for America.

## **The evolution of the printing industry**

The Lefèbvre family's interest in publishing (and not just printing) began in 1828, when signed a contract with the prestigious Parisian publisher and printer Didot for the supply of paper. In the 1830s, the Fibreno paper mills acquired a second printing press in Naples, after the one in Chiaia, and became one of the most active publishers and printers in the Neapolitan market, as has already been written. Lefèbvre and Didot thus became competitors, and it is perhaps for this reason that their relationship came to an end. What is certain, however, is that although the partnership between the two families came to an end, a certain form of collaboration or friendship continued over the decades. In fact, in 1859, the editor of Madame Récamier's letters notes that a Monsieur Didot, a member of the great Parisian printing family, worked

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 206-207.

as a director in one of the Lefèbvre establishments (probably Carnello).<sup>55</sup> The interest stemmed from the obvious advantage the Lefèbvre could have over the cost of paper. It must be said that Neapolitan publishing grew in a rather haphazard way. There were no registers to keep track of what was being printed and how many copies were being printed, not least because copyright law was still underdeveloped - and this was not just a Neapolitan problem, but a European one. It was not until the end of the century that copyright became a firm and sufficiently regulated institution in many countries (Berne Convention, 1886). The existence of a particular book was often known from publishers' catalogues (but not all printed books were included) or from censorship visa records.

The first document analysing the state of the book industry in the South is *La Relazione della Giunta Provvisoria di Commercio in Napoli sulle forze produttive delle Provincie Napoletane* drawn up in June 1861. This is, according to Luigi de Matteo, 'the first organic document analysing the economic conditions of Southern Italy in the aftermath of Unification'.<sup>56</sup> It is a document that deserves particular attention because it was 'produced by prominent representatives of the business world appointed by the lieutenant-government and therefore not suspected of Bourbon loyalism'.<sup>57</sup> On 9 January 1861, the King's Lieutenant General dissolved the Chamber of Commerce of Naples, which was reconstituted in December 1862. Many of the signatories of the report were elected to the new Chamber of Commerce. In 1862 the Ministry published the report in its *Annali*, cutting out the most critical passages. The text presented a more complete picture of the economy of the Mezzogiorno, 'of its shortcomings and needs, in which it appeared that the unification and, above all, the extension of the

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<sup>55</sup> *Souvenirs et correspondance tirés des papiers de Madame Récamier*, Levy, Paris 1860, p. 138 (ver).

<sup>56</sup> *La Relazione della Giunta Provvisoria di Commercio in Napoli sulle forze produttive delle Provincie Napoletane* (June 1861) in 'Annali di Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio', published by the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce, vol. I-1862, Turin 1862, pp. 9-12.

<sup>57</sup> Luigi de Matteo, *Noi della meridionale Italia*, cit., p. 7.

Piedmontese tariff to the southern provinces, while seeming to offer new and more advantageous opportunities for southern agriculture, had seriously affected the industrial sector".<sup>58</sup>

They criticised the lack of consideration shown by the unity government towards industry in the Mezzogiorno. In recent months, decrees had been passed drastically reducing import duties on certain types of fabric and yarn. The *Relazione* also gave an overview of the main industries (cotton, wool and paper) and the minor ones (silk, leather, glass, plates and bottles), and highlighted the difficulties caused by the total abolition of the customs system, which had suddenly and without gradualism opened up southern industry to foreign competition. Some divisions were making losses because they had warehouses full of expensive goods made with raw materials bought at high prices during the tariff system. Reselling them at lower prices risked - and indeed did after 1861 - putting many companies out of business. There were other very serious problems. For example, the price of coal, which Italy had to import, was higher for Italian industrialists than for French, German or British industrialists. There was also less easy access to credit because of the backwardness of the banking system.

Another not insignificant problem was the demobilisation of the Bourbon army, most of which had been incorporated into the Savoy army. This consisted of just under 100,000 men, who had always been supplied with southern products, but now had to rely on suppliers from northern Italy. This meant that the South was deprived of important orders for clothing, weapons, accessories, food, medicines and everything else that went into the life of an army and the operation of barracks, sentry posts and military transport. The diversion of these supplies led to further bankruptcies and closures of small and medium-sized but nevertheless widespread craft industries and activities. The report, De Matteo recalls, did not mention the paper and printing industry, which was also one of the most important sectors of the economy. This sector was dealt with in the *Rapporto sul movimento commerciale e industriale della provincia nel 1863*, published by the

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

Chamber of Commerce of Naples. The report emphasised the importance of these interlinked industries, which were mainly concentrated in the Sora area (where there were 9 factories, 3 of which belonged to Lefèbvre) and on the Amalfi Coast (where almost all the handmade paper factories were located). The total production amounted to 80,000 quintals of paper, a small part of which was exported.

The text admitted that the Bourbon government had restricted the book trade, but that before the unification books produced in Naples were highly valued and less expensive, due to the lower cost of raw materials and labour. After 1860, the crisis in the sector was generalised and then deepened, and many works - entire catalogues and volumes printed in large editions - became unsaleable. These were volumes of jurisprudence, commentaries on the Bourbon codes, but also ecclesiastical works, historical works, political treatises that referred to the Kingdom as still existing. Schoolbooks, textbooks in general for all orders and grades, began to be imported from the North, while Neapolitan books were completely neglected. As a result, many operators in the sector - printers, publishers and booksellers - found themselves on the verge of closure. There was also a shortage of printers with capital, so much so that the Neapolitan press, according to the Chamber of Commerce's report, was filled with 'needy publishers'. This was not the case with Lefèbvre, but when Montgolfier, director-general of the Manifatture del Fibreno (the official name of what was usually called the Cartiere del Fibreno), complained about warehouses full of unsold rolls of paper, the director of the Stamperia del Fibreno, the printing works in Naples, Raffaele Caccavò (but elsewhere accented as Càccavo), pointed to the piles and piles of books that had been printed and never paid for. It is worth noting that this Caccavò was described as 'erudite' by the director of the National Museum of Naples in a work published in 1877.<sup>59</sup> Caccavò was director of the Tipografia del Fibreno from at least 1860 to 1877. Several well-known Neapolitan booksellers, such as Mirelli, Margheri and Dentken, were in serious

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<sup>59</sup> Demetrio Salazaro, *L' arte della miniatura nel secolo XIV: codice della Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli*, Tipografia del Fibreno, Naples 1877.

difficulties and could not easily obtain credit, which was already scarce. The case of the famous bookseller and printer Gennaro Mirelli was the most painful because it led to the bankruptcy of the bookshop.

It is true that after unification, the state became the biggest buyer of printed matter. It was necessary to print the new laws, then the parliamentary acts, the reports and the huge amount of documents that were to guide the legislative, economic and administrative unification of the country. These massive orders almost exclusively benefited the printing houses of Turin and Florence, which were guaranteed work and the possibility of making investments. Very little went to Milan and Modena, and very little to other cities, including Florence.<sup>60</sup> In the ten years between the establishment of the post-unification dictatorship in Naples and the completion of the unification in 1870, very few works were commissioned from the printers of the former capital. The *Tipografia del Fibreno* managed, at least for a while, to win publications from scientific and university institutes and some museums. In any case, Naples remained a very important cultural city even after the unification and especially until the First World War.

In September 1871, the Associazione Tipografico-Libraria Italiana held its last congress in Naples, where it had its headquarters, and by the following year it had 17 active members, including the director of the *Tipografia del Fibreno*, Raffaele Caccavò. Among other things, it was reported that, at the time of the annexation of Rome, the practice began of sending out invitations to tender a few days before the deadline, making it impossible for printers based in other cities of the kingdom, who were already disadvantaged by transport costs, to participate. With the decrease in work, the technical equipment and also the professional skills of the Neapolitan printers deteriorated. Also because the more experienced ones emigrated to the United States or Canada, while the young ones had no one to teach them the trade.

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<sup>60</sup> Luigi De Matteo, op. cit., p. 34 *passim*. An important French bookseller-publisher Felice (Félix) Le Monnier (1806-1884) had been active in Florence since 1837.



In 1874, the Tipografia del Fibreno was one biggest printing houses in the city of Naples along with – according the publisher Morano – Batelli, Tramater and Nobile and one of the biggeste in the South of Italy. It gave work to 30 workers and almost 10 clerks with his 15 presses and vast offices. The paper that was used by the four major printing houses in Naples came from the Liri Valley.<sup>[1]</sup> The crisis in the Neapolitan publishing industry stormed Naples after the 1861 but the Lefèbvre's withdrawal came only in the middle of eighties.



## Chapter 2

### Rebellious children

#### The crisis of the Partenopea

The crisis at *Partenopea*, in which part of the family's wealth was invested, first became apparent in the mid-1850s. In 1861, when a great exhibition of Italian products was held in Florence, the Sarno factory was still the most important on the peninsula in terms of numbers, production and sales. In 1864, Sideri and Laviano had presented a further adaptation of the new technology, which was presented as an important innovation in the *Bollettino del Ministero di Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio* (Mucci, Siena 1864). Although some aspects of the crisis were beginning to become apparent. In particular, technical innovations were presented that the Sarno factory had not incorporated and that were present in factories in England, Belgium, France and northern Italy. The Florence jury of the 1861 exhibition mentioned the flax spinning machine introduced by the Prince of Satriano, Carlo Filangieri, in the factory of the former convent of Santa Caterina a Chiaia in Naples, where he had started work in 1830 and where he installed the first machines in 1839. Subsequently, the *Società Partenopea* set up its large factory in Sarno, which until 1868 enjoyed the important right of privative property, which applied to all the provinces of southern Italy, except the islands, both for the spinning of canape and cut linen and for the combing of the fibres and the mechanical carding of the tow.

The factory still consisted of two workshops, one for spinning and the other for weaving. The first was used for the mechanical twisting of raw yarns and two, three, four and five yarn bobbins, which were then

reduced to skeins. In the second, linen and hemp were woven using yarns of different qualities, both coloured and white or raw. The value of these processes reached up to 200,000 ducats per year.<sup>61</sup> Weaving alone employed 500-600 women, with an undefined and variable number of homeworkers. The wages ranged from half a lira to one lira, depending on the conditions. The looms, all assembled in the factory, were jacquard or heald looms. In total, including subcontractors, the *Partenopea* employed at least 1,000 workers, plus about fifty girls, with 6,000 spindles and three hydraulic motors (240 horsepower in total). The only comparable factory was the *Cusani & Co.* factory in Cassano d'Adda, near Milan, with 700 workers and 6,000 spindles. It had four hydraulic motors for a total of 180 hp. There was also a new factory founded by two former directors of the *Partenopea* factory, Eugenio Weemaels and Giuseppe Turner, who had set up their own factory in Atripalda with 2,000 spindles.

Throughout the 1850s and early 1860s, the now famous and celebrated *Filanda di Sarno* paid dividends on the first series of shares: 12 ducats in 1858 and 12 in 1859. In 1860 it reached 1.8 ducats per share and 2.40 in 1862, and similar figures in the following years. In its evaluation, the Commission praised the variety of the yarns and the prices, which made them affordable to the less well-off, but noted that greater perfection could be achieved in the future with certain types of yarn. Nevertheless, the company was awarded a medal. They praised President Spinelli, Vice-President Laviano and General Secretary Augusto Sideri, also because they sent someone abroad every year or invited foreign technicians. The Commission concluded by expressing the hope that a future exhibition would welcome the progress that the company's representatives were clearly striving for.

The Commission drew up a general report in which, after praising those present, it painted a generally gloomy picture: mechanical weaving was in its infancy, while spinning counted a total of 23,800 spindles, a quantity that would have exposed the industry to massive imports. As the population grew, more than 2 million kilos of

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<sup>61</sup> Esposizione italiana tenuta a Firenze nel 1861, III, 1865.

mechanically produced yarn had to be imported. Rapid development was also hoped for because the conditions in Italy were ideal in terms of the number of watercourses and the potential abundance of raw materials that were apparently ready to be cultivated. It was hoped that this would take account of the fact that, in those years, linen yarns were preferred to cotton yarns due to the collapse of supplies from the United States of America, where the war of secession had halted exports and production. Even when production resumed, the situation would remain favourable to linen, the jury said. New industries would have to be created that would not be limited to the horizon of domestic consumption, but that would seek to export the quality products they already produced. One of the authors wrote that the mechanical spinning and weaving of flax could be of immense benefit to the country.

A few years later, at the Paris Exposition of 1867, it was noted that the production of hemp had increased, but not that of flax, which was still insufficient to meet the growing domestic demand. England was an example in this respect, as it processed its own flax but also imported 2 million quintals. In that year there were still only eight flax spinning mills: four in Lombardy (Villa d'Almè, Cassano, Melegnano and Crema) and four in southern Italy (the *Partenopea*, Capaccio, Atripalda and a second one in Sarno), employing a total of 800 workers, but whose production did not even come close to that of Belgium or France in terms of quality. He concluded by calling on the government to promote linen processing and to invite technicians from France and Belgium to study the methods and techniques to be introduced in the Kingdom.

In fact, at the time of the unification of Italy, the *Partenopea* provided the Sarno factories with some funds for a substantial expansion of the factories and a complete restructuring of the plant. It was also planned to renew at least part of the machinery. Luigi de Matteo, following payments made by the company's treasurer to the Banco di Napoli, discovered some of the interventions that were carried out in those months.

In 1860, the architect Raffaele de Nicola visited Sarno several times to plan the extension of the buildings and other maintenance and expansion work. For example, a new room for the Carderia was set up, insulated from humidity with an asphalt roof covering.<sup>62</sup> Various purchases were made, including 100 wooden tables and mechanical equipment ordered from the mechanical factory of Luigi Oomens of Naples, the manager of a factory for tools and small automatic machines. In addition, 35 packages of important machines from abroad arrived in Sarno.<sup>63</sup> Director Oomens carried out various metallurgical works, making machine parts in bronze and wrought iron and also built a machine for softening the wire and gears of the iron cylinder for the turbine of the spinning mill that was a branch of the main one.<sup>64</sup>

In April 1861, the *Partenopea* paid 1371.11 ducats to the *Compagnia di Navigazione a Vapore delle Due Sicilie* - of which Sideri himself was about to become director - for the transport 'of the Sarno turbine and spinning mill'.<sup>65</sup> In the 1860s, *Partenopea* continued to invest in the two Sarno mills and benefited for a few years from the crisis in the American cotton sector. A report submitted by the Naples Chamber of Commerce to the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Trade in 1863 for the province of Naples stated that the two large mechanical spinning mills, *Partenopea's* in Sarno and Eugenio Weemaels' in Atripalda, were in full operation.

With the end of the American Civil War and the resumption of exports of cheap but high quality cotton, the European cotton sector was plunged into crisis. The crisis manifested itself in Great Britain and Belgium, but also in Italy. Firstly, because Italian products were not exported and could not be directed to new markets (probably also due to the lack of transport infrastructure: transport from Sarno and Atripalda was expensive), but also because of the treaties that the

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<sup>62</sup> ASBN apodissary BN, Cassa di San Giacomo, banknote in the name of Luigi della Valle and sworn to R. de Nicola, 31 December 1861, extinguished 4 January 1862, cited in Luigi de Matteo, *Holdings...*, p. 112.

<sup>63</sup> De Matteo, cit., p. 112.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

Kingdom of Italy had signed since 1863 with the countries with the strongest competition: Great Britain, France and Belgium. Before the measure was debated in the Chamber, the *Partenopea* sent a memorandum to the Parliament explaining the situation in which the flax and related spinning industries found themselves. At the same time, similar memoranda were sent by paper and cotton industrialists, and the tone was catastrophic. On 11 April 1863, Laviano stated that the tariff reductions, which had fallen tenfold in a few decades, were a serious problem, even if they could theoretically be overcome. The main problem was that the finest and coarsest threads were subject to the same import duty, even though they required very different processing. This incentivised the production of less refined and finer products, effectively discouraging improved manufacturing. It was therefore necessary to set the duty at least in relation to the type of product.<sup>66</sup>

Raw wire and white wire were also subject to the same duty, but there was a big difference in value between the two types of product: white wire cost money. So white wire had to be protected. There were also problems with the different duties applied to white (light) wire and wire of other colours. The tariff scale applied in France took into account the different value of threads and provided for a scale of six classes of thread based on fineness and even colour. Italian canvas and linen (raw and spun) could then be freely imported into France, but this would have led to an increase in prices because Italy imported its linen from Belgium, Riga and Egypt. The spinning mills would have paid dearly for raw materials, suffering from French competition without being able to penetrate the French market. Later, the situation would have been even worse. The clauses would also have applied to England, a formidable competitor in every field; a country from which, moreover, the largest imports of raw and bleached yarns came. At the end of his report (10 June 1863), which was also shared by the administrator of the Canapa factory in Bologna, Laviano recalled the

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<sup>66</sup> ACS Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Trade, Industry and Trade Division, bundle 194. To the National Parliament. *The linen spinning mills*, cit. p. 12.

importance of the sector, of the Sarno factory, of Atripalda, of Bologna, of Cassano d'Adda, Melegnano, Crema and Almè: the crisis in linen and hemp spinning would have repercussions on the national economy. Flax was important in Lodi, Cremona, Brescia, Naples and Terra di Lavoro; hemp in Bologna, Cesenatico, but also in Caserta and Naples. However, the *Partenopea*'s requests were not granted. The government of the Kingdom of Italy acted under international pressure to gradually abolish the protectionist and customs regime of the past.

## End of a dream

The economic situation, the tariff policy and the post-unification crisis brought the company to its knees in just a few years, after having flourished until the mid-1860s, or at least until 1862-1863. As early as 1864, Sideri and Laviano, as we have seen in previous chapters, presented technical improvements to the factory in the form of patents. However, 1865 was to be a year of stagnation, and from 1866 no dividends were paid to the shareholders of the Sarno factory, while debts accumulated at an impressive rate. In the mid-1860s, the political framework for industry, especially in the Mezzogiorno, deteriorated, affecting wool, paper and spinning mills. In the meantime, Sideri had also become director of the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore*, a company in which some of the main protagonists of the *Partenopea* had strong interests, such as Laviano, Ernesto Lefèbvre (who took over from his father, who had died in 1858) and others. A company, moreover, that was experiencing the last months of its life.

In order to pay its debts, *Partenopea* applied for a loan of 450,000 lire from the Banco di Napoli's Credito Fondiario, offering a mortgage on all its properties. The Banco di Napoli considered the properties without assessing their industrial use, thus granting a lower loan than expected. And so, on 27 March 1872, the Banco di Napoli's Credito Fondiario estimated the value of the land at 483,000 lire - of course, the currency had changed after the unification - and granted a loan of



241,500 lire, divided into 483 land parcels of 500 lire each at 5% interest, to be repaid in 50 years. The final agreement was signed on 31 May.

Despite this injection of liquidity, which was less than what was really needed, the situation continued to deteriorate. On the one hand, the company's machinery was ageing and needed to be replaced, but there was no money to do so. On the other hand, ordinary and extraordinary maintenance was becoming increasingly expensive. On the market front, internal Italian competition had become very strong with the merger of the Fara d'Adda and Cassano d'Adda factories to form the large *Linificio e Canapificio Nazionale*, with a capital of 20 million lire - absolutely huge at the time. It bought several factories, some very large, especially in Lombardy, equipped them with the most modern machinery and began to export large quantities of its production to England, France, Germany and America.<sup>67</sup>

At a certain point, *Partenopea's* situation became even more dramatic. The company managed to obtain a loan from Michele de Paolis, its representative in Naples, who granted a credit line of 120,000 lire in April 1874. On 31 May it was decided to entrust the management of the holding to a person of proven ability.

It is difficult to say why Augusto Sideri fell from grace in just a few years; he had led the company through some very difficult situations, but at this point, perhaps because of his age, perhaps because his skills had become inadequate for such a changed context, he was no longer able to cope with the new challenges. In the meantime, Domenico Laviano had left the company in the hands of administrators. One of *Partenopea's* most important administrators, Charles Lefèbvre, had died, leaving his son Ernesto in charge, but the latter had no interest in the company's affairs, which now seemed doomed, not least because the family paper mill at Isola del Liri was beginning to decline.

Finally, Francesco d'Andrea, Raffaele d'Andrea's son, was chosen as director. Francesco ran the weaving mill in Sarno and had a flourishing business. His father had a busy shop in Naples. To get him more

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<sup>67</sup> Bruno Caizzi, *Storia dell'industria italiana*, UTET, Turin 1965, pp. 300-301.

involved in the business, it was decided to give him a share of the profits. He accepted: he was, after all, a native of Sarno, and his survival was at stake. On 6 June of that year, Antonio Spinelli, *Partenopea's* representative and president of the company's social council, signed a contract with D'Andrea for nine years (the time he remained with the company), which could be extended to 20 years if the shareholders' meeting decided to do so. In the first case, D'Andrea would have kept half of the profits; in the event of an extension, the profits would have been used to pay off the bonds and then divided 3/5 in favour of D'Andrea and 2/2 in favour of *Partenopea* (which had to pay the 50-year loan to the Banco di Napoli). The latter would pay 30,000 lire into the *Partenopea's* coffers, becoming its creditor.

Francesco D'Andrea was an excellent manager who managed to revive Filanda by making a profit, albeit a modest one. Today, the *Partenopea* factory in Sarno is known as *Filanda D'Andrea*; time has erased the founder's contribution from public memory. Even during the first period of D'Andrea's management, the company's debts were considerable: working capital had to be replenished and machinery, some of which was no longer in use, had to be replaced. The industry was still in a serious crisis and competition from the UK and Italy (Milan) was very strong.

The shares in the subsidiary were bought by D'Andrea himself at a low price of 11.25 lire, as no dividends had been paid for 10 years and no one had bought shares. The board of directors decided to wind up the company. After several postponements, D'Andrea finally submitted an official application. It was now 1877. He noted that the company's situation had improved, that there was no danger of bankruptcy and that the annual bleeding had stopped: the annual accounts were no longer in the red, but the crisis continued and other factories were also in crisis in those years; the Atripalda factory had been forced to reduce its production, even though it produced excellent yarns thanks to the superiority of its machinery. At Filanda di Sarno, it was necessary to replace the machines that had become obsolete. The joint stock company prevented him from taking radical decisions and he was ready

to buy it in order to acquire the "absolute power" that would allow him to act freely. The value of the first series of shares was too high and there were no buyers. He offered to buy everything for 240,000 lire, taking on the burden of paying off all the debts. The sum would be divided among all the shares of the first series, bringing them up to 19.22 lire, to be paid in 12 years; the shares of the second series would be paid in annual instalments by lot. According to the rules, the dissolution of the company was to be decided by an extraordinary general meeting convened four months after the announcement and confirmed one year later. Since D'Andrea could not wait that long, he proposed that the main shareholders be brought together and that the statutes be amended to shorten the period. After some discussion, this was agreed on condition that D'Andrea raised his offer to 260,000 lire, which he did.

The changes were decided at the meeting of 18 July 1877. At that time Antonio Spinelli was still president and the elderly Augusto Sideri was secretary general. At the end of the discussion, the figure of 220,000 lire was agreed, to be paid in 8 years in instalments of 27,500 lire without interest. The history of the *Società Industriale Partenopea* came to a definitive end in 1879, after the liquidation of its balance sheet in 1878. Throughout the years it had maintained its headquarters in Via dei Guantai, a location that was vacated in 1880. In these 46 years of history, all of the company's main protagonists had died years ago and their children had grown up. For a few decades the company was forgotten, until about a century later, when academics from the University of Naples began to promote a cycle of studies on its achievements.

What was the state of the textile industry in the Kingdom between 1835 and 1870, the period of the Sarno Spinning Mill and the development of mechanisation in the Kingdom until the Unification?

Traditionally, some sectors were divided. The most developed, because they had a bigger market, were the cotton mills, which were the biggest factories. Then there were the woollen mills, the linen and hemp textile industries (which were often sectors of the cotton mills due to their production affinity) and the silk industry.

## **The silk, cotton and wool industry**

Silk production was particularly widespread in Calabria (around 300 factories with an average of 25 workers out of a total of 8000), whose output met half of the national demand. There were also mills in Campania and Abruzzo. Silk mills were located in Paola, Spezzano, Mendicino, Carolei, Dipignano, Domanico, Scigliano, Amantea, Longobardi, Donnici, Acri, Bisignano, Rende, San Fili Marano Marchesato, Rossano and Cerisano, where there was a spinning mill with a 16 horsepower machine and a 2 horsepower machine: the latter was the largest and employed 70 workers. In Cosenza there was the Ottaviani spinning mill with about 100 seasonal workers and the Daniele Bianchi spinning mill with 50 workers. In Catanzaro there was the Schipani spinning mill and in Villa San Giovanni the spinning mill of the Englishman Thomas Halam. Almost all of them produced raw silk, but in some cases, as in Catanzaro, small dyeing factories had spread.

In Terra di Lavoro there was the San Leucio factory, founded by Charles III, which produced 20,00 pounds of raw silk and 16,000 pounds of precious silk (damask, satin and others) per year. It employed 600 workers from the community of San Leucio, although the profitability of this factory is debated, as it mostly operated at a loss. Another area with a vocation for the silk industry was the province of Caserta and Naples, with about 45 raw silk factories.

There were many factories that processed silk into ribbons and garments. These included the factories of Leonardo Matera, Nicola Fenizio, Rosa Fattorini and Solei Hebert. In total, silk spinning and weaving in the Kingdom employed about 20,000 workers, at least 60 per cent of whom were seasonal workers in about 600 mostly small factories. The annual added value was about 4.6 million ducats.

Much larger were the cotton spinning plants. The *Schlaepfer, Wenner & C.* factory in Angri was very large and employed 1,500 workers with a considerable output. On the Irno river stood the large *Vonwiller & C.* and *Escher & C. factories*. In Scafati there was the large

*Meyer & Zollinger* factory. In Sarno, as far as cotton mills were concerned, there were *Reise & C.*, *Freitag & C.* (600 workers) and again on the Irno the factories of Biancheggio *Wenner & C.* and those of the former director of the Filanda di Sarno *Eugenio Weemaels & C.*. A mixed factory was that of Giovanni Giacomo Egg that processed hemp, cotton and linen with 700 workers, and another factory belonging to the Egg family was in Piedimonte (with 900 workers). Mangone mentions a large cotton mill of the *Società Industriale Partenopea* in Naples of which, however, no trace actually exists. Also near Caserta was the *Girard* factory and the cotton factory (which also processed wool) *Zubin & C.*, with 500 workers. There were dozens of cotton factories active throughout the Kingdom, many of which were small or medium-sized, as in Chieti, Catanzaro, Tropea, Agerola and Naples itself. These small factories were destined to decline rapidly after the end of the 1870s when the concentration of the larger ones began.

However, between 1854 and 1860, cotton production had doubled to around 45,000 quintals.<sup>68</sup> Of the linen spinning mills mentioned above, the largest was that of *Partenopea* in Sarno. Several cotton mills also dedicated a wall of their looms to the spinning of linen. Overall, the linen, hemp and cotton spinning mills employed 18,000 workers in around 200 factories of various sizes worth 7 million ducats. These are the aggregate figures found in most of the books that have been devoted to the subject derived from the calculations of historians of the Kingdom such as Lodovico Bianchini. Only one author, Pino Arias, goes so far as to calculate the total value at 17 million ducats, but it is not known where he derived these figures from. The cotton industry and the major linen mills were very modern and mechanised, but its value dropped rapidly after 1870.

The wool industry was more widespread throughout the kingdom, in Campania, Abruzzo and Puglia (where most of the raw material came from). The largest were the Sava factory in S. Caterina di Formiello (Naples) and the Polsinelli, Manna and di Lorenzo Zino wool factories

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<sup>68</sup> Angelo Mangone, *L'industria del Regno di Napoli*, Grimaldi & C. Editori, Naples, pp. 61-64.

in Isola di Sora and Sora, suppliers of wool dyed with *rubbia* (rubio).<sup>69</sup> Raffaella Perullo's factory in San Giovanni a Teduccio also supplied this type of production. There were also many wool factories in the Liri and Garigliano basins: in Isola Liri, Sant'Elia Fiumerapido, Isola and Arpino, where the Ciccodicola factories were the largest (about 30 factories in total). There were also factories in Palena, Chieti (Odorisio wool mill), Torricella, Fara Sammartino, L'Aquila and in Molise, and then in various places in Apulia. The most modern were in the Liri and Neapolitan valleys. The wool mills employed around 9,000 people in 300 factories and the total value added was much higher than that of the cotton mills: around 21 million ducats. If we include the production of semi-finished products (hats, etc.), there were 1200 factories employing 48,000 people.

With a few exceptions, the textile industrialists concentrated on their work and did not appear among the financiers of the capital's more modern industries, such as gas, engineering, steamboats or others. They created small *énclaves*, often brought their religion (most Swiss were Protestants) and built large mansions for themselves in the places of their work. In this respect, too, the adventure of the *Società Industriale Partenopea* and its men can be said (along with the less fortunate *Sebezia*) to be a rare case.

## Carlo and 'Franz'

Of Ernesto's two sons, Carlo was the eldest, born in Naples on 28 May 1852, and Francesco, called 'Franz', the youngest, born on 8 August 1856. There is an obvious error in the genealogies of the counts of Balsorano: Francesco is considered older than Carlo because he was

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<sup>69</sup> The Sava mill and its figure are the subject of an interesting in-depth study by Luigi de Matteo: De Matteo, Luigi, *Modelli di sviluppo e imprese nell'Ottocento meridionale. Il caso del lanificio Sava di Santa Caterina a Formiello in Napoli e il tema storiografico della crisi del mezzogiorno nell'unificazione* in *Storia Economica*, XIV, 3, (2011), pp. 449-486.

the third to assume the title, while Carlo was the fourth. But history tells us another story, much more complicated, as we shall see. The younger man came into possession of the title of "third Count of Balsorano" through a vicissitude that involved the whole family: Carlo was effectively disinherited. To understand how this happened, we must return to the two brothers, who, as experience teaches us, were the classic 'third generation' of industrialists, the generation that dissipates what the first has built and the second has preserved.

We know that they had done their first studies in Naples with their main tutor, Mr Bossi from Lucca, and were then sent to this new institute (founded in 1865) before preparing for the profession. Carlo, through Raoul's intercession, had made a six-month attempt at the Jesuit college of Vaugiraud in Paris, but was expelled: undisciplined, with little desire to study, his personality was incompatible with the strict Jesuit college of the time. In 1866, four years apart in age, the two entered the Jesuit-run College of Mondragone (Frascati) as boarders. Ernesto clearly did not despair of guiding Carlo in the right direction. We are certain of their admission, even if the documentation in the registers shows their names at the time of entry, but does not, for example, preserve their photographs, as is the case for other boarders. Achille Lauri and, above all, André-Isidore mention them without being more specific. The registers show the date of admission, but not the licence. Why not? They probably did not finish their studies and did not leave. Certainly not Carlo. Given the 4 year age difference between the two brothers and the fact that the study cycle lasted between 4 and 5 years, Carlo should have been released between 1870 and 1871 and Francesco between 1874 and 1875. However, this did not happen.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> The Archivist of the Association of Former Students of the Mondragone College, who is in charge of the old school registers and dismissal records, found the names of Carlo and Francesco Lefèvre's admission in 1866 without any licence notes for either of them.

We know that Carlo was sent to England to study around 1868, probably at a small private boarding school. The name given by André-Isidore is Stonners, which does not correspond to the schools operating in England at the time (a famous Stoner School was not founded until 1895 in Wiltshire). So either it was a private tutor or a family, and the name would still be very rare, or, more likely, André-Isidore misspelled it. Certainly by 1870, when he was 18, he had already returned.



At the beginning of the Seventies, the two brothers lived in Naples, but did not work in the family business, although we can imagine that Ernesto tried to do so; the two boys were wasting time among the bums portrayed by Marie Colombier during those months. The Lefèbvre brothers soon acquired a reputation for being eccentric and spoiled. Even their cousin thought so. And Giovanni Artieri, in 1963, collected an anecdote that must date back to around 1875 and is still told in the streets of Naples. Although it seems exaggerated, it is probably authentic.



At the beginning of via Francesco Crispi, where the Institute of the Sacred Heart is now located, in the same building, dominated by a large terrace, lived the family of the Counts of Balsorano, famous for their eccentricity. Once, one of the young Balsorano brothers had a curious idea: "I wonder," he said, "what noise the great piano in the hall would make if you threw it from the terrace into the street". The mad brothers agreed and did it immediately. While the porter kept passers-by away, a gaggle of servants hoisted the huge instrument onto the parapet and threw it into the void. Shortly afterwards, the old Count of Balsorano got into his coupé and, noticing the crowd, the comments and the debris, asked what had happened. To the doorman, who was worried about who knows what sacred reactions, the old man said, incredibly: "What a pity! I would have liked to be there....".<sup>71</sup>

Artieri writes that the members of the "family of the Counts of Balsorano" were "known for their eccentricities". This statement, which is not supported by other episodes, makes us think that there must have been many anecdotes in the city, and that therefore there must have been others in the Neapolitan memoirs of the late 19th century. But we are talking about his sons. As for Ernesto, his profile is not that of an eccentric. On the contrary, he was an astute administrator, with a background in finance and paper production. Ernesto was cultured, polyglot, could play the piano and draw. He may have had a few minor quirks, but these never detracted from his reputation for seriousness. Otherwise, his cousin André-Isidore, of a rather serious and compassionate nature, who often visited him by living in his house for months on end, would have pointed him out, perhaps in a benevolent tone. As far as we know, he conducted himself with great shrewdness in business and other matters of life. The reputation for eccentricity and even dissipation, on the other hand, is evident in his two sons, especially Carlo. The episode recounted by Artieri shows, this much is certain, a marked indulgence by Ernesto towards his sons, and there is no reason to doubt the veracity of the episode, since André-Isidore himself repeatedly deplores such indulgence.

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<sup>71</sup> Giovanni Artieri, *Penultima Napoli*, Longanesi, Milan 1963, pp. 32-33.

At some point, having reached the age of majority (21) in 1873, Carlo began to travel to Rome, Milan and Nice, where he stayed for a long time. He also spent several months in the United States. Wherever he went, he left debts and protests behind, to the point that in 1877 and 1878 Ernesto considered him unfit to succeed him. He asked for his disqualification to prevent him from taking over the family business. One can imagine the despair of his mother Teresa, who was very attached to her children. This first disqualification was linked to moral behaviour and the need to preserve the family's good name, not to individual acts that could damage the Lefèbvre industries.

From what is known, we can say that Carlo and Francesco were very close, even accomplices, in their youth, and that they later separated because of economic disagreements. Their relationship with their sister Flavia, who led a very separate life and was often abroad, is more nuanced.

For Francesco, we know that he followed his brother to Nice for a few years and that, between 1876 and 1877, he met the beautiful Franco-Austrian Gisèle, whom he would later marry. Carlo's disqualification was complete: he deprived the young man of all the powers to manage the paper mills and other family activities that were his as the eldest son, now 28 years old. The measure lasted a few years and left Carlo in a state of despair, unable to cope with his lavish lifestyle. But his insistence, and probably that of his mother Teresa (according to André-Isidore), must have been pressing when, in 1885, Ernest, now old and approaching 70, decided to reconsider.

That decision, inspired by a father's attempt to rescue his son, turned out to be ruinous for the Manifatture del Fibreno, becoming one of *the causes* (*one of the causes*, it should be pointed out) that would lead to their closure almost seventy years after their refounding. Before recounting that event in brief, more needs to be told.

## **The catastrophe of Ischia and Naples: the earthquake of 1883**

On Saturday 28 July 1883 the island of Ischia was struck by an earthquake caused by the non-eruptive activity of the Epomeo volcano. The earthquake caused thousands of deaths in the city of Ischia, especially in the town of Casamicciola, and damage in Naples, where dozens of buildings and houses collapsed. According to the chronicles, Epomeo's last catastrophic eruption took place in 1303, when it produced devastating pyroclastic flows and lost height, falling to its present height of 789 metres. Since then, all memory of its activity has been lost. It is a volcano that cannot yet be considered extinct, although its activity is considered low risk.<sup>72</sup> But not the seismicity. In fact, nobody expected such a seismic event to occur after so many centuries. According to contemporary accounts, a small tidal wave also hit parts of the Naples coast in 1883. However, the city and Pozzuoli were hit by an earthquake of magnitude IV on the Mercalli scale, which, although not very strong, caused collapses and hundreds of deaths. Unfortunately, it struck at nine o'clock in the evening, when many people had already retired to their homes. The earthquake also affected many personalities: the young Benedetto Croce lost his mother, father and sister.

Before they said goodbye to each other, or in an earlier lost letter, Ernesto had told his cousin that the whole family would be in Ischia on 25 July. What a surprise it was for the cousin to learn from the newspapers, a day late, that Ischia had been devastated by a terrible earthquake and that hundreds, if not thousands, of victims were feared. He was in Dijon at the time and worried about the fate of Ernesto and his large family. Eugénie Lefèbvre wrote a telegram to Naples, asking Ernesto to reassure her and the other cousin present, Marie Gaume Grand, widow of Charles Grand, who had the same degree of

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<sup>72</sup> Chiesa S., Poli S., Vezzoli L., *Studio dell'ultima eruzione storica dell'isola d'Ischia: la colata dell'Arso - 1302*. Department of Earth Sciences, University of Milan, Centro Alpi Centrali, CNR, Milan 1986.

cousinship with the Neapolitan Lefèbvre family. For three days, the telegraph was silent, while news of the scale of the disaster arrived in the typical dropper of the time, news that made people fear the worst.<sup>73</sup> The reply telegram arrived on the 31st and was immediately communicated to the Lefèbvre in Paris:

"We arrived at Isola last night. We thank God that we escaped danger. Ernesto".<sup>74</sup>

The telegram was followed on 16 August by a letter in which Ernesto explained in more detail what had happened and how fortunately the entire Lefèbvre family had narrowly escaped complete destruction:

On the morning of your departure from Paris, you heard about the disaster in Ischia, which affected you so much that you sent me a telegram as a token of your affection. In fact, I had expected to arrive in Casamicciola around the 25th of July, but the owner of our little house had written to say that the apartment was still full and that we would have to wait until the first week of August. This inconvenience saved me! On Saturday evening, 28 July, at 9.30 p.m., I was in the hall where the music was being played; there were 36 people there. Almost all of them died. The details are terrible. Almost everyone (in the city) has someone to mourn and Naples is in mourning. We have lost neither relatives nor close friends. The number of victims is shocking. The town of Ischia is a real graveyard. I lost a good 'countermaster' who had worked on paper machines for 50 years. He had seen four different directors. Because of a slight sprain, the doctor had ordered him to go to Ischia for mud treatments. He never returned, and neither did his wife. Every day you hear a sad story about this massacre. Ernesto (16 August 1883).<sup>75</sup>

In its summary, the letter, which juxtaposes two sentences suggesting that they must be connected, leaves room for uncertainty ('On Saturday evening, 28 July, at half past nine, I was in the hall where the music was being played; there were 36 people there. Almost all of

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<sup>73</sup> XIX AB 4483, vol. XII, p. 17.

<sup>74</sup> XIX AB 4483, vol. XII, p. 41.

<sup>75</sup> XIX AB 4483, vol. XII, pp. 41-42.

them are dead'). It seems that the first sentence makes the second logical: there were 36 of us... almost all of them are dead. In fact, the second sentence about the number of dead is related, *ad sensum*, to the dead in Casamicciola and Naples, otherwise the addition 'We have lost neither relatives nor close friends' would not make sense.

### **The last meeting between the Lefèbvre cousins**

In 1885 Ernesto spent a holiday in Switzerland and then on Lake Como with Teresa, his daughter Giulia and his faithful servant Jean, now an old man, who had served him for over 40 years. His health was failing and the doctors had recommended mountain air. These last trips were all therapeutic. André-Isidore remembered that in 1841 Ernesto, his parents, his sister Luisa and Gioacchino had travelled the same route in a stagecoach, and this gave him an attack of nostalgia. He feels dizzy at the thought of how much time has passed, now that he himself is more than an octogenarian. Never trivial or obvious, André-Isidore's reflections on the passage of time are a valuable addition to his pages.

Staying at the Hôtel National de Lucerne (recommended by Isidore since 1878), the "Neapolitans" go for a walk on the Gütsch hill. André-Isidore notices that Ernesto, now almost 70, is trying to retrace the places he saw in 1850. André-Isidore is much older, 86 years old, born in 1799, and is finishing the very long *mémoire* that he started 13 years ago.

On 21 July, after several excursions, Ernesto set off for the spa town of Bad Ems, where he had been prescribed mineral baths to treat his bone pains, the rheumatism from which he suffered so much and which had also afflicted his father. First he planned to stop in Zurich and Frankfurt, places that interested his daughter Giulia, who was in her early twenties. On the 28th they arrived in Bad Ems, south of Koblenz, where they had booked into the luxurious Hôtel Prince de Galles. There they stayed with André-Isidore and his wife for a few days, until 10 August, while Teresa and her daughter continued their journey.<sup>76</sup> Not

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<sup>76</sup> AB XIX 4483, vol. XII, pp. 378-379.

far away, at the same time, were Pedro and Flavia, with their three-year-old son Illán. They met up and then mother and daughter travelled all the way to Ostend to swim in the cold sea. In Porte Belge they also met the Motta Bagnara family, Fabrizio and his wife Lucia Saluzzo. They were accompanied by their children Luisa, 17, Maria, 13, and Gioacchino, 6. Far from the dangers of cholera, the northern seaside resorts were considered by doctors of the time to be the healthiest.

On 1 September 1885, Ernesto returned to Paris with his faithful Jean to meet André-Isidore again. As always, his words of admiration and affection for his cousin were sincere and passionate.<sup>77</sup> He repeats - this time in a more heartfelt tone than usual - that he has inherited his father's best qualities, that he is far-sighted, wise and educated, and that he has maintained the esteem that people, workers, society and institutions had for his father Charles. Honest, hardworking, united and always faithful to his wife Teresa. Unfortunately, according to André, she has vices of character: she is too good and submissive with her children. Good, but weak and impressionable, incapable of being obeyed, she has passed on her weaknesses to her children through her character. Surely Ernesto must have had some responsibility, but he did everything he could to give his sons an education on a par with hers. Perhaps it was the wealth, the luxury, that Ernesto did not lack. In the end, André-Isidore says he is convinced that everything happened in the early years, when Teresa dominated and Ernesto, who was busy working, left her to raise them. It was there, before the age of eleven or twelve, that the breakdowns in the children's character occurred. It was a different story for the two daughters, who maintained and preserved the dignity of their position. In the next chapter, we will look at other information about Francesco and Carlo, taken from André-Isidore's reliable and rigorous source, and compare it with others. In the meantime, let us finish by tracing the family's movements in 1885.

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<sup>77</sup> AB XIX 4483, XII, p. 380.



The entrance to the Rue de Douai. One of the first houses on the right, number 15, was the home of the French Lefèbvre family.

On 6 September, Ernesto was joined in Paris by his wife and Lucia Saluzzo Motta Bagnara. The Neapolitan Lefèbvre took up residence at 15, rue de Douai, the home of André-Isidore, whose guests they were. André-Isidore had not seen young Giulia since 1865, when she was only three years old. She is now a beautiful young woman with very refined manners (as Flavia certainly is); she has not been "neglected" like the other children in terms of education and indulgence (and here it is not clear whether she has any reservations about Flavia, as well as Carlo and Francesco, or not), but has learned from her mistakes by giving her a proper education, self-respect, education and manners.<sup>78</sup> Her cousin Lucia Saluzzo married Motta Bagnara and her two daughters also made a good impression on her. Lucia, however, was in poor health following the death of two very young children, twins, in 1881.

<sup>78</sup> AB XIX 4483, vol. XII, p. 385.

During his stay, Ernesto was struck by a severe attack of rheumatism which prevented him from going out and from attending a dinner to which many people were invited on 29 September 1885. On 20 October, the entire Lefèbvre family left Paris to visit their cousins in Besançon and Franche-Comté, with whom they remained in close contact almost 80 years after Charles's move and the dispersal of the original family stock. In fact, we know from André-Isidore's notes that the various branches of the family continued to exchange letters (especially with Léon Lefebvre's family). They then set off again, passing through Rome, where they left Giulia, and were back in their native Naples on 11 November.



Earthquake of Ischia and Casamicciola, 28 July 1883.



## **Chapter 3**

### **The post-unification crisis Second Phase**

#### **Philanthropic initiatives**

As we have seen in our history, the Isola and Carnello areas were enriched by works of public utility and infrastructure financed by Charles and his son Ernesto: The "Verga d'Oro" canal - which, for a few kilometres, diverts about a third of the flow of the Fibreno river, helping to irrigate the fields and therefore valuable for agriculture - the small church of Forme, the improvement of the road from Isola del Liri to Sora, a section of the railway between Sora and Arce, the Isoletta railway station, the two Sale Flavia, the care of the nurseries in Naples. As long as the Lefèbvres remained in the Terra del Lavoro, they wanted to give back to the community at least a little of what they had earned by exploiting the paper mills. For this, the Lefèvre were well liked. We know this from the writings of Achille Lauri, Vincenza Pinelli and the local historian Bruno Ceroli, who state that the same feeling persisted for more than a century after the paper mills were abandoned.

Some of the old infrastructure in the area (railway, roads, aqueduct, canal, public buildings) were built with contributions and donations from the Lefèvre family for about a century, and this has left its mark. The name Isola di Sora was changed in 1863 to Isola presso Sora and in 1869 to Isola del Liri. The census of 1861 recorded a population of 12,000, a figure that remained constant for more than twenty years, probably due to the paper crisis. On 3 May 1861, Umberto of Savoy visited Sora (but not Isola), thus signalling the importance attached to the industrial district, still one of the largest in southern Italy, but

without passing by the Lefèbvre paper mills, as the Bourbons had done in Naples. Given its importance, this failed gesture probably marked the Lefèbvre's link with the former kingdom.

In the post-reunification years, Ernesto had a primary school built, which was recognised and equated by the Ministry of Education. The school was located close to the production facilities: it was mainly intended for the children of paper mill workers, but it was also open to adults who wanted to improve their education. As for the Sala Flavia (Flavia Hall), it was commissioned by Charles in Isola shortly before his death:

Up to now there was only a very small hospital on Isola, lacking all comforts, but recently a more decent place has been added, which can accommodate 10 or 12 sick men and women. It has a perpetual annuity of 150 ducats a year, donated by the Count of Balsorano, Mr Charles Lefèbvre, who wanted the pious hospital to be called Flavia, in memory of a daughter of the donor who died in the prime of life.<sup>79</sup>

The factory also had a crèche, inspired by the crèches in England and France. Working women could leave their children, even babies, in the care of paid nurses. These facilities were still in use in 1930. By 1870, the workforce had grown to 600 (380 men, 120 women, 100 boys).<sup>80</sup>

Ernesto became involved in local politics when he was elected to the municipal council from 1870 to 1886; during these fifteen years he lived in Villa Lefèbvre (now Pisani) rather than in the Palazzo, although his presence in Isola was not as assiduous as that of his father. For a few years he did not take part in the discussions of the town council, but on the whole his interest in the Sora area remained constant and remarkable. Over the years, the Manifatture del Fibreno took part in trade missions and international fairs in Europe (Germany, England, France) and even in the United States, gaining worldwide fame. In

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<sup>79</sup> Filippo Cirelli, *Regno delle Due Sicilie. Descritto ed illustrato*, Naples 1858, p. 356.

<sup>80</sup> Michela Cigola, *Le cartiere storiche del basso Lazio*, Ciolfi, Cassino 2002, p. 64.

1880, they still enjoyed a considerable reputation, but it was the end of a cycle. It was then that the company was taken over by their sons, Francesco and Carlo.

## **Lefèbvre Chemical Industries of Bagnoli**

Meanwhile, in 1864, the construction of the Bagnoli chemical factory and the assembly of reactors and equipment were completed. This factory will be discussed in more detail in the relevant chapter, but those who wish to skip the detailed account can get a general idea of the enterprise in the meantime. The management was entrusted to the Frenchman Charles-Alexandre Déperais (1820-1900) - originally from Bercy but adopted as a Parisian - an expert in textile and paper dyes. Many sources attest to the excellent quality of Lefèbvre Chemical Industries' products.<sup>81</sup> Ernesto's first aim was to produce the products that he had to import from abroad in large quantities and at high prices; a way of responding to changing conditions by reducing the cost of at least one link in the production chain. The factory was also large enough to supply the paper mills of the Liri Valley and the textile industry of the Salerno area, in particular the Sarno spinning mill, in which the Lefèbvre family had a shareholding.



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<sup>81</sup> Déperais still appears in an *Annuaire* of French Engineering Chemists published in 1884 in Paris.

Unfortunately, demand was lower than expected. The reason for the lack of exploitation was the structural economic and social crisis that affected all the territories of the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies after the Unification. According to a report by the Naples Chamber of Commerce and Arts in 1864, the factory mainly produced hydrochloric acid and alum. The former was an important intermediate product in the production of chlorine for bleaching paper and cotton fabrics, while the latter was used in the production of a paper glue, but also as a brightener in the tanning industry, in the building industry and in the vulcanisation of rubber.

Charles Déperais lamented the problems Lefèbvre's industry had in finding skilled workers, which were non-existent in the Naples area. The industry was a pioneering one, so all the technicians had to be recruited in France, at considerable cost. These were people who had to leave, who had to be guaranteed a home. There was also the problem of a saturated market and a lack of infrastructure in the area where the company was located. It is known that the Bourbons had promised to provide infrastructure, but after the change of regime the new rulers did not do so. The factory initially employed 24 people, rising to around 40. It was a large factory considering its size (the main building was at least 200 metres long) and the fact that Italian chemical factories at that time were mostly small workshops producing small quantities of products with few workers.

A full description of *Industrie Chimiche Lefèbvre* is given by Professor Silvestro Zinno in one of his writings of 1871, which we will examine in more detail later, where he praises the factory as being almost unique in southern Italy and so well maintained that it was able to compete with factories in France, Germany and England. Not surprisingly, Déperais, a chemist and engineer of some repute, was the holder of several important patents and an inventor capable of designing innovative machines.<sup>82</sup> He had invested all his fame and expertise in setting up this factory. The production of sulphuric acid, for example,

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<sup>82</sup> *Bulletin des lois de la Republique Francaise*, Paris 1843, p. 266.

was described as abundant and the production process as modern, thanks to a special machine invented by the French engineer himself. Alessandro Bertocchi, Director of the Statistical Office of the Chamber of Commerce, also praised the production of alum and other products. The Lefèbvre complex, still isolated in the countryside at the end of the 19th century, was surrounded by other infrastructures from 1903. It was the first nucleus of what was to become, through complex transitions, the ILVA of Bagnoli.

At the same time as founding the Chimica di Bagnoli, Ernesto founded another factory, the Fabbrica San Carlo, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Reasons for a long absence**

After the unification, between 1861 and 1867 (around the time of the abolition of the pica law), the Lefèbvre family spent almost four and a half years abroad, mainly in France, although not continuously. Never before had they been so far away from their interests. If this indirectly shows that the industries were well managed and that a few months' return was at least enough to give them a sense of direction (the San Carlo factory and the Bagnoli industry were created during this period), it also shows that the family preferred France to Italy for long periods in the 1860s. Only reasons of travel?

Apart from the uncertainties of the change of regime, a very valid reason could have been the bloody military operations that led to the suppression of brigandage, which ended for the most part in 1865, but left the situation uncertain for a few more years. As part of the Bourbon elite, the Lefèbvre family, although loyal to the new king, had something to fear from the measures taken by the armed forces to suppress brigandage (which was very active in the Terra del Lavoro). A letter from the Fibreno factory at that time explains what happened. It was written by Lorenzo Montgolfier and addressed to Achille Montgolfier:

Dear friend, I thank you with all my heart for your hospitality. At the critical moment we find ourselves in, to all our worries have been added other, more distressing fears, which have kept us in deep anxiety for a week. Our little Gaston was so seriously ill that we had lost all hope of keeping him alive. Thank God, by a miracle we had not hoped for, the complications are over and the little one seems to be reborn. In truth, he is still very weak, but he is starting to take some chicken broth, which he digests well. The doctor treating him now gives us hope. Here's the plan for today: when Gaston has regained his strength and no longer needs medical care, we will go to Naples and then to Civitavecchia. Céline and my daughter will return to me. I think they will be able to leave between the 15th and 20th of August. Every day the newspapers bring us more serious and worrying news. Everyone is afraid of anarchy and looting because of the riots and disturbances caused by the provincial feuds. So far there has been little unrest in our areas, but the workers who can no longer find work in the factories are suffering and complaining. Trade is at a standstill and factory owners are using their last resources to keep their workers employed.

