

INSPECTION VISITS TO SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ITALY: THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS (1859-1889)

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ABSTRACT

This contribution focuses on an important chapter in the history of education that has not yet been investigated, that is the methods of inspections in government gymnasiums and lyceums in the first thirty years after the Unification of Italy. Starting from the legal framework and on the basis of archival documentation, the historical passages of a system centered on university professors are reconstructed. Between 1863 and 1889, they were called upon by the ministry as government inspectors to visit gymnasiums and lyceums to assess first and foremost the teaching activity of the teaching staff.

Keywords: 19th century, Secondary education, School inspections, University professors

1 Introduction¹

The history of school administration in Italy is a completely unexplored field of investigation: there is a lack of research expressly dedicated to the various objects that could constitute its field of study, and the marginal attention paid to the interconnection between the history of administration and the history of teaching is evident. In particular, there are no attempts to highlight the directions taken by the Ministry of Education to inspect secondary schools, although there is a tenuous recovery of studies on secondary education [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6]. Thus, the inspection function performed by university teachers as inspectors of government secondary schools, gymnasiums and lyceums, from 1863 to 1889, has not yet been investigated.

In order to proceed with the reconstruction of inspection visits to gymnasiums and lyceums in the Kingdom of Italy, it is necessary, however, to make a brief mention of the law establishing the Italian school, the so-called Casati Law of 1859 [7]², which originated in the Kingdom of Sardinia but was extended to the annexed territories during the unification process. The law entrusted the supervision and technical direction of all schools, in addition to the *Consiglio Superiore della Pubblica Istruzione*, to three general inspectors, respectively for higher studies, classical secondary studies and, finally, technical, normal and elementary studies.

The general inspectors were entrusted with the effective supervision of the educational trend in their respective branch (Art. 17-22), with the obligation to provide personally, or through the officers subordinate to them, for the visit of all schools and all public and private institutes, for the inspection of which they were in charge and to compile every year and submit to the ministry a report on the state of each part of education placed under their supervision.

¹ The Italian classical school system was divided into two levels: the first level, called “Ginnasio”, lasted for five years, and the second level, called “Liceo”, lasted for three years. Since there is no exact correspondence of these terms in English, the Latin terms Gymnasium and Lyceum were used. For the same reason, the names of the governing bodies of Public Education were left in Italian. Finally, it should be noted that printed sources are not included in the final bibliography, but are indicated in the footnotes.

² Law No 3725 of 13 November 1859, in *Codice della Istruzione Classica e Tecnica e della Primaria e Normale*, Torino, Tipografia scolastica di Seb. Franco e figli e comp., 1861, pp. 23-112.

However, it was reserved to the minister to have the institutes visited by persons from outside the public education offices. In addition, two inspectors for classical schools and one for normal, technical and elementary schools were placed under the general inspectors for secondary and elementary education, who had to assist the general inspectors in their duties, especially in visiting schools and establishments. As Public Education Minister Luigi Rava pointed out when he presented his draft law on inspections in 1907, the directive part, which was actually the responsibility of the general inspectors, was distinct from the administrative and economic part, as purely administrative affairs were referred to the two divisions that then made up the Secretariat of State for Public Education: “It can be observed that the inspectors-general summarised in themselves, without limits of competence, two different but intimately linked functions, one, continuous, of direction, the other, occasional, of inspection. But this was enough for the small Kingdom of 1859”³.

2 Minister Matteucci’s project

In the aftermath of Unification, the Minister of Public Education Carlo Matteucci [8], with a Ministerial Decree of 29 April 1862⁴, set up an Inspectorate Office composed of the general inspectors of primary and secondary schools, the two inspectors of classical secondary schools, the inspector of technical, normal and elementary schools, the inspector of physical, mathematical and technical studies in Tuscany, and the two inspectors of secondary schools in the Neapolitan provinces. The office was to carry out ordinary and extraordinary inspections, interpret laws and regulations, judge the suitability and morality of teachers, supervise the discipline of schools and educational institutes, compile statistics and so on. However, as Rava pointed out in his detailed reconstruction of the history of the inspectorate, frequent and serious conflicts of attributions arose between the Office and the Divisions⁵.

