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Criminals or Bad Boys?
The Reform of Juvenile Reformatories in Liberal Italy

SUMMARY: Introduction – 1. Children in Civil and Criminal Law – 2. From Houses of Custody to Reformatories – 3. The Reformatory at Tivoli – 4. Education – 5. Work – 6. Teaching Staff – Conclusion.

Introduction

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, children became a focus of social anxiety, scholarly research, and government policy in Europe and the Americas. Several factors underlay the explosion of debate, publication, and legislation about children, a category whose definition was expanding to include the new notion of adolescence. Demographic growth – attributable to improvement in diets, medical care, and sanitation – burdened families with increasing numbers of children. Urbanization made these children more visible as factory workers or as beggars and vagabonds on city streets. Initially labeled as a criminal component of the «dangerous classes», these children were gradually reconceived as victims, whose families failed to nurture them physically and morally. Viewed as a group that was «dangerous» yet «in danger», youth produced both fear and sympathy that invited intervention from outside the family. A coalition of «child savers» developed strategies to both discipline and protect children, drawing from the traditional fields of law and medicine; the new fields of psychiatry, criminology, and pedagogy; and political reform philosophies such as feminism and socialism¹.

Italy participated in this transnational movement to reconceptualize childhood as a phase of life deserving special attention by scientists, doctors, lawyers, lay reformers, feminists, and the liberal state. Much is still unknown about the Italian movement of child savers because of

¹ The phrase comes from the pioneering work by A. Platt, *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency*, Chicago 1977. On the child-saving movement in Europe, see M. Dupont-Bouchat-É. Pierre (eds.), *Enfance et justice au XIX^e siècle: Essais d'histoire comparée de la protection de l'enfance, 1820-1914*, Paris 2001 and J.J. Dekker, *The Will to Change the Child: Re-education Homes for Children at Risk in Nineteenth Century Western Europe*, Frankfurt 2001.

«the widespread inattention of historians to the subject of childhood», which Laura Guidi noted in 1999². The twenty-first century, however, has been marked by an acceleration of historical scholarship on the rich and varied Italian initiatives to reconceptualize early stages of life and to introduce the notion of children's rights. In his synthetic volume *Italy in the Age of Pinocchio*, Carl Ipsen has enumerated the categories of children who were perceived as dangerous or in danger in liberal Italy – including those who had been abandoned, emigrated, or put to work – and of the many organizations, institutions, and laws meant to ameliorate their lives³. Patrizia Guarnieri, in a series of deeply researched case studies, has explored the development of pediatrics as a branch of medicine applied in new hospitals and local clinics for children in Rome; the role of the venerable foundling home in Florence, the *Innocenti*, in saving newborn lives through the evolving work of nineteenth-century physicians, nurses, and mothers; and the important role of the new field of child psychiatry in promoting the educability, rather than simply the warehousing, of «abnormal» or marginal youth⁴. In a work that focuses on World War I, Beatrice Pisa has traced initiatives of state institutions, doctors, and organized women's groups to care for abandoned and orphaned children.⁵ Maria Montessori, still recognized internationally for her pioneering pedagogy, is the subject of an intellectual biography by Erica Moretti⁶. Most recently, Luisa Tasca has argued that Italy's «child study movement» – composed of psychologists, psychiatrists, anthropologists, and hygienists – was more complex than often recognized and had an important impact

² L. Guidi, *La storia dell'infanzia in Italia: Studi recenti, zone oscure, questioni aperte*, in «Studi storici», 22, (1999), p. 849.

³ C. Ipsen, *Italy in the Age of Pinocchio: Children and Danger in the Liberal Era*, New York 2006.

⁴ P. Guarnieri, *Piccoli, poveri e malati. Gli ambulatori per l'infanzia a Roma nell'età liberale*, in «Italia contemporanea», 223 (2001), pp. 225-257; Ead., *Non del tutto abbandonati. Dottori, donne e neonati nel brefotrofio degli Innocenti (1850-90)* in «Medicina e Storia», 2, (2002), pp. 7-50; Ead., *Dall'accoglienza alla cura. La riforma sanitaria nel brefotrofio degli Innocenti di Firenze 1890-1918*, in «Medicina e storia», 7 (2004), pp. 57-100; Ead., *Un piccolo essere perverso: il bambino nella cultura scientifica tra Otto e Novecento*, in «Contemporanea», 9 (2006), pp. 253-284.

⁵ B. Pisa, *Infanzia abbandonata, orfani e pupilli della nazione in Italia (1915-1920)*, Roma 2020.

⁶ E. Moretti, *The Best Weapon for Peace: Maria Montessori, Education, and Children's Rights*, Madison 2021.

at the international level⁷. This cluster of studies has transformed our understanding of liberal Italy's role in the transnational child-saving movement from one of scattered initiatives to a broader interdisciplinary investigation of children's lives in liberal Italy.

Children also became the focus of attention in Italy's criminal justice system which, having inherited a hodge-podge of institutions for juvenile detention from the pre-unitary monarchies of the peninsula, expanded their number and sought to reform their practices⁸. These penal institutions shared many characteristics with the other civil initiatives involved in child-saving. First, they were reserved for youth under twenty-one years of age and regulated by specific articles of the criminal code that curbed excesses of punishment and required release upon reaching the age of majority. Secondly, although regulated by national law, reformatories occupied the borderline between state and church, some being entirely secular and others managed by religious staff. This mixture of public and private control typified not only many other institutions for children – such as foundling homes, orphanages, schools, and hospitals – but also the entire sector of charity in general after unification. Thirdly, punishment of youth was divided by gender, with institutions for boys receiving more resources and innovative programs of reform than those for girls. In a nation that was gradually extending suffrage to all men, boys were increasing privileged as future citizens while girls were mostly left in the private, domestic sphere.