Although nothing is being sold at the moment, the Count of Balsorano has decided to continue production in order to avoid laying off workers. All the cloth manufacturers who have shops in Naples have chartered merchant ships on which to transship their goods to protect them from looting. All foreigners made an inventory of their furniture, certified by two witnesses, and deposited it in the appropriate embassies. Attempts have been made to sow discord among the population. The reactionary feuds have risen to the cry of 'Down with the Constitution, long live Maria Teresa' (the Queen Mother), who has found herself in Gaeta among her loyalists and who seems to be directing the feuds in favour of her son, the Count of Trani. Here is the latest news of the day. The capture of Milazzo in Sicily by the dictator's army: the battle was fierce, with rumours of 3000 dead. The abandonment of the citadel of Messina by the royal army and the withdrawal of all troops from the island. The exile of 12 high-ranking members of the Camarilla, including General Nunziante and Monsignor Gallo, the king's confessor, who had the greatest influence on him. The return to Naples of all the exiles of 1848. It would take volumes to recount the events. What is certain is that anarchy will prevail if one side does not forcefully gain the upper hand. Everyone agreed that the National Guard was well organised and present in the provinces, but lacked weapons.<sup>83</sup>

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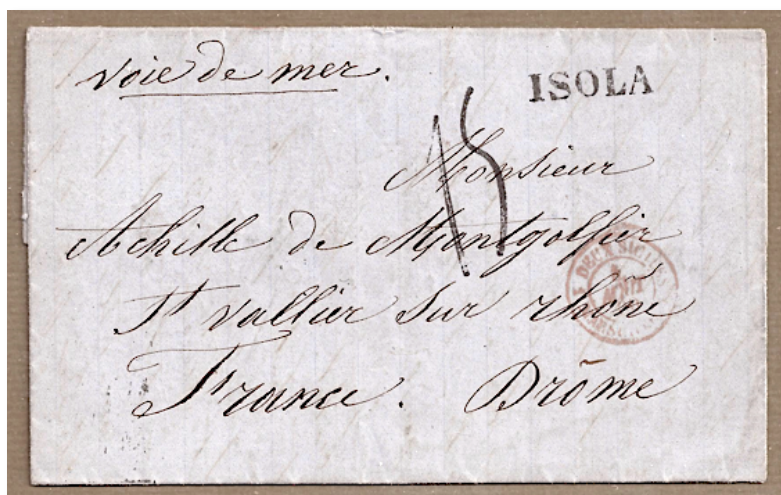
<sup>83</sup> *Letter from Lorenzo Montgolfier to Achille Montgolfier, 28 July 1860.*

After the surrender of the Bourbon troops at Civitella del Tronto, the spring of 1861 saw the spread of revolts throughout the southern continent. These were sometimes called *jacquerie*, or unplanned uprisings, in which social demands were combined with political and religious ones, all of which were suppressed with extreme violence.

Fearing that the reunification of the scattered soldiers and fighters scattered throughout central and southern Italy, but also in the Papal States (where Francis II of the Two Sicilies had taken refuge), might revive the Bourbon resistance, the action was fierce. In 1861, the Bourbon Committee organised a public demonstration in Naples. In April 1861, a conspiracy was foiled with the subsequent arrest of 600 people, most of whom turned out to be former Bourbon officers. Meanwhile, Savoy troops surrounded and wiped out one revolt after another in Montefalcione, Montemiletto and many other places. On 14 July 1861, General Enrico Cialdini was sent to Naples with extraordinary powers. His repression was extremely harsh: he resorted to mass arrests, decimations, extrajudicial executions and the destruction of entire towns in Pontelandolfo, Casalduni and Auletta. Because of the scandal that ensued, Cialdini was replaced by General Alfonso La Marmora in September. In addition, the Calabrian MP Benedetto Musolino accused the French government of funding bandits to weaken Italy and create public order problems.

Similar accusations were made in the following months, when the newspapers suggested that the French were aiding the rebels. People who had known Lefèvre, such as Francesco Xavier de Mérode, were implicated in these accusations. There were French troops helping the Legitimists, and this multiplied the Savoyards' efforts - and also their ferocity - by spreading suspicion and multiplying military actions against the civilian population. Between 1862 and 1864, the number of troops involved in repression and military conquest reached 105,000. On 16 December 1862, the Chamber of Deputies set up a commission to investigate the phenomenon, with Giuseppe Massari as secretary and Giuseppe Sirtori as president. Subsequently, the Pica Law (1863-1865)

was enacted, which introduced the systematic use of bounties and forced residence, a measure that affected not only brigands but also presumed supporters, relatives or simple suspects. The law was in force until 31 December 1865.<sup>84</sup>




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<sup>84</sup> The historiography that has studied the phenomenon from different points of view, 'pro-Savoia' or 'neo-Bourbon', is abundant and suffers, on both sides, from considerable interpretative imbalances. Some summary studies are worth mentioning here, such as Giovanni De Matteo, *Brigantaggio e Risorgimento - Legittimisti e Briganti tra i Borbone e i Savoia*, Naples, Guida, 2000; Antonio Lucarelli, *Il brigantaggio politico del Mezzogiorno d'Italia (1815-1818)*, Milan, Longanesi, 1982; Antonio Pagano, *Due Sicilie 1830/1880. Cronaca della disfatta*, Lecce, Capone 2002; Giordano Bruno Guerri, *Il sangue del sud*, Mondadori, Milan 2010.



Isola di Leri 28 juillet 1860.

Mon cher ami, je vous remercie de grand cœur  
de l'hospitalité que vous m'avez offerte dans le moment  
où j'étais si malade. Vous m'avez trouvé à tout le moins  
dans une si bonne position pour vous l'avez traitée  
plus sagement, qui vous ont tenu pendant une semaine  
dans de si bonnes conditions. Notre pauvre petit garçon  
a été dangereusement malade au point de ne plus  
pouvoir tenir debout. Le docteur Giamà à Rome, par  
un prodige médical, lui a fait faire un bon et le pauvre  
enfant semble revivre. Il est même d'une nature  
gaillarde, mais il commence à prendre son air de  
bonhomme de paille qu'il digère bien. Le médecin  
vous remercie tout aussi.

Je n'ai pas encore fini mes projets. Un peu de  
courage pour le faire et à vous plus de bien. Je  
vous envoie ce que vous m'avez donné. J'en ai emporté  
à Naples ou à Civitavecchia. J'en ai aussi fait  
et tenez-vous à mon parti. Je vous envoie tout  
par la voie de 15 au 20 août.

Les journaux vous donnent la nouvelle qui  
se succèdent chaque jour plus grave et plus inquiétante.  
Chacun craint l'anarchie et le pillage par  
suite de troubles et de désordres qui provoquent  
la mouvement révolutionnaire en province. J'espère  
que tout ira bien. Je vous envoie tout ce que  
vous m'avez donné. Je vous envoie tout ce que  
vous m'avez donné.

Letter sent by Lorenzo Montgolfier to his relative Achille Montgolfier.  
Courtesy of: Viscogliosi Collection, Isola del Liri.



Facade of the imposing Palazzo Balsorano, where the Lefèbvre family lived after the unification of Italy, after extensive restoration and the addition of 3 floors (1860-1865).

## The Polvica estate and farm

Precisely in the middle of the century, on his return from long absences in France, when the new activities of San Carlo and Bagnoli Chimica were underway, Ernesto bought a large agricultural estate in Polvica, in the Neapolitan hinterland.<sup>85</sup> The family owned large tracts of land in the area between Isola di Sora, Sora and Arpino and the surrounding area. For a long time they were the largest landowners in the area, when they owned almost the entire hill of San Lorenzo with its cultivated land and the land stretching from Forme towards Carnello, a property divided into many estates which, as we have seen, were used partly for the personal needs of the family living in Palazzo Balsorano and partly for the production of silk used in the San Carlo factory. In 1865 a private deed was drawn up in accordance with art. 1279 of the Civil Code records the acquisition of a large fortune by Ernesto Lefèbvre, who, at the time of the completion and restoration of Palazzo Balsorano in Naples, was still residing at 253 Riva di Chiaia.

The management of the farm was entrusted to a certain Francesco Imbriano, who lived in Polvica. The farm, bought in 1854 by Enrico Catalano with all its belongings, was bought back by Lefèbvre on 15 August 1860, after a careful inspection, and leased to Imbriano himself for 640 ducats a year.

This contract is also interesting for the way it describes the management of the large estate. According to the contract, the settler was to be paid 130 ducats a year in the event of a poor harvest. In return, Lefèbvre undertook to supply Imbriano with all the sulphur it needed, on the condition that this amount would be included in a 'special debt' to be paid each year by November, which the settler would have to pay in kind. In 1860, the Chimiche factory in Bagnoli was not yet completed, but given its size, it is likely that at least some sections were already in operation and that Déperais was able to produce the sulphur that Lefèbvre had brought to Imbriano. The production of wine in barrels, which the settler had to deliver to the landlord, had to amount

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<sup>85</sup> ASN, Ruffo di Bagnara Archives, Part II. Various 135/1581.

to 8 units per year, and the excess was valued at 10 ducats, to be deducted from the special debt for the sulphur supply. In this way, the exchange was to be mutually beneficial.

The delivery report describes a very large farm from which Lefèbvre received fruit, vegetables, wine, oil and other fresh produce. Its proximity to Naples meant that deliveries were made almost daily.

The farm consisted of a large open courtyard with various rooms used for wine production ("Celliera" with 12 large barrels), an oil press ("Spremitoio") and various rooms known as "bassi" paved with lapilli, stables and a mill (for the production of flour). The main building consisted of many rooms with a fireplace, a well and all the comforts. Above all, however, the size of the orchards, vineyards and vegetable gardens, which provided the Lefèbvre family with large quantities of produce, was remarkable. In fact, the Polvica farm and the adjoining estate counted no less than 6,055 vines, 2,043 poplars, which were able to provide wood for the paper mills even before the industrialisation of pulp production, 88 pine trees and 145 mulberry trees, which were able to produce leaves for the silkworms reared on Isola. There were also 26 rowan trees, 70 elms, 28 oaks, 36 walnut trees, 6 cherry trees, 18 fig trees, 12 pear trees and dozens of other fruit trees producing plums, walnuts, laurels, oranges and citrus fruits. It is known that between 1860 and 1865, when the family returned to Naples, all this could only be used occasionally, but after that the supply of wine, oil, fruit and vegetables was continuous.

The deed of sale is not known. Polvica was probably sold about 25 years after the purchase, around 1888-1889, when much of the Lefèbvre business and property was sold off.

## **New property purchases**

The so-called "Catasto provvisorio della Città di Napoli", which in reality remained definitive for decades until it was revised in the Unitarian years, records the acquisition of numerous properties by Charles Lefèbvre, from the 1830s until his death, and then continued by Ernesto. In particular, in the hamlets of Vicaria and Chiaia, the cadastre records the ownership of 10 houses and 1 house of the 'Case-Fondi urbani' typology. These are made up of around thirty properties, including apartments, shops and warehouses. The cadastral charge, which records the relative value, shows values ranging from 3.60 to 25 ducats per year. This was an area of recent urbanisation, where the Lefèbvres themselves owned a large plot of building land, partly connected to the land bought by the Rothschilds to extend Villa Acton.

At the same time, the Lefèbvre family owned many buildings in Isola and estates in Fontechiari, Arce and Arpino, such as the so-called Casino Palma, two storeys high and with ten rooms, a house in the Contrada Borgonuovo, three storeys high and with eighteen rooms, another house in Borgonuovo, two storeys high and with seven rooms, a one-storey, two-bedroom house in Carnello, a one-storey, two-bedroom house in the Contrada San Domenico, and the recently built three-storey building for the production of Remorice Pistolegno, overlooking the River Fibreno, which was very advanced for its time, as well as a series of new warehouses in the same area.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Properties that appear in various documents, including the Deed of Donation of 2 February 1887 from Ernesto Lefèbvre to his son Francesco, and earlier.



## A tumultuous transformation

A brief sociological overview, which takes us back a few decades in the time line we are following, can help us to clarify the position of the Lefèbvre family in Isola and prepare us to tell the final phase of their story in the village of Terra del Lavoro. It is a reflection on the facts, the characters and their relationship with the territory that surrounded them.

In the eighteenth century and again at the beginning of the nineteenth century, until at least 1820, Isola di Sora was a land of agricultural and artisanal vocation. The main activity was agriculture, made easy by the abundance of water and the nature of the soil. The area was surrounded by woods that provided wood suitable for solid construction, such as chestnut, and by waters that flowed at different angles and were particularly suitable for powering mechanical mills. Since the 16th century, and perhaps even earlier, these had supported a rich wool and felt production. The wool and felt mills were flanked by

the first small paper mills, which had an artisanal dimension, together with ancillary activities that were often separated into different premises and activities: leaching, grinding of rags.

The new legal framework inaugurated by the Bourbons in the 18th century and then implemented by Joachim Murat, who was able to donate large buildings such as monasteries for long-term use, changed the situation. At a time when even the paper industry had made considerable technological progress, Murat's interest was the basis for a rapid economic and social transformation of the Terra del Lavoro and the Sora area in particular. This transformation was rapid, if not abrupt. Thanks to the implementation of Murat's decrees, the poor but dignified hamlet, which lived on the fruits of the land, hosted the Beranger and Lefèbvre factory, which marked the beginning of the industrial transformation of the area. There were, of course, other factories, and many more were to be set up throughout the century, but this was undoubtedly the "model" and driving force for the whole area. Thanks to the Berangers, but above all to the Lefèbvres, highly skilled craftsmen, technicians and French inventors arrived in the area and settled in the village for decades (like the Montgolfier family) or even forever (like the Courier family). They attracted the attention of other foreign industrialists who had been living there for a long time but who were involved in other trades, such as wool spinning, or who came from outside, from Naples or even from France. A virtuous circle was created, attracting capital and valuable skills, which were then transferred to the locals.

The 'industrial spectacle' that the Lefèbvre family created on their estate should not be underestimated in this context. Those who stayed with them were exposed to modern industry in a way that was unimaginable in other parts of Italy; they could see for themselves the great paper machine and anticipate the publishing revolution that was brewing. The news spread, especially in Paris and the surrounding area. The building typology of the large factory villa was different from that of the factory building, as we have already seen. The factory villa implied that the owners of the factory lived close to the factory, but did not work there as artisans. With the exception of Charles, the inventor



of the model, no other Lefèbvre would do so. It was also thanks to the Lefèbvres, and later to other industrialists such as the Boimonds, that real working class towns began to emerge in the 19th century, and increasingly so towards the end of the century. However, and this is the point, the Lefèbvres did not ally themselves with the local industrialists or with the natives, with whom they also had conflictual relations or, in some cases, a distant collaboration in financial matters, as was the case with the Sorvillo family. Nor did they ally themselves with the French industrialists. They were invited to the Palazzo Lefèbvre, but they did not establish stable relations with them. It was the French Neapolitans, the rich families who had been established in the capital for many years, such as the Degas, who had an equal relationship with the Lefèbvre, not the newcomers from France such as the Courriers and the Boimonds.

The Lefèbvre established very good relations with the workers and technicians, who admired them, viewing them more as aristocrats than industrialists (and this is the difference between the Lefèbvre and the other French families that settled in the area, which were never ennobled).

## **The great industrialists of Isola**

The decline that began after 1880 for the Lefèbvre paper mills had, as we have seen and will continue to see, a number of concurrent causes: accidental causes, accidents along the way, a poor economic and industrial situation that hit this part of Italy and this sector particularly hard.

Towards the middle of the century, after Lefèbvre, the Meuricoffre, Sorvillo, Courier and Boimond paper mills stood out. These families, many of them of French origin, tended to settle in the area and raise their children there. This was the case with Emilio Boimond, born in Sora in 1844 to a French couple who belonged to two industrial dynasties: François Claude Boimond and Elisa Courier. Names that have come up again and again in our history, since the Boimond and



Courrier families settled in Isola (one of the Courriers was production manager in a Lefèbvre factory), where their descendants continued the business as factory managers, machine technicians, production technicians, industrialists themselves, until the great crisis of the 1970s. A Boimond factory used the Valcatoio waterfall before it was converted into a hydroelectric power station. Despite bankruptcy in 1932, the Boimonds continued to invest. Their sons, Emilio and Mario, took over and revived the company. When the two sons died at a young age, the company continued to operate with outside help. Finally, after various vicissitudes, it went bankrupt in 1979, having survived about a century longer than Lefèbvre. This was certainly not because Emilio Boimond was more shrewd than Charles and Ernesto, but because subsequent generations of Boimonds continued as entrepreneurs.

The marriage policy was also followed by the Mancini family (who were also established in Rome as building industrialists), the Ciccodicola family and the Bartolomucci family. The sons and daughters of these families (and others) married French women and men whose names were often Italianised, such as Pierre Coste, who always reads Pietro Costa. The Bartolomucci family owned a paper mill as early as 1630, but it was not until around 1824 that work was completed on the extension of a factory in Picinisco (about forty kilometres east of Isola). The factory, which housed 64 workers, was initially run by Lorenzo Montgolfier, who was later hired by the Lefèbvre family. The Bartolomuccis supplied the Ministry of the Interior of the Kingdom of the Bourbons for several years because their paper was considered to be of excellent quality, although the mill was much smaller than that of Charles. Bartolomucci survived many crises by remaining extremely small, closer to artisan size; it employed 90 workers in 1876 and neither grew nor shrank in 1890, a year of severe crisis. Around 1870, half of the mill was sold to the Visocchi family. The Bartolomuccis, like the Courier, Boimond, Sorvillo and De Caria families, also sought alliances, which, as we have said, often took the form of marriages and the joint ownership of plants or activities. Perhaps because of its size, Bartolomucci resisted until 1906, while Lefèbvre's activities in the three paper mills ceased around 1890. The

reasons for this increased resistance are easy to identify if we study the history of these families: they remained entrepreneurial families, and the children and descendants of these owners remained in place. The history of the Lefèbvre family tells us of very different relationships, international relationships, which also forced different social behaviour.

Moreover, the family begins its history in Naples, capital of a powerful kingdom, and returns to Naples. Ernesto is a pure entrepreneur (Ernesto's sons will not see themselves as entrepreneurs), he has also lost the connotation of a technician, which was his father's, who got his hands dirty, picked up irons, brushed oils and greases, immersed himself in the mechanisms of his clanking machines; he himself experimented with mixtures and discussed with the technical directors, in French, the composition of this or that pulp, trying out different types of wood, different types of rags, different processes. Ernesto sought good relations with banks, found orders, discussed with ministers to obtain orders, argued with technicians about new safety regulations or child labour. He is a businessman who thinks about the future. When it is explained to him that Italy has a great future as a single, undivided nation, that it has become an economic power, that the Kingdom will be swept away by a powerful international alliance, and he understands that this destiny is inescapable, he prepares himself: He succeeds in building an innovative chemical factory in Bagnoli, fighting hard against a bureaucracy that has become, if possible, even more stifling than that of the Bourbons; he builds the brand-new, futuristic factory in San Carlo, which, apart from the initial flicker, has little luck. Apart from that, Ernesto is the quintessential modern entrepreneur.

There is also the figure of Francesco, whom we will get to know better in the chapters to come: after a lavish and foolish youth, he is forced to administer an empire because of the disqualification of his brother. An empire that seems, almost suddenly, to be falling apart. He tries in every way to save his possessions. He even lived for years on Isola del Liri, where he had himself elected mayor in order to have more influence on the decisions that were taken there, which often saw the local landowners allied against the Lefèbvre family. It could be said that

Francesco becomes almost a tragic figure, struggling against a contingency or conjuncture against which he can do nothing. And the more he struggled, the more he suffered the blows of the opposing lawyers and the more his property lost value. He is forced to endure moves, rejections, outrages and quarrels that his grandfather and father never had to endure or inflict. Perhaps because of this exhausting struggle, he died young and suddenly.

Although Francesco was mayor and deputy for a short period (1893-1897), he never managed to consolidate the alliances he had won. His own activity as a parliamentarian leaves few traces: perhaps he was too distracted by the affairs of the paper mills. He inherited the long-running case against the Ciccodicola family, former wool manufacturers. In the memory of the people of Isola, however, he remains a beloved, generous and very popular figure, like his father and grandfather. The staff he had to deal with after renting the Fibreno factory all came from outside Isola: from Livorno, from Rome, from Turin. He found himself isolated: he had no relatives or local acquaintances to turn to. He is a Lefèbvre, an industrial aristocrat from outside. His wife is part of the international jet-set that Flavia and Carlo frequent and that has always been the family's chosen milieu. The fact that he is no longer trying to renew the machinery is significant. In 1892, the company had four paper machines, an exceptional endowment, but they were at least twenty years old and perhaps more. Two of them dated back to the 1840s, and the other two had certainly been bought during Ernesto's last phase of renewal. It must also be said that the crisis played an important role: the Lefèbvre companies were simply too big, with three very large mills, to resist without the large amounts of capital that Cartiere Meridionali could provide; and the mills that resisted the crisis and the changes in the paper industry were either small or formed alliances.

It is no coincidence that the race to occupy all the free space along the Fibreno and Liri rivers between Sora and Isola began after the proven success of Charles Lefèbvre's company, around 1840. The new activities were mainly concentrated around the two bridges leading to the town centre. Isola is well suited to this type of industry, even in its

modern, more mechanised version, because the water flows with sufficient energy to move mills of considerable size. In the middle of the century, the three paper mills of Lefèbvre (Forme, Carnello, San Carlo), that of Paquier and associates (Fabbrica Carta Liri), the factory of Giovanbattista Viscogliosi and the cardboard factory of Giuseppe Sarra operated in Isola di Sora. There were also several woollen mills producing woollen cloth, which tended to disappear in the course of the century, replaced by paper mills or cellulose factories: the factories of Giuseppe Polsinelli, Vincenzo Manna, Achille Simoncelli, Pasquale Ciccodicola, Marco Pelagalli and Francesco Ippolito. Three factories produced spun and combed wool for the clothing of the army and religious orders: Loreto Mazzetti, the Coccoli brothers and Peticca. Two produced Renaissance wool (basically a type of felt) and belonged to Francesco Roessinger and Federico Courier.

If we look at the company composition of the various factories, we can see how, as the century progressed, there were amicable and matrimonial alliances, as well as economic and parental entanglements, which would be too complicated to summarise here, if not with a few examples. We can take an example from 1844: a foreign industrialist, Roessinger, married an apparently Italian woman, the owner of some landed property, Sebastiana Leprezia, who came from a family that had been settled in the area for some time, but whose real name was Sebastienne Lepreux.

Several industrialists and landowners in the Isola area decided to create a factory based on the Lefèbvre model: this was the Fabbrica Carta del Liri, which brought together Natale Sorvillo, Francesco Roessinger (a wool industrialist who switched to paper production), his wife 'Sebastiana Leprezia', Pasquale Ciccodicola and the Frenchman Antonio Napoleone Paquier, who was to be the technical director. More partners were added until there were 13. The machines were bought in France, in Marseilles, between 1842 and 1843. Pasquale Ciccodicola, heir to an ancient wool industry in Arpino and father of six children, all of whom worked in the industry, had initially agreed to have the factory built on his own land for the equivalent of 8,000 ducats; he later changed his mind and preferred to compensate the partners for his

reconsideration by giving them another piece of land in the town of Lago. Considering that, according to the contract, this money was to be covered by two payments to be made over a period of ten years, between 1844 and 1854, and considering that in the same year a very long lawsuit was started between Pasquale Ciccodicola and Ernesto Lefèbvre for the restitution of a sum, it can be assumed that this sum was paid by the latter to the former, we can consider it probable that this sum was paid by Lefèbvre as a loan, in exchange for the hydraulic works that Ciccodicola had had carried out by Lefèbvre himself on the Remorici Fund. In any case, the Ciccodicola Company was founded with a dowry of 100,000 ducats not far from the Fibreno estates.

According to local rumours, Lefèbvre was the object of intense social envy on the part of other industrialists and merchants, although this was offset by a sense of admiration and gratitude on the part of the population. So when the crisis hit, the capital that had allowed other factories to survive thanks to local alliances did not come to Lefèbvre's aid. The families of industrialists in the area were very keen on financial and marital alliances, but the Lefèbvre family decided not to play these games.

### **The significance of Lefèbvre Park and the funds**

The Lefèbvre Park and its buildings are in a way the symbol of the discourse on the separation of the Lefèbvre family from the surrounding society, a separation that was not unusual as all the Lefèbvre's always had good relations with local personalities, i.e. lawyers, notaries, priests, landowners, civil servants and even the people. No other family of industrialists is known to have built for themselves "places of pleasure": parks, orchards, the elegant Villa Trianon and the coquettish Villa Pisani, a piece of French Parisian architecture in the middle of the province of Frosinone. These are signs, clues, a language: united, yes, participating in the industrial life of the place, yes, and also giving back some of what has been earned, but irrevocably on another level. Palazzo

Lefèbvre was built in an international neoclassical style that is not specifically French, but the villino Trianon (of which, however, we have no drawings apart from the significant name) and the Villa Pisani, completed in 1855, show that Frenchness remained a very strong trait in the family.

The contradictory signs were also perceived by contemporaries: while some playfully referred to Isola as 'Petit Paris' because of the number of French people working there, others called it 'Little Manchester'. This oscillation between France and England also reflects the otherness that the Frenchman Lefèbvre brought to what was, until a few decades earlier, a modest but picturesque farming village

## Chapter 4

### San Carlo wallpaper

#### A new fashion

On the eve of the Seven Years' War, the taste for high-quality printed wallpaper, for 'velvety' paper (coated with wool powder), arrived in France. In 1753, the Marquis de Mirepoix, French ambassador to England, sent the first coated papers seen in Paris [...]. No one could glue and arrange these papers except Sieur Réveillon, who succeeded and was so successful that the court and wealthy people wanted to have them.

The war of 1756 had deprived Mr Réveillon of any possibility of obtaining them from England, so he decided to produce 'velvety' papers himself and sell them at lower prices than English papers of a similar type, so much so that 'it was impossible to make them compete with those of France after the war' (ibid.). Réveillon was not the only one to take advantage of the war with England to enter the luxury wallpaper market. Jean Aubert had been making them in the rue Saint-Jacques since 1759. An English watchmaker who had set up in France became a papermaker, Jean Arthur did the same in the 1760s. François Robert made them in Paris from the 1770s. Painted wallpaper appeared in Lyon at the same time: Antoine Richoud made his debut in 1779. Around 1780, Jean-Antoine Ferrouillat set up an illustrated wallpaper workshop in his family's soya fabric factory [...] In Mulhouse, Jean-Jacques and Nicolas Dollfus opened a printed wallpaper factory in 1790. Their company passed to Hartmann Risler in 1795 and was taken over by Jean Zuber in 1800. It still exists in Rixheim today.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Paul Claval. *Le papier peint panoramique français, ou l'exotisme à domicile*. In: 'Le Globe. Revue genevoise de géographie' tome 148 *L'exotisme*, 2008 p. 71. Paul Claval's reconstruction has some inaccuracies but it is important to note that the characters involved are still William van Keppel and Monsieur Mirepoix.

Today we know that the first scenic wallpapers were produced by Zuber in 1804: the first was a panoramic *Vue de Suisse*. It is thought to be the first polychrome panoramic paper to reach the market. Up to 1867, the Zuber factory in Rixheim produced another 30 scenic views including *Hindoustan* (1807), *Les Vues de Brésil* (1830), *Les Vues d'Amerique du Nord* (1834). From 1842 onwards, Zuber also produced views that contained only panoramas without human figures, such as *Isola Bella* (1842) and *Eldorado* (1848). The names of the first artists who painted panoramas are known, the Parisian Pierre-Antoine Mongin (1761-1827) and the prolific Jean-Julien Deltin (1791-1863). They were later succeeded by Alsatian artists, Émile Zipelius (1840-1865) and Eugène Ehrman (1804-1896).<sup>88</sup>

The figure of Deltin is of particular interest to us because his style, which can be seen in many of the scenographic papers produced by Zuber, corresponds more closely than that of the other artists mentioned to the style of the scenographic paper of Villa Nota on Isola del Liri: he could therefore have been the artist commissioned by Ernesto Lefèbvre to produce the first subjects for panoramic papers, also because the know-how for producing this type of paper did not exist in that area, and probably not even in Italy around 1860. Kate Sanborn's book, *Old Time Wall Papers*, is an exceptional testimony to the wealth of images and documentation on this subject.<sup>89</sup> The book shows how widespread and elaborate scenic wallpaper was in the homes of the rich and wealthy in England, France, Italy and the United States, not to mention other countries (the documentation is mainly based on Anglo-Saxon and American examples).

There is much evidence to suggest that the period from around 1840 to the end of the Second World War and part of the following decade (around 1950) was the golden age of wallpaper. In that century, this wall decoration was cheaper than painting or boiserie and was used in

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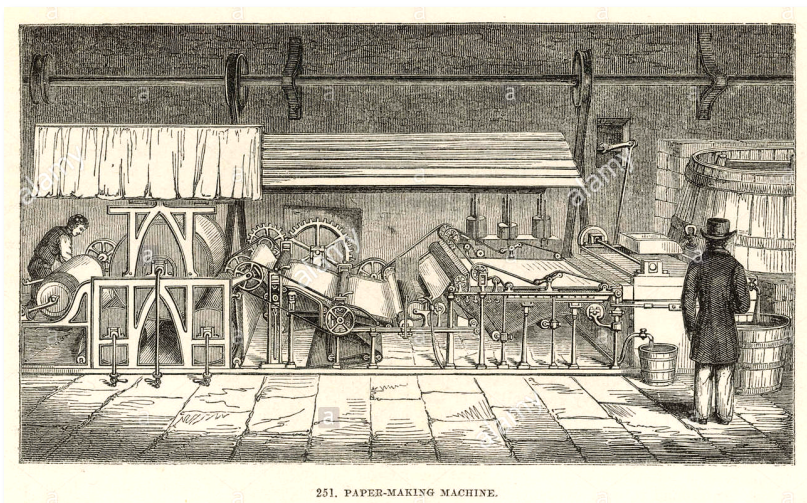
<sup>88</sup> S.v. Jean Zuber, *Encyclopedia of Interior Design*, Bahman Johanna ed., Routledge London and New York 2015 (first 1997), pp. 1407-1409.

<sup>89</sup> Kate Sanborn, *Old Time Wall Papers. An Account of the Pictorial Papers on Our Forefathers' Walls with a Study of the Historical Development of Wall Paper Making and Decoration*, Clifford & Lawton, New York 1905.



all kinds of homes. At that time (it is now generally more expensive than painting) there was something for every budget. There was a certain taste for wallpaper in the fifteen years from 1960 to 1975, and it gradually declined in the following years, although it did not disappear until the 1980s, when it was completely replaced by other wallcoverings and paintings. However, the limited market for panoramic wallpaper remained.

By the first quarter of the 18th century, it was difficult to find an English or French (or Italian or German) country house or palace that did not have at least one room decorated in this way. Until the 1840s, all wallpaper was produced by hand using the block printing process. Not surprisingly, manufacturers looked for ways to speed up and simplify production.



The machine continues in a version from around 1850. It was the technical precondition for the industrial production of wallpaper rolls.

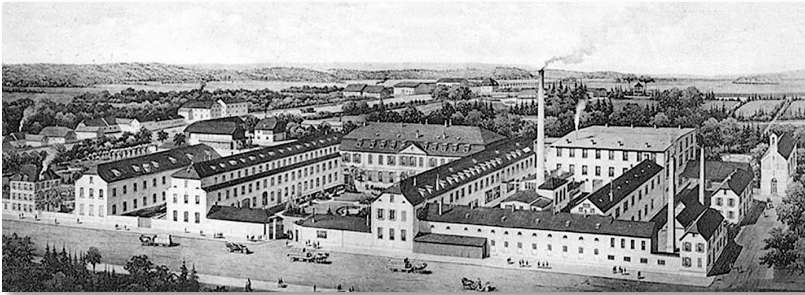
A curious fact is that in France (as in Italy) papermaking families have been practising the art for centuries and have often met each other. Jean-Baptiste Réveillon painted the paper that decorated the first balloon to fly with human passengers (21 November 1783, Versailles) by Etienne Montgolfier (1745-1799) and his brother Michel (1740-1810). Later, members of the Montgolfier family worked at the San Carlo factory on Isola del Liri. Lefèbvre invited a Montgolfier as well as wallpaper makers who were also students of Réveillon's methods. The families working in these fields formed alliances, with courses and recurrences that spanned not decades but centuries. During these years, part of the Lefèbvre family lived in Versailles, whether at court or in the houses built just outside the palace, we do not know. The memory of this event and these names, Réveillon, Montgolfier, had to be passed on in the family memory.



Model of the balloon that was first flown at Annonay and then at Versailles in 1783, decorated by the wallpaper master Réveillon with paper produced by the Montgolfier.

## Machine-made paper

In Alsace, Zuber started business in 1797 producing spectacular hand-printed scenic wallpapers as well as self-printing papers from machines initially designed to print light calico fabrics. The idea was progressively improved by various manufacturers.



Zuber in Rixheim, a wallpaper factory since 1797.

In particular, a number of mechanics invented the first machines that ran a series of cylinders in relief around a drum, on the surface of which designs were inked in different colours. The first designs or variants of these machines had no real authors: they were improvements on existing machines. In these models, the ink released on the drum was then transferred to the paper. Improvements continued, but the first to create a truly effective machine was Louis-Isidore Leroy (1816-1899), who patented his machine to print not only wallpaper but also textiles (e.g. curtains), with a few technical variations.

Traditional tablet printing was replaced. In 1839, a machine was invented that perfected the continuous-sheet principle of Louis-Nicolas Robert's machine. This machine, very cumbersome but very efficient, was patented by Charles Potter (1802-1872) who, with his brothers Harold (1806) and Edwin (1810), ran a wallpaper factory in Darwen (Lancashire). Charles Potter and technician William Ross founded the Potter & Ross factory and patented the first automatic machine in 1839,

using the methods and mechanisms of the plain-weave textile printing presses.<sup>90</sup>

With this automatic system, the paper had to pass under a large cylindrical drum, each section of which received an ink impression until the overall colour scheme was composed by the work of a series of rollers (up to 24) connected around the base. These were simultaneously inked with inks held in troughs or trays beneath each roller. The first wallpapers printed with this machine appeared drab and simple compared to the complex and refined effects of papers made with the block printing system. Many papers had floral or geometric patterns with small elements. As time went on, the machine improved and was able to print more complex patterns and distribute the ink more accurately. In any case, productivity multiplied immediately. In England alone, it went from around 1 million rolls in 1834 to around 9 million in 1860, and prices fell. In less than a generation, wallpaper had become affordable to the bourgeoisie. Only the poorest remained excluded.

In 1877, Isidore Leroy invented a 26-colour machine based on the same principles as Potter & Ross. For Isidore Leroy & Fils in Paris, this was the start of a great economic boom that would lead to more than 400 employees by 1900.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Gordon Campbell, *The Grove Encyclopaedia of Decorative Arts*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006, p. 232. Calico is a lightweight fabric of Indian origin and takes its name from the city of Calcutta (kalikut, from which the name calicò in French and calico in Italian is derived).

<sup>91</sup> Lewis Pyenson, *The Shock of Recognition: Motifs of Modern Art and Science*, p. 286; Virginie Lacour, *La manufacture de papiers peints Isidore Leroy de Saint-Fargeau-Ponthierry*, Somogy Editions d'Art Paris 2010.



Isidore Leroy's 26-colour machine was based on the Potter & Ross model.

The first machines Charles Lefèvre bought for his factory were calico printing machines adapted for printing on paper, capable of printing in 4 or 6 colours. In 1852, father and son Lefèvre visited the Great Exhibition in London's Christal Palace, where these machines and their products were on display. This must have given rise to the idea, which came to fruition less than a decade later, of creating a factory dedicated exclusively to wallpaper, a business whose huge commercial potential was obvious to all. A new building had to be built to house machines similar to those of Potter & Ross, built by other companies in France and England, because the Manifattura del Fibreno, Fabbrica del Carnello and Soffondo, the three production units of the Lefèvre paper factory, were already occupied by machines and the production of various types of paper. There were a few artisans in Italy who produced wallpaper in small quantities using the block printing system with powdered wool: all that was needed, apart from a drawing and a wood engraver, was pigments, a printing press and good paper.

All of this was done by a skilled craftsman, perhaps the most delicate aspect of production.

For a long time, however, Italian production could not compete with that of France, England, America and Canada, and the largest production remained in Fibreno. The forerunner in the Naples area was the Frenchman Francesco Charavel (dates of birth and death are unknown), who in 1834 obtained a licence from the king to manufacture wallpaper with a non-automatic machine. In 1836 he won a gold medal at the Public Exhibition of Arts and Manufactures held in Naples on 30 May of that year for "coloured papers for decorating rooms".<sup>92</sup> He worked with the *Compagnia Sebezia*, a joint-stock company that, like the *Compagnia Partenopea*, sought to promote the most diverse productions by financing and associating them. A later note in the *Annali Civili del Regno delle Due Sicilie* (Civil Annals of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies) confirms this: together with Felice Bontour (?), Charavel seems to have been paid by the state for producing wallpaper on behalf of the *Compagnia Sebezia*. Here we are given a summary of Charavel's work, which is important in our book because he is the direct forerunner on the Neapolitan market of Beranger and Lefèbvre, who in all likelihood bought Charavel's engraved plates. So we read:

Painted wallpaper.

We discussed this new industry at length when Mr Charavel first exhibited it. It is therefore superfluous to remind you that this Frenchman, in close partnership with the Sebezia company, has set up here, four years ago, a production of painted papers for decorating the walls of rooms. These papers, inconspicuous at first, have become more and more beautiful and varied, so that today they are suitable for the humblest as well as the noblest homes, in every design and quality. Chemistry, painting and the mechanical arts are involved in their production, and urban politics helps them. They are not really equal to the most luxurious in France, but they are generally sufficient for

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<sup>92</sup> *Elenco di saggi de' prodotti della industria napoletana presentati nella illustre mostra di Napoli....* Tipografia Plantina, Naples 1840, p. 9; *Annali Civili del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, f. XXXVII, January-February 1839, Tipografia del Real Ministero degli Affari Interni nel Real Albergo de' Poveri, Naples 1840, p. 47.

common use, and are always cheaper than those of foreigners. Each of these rolls, 32 palms long and two wide, costs from 22 grana to 22 carlins, according to the amount of work involved. Those for friezes are worth 17 carlins each.<sup>93</sup>

This passage from the *Annals* gives us some interesting facts. First of all, the use of wallpaper seems to have been quite widespread in Naples in the 1840s, and that it was suitable for "the noblest houses, of every design and quality". Since Naples is mentioned, this statement is interesting, although there is very little literary or material evidence or remains of walls decorated with wallpaper in those years. Due to their perishable nature, there are no known examples of rooms with wallpapered walls from the 1840s and 1850s, or at least they have not been measured and reported.

Wallpapers, however, were becoming increasingly popular. They were still quite expensive at the time, but Charavel apparently managed to sell them at a price that was not high (and indeed the price is indicated). We also learn that they were machine-printed papers, with the first 2 or 4-colour machines, adapted from the textile industry: 'chemistry, painting and mechanical arts are given a hand in their production', we read. It is then admitted that they are not of the same standard as French and English papers: 'they are not really equal to the most luxurious French papers, but they are generally sufficient for ordinary use and are always cheaper than foreign papers'. In other words, less beautiful but cheaper. It was, however, the beginning of an industry, a proto-industry perhaps, which could guarantee limited quantities.

Antoine Beranger, the first founder of the Fibreno factory, also tried his hand at wallpaper, and in 1834 he obtained a patent allowing him to produce and market wallpaper exclusively in the kingdom. The venture was successful, but not overwhelming. To produce wallpaper in small quantities, all that was needed were boards of pear wood, which could be bought on the market at a not inconsiderable price (depending on the design), paper in sheets measuring at least 50 x 30 centimetres, and a

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<sup>93</sup> *Annals Civil of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies*, cit., p. 79.

few skilled craftsmen. It was even better if you had a 2 or 4 colour printing press. It was then possible to produce minimal quantities that might not be worth the effort, especially if the quality was poor.

What was more expensive in those days was the availability of good moulds. Alessandro Betocchi was certainly referring to Charavel when he wrote of a factory founded in 1832 in Palazzo Barbaja in Mergellina, where 40 years later a modest factory with 12 or 13 workers still existed. It produced decorative and wallpaper in small quantities, of a quality described as 'inferior'.<sup>94</sup> Charavel's production was due to end when the patent expired in 1839, but the Frenchman managed to obtain an extension by making his geometric designs available to the King and his craftsmen.<sup>95</sup> Charavel's enterprise, which of course utilised the expertise of French craftsmen, lasted until around 1844, after which he left the scene.<sup>96</sup> Wallpaper production was taken over, not by privatisation but by production power and organisation, by Charles Lefèbvre.

Lefèbvre used part of the paper mill in Forme (Isola di Sora) for the production of hand-made wallpaper at the time when Charavel left the business. Such a production patent was valid for the entire territory of the Kingdom and others would not have been able to devote themselves to it: this means that until then there was no wallpaper factory in the Kingdom of Naples, and certainly not in the Neapolitan area. The *Manifattura del Fibreno* began to make a name for itself and marketing must have been satisfactory, even if limited to the Neapolitan area. As mentioned above, at the end of the fifties (and the project was certainly delayed by the wars of independence) it was decided to build a complete factory dedicated to the manual and mechanical printing of various types of wallpaper.

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<sup>94</sup> Alessandro Betocchi, *Forze produttive della Provincia di Napoli*, Stabilimento Tipografico De Angelis, Portamedina della Pignasecca, 1874, p. 205.

<sup>95</sup> Maurizio Lupo, *Il calzare di piombo. Materiali di ricerca sul mutamento tecnologico nel Regno delle Due Sicilie*, Franco Angeli, Milan 2017, p. 40.

<sup>96</sup> However, he seems to have been the father or more probably the grandfather of Paul Charavel (1877-1961), a painter of some renown in Marseille.



The first written, and not just material, accounts of the history of wallpaper date from these very years. One of these was written by John Gregory Crace (1809-1889), who on 14 February 1839 read a dissertation, *The History of Paperhangings*, to the members of the Royal Institute of British Architects, confirming the growing importance of this production for decorators and architects.<sup>97</sup> Crace himself was an interior designer and architect who began to make extensive use of wallpaper. It was not until 1845 that the *Manifatture del Fibreno* was granted a concession to produce wallpaper. It was a general concession (and therefore not a private right) that allowed the activity to be carried out in a part of the factory in Via Tavernanova and then, with an exclusive concession, in a purpose-built factory designed according to the most modern architectural and industrial engineering methods.

The Second War of the Risorgimento, which had brought an end to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, had put the plans on hold for years, and the owners, the Lefèvre family and their families, stayed away from Italy for more than three years, from 1860 to 1865, but the construction of the factory began in 1861 and was completed in a short time, after which paper production began. This was not a new field. As already mentioned, the *Manifatture del Fibreno* had been producing wallpaper in block printing since the 1840s. They printed two- or four-colour or monochrome patterns on rolls of paper. This method, which we have already described, produced very high quality wallpaper, but it was also very expensive because it was a slow and laborious process.

The new factory, on the other hand, would make use of the latest developments in industrial machinery and mechanisation to combine handmade and printed wallpaper, increasing the quantity produced a hundredfold. A document from 1861 gives the company's industrial data for wallpaper up to 1859, before the construction of the factory.

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<sup>97</sup> Crace, "John Gregory, The Crace Papers." Two lectures on the history of paperhangings delivered by J. G. Crace to the Royal Institution of British Architects on 4th and 18th February, 1839. With foreword and comments by A. V. Sugden and E. A. Entwisle. [With illustrations, including a portrait].

Around 1,130,000 metres of paper were produced each year in a wide variety of grades. In order to meet the high demand, Manifatture del Fibreno had to rely on a single specialised unit, which was unable to supply the market with sufficient quantities. The new major investment has proved its worth for over 25 years.



The former Liri Paper Factory, later Cartiere Meridionali, in the foreground and background: on the left the San Carlo and on the right the Forme complex.

The new factory a few hundred metres from the main one, called the San Carlo factory, no longer exists: it was completely demolished and its bricks and stones were reused by the people of Isola.

It stood about 400 metres north-east of the Fabbrica delle Forme complex. The name of Fondo San Carlo is still remembered by the street of the same name, which forms a quadrilateral closed to the north by via Carnello.<sup>98</sup> In its place today are houses, car parks and grassy

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<sup>98</sup> Massimo Petrocchi, *Le industrie del Regno di Napoli dal 1850 al 1860*, Naples 1955, p. 33.

patches, but above all a social housing building built in the 1970s. There is a photograph, reproduced here, which shows the factory in the background. Between this long building, which in the photograph shown above is taken in 1901, and the row of council houses are the Fondo Strada dei Gelsi and the Fondo San Carlo.<sup>99</sup> Probably, the white mass visible on the left was the small villa known as Trianon, which collapsed almost entirely in the Avezzano earthquake of January 1915.

Another photograph shows the factory, with the buildings on the left, and the boundary wall that ran parallel to the road to Arpino and that, at the end, crossed the railway yard that divided the property from the outside. The photo was probably taken at the end of the 19th century.<sup>100</sup> It is the long building in the centre of the photograph, which continues the line of trees on the right; it is the farthest building, to the left of the dark mass of trees in the Lefèbvre Park, leaning more against the hill that is now crossed by Via Quaglieri towards Arpino. The building ran parallel to the Canale delle Forme, from which it was separated by a two-metre wide walkway, which in turn separated it from the Fondo Strada dei Gelsi.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> The dating of the photograph is derived from a comparison of historical photographs of Isola. The photograph shows a space between the fourth house from the left and the fifth, built at the end of the 19th century (ca. 1898-1899), where a narrow dwelling was inserted in 1902. As that house is not yet present, the photograph dates from 1900-1901.

<sup>100</sup> The photo was assessed by the expert Bruno Ceroli, who recognised the absence, in the row of houses at the bottom, of the house built in 1902. Communication from Bruno Ceroli to the author: May 2018 and July 2020.

<sup>101</sup> According to local historian Bruno Ceroli, who has long researched the matter and is a great expert on the history of Isola del Liri and its factories, the factory was located on the eastern side of the canal that carried water derived from the Fibreno River and moved the factory's machinery; according to Amleto Iafrate, author of several monographs on the history of Isola del Liri's industries and keeper of extensive documentation, it was located on the right, western side of the same canal.



San Carlo factory probably around 1895.

Around the factory you can see some arable land and a small service house giving access to the farmhouse on the left. The factory had a horseshoe plan, as shown on various maps and descriptions, a plan that cannot be seen here because it is hidden by the north side. It was 156.80 metres long and, as can be seen, consisted of two storeys plus an attic. The south side, which cannot be seen in the photograph, was of the same length but less than half the height of the first, 5.60 metres, and was divided into three sheds of the same length as the first. On the right, the main front can be seen behind a building that was probably the San Carlo farmhouse. On the north side there is an embankment where the Forme artificial canal was (and still is) located. The factory was separated from the Forme canal by a walkway just over two metres wide.<sup>102</sup> Parallel to the factory, on the opposite side to the south, was the natural stream of the Magnene, with a good flow of water, which was used to remove the processing waste (and dyes) for both the San Carlo and the Forme, and which was channelled through underground

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<sup>102</sup> Perizia de Rogatis, *Count Ernesto Lefèbvre Inheritance Division (1915-1916)*, p. 46. Iafate brothers collection Isola del Liri.

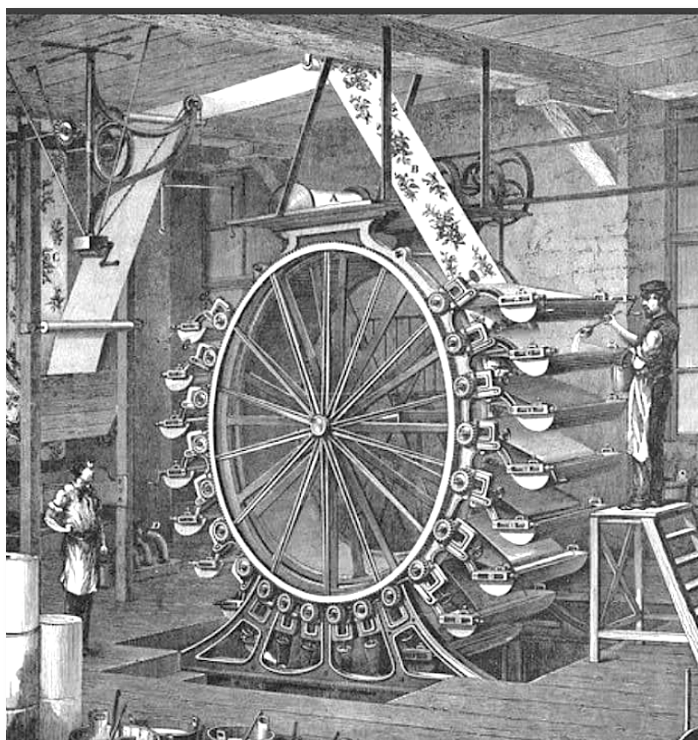
pipes under Palazzo Lefèvre, whose waste outlet it was. It is also interesting to know that the building of the San Carlo, inside which gigantic machines moved, was braked and reinforced (probably to protect it from stresses and vibrations dangerous to the structure) by three rows of iron chains, i.e. 30 chains, attached to the building by circular cast-iron plates on the outside.<sup>103</sup> The Fabbrica San Carlo was gigantic, and photographs taken from a distance do not do it justice. It stood almost out of place in a rural landscape, still devoid of buildings but harmonious. The entrance was from the side of the Arpino road, on the left in the photo above, but there was a second entrance, as can be seen in the same photo, from the boundary wall and the farmhouse on the other side of the San Carlo estate. Shortly after its construction, although it is not possible to determine the exact date, the Forme factory was connected to the railway network by a private track, which started in a large square that opened up at the rear of the factory. This connection also benefited San Carlo, which was connected to Forme by a private road, probably with rails, leading to the railway.

The San Carlo factory, whose name was not a tribute to Charles Lefèvre, as we read in many local chronicles, but to the San Carlo estate on which it stood (together with the Montemontano estate), was served by the 'Verga d'oro', which flowed eastwards, a few hundred metres from Palazzo Lefèvre. The part of the building on the right, in the foreground, which undoubtedly housed the machinery that set up the larger machines, such as Gontani & Marten, according to the description by engineer De Rogatis, must have stood on the northern side, the one shown in the photo, probably closest to the entrance. The demand for multi-coloured wallpaper had increased with the redecoration of bourgeois homes from the middle of the century. Upholstery fabrics, which had been popular until the first decades of the 19th century and had at various times been replaced by very expensive coloured paintings, were finally replaced by wallpapers in increasingly elaborate colours and patterns, which began to be produced in a monochrome and a two-coloured variant called 'mixed ground'.

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*





The 1839 Potter & Ross machine. A similar 24-colour machine made by Gontani-Marten of Paris was installed at San Carlo.

It is significant that the construction of the Fabbrica San Carlo coincided with that of the Industrie Chimiche Lefèbvre in Bagnoli at the end of his stay in Paris. This shows that, despite everything, Ernesto had great faith in the future even after the Unification, and that the promises of the new Savoy regime regarding the investments he intended to make in Naples and southern Italy seemed sincere. Engineer De Rogatis estimated that the factory extension covered 7740 square metres out of a total surface area of around 15,400 square metres. He described the building as 'grandiose'. It was 156.80 metres long and 25 metres wide. The lower part consisted of three large rooms, the central



one being the largest. The two larger rooms at either end were served by large windows, while the narrower central part was probably used as a passageway for materials and men.

Along its length, the factory was lit by 28 large windows on one side and 30 on the other (the side with the 30 large windows can be seen in the photo above). The internal layout consisted of a caretaker's room on the ground floor, a large waiting room where customers were kept waiting, and a sort of shop for small quantities, complete with cash register and wrapping counter. Also on the ground floor of the two-storey building were two interconnected rooms, each measuring 69 metres long and 19.20 metres wide. The first was the embossing room and the second was the paper store. As there are no views in the picture, it is difficult to understand the proportions of the building, which was very large. In picture 9 fruit trees can be seen which are not visible in picture 6 (some 10 years later) when the extensive apple and pear orchards of the Lefèbvre estates on the north side began to be felled.



San Carlo factory in 1884. North side. One glimpses before the building the embankment of the Forme canal, which also served as motive power for the Forme factory, about 400 metres further east.



Embossing was a special type of calendering that allowed a simple design to be stamped onto wallpaper under pressure. A system of drainage channels allowed waste or sewage to flow into the Magnene, which ran underneath the factory. Connected to this system of large halls was a hand-printing room dedicated to hand-made wallpaper, the most expensive, intended for a demanding and limited clientele. In one of the pictures published in issue 11 of the magazine dedicated to the Turin Exhibition of 1884, you can see how this machine, dedicated to the complex production of hand-made paper, had at least 12 stations.

