

ILLEGITIMATE BIRTHS and INFANTILE ABANDONMENT in  
TRENTINO during the 1800s  
Case Study: The Laste Triplicate Institute – *Triplice Istituto delle Laste*

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### Premise

One aspect which perhaps more than any other characterizes the makeup of social marginalization in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries because of its socio-cultural, and in part economic significance, is that concerning abandoned children or foundlings. This phenomenon related in particular to the abandonment of newborn infants - an action that had occurred on an ever-increasing scale at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Measuring the importance of this phenomenon is a very difficult undertaking but it was of such magnitude that Jean Pierre Gutton<sup>1</sup> declared that... *“the abandonment of children is almost a normality for the poor, at least in certain periods of time.”*

One of the best attempts at documenting this tendency was carried out by Lallemand in 1885. Although not statistically proven, it was at least a historical investigation and his methods were adopted worldwide. He paid particular attention to France, which had taken a leading role in this arena in particular regarding legislation, and he outlined the major stages of the process<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Gutton, J.P., *La società e i poveri*, Milan 1977, p. 71

<sup>2</sup> Lallemand L., *Histoire des enfants abandonnés et délaissés. Etudes sur la protection de l'enfance aux diverses époques de la civilisation*, Paris, 1885; and De Gerando M., *Della pubblica beneficenza*, Tomo III and IV, Florence 1844; Armaroli L., *Ricerche storiche sulla esposizione degli infanti presso gli antichi popoli*, Venice 1884; Bembo P., *Delle Istituzioni di beneficenza nella città e provincia di Venezia*, Venice 1885; De Kumert S., *Alcune notizie sulla Casa di Dio di Padova ora Istituto degli Esposti*, Padua 1898; Agostini A., *Del governo degli Esposti*, Milan 1880; idem *L'Ospizio Provinciale e degli Esposti e delle Partorienti di Milano e L'ospizio degli Esposti e Maternità della provincia di Verona nell'anno 1877: parallelo comparativo*, Verona 1877; Albin D., *La questione degli esposti ed il Brefotrofio di Roma*, Rome 1896; Andreucci O., *Delle ruote o dei torni negli ospizi degli esposti*, Florence 1868; Buffini A., *Ragionamenti storici economici statistici e morali intorno all'Ospizio dei trovatelli di Milano*, Milan 1845; ibid *Ragionamenti storici economici statistici e morali intorno all'Ospizio dei trovatelli di Brescia* in the *Commentari dell'Ateneo di Brescia per l'anno accademico*

Researchers agree that for reasons still unknown infantile abandonment increased dramatically in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and governments at the time did not know how to hold it in check. Nonetheless, the fact that the governments were aware of this issue was evident because of the existence of an ever-growing number of better organized charitable institutions and the possibility, at least in Catholic countries, to use the 'wheel', a process which made it easier to anonymously resolve the problem. However, this option which had originally been set up for needy cases involving an illegitimate offspring also seemed to encourage the abandonment of children.

The problem at the root of this behavior evoked interest in Lallemand's contemporaries because in many cases the mortality rate of abandoned children was extremely high.<sup>3</sup> Many coeval authors attribute this phenomenon to the dire state of poverty and to a 'total lack of family sentiment'. The former aspect is considered the predominant factor by some authors<sup>4</sup> even today while others suggest that in many cases the parents gave up their children simply as a result of 'indifference'.<sup>5</sup>

Other scholars believe that one reason was the diffusion of certain convictions among the poor in that 'an unfounded prejudice is deeply rooted in our society where abandoning your offspring is not a felonious act but part of the right one believes to have when making use of public benevolence'.<sup>6</sup>

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1838, Brescia 1839, pp. 81-105; Nardo G. D., *Delle condizioni dei trovatelli nelle province venete* in *Atti dell'Ateneo Veneto*, Venice 1864, pp. 188-201; *ibid Sulla condizione attuale dei trovatelli nelle nostre province*, Venice 1864.

<sup>3</sup> Mc Keown T., *L'aumento della popolazione moderna, con Infanticidio: una rassegna storica*, Milan 1979, p 230 'almost legalised assassination, an infanticide hidden and postponed by perhaps a few days'.

<sup>4</sup> Delaselle C., *Les enfants abandonnés à Paris au XVIII siècle*, Annales E.S.C. Paris XXX 1975, pp 187-218: « La cause la plus générale et la plus exacte de cette progression, c'est la misère des journaliers à la champagne... est extrême quand ils sont surchargés d'enfants en bas âge... Ce fut de tout temps l'indigence qui causa la plupart des désordres trop généralement attribués à l'ignorance et à la barbarie des hommes. »

<sup>5</sup> Shortes E., *Famiglia e Civiltà*, Milan 1978, p. 174; Ariés P., *Padri figli nell'Europa medioevale e moderna*, Bari 1968.

<sup>6</sup> cfr. Gorni M.G., Pellegrini L., *Un problema di storia sociale. L'infanzia abbandonata in Italia nel secolo XIX*, Florence 1974.

As a result 'benevolence available to whoever needed it' made the poor person into an idle parasite and confirmed the conviction that it was 'the duty of society to keep the poor'. There was, therefore, no need to push the poor into abandonment as they simply acted on the desire to do what was necessary to survive and that did not always include bringing up children.<sup>7</sup>

These ideas would confirm a hypothesis put forward by Francois Lebrun which stated that the increase in the number of abandoned children and birth control (two seemingly contradictory but in reality complementary practices) evident at the end of the Ancien Régime were really manifestations of the beginnings of 'a new approach to controlling the number of children born in a family and a means to finding a solution to dire poverty as well as guaranteeing the smaller family a better lifestyle'.<sup>8</sup> However, there was unanimous agreement at that time that the succor given to foundlings left at the wheel and the secrecy surrounding them imposed by the Catholic Church and carried on during the French Revolution and by Napoleon<sup>9</sup> were the main reasons for the expansion and dramatic outcome of this act. These issues were first addressed in France around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Given the example of Protestant countries where abandonment was not allowed and the interests of the child were given first place just as any other poor offspring, other Catholic countries<sup>10</sup> followed suit and began to set up a

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Lebrun F., *Naissances illégitimes et abandons d'enfants en Anjou au XVIII siècle*, Annales E:S:C., Paris XXVII (1972), 4, pp.1188 onwards.

<sup>9</sup> In the reform welfare, including the buildings and convents often old and in bad repair, became a lay concern with the underpinning idea that the State had to look after its poor and provide for them. The French Revolution changed state welfare into a duty, charity into an institution and the adoption of foundlings (Schwarzenberg C., *Breve storia dei sistemi previdenziali in Italia*, Turin, 1971). The decree dated 19.1.1811 declares 'the universal opening of institutions with the wheel' (De Gerando, *Della Beneficenza*, p. 419; Alasia G., Freccero G., Gallina M., Santanera F., *Assistenza, emigrazione e lotta di classe. Ieri e oggi*. Milan, 1975; Cherubini A., *Storia della prevenzione sociale*, Introduction, Rome 1977; Russo R.M., *La politica dell'assistenza*, Florence, 1968).

<sup>10</sup> Supporters and opponents discussed the pros and cons of the institution at great length. The poet Lamartine, a fierce supporter, defined it as ... 'an ingenious invention of Christian charity, which has hands to receive but no eyes to see nor mouth to speak' (Lallemand L., *Histoire*, p.669). For moral reasons, the Director of the Foundling Hospital in Brescia had the same opinion. He wanted to safeguard the mother's honour and reinsert her into a society from which she would otherwise have been excluded (Buffini A., *Ragionamenti*, p.97). De Gerardo, a relentless detractor and

help scheme for unmarried needy mothers thus phasing out the wheel and then closing down the orphanages.<sup>11</sup>

Encouraged by the findings of the French<sup>12</sup> historical consensus board, other historical evidence regarding the same issue in Italy has come to light in the last few years but there is still a long way to go before a complete picture of what happened to foundlings can be constructed<sup>13</sup>.

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supporter of a different way of helping the foundlings and their mothers expressed the following: 'Notice to an all-bearing public: Anyone who wishes to rid herself of looking after her own child and put the burden on society is invited to indicate to whom the child should be deposed and she will then be exempt from every justification', (see De Gerando, *Della pubblica beneficenza*, p.110; Andeucci O., *Delle ruote*; idem, *La mortalità dei bambini in relazione alla soppressione delle ruote negli ospizi degli esposti, alle sale dei lattanti ed ai sovvenimenti di balatico*, Florence, 1870.)

<sup>11</sup> At the height of the discussions and given the presumed need to suppress the barbaric wheel (suppressed in France in 1862 but 1,179 still open in Italy in 1866; Ferrara was the first to close in 1867 followed by Milan in 1868 but 285 still remained in 1912), the conviction underpinned by new pediatric knowledge was that not only the existence of children's homes was the cause of the many negative results in bringing up foundlings but also the bad management of the aforementioned institutions and lack of means and equipment. But most of all – and this is where the assistance underwent a dramatic change – it was finally understood that no effort would bear fruit unless everything was done to keep the child united with its mother. For the first time in the history of child abandonment (in most cases associated with illegitimacy) a new figure appears, one which cultural conservatism and a false pietistic and profane mentality had always keep at a distance and hidden (see Daldoss G., *Le madri nubili, I trovatelli e la famiglia materna di Rovereto*, Rovereto, 1937, p.22; Portigliotti G., *Un'istituzione che scompare: La ruota*, in *La Lettera*, Trento, XIII 1913, pp. 866-868).

<sup>12</sup> As well as the works already cited by Delaselle and Leburn also refer to: Armengaud A., *L'attitude de la société à l'égard de l'enfant au XIX siècle* in « *Annales de Demographie Historique* », Paris (1973), *Enfant et Société*, pp. 303-3012 and 345-352; André P., *Histoire des faits économiques et sociaux de 1800 à nos jours*, Paris, 1963; Aries P., *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime*, Paris, 1964; Billot G., *Les enfants abandonnés à Chartres à la fin du Moyen-Age* in « *Annales de Demographie Historique* », Paris (1975) pp.167-186; Chamoux A., *L'enfant abandonné à Reims à la fin du XVIII siècle* in « *Annales de Demographie Historique* », Paris (1973) pp. 263-285; Charpentier J., *Le droit de l'enfance abandonnée*, Paris, 1967; Chartier R., *Pauvreté et assistance dans la France moderne* in « *Annales E.S.C.* », Paris, XXVIII (1973), 2, pp.572-582; Dehaussy J., *L'assistance publique à l'enfance. Les enfants abandonnés*, Paris, 1951; Depauw J., *Amour illégitime et société à Nantes au XVIII siècle* in « *Annales E.S.C.* », Paris XXVII (1972); Mollat M., *Etudes sur l'histoire de la pauvreté*, Paris, 1974; Mutin J.C., *Les abandons d'enfants à Bourg et dans le département de l'Ain à la fin du XVIII siècle et dans la première moitié du XIX siècle* in « *Cahier d'Historie* », X (1965), 2-3, pp. 137-150; Hélin J., *Une sollecitude ambiguë: l'évacuation des enfants abandonnés* in « *Annales de Demographie* », Paris (1973), pp. 225-229; Gutton J.P., *Charité ed assistenza en Europe XV, XVIII siècle*, paper given in week six of the « *Francesco Datini Studies Conference* », Prato 1974; Laslett P., *La famille et le ménage: approches historiques* in « *Annales E.S.C.* », Paris XXVII (1972), 4, pp. 847-870.

<sup>13</sup> The first attempt in this field is attributed to research by M.G. Gorni and Laura Pellegrini on abandoned infants in the XIX century: the work refers mostly to the situation in Lombardy and the Naples area but it is limited because of a lack of consultation of archives from children's homes and registry offices and is based only on the reports written by the directors of the orphanages and official statistics at that time (Gorni M.G. and Pellegrini L., *Un problema* – cited). C.A. Corsini investigated the foundling situation in Tuscany (Corsini C.A., *Materiali per lo studio della famiglia in Toscana nei secoli XVII-XIX: gli esposti*, in "Quaderni storici", Ancona-Rome, XI (1976), 33, pp.998-1054). Odoardo

Everyone is of the opinion that how to analyze the problem in its entirety is still a very difficult task because of the lack of sources of information and the disparity and complexity of the methods used to gather any data in the past. Added to that, there are the problems of the consistence systematic removal and destruction of the archives in the institutions and hospitals used to look after foundlings as well as the parish registers ‘... if indeed the parish priests were obliged to keep a separate register of abandoned children’.<sup>14</sup>

Taking these limitations into consideration but with the aim of contributing constructively to this subject, my investigation looks at the makeup and the different aspects of infant abandonment in Trentino during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup>

### ***The problem of infantile abandonment in Trentino***

The interest shown by other countries and regions concerning the social problem of infant abandonment is not evident in Trentino. Documents containing references regarding the available public welfare system – hospices, confraternities, religious institutions for the poor, infirm,

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Bussini has carried out systematic research in Camerino for the period 1749-1908 (Bussini O., *L'infanzia abbandonata a Camerino nei secoli XVIII e XIX* in S.I.DE.S., “La demografia storica delle città italiane”, Bologna, 1982), while Gabriele de Rosa looks at foundlings in Calabria (De Rosa G., *L'emarginazione sociale in Calabria nel secolo XVIII: il problema degli esposti*, in Social and Religious Historical Research, Rome, VII (1978), 13, pp.5-29) and Bruno Bertoli has analyzed the situation in Venice during the Austrian domination (Bertoli B., *L'assistenza pubblica e riformismo austriaco a Venezia durante la Restaurazione: I luoghi pii*, in “Ricerche di storia sociale e religiosa”, Rome, VI (1977), 12, pp. 25-69). The same question in Trentino was addressed by professor Gauro Coppola during the national convention, “Storia e Chiesa di fronte all'assistenza”, held in Pistoia, 15-18 November 1979 (in print). Gianna Pomata examined the problem of illegitimate mothers in the maternity homes annexed to orphanages (Pomata G., *Madri illegittime tra Ottocento e Novecento: Storie cliniche e storie di vita* in “Quaderni storici”, Ancona-Roma, XV (1980), 44, II, pp. 497-542.

<sup>14</sup> De Rosa G., *L'emarginazione*, cited, p.28.

