

How “beneficial” virus of popular education “contaminated” Sardinia island, in the first half of the 19th century.

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Abstract

Popular education has played an important role in order to build the national Italian identity. Many researchers show that, after unification of Italy (1861), the government paid attention to primary schools: teachers not only taught reading, writing and calculating but also spread new values such as patriotism, positivism, rationalism. The aim of my paper is to study this kind of schools in the first half of 19th century, when Italy was shared in many States, everyone with different education policies. I'm going to concentrate my attention on an independent and isolated region: Sardinia.

In natural history, islands are quite interesting because scientists can study autochthon species and understand when local environment keeps in contact with outside ecosystems. I think historians can do the what scientists, if they want to investigate the beginning of popular school in Sardinia.

After four centuries of Spanish domination, in 1720, the island passed under the rule of Vittorio Amedeo II of Savoia, prince of Piemonte, member of the Sabaudi dynasty. Only after a century of Savoia domination, the kings Carlo Felice and Carlo Alberto could begin a systematic program of reforms that was continued after the unification of Italy in 1861. The popular school called “scuola normale” arrived in Sardinia with the school reforms in 1822-1824.

The aim of my paper is to show how and when models, coming from abroad, mixed with the presence of congregations of teachers, not only Jesuits, who were very active in the education of the ruling classes, but also Piarists who settled in many villages, giving life to an efficient school system made up of boarding schools, seminaries and private teaching posts.

My research is founded on letters sent between: Francesco Cherubini and Antonio Manunta in the early XIX century. The first translated education books coming from Austria into Italian and tried to use simultaneous education methodology in a popular school that he founded in Milan; the second learnt from Cherubini new didactic models to instruct a maximum number of pupils at the same time and made many efforts to import them to the island.

My study case is interesting such as a laboratory test: according to me, Sardinia - set in the middle of Mediterran - is a good point of view to analyze the impact of the “beneficial” virus (popular education) that “contaminated” all Europe from the end of 18th century.

Keywords

Education systems; Italy, Sardinia; popular school; Manunta.

Introduction

According to the opinion of a contemporary writer:

“In Sardinia history is more than elsewhere daughter of geography, because of the almost impassable sea, almost, we must underline the adverb. Actually some relationship between inside and outside has always existed but it hasn't been easy due to narrow, dissimilar doors”¹.

My paper is basically influenced by two events: the bicentenary of Charles Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, which laid out the theory of evolution. I have imagined Sardinia as a metaphorical laboratory for a study of propagation of popular school or, better, the new kind of education methodology called “*scuola normale*”².

When Darwin arrived at Galapagos on 15th September 1835, he realized that nature was providing him an interesting laboratory for the application of his theory on the inheritance of dominant characters. The distance that separated the archipelago from the mainland (about one thousand miles from the west coast of South America) meant that the islands were really primordial, a kind of paradise without social interference.

According to Darwin's theory, isolated and indigenous groups for generations are less connoted by genetic coincidental mutations which are helpful for the survival of the fittest. I'm going to talk about Sardinia, an island that we cannot compare to archipelagos studied by Darwin, but enough exotic, isolated and deserted that to be considered, figuratively speaking, as a uncontaminated paradise.

The journey from Genoa to Cagliari by steamboat, when at last could be accomplished in the early XIX century entailed 38 hours of navigation, 24 from Genoa to the North of island, Porto Torres. But, despite the comfort of a ship that was no longer totally dependent on winds, going to Sardinia was a long and dangerous voyage. Actually, those days when trade was done by sea, rather than by land, Sardinia, set in the centre of Mediterranean Sea, could not be considered periphery. However, the wild nature, presence of malaria, lack of roads because of the geography of the region, made inland links with other villages difficult. So all the authority's efforts to impose civilization failed. Climate, low density of population, limited farmlands did not make the island welcoming.

