

The beginnings of institutionalised girls' education in the territory of present-day South Tyrol from the Middle Ages to the "Renewed Tyrolean School Regulation" of 1747

Gli inizi dell'educazione femminile nel territorio dell'odierno Alto Adige dal Medioevo al "Rinnovato regolamento della scuola tirolese" del 1747

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abstract

This research analyses the first verifiable efforts made towards an institutionalised female education in the territory of present-day South Tyrol, drawing upon primary and secondary sources. Beginning with the earliest recorded testimonies during the 11th century, the study follows the development of educational institutions for girls and shows female exclusion from and integration into contemporary monastic and ecclesiastical schools (convents and parishes) and secular institutions ("Latin- and German urban schools"). Both the ecclesiastical and the secular educational initiatives were influenced by large-scale developments. At the same time, research has uncovered regional implementations and interpretations influencing other events beyond the regional borders (*e.g.* the foundation of an order for poor girls' education by Maria Hueber during 1696 in Brixen).

The predetermined timeframe for the research ends with the "Renewed Tyrolean School Regulation" of 1747, specifically including girls as potential pupils of secular schools.

Keywords: Genesis of girls' institutionalised education, Middle Ages and early Modern Times, South-Tyrol, Gender and status as access criteria for school education, Secular and clerical players in girls' education

La presente ricerca, basata su fonti primarie e secondarie, analizza i primi sforzi atti a offrire una formazione indirizzata al pubblico femminile nel territorio dell'attuale Alto Adige. Ripercorrendo le prime testimonianze durante il secolo XI, la ricerca segue lo sviluppo delle istituzioni educative per ragazze e mostra l'esclusione e l'integrazione femminile nelle scuole monastiche ed ecclesiastiche (conventi e parrocchie) e nelle scuole secolari (scuole cittadine latine e tedesche). Sia le istituzioni ecclesiastiche, sia le istituzioni secolari, furono influenzate dagli sviluppi verificatisi su più larga scala. Contemporaneamente

te, la ricerca ha messo in luce implementazioni e interpretazioni regionali che riuscirono a influenzare le realtà oltreconfine (p.e. la fondazione di un ordine per mano di Maria Hueber nel 1696 a Bressanone, dedito alla formazione delle ragazze provenienti da famiglie povere).

L'arco temporale della ricerca si conclude con il “Rinnovato regolamento della scuola tirolese” del 1747 che include le ragazze come destinatarie delle scuole secolari.

Parole chiave: Educazione per bambine, Medioevo, Età moderna, Scuola di monastero, Scuole secolari

1. Introduction: Historical and geographical framing and theoretical references of the research

The time frame of this study extends itself from the first substantiated suppositions and concrete mentions of institutionalised girls' education during the Middle Ages (11th century) to the first education policies and regulations during the Age of Enlightenment, specifically, the “Renewed Tyrolean School Regulation” (*Erneute Tiroler Schulordnung*) of 1747. The geographical location is the present-day Italian province of South Tyrol¹.

The theoretical approach used for the analysis of the researched primary and secondary sources regarding female education is inspired by Helmut Fend's (2006b) understanding of school as an “institutional actor”. Through a broadened integration of social and pedagogical aspects of educational realities, as in Luhmann's (2002) system theory, Weber's philosophical action theory and the actor- and institutional centred insights (Scharpf, 2000; Schaefer, 2009; Kuper, 2001), this approach allows the analysis of the interrelations between the institutional framework (school laws, regulations...) and the actions of the responsible actors (Fend, 2006a, p.13). The actions of the responsible actors within educational institutions are thereby not seen as a “closed and causally functioning reality”, but rather as “recontextualisation performances” (translations) of the actors at the different organisational levels: from the definition of general regulations regarding the school's organisation and mission at the macro level, to the adaptation of those regulations at the

1 Together with the Trentino province, the province of South Tyrol is Italy's northernmost region since the end of WWI.

meso level, through to the arrangement of concrete educational realities for schools on-site at the micro level. The translation performances made by the actors at the respective organisational level, occur within the framework of “given environments, mediated by the actors self-reference, interests and resources” (Fend, 2006a, p. 181).