This paper will address the questions of how and to what extent the punishment of children was subject to reform within the more general values of the child-saving movement during the period between unification and World War 1. It will explore the new penal policies toward children of the Italian state in both theory and practice; most of these were modeled on reforms discussed at the International Penitentiary

⁷ L. Tasca, *The Science of the Child in Liberal Italy*, London 2024, originally published as *Piccoli primitivi. Scienza e studio dell'infanzia nell'Italia liberale*, Roma 2024.

⁸ For a classic overview, see the two-part study by D. Izzo, *Da Filippo Franci alla riforma Doria (1667-1907)*, in «Rassegna di studi penitenziari», 4 (1956), pp. 289-332 and *Il trattamento dei minorenni delinquenti dalla circolare Orlando al progetto Ferri (1908-1921)*, in «Rassegna di studi penitenziari», 8 (1957), pp. 146-194. For more recent contributions, see F. Colao, «*L'albero nuovo si piega meglio di quello vecchio*»: *La giustizia "educatrice" per i minori nell'Italia liberale*, in «Historia et ius», 10 (2016), paper n. 1, pp. 1-29 and P. Passaniti, *Diritto e questione minorile tra Otto e Novecento* in L. Lacchè-M. Stronati (curr.), *Questione criminale e identità nazionale in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, Macerata 2014, pp. 157-176.

Congresses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries⁹. A wave of legislation, culminating in the first decade of the twentieth century, incapsulated the vision of the Italian parliament and, more decisively, the Division of Prisons (*Direzione Generale delle Carceri*), for the treatment of young offenders. To measure the implementation of this legislation, a microhistory of the reformatory of Tivoli will reconstruct everyday lives of its inmates. As a guiding question, the paper will focus on two areas of special concern to child savers – education and work – and evaluate similarities and differences in the lives of children inside and outside of reformatory walls.

1. *Children in Civil and Criminal Law*

Because of the complex nature of youth reformatories, which straddled the line between the state and the family, the place of children in civil and criminal law was strictly connected. The Civil Code of 1865 placed legitimate children under the rule of the father according to the traditional doctrine of *patria potestà*. Until their offspring reached legal majority at the age of twenty-one, fathers had the right to control their property, fix their place of residence, and make decisions about their education¹⁰. While this dominance by fathers was typical in nineteenth-century European family law, one provision was more specific, although not unique, to Italy. According to Article 222 of the Civil Code, fathers who could not «restrain the perversions of their child», could make a judicial request for internment in an «educational or correctional institution» for the purpose of reform. Judges were not required to investigate the charges against the child but could accept a simple verbal petition from parents and expedite the admission of the child into a reformatory «without explaining his reasons in the decree»¹¹. As the legal basis for incorporating non-convicted children into the reformatory system, Article 222 aroused stormy debates

⁹ On the subject of children at the International Penitentiary Congresses, see C.G. Leonard, *Priceless Children? Penitentiary Congresses Debating Childhood: A Quest for Social Order in Europe, 1846-1895* in C. Emsley-E. Johnson-P. Spierenburg (curr.), *Social Control in Europe*, Columbus 2004, pp. 125-148.

¹⁰ See Civil Code of 1865 for *patria potestà* (Arts. 220-239); marriage (art. 55); and «emancipation» (Arts. 311, 323).

¹¹ Civil Code of 1865, Article 222. On the use of Article 222 by parents, see B. Montesi, *Questo figlio a chi lo do? Minori, famiglie, istituzioni (1865-1914)*, Milano 2007.

in parliament and the press.

A second group of children, who had not undergone court proceedings but were also submitted to preventive detention, were beggars, vagabonds, and abandoned children. Under the Public Security (PS) Law of 1865, police could arrest any minor under the age of sixteen who was wandering city streets on the suspicion of potential criminality¹². Although the sanction of internment in a reformatory was based on an «administrative» rather than «criminal» statute, it mirrored that for convicted juvenile delinquents. In fact prison sentences following police arrest were often longer because, rather than being limited by the criminal code, they were indeterminate and could last until the age of majority. The subsequent PS law of 1889 made these strictures harsher by adding more categories of youth who were subject to arrest, including the exclusively female category of prostitute, and extended the age limit to eighteen¹³. While many children were returned by police officers to their parents, others spent long periods of their adolescence in reformatories.

Finally, a minority of reformatory inmates had been sentenced after trial under complicated provisions that differentiated treatment by age. All youth under twenty-one were eligible to have their punishment shortened or even abolished. The key concept was «discernimento», or whether a child had the maturity to understand the difference between right and wrong. According to the Sardinian-Italian Criminal Code of 1859, only minors under fourteen years of age were eligible for acquittal on the grounds of lacking *discernimento* although this finding was not mandatory. Judges could convict children of any age if believed to possess the ability of moral choice but had to offer them reduced sentences. Except for those over eighteen accused of homicide, parricide, or poisoning, all children were exempt from the death penalty and hard labor¹⁴.

In consonance with the increasing interest in child protection, the Zanardelli Criminal Code of 1889 was more liberal. All children under nine were recognized as incapable of *discernimento* and those between nine and fourteen remained eligible for acquittal if found incapable of understanding the illegality of their offense. However, because civil judges had the authority to levy «administrative» orders of confinement even after these cases were dropped, a small number of very young children continued to populate Italy's reformatories. For all other minors, the

¹² Public Security Law of 1865, Arts. 72, 103, and 107.

¹³ Public Security Law of 1889, Arts. 113-116.

¹⁴ Sardinian-Italian Criminal Code of 1859, Arts. 87-91.

Zanardelli Code continued to offer reduced sentences and to exempt them from the most severe punishment, that of incarceration for life¹⁵. In 1904, the approval of probation redounded to the benefit of minors, who initially made up one-half of those diverted from prison sentences.¹⁶ If eligible for probation, the courts were obliged to assign them temporarily to a reformatory, rather than an adult jail, during the trial itself¹⁷. The law on probation, therefore, added an additional, albeit small, category of internees to youth institutions.