After Spanish domination lasted 400 years, in 1720 Sardinia passed under the rule of Vittorio Amedeo II of Savoy, prince of Piedmont, Member of the Sabaudi dynasty, in a new kingdom named Regno di Sardegna. The economy of the island was very poor, and when the House of Savoy took control of Sardinia they found it difficult to “domesticate” the island in order to nationalize it according to the continental rules, after nearly four centuries of Iberian domination. The young Kingdom of

¹ Salvatore Mannuzzu, *Finis Sardiniae (o la patria impossibile)*, in Luigi Berlinguer, Antonello Mattone (ed.), *La Sardegna*, in *Storia d'Italia. Le Regioni dall'Unità ad oggi* (Torino: Einaudi 1998), 1227.

² The term normal school indicated very different concepts: for the law of 1823, it designated the municipal elementary school, specifically the school that adopted simultaneous method. In subsequent legislation, after the unification of Italy, normal schools were the training school for teachers. However, we should bear in mind that training schools were considered part of primary education but not as an area of upper secondary school.

Sardinia under the energetic and reforming guidance of Vittorio Amedeo II introduced a profound reorganization of the University of Turin, starting from 1720, but only after a century of Savoy domination, the kings Carlo Felice and Carlo Alberto could complete a program of reforms that was continued after the unification of Italy in 1861.

School in Sardinia

The school system adopted in Sardinia in 1760 followed the Piedmont reforms of university studies and secondary education started in 1729. According to this reform, the government did not care about popular education, run by parish priests, in informal classes called in Italian *scuolette* (little schools), or schools for the alphabet. The king paid attention only to a seven year period of study left in Jesuits' and Piarist' care. These religious orders were very active in education since the XVI century, when they were autonomous in performing their tasks; but, from 1760, they were put under the control of the State.

Pupils learned Italian, in the first form, called *settima* (classes went from seventh to first), then they continued their studies in the grammar schools, according to *Ratio Studiorum* system. So Latin culture and classical studies were the main subjects to be studied. As well as these subjects, philosophy, logic, metaphysics, and very few experimental physics and geometry were taught. So we cannot consider this model as popular education, actually the education policy was to create a secondary school system under the control of the government. In this way it has been possible to define a clear separation between first literacy and secondary schools to enter universities.

Popular education by law

The conference theme is popular education, but what does it mean? Definition of this adjective “popular” is more or less a synonym for public education, but in Sardinia as well as in the rest of Europe, before the XVIII century we have different kinds of school, beyond religious boarding schools; for example in the island they were named little schools (*scuolette*), *escuela de los niños*, schools for abc, primary schools, they were dissimilar for the subjects that could be taught, for the place where they were settled (village or town), and of course for schoolboys' circumstances (easy or poor).

After the Restoration, European States introduced national laws to provide schooling for the masses. On 24 June of 1823 the viceroy of Sardinia issued an edict named: On secondary and primary education (called *scuola normale*), a legislative measure following the law emanated just one year before in Turin³. In the introduction of this law, the king Carlo Felice reminded duty of education as “one of copious source of public happiness”. “In the past, he continued, forefathers took care of classical education, now, said the king, it needed to bring that project to fruition, setting some ‘invariable’ rules from the beginning of the life”. Popular education was not a way to offer new rights to Sardinian inhabitants, but an ideological tool to increase control of them.

³ Angelino Tedde, ‘La scuola normale di Carlo Felice e di Carlo Alberto (1823-1841)’, in Fabio Pruneri, Filippo Sani (ed.), *L'educazione nel Mediterraneo nordoccidentale. La Sardegna e la Toscana in età moderna* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2008), 61-81.

So, according to Piedmont education policy, also in Sardinia, after 1823, the ruling classes clamoured for the birth of primary schools affordable for all. Reforms corresponded to a structural policy which was common to many European countries: centralization, scholastic territorialisation, potential linearity and a uniform cycle of studies. The 'centre' also imposed institutions on the basis of a territorial planning, set uniform didactic standards, homogenous pedagogic rules and compulsory curricula. Popular schools were not just catechism schools where, in the past, young learners studied alphabet and read Latin from prayer books, but places where pupils learned reading, writing and catechism on agriculture (*catechismo agrario*), a new useful subject for young farmers or shepherds. The study language became Italian, once used only in starting classes. The Article 31 of edict of 1823, I'm quoting word for word, said:

“In all villages of the Kingdom there will be a teacher, who will teach to read, to write, to use abacus, doctrine, and catechism on agriculture, according to official instructions”. Administrative organization provided for division of island in two parts, the North and the South, in which two “magistrates for reforms” were nominated. Those civil servants controlled provincial intendants who kept parish priests under their surveillance. Priests were the only teachers of local schools mainly for two reasons: they guaranteed restoration ideals and their salaries were half than that of lay teachers. The crucial historic turning point of the Twenties of the XIX century is just the shift from an individual self-made instruction with priests as private tutors to a system where the Church and the State together adopted a new place, the classroom, where a teacher, chosen from parish priests by state authority, could educate groups of citizens to observe the country loyalty. New didactic models, never used before in the island, made it possible, according to official directives, to instruct a maximum number of pupils at the same time. In short, it was confirmed that every pupil, resident in village after the age of six, would have to attend a normal school where they would study reading, writing and counting in Italian language. This new institution was planned for artisans, shepherds and farmers. Beyond this, as it was literally affirmed by *The Normal Schools Regulations* written in 1824, primary teacher had to remind pupil of “punishments fixed by law against common crime such as murders, theft, perjury, disobedience to superiors”. This sentence allows to understand that popular school tried to clamp down delinquency and banditry, habits very frequent in the island where isolation and feudalism system created its own code.

Popular schools were learning place on patriotism ideals, but the clergy continued to exercise a fundamental role in state education even after the process of secularization was implemented by the State. Education with school was really different from education without school, it needed teaching tools, classrooms, schoolhouses, and, of course represented a substantial outlay. Administratively, council schools were taken charge by local authorities; teacher's salary was provided by community

taxes. A teacher cost less than civil servants maintenance (major, censor, town clerk) and the law fixed the minimum and maximum of teachers' salary.

Sardinia a Mediterranean Galapagos

However, as I said before, social stratification, cultural and geographical complexity of the island, made adoption of outside models and univocal solutions of problems difficult. In this Mediterranean "Galapagos" life emerged following ancestral rhythms, so the initial enthusiasm of reformers collided with hard reality. Many programmes of reform remained nothing but projects due to both lack of funds and unqualified teachers. A French traveller Antoine-Claude Pasquin (1789-1847), known under pseudonym Valery, in the report of his Sardinian tour in 1834 about school in the Island writes:

"When I learned that about 392 municipalities in Sardinia over 300 had a male elementary school, I was tempted to congratulate the island for its school development. However, sooner I had to change my mind about it. These schools had had fairly negative results. Before to improvise new education by law, it was necessary to previously form the good teachers who are still missing today. It would be urgent and the bare essentials to create here some of our primary schools. The salary of teachers, higher than that they received in France, is 250 francs. The decree provided for the establishment of an elementary course on agriculture, which was replaced by a bad lesson in Latin, which produces rustic pedantic rather than intelligent and educated farmers"⁴.

Authorities carried out some surveys among the different villages in the first half of the XIX century and statistical data highlighted lack of construction of schools, unbecoming conducts of some teachers, delays on salaries payment, repeated unauthorized absences of pupils.

The edict prescribed to follow teaching methods written by a theologian: Maurizio Serra. This unknown canonical wrote a book, appeared in 1824, under the title Instructions for Bonnannaro's Sardinian village schoolteacher (*Istruzioni al maestro della scuola normale del villaggio di Bonnannaro in Sardegna*). The schoolteacher at issue was the parish priest assistant Gianantonio Vargiu who helped Serra with the starting up of popular school in the small village of Bonnannaro.

Serra's textbook, as the author says, is inspired by the normal school system of education. In the second part of my paper I would like to pay attention to the way this system could arrive in the remote Sardinia. I chose to use the metaphor of virus to talk about contamination of popular school which affected all Europe and arrived in Sardinia late, because of its natural protections. Now I'm going to present, in short, how the contagion happened⁵.