Minister Berti tried to reorganize the matter, who, with Royal Decree No. 3382 of 6 December 1866⁶, abolished the general and special inspectors and divided the *Consiglio Superiore* into three committees: the first for university education and further education, the second for secondary education, and the third for primary and popular education, which were to preside over the progress of their respective branches of education. Berti’s order did not last long, suppressed by Royal Decree 22 September 1867⁷ by Coppino, who: “Restored the *Consiglio Superiore* to its original form, and with the regulation of 20 October 1867 ordered a *Provveditorato centrale per gli studi secondari e primari*, giving some central superintendents administrative functions and other technical-pedagogical powers, and all collectively the power to interpret laws, to make appointments, promotions, etc. [...]. This *Provveditorato* lost its unity with the reorganisation of the Ministry’s offices by Minister Scialoja with the Royal Decree of 26 March 1873; and was abolished by Baccelli with the Royal Decree of 6 March 1881”⁸.

In the meantime, the *Giunta esaminatrice per la licenza liceale* had been established and functioning at the Ministry since 1866, which in 1869 was called the *Giunta superior per gli esami di licenza dei licei*, whose work was sometimes coordinated with that of the *Consiglio Superiore* in various ways: “It had the office of preparing, directing and judging the lyceum graduation exam. But at the same time that it was reviewing examination topics, it had the opportunity to verify the results of teaching in the various schools, and to judge part indirectly

³ *Bollettino Ufficiale della Pubblica Istruzione*, Anno 1907, II Semestre, p. 3411.

⁴ D.M. 29 aprile 1862, in *Appendici al Codice della Istruzione Classica e Tecnica e della Primaria e Normale*, Torino, Tipografia scolastica di Seb. Franco e figli e comp., 1861, pp. 88-91.

⁵ *Bollettino Ufficiale della Pubblica Istruzione*, Anno 1907, II Semestre, p. 3411..

⁶ R.D. 6 dicembre 1866, n. 3382, in *Raccolta ufficiale delle leggi del regno d’Italia*, Vol. XI, Torino, Stamperia Reale, 1866, pp. 2629-2643.

⁷ R.D. 22 Settembre 1867, in *Bollettino degli atti del Consiglio Superiore di Pubblica istruzione*, Firenze, Successori Le Monnier, pp. 5-6.

⁸ *Ibid.*

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(from the results), part directly (from the first corrections of the topics) of the suitability of the teachers. Recently, Fornelli, discussing the inspectorate, recalled the trepidation with which the young teachers awaited the *Giunta's* response, and emphasised its beneficial effects. This inspection, which did not extend to all schools, nor to all subjects, nor to all teachers responsible for teaching, and therefore could not give a complete picture of school life in its various aspects, lasted until 1885”⁹.

Indirect control, however, was not the only system implemented to supervise secondary schools. In the Report of 28 November 1862, Matteucci announced an “extraordinary Inspection” in all gymnasiums and lyceums in the Kingdom, in order “to well govern the schools, to know the needs of public education, to justly estimate the officers to whom it is entrusted, and to give a common direction to all government teaching”¹⁰.

After reassuring on the non-persecutorial intentions of the inspection visits and establishing a contingent timeframe, according to needs and financial resources, the minister assigned the task to ten commissions, divided as follows: “one for Piedmont and Liguria, one for Sardinia; one for Lombardy; one for Emilia, Marche and Umbria; one for Tuscany; three for the provinces of Naples; two for the provinces of Sicily”¹¹.

It then indicated the number of members, which could vary between two and three, responsible for the ‘literary’ and ‘scientific’ parts, and identified the criteria for appointment: “For the selection, then, the Minister will find from among the teaching staff or management, or from among men distinguished in the sciences and letters, those who, associating themselves with the work of the Ministry’s Inspectors, are willing and able to carry through an act of such importance and difficulty”¹².