2. *From Houses of Custody to Reformatories*

This shift from punishment toward protection was even more pronounced in a series of administrative regulations that defined the organization of different categories of penal institutions, the functions of their staff, and the treatment of inmates. On a symbolic level, the General Regulation for Prisons of 1891, which for the first time unified all Italian penal institutions under one code, substituted the modern label of «reformatory» for the traditional denomination of «house of custody», the institutions in which minors had been traditionally interned¹⁸. The earlier Regulation for Houses of Custody, promulgated in 1862 and emphasizing the centrality of labor, differed little from that for adult penitentiaries. In line with the Sardinian-Italian criminal code, custodial prisons were not yet conceived as specialized institutions for youth but also admitted adults who were judged to lack a full capacity for moral discernment, such as the insane and the deaf. Although in practice very few adults were assigned to custodial prisons, the state clearly had not yet developed a coherent philosophy of youth reform. Like adults, minors underwent a period of isolation upon admission and were required to maintain the rule of silence after joining their peers in dormitories and workrooms. To keep in touch

¹⁵ Criminal Code of 1889, Arts. 53-56. If found to have acted with *discernimento*, youth between 9-12 were among those who received reduced sentences.

¹⁶ *Rivista di Discipline Carcerarie (RDC)*, 30 (1905), p. 151. During 1904, 6,508 of the 12,340 persons given probation were children under 18 years old.

¹⁷ Legge 26 giugno 1904, n. 267, Art. 7. Only those under 14 were prohibited from adult jails.

¹⁸ Regolamento generale degli Stabilimenti carcerari e dei riformatori, RD 1 feb. 1891, n. 260.

with their families, they were allowed only one visit and one letter per month. Five articles of the regulation outlined a long list of bad behaviors for which they could be punished ranging from lack of cleanliness and simple laziness to rebellion and attempted escape¹⁹. The former elicited mild punishments such as deprivation of recreation or one meal per day while the latter brought solitary confinement with a diet of bread and water. The most extreme measure was the *cella oscura*, or incarceration in a punishment cell deprived of any light.

In 1876 and 1877, two administrative decrees began to distinguish houses of custody from adult penitentiaries, although the steps were tentative²⁰. While adults could still be assigned to houses of custody, they were to be strictly separated from minors. The purpose of internment for youth was now clearly stated to be «reform and moral education [...] accompanied by elementary schooling and instruction in a craft or trade»²¹. Yet licensed tutors (*istitutori*) never replaced the untrained chaplains as teachers, as promised in the law, nor was the requirement that the three categories of youth – those consigned by courts, the police, or parents – occupy separate quarters in each institution²². In 1888, Beltrani Scalia partially remedied the last problem by designating that each boys' reformatory, whether public or private, admit only one legal category. No similar differentiation, however, was made among girls' institutions, in which the cohabitation of criminal and non-criminal internees – a practice universally condemned by all legal and criminological schools – remained in place. That Beltrani Scalia ignored the backward state of girl's institutions cannot be attributed to their marginal number since they constituted 45 percent of all reformatories. Instead, in a pattern that would be repeated throughout the following years, reformers devoted no particular attention to the needs of girls, who were not perceived as fundamental to nation building.

The General Prison Regulation 1891 constituted a more radical break with the past by classifying reformatories as «special institutions of

¹⁹ Regolamento per le case penali di custodia del Regno, Arts. 45-49, RD 27 nov. 1862, n. 1018.

²⁰ RD 17 novembre 1876 and RD 29 novembre 1877.

²¹ RD 17 novembre 1876, Art. 2.

²² U. Conti, *Case di Custodia*, in L. Lucchini (cur.), *Il Digesto italiano: Enciclopedia metodica e alfabetica di legislazione, dottrina e giurisprudenza*, VI/2, Torino 1891, pp. 222-224.

punishment» in contrast to «ordinary» jails and penitentiaries for adults²³. Comprised of only five articles, the section on reformatories sketched the broad principles for the internment of all three legal categories of youth. Directors of both public and private reformatories were to draw up «internal regulations» that would instill «a love of order, discipline, and respect for their superiors» as well as habits of «bodily cleanliness and sobriety of behavior and language»²⁴. Work and education were required «for the purpose of preparing children for an honest job appropriate to their own social class»²⁵. Rewards and punishments would «strengthen moral feelings and form character»²⁶. The only reference to gender regarded teachers, who were to be civil servants in public reformatories for boys and nuns in female institutions. The Ordinance permitted reformatories to hire instructors in specialized areas such as drawing, music, and gymnastics but this clause was implemented only in the case of boys²⁷.

In 1904, Doria began to implement a radical reordering of juvenile institutions of punishment by separating them administratively from adult prisons. As an initial step, he replaced prison guards in government reformatories with civilian personnel – proctors and tutors – who were to reform, rather than simply discipline, their charges²⁸. The next step came with a 1905 decree that required all employees to be certified in primary education and promised to offer them specialized training in criminal law, pedagogy, and «the elementary principles of anthropology»²⁹. A brief decree of 1905 re-organized juvenile and adult penal institutions into two parallel bureaucracies under what was now renamed the General Division of Prisons and Reformatories³⁰. Doria completed the process in 1907 by issuing a detailed «Regulation for government reformatories». This law defined the four categories of youth that were eligible for admission: «corrupted minors who have rebelled against paternal authority» under the age of twenty-one; beggars and prostitutes under the age of eighteen

²³ Regolamento Generale, 1891, Art. 4.

²⁴ Regolamento Generale, 1891, Art. 487.

²⁵ Regolamento Generale, 1891, Art. 487.

²⁶ Regolamento Generale, 1891, Art. 487.

²⁷ Regolamento Generale, 1891, Art. 128.

²⁸ Legge 3 Luglio 1904, n. 318.

²⁹ R. D. 24 Marzo 1907, n. 122, Art. 24.