⁴ Valery, *Voyages en Corse, a l'île d'Elbe, et en Sardaigne*, tome second (Paris: Librairie de L. Bourgeois-Maze 1837), tr.it. *Viaggio in Sardegna*, Maria Grazia Longhi (ed.), (Nuoro: ILISSO 1996), 148-49. Francesco Obinu, 'L'organizzazione della scuola normale in Sardegna: luci e ombre (1824-1848). Dalle relazioni degli intendenti provinciali', in , in Fabio Pruneri, Filippo Sani (ed.), *L'educazione nel Mediterraneo nordoccidentale. La Sardegna e la Toscana in età moderna* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2008), 85-103.

⁵ Roberto Sani, Angelino Tedde (ed.), *Maestri e istruzione popolare in Italia tra Otto e Novecento. Interpretazioni, prospettive di ricerca, esperienze in Sardegna*, (Milano: Vita e Pensiero 2003).

Popular school “virus”

As everybody knows the spread of a virus can be transmitted in two ways: an infected person can directly or indirectly pass the virus to an uninfected person or a healthy person can touch a surface that has been contaminated by an infected one and then pass the virus to his body.

In Italian peninsula, exportation of normal method happened obviously by contact through a privileged way: the reforms of popular school in Kingdom of Lombardy-Veneto by Maria Teresa of Austria. In this southern territory of Austrian state, the Government adopted the same rules used in Wien. With the *Regolamento scolastico* (School regulation) of 1774 the primary schools were organised and put under state control, making them compulsory from 6 to 12 years old and imposing uniformity in teaching methods. After primary school, pupils could continue their studies in the grammar schools of Latin culture. The teachers were chosen by competitive selection and to ensure the principle of making steady progress, students were obliged to follow a step-by-step study plan⁶.

According to the abbot Giovanni Ignazio Felbiger’s General regulation, translated into Italian, four points were fundamental: 1) Initial letters: on the board, teachers write the initial letter of any word that form a sentence, pupils learn them by heart; 2) the tables: the learning subject is written in summary table, that shows a general outlook of the topic, studied in detail; 3) Question and answer text; 4) Essays: writing text imitating the structure of some models, for example business or felicitation letters. Also arithmetic lessons were taught starting from economic situation, and problems traceable in the ordinary life.

Austrian education system played an important role in Italian school reform. The review of the Italian translation of a book made by E. Milde, a professor of education in University of Wien, proves my point; the author, Vincenzo Garelli, wrote that the pedagogical treatise of Milde, printed in 1811-13, could be considered the starting point of Italian history of education⁷.

Moreover, scholars as Francesco Soave came in contact with normal schools in the North of peninsula in cities like Rovereto, Trento and Bozen where new school methodology was carried out. The idea was to be apprenticed to these institutions and then export the simultaneous approach in Lombardy. In fact, in February 1788 a training school for teachers educated at normal methodology had been opened in Milan⁸. And it is from this point that our story could begin.

⁶ Angelo Bianchi (ed.), *L'istruzione in Italia tra Sette e Ottocento. Lombardia-Veneto-Umbria, I Studi* (Brescia: La Scuola, 2007).

⁷ Paolo Bianchini, ‘Tra utopia e riforma. La metodica e il libro per l’istruzione elementare durante la restaurazione’, in TESEO, *Tipografi e editori scolastico-educativi dell’Ottocento*, (Milano: Editrice Bibliografica 2003), XXXVIII. Maurizio Piseri, ‘La legislazione per l’istruzione primaria nella Lombardia tra Sette e Ottocento’, in Angelo Bianchi (ed.), *L'istruzione in Italia tra Sette e Ottocento. Lombardia-Veneto-Umbria, I Studi* (Brescia: La Scuola, 2007), pp.83-111.

⁸ Francis Soave (Lugano, 10 June 1743 - Pavia, 17 January 1806) was an Italian philosopher of Swiss origin and the founder of the Italian first normal school, opened in Brera on 18 February 1788. He visited schools in Rovereto, Trento and Bolzano, and then he wrote the *Compendium of the method of normal schools for use by schools of Austrian Lombardy*, addressed in particular to the training teachers and with the educational principles revised by himself. Part of the book was the translation of the General Regulation of normal, major and municipal schools, issued by Maria Theresa of Austria December 6 in 1774 and edited by John Ignatius Felbiger to which the Soave added an *Appendix*.