The commissions were to inspect the 99 government gymnasiums and 69 government lyceums that constituted the government education channel in 1862, and were to increase, albeit slightly, over the next two decades (Tab. 1)

Tab. 1: Government Gymnasiums and Lyceums statistics. Source: Our elaboration based on statistical data published by the Ministry of Education.

Years	N. Government Gymnasiums	N. of teachers and managers	Government Lyceum	N. of teachers and managers
1861-62			43	381
1862-63	99	602	69	612
1863-64				
1864-65				
1865-66				
1866-67				
1867-68	104	632	79	701
1868-69	103	626	78	692
1869-70	103	626	78	692
1870-71	103	626	78	692
1871-72	104	632	79	701
1872-73	104	632	79	701
1873-74	103	626	79	701

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3412.

¹⁰ *Relazione a S.M. per l’istituzione delle Commissioni incaricate di scegliere i libri migliori per le Scuole elementari e secondarie, e delle Commissioni ispettrici ai Ginnasii e Licei del Regno*, in *Raccolta di scritti varii intorno all’Istruzione Pubblica del Senatore Carlo Matteucci*, Vol. 2, Istruzione secondaria, Prato, Tip. V. Alberghetti e C., 1867, p. 78.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 80.

1874-75	104	632	80	710
1875-76	104	632	80	710
1876-77	104	632	80	710
1877-78	108	557	81	718
1878-79	109	663	83	736
1879-80	110	669	83	736
1880-81	113	687	83	736
Media	105	631	77	683

The inspections announced by Matteucci completed the project started with the establishment of the Commissions for the choice of textbooks [9] and the institution of the autumn conferences for secondary school teachers¹³. Having provided the schools with textbooks adequate in content and method, the inspections were to identify teachers with cultural and teaching deficiencies, to be sent subsequently to the conferences that were to be set up at the universities of the Kingdom, designed not as “academic lectures”, but as “conversations and practical exercises, both in interpreting the classics and in the exposition of doctrines and in the use of instruments and scientific applications”¹⁴.

To allow uniformity in the method of inspections, Matteucci gave precise instructions to the “visiting” Commissions in the annex to the Report entitled *Istruzioni per l'ispezione straordinaria delle Scuole del Regno*. First of all, the Commission in charge of inspecting the schools had the task of ascertaining the way the classes were composed, i.e. the origin of the students and the qualifications with which they had been admitted to a particular year. In addition, the Commission was supposed to obtain all the necessary data to be able to pass an accurate judgement on the action taken by the school's officials, both in terms of management and education. The minutes of the Teachers' Council, the arrangements for coordinating teaching and establishing discipline, the choice of topics and the exercises proposed to the students were considered fundamental data for achieving the intended purpose. Direct inspection in the classrooms to observe the lectures of the teachers and interview the students was considered, however, the most important operation to assess the teaching effectiveness of the professors¹⁵.

Matteucci's project was not fully realized, as the inspection visits were not followed by conferences. The inspection system devised by the minister, however, was consolidated as a practice over the next twenty years, with commissions composed mostly of two university professors, one for the literary branch and the other for the scientific branch, who would use the scheme presented in the aforementioned *Istruzioni* in their reports.

3 University professors as government inspectors

On the basis of an initial reconnaissance of the documentation kept in the *Archivio Centrale dello Stato*¹⁶ (Tab. 2), it is possible to state that, in line with the Casati Law, where it indicated the possibility of using staff from outside the public education offices for inspections, and in the wake of Matteucci, the liberal ruling class preferred to use university professors to inspect the gymnasiums and lyceums of the Kingdom, instead of appointing a territorial inspection body on the model of the inspections carried out in primary schools, or resorting to experienced headmasters and teachers as was the case, for example, in Austria.