³⁰ R.D. 10 Novembre 1905, n. 572.

who had been picked up by police; juvenile delinquents under the age of nine or those under the age of fourteen who acted without *discernimento*; and first offenders between 9 and 13 years at the recommendation of a judge³¹. Convicted youth were now expelled from the reformatories and re-directed to the adult penitentiary system. The Regulation made few distinctions between the sexes, devoting only four articles specifically to girls and declaring that «the same system of education and discipline would be applied» in male and female reformatories³². Yet the few exceptions to this rule, made to accommodate «the special necessities of the [female] sex», promised to vitiate this equality in practice³³. For example, girls over the age of fourteen had to learn «domestic tasks» by working «in the kitchen, in the laundry, in the supply room, in the storerooms, and in the general cleaning at the institution»³⁴. Boys were under no such obligation.

3. *The Reformatory at Tivoli*

The reformatory of Tivoli, established in 1879, provides an instructive case study of the national project to reform penal confinement for minors. With its male population, Tivoli was typical of institutions of the punishment for youth. While boys as a proportion of juvenile inmates decreased at the national level from 86 percent in 1871 to about 60 percent in the 1890s, their numbers rebounded to 70 percent by 1914³⁵. It should be noted, however, that rates of interned girls significantly exceeded those for adult women in penitentiaries (4 percent). Nevertheless, overall boys were significantly more likely than girls to face incarceration for criminal or bad behavior during the fifty years after unification.

Yet in other ways, Tivoli differed significantly from most other reformatories. First, it was public rather than private, that is, under religious management. Administered directly by the state – specifically the Division of Prisons within the Ministry of the Interior – Tivoli constituted one of governmental reformatories whose number multiplied over the

³¹ R.D. 14 Luglio 1907, n. 606, Art. 1.

³² *Ivi*, Art. 165.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ivi*, Art. 167.

³⁵ *Annuario Statistico (Ann. Stat.)*, 1871-1914.

years but, even in 1914, housed only 34 percent of all juvenile inmates, all of them boys³⁶. Only in these public reformatories could Doria directly implement his reforms, such as the replacement of large dormitories with individual sleeping cells; the substitution of teachers for prison guards; and the expansion of programs for both education and professional training. Despite being codified in a series of laws culminating in the Regulation of 1907, such radical improvements were never successfully imposed on private reformatories, whose religious directors were often recalcitrant to change and only indirectly subjected to state control.

Secondly, unlike most reformatories, which were assigned only one type of inmate, Tivoli held all three categories for most of the period before World War I. While seemingly in violation of the prison administration's official prohibition of mixing legal categories in one institution, Tivoli's wealth of buildings kept each group apart. Each of its three buildings – labelled the *Centrale*, the *Cappuccini*, and the *Missioni* – had served as a monastery until unification, when the new secular state subjected religious institutions that did not carry out social services to confiscation. The *Centrale*, formerly a Jesuit monastery, became the section for boys interned for paternal correction. The *Cappuccini*, named after the former Capuchin convent, initially interned vagabonds and homeless boys arrested by police but was quickly converted to an institution for young children acquitted for lack of *discernimento*³⁷. The *Missioni*, formerly a monastery of the Missionaries of San Vincenzo de' Paoli, became a high-security unit for older children convicted by the courts or for troublesome inmates transferred from other reformatories³⁸. With its three sections, Tivoli was exceptional for the large size of its inmate population, which increased from 86 in 1881, soon after its founding, to over 300 by the turn of the twentieth century³⁹.

Because of its large size and the multiple legal categories in its population, Tivoli provides an especially useful case study for measuring the practical institutionalization of Doria's reforms. Most importantly, did universal education in fact replace child labor as called for by the child-saving movement? To what extent were the radical revisions in

³⁶ *Ann. Stat.*, 1871-1914. The only public reformatory for girls, at Perugia, was closed in 1910 but previously was managed by nuns who imposed religious rather than secular values.

³⁷ Codice Penale (Zanardelli), 1889, Art. 53 and 54 (pt. 1).

³⁸ Codice Penale, 1889, Art. 54, pt. 2 and 55.

³⁹ *Statistica Carceraria (Stat. Carc.)*; *Ann. Stat.*; and *Statistica dei Riformatori (Stat. Rif.)* (1881-1914).

penal and prison legislation implemented in Tivoli? How closely did the lives of its inmates correspond to boys on the outside? While we have no documentary evidence from the boys themselves, these questions can be partially answered on the basis of correspondence between Tivoli's personnel and the Division of Prison in Rome; inspector's reports; and official statistics collected about myriad aspects of each reformatory.

4. *Education*

Did education become a central focus of Tivoli's agenda of rehabilitation in line with national legislation and the philosophy of the child-saving movement? Since unification, two laws made school attendance obligatory in Italy for the purpose of eliminating disparities inherited from the pre-unitary monarchies and of increasing literacy, which stood at only 34 percent for men and 20 percent for women at the time of unification in 1861⁴⁰. The Casati law of 1861 required children of both sexes to attend classes for two years and that each municipality fund free, secular elementary education. In 1877, the Coppino law raised the minimum number of years to three, stipulating that children attend school from age six to nine. Enforcement of the laws was weakened both by the resistance of many poor families, especially in the rural south, to losing the labor of their children and from the inability of many small cities to fund fully the educational mandate. Yet the national laws at least recognized education as not only a right of children by also an important mechanism for turning them into modern Italian citizens. But did the reformatory at Tivoli offer equal educational opportunities for its inmates?

Even before Doria's reforms, which replaced prison guards with teachers, education seemed to be a priority at Tivoli. In a report of 1896 to the central prison administration, the Director E. Di Marzo advocated passionately for a special law to distinguish youth reformatories from prisons and to redefine their mission as one of education rather than of punishment⁴¹. As a surrogate of the family, reformatories had the duty to encourage honesty rather than vice, which would be possible only if

⁴⁰ G. Vecchi, *In ricchezza e in povertà: Il benessere degli italiani dall'Unità a oggi*, Bologna 2011, p. 175. Children under 6 were excluded from these statistics.