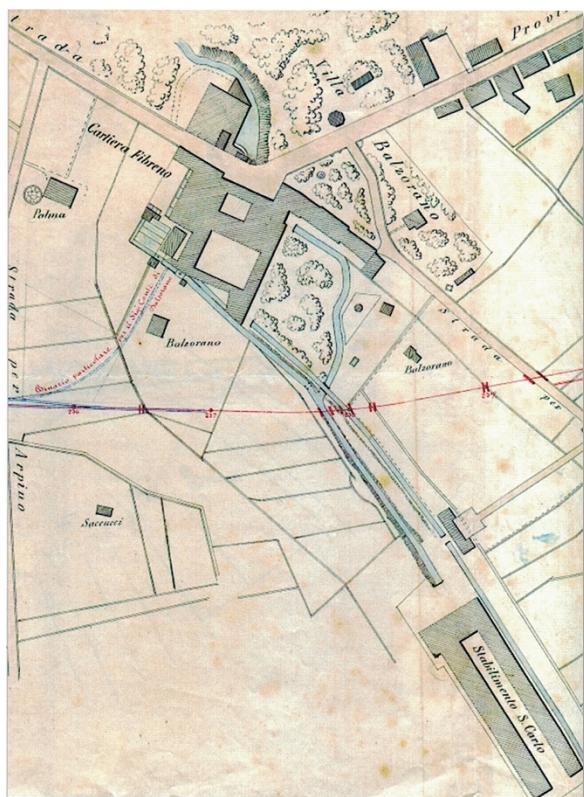
To the right of the two previous sections, there was a third longitudinal section with other large halls and machines that were enormous for the time: the wallpaper cutting room (located in a room about 20 metres long), the paper drying room, where the paper was hung to dry after processing, and the printing room (with a remarkable length of 113.50 metres). This was followed by a room 14.50 metres long: the room for winding and cutting the paper itself. These halls and rooms were completely avant-garde, similar in size to those of the great wallpaper factories in the Anglo-Saxon world, but typologically closer to those in France. Next to these rooms was a large warehouse where the wrapped and finished paper was stored until it was ready for shipment. In the middle of these large rooms were 'compartments', smaller sections into which intermediate processing steps were inserted.

The typology of the building is very similar to that of the factory immortalised in 1833 by the painter Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796-1875), *La casa e la fabbrica di Monsieur Henry*, located in Soissons. The factory at Isola del Liri is much larger, more modern, perhaps three times as big, but the long body, the elongated shape, the two storeys and the facade are very reminiscent.



Monsieur Henry's wallpaper and printing factory in Soissons (1833). Painting by Camille Corot. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

In Monsieur Henry's factory, there were still no automatic printing presses: the work was done by hand. The dimensions were therefore smaller. But we can already see the typology of the factory, which tends to have a wide front, a long body and other buildings grouped around a courtyard. The villa on the left is very reminiscent of Villa Lefèbvre (now Villa Nota), built at the same time as San Carlo.



Fibreno complex: above the Forme, the system of canals and roads. The San Carlo factory is shown with two equal wings, but the south wing was much lower.

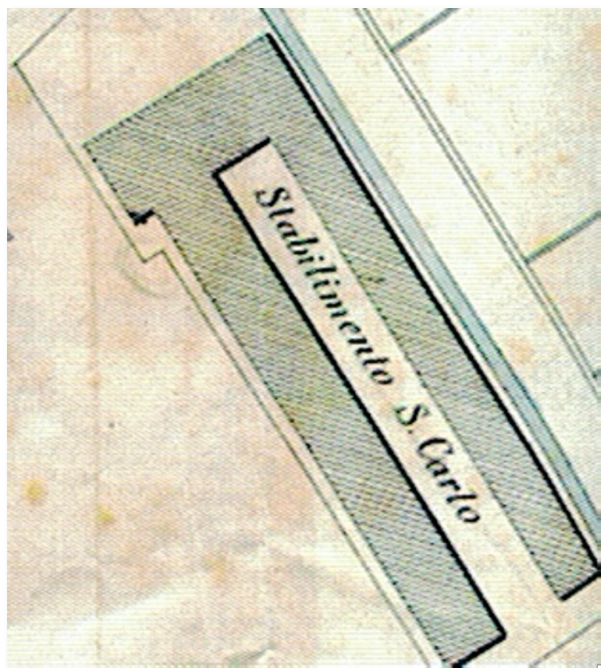


San Carlo factory in 1884. Facade and entrance from the west.

The exact layout of these rooms can be reconstructed from the description in the *Perizia de Rogatis*, reproduced in the appendix to this text. In the picture above, in addition to the main building, about 160 metres long, which housed all the main processes, we can clearly see four other long, lower halls for secondary processes, connected to the main building by a building that must have contained a large entrance hall and offices.

From the press room there was access through a compartment to the 'Compreso per il lavaggio dei feltri', where the felts used in the daily work were washed. In this room, which required a lot of water, clean water from the Fibreno river was brought in through large pipes with an intake from the nearby Forme canal and then discharged through a system of shafts into the Magnene, which, as we have said, ran underneath the factory. The structure that housed the dynamo for the production of electricity (installed in the 1890s) and the turbine for the production of energy that was transmitted to the factory's machines through a complex system of axes and gears, was also fundamental. The building was completed on the ground floor by a large hall (19.50 x 5.50 metres), called the carpentry and dispatch hall, where the rolls of

wallpaper were packaged and transported on trolleys to the wagons and then to the railway wagons. The factory also had a complete mechanical workshop, which made it completely self-sufficient in terms of breakdowns and the replacement of parts for normal maintenance and more.



Detail of the San Carlo-Fibreno factory, showing the horse-shaped plan and the presence of the Forme canal on the north side, and the large loading and unloading yard on the east front. The Magnene, on the south side, is not shown here. It is possible that by this time it had been moved underground to the front of the factory, where it reappeared.

The Lefèvre family always made sure that they had the best technicians in their factories, who could quickly carry out repairs that would otherwise be impossible, and even make the necessary parts that would otherwise have to be ordered from abroad, with very long waiting times and exorbitant prices, because they were not in series production and had to be specially made. In this way they avoided the very costly production stoppages that were common in factories at the time. For this reason, a forge was set up with all the equipment needed to make the moulds, cast iron, steel and cast iron, and to mould the necessary parts.

The workshop was equipped with the most modern equipment of the time, such as extraction hoods to prevent harmful stagnation of fumes and acids, fans, bellows and probably refractory materials such as special ceramics. This policy of self-sufficiency was a characteristic of Charles and was also followed by his son Ernest. There is a picture, reproduced below, of a postcard showing the factory. It is understood that at some point the factory acquired an autonomous legal personality as the *Società Anonima per la Fabbricazione delle Carte da Parati*.<sup>104</sup>

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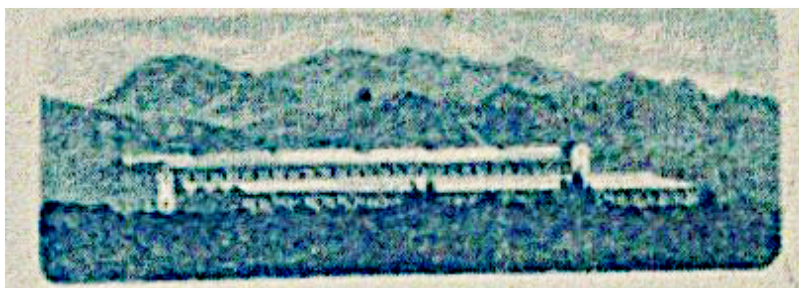
<sup>104</sup> This circumstance still requires further investigation, which has not yet been found.





Postcard showing the appearance from the south of the San Carlo-Fibreno factory. Close examination reveals the tall factory building on the north side and the three low sheds, of the same length, on the south side.

The picture is badly damaged, but it gives us some very important information about the structure of the factory, which can only be appreciated by magnifying the details. As can be seen, the factory was very large: the northern section, facing the hills, was two storeys high plus attic, flanked by four lower sheds and a very high entrance which contained the offices.



The postcard is poorly preserved, but the outline of the factory and its size are evident.

Other rooms included the caretaker's house, where he lived permanently with his family, and the very important grinding room, where iron or lead printing cylinders were regenerated. Also on the ground floor was a very large mixed wallpaper printing room, a good 79 by 5.50 metres (it took up half of the south side of the building), which housed a special machine that used several colours and several passes of ink to achieve special effects: the large Gontani & Marten machine.

There were also various storage rooms for new paper and moulds. The upper floor of the facade (east side) was entirely occupied by offices where the draughtsmen worked. A draughtsman from Udine by the name of Simonetti is mentioned in the documents, without any further details, at least for the time being. There were technical, commercial, sales and administrative offices, where payments were made, customers were invited, telegrams sent, letters and invoices written. There was also a large attic used to store objects and materials of lesser use. Around 1880 (the testimony is from 1884 in *L'Illustrazione italiana*) the San Carlo factory was connected to the Stabilimento delle Forme by a telephone line.

As you can see from this description, the San Carlo factory was very modern, built using the most advanced architectural solutions for industry at the time. Its elongated, rational shape made it absolutely efficient from an industrial point of view. The large, high windows, more than 20 on each side, made it bright. In this it was very similar to the slightly smaller Lefèbvre chemical factory, so much so that if the architect was not the same, the criteria were. Although a few paper mills had already been built in the Liri Valley, nothing of this kind had yet been seen, and it was only later that the large paper mills that would outlive Lefèbvre would arrive. Not even the Liri paper factory, which later took the name Cartiere Meridionali, had the Cartesian modernity of Ernesto Lefèbvre's San Carlo.

Of course, we do not know who produced the wallpaper that inspired Adriano Cecioni (1836-1886) for his *Interno con figura* of 1867, but it was exactly the type of wallpaper that at least 75 per cent of Italian



wallpaper was produced by the San Carlo factory: a geometric pattern in bright colours that was very popular in France and Italy at the time, while other motifs and colours were preferred in England.



Inside with figure by Adriano Cecioni, 1867.  
Gallery of Modern Art, Rome.

After combining manual and mechanical production, Fibreno began to improve its technical equipment. Around 1880 it bought a machine very similar to the model developed by Potter & Ross and later Leroy, but built by the Gontani & Marten workshop in Paris. It was a 24-colour machine, very expensive and unique in Italy. It was also one of the largest in Europe, surpassed only by a single 24-colour machine from the Leroy factories. This is the description of the machine, which contains a lot of interesting information:

This machine, of the latest model, is of astonishing perfection; it consists, among other things, of a pressing drum of 10 metres in circumference around

which the rolls of raw paper ready for printing are wound. Depending on the design to be produced and the number of colours required, from 1 to 24 engraved cylinders, with diameters ranging from 14 to 23 centimetres, are systematically arranged around the drum. As the design evolves, these engraved cylinders are mounted on mobile shafts supported by bronze bearings, at the end of which is a gear that acts on the large cast-iron regulating wheel, which is used to precisely move the cylinders once they are in place. The large machine is surrounded by metal trays containing the inks, through which passes an endless felt, or sleeve as it is called, which rotates on small rollers and adheres to the impression cylinder, which feeds it with the ink it has absorbed. The trays are mounted on mobile chambers attached to the machine and equipped with a differential screw that serves to move the trays in all directions, according to the resistance of the design to be printed.<sup>105</sup>

After printing, the paper, which is still wet from the ink it has received, is moved automatically over a mechanical drying rack where it is transported for 100 metres by an endless chain system fitted with gripping bars that form a monorail, at the end of which it stops completely dry. It then passes through a device that cuts it to the required length and rolls it up into many rolls, which are then transported to the warehouse to be packaged and shipped.

This colossal machine, the only one of its kind in Italy, produces 1200 rolls a day, each eight metres long. It requires only twelve operators and has the advantage of being able to print the entire design in one go, which, due to the variety of colours, would have to be reprinted five or six times, depending on the number of colours, if it were done by another machine or by stamping, thus increasing the labour costs and the time needed to produce the corresponding number of rolls by a factor of five or six.

As you can see, cylinders for machine-impressed tapestry papers played an important role.

They required a process no less delicate than that of the hand-impressed moulding tables. Made of strong, homogeneous wood, sometimes brass, they were all crossed by an internal board that protruded from the base like a pivot so that they could be supported and aligned with the machine.

They were first machined on a lathe to achieve perfect cylindricity, and

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<sup>105</sup> On the machine model and manufacturer, see Erculei R., *Le carte decorative artistiche del Fibreno*, in *L'illustrazione italiana*, Treves, Milan 1884, p. 135. The machine still present, rusted but no longer working, is mentioned in the *de Rogatis report* of 1915 but without mentioning the model.

then the engraver embossed the design, or part of it, to be printed on their surface. With a length of 48 to 50 centimetres, their diameter usually varied from 10 to 40 centimetres, depending on the development required to ensure the continuity or repetition of the design without gaps or interruptions.

Cylinders made of wood were most commonly used because they offered greater ease and variety of design, and because they were made in the same way as mould plates and, like the latter, could contain metal, brass or copper parts to reduce the engraver's fatigue, or outline felts for coloured solids; brass cylinders were initially used only for striped tapestries (parallel lines, wide and narrow stripes, punctuation), engraved on a lathe with a punch, and later for less basic designs using the nitric acid engraving technique. The cylinders, like the plates, required a great deal of care in their cleaning and storage in a dry and semi-dark room, the former resting on their pivots and shelves, the latter on shelves. The former were enumerated according to the quality required to impress a complete design.<sup>106</sup>

In Adriano Cecioni's painting, behind the open door in the vestibule, another wallpaper with floral patterns on a pink background can be seen. The house portrayed is a bourgeois home of dignity and a certain wealth, but it is certainly not a luxurious one, as can be seen from the state of the door, which Cecioni realistically depicts (it looks old and dilapidated), and the type of chair. The painting shows that these furnishings were available to the less affluent bourgeoisie.

Apart from Cecioni, another artist who frequently depicted bourgeois and upper-class interiors in Umbria was Silvestro Lega (1826-1895).

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<sup>106</sup> *Memoria degli amministratori dello Stabilimento del Fibreno al Ministero dell'Agricoltura Industria e Commercio*, cited by Edmondo and Amleto Iafrate, op. cit. pp. 111-112. The document turns out to be a memorandum submitted to compete for an encouragement prize, present in the Iafrate Collection. The description continues but the other information is less interesting.



Silvestro Lega, *Two Little Girls Playing Ladies* (c. 1873). Private collection, Matteucci Institute-Viareggio. The wallpaper adorning the background was typically used in Italy and France and is now considered 'Italian style'.

The background wallpaper is of the 'arabesque' genre, popular in Italy and France from the 18th century onwards.

These were elegant designs, often treated with ochres that imitated gold. Sometimes they were treated with wool powder. The Fibreno experts reproduced these motifs by copying the best examples in the palaces of Naples, Rome, Florence and other places in Italy, which were celebrated in Naples in 1873 and, above all, in Milan in 1881 and in Turin in 1884.

## The draughtsmen

But who were the draughtsmen, engravers, technicians and craftsmen that the Lefèbvres employed in their factory? The privatisation of Charavel prevented the development of a large factory, but when, in 1840, Fibreno began the actual production of wallpaper, the technical and artistic manpower necessary to develop this industry was almost completely lacking, so that Charles Lefèbvre was forced to bring in craftsmen from France, although there is evidence of the presence of Italian draughtsmen, such as a certain Simonetti, of whom nothing else is known.

Unfortunately, we do not currently know the names of these true draughtsmen and craftsmen who were able to carve wooden panels (it is possible, indeed it is almost certain, that a certain number were bought from France). We know from later testimonies (*L'Illustrazione italiana* n. 35 of 1884) that some of them were sent to the great aristocratic palaces in Rome (but probably also in Florence and Rome) to reproduce the designs of the tapestries that decorated these places. In Isola del Liri they were certainly well paid. We do not know their names, however, as far as the documentation available today is concerned.

They certainly had a department or drawing room for their work at the front of the factory, probably in large, well-lit rooms. Around 1870, wallpapers were produced that changed the pattern at a certain height to make the wall less monotonous and to avoid having the same pattern on every wall. Around 1880, this solution was adopted in many parts of Europe, including Italy. We do not currently have any examples from San Carlo.



Detail from a black and white illustration by Ximenes. Example of a San Carlo-Fibreno pattern (taken from No. 35 *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, 1884).

## Wallpaper for children's rooms

As the wallpaper market expanded, the idea was to specialise production by creating motifs suitable for living rooms, reading rooms, children's rooms and dining rooms. In England, the motifs designed by Walter Crane (1845-1915), among others, are remembered. His *Sleeping Beauty* (1879), which had qualities of beauty and didacticism, is often recalled. It became a classic not only in England but also in Italy, where wallpapers for children's rooms became popular. The refined and delicate design was accompanied by a theme suitable for children's rooms: *Sleeping Beauty*, which encouraged sleep. Wallpapers were also extremely practical because the oil pigments from which they were made could be washed, or at least wiped with a damp sponge, without damaging them. They also did not contain arsenic, a substance

that had been widely used in the manufacture of paints for reproduction on printed fabrics and for fixing the colours of wallpaper. The use of the insidious arsenic lasted from the early 1800s until around 1870, when its danger was finally recognised. It took many deaths and poisonings, especially of children, to realise that this type of pigment was very dangerous, and the growing public alarm about the dangers of these wallpapers led to the production of safer papers. Sleeping Beauty was included in the wallpapers produced by Jeffrey & Co. around 1885 under the brand name Patent Hygienic Wallpapers. As for Italy and Naples, examples of late 19th-century wallpaper design in a Neapolitan interior include several paintings by Gioacchino Toma (1836-1891), such as *La Lettura* (Reading), which shows a woman reading in front of a wall covered with a geometric pattern typical of bourgeois homes. This type of drawing was particularly fashionable in the last quarter of the century. A long series of studies in recent decades has shown how, in Europe, the wallpaper chosen by women was associated with certain domestic virtues related to childcare, the role of mother and wife and 'angel of the hearth'. Some of the production, with its colours and motifs, followed and promoted precisely these roles.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Barbara Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,' 'American Quarterly' No. 18 (1966), pp. 151-174; Welter's article is considered pioneering in a way and has inspired many studies on the domestic ideals associated with wallpaper in France, England, the United States and also in Italy.





## Chapter 5

### **The successes of the San Carlo factory: fashion, industry and society**

#### **The 1881 Milan National Exhibition**

While the Lefèbvre family tried to prepare the transition from the second industrial generation, Ernesto's, to the third, with some difficulty due to the reluctance of Ernesto's sons to work, the latter continued to be successful, especially in the paper and wallpaper sectors. The start-up of the chemical factory in Bagnoli was more problematic: awards and certificates of excellence arrived, but in reality the factory was operating at a loss.

As for San Carlo, after the excellent patronage of the Naples Exhibition of 1873, the first real national importance was achieved with the National Exhibition of 1881, the first national exhibition after others that, although sometimes full of proposals and exhibitors, lacked the size to have a national scope and to attract an audience from abroad.

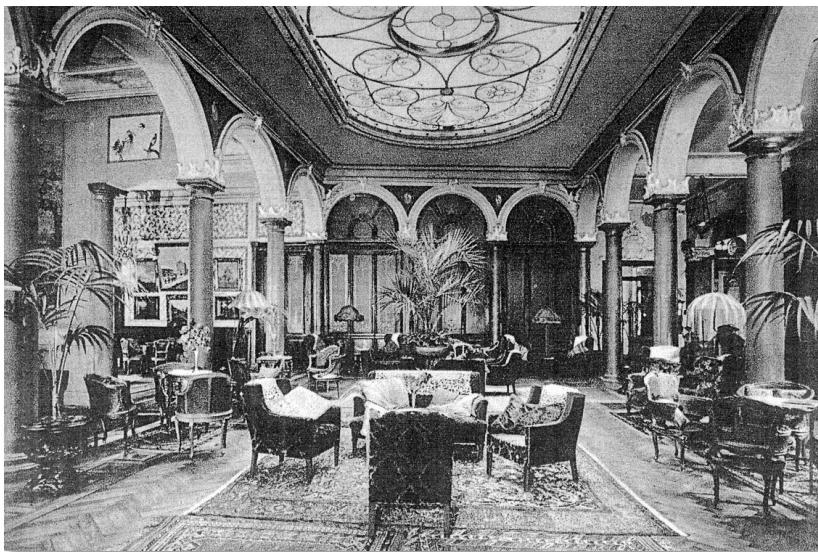
The Milan National Exhibition of 1881, held from May to November 1881, also known as the *Esposizione Industriale Italiana* (Italian Industrial Exhibition), followed the much smaller exhibition held in Florence in 1861, the year of the birth of the new unified Kingdom of Italy.<sup>108</sup>

The Fibreno appeared on the national market for the first time and immediately showed the ambition of its owner, Ernesto Lefèbvre, who was present for several weeks. Like many other important exhibitors,

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<sup>108</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the organisation and layouts see Zanella Francesca, *L'esposizione nazionale di Milano 1881. Gli strumenti della rappresentazione: architettura, ordinamento, allestimento*, in *Arte Lombarda*, Nuova serie, n. 160, 3, (2010), Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, pp. 73-93.

he probably stayed at the Grand Hôtel de Milan, where Giuseppe Verdi lived for a long time, and had a special agreement with the main exhibitors at the fair.

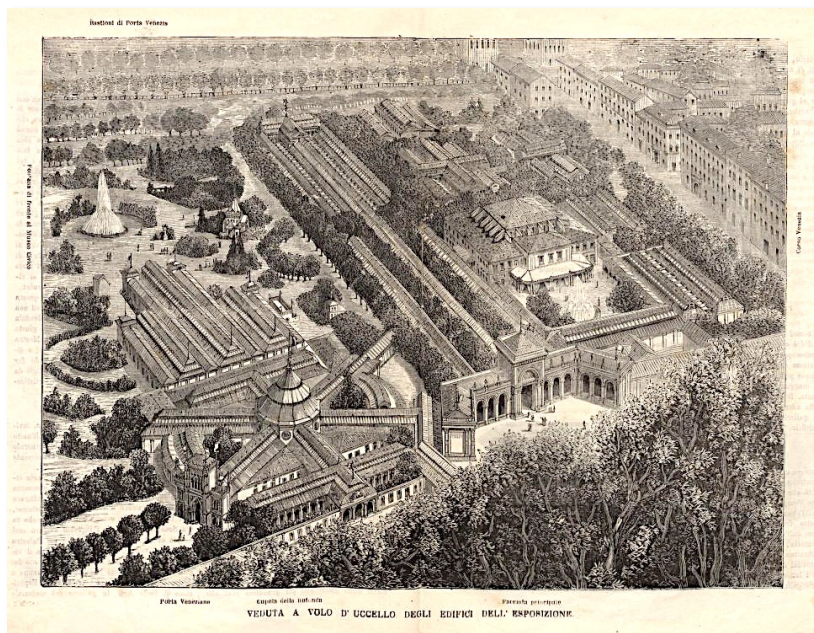


Room of the Grand Hotel de Milan, which hosted the great exhibitors of the exhibition.

What the company's shop window looked like was told to us by two journalists who were sent to the site and walked through the Paper Gallery. These products were displayed in one of the rooms accessible from the rotunda, as can be seen in the illustration on the left. So wrote the chroniclers Silvestri and Marcatili:

[...] All we have to do is enter the rotunda and immediately enter the paper and upholstery room. What seduces us in this room is the display of paper and tapestry imitating satin and silk. In this genre, there are pieces of paper that are magnificent for their different colours, for their truly artistic designs and, above all, for the complete illusion one feels when looking at them. On the right, the large and elegant showcase of the Fibreno factory of the Count of Bassorano [sic] in Isola del Liri stands out. There are tapestries worthy of

covering the walls of aristocratic salons. On the same page, a Milanese firm, Carlo Oggioni, occupies a large space on the wall with its production of paper upholstery of all kinds [...] The paper industry in Italy is becoming increasingly important. We have 3900 factories; forty-eight million sheets of paper are produced every year. Eighty thousand quintals of paper are exported every year.<sup>109</sup>



Bird's eye view of the Milan Exhibition 1881.

<sup>109</sup> *Alla mostra industriale. Galleria della carta, Milano e l'esposizione italiana*, no. 12-13, August 1881, Treves, Milan, p. 90. On paper production in Italy, the chroniclers exaggerated the number of factories: they were mostly small, the largest being the Fibreno, the Binda, the Maffioletti, the Jacob, the Rossi di Alserio, the Cartiera di Vaprio d'Adda and a few others. See my *Storia dell'industria della carta in Italia*, forthcoming.

In the rest of the room, there were displays by well-known paper manufacturers such as Binda and Maffioletti. On this occasion, Lefèbvre was also present as a paper manufacturer, but it seems that he was mainly concerned with promoting wallpaper, since his paper production - of which samples were certainly on display in this room - was already well known throughout the country. In any case, a writer who visited the exhibition, Angelo de Gubernatis (1840-1913), author of many books, wrote to the *Corriere della Sera* about the beauty of the paper produced by the Fibreno factories and the poor quality of the paper used in the books published in Naples, concluding that this paper was mainly exported, which was true.

The paper produced by the Stabilimento del Fibreno on the island of Liri is beautiful. How is it that books and newspapers in the Naples area are printed on paper that is generally so ugly that it looks like waste? This means that the Stabilimento del Fibreno does not sell its best products in the Neapolitan area; and that is a pity, because in taste, as in all other good things, since there can be a correspondence between the material and the moral fact, the meanness, the neglect that goes into the printing of a book is also, in most cases, maintained in its production: so that there is no possibility of comparing Italian literary production with that of the rest of Italy.<sup>110</sup>

In addition to recognising the industrial power of the Stabilimenti del Fibreno, De Gubernatis highlighted a true and dramatic fact: the collapse of book production and the crisis of the Neapolitan publishing houses, which forced paper manufacturers to change their traditional sales base. The Fibreno paper mills had also been exporting abroad for many years, and in the 1870s they reinforced this tendency to internationalise their market. At the Milan Exposition of 1881, however, Ernesto Lefèbvre of Balsorano was awarded the gold medal in Section XIII, Stationery and Graphic Arts, as the best exhibitor from southern Italy. In an italic text signed by Raffaele de Cesare, a well-known author who cannot be accused of being parochial, he described

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<sup>110</sup> *Milano e l'Esposizione italiana* n. 14-15, Treves, Milan 1881, p. 118, (the name change from Isola di Sora to Isola del Liri was in 1863)

the situation in dramatic terms. The article, which appeared in issues 33-34 of *Milano e l'Esposizione*, lamented the absence of any significant southern exhibitors at the Milan exhibition. There were 700 in all, but only about twenty of them could be considered important, and among these were the Stabilimenti del Fibreno, the most important of all. The Manifattura del Fibreno was exhibited in two places, with a large display case (probably the same or very similar to that of 1884) in Gallery XIII, the right wing of the Rotonda.

The chronicler and commentator noted that some of the exhibitors were outstanding: "An example of these great achievements can be seen in the splendid exhibition of the Fibreno factory, whose paper wallpapers are a real revelation and a commercial success". In short, people were surprised that wallpapers could be produced in Italy at the level of French wallpapers. The commercial success, the effects of which we can only measure indirectly - over the next three years Fibreno grew and invested again - was also due to the fact that paper of this quality cost much less than imported French paper of the same level. These were the reasons given by Ernesto Lefèvre, who had always wanted to be present at the Milan Exposition, as he had been in Naples and later in Turin, when he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Exposition in his category.

Meanwhile, in the great palace in Naples and in Isola del Liri, in the villa built in the 1860s in front of the Manifatture del Fibreno, illustrious and less illustrious guests were able to admire a vast collection of wallpapers produced by the factory, of which a small but notable collection remains in the latter building, Villa Lefèvre, now known as Villa Nota.



The villa where most of the wallpapers produced by San Carlo-Fibreno are preserved.

## **San Carlo in 1884**

The importance of the Manifatture del Fibreno in the latter part of the century is evidenced by its success at the Great Exhibition in Turin in 1884, which crowned the one in Milan three years earlier. There is an article on this subject in issue 11 of *L'Esibizione di Torino of 1884*, which should be quoted in full:

Among the industries flourishing in Italy, and of which the present exhibition shows us the degree of perfection and prosperity they have reached, that of tapestry paper is certainly one of the first. The Fibreno exhibition is a testimony to the great step forward that this important branch of the decorative arts has taken. The imitation fabrics, leather, brocade and velvet are of unmistakable elegance and beauty. The wallpapers on bronzed backgrounds are admirable for the intonation of the colours, superimposed with delicate ornamentation and artistic taste - in addition to the luxurious papers, we have

observed more common articles offered at a remarkably good price. The upholstery paper factory, the first in Italy, was founded in 1806 by Carlo Lefèbvre, Count of Balsorano, in Isola del Liri, a pleasant town in the province of Caserta, together with the paper mill.

At that time, before the advent of mechanisation, the papers were all made by hand with printing, a system that is still used today only for luxury papers.

At that time, production was very limited and it was not until a few years later that the ever-increasing development of this industry reached the important proportions of today's processing.

At that time, 3,000 rolls of paper were produced per month; today 150,000 rolls, representing 60,000 kilos of madder paper, are printed and sold in Italy and abroad every month. Imports, which used to be very important, have now been reduced by three quarters. The current factory covers an area of 250 (25,000) square metres, and the number of workers employed specifically for wallpapering is about 300, to which must be added the number of engravers, smiths, turners, mechanics, bricklayers, etc., not to mention the workers employed in the construction of new factories, which is necessary for the daily workload. - Eight roller printing machines are in full operation, in addition to auxiliary machines for stamping, satin-finishing, embossing, rolling, etc. Among the machines, the one that prints 24 different colours is remarkable, the largest ever built and the only one in Italy. A paper mill with 5 paper machines, owned by the same industrialist, supplies the wallpaper factory with raw paper, using two machines day and night. The paper mill employs over 600 people. There is a telephone link between the two factories. An elegant, recently built building, equipped with the most powerful mechanical defibrators, supplies the paper mill with the wood pulp for the production of paper, and a chemical factory, owned by the same owner and located in Bagnoli, near Naples, supplies it with soda salts, alumina sulphate, alum, Prussian blue paste, iron sulphate, sulphuric acid and other ingredients necessary for the production of paper. The owner of these mills is thus both producer and consumer of his products; one mill produces the raw materials needed by the other, thus securing part of the trade. This explains the good market prices and it is not surprising that the Fibreno mills have already received several awards at previous exhibitions, especially those obtained abroad at international exhibitions (Paris and Philadelphia) and the gold medal obtained in Milan in 1881, where Fibreno was, as always, the leader in the production of decorative papers.

In order to serve customers in every region of Italy, these factories set up

large warehouses for the sale of their products in Milan, Rome and Naples, as well as representations all over Italy and special houses in Palermo and Messina.

Our engravings [...] reproduce some views taken from the photographs displayed in the splendid exhibition that the Fibreno company formed in the Paper Gallery (in the Chemical and Mining Industries section) at the Turin Exhibition, and from which the reader will be able to deduce the importance of the company we have entertained, which has won so many titles for the good name of Italian industry.<sup>111</sup>

The anonymous article that appeared in the official journal *Esposizione di Torino del 1884* contains a lot of interesting information. First of all, the size of the workforce, which seems to have been very large: 300 workers plus the number of specialists, which was certainly a few dozen. According to Alessandro Betocchi, in 1874 the factory employed 400 workers and produced wallpaper worth half a million lire a year. Not only that, but the factory was "in the opinion of competent men one of the first, not to say in Italy, but in Europe".<sup>112</sup>

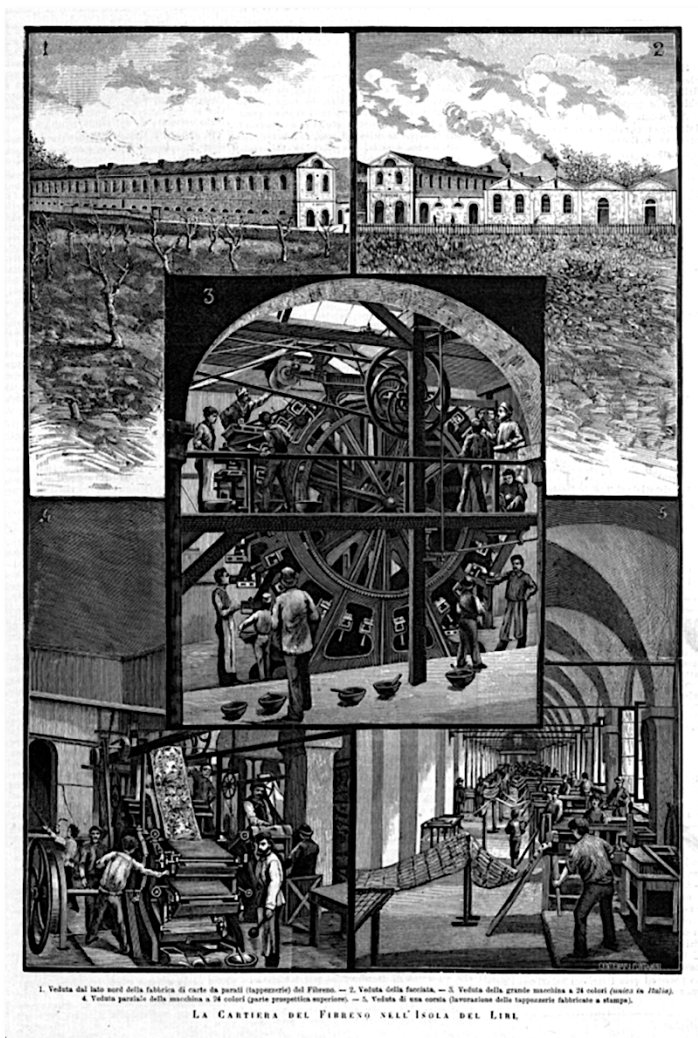
San Carlo was a production unit of the Manifatture del Fibreno, which, with the Carnello and Forme units, employing about 300 and 400 workers respectively, must have exceeded 1,000. If we take into account the induced industries, we can estimate that about half of the population of Isola del Liri Inferiore and Superiore at that time depended on the Lefèbvre factories. The rest was divided between the rather large Liri factory, founded in 1844, and other paper or textile factories such as Mancini or Ciccodicola.

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<sup>111</sup> *Tapestry papers. Gli stabilimenti del Fibreno in Isola del Liri (Caserta). Torino e l'esposizione italiana del 1884*, p. 101, no place (but Turin).

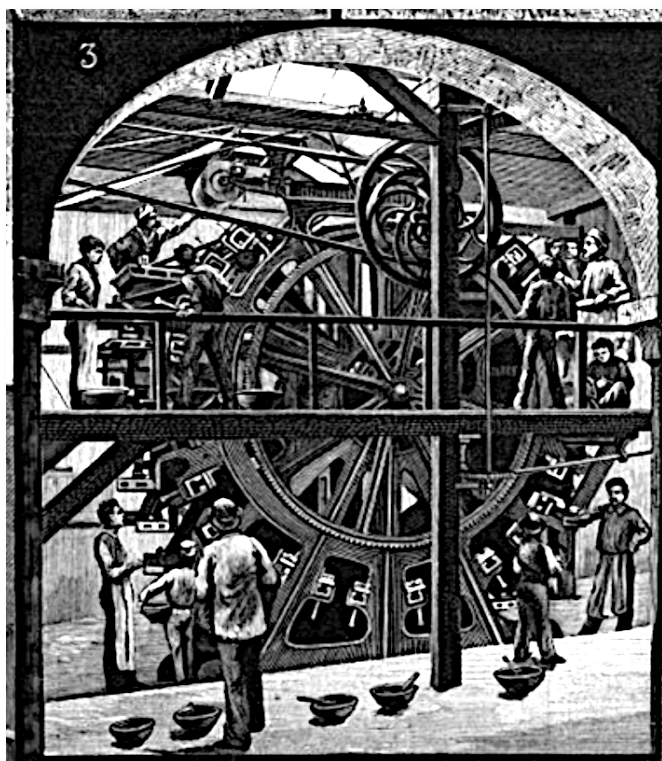
<sup>112</sup> Alessandro Betocchi, *Forze produttive della Provincia di Napoli*, Stabilimento Tipografico De Angelis, Portamedina della Pignasecca, 1874, p. 205.





*L'Esposizione di Torino del 1884, periodical, n. 11, p. 110.*  
 Inside the San Carlo factory.

At the Lefèbvre factory, wallpaper was produced using two systems: the 18th-century system of printing with plates or boards (block printing), as evidenced by the article (manual production), and with machines. This is illustrated by the engravings from the *dell'Esposizione di Torino del 1884*. The image below shows the large 24-colour drum printing machine invented in 1859. Even in 1884, the machine installed at the San Carlo factory was unique in Italy. It produced large quantities of wallpaper with designs of considerable complexity. As you can see, its operation alone required the work of about a dozen workers. The machine was about 10 metres high, moved by hydraulic power and operated on two floors of the factory.



San Carlo factory in 1884. The large 24-colour drum printing press, invented in 1859.

This other engraving depicts the 'upper perspective part', i.e. the upper part of the machine, manoeuvred by a group of workers placed on a platform at a height of about 3 metres. They had to pick up the printed roll and detach it, probably every 10 metres or so. The image allows us to appreciate the size of the paper, about 60 centimetres, which was wound into rolls, and to distinguish a floral design.



The 'upper perspective part' or summit part  
of the 24-colour machine.

As you can imagine - even if you know how the machine works - the roll of paper moved and each of the plates shown was engraved with a different colour as they were placed on the paper from top to bottom. The workers had to be constantly careful to keep the plates on which the engravings were placed wet with ink in the different colours. In general - and this is a hint from the factory itself - they tended to use as few colours as possible. The average production of Lefèbvre papers probably used a dozen colours, sometimes more.

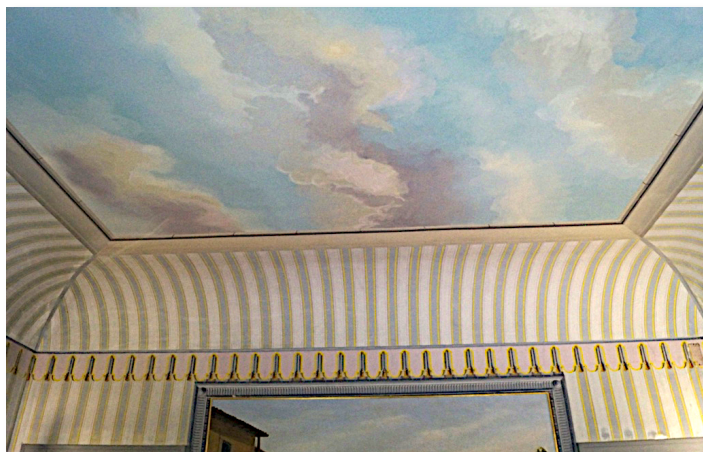
Apart from the Prussian blue mentioned above, the Lefèbvre chemist's in Bagnoli certainly produced red and brown, with iron sulphate, and probably black. We do not know if it also produced yellows and greens, but it is possible that even if it was not known primarily as a pigment factory, it was able to produce enough - as the article suggests - for San Carlo and probably some other textile industries in the area. It was probably not able to produce all the colours that the machines, especially the new ones, were capable of imprinting on paper, so it certainly had to import. The machine produced a multi-coloured paper in rolls, which had to be combined into more complex designs for panoramic paper. San Carlo produced many different designs, but no examples have survived. As the surviving examples show, the factory produced two-colour varieties (called 'mixed ground'), multi-coloured varieties requiring three different passes of the paper on rolls, and hand-made panoramic papers. In the Palazzo Visocchi in Atina, there are examples of wallpaper traditionally attributed to Fibreno in at least 6 or 7 colours. An example of a red monochrome tapestry depicting a wild boar hunt can be admired at Villa Nota. As is always the case with this type of decoration, the scene is unique; it was drawn, printed several times on a cylinder and then printed in long strips that were glued together to give a sense of continuity.



Monochrome wallpaper, produced at the Fibreno-Fabbrica San Carlo. Image courtesy of the Nota family.



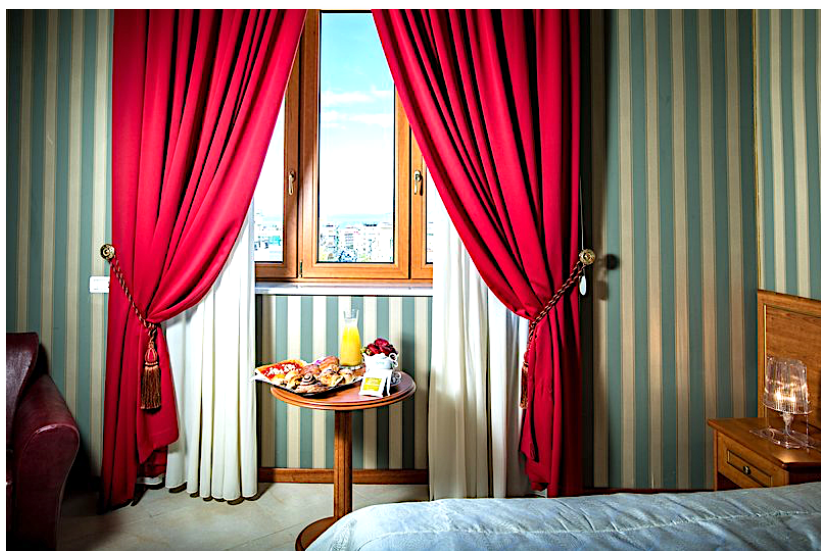
As for non-figurative wallpapers with geometric decorations (squares, stripes, diamonds), an example can be found in the Villa Nota. The example shown in the next two pictures (bordered vertical stripes), although appearing simpler, required a more advanced technology because the light grey paper (the background) was passed over with two colours, a darker grey and a pale yellow.



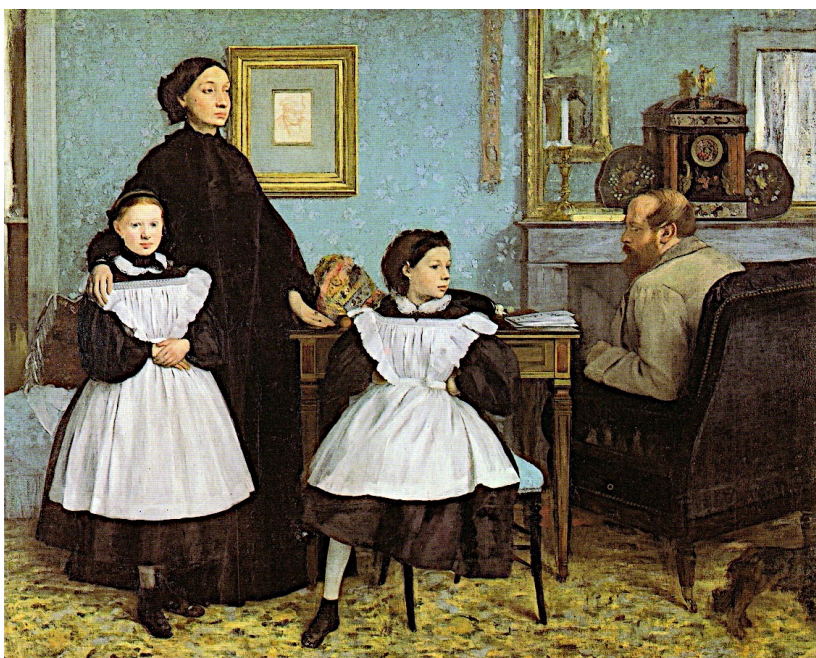
Trichrome wallpaper (light grey, dark grey, golden yellow), of the type produced by the Fabbrica San Carlo. Image courtesy of the Nota family.

This type of paper could be produced by machine or by hand. Due to its uniformity, this appears to have been produced with the large wheel machine system. In any case, note the extreme refinement of the combinations. To complete the picture, the ceilings of these rooms are frescoed with a sky covered in light clouds, which fits well with the clouds of the complex compositions we will see in the next chapters. There is at least one other example of wallpaper identical in design and colour found in the city of Naples, as can be seen in the image below.

The picture depicts the interior of a Neapolitan palace of the time located in Portici, now used for tourist accommodation. As can be seen, the wallpaper, probably original, is identical to the three-colour wallpaper in Villa Nota produced at the San Carlo paper mill.



Neapolitan 19th century. Palace of Portici.  
Paper of probable San Carlo-Fibreno production.



The Bellelli family by Edgar Degas.

A famous painting by Edgar Degas (1834-1917) shows us the Italian interior of a Neapolitan, Gennaro Bellelli (1812-1864), who was still in Florence at the time of the painting, having fled there after 1848 because of his involvement in the uprisings of that year. Laure Degas, Bellelli's wife, and Edgar Degas were related to the Degas family in Naples, where Edgar lived for several years. The wallpaper used in this painting may not have been produced by the San Carlo factory (the painting was completed in 1864 and the factory started production in 1861), but it is an example of the taste of an interior at the time: a light green wallpaper printed with floral motifs.

It should be noted that wallpaper production was almost exclusively in the hands of the industrialist Ernesto Lefèvre, since the San Carlo factory alone had the size and production capacity to satisfy between 50 and 60 per cent of the Italian market for paper produced in Italy, with even higher percentages in the south. There was a second, smaller factory founded by Francesco Roessinger and his associates. Francesco Roessinger, a figure also to be found in the field of paper production in Isola del Liri, was one of the founders of the Fabbrica di Carta del Liri in 1844, which later became the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali. However, seeing the success of Lefèvre's production, around 1845 he set up a wallpaper factory in the town of Barra, in a building owned by Roessinger, employing between 12 and 150 workers (depending on the period). Betocchi reiterates that he would have liked to talk about San Carlo, because its size and quality made it very interesting in his eyes, but since his book was limited to a description of the Neapolitan in the strict sense, he had set limits that he did not want to exceed. In any case, he gives us some interesting information by pointing out that the San Carlo of Lefèvre and Roessinger were the only factories in the south and that there were also some craftsmen who produced very limited quantities, perhaps on commission, for the decoration of individual palaces or villas.

Our main factory [apart from Lefèvre's San Carlo, which was one of the first in Europe], and it would be better to say the only one, because those modest foundries where two or three workers produce the very ordinary paper used for people's houses do not deserve the name, is that of Francesco Roessinger e C.. This factory is located in the municipality of Barra, where various other industries have settled [...]. The building is owned by Roessinger and employs between 120 and 150 workers. Wallpapers of all types and qualities are produced here, so that they can compete with French wallpapers in terms of quality and strength. They work by hand and by machine and, in addition to producing new products, they are not averse to what the French call "restocking", i.e. meeting the demands of good customers who ask for a very small quantity of a wallpaper that is no longer in stock. They want it because the technical director of the factory is French. Or because France is the master



of all nations in this industry - and will probably never stop being so - everything in this factory is ordered the French way.<sup>113</sup>

This was also the case in Ernesto Lefèvre's largest factory, whose craftsmen, engravers and designers were, with a few exceptions (a certain Simonetti from Udine), all French, just as the machinery was of English and French design. In fact, the wallpaper industry in Italy - at least in the south - was in the hands of French entrepreneurs, such as Roessinger, or at most of the first generation, such as Count Lefèvre.

As far as we know, the situation that Betocchi describes with regard to Roessinger's factory, the organisation of work and wages, was also common to Lefèvre's factory: the main workers Betocchi speaks of were highly specialised craftsmen who had first come from France and then trained local craftsmen. They all had considerable bargaining power.

The work is divided among the workers so that each one has only one task; the wages are fixed in the same way as in France, that is to say, they are discussed between the entrepreneur and the main workers, according to the designs and the number of colours that make them up. And he is pleased to recall that in a few years, in a country where no art other than that of textiles was known, it has been possible, without tradition, without schools and without examples, to create a class of craftsmen who know how to draw, to put and engrave on wood, to make the backgrounds, to draw the frets, to print, to velvet, to gild, to paint, to satin, to polish and to varnish. And they know how to do all this in such a way that the product they create, to those who do not know its origin and are not at all intelligent in art, may seem to come from the best factories in Paris.<sup>114</sup>

After this interesting observation, according to which the quality of the wallpaper produced in the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and in particular in the only two factories worth mentioning, Fibreno, first and foremost the largest in Italy, and Roessinger, the second largest in

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<sup>113</sup> Alessandro Betocchi, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>114</sup> Betocchi, *op. cit.*, p. 205-206.

southern Italy, was comparable to the quality of French papers (after all, they used the same processes), Betocchi goes on to make economic considerations that, with such a wealth of detail and commentary, we find in this text only in contemporary literature.

The forced course contributed to this state of affairs. Before 1866, our factories produced a lot of wallpaper, but of inferior quality. When the introduction of the forge was increased for the premium, the merchants began to examine the samples of the domestic factories, which they had previously despised, and from the examination it appeared that they were acceptable: indeed, they gradually recognised them as valuable. Since then, there has been a decline in the import of tapestry paper, as can be seen from the table below.

### **Carte da tapezzeria.**

<b>A N N O</b>	<b>IMPORTAZIONE</b>	<b>ESPORTAZIONE</b>
1864	Chil. 155,973	Chil. 237
1865	» 178,156	» 337
1866	» 124,642	» 475
1867	» 181,074	» 31,023
1868	» 102,337	» 902
1869	» 128,036	» 499
1870	» 104,018	» 945
1871	» 97,245	» 2,525
1872	» 108,185	» 4,728
1873	» 88,410	» 7,326

In the ten years from 1864 to 1873, imports more than halved and continued to do so in the following years; on the other hand, Italian

papers, especially those of San Carlo-Fibreno and Roessinger, began to be exported to various countries (although only one is mentioned, Egypt).<sup>115</sup>

Betocchi notes that it is difficult to understand the annual production of wallpaper in Naples alone, but we do know the total quantity, which largely comprised the production of fibreno (at least three quarters), divided into white or brown wallpaper (this was an inexpensive variety, generally dark brown) or painted paper (this is understood to be hand-printed or mechanically printed).

SPECIE	QUANTITA'		DAZIO	
	1872	1873	1872	1873
Carta da tappezzeria bianca o bruna. Q.	589.39	1.060.89	1.178.78	2.121.78
» dipinta . . . . »	1.916.84	1.748.88	19.162.40	17.488.80

The table shows some fluctuation (with production in 1873 slightly lower than in 1872), but also considerable quantities compared with a few years earlier. It should be noted, for example, that of the total amount of wallpaper produced in 1873, around 50 per cent was produced by Fibreno. Ten years later, according to other statistics quoted by Herculei, there were 1,200,000 rolls of wallpaper, which was about twice the weight (although it is difficult to calculate exactly). The percentage increases if we consider only painted wallpaper, which was the predominant production of the Isola del Liri factory: at this point we reach the 75% of production mentioned in issue no. 11 dedicated to wallpaper at the 1884 Turin Exhibition.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Betocchi, op. cit., p. 206.

<sup>116</sup> Alessandro Betocchi, op. cit., p. 206. Elsewhere, Betocchi, drawing on data he does not cite, claims that the national production of painted paper in 1872 was 864 quintals, maintaining the same proportions between San Carlo-

Betocchi again:

This is approximately 5315 quintals per year that are imported, either in their natural state or painted, or that are to be painted in the small factories mentioned above. But this calculation cannot be absolute, firstly because this quantity includes what comes from the Fibreno factory and foreign imports; secondly because, since the above tariff came into force, industrialists who had their factories outside the municipality have set up export warehouses in S. Giovanni a Teduccio, Portici and Barra. [...]. Nowadays the wallpaper industry depends on foreign countries for everything. For the glues, the first element of the production, we lack rabbits; and the hare skins, which are plentiful and could be used usefully, have a certain sanguine vein that obscures the colour of the glue when it is baked. For brushes, for brushes, for paints, we are also tributaries, and we are even tributaries of white lead, which, either by the natural defect of our raw material, or by the inexperience of the manufacturers, cannot be obtained in such a fine quality as to prevent it from spoiling the other colours with which it is mixed. The pear-wood plates must come from France, engraved, if they are to be less expensive and better made; and it is almost superfluous to say that we must also copy all the designs from France: a vassalage in which, moreover, we have all the peoples of Europe as our companions. The worst thing for our factories is not only that they have to bring all these things from outside, with the burden of transport and premium, but that, as there are no stores in the country, in order not to find themselves without them one fine day, they have to keep copious stocks of everything, with the damage of the unproductiveness of much capital.<sup>117</sup>

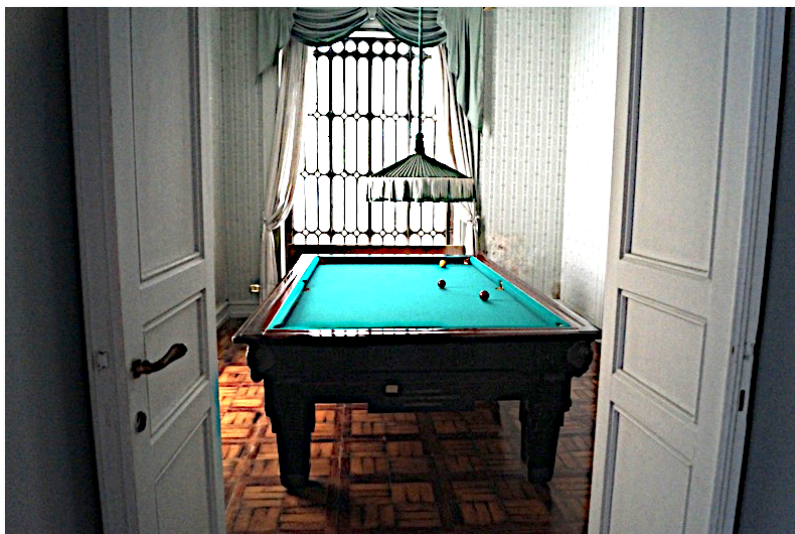
Betocchi concluded his speech by saying that he was sure that once the Italians' innate sense of art and beauty had been educated and corrected in art and design schools, by training a sufficient number of craftsmen and artists capable of producing original wallpapers, the paint industry would have developed in Italy, making production easier and cheaper. Finally, the author lamented the burden of taxes and

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Fibreno (about  $\frac{3}{4}$ ) and Roessinger. However, this reasoning is not supported by further tables and sources. *Ibid*, p. 208. The substance of the argument does not change.