This study is based upon primary and secondary sources (regulations at the macro- and the micro level).

Unfortunately, due to the partial lack of documentation, the beginnings of institutionalised female education in the territory of present-day South Tyrol cannot be seamlessly reconstructed and analysed. Nonetheless, based on the available sources, the effort is to present the first approaches to the addressing of girls’ education at the three organisational levels as a recontextualisation performance of the respective actors in its manifold contextualisation².

2. The development of school institutions and their standing towards girls

2.1 *The beginnings of institutionalised educational efforts in cathedrals and convents*

The beginnings of institutionalised female education in the territory of present-day South Tyrol can be found researching the tentative steps of some convents at the end of the Middle Ages, whereas Charles the Great had already requested a schooling system for boys in his synod of 789 (Moderk, 2008), obligating bishops and abbots to found male schools in cathedrals and monasteries (Melville, 2012). While there is a lack of documentary evidence regarding said schools at the bishop’s seat of Säben Abbey (Fischnaller, 1880, pp. 4-5), after the bishop moved to Brixen there are proves of a cathedral school, founded around the year 1000 (Zingerle, 1882). In Trento, the bishop entertained a similar institution as from the year 930 (*ibid.*). During the following centuries, all monasteries were obliged to found a school, sometimes respecting their own order’s Rule [ex. the Rule of Saint Benedict, written in 516]. Therefore, the first

2 Unfortunately, the sources didn’t allow a statistical statement clarifying the real utilisation of the educational offers or the implementation of educational rights.

educational institutions during the Middle Ages were part of the secular education policies at the macro level and part of the rules pertaining to the ecclesiastic and monastic environment at the micro level. Even their goals were similar. Considering the context of the conversion efforts to Christianity made by the Frankish Empire, they should guarantee an education to the higher clergy and some writing lessons for the monks. At the same time, those schools soon became educational institutions for the nobles' sons, now obtaining a preparation for the takeover of their socially predetermined social and political duties. Their education was oriented towards theological concepts and the *septem artes liberales*.

The idea of a possible equivalent to this educational system, based upon male fruition and oriented towards the respective ecclesiastic, social and political positioning, for girls, would contradict every current historical notion. However, there are traces of similar organizational concepts for convents and their female beneficiaries even before the year 1000. Probably due to the educational understanding of the time, open to a spiritual education for the nobles' daughters and due to the idea, that singing and reading teachings would be as conducive for the religious convent life, the convent communities organised simple teaching lessons for their novices. All pedagogic efforts were based upon the religious education and its main goal was the formation of the individual personality according to the convent's rule. All teachings were given by the nuns themselves, supported by confessors and monks from other monasteries. The initial inspiration came from England. Following the example of the pre-existing English convent schools, there are records of convent schools' foundations at the convent of Tauberbischofsheim [Baden-Württemberg in Germany] during the 8th century (Bauerreis, 1947, pp. 52-54) and at the convent of Nonnberg in Salzburg [Austria]³.

The first concrete efforts of Tyrolean convents are documented for the late Middle Ages. Soon after the foundation of the Benedictine convent of Sonnenburg in Sankt Lorenzen between 1030 and 1039 (Hörmann-Thurn und Taxis, 2012, p. 18), there is documentary evidence of a similar educational institution (Mair, 1991, p. 10). Considering the current archival research, the first female convent school was the convent of the Order of the Clares in Meran. The first convent of the Order of the Clares in the whole German language area was already founded

3 Both convents adopted the Rule of Saint Benedict.

in 1235 in Brixen. Nearly 55 years later, another convent was founded in Meran and as from 1369, organised a convent school for the aristocrats' daughters (Caramelle, Frischauf, 1985, p. 213). However, there is no documentary proof of a similar schooling effort researching the Beguines, a lay religious order detected in the region around Bruneck since the 15th century. The same applies to the Dominican nuns of Algund and Innichen, respectively mentioned for the first time in 1241 and 1243 (ibid., p. 203).