⁴¹ Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), DG Carceri, Arch. Gen., Atti amm. (1896-1900), b. 88, f. 65-I.

teachers replaced the current prison guards, whom he believed lacked the necessary temperament and training to guide the rehabilitation of the boys. Such a transformation would finally answer «the criticism of the positivists of the school of [criminal] anthropology who [...] deny the efficacy of our work»⁴². Despite his rejection of Cesare Lombroso's critiques of Italy's reformatories, he nevertheless echoed criminal anthropological theory by classifying the inmates into two groups: the reformable and the seemingly incorrigible. The first and by far the largest group consisted of the boys in the Centrale and Cappuccini buildings, who, according to Di Marzo, «feel a sense of duty, an appreciation of work, school, good behavior, and our efforts to raise their spirits»⁴³. The Missioni section, on the other hand, housed youth who were «incorrigible [...] born villains, violent and corrupt thieves»⁴⁴. Lacking honesty and honor, these inmates required the «iron hand of repression» to tame their inborn criminality⁴⁵. Thus, Di Marzo seemed to have absorbed the positivist warning that a proportion of children might never mature into «normal» adulthood.

Despite this pessimism about the psychological and moral disparities among the boys, educational programs were established in all three sections. As early as 1884, a national inspector reported that the schoolrooms in the *Centrale* and *Missioni* buildings were well-situated with plenty of air and light while boys in the future *Cappuccini* building, which was under renovation, could use the sacristy of the large church for lessons⁴⁶. In statements attached to Di Marzo's report of 1896, the instructor of the boys housed in the Cappuccini and Missioni buildings was mostly satisfied with the progress of his students. Numbering ninety-five at the beginning of the year, with an additional 38 – mostly illiterate – boys later admitted, the large majority learned to read, write, and do simple arithmetic according to his perhaps unrealistic claims. The teacher of the internees for paternal correction, most of whom had advanced past the first grade, was less sanguine. While many of his charges had made progress during the year, several problems hindered his efforts: the high turnover of students during the year, the large range in their ages, and the diversity of their regional dialects. Aware of national standards for each

⁴² ACS, DG Carceri, Arch. Gen., Atti amm. (1896-1900), b. 88, f. 65-I.

⁴³ ACS, DG Carceri, Arch. Gen., Atti amm. (1896-1900), b. 88, f. 65-I.

⁴⁴ ACS, DG Carceri, Arch. Gen., Atti amm. (1896-1900), b. 88, f. 65-I.

⁴⁵ ACS, DG Carceri, Arch. Gen., Atti amm. (1896-1900), b. 88, f. 65-I.

⁴⁶ Direzione Generale delle Carceri, Ministero dell'Interno, *Relazione del Direttore generale e degli ispettori delle carceri per gli anni 1878-1883*, Roma 1884, pp. 443-444.

level of elementary education, both teachers promised to instill patriotism and respect for the law to turn each student into «an honest worker and good citizen» or even a «hardworking gentleman»⁴⁷. This commitment to education by Di Marzo, and by his part-time teachers, demonstrated that calls for reform came not just from the top of the bureaucracy in Rome but also from select reformatories like Tivoli.

Because of the limitations of employing only part-time teachers, it was no surprise that Di Marzo enthusiastically approved Doria's replacement of prison guards with full-time educational staff in 1904. In a letter to his superior, he praised the new proctors and tutors, who held high hopes of future promotions and, if holding university degrees, of eventually becoming reformatory directors themselves. He assured Doria of the «marvelous service of the new personnel, who were implementing modern educational methods» in all three sections of Tivoli, a positive evaluation that was confirmed by an inspector sent from Rome⁴⁸. After only one year, Di Marzo rated more than half of the new teaching staff to be «excellent» «and only seven out of thirty-seven to be «average» in carrying out their duties⁴⁹. He noted that most in the latter category simply needed more experience while two were in poor health. Of those rated more highly, Di Marzo singled out their qualities of intelligence, energy, patience, kindness, and affection as most important in reformatory staff. He was even pleased with the work of Giuseppe Morando despite his tendency to drink «wine in larger quantities than necessary»⁵⁰.

Applauding the new system, Di Marzo reported in 1907 that 70 out of 80 boys had passed their exams while another 130 (out of 140) were promoted to a higher grade⁵¹. The following year, he praised several boys in the Cappuccini section who had «happily obtained their elementary school certificates» and were ready for high school courses in physics, math, and French⁵². An assistant proctor, Gravagno De Salo, requested permission to hold classes in scientific pedagogy for the tutors so that they could better understand and educate their charges.

⁴⁷ ACS, DG Carceri, Arch. Gen., Atti amm. (1896-1900), b. 88, f. 65-I.

⁴⁸ ACS, M. Grazia & Giustizia, DG Ist. Di Pena, Atti amm. (1906-1925), b. 115, f. 55M.

⁴⁹ This large number of employees included both teachers of «civil» and «professional» education.

⁵⁰ ACS, M. Grazia & Giustizia, DG Ist. di Pena, Atti amm. (1906-1925), b. 115, f. 55.

⁵¹ ACS, M. Grazia & Giustizia, DG Ist. di Pena, Atti amm. (1906-1925), b. 115, f. 55.

⁵² ACS, M. G&G, DG Isti. di Pena, Atti amm. (1906-1925), b. 100, f. 55.

In this way, «we can banish the sense of a prison, unlock the doors [...] and ring the bells of hope» for the children⁵³. Despite this rhetorical exaggeration, correspondence between the Director of Tivoli and the central administration shows a serious intent to implement Doria's dream of transforming public reformatories into schools. According to official statistics, however, success was limited to the higher grades; between 1909 and 1914, those inmates completing primary school rose slightly while most boys learned only the fundamentals of reading, writing, and math⁵⁴. Because most inmates remained less than 2-3 years, this apparent stasis may simply reflect the constant turnover of the reformatory population rather than absence of individual improvement⁵⁵.