<sup>117</sup> Betocchi, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-209.

regulations that did not even encourage the local industry and hoped that things would change in time. Indeed, from the end of the 19th century, the wallpaper industry was to develop considerably, with new materials and the development of an Italian school of design that owed little to the French, English or American schools (which had themselves developed considerably since the mid-19th century).



The walls of this room show another example of simple and elegant wallpaper (Villa Nota ex Lefèvre).

## **The cycle of Isola del Liri**

The Villa Nota ex Lefèvre is a true exhibition of what must have been one of San Carlo's finest productions, with a highly articulated arrangement of decorations inspired by classical poetry and neoclassical imagery, printed on particularly resistant paper using the tablet or block printing system. Some areas, especially the current vestibule and entrance hall - which did not exist at the time of Lefèvre but was added later by Ostrogovich - are decorated with tempera panels

or frescoes that match the colour and style of the wallpaper in the other rooms.

One of the 69-metre-long rooms is decorated with handmade wallpaper. The engraving in the exhibition publication of 1884 shows in great detail the long room in which the printing presses were installed. As described by engineer De Rogatis, this department was probably located to the north of the main building. The large Potter & Ross machine was installed on the south side.



Section of the San Carlo factory where block printed paper was produced. From the magazine *L'esibizione di Torino* of 1884 (Turin, Treves 1884).

The number of workstations shown in the engraving, i.e. the presses, appears to be more than 20. Of course, not all of the workstations were used for the production of extra-luxurious papers such as those found in the Villa Nota; it is likely that this very difficult and complex work was reserved for limited production and particularly skilled craftsmen. Block printing, on the other hand, made it possible to produce complex designs, an expensive type of wall decoration that Ernesto Lefèvre chose for his villa. Here, especially in the rooms on the ground floor,

one can see an exceptional quality of wallpaper, with a remarkable quality of design and composition and brilliant colours. These productions required specialised artists and also good technicians working at the presses.

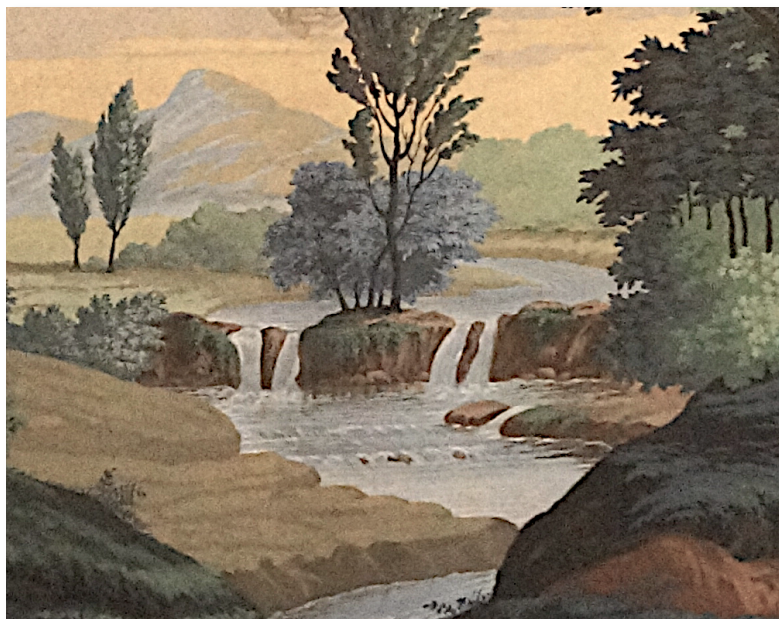
On closer inspection, the wallpaper shows some corrections made with a brush: perhaps restorations, perhaps the kind of corrections that craftsmen still make today at the time of production, to correct a smudge, to fill in an area where the colour has not saturated properly, or to better define the joint between two sections. In one part of the house there is also a third type of strong paper, painted directly by hand and then glued to the wall, but these are later interventions from the early 20th century.

The type of backing used for the scenic wallpaper was particularly expensive and durable. However, despite its resistance, it was still susceptible to moisture, and this is how one of the largest installations in the Palazzo Lefèbvre in Isola del Liri was lost. According to the testimonies we have, in particular that of the engineer De Rogatis, who visited the rooms around the time of the First World War, in 1915, the main rooms of Palazzo Lefèbvre di Isola were to be completely covered with this type of wallpaper, so refined and expensive that it resembled a fresco. Unfortunately, it was at this time that the wallpaper began to deteriorate rapidly due to the infiltration of water from the roof, becoming detached and mouldy to such an extent that it could not be salvaged and was then completely destroyed. This was a great loss and no descriptions, drawings or photographs have been found of the wallpaper which was completely stripped and destroyed shortly after 1915.

The examples on these pages show wallpapers that could cover many square metres. In the image on this page, you can see how the dampness has highlighted the hand-printed strips (at least 9 in this case, plus a dozen on the left at the curve of the wall) which, when combined and placed side by side, form the great classical scene with architectural designs, gardens, bucolic landscapes and many figures, no doubt inspired by classical poetry.



Handmade wallpaper of the type produced at the San Carlo factory. Note on the left the partial lifting of the paper due to moisture infiltration. Photo courtesy of the Nota family.



Detail of the scene from the previous image.  
Villa Pisani-Nota (formerly Lefèvre).



The effect of these large papers, even 5 x 3 metres, is pictorial. As mentioned above, Ostrogovich's interventions are well integrated into the newer part of the villa. Ostrogovich - a tenant of the San Carlo establishment - lived in the Villa Lefèbvre with his wife for just under a decade.<sup>118</sup> His wife, however, was the daughter of the director of the Meridional paper mills. Ostrogovich was unable to decorate the new front wing of the villa with wallpaper, as San Carlo no longer produced it and its craftsmen had dispersed after 1896-1897. The enlarged detail shows the quality of the printing. The landscape and the waterfalls are reminiscent of the Sora and Arpino area and the Fibreno river.



Villa Nota. One of the compositions of extra-luxury scenic wallpaper. Note the richness of the details. This scene consists of 7 rolls about 50 centimetres wide by about 2.5 metres each placed side by side so that the design lines match perfectly.

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<sup>118</sup> I received this information ad personam from the current owners of Villa Nota in May 2018.

In this other example of wallpaper in the Villa Nota, formerly Lefèbvre's, humidity has made it possible to highlight the vertical bands marking the different rolls (at least 7). Note that the composition, printed with an advance of squares of about 50 cm by 50 cm, with many colour transitions (at least 15), also continues on the left wall and on the right wall behind the door. This gives an idea of the complexity of the production and the cost of such papers. The scene is classically inspired.

It is likely that the high mountain overlooking the ancient Greek city, beautifully depicted on the wallpaper, was ancient Herculaneum or Pompeii before the eruption of 9 AD.



Villa Nota. Another composition between two windows.

In this case too, the humidity, by partially discolouring the paper, has made it possible to emphasise the vertical bands that mark the different rolls or strips of paper. The mountain in the centre of the composition corresponds to the profile of Mount Olympus.

In other cases, the Gulf of Naples or Cape Misenum seem to be recognisable in the depiction of a classical scene. The next image is a navy, probably depicting an episode from the Aeneid. The wallpaper in this case is cut to surround the fireplace in the rococo style of the late 18th century. The lighting effects are of great quality, depicting the sea and sky at sunset..



Classical scene, around the fireplace. Detail. Villa Nota.

These wallpapers were printed with a raw material made up of rags and textile fibres, which made them more resistant. It should be noted that Villa Nota was inhabited continuously, first by the Lefèbvre family (who were only present at certain times of the year, as they had their main residence in Naples), then by the De Caria, Ostrogovich, Pisani families, various directors of the Cartiere Meridionali, and finally by the Nota family. Thus, despite some periods of semi-desertion, it has enjoyed constant care and heating, protecting it from the damp that, after decades of neglect, has not spared the papers in Palazzo Balsorano. Described by some guests as "splendid" (unfortunately without any further details), they were already detached and ruined by water

infiltration in 1914 and even more so in the summer of 1915, when the expert De Rogatis had to assess the damage caused by the catastrophic water infiltration caused by the collapse of part of the roof following the earthquake in Avezzano in January of that year. Within a few years, all these documents were completely lost.<sup>119</sup>



Zuber panoramic panel designed by Jean-Julien Deltil. Sold to private individuals in 2008.

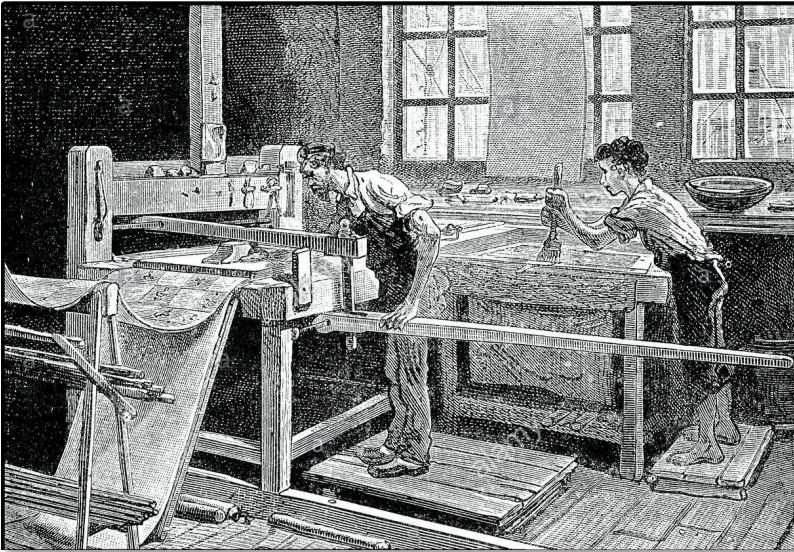
Above is a panel made by Deltil for the Zuber factory, the artist whose style seems to be mirrored, right down to the use of colours and stylistic devices in the creation of the sky and trees (in several shades of green), in those that can be seen in the former Villa Lefèbvre in Isola del Liri.

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<sup>119</sup> Bruno Giuliana, *Atlante delle emozioni: in viaggio tra arte, architettura e cinema*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano 2006, pp. 149-151.



The following picture shows a hand printing station that could easily be converted to textile printing uses. On the left, the assistant can be seen carefully and evenly inking the board or block while the operator at the press carefully measures the position of the board, which must match with crosses.



Printing station for wallpaper or textiles very similar to the one in the Lefèvre factory.



Corner wallpaper layout  
in continuity of the scenic maps.

It is certain that there were not many producers who could boast of maps as beautiful as those that can be admired in the Villa Lefèbvre, now known as the Villa Nota: the largest and most important were French, the Parisian Dufour and the Alsatian Zuber, in primis. But Lefèbvre's maps were also of remarkable quality and, as we shall see, were considered by observers of the time to be of a very high standard.

The cycle of scenic maps of the villa seems to be consistent: they are scenes of ancient classical inspiration, to be read in sequence, representing places and episodes inspired by classical history and mythology. The villa, although very large, could not compete with the Palazzo Lefèbvre in front of it and was probably built to be inhabited mainly by the directors of the Manifatture del Fibreno. As these were people of great responsibility, who were expected to be absolutely efficient, they were also well paid and lived in a suitable place. We know for a fact that when the Manifatture del Fibreno was bought by

the Cartiere Meridionali, the directors lived there: this was probably a well-established custom. If the cycle of stage maps of the villa seems remarkable to us today, we can imagine how much more remarkable it must have been in the palace, which was much larger and had at least two large rooms, one where music was played and danced, with pink marble floors, and one where people ate. De Rogatis testifies that at the time of his visit the rooms, even the larger ones, were covered with decayed, detached and mouldy 'painted' paper due to rain and infiltration. Nevertheless, the engineer makes it clear that it must have been something remarkable. Almost certainly, although we do not have absolute certainty - De Rogatis does not say so - these 'painted' papers were scenographic papers exactly like those found in the villa. The Palazzo Lefèvre on the Isola del Liri was a place frequented by many wealthy people who, for decades, had found there a refined and exclusive environment similar to that of the Parisian salons.

The Lefèvre family had hosted artists, ambassadors, aristocrats, statesmen, clergymen, poets, painters, ambassadors and travellers of all nationalities for decades, since 1824 and perhaps even before. The palace became a stopover for some of those who, on their Grand Tour, chose to pass through the area on their way from Rome to Naples and vice versa, also to visit the nearby Ciceronian sites. The decoration with scenographic maps, not only in the later Villa but also in the Palazzo, is therefore entirely appropriate, as is the subject matter that can still be admired in the first building: a scene of ships arriving on a beach, a marina, a sylvan scene with classical figures, an ancient city with temples and colonnades. These maps opened up the closed space of the Villa, and certainly of the Palazzo, in a way that has been well described by Giuliana Bruno, who, with some justification, sees in the scenographic maps a forerunner of the reasons for the cinema. Whether this assumption is justified or not is not our concern here. Certainly, in the 18th and 19th centuries, there was a need for travel, for displacement, for the exotic, and scenographic maps made it possible to make journeys while staying at home, to break through walls in an illusory way. This was particularly true of places of representation,

luxury houses, perhaps visited by travellers and curious geographers, as was the case with the Lefèbvre houses.

The fashion for panoramic wallpaper appeared in Europe at the end of the 18th century. At that time frescoes and tapestries had been replaced by wallpaper, which decorated rooms with various images, especially landscapes. [...] Decorative painting was in vogue at the time of Ancient Rome and reappeared with an illusionist touch during the Baroque period, when ornamental paintings, often depicting architectural elements, covered the ceilings and walls of churches and palaces. Trompe l'oeil techniques permeated furniture, while mural painting became fashionable in domestic decoration. The eighteenth century saw the rise of the garden room, where the boundaries of the roofed area were extended to provide a total view. In the 19th century, wall decoration added a new, global dimension to ornamentation. Initiated by Joseph Dufour, Jean Zuber and others, the new fashion of covering an entire room with panoramic wallpaper became increasingly popular, replacing paintings and tapestries. The panoramic tapestry redefined the interior as an exterior. The only decorative element in the room, it was an architectural aspect that transformed the outside into the inside.<sup>120</sup>

So, if it is true that the same or similar papers adorned the great palace that witnessed so many receptions and the passage of so many travellers, what better aesthetic choice than to break through the walls with views that recall the classical facts and widen the view?

Panoramic wallpaper was not simply an extension of earlier forms of wall decoration, but a new technological invention. Produced industrially as a serial image, it was based on the mode of mass production. The fresco, a unique work of art, was thus replaced by a series of industrially produced images. [...] The papier peint panoramique not only anticipated the cinematic mode of production, but, as a composition rhythmically structured in a series of tableaux, it exhibited the new spatial form of representation of the cinema. Scenes followed one another without repetition, describing a landscape or telling a story. [The papier peint panoramique modelled the panoramic impulse

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<sup>120</sup> Bruno Giuliana, *Atlante delle emozioni. In viaggio tra arte, architettura e cinema*, Bruno Mondadori, Milan 2006, p. 149.



that cinema would technically reproduce; in an attempt to achieve this vision, it accentuated the horizontal direction of its visual horizon.<sup>121</sup>

This was, after all, a family that was constantly on the move and that had equipped itself with a large carriage, a number of smaller ones for the servants and a cook, in order to cope with the constant passages through France and Switzerland. Thus, in the houses wrapped in scenic paper, one had the impression of travelling while standing still, and this effect can be seen in the striking papier peint decorations of the Villa, which belonged to the paper and wallpaper industrialists.<sup>122</sup>

Motionless at the centre of the scene, the viewer-passenger is embraced by the composition and transported by the circular flow of images. The inhabitant-viewer-passenger convention was established architecturally before it became a cinematic practice. The body was made to travel inside the house [...] The spectator of mythological scenes or historical journeys was the representative of a familiar story: the walls also contained his story, enacted within them and sketched on their surfaces. As an inhabitant and traveller, he was both on the move and settled. When living rooms and dining rooms opened up to the outside, migrating panoramically elsewhere, the closure of the interior collapsed.<sup>123</sup>

It is important to note that the group that met in Coppet, which included Madame de Staël (1766-1816), Juliette Récamier (1777-1849) and René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), to name the most important, was made up of people who were also considered in Italy (for example, by the exponents of the magazine *Il Conciliatore* in Milan) to be the inspirers and greatest promoters of Romantic exoticism. This was reflected in travelogues, such as those of the great traveller

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<sup>121</sup> Bruno Giuliana, *Atlante delle emozioni. In viaggio tra arte, architettura e cinema*, Bruno Mondadori, Milan 2006, p. 150.

<sup>122</sup> Other known factories, apart from Zuber and Dufour, among the not many that produced panoramic maps, were Desfossé & Cart, Leroy and probably also Roger, see in Turgan Julien, *Les Grande usines: études industrielle de France*, Paris 1923 where mention is made of the Desfossé & Karth factory, pp. 113-128; of Isidore Leroy, pp. 193-208 and of Roger à Mouy, pp. 1-6.

<sup>123</sup> Bruno Giuliana, op. cit, pp. 151-152.

Chateaubriand, but also in the production of panoramic maps, which, according to Paul Claval - a great scholar of human geography and one of the founders of the discipline - is an English phenomenon in origin, but eminently French in its panoramic declination.<sup>124</sup> And so it will not be insignificant to note, as has been done in other studies of this family and its vast cultural and industrial entourage, that the Lefèbvres were frequent guests in Naples and on the Isola del Liri of both Chateaubriand and other writers of that circle, as well as Juliette Récamier, who visited the very places depicted in the panoramic maps of historical-mythological themes. Nor is it surprising that they also knew Madame de Staël well. After all, the only truly Italian panoramic wallpaper factory was desired and run by a family closely linked, first by business interests (in Paris) and then by affection, to the romantic-intellectual circle that had made exoticism towards the past and geographical elsewhere one of its intellectual hallmarks. An Italian factory, to be sure, but above all a factory of typically French taste and sensibility, implanted in central and southern Italy.

### **Wallpaper printed with the Potter & Ross system**

In an aristocratic palace belonging to the Visocchi family (a different branch from the one known to have been involved in papermaking) in the town of Atina, not far from Isola del Liri, there is a room entirely covered with 19th century wallpaper. According to the family tradition of the Visocchi family, but also to the logic of contiguity and the assessment of the experts of the Rixheim Museum, it is attributed to the Fabbrica San Carlo of Ernesto Lefèbvre, and today this attribution is also officially recorded in the documentation of the *dell'Associazione delle Dimore Storiche italiana*.

The scene printed on this wallpaper has many shades and a texture

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<sup>124</sup> Paul Claval, *Le papier peint panoramique français, ou l'exotisme à domicile*. In: *Le Globe. Revue genevoise de géographie*, *L'exotisme*, tome 148, Geneva 2008, pp. 65-87.

and complexity of colours that make it compatible with the paper produced by the Potter & Ross machine (or a similar Leroy machine).

It is composed of successive stripes that are integrated into a repeating continuum, yet the design is contained within each vertical stripe. It could also have been produced by the system of block printing on a single continuous roll, but the uniformity of the scenes and the distribution of the colours suggest the former. The subject shows a river landscape, a river at its mouth - the sea looming in the distance - with Gothic buildings in the northern European style, a shepherd scene in the foreground (a group of shepherds with a dog walking along a road) among trees and hills.



Detail of hand-painted wallpaper attributed to Fabbrica San Carlo.  
Image courtesy of the Visocchi family of Atina.

On the river, on the way to the sea, you can see some steamers, of the wheeled type, which were also part of the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore* di Napoli, in which the Lefèbvre family had many interests. A fusion of modernity and tradition, typically romantic, certainly of the 1860s and 1870s, and of French taste. The various scenes are linked not by garlands and festoons, as in other motifs, but by fences and patches of trees. Finally, San Carlo produced a paper in the French style and, as Betocchi claimed, completely indistinguishable from examples from beyond the Alps.

The quality of this paper meant that it was chosen as the presentation image for a wallpaper museum in Belgium, in Rixheim (Alsace), where a part of the same paper is kept in the Palazzo Visocchi in Atina.<sup>125</sup> The fact that the paper arrived in the Franco-Belgian area suggests that it was also exported. After all, it was a wallpaper in the French tradition. However, the museum's curators could not find a French copy and agreed to attribute the paper to San Carlo. Today we can say that it was a Lefèbvre production in French taste, with references to Gothic taste, but also to the modernity of steam navigation.

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<sup>125</sup> At the time the exhibition was organised in 2018, the Museum's organisers had chosen this paper for its poster but were unaware of its origin. The only other example of this paper was found in Atina, and is attributed to the production of the Fibreno-San Carlo.



Palazzo Visocchi (Atina).  
 Photograph taken from the Italian Historic Houses website.



Palazzo Visocchi (Atina).  
 Photo taken from the Italian Historic Houses website.

Interesting for the period mentioned here are the visual testimonies left to us by the Bolognese artist Giovanni Paolo Bedini (1844-1924), who painted many scenes of Italian upper-class and aristocratic interiors, often dressing his figures according to the tastes of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The wallpapers, however, reflect 19th-century taste and can therefore be regarded as an interesting visual, if not exactly documentary, record of Italian and French wallpaper taste.

## The exhibitions of 1881 and 1884

According to an article published in issue X of *L'Illustrazione italiana*, written by Raffaele Erculei (a great expert in art history), the artists of the Fibreno factory reproduced models of Neapolitan palaces and the most luxurious Roman palaces, such as the Palazzo Corsini, in order to produce wallpapers to sell to the customers of the time. The work is one of the most interesting and informative, if not the most, written about the factory in those years and has considerable documentary value.

Anyone who attended the Milan Industrial Exhibition of 1881 will remember the Class XXX exhibition, in which the Stabilimento del Fibreno was awarded a gold medal for 'its exceptional display of wallpapers, a speciality of this important paper mill'. The quoted words are taken from the jury's report, which also states that "Fibreno's wallpapers, especially those imitating silk, have absolutely no fear of foreign competition: the colours are harmonious, the execution precise". Between the Industrial Exhibition of 1881 and the Exhibition of 1884, the Fibreno factories underwent a long and rapid development, not only perfecting their technical systems but also applying a series of new designs, as can be seen in the display case on show in Turin, which we present to our readers in this issue. There are reproductions of antique Venetian fabrics, tapestries made in Genoa and Florence, tapestries based on originals in the Corsini Gallery in Rome, brocades copied by Cretonnetz from 17th and 18th century originals with good artistic taste. The Milan jury's report praised the Fibreno for the variety of its designs, so that, as we would say from this side, it has made great progress, even though in Italy it is very difficult to have designs for fabric and paper, and we are unfortunately far from the progress made in France, where in Paris alone there are more than 300 industrial design studios at the service of artistic industries.

It is to be hoped that the schools of applied arts in industry, subsidised by the State, will provide Italy with a number of talented designers who will ensure that our products will not have to fear foreign competition in terms of harmony of form and colour. The wallpaper industry has a very short history in Italy. Its invention is attributed to the Chinese and in Europe it dates back only to the 17th century. [...]. The first appearance of this industry in Italy was at the Milan Exhibition of 1881, with the products of the late Carlo Oggioni,

the Giovanni Ferro company and, above all, the Stabilimenti del Fibreno. [...]. A very rare machine, specially built in the Gontani-Marten workshop in Paris, prints up to 24 different colours simultaneously and can produce up to 1,200 rolls of paper per day. Fibreno has factories in Naples, Rome, Milan and Turin, and this year even exported its paper to South America. We are sure that this very important industry, which brings so much honour to our country, will find in the jury of the Turin Exhibition the just rewards that the quality, quantity, beauty and good price of its artistic decorative papers deserve.<sup>126</sup>

## **The visit of the Italian royals**

Only two pictures appeared in issue 35 of *Illustrazione italiana* (31 August 1884) to accompany the above-mentioned article on the International Exhibition in Turin: *La mostra degli Stabilimenti del Fibreno, visitata delle loro maestà*, with a beautiful engraving by Ettore Ximenes, and *La visita dello zio cardinale*, a painting by Raffaello Armenise. Obviously two moments that were considered important and significant in the exhibition at the time. This confirmed what Betocchi had written ten years earlier.

The Manifatture del Fibreno was present in another section of the exhibition, that of paper production, but the visit of the Savoy monarchs was decided in this section because Fibreno wallpaper was an Italian excellence to be proudly displayed internationally, while in the actual paper and papermaking sector, the Isola del Liri factory had been joined in 1884 by other industrial concerns, especially in northern Italy (Lombardy and Veneto in particular).

Count Ernesto Lefèbvre, 63 years old at the time, seems to have received the royal visit. We know that he was in Turin at the time and only he could have received the Savoyards with dignity. The picture shows the delegates, the organisers of the exhibition, the ministers, with the royals in the centre, approaching Lefèbvre, who shakes their hands. They are all standing under a large pavilion containing several dozen

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<sup>126</sup> Raffaele Erculei, *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, No. 35, 31 August 1884, Treves, Milan 1884, p. 135.

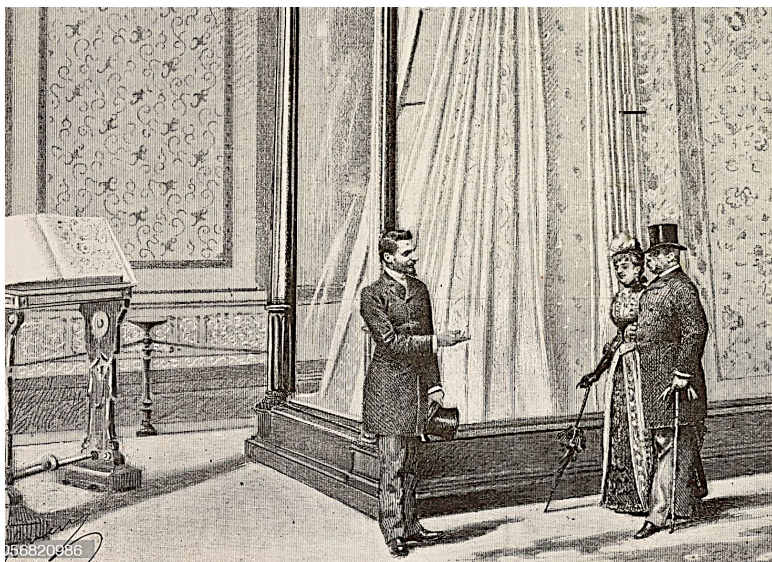


rolls of wallpaper. To the left of the picture is a large book of samples, and the wall behind it shows the wallpaper spread over a large area.



Umberto I and Margherita of Savoy approached Ernesto Lefèvre at the Fibreno Pavilion. Two other visits by the Bourbon had taken place in 1832 and 1858 to the Stabilimento delle Forme.

The visit of the monarchs was due to the prestige of the production of Fibreno Factory: At the time, the Manifattura del Fibreno had several competitors, especially in northern Italy, such as the Rossi di Perale di Arserio factories, but in the field of mechanical and handmade wallpaper production it was the absolute leader, rivalling French and English papers in terms of quality.



Detail of the previous picture: Count Ernesto Lefèbvre and the sovereigns of Italy. On the lectern, the sample book with the production of the factory.

The sample album, as you can see from the picture, is very well stocked with probably dozens of different designs and colours. The large display case is closed on three sides by glass, but open at the front, allowing visitors to touch and appreciate the cards on display. The visit of Umberto I (1844-1900) and Margherita (1851-1926), in the heart of the Bell'Époque and the not inconsiderable splendour of Umbrian Italy, was another high point in the history of the Manifatture del Fibreno.

## Chapter 6

### Lefèbvre Chemistry: a sign of transformation

In January 2020, Italian newspapers and television stations announced the long-delayed large-scale reclamation of the Bagnoli industrial site to remove all the ruins and remnants of more than 170 years of chemical processing. If this is the well-known end of the site's industrial history, its beginnings are less well known. We can ask ourselves: why did Bagnoli become an industrial area in the middle of the 19th century?

It can be said, with good reason, that it was an area that, in times of industrial development, was naturally suited to this purpose. It was a flat, free area, now drained of the water that had made it swampy in previous centuries, close to the great expanding city; it was situated on a low, sheltered coastline that made it possible to build piers and convenient moorings. It could be easily reached by crossing the hills that surround the city to the north, in particular Posillipo and Monte Spina. This is true. But it is also true that the industrial destination of this area, and in particular of the town of Coroglio, where, over the years and throughout the 20th century, a large and important industrial settlement would develop, was also the result of a precise choice. A choice made by the French industrialist Charles Lefèbvre, transplanted to Naples after 1851, when the political situation in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies seemed to be calming down.

In just a few decades, Lefèbvre had built up a veritable industrial empire and, according to the 1848 census, was one of the three largest tax payers in the Kingdom. A 'billionaire', as we would say today; an intelligent, intuitive, adventurous but prudent man, interested in putting his money to good use in industry and always in new and modern

activities. His role in the history of the Kingdom has not yet been sufficiently studied.

At that time, in the middle of the century, Charles Lefèbvre owned a great deal of land and farms, but above all he owned two paper mills in Sora (which would become three with his son Ernesto), various properties in Naples and in neighbouring towns and in Sora; he had important interests in the steamboat company called *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore nel Regno delle Due Sicilie*, which had six steamboats. He also had shares and financial positions in the lighting company called *Società Lionese* in Naples, in the large spinning mill in Sarno run by the *Società Partenopea* and in the Henry & Macry Industries. Associated with the paper mill was a large printing works, the *Stamperia del Fibreno* in Naples with a warehouse in Rome, and other real estate and land trading activities.

At that time, at the age of 75, flanked by a son in his early thirties, clever and an excellent administrator, and by then a member of one of the most important Neapolitan families, the Doria D'Angri, he still felt able to act. The story of this man, his adaptability, his industriousness, which lasted until a few days before his death in 1858, is astonishing. In 1851, when the King was consolidating his power and preparing to ennoble Lefèbvre, the latter thought of making the most of his business by extending the paper production chain upstream, creating a factory for chemical products used in the paper industry, in order to have them in abundance, to be able to sell them and to avoid importing them from abroad, from Northern Italy or France.

The Bagnoli plain was very familiar to him. For years, he and his family had visited the hill of Posillipo at different times of the year. In 1834 he lived there for a year, in the Palazzo Gallo, when his large apartment in the Palazzo Partanna, on the side of the Strada di Santa Maria in Cappella, had to be renovated.<sup>127</sup> Later, for many years, he rented a villa in Posillipo, above the Bagnoli plain. There were many villas to rent in those days. He also stayed in the large villa of his

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<sup>127</sup> *Manuale del forestiero in Napoli*, Borel e Bemporad, Naples 1854, p. 108.

daughter-in-law, Teresa Doria d'Angri, whose father had built a princely residence on one side of the Posillipo hill. Over the years, the Lefèbvre's summer residences changed, but they remained faithful to Posillipo, which was an unbuilt hill overlooking Bagnoli.

The hill was much sought after by the rich and noble, especially the part facing Naples. On one side there was the city, the international metropolis trying to modernise; on the other, towards Bagnoli and Pozzuoli, there was tradition, ancient memories, Roman ruins, ancient baths and more modern, functioning ones beyond Coroglio. The impressions of the visitors of the time are unanimous: the area is splendid, full of classical memories.

We know from the diary of a cousin, André-Isidore Lefèbvre (1798-1889), which also contains extracts from a lost diary of Rosanne Lefèbvre, Charles' wife, that the Lefèbvre family accompanied their many acquaintances and foreign visitors who arrived punctually each year to visit Fuorigrotta, Pozzuoli, Baia, Miseno and the Bagnoli Baths. The tunnel that connected Bagnoli to Naples was also a curiosity that fascinated the French visitors and the many relatives who accompanied the Lefèbvre family. Passing through a dark and dusty cave, a real attraction at the time, after 770 metres on the hill of Posillipo, one reached the sunny land, cultivated mainly with vines, a vegetable garden and an orchard. The tunnel was begun in 37 BC and completed by Lucius Cocceius Aucto at the request of Agrippa.

Bagnoli could therefore be reached by land along the road called *Per Cryptam*, which was lined with ancient sanctuaries, sarcophagi and Roman monuments. The alternative was the road known as *Per Colles*, more inconvenient and winding, which connected the entrances to the villas and, on the other side, offered a view of an unspoilt plain crossed by a straight coastal road, the road to Pozzuoli. This is the route of today's Via Posillipo, which continues on to Discesa Coroglio, a route lined with historic villas. Today there are two tunnels that go through the hill, the old Fuorigrotta (Posillipo tunnel) and a parallel route, the Quattro Giornate tunnel. At that time, however, the route was longer and Bagnoli could be considered an isolated area.

It must have been walking around these places where he and his illustrious guests used to go, surrounded by the scents of the countryside, the fig trees, the vineyards, the plum orchards, the silence that must have been so profound in this area, that Charles Lefèbvre must have had the idea of buying up the whole plain. We do not know why it was not exploited earlier. We do know, however, that until the end of the 18th century it was an area that still had drawbacks, such as marshes. It was intensively cultivated and divided into numerous plots, although, as we shall see, the property was less divided than it might appear, and therefore the purchase could be made without great complications, at least at first. A detail from the *Mappa geografica della città di Napoli e suoi dintorni* by Giovanni Carafa, Duke of Noja (1715-1768), shows the situation in 1775 or shortly before (the year in which the map was published): plots of land cultivated with fruit and olive trees, some plots with vegetable gardens and wheat. We can read the names of some of the farms, such as the Podere di Buonocore e Ferri, where the Lefèbvre chemist's shop was to be built, although 75 years later the tenant family had changed.



Map of Giovanni Carafa, Duke of Noia dated 1775 (National Archives of Naples). The site of the Lefèbvre Chimica in Bagnoli was still like this in the mid-19th century.



However, Charles Lefèbvre decided to buy all the land, at a cost of about 1,000 ducats (we do not yet have the transaction documents, but 20 years earlier, a large portion of the same land had been paid 650 ducats).<sup>128</sup> The factory was to be built there. However large it was, it would not change the face of the area for decades to come, which would remain agricultural and, er, mostly cultivated. But it was the choice of Lefèbvre and the construction of his factory that would determine the fate of the town.



Above is a painting by Pietro Fabris (1740-1792) showing the Coroglio plain around 1785. Strangely enough, there are no farm buildings, farms or houses to be seen along the coastal road at the beginning of the 19th century. It is probably a partially idealised view, or the farms were low and indistinguishable from the high point to the north where the painter had fixed his easel.

It was in 1857 that the vedutist Gabriele Smargiassi (1798-1882), a member of the Posillipo school, was commissioned by Charles

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<sup>128</sup> Not being present in the collections of notarial deeds in the Naples archives, it is probable that the contract was registered in Sora, with jurisdiction at the Court of Cassino, because the land and then the Lefèbvre Chemist's shop were legally considered part or branch of the Cartiere del Fibreno.

Lefèbvre to paint an oval view of Bagnoli.<sup>129</sup> The painting seems to have been lost, but the news of its existence is significant. It is true that the "vedutisti" liked to paint the surroundings of Naples, and views from the hill of Posillipo were particularly appreciated by foreigners, but there was a more specific reason for this commission. As we know, Charles Lefèbvre had just bought this vast piece of land, a decision that would have consequences for centuries to come. This commission was a celebration of his ownership. By this time, the factory had been built and Smargiassi's painting almost certainly depicted it.

There is an image that better 'crystallises' the state of the Coroglio plain at the very moment when Charles Lefèbvre was thinking of buying it. It is a beautiful engraving made in 1850 by the Parisian artist Frédéric Bourgeois de Mercey (1803-1860) and lithographed by Eugenio Ciceri. The engraving, which was scarce for a long time, was finally republished in 2006 by Grimaldi, along with 11 other engravings.<sup>130</sup> It shows Nisida and its small port.

There is a level of detail in this image that is not found in any other. One can see that the farms on Carafa's map of 1775 are exactly the same in 1850. In 1850, we can see that the Bournique glassworks did not yet exist, so it must have been built at the same time as the Lefèbvre glassworks. Moreover, one might think that the Bournique glassworks and the Lefèbvre chemist's shop were linked by more than just an exchange of shares.

As there was no Bournique 'ownership' of the land, the factory was built on the land purchased by Lefèbvre in 1853. The existence of this glassworks on this site can be explained in one way: the retorts and containers needed for the chemical industry were rare and had to be imported from outside (e.g. from Venice or France) at very high prices. They were also prone to breakage. The existence of the chemical industry and the glass industry, which were close and shared, could be

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<sup>129</sup> *Annali Civili del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, Real Ministero dell'Interno, Naples 1859, vv. 65-67, p. 28.

<sup>130</sup> Bourgeois de Mercey Frédéric - Ciceri Eugenio, *Napoli in bicromia. Twelve rare views of 1850 drawn d'après nature by F. Bourgeois de Mercey and lithographed by Eugenio Ciceri*, Grimaldi & c. Editori, Naples 2006.



explained precisely by the need for containers for the various stages of chemical production, containers which, as we know from other sources, were rare, expensive and difficult to transport. The fact that the Lefèbvre family owned large farms, such as the Masseria di Polvica in the Neapolitan region, with over 6,000 vines that were sprayed with Lefèbvre's chemical products (in addition to the much larger supplies from the paper mills), suggests that these industrialists were trying to establish a truly integrated production cycle.



Lithograph of the Coroglio plain (1850).  
Bourgeois de Mercey Frédéric and Ciceri Eugenio.

To return to Bourgeois de Mercey's beautiful painting, it is worth noting that the road leading from Posillipo, at a certain point when leaving the villa area, offers a beautiful panoramic view of the plain. The picture shows some bourgeois or aristocrats going for a walk, which became a custom for foreign visitors and Neapolitans.

A detail of the same picture shows the Coroglio estate, surrounded by some rustic buildings and trees. To the right of this building is the

area where, a few years later, the Lefèvre chemist's and Bournique glassworks were to be built, still completely devoid of any artefacts.

A drawing by Luigi Fergola (1768-1835), engraved by Vincenzo Aloja (ca. 1770-1815), *Veduta de' Bagnoli, e Fuorigrotta preso da sopra Posillipo*, also predates any industrial settlement. It shows the plain of Bagnoli to the north, from the hill of Posillipo in a section of the road beyond. The area to the north of the hill, the one furthest from Naples, did not have the concentration of villas and palaces of pleasure that existed on the other side. Since the term *ante quem* for dating this view is Fergola's death in 1815, *Veduta de' Bagnoli* can be dated between 1800 and 1815.



View of Bagnoli and Fuorigrotta from Posillipo.

## Forgotten pioneers

Architectural historians Silvio de Majo and Augusto Vitale wrote in 2014 that Lefèbvre's "great chemical factory" was "little known and neglected by not many historians of the Italian chemical industry". The authors are right: this serious omission, let's call it neglect, on the part of many historians has meant that Lefèbvre has been mentioned very rarely and with scant information, thus neglecting the historical importance of the plant, its novelty, the impact it had on the economy of post-unification Naples or on the technical-scientific community of the time; an impact which, thanks to the work of its French director, was considerable, as we shall see. The Chimica Lefèbvre in Bagnoli is a "factory that must be considered one of the pioneering companies of the peninsula, even before it dedicated itself to the production of fertilisers and pesticides, the type of production that, in a predominantly agricultural country like Italy, could not fail to characterise the first national chemical industry". It was only after the Lefèbvre period that the production of fertilisers began.

In fact, there are several phases in this history: the first, from 1854 to 1887 or 1888; the second, better known because it is more documented, when it was sold by the original owners and became the fertiliser factory of the American Arthur Walter (duration of the company: 1888?-1905). With one clarification: the exact border between the two properties has not yet been established. In fact, it is likely that Walter's business started after 1888, contrary to what is commonly written: no small detail. Walter's company was managed brilliantly and with innovative methods: advertising, conferences, a system of discounts - in other words, 'American' marketing. It had a remarkable development because it produced copper sulphate, an effective remedy against the peronospera infection that did so much damage to the Italian wine industry between 1888 and 1893.

Walter and partners sold the plant in 1905 to Unione Concimi, under whom the third phase took place. In 1920, Unione Concimi (1905-1920) ran into difficulties for a variety of reasons too numerous to mention, and sold to the company that would become Montecatini.

The fourth phase was complex and involved Ilva and Montecatini, who invested heavily in the site. They expanded their plants, turning the original ones into a real petrochemical centre. This phase lasted until 1993, after a period of crisis and disinvestment. A final, unproductive phase concerns the Città della Scienza, where a fire in 2013 destroyed most of the archives of the first factories and a large part of the Montecatini archives. This paper is dedicated to the first phase only.

The deed of foundation of the first company in 1853, the construction plans and the exact list of machinery and fixed assets present in that year are currently untraceable; they can be found among the uncatalogued material deposited in the State Archives of Naples.<sup>131</sup> In fact, the original archive, the Historical Archive of Montecatini, kept first at the headquarters of Ilva and then at the Città della Scienza Foundation, survived the fire of 2013 and in 2016, after two years of storage at the headquarters of the Soprintendenza of Naples, it was transferred to the State Archives of Naples, in a still uncatalogued fund that gathers the documents of the Città della Scienza.

It is not yet known whether this fund contains copies of the articles of association of the company founded by Charles Lefèbvre, the original plans of the factory and the deeds of purchase of the chemical plants, as well as other documents that testify to the nature of the agreement between the director of the factory, Charles Déperais, and the owners. It is probable that some of these materials are kept in the Frosinone Archives and some in the Caserta Archives, which, after the Second World War, received the notarial and civil archives relating to the former Terra di Lavoro and Sora district, where the Cartiere del Fibreno property was located.

Perhaps because of this lack of information and the fact that the Lefèbvre factory was later incorporated into other factories, from Walter to Ilva, historians have not studied it. On the other hand, there is a deed of sale dated 1887 which documents the temporary management of the factory by Pietro della Posta, Duke of Civitella,

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<sup>131</sup> The material has been inaccessible since 2013. It still awaits reconnaissance and cataloguing in 2020.

while the date of the transfer between the Lefèbvre and Walter estates is uncertain. If it took place in 1887, there is currently no documentary evidence. The oldest reliable mention of the winery dates back to 1890 in the *Bollettino della società italiana dei viticoltori italiani*.<sup>132</sup> Walter & C. was already very active and well known, so its activity could have begun, for example, in the years immediately preceding 1888.

This raises interesting questions about an important and futuristic project that the English architect Lamont Young (1851-1929) was attempting in those months on the Bagnoli plain, a project that was never realised. In any case, many years after the historians De Majo and Vitale wrote these lines, the situation has not changed: this factory, which was pioneering and unique in the industrial panorama not only of the Kingdom of the Bourbons and of the South, but of the entire peninsula, together with a factory in Turin, is still little studied, always cited with the same meagre data that are referred to from one book to another. And yet it was a large, modern factory run by a man of international prestige, Charles Déperais. If, in recent decades, it has returned, at least sporadically, to the memory of historiography and journalism, it is because its walls housed the Bagnoli City of Science, a museum and meeting place founded in 1993, which, unfortunately, as mentioned above, went up in smoke after an act of arson in 2013 and was reborn in the following years, but mutilated by an important archival and documentary heritage.

The volume of the City of Science is that of the old Lefèbvre factory, albeit enlarged by subsequent interventions, and the photographs testifying to the drama of the fire concern the old building itself, whose load-bearing walls have been recovered for scientific exhibitions. To tell the story of the Bagnoli factory, which belonged to the Lefèbvre family, is therefore to tell a very important part of the origins of Italian industrialisation.

Of the fire, the authors write that it "destroyed an important part of the museum and, above all, the oldest pavilions, dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, the result of the innovative industrial initiative in

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<sup>132</sup> *Bollettino della società italiana dei viticoltori italiani*. 1890, p. 171.

the chemical sector by foreign entrepreneurs who had anticipated the Italian industrial companies in this sector and many other factories that had sprung up east and west of the city of Naples". It was not until 2013 that the original structures of Chimica Lefèbvre, especially the wooden ones, were irreparably destroyed. Again, "the mistaken identification of the gabbriaca with a 'glassworks', as has often been done by the press and by many quality publications [...] has prevented people from realising [...] that it was instead a large chemical plant, the oldest in the whole of the Mezzogiorno, if not one of the first in Italy".<sup>133</sup>

## **The chemical industry in Italy**

At the end of the 1850s there were still no chemical industries of any significant size in Italy, with a few exceptions, one in the north (in Turin) and one in the south (Lefèbvre). In this field, not only the south but the whole peninsula shows a certain backwardness, which can be explained by the predominant agricultural and artisan vocation. There are workshops for the production of sulphuric acid, which is used in many processes; workshops for the production of caustic soda, paints and various pharmaceutical products, which require modest and inexpensive equipment.

A sign of revival in the chemical industry came with the first production of sulphuric acid, dyes and glass. A serious and wide-ranging history of the Italian chemical industry has not yet been tackled by any scholars and even international contributions, such as *The Chemical Industry in Europe* (Springer, 2002), offer few insights and deal almost exclusively with the chemical industry after 1880, completely ignoring Bagnoli's Chimica Lefèbvre, not because of any desire to do so but because of a lack of information and difficulties in accessing it.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Silvio de Majo - Augusto Vitale, op. cit, p. 107.

<sup>134</sup> Paolo Amat di San Filippo, *The Italian Chemical industry*, in *The Chemical Industry in Europe: Industrial Growth Pollution and Professionalisation*, ed. Ernst

The first pioneering activities took place in Lombardy, Veneto and Piedmont as early as 1830, often using foreign patents: but these were almost always small laboratories, certainly not industries. A description of the state of the Italian chemical industry is given by Professor Silvestro Zinno in his paper *Sulle possibili industrie chimiche nazionali*, published in the *Atti del Regio Istituto di Incoraggiamento di Napoli* in 1871. He deplored an attitude of foreignophilia in Italy, which, Zinno argued, was damaging to national industry, including the chemical industry. There was a 'prejudice' in Italy, particularly in Naples and Sicily, not to take account of domestic production, which was 'not so much inferior to foreign production'. Nevertheless, there is a "desire to always welcome foreign productions, because they are considered to be the most perfect and the most valuable". The problem, Zinno writes, is all the more painful when one considers that 'such products exist in the soil of our beautiful country and are therefore either ignored or despised'. Thus, he continued, "foreigners take advantage of them", extracting them, processing them in their own workshops and "sending them back to us, forcing us to pay a very high price for them, as foreign products that are therefore perfect to the common feeling and therefore very valuable".

The allusion here is to sulphur and its derivatives, which were present in large quantities in Sicily and had caused tension for decades with the British government, which exploited them by paying a very low rent to the Kingdom. There had even been a risk of armed conflict a fortnight earlier, the so-called Sulphur War (1840). Sulphuric acid and its derivative salts (sulphates) or sulphur anhydrite solutions (oleum, vitriol), were products used in numerous processes and various industries and the raw material was sulphur.

It has to be said that it took a foreigner, albeit a Neapolitan, to try to change this situation. The planned factory would have produced exactly the products mentioned by Zinno, and in considerable quantities. On the other hand, the expert - and he was not alone, as we shall see - denounced the fact that this factory was isolated and almost unique,

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Homburg - Anton S. Travis - Harmt G. Schröter, Springer 1998, pp. 46-57.

surrounded by a considerable ignorance of chemistry. He also denounced the lack of "technical education in Italy, the little or superficial study of chemistry, the little encouragement and very little reward given to those who profess it". What was lacking at the time, he explained, was "a large chemical laboratory to carry out the indispensable research, to carry out the preparations in an industrial system, to convince the capitalist of the success of the undertaking that could be carried out here". And this 'makes it painful to see men who are very well versed in the study of chemistry abandon it to carry on ordinary trades'.

The Lefèbvre factory in Déperais had a director of international repute. In the absence of adequate higher or university education and laboratories in which to practice and develop processes, industrial chemistry lacked capital. Hence the shortage of men 'capable of running chemical factories, who can therefore only be trained outside their homeland, where they will find large factories and large chemical laboratories of industrial application'. As a result, he lamented, "if our few industries are small and infantile for the above reasons, it follows that they cannot offer their products at the price offered by foreign products, which are produced on a large scale with economic methods and more or less arranged in large factories, can rightly be exhibited in commerce at a lower price; and so our factories fail, which by chance begin their industrial career, even if perfectly, and so there is discouragement and ultimately misery!" For Zinno, it was therefore necessary to start with professionalism, with the training of capable chemists such as the director of Lefèbvre, Charles Déperais.

Bagnoli's industry was all the more exceptional because the capital that had created it came from Naples and those who wanted it had done everything to make it work, with the best equipment, in a large and modern structure, with access to the sea, which at least solved the problem of easy supply of raw materials, most of which came from the solfataras of Sicily. Zinno believed in private initiative, but he also hoped for the promotion of national industry through government initiative, and the *Regio Istituto d'Incoraggiamento di Napoli* was dedicated to this. It reviewed the main products that could be developed



in Italy thanks to the raw materials found on Italian soil, such as sulphuric acid (and derivatives), carbon disulphide, ammonia, potash, soda, sulphates, nitrates, sulphites and others. As for sulphuric acid, there were many but small factories.

In order to fully appreciate the courage of Charles Lefèbvre and his son Ernesto, it is necessary to consider the state of the Italian chemical industry in the period before unification and in the following 30 years, i.e. during the lifetime of the first factory. There was the Michele Mirone's sulphuric acid factory in Catania, which closed in 1838 because it was impossible to find glass pots on the local market that would not break: exactly the sort of inconvenience that Lefèbvre probably solved by setting up a glassworks alongside the chemical factory. There were also small factories in Messina and Palermo. The losses were due to the war and to other reasons unrelated to the market, because the demand for sulphuric acid increased to such an extent that too many factories were opened, for example in Marseilles, leading to overproduction.<sup>135</sup>

The largest factories were in Turin (in Borgo Dora, owned by the Sclopis family, founded in 1812) and Schiapparelli (pharmaceutical chemistry). In Milan, Carlo Erba (pharmaceutical chemistry) and the factory of Antonio Candiano (1830-1910) and Antonio Biffi (1831-1908) stood out. In Genoa there was also a factory of some size, but of pharmaceutical chemistry and Fratelli Piccardo, which produced saltpetre. Although the Neapolitan factory had fewer workers than Sclopis's Turin plant, it was more modern and productive. It could produce around 13,000 quintals of sulphuric acid per year in various grades. According to Zinno's calculations, the industries of unified Italy could have had an annual requirement of 100,000/120,000 quintals of sulphuric acid, with some state incentives. In this case, the Lefèbvre factory could have guaranteed 10% of national production. In fact, it never worked at full capacity, except during periods when there was a demand for a particular substance against cholera, as we shall see; and

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, *passim*.

in any case, it satisfied a large part of the demand in the south and a part of that in northern Italy.<sup>136</sup>

### **Betocchi's visit**

About three years after Zinno's report, Professor Alessandro Betocchi (1843-1909), an engineer and director of the Permanent Statistical Office of the Chamber of Commerce of Naples, published his two-volume work *Forze produttive della provincia di Napoli*, in which he attempted to give a precise description of the industrial, handicraft and agricultural situation in the Neapolitan region about ten years after the unification of Italy. The work is also accompanied by tables showing, for many factories, production capacity, workers' wages, patents and the modernity or antiquity of the factories.

It is one of the most comprehensive works on the state of the economy in the south at the time. In a necessarily brief chapter, he dwells on the chemical industry and, in particular, on the Lefèvre 'de' Bagnoli factory, because of its absolute pre-eminence in the panorama of southern Italy, but also nationally. In fact, while praising the initiative of these courageous industrialists, Betocchi, like Zinno, expressed his concern.

First of all, Betocchi was enthusiastic about this plant, which was unique in the region and deserved special attention compared to other 'modest laboratories' in the area. For him, too, chemical production was a reliable indicator of the health of an economy: "chemical factories are not only a wealth in themselves, but because they are the most powerful auxiliary of many other industries, so that the more their number multiplies, the more all other processes will benefit; not only because the new factories will be able to produce certain special products for which we are nevertheless indebted to foreigners, but because the same products already produced in the country will be able to be sold at the fairest price thanks to free competition".

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<sup>136</sup> Silvestro Zinno, *Proceedings of the Institute of Encouragement*, pp. 52-53.

So there was a twofold problem: chemical products favoured the emergence of other industries, which often did not find it worthwhile to set up, precisely because of the lack of chemical products needed for the most varied processes, which therefore had to be imported from abroad at a very high price. And those who used them had to pay very high prices for both domestic and imported products.

The primary establishment I refer to is the one nicknamed *de' Bagnoli*, a name that comes from the beach on which it is located. It is an immense building, divided into several compartments, each of which is dedicated to various processes. There are three furnaces, one to calcine and one to burn sulphur, a steam machine, and it is full of pumps, apparatuses, lead chambers, vats and caissons for crystallisation. It is owned by that Ernesto Lefèbvre, Count of Balzorano, to whom the Sora wallpaper factory belongs, and which was mentioned earlier.<sup>137</sup> The factory was established in 1853, and, given the little development that had previously taken place in the industries supported by chemical products, it had a troubled existence at first. Now, the manufacture of alcohol, garanzine, stearic acid and all artificial sulphates has enabled the factory to produce on a large scale [...] And therefore with greater advantage; and by a happy reciprocity, the prosperity of the chemical factory has been useful to the factories that depend on it. The Bagnoli factory produces sulphuric acid at 50, 50 or 66; it also produces alum and iron sulphate.<sup>138</sup>

Most of the raw materials were bought in the surrounding area: aluminous earth and ferrazza, and sulphur in Sicily.