The first written testimonies about a school at the convent Sonnenburg are dated after the year 1562, allowing insight into the problems, strategies and orientations of the educational institutions considering the context of the convent's interests. As stated in a convent's protocol, the good morals should be obtained "commendably educating the daughters of the many honest landlords to a secular and spiritual discipline" in order to reunite the nobility into their own proper "council". The same protocol reveals that besides the "inner convent school" for the aspiring novices, the nuns instituted an "outer convent school" for the nobles' daughters without an ecclesiastic purpose. It also appears, that the convent school periodically served as a reformatory for unmanageable aristocratic daughters (quoted from: Mair, 1991, p. 18). Girls were admitted at an early age. Older applicants were dismissed by the convent's authorities, as stated by a document of 1568, according to which a thirteen year old nobles' daughter was rejected because of the convent's need of younger novices, in order to properly teach them reading and singing (Mair, 1991, pp. 72-76).

2.2 *Schools for the broad masses, organised by parishes*

During the 12th century, the history of the European education system manifests itself through the various regulations at the macro level and in the wake of the 3rd and 4th Lateran Council (1179 and 1215). Especially Pope Alexander III (1159-1181) and Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) requested the institution of "parish schools" (Schermeier, 1990, p. 34). The objectives of those institutions were, firstly, the promotion of a religious elementary education of the population and, secondly, the training of beadles and altar boys. Accordingly, some lessons may only have been offered to boys. Both girls and boys probably received the same basic intro-

duction into the Catholic doctrine of salvation (Weiss, 1986, p. 212). Those complementary lessons were mostly provided by the local pastors themselves or by an appointed supplementary schoolmaster. Often the schoolmasters were laymen and students, making their living with year-long contracts (Menghin, 1893, p. 14).

The documentary evidence of the parish schools is rather difficult to produce. The already evaluated sources report that from the 15th century onward, most of the bigger Tyrolean parishes had instituted schools. In his essay, Anton Bernhart (1983, p. 271), lists the following Tyrolean parish schools: Kaltern (1321), Tramin (1381), Schluderns (1406), Toblach (1413) and St. Pauls-Eppan (1518). By the middle of the 13th century, the Teutonic Order in Sterzing also lead a parish school. According to Noggler (1885, p. 13), it stands to reason, that the same congregation instituted similar educational offers in the commandries of Lengmoos, Schlanders and Lana.

2.3 *Latin and German schools in towns and bigger settlements*

The 13th century marked a new phase of the institutionalised education in the researched territory. Around the year 1200, the Tyrolean region, conveniently situated on an important north-south corridor, increased its significance. In connection with the flourishing of the region's towns and markets, the citizens, recently ascended to a new economic and political power, made an effort to create an educational offer for their children, appropriate to their needs (Augschöll, 1999, pp. 22-24).

During the 13th and 14th century, new educational initiatives in many of the larger Tyrolean towns and settlements were developed. Following the German role model, two main types of schools were instituted and, mainly at the micro level, were organised and programmed by the respective political and ecclesiastical authorities (Wiesner-Hanks, 1996, p. 93). Now there were alternatives to the convent schools, the so called Latin schools, open to the commoners' children and the so called German schools for the theory teachings regarding the trade and crafts sector (Augschöll, 2000, p. 55 *et seq.*). The teachers of the Latin schools were laymen or clergy, often in possession of a university degree. The schoolmasters of the German schools, however, had only a scarce training (*ibid.*, p. 72 *et seq.*).

The Latin schools were addressed to male applicants, who had to receive the qualifications required to attend university or to gain the necessary insights in order to take on their social, economic and political duties and positions (ibid., pp. 47). With the beginning of the Modern Age, in the school fee registers there are sporadic references to female students. Such a school career could have been interesting for those bourgeois girls, who, due to their social standing, were not admitted to the convent schools, but were destined to join the convent later on (Kammeier-Nebel, 1996, p. 81).