¹³ The Conferences were established by R.D. n. 854 del 5 ottobre 1862, in *Raccolta ufficiale delle Leggi e dei Decreti del Regno d'Italia*, Vol. IV, Torino, Stamperia Reale, 1862, pp. 2313-2315; and R.D. n. 939 del 2 Novembre 1862, in *Appendici al Codice della Istruzione Classica e Tecnica e della Primaria e Normale*, Torino, Tipografia scolastica di Seb. Franco e figli e comp., 1861, pp. 138-146.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁵ *Raccolta di scritti vari intorno all'Istruzione Pubblica del Senatore Carlo Matteucci*, cit., pp. 88-91.

¹⁶ Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Divisione Scuole Medie 1860-1896, bb. 43,45,59,63,77.

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There was no lack of information at the ministry, which obtained important information from the annual reports of the managers and the reports of the prefects and superintendents. Reports gave a picture, sometimes detailed, sometimes synthetic, of the conditions of the schools, the pupils enrolled, the teachers, the syllabus and the educational activities carried out during the year. But at the heart of this information system were the “government” inspectors, who went right to the heart of the school’s activities, dwelt in great detail on the pupils’ data, checked the minutes of the teachers’ council, judged the didactic compliance of the syllabus, scrutinised the management of the institutes and concluded the visit with a “conference” in the presence of the entire board of teachers, in which they outlined the findings of the inspection and gave suggestions and reminders to remedy the shortcomings and deficiencies found. The report to the minister concluded the inspection.

Tab. 2: Inspection visits Government Gymnasiums and Lyceums

Year	Government Gymnasium and Lyceum	Government inspectors	Chair at the time of the inspection
1863	“Pagano” Campobasso	Giuseppe BARBERIS	Inspector General for Classical Schools
		Cesare TAMAGNI	Latin Language and Literature - Scientific-Literary Academy of Milan
		Emanuele FERGOLA	Higher Calculus and Analysis - University of Naples
1871	“Pagano” Campobasso	Antonio GALASSO	Ethics - University of Naples
		Giuseppe DE LUCA	Geography and Statistics - University of Naples
1872	“Forteguerrri” Pistoia	Michele COPPINO	Member of Parliament 11 th Legislature
		Francesco ROSSETTI	Physics - University of Padua
1876	“Romagnosi” Parma	Giovanni Battista GANDINO	Latin Literature - University of Bologna
		Camillo PLATNER	Medicine and Surgery - University of Pavia
1877	“Forteguerrri” Pistoia	Giosuè CARDUCCI	Italian Literature - University of Bologna
		Francesco ROSSETTI	Physics - University of Padua
1877	“Pagano” Campobasso	Francesco D’OVIDIO	Comparative History of Neo-Latin Literatures - University of Naples
		Salvatore DINO	Descriptive and Projective Geometry - University of Rome
1878	“Dante” Firenze	Domenico COMPARETTI	<i>Istituto di Studi Superiori</i> in Florence
		Ulisse DINI	Analysis and Geometry - University of Pisa
1879	“Umberto I” Palermo	Michele KERBAKER	Comparative History of Classical and Neo-Latin Languages - University of Naples
		Emanuele FERGOLA	Higher Calculus and Analysis - University of Naples
1880		Pietro MERLO	Greek and Latin Grammar – <i>Scuola di Magistero</i>

"Palmieri" Lecce		University of Naples
	Vincenzo IANNI	Rational Mechanics - University of Naples

As can be seen from Table 2, drawn up on the basis of the reports traced so far, the so-called ‘governmental’ inspections were mostly entrusted to academics, with the exception of the appointment of Giuseppe Barberis, Inspector General of the Classical Schools, Michela Coppino a former lecturer in Italian Literature at the University of Turin but on leave of absence at the time of the inspection for parliamentary office, and, finally, Domenico Comparetti, who had nevertheless held the chair of Greek Language and Literature at the University of Pisa before moving to the *Istituto di Studi Superiori* in Florence. Another relevant aspect is the fact that university professors were only used for inspections in “government” gymnasiums and lyceums, an unequivocal sign of the strategic role attributed to these institutes by the liberal ruling class.