<sup>15</sup> I would like to take the opportunity to thank Professor Gauro Coppola and his staff in the Department of Theory and Social History in the University of Trento for his precious help at every stage of this research. I would also like to thank the Director of the National Archives in Trento, Salvatore Ortolani, the director of the main civic library, Mrs. Anna Maria Paissan Schlechter who is responsible for the communal archives, Mr. Vincenzo Adorno, the staff of the Church Bishopric Archives and all those in this institute for their precious help and courtesy given to me during my research. My final thanks go to the Society of Trentino Studies and their President, Professor Umberto Corsini, who have undertaken the publication of this work.

insane, pilgrims and orphans - do not contain specific information on what happened to foundlings.

From information recorded in the registers of the St. Mary of Mercy Institute about the Trentino infants fostered out to farm workers, a note in 1585 relates to the temporary aid given '*for the bastard found*'.<sup>16</sup>

Under the ruling Bishopric State in Trentino and the maximum discretion needed to avoid a scandal, a solution to the fate of foundlings was always found. In the aforementioned citation, there is evidence that Prince Bishop Madruzzo corresponded with the House of Mercy in Verona and utilized their rules and regulations in the orphanage/children's home in Trento. It is very probable that at that time foundlings from Trentino were transferred to the institutions in the Verona area and as a result all traces of them have been lost.<sup>17</sup>

However, examining later documents from 1777 shows that secular documentation and indications did exist. This conclusion derives from evidence that a mountain terrain was handed over to the House of Mercy in Verona<sup>18</sup> on the part of the Prince Bishop and from an agreement with institutions in the Verona area that foundlings from Trentino could be sent there on payment of a small fee.<sup>19</sup>

This solution to the problem of Trentino *bastards* accorded with Verona continued for almost two centuries. The sociably unacceptable behavior was thus well taken care of and the transfer organized with professionals capable of facing the once long precarious journey to Verona for newborn

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<sup>16</sup> Segala S.F., *La pubblica beneficenza in Trento. Gli orfanatrofi*, cited, p.18.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.19. In addition, with the secularization of the Prince Bishopry Archive this was transferred and meant that many documents were only available from 1777 onwards (A.C.A.T., book B (329), no.2172, 1833, *Lettere del Vescovo Luschin al Capitanato circolare di Rovereto, Trento, 17.7.1833*).

<sup>18</sup> For information about the Pia Casa di Verona and references to 'Tyrolese foundlings' see Fainelli V., *Storia degli ospedali di Verona dai tempi di S. Zeno ai giorni nostri*, Verona, 1926; Viana O., *Appunti per la storia della S. Casa della Pietà di Verona, sec. XV*, Verona, 1927; Viviani G.F., *L'assistenza agli esposti nella provincia di Verona (1426-1996)*, Venice, 1969; Agostini A., *L'Ospizio Provinciale*, cited.

<sup>19</sup> For research on the rights and agreements with Verona see A.C.A.T., book b, (150), no. 152, 1812 and A.S.T. Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 570; A.C.T., Sanità, Rovereto, 21.7.1833.

infants.<sup>20</sup> This procedure was considered less costly and much easier to deal with than fostering out locally or putting them in an orphanage. Unfortunately no real statistical or validated information has been found regarding these facts and there is even disagreement on the number of foundlings taken to Verona; in many cases one hundred children per year but other records mention about 500 and also all the 'bastards'<sup>21</sup> resulting from illicit relationships but never on account of poverty alone. Justified by avoiding possible infanticide, government and religious bodies took it upon themselves to relieve the mother of her illegitimate burden by using the House of Mercy in Verona and to concentrate on setting up better assistance and charity for the more socially acceptable needy like the poor, the sick, orphans and the elderly.

With the end of the rule of the Prince Bishopry, new legislation and a different approach to rights and duties were set up and this also included welfare. Even the charitable institutions in Verona called for different laws and remuneration after the new Italian government had ordered each province to open suitable institutes, other than hospitals, for foundlings.<sup>22</sup>

Magistrates and other government officials in the most populated areas in Trentino were forced to deal locally with the problem of abandoned children and illegitimacy in general because in Trentino an abandoned child was always illegitimate.

The first major area of worry concerned the nagging problem of finding funds that, given the unpopularity of the recipients, certainly would not

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<sup>20</sup> B.C.T., Sanità, 1825. Here the inhumane treatment of the illegitimate children in general and in particular the extreme lack of attention by the accompanying carers meant that the latter were repeatedly reminded of the duties to be observed.

<sup>21</sup> Admissible deportation does not exist in Trentino. For the number of the illegitimate children sent to Verona see A.C.T., book B (206), no. 884, 1819; A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare, Fondo Laste, c.53; Viviani G.F., *L'assistenza agli esposti...*, cited, pp. 30-31, 'from 1814-21, every year the home (in Verona) took in around 336 children per year, almost all the illegitimate... about one third from Trentino'.

<sup>22</sup> On the French method ratified by the 1811 law: 'Opening of the appropriate institutions with a wheel for each department/ward', see Schwarzenberg C., *Breve storia dei sistemi ...*, cited.

come from private charity.<sup>23</sup> Even after attempts at a modernization of attitudes and approach and the institutions themselves following the secularization of the bishopric kingdom, economic conditions did not improve. Most of the population lived in a state of extreme poverty to such an extent that evidence from the period clearly mentions children who died of starvation because their parents had so little to feed them with.<sup>24</sup> This fact makes it possible to imagine that some poor legitimate children might have been sent to the institutions in Verona, but this solution is never mentioned in any of the documents even in the worst periods of poverty and economic and social upheaval.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the reason for this conduct can be found in the strong religious conditions regarding family morals which were ingrained in the Trentino people and their strict social practices. For these children infanticide was unimaginable and abandonment was unheard of but infant death was so frequent that passive acceptance was a necessary psychological scapegoat.<sup>26</sup>

We cannot even assume, at least until the middle of the 1800s, that in the case of need the communes and charitable organizations were able to provide adequate assistance for special cases e.g. the weaning of infants or helping sick mothers etc. given the meager financing available for these interventions and the chronic state of the financial deficit the communes were experiencing.

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<sup>23</sup> A.C.A.T., book B (150), no.152, 1812. *Lettere del podestà di Trento Graziadei al Vescovo 25.2.1812*: A.S.T., Fondo Cap. Circ. Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 570, *Lettera 20.4.1811 del Vice prefetto di Riva*; in *Lettera del Vice prefetto di Bolzano 4.5.1812*.

<sup>24</sup> Sardagna I., *Prospetto pubblico economico del Dipartimento dell'Alto Adige*, no date (MS 65 B.C.T.); idem, *Memorie storico economiche intorno al Trentino volgarmente detto Tirolo italiano*, Trento, 1806 (MS 1195 B.C.T.).

<sup>25</sup> This situation seems even more anomalous when compared to that of many other cities in Italy (Verona, Milan, Brescia, Turin and Florence) and France at that time where, according to many scholars, the problem of abandoning illegitimate children due to poverty and as a way to control, after the fact, the number of children or, in the opinion of others, to debauchery, the lack of a sense of family or simply pure speculation was a real social plague. On the problem of abandoning illegitimate children see Gorni M.G., Pellegrini L., *Un problema di storia sociale...*, cited, Corsini C.A., *Materiali per lo studio della famiglia*, cited; Lallemand L., *Historie*, cited; Delaselle C., *Les enfants*, cited.

<sup>26</sup> Sardagna I., *Prospetto...*, cited, p.20: "Bringing a child into the world and letting them, perhaps, slowly die of hunger."



The fact that finding a solution to the problem of illegitimate children had been imposed by the Italian government<sup>27</sup> initiated a debate which involved both political and religious powers. Plans for the building of institutes for foundlings in Riva, Rovereto, Trento and Bolzano were presented and discussed.<sup>28</sup> However, with the subsequent changes in the political arena there was no time or opportunity to put them into practice; in fact during the Restoration Period, the innovative drive underwent if not an abrupt halt certainly a slowing down. Efforts were focused on lifting the economy burdened by wars, epidemics and famine and the issue of the foundlings was for the moment left on the shelf.

Perhaps due to the continued insistence from the Veronese bodies, the subject was readdressed around 1818 based on the research carried out by the governing bodies in the largest Trentino towns during the Italic Period (1810-1813). However, the possibility of obtaining a clear and substantiated claim for the institutions in the Verona area or the eventual repayment of ceded funds proved in vain as the various supplications and guarantees by the communes were almost always attributed to be part of the national budget. Lists were made of everything - both political and financial issues - that needed to be attended to in order to provide proper establishments in situ for illegitimate children and their mothers.

The positive interest taken by the local government office in Trento finally opened the proceedings which had been started around 1818 by the Austrian Chancellery and which then dragged out until the end of 1832, hindered by the complicated slow cycle of talks, consultations and dealings.

The details of the problem were outlined in a letter written by the Social Security Magistrate in Trento<sup>29</sup> where finally even the government

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<sup>27</sup> A recurrence of illegitimate births was also found and borne out by the data requested from the communes in Trentino (but this is not very reliable due to shortcomings). A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 570, 1812, *Statistica del Maggio 1812 richiesta dal Prefetto del dipartimento dell'A/A*.

<sup>28</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 570, 1811 and 1812.

<sup>29</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, c. 570, *Lettera del Magistrato politico economico di Trento al Capitanato Circolare*, Trento, 15 May 1826. See Appendix I. (As indicated in c. 570, 1800-1832, information regarding the problem of foundlings mixed up.)

seemed ready to deal with the need for an institution by taking a broader view of the problem than previously assumed. Trento was chosen as the site for the institute which would have three main purposes namely a foundling hospital, maternity home for single mothers and a school for midwives.

The concerns of the government in Vienna were reframed in a possible solution that went further than just providing an adequate answer to the question of illegitimacy. There would no longer be the usual system of placing the child in the institution(s) in the province of Verona, nor separating the child from the mother and then forgetting about its existence.

The new Trentino institute supported by the government would combine a foundling hospital with a maternity home and thus lighten the burden on other hospitals. Given the large number of foundling cases in question, it would encourage research and medical innovation in obstetrics as well as serve as a training school for midwives. Another important factor was that the large number of newborn infants would make the study of pediatrics easier and prove to be the solution to the smallpox vaccine program as they would serve as vaccine candidates for the procedure then in use. The vaccination was carried out from arm to arm with human vaccine and this alleviated the communes from yet another trifling duty.

The original charitable intent was invalidated by the Austrian political view of containing and controlling public and scientific behavior as part of a health policy that had always had a prominent place in its public welfare program .

The Carmelite Scalzi convent in the area known as the *Laste*, expropriated during the Napoleon era, was chosen as the site for the institute from among the different locations in Trento under consideration by the Minister for Social Security. Approved financially by the state treasury, it was the most logistically suitable because of its excellent position and the fact that it was in good repair.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> For the history of the monastery see Zieger A., *Il Monastero delle Laste*, in *Vita Trentina* (1960), no. 41, 20.10.1060, pp. 6-7; Dossi I., *Il Carmelo delle Laste nel XXV del ritorno dei Padri Carmelitani*, Trento 1924, p. 16; Pinamonti G., *Trento e sue vicinanze, industria commercio e costumi de' trentini*, Trento, 1863.

## *The Beginnings of the Laste Triplicate Institute*

On 25 June 1819, the Austrian authorities officially made the following announcement: *'It is the express desire of His Majesty that in Trento, in Laste, a hospital for abandoned children, financed by the Austrian Government, be erected, to which a maternity home and a School of Obstetrics, for the convenience of the mothers, be added'*.<sup>31</sup>

Having resolved the spiny problem of where the money was coming from, the job of making the necessary changes to the existing building and adding the required annexes was given to the local government engineer Giuseppe Ducati.<sup>32</sup> The building was structurally ready in 1823 but the problem of which religious order, as owner of the property, was to be compensated still had to be dealt with.<sup>33</sup> Regardless of the entreaties, the opening of the institute was delayed indefinitely as the government in Vienna, with its meticulous bureaucracy, carried forward each proceeding with exasperating slowness.

In the meantime, the problem of illegitimacy was also to become more pressing as in 1828 the same government, having officially taken note, carried out a survey involving the Ordination Body with both German and Italian deacons/priests to discover their views on 'the most efficient way to prevent the disorder caused by so many illegitimate offspring and the resulting immorality without, however, causing other sadder effects by imposing too severe penalties other than being influenced or persuaded by carers of the soul and some education'. This underlined the role of the clergy as keepers of order and indeed as government intermediaries.<sup>34</sup>

Almost ten years passed from the start of the work but the Laste building remained closed and unused. However, it underwent damage which

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<sup>31</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare , c. 570, 1819. *Lettera della Cancelleria Aulica al Capitanato Circolare di Trento*, Vienna, 25.6.1819.

<sup>32</sup> In 1821-1832. The work was entrusted to the builder, a Mr Caminada, at a cost of 10,559 florins.

<sup>33</sup> In 1825 an agreement was made establishing the annual rent of 600 florins to be paid in two installments, one on St. John's Day and the other on St. Michael's Day, until the full payment of the value of 12,000 florins in Vienna M.C.; see A.S.T., c. 65, Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, *Contratto di locazione – Trento*, 21.1.1825.

<sup>34</sup> A.C.A.T., book B (283), no. 2878, 1828.

required new maintenance, various interventions, inevitable delays, and requests and entreaties on the part of government and religious bodies. In 1830 the building was finally repaired and ready, and provision was made for furnishing the institute and landscaping the surrounding area.<sup>35</sup> That same year, the work carried out over almost ten years was completed and steps were taken to at least set up the course for trainee midwives. The course started on 1 October 1832 under the guidance of Professor Ignazio Laschan and his assistant Andrea Rossi. The opening of the other two institutions required another few months during which the positions for personnel and service staff were advertised.<sup>36</sup> According to firsthand information available at the time, the entire establishment was considered state-of-the-art technically and hygienically. Situated splendidly on the hill above Trento, surrounded by an extensive park and gardens and a few hundred meters from the nearest abodes, the left wing housed expectant mothers, wet nurses and the abandoned infants. The center block contained the doctors, midwives and the kitchen while the right wing held the administration block, the school, storerooms, the lodgings for the chaplain, and the church. The three sections were also interconnected via the first and mezzanine floors by covered passages and walkways. There were about thirty rooms in the northern section of the left wing for mothers in labor.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Selection and planting of greenery was entrusted to forestry assistant Agostino Perini, who planned out the paths and divided off the kitchen garden and the surrounding countryside (see A.S.T., c. 570, cited).