The German schools' teachings integrated mathematics, reading and writing in German language, as well as some singing and Latin (in order to listen to the services). All of those skills were also interesting for women, helping men in the commercial and craft enterprises (Wiener Hanks, 1996, p. 93). Therefore the school fee registers often show, although fewer in number, the attendance of female students. In many communities, also women (especially widows and wives of schoolmasters) were enlisted as teachers for the female students. At some schools, the school curriculum was broadened with the subject of female handicrafts. Apart from that, very likely the teachings for girls and boys were coeducational and the lessons were held in the same classroom (Augschöll, 2000, pp. 290-298).

2.4 *The first Tyrolean School Regulation*

As previously mentioned, the respective ecclesiastic and political authorities shared costs and supervision of the German and Latin town schools. They nominated the schoolmasters, determined the school fees and created the school regulations.

In 1586 Archduke Ferdinand II issued the *Tyrolean School Regulation* (*Tiroler Schulordnung*)⁴, the first regional attempt to reunite all school matters, until then regulated by the local authorities, into a binding set of rules. The main aims of this school regulation was already explicitly stated in its opening lines. Considering the events of the time, the regulation had to act as a dam to the spread of Lutheranism. Even in Tyrol the Reformation ideas denounced the old paradigms and orders, someti-

4 TLA, Causa Domini 1586, fol. 472

mes through autonomous implementation forms (*e.g.* Jacob Hutter⁵). Therefore, all recruitment conditions, contents and course books had to be predetermined.

In addition, the regulation contained dispositions concerning the unification of the school calendar, the timetables, the students' punishments and clearly assigned the supreme supervision to a secular authority, the "Upper Austrian Government".

The regulation denominated all educational addressees with the gender neutral term "school children". There are specific mentions of girls in two text passages, firstly, addressing the separate punishment of boys and girls and, secondly, obligating the schoolmaster's wife to escort the girls on their way to church⁶. Insight into the school fee registers demonstrates that girls had access to education both in German and (less) in Latin schools. Hence, the general term "school children" most probably stood for both boys and girls.

3. The flourishing of female educational institutes lead by female congregations

Between the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century, in many of the larger Tyrolean settlements, the female congregations instituted new female schools by initiative of the local secular or ecclesiastic authorities, by request from the citizens or simply inspired by the building of a new convent. In exchange for the permission to found schools for the girl of noble or bourgeois descent, the communities often obliged the nuns to also guarantee an education to the girls of "low status". It remains to be seen if those clauses really could indicate the purpose of a better education for all female students. All the ecclesiastic, social and economic backgrounds considered, it seems unlikely. One may assume that the communities took advantage of the freed-up financial and human resources, investing them into the more important sector of male education. Being the main pillars of the schooling system, the delega-

5 Jacob Hutter was born in the Puster Valley (present-day South Tyrol) and was the founder of the Hutterites, Anabaptist communities. Some Hutterian colonies are still living as closed communes in Canada and in the USA (von Schlachta, 2006).

6 TLA, Causa Domini 1586, fol. 472.

tion of female education to the convents did alleviate their organisational and financial burdens. Especially, both providing appropriate school buildings and remunerating the teachers for the female education system, now were no longer part of the communities' concerns. Also, the Renewed Tyrolean School Regulation of 1747 and all further regional and national regulations, in specifying the moral necessity to "separate the genders" both within and outside of the classroom, could have encouraged the development of convent schools and the support of the local authorities.

3.1 *The Ursulines in Innsbruck and Bruneck*

The most significant Tyrolean convent school was founded in 1691 by the Ursuline sisters⁷ of Innsbruck. On the initiative of the Jesuit priest Karl Barbi and financed through the foundation of Count Ferrari, the noble and bourgeois daughters were defined as the main target group (Tinkhauser, 1856/79, pp. 188-189). Following this example, almost half a century later, the Ursulines opened a girls' school in Trento (Hörmann, 2012, p. 31). In 1722 the community of Bruneck and the surrounding nobles' families sought to address the same objective and supported the establishment of the Ursulines' school (Exinger, 1936, p. 16). In spite of the protests coming from the nearby convent of Sonnenburg, the bishop encouraged the initiative, albeit with the clause of providing free education for the city's female youth. Separated by gender, the girls coming from lower classes were taught religious, theoretical and practical subjects. The female nobles' school curriculum, however, embraced a wider range of subjects, such as reading and writing in German and Latin, mathematics, music, drawing, painting, Italian and French (Pedevilla, 1941, p. 77).