5. *Work*

According to the principles of the child-saving movement, education was to replace work as the daily activity of children. Although Italy passed protective legislation for minors later than many other European nations, the new nation followed the general pattern of raising the age for engagement in certain occupations. The first child labor law, passed in 1886, covered only factories, quarries and mines. It forbade the employment of children under nine with a limit of eight hours per day for those aged 9-12⁵⁶. In 1902, a second law tightened these restrictions, with the minimum age raised to 12 and the maximum workday to 11 hours for those aged between 12-15⁵⁷. Agricultural labor, the most widespread

⁵³ ACS, M. G&G, DG Isti. di Pena, Atti amm. (1906-1925), b. 115, f. 55.

⁵⁴ Direzione Generale delle Carceri, Ministero dell'Interno, *Statistica dei riformatori* (Rome: Mantellate) 1909, pp. 144-59; 1910, pp. 114-25; 1911, pp. 128-41; 1912, pp. 146-59; 1913, pp. 150-57; and 1914, pp. 154-161) for statistics on educational levels.

⁵⁵ Direzione Generale delle Carceri, *Statistica dei riformatori* 1904-07, pp. 140-87; 1908, 118-33; 1909, pp. 144-59; 1910, pp. 114-25; 1911, pp. 128-141; 1912, pp. 146-59; 1913, pp. 150-57; 1914, pp. 154-161 for statistics on the duration of incarceration.

⁵⁶ In addition, the minimum age was 10 for underground work and 15 for dangerous work. For an excellent comparative table of the laws of 1886 and 1902, see C. Ipsen, *Italy in the Age of Pinocchio*, cit., p. 86. An earlier and narrower law of 1873 had forbidden children from participating in «wandering trades» (*professioni girovaghe*) such as that of street musicians.

⁵⁷ The 1902 law introduced some distinctions by gender: underground work required boys to be 13 years old and was forbidden for girls; dangerous work required boys to be 15 and girls 21; and the workday for girls over 15 was restricted to 12 hours.

employment category in Italy, was not included in either law. However, the legislation set a general framework by 1902 of forbidding the employment of children under the age of twelve or those who had not completed three years of education in line with the Coppino law. Did Tivoli respect these guidelines for its inmates?

From its establishment in 1879, the inmates received what was termed «industrial training», although it involved mostly artisanal production rather than the use of machines. In 1884, an inspector reported that Tivoli had four indoor workshops and the expectation of turning the *Cappuccini* section into an agricultural colony. He repeated the common wisdom among prison administrators that «it was not useful to train rural youth in a trade because, once liberated and returned to their families, they would work in the fields»⁵⁸. However, because the state never invested the money to develop a farm around the *Cappuccini* building, only a few boys were ever employed in agricultural pursuits. By 1911, agriculture constituted only one of the seven types of professional training offered at Tivoli and employed only one of the eleven specialized instructors⁵⁹. Clearly the dream of many Italian reformers to turn the reformatories into extensions of the agricultural colonies for adults was not achieved.

Instead, craft production dominated the remaining six workshops until World War I and beyond. During the period 1904-1914, the largest group of boys at Tivoli were trained in carpentry, followed by blacksmithing and then shoemaking⁶⁰. Instruction, under the guidance of proctors, tutors, or master craftsmen employed from the outside, provided specialized skills in each area. For example, carpentry students learned intricate wood carving – of leaves, rosettes, griffins, and cariatides – for the purpose of producing «artistic furniture»⁶¹. Boys under twelve years old attended

⁵⁸ Ministero dell'Interno, *Relazione del Direttore generale e degli ispettori delle carceri per gli anni 1878-1883*, cit., p. 448.

⁵⁹ *I Riformatorii Governativi Italiani alla Esposizione Internazionale di Torino 1911*, Roma 1911, p. 64.

⁶⁰ Ministero dell'Interno, *Statistica dei riformatori*, 1904-07, pp. 140-87; 1908, pp. 118-33; 1909, pp. 144-59; 1910, pp. 114-129; 1911, pp. 128-41; 1912, pp. 146-59; 1913, pp. 150-57; 1914, p.154-61. This pattern of artisanal work at Tivoli corresponds with Roberto Giulianelli's findings for reformatories throughout the peninsula. See R. Giulianelli, *Il lavoro dei minori nelle carceri e nei riformatori italiani (1860-1940)*, in C. Cenedella-G. Fumi (curr.), *Oltre l'assistenza: Lavoro e formazione professionale negli istituti per l'infanzia 'irregolare' in Italia tra Sette e Novecento*, Milano 2015, pp. 129-155.

⁶¹ Ministero della Giustizia Italiana, DG delle carceri e dei Riformatori, *Il lavoro negli stabilimenti carcerari e nei RR riformatori*, Roma 1923, p. 712.

classes in «manual labor» in which they learned «notions of design and of geometric shapes» from working in clay, cardboard, and metal wire⁶². As early as 1905, Director Di Marzo had successfully pleaded with Rome to extend classes in design, which were already available to the inmates in the Centrale and Cappuccini buildings, to those in the Missioni building⁶³. During their four-year course in design, boys first learned to draw «simple shapes by hand», then to create «geometric figures of an ornamental character» with mechanical devices, and then finally to copy «real models that could be applied to work»⁶⁴. Despite their positive assessment of craft education at Tivoli, authorities in Rome bemoaned the lack of funding for «machines and motorized equipment» that could have prepared the boys for jobs in «modern industries»⁶⁵.

In addition to the traditional types of education in literacy and crafts, Tivoli added two more modern types of training: in gymnastics and military exercises. Both were directly related to citizenship by training the male body to be strong and capable of defending the nation. According to a report commissioned by the Minister of the Interior in 1907 on «Physical Education in Reformatories», Tivoli was already well-equipped for such training. Based on a local visit, Michelangelo Jerace, an expert in gymnastics, praised Tivoli for its outdoor exercise courts: 3 for the *Missioni* building, 3 for the *Cappuccini* building, and 6 for the *Centrale*, one of which was «very large, beautiful and picturesque» measuring 50 meters in diameter⁶⁶. Not only did the *Centrale* boast more space for gymnastics but also more equipment, such as parallel bars, pommel horses, and wooden guns. The boys, organized into squads, practiced twice a week under the guidance of a specialized teacher, who received high praise from Jerace. His duties included training one squad in firefighting, an example of the wide range of skills offered at Tivoli.