<sup>36</sup> The *Messaggere Tirolese*, 1 February 1883, informed its readers of the opening like this: “The opening of the Laste Institution for Expectant Mothers and Foundlings near Trento will take place on 1 January 1833, after which, by 1 October the consulting room for the midwives, built using the sovereign generosity of Treasury, will be opened. This is clear proof of the particular affection towards this province, and as such we proffer our profound gratitude”. (B.C.T., *Foglio Ufficiale del Privilegiato Messaggere Tirolese*, no. 3, Rovereto – Friday 1st February 1833)

<sup>37</sup> Braun C., *Übersicht der klinischen Ergebnisse des K.K. Gebar – und Findel – Hauses in Trient*, Würzburg, 1855. The rooms with large ventilated windows were shaded by cypresses and mulberry trees. Opposite the windows were pearl grey beds with mattresses filled with maize foliage and covered with calfskin to prevent them getting wet during the birthing. Mattresses were changed every four years. There was also a well-equipped wash area with large marble baths and abundant hot water from a modern steam boiler. For the linen, a steam laundry was installed after 1850 which produced white, fresh smelling, clean linen. The heating was a series of green terracotta stoves, some with circulation systems and some without. Toilets were in well aired tower blocks in the northern part of the building.

The statutes of the institute were based on those in Vienna and Milan<sup>38</sup> and had three distinct administrative sections: for those who paid, those free of charge and the those destined to go to a home for foundlings and surrogate mothers.

The entire complex was surrounded by high walls and the entrance, with its six marble pillars, was guarded by a porter who directed the private clients to another entrance, itself decorated with four colossal gold covered columns which led them directly to the administration block. Patients, on the other hand, had a special entrance to guarantee them complete secrecy.<sup>39</sup>

However, other documentation<sup>40</sup> highlights not only the pleasant position for its pure air and water but also the difficulty reaching it because of the impractical steep road and then, little by little, the unsuitability of the rooms given the increasing number of people and patients. As time passed, the institute would require restructuring or even an extension.

Not only the critical economic aspects which always had a major part in how the institute was run in strict parsimony, but also its underpinning ideals of a positive outcome and social order continuously slowed down any excessive development. These ideals were modeled on the type of assistance set up in protestant countries rather than the purely philanthropic or charitable aims of catholic states. Indeed the intention of assisting illegitimate infants, which was of primary importance to the political and religious powers in Trentino, was for example considered only a secondary propriety as the institute did not want to be classified as a foundling hospital. This was demonstrated even further in the clause written into the procedure requiring to hand back children, not under care of guardians, to their mothers when they reached ten years of age.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Lallemand L., *Historie des enfants abandonés ...*, cited and Gorni M.G., Pellegrini L., *Un problema ...*, cited.

<sup>39</sup> Braun C., *Übersicht ...*, cited, p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 406. *Relazione del Commissario circolare*, 24.10.1857; in c. 287, *Lettera del prof. Pastorello*, Trento, 25.1.1850; c. 426, *Lettera del prof. Esterle*, Trento, 26.8.1857.

<sup>41</sup> A.S.T., *Raccolta delle Leggi del Tirolo e Vorarlberg*, vol. 1832, pp. 808-866 – *Aprimento dell'Istituto delle Partorienti e degli Esposti in Trento, 14 dicembre 1832 – Piano di organizzazione*.

This clause could not be entirely complied with during the first years of the institution's operation simply because of the different existing local concepts regarding this issue on the part of private individuals but particularly by the political and religious authorities. Gradually, but with great difficulty, this new idea that handing back the child at least to the commune of the mother, as required under the existing laws for the poor, meant that the child, having been looked after for ten years by the institute, was brought closer to its place of birth and then to the mother herself.

The most important stages which feature in the life of the institute focus on the problem of who should provide for the Tyrolese foundlings after the Austrian Treasury had set up what was necessary for the newborn infants, and more importantly, the momentary help also given to their unmarried mothers. Initially, for the first ten years of the child's life, the Treasury bore the burden by paying a network of guardians. At the end of the ten years, however, as well as pointing out the possible future economic benefit of having another or extra working family member, a spirit of philanthropy was almost expected and hoped for from these guardians. Having brought up the child, the guardians should therefore have continued to keep him/her without further remuneration. These entreaties were made unceasingly and the clergy were certainly encouraged to remind their flock of these facts.

During the first years of the institute these expectations were not completely thwarted but with the increase in the number of children cared for, the number of those to be returned increased too. This induced the government to repeatedly refer to the common laws on home help for the poor, which in the case of foundlings with unknown origins, fell to the Trento Commune as this was where the institute was located.<sup>42</sup> This arrangement provoked various protests from the commune and opened

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<sup>42</sup> Haemmerle E., *Il Comune autonomo. Guida per i capo comuni e le rappresentanze comunali*. Vienna, 1868.

up an age-old controversy involving the town council (Captaincy), the clergy, the tribunal and part of the population.<sup>43</sup>

The Captain General (*Capitanato Circolare*) had also suggested placing any foundlings given back by their guardians or foster parents in the Pia Casa di Ricovero S. Lorenzo (St. Lorenzo Home) in Trento but this was met with blank refusal by the local charitable congregation. It was claimed that this act was in direct conflict with the home's objectives of providing for the poor only from the Trento Commune and that 'by uniting the foundlings from the entire province with the inmates who themselves were not part of this establishment, the spirit of charity so vital to its existence would be completely annihilated'.<sup>44</sup>

The temporary solution asked for by the Trento Commune regarding the longstanding foundling dispute brought about changes in how the institute was run. One by one, the age of ten was extended to twelve years old, thanks to monies from a special fund set up using different provincial contributions, but at twelve the child no longer kept by the foster parents was sent directly back to the commune where the mother resided and sometimes to the mother herself. This arrangement was more easily carried out by the fact that the German-speaking mothers, less jealous of the 'secrecy' required regarding the identity of illegitimate mothers, had been given the possibility to choose foster parents who would not burden the institute with the worrying problem of returning the children.<sup>45</sup>

Initially the Laste Triplicate Institute was set up to be governed mainly by lay supervisory staff who did not reside on the premises but who were responsible for the three main areas - medical, administration and

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<sup>43</sup> The bulky documentation on this issue is in the file *Vertenza Esposti* in the Trento Commune Archive under *Sanità 1844-1850*. Other information is under *Normali 1833-1875* and also in the Trento State Archive, Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 247, 241, and 269. Analysis of these documents regarding this long diatribe, which started around 1842 and concluded favorably for the Trento Commune only around 1850, gives us a meticulous example in terms of morality and traditions and, in particular, the attitudes of various political and religious forces as well as private individuals regarding single mothers and their offspring.

<sup>44</sup> A.S.T., Fondo capitanato Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 139, 1846. *Lettere dd. 15.2.1846*.

<sup>45</sup> In Fondo Sanità, c. 269; A.C.T., entry '*Normali*' as well as *Raccolta delle leggi provinciali pel Tirolo e Vorarlberg*, Innsbruck, 1814-1848 and the *Bollettino Provinciale degli atti del Governo pel Tirolo-Vorarlberg*, Innsbruck, 1849-1914.

religious. The superintendence responded directly to the Captain General and the local magistrate, the only person authorized to ratify legal directives. This office was first held by Mr. Montavon and from 1853 by a Mr. Tecini.

The medical area comprised the doctor, the obstetrician, the professor of obstetrics and the vice superintendent. The latter could also carry out his medical profession but was obliged to live in the institute. On his shoulders fell the responsibility of fulfilling the government's expectations of improving the field of obstetrics and educating the mothers, which although never declared explicitly, was one of the institute's main objectives. Indeed the best local obstetricians at the time joined the institute where they acquired fame and then moved on to run more important clinics of obstetrics or take up university teaching posts. Among those most noted were Professors Pastorello, Esterle, and Angelini but in particular Professor Braun.

The head physician had an assistant who attended at the births and carried out minor surgery and, given the heavy schedule of the head physician, was the person mostly on duty in the institute. Alongside these was the head midwife who generally looked after the paying clients and a second midwife who worked gratuitously under the first. There were also two nurses in the medical department but in light of their little or non-existent training and resulting very low wage would have been better classified as hospital attendants.

The administration area was managed by the supervisor and the general manager, who assisted by two day staff, had to share the work involving the accounts, general housekeeping and clerical duties as well as deal with any disciplinary measures involving staff.

The pastoral area was overseen by a priest. After 1847 together with his normal duty of saying mass, he also taught religious studies and general education to the older foundlings then resident or temporarily accommodated for various reasons in the institute.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The owner of the eating house, who supplied meals until 1850, was part of the staff. Up to that time, there was also an inspector with the duty of surveilling the foundlings in custody but he/she did not reside in Laste Institute.



A turning point in how the institute was run occurred when the Lovere Sisters of Charity were introduced. This had already been planned for in 1851 as part of the proposed reorganization, even if up to that time the institute had been run mostly by lay personnel without intrusions or financial aid from the church, not even from the bishop who himself presided over the allocation of funds from charitable congregations. Their presence would prove useful based on the positive results they had obtained both in terms of professional input and patient morale in the general hospital in Trento. However, their professional and ethical preparation was not the only reason the Sisters were to be given the job of looking after the medical/financial aspects and general running of hospitals and especially the Laste Institute. It was also a question of utter utilitarianism as well as greater saving. The humanitarian aim of the vocation of a religious person and the unselfish brotherly love imposed by their order were aspects that the different administrations did not hesitate to exploit in the more qualified services provided by the Sisters at less cost and on a full time basis.

However, negotiations continued until the end of 1859 because of the sorrowful lack of appropriate funds but more importantly in anticipation firstly of the handing over of the institute to the Province, planned for 1854 but only realized in 1868, and secondly because of the publically unannounced intention of a possible transfer of part or all of the institute to Innsbruck.

Repeated pressure in general, financial arguments forwarded by the Laste administration and moral issues arising from a contribution of 1000 florins paid by the Captain General finally convinced the Internal Minister in 1859 to formally employ six nuns. These nuns imposed an even stricter management of the Laste concerning the food and how the available premises were to be used.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Reggenza Circolare, Fondo Laste, c. 330, 1851. *Lettera dell'Amministrazione Laste alla Pia Casa di S. Caterina alla Ruota*, Trento, 4.10.1851; *ivi*, 1852 *Lettera del Ministero dell'Interno*, Vienna, 25.11.1852; *ivi*, c. 513, *Lettera dell'Amministrazione Laste all'Ordinariato*, Trento, 13.10.1856; in *Lettera dell'Ordinariato alle Suore di Carità di Trento*, Trento, 2.12.1857; A.C.A.T., book B (541), no. 928, *Lettera dd. 24.3.1859*; no. 927, *Lettera di data 3.11.1859 del direttore delle Laste de Tecini al Vescovo de Tschiderer*; book B (546) no. 3448, 1859; the Maria Bambina Institute Archive – Novitiate – Trento, from the *Cronaca Suore di Maria Bambina – Provincia di Trento, parte I, 1844-1896*. With the arrival of the Sisters, the two daily hires, namely the inspector and the eating house owner, were dismissed.

Yet the Laste Institute was still unable to accommodate the increasing number of requests for places and was in desperate need of enlargement or restructuring. Different suggestions on how to improve assistance for the foundlings were put forward: for example, to add a workhouse for children 'at the right age'<sup>48</sup> to become industrious. However, the solution to all these evident problems was found in a completely different way *viz.* by not rebuilding the institute but by breaking it up.

The maternity ward was transferred to Innsbruck in 1858. Officially this was to meet the needs of the local university but it also benefited the German contingent of the population who had repeatedly asked for an *in situ* arrangement.<sup>49</sup> This relocation produced a partial elimination of the orphanage because at a few days old most of the infants were given in custody to foster parents nominated by the mothers themselves.

In 1866<sup>50</sup> the Vienna Foundling Institution introduced another measure which was later adopted in Innsbruck, that of lowering the age of assistance for foundlings to six years old. After that age six, foundlings passed to the care of the communes they were born in.

On 1 July 1868, the Laste Institute became the administrative responsibility of the Province of Trento: instead of the lieutenancy of the local authorities, the Tyrolese Provincial Committee<sup>51</sup> took over and dealt with all matters. The acceptance of children had, however, undergone major restrictions in the form of provisional amendments which finally concluded in the law of 3 December 1863 regarding home or domicile help.

This law stated that the local districts should look after their own infirm or those without means of support and these categories of the destitute also included the very vulnerable. This was a sign of the times but also in line with the Austrian concept of help for the vulnerable which aimed at

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<sup>48</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 406, *Lettera del direttore de Tecini al Capitanato*, Trento, 19.11.1855.

<sup>49</sup> Reports from meetings of the Tyrolese Diet Parliament in Innsbruck in "*Tirolischer Landtage 1865-1866*", Innsbruck, 1866.

<sup>50</sup> A.C.T., Sanità, c. 609, *Raccolta delle leggi del Tirolo e Vorarlberg*, cited, 1866, p. 33.

<sup>51</sup> A.C.T., *Normali*, 1868.

protecting the interests of the child. The mother was also assured of material and moral help and shelter in her moment of greatest need while reminding her of her duties and responsibly that whoever made use of this service would pay back in some way.<sup>52</sup>

A new Faculty of Medicine was opened in the University of Innsbruck on 28 September 1869. The ward transferred from the Laste Institute proved to be inadequate for the requirements of the Clinic of Obstetrics and so with little fanfare other than a few lines in the Tyrol Law bulletin, the Laste Institute in Trento was transferred entirely and permanently to Innsbruck.<sup>53</sup> Another reason that possibly influenced this decision was that any dual management involved an extra burden and very complex organization which the Tyrolese administration did not consider worthwhile.

As well as the understandable distress, the relocation weighed heavily on the Trentino population and communes and lead to a long heated debate involving political, social and religious powers as well as the media right up to the end of the Austrian domination.<sup>54</sup>

The nationalist parties made the case for the reopening of the Laste Institute by canvassing it as yet another abuse of power in Italian Tyrol and more evidence of the injustice of Tyrolese politics which always favored the Germans.<sup>55</sup> The situation was indeed extremely complicated. The removal of the Laste Institute meant that Trentino officially lost all rights to, or rather was made to renounce, the longstanding practice it had tried to provide regarding the placement of children in Verona. The solution in Innsbruck, as well as being disliked by the population,

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<sup>52</sup> In exchange the institution's statute required the mother-in-labor who was accepted free of charge to be a wet nurse and do other tasks or services without payment for four months.

<sup>53</sup> A.C.T., *Normali*, 1869

<sup>54</sup> A.C.T., *Sanità*, c. 668, *Lettera della Giunta Provinciale Tirolese alla Congregazione di Carità*, Innsbruck, 9.12.1870; *Lettera dell'I.R. Commissariato di Polizia*, Trento, 4.2.1871; *Lettera del direttore dell'Istituto Esposti di Verona al Municipio di Trento*, Verona, 26.4.1871; *Lettera del Podestà di Riva*, Riva, 14.12.1870.