Thus 'the production of Bagnoli is used to supply the factories in our province and in the neighbouring provinces: a small quantity is exported to Italy and Sicily, none is sent abroad'. At the time of Betocchi's visit, the factory employed 24 workers at a good wage, plus transport workers and various external activities that made up the allied industries. There was also Déperais, who lived in a house next to the factory.

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<sup>137</sup> In another part of the book, Alessandro Betocchi focuses on the San Carlo wallpaper factory, which boasted a production quality of international significance at that time.

<sup>138</sup> Betocchi, *op. cit.* p. 277-278.



The Lefèbvre factory was the largest industrial chemical plant in the Mezzogiorno and one of the first in Italy (picture postcard from around 1920 after the transfer of ownership from Unione Concimi to Ilva).

At the beginning of the 1870s, the Lefèbvre factory, which was a specialised branch of the Cartiere del Fibreno, was a building about 180 metres long, running along the coastal road to Pozzuoli, surrounded by a wall that formed a large courtyard. It was an example of a large Italian plant, the largest for several years together with the Sclopis in Turin. It also represented, for those who had wanted it - Charles and Ernesto Lefèbvre - great confidence for the future of industrial development in the Neapolitan area.

Italy's largest chemical industries would emerge years later in both the petrochemical and pharmaceutical sectors. In Italy, the Azienda Coloranti Nazionali e Affini (ACNA) in Cengio was founded on 26 March 1882 in Saliceto, on the Bormida river (Liguria), to produce dynamite and later sulphuric acid, oleum and tritol. In Naples, A. Menarini Industrie Farmaceutiche Italiane, but only in 1886.

In both cases, as can be seen, these experiences are not comparable with the Chimica Lefèbvre, for which a special, modern, large building was constructed and completed in 1860, specialising in the production

of chemicals for the textile and paper industry. Furthermore, from the establishment of the Fabbrica Chimica Lefèbvre. More than 20 years passed in one case and almost 30 in the other. In these sectors, Italy lagged far behind England, France and Germany.

It is interesting to note that Betocchi mentions the troubled life of the factory in its early years: we do not know whether he knew or was unaware that much of that trouble was due to a claim by the State to get back the land on which the factory itself had been built, and which had been duly purchased in 1853. Although we cannot quantify how much it damaged the industry, we can think that the threat, repeated in several sentences, to demolish infrastructure and the building itself was not insignificant.

We will return to this.

## **The birth of Officine Chimiche Lefèbvre**

Let us take a closer look at how such a factory came about. The decision to create a chemical industry was taken by Charles Lefèbvre and his son Ernesto in the last years of the former's life. The first act was the purchase, on 22 April 1854, of "the entire beach of Bagnoli, from Monte dei Sassi to below Monte Coroglio", i.e. about one kilometre of sandy coast and a strip no less than 300 metres inland. The area, then deserted and partly cultivated, was close to the small farming village of Bagnoli. The land was bought by Tommaso de Franco and Giuseppe Jauch.

The construction of the building, or rather the buildings, including the service structures, was carried out quickly, as was the arrangement of the works and infrastructure that would serve the modern factory, the most modern in the south, as observers immediately recognised. The Melchiorre Bournique glassworks and the Vincenzo Damiani glassworks already existed on the site or were built at the same time, in 1853, producing mainly glass for windows and later for railway carriages. The glassworks seem to have been separate, and the Lefèbvre

family seems to have been partners in the first, located 'on the beach of Bagnoli', from 1853.<sup>139</sup> By studying the cadastral maps and rare photographs taken between 1853 and 1896, it is reasonable to assume that the Bournique-Damiani-Lefèbvre was located about two hundred metres from the chemical factory, much further towards the village of Bagnoli.

The construction of the factory did not change the appearance of the plain, which until the end of the 19th century retained the characteristics that had given it its name, *Balneolum*, as well as the appearance seen in the pictures taken at that time of this place: the exploitation of the thermal springs of Mount Olibano. There were few houses on the plain and two main activities: agriculture, made possible by the reclamation of land, with farmhouses and country estates, and tourism, made possible by the natural springs, the thermal baths and the bathing establishments built on the Coroglio beach. After 1905, with the purchase of ILVA, the area underwent a major transformation. The new factory took advantage of the concessions of the special law for the Risorgimento in Naples of 1905.

The designer of the factory was a brilliant and volcanic character, the aforementioned Charles Déperais, an inventor of chemical processes and equipment and a tireless experimenter. From the outset, he was the true master of the factory, a director who was given a great deal of freedom to experiment and use the equipment for his own research.

For this reason, as Betocchi noted, he called himself the "founder" of the factory. He only said this because he had designed it entirely,

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<sup>139</sup> This glassworks is little known, although it is often mentioned. In some cases the documents mention the name of another partner, see Barbara Bertoli, *Le utopie smarrite della Bagnoli jungle nella rappresentazione delle arti visive*, in *La città altra*, cur. Francesca Capano - Maria Ines Pascariello - Massimo Visone, Federico II University press, Naples 2018, pp. 959-969. Ibid, p. 960. The State Archives in Naples contain the file of a trial called: *Criminal trial of Bournique Carlo, De Rosa Pasquale, Riccio Giuseppe for complicity in fraud (in supplying plates) against Amm. Ferrovie di Stato, year 1917*. There is no further news of this company thereafter. However, the association with the Lefèbvre had been concluded since 1888.

even though it belonged to the Lefèbvre family. The Lefèbvre family was engaged in costly legal battles with the Demanio family, who wanted to reclaim the land, which was also being bought up at regular intervals, legal battles in which the name of Déperais was not mentioned. The Lefèbvre family, first Charles (who died in 1858) and then his son, gave Déperais considerable freedom over the next twenty years: they knew he was capable and showed a very modern attitude to delegation. We have already read Betocchi's description:

It is an immense building, divided into several compartments, each of which is dedicated to various processes. There are three furnaces, one to calcine and one to burn sulphur, a steam machine, and it is full of pumps, apparatuses, lead chambers, vats and caissons for crystallisation.

Admittedly, 'huge' refers to a time when industrial plants were small, but this one was obviously quite large, so the 180 metres (and a little more) mentioned in some sources is entirely credible, and can also be confirmed by looking at the maps.

The 'calcining' kiln produced sulphites and other calcineable substances, while the sulphur burning kiln was used to produce sulphur-derived acids. A filtering system led the dangerous fumes to a high chimney, the first ever built in the Bagnoli area and certainly one of the first in Naples, along with the Chiaia gasometer. From this brief description we can see how well organised the factory must have been and how the work was divided into different "compartments".

A great deal of experimentation was carried out in the factory and some processes that were later to become widespread were first used here. On 28 May 1868, for example, Déperais patented a spherical boiler based on an idea by M. Thomas and a process for extracting sulphur from earthy ores by immersing them in a solution of calcium chloride, which was expensive at the time, at a temperature of 120 degrees. But the resulting product of a complex process was so expensive that Déperais abandoned the project and surrendered his patent. The experiments that Déperais carried out in the factory, often without making a profit but purely for experimental interest, made the

Lefèbvre Chemistry the only place where chemistry could also be practised for didactic-experimental purposes, albeit for the benefit of one person, Déperais himself.

Later, in 1881, the idea of the French-Neapolitan chemist, who always made his proposals and discoveries public, was taken up and improved by the De La Tour Dubreil brothers when calcium chloride became cheaper. It is likely that Déperais also took up the idea at the Bagnoli factory, as he wrote about it in *le Génie Civil* and in the *Atti del Regio Istituto di Incoraggiamento*.<sup>140</sup>

In 1883 and 1895, evidence of the importance of the procedure initiated by Déperais at the Lefèbvre in Bagnoli emerged in an issue of *Scientific American* in which, describing sulphur extraction, the advances introduced by Déperais and the De La Tour Dubreil were cited.<sup>141</sup> Even clearer is the description in Rudolph von Wagner's *Handbook of Chemical Technology*, published in 1895, of the process developed by Déperais at Lefèbvre, which was then improved in France and, according to the Handbook, remained the state of the art at the time for the effective extraction of sulphur from sulphurous soils. Despite all the difficulties, the Bagnoli factory had left its mark.

In the documents that we have of the Lefèbvre family, the factory does not appear very much. The care with which they defended it in the legal battles shows that it was important to them: the purchase of the land, the building, the installations, the collaboration of Déperais itself must have cost a lot. The Lefèbvre bet was born in the Bourbon and pre-unification period, when sulphur produced in Sicily was a veritable monopoly. Betting on products made from sulphur extracted in large quantities from Sicilian sulphur mines, either pure or in sulphurous

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<sup>140</sup> *Bollettino Industriale del Regno d'Italia*, v. 5, 1868, p. 189; *Lettre de Ch Déperais, Ingénieur des Arts et manufactures à Naples*, *Le Genie Civil*, III, no. 18, 15 juillet 1883, p. 456; cf. *Annales Industrielles*, XVI, 1884, t. I, pp. 241-244; Charles Déperais, *Brevi cenni sui metodi di estrazione dello zolfo da' ore terrosi*, *Atti Accademia del Regio Istituto d'Incoraggiamento di Napoli*, v. I, serie 3, no. 16, 1882, pp. 1-4.

<sup>141</sup> *The Extraction of Sulphur*, *Scientific American Supplement*, No. 436, 10 May 1884, vol. XVII, Munn & Co., New York, p. 6952.



soils, was a winning bet, at least on paper. In the 1830s, the value of sulphur exports abroad was 1,6712,500 ducats. Sicilian sulphur, which was almost all that was available in Europe, could be bought at an excellent price from the Bagnoli factory. It arrived in bales and cakes on cargo ships that left mainly from the ports of Licata, Girgenti and Terranova, to the detriment of Messina and Palermo, which were cut off from the sulphur routes. The invention of processes to make extraction more efficient and economical was therefore of great importance; moreover, sulphuric acid and other derivatives had an enormous potential market, as there was no factory in the whole of central and southern Italy that could compete with Lefèbvre. As we shall see, these premises did not produce the hoped-for positive result, but not for long and only in an intermediate phase (around the 1870s), not because of the factory itself, but because of the unforeseeable impoverishment of the Neapolitan industry, which had previously shown signs of vitality and expansion; another cause was certainly the replacement of sulphuric acid by other preparations and substances, such as pyrites, the use of which had been experimented with by the English companies when they had to escape the temporary monopoly of the French company.<sup>142</sup>

By the time industrialism became firmly established, especially in the north, factories had sprung up that made it less convenient to transport sulphuric acid from Naples. Large sulphuric acid plants were built in Turin, Genoa and Milan. At a certain point, conversion to fertiliser production became almost obligatory.

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<sup>142</sup> Orazio Cancilia, *Storia dell'industria in Sicilia*, Laterza, Bari-Roma 1995, pp. 22-45.

## Charles-Alexandre Déperais

At this point it is worth focusing on the figure of Charles-Alexandre Déperais, one of the protagonists of this story. He was born in Paris on 8 July 1820, the son of Victor Romeo Déperais (who died in Naples in 1854) and the Englishwoman Louise Mac Sheeley, herself the daughter of an Irish nobleman who had been one of the physicians to Louis XV and Louis XVI.

The family had moved to Naples in the late second or early third decade of the 19th century: Charles' last sister, Amélie-Henriette, was born in Naples in 1833.<sup>143</sup> However, Charles remained in Paris where he completed all his studies at the prestigious technical school, actually a polytechnic university, called the École Centrale.

Arriving in Naples in 1851, Charles Déperais set up his own workshop at 20 Piedigrotta Street. He would work in Naples for most of his life, while maintaining his business, contacts and interests in Paris. A member of important Neapolitan scientific institutions, he was also a correspondent of *Le Génie Civil* and a corresponding member of the Société des Ingenieurs Civils in Paris.<sup>144</sup>

Around 1850, Déperais married Pauline Achard (born in Marseilles in 1830), the daughter of a manufacturer of varnished leather who had moved to Naples in 1831, enriching the rich French colony made up mainly of Lyonnais, Marseille and Parisians, a colony of which the people who would entrust him with the factory in the middle of the century were illustrious members. Charles and Pauline had six children.

One of his cousins, Giulia Achard, married Antonio Scialoja (1817-1877), one of the most important Neapolitan anti-Bourbon economists and Minister of Finance in Garibaldi's provisional government.

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<sup>143</sup> I draw this information and others from Tommaso Dore, *The Mummifier. Le invenzioni del chimico Déperais a Napoli al tempo del cholera*, Italus 2017.

<sup>144</sup> *Mémoires compte-rendu des travaux de la Société des ingenieurs Civils*, Bourdier, Paris 1865, p. 14.



The prestigious École Centrale in Paris where Charles Déperais trained.

In view of his remarkable preparation, Charles and Ernesto Lefèbvre chose him as designer and director of the factory they were going to found in Bagnoli. As they had always done for other ventures, this family of French entrepreneurs, who had moved to Naples in 1808, chose an excellent French technician who had been trained in Paris and was in constant contact with the mother country. It also helped that Déperais was perfectly bilingual. The production of chemicals was viewed with suspicion by the population because of the effluents and possible dangers, and indeed other Frenchmen who had worked with chemicals, such as the "Lyonnais" of the lighting company in its first configuration, had to abandon their business precisely because they did not know how to deal with the locals.

We do not know the exact terms of the agreement or how they met, but they travelled in the same circles and we can therefore assume that this meeting was almost fatal. Thus, in 1854, he began his adventure with the Bagnoli factory, which he managed for more than 30 years until its closure between 1887 and 1888. In 1869, Déperais also held the position of assayer chemist at the Naples Town Hall, in charge of selecting preparations and solutions to solve various problems. He also claimed to have collaborated with other large chemical industries outside Naples, but never specified which ones.

Although active in the last decade of his life, Déperais did not work with the new management, which specialised in organic chemistry and fertiliser production. It is likely that Arthur Walter, an experienced chemist, did not need a production manager.



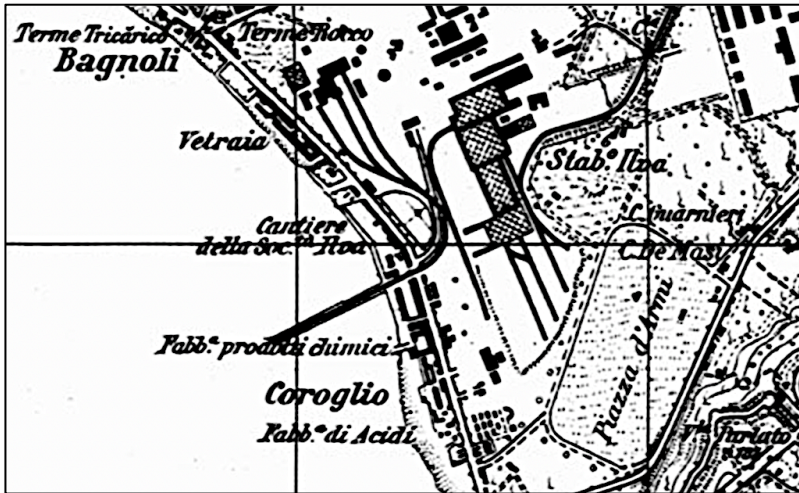
Portrait of Charles Déperais, anonymous.  
Brandt Civitavecchia Collection.

## **The buildings of Lefèbvre Chemistry in Bagnoli**

The factory, as we have said, was located at the beginning of the Campi Flegrei, on the Coroglio plain, in an area characterised by the presence of solfatara and thermal waters, which had been used for thermal baths since ancient times and which had only been slightly touched by the factory, as there had only been a glassworks for some time. The construction of the first factory did not stop the operation of the baths that had given their name to the area, which was more precisely called 'Ai Bagnoli'. In the 19th century the baths were modernised and equipped with hôtels, restaurants and gardens. The Manganello (1831), Cotroneo (1831) and Rocco (1850) thermal baths, which were considered modern at the time, were not far from the Lefèbvre baths. After the establishment of the factory, the Tricarico was born (1882). In fact, until almost the end of the century, photographs of the area show the coexistence of agricultural land, industry and spas, even if, especially from the 1910s, the industrial plants expanded to such an extent that many spas and the remaining vineyards disappeared. Not completely, however, as by 1960 some of the remaining spas still survived.

The location was strategic, as it was possible to obtain sulphur from the sea in Sicily, a raw material for products such as carbon sulphide and many others; the financial backing was good, as the industrialists of Lefèbvre enjoyed exceptional success in their various industries in those decades. Unfortunately, this factory proved to be more vulnerable to adverse events precisely because it was so daring. The context was very fragile, given the backwardness of the Italian system compared to that of other states; industrial chemical production was pioneering and Déperais and the Lefèbvres had to operate in an extremely poor industrial and infrastructural state. As if this were not enough, the first ten years and more of activity were hampered by a series of obstinate initiatives on the part of the State, which tried to take possession of the land on which the factory had been built and even demanded its demolition on several occasions.

This apparently unmotivated dispute was perhaps linked to the desire to prevent the development of a chemical industry in Naples at that time, which lasted until 1871.



Istituto Geografico Militare, F. 184, map NE Pozzuoli, 1:25,000, year 1907. The Lefebvre factory is indicated here as the 'Acid factory', as in a similar document of 1888. Of later construction is the 'Chemicals factory'. The factory is divided into the two production units 'acids' and other 'chemical products' (cf. S. de Majo and A. Vitale, 2014, p. 40).

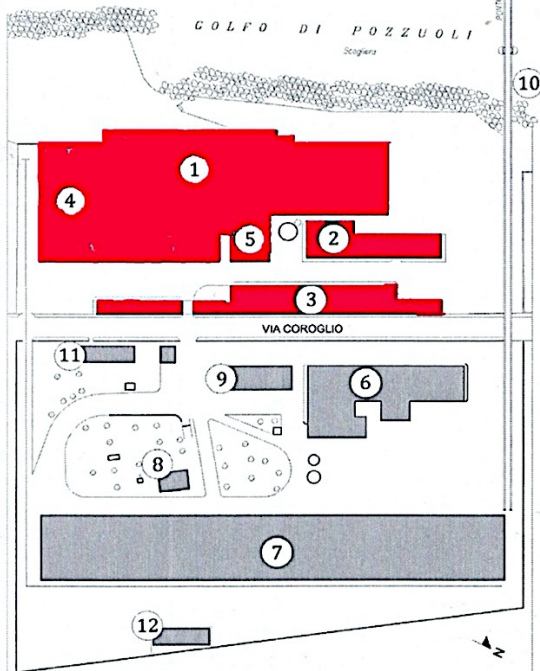
In the map reproduced above, one can still see some traces of the thermal vocation of the plain: Terme Rocco, Terme Tricarico and a few others; its transformation is also beginning with the construction of the ILVA plants.

#### NUCLEO ORIGINARIO LEFEBVRE

1. padiglioni ottocenteschi (solfato di rame)
2. magazzini e mensa
3. uffici, depositi, magazzini, falegnameria

#### AMPLIAMENTO MONTECATINI

4. ampliamento magazzini solfato di rame
5. nuova produzione solfato di rame
6. produzione acido solforico e forni a pirite
7. produzione ed essiccamento concimi fosfatici
8. abitazione del direttore della fabbrica
9. officina meccanica e centrale elettrica
10. nuovo pontile a mare
11. dopolavoro
12. acido fluorosilicico

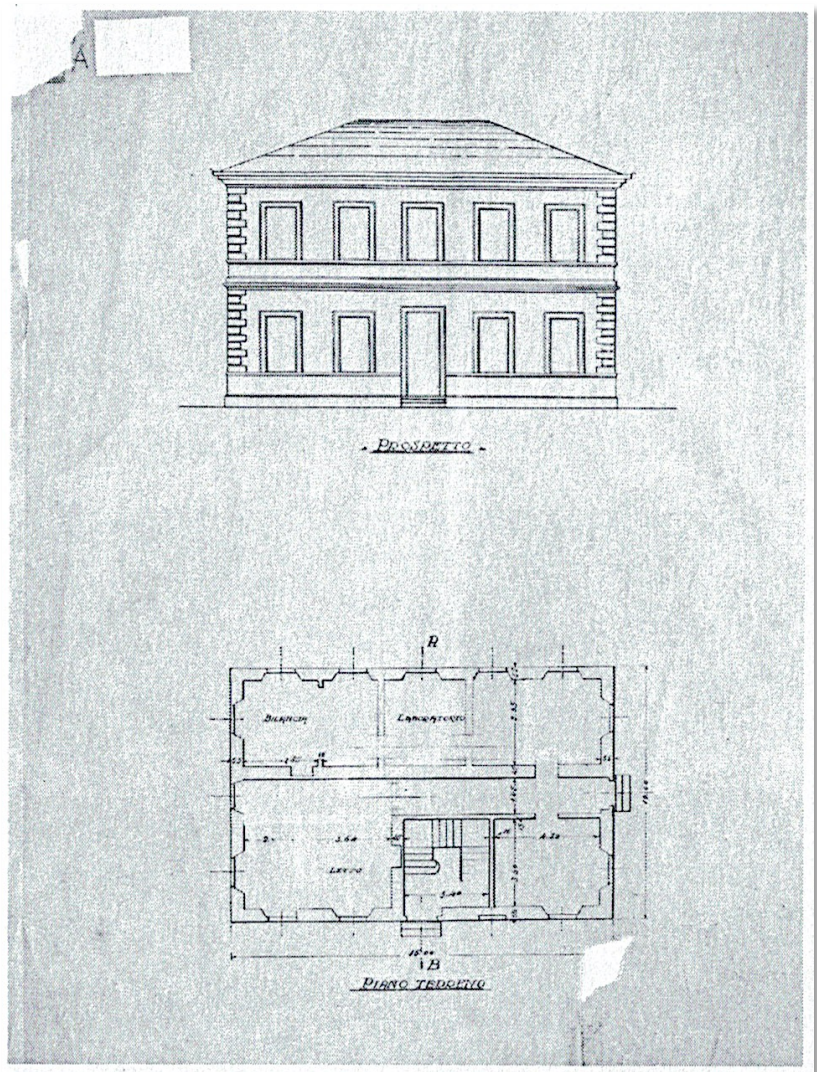


Re-elaboration of a drawing reproduced by S. de Majo and A. Vitale,  
*The City of Science*, p. 40.

A 'glassworks' is marked on the map, which can only be the Bournique, which stood next to the Lefèbvre plant. In the book by De



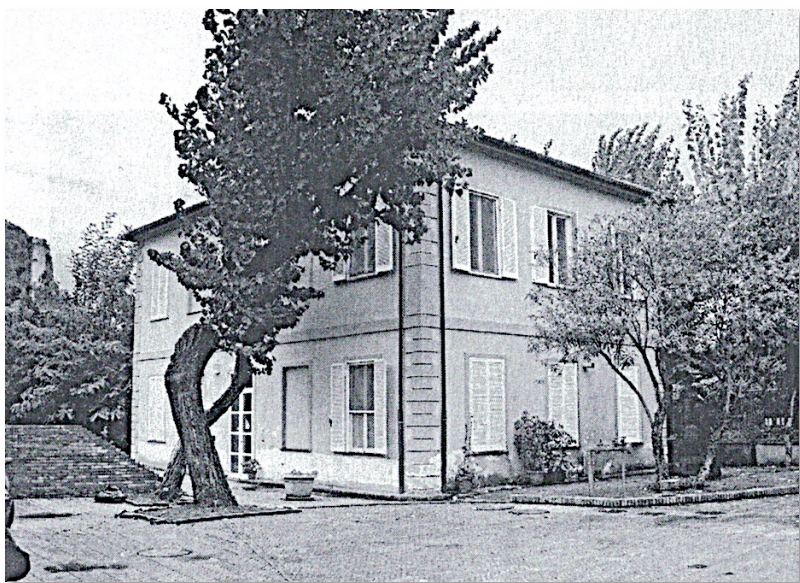
Majo and Vitale (2014), the original Lefèbvre plant is distinguished from later buildings.



Map of the factory manager's house  
(1853 and subsequent renovations).



All that remains of the original layout is the director's house, where Déperais probably lived for at least a few years, although he lived in Naples. The house still has the neoclassical layout designed around 1853, although the plan and documents (the one above is from Montecatini) show that it has been rebuilt, probably more on the inside than on the outside.



The factory manager's house,  
photo De Majo - Vitali 2014, p. 87 (photo from 2013).

## The legal case

It is important to know a little about the legal dispute that had been going on almost since the factory was founded and that lasted for about fifteen years, ending only in 1871. It was only then that the Fabbrica Chimica Lefèbvre in Bagnoli was able to operate without the threat of demolition of all or part of its buildings. The history of this process shows how difficult the conditions in which the managers worked had become.

It all began in 1457, when King Alfonso of Aragon (1481-1500) gave the land of Bagnoli, with the area called Coroglio, near Posillipo, to the nobleman Nicola 'Cola' Sannazzaro. It was a generous gift. The possession was maintained by Sannazzaro's successors and then sold to third parties by one of them, called Troiano Sannazzaro, with deeds and payments dated 10 January 1651, 16 January 1654 and 22 March 1695. The new owners of the plain and the beach in the 19th century were members of the family of Carlo Venuto d'Accaja, descendants of Trojano Venuto. On 20 April 1827, the latter declared that he had granted a small part of it in emphyteusis to the Administration of Indirect Duties and the Administration of Public Health, and the rest to Messrs Giambattista and Raffaele Mugnoz, Antonio Pineda and Luigi de Ruggiero, and to Messrs Tommaso de Franco and Giuseppe Jauch (20 December 1826). This "company" obtained the direct dominion from the beach to the embankment "ai Bagnoli" for the price of 650 ducats. A study of the cadastral maps of Bagnoli shows that all the leases and emphyteusis made up the total of the land acquired by Lefèbvre.

Charles Lefèbvre, through his agents Enrico Catalano and Ottaviano Cusutto, bought the land with a deed dated 22 April 1854, with the intention of building a factory on it. The State Property Office immediately objected and demanded the return of the beach, as it did not accept the change of use. The apparent reason was that they wished to preserve its ancient purpose as a seaside and agricultural site,

apparently with little confidence in the development of a chemical industry there.

Charles Lefèbvre appealed, an appeal that was declared null and void by the Court of Naples on 1 May 1858. The reason for the nullity of the appeal was that he could not produce the original of the concession granted by King Alphonso to Sannazzaro, but only documents from 1651 and a 'bancale' (cheque) from March 1695.

A survey was then ordered (in fact, at least two different surveys were carried out) to determine whether the works had exceeded the area mentioned in the 17th-century documents, and it was requested that "the demolition of the unlawfully raised works be ordered without further order". However, it was not clear which parts should be demolished. The experts argued that "Balsorano, by virtue of the concession of 1497, is the owner of the entire Bagnoli beach, which stretches from Monte dei Sassi to Monte Coroglio; that the factory's jetty, which extends into the sea, the rocks and the artificial dunes may cause damage to the port of Nisida, but not to the beach; that the new constructions have not preserved any part of the actual seashore defined by them, therefore the corner of the glassworks, the ruins of the factory jetty and a part of the artificial dune fall on the repeated area of State property".<sup>145</sup> In 1858 the owner of the case became Ernesto.

The fact that Déperais never appears as a party in this case suggests that he was never a partner, as is sometimes assumed. On 18 May 1860, the State Property Office explained to the Board of Intendency that "the late Count of Balsorano had built a large building on the beach at Bagnoli to be used as a chemical laboratory, and had later extended it on the beach side with other works, including that of a factory landing. He therefore asked for measures to be taken to demolish these unauthorised works".<sup>146</sup>

In fact, a lawsuit filed by the State Property Office to recover part of the beach and state property had turned into a lawsuit to recover the entire beach. In fact, the State Property Office requested a survey to

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<sup>145</sup> Court of Naples, 25 February 1871 (see appendix).

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

measure the beach and the size of the facility, which, according to its technicians, was built partly on its own land and partly on state land. In particular, the "plateau" built on the beach to facilitate access to the sea was on state land, as were the rocks used as breakwaters at the end of the beach. Although the beach and the land had been sold to Charles Lefèvre as freehold property (deed of 21 April 1854), the Directorate of State Property and Taxation, in a request to the Prefectural Council dated 20 April 1865, asked for the release of plots 12, 46 and 15, which, having already been granted for grazing only, had reverted to state ownership by right. He also asked for the demolition of what he considered to be abusive works on the land intended for grazing, and asked for damages and costs. The same request was repeated in the acts of 2 and 22 November and 7 December 1867 before the Civil Court of Naples.

In their final pleadings, Count Ernesto Lefèvre di Balsorano defended their arguments regarding the application for release and asked for the application to be rejected as regards the value of King Alfonso's concession. The Public Property Office disagreed, stating that not only the beach and the sand belonged to the Public Property Office, but also all the land that had once been used for hay production and grazing. On 25 October 1870, the Ministry of the Treasury, in a report on the case, concluded that the State Property Office's action was intended to "claim the entire beach as part of the lands donated by King Alfonso of Aragon to Cola Sannazzaro in 1457 and to order the demolition of the structures illegally built on public land".<sup>147</sup> In short, he reiterated that "the entire beach should be released and the building demolished". In its judgement of 15 February 1871, the Court of Cassation stated that "the action of the State was aimed at claiming the beach from the Bagnoli; that of the titles presented by the Count of Balsorano, only two could be valid as equivalents of the primitive title of King Alfonso's concession: i.e. the *istrumento* of 16 January 1651 and the *bancale* of 1695; that from the former it follows how the donation consisted, for the sea, in the right to fish, and for the marinas

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

and the territories near the beach, in the right to herbage and pastures; that from the bancale it follows the sense that the beach of the Bagnoli was precariously granted to Sannazzaro, and therefore also to the descendants of Trojano Venuto", i.e. Carlo Venuto.

Consequently, he declared "the entire beach from the Duna to the Bagnoli, previously owned by Balsorano, to be the property of the aforementioned Intendenza di Finanza" and ordered it "to demolish, within four months, the part of the factory's dock that protrudes from the construction of the rocks and the artificial Duna". Not only that, but it reserved the right to demolish other works as a result of the process.

One can imagine the mood in the Déperais factory at the time: was the possibility of a cull concrete? Was the possibility of the factory being closed concrete? Lefèbvre's lawyers were afraid of this and worked hard. In the end, after a timely appeal, they succeeded in getting the decision overturned. In fact, the case did not end until 25 February 1871, when the decision of only 10 days earlier was overturned:

The Court, giving final judgment on the appeal brought by Ernesto Lefèbvre fu Carlo, Count of Balsorano, against the judgment of the Civil Court of Naples of 15 February 1871, annuls it. And, doing what the first judges should have done, without dwelling on other exceptions that Mr Lefèbvre preliminarily deduced, it declares that the action brought by the State Property Office, now represented by the Intendenza di Finanza of Naples, for the recovery of the Bagnoli beach granted by King Alfonso of Aragon to Nicola Sannazzaro, now owned by Mr Lefèbvre, is time-barred. It therefore rejects any other application for the demolition of the structures built by the same Mr Lefèbvre on the beach owned by him. Without prejudice in whose favour, if, as by law, any right, reason and action with regard to works built outside the limits of the area possessed by virtue of the same sovereign concession, or that wherever built were prejudicial.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Court of Appeal of Naples, IV Section. Spiagge-Lidi-Prescrizione-Interversione di diritti, *Judgment of the Court of Naples*, 25 February 1872 in *Gazzetta del Procuratore*, Naples 1872, pp. 114-116.

The case brought by the State against the Lefèbvre chemical factory in Bagnoli is a curious one. In the first phase, which lasted from 1854 to 1858, the dispute was limited to certain works carried out on the beach: a concrete platform, a pier and artificial reefs to facilitate access to the sea and the transport of products. Later, especially after the survey of 1860, the case became more important: it was no longer just the works that were considered illegal and built on the beach that were disputed, but the ownership of all the land on which the factory was built. For more than ten years, lawyers and experts debated the nature of the ownership, which stemmed from the donation of the entire land by King Alfonso in 1457, which then passed to Trojano Venuto and then to his descendants, before being sold to other parties in the 19th century, who then sold it to Charles Lefèbvre in April 1854.

Certainly, no buildings had been erected on the land previously used for agricultural and pastoral purposes, except for the glassworks, for which no exception seems to have been made - unless the entire industrial plant was considered unique - and some agricultural buildings. The concern of the State Property Office, especially in the post-reunification period, therefore seems singular and excessive: it demanded the demolition of a modern chemical factory, unique at that historical moment in southern Italy. Was there any pressure other than the express pressure to enforce the law after centuries in which no one had dealt with the question of who was the real owner following the donation in the mid-15th century? It is safe to assume that there was, although at the moment we have no proof and so the hypothesis must remain a mere supposition.

At the time, there were no environmental concerns, and indeed a modern factory was considered of great value. It is likely that Zanni and Betocchi, aware of the risk they were taking, visited the factory at the very moment it was threatened with demolition, and their writings could be used as a defence of the merits of Lefèbvre's initiative that the judges could not ignore. If they had agreed to the demolition, they would have been responsible, at least symbolically, for a considerable impoverishment of the Neapolitan economy, which was already in deep crisis.

When, on 25 February 1871, Lefèvre was granted full ownership of the land, one can imagine the relief that greeted the end of a legal battle that had lasted at least fifteen years, with the constant threat of the demolition of part, then all, of the factory buildings. How much did this threat influence the dynamic management of the factory, the decision not to expand the range of products? The director, as we shall see, was a first-rate character who had to deal with a stifled market, the crisis in the paper industry and the lack of infrastructure in the Bagnoli area. In addition, he had to cope with the pressure of the destruction of the factory due to the intransigence of the State.

### **A very large building**



The Alinari photograph shown above is of uncertain date. It was taken between 1890 and 1905, shortly after the sale of Lefèvre to Walter. If, as now seems more certain, it dates from a period close to 1890 or even a little earlier, it would appear almost in its original form,

except perhaps for some initial enlargements already made by Arthur Walter.

All the darker buildings near the chimney, which are of considerable length, were definitely part of the factory. The darker, shed-like buildings were built by Lefèbvre. According to the legends on the 1907 military map, the Bournique-Damiani glassworks was a few hundred metres away, not next to the Lefèbvre factory.

It was therefore a very large building and much of the original structure of the Lefèbvre factory was still there when Ilva was decommissioned, although some parts had been manipulated and integrated.

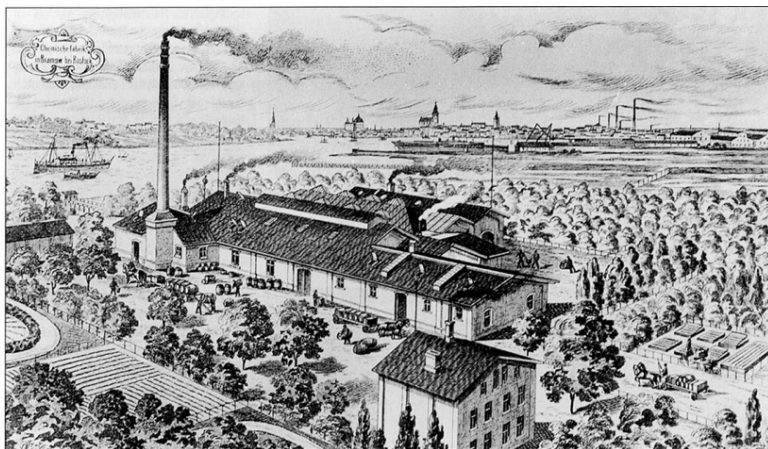
A photograph taken in 2013 shows the interior of one of the sections of the original structure, the tallest and widest, dating back to the Lefèbvre period. At the time, it was in a state of semi-decay, used as a warehouse. However, it is possible to appreciate the remarkable size of the building, which represents a typical early industrial building: a very high room with large windows designed to capture as much light as possible at a time when lighting was expensive and scarce.

The Palladian trusses were 5.5 metres high and the height at the top was around 6.5 metres. The height was also intended to disperse toxic fumes and vapours from the room containing the decantation tanks. This was one of the three major production areas of the factory, which maintained the original 19th century plant in the area downstream from the road. Unfortunately, all the chemical equipment (reactors, settling tanks and other apparatus) had already been dismantled, making it impossible to preserve the industrial archaeological heritage in its entirety.

This part of the site, in particular the Lefèbvre and Walter sections, became an integral part of the City of Science after 1993. In this space, 'the work of the primitive Lefèbvre plant was carried out until the end of production by workers who collected by hand the copper crystals at the bottom of the vats'. Both in the original factory and in the more



recent production organisation, the sheds facing the sea were used for this work".<sup>149</sup>

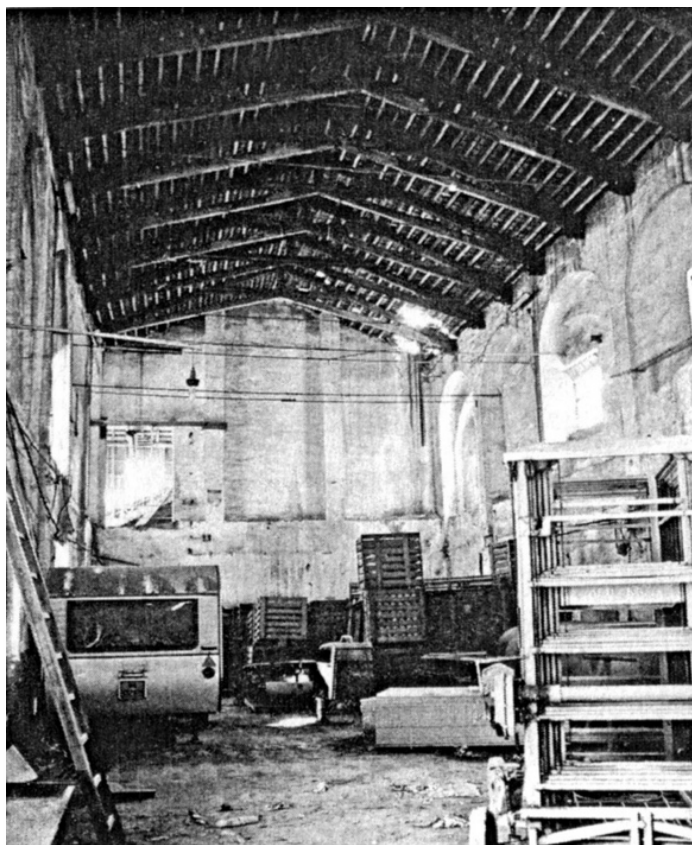


The Friedrich Witte chemical factory in Rostock, around 1890. It belongs to the same building type as the Lefèbvre Chemistry in Bagnoli.

The picture above shows a chemical factory in Rostock, the Friedrich Witte, in a drawing from around 1890. Although it produced different substances to the Lefèbvre in Bagnoli, the Witte has the same type of structure that was widespread in Germany and France in the mid-19th century: a furnace with a chimney at the end, and a long shed divided into compartments for the various processes, with drying tanks and the various apparatus, as well as one or more steam engines. On the sides, the loading and unloading area and, beyond the main shed, the warehouses, which in the Lefèbvre factory were located in the narrow building facing the road. In the foreground is the house of the caretaker and factory manager, in this case with offices. At that time, the sea or river was necessary for the transport of raw materials and the shipment of the finished product.

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<sup>149</sup> Silvio de Majo - Augusto Vitale, *At the Roots of the City of Science*, cit., p. 73.



Inside the room of the original Lefèvre factory where copper sulphate was produced (photo from 1993, from S. de Majo and A. Vitale, 2014).

## **The activity of the factory**

When he took over the Lefèbvre empire, Ernesto was 40 years old and familiar with the development of various modern industries in addition to paper, especially the newer ones. He regularly read Italian and foreign journals on scientific and technical progress. He was aware that he was operating in a market that was more restricted than the one in which his father had started out, a market in which credit for new activities was scarcer than at the beginning of the century. His aim, like his father's, was to reduce the cost of importing essential chemicals, especially acids, which accounted for a significant proportion of the total cost of papermaking.

The factory was completed in 1860. We do not know the exact stages of construction, but given the time frame, work must have begun in 1855 and been completed around 1858. The building plans are currently untraceable. The construction of the main building, "a large building used as a chemical laboratory", with various service buildings, the factory manager's house (which still exists today, after various modifications over the years) and a sea passage with a pier for embarkation, was completed around 1858. The complex was very close to the sandy shore - but not to the sea - and had, after a courtyard, a body of offices and warehouses overlooking the road to Pozzuoli, a road that connected the village of Coroglio with that of Bagnoli, a town much frequented by tourists.

At that time, the beach was about 200 metres wide, but later it receded and in any case the building was protected by an artificial reef and a series of dunes. A few years after buying the Bagnoli coastline, Ernesto also acquired an important stake (around 30%) in the glass factory a little further north, the Swiss glass factory Melchiorre Bournique (1829-1909).<sup>150</sup> The financial effort was considerable and unfortunately, as we shall see, production did not begin until 1864, a

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<sup>150</sup> A Bournique glassworks dedicated to the manufacture of lamps, derived from this Neapolitan one, set up in Indiana (USA) and became famous for its original glass lamps that were very successful in the Art Deco period.

good 10 years after the land had been purchased, while the litigation threatened to reduce the size of the factory itself, if not destroy it. In 1864, the installation of reactors and equipment was completed, in particular the large iron sulphate settling tanks, the steam engine and the furnaces.

The management of the plant was entrusted to the Frenchman Charles-Alexandre Déperais.

According to a report by the Naples Chamber of Commerce (*Relazione della Camera di Commercio e Arti di Napoli*) in 1864, the factory produced only sulphuric acid and alum and was not working at full capacity, probably because of the dispute with the state: "The company that founded this factory intended to produce several articles, but in fact it did not carry out the important project it had proposed and limited itself almost exclusively to the production of two products: alum and sulphuric acid".<sup>151</sup> Demand was lower than expected, but the reasons for the under-utilisation of this factory must be considered. It certainly did not work as well as expected because of the structural, economic and social crisis that affected the whole of the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies after the Unification. Perhaps even more important was the legal case mentioned above, which made its existence uncertain for almost fifteen years. Later, especially after the legal victory of 1871, production resumed and was extended to other acids, sulphites and other products such as carbon disulphide. Sulphuric acid in particular, the factory's most popular product, was an intermediate in inorganic chemistry and was used to produce chlorine for bleaching paper or cotton fabrics. It was distributed in demijohns.

The factory also produced large quantities of alum, which was used to make paper glue with the addition of resin. It was used as a whitener in the tanning industry and also in the construction and rubber vulcanisation industries. This name referred either to naturally

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<sup>151</sup> *Relazione della Camera di Commercio e Arti di Napoli*, Napoli 1864, cit. in Silvio de Majo - Giovanni Ventura, *Alle radici della città della Scienza*, op. cit., p. 31.

occurring aluminium potassium sulphate or to alumina sulphate obtained by the action of sulphuric acid on aluminium silicate minerals. At Lefèbvre it was produced at a rate of "about 1000 metric quintals per month". It was obtained from both aluminous slate and tuff.

According to Zinno, it was no longer used in the paper industry (where new, more effective compounds were being found), but rather "as a mordant for linen and cotton fabrics, as a tanning agent for skins, not only to clarify cloudy waters and other liquids, as an internal and external medicine, as one of the factors in artificial marble" (S. Zinno's Report, 1871). With regard to the production of alum, an unpublished report from ten years later gives us the information that the factory obtained the raw material from the mines of the Leucogei Mountains, not far from Naples, and that the production of alum was abundant and renowned, so much so that it was the first (in the sense of the most important) factory to process large quantities of this product, guaranteeing a very good cost price. The quantity of piombina processed in 1881 was about 1,000 tonnes and the production was about 1,200 tonnes of crystallised potassium alum; the selling price at the factory was 150 lire per tonne. Processing took place throughout the year (300 days) and employed 32 workers per day.<sup>152</sup>

We learn that in 1881 the number of workers had already risen from 24 to 32, plus a dozen or so caretakers, transporters, accountants and salesmen. In 1881, according to the *Annals of Agriculture* of 1883, the Lefèbvre chemist was extracting slate for the production of alum from the heights of the southern Terra del Lavoro, called Monti Leucogei on old maps. This meant that two of the main raw materials could come from the south: sulphur from Sicily and lead from the Terra del Lavoro, where the factory owners also had three paper mills.

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<sup>152</sup> *Annals of Agriculture 1883, Report on the Mining Service 1881*, Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce, Botta, Rome 1883, pp. 326-327.

## Patents and experiments

When Charles Déperais was writing technical articles for the *Bulletin of the Royal Institute of Encouragement*, he complained about the difficulties Lefèbvre's industry had in finding skilled workers, who were scarce in the Naples area. The industry was in a pioneering field, so all the technicians had to be recruited in France, at considerable cost. These were people who had to be expatriated, who had to be provided with accommodation and who were likely to be tied to multi-year contracts. Another problem was the stifled market, which had not developed as much as had been thought after reunification. Then there was the lack of infrastructure in the area where the company was located. It is known that the Bourbons had promised infrastructure, but after the change of regime the new rulers did not follow through and the area remained poorly served for decades. Things changed only during the Fascist years and under the Montedison administration, when many works were carried out to connect the area, and then after the war, from 1946.

The Lefèbvre factory, which initially employed 24 people, grew by 15 in 1870 to around 40, in addition to the workers and the manager. It was a factory that was anything but small, considering its size (as mentioned, the main building was about 180 metres long) and the fact that Italian chemical factories at that time were mostly small workshops producing modest quantities of products and employing a small number of workers.

Charles Déperais, a chemist, engineer and inventor, held several important patents. He was able to design innovative machines to improve the quality and speed of the manufacturing processes he was involved with.<sup>153</sup> From the beginning, the factory had a 5 horsepower steam engine and produced a good quantity of sulphuric acid, about 12,000 quintals per year at 50 degrees, but also between 700 and 900 quintals at high degrees (60, 66 degrees). This product was sold in the

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<sup>153</sup> *Bulletin des lois de la Republique Francaise*, Paris 1843, p. 266.

Mezzogiorno but also in Rome. In addition to alum, copper sulphate and ammonium were also produced.

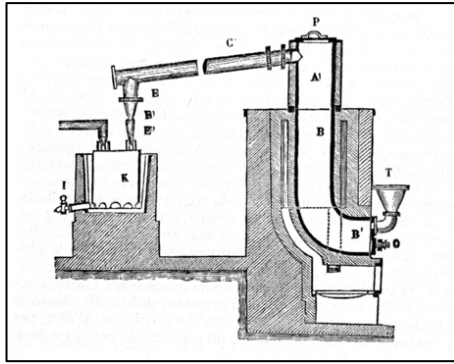
A description of *Industrie Chimiche Lefèbvre* by Professor Silvestro Zinno was published in 1871 in *Atti dell'Istituto di Incoraggiamento* in which Déperais was interviewed. Zinno praised the Lefèbvre factory as one of the few Italian chemical factories able to withstand international competition from factories in France, Germany and England, but lamented the problem of the lack of rail links, which made the transport of materials and products very expensive. He praised the fact that it was an almost unique example of autonomy at a time when Italy imported 'from overseas' almost all the chemical products 'indispensable and useful for the natural and civil needs of our people'.<sup>154</sup>

According to Déperais, as well as Zinno and Betocchi, the rarity of industries such as Lefèbvre's was due to the lack of good technical training. As a result, small and poorly capitalised industries were exposed to destructive competition from foreign products, which were imported from abroad at a lower cost because they were produced in large factories: "prepared on a large scale by economical methods and more or less arranged in grandiose factories" (Report, S. Zinno, 1871).

The Bagnoli factory was also the only one in Italy to produce carbon sulphide using an apparatus invented by Déperais. It economically produced up to 300 kg per day and could be used in many industrial processes and 'for vulcanising rubber, for extracting fats, paraffin, iodine, bromine and sulphur from poor minerals, for degreasing wool, etc., etc., and most effectively for extracting olive oil from its stones' (Zinno, 1871).

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<sup>154</sup> Silvestro Zinno, *Sulle possibili industrie chimiche nazionali*.



Apparatus invented by Déperais for the production of carbon sulphide (by S. Zinno, 1871).

Déperais had invested all his fame and recognised expertise in this field in the creation of this factory. The production of sulphuric acid, for example, was described as abundant and the production process as modern. We have seen that Alessandro Betocchi described the factory as an "immense building", divided into "several compartments, each dedicated to different processes", with three furnaces, one for calcining and one for burning sulphur, a steam engine and "full of pumps, apparatus, lead chambers, vats and caissons for crystallisation" (Betocchi, 1871).

The advantages of the factory were therefore, in a sense, the continuous process and the equipment invented by Depérais, as well as the abundance of raw materials at low cost. However, during the 1870s, once the legal problems had been resolved, the factory had to contend with the crisis of southern industrialism and, not least, the cost of rail transport, which made its products uneconomical in the middle of the North.

It also lacked the state protection that the Borgo Dora factory in Turin and others enjoyed. In the 19th century, Déperais also used the factory's products to become famous as a mummifier and inventor of preparations for preserving bodies, disinfecting and curing cholera. One



of his preparations was patented on 20 March 1880 for three years. It consisted of a:

A new preparation to harden animal substances and tissues and make them insoluble in water, thus protecting them from putrefaction, so that they can be more easily used for the manufacture of artificial fertilisers and the embalming of corpses.

This preparation was then transferred and sold to Mr Alfredo Huet on 20 May 1881.<sup>155</sup> In May 1881, the company also sold a process for "making the hydrocarbons that make up crude tar oil undergo all the metamorphoses to which they are susceptible under the double influence of air and lime hydrate, with the aim of reducing their harmful effect on vegetation and increasing their toxic effect on insects".

Much of Charles Déperais's work seems to be directed towards the positivist goal of stopping the decomposition of organic matter and recycling it: from the system for recycling slaughterhouse waste (1851), to the antiseptic Mineral Liquor (1880), to the disinfectants tested during the two cholera epidemics of 1865 and 1884. More curious are an apparatus for disinfecting and mummifying corpses (1883) and the idea of recycling animal blood as a protein-rich food for the poor and needy (1885), even using their skin as an adhesive (1894).

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<sup>155</sup> *Official Gazette of the Kingdom of Italy*, p. 2596. Supplement to No. 144 (22 June 1881).



## **Chapter 7**

### **Pistolegno**

In the 1850s, a mechanical pulp mill was built next to the Soffondo mill. After many experiments since 1840 with wood, mainly poplar, and other plant materials such as seaweed, the technology for producing paper from this raw material had become mature and cost-effective.

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 to do this, and Charles had never been convinced.

The process by which wood could be used 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 a direction transverse to the fibres and partially immersed in a tub 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 characteristics, which was considered suitable mainly for popular periodicals that did not need to be stored for a long time.

At the beginning of the 1850s, it is known that the Manifattura 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 by the Lefèbvre Chemist's in Bagnoli, which were added to the Lefèbvre industrial plants in those years.

The sulphate process, developed in 1884 (Dehl process), produced a pulp 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 good quality paper, 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 for his 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 power it. Since the 'public water' to be used was to be taken from the Canale delle Forme, 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 carried out on Lefèbvre's own land, he was told that he did not need to make any agreements with third parties or seek permission from the state or the authorities.

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



The upper floor of the Pistolegno, now restored as a dwelling.

One document clearly lists the Remorici Pistolegno's machine equipment.

Within that establishment were:

- 1) two vertical defibrators housed in cast-iron boxes, each supporting four piston boxes with cast-iron racks;
- 2) two horizontal refiners, each consisting of two stones, one fixed and the other rotating;
- 3) a cast iron calasca mounted on wooden boxes;
- 4) two pasta presses mounted on cast iron frames and boxes;

- 5) a lift to lift the pressed plywood with an iron cage with cast iron side uprights;
- 6) two 2 m x 50 cm brick tanks for storing the pistons;
- 7) two vertical piston pumps driven by a pulley transmission;
- 8) two large tanks located underground at the mill for the storage of waste water from the pulp 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 process water, each with its own sheet iron pipework;
- 11) a wooden hatch next to the charging tank with a rack and a cast-iron valve for draining the water;
- 12) a double chair with gears, sprockets for operating the above door, a filter;
- 13) a production water filter consisting of three large tanks equipped with their own hatches;
- 14) dam containing the turbine;
- 15) a double-walled lattice 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 flushing paste.<sup>156</sup>

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 an easement granted by the Ciccodicola, who owned this part. The plant was located at the end of a road that crossed the Ciccodicola's land and led to a bridge leading to the plant, which later collapsed.

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<sup>156</sup> Notary deed Placidi 30 January 1907.

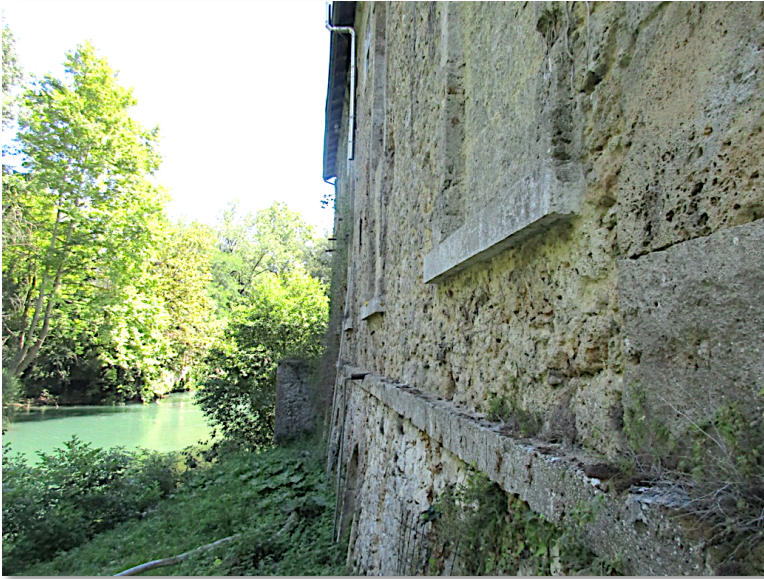


Dirt road used at that time to reach the Remorici Pistolegno.