As demonstrated by the inclusion of wooden guns on the list of exercise equipment, physical and military training were tightly linked in

⁶² Ministero della Giustizia Italiana, DGCR, *Il lavoro negli stabilimenti carcerari e nei RR riformatori*, cit., p. 710.

⁶³ ACS, M. G&G, DG Isti. di Pena, Atti amm. (1906-1925), b. 115, f. 55.

⁶⁴ Ministero della Giustizia Italiana, DGCR, *Il lavoro negli stabilimenti carcerari e nei RR riformatori*, cit., p. 712.

⁶⁵ Ministero della Giustizia Italiana, DGCR, *Il lavoro negli stabilimenti carcerari e nei RR riformatori*, cit., p. 709.

⁶⁶ ACS, Ministero di Grazia e Giustizia, Direzione Generale Istituti di Pena, Atti amm. (1906-1925), b. 35, f. 18.

the program of prison reform for boys and the role of reformatories with preparing their inmates for military service, which was required of all male citizens. That military service was promoted as an appropriate step for inmates after release was also clear from correspondence between the central prison administration and Tivoli's director about the importance of musical education. In 1908, Doria's office requested a list of all inmates whose level of expertise in playing an instrument would qualify them to join a military band. In response, the Director of Tivoli replied that its band comprised 28 members, with 35 other boys in training. However, he complained that their instruments were old and defective, making them difficult to master. Tivoli deserved «newer models of instruments as have been granted to all other Government Reformatories» because improved musical training was invaluable preparation for the boys' future military careers⁶⁷. Indeed, as in the case of artisanal trades, released inmates frequently found posts in the military, and related fields such as policing, as their first type of employment⁶⁸.

6. *Teaching Staff*

At Tivoli, the teaching staff was fundamental to the programs of education and professional training. Both Di Marzo, and Benedetto Altamura, who succeeded him as the reformatory's director, routinely proposed long lists of teachers to the Director General in Rome for recognition or rewards above their salaries. In 1910, for example, Director Altamura and his executive committee – comprised of the assistant director, doctor, and several proctors – recommended that twenty-three members of the teaching staff receive official commendations. Submitting a detailed list of their individual accomplishments, he praised the group for «distinguishing themselves in an assignment that was not only serious but also noble and philanthropic»⁶⁹. An additional fifteen teachers also received monetary bonuses because of their past record of multiple commendations⁷⁰. Other measures demonstrated the commitment of the

⁶⁷ ACS, M. G&G, DG Ist. di Pena, Atti amm. (1906-1925), b. 49, f. 18.

⁶⁸ ACS, M. Int., DG Carc., Arch. Gen., Atti amm. (1896-1900), b. 88, F. 56-I.

⁶⁹ ACS, M. Grazia & Giustizia, DG Ist. di Pena, Atti amm. (1906-1925), b. 115, f. 55M.

⁷⁰ Commendations and bonuses were awarded in accord with Rd 227, the Regolamento del Personale di educazione e di sorveglianza dei riformatori governativi, 24 marzo 1907,

director to strengthening his teaching staff. For example, in 1907 he offered them special lessons in scientific pedagogy as well as procuring permission from the Director General in Rome for the censors to attend courses at the University of Rome⁷¹. In 1914, he willingly re-arranged the schedule of classes so that teachers could return to their hometowns to vote⁷².

Yet the teachers were not exempt from criticism, particularly from the Director General in Rome, the press, or even anonymous letters. Escapes from the reformatory, although usually unsuccessful, brought down the wrath of Rome and the punishment of members of the staff. Both Di Marzo and Altamura tried to shield their staff from excessive punishment, admitting that specific teachers had been inattentive but not entirely negligent in their duties. In 1911, for example, three boys on the top floor of the Missioni building broke open the barred windows to reach the roof and then lowered themselves to the nearby perimeter wall with a rope. Deploring the «audacity» of this escape, the administration in Rome called for severe punishment – including the suspension of pay – of two tutors and criticized Tivoli's director for absence of attention «to the internal life of the reformatory»⁷³. In response, Director Altamura defended the vigilance of himself and his staff, a claim ridiculed by the director general in handwritten exclamations on the border of the letter⁷⁴.

A series of anonymous letters, sent to the ministry in Rome, also revealed tensions within the staff at Tivoli. To conceal their identities, the writers used either block printing or childish script to voice their complaints. In 1912, for example, a long missive denounced one censor for «almost never holding classes» and another for teaching only half of the allotted time. They set a bad example for the «lower personnel», that is the tutors, who were «rigorously prohibited» from such sloppy behavior⁷⁵. In response to an order from Rome to investigate these complaints, Director Altamura admitted weaknesses among the staff but put most of the blame on a disgruntled teacher for the complaints. A subsequent letter labelled

art. 36 and 37.

⁷¹ For correspondence on both issues, see ACS, M. Grazia & Giustizia, DG Ist. Di Pena, Atti amm. (1906-1925), b. 115, f. 55M.

⁷² ACS, M. Grazia & Giustizia, DG Ist. Di Pena, Atti amm. (1906-1925), b. 431, f. 55M.

⁷³ ACS, M. Grazia & Giustizia, DG Ist. di Pena, Atti amm. (1906-1925), b. 431, d. 55M.

⁷⁴ For a similar response from Di Marzo following an escape in 1908, see ACS, M. Grazia & Giustizia, DG Ist. Di Pena, Atti amm. (1906-1925), b. 115, f. 55M.

⁷⁵ ACS, M. Grazia & Giustizia, DG Ist. di Pena, Atti amm. (1906-1925), b. 431, d. 55M.