<sup>55</sup> See different articles in the *Voce Cattolica* newspaper, in particular a report on various speakers published on 6 June 1881; *Resoconto delle sedute della Dieta Tirolese 1866*, cited, where a deliberation of the House preannounces and proposes the definite transfer to Innsbruck and where the speaker recriminates on yet another "abuse of power on the part of the Italians".

produced new problems related to the distance, different traditions, lack of organization but especially the language disparity. In practice Trentino now found itself in an even worse position than in 1832.

Somewhat unofficially and with the understanding demonstrated by the head of the orphanage in the Veneto region, Mr Agostini,<sup>56</sup> the dispatch of illegitimate children from Trentino slowly restarted and the institute in Innsbruck was consistently disregarded. In 1920 Trentino finally acquired a new institute based on modern criteria for the assistance of illegitimate children and their mothers in the form of *la Famiglia Materna (The Family Nursery)*, in Rovereto.<sup>57</sup>

## THE INSTITUTE and INSTITUTION ACTIVITY

### a) *The Maternity Department*

The Institute's statute documents the mission of this section to be: *It serves as a haven for those who have lost their virginity, protects them from shame and need, and welcomes the fruit of their womb.*<sup>58</sup> This clearly defines and outlines the primary commitment of help for single mothers but retains a negative undertone which was part of the convictions at that time.

In fact... *'having an illegitimate child in this land is reputed a disgrace: a young woman who is an unmarried mother must conceal her monstrosity, place the offspring in a children's home, then lead a respectable life so as not to have her name tarnished. In this part of Tyrol morality is a very delicate matter. Sin does not always lead to triumphal dissolution. Illegitimate intercourse is still a stigma here and everything must be done*

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<sup>56</sup> A.C.T., *Sanità*, c. 668, *Lettera del direttore Agostini*, cited.

<sup>57</sup> Daldoss G., *Le madri nubili, i trovatelli e la famiglia materna di Rovereto*, Rovereto, 1938. The hospice was set up with the main objective to unite the mother to the child, to help her by giving her a job and financial help as long as she was willing to recognize her child and not abandon it.

<sup>58</sup> A.S.T., *Raccolta delle Leggi*, cited, p. 810.

to keep it a secret. This way of thinking is a strong deterrent to immoral behavior'.<sup>59</sup>

A letter from the Captain General reaffirms that... 'The beneficent aim of his royal Majesty, whose generosity and grace has led to the building of this Institute ... was certainly the sanctified idea of diminishing the very sad consequences of the immorality and vice, to impede very serious crimes and uphold the honor of many unhappy women'.<sup>60</sup>

The captaincy office in Trento also stated that 'institutions for pregnant and birthing mothers were set up to protect the honor of unfortunate ill-fated women'.<sup>61</sup> The conditions of absolute dependence, economically as well as psychologically, under which the women of 19<sup>th</sup> century Trentino were expected to live did not permit convictions of any other nature.<sup>62</sup>

The principle of 'policing', which in the eyes of the public opinion in Trentino more so than in German Tyrol, justified the building of institutions for unmarried mothers and their babies remained unchanged until the end of the 1800s.

The institute for mothers and babies in Trento came to be thought of as a prison or a house of correction rather than the modern medical unit as intended by the government. It was these differently held views that over the years caused discordant interpretations of any measures and regulations but in particular the idea of considering the institute not as a temporary refuge at the time of greatest need for the mother and baby,

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<sup>59</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Varie, c. 241, *Relazione del Parroco di S. Maria sull'Istituto Laste*, Trento, 26.5.1846.

<sup>60</sup> In Sanità, c. 241 *Lettera dell'Ordinariato Vescovile Principesco di Trento, all'I.R. Capitanato Circolare di Trento*, Trento, 1.10.1864

<sup>61</sup> A.C.T., Sanità, c. 56 *Lettera dell'I.R. Capitanato Circolare di Trento al Magistrato, Politico economico*, Trento, 30.10.1838

<sup>62</sup> In a letter sent by curate in Terzolas to the management of the institution in 1864. The stance and the common mindset are clearly defined (cf. A.S.T., Fondo Consigliere Aulico, Sanità, c. 21, 1864). See Appendix II. On this topic cf. A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 406, *Ricorso di una mamma* (Appeal of a Mother), 6 May 1865, "public shame, maltreatment, shunned by family relatives, the loss of any kind of decent placement" for a single mother.

but as a system which would have been able to 'cancel out the sin and its fruit for ever'.<sup>63</sup>

Admission could be free of charge or by payment. Obviously being admitted to the private ward meant a minimum of formality and a guarantee of absolute secrecy. The private patients could enter veiled, at any time during their pregnancy and at any time day or night, and were received by the porter who was commissioned to collect the fee depending on their class of treatment. Their details were written down on a special form and sealed in an envelope which was opened only in the case of death. The private section was divided into three classes: as well as absolute secrecy, patients were guaranteed separation and differentiation from those admitted free even where meals and use of the garden were concerned. In particular in the case of first class patients, the institute functioned as a modern clinic and this meant being assisted by the chief midwife in a single room where expectant mothers could have their meals and then give birth. They could choose to refrain from breast feeding their child and even in church an individual 'prayer room' was reserved for them. These inmates enjoyed the full liberty of leaving and entering the institute before and after the birth at any time of day, and also the privilege of having visitors.<sup>64</sup>

As intended by the government, this institute carried out its *policing* obligations but also the normal keeping of public order duties, and thus took care of any potential public, social or medical conflict; indirectly this effectively served as a partial remedy to the then widespread pauperism because most of the admitted patients pertained to the non-paying class.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> A.S.T., Capitanato Circolare di Trento, Sanità, c. 241, *Lettera dd. 7.10.1846 dell'Ordinariato al Capitanato Circolare di Trento*.

<sup>64</sup> Obviously the number of paying patients in the Institution was not very high: for 1833 -1870, from a total of 8435 registered admissions, 1115 were 3<sup>rd</sup> class, 3812<sup>nd</sup> class and only 25 were 1<sup>st</sup> class. These are only approximate numbers because those who moved from one class to another are not registered. This normally took place from the paying section and vice versa. Cf. statistics in the appendix.

<sup>65</sup> Coppola G., *Comunicazione al Convegno nazionale di studio "Stato e Chiesa di fronte all'Assistenza"*, held in Pistoia 15-18 November 1979 (in print).

However, it is important to stress the fact that the condition of free admittance came with a whole series of questions about the whereabouts, status and the tangible poverty of the person involved as well as various compensatory acts on the part of the inmate. The most important demanded the services as a wet nurse for four months in the institute and being called unrestrainedly upon to take part in the practical exercises for trainee midwives from the School of Obstetrics.<sup>66</sup>

Just as secrecy was closely kept for the private patients, this certainly was not the case for the free inmates given that the large amount of documented information made them easily identifiable. It has to be said that investigations were carried out ten years later at the 'normal' age of the child who if not kept by its guardians, or claimed by the mother herself, were returned to their commune of origin. As a result of uncertainty regarding the law and later circular letters, the communes did all they could to charge others with the 'assisted residency' or presented moral arguments to escape the burden of these costs.

Under the claim of secrecy, in addition to upholding the lady's honor and the resulting effective disparity of treatment between private and public patients, also lay the firm economic aim of trying to charge the State Treasury with the needy mother-to-be and her child in a period of widespread pauperism. For economic reasons the debate on this issue extended not only to the communes, but also to the Ordinariate and the clergy who repeatedly enumerated that the name and the origins of all those admitted to the mother and baby institute should be 'indistinctly kept under the most inviolable secrecy and that at no time would an illegitimate child be returned to any mother unless expressly requested by the mother herself.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Occasionally mothers seven months pregnant (instead of eight) or those with premature first births were also accepted in the Laste Institute as long as they were willing to comply with the previous obligations. However special cases were evaluated singularly even if the institution's general rules were always to be adhered to. (cf. Piano di organizzazione dell'Istituto Laste in 'Raccolta delle leggi', cited). Pregnant mothers sent by the authorities (from prisons or retention centers) were also accepted without any guarantee against their trying to escape or validating their unmarried status and poverty. The Trento Hospital admitted legitimate sick pregnant mothers and these costs were covered by the home commune or by a local charitable congregation.

<sup>67</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Sanità, c. 241, 1846, *Lettera dell'Ordinariato al Capitanato Circolare*, Trento, 19.10.1846.

Obviously not only was the cited view not accepted in the seat of government but the different viewpoints regarding the assistance and containment of illegitimacy in general and especially the foundlings became even more marked. A first attempt was made to shift the financial burden onto the Trento commune as it was home to the institution but then as a result of lack of information, no one knew exactly which commune to debit. However, following a series of dispositions, on 1 September 1855 a declaration was made to the effect that on admission every nonpaying individual had to state her name and abode thus making it easier to redraft a claim for any eventual future expenses.<sup>68</sup>

For the same reason first only the paying patients, followed by the German inmates and then everyone else, were given the possibility, but later forced, to indicate any remunerated guardians in order to avoid more outgoings and drawn-out bureaucracy. Unintentionally this precaution worked in the interest of the foundlings and during the final years of the institution the future placement of the child became a general compulsory condition and finally placed protecting the mother's honor, which had previously been assured and reiterated in word, into secondary importance.

To justify its position, the Austrian administration never failed to point out in response to the numerous protests received that excessive largesse in free admissions would have favored the entry of illegitimate children, a condition which had become a deluge in the nearby orphanages and homes in Milan and Brescia and which the Austrian government had attempted unsuccessfully to stem.<sup>69</sup>

After the bureaucratic formalities had been taken care of, the woman in labor was visited by the senior midwife and in cases of uncertainty, by the assistant or the head of the department. Particular attention was paid to syphilitic mothers who, even if continuative data is missing, must have

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<sup>68</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Reggenza Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 287. For transitional cases cfr. A.S.T., Fondo Reggenza Circolare Trento, c. 333, c. 287, c. 406; A.C.T., Sanità, c.247. Alternatively "the guarantee of maintenance for the illegitimate child until the normal age" was imposed but eventual appeals, which always occurred, were accepted and examined case by case.

<sup>69</sup> Gorni M.G., Pellegrini L., *Un problema*, cited.



been fairly numerous considering the number of case reports found. After the birth these mothers went to the general hospital to be treated.

In the institution there was very strict discipline especially for the gratuitous individuals. Everything was planned within a tight budget. The women admitted were made to work under the guide of a training supervisor to clean, thread and weave hemp. In addition the expectant mothers, wet nurses and nurses also attended to the linen and laundry and prepared layettes. They also looked after the slightly older or *bread* (weaned) children and bottle-fed new born infants.<sup>70</sup> A decree in 1836 specifically states that 'gratuitous mothers, unless sick, and even if not suited to being a wet nurse... before being discharged must be sent to the Foundling Institution where only the administration will decide if they should not be called to carry out other services or duties'.<sup>71</sup> They could even be destined to be wet nurses for private individuals, families or other nearby institutions for a maximum period of four months.<sup>72</sup>

The board or food was supplied by an outside contractor who had to abide by the requirements laid down in terms of the quality and quantity of the meals. Much importance was given to the preparation of the food and the dietary needs: this meant enough variety and fairly complete given the era, meat broth or bouillon always on the menu, different types of food on a daily basis and wine. There was a shortage of milk and eggs, probably thought of as food for the privileged few and not always readily available, and certainly, in the case of milk, difficult to conserve but these two foods, white bread and the best quality wine were prescribed by the doctor when needed.<sup>73</sup> Vegetables, which were grown in the nearby

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<sup>70</sup> Even if the plan of how the institution was organized did not indicate as such, it can be presumed that most of the cleaning and upkeep of the house etc. had to be done by the inmates themselves because only two nursing staff considered cleaners would certainly not have been enough for such a complex structure.

<sup>71</sup> A.S.T., *Raccolta delle Leggi*, cited, 1836, p. 420.

<sup>72</sup> A.S.T. Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 88. On 28.6.1841 the Foundling Home in Brescia asked the Laste Institution to send help as it had urgent need of wet nurses.

<sup>73</sup> A.S.T., *Raccolta delle Leggi*, cited. *Piano di Organizzazione dell'Istituto*, p. 832; in Fondo Capitanato Circolare, Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 570, 1832; *Condizioni d'asta per l'impresa di vivandiere al Triplice Istituto alle Laste presso Trento*; in "Prospetto sulla commisurazione degli ingredienti per ogni singolo articolo che forma parte delle porzioni da somministrarsi dal vivandiere al triplice Istituto delle Laste in base all'editto d'asta del 1° ottobre 1832; in *Prospetto dei*

kitchen gardens, were unexplainably used in a limited fashion and even more so fruit, which was then considered a luxury and given mostly to the paying patients who enjoyed better treatment.

The wet nurses who as well as breast feeding their own child were obliged to nurse another infant for four months were even given an afternoon snack.<sup>74</sup> This particular circumstance set the Laste Institution apart from other similar establishments because even if the latter were in dire straits concerning the number of nursing mothers, they did not resort to making their inmates breastfeed others.<sup>75</sup>

Undoubtedly, in particular with the outside contractor and before the arrival of the nuns, the meals was checked by the staff and the food was available regularly, well prepared and a balanced diet for most of the individuals admitted and certainly much better than the lifestyle of those outside its walls.<sup>76</sup>

The phenomenon of illegitimacy was mainly found in the lower classes especially among maids or domestic servants (49.6 percent) who lived away from their families, and farm workers (41.41 percent) who were too poor to get married and bound by the laws that excluded marriage between indigents as a result of isolation or seclusion and the precarious unions governed by poverty.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, abject misery rather than immorality was the cause of illegitimate pregnancies and the pregnancy itself only increased the destitution because the unwed mother was not readily accepted in the workplace.

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*generi, loro quantità, qualità, da somministrarsi alle tre diverse classi dal vivandiere dell'Istituto degli Esposti alle Laste".*

<sup>74</sup> In *Prospetto dei cibi per le balie*.

<sup>75</sup> Obviously this obligation and rigid discipline compelled many assisted patients to think up various ways to avoid this task e.g. trying to be declared unfit or even running away so much so that the management built a containing wall around the institution cfr. A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare, Voci Varie, c. 112; Fondo Laste, c. 466, 1858.