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

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

The following picture shows the construction 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 floors.



Western side of the Remorici Pistolegno factory.

Here, through another entrance, now closed, the logs 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 appears 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. Remarkable are the large windows, facing west, which let in light until late in the day.

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



Pistolegno from the side towards Soffondo.

In the advertising poster reproduced below, the Pistolegno was promoted in the management of the Cartiere Meridionali: you can see the large wheels that radiate movement, the turbines, the vertical shafts.



Although they belong to the period of the Cartiere Meridionali, the installations shown on this unfortunately ruined map refer to the Pistolegno Remorici factory. The use of pulp became widespread for certain types of paper as early as the late 1880s.

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



Chipper machine. Southern Paper Mills. 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 between Pistolegno Remorici and Soffondo.



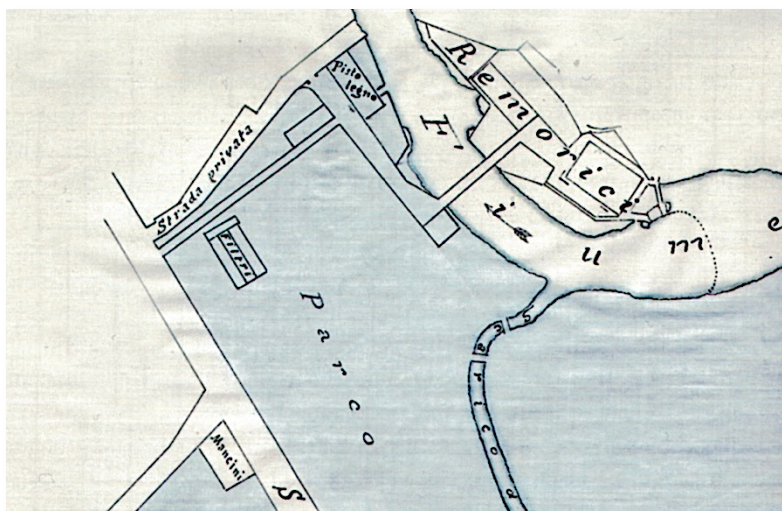
Connecting tunnel between Pistolegno and Soffondo.

At the end of the tunnel, which seems to have had a function of coverage and protection from the very steep embankment, one can see the gate leading to the clearing in front of the Soffondo. The space allowed the passage of trolleys on rails, the same ones seen in the Soffondo that have been removed here.

The factory under Lefèvre's management lasted only a few years. At the time of Count Ernesto's death, family and financial problems, which had in fact been going on for years, led Francesco, who had been appointed 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.

However, with a lease signed by Giulio Emery and Francesco Lefèvre on 21 December 1892, the factory was leased to the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali and reopened at the beginning of 1893.

From 1900 to 1906 it was leased to Gabriele De Caria's company, and from 1907 it was leased again to Cartiere Meridionali that at last bought them.



Picture of the Remorici area.

In the picture above, a detail of the map that accompanied the sale of the factories in 1907, and which can be seen in its entirety a few pages earlier, the area is clearly visible. One of the Mancini villas, built in the Tavernanuova area at the end of the 19th century, can be seen at the bottom. You can also see the private road belonging to the Ciccodicola family, which gives access to the park and the Pistolegno complex. On the right is a structure called 'filtri', where pasta was filtered. The narrow, raised factory is clearly visible. You can see an iron bridge built by the Cartiere Meridionali during the years of the lease. All the spaces and accesses shown in the photographs in this book were therefore part of the Lefèbvre complex, and in particular the park. Between 1885 and 1895, the whole area of via Tavernanuova, around the Lefèbvre mills of Fibreno, Soffondo and Pistolegno, was in a state of flux, because behind them, on the slope of the hill, connections were being built to the railway station, which was finally completed in 1895 after a long wait (it had arrived at Ceprano in 1865). In fact, at the beginning of the century, the Fibreno mill, still owned by Lefèbvre but

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

The Mancini family finally bought the Palazzo dei Ciccodicola, which was always on the verge of bankruptcy due to debts to the Lefèbvre family, a slump in business and the collapse of the factory. The Mancini family built two more villas, one of which incorporated a sixteenth-century villa visible in the first images of Isola Superiore, when there was only the convent.

In 1885, according to an expert's report, the Boncompagni building was equipped with seven water intakes that powered four automatic spinning machines, each with 240 spindles, and 33 hand looms. The Palazzo Ducale was then mortgaged by the Bank of Italy in 1883 and 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 factory, located under the cascade of the Isola Grande, closed in 1883, the Feltrificio Mazzetti, also located in the Palazzo Ducale, lasted until 1922, when it gave way to the Liri felt factory, owned by 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 in a paper mill in Valcatoio, next to the Palazzo Ducale.<sup>157</sup> This takes us back to a time long past, but it also tells us how lively Isola was, at least until the end of the century

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<sup>157</sup> Carlo Lambert, *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*, March 2018, pages not indicated but after panel 27.



## Chapter 8

### The Stamperia del Fibreno: from Unity to Closure

Some of the postunification production, the crisis, and the change in the market have already been mentioned. The main economic backlash was due to the entry of much tougher competition in the paper mill sector and the loss of orders also for the Stamperia del Fibreno, which, like almost all Neapolitan printers, saw preference given to Piedmontese and Tuscan printers. Although the ideology of the men who ran it - Ernesto Lefèbvre, the president Raffaele Caccavò - remained Bourbonist, they swore an oath to the new King of Italy, adapting to provide books that were useful to the new time and the new state.

A text inspired by the historical moment and probably difficult to withhold from print was Lelio Maria Fanelli's brief but pompous encomium to Garibaldi, *Pel 7 settembre nel Consiglio della Provincia di Napoli: Omaggio a Giuseppe Garibaldi*.<sup>158</sup> It is hard to believe that the publishing house, 'relying on the support of liberal men', had intended to provide 'information on the rapid and profound transformations taking place'.<sup>159</sup> It could not have been easy to publish that text: years earlier, Charles had been forced to flee during the first advance of the Garibaldini when he had learned that they were looking for him. Ernesto had thought it best to leave his homeland for a few years, settling in an elegant house on the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris, with his family and some twenty people in tow. He returned to Naples at least twice a year on business. Garibaldi had declared himself

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<sup>158</sup> Lelio Maria Fanelli, *Pel 7 settembre nel Consiglio della Provincia di Napoli: Omaggio a Giuseppe Garibaldi*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Naples 1860.

<sup>159</sup> Flavia Luise, *La stamperia del Fibreno*, op. cit., p. 106.

(and then ratified the decision) dictator for the territories of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies on 14 May, and on 7 September 1861 had entered Naples and occupied it. He had set up his headquarters in the house where Teresa Doria D'Angri Lefèbvre was born, as immortalised by Franz Wenzel Schwarz's painting: *Ingresso di Garibaldi a Napoli il 7 settembre 1860*, kept in the Civic Museum of Castel Dell'Ovo.

Many laudatory and encomiastic texts of personalities linked to the Risorgimento are published in this period.<sup>160</sup> For example, a eulogy to Victor Emmanuel II, the new King of Italy, was published.<sup>161</sup> On the death of Camillo Benso, the Printing House printed a high-sounding *Elogio funebre* compiled by Sigismondo Magnani.<sup>162</sup> To this was added a *Funebre orazione*.<sup>163</sup>

For the first time in its history, it also printed books on Freemasonry: especially on English obedience, and the Scottish Rite, whose members were always present in Naples. Thus, for example, Domenico Angherà with *Memoria storico-critica della Società dei FF Libero Muratori*. Between 1864 and 1865, the Masonic works of the Sebezia Lodge came out in 15 fascicles, *Guida dei fratelli libero muratori per la madre loggia Sebezia with a description of the first 15 degrees*.

It is not surprising that the words 'Stamperia del Fibreno' in these cases are printed very small, a unique case in the company's entire production, and that under the title sometimes only the place appears: Naples. Culturally, the Bourbon Lefèbvre and of course the people around them, including relatives with the exception of Gioacchino di Saluzzo harboured anti-Masonic sentiments.

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<sup>160</sup> Luigi Cancrini, *Per l'Italia: canti 4*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Naples 1861.

<sup>161</sup> Francesco de Luca, *A sua maestà Vittorio Emanuele II Re d'Italia*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Naples 1860.

<sup>162</sup> Sigismondo Magnani, *Elogio funebre di Camillo Benso Conte di Cavour dotto nel suolo di Sansevero dal prof. Sigismondo Magnani, ed un epigramma iscritto sull'alto del Tumulo temporaneo*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Napoli 1861.

<sup>163</sup> *Funeral Honours for the Death of Camillo Benso Conte di Cavour, Fibreno 1861, rendered on 19 June 1861*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Naples 1861.

## Production of literature books

In the post-unification period, a historicist critical-literary school, interested in considering Italian literature as a single history, prevailed, and the management of the printing works, also in order to follow the new ministerial programmes and the new literary canon, printed a Collection of Writers on the History of Italy, which began with the publication of the works of Francesco Guicciardini and Pietro Colletta. There was no lack of studies on Dante, such as Luigi Marii's *Dante e la libertà moderna*: a very appropriate subject for the post-Risorgimento period.<sup>164</sup> The Fibreno was a publishing house that published many series and many different types of books. For example, it republished all the decrees of the French Decade, re-edited after the Bourbon interlude, and many other acts and laws concerning the new Kingdom of Italy and the constitutions of other European kingdoms, particularly France and Great Britain, as well as reform projects concerning Naples<sup>165</sup>

It was with great emotion that André-Isidore, Ernesto Lefèbvre's cousin and Charles's nephew, visited the Stamperia del Fibreno in the heart of old Naples. After Carminiello and San Domenico Maggiore, this was the third workshop opened for the company that his father had helped to found in 1808. In 1865, during a trip of several weeks, he visited the office where the registers and documents were kept, on the second floor of Calata di Trinità Maggiore 26, with his cousin to explore the premises, and there he found an old worker, very old, named Fulvio, who still remembered his father, Joseph-Isidore, who had left 49 years earlier. The man began to rummage through piles of old

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<sup>164</sup> Luigi Marii, *Dante e la libertà moderna*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Naples 1865.

<sup>165</sup> *Collezione delle leggi de' decreti e altri atti riguardanti la pubblica istruzione promulgati nel già reame di Napoli dall'anno 1806 in poi*, Stamperia del Fibreno, 3 vols. Napoli 1861-1863; *Appendice al 2 volume della Collezione delle leggi de' decreti e altri atti riguardanti la pubblica istruzione promulgati già nel reame di Napoli nell'anno 1806 in poi*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Napoli 1863.

registers in what must have been a dark and dusty environment. Finally, he found a 50-year-old one in which his son recognised his father's handwriting, and the emotion was overwhelming.

As far as is known today, the Stamperia del Fibreno remained a hand-operated press for many years as far as the actual printing stage was concerned, but in 1871 it was reported that it had an automatic press. It was not until 1899, when the company was already closed, that electricity was supplied to Naples to power the machinery. At the time of its actual closure (1885-86), only electric lighting was available.<sup>166</sup> The Fibreno presses were therefore manual presses, albeit perfected. Machines that had been in use throughout the 19th century.

For the 17 presses attested just after mid-century (their number after 1840 had changed little) we must imagine at least 6 or 7 typesetting stations, where typesetters worked using movable lead type. Since the Printworks had been opened in 1808, it must presumably have had presses of different models and from different periods, also because the presses in use, for example in 1811, were very well suited for typesetting pamphlets, tickets, speeches. The Rossi cash register system was in use in Naples.

The actual printing was done manually sheet by sheet or two sheets by two sheets, in pairs. This was the stage of the process that could not be changed until the production of rotary presses and automatic printing machines, which in any case required electricity that was not available in Naples until the first decade of the 20th century. Each press required two operators. Between the press operators and the typesetters explains the fixed number of employees of 30-35 that remained constant for some 50 years, not counting the accountants who worked on the second floor.

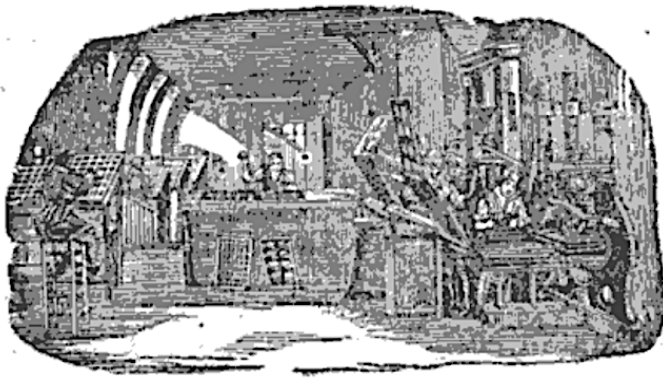
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<sup>166</sup> The first experiments in public lighting with electricity were carried out in 1875 by the Mende & C. company (Società Generale per l'Illuminazione), based in Piazza Cavour. In 1899, the Compagnia del Gas of Naples formed a consortium with the Società Franco-Suisse and the Banca Commerciale Italiana and founded the S.M.E. (Società Meridionale di Eletticità), based in Naples. It was at this point that the large plants for the production and distribution of electricity began to be built and became available within the first decade of the 20th century.



A press in use around 1850.  
As can be seen, the equipment had changed little in 40 years.

However, we do have an engraving, published in 1854, which probably shows us a sketch of the interior of the Stamperia del Fibreno. It is included in a children's book published by a very prolific author of the publishing house and shows a large typography that corresponds to the descriptions and equipment we have of the Stamperia del Fibreno. It would have been foolish to include the image of a competitor, as the Fibreno had engravers and everything necessary to produce such an image.



A probable image of the premises of the Stamperia del Fibreno in the book *Secondo fior di memoria, ovvero Antologia di prose italiane per la puerizia* of Lelio Maria Fanelli (Stamperia del Fibreno, 1854, p. 258).

In the image, which is not very clear but also not defined in the printed book, we can see a large room lit by large windows that let in bright rays of sunlight from the left. Also on the left are various writing stations. In the middle is what is probably the bookbinder's station, or more likely the table on which the composed texts were arranged and put in order before the actual printing. On the right are the printing presses. It is difficult to distinguish six presses in the picture, but the room is large and there must be more.

From the 1840s, probably from 1848, the Stamperia del Fibreno seems to have had a large warehouse in Via Nazionale in Rome, which was used to distribute not only paper but also books. This prestigious location was maintained until 1885, when a fire, probably arson, destroyed the warehouse and part of the buildings. After this date, the warehouse is no longer mentioned in the company's papers and documents.

## Trust that has never failed

Flavia Luise notes that the links that the Stamperia del Fibreno had developed over the decades under the Bourbons with members of the most prestigious Neapolitan academies remained strong, and that this was why, from 1864 onwards, the Stamperia del Fibreno was chosen, by annual decision, to print the dell'*Annuario della Regia Università degli studi di Napoli*. Certainly, in 1864 the Stamperia del Fibreno, with its 17 presses (or slightly less, the figures are from 1851), was the largest and most solid Neapolitan printing house in Naples, and Ernesto Lefèbvre, married to Teresa Doria D'Angri and related to the Duke of Bagnara, the Duke of Casalapro and Senator Gioacchino di Saluzzo (1811-1874), was well established in Neapolitan society.

It is also significant that an educator who was considered an expert and who had many responsibilities in the reorganisation of primary and secondary education in the south of the new Kingdom of Italy, Lelio Maria Fanelli, whom we have already met, published most of his books and communications precisely with the Stamperia del Fibreno. These were texts with a normative value. For example, the *Secondo fior di memoria, ovvero Antologia di prose italiane per la puerizia* (1854); the *Nuovo corso d'insegnamento* (1857) up to the *Progetto di regolamento per le scuole maschili del Reale Albergo de' Poveri* (1860). He also wrote *Supplementi alla grammatica italiana* (1855) and *La Scienza dei maestri elementari* (1862) for the provincial councils with which he dealt, which were certainly bought and read by many thousands of teachers who began their careers after attending the new Scuole magistrali or after qualifying to teach according to the new pedagogy of the Risorgimento.<sup>167</sup> Fanelli was a powerful and influential figure, and it was not easy to disregard his advice.

The *Annuario* is published annually by decision of the Academic Council. It is divided into several sections. The first ones list the Rector,

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<sup>167</sup> For the long list of Lelio Maria Fanelli's works published by the Stamperia del Fibreno from 1850 to 1862, see my *La stamperia del Fibreno* (2020)

the Faculties, the Body of Ordinary, Extraordinary and Appointed Professors, the Medical Clinics, the Experimental Institutes, the Scientific Cabinets, the Museums, the Vesuvian Observatory and the Botanical Garden. There is also information on the secretariat, the library and the calendar of classes and lectures. A central place is given to the publication of the inaugural address read on 1 January each year by the Dean of the Faculty, chosen from time to time by the Rector.<sup>168</sup>

In general, the whole world of the press, of Neapolitan publishing, fell into a deep crisis after the 1870s, following the crisis of the shipbuilding, industrial and commercial sectors, despite the incentives, initiatives and animations of the city's intellectuals and institutions in those years.<sup>169</sup> The fall in workers' wages led to discontent and many began to emigrate. The number of people employed in the book industry in the south (but almost all concentrated in and around Naples and Palermo) was around 2,200, and the constant closure of bookstores, printers and related industries (typesetters, typesetters) created unemployment that was difficult to absorb.<sup>170</sup>

The printing works also fell victim to this spiral, aggravated by the disorderly state of the paper mills' finances. The third generation of the Neapolitan Lefèbvre family found in Francesco (1856-1911) and especially in Carlo (1852-1920), after the brilliant initiative of Charles and the astute management of Ernesto, two people ill-prepared to deal with a difficult situation, not so much industrial (difficult) as financial. The second son, Francesco, after a dissipated youth, had tried to save the company, often staying in Isola del Liri to look after the paper mills. He had also mastered the management of the company, but nothing had saved it. It should be added that the profit margins for printers and, above all, booksellers were reduced when the raw material of rags was replaced by pulp and cellulose. Books became cheaper and so did paper.

Notwithstanding the above, it must be added that the technical

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<sup>168</sup> Flavia Luise, *La stamperia del Fibreno*, cit. p. 111.

<sup>169</sup> Vincenzo Trombetta, *L'editoria napoletana dell'Ottocento*, Franco Angeli, Milan 2013, pp. 177-179.

<sup>170</sup> 'Bibliografia italiana. Giornale dell'Associazione libraria italiana', XX, no. 6 (1886), p. 15.



capabilities of the Printworks remained excellent. The printers were able to print both large and small volumes or scientific communications with remarkable print quality even in colour plates, as is demonstrated by a small publication, an academic communication by Guglielmo Guiscardi, entitled *Sopra un teschio fossile di foca*, an excerpt from a publication of the Academy of Sciences printed by the Stamperia del Fibreno itself in which two colour plates appear reproduced with excellent print and colour rendering.<sup>171</sup> This small but significant publication comes at the very beginning of the difficult 1870s, which marked a very hard period for all Neapolitan publishing, printing and printing activities, in which bankruptcies and closures multiplied, especially in the city.

On 25 June 1865, the National Law against Counterfeit Books was enacted, a serious problem for publishers and authors not only in the South but throughout Italy. Often, several publishers had the same authors and titles in their catalogue at the same time, and the regulation of rights was neither certain nor regulated (probably private agreements based on trust). Publishers in the Neapolitan area tried to evade their legal obligations by backdating their works (which is why the date of publication is not always certain), since until 1861 literary property was not protected for texts published outside the Kingdom.

In any case, during the course of the turn of the century, many irregularities were resolved.<sup>172</sup> A comprehensive analysis of the situation of the Neapolitan printing and publishing industry can be found in the *Relazione sul movimento commerciale e industriale della provincia nell'anno 1863*, approved on 12 January 1864, then published and sent to the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce in

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<sup>171</sup> Guglielmo Guiscardi, *Sopra un teschio fossile di foca*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Naples 1871.

<sup>172</sup> In this regard, the text by Francesco Sanvito-Giovanni Ponzoni, *Memoria sulla contraffazione libraria nelle provincie meridionali*, senza luogo ma Milano, Tipografia Fratelli Borroni 1870, is a classic in the debate of the time. The dialogue is also reported in 'Bibliografia italiana' IV, 1870, 4, pp. 14-15; pp. 17-19; pp. 41-48.

Rome.<sup>173</sup> It describes the importance of the printing and publishing industry in the city of Naples and the problems it faced. It claimed that during the Bourbon period, due to government pressure, there had been few books dealing with politics and moral science, but that books had nevertheless been produced, good and cheap. Changing schooling methods and other causes (changing laws, centres of power, etc.) had driven many publishers and printers out of business. Despite the 'pressure' of the Bourbon government, foreign books had been translated and published in Naples and had benefited publishers and printers, although certain censorship requirements had discredited many works. Several booksellers and publishers had to take out loans immediately after the unification in order not to close down, such as Giuseppe Marghieri, Angelo Mirelli and Alberto Detken.<sup>174</sup> Mirelli was not saved and his library was sold with the contents of thousands of books (1861-1863) and his previously flourishing magazines were sold or discontinued: the *Monitore italiano* ceased, and the *Arlecchino* was sold.<sup>175</sup>

## The 1870s

In the ten years between the establishment of the post-unification dictatorship in Naples and the completion of the unification in 1870, very few works were commissioned from the printers of the former capital. At the beginning of the decade, however, this was to change. As early as 1861, the Tipografia del Fibreno was printing the *Atti governativi delle province napoletane* in several volumes, with a print run of thousands of copies, because they had to be available in every department, province, city and institution of the Kingdom.<sup>176</sup> These were

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<sup>173</sup> *Relazione sul movimento commerciale e industriale della provincia nell'anno 1863*, Nobile, Napoli 1864.

<sup>174</sup> Luigi de Matteo, *Noi della meridionale Italia*, op. cit., pp. 17-23.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 23-28.

<sup>176</sup> *Atti governativi delle province napoletane*, 25 June-31 December 1861, v. 1 Stamperia del Fibreno, Naples 1861.

publications that, if they did not give cultural prestige, did however guarantee fixed income.

During the 1860s, the Garibaldi dictatorship and then the Kingdom of Italy continued to have the Stamperia del Fibreno publish official acts for the southern provinces, but by the end of the decade these commissions had all but disappeared. They became the subject of invitations to tender, which were won through various systems, mainly by printers from Tuscany and Piedmont. For a while, the Stamperia managed to win at least the publications of scientific and university institutes and some museums. Even after the unification of Italy, Naples remained a very important cultural centre until the First World War.

In 1870, the printing house had no members on the board of directors of the In 1870, the printing house had no members on the board of directors of the Italian Booksellers' Association, where the Neapolitans included Giuseppe Marghieri, Riccardo Marghieri, Giovanni Parravicino, Alberto Detken, Romano Rossi, Antonio Morano and Alessandro Nobile.<sup>177</sup> The first meeting was held in Milan, while the following year, in September 1871, the Associazione, renamed Associazione Tipografico-Libraria Italiana, held its Congress in Naples, where it set up its headquarters. The following year, the Neapolitan members of the Association grew to 17, including the director of the Tipografia del Fibreno, Raffaele Caccavò.<sup>178</sup>

During the work of the Congress, the representatives of the southern companies (almost all of them Neapolitan) pointed out, among other things, that at the time of the annexation of Rome, the practice had begun of distributing tenders a few days before the deadline, making it impossible for printers based in other cities of the kingdom, who were already disadvantaged by transport costs, to participate. With the decrease in work, the technical equipment and even the professional skills of the Neapolitan printers deteriorated. Also because the more experienced ones emigrated to the United States or Canada, while the

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<sup>177</sup> List of Members of the Italian Book Association, 'Italian Bibliography', IV, 1870, p. 4.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

young ones had no one to teach them the trade.

At the second congress mentioned above, the Tipografia del Fibreno was awarded a silver medal for the "quality of its composition and distribution" and for the "clearness found in the printing of scholastic works, especially Greek and Latin classics".<sup>179</sup> In any case, the congress marked the defeat of the southern publishing industry, which was poorly represented. The Florentine publisher Gaspero Barbèra was elected president with 37 votes, followed by the Milanese Emilio Treves (36) and Gaetano Brignola (35). The arbitrators for the Neapolitan and Sicilian sections of the association were Detken, Nobile and Giuseppe Marghieri.<sup>180</sup>

In 1872, at the third congress in Venice, the Marghieri proposed the creation of a book centre in Florence. The project was drawn up by Vincenzo Pasquale, Nicola Jovene, Raffaele Caccavò and Antonio Morano, representing their respective printers and publishers, under the title 'Progetto intorno all'istituzione di un centro librario'. The project was not carried out for various reasons explained by Antonella Venezia.<sup>181</sup>

In 1872, an event occurred that is recorded in the chronicles of the period and that gives us a picture of the organisation of this society:

Yesterday, Saturday, just before 4 p.m., an unexpected, powerful explosion, as if from a cannon, shook the foundations of the large block of flats overlooking the internal gardens, between the streets of Trinità Maggiore, Pignatelli a San Giovanni and Santa Chiara. The shaking broke all the glass on the lower floors, while the rumbling and shouting spread fear throughout the neighbourhood.

Fire! Fire! - This cry, coming from the ground and from the great hall of the palace, echoed from mouth to mouth in the crossroads and moved the people gathered there, who quickly became a dense crowd, hastening the arrival of the fire pumps and the public security forces.

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<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, n. 18, p. 96; n. 20, p. 107.

<sup>180</sup> *Statuto dell'Associazione Libreria Italiana preceduto da alcuni cenni intorno alla sua fondazione*, Treves, Milano 1869, p. 7. Quoted by Antonella Venezia, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>181</sup> Antonella Venezia, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

Unfortunately, the stench of burnt paper and the smoke billowing from the window confirmed the news. In less than 20 minutes, the fire brigade arrived on the scene and, to their credit, and comforted by the presence of the deputy mayor and police officers, not only isolated the danger, but also averted it, saving every factory and household item except for very minor damage or deterioration.

The fire that broke out and took such a fortunate course had started in the paper storerooms of the Fibreno printing works and is believed to have been criminally set. Mr Alfonso Pouchain, the director of the factory, was busy with the business of the studio he occupied on the upper floor, and the deputy director was absent, while on the ground floor the cashier, Mr Preite, was performing his Saturday duties, paying the numerous workers and employees their weekly wages. The roll call was in progress and a man named De Angelis was approaching when the bang hit him in the ear, scattering all sorts of small debris, which fortunately did not cause any serious injury to the people around.

Only a young orderly suffered a slight bruise on his knee, and the Preite felt his eyes hurt and dazzled by a splinter thrown violently. Carried and dressed to the Director's house, the Preite will retain only the memory of the incident, and in a few days he will be fully recovered.

Meanwhile, the Magistrate's Court, having found evidence of a heinous crime of vengeance that makes the suspicions we have just mentioned plausible, immediately began an interrogation and investigation. In January, one of the Fibreno's chief guards, a foreigner, was summarily dismissed. And it is already clear from the fragments that the shot was fired with gunpowder in a tin box placed secretly near the chest on the ground floor.<sup>182</sup>

Meanwhile, the news gives us an interesting piece of information: the Stamperia del Fibreno had its offices on the second floor of the palace, which, although now dilapidated and neglected, must have been elegant at the time, also because it was located in an elegant area. A little further up the Calata is Palazzo Degas, home to another French family that played an important role in the economy of Naples from the second half of the 18th century until the end of the 19th century. Alfonso Pouchain had his offices on the second floor and the workers

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<sup>182</sup> "Cronaca della bibliografia italiana", *Atti dell'Associazione Tipografico-libreria Italiana*, Year VI, Barbèra, Florence No. 3, 28 February 1872, p. 12.

are described as numerous: clerks, warehousemen, accountants, printers, composers.

A few months later, in June, the same magazine, which collected news from all the Italian publishers, added other interesting details:

In those days, a case occurred that was certainly not new, but which had an unprecedented solution, and which perhaps heralded an important reform in typography. Shortly before, the proto of the Stamperia del Fibreno in Naples had died, and its director, the Reverend Don Raffaele Caccavò, was about to propose his successor.<sup>183</sup> However, as often happens in such cases, especially in large companies, there were several candidates: one boasted of his seniority in the printing house, another that he had sometimes replaced the previous proto in his absence, a third of his technical knowledge, etc., so the director was at a crossroads and he presented this situation to the management of the Società del Fibreno, which decided that the proto should be put out to tender among the workers of the printing house and that Mr Cav. Pietro Marietti, who happened to be in Naples, was asked to draw up the examination programme. Mr Cav. Marietti, even though he had to hurry because he was on a business trip, prepared a series of questions to test the theoretical and practical knowledge of the candidates. Since we know that the competition took place, and since we were promised both the questions and the answers, we will return to this fact, first of all, we believe, in the art of typography in Italy, and which may perhaps later be applied in a normal way.<sup>184</sup>

Interestingly, the cavalier Pietro Marietti was asked to speak. The latter was the son of Giacinto Marietti, founder of the Catholic publishing house Marietti in Casale Monferrato in 1820, who had inherited the publishing house in 1861 and was later called to Rome to head the Tipografia di Propaganda Fide, which later became the Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana. Marietti was by then an elderly widower

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<sup>183</sup> Proto' in 19th and early Italian meant the head of the workshop, the production manager of the printing house, who had to be an experienced person.

<sup>184</sup> "Cronaca della bibliografia italiana", Atti dell'Associazione Tipografico-libreria Italiana, Year VI, No. 11, 15 June 1872, Barbèra, Florence 1872 pp. 42-43.

who had been a member of the Church for many years and was to die in 1875. He was in Naples on a business trip but was involved in the selection of the new director. He seems to have set a series of questions for a technical and practical examination, which was carried out in the following days, perhaps in his presence. It is interesting, however, to note the closeness between Ernesto Lefèbvre, the owner of the Manifatture del Fibreno and the printing works at the time, and the director of the Propaganda Fide printing works. There must therefore have been a certain friendship between them.



Vienna World's Fair, 1873.

In 1873 the Marinoni hydraulic system was unveiled at the Universal Exhibition in Vienna, which, by replacing the steam engine in paper machines, guaranteed greater uniformity of copies and time savings. An industry that had invested heavily in its various production units over the previous fifteen years, and that at the time owned no less than four paper machines and maintained its supremacy in southern Italy, was in danger of becoming obsolete. This did not, however, affect the Stamperia, which was also closely linked to the paper mill. It was in 1873 that the printing house had the honour of printing the *Breve notizia della Regia Università di Napoli per l'esposizione universale di Vienna* (Short Notice of the Royal University of Naples for the World Exhibition in Vienna), which in 160 pages presented the situation of the University of Naples, its departments and faculties, professors, scientific and library equipment, and the environment for professors from all over the world. The presentation, printed in clear, crisp type on excellent paper, is itself a testimony to the quality of the company.

That same year, Raffaele Caccavò applied to Naples City Hall to open a typography school in the former convent of San Domenico Maggiore. The request was initially accepted by the municipality, but then rejected following protests from the Italian Typographical Association. The reasons are explained by one of the authors of the protest, Giannini, who defines Caccavò as an outsider, an 'intruder' in the art of printing. This may seem strange given that he was the (editorial) director of the Stamperia del Fibreno, even less so given that he was the editorial director and not the head of the printers, a very closed and technical category. The controversy does not seem to be directed against the Stamperia del Fibreno, but only against Caccavò, who at the time was a powerful man, director of the largest printing and publishing house in Naples. At a time when work was scarce, he wanted to create new typographers and printers with his school. It seemed inappropriate at the time, as those who were working at the time had to go on strike to increase their wages, or even lose their jobs.

It seems to me that it would be a serious mistake to open this correspondence without briefly mentioning a fact that has caused concern on



both sides among those who, out of interest or love, are involved with typographers and typography. I am referring to the concession granted by the City Council to Mr Raffaele Caccavò to use the premises of the former convent of San Domenico Maggiore to set up a technical printing school. I won't go into the merits of the concession, because I would have a lot to say, and perhaps not to everyone's liking; I will just mention that the Naples Typographical Society, disapproving of the concession, elected a commission to present a petition on the matter to the first civil magistrate of the city. It was published in our political diaries with various comments. For the reasons I have given above, I shall refrain from analysing this petition, except to note, and you will readily understand the importance of this reservation of mine, that one of the main reasons put forward by the Company against the concession was "that it was made by an interloper (sic) in the art of printing, and not, when the necessity was recognised, to a printer or to the Society itself". This is where things stand at the moment; however, I can add that, according to information from a good source, the Town Hall revoked the concession to Caccavò, accepting the comments of the printing company.<sup>185</sup>

Moreover, in 1874 the Tipografia del Fibreno, with its 30 workers and 15 presses (two fewer than the 17 in 1855), was still one of the four 'first-class' printing houses in the city of Naples. Almost all the paper used by the Neapolitan book industry came from the Liri Valley (essentially from the Boimond paper mills, the Cartiera del Liri and, above all, the Manifattura del Fibreno), and only 1% of the luxury paper was bought from outside, mainly from Lombardy.

An important book publisher, Morano, who had entered the Neapolitan market in those years, placed Fibreno among the most important publishing houses that had "won laurels" for the quality of their works, along with Batelli, Tramater and Nobile. However, the crisis in the Neapolitan publishing industry did not diminish the Lefèbvre family's interest in the book world: the losses were never such as to suggest a complete withdrawal before the mid eighties and, in any case, involvement in this world gave prestige to the family, whose

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<sup>185</sup> G. Giannini, *Nostro carteggio*, in *L'arte della stampa Rivista tecnica mensile*, February 1873, Naples, Year V, December 1873, Florence p. 52.

financial and economic centre of gravity was already elsewhere.

In 1875, the first law on literary property was promulgated in Italy, requiring the author's consent for a period of 80 years. This restricted the production of the texts of certain authors in the catalogue of publishing houses or the renegotiation of rights during the lifetime of the heirs. At the time, this was not a major problem, but in retrospect it was. In the meantime, Treves had opened offices in Milan and Morano in Naples. Margheri was also back in business. Giuseppe's son also opened a bookshop in 1881 in Piazza San Ferdinando, 48, an area that had hitherto been devoid of major bookshops, just opposite the Palazzo Balsorano of the Lefèbvre family.

In 1877, the Associazione Nazionale delle Cartiere Italiane (National Association of Italian Paper Mills), which also represented the interests of printers and the paper industry, denounced the serious situation of the Italian publishing industry due to the inefficiency of transport, which made it difficult to sell books in other cities, and the cost of rail travel. The long-standing demand for legislative intervention continued.

The first workers' strike took place in 1879, when the bosses refused to accept the new minimum wage set by the Società Italiana dei Tipografi, which provided for different pay rises for the most and least skilled workers.<sup>186</sup> But the strikes of the typographers' workers' movement spread throughout Italy, even in Milan, paralysing activity and even causing the start of trials against the strikers.<sup>187</sup>

The Lefèbvre family have managers for their three paper mills and the printing works, but they manage the main decisions themselves. At this time, however, the only decision-maker is Ernesto, given the relative absconding of his youngest son Francesco, in his thirties but still inexperienced. In those years a situation arises whereby some of the books published by the Stamperia are marked as Stamperia già del Fibreno and others as Stabilimenti or Stamperia del Fibreno.

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<sup>186</sup> "Cronaca della bibliografia italiana", Year XII, No. 23, p. 99.

<sup>187</sup> "Cronaca della bibliografia italiana", Year IIV, No. 4, pp. 1-4; XVI, No. 8, pp. 30-31; No. 10, p. 39.

This situation suggests that the management was divided into two departments, one publishing books for itself and the other publishing books for others. This situation, which is anomalous and difficult to decipher, lasted from 1877 to 1886, when the printing house published books with the inscription 'formerly Stamperia del Fibreno', such as the books by Salazaro Demetrio, *Sulla cultura antica dell'Italia meridionale dal IV al XIII secolo* and *L'arte della miniatura del secolo XIV*.<sup>188</sup>

In 1879, Alberto Errera's *Inchiesta sulle condizioni degli operai nelle fabbriche* had caused problems. Finally, following the example of other countries, it was decided that the problem of child labour should be resolved and that appropriate legislation should soon be enacted. Minors were heavily employed in the paper mills, accounting for about a quarter of the total workforce at any one time. They had exhausting working hours and low wages. After a feeble defence based on the educational value of the work, they asked for a suspension of a few years to reorganise the mills. But the crisis in the paper mills, now well established, also began to affect the publishing house.

## **The size of the Neapolitan printing houses**

Coming back to the question of the size of the printing houses, their number, their equipment, a subject that has been mentioned here and there in this paper, the figures given by Luigi de Matteo in 2008 in his book *Noi della meridionale Italia*, and later confirmed by other historians who have studied the same sources or other contemporary sources, are still valid on closer examination.

In 1807 there were 17 printers, in 1829 there were 51, in 1849 there were 62 and in 1859 there were 89. It was a slow and steady process, which only came to a halt at the end of the 1950s, when the market

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<sup>188</sup> Demetrio Salazaro, *Sulla cultura antica dell'Italia meridionale dal IV al XIII secolo*, Tipografia editrice già del Fibreno, Naples 1877; ID, *L'arte della miniatura del secolo XIV*, Tipografia editrice già del Fibreno, Naples 1877.

became more dynamic for a while.<sup>189</sup>

The censorship law of 13 August 1850, which obliged printers to pay a deposit in proportion to the number of presses they owned and operated, produced another statistic that was probably closer to the mark, and so, excluding the 56 printers who owned 5 presses (6), 4 presses (11), 3 presses (14), 2 presses (20) and only 1 press (5), and considering only those who owned 8 or more presses, i.e. the largest, in 1851 the following remained, in descending order of size.<sup>190</sup>

Fourteen presses: Marotta Raffaele, Stamperia del Fibreno.

Ten presses: Tipografia del Vaglio.

Nine presses: Fabricatore Nicola, Silvestri Roberto.

Otto Torchi: Tipografia dell'Albergo de' Poveri di Cioffi Vincenzo.

In all, there were seven printing-shops that could be described as large.<sup>191</sup>

In the middle of the century, therefore, confirming the results of this study, the Tipografia del Fibreno was the largest, together with the Tipografia di Marotta. A few large printers and a fairly large number of medium-sized printers were flanked by numerous small or very small printers with 1 or 2 presses. At that time, Naples was second only to Milan in the number of titles printed in Italy.

Twenty years later, the situation had changed: new printers had entered the market, relegating Fibreno to sixth place. There is a wealth of documentation, especially for the first half of the 1870s. According to the *Bibliografica italiana* (1872), the official journal of the

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<sup>189</sup> The data are taken from Luigi Galanti, *Guida storico monumentale della città di Napoli e contorni*, Luigi Chiurazzi, Naples 1881, p. 144. This was an updated edition by Lorenzo Polizzi. The same publication reported that there were 172 printing works in Naples in 1881. The data for 1849, 1851 and 1853 are taken from Luigi Mascilli Migliorini, *La memoria meridionale*, pp. 673-674. Quoted from Luigi de Matteo, op. cit., p. 50 and 86n.

<sup>190</sup> State Archives of Naples, Ministry of Police, Prefecture, fascio 765.

<sup>191</sup> P. Maestro, *Dell'arte tipografica*, p. 350. cit. L. di Matteo, op. cit., p. 50.

Associazione Tipografico-Libraria Italiana, there were 75 printers, 9 printer-publishers and 20 booksellers in Naples. In total there were 979 workers. The typologies and specialisations became more precise. Publishers and booksellers did not have to own printing presses, and printers did not have to own printing presses.

The most complete type was that of printer-publishers, such as the Stamperia del Fibreno, which numbered nine in all. Also in 1871, the Questura of Naples recorded 87 printers in the city. Alessandro Betocchi, director of the Institute of Statistics of the Chamber of Commerce of Naples, considered the figure given by the *Biblioteca italiana* in *Le Forze produttive della provincia di Napoli* to be more reliable.<sup>192</sup>

In any case, the largest printers active, according to these documents, in the first half of the 1870s were:

Stamperia Governativa, with 10 printing presses, 12 presses, 5 ancillary machines, 120 workers.

Gennaro de Angelis, with 5 machines, 3 presses, 5 auxiliary machines, 80 workers.

Eugenio Chiaradia, with 4 machines, 2 presses, 2 auxiliary machines, 50 workers.

Francesco Giannini, with 4 machines, 1 press, 2 auxiliary machines, 40 workers.

Gaetano Nobile, with 3 machines, 2 presses, 3 auxiliary machines, 24 workers.

The Stamperia del Fibreno, with 1 machine, 8 presses, 1 accessory machine, 30 workers.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Alessandro Betocchi, *Forze produttive della Provincia di Napoli*, II, Stabilimento tipografico De Angelis, Napoli 1874, pp. 293-297. See Luigi de Matteo, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>193</sup> "Bulletin No. 12 of the Italian Bibliography, year 1872, contains a list of booksellers, publishers and typographers in the Province of Naples. It shows that here there are 21 booksellers, 20 booksellers-publishers, 9 typographers-publishers and 75 typographers alone. The number of the latter, which, for the

It may be useful, however, to quote Betocchi's text in full:

[There is little or no production of frontispiece type: it is useless to speak of friezes; and the same current typefaces are made with such low precision that Neapolitan printers prefer to pay more and obtain them from abroad rather than order them here, where they would undoubtedly get price reductions and prompt deliveries. However, there is still some doubt as to whether the progress of the foundry in our country is being delayed because our printers demand the typefaces of the Neapolitan foundries at too low a price, or whether the work of the latter does not deserve a higher price. Recently, Messrs. Salvati and Francesco De Angelis, who run the Government Printing Office, bought a large foundry in Genoa and transported both the machines and the matrices and ponzoni here. With more resources at their disposal, they will be in a better position to manage the industry; and if they succeed in creating favourable conditions for our printers, they will be able to free themselves from the obligation to demand typefaces from France or Germany. As for ink, the leading printers in the country bring it from France or Germany: the small ones, those who cannot buy large quantities and have reserves, buy Neapolitan, which is not very good. Up to now there has been no attempt to fill this gap in the Neapolitan printing industry. Only for felts we do not have to resort to foreigners: ours, native to the country, are very cheap and of good quality, because they perfectly satisfy the needs. As for paper, almost all of it comes from our Liri mills: if paper from Lombardy is used for rare luxury jobs, it represents only 1% of total consumption. What is very good in Naples is the price of labour, because a book with the same quality of paper, fonts and number of copies could, strictly speaking, cost much less here than abroad, and even in the cities of northern Italy.<sup>194</sup>

At this point, Betocchi gives an interesting indicator of Neapolitan

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same year, the Naples Police Headquarters declared as existing in the capital, was 87. I prefer to stick to the first source; adding that five individuals must be subtracted due to death or cessation of industry. And to finish off with the number of people employed in this special industry, I will point out that, in the census tables, the number of printers is put at 1076, 97 of whom are owners and 979 workers, almost all of them in the District, or rather in the City of Naples, because in the smaller municipalities of the Province there are no printers of even the slightest importance". Betocchi, *Forze produttive*, cit., p. 291.

<sup>194</sup> Betocchi, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

publishing, namely the average print run. While in France, as in Germany, the average print run is around 2000 copies, in Naples it is 500, a figure that makes it difficult to make money from quantity. When Betocchi speaks of *us*, it is not easy to understand whether he means the whole of Italy or the south, or rather the Neapolitan area: this is probably the case, given that his survey is based on the province of Naples.

It is easy to see how the undeniable saving in labour is cancelled out by having to divide the total cost of the book over such a small number of copies. Moreover, in recent times even the industriousness of publishers has been much reduced from what it was in the past, when education was less widespread and the right to print was hampered by so many restrictions. The rarity of wrist publications can be explained either by the lack of writers, or by the fact that the times are so great that other concerns do not lend themselves to the printing of serious and thoughtful books. But how do we explain the scarcity of textbooks needed in a province with a population of around one million, of whom 302,107 are of an age to attend or be enrolled in schools of various levels? How do you explain the scarcity of printed matter for the use of the public administrations of the Province of Naples and all those within a certain radius? In the same way, as regards schoolbooks, we have been weakened, to the small benefit of young minds, by books sent to us by authors from the higher parts of Italy, and not otherwise, to the immense detriment of Neapolitan publishers, the latter have been deprived of the important amount of work that the supply of schools represented. [... With regard to printed matter, the Neapolitan printers also complain with great insistence to the government that, since they can only contribute greatly to the progress of industry, not only in some provinces of the kingdom, but in the whole state, if it distributes equally the enormous amount of work for the public administrations, it favours only certain printers, with an undeniable partiality that one would try in vain to justify by claiming that certain printers in Florence, Turin, Milan and Rome can do better and in a better market than we and elsewhere. It cannot be overlooked that they have been placed in such a favourable position precisely because of the encouragement they have received from the government, so that ours also swears that the great supply of printed matter is not the privilege of a few; This will inevitably be the case as long as very large deposits are required, as long as suppliers of great importance are

mixed up in a single tender, as long as tenders for paper are not distinguished from those for printing, as long as specifications are not unduly rigid, and, finally, as long as the work of local administrations is not handed over to printers in the various countries and the printing houses are not obliged, for example, to take over the work of local administrations. For example, For example, a printer in Palermo or Naples is not obliged to transport his products to Rome or Florence at the cost of freight. Above all, it will be necessary to convince ourselves that we must abolish the system of invitations to tender for the supply of public administrations, which, by permitting artificial collusion between suppliers and small employees of public bodies, due to the elasticity of the conditions, does not serve the interests of the latter and harms honest industrialists, who cannot rely on ambiguous artifices and cannot be pushed along the path of incomprehensible discounts. Assuming - and ouch! how gratuitously assumed! - that the administration will in future be inspired by these benevolent and impartial intentions, and that the chancellors of public and private education among us will succeed in emancipating themselves from the usurped primacy of educational literature, is there nothing left for our printers to do to improve this industry? Yes, it remains to perfect the presses themselves and to improve the condition of the workers. [...] But the main shortcomings lie in the printing staff, and especially in the lack of good printers. These printer's assistants, who from an administrative point of view are the first assistants of the owner, and who from a technical point of view should be equipped with literary knowledge to replace the proofreader when he is absent, and with artistic knowledge to guide them in the choice of typefaces, in the way they are used, and in the frontispieces; these proofs, he says, leave much to be desired. What is also lacking in most Neapolitan printers is a proofreader, especially a literary proofreader, to ensure that grammatical and orthographical errors in the printed matter are accurately and correctly reproduced. [...] <sup>195</sup>

In this lucid and well-informed article, Betocchi talks about the inks, the fonts, which at the time were mostly purchased abroad, the problems of invitations to tender that favoured companies outside Naples, the narrowness of the local market and other problems such as the diminishing need for textbooks (the production of which even for the Stamperia del Fibreno diminished in the 1870s). Above all,

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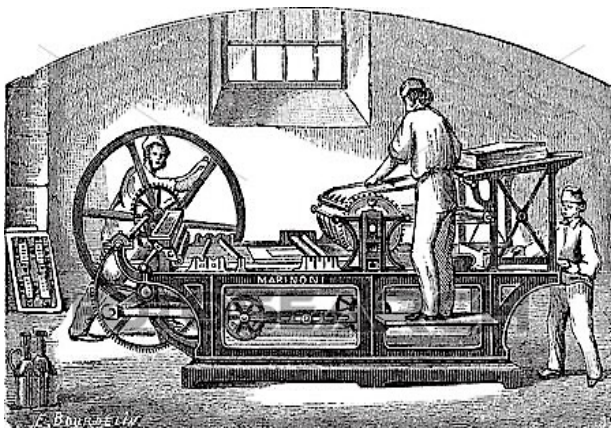
<sup>195</sup> Betocchi, *Forze produttive*, cit., pp. 293-296.



however, there was a lack of technological updating. The Stamperia del Fibreno, at the end of its history, just before the serious crisis at the end of the 1870s, had eight presses (as opposed to 17 of 20 years earlier, which were obviously outdated) and one printing press. In this respect it was surpassed by the other five of the six main companies in Naples. The machines used at the time (Betocchi mentions three manufacturers, Marinoni, Alauzet and Dell'Orto) were similar to this pianocilindrica (although the one shown below dates from the turn of the century). Very expensive, they greatly facilitated the printing process by eliminating many manual operations.

After 1884, another important variable in assessing the efficiency and modernity of a print shop was the presence or absence of a Linotype machine. Linotype machines (Lynotype) had been invented in 1888 by the German watchmaker Ottmar Mergenthaler (1854-1899) and had revolutionised the long composition stage. Fibreno did not survive long enough to introduce these machines, which represented the first real revolution in printing after the invention of movable type, and although there were examples marketed before 1888, they did not work properly. It was in that year that the first really useful one was marketed.

This machine, combined with printing presses, made it possible to speed up the typesetting process. In fact, the Linotype automated the work of typesetting: a keyboard allowed the operator to select the correct characters from a deposit divided into letters and to compose the page 7/10 times faster than before. This made typesetters' work faster and cheaper, and it was possible to produce books with more pages.



This image shows a Marinoni printing press, one of those in use around 1860 in Italy.

## The difficult Eighties

Unfortunately, due to the closure following a collapse, the sale of equipment and the probable immediate re-use of the ground and first floor rooms, an accurate list of the Printworks' equipment has not, to the best of our knowledge, been preserved. This aspect will therefore be left to future research. For the time being, however, this shortcoming can easily be remedied, as the equipment used in 19th-century printing houses was rather standard and there was no possibility of varying the machinery. The most important variable was the number of presses, which, although more or less obsolete, all worked on the same principle.

In 1884, the Manifatture del Fibreno, the parent company of the printing works, received the last of the many industrial honours and awards it had received during the 60 years of Lefèbvre's management, visited by two kings, a Bourbon and a Savoy, and known throughout the world.<sup>196</sup> In the previous years, after the unsuccessful attempt to entrust the rehabilitation to Carlo, which began in 1876 and proved to

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<sup>196</sup> "Cronaca della bibliografia italiana", Year XII, No. 3, p. 9.

be totally inadequate, Ernesto entrusted the management for a time to his son-in-law Pedro Álvarez de Toledo, the husband of his sister Flavia Lefèbvre, Marquise de Casafuerte.<sup>197</sup> Pedro Álvarez de Toledo had diplomatic experience (he was about to leave as Spanish ambassador to Russia), but no financial or administrative experience. He was probably hoping for some loans.

But Cartiere Meridionali, the company that had taken over the Cartiere del Liri (founded in 1844 by a group of local and Neapolitan businessmen such as Sorvillo), did not show any interest in buying it, even though it had been approached. After decades of use and some 20 years in which most of the machinery had not been renewed and the premises themselves were in need of repair and adaptation, the company was no longer willing to invest but was interested in renting. This happened in 1893, under the management of Francesco Lefèbvre, who succeeded his father, Pedro, and his elder brother, who had fled to France and then to Rome.

As for the printing works, publications have become less frequent in recent years. There are more and more plaquettes requested by poets, such as Cesare Micheletti's *Verismo*, a seven-page plaquette that shows a novelty in typography.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> He was not Giulia's husband as stated in Flavia Luise, *La Stamperia del Fibreno*, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>198</sup> Cesare Micheletti, *Verismo*, Tipografia editrice già del Fibreno, Naples 1884.



Cesare Micheletti, *Verismo*.  
Tipografia editrice già del Fibreno, Naples 1884.

In the 1880s, book production slowed down, especially fiction, large scientific treatises, vocabularies, grammars or other systematic works. Religious production, of a theological and devotional nature, resisted. There was indeed a neo-Thomist school in Naples, which soon took root in France, and its representatives published books, such as Carlo Garofalo's *Scienza di San Tommaso* and Mariano Campagna's *Divino magistero di Cristo*.<sup>199</sup> Works on moral theology, such as *Matrimonio e divorzio*, entered into the debate to introduce divorce in Italy, as in

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<sup>199</sup> Carlo Garofalo, *La scienza di San Tommaso nella cultura contemporanea, dissertazione letta all'Accademia teologico-filosofica di San Tommaso d'Aquino*, già Stamperia del Fibreno, Napoli 1886; Mariano Campagna, *Divino magistero di Cristo nella cattolica Chiesa e del dottor d'Aquino*, già Stamperia del Fibreno, Napoli 1885.

France.<sup>200</sup> All these works bear the mark of an unnamed printing house, the 'former Stamperia del Fibreno', evidently for legal reasons.

But they are meagre, often small, noncommittal works. They are basically theses or lectures read at the Academy of Archaeology, the University, the Pontifical Academy or other institutions. In 1885 the wording Stamperia del Fibreno was replaced by *già Stamperia del Fibreno*, but this does not mean that the ownership had changed. It is true that the financial management of the Manifatture del Fibreno and the Stamperia was entrusted first to Carlo Lefèbvre, then to Pedro Álvarez de Toledo, and then, when the latter gave up after a few months, to Francesco Lefèbvre and his lawyers. The elder brother was abroad at the time, disinherited and deprived of his title, and would not return until 1899 to recognise his only son, Carlo Ernesto.