3.2 *The Terziar Sisters in Brixen, Bozen and Kaltern*

The episcopal city of Brixen was only the second city in the region of the present-day South Tyrol to establish an educational institution for girls.

7 Regarding the Ursulines see: Conrad, 1994.

Just a few years after the already mentioned inauguration of the girl's school in Bruneck, in 1696 the Sisters of the Third Order of Saint Francis, a community founded by Maria Hueber, opened a school especially destined to poor girls. Maria herself came from a poor family. Her father, who worked as a watchman, died early and Maria couldn't pay for the school fees in Brixen. She was taught arithmetic, reading and female handicrafts by her mother, her writing skills, however, were self-taught. In her study about Maria Hueber, Cescutti (2012, p. 157) underlines the informal character of the learning locations and, inspired by King's research (2008, pp. 41-85) about mothers being the teachers of their daughters, presents her educational biography as a "typical female educational biography" (Cescutti, 2012, p. 157) of that time. At the same time, she points out that most girls could not master the proper cultural tools due to the educational disadvantage their mothers suffered (*ibid.*)⁸.

Maria Hueber dedicated her formal educational initiatives to the involvement of girls coming from the lower social classes and therefore the new educational institution added a totally new dimension to the Tyrolean educational offer for women. The Order soon founded more schools in other locations and is today still active in the girls' education sector. The Sisters of the Third Order taught "poor girls how to sew, combining, in a quiet and intelligent manner, all other subjects pertaining to the Christian doctrine of morality" (Gelmi, 1993, p. 241). Exinger and Aldegheri (1998, p. 46; p. 64) define the Order's efforts as the first Tyrolean industrial school. It might be reasonably to assume that the girls were also taught how to read and write, since the schoolmaster of Brixen perceived the new school as competition and vehemently attempted to impede its opening. Nevertheless, the community obtained the official permits to begin their teaching activities and was therefore deemed equal to the German school. Just a year later, prince bishop Künigl visited the school giving a positive assessment. The visitation records from 1728 show a broad educational offer. Besides subjects such as religion, reading, writing and mathematics, the enlisted teachings were also knitting, sawing, cobbling and spinning (Vettori, 1955, pp. 28-30).

As of 1754, following the respective regional regulations, the school was subdivided into a "children's school" and a "work school". As soon as

8 All the currently available sources considered, it is still not known, why Maria's mother knew how to read and write (Gelmi 1993, p. 42)

1754, the Sisters requested permission from Bozen's municipal council to inaugurate a new girls' school: "It seems that in Bozen there was often expressed a desire to employ females in order to offer free education for girls, teaching them reading and writing skills, as well as female handicrafts, disciplining them to a life of virtue. Therefore, in Christian love, we decided to satisfy the poor parents' manifold and fervent requests, assuming those teaching responsibilities" (quote from: Exinger, 1936, p. 18).

Here too the schoolmaster's protests could achieve nothing and the Terziar Sisters, as they now called themselves, in the autumn of 1713, obtained the teaching permits also in Bozen. Already from the early years their institute counted from 60 to 70 female students. In 1717, they founded another convent in Kaltern (Vettori, 1955, pp. 41-46). After several disputes, the community even sentenced the Sisters to reimburse the schoolmaster for the financial loss of the school fees (Barth-Scalmani, 1995, p. 352).