<sup>76</sup> This was highlighted by the evident social diseases caused by a serious lack in nutrition, carelessness in food preparation or precarious living conditions in general, and often found in the poorest patients who made up the largest number. Very often ratchets were the cause of difficult and irregular labor as well as being the indirect effect, as stated by Prof. Esterle, of the illegitimacy problem.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Statistics, Table 2

From this point was perhaps the path to prostitution. Although not mentioned in the conditions of those admitted to the Laste, it may well have been that most cases of syphilitic mothers were in aforementioned category. As well as farmworkers and domestic servants, who made up 90 percent of the women, 144 day workers, 127 sewers, 136 factory workers, 38 craftswomen, 35 weavers, 17 civilians, 14 washerwomen, 10 seamstresses, 5 cooks, 2 waitresses, 1 florist, 4 spinners, 1 innkeeper, 2 ambulant traders, and 1 teacher are mentioned. This social makeup supports the theory that the institution was also a remedy for pauperism.<sup>78</sup>

In its thirty-seven years, the institution welcomed 8,435 expectant mothers, an average of 228 per year with a consistently upward trend. Numbers peaked in 1851 (272), 1852 (308), 1853 (326) and 1857 (365) and then decreased gradually after the opening of the new ward in Innsbruck. The number of nonpaying expectant mothers, used as the basis for our statistics, together with their information (place of birth, age, profession) were a total of 6914 persons, 3782 of which were German. From among the paying inmates, it is only possible to infer their place of birth from 1850 onward by considering the surname given to the child.<sup>79</sup>

The subdivision by age confirms the fact that the largest number of illegitimate births occurred in young woman<sup>80</sup> with 1,102 in women aged 23-24 years and 1,012 in those aged 25-26 years.<sup>81</sup> Their origin, understandably available only for the majority of the nonpaying class, was established using the nine captaincy localities as well as the twenty-five census districts. This confirmed the opinion put forward in various reports and declarations released by the civil and religious authorities in Trento of perhaps a scarce afflux of pregnant mothers from Trento itself. It also presumed not necessarily a decrease in the number of illegitimate births

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, Table 1

<sup>80</sup> Not the very young but only 11 aged 15-16 years. *Ibid*, Table 3.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*

but a continuation of the customary traffic to the home in Verona with the complicity of wet nurses and the customary transporters even if this had been prohibited after the opening of the Laste institution. This activity not only occurred in Trento but also in Riva and Rovereto and the phenomena can be proven by the repeated complaints from Verona and by the conviction that the longstanding habit was difficult to break especially as Verona was accessible and well established and also had the *wheel*, which certainly made matters so much easier to deal with.

To sum up, there were 209 registered patients from the census district of Trento in the Laste Institution, 253 from Cavalese, Borgo had 257, Rovereto 173 and finally Riva with 54.<sup>82</sup>

The scientific function of the institution as confirmed by the positive results and high practical level in obstetrics attained by surgeons working in the Laste School has already been mentioned. The general precariousness of the health of many of the patients should have presupposed a high death rate or at least a high rate of morbidity. The positive results obtained demonstrated an average death rate of 1-2% and even the morbidity was always lower when compared to that of other national and international institutions.<sup>83</sup> In addition, the institution was spared from some epidemics, like the cholera which broke out around Trento in 1836, and involved less frequently and with a lower ensuing death rate by other outbreaks. It was not, however, saved from puerperal or childbed fever which was an almost unsolvable problem in childbirth until the end of the 1800s: the first case was reported in 1846. Cholera also reached the institution in 1855 forcing it to close and

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* An interesting fact, which had always been highlighted in various other reports, was the increasing number of admissions from northern Tyrol coinciding with the possibility given them to choose the foster parents. This shows their quicker ability to overcome a conception based on saving their honor and the tendency to use the institution basically as a clinic thus reserving their possibility, when the moment of most need was over, to follow and even get their child back more easily.

<sup>83</sup> These diseases, including ever-present intermittent fevers, scabies, bronchitis and of course types of syphilis, were accurately described together with how they were cured. The most frequently used medications were castor oil, emollient poultices, oily drinks, rye seeds, chloroform, opiates, iodine tincture and other plant tinctures like mallow, deadly nightshade, chamomile, valerian and arnica as well as the head physician's, Dr. Braun, wide use of leeches. Cf. Braun C., *Übersicht*, cited; Pastorello L., *Prospetto clinico per l'anno 1850/51*, p. 62; Esterle C., *Rapporto clinico 1856-57*.

discharge the pregnant patients for a few months. In 1857 there were 15 cases of smallpox and in December of the same year, 70 cases of typhoid in the breastfeeding mothers. In 1858 a new very severe epidemic of puerperal fever occurred which forced the suspension of admissions and the discharge of pregnant patients for five weeks.<sup>84</sup>

In his final report Dr. Esterle attributed the causes of the closure not only to the ongoing epidemic but to the overcrowding in the nonpaying section and impossibility of isolation as well as to the overwhelming want of space in the building, the lack of fresh water etc., all matters which as the institution grew would have required a general reorganization. Another epidemic of puerperal fever also broke out in 1861.<sup>85</sup>

### b) *The Orphanage, Children's Home and Foundling Institution*

This establishment, which was linked to the maternity home and managed by the same staff, took in the needy illegitimate children and educated them until the age of 10 and in some cases even longer.

Although set up only for illegitimate children born to unwed mothers, it also temporarily accepted children whose parents were ill or in hospital in Trento until they recovered or, in the case of death, until suitable alternative accommodation was found. It accepted legitimate children born to prison inmates or those in the provincial workhouses.<sup>86</sup>

Strict regulation as well as a considerable increase in the fees, or at least a rigorous check on the possibility of payment by relatives, had displeased the local population and district authorities who had for a long time been used to the different admission criteria used for the home in Verona and simply small fees or even none at all.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid* and A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 193, *Lettere del Direttore Montavon al Capitanato Circolare, Trento*, 7- 8 June 1846, therein c. 466; Sartori E., *Istituto provinciale di Maternità in "La voce Cattolica"*, Trento, a. XIV (1879), 88, 27.7.1879, pp. 2-3.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>86</sup> A.S.T., *Raccolta delle Leggi*, cited, 1832, p. 826.

<sup>87</sup> A.C.T., Sanità, c. 106, *Lettera del Magistrato Politico ec. di Rovereto*, 12.7.1833 "... the Hospital of Mercy in Verona has from time immemorial been obliged to admit all the illegitimate children born in Tyrol. This obligation can be inferred from some treaty or some estate sold to them... From a declaration by the Verona Orphanage it was

After a taut though futile debate with the Austrian government to try and have some rights recognized, at least on the basis of the long practice with Verona as an alternative to the Laste, the political and religious parties in Trentino had to desist that objection.

The controversy then focused on the principle held by Vienna regarding the aid or assistance for the orphans namely that the maintenance of illegitimate children was not the main objective of the institution but rather the duty of the respective commune except in special cases under examination from time to time.<sup>88</sup> The different concepts of aid and clearly the financial motivations tended, however, to shift the maintenance and destiny of the foundlings in the institution firmly onto the State Treasury.<sup>89</sup>

Just as in the maternity department where the law imposed the carrying out of scientific gynecological research and the training of wet nurses, the Foundling Institution could serve in the clinical instruction and investigation of childhood diseases for internships and, even if the interest in pediatrics in general was still at its beginnings, later in experiments on artificial breastfeeding. In a report, Dr. Pastorello, one of the most illustrious professors assigned to the Laste home, hints at this fact and at the possibility of publishing interesting cases of infant disease. He insisted on the need to keep syphilitic children, or suspected as such,

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understood that no fee is expected for the foundlings from Tyrol but that they paid only 10 Italian lire. This acknowledgement is considered alms as in holy times and of old custom”.

<sup>88</sup> This principle, not having been made clear in the Institution’s Organizational Plan, had thus caused a series of misunderstandings followed by appeals, investigations and moral and financial quibbles throughout the entire working life of the institution.

<sup>89</sup> Safeguarding the mother’s honor was the recurrent main issue and as a result the human rights of the child were left out. This line of conduct was also endorsed by the clergy who justified this by highlighting the disparity implemented for the children of paying patients (guaranteed complete secrecy) and those free of charge. Paradoxically this discrimination made the children of wealthy mothers into ‘privileged children’ who would never know who their mother was. ‘This law seems to have been attributed to only certain illegitimate children and the Magistrate’s Court sees no reason why these children cannot deprive of a law in which everything their mothers paid for maintenance and satisfied the required fee remains secret’. A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Sanità, c. 241, *Lettera dell’Ordinariato di Trento all’I.R. Capitanato Circolare di Trento*, 19.10.1846.

under tight control in order to experiment with the most effective treatments but especially to contain the infection.<sup>90</sup>

The head physician was also delegated to carry out the vaccination program and to obtain and supply the vaccine required for Trentino.<sup>91</sup> If on the one hand the designation of the Laste Foundling Institution as the provincial vaccination body provided a practical solution to the anti-smallpox program, it did not stop the rise of perplexity concerning health and hygiene issues and then financial and administrative problems too. Hygienically there was always the high risk of infection regardless of the precautions taken<sup>92</sup>; financially, the requirement to vaccinate the foundlings before being given into custody meant their remaining in the home for at least two months with 'unnecessary extra costs'.<sup>93</sup>

Admission was determined on the basis of the conditions already mentioned but illegitimate children born in the maternity department were considered first and even the required fee was adjusted depending on the 'class' or social rank of the mother; 40 florins for first class and 16 florins for the second and third. Children of the nonpaying mothers who had become wet nurses and helped the midwives did not pay any fee. For illegitimate children from other provinces, a fee was set at 80 florins while those born outside the institution but who with the correct documentation could be admitted were required to pay 16 florins, the same amount as those children from the communes or charitable establishments. The real foundlings, namely those abandoned in the

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<sup>90</sup> Pastorello L., *Prospetto clinico dell'I.R. Istituto delle Partorienti alle Laste presso Trento, per l'anno 1850*, in the *Gazzetta medico-chirurgica del Trentino*, Trento, a. II (1852), VI, p.490.

<sup>91</sup> In 1839, for example, there were 490 children to be vaccinated from the Commune of Trento alone. A.S.T. Sanità , c. 56-90.

<sup>92</sup> Early vaccination was not after all advisable given the lowered defenses of the child: on the other hand the lymph vaccine had to be extracted from strong healthy children at least 6 months old (cf. A.C.T., Sanità, c. 90); Gorni M.G., Pellegrini L., *Un problema sociale*, cited, p.175; Nardo G.D., *Considerazioni sulla convenienza sanitaria di vaccinare i bambini esposti alla campagna dopo alcuni mesi di vita, piuttosto che nell'Istituto ove vengono accolti e nei primi giorni della nascita e sulle avvertenze igieniche da aversi nella baliera degli Istituti e nei comuni rurali onde impedire la propagazione della sifilide*; Agostini A., *L'ospizio provinciale degli esposti*, Verona, 1877, p.29.

<sup>93</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Reggenza Circolare, Trento, Fondo Laste. c.436, *Relazione del dott. Pastorello sulla vaccinazione*, Trento, 12.6.1852.

street or at the door of the ex-convent, were received free of charge at first.<sup>94</sup>

The admitted child was assigned a number and even given a name if it had not already been baptized.<sup>95</sup> Every detail of the mother was accurately written down in the admissions register if she was gratuitous, while paying mothers were only registered numerically with the details of the child and its personal record (if a permanent or temporary resident, given to a wet nurse, vaccinations, whereabouts of custody, name and address of various guardians, date of leaving the institution, name of guardian, return home and death).

The person who had brought the child received a note or receipt which on later presentation allowed that person in possession to obtain further information.

For children found abandoned, everything and anything that could lead to eventual identification was scrupulously conserved. Once all the administrative requirements were completed, the child was taken to the 'default room' and medically examined. Healthy children were then placed with wet nurses who had been carefully selected from among the nonpaying mothers who had given birth or, if necessary, those paid to carry out that particular task.

Sick or especially frail children (suspected syphilis cases) were placed in isolation or intensive care and bottle fed with cow's milk diluted with water and then milk mixed with rice flour. According to what has been understood from Dr. Braun's<sup>96</sup> writings and notes, particular care in terms

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<sup>94</sup> The number of cases of 'publicis locis' abandonment were relatively few during the 30 years of the institution's operation and even before that. This is unexplainable especially if one thinks about the widespread poverty, the prohibition of placing legitimate children in the Laste home, and the rigorous control in the admission of illegitimate children (cfr. A.S.T. Fondo Reggenza Circolare, Trento, Fondo Laste, c.319, c.149; A.C.T., Sanità, c. 307, 393, 483, 500, 520, 640; Menestrina F., *La delinquenza nel Trentino* in "*Tridentum*", a. I (1898), 2, pp. 120-147, 3 pp.161-184, 4, pp. 366-382.

<sup>95</sup> There was enormous concern about baptism which had to be celebrated in the correct manner and attested by a certificate from the institution's chaplain or another priest. The surname was decided upon in various ways: it could have been that desired by the mother or a name associated with the home region but never ridiculous or unusual names, or names which might reveal origin as had occurred in other similar orphanages (cf. Corsini C.A., *Materiali*, cited, p. 1027 and De Rosa G., *L'emarginazione sociale*, cited, p. 27).

<sup>96</sup> Braun C., *Übersicht*, cited, p. 13.



of hygiene and temperature was taken in the preparation of the milk. The practice of bottle feeding was still in its infancy and given the resulting disastrous consequences, it was generally not often used for infants in orphanages in spite of the problems encountered in finding enough nursing mothers in institutions of this type. This, however, was not the case in the Laste institution due to the fact of the good availability of wet nurses and Dr. Braun's experiments with bottle feeding even for healthy children which as well as producing satisfactory outcomes also proved economical.

In addition to a normal average of around twenty newborn infants, the older or so called 'bread' children, who for various reasons were in the institution – returned and awaiting a new foster home, brought back for medical care or infirm and therefore unwanted - had to be thought about and looked after. As for the infants, special foods were also prepared for these children in the kitchens by the same parturient mothers.<sup>97</sup>

As well as operating as a placement center, the institution in practice was also a hospital for very weak or sick children or those who needed special care and treatment: having two doctors always on duty meant that the institution was indeed a specialized medical center for that period. It is perhaps for this reason that the mortality rate within the institution remained relatively low when compared to other homes for foundlings and even with that of the infantile population in Trentino itself.<sup>98</sup>

Moreover the institution effectively carried out the duties of an orphanage for children who due to 'a complication or change in circumstances'<sup>99</sup> found themselves in the home in numbers fluctuating from between sixteen to forty-eight youngsters, which however created problems with their supervision and upbringing.