Altamura, the assistant director, and one of the censors of «imbeciles», who needed to be removed «for the salvation of the Institute and the peace of the personnel»⁷⁶. An Inspector sent from Rome found the accusations to be vague and not requiring an investigation although he admitted that Altamura, despite his qualifications and good intentions, often displayed weakness and absence of energy in overseeing his institution. Noting that these types of letters rarely came from other reformatories, the Inspector concluded that if Altamura could not restore morale among his staff, he should be transferred or demoted. Thus, while directors mainly praised and rewarded their staff, the new reformatories were not free of conflicts among the educational personnel or resistance by inmates against their confinement.

Conclusion

This microhistory of Tivoli suggests that public reformatories for boys underwent significant reforms in practice as well as legislation. Beginning with the passage of the Zanardelli Criminal Code in 1889 and accelerating with Doria's reforms during the first decade of the twentieth century, the lives of boys in Tivoli began to resemble those of their counterparts outside of reformatory walls in terms of education and work. Such was not the case in the old houses of custody, where, in violation of the Casati law, work but not education was required. After the passage of the Zanardelli Code, however, education became an obsession of Director Di Marzo, who established an elementary curriculum offered by part-time teachers. He subsequently and enthusiastically adopted Doria's reforms of 1904-5 by hiring a full-time teaching staff and expanding the range of courses to include advanced subjects beyond the elementary requirements such as foreign language, math, and science. To complement the expansion of schools within the three reformatory buildings, workshops were turned into industrial schools for the purpose of developing specialized skills in metalwork, carpentry, and shoemaking with an emphasis on design and fine craftsmanship. By 1907, with the passage of the new Regulation on Reformatories, work was limited to six hours per day for all inmates although it is not clear if those under nine were exempt as required by the Child Labor law of 1886. Six hours of work also left little time for

⁷⁶ ACS, M. Grazia & Giustizia, DG Ist. Di Pena, Atti amm. (1906-1925), b. 426, f. 55.

elementary education, so that it is difficult, as Roberto Giulianelli has argued, to deny the continuing centrality of work in reformatory life. The state still sought to make a profit, partially by paying the boys very little.⁷⁷ In short, despite the significant improvements in the educational and professional programs at Tivoli, the balance was probably tilted more toward work than for boys outside of public reformatories. Yet, if not identical to a school, the reformatory had nevertheless incorporated education as the core mechanism of rehabilitation.

Because of a dearth of research on delinquent children in liberal Italy, it is difficult to assess whether Tivoli was typical of other public male reformatories. A few recent studies, however, offer glimpses into the practical implementation of Doria's reforms in similar institutions. In her microhistory of S. Martino delle Scale, an agricultural colony for boys in Palermo, Francesca De Pasquale has traced the transition in management from the Benedictine order to that of the state⁷⁸. While both religious and secular authorities agreed on the centrality of work to juvenile reform, national inspectors found that the Benedictines had failed to institute required standards of education and health required by the state. Under the leadership of a special envoy from Rome, St. Martino was therefore converted to a public reformatory whose curriculum became increasingly focused on preparing its inmates for military service in the homeland and colonies. In Bologna, the house of correction at San Ludovico, according to Martina Giovannini, became a reformatory for paternal correction in 1891⁷⁹. During the reforms of Doria, she found a similar imposition of a military spirit alongside improvements in primary education and the establishment of «industrial schools» for the purpose of «training competent workers»⁸⁰. My own previous microhistory of San Michele in Rome found not only significant improvement in completion of primary education but also the introduction of advanced classes in science, literature, French, and even in the use of the telegraph⁸¹. As at Tivoli, boys

⁷⁷ R. Giulianelli, *Il lavoro dei minori nelle carceri e nei riformatori italiani (1860-1940)*, cit., pp. 150-151.

⁷⁸ F. Di Pasquale, *I benedettini e la colonia agricola per minori di S. Martino delle Scale (Palermo) 1862-1888*, in «Meridiana», 101 (2021), pp. 77-98.

⁷⁹ M. Giovannini, *Per una storia degli istituti penali per i minorenni: Il caso Bologna*, in «*Historia et ius*», 6 (2014), paper n. 11, pp. 1-23.

⁸⁰ Ivi, p. 19.

⁸¹ M. Gibson, *Italian Prisons in the Age of Positivism, 1861-1914*, London 2019, p. 181. On San Michele more generally, see pp. 178-184.

were mostly trained in blacksmithing, carpentry, and shoemaking, with examples of their work receiving prizes at the International Exposition in 1911, held in Turin to celebrate 50 years of Italian unification.

In conclusion, the goals of the child saving movement, enshrined in Doria's reforms, were largely implemented in practice at Tivoli and other public reformatories. Through an increasing emphasis on civil and professional education, these penal institutions sought to replace retributive punishment with rehabilitation. Inmates gained literacy, artisanal skills, and military training, all of which were considered necessary for modern male citizenship. Reform was limited by the continuing exploitation of youth through work and the expectation that such training should not seek to elevate inmates above their own class. Yet the improvements at Tivoli—which included the provision of separate sleeping cells for each boy, better sanitation, and increased medical care—more successfully implemented international standards than in any other category of Italy's penal institutions.

Yet, as public reformatories for boys underwent significant transformation from prison to schools, similar reforms were not implemented in private reformatories, which confined all girls and the majority of boys. Doria and other prison officials during the liberal era bemoaned the state's inability to impose its official standards of health and humanity on the religious personnel of private institutions. In theory, the General Regulation of 1891 applied to all penal institutions for youth, yet monks and nuns refused to get teaching licenses and primary education was often minimal. Work continued to be emphasized for profit rather than for professional development, enriching the coffers of religious administrators, who generally acted as contractors. Despite the nominal requirement of state inspections, conditions were usually lower in private reformatories: sanitation was neglected, individual cells never replaced large dormitories, hours of schooling and the size of libraries were minimal, and days were occupied mostly with work. The situation was worse for girls, who were confined to convent cloisters even for recreation. Therefore, the notable success of Tivoli, and other public reformatories for boys, must be placed in the larger context of the failure of the Italian state to provide the same benefits to all confined children.