The process of letting and selling the large estate continued for about 20 years, with various stages of selling off parts of the property: the vast estates that stretched between Sora and Arpino and Naples, the palaces in Naples, apartments, land and more. This curiosity can be explained by the fact that, between 1876 and 1886, Ernesto Lefèbvre, with the agreement of the other members of the family, filed a lawsuit against his son, who had issued uncovered cheques that were then presented at the Calata di Trinità Maggiore Pignatelli in order to obtain a discount.

Probably from 1877, although the documents are sketchy, the Stamperia's destiny was separated from that of the Manifatture del Fibreno and it became a joint stock company with a capital of 200,000 lire, which was not fully paid up (probably in the form of a long-term loan). Francesco Carignani became the director of this company, called Stabilimento del Fibreno, formerly Stamperia. The operation was carried out in order to avoid the legal problems (protested bills of exchange, threats of foreclosure) that Carlo Lefèbvre had been causing since 1877, together with his accomplice Enrico Catalano. In 1885 the warehouse of the former Stamperia del Fibreno, now Stabilimenti del

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<sup>200</sup> Luigi de Matteis, *Matrimonio e divorzio secondo natura e religione, tradizione, storia, diritto e civiltà*, formerly Stamperia del Fibreno, Naples 1885.

Fibreno, in Via Nazionale in Rome, seems to have suffered a fire, probably arson, linked to events involving Ernesto's rebellious son Carlo. A dispute ensued with the Compagnia La Fondiaria, and all this culminated in the events described in the *Memoria* of the lawyer Vastarini Cresi, prince of the Foro di Napoli.<sup>201</sup>

In 1886, the lawyer Alfonso Vastarini Cresi, a member of the Italian parliament, who defended Ernesto Lefèbvre in the painful trial against his son, had his memoirs printed by the 'former Stamperia del Fibreno', which had changed its name slightly in 1885 to Stabilimenti del Fibreno: *Osservazioni in difesa del signor Ernesto Lefèbvre*; the change, which seems small, is in fact significant.<sup>202</sup>

The progression is therefore as follows:

Stamperia francese (1812-822).

Stamperia del Fibreno (1822-1876). Manifatture del Fibreno.

Già Stamperia del Fibreno (1876-1885). Dipartimento delle Manifatture del Fibreno.

Stabilimenti del Fibreno (1885-1904). Independent company with fully paid-up capital of 200,000 lire.

Caccavò was present until 1885-1886. In 1885, he was still head of the Association of Italian printers and publishers and president of the Stamperia del Fibreno, now Stabilimenti del Fibreno.<sup>203</sup> In that same

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<sup>201</sup> "Bollettino delle Assicurazioni", organ of the insurers, Rome 1885, p. 332. We have not dwelled on these events in the present publication.

<sup>202</sup> Alfonso 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. Vastarini Cresi was a Member of Parliament and therefore had the words 'Camera dei Deputati' put before Stabilimenti del Fibreno because he had the authority to do so. Everything printed by a deputy, if it had any bearing on his political mission, could have such double wording.

<sup>203</sup> He participated in the drafting of the Regulations of the Neapolitan Typographic Society for Mutual Aid, as he was still part of the management group, in *Il tipografo pubblica gli atti ufficiali del Comitato centrale e dell'Associazione fra gli operai tipografi italiani*, Tipografia Polizzi 1885, p. 1.

year, due to the company's obvious problems that no longer guaranteed its future, Caccavò applied to the state for a subsidy, which was at first refused and then granted.<sup>204</sup> Evidently by that year, given the Fibreno's failing situation, he was no longer receiving a regular salary. In 1888 we find him in a religious role outside Naples, as a visitor to various religious institutes.

In 1888, one of the last known works of the glorious printing house was the *Regolamento della Camera dei Deputati* printed by the Tipografia della Camera dei Deputati - Stabilimenti del Fibreno. The wording 'Stabilimenti del Fibreno' was adopted and no longer 'Stamperia del Fibreno', a wording that we also find in the deed of sale of 1904 and was therefore used from 1885 to 1904. At that time, the unused facilities were probably used as a service by the Chamber of Deputies. This would happen again between 1892 and 1895, when Francesco Lefèbvre was elected a deputy in the 18th Legislature for Crispi's party.

In any case, the slowdown was noticeable and the production of fiction ceased for good. The main reasons for this were the stagnation of the factory, which lost orders and was paralysed by lack of liquidity, the scandal caused by Carlo Lefèbvre and, who knows, the bitterness of Ernesto Lefèbvre himself, who had tried to give his children the best education but who had grown up spoiled and with little responsibility. Only the youngest, then in his thirties, tried to improve the company's fortunes, but with little success.

Even before Ernesto Lefèbvre's death, production was slowing down: dry administrative reports, scant scientific essays, poems, sacred edicts. A few Latin classics, old reprints, collections of poems.

Above all, the weight and importance of publications diminished. The number of texts diminished due to the numerous closures of religious institutes and the movement of priests and entire monastic

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<sup>204</sup> ASN, *Affari Civili, Affari Generali, Correspondence for various civil affairs 1885, Appeal of the priest Caccavò Raffaele for subsidy*, 1885 (b. 1703, fasc. 393). Let us remember that, in the absence of Concordat (the first would be signed in 1929), secular priests could also find employment, salaries or subsidies from the State.

communities to other parts of Italy. Nor should the phenomenon of emigration be underestimated, which led millions of Italians and also thousands of priests, especially from the south, to leave Italy, especially for the United States.

On Ernesto Lefèbvre's death in November 1891, ownership of the entire Fibreno complex, paper mills and printing works, passed to his son Francesco, who, after a foolish early youth spent following his older brother's example in amusements and a marriage that was considered rash, had come to his senses. From that year on, it was he who tried to save the company, or the companies, considering that at that time the printing and publishing house was legally separated from the big factories in Isola. On 21 December 1892, the witnesses Giuseppe Levi, Giuseppe Olvitti and Giuseppe Calabritto, all from Naples, met before the notary Giovanni Bonucci at Via Maddalena 6 in Naples. They were joined by Francesco Lefèbvre, "domiciled in Isola del Liri", and Giulio Emery from Naples, domiciled for office purposes in the old premises of the Lefèbvre printing works, in Strada San Giovanni Maggiore Pignatelli at no. 26. At the time, Giulio Emery was the managing director of the Società Anonima delle Cartiere Meridionali, a company based in Turin with a fully paid-up capital of 1,500,000 lire and no interest in the Stamperia del Fibreno, which was closed and liquidated and is not included in this contract as it is not named.

Francesco Lefèbvre declared that he was the owner of the paper mill, which at that time was equipped with "4 paper machines" and "all the equipment of other machines for the preparation of pulp, for the embellishment of paper", and then "buildings, engines, yards, canals, the dwelling already occupied by the technical directors, as well as the special room for administrative use". The house to which the Bonucci deed refers is Villa Louise, which was occupied for many years by the Montgolfier family. This deed granted a lease of the premises, which were described in detail on a map attached to the deed, together with a "descriptive note". The lease was for 15 years, starting on 1 January 1893. The price was set at 20,000 lire per annum, of which the first 5



annuities were to be paid with 19 promissory notes of 5,000 lire each, payable in advance and every 3 months.<sup>205</sup>

This means that the paper mill was closed for about four years, from November 1888 to January 1893. The articles on the use of the water that powered the mill are very detailed. It is clear that Charles Lefèbvre built his water intake from the Fibreno without asking for any concessions, because nobody asked him for anything. Over time, this became a right that gave him a competitive advantage over other companies.

The Carnello factory, which was in better condition than the one in Via Taverna Nuova (Le Forme), was sold to the industrialist Gabriele de Caria, while the San Carlo factory, the youngest (in operation since 1865) and the most modern in terms of machinery, still in its late eighties, was rented out several times. Wallpaper production was suspended shortly after Count Ernesto's death because the Italian market proved too stifling, despite the fact that the quality of Lefèbvre's wallpaper was considered excellent. After a few years of stagnation, the building and some of the machinery were rented out.

As for the former Stamperia del Fibreno, now called Stabilimenti del Fibreno, by the beginning of 1889 it was no longer selling or was selling off its stock. After 1890 there are no more books published under the name of this company, which was probably leased out several times, along with machines and know-how. The last book of which the author has found any trace is a new and annotated edition of the *Nuovo codice penale italiano*, printed by the Tipografia Camera dei Deputati-Stabilimenti del Fibreno (this is the exact wording according to the company founded in 1885). The place of printing is given as Rome, the year as 1890 and the editor as Mel Isidoro.<sup>206</sup>

After his release in 1885, Raffaele Caccavò became a priest in the diocese of Giovinazzo (Apulia) as a 'cursor' (i.e. itinerant inspector) of

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<sup>205</sup> Executive copy of the Deed of 21 December 1892, notary Giovanni Bonucci, p. 4.

<sup>206</sup> *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia*, Tipografia Camera dei Deputati, 25 February 1890, Rome 1890, p. 680.

the Episcopal Curia.<sup>207</sup> The same year, Caccavò took part in the Committee of the Association of Italian Printing Workers, but was no longer qualified as director of the Stabilimento del Fibreno.<sup>208</sup>

The printing works continued to operate until 1903, probably for small jobs, and went into liquidation in March 1904, three years before the sale of the paper mills. However, a deed for the sale of the paper mills was signed in 1903, but was not completed until 1907, after debts and liabilities had been settled. This transfer took place on 25 January 1903, signed by Francesco Lefèbvre before the notary Vallauri in Turin. This agreement, which was preceded by dramatic events and episodes that testify to the growing tension between Francesco and the Cartiere Meridionali of Turin, was different from another one signed in Naples in March 1904, as we shall see.<sup>209</sup>

The new owners of the Cartiere Meridionali, with their centre of gravity in the north, between Turin and Milan, had no interest in continuing the publishing experience in Naples, which had become much more difficult with the opening of new bookshops and, above all, new publishers. The ecclesiastical world, which had always been an important customer for the Stamperia del Fibreno, was experiencing difficulties, as were lawyers and other categories. In particular, acts and laws or provisions that the Bourbon government had previously had printed at the Stamperia del Fibreno were printed elsewhere.

Apart from the complex events surrounding the sale of Lefèbvre's plants, buildings and assets, the glorious old Stamperia del Fibreno was in fact already closed. However, the definitive and legal act of closure did not take place until March 1904, when the Stabilimento del Fibreno, transformed into a joint stock company, summoned its shareholders (essentially the Lefèbvre family, and Francesco in particular) to a meeting of liquidation. The meeting took place in Piazza Nicolò Amore

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<sup>207</sup> Giuseppe Bertolotti, *Statistica ecclesiastica italiana*, Tipografia di Andrea Riocci, Savona 1885, p. 683

<sup>208</sup> "Il tipografo", Polizzi, Napoli 1885.

<sup>209</sup> *Conformed copy of inventory of the premises and machinery of the Fibreno Paper Mill*, p. 102. Fratelli Iafate Archive, Isola del Liri Superiore (f. 597).

14 (along Corso Umberto) in Naples, where the Stamperia del Fibreno was located.

We do not know if it was a residence or if there were actually offices there, but the low level of publishing and printing activity during this period suggests that it was. The printing plant was finally sold at that time, while the sale of the Manifatture del Fibreno, paper production, machinery and buildings was postponed until three years later, in 1907, after the Turin deed of 1904. There were therefore two separate events.

F. Carignani was probably Francesco Carignani (1852- post-1904), a Neapolitan nobleman of the Carignani family, who at the time was managing director of Stabilimenti del Fibreno.

**Società Stabilimento Fibreno**  
**A N O N I M A**  
Capitale versato L. 200,000

È convocata l'assemblea generale degli azionisti per il 4 del prossimo mese di aprile, alle ore 11, in Napoli presso la sede della Società, piazza Nicola Amore 14.

*Ordine del giorno :*

Provvedimenti per la sistemazione del capitale sociale, ovvero per la liquidazione della Società.

Per intervenire all'assemblea, ogni azionista deve depositare le proprie azioni almeno tre giorni prima dell'assemblea, presso la sede della Società in Napoli, Piazza Nicola Amore 14.

Occorrendo una seconda convocazione, resta fin da ora fissata per il 12 aprile, alla medesima ora e presso la medesima sede qui sopra indicata.

L'amministratore delegato  
**F. CARIGNANI.**

6581 — A pagamento.

After the sale of the Carnello factory to the industrialist De Caria, the sale of the Stabilimento delle Forme to the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali and the liquidation of the Stamperia, the Stabilimento di San Carlo, considered a real jewel, was left. It was first leased to the industrialist Ostrogovich, who marketed a particular type of smoking paper he had invented, but it was to have an unfortunate fate when it was badly damaged in the earthquake of January 1915. The factory could not be saved and was demolished before the end of the First World War.

Later, after the sale of Villa Lefèbvre to De Caria, the manor house attached to the mills, Palazzo Lefèbvre di Isola in via Taverna Nova, was also sold, along with the vast ploughed land, orchards, vineyards and olive groves, and the adjoining farmhouses with the precious water intakes that brought the pure water of the Fibreno to the mill. Within a few years, the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali had acquired some of the largest and most prestigious paper mills in the Fibreno area, which lasted until the 1970s.

As far as the industrial and cultural affair described in this book is concerned, the not short-lived history of the Stamperia del Fibreno's printing presses had already come to an end, officially at any rate, with no possibility of resumption. Walking along this street today, from this side of Calata Trinità, no one would think that once upon a time the presses of the largest printing and publishing house in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies could be heard, and that one or two shop windows, or perhaps more, offered the elegant Neapolitans strolling by papers, envelopes and cards of every colour, price and quality. The penultimate owner of the Fibreno, Francesco Lefèbvre, died at a young age, in October 1911, of tuberculosis, the same disease that had killed his sister Flavia in 1905. Shortly afterwards his mother, Teresa Doria D'Angri Lefèbvre, also died in 1911. After recovering the title of Count of Balsorano and recognising his son Carlo Ernesto, who had grown up in the castle of Balsorano in Abruzzo, Carlo Lefèbvre returned to Naples, where he died in 1920.

Hundreds of books are all that remain of the great activity of the Stamperia del Fibreno, which was soon forgotten. Perhaps the hybrid nature of the Calata Trinità store: paper warehouse, stationery store, seller of maps and other stationery, bookstore and book warehouse, publisher, printer, gave it a less recognisable profile than the pure bookseller-publisher.

## Chapter 9

### Marriage policy: Flavia and Pedro

#### The wedding of Flavia Lefèbvre from Balsorano

Maria Flavia Lefèbvre was born in Naples on 8 October 1850. She was educated from an early age. Entrusted to the care of tutors whose mother tongue was French, she entered the Poggio Imperiale boarding school in Florence at the age of 15 in early 1865. According to the testimony of several contemporaries - and the photographs that depict her bear witness to this - she was endowed with a remarkable beauty, delicate and melancholy, and a marked inclination towards literature and art. The salons of artists and intellectuals, both in Naples and in Paris, became her favourite place, her habitual environment.

Little or nothing is known of Flavia's early youth, except for the occasional mention of her attending baptisms or weddings of relatives, and also because, after a life of seclusion as a noble "maiden", she entered Poggio Imperiale, where she lived for five years, until 1870. When she left, she returned to Naples, where she had been officially engaged since 1871. Her first real public appearance was her engagement and subsequent marriage to a Hispano-Napolitan nobleman. She married on 27 June 1872, when she was 21. Her husband was the Neapolitan diplomat Don Pedro Álvarez y Toledo y Acuña (1841-1890), Marquis of Casafuerte (sometimes Casa Fuerte, although this spelling is less correct). The marriage was announced between April and May and the girl brought a dowry of around 500,000 francs, which alone far exceeded the annual income of a Grand of France.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> AB XIX 4483, XIX 4482, vol. IX, p. 148. The calculation can be made considering that many of the Grantees of France, the highest Nobility

Pedro was 30 years old and, along with the Doria d'Angri and Lefèbvre families, was one of the richest men in southern Italy at the time. He also belonged to a family that had been one of the most powerful in Spain for centuries. Among his titles, he collected a dozen noble predicates, almost all of Spanish origin. Pedro's family was one of the most important in Spain and in the previous century a Casafuerte had been viceroy of Spain.<sup>211</sup> A profile portrait of Flavia, with a row of pearls, dates back to shortly before the marriage.



After their marriage, the couple lived in part of his family's palace in Largo Ferrandina, called Palazzo della Cavallerizza or Palazzo Toledo in Chiaia (of which only parts remain today), which was the largest in Naples before the construction of Palazzo Doria d'Angri.<sup>212</sup> This palace stood opposite Palazzo Caracciolo or Palazzo della Contessa di Balsorano.<sup>213</sup>

The vicissitudes of this building built in the 18th century are

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consisting of princes of ancient nobility, relatives of the King, high clergymen, could have an annual income of around 260,000 gold francs near the time of the Revolution. Indeed, the majority, at that time, were between 50,000 and 250,000. v. Pierre Goubert, *L'Ancien régime. La società, i poteri*, translated by Jaca Book 1976, p. 196.

<sup>211</sup> He was Juan de Acuña y Bejarano, second Marquis of Casafuerte (1658-1734), Viceroy of New Spain from 1622 to 1634.

<sup>212</sup> The palace of the Cavallerizza, in Neapolitan Baroque style, was built on the pre-existing villa of García Toledo in the 18th century.

<sup>213</sup> 'Palazzo della Contessa di Balsorano' by which Palazzo Caracciolo was known must refer to Teresa and not Flavia, who was, strictly speaking, a marquise, not a countess.

laconically recounted even in well-informed books where some passages are evidently ignored.<sup>214</sup> During the same period, Ernesto and Teresa occupied Palazzo Manso-Balsorano in Rione Amedeo while Palazzo Caracciolo was included in Flavia's dowry.<sup>215</sup>

The marriage between Pedro and Flavia was certainly the kind of marriage favoured by the families, and if there was passion, there was no love, because it soon ended. The couple's young son recalls in his memoirs that when he was a child, there was already a frost between his parents. In the 1870s and early 1880s, the couple divided the year into three parts: a long stay in Paris, between autumn and winter, for the concert and salon season; a few months in Naples, between spring and early summer; and a few months in Brittany, in the cooler weather, before the Paris season began. Pedro was so rich that he could afford not to work in the old aristocratic style, even though he held posts in the Spanish consulate in Naples.

### **A fashionable couple**

After the wedding, the fashionable and admired couple left before the end of the year for St Petersburg, where he had been appointed First Secretary of the Embassy and where they stayed for over two years. This stay on the banks of the Neva was, according to his son Illán, "a great success for the diplomat and a triumph for his wife"; we can believe him, since Flavia was in the company of the Tsarina and the Russian nobility, who also spoke fluent French. There were many French people in St Petersburg at that time.

Two years later, at the end of 1874, the couple settled in Paris, where Pedro replaced the often absent Spanish ambassador as delegate and

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<sup>214</sup> In the otherwise informative book by Aurelio de Rose, e.g., *I Palazzi di Napoli* (Newton Compton, Rome 2001, p. 318-319), the period justifying the nickname the palace had for some time referred to the Countess of Balsorano is missing.

<sup>215</sup> AB XIX 4482, vol. IX, pp. 149-150.

plenipotentiary. Between 1874 and 1880, Flavia made annual trips to Naples, especially in winter. It was not until 1880 that the couple returned to Naples for an extended period and, after another brief absence in 1881-1882, again for the birth of Illán, who was born after 10 years of marriage.

When his son was born, Pedro was in Madrid. He made a short trip to see him in his nappies, spent some time in Naples and then, at the beginning of 1883, left for Russia to attend the coronation of Tsar Alexander III (1845-1894), with whom he had been in contact, without taking Flavia and Illán with him. After this trip, he was appointed Spanish ambassador to the Infante Don Antonio d'Orléans, a post that allowed him to stay in Naples for several years. These were the couple's happiest years. Illán remembers a carefree childhood spent with his cousins, the children of Giulia Lefèbvre d'Acquaviva.

From this period, which lasted until almost the end of the century, Illán recalls the beauty of Naples and the palace where the couple lived, with a large garden and a rich vegetable garden, whose fruits were so abundant that they were sold at the market. He remembers that there were up to six horses in the palace stables. Sometimes he would take his horse for a ride around Naples.

At the end of the 19th century, despite a development that had led to the construction of thousands of houses and the transformation of entire districts, Naples was still surrounded by villages and enchanting landscapes, and Illán reveals in his memories that he carried these visions in his heart forever. Soon, however, asthma attacks prevented him from continuing. He preferred to go for walks with his mother, who was a great conversationalist and a cultured woman who instilled in him a love of reading.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Illán de Casafuerte, *Le dernier des Guermantes*, Julliard, Paris 1994, pp. 37-39.



## Marie Colombier's memories

A glimpse into the lives of Flavia and Pedro is provided by the French visitor to Naples Marie Colombier (1844-1910), an actress and author of three volumes of memoirs in which she describes a trip to Naples in the second half of the 19th century. On tour, she performed for two months at the Teatro Sannazzaro, where she experienced life in the former Bourbon capital in the early years of the Unification.

After the fall of the Bourbons of Naples, the Teatro San Carlo had an intermittent vitality. Around 1870, the city entered a period of decadence in terms of performances, although there were still many cultural institutions. The inauguration of the Sannazzaro in 1874 was therefore the great event of the year. It was built near the church of S. Orsola a Chiaia, designed by the architect Fausto Niccolini and financed by Giulio Mastrilli, Duke of Marigliano. The Grand Soirée was held on 26 December 1874, shortly after the return of the Casafuerte family from St Petersburg.<sup>217</sup> Let us follow what Marie Colombier wrote, with the commentary of Alice de Rensis.

When she entered Naples, she seemed to see the "hanging gardens of Babylon between heaven and earth" under a "turquoise" sky that made it resemble another "Kythera". The French actress, who was steeped in classical and decadent theatre culture, was in her thirties at the time. Naples made both positive and negative impressions on her. As she came into contact with the locals, she noted: What struck and fascinated her was the universal serenity that appeared in all the characters, like laughter on the lips. She is amazed and fascinated by this sense of universal 'gaiety' or 'joy' and that everyone is laughing and smiling.<sup>218</sup> Despite their misery, Italians, especially those from the south, are always portrayed as a cheerful people, ready to enjoy life. After the *promenade à la mode*, Marie is able to confirm her impressions and fill them with carnivalesque colours, to the extent that

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<sup>217</sup> Mehilac's *La Petite Marquise* is staged with the Le Roy-Clarence company.

<sup>218</sup> "Ce qui l'étonna et la charma, ce fut la gaieté universelle, toutes les figures épanouies, le rire aux lèvres".

the Neapolitan liveliness seems to her "full of madness":

"Marie n'était pas très ferrée sur le calendrier, elle se crut en carnaval et pensa qu'elle était tombée en pleine folie: les chevaux avaient des grelots; le cocher était dressé sur son siège, le fouet enrubanné, s'agitant, interpellant ses camarades au passage, riant avec une exubérance de gaieté extraordinaire, qui avait fini par gagner la jeune femme. Elle augurait bien d'un pays où le peuple avait l'air si heureux de vivre'.<sup>219</sup>

Someone recommends the exclusive *Circolo dei Buontemponi*, of which Pedro di Toledo was a member, to Colombier, who becomes involved in this tale of joyful, indolent and decadent Naples. The actress hears a description of the southern nobility from the master of the *Hôtel Chiaia*, who explains that the gentlemen are almost all blond and phlegmatic; they detest Naples, which the playwrights find so beautiful, and are inexorably bored. They would like to leave this city, where they are only staying for lack of money. They would all like to go to Paris, and yet they detest Parisians. Not so Pedro, who has plenty of money and does not hate Paris. But he is also one of the bored. The *Circolo dei Buontemponi* is based in the *Caffè d'Europa*, in *Piazza Ferdinando* (now *Trento e Trieste*). This is the area where all the streets of Naples converge. Besides the *Caffè d'Europa*, there is the *Grand Café*, and these are the places where artists and intellectuals meet, but also moneylenders, middlemen, traffickers, people who have fun and pass the time. And they do nothing – notes Colombier – except drink water and eat ice cream.

The mischievous list of personalities present is entrusted to Prince Melissano, who dwells on the intriguing events and obscure family relationships of each of them. There are the Duke of Marigliano and the Duke of San Martino, relatives of San Cesareo; the princes Tiraboschi, Pescara, Casareale and Maffeo Orsatti; Gennaro Sambiase Sanseverino,

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<sup>219</sup> Alice de Rensis " Napoli post-unitaria. La testimonianza di una comédienne tra stereotipo e realtà", *Diacronie. Studies in Contemporary History*, 29/01/2011, URL:<[http://www.studistorici.com/2011/01/29/derensis\\_numero\\_5/](http://www.studistorici.com/2011/01/29/derensis_numero_5/)>. Pp.1-11. *Ibid*, pp. 2-4.

Duke of Sandonato, mayor of Naples (1876-1878); and a Charles Balzaroni, lover of Amalia Gioia, a beauty in vogue in Paris. The princes Castracane and Fusella squander their fortunes on the dancer Fiammetta and her colleague Ferrera respectively, who compete for more and more from the improper lovers. Three Milanese Anabaptists (probably an ironic definition alluding to Milanese seriousness), obviously very elegant and above all blond, flank the unspecified Fontana and Calandrino, who play the kept men, alongside the Duke d'Asciutto, Count Statella, Prince Cavaradosso and the knight Mario di Belgiojoso. There are also the unhappy Dukes of Civita Grande, whose wife lives in Paris and is the "friend" of the Prince of Wales, and the Duke of Capri, who can never marry his mistress, Angelina, the flower girl. Finally, we meet the Duke of Perdifumo and the Marquis Casafuerte, secretary of the Spanish Embassy.<sup>220</sup>

The list is closed by Pedro de Casafuerte, who is at least a secretary in the Spanish embassy and therefore has a job. It is a dark atmosphere of love and drinking, of boredom and endless afternoons waiting for the evening. It is the same atmosphere that we find in many memoirs of Neapolitan personalities of the time.

With the exception of Pedro, the other idlers were almost all young people who, like Carlo, squandered the fortunes their fathers and grandfathers had accumulated over the centuries. In this lethargic and sleepy atmosphere of laudanum and alcohol, at 4 a.m. someone enters the Circolo dei Buontemponi shouting: he brings news, the shocking news of the founder's death by suicide. On this cloud of boredom and fatuity - the singer notes - tragedy descends: this forced cheerfulness conceals nothingness and despair.

This Naples seen through the eyes of a French woman, a woman of the world, is very different from the Naples seen through the eyes of

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<sup>220</sup> De Rensis Alice, 'Post-unification Naples. La testimonianza di una comédienne tra stereotipo e realtà', *Diacronie. Studies in Contemporary History*, 29/01/2011, URL:<[http://www.studistorici.com/2011/01/29/derensis\\_numero\\_5/](http://www.studistorici.com/2011/01/29/derensis_numero_5/)>. Pp. 1-11. Ibid, p. 6-7.

André-Isidore. We have to believe her: part of Naples has indeed changed, but Colombier was visiting a city that was not that of Lefèbvre.

It is certainly in crisis, it is impoverished. It is no longer the city of opportunity, it is no longer the capital. Even the Manifatture del Fibreno and the many other Lefèbvre companies are not doing as well as they used to. It was a world in decline, a capital that was no longer a capital, deprived of its court and its factories, impoverished after fifteen years of unification.

It was from this Naples, however, that the Casafuerte often fled. They were Neapolitans by birth, but Parisians by spirit. In general, all three of Ernesto's sons showed a loosening of the family ties and rituals that had held the family together. Charles and his son, like their ancestors, had made a point of celebrating Christmas, Easter and also St Peter's Day with the family, and of creating occasions for everyone to be together at important moments such as births, deaths and weddings. The three sons seem less attached to all this, which they probably see as a legacy of the past.

Opportunities for large family gatherings are becoming rare. Flavia spends much of her time in Paris, St Petersburg and other cities, on business as well as pleasure. She belongs to another generation. However, she respected the dynastic policy of the Lefèbvre family by marrying into a good match, and pressure from the respective families certainly played a role in her choice of marriage. This can also be seen in the dowry policy, with both families giving the new couple a great deal of money and entire palaces. We shall return to the case of Flavia and Pedro. As for Carlo and Francesco, as we shall see, they followed their passions above all else, and their modern mentality - detrimental to the immediate fortunes of the family - kept them away from marriages or unions where dynastic politics and family conventions might prevail. In this they were more children of their time than of their parents.

Meanwhile, also in 1874, Prince Doria D'Angri, Teresa's father, died on the same day (9 May) after a long illness, and Gioacchino of Saluzzo died the following day. He, who, according to André-Isidore, had a

violent temper and indomitable passions that he could not control, died as he had lived. On 2 May of that year, in the midst of a violent quarrel in the street, he became so agitated that he was seized by a cerebral congestion, or more probably a stroke, which left him unable to speak. Eight days later, on 10 May, he died. On the same day, Ernesto ordered his brother-in-law's body to be buried in the Lefèbvre family chapel, next to that of his wife Luisa and son Carlo.<sup>221</sup> Since 1861, he had retained the rank of senator (he was still on the list of Senators of the Kingdom of Sardinia in 1874) and to avoid disgrace, he was still marked with the title of Prince of Lequile.

### **The Lefèbvre estates in Naples 1840-1871**

As far as the real estate holdings of the period are concerned, we know from all the evidence and documents we have that the Lefèbvre family, after having lived for a long time in Palazzo Coscia Partanna, acquired at least two other palaces in the Chiaia area, in Via dell'Annunziata and in what is now Piazza Amedeo. Later they had to move either to an apartment in Villa Pignatelli Acton or to a building next to it. A palace was then built on the Riva di Chiaia and the very large Palazzo Manso then Lefèbvre in Rione Amedeo was restored by the architect Federico Rendina (1814-1885).

Work on a palace built ex novo on the Riviera by Rendina began much earlier. The site is mentioned by Ceva Grimaldi when he writes of the small church of San Rocco (late 16th/early 17th century), which was rebuilt in the neoclassical style in 1858, when Count Lefèbvre "made his palace out of some of the huts that surrounded it".<sup>222</sup> The

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<sup>221</sup> Historical Archive of the Poggioreale Cemetery, Fasc. 44-Inc. 23, f. XII.

<sup>222</sup> Francesco Ceva Grimaldi, *Memorie storiche della città di Napoli dal tempo della sua fondazione sino al presente*, Stamperia e Calcografia, 1857, p. 407. This church was already present on the map of the Duke of Noja in the 16th century. The obituary of Francesco Rendina, published in the *Bollettino del Collegio degli Ingegneri e Architetti in Napoli* on 16 March 1885, mentions among the works of the late architect "the palazzo del Conte di Balzorano (sic)

church was then entrusted to the Congregation of the Rosary at the behest of Ferdinand I. After Ferdinand Acton's death in 1837, his widow Betsy put the property up for sale. In 1841, part of it was bought by Charles Lefèbvre and his compatriot Francesco Verhulet.<sup>223</sup> On the land of the Actons there was the little church of San Rocco, now incorporated in a nineteenth-century palace in via Chiaia, number 255, built by the Lefèbvre family. It was here that the descendants of the Neapolitan aristocracy, such as the Capece Minutolo sisters, Teresa's relatives, sang, played and demonstrated their musical prowess. Clotilde Capece Minutolo, for example, when the church had already been incorporated into the Palazzo Lefèbvre, performed a vesper "for two male voices and organ".<sup>224</sup>

Ernesto Lefèbvre was in this palace in 1863, but he did not live there. Instead, he lived in Palazzo Caracciolo and then, after the restoration work had been completed, in Palazzo Balsorano in Piazzale Amedeo.<sup>225</sup> Between 1859 and 1871, the Lefèbvres probably moved several times between this palace, which was less suited to their rank, and the Palazzo Caracciolo, which was much more suitable. The palace in Via Chiaia 255 was nevertheless used: in 1865, for example, the French cousins stayed there (although André-Isidore did not call it his home). In 1846, Maria Luisa Lefèbvre Saluzzo gave birth to her daughter Luisa in Villa Pignatelli Acton.

To return to what is now Palazzo Balsorano in Piazzale Amedeo, it was actually a 16th century palace that was bought when it was in ruins. It was originally a country house used by Giovanni Battista Manso (1567-1645) for small hunting parties in an area outside the walls. Later

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nel Rione Amedeo [...] l'edificio Lefevre alla Riviera".

<sup>223</sup> *Napoli nobilissima* (1991), vol. 30, p. 117.

<sup>224</sup> Paola de Simone, *A Chiaia la nuova Pietà dei Turchini*, 'Corriere del Mezzogiorno', 12 May 2012. The 'Vespro della Vergine / messo in musica / per la Chiesa di S. Rocco a Chiaja', is kept in the Library of the Conservatorio San Pietro a Majella.

<sup>225</sup> The domicile is mentioned in an *atto notarile* (notarial deed) executed on 14 November 1863 and reported in the *Raccolta ufficiale delle leggi e dei decreti del Regno d'Italia*, parte supplementare vol. IV, Stamperia Reale, Turin 1864, pp. 480-481.

it was built as a palace of no more than two storeys. In 1892, according to a commemorative plaque placed on 25 April 1895, the poet Torquato Tasso (1544-1595), who was born in Salerno, lived there and, judging by the amount of work he did there, he must have stayed for a long time:

Torquato Tasso, a guest of a friend in 1592, gazing from this hillock at the skies, the fields, the sea, outlining *the created world*, recounting *Jerusalem*, philosophizing about *friendship*, forgetting adversity, content with life.

At that time it was situated on a hill overlooking the sea, and it remained so until almost the end of the 19th century. It was also chosen by the Lefèbvre family for its splendid location. Its restoration must date back to the period when Rendina was carrying out various works in the area known as Rione Amedeo. In fact, the architect was commissioned to redevelop the area immediately adjacent to the palace, modifying a previous urban plan. The palace was already partially inhabitable at the end of the 1860s, but in 1871 it underwent a radical renovation, with the addition of two more floors.<sup>226</sup> Following the chronology of the Lefèbvre family's movements, the renovation must have been completed by the end of 1872. Today's Via Crispi, which the palace overlooks, was also opened by demolishing old houses adjacent to the building, in that same 1871.<sup>227</sup> And the adjoining street that would take the name Via Crispi would shortly become 'one of the most prestigious new residential axes' in Naples.<sup>228</sup>

To these properties must be added, of course, as already mentioned, the two printing houses located in the buildings he owned in Via Pignatelli in San Giovanni Maggiore and in Strada Trinità Maggiore no. 26 in Castellamare di Stabia, various apartments and the very large

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<sup>226</sup> Benedetto Gravagnuolo-Giuseppe Gravagnuolo, *Chiaia*, Electa Napoli, Naples 1990, p. 67.

<sup>227</sup> The layout designed by architects Francesco Rendina and Luigi Scoppa provided a connection between the Riviera di Chiaia and Corso Vittorio Emanuele, the route of today's Via Martucci, Piazza Amedeo, Via Crispi and Via Pontano.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

residential and industrial complex in Isola del Liri.

Chiaia was not only the most elegant and international area of the city, but also the one with the best public services. For example, it was one of the few areas illuminated by gas. The lighting, it should be noted, was provided by the Lionese company in which the Lefèbvre family had a financial interest. Via Toledo, Chiaia and the surrounding area were provided with 'gas columns' in 1853, while the rest of the city was still served by scarce oil lamps in 'dark, frightening and dangerous' streets.<sup>229</sup> This company was liquidated in 1871 and the 20,000 ducats invested by Lefèbvre 30 years earlier were cashed in with interest.

## Matilde Serao

Among Flavia's acquaintances was Matilde Serao (1857-1927), writer and journalist. This woman, who led a turbulent life in all respects, even professionally, was one of her closest friends in the last decade of the century. This friendship certainly represented a change in the typical Lefèbvre society.

Although sentimental and politically conservative like her husband, Scarfoglio, she was also an unprejudiced woman for her time, "modern", "free", almost feminist. This was also due to the behaviour of her husband, who forced her to accept a mistress of his and a son by her. When she was in Naples, after the Roman interlude, she founded an important daily newspaper, *Il Mattino*. But it is to her and her not insignificant role in the destiny of the Lefèbvre family that we shall return.

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<sup>229</sup> Raffaele de Seta, *La fine di un regno*, cit., p. 79.



## **Chapter 10**

### **The D'Ovidio family**

#### **Culture in Naples in the late 19th and early 20th century**

In this chapter we reconstruct the origin of the D'Ovidio family through Elvira D'Ovidio, who married the last descendant of the Lefèbvre family who still held the comital title, thus creating a new family that would bear the two names, thanks to a special permission obtained after the importance of Francesco D'Ovidio, a scholar and academic of international renown.

In the last decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Naples was still a city of great beauty, free from the industrial ugliness that had already appeared elsewhere, and still culturally active. In various fields it still retained considerable weight, partly inherited from the Bourbon era, partly enriched during the Kingdom of Italy, which also financed Neapolitan institutions so as not to create discontent in the former capital. First of all, the city had the size of a metropolis; in the 1911 census it had about 730,000 inhabitants, a few more than Milan, which had 701,000, and not far from Rome, which had 843,000. It was therefore the second largest city in Italy and, unlike Milan, which was demolishing its oldest districts, the Neapolitan capital preserved them, retaining the atmosphere of an ancient city and capital of the lost Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which made it unique. At the time of the unification, the population was around 600,000.

Because of these characteristics of coexistence between the old and the new (a new that was still struggling to find its feet), many of the first professional photographers opened their studios there, from Giorgio Sommer to the Alinari brothers and Alphonse Bernoud, among

others. Photography imposed itself with the image of picturesque Naples, an image typical of the painters of the Neapolitan schools of landscape painting that developed in the 18th and 19th centuries, the last of which was the school of Posillipo. Naples suffered greatly from the unification: it lost many industries, especially in the nautical, printing, paper, textile and general manufacturing sectors. Shipping companies, joint-stock companies, mechanical companies, even agricultural industries failed, were downsized or taken over. This was due to a complex series of reasons, including the central government's desire to weaken, at least initially, the city that had been the capital of a powerful kingdom. Nevertheless, Naples managed to maintain its prestige and institutions in the fields of culture, mathematics, applied sciences, literature, law and history and literature. The new state invested heavily in the University of Naples, Federico II, which was reorganised in the 1870s and where Francesco D'Ovidio spent much of his career.

In the decades following the unification, the Savoy monarchy rewarded above all those intellectuals who showed their attachment to the new state, which had found its definitive territorial arrangement in 1870, while the increasingly rare intellectuals nostalgic for the Bourbon monarchy were removed from positions of power and prestige, unless they adopted a cautious attitude. In time, according to Galasso, many of them would become Savoy legitimists, although this thesis, although so authoritatively expressed, has yet to be proven.<sup>230</sup> In any case, the elevation of so many Neapolitan intellectuals, historians and writers to the Senate is a sign of this period.

At the end of the 1880s, at Palazzo Sirignano, Prince Giuseppe Caravita (1849-1920) promoted the creation of the Neapolitan Artists' Association, which for a few years was reserved for landowners and aristocrats and then, in 1892, was opened up to journalists and writers. An artistic circle, later to become the Artistic-Political Circle, was also founded, led by the painter Domenico Morelli (1826-1901). Having

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<sup>230</sup> Giovanni Galasso, *Galasso: The Bourbon Paradise? È solo un'invenzione nostalgica*, 'Corriere del Mezzogiorno', 13 July 2015.

studied under the Bourbons and gained initial recognition, he established himself in the Umbertine period as one of the leading exponents of the "antiquarian" and historical taste, inspired by the facts and atmospheres of antiquity, in the wake of Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Mariano Fortuny and other artists working in Naples.

In Naples, this trend was greatly encouraged by the work of the archaeologist Giuseppe Fiorelli (1823-1896), who worked on the royal site of the Pompeii excavations, where he introduced the technique of plaster casts and reorganised an extremely important and vast archaeological area that had been discovered and tended to during the Bourbon period, and which received further attention from 1863 onwards. In 1866 he conceived the idea of the *Museo nazionale di San Martino*, which in time would gather, among other things, an important picture gallery, and for a few years he directed the *Museo Archeologico Nazionale*. In 1878, on the personal initiative of Gaetano Filangieri (1824-1892), the Filippo Palizzi Artistic-Industrial Museum was founded, and later, in February 1883, by decree of the Minister of Culture, Francesco de Sanctis. It is a museum rich in handicrafts and applied arts in ceramics, bronze and other techniques, used for the training of students in goldsmith and artisan schools.

To keep the new class of intellectuals, especially university teachers, in the fold, many of them were appointed senators. In particular, the generation that flourished in the seventies and eighties, most of whom had been educated in Tuscany or Lombardy. Some of the names that we will find in our history are worth mentioning in this context: Antonio Sogliano (1854-1942), archaeologist; Girolamo (1849-1935), papyrologist; Michele Scherillo (1860-1930), writer and university teacher; the mathematicians Enrico D'Ovidio (1843-1933) and Achille Sannia (1822-1892), the latter two belonging to the same family and circle of friends; and Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), born in Abruzzo in 1866 and entrusted to Silvio Spaventa (1822-1893), who acted as his tutor. In Naples, Croce first studied theology and then philosophy and aesthetics. Together with Giustino Fortunato (1848-1932) and Francesco Saverio Nitti (1868-1953), he was to become the true dictator of Neapolitan (and Italian) culture, especially after his return to Naples

from Perugia. In 1907 he settled in Palazzo Filomarino, where he held a salon attended by at least twenty prominent writers and university professors.

In addition to these innovations, Naples still boasted a great university, strong above all in academic literary, philological and legal studies; very prestigious at the time were the Accademia Pontaniana (founded in 1453), the Società di Storia Patria, the Circolo Filologico (founded in 1876 on the model of those already existing in Turin, Milan, Genoa, Florence, Rome and Palermo), the prestigious and now ancient Istituto di Incoraggiamento (founded in 1806) and other academies and circles. The school of engineering, the Scuola di Ponti e Strade (School of Bridges and Roads), was a legacy of the previous period and later provided teachers for the technical and mathematical faculties of the University of Naples. There were many cultural magazines of national importance.

In the field of music, there was the heritage of a great tradition that, since the 17th century, had boasted important schools, above all the Conservatorio di San Pietro a Majella, which inherited the tradition of the institutions of previous centuries and was refounded in 1808. Of great importance was the foundation of the Società orchestrale di Napoli by Prince Francesco d'Ardore of Milan (1699-1780), which continued under various directors. The concerts held at the beginning of the eighties brought the new Wagnerian fashion to Naples. Various musical and dramatic theatres were active, above all the San Carlo, but also the Teatro Mercadante and others, with their companies, authors and artists. In general, as Francesco Barbagallo points out in his book *Napoli Bell'Époque. 1885-1915*, the city remained a culturally vibrant metropolis throughout the Umbertino and the Bell'Époque, that is, until 1915 and, in some areas, well beyond. Afterwards, this dynamism did not disappear, but the difficulties became more pronounced.

At the time, it was a modern European metropolis with a middle class of high cultural level, where important experience could be gained in the professions (medicine, engineering, chemistry, mathematics) and in trade. The foreigners who had arrived during the Napoleonic and Bourbon periods had formed families, reached the second and third

generations and maintained links with their countries of origin. Initially, as already mentioned, the greatest prestige in Naples came from the reopening and reorganisation of university teaching.

In the University Federico II, however, the previous class of teachers, the most loyal to the Bourbons, was almost completely wiped out. Many, of course, swore allegiance to the new kingdom, as was the case with every change of regime. At the same time, apart from the question of loyalty or disloyalty to the new or old rulers, what is important is that a serious reorganisation of teaching was carried out according to the new ministerial programmes; and ordinary professors, almost all from the south, were added to the ranks. For fifty years, the protagonists in this context were the personalities who had been educated at the Scuola Normale in Pisa, as well as in Florence, Turin and Milan. It was they, in particular the normalists, who introduced the new scientific methods of studying texts or documents: in short, what was vulgarly called the German School.

### **Studies by Francesco D'Ovidio in Naples**

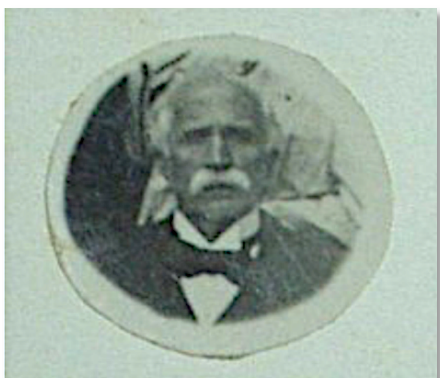
Francesco D'Ovidio's family came from the large village of Trivento, near Campobasso. This family had an intellectual tradition of some importance, given the provincial setting. The earliest known member of the family is Don Francesco D'Ovidio (1734 - 1809), who bears an honorary title typical of mayors of southern towns. If he is 'don', it is because he has property or a profession. He was probably a professional, a lawyer or a doctor. Thus, his wife Emanuela Ciampitti (1747-1839), born in Frosolone (Isernia), is referred to in documents as Donna Emanuela.<sup>231</sup> Among the many children of this couple, Amato D'Ovidio (1779-1830) stands out. He probably studied medicine in

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<sup>231</sup>Other, more precise data from the registers show us that a Francesco D'Ovidio was born on 1 January 1734 in Trivento and died there on 16 November 1809. His wife, Donna Emanuela Ciampitti, was born in Frosolone on 1 January 1747, and died in Trivento on 25 May 1839.

Naples and married Donna Maria Rosa Colaneri (1780-1845), a native of the same village. They had five children, one of whom was Francesco D'Ovidio's great-grandfather, the lawyer Emidio D'Ovidio (1801-1862), who married Donna Maria De Lellis, known as Mariuccia (1803-1845). They had 11 children, but Donna Mariuccia died young at the age of 42.

Amato D'Ovidio (1834-1931), the only one whose portrait we have, was one of the many children of this couple. An educated man, he studied at the Real Collegio Sannitico in Trivento, where he taught for the rest of his life. Amato married Donna Giulia Scarano (1846-?), who probably died young, and then a certain Anna Maria.



Amato D'Ovidio

Pasquale D'Ovidio (1808-post 1883), Emidio's brother, entered the locally renowned college in November 1819 and left in 1826. In 1824, after the resignation of Nicola Delia, teacher of calligraphy and Italian, the Rector, Andrea Amato, proposed him as teacher of

calligraphy, the only case in the thirty years from 1817 to 1848 of a student teacher at the College, as he was not yet a graduate.

Pasquale married Francesca Scaroina from Campobasso (1815-post 1860) in the then Bourbon Kingdom and lived with her in Trivento for about 10 years before deciding to move. Pasquale D'Ovidio was also an excellent musician, first violinist and conductor of the theatre orchestra in Campobasso. He also wrote *Dilucidazioni sulla musica dello Stabat Mater di Rossini* (Campobasso, s.n., 1843) and was the author of musical compositions performed at official celebrations.<sup>232</sup> Pasquale worked as a teacher from 1824 to 1860 (end of 1859), then moved to

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<sup>232</sup> I get this news from the historical services of the Trivento municipality. Archiviomemo.it.

Naples after being appointed teacher of calligraphy by decree on 28 November 1860. He worked at the newly founded Scuola Normale Maschile in Naples, one of the many institutions set up to 'normalise' education, in this case in primary and secondary schools. He also worked as a calligrapher at the courts (and wrote a small manual on the subject: *Delle principali norme da tenersi nelle perizie calligrafiche giudiziarie*, Stampatore Filangieri, 1883). His mother, Francesca, was from a family of merchants. Francesco was the penultimate of five children, and his elder brother Enrico was also destined for fame, becoming a famous mathematician and, like himself, a senator of the kingdom. The D'Ovidio children were born in a bourgeois house in what is now Corso Matteotti, in the centre of the city, now commemorated by a plaque.



The country of origin of the D'Ovidio family, Trivento.

In 1858 (according to other sources at the end of 1859) the family moved to Naples, to a house on the Vomero hill, then a suburb of the city. In Naples, as we know, Pasquale found a better job as a calligrapher at the Tribunale. Like his father, his son Francesco was noted for his early 'liberal faith' and 'Risorgimento'. It is possible that Pasquale D'Ovidio was involved in the Risorgimento uprisings and took the opportunity to move to Naples when the Kingdom was about to fall. This would make it more likely that he moved towards the end of the decade, in the last months of 1859 and early 1860. Francesco was 9 years old and he will always have few memories of his early years in Campobasso: his city will always be Naples. In Campobasso, during his early elementary school years, his first teacher was his maternal uncle Camillo de Luca, a "professor of fine literature" and author of a book of historical memoirs, *Ricordanze patrie* (1856).



View of Campobasso, late 19th century.

In Naples, the young Francesco completed his secondary education at the 'Vittorio Emanuele' Royal Grammar School, which was an excellent preparation. He would always remain "a man from Molise", even if his education and activity would be concentrated in Naples and, as far as we know, he would have little to do with Campobasso, apart



from a few journeys, visits to relatives and, of course, affection for his place of origin. His pupil, Nicola Zingarelli, recalls in the typical poetic tone of the Risorgimento: "In Naples, when he was a high school student, on the evening of the 8th of September 1860, the boy from Molise was ecstatically immersed in the crowd that rushed towards the Spirito Santo from all sides to applaud Garibaldi, then suddenly fell silent because Garibaldi wanted to sleep, and he made up for the cry of: *Una Italia!*".<sup>233</sup> This seems to be a recollection that D'Ovidio gave to Zingarelli himself, and it is probably an authentic memory because it corresponds to what D'Ovidio himself would have written about his passion for a united Italy.

The D'Ovidio family belonged to the intellectual and professional class that, perhaps for a long time, did not identify with the reasons or traditions of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, preferring liberalism or, in any case, embracing the demands of the Risorgimento. In Zingarelli's account, the young man from Molise was forced to pay lip service to his enthusiasm (he could not speak, it was not allowed). Nevertheless, he witnessed Garibaldi's entry into Naples. This seems to be the first example of his ardent support for the cause of the Risorgimento.

The 'Vittorio Emanuele' high school in Naples, housed in a beautiful building with large classrooms and attended by the *crème de la crème* of the Neapolitan bourgeoisie and nobility, was then run by a friend of Francesco's father, Ippolito Amicarelli (1823-1889), a very learned clergyman of gigantic stature, born in Agnone, near Trivento. The friendship between Pasquale and Ippolito must have given the Triveneto man some advantage: Amicarelli was a scholar, but also a deputy in the VIII Legislature of the Kingdom. He was a generous and ingenious man, of whom Francesco himself left a vivid portrait, collected in volume II of *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, recalling his humble origins, his passion for study, the legends that surrounded his childhood and youth, his energy and curiosity, and his ability to maintain the boarding school and lyceum, which his predecessor had left in a precarious state and which he took over in 1865.

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<sup>233</sup> Nicola Zingarelli, *Francesco D'Ovidio*, 'The 20th Century', 1926.

He was a good administrator, an excellent teacher, knew how to deal with students and parents, and was at the same time a fatherly figure and an important figure for D'Ovidio.<sup>234</sup> That's all D'Ovidio says about those early years in what is now Via Matteotti. Among his teachers, the influence of the Brescian Domenico Denicotti (1829-1903), who taught in Naples for a few years before returning to Brescia, was particularly important. He inspired in him a passion for the study of Latin and Greek, for which he used the Curtius Skulgramatik that Denicotti had obtained for his two best students, Vitelli and D'Ovidio.

Having obtained his baccalaureate, in the autumn of 1866 he won the competition for admission to the Scuola Normale in Pisa. With a free scholarship, he moved to Pisa as a boarding student and began a four-year course which, at the time, was particularly rigorous. His intention was to "come out a classical philologist and glottologist".<sup>235</sup>



The entrance to the Liceo 'Vittorio Emanuele' from Piazza Dante in a photograph by G. Brogi (1822-1881) c. 1870. It was here that Francesco D'Ovidio completed his high school studies.

<sup>234</sup> Ippolito Amicarelli, in *Rimpianti Vecchi e nuovi*, v. II, Editrice Moderna, Caserta 1930, pp. 103-139. The portrait is included in the first edition of *Rimpianti* (Sandron, Milan 1903).

<sup>235</sup> G. Vitelli, *Ricordi lontani*, 'Il Marzocco', 6 December 1925.

## Studies at the Normale in Pisa

The Normale was already a very prestigious school. Originally founded by Napoleon in 1810 on the model of similar French institutes, it underwent various changes in its programmes and even its location during the Grand Ducal period, arriving in 1862 at its current location in the rooms of the Palazzo della Carovana in Piazza dei Cavalieri. During these years, the mathematician Enrico Betti (1823-1892), who had equated normalistic studies with university studies, was the director. During the transition from one regime to the next, the Normale did not lose the quality of the preparation that its students received. They were admitted after rigorous selection and examinations, and even then there were two courses, one linguistic-philological and the other physical-mathematical.