Antonio Manunta

Headmaster of this school in Milan was Francesco Cherubini, translator into Italian of Austrian manuals for teachers⁹. Here came for a short but intense period Sardinian clergyman Antonio Manunta. This priest, a theology graduate from University of Sassari in 1799, has constituted a real discovery, because thanks to the “infection”, happened in the north of Italy, he spread popular schools in Sardinia. Manunta was a versatile intellectual, as says his biographer:

“University offered him a professorship, but he refused saying that he wanted to be free to study everything. He could be able to do everything, but he did not want to be forced to do anything. He liked to work for free and his curiosity ranged over a wide variety of interest: from agriculture to university, from cooking to music. He taught pupils of orphanage in Cagliari, where he lived, Gregorian chant, dancing, gymnastic, the rules of etiquette, how to behave during religious ceremonies and other useful subjects. [...]”¹⁰. Popular education virus infected deeply him. What were the signs of this contagion? I think that symptoms could be summed up in four points: refusal to teach Latin, attention to practical experience, interest on vocational guidance, concentration on relation between school and territory economy. When the king Carlo Felice got Manunta to direct an orphanage in Cagliari he assumed this task choosing text books and didactic guides from Milan. He introduced at his own expenses textile work, so pupils could learn this job in town laboratories. Manunta tried to turn the prison into a working house so that prisoners could learn a trade and did not commit an offence any more. As a member of the Royal Agricultural Society, he took the trouble to increase agriculture and craft and he preferred to show farm implements coming from the most productive areas of peninsula, instead of teaching boring and lazy theoretical lessons¹¹. He wanted to change the imperfect Sardinian plough; tool that showed the middle age heritage could still be felt.

The "fever" that struck Manunta urged him to criticize the reform of 1823, which had introduced the popular school; in his opinion the government had failed because it had wanted to open schools in every village without having teachers able to teach, and, as he wrote several times to his friend Cherubini, "the balm has been converted into a poison, and I still regret to have spent my money unnecessarily in Milan to buy books and learn the system that I hoped to spread and I would widely expand among the teachers, if the Government had been able to assess the importance"¹².

He criticized the teaching of the school in Sardinia, tied to the past, and wrote that:

⁹ Simonetta Polenghi, 'La formazione dei maestri nel Lombardo-Veneto. Le traduzioni di F. Cherubini dei testi di J. Peitl (1820-1821)', in AA.VV., *Le carte e gli uomini. Storia della cultura e delle istituzioni (secoli XVIII-XX). Studi in onore di N. Raponi*, (Milano: Vita e Pensiero 2004), 153-157.

¹⁰ Giovanni Spano, *Cenni sulla vita del Teol. Cav. Antonio Manunta di Osilo, canonico preb. nella cattedrale di Cagliari* (Cagliari: Tipografia di A. Alagna 1867), Appendice 4, paragr. IV.

¹¹ Correspondence between Cherubini and Manunta is available at the National library of Brera in Milan (BNB, *fondo Cherubini*). Cfr. BNB, *fondo Cherubini* Cagliari, 30 Maggio 1835.

¹² BNB, *fondo Cherubini*, Cagliari, 30 Luglio 1835.

"You must know that the education of our young people is supported to the Jesuits and Piarist, they made their students stutter and disgusted them with declinations of Latin names, [...] students lost from six to seven years in the study of unpleasant Latin, which can also be useless for those who do not aspire to the priesthood or degree"¹³.

He also insisted that schools would adopt in Turin, the capital of Sardinian Kingdom, textbooks similar to the one written by Alessandro Parravicini, the headmaster of the normal school in Como. Infact *Giannetto*, Parravicini's textbook, is full of moral advice and "modern" teaching methods¹⁴.