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<sup>97</sup> Different diets according to age 1-3 years, 4-7 years, 8-12 years and over. Strangely in these diets there was no afternoon snack.

<sup>98</sup> Grandi C., *La popolazione rurale trentina nella prima metà dell'Ottocento: primi risultati di una indagine*, and in Grandi C., Bassetto Pastori L., Leonardi A., *Popolazione, assistenza e struttura agraria nell'Ottocento trentino*, Trento, 1978.

<sup>99</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Reggenza Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c.333.

This ensemble of functions continued for the foundlings until someone in the county was found to assume the burden of feeding and keeping them. To this effect the district judges, magistrates, the captain general and the clergy were continuously urged to collaborate so that willing 'partners' in assuming their care, possibly free of charge, were not lacking.<sup>100</sup> This need to put pressure especially on peasant families was one of the most harassing issues for the Laste administration. Although the internal problem of wet nursing had easily been resolved, this fostering issue was met with great resistance from the local population, clergy and even the heads of the communes and judges.<sup>101</sup> These difficulties could in part be explained by the attitude towards the foundlings who were looked upon primarily with moral embarrassment and only, on second thoughts, considered human beings in need of greater pity and help.

We can presume that the slight or unfamiliarity with this social problem in Trentino circles (a solution having always been found in 'distant' Verona) had also played a part in the lack of awareness and understanding not only from the local population but the administrators themselves. The institution had been first state and then provincial-run and as a result people always tended to define the inmates as outsiders. This was also one of the main reasons for the lack of private charitable donations and quite different from what occurred for other types of needy groups.<sup>102</sup> In addition there was opposition from some priests and judges who were asked to produce certificates required for prospective

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<sup>100</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 572 and in Fondo Reggenza Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c.333, c. 319.

<sup>101</sup> A.C.T. Sanità, c. 200; A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Varie, c. 149, c- 200, c. 242. In a report by the Laste administration, Judge Floriani from Civezzano was accused of having answered Mr and Mrs Bonelli from Segonzano with the following comment when they asked him for a certificate of authorization to bring up a foundling: 'Do you really want to go crazy taking in bastards? What will you 'do' then with a bastard? You are mad, go crazy if you want with the bastards, I will not sign any such thing because it is a dishonorable act for a family to bring up bastards'. A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare, Fondo Laste, c. 572.

<sup>102</sup> A.C.T., Sanità, c. 200, *Lettera del Parroco di S. Maria Maggiore*, Trento, 24.2.1847.

guardians.<sup>103</sup> The situation became paradoxical: the very carers of the soul who did not tolerate foundlings in the villages or the judges who refused to provide authorization for possible foster parents were at the same time charged with checking and reporting on their treatment every three months.<sup>104</sup>

The problem of warding out children heightened during periods of famine and natural disaster when compensation, normally considered an incentive and in most cases the only incentive, almost dried up. Being a guardian was in fact neither clearly defined nor well paid. There was the possibility of keeping the foundling until the age of twenty-two but only if the child was not reclaimed by his/her natural parents or if the administration did not first find a less expensive or free arrangement.<sup>105</sup>

As well as the compensation other favorable terms were publicized for foster parents. A government pamphlet in 1832 explains the granted extension of military service for one of the guardian's children if two foundlings were taken free with at least one male being kept until age twelve.<sup>106</sup> A child also received an infant layette to be handed back after use. The institution took care of any required medical treatment and in

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<sup>103</sup> A.S.T., Fondo reggenza Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 333, *Lettera del Giudice Zanetti all'Amministrazione Laste*, Malè, 28.8.1846 and in *Lettera del Curato di Caldes all'Amministrazione Laste*, 1.5.1853 and Fondo Laste, c.572.

<sup>104</sup> However, examples of genuine interest in the foundlings were not lacking. Incitements which were often addressed to the Ordinariate spoke of a spirit of charity, moral humility and public order. At the same time it was hoped that the education of these foundlings was not neglected so as not to provoke an even greater decline in the morality of the population. In his reports the Ordinariate also underlined the fact that sometimes the lack of interest of the foster parents was because of the behavior of the Laste Administration which did not take into account the information supplied by the local clergy and, at the same time, urged placement of the foundlings to German areas in order to 'avoid an enormous increase in the number of proletariat only in the Trento area' (this advice was followed after 1850). A.S.T, Fondo Reggenza Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 333, *Lettera dell'Ordinariato alla Reggenza del Tirolo Italiano*, 7.7 1853.

<sup>105</sup> The four tariff categories for the guardians according to the age of the child meant 36 florins up to age 1, 30 florins up to age 2, 3-6 years 24 florins, and 7-10 years old 18 florins. To begin with, a guardian who kept a child from birth without interruption until 18 months old was awarded 4 florins. Cf. A.S.T., *Raccolta delle Leggi*, 1832, cited, p.854.

<sup>106</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 572. A strange fact about the Laste Institution was that there was minor request for and also less restitution of girls compared to boys even if the system of a 'dowry', which was present in many other institutions, did not exist there.

cases of special infirmity in the child, the foster parents received higher compensation.<sup>107</sup>

Regardless of the precautions taken by the institution when placing the children and considering the ever insufficient number of guardians, a large proportion of foundlings were brought up by generally the poorest families in the county. The sight of even misery earnings, the hope of a future occupation and the possible restitution of the foundling brought about real conditions for exploitation which were sometimes denounced but unfortunately often not dealt with or even accepted. The need for schooling and the *General Instructions* handed out by the institution<sup>108</sup> regarding hygiene, medical treatment and morals remained an enlightened list but unfortunately it was impossible to apply in most cases.

Fostering foundlings became a subsidiary or secondary profession to agriculture in some of the poorest valleys in Trentino, for example in Pinè and Cembra, and involved a large number of women who tried to reconcile the hard labor of working the fields with this new but still underpaid work.<sup>109</sup> In such a precarious social context, the dictates from the institution were not followed either through ignorance, prejudice, different living and eating conditions and the general overall meager lifestyle.

The inspector for the foundlings, who during his bimonthly visits always denounced the most obvious inconsistencies in how they were being treated, at the same time had to look after the interests of the institution which most of all feared the foundlings being returned. In carrying out his duty, the inspector availed himself of the assistance of the spiritual guides and district magistrates whose responsibility it was to compile and then, by means of the captaincy office, present the Laste administration with a

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<sup>107</sup> After a visit by the fiscal authorities which the Laste Administration was forced to establish because of the continued increasing requests for monies for 'defective' or sick foundlings, supported by too many complacent medical certificates.

<sup>108</sup> A.C.T., Sanità, 1834 and A.C.A.T., Libro B (388), *Istruzione per Quelli che Ricevono da Nutrire e Governare dei Figli Appartenenti alla Pia Casa degli Esposti alle Laste presso Trento*.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Statistics, Table 11

detailed report regarding the treatment, education and school attendance of the foundlings. This organization was fairly grass rooted as it involved the local authorities witnessing the daily life and vicissitudes of the population and should have guaranteed good routine inspection at least because a report had to be written. However, there were always protests of lateness and negligence and, over the course of the years, in particular complaints regarding the carelessness and oversight on the part of the clergy and general practitioners.<sup>110</sup>

The gratuity of the services of the doctors and priests as expected by the administration was often blamed for this lack of interest and even if a circular did anticipate reimbursement, the free services continued as did the grievances and appeals for some type of compensation.<sup>111</sup> The Laste administration tried to get round this obstacle by defining their request for collaboration from priests as 'a simple act of moral supervision in keeping with their calling'<sup>112</sup> and the work of family doctors looking after the health of the foundlings as a philanthropic gesture or act and indeed part of a doctor's profession. However, evidence of impartial and genuine compassion by some guardians in the treatment of 'the institution children' was also found.<sup>113</sup>

Conversely the district court in Civezzano, a constituency where the biggest number of orphans or displaced children were found, produced the following report in 1857: 'On visiting the orphans in Valle di Pinè, one may be led to think, in keeping with the commune and clergy documents, that the intention of the foster parents is not that of love or humanity but

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<sup>110</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare , Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 65 and in Sanità, c. 53.

<sup>111</sup> Therein cited, *Avviso ai medici Chirurghi ed ai proprietari di pubbliche e private farmacie*, 4 novembre 1836. Also in Fondo Laste, c. 193, *Supplica del Curato di Bedollo all'eccelso Governo* in order to obtain financial aid, where everything done and all the expenses incurred in looking after the 'morals' of the foundlings are described down to the minimum detail.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>113</sup> At the same time cases of real attachment of the foundlings to their guardians were also reported. Placed with their natural mothers, they ran away to go back to their foster parents so that the Laste head office decided to accept this, even by providing compensation. Some changes in presumed better placements had to be revoked because of the affection shown by the foundlings towards the first guardian. (A.S.T., Fondo Reggenza Circolare, Fondo Laste, c. 319).

only that of gain at the expense of these unhappy beings: for whatever sum or amount, having also convinced themselves that the wont of trafficking and pawning the related contracts to creditors was possible. The guardians of some foundlings were recalled and given notice to return these foundlings to the institution but they did not comply. A fine of 10 florins was ordered to be paid, the only remedy to stir these individuals who have hardened their hearts to the sentiments of humanity.<sup>114</sup> The most frequent accusations related to neglect by the guardians, lack of cleanliness, and transgression of schooling especially on the part of those living in outlying farms. Actions and measures by the Laste administration were, however, not always immediate and the inspectors sent to investigate the cases tended to minimize the accusations, in the interests of the institution rather than the child.<sup>115</sup> The problem of custody and the resulting surveillance appeared however to be the trickiest for the Laste administration. The situation did not improve with the passing of time and indeed after the introduction of the Sisters, the role of inspector was suppressed and the only interlocutors with the institution remained the local authorities; the clergy, commune, magistrates and family doctors who without the medium of the inspector found themselves, depending on their own goodwill and conscience, becoming protectors for the institution.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare, Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 436, *Relazione della Pretura di Civezzano alla Direzione Laste*, 1857.

<sup>115</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Reggenza Circolare, Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 303, *Rapporto dell'Ispettore Liberi*, 1851 in c. 333, *Rapporto dell'Ispettore Liberi*, Trento, 20.7.1853. The bad character of many foundlings was used as a means of unexpected restitution encouraged by the communes themselves who were afraid that in the future they would be liable for maintenance as in the rare cases where foundlings ran away, became vagabonds and were later arrested. There are personal records which show continuous moving about from one guardian to another with stays of a few days or less in the institution waiting for a suitable arrangement, a situation which was sometimes used to speculate for months and for a few florins. A.S.T., Fondo Reggenza Circolare, Fondo Laste, c.319, Schede personali (Personal Records).

<sup>116</sup> On this point, from among the numerous found, a letter dated 6 July 1860 from the district court in Civezzano, where the biggest number of foundlings resided, sent directly to Count Hohenwarth, the Captain of the Guard in Trento (I.R. Capitanato Circolare) describing the inhuman treatment reserved for many foundlings in the Pinè Valley. A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, c. 513, *Lettera della Pretura di Civezzano*, 6.7.1860. (See Appendix III).

Another knot just as complicated to resolve was that concerning the safeguards. The law stated that: 'At age ten the care and safeguard of the foundling by the Laste administrative department ceased and a guardian had to be deputed or the already nominated party commissioned to assume the care of the ward.'<sup>117</sup> This task fell to the authority where the displaced child had residence and, as previously mentioned and explained, the fact that the institution was based in the commune of Trento meant that for the most part the citizens of Trento<sup>118</sup> would be encumbered.

If the government by 'retracting from the original rules and regulations'<sup>119</sup> had consented in exceptional cases to prolong the giving of financial aid to guardians or craftsmen requested to teach a trade to the child so as to make him/her independent, and to exonerate the Trento commune from the double obligation of maintenance and looking for guardians from amongst its citizens by dividing them among the other possible districts, this would have been considered only a temporary situation pending the different implementation of another type of assistance.<sup>120</sup>

The institution should then have served only for 'abandoned children of unknown mothers' with severe physical or mental disabilities and who were in fact the only ones placed in special orphanages to be educated to

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<sup>117</sup> A.S.T., *Raccolta delle Leggi*, cited, 1822, p.739; 1840, p. 890.

<sup>118</sup> On this occasion from the many proposals including even closing the institution (A.S.T., *Varie*, c. 241) came the unsuitable idea of sending the abandoned children away at the too tender age of 10. The welfare magistrate in Trento took the situation in hand by stating the possibility of these children being exploited. This would have undermined any idea of education at a time when even legitimate children escaped from this obligation in an attempt to earn a living as well as adding to the scorn they suffered from public opinion (A.S.T., *Fondo Capitanato Circolare*, Trento, *Varie*, c. 241, *Lettera del magistrato politico e economico*, Trento, 28.6.1841, see Appendix IV. On this debate cfr. in c. 149, *Sanità*, c. 269, c. 241, *Fondo Laste*, c. 211). In addition, A.S.T., *Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento*, *Fondo Laste*, c. 319, 1852. There was also the proposal to unite the institution with the work house or to put the abandoned children to work in the Tobacco Factory in Trento. This was rejected because 'abandoned children older than 10 are rarely rejected and when this happens they quickly find placement on account of the numerous requests. Abandoned children, however, are more often given back causing enormous expense to the treasury'. In fact the expense calculated by the institution for the maintenance of a child was three times the remuneration agreed with the guardians.

<sup>119</sup> A.C.T., *Sanità*, c. 247, *Circolare governativa* di data 13 ottobre 1843.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*

the best of their ability.<sup>121</sup> After 1850 with the services described above and by the intervention of the local authorities, placement was also sought and intensified in German-speaking districts: placement with different criteria and in the direction desired by the terms and objectives of the institution.<sup>122</sup>

Where female labor was concerned, even if only seasonal and especially in the silk industry, limited requests for custody were noted and in these more wealthy industrial areas less returns of foster children were found. This was a sign that the custody occurred with aims, even if purely philanthropic, or was strictly an economic issue in view of being utilized in later full time permanent employment.

Even the act of returning children to their mothers - a practice which was foreseen and carried out only for a few years (1843-1846) most times forcibly but not in all cases envisaged by the regulations and then suddenly suspended if not explicitly requested – were very rare especially in South Tyrol. This was also the case for legitimization and adoption which were hindered by the Austrian legislation itself.<sup>123</sup>

A similar iterative was used with the guardians. To begin with whoever gratuitously took an illegitimate child was automatically pronounced his/her guardian and the same occurred in the case of those paid carers suggested by the mothers. For the others, considering how the question of custody was proceeding and which more and more often with the discontinuation of payments determined the return of the foundling to the institution, the search for guardians was limited, as previously stated, to the city of Trento at least up until around 1855. As well as the position taken by the various local authorities, the commune, magistrates and

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<sup>121</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare, Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 494, 1859.