3.3 *The Mary Ward's Nuns in Meran and Brixen*

After 1720, a fourth female congregation settled in Tyrol. Now once more, the Mary Ward's Nuns addressed the education for noble girls. Being the female counterpart to the Jesuits, their service for the girls' education was already contained in their vows. Under the sovereign's protective shield, pastor Veit von Tschiederer founded the girls' institute in 1720. The first Nuns came from Augsburg to Meran. Similar to other cities, the city of Meran obliged the Nuns to also provide an education for the poor girls (Christanell-Hofer, 1979, pp. 202-203). At the beginning, the main obstacles were the financial restrictions, which could only be overcome after several daughters of wealthy Tyrolean noble families entered the convent bringing their dowry with them. The same difficulties were mastered in the girls' school opened 19 years later in Brixen through a generous donation given by the bishop (Überbacher-Burger, 1991).

Summary and perspectives

Over the period analysed (until the middle of the 18th century), the efforts for a girls' school education show various guidelines, valid beyond

the area concerned, since they arose from the general contemporary idea of society. The impulse for the first boys' schools came from dedicated regulations issued by the highest political level, while the girls' schools were merely a simplified copy driven by the local actors. Therefore, the institutionalisation and implementation of formal education was a parody following the female image (Ketsch, Kuhn, 1984) given by the medieval church [cemented by the thesis of the Church Fathers like Augustine, Tertullian, Jerome, Thomas Aquinas *et al.*], and referring to the Old Testament creation ritual which merely describes women as a by-product of the men's ribs, instead of created in God's image. This line of argumentation resulted in a "demonstrated" intellectual and social subordination of women, largely represented in the organisation and contents of female education far beyond the Middle Ages⁹.

Nonetheless – as in all other European countries – female education in Tyrol mainly remained under the direction of the Church. In addition to the above-mentioned Orders, from the middle of the 18th century, eleven convents in Tyrol and Vorarlberg were dedicated to the girls' education. In accordance to the social order of the time, the initiators wanted to achieve a strict separation pursuant to the social standings. As for the teaching's quality, according to Hölzl (1972, p. 256), "it was by no means better than in the public community schools".

The *Renewed Tyrolean School Regulation* of 1747¹⁰, after the first *Tyrolean School Regulation*, as the second regulation of non-ecclesiastic schooling at the macro level, explicitly named boys and girls as addressees of institutionalised educational offers¹¹. At the same time, this regulation,

9 Those theses can be found, for example, reading the philosophical-pedagogical treatises of Juan Luis Vives (1523) *De institutione feminae christianae* (Fantazzi, Matheussen, 1996/97). Few or no reception was gained by essays requesting the female access to deeper knowledge and education, as, for example, *La semplicità ingannata* (1600) by Arcangela Tarabotti, a Venetian nun (Mazohl-Wallnig, 1990). The requests made by Johann Amos Comenius (1592-1670) "omnes omnia omnino excoli" (Reents, 1992, pp. 49-67), however, have to be related to the protestant life philosophy, promoting – much more than Catholics – the independent quest of the individual for salvation through the autonomous reading of the Sacred Scriptures (Fend, 2006 2), pp. 115-117).

10 TLA, Erneuerte Schulordnung (Renewed School Regulation) 1747, in: Normalien, Fasz. 34, Pos.1 in: J. Gub. Fasz.345.

11 About the separation between boys and girls in Lombard schools, see, for example, Polenghi, 2012, pp. 50-53.

more than ever before, underlined the division between genders¹². During the following centuries this division remained, whenever and wherever possible, a key focus at all organisational levels of the schooling system. This requested differentiation followed the idea, that the closeness between girls and boys could lead to moral decline and upheaval. The division between male and female pupils remained a central topic in the following centuries, claimed by the responsible officials at all organisational levels¹³. In line with and due to the gender division, also requested during the extracurricular activities, such as play time and church visits, – even if just marginally – new actors came to the playing field of institutionalised education: female actors, namely the schoolmasters' wives, long before the first female teachers appeared¹⁴.

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12 See, for example, "Instruction für den Neuen Schuellmaister zu Klausen Franz Karl Rauch" 19.12.1749. St.A.KI.

13 Even during the First World War, bigger communities tried to organise separated school classes St.A.K., Fasz. C 1921, Zl.645/1, 19.07.1921.

14 TLA, Causa Domini 1586, fol. 472; Normalien, Fasz. 34, Pos.1 in: J. Gub. Fasz.345.

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