It was here that D'Ovidio was taught by two masters who were to have a decisive influence on his life: Alessandro D'Ancona (1835-1914) - very attentive to medieval texts, from a literary, cultural-historical and comparative point of view - and Domenico Comparetti (1835-1927), remarkable in the field of Italian linguistics.<sup>236</sup>

He was also greatly influenced by Emilio Tèza (1831-1912) who taught a course in Comparative Languages and Literature with notions of 'Gothic, Old German, even Provençal' as well as Sanskrit.<sup>237</sup> Rajna recalled, however, that D'Ovidio only received 'impulses' in the field of Romance glottology and studied it almost autodidactically, because

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<sup>236</sup> For Comparetti, see at least *Gli anni giovanili di Domenico Comparetti, dai suoi taccuini e da altri inediti*, edited by E. Frontali Milani, Florence, Leo S. Olschki, 1969, excerpt from "Belfagor", vol. XXIV, no. 2. E *Convegno internazionale di studi, Napoli - Santa Maria Capua Vetere 6-8 giugno 2002*, edited by S. Cerasuolo, M. L. Chirico and T. Cirillo, Naples, Bibliopolis, 2006 March 1969, pp. 203-217. D'Ancona's biography is less well researched, for which we can at least recall the recollection published by D'Ovidio's close friend, Gerolamo Vitelli, who was his pupil: Gerolamo Vitelli, *Ricordi di un normalista*, in "Nuova Antologia", 1 April 1930.

<sup>237</sup> Pio Rajna, *Francesco D'Ovidio e la filologia neolatina*, Nuova Antologia CCCXXIV, March 1926, pp. 119-126. Ibid, p. 121.

Tèza gave an inorganic teaching.

The academic year 1867-1868, for example, was devoted to the *Poesia del primo secolo* from all points of view, metrical, historical, scholarly, aesthetic. In 1868-1869 he continued the theme, arriving at Dante. As for D'Ancona, "although he lacked preparation and specific interests in the field of linguistics and textual criticism [...] thanks to his collaboration with Comparetti and Tèza and his assiduous correspondence with philologists such as Paris, Meyer, Köler [sic] and Mussafia, he was able to give his students a vital and up-to-date teaching, also in terms of developments in these new disciplines".<sup>238</sup>

D'Ancona was therefore able to prepare his students to a very high standard through the network of acquaintances he maintained through his extensive correspondence, and in particular with Adolfo Mussafia (1835-1905), an eminent glottologist with international experience, particularly teaching in Austria.

Francesco entered the school in 1866 at the age of 17 and remained there until he was 21. Those who passed the entrance examinations were entitled to free board and lodging at the boarding school (this was extended to the scientific section in 1873), and D'Ovidio was able to take advantage of this by keeping up with the exams and securing high marks with a very hard application to study. The following year, in 1867, he met his lifelong friend Girolamo Vitelli (1849-1935), with whom he shared not only a passion for literature but also a political passion for a united Italy in the spirit of the Risorgimento.

On their frequent journeys between Naples and Pisa, during holidays and family visits, the two of them passed through the territories united to the Kingdom of Italy and the territories of the Papal States. In the latter part of his life, D'Ovidio recounted that he and his friend were often searched by the Bourbon gendarmes, called "occhiuti", who were meticulous but inexperienced, and who searched the bags of the two young men not for weapons but for forbidden books, books that

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<sup>238</sup> Francesca Nassi, *Tra manzonismo e glottologia: Francesco D'Ovidio e la questione della lingua, Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Class of Letters and Philosophy, Series III*, v. 23, no. 1 (1993), pp. 275-318. Ibid, p. 278.

propagated the liberal and Risorgimento doctrine, such as the texts of Silvio Pellico, which D'Ovidio would later edit in the first important edition.

According to D'Ovidio, the greatest disappointment for the two ardent students was the arrival of travellers from the Lazio countries, and therefore from the Church State, who did not seem to be in such a hurry to be "liberated". On the contrary, they seemed quite relaxed and content with their papal rule. This, of course, clashed with their ardent Risorgimento beliefs.

What he and his friend Vitelli thought of this period, D'Ovidio, in the memoirs he wrote many years later, manages to look at it with a certain smiling detachment, forgiving the apparent insensitivity of those people who obviously did not live badly and were not so oppressed in the Papal States as to expect to be saved. D'Ovidio's account is deliberately self-deprecating.

They spoke quietly or cheerfully of their ordinary lives, of the trivial affairs of their state, as if it were still solid and would last for ever; While we in the Kingdom were always talking of the Roman question, and sighing for the liberation of Rome and the fall of the secular power, whether we liked it or not, our spirits were exalted, and we crossed that part of the country which was not yet free with a rebellious spirit, in the expectation, natural though unreasonable, that we should find only frowning, heart-broken, tearful faces, which could scarcely conceal the eagerness for freedom. The contrast between our inner restlessness and their serenity made us spiteful, suspicious and disheartened. It also reassured us a little, suggesting that perhaps there was no need for us to despair so much if they were so calm after all.<sup>239</sup>

Pisa, a hotbed of Risorgimento spirit for many decades, and the Normale even more so, nourished that belief in a united Italy, in the non-religious version, without being openly anticlerical, which D'Ovidio never rejected. At the time, the two young men were burning with warlike fervour, and they sometimes thought of taking part in military campaigns against the hated Papal Rome. But they were too

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<sup>239</sup> Francesco D'Ovidio, *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, Caserta, Moderna 1930, pp. 383-384.

young, they had to study.

In Pisa, the young man from Campobasso studied with great success, and Comparetti recognised in him an unusual ability as a Greek scholar, as his friend and pupil Pio Rajna would testify many years later:

He therefore brought to Pisa a rich store of doctrine, but above all he brought with him an intellect that I cannot better define with the epithet *luminous* [...] In D'Ovidio [...] a convinced appreciator of research and patient observation of the facts, there was, by natural aptitude and study, a beautiful combination of ideal visions and positivism, of sensitivity and reasoning.<sup>240</sup>

There were only a few dozen students, closely followed by their teachers. In them, gathered in that elite school where wit counted more than any recommendation or noble birth, was concentrated the hope of training the men of letters and professors of the new Italy and of bringing the German method, then the most modern, to the new nation. Pisa was a small city, so we can imagine that the years between 1866 and 1870 were very intense, with close contact between students and professors. In addition to studying philology, in which he intended to specialise, he was introduced to the study of Sanskrit, Germanic languages and Provençal, under the guidance of Emilio Tèza, a polyglot philologist.

This training would give him an unusual depth in the philological sciences and a very solid linguistic sensibility. In addition to Greek, Latin, Ancient Provençal and Sanskrit, D'Ovidio also studied French, German and English. In particular, he had an excellent command of German, which gave him access to the reservoir of untranslated philological works written mainly in that language at the time.

During his years as a “normalista”, he studied Dante and Dante's *De Vulgarie Eloquentiae* in depth, as well as the work of Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873), not only for its literary merits but also for its

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<sup>240</sup> Pio Rajna, *Commemorazione di F. D'Ovidio* in 'Il Marzocco', 6 December 1925.

linguistic proposals. This was crucial for his career, as it allowed him to enter the debate on the national language on an equal footing with much older masters, even before he had completed his studies. Manzoni proposed the promotion of Florentine as the national language, and D'Ovidio was asked to write about it in an authoritative forum during the work of the linguistic commission set up by the minister Emilio Broglio (1814-1892).

For years, Manzoni had introduced the subject of the language to be adopted in the documents of the unified Italy and, together with Ruggero Bonghi and Giulio Carcano, had chaired the Milanese section of the Commission. It was Manzoni who wrote and circulated the first report, *Dell'unità della lingua e dei mezzi per diffonderla*, on 14 January 1868. The members of the Florentine Commission (Raffaello Lambruschini, Niccolò Tommaseo, Giuseppe Bertoldi and Achille Mauri) debated with him because they did not agree with some of his conclusions.<sup>241</sup>

The opportunity then arose for promising young scholars to express their opinions, and Domenico Comparetti decided to propose to the young scholar from Campobasso, whom he considered equal to the challenge of those great names, that he should expose himself and publish, as his first important work, a critical review of the essay by the famous German scholar Eduard Böhmer, *Über Dantes Schrift De vulgari eloquentia* (Halle, 1867), which discussed Dante's linguistic theses, also the subject of the parliamentary commission.<sup>242</sup>

The application was made in July 1868. It was not an easy task: one had to read a German text and argue one's own reply in German. D'Ovidio, it should be remembered, was only 19 years old, but he was

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<sup>241</sup> What happened was that Manzoni wrote a first report *Dell'unità della lingua e dei mezzi per diffonderla*, published in *Nuova Antologia* (February 1868) and *Perseveranza* (March 1868), but the Tuscan section dissociated itself by sending its own report that was published in *Nuova Antologia*. At this point Minister Broglio dissolved the commission and Manzoni reiterated his ideas and positions in his *Lettera intorno al De Vulgari Eloquentia* (21 March 1868).

<sup>242</sup> The work was introduced in Italy at the same time as the publication of the report *Dell'unità della lingua e dei mezzi per diffonderla* (Florence 1868).

already considered well prepared for such a task. He had just passed his exams for the third year of literature at the Scuola Normale Superiore and had to return home, to Naples. He had also promised himself that he would not publish anything before graduating, 'also so as not to waste a single hour of his high school and university years, which I believed and still believe should all be spent in treasuring the lessons of the masters, in rigorous study', as he wrote in the biographical fragment *Il primo passo*. But he could not refuse Comparetti's proposal. About a year earlier, he had made friends with Giuseppe Puccianti (1830-1913), a friend of Carducci and of the Amici Pedanti, who, in March 1868, influenced D'Ovidio with the pamphlet *Della unità della lingua italiana*.<sup>243</sup>

He would later write, in the words collected by Zingarelli: "The town where I lived for three years, which belonged to the privileged region and which gathered schoolchildren from all parts of it, had given me a vivid sense of Tuscany in which I wallowed with the greatest joy, my soul always inclined to absorb Tuscany in every way". And again. "It was an irresistible vocation to deal with modern literature, or rather literary criticism in general... I was driven to write about Manzoni by the enthusiasm and example of the greatest critics I loved, and also by the horror of the injustice and impropriety of which Manzoni was then constantly the object; and then I was driven by the inevitable legacy of the love I had nurtured and the struggles I had endured in my youth. I was never moved by a deliberate purpose, nor by the desire for a subject of study and research. I was a Manzonian as others had been Garibaldians".<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> G. Puccianti, *Del Volgare Eloquio di Dante* (30 March 1868), in *Dell'unità di lingua in Italia*, Pisa 1868, pp. 33-44. For more technical discussions I refer to Francesca Nassi's cited essay, *Tra manzonismo e glottologia*, cit., pp. 282-287, with extensive bibliography.

<sup>244</sup> Nicola Zingarelli, *Francesco D'Ovidio*, The 20th Century, 1926.



And indeed, the Zingarelli itself writes:

When the 21-year-old doctor first presented himself to the public, he showed that his heart was committed: and even for him, who brilliantly wrote about determinism and free will, free will did not exist.<sup>245</sup>

These sentences, reported by D'Ovidio's disciple Zingarelli, make us think that D'Ovidio, who wallowed in Tuscany and Tuscanity with the greatest pleasure, probably spoke without an accent. They also make us aware of his particular conception of the destiny of man, driven by an inexorable fate, a fateful destiny in the true sense of the word for great geniuses, where free will is less important. A kind of classical-pagan conception, not uncommon among the classicists of the time.

And so, during the summer holidays in Naples, he wrote the dissertation on language; back in Pisa, in September, he had it read by Comparetti and D'Ancona, who praised it and asked for very few corrections. D'Ovidio thought of having the text printed in the 'Rivista Bolognese', edited by Francesco Fiorentino.<sup>246</sup> Not daring to ask him directly, he had himself introduced to Domenico Denicotti, his former professor at the Liceo Vittorio Emanuele II in Naples, who had been transferred to teach in Bologna. Thus he made his first publication:

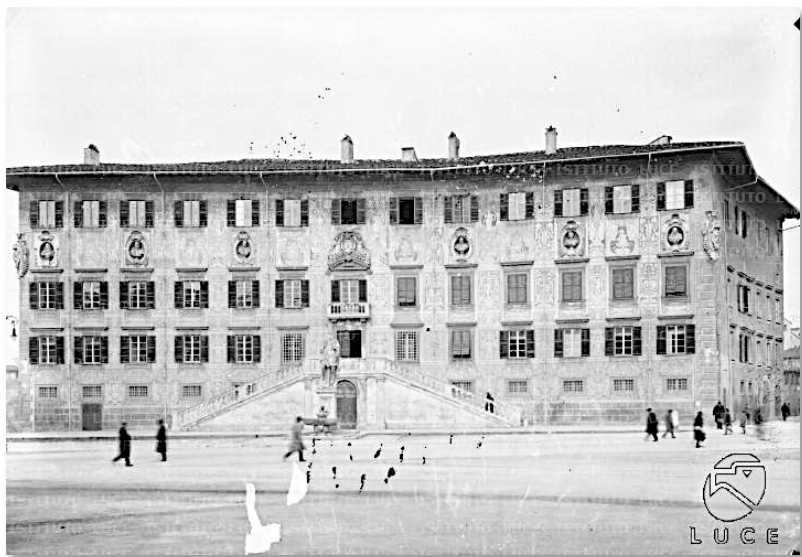
So Fiorentino gave me the most loving hospitality, and in the August '69 issue of Rivista I had the consolation of speaking to the public for the first time through main characters. Fiorentino wrote to praise my work, but confessed that he found it too dry for a young man, and a southerner at that. Poor Fiorentino did not yet know what devils I had in my body, and his admonition made me rejoice: for he saw that I had succeeded, as the subject and the

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<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> Francesco Fiorentino (1834-1884), a philosopher from Sambiasi (Lamezia Terme) who taught in Naples, Bologna and Pisa, was a freethinker, a scholar of Giordano Bruno and of moral and theoretical philosophy, as well as the author of many books explaining Masonic thought (he was a member of the important Felsinea Lodge). More than friendship, due to the difference in age, he was bound to D'Ovidio by professional respect, who admired his depth of thought and style of writing.

intention of myself and my masters wished, in showing only one side of my character. The work had the good fortune to meet with the full approval of scholars [...] In those days there was much less printing, knowledge of the German language was a rather rare prerogative, the attitude of Italian critics towards foreign doctrines was still humble; so that a young man who argued almost toe to toe with a German scholar made an impression.<sup>247</sup>



Palazzo della Carovana, seat of the Scuola Normale di Pisa (1925).

The text was written in German, and this must be emphasised: Francesco D'Ovidio knew how to write a thesis in German when he was only 19 years old. In his text, he proposed ideas similar to those of Manzoni, but he also expounded a line of his own: it was the so-called "conciliatory line", which avoided Manzoni's excesses of adopting Florentine. He was enthusiastic about the philological treatment of the subject and received a flattering judgement from Niccolò Tommaseo and compliments from the minister Emilio Broglio. If we take into

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<sup>247</sup> Francesco D'Ovidio, *Il primo passo*, in *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, II, Editrice Moderna, Caserta 1930, pp. 457-464.

account his teachers - Comparetti and D'Ancona belonged to powerful families linked to the Risorgimento and had prestigious careers - and his friends, such as Vitelli, we can say that Francesco D'Ovidio was, from an early age, connected to very influential circles that favoured his career. They were, moreover, betting on a young man who showed brilliant ingenuity and a remarkable will.

D'Ancona was an Italianist, linguist and philologist, while Comparetti was a Greekist, antiquarian and philology teacher. Their collaboration, together with that of their students, gave birth to what is known as modern Romance philology, a "German" imported science that they wanted to establish in Italy in order to strengthen the study of the origins of the Italian language, which was necessary to consolidate the cultural foundations of a unified Italy. In any case, in July 1869 Francesco passed his exams for the fourth year, and the following year he began writing his dissertation. Although he considered himself a 'Grecajo', the two theses were glottological.

As he himself relates in his *Rimpianti* (Regrets), during these years in Pisa he led a very secluded life, devoted to his studies, except for occasional trips to the osterias or restaurants that Pisa was rich in, in the company of Vitelli and a few other friends. In earlier years, with Pietro Giordani and the visits of Giacomo Leopardi, Alessandro Manzoni and others, Pisa had been at the centre of Italian cultural interest for some time. At that time it was a small, rather sleepy town, surrounded by the countryside and animated mainly by the few dozen students of the Scuola Normale. They were very disciplined and hardworking students, chosen for their character. This is why Francesco, when recalling those years, recalls a few episodes from his youth: a few excursions, discussions, gratitude to his teachers, a quiet life and his back always bent over his books. A fidelity to study that, according to friends and acquaintances, would be fatal to his eyes.



Domenico Comparetti, one of Francesco D'Ovidio's teachers. He wanted him as his heir to the *Archivio glottologico italiano*.

On the basis of his first known text, D'Ovidio developed his thesis entitled *Sull'origine dell'unica forma flessionale del nome italiano* (*On the origin of the unique inflectional form of the Italian name*), which was discussed in Pisa in July 1870. In it, the young D'Ovidio took part in the discussion of the glottological theories formulated by the German scholar Friedrich Christian Diez (1794-1876), considered the founder of Neo-Latin philology. Meanwhile, in 1872, his dissertation was published by the Fratelli Nistri publishing house in Pisa. In 1871, an acquaintance of his, Giuseppe Puccianti, had an *un'Antologia della prosa italiana moderna* published by Le Monnier, which was a great success. D'Ovidio, reviewing it in the *Il Propugnatore*, communicated his idea of the ideal Italian canon, which not only approved of the authors consecrated by the Risorgimento (Manzoni, Grossi, Guerrazzi,

Pellico, Tommaseo, D'Azeglio, Leopardi), but also disapproved of the inclusion of antiquated authors such as Botta, Colletta and Giordani (who would later be given less and less space) and criticised the exclusion of Bonghi, Giorgianni, De Amicis, Gabelli and Fambri. Except for the last two, the others would be included in the anthologies - not this one by Puccianti.<sup>248</sup> He thus consecrated the path that distanced him from classical prose, even from Leopardi's, in order to adhere to a moderate Manzonianism. At the age of only 23, he was able to show the way and provoke reactions, some enthusiastic, some indignant, such as those of the editors of *Il Propugnatore*, who ended all collaboration with him. To those who were not involved in these debates, they seemed like sterile literary disputes, but they were not: the canon of authors to be studied by generations of students was being definitively established, and D'Ovidio, who had not yet completed his studies at the Normale, was already able to make his opinion heard. In the same review he criticised, or perhaps it is more accurate to say he raged against, Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi, then a very successful author, and Cesare Cantù. His review provoked the indignant reaction of Giovanni Chiarini, a classicist, purist, anti-romantic, who had belonged to the Amici Pedanti group, in the *Gazzetta livornese* (1849-1879) of 12 April 1872, who called D'Ovidio a 'boy'.<sup>249</sup> It was an irreverent intervention that mocked the glottological and dialectological training and studies of folk texts that were carried out at the Normale, and showed that D'Ovidio was already being identified as a new protagonist on the Italian literary scene. On 2 May, in the same newspaper, Chiarini took issue 'with the boys who have just left school, and what schools!'

After completing his studies at the Normale, he went to Florence, where he met and briefly visited Francesco De Sanctis (1817-1883), who at the time was writing *Storia della letteratura italiana* and holding

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<sup>248</sup> Francesco D'Ovidio, *Recensione a Puccianti*, Antologia, *Il Propugnatore*, V, 1, 1972, pp. 124-134.

<sup>249</sup> *Gazzetta livornese* (1849-1879) of 12 April 1872. See Nassi, op. cit., pp. 294-295.

a chair in Naples. A historian of the Romantic period, a patriot who had been imprisoned for a short time in the Castel dell'Ovo in Naples, a moderate, he was a model for D'Ovidio in his political (he was twice Minister of Education), Risorgimento and cultural commitments. There seems to have been no friendship between the 23-year-old graduate and the 45-year-old critic, only a formal respect, because too much separated them: the way they studied the greats of literature.

Then, except for short stays in Naples, D'Ovidio continued his reclusive life as a student in Pisa to prepare for his postgraduate studies, his doctorate. After the four years as a normalist that had prepared him for university, D'Ovidio stayed in the Tuscan city for another three years to attend courses that would qualify him infallibly for university teaching. The school he attended was considered to be very rigorous and prepared him excellently for academic teaching. Moreover, as its name suggests, it taught the 'norm', the model of higher and university education.

Before completing his doctorate, in the academic year 1873-1874, he was called to teach Latin and Greek at the Galvani Lycée in Bologna. High school teaching was considered a preparation for university teaching, a probationary period that could not be ignored. It was during this period that he met his future wife, the Mantuan Maria Bertolini, a 'gentle and cultured young lady' from a good family who lived in Bologna where her father taught. He must have known Bertolini, his father, as early as 1872. She graduated in the spring of 1874, at a time when many doors were open to her: graduates of the Normale in Pisa had easy access to the professorships that were being set up in many parts of Italy. From 1874 to 1876, before finding a suitable university position, he taught Latin and Greek at the Ginnasio Classico Parini in Milan, then one of the best in Italy and a training ground for many classicists. During these two years, he studied the Milanese dialect, never ceasing to be a scholar and dialectologist, as he would be throughout his career. This enabled him to read the poems of Carlo Porta (1875-1881). The turning point in his career came in 1876, when he was just 27 and had already moved to Bologna, as we shall see.

The dissertation, which was also praised by the linguist Graziadio Isaia Ascoli, was followed by a dissertation *Sul trattato De vulgari eloquentia* (1874) to "determine the precise meaning of the doctrines understood by Dante", about the "illustrious vernacular" text that was well received and contributed to resolving the question of language in Italy.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> *Archivio glottologico italiano*, II [1874] pp. 416-438; and *Opere complete XII: Versificazione romanza. Poetica e poesia medioevale*, II, Naples 1932, pp. 59-100. For the complex issues surrounding the discussion of language I refer to the comprehensive Francesca Nessi, *Tra manzonismo e glottologia: Francesco D'Ovidio e la questione della lingua*, "Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e filosofia, Serie III, v. 23, n. 1 (1993), pp. 275-318.





## **Chapter 11**

### **Clashes and restlessness**

#### **The decline of the Fibreno paper mills**

Around 1870, what was then known as the Cartiere del Fibreno entered a period of crisis, which crept up until 1880, when it came to the fore. It affected the entire paper industry in the south and was caused by complex conjunctural and structural factors: increased competition, the abolition of protective tariffs in the sector, which had kept raw material prices low and final paper prices unnaturally high, but above all, since the last thirty years of the 19th century, by the increasingly severe shortage of orders. Another factor to be taken into account, because it was the trigger for the crisis of the Fibreno paper mills, was the creation in Naples of the Società delle Cartiere Meridionali - Società Anonima.

This company, with a considerable capital of two and a half million lire and modern machinery, specialised in the production of paper from vegetable and wood pulp, a cheaper and more abundant raw material than the rags that were still mainly used in the paper production cycle of the Fibreno mills. As we have seen, Charles Lefèbvre had already introduced the use of wood pulp, but only for certain types of paper and for certain types of processing: the majority of sales were still made with much stronger, but also more expensive, paper made from vegetable textile fibres.

In those years, technological progress had brought production cycles using only pulp onto the market. The Società Anonima delle Cartiere Meridionali invested mainly in the Liri Valley, where all the conditions for the development of the paper industry were present: an abundance

of water and specialised workers who came from the Cartiere del Fibreno. These factors - the abolition of a privileged tariff and customs regime, increased direct and indirect competition - led to a liquidity crisis in the Cartiere del Fibreno's coffers, just at the time when it became necessary to replace the machinery.

While waiting to reconstruct in detail the moments of this crisis, it can be read for the moment in its general evolution.<sup>251</sup> To keep up with the times and compete in the marketplace, the company would have had to invest huge amounts of capital and replace almost all of its machinery. Much of the equipment was now 60 years old, dating from around 1818 to 1830. The newest factory was San Carlo, which produced wallpaper now imported cheaply from the north and abroad. These machines were still running on steam or gas when the first electric machines became available.

During this difficult period, Ernesto, like his father Charles, kept the family's finances separate from those of the paper mills, the main activity of the Lefèvre family. He believed that if the paper mills were no longer able to generate the necessary cash flow, it would be better to close them down. Throughout the 1870s the business continued to operate, although not as profitably as before, but by the end of the decade, in 1879, the mills' cash flows had become more problematic.

That same year, the results of a government inquiry 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.<sup>252</sup> Errera was known to have produced a large number of studies over the years but was often accused of eclecticism and superficiality. Nevertheless, this study had a strong impact on public opinion.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> The historical archive of the Manifatture del Fibreno and its successor companies was found recently, in 2018, but is not yet catalogued.

<sup>252</sup> Alberto Errera, *Inchiesta sugli operai nelle fabbriche*, Tipografia Elzeviriana, Rome 1879.

<sup>253</sup> Alberto Polsi, S.v. *Errera, Alberto* in 'Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani' - Vol. 43 (Rome, 1993).

In the Fibreno paper mills, as we have already seen, one hundred of the 600 workers were minors. Like many businessmen of the time - an idea that was particularly widespread in England, Belgium and France - Ernesto defended child labour as a measure against idleness, but the laws were changing, introducing protection for the weakest, and so a new discipline against child labour was drawn up, which came into force on 11 February 1886, when the crisis in the paper mills was already severe.

This, together with other factors such as waste, mismanagement and family conflicts - for which Carlo was responsible - contributed to the sale of the company, piece by piece. In order to avoid a crisis in the paper mills, a gradual implementation of the new regulations was demanded. There were several reasons for this request, not least the shortage of labour in the part of the Terra di Lavoro where the mills were located. But the request was not heeded and no exemptions were granted.

Nearing the age of seventy, Ernesto decided to leave the management of the paper mills and the family's other economic and financial activities to his eldest son, Carlo, but this decision had even more serious consequences and led to a crisis that embittered the last years of Ernesto's life. But before recounting these events, let us take a look at Naples, at what was happening around the protagonists of this family history.

## **Naples in the early Bell Époque**

But what was Naples like in the last quarter of the 19th century, beyond André-Isidore's gaze? It was still a metropolis of almost 700,000 inhabitants, a complicated city still burdened by the splendour of its history, and a city in crisis for lack of renewal, for lack of indigenous capital, for still being the conquered capital of a lost kingdom. There was also no shortage of important ferments that made it one of the few Italian cities to dictate fashion and produce a first-class intellectual class.

The eighties saw the beginning of the adventure of Lamont Young (1851-1929), an engineer born in Naples in 1851 to English parents, a British subject but raised in the Neapolitan city. Because of his international background, Young had not only modern but even revolutionary ideas that he wanted to apply in Naples. In 1874 he took part in a competition organised by the city council for the construction of horse-drawn carriages in the city, but in 1880 he went even further and presented a project for the construction of an underground railway based on the London model.

The line would run from Fuorigrotta and Mergellina to Vomero via Rione Amedeo and Rione Sanità to the railway, San Carlo all'Arena, Duomo and Chiaia, returning to Amedeo where a lift would be built to Vomero. The project was not finally approved because of the risks involved in its construction. In 1883, disappointed but not tamed, he presented another project that did not involve digging under the houses but only in the tuff. Since Young wanted the project to be financed mainly by private capital, and since the proposed project did not seem to be profitable, he presented two alternative projects: in one, he imagined a Rione Venezia, a new district built on the sea, divided into 11 islands connected by bridges, with low buildings surrounded by gardens. The islands would have been made of stone from the underground excavations, and a new district would have been built along the coast from Posillipo to Bagnoli. Young also imagined a navigable canal, with two side roads, that would cut through the Posillipo hill for more than two kilometres. Another of Young's projects was the creation of the Campi Flegrei district for tourists, with a large beach, a large hôtel, a crystal palace and a tent roof over the foreshore. In this way, Young thought, he could restore the urban beaches that had been destroyed by the reclamation work begun in 1870 at Santa Lucia and Chiaia.

Young's plans were discussed and even approved with modifications in July 1888. The futuristic project, with the second version of the underground and the Venezia and Campi Flegrei districts, was approved on 21 July 1888. But Young could not find the capital on the local or even the international market. He would have needed at least

40 million lire.<sup>254</sup> Today it seems strange that the villa built by Young (known as the Anselmayer villa, unfortunately in serious disrepair for many years) stands on the vertical of Palazzo Balsorano, just behind it, clinging to the Vomero hill. In the most elegant area of the city, a new protagonist, whose projects remained almost entirely on paper, contrasted with the old protagonists of a Naples long gone, the Lefèbvre.

The problem of the lack of indigenous capital, or rather the lack of dynamism of the rich Neapolitans, still largely coming from the landowners, was an old one. The Neapolitan Tramway Company, for example, was controlled by foreign companies, as was the entire Neapolitan transport sector. Belgian capital came from the exploitation of the Congo, and throughout Italy Belgian companies had taken control of transport. In Italy this happened in Bologna, Palermo, Verona, Catania, Alessandria, Livorno, Vicenza and Salerno, but also in Lombardy and Piedmont.

In the same years, the Società per le Ferrovie Napoletane, set up in Rome by a Belgian company, the Banca Romana and the Neapolitan banker Gallotti (who had excellent connections in Paris), began the construction of a railway line that by 1890 would be 20 kilometres long, 6 of which would be underground. The project was carried out by the engineer Giulio Melisurgo, who was born and studied in Paris: the link between Naples and France continued underground. The Cumana railway started from Montesanto, reached Corso Vittorio Emanuele and then plunged down to Posillipo, reaching Fuorigrotta and the Campi Flegrei. In 1887 the history of the Circumvesuviana of the railway company Naples-Ottaviano began, to be completed later. The driving force behind the construction of the Circumvesuviana was Giuseppe Caravita, Prince of Satriano, a banker who later married a very rich Spanish noblewoman, Rosa Plazaola y Limonta. The Prince of Satriano also animated the *Società di Assicurazioni Diverse*, the *Società Meridionale di Eletticità* and the company that managed the two funiculars of Naples.

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<sup>254</sup> Francesco Barbagallo, *Naples. Bell'Époque*, Laterza, Bari-Rome, pp. 25-35.

## The cholera of 1884 and the Restoration

In 1884, for the umpteenth time, there was a cholera epidemic brought by ships from the East. It was the eighth time in the nineteenth century that Naples had been seriously affected, and the only time in Europe. In the dirty and unhealthy districts of Naples, the Quartieri Spagnoli, Porto, Pendino, Mercato and Fuorigrotta, the epidemic still claimed many lives. Cholera affected many cities, but in Naples it was more difficult to eradicate than in other cities, even coastal ones such as Genoa or Marseilles. As a result, the romantic myth of 'beautiful Naples' from bygone eras began to fade: Naples had serious problems, and one of them was the neighbourhoods that spewed sewage and filth, as Marino Turchi (1808-1890) denounced with a scientific eye in *Igiene pubblica a Napoli* (1861-1862). What had been the norm in Bourbon times, as well as in Paris and London, became a disgrace in Umbrian Italy. At times, the sewage, which was even dumped on the sides of Chiaia or Posillipo, caused English or French tourists to flee in horror. The cholera of 1884, which affected Naples more than any other city, brought Cardinal Sanfelice, his friend Matteo Schillizzi, King Umberto and many personalities of the nation to Naples, convinced that something had to be done, that Naples needed to be renewed, even rebuilt. Matteo Schillizzi, a Jew from Livorno, was in 1884 the richest person in Naples and the richest landowner. For this reason, he was very interested in the renovation of the city, in order to make the best use of his buildings. Together with other French, Belgians and Englishmen, he was as much the type of the new capitalist as the Lefèbvre had been the protagonists of the international capitalism of the 19th century.

Almost all of the old southern aristocracy, with the possible exception of the Doria D'Angri and other nobles who had devoted themselves to politics or banking, was about to be replaced by a new class of rich, often financiers, devoted to property speculation. Naples was also changing in this respect, and yet it was a change that was reminiscent of the past.<sup>255</sup> During the sanitary crisis of 1884, Prime

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<sup>255</sup> Frank M. Snowden, *Naples in the Time of Cholera, 1884-1911*, Cambridge

Minister Depretis announced that it was necessary to gut, clean and reclaim the lower part of the city, where 200,000 of the 500,000 Neapolitans were crowded into an area where seawater, sewage and drinking water wells mixed, creating an explosive sanitary situation and frequent outbreaks of disease.<sup>256</sup>

The Banco di Napoli, Cardinal San Felice and other benefactors raised money to start the recovery, or rather the Risanamento, with a capital 'R', as it was called. This time there were 7,000 dead and 14,000 infected. Life in the city had come to an almost complete standstill for months. Something had to be done.

At Christmas 1884, a decree called *Provvedimenti per Napoli* (Measures for Naples) was passed, followed by the *la Legge per il Risanamento della città di Napoli*. Expropriation procedures were established and the companies that could work were selected. Building speculators or financiers looking for business after Florence and Rome, in fact, looked to Naples and in particular to its expanding areas (Rione Amedeo, Vomero). In the same year, 1885, the city council, led by Nicola Amore, set up a commission of experts to create a new industrial district beyond the central railway station, a project that was to be realised more than 20 years later and that did not rely solely on local resources, as had been hoped.<sup>257</sup>

In fact, the general plan proceeded rather quickly, from 1885 to 1888, when the Society for the Reconstruction of Naples was founded, and work began in 1889 with the presence of Umberto I and Depretis. In the meantime, the Serino aqueduct had been inaugurated in 1885, an important project for the improvement of the city's hygiene. The restoration began in the same year that the banking and construction crisis exploded, with Naples at its epicentre.<sup>258</sup> Banca Tiberina, despite

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University Press, Cambridge 2002 (1992), pp. 167-171.

<sup>256</sup> Silvana Bartoletto, *La città che cambia. La trasformazione urbana della Napoli preunitaria*, Edizioni scientifiche italiane, Rome 2000, pp. 35-54.

<sup>257</sup> *L'avvenire industriale di Napoli negli scritti del primo '900*, cur. Giuseppe Russo, Guida, Naples 2004, p. 12.

<sup>258</sup> For the reconstruction of these events I rely on Barbagallo, *Napoli. Bell'Époque*, Laterza, Bari-Rome.

its name, was looking for business, but the crisis of the nineties prevented it from building and selling as much as it would have liked, and the chain bank failures of those years also delayed the Risanamento. The Banca d'Italia came to the rescue of the Società del Risanamento, as the private initiative (which was to compete for two-thirds of the business) had failed. A contract signed in 1888 between the Società del Risanamento and the Municipality provided for the construction of 375,000 square metres of housing in accordance with modern and healthy standards, but the project was not carried out, and Naples fell behind other Italian cities at the time.

The lack of industrial development did not speed up the reconstruction, and it was only in 1910 that the financing of various state banks made it possible to build half of the planned buildings and to carry out the plan, adopted in 1885, of cleaning the sewers and gutting the less healthy districts.

From then on, for almost 30 years, Naples was overcrowded with 4,000 workers. Finally, it was possible to adapt at least the centre of Naples to the new European urban and building standards. The city was given a more modern face, although large areas were still undeveloped and many houses built in the Vomero remained unsold because the city had become impoverished and there was no middle class large enough to buy property.

However, the S. Brigida district and the Maschio Angioino area were reclaimed, and important work on the renovation of the sewerage system was completed by the Neapolitan Society of Engineers and Builders (1887), once again founded by Matteo Schillizzi, Alfredo Diana, the engineer Achille Minozzi and other minority partners.<sup>259</sup> The 29-year-old engineer Minozzi, enfant prodige of the Neapolitan building industry, completed the renovation of the main sewers (1899) in about 10 years and, having become decidedly wealthy, crowned his success with the purchase of Palazzo Sommer on the new waterfront. Achille Minozzi had married a young Neapolitan of French origin,

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<sup>259</sup> Francesco Barbagallo, *Napoli. Belle Époque*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2015, pp. 15-25.



Olivia Dertenois, and had found the money for his enterprise thanks to the presentation Schilizzi had made of him to his Rothschild friends and co-religionists in Paris.

### **The prodigal son...**

In this vibrant atmosphere of proposals and innovations, with new names appearing in the quiet panorama of a city rich in small and medium-sized manufacturing and artisanal businesses, the Lefèbvre family lacked the most important thing: not money, but generational change. Carlo and Francesco were not up to the task that fate had given them. And events took place which embittered the last years of Ernesto's life. We can reconstruct these events thanks to André-Isidore's notes and an article published by the lawyer Alfonso Vastarini Cresi (1839-1902).

Towards the end of his diaries, after recounting an affectionate meeting with Ernesto in Paris in 1885 - the last between the two of them - André-Isidore indulges in a harsh, even ruthless indictment of his brothers Carlo and Francesco. André-Isidore was clearly aware of what was at stake: the disappearance of Lefèbvre Industries. He begins by writing that Carlo and Francesco caused Ernesto great suffering and were spoiled by their mother. However, in his "cahiers de doléances", André-Isidore also mentions the two women, Flavia and Giulia. Flavia's marriage and early separation from her husband may have been a reason for him to blame her. Whether there were other, perhaps economic, reasons for this reproach, we cannot know. As for Giulia, we know of no reason to criticise her, although she is included in the list of ungrateful children. But the older cousin's criticism is mainly directed at the two boys who were supposed to carry on the family tradition. This is what he says in his récit:

When I have named these four children and the date of their birth, I can only deplore the fatal consequences that have resulted, for my unfortunate relative, from the fatal direction imparted to their early upbringing. Which

made them capable of self-deception:

Lefèbvre Flavia, born in Naples on 8 October 1850.

Lefèbvre Charles [Carlo], born in Naples, 28 May 1852.

Lefèbvre Franz [Francesco], born in Naples on 1 August 1856.

Lefèbvre Giulia (Julia), born in Paris, 14 September 1862.

With her impetuous, imaginative, impatient and irrational nature, Madame Teresa always preferred to suffer the whims of her children rather than take the trouble of reprimanding or punishing them. Unfortunately for the future of these four children, they will morally share their mother's nature, and it will not be long before we realise that this fragility has given them *carte blanche* for their mistakes and for a multitude of whims that will continue to arise in them and take on power in various forms.

These words, which also criticise Teresa, the cousin with whom he spent so many peaceful hours, were evidently not meant to be read by any of the Lefèbvre. Here André-Isidore indulges for the first time in such judgments against relatives.

Impunity," the Frenchman continues, "does not take long to turn them into superficial, disobedient subjects, incapable of resisting any internal rules, so that the people proposed to educate them have never been able to achieve anything.

We have witnessed this disobedience in various circumstances. In 1857, when we had the opportunity to spend a week under the same roof as Ernesto, rue d'Anjère Saint-Honoré, and to eat at his table; then in Italy, during our two-month stay in 1865; and finally at every meeting I had in France with my Neapolitan family. But the weakest aspect of this totally inadequate upbringing was later revealed in the two sons, Carlo and Franz, whose disobedience so often exhausted Mr Bossi, their tutor, that in a moment of discouragement he allowed himself to predict that they would one day make their mother cry tears of blood!

In fact, Carlo, the major has made 'painful studies. He got himself kicked out of several Colleges where he was gradually transferred; much less did he get the taste for work, the habit for discipline, the feeling of Duty that signal a usefully and nobly fulfilled life...".

It so happened that after 1870, on his return from England, where his father had taken him to study with the Stonners, [...] he still found himself driven by the ideas of independence, of idleness, of that which never reckons with its own expenses, of the prodigal in his attitude and vanity [...] of the tormentor of his parents' too benevolent heart. Finally, the new prodigal son, finding that the great cities offered enough space to satisfy his insatiable need for pleasure, one day left his father's house and devoted himself to material pleasures, to the places of amusement that Rome, Milan, Nice, in particular, could offer, where he met dubious companions; moreover, to widen the scope of his daring, and without informing his family, he took to the sea, leaving the European continent to set off for new adventures in America. With nothing more than an excessive need for independence to satisfy this series of extravagances and follies, Carlo returns to France, settles down luxuriously in Paris, where he keeps away from us, leads a nabob-like life carried by a four-horse carriage, buys, receives, trades, and finally, one day in the year 188..., leaves Paris secretly, leaving behind considerable debts and an unknown domicile. Under these disastrous circumstances, the father's heart bled to get his wealthy son out of trouble... first his heart, then his wallet!<sup>260</sup>

André-Isidore, who had previously praised the young Lefèbvre, now considered her to be as capricious as her brothers. All four of them, in fact, 'share morally in their mother's nature, and it will not be long before we see that this fragility has given them license for the errors and caprices that continue to arise in them'. This sentence does not leave much room for interpretation, although the worst part falls to Carlo. After the boarding schools of Vaugirard and Mondragone, from which he had apparently been expelled, he was sent to study in England with the 'Stonners' or 'Stunners' (André-Isidore's spelling is unclear), where his father had taken him 'pour faire sa philosophie', which in this context can be understood as 'to find his own way', to clear his mind. Stonners could be a family, less easily a place, since there is no place of that name in England. It could have been an institution devoted to the practical arts. In any case, after 1870, at the age of eighteen, Carlo returned to Italy, to Naples. He stayed there for a while, perhaps a year,

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<sup>260</sup> AB XIX 4483, vol. XII, pp. 381-383.

perhaps two, only to discover that he was attracted by "ideas of independence, of idleness, of that which never reckons with its own expenses", in short, he was spendthrift, vain, but also "a tormentor of his parents' overly benevolent hearts". The situation was clearly untenable for a young man in his late twenties, and he was drawn to the big cities, going to Rome, Milan and Nice in particular, where he began to mix with dubious company. He was in Rome in his mid-seventies and in 1878 he had a son with a woman called Antonietta Candida, about whom family sources, like André-Isidore himself, say nothing. She must have been his age or a little younger, and was probably born around 1852 or 1853. We have no evidence, even oblique, of her presence after 1908. Her figure has been completely obliterated, although she may, as we shall see, appear in a photograph.

It is probable that Carlo met the girl in Rome, but the son was born in 1878 in Balsorano where he would stay for a long time. An issue of the 'Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia', 1 July 1878, mentions a house *belonging (property)* to a 'Carlo Lefevre' between Via Vasellari (Vascellari) and Via Longarina in the Lungotevere area.<sup>261</sup> It is certainly Carlo Lefèbvre because there are traces of lawsuits in Rome involving him in later years.<sup>262</sup> Then he left for North America where he stayed for some time, certainly many months. André-Isidore recounts that when he returned to Europe, Carlo settled 'luxuriously in Paris where he in fact kept away from us, led a nabob-like life carried by a four-horse shot, bought, received, trafficked, and finally, with ease, left on a day in the year 188...'. Probably the deleted date is 1881.

So he had settled in Paris, where the Parisian Lefèbvre knew of him, but did not visit him. It seems that he is the one who keeps away from them. Perhaps André-Isidore could have said much more, but he does not, he simply says that he leads a nabob's life and that he 'buys, receives and trades' and engages in an activity of which his cousin disapproves. When he left Paris at the beginning of the decade, he left

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<sup>261</sup> "Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia", 1 July 1878, p. 261.

<sup>262</sup> My question to the Civil Status Office in Naples, Historical Archives, detached section; years 1840-1860, November 2012.

behind debts. From 1884, his presence in Naples is documented. The passage in which André-Isidore speaks of Carlo's flight is important because it suggests that everything happened shortly after 1880. André-Isidore writes and then partially erases the date of Carlo's escape and return. The manuscript reads '188...' (after the last '8' of the erased date there is a space with the erasure and then a comma).

The Lefèbvre family was well known in Paris, where they had relatives and even interests, and so Ernesto was forced to pay the debts left by his son so as not to tarnish the family's good name. It was at this point that his father took away any possibility of spending money by having the Court of Naples declare him incapacitated. The effects of this act - which is lost, but whose contents are well known - were above all on Carlo's ability to spend, as he was unable to sign cheques, create assets in his own name or manage the family's funds.<sup>263</sup> Obviously, he was also deprived of any managerial functions in the Cartiere del Fibreno. In the meantime, Antonietta and her son Carlo Ernesto remained in the Balsorano castle, far from prying eyes, isolated.

### **The clash: the memory of Vastarini Cresi**

We obtain further, precise information on the case from the memorandum published by the lawyer entrusted with Ernesto Lefèbvre's interests: *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* (transl. *Observations in defence of Mr Ernesto Lefebvre, Count of Balsorano, civil plaintiff in the case against Enrico Catalano and others for forgery of business records*).<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> XIX 4482 vol. VIII, p. 127 ff.

<sup>264</sup> 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.

The text recalls that Ernesto had his son interdicted by the court in Naples.<sup>265</sup> First of all, it should be noted that the publication of such a memoir was an indication of the importance of the event and did indeed interest the newspapers of the time, such as 'Il Mattino' of Naples, but with great caution so as not to read more into these brief articles than what we find in this text. Edoardo Scarfoglio and Matilde Serao, the leading journalists of the newspaper, were very close to Lefèbvre.

It is clear that the lawyer, Vastarini Cresi, named Enrico Catalano in the title and not Carlo Lefèbvre, out of a kind of modesty towards his client, since Enrico Catalano and Carlo Lefèbvre were equally responsible for what was attributed to them. After being banned for a few years, Ernesto reversed the decisions he had taken at Teresa's insistence. He put his trust back in his son, who said he wanted to settle down and had moved back to Naples.



The lawyer Alfonso Vastarini-Chiesi.

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<sup>265</sup> Vastarini Cresi, *Osservazioni*, cit., p 17.

In fact, on 11 April 1885, he went before the notary Carlo de Angelis and gave his son the mandate to manage and administer the Fibreno factories, with their annexes and dependencies, i.e. the warehouses and other services that surrounded the industrial complex. At that time, Manifatture del Fibreno employed around 500 people, a reduction of at least 100 compared to the previous decade: despite the crisis, they remained an important reality. With a subsequent deed, signed before the same notary on 12 May, he "extended the powers granted to him also to the management of his civil assets", and on 26 August, at Carlo's request, he signed a third mandate, adding the power "to carry out all financial operations and claims arising from the needs of the administration and cash on securities and valuables".<sup>266</sup> In short, in the course of that year, 1885, Carlo was forgiven everything, given full confidence and prepared, as the first-born son, to take 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 matters into his own hands at a time - Naples at the end of the 19th century - when many things were changing rapidly, progress was being made, plans were being made, labour legislation was changing, the market had become completely open and new players were replacing the old group of Neapolitan landowners and industrialists. Cartiere Lefèbvre, which was still at the forefront of innovation, could have succeeded. But you needed a strong wrist, and Ernesto was probably unable, or at least while Carlo was coming to his senses, unable to find someone who could take the lead and make decisions. It must be remembered that Manifatture del Fibreno was still a family business and it was not in Ernesto's mind, nor in Charles', to have someone from outside the family make 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

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<sup>266</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 3-4.

and the glory of those who had founded it".<sup>267</sup> It may not have been flourishing, but it was certainly not making a loss. One wonders why Francesco was not trusted in the same way as he was later. Probably the family tradition was that anything had to be done to get the eldest son back.

In a short space of time, Carlo did indeed default on payments to his suppliers, and the lawyer makes it clear that he did this in order to divert money from the treasury; not only that, but he had the huge deposits that formed the dowry of the various establishments sold at a loss and did not pay his father the income due or the conspicuous profits that had been extracted from the industry before his administration. Vastarini Cresi mentions among Carlo's 'mad dissipations' that of keeping no less than 37 horses in his stables and the project of 'designing the city of Carlopoli'. Perhaps this last project was more of an exaggeration on the part of the Prince of the Forum, or perhaps it was a real estate project of the kind that had become the business of many in the Naples of the building fever: the construction of districts, blocks and blocks of flats. The lavish passion for horses had already been denounced by André-Isidore and contrasted with the moderation of Charles-Flavien and Ernesto, who always travelled in a carriage drawn by two horses. Ernesto first tried to persuade his son to voluntarily renounce the powers he had abused, in order to "spare his father the shame of a re-enactment with the necessary and widespread publicity", but his son did not listen, also because the knight Enrico Catalano, "well known to the penal justice system", had exercised a negative influence on him "for 14 or 15 years".<sup>268</sup> Catalano had therefore been in prison several times and was a convicted criminal. This detail allows us to confirm the accuracy of the beginning of Carlo's dissipations in 1870, as André-Isidore also says.

This was the same Enrico Catalano who had printed the florid *Necrologio* di Charles Lefèbvre in 1858. André-Isidore had met him in 1865 and had been an old friend of Charles's in the 1830s and 1850s, or

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<sup>267</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid*.



perhaps he was simply a Lefèbvre courtier of the golden age, which is why we find him mentioned in the *Journal*. Catalano is said to have been a man of skill and easy conversation.

He was certainly old at the time, being born around 1810. According to Vastarini Cresi, he had been hanging around the Lefèbvre family for many years, doing odd jobs but really looking for an opportunity to extort money. The subject was described by the Quaestor of Naples as "a knight of industry of the most dangerous kind, because he was sufficiently educated, had courteous and urbane manners, and was easily and insinuatingly talkative".<sup>269</sup> His wife, as we know, was a painter of Latvian nationality. The fact that the Quaestor described him as a knight of industry, i.e. an entrepreneur, makes us realise that he must have been involved in business with the Lefèbvre family, either as a supplier or as a customer, and must have won the confidence of Charles and then Ernesto. We know from André-Isidore's notes that he also dealt in paintings and art publications.

Another witness, the lawyer and deputy Federico Grossi, claimed that he had "never in his life found or known, either in reality or in the pages of books, even novels, a more dangerous type than the self-proclaimed knight Catalano Enrico". He was, according to Vastarini, "not least responsible for the misfortunes of the Balsorano household, due to the utterly inexplicable influence he had exercised over Carlo Lefèbvre for years".<sup>270</sup> A fictitious, determined and dangerous character who influenced the young Lefèbvre, and especially Carlo, he seems to suggest. This portrait is at odds with the good impression he made on Charles, Rosanne, Ernesto and André-Isidore himself. Vastarini Cresi seems to place all the blame on Catalan in order to take some of it away from Carlo, who was judged to be the victim of his older friend.

After a few months of correspondence, Carlo renounced his claims. At the end of May 1886 he sent a draft of the renunciation, in which he inserted a clause that his father could not accept (Vastarini Cresi does not specify, but I understand it was the payment of a sum), so that the

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<sup>269</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

latter, having broken all the delays, revoked the mandates on 1 June 1886.

It was then that the real reason for Carlo's tergiversations was revealed. He had signed a contract with a certain Giovanni Gessner in 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 Francesco Carignani, Duke of Tolve (1852-1887), with the management and operation of the wallpaper warehouse of the Stabilimenti del Fibreno, located in the warehouses of Via Nazionale in Rome, for a period of nine years and without any consideration. On 30 May, for the same period, he entrusted to Messrs. Antonio Annicelli and Enrico Battinelli the management of the Fibreno wallpaper warehouse in Naples, for an annual fee of 12,000 lire.<sup>271</sup>

When Catalano and Carlo realised that Count Ernesto and his other brother Francesco were going to get their property back, they set about "exploiting him in a way that could not have been worse, so that the Count and his other son Francesco, as a sign of the implacable hatred of Carlo and Catalano, would have nothing but an enormous passivity".<sup>272</sup> This also shows that there was a distance between Carlo and Francesco and that, although André-Isidore considered them similar in character, Carlo's behaviour was worse and also damaging to his brother.

Furthermore, Carlo drew up 21 bills of exchange 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. Enrico Catalano endorsed six of them to Giuseppe Jengo who, on the following 26 October, presented them for collection to the Società di Credito Meridionale, which in turn presented them to the Fibreno depository in via Pignatelli 18, where they were not paid. Three days later, a protest was lodged: the non-

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<sup>271</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7. These three contracts were declared null and void by the judge.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid*. "Enrico Catalano and Carlo Lefèbvre's 'implacable hatred' against the latter's relatives seems to be a licence for Vastarini-Cresi's harangue. The maneuvers of the two accomplices seem to be inspired simply by reasons of interest.

payment of a bill of exchange and its forgery was, of course, a criminal offence and created an unprecedented scandal for the Lefèbvre family.<sup>273</sup>

On hearing of this, Count Ernesto denounced his son Carlo and Catalano for falsifying commercial documents: a very serious but obligatory step. In January 1887, two more false bills were presented to the same number of Roman merchants. The police discovered that Catalano, no stranger to such crimes, was behind the operation. The scandal that followed was huge. Cartiere del Fibreno was one of the largest and most prestigious companies in southern Italy. Investigations revealed that the bills of exchange apparently presented by Cartiere's management had been issued after 1 June 1886, the date on which the warrants had been revoked, and bore the false date of 27 January. The fraud was therefore blatant.

Despite the inevitable condemnation and the evidence of malice, Cartiere del Fibreno, already in crisis due to the economic situation, the obsolescence of its equipment and the decline in orders, could not be saved and had to be sold. We do not know whether the sale was due to Carlo's behaviour, but the bleeding of money and credibility, with a probable reduction or cancellation of orders, was the classic straw that broke the camel's back.

In 1888, they began to sell off their possessions, but not all at once and not suddenly: they tried to save themselves by renting out the business before selling the buildings. In this context, the cousin indirectly suggests that the dissipation of both Csrlò and Franz was at the root of the weakening of the family's substance: "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".<sup>274</sup> In the years following the deaths of Francesco and

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<sup>273</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 8-9. The affair is also reconstructed in *Il diritto commerciale: rivista periodica e critica di giurisprudenza e legislazione*, Nistri, Pisa 1889, pp. 239-241.

<sup>274</sup> AB, 4483, vol. XII, p. 384.

Carlo, the most obvious effect was the withdrawal from Naples and the south. We do not know the fate of Catalano, although he seems to have been imprisoned, but we do know that Carlo was tried in absentia. He fled to France and was probably pardoned when he returned. There is certainly no record of his imprisonment.

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