<sup>122</sup> The district judiciary in Trento was often chosen as it was nearest the institution. In fact of the 4845 placements carried out in the 23 years of the institution, 3010 took place there. The institution's concern regarding children being returned induced the authorities to allow guardians to be selected by the mothers themselves and, in the German districts, to hand over children to relatives paid for their board. They also authorized indications on the placement and expected an obligatory guarantee on the part of the mother regarding suitable maintenance of the abandoned child at age 10, and this at the very moment the mother was admitted. If this commitment was not taken the mother went back to her home commune.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Statistics, Table 13



courts and the clergy on this latter issue, a group of citizens were spokesmen in the Vienna Parliament for a petition which stressed the moral repercussions, supported mainly by the clergy and the welfare office. What was underlined was that from an average of around eighty abandoned children per year in need of a guardian, the number continued to increase so much that presumably in ten years there would be '*... 1000 illegitimate children entrusted and safeguarded more in name than in fact to the citizens of this, our Trento ... from a population which does not reach 9000 souls: half, according to political estimations, are women and the men would then be 4500*' and therefore by excluding those classified as unsuitable or because of age or financial or social conditions (the clergy, soldiers, public servants, those already looking after others, the poor) '*there are very few in the town qualified to dedicate themselves successfully to guardianship or fostering*'. In addition '*the duty of these safeguards [should have] by law fallen on the inhabitants of the entire province, or at least, if the place of birth is known, the duty could be divided fairly*'.<sup>124</sup>

It has already been mentioned that the mortality rate in the Laste Institution was relatively low when compared to the Italian<sup>125</sup> and French average. Similarly it was also contrary to the mortality rate in other countries both in the case of fostered children and those born in Trentino.<sup>126</sup> It is difficult to calculate a precise number due to the different statistical methods used and because of the scarcity and fragmentation of the data sources concerning the foundling institution.

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<sup>124</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Sanità, c. 241: UMILISSIMA ESPOSIZIONE DI PIU' CITTADINI DEL COMUNE DI TRENTO DIRETTA A CONSEGUIRE UNA RIFORMA DELL'ATTUALE SISTEMA PER LE TUTELE DI ILLEGITIMI CHE SORTONO NELL'ETA' DI DIECI ANNI DALL'INSTITUTO ALLE LASTE SITO NEL CIRCONDARIO DEL COMUNE DI COGNOLA, DISTRETTO DI TRENTO. Trento 3.4.1846.

<sup>125</sup> The Italian situation was described like this '*... an extraordinarily high number of abandoned children ... under the pretext of preventing [publicis locis] abandonment, an enormous expense for the taxpayers ... with the aim of taking solace in poverty ... diversity even in maintenance age... a mortality rate unknown in Italy in these children, a real slaughter committed under the shadow of the law, under the mantle of charity, to stop a heartless mother inflicting harm on the fruit of a guilty love... this is the balance of the community service for the vulnerable, in our present legislation to be observed...*'. Gorni M.G., Pellegrini L., *Un problema*, cited, p.77.

<sup>126</sup> Grandi C., *Popolazione*, cited, pp 30-38 .

Prof. Braun in his report of 1855 produced a complete record of the twenty-two years since the opening of the *Triplize Instituto alle Laste*. Perhaps a little too enthusiastically, he demonstrated the positive results obtained in the birthing and maternity sections (an average mortality rate of 1.6 percent) and for the foundling orphanage where he looked at morbidity and mortality figures.

These satisfactory results were attributed by Prof. Braun to the rational type of assistance and the favorable location of the institution (salubrious and isolated), to the cleanliness and order which reigned, and to the possibility of always having available 'the best and most suitable wet nurses for breastfeeding'.<sup>127</sup> Having the two sections together proved to be an excellent solution which was later often copied by other foundling organizations not only because of the convenience of the wet nurses but also because of control the doctors could exercise over the mothers and on the child before and after the birth. As noted previously, the obligation to forcibly detain as wet nurses those mothers who had birthed gratuitously – seemingly a rule practiced only in the Austrian provinces – became valuable over time because breastfeeding, an essential in infant survival, was the only method possible.

In addition, the hygiene in the institution could be considered cutting edge especially in the first twenty years of its existence and before the building and its facilities proved to be inadequate on account of the ever-increasing affluence.<sup>128</sup>

In lactation methods, the experimentation with bottle feeding carried out by Prof. Braun even on healthy children proved to be interesting. In 1854, for example, eighty-five infants fifteen days after birth were fed

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<sup>127</sup> Braun C., *Übersicht*, cited., p.19.

<sup>128</sup> Braun C., *Übersicht*, cited., pp. 18-20. The enthusiasm shown by Prof. Braun was not exactly shared by his successor Prof. Esterle. A few years later after the manifestation of epidemics in the foundlings and the pregnant women, he highlighted the deficiencies especially in available space, the lack of new ventilation equipment and the renewed scarcity of water which also caused problems in the laundry. Effectively, the Institution planned for an average of around 30 pregnant women had become unable to meet the needs of even 100 hospitalized persons. Therefore extension and modernization were urgently required. A partial solution was found in transferring the Maternity Ward to Innsbruck and a consequent cutting down on the number of patients. Finally, better management was had when the Sisters were introduced.

artificially using feeding bottles with vulcanized rubber teats. To obtain a constant tepid milk temperature, these bottles were immersed in brass containers.<sup>129</sup> Contrary to what happened in other institutions, the experiment seemed to have worked. The reason for its success, and repeated in the later experiments, lies in particular in the observance of the most basic hygiene laws, namely cleanliness and selecting and conserving the food, as well as the scrupulous daily examination by the resident Laste medical staff to check the reactions and needs of the infants.<sup>130</sup>

In the life of the institution neither serious epidemics nor severe morbidity were reported. Only in the winter of 1858 as a result of overcrowding of new born infants and their mothers were seventy cases of typhoid registered in the former, and fifty children subsequently died.<sup>131</sup> The most common summer illnesses, like diarrhea and stomach bugs, were put down to excessive heat or the 'pertinacious dryness' and the usual lack of space. In winter, however, colds and flus were common especially in children from outside Trento. Illnesses which occurred often and were feared because they could be easily transmitted even to the hospital patients were the 'eye infections'. For foster children, ill health came in numerous forms and were generally related to their precarious living conditions such as lack of cleanliness, malnutrition, inadequate housing, being uncared for, no compliance with basic hygiene laws and ignorance on the part of the host family. There were numerous cases of rickets, scabies and skin infections, tabes, gastroenteritis, pneumonia,

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* This service was given to the pregnant women in the institution who 'voluntarily offered themselves' thus allowing a notable saving and also better selection in those hospitalized to be assigned to feeding. Those who could and were more willing to be a 'wet nurse' were preferred as this guaranteed also better treatment of the infant even if Prof. Braun always added... 'in general it has been noticed that both the pregnant women willing to bottle feed and the mothers forced to do so loving and carefully looked after the infants entrusted to them', p.22.

<sup>130</sup> A.S.T., *Raccolta delle Leggi*, cited, 1832

<sup>131</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare, Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 466. *Rapporto finale del Dott. C. Esterle sull'epidemia tifoidea che dominò nell'Istituto nel 1858.* (Final report of Dr Esterle on the typhoid epidemic which dominated the institute in 1858).

and of course the classic infantile diseases which occurred in the most viral forms and which easily became fatal.<sup>132</sup>

Data inferred from the ledger of the foundlings shows that for the twenty years between 1833-1853 there was a morality rate of 39.34 percent in children in custody aged 0-10 years old. Most of these deaths (94.4 percent) occurred in the 0-5 age group and especially during the weaning period where 1-2 years old was the most critical time.<sup>133</sup>

What proved more difficult was obtaining data on the number of deaths within the institution especially when comparing with the official statistics found. Firstly, there is no distinction made between legitimate (these patients were also temporarily hospitalized) and illegitimate offspring so presumably a separate register for legitimate births did exist although none has yet been found. Another possible discording issue derives from the fact that the mortality rate of foundlings is kept quite distinct in the two establishments. From the data in the existing registers, an average of 11.86 percent (including deaths without differentiation) mortality rate was found in the maternity section.<sup>134</sup> However, from the data found, although it raises other questions, the general trend in mortality can be deduced. For example, from 1833-1856 an average of 47.55 percent of children aged between 0-10 years old died in the institution and in care. This is undoubtedly the most reliable datum as death was almost always indicated by a cross beside the name but the two separate values need to be considered with a little more caution: 8.96 percent for deaths in the institution and 38.59 percent for children in care. Indeed the transfer of a child from care to the institution in case of illness and where the child

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<sup>132</sup> Cf. Statistics, Table 15.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Statistics, Table 12.

<sup>134</sup> In this 'pre-Cesarean' age numerous infant deaths occurred immediately after birth as a result of exceedingly long labor and the problems the obstetricians had to deal with concerning the malformation of the mothers or their poor physical health as well as the lack of appropriate instruments. Some improvement in obstetrics was introduced by Dr. Braun who produced more suitable instruments invented by himself and more advanced techniques, a direction which was carried on by his successor Prof. Esterle. The backwardness in the techniques was also evident in the number of still births which during the first year of the institution was almost double that of after the arrival of Prof. Braun as the head physician. However, in the official statistics it would appear that not all the children born dead were counted simply because of the subtle difference made between the infants born death and baptized, and those who were not.

may have later died was not always registered. Nevertheless, the final total found is in line with the official statistics from the institution but strong perplexity arises when consulting the register of births and deaths as it probably also contains legitimate children even this is if not clearly specified.

Comparing these statistics with those previously found, and presumably gathered using the same method, in the orphanage in Verona and which related to child mortality in the first year, it was found that in the first decade (1828-1838) 20.29 percent died in the Trento Laste Institute while 28.05 percent died in Verona. From 1843-1853, 29.67 percent died in Trento while 34.31 percent died in Verona from 1838-1848. The average number of deaths in the Laste Institute was 25.86 percent 1833-1856 and 35.26 percent in Verona from 1828-1877.<sup>135</sup>

### c) *The School of Obstetrics*

The third objective of the establishment was the training of midwives. The need for such a school was strongly felt in Trentino where because there was no public institution for the instruction of midwives ‘...three hundred or more communes did not have but entirely ignorant childbirth assistants’.<sup>136</sup> There was no doubt regarding the inadequate preparation of many of the working midwives, especially in small villages, considering the high neonatal death rate, sometimes as a result of their unskillfulness and in many cases, their scarce knowledge about basic rules including hygiene. It is important to remember that the branch of obstetrics remained for a long time one of the most neglected in medicine by delegating this task to ‘... experimenters and silly women thus generating ever-repeated errors which are particularly persistent’.<sup>137</sup> The institution’s

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<sup>135</sup> Agostini A., *Del Governo degli esposti*, cited, p. 9.

<sup>136</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare, Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 53, *Lettera del Direttore Montavon*, Trento, 27.10.1835.

<sup>137</sup> Esterle C., *Rendiconto*, cited, 1861, p. 368.

concern about the training for midwives and in particular the religious and moral implications that this profession entailed had been highlighted even in the era of the Prince Bishops who had taken it upon themselves to put together a booklet containing the most important instructions.<sup>138</sup> After the secularization of the Prince Bishopric and under the Royal License dated 2 February 1804, these instructions were resumed by placing importance on the health and welfare aspects but certainly not omitting the ethical issues either.<sup>139</sup> Before the commencement of the Laste Institution, various laws indicated the Lyceum in Innsbruck and the University of Padua as the seats of learning for midwives, where they could attend and take a final examination at the end of the course to become qualified and able to work anywhere in the Empire.<sup>140</sup> The same laws established the remuneration and costs the communes had to incur as well as the age and marital status of the midwife. Until 1848 only

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<sup>138</sup> A.C.A.T., Libro B (51), no.691, 1786. *Circolare di data 9.12.1786 del Principe Vescovo Pietro Vigilio: Istruzione per le mammane della diocesi di Trento da osservarsi per ordine della reverendissima superiorità ecclesiastica*, Trento, 1786.

<sup>139</sup> In Libro B (114), n. 73½, 1804. ISTRUZIONE PER LE MAMMANE *Prescritta con Sovrano Imp. Reg. Comando d.d. Vienna il 2 del mese di gennaio dell'anno 1770. Dal Ces. Reg. Giudizio Provinciale ed unitovi capitanato Circolare ai Confini d'Italia. Trento, 27.1.1805.* The awareness of the Austrian government of the field of medicine in general and in this branch in particular was evident as early as 1752 when Maris Teresa of Austria founded a special establishment in Vienna for the teaching of obstetrics. This Joseph II considered too small and enlarged the project by including it as part of the Maternity Department of the General Hospital set up by him and to which he had annexed a hospice for foundlings (cf. Lallemand L., *Histoire*, cited, pp. 484-490). An institution based on the Viennese model was set up in Milan when to the Maternity Sector annexed to the orphanage by a decree dated 3 August 1808, Napoleon added the Royal School of Obstetrics, exploiting those patients in the maternity department for the training of the university students and the midwives who worked there. At the same time foundlings retained suitable were chosen to help in educating those in the of a midwife (cf. Gorni M.I., Pellegrini L., *Una storia sociale*, cited, p. 172). A school of obstetrics, whose documents, according to Dr. Truzzi who tried to reconstruct events, have not been found, did exist in Rovereto. We know with certainty that it was opened in 1770. What is uncertain is the date of its closure: this probably took place as a result the law of 1784 regarding all schools of obstetrics in different countries united under the domination of the Hapsburgs (cf. Truzzi F., *Le scuole ostetriche nelle terre redente*, in "Atti del Reale Istituto Veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti", anno accad. 1920-21, pp. 908-912). A school of obstetrics, connected to the University of Padua, operated in Verona until 1817, which strangely enough and in spite of the opposition from those in Verona, was suppressed by the Austrian government, possibly because of its vicinity with Padua (cf. Viana O., Vozza F., *L'ostetricia a la ginecologia in Italia*, Milano 1933, p.606).