Extreme attempt to "contagion" of the island, protected with strong antibodies, was the request, made by Manunta in 1839 to the government of Turin, to open a school of methodology in Sardinia. This course could be run by a student of Cherubini willing to migrate. A first attempt, made in 1840, failed, the preceptor sent from Milan to privately educate the grandchildren of the priest, took less than capable, in fact, rather than teaching he amused himself with the reading of the Encyclopedia, held in the library of Manunta and he dedicated himself to the study of Chinese!¹⁵

Finally, after considerable requests, in 1840 at Christmas in Turin three Piarists arrived, those fathers intended to move to Milan where they would learn the normal method. Who led the expedition was father preacher Michele Todde "a Veteran [...] intended to make the monitor of the three candidates"¹⁶. In a letter Manunta wrote: "when Todde came to take leave from me, I interrogated him about the wits of the three Piarists, he told me that they were old teachers in grammar classes [...] well, I said, these people, could take advantage of Cherubini's lessons if they completely forget everything they think they have known so far"¹⁷.

According to Manunta, it needed to prevent what had happened after 1825 when

"We wanted to open popular schools in each village of Sardinia, but throughout the Kingdom there was only one teacher who knew the method of education. In all elementary schools we saw old books like Donato and other volumes for the study of Latin, which according to the king edict should have been excluded from those schools. This disorder occurred in 1825 but has been persevering".

The cost of four priests' training weighed on "Sardinian exhausted finances" and Manunta hoped that the meeting with the "Athens of Italy", so he called Milan, the birthplace of Italian normal method, occurred in the same way it was done in the past, that is with a direct exposure of aspiring teachers with classes, with a real internship, with a direct contagion.

We know that the fathers who attended Milan courses came back on the island and opened schools of method in Cagliari, Sassari and Oristano. In 1841, with a delay of nearly twenty years the

¹³ BNB, *fondo Cherubini*, Cagliari, 17 Settembre 1836.

¹⁴ BNB, *fondo Cherubini*, Cagliari, 22 ottobre 1839.

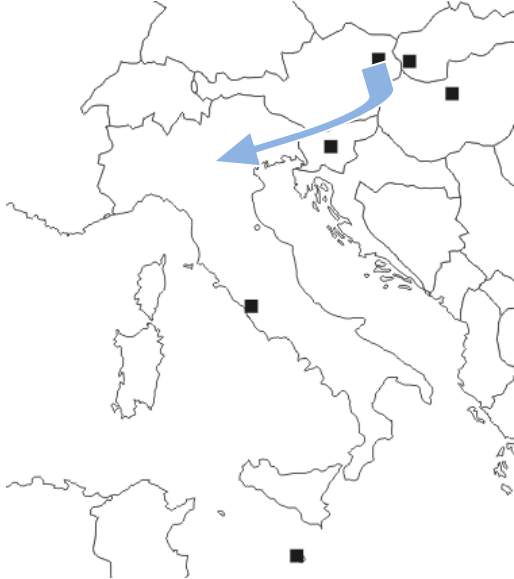
¹⁵ BNB, *fondo Cherubini*, Cagliari 6 Marzo 1840.

¹⁶ BNB, *fondo Cherubini*, Cagliari 8 [...] 1841.

¹⁷ BNB, *fondo Cherubini*, Cagliari, 8 [...] 1841.

virus began to infect the Sardinian teachers¹⁸. The law obliged them to follow the lecture method, before being recruited in municipal schools. The increase of popular schools was far from being realized. The link with a humanistic and classical conception of school, lack of economic resources were strong antibodies against the diffusion of the virus.

Direct contamination



Felbiger, Milde (Wien) 1774

Soave, Cherubini (Lombardy) 1788

Indirect contamination



Cherubini 1825 (Lombardy)

Manunta 1841 (Sardinia)

- 1) refusal to teach Latin,
- 2) attention to practical experience,
- 3) interest on vocational guidance,
- 4) concentration on relation between school and territory economy

¹⁸ “In altra mia direttaLe per mezzo del Conte di S. Margarita Le partecipai che si trovano aperte le Scuole di Metodica in Cagliari, Sassari ed Oristano dai tre P. P. Scolopi che frequentarono le Scuole di Milano, e per quanto ho potuto rilevare dalle lezioni dettate agli Scolari, pare che apprezzino meritamente il libro Metodica; e se da Milano si fossero importate cinquanta o sessanta copie di quel aureo libro, i Candidati avrebbero fatto maggiore profitto senza perdere tempo sotto la dettatura dei precetti in esso libro contenuti”. BNB, *fondo Cherubini*, Cagliari 23 Marzo 1842.