In the context outlined above, the figure of Giuseppe Barberis (1823-1896) deserves a closer look. Originally from Piedmont, he was a lecturer at the colleges of Turin and Cuneo and headmaster of the National College of Genoa. In the aftermath of the Unification of Italy, he was called to hold the position of Inspector of Classical Secondary Schools for the literary part of the Ministry of Public Education and it was in this capacity that he visited secondary schools in the Neapolitan provinces in 1863, accompanied by university lecturers, following the “Extraordinary Inspection” announced by Matteucci. From 1867, he held the position of Central Superintendent of I class and later Chief Superintendent for Secondary Education, as well as member of the *Consiglio Superiore della Pubblica Istruzione*. Under Minister Antonio Scialoja, he was appointed Secretary General of the Ministry of Education (1872). He also served on many commissions for the compilation of secondary school regulations and syllabus.

Because of his apical role, Barberis was the ministerial figure of reference for classical secondary education in the Kingdom of Italy in the first thirty years after the Unification of Italy, so much so that he deserved a place in De Gubernatis’ *Piccolo dizionario dei contemporanei italiani* (1895). The political weight of Barberis did not escape his contemporaries, therefore, but among them there were also those who considered him the *longa manus* of the “Piedmontese” in the management of the public education affairs of the nascent national state [10].

After all, in the years of the *Destra storica*, inspections of secondary schools were dependent “on ministerial arbitrariness”, as Minister Cesare Correnti recalled in the sitting of the Chamber of Deputies on 17 December 1871, dedicated to the discussion of expenditure chapters of the Public Education. The matter was never actually regulated, and the arbitrary choice was even referred to in a commentary note to the Provincial School Administration Regulations of 21 November 1867, no. 4050, which specified that as far as inspections are concerned, the Ministry has established that those of secondary schools are to be carried out by its own order, and in the manner that will be designated by it.

Such a system did not find everyone in agreement. Ruggiero Bonghi, for example, in the same session, as rapporteur of the Parliamentary Commission on Public Education Finance, reminded the minister of the urgency of dealing with the delicate issue of secondary school inspections, resorting to “ordinary and normal means” and not to “university professors”, in order to avoid: “The harm that Mr Bertani has noted, but of which these professors cannot be censured in this case or in any other. That is to say, what happens? The minister of public education, in June, in July, in May, in the best of instruction in the normal schools, from the faculties of philosophy, is fine arts, takes two professors, one of mathematics, one of Latin or Italian literature most necessary for instruction, and sends them to tour the lyceums of one province to another. What is the effect? The effect is twofold, i.e. the students of normal schools have no teachers, and they find themselves in the best part of the year at a loss; furthermore,

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these inspections are poorly done, because, with all the esteem in which university professors are held, I believe that they are not suited to making inspections of secondary schools.

You have to have been accustomed to those methods, you have to have followed them, moreover you have to have a certain constancy of character in applying them to inspections. What happens? The university professor today has teaching methods that are quite different from those of the lyceum and gymnasium professor; and when he or she addresses a different audience, he or she does it differently from the secondary professor. But there is more: university professors are naturally taken now in one faculty, now in another, and are very different in their ideas about the methods to be followed in secondary teaching. One year there goes a university professor who, for example, greatly esteems the Greek or Latin grammars of the Germans, and washes his head of the lyceum professor for not introducing those grammars; another year there goes a university professor who despises those grammars, and scolds the lyceum professor for adopting them; another year there goes a university professor who holds grammar teaching in high esteem, and demands a great deal of attention to this part; another year there goes one who thinks the opposite, that is, that grammar is of no importance to him, and wants it to be learnt only by practising the classics. In short, the inspection of secondary schools done in this way cannot produce anything useful”¹⁷.