<sup>140</sup> A.S.T., *Raccolta delle Leggi*, cited, 1832, p.184 and p. 582.

married women could enter this profession but after that date unwed women aged over twenty years old were admitted.<sup>141</sup> Notwithstanding the appeal for training midwives, or rather whoever improvised as one, many worked, especially in small villages, not only without 'certification' but also without 'authorization'.<sup>142</sup> The opening of the Laste School contributed to divulging more rational and modern methods of caring for newborn infants even in the most backward communes, which were obliged to train their midwives at this school. The government circular issued on 20.11.1832 sanctioned these methods without exception for any commune or parish and indeed ordered communes to regularize the position of the midwives without 'authorization' or momentarily provide a medical certificate recognizing them as being 'skilled and trustworthy for public duty'. The clergy were given the extra responsibility of making sure that the heads of the communes observed these instructions.<sup>143</sup> To avoid negligence in this matter a detailed investigation was carried out in the different communes by government officials who were able to gather information regarding the position of all the midwives in service. The statements displayed situations of serious deficiency but more importantly the unwillingness of some of the poorer communes to undergo more expense.<sup>144</sup>

The theory and practical lessons in the Laste School were held in Italian by the head physician and professor of obstetrics for the southern Tyrol students and took place in the nonpaying section for pregnant and nursing mothers. The course lasted five months followed by two months of practice or internship. During that time the poorer students had to be

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<sup>141</sup> Ivi 1848, p.628.

<sup>142</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 570.

<sup>143</sup> Ivi, *Circolare Governativa d.d. 20.11.1832*.

<sup>144</sup> Ivi, *Prospetti sulla situazione delle levatrici*.

financed and supported by their respective communes: these were also required to supply books and pay the various taxes.<sup>145</sup> Naturally the communes tried to save on the emoluments required by speculating on the needs of the students and also on their ignorance.<sup>146</sup>

According to the 1852 Perini statistics, each year there were sixteen to eighteen students: Prof. Braun listed twenty-two for 1845.<sup>147</sup> The program followed was that approved in the Austrian universities as part of Faculty of Medicine in force in 1804 and 1810. The practice of holding the lessons at the beds of the birthing mothers was modified in 1857. To avoid extreme overcrowding in the ward it was decided to explain the theory in another separate room and 'visit the birthing and nursing mothers only for the required demonstrations and exercises, and then only in small groups of students'.<sup>148</sup>

At the end of the course there were 'rigorous examinations' given by the course director, the professor of obstetrics, a doctor from Trento who regularly assisted at births and by the itinerant surgeon. Particular importance was given to the oath taken by the midwives so much so that in the course of time it underwent various changes.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Two courses were held every year: the first from October to February and the second from 1<sup>st</sup> March until the end of July. The trainee midwives had to produce certificates of good conduct, their political and moral behavior, the ability to read and write as well as the agreement stipulated with the commune. The cost for one student was calculated as 124 florins plus 30 *carantani* (mediaeval coin) per day for board and lodgings, 5 florins 30 *carantani* for the diploma taxes and stamp duty, 3 florins for the oath tax and 5 florins for the required instruments (cf. A.S.T. *Raccolta delle Leggi*, cit., 1832, p. 865).

<sup>146</sup> Dr. Pastorello complained about this in his book written for the students of his courses and added that 'because of the uncouthness and lack of formal education on the part of the students, the lessons can only be understood by listening to the voice of the person teaching'. Pastorello L., *Elementi di ostetricia ad uso delle Levatrici*, Trento 1843, pp. 8-9.

<sup>147</sup> Perini A., *Statistica*, cit. p. 322; Braun C., *Übersicht*, cit. p. 6.

<sup>148</sup> A.S.T., Fondo Capitaniato Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 435, 1857

<sup>149</sup> A.S.T., *Raccolta delle Leggi*, cit., 1874, p.103. According to the law of 1825, midwives had to live in places where they were already known. From 1853 onwards, however, they had the permission to practice throughout the



In the view of Prof. Ettore Truzzi, clinical obstetrician at the University of Padua, the Trento School shone ‘... for the quality of its clinical teaching as well as its excellent tradition’.<sup>150</sup> T

The closure of the School came on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1870 after the establishment of the Faculty of Medicine in the University of Innsbruck and the University’s insistence on the transfer of not only the school but the entire institution in order to have enough ‘material’ for its own midwifery clinic. This situation caused bitter controversy in Trentino and repeated requests for a possible reopening all of which unfortunately fell on deaf ears. For the Austrian School of Obstetrics the main problem arose as a result of the difference in language which, as might have been expected, almost none of the prospective students from southern Tyrol knew or spoke.

The Trento School, the key division of the entire institution, was never reestablished. The trainee midwives returned to studying in Innsbruck or Padua until a new school of obstetrics reopened in Verona as part of a Maternity Unit under the auspices of, once again, the University of Padua.<sup>151</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The investigation of the chronicles of the entire establishment and the activity of the Laste Triplicate Institute brings us to a series of reflections on its real meaning and significance.

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monarchy with no obligation other than on approval. In addition, they had to pledge to keep a good home and conduct an honest sober life; abide by secrecy and provide their services willingly and conscientiously day or night.

<sup>150</sup> Truzzi F., *Le scuole ostetriche*, cit., p. 910.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

It is difficult to single out the objectives the institute laid down at its outset and define a list of ownership. Nevertheless, it is possible to affirm that the establishment was set up primarily to provide an answer to the grave social problem of illegitimate births which at the time in question had become much more evident. This was a social problem but also a problem of public order and 'policing' because the phenomenon created reflections of alarm in the social-cultural structure of the environment but not only. In the hands of a public body, the solution to the issue undoubtedly presented itself as one of the ways to instigate the reorganization of the State and its working methods.

However, a second objective seems important and is indeed linked to the institute's medical-scientific interests which were also an indication of an attempt to find an answer to the problem of healthcare in a modern State. The importance placed on the Maternity Section, highlighted in the numerous medical reports and records of different professors engaged in the management of the institute, leave no doubt as to the experimental purpose of the initiative carried out. The aim was to increase medical knowledge at a time when particular attention was being paid to the scientific aspects of medicine and the need for training to produce qualified staff. This was especially evident in obstetrics, which for centuries was the prerogative of 'unpaid silly women' without training, had found in the 'readily available mass of humanity' the possibility for valid experimentation.

The section for the abandoned children equally demonstrates the twofold purpose of the institute: on the one hand, the scientific interest displayed in the vaccine campaign as well as the bottle-feeding experiments and program, and on the other, the social commitment developed through the complex problem of maintaining and then warding out these children.

Unlike similar institutes at that time, the Austrian view of foundlings was, from the very beginning of the Laste Institute, directed toward eliminating the phenomenon of abandoned illegitimate children and to encourage, at least by the mother, the recognition of the natural child. Perhaps for economic rather than social justice reasons, the aim of the institute was always to try to return the illegitimate child to the mother. In reality, however, this effort was hindered by the clergy and the local political authorities, for various reasons, in favor of defending the secrecy of the mother and her 'honor' but at the expense of the rights of the child.

Nevertheless, with the evolution of ideas and the intense debate both in France and Italy progressively initiating first the elimination of the infamous 'wheel' and then indeed the orphanages for abandoned children, the Laste Triplicate Institute was gradually able to return to the draft of its primary functions: to provide assistance for the women in labor with an illegitimate offspring and the poor in their hour of need, to temporarily bring up the abandoned child until returned to the mother at the 'right age' and, last but not least, to train professional competent midwives later placed to work throughout the various communes in Trentino.

## APPENDIX I

A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare di Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 570 (Trento Local Government Fund, Laste Fund, c. 570)

*Lettera del Magistrato Politico Economico di Trento al Capitanato Circolare di Trento, Trento, 17.5.1826 (Letter from the Welfare Magistrate to the Trento Local Government Officials, Trento, 17 May 1826)*

Though the desperate need for this pious establishment has been presented several other times, I believe, however, that it is not completely superfluous for the Welfare Magistrate to recommend that the question be considered again from both a political and financial viewpoint.

The distance of the home in Verona, where the illegitimate children are sent at present, is in itself a demonstration of such need, added to which transport of the children at a very tender age and sometimes in rigid weather expose them to extreme danger. As a result many die on the way or soon after become seriously ill with consequences throughout the rest of their lives.

If such inconvenience ceases with the erection of this home in Trento, other issues of no lesser importance than the danger of exposure will moreover be dealt with, which was not the case in Romagnano. It will prevent the present influx of clandestine mothers in labor from communes along the Adige and at the same time wipe out the scandals which occur every day.

In addition, due to the numerous maternity cases available for investigation, the ease with which midwives are trained and qualified to carry out their profession deserves mention. Finally, removing the large cost of pregnant mothers from the general hospital budgets and the burden from the Trento Commune of sending illegitimate children to Verona are a crucial basis for the erection of the aforementioned institute. All this evidence provides the Magistrate with a new reason to address the illustrious Captain General, begging him to become personally involved so that opportune determinations regarding this pious establishment are forthcoming ... and in keeping with the wishes of the public, put into action without delay.

## APPENDIX II

A.S.T., Fondo Consigliere Aulico, Sanità, c. 21 (Court Councilor Fund, Healthcare, c. 21)

*Lettere del Curato di Terzolas alla Direzione Laste, 1864 (Letter from the Curate in Terzolas to the Management of the Laste Institute, 1864).*

With deep regret it is my duty to inform you that a certain Rosa Stanchina, who lives here, has once again fallen foul and finds herself already about six months pregnant. This is what the local gossip purports. When, as is the common practice, this unfortunate young lady was asked to consider going to the aforementioned institute, she adamantly refused saying that neither the curate, nor commune, nor district court could force her. Her remaining in the village is a sure way of reproducing the scandal and fomenting in this, and possibly other, wretched young women, the ease of the wrongdoing. I plead with this Honorable Directorate to kindly reply and inform me if, under the regulations in force for the institute, these wretched ladies are obliged or not to go there for the birth and then nurse their own child. I am of the opinion that the regulation should be so for many worrisome reasons but especially to forestall other scandals.

This unhappy young lady intends to send the fruit of her transgression away when the time comes and nothing more. When she is not forced to leave the village, she will be left restored in her insolence. I fear that the Stanchina *school* has produced other students. When this situation is tolerated in the village, it can moreover happen in others. I believe, in the light of the above mentioned facts, that under its regulations this

Honorable Directorate could have the necessary means in hand to oblige the young lady in question. I have already spoken of this affair with the head of the commune and honorable representative from the Malè district court.

But Miss Stanchina seems obstinate in her unwillingness to obey any authority. If this present Directorate wishes, on the basis of my present report, to invite the head of the commune or the honorable district commissioner to implement, however reluctantly, the means in place, I am sure that our goal will be achieved and as a result, the present and any future scandals will be halted.

### APPENDIX III

A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Fondo Laste, c. 513 ( Trento Local Government Fund, Laste Fund, c. 513)

*Lettera della Pretura di Civezzano al Conte Hohenwerth, Civezzano, 6.7.1860 (Letter from the Magistrate in Civezzano to Count Hohenwerth, Civezzano, 6th July 1860)*

In the vast district of Pinè most families take in an abandoned child initially raised by The Honorable Body of the Laste Institute, and the very poorest families even three or four children. It is easy to imagine just what kind of education and treatment these children received... and without discussing special cases which resulted in criminal charges, one has merely to enquire into the public rumors and reports.

Many shopkeepers retain the maintenance agreement pawned by the guardians following debt, and the former instead of the latter were the very persons who went to the Laste administration to collect the stipulated monies. I the writer, being aware of these underlying

circumstances, in order to try to halt such terrible infamy and alleviate the fate of these unhappy victims, when the occasion arose made official transfers and deliberately, without being paid or without obligation of duty, made frequent unannounced visits... unfortunately I, having found the treatment to be truly barbaric and beastly, both physically and morally, I took it upon myself to implement ... stringent measures to remove the children at once from their respective guardians and subject those who resisted to an appropriate fine... It would also be of benefit to reaffirm that the clergy pays little attention to the fate of these poor beings albeit their protection has been incumbent upon the clergy for some years. And of this there is proof, among others and perhaps for humane fears, in how easily certificates to obtain custody of a foundling were handed out. In the light of the premised circumstances I would humbly ask Your Illustrious Highness to see fit that the foundlings be removed from guardians in the commune of Pinè, in particular those foundlings entrusted recently to guardians and certified by the priest without the permission of the Magistrates Court and to impede the reoccurrence of similar cases in the future.

#### APPENDIX IV

A.S.T., Fondo Capitanato Circolare Trento, Varie, c. 241 (Trento Local Government Fund, Various, c. 241)

*Lettera del Magistrato Politico Economico di Trento al Capitanato Circolare di Trento, Trento 28.6.1846 (Letter from the Trento Welfare Magistrate to the Trento Local Government Officials, Trento, 28th June 1846)*

... On the assumption that the foundlings are indeed healthy and of excellent disposition, at the age of ten physical and intellectual

development is still so imperfect that to subject a child to a daily grind to earn its bread is the same as smothering, at their birth, the seeds of robustness and health: to gather so little fruit, you kill the plant. Unfortunately experience throughout Europe demonstrates this truth because numerous laws have had to be issued to regulate the age of entrance and the number of hours worked by children in the manufacturing industry and in factories where their child labor is exploited. The complete lack in our city of these factories and manufacturing industries where poor foundlings normally work renders their condition here much worse. Most are warded out to land farmers who become their families, and then they are subjected to the heaviest work duties because the farmers themselves do not use discretion nor measure. It is well-known that a farmer has more regard for his mare, which costs him money, than for a family member which he can transform at his pleasure and considers an object paid for, to be used until needed and thrown away when worn-out. These, therefore, are the terrible conditions that await poor foundlings discharged from the Institute, conditions that are aggravated considerably by public opinion which looks upon them with disdain, almost as a different degraded race. Their moral culture is neglected and any attempt or method of persuasion to oblige the guardians to send these unfortunate children to school would be in vain. Farmers want the children to work all day long and will not see reason. The populace who work in the fields and workshops profit from the energy of their own young teenage children and sometimes, through greed to earn more, abuse them. Little thought is given to their intellectual development and punishable laws are needed to enforce attendance at the public schools. If land workers treat their own children in this manner, how would they treat these apprentices where the abuse derives from the misjudged love of money but at times, unfortunately, out of need? A remedy which provides skilled workers with a just reward



is not sought. How can it be possible to guard against these inevitable unpleasant circumstances if their custody in the Institute is not prolonged or a fund is not destined to come to the rescue of those discharged so that they can find employment and learn a trade and come to be treated more humanely? The need of the orphans in care inculcates vigilance and charity in the guardians, and the guardians turn to the clergy and the local authorities but in the meantime the unfortunate condition of their wards does not improve, and good advice and words do not lighten the type of slavery in which they groan oppressed.