Bonghi was answered by the minister, who claimed the usefulness of the method followed until now and endorsed by the Parliamentary Commission and the *Consiglio Superiore della Pubblica Istruzione*, to which Bonghi also belonged, and specified: “Many trials were made to find the preferred method of effective inspection of secondary schools. Before, there was a special department, the Inspectorate General, a kind of magistracy that kept the teachers under its control, syndicated them, supervised them. The same people were always on top, judging, directing. This was the ancient method of fixed inspections to which Mr Bonghi seems to wish to return. But it was observed that, while on the side of discipline and the exact observance of regulations, this intrusion of a purely official element could bring no small benefit, on the side of the spirit and progress of education, it was much more expedient to use authoritative and competent persons in the office of inspection who could advise effectively and persuasively. This is achieved by electing men of undisputed reputation and impartiality to the inspection. If there was perhaps some inconvenience at times, it was due to the inappropriate choice. Moreover, I can assure you that the administration has never been able to have a specific and reasoned statistic of the didactic value of its professors until after it delegated eminent professors from the university to visit the schools. So, I repeat, I believe that Mr Bonghi’s criticism of the current system of inspections in secondary schools is the effect of some particular impression, some isolated fact, but not a judgement of the parliamentary committee”¹⁸.

Having risen to the top of the Ministry of Education, Minister Bonghi, in spite of himself, had to admit his impotence in the face of Mr Pissavini, who complained, in the parliamentary session of 10 February 1875, about the absence of “well-ordered” inspections: “With regard to the inspections of secondary schools, I could do nothing more than send the professors of the university faculties to visit them”¹⁹, citing budgetary constraints as the reason. Finally, Royal Decree No. 3254 of 16 April 1885 regulated the matter, but in a direction opposite to that desired by Bonghi, with the establishment of the *Collegio degli esaminatori per la licenza liceale*²⁰, which replaced the *Giunta Superiore* of 1869. Composed of thirty members chosen from university lecturers, the College, also known as ‘of Thirty’, was divided

¹⁷ *Rendiconti del Parlamento italiano. Session of 1871-1872*, Rome, Editori Botta, 1872, p. 330.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Atti del Parlamento Italiano. Camera dei Deputati. Sessione del 1874-1875*, Roma, Eredi Botta, Vol. 2, 1875, p. 1150.

²⁰ R.D. n. 3254 del 16 Aprile 1885, in *Bollettino Ufficiale del Ministero dell’Istruzione Pubblica* Anno 1885, I Semestre, pp. 868-869.

into two sections: 20 members for literary subjects and 10 for scientific subjects. Elected by the minister, the members remained in office for five years but could be reappointed. In addition to the functions inherent to composition and the correction of assignments, the members were assigned the role of visiting “the governmental lyceums and gymnasiums”. The College did not go beyond its first term (1885-1889), but, as Mr Blaserna recalled in one of his speeches to the Chamber, “under the system created by Minister Coppino, regular inspections were made for the first time” [11]²¹. During the five years in office, however, there were numerous criticisms of the College, which was icastically renamed the College of the ‘Thirty Tyrants’ by its detractors.

4 Conclusions

The literature on the history of secondary education lacks references to the inspections carried out in gymnasiums and lyceums in the Kingdom of Italy in the aftermath of Unification. Through the study of legislation and archival documentation traced so far, we have proposed an initial reconstruction of the inspection function performed by university teachers as inspectors of government secondary schools from 1863 to 1889.

This reconstruction is only a first step in the discovery of new archive sources. Indeed, the inspectors’ reports constitute a type of source that offers multiple perspectives of analysis: institutional, social, pedagogical, cultural, etc. Therefore, a broad reconnaissance of archival sources is necessary to further explore the history of classical education in Italy.

The *Relazione sugli istituti governativi classici*²², written by Giuseppe Barberis, as Chief Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1869, based on data collected in inspections between 1867 and 1868, bears witness to this: school attendance, furnishings, moral order the discipline and temperament of the pupils, performance and teaching practices, and finally the characteristics of the teaching cohort, analyzed by resorting to didactic value, “civil condition” and “moral condition”.

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²¹ *Bollettino Ufficiale del Ministero dell’Istruzione Pubblica*, Anno 1908, II Semestre, p. 3412.

²² *Relazione generale presentata al ministro dal Provveditorato centrale sulla condizione degli istituti classici governativi* [2, pp. 137-142]