

Stefano Franscini: statistics, schools and the federal state

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No person embodies the transformation of Ticino between 1798 and 1848 more fully than Stefano Franscini. Born in a peasant family in the Leventina two years before the end of the bailiwicks, he became the author of the first statistical description of Switzerland, the architect of the cantonal school system, a leader of the liberal government after 1839 and, in 1848, the first Italian-speaking member of the Federal Council. His life links the three levels of public institutions that the financial centre would later need: a cantonal state able to educate its citizens, a federal state able to measure its economy and a political class that regarded knowledge as the basis of good government.

1 From Bodio to Milan

Franscini was born on 23 October 1796 in Bodio in the Leventina. He attended the seminary of Pollegio from 1808 and the archiepiscopal seminary in Milan from 1815 to 1818, but he abandoned his studies for the priesthood and stayed in Milan, where he worked as a private tutor and, from 1820, as a teacher at a higher elementary school. In 1821 he published a *Grammatica inferiore della lingua italiana* for schools.¹ Milan in the years of the Austrian Restoration was the intellectual capital of the Italian-speaking world, the city of Manzoni, of the *Conciliatore* and of the economists and statisticians of the Lombard Enlightenment. Franscini absorbed there the conviction of the Lombard reformers that a state should be governed on the basis of exact knowledge of its population, its wealth and its institutions.²

After the death of his sister in 1824 Franscini returned to Bodio. In 1826 he moved to Lugano, where he directed a school run on the Lancaster method of mutual instruction, in which older pupils taught younger ones under the master's supervision, and opened schools together with his wife. In those

years he wrote the work that made him known throughout Switzerland, the *Statistica della Svizzera*, published in Lugano in 1827 or 1828 and immediately translated into German. It contained, among other things, a report on the state of education in Switzerland that he had written in 1824 and 1825.³ He followed it with an Italian translation of Heinrich Zschokke's history of the Swiss people (1829–1830) and later with *La Svizzera italiana* (1837–1840), the first comprehensive description of the canton's geography, economy and society.

2 The reformer in government

Franscini's pamphlet of 1829 on the reform of the constitution, discussed in the previous section, carried him into politics. In October 1830 the new government appointed him secretary of state of the canton, and in May 1837 he was elected to the Council of State. He represented the circle of Giornico in the Grand Council. After the liberal revolution of December 1839 he became one of the leading figures of the new government.

His main field was education. The first school law of 1804 had required a school in every commune but had remained largely without effect. A law of 10 June 1831 and a regulation of 28 June 1832, prepared under Vincenzo Dalberti, renewed the obligation but achieved little until 1837.⁴ In that year Franscini, who succeeded Dalberti in the field, organized the first course of methodology and pedagogy for teachers and issued circulars that improved the working of the schools for many years. Laws on drawing schools (1840), on higher elementary schools (*scuole elementari maggiori*, 1841) and on literary and grammar-school institutes (1845) followed.⁵

The results can be measured, as Franscini himself would have wished. Between the school years 1836–1837 and 1842–1843 the number of schools in the canton rose from 239 to 358, an increase of almost 50 per cent. Primary pupils increased from 8,289 to 13,878, girls attending school from 1,158 to 5,241. By 1843 the canton's kindergartens had 247 pupils.⁶ The increase in girls' attendance was the most striking change, because it altered the education of the women who, in a canton of emigrant men, managed households, land and remittances for much of the year. Chapter A.III has described how the families of the emigrant builders depended on written contracts, letters and accounts. Franscini's schools made these skills general.

In figures. The population of Ticino grew from 88,793 in 1808 to 101,567 in 1824, 113,923 in 1837 and 117,759 resident inhabitants at the first federal census of 1850, when Switzerland as a whole counted 2,392,740.⁷ By 1900 the canton had 138,638 inhabitants. Between five and seven thousand

persons left the canton each year for seasonal work abroad during the nineteenth century. Between 1836–1837 and 1842–1843 the number of schools rose from 239 to 358 and the number of primary pupils from 8,289 to 13,878.⁸ On 16 November 1848 Franscini was elected to the Federal Council in the third ballot with 68 of 132 votes.⁹

3 Notes

1. Marco Marcacci, "Franscini, Stefano", HLS, version of 21 April 2022, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/003508/2022-04-21/>. ↩
2. Raffaello Ceschi, "Stefano Franscini", in Ceschi (ed.), *Storia del Cantone Ticino*, vol. 1 (Bellinzona 1998). ↩
3. Marcacci (above) dates the *Statistica* to 1828; Guido Marazzi, review of Carlo G. Lacaita (ed.), *Stefano Franscini. Per lo sviluppo dell'istruzione nel Cantone Ticino*, *Scuola ticinese*, no. 121, https://m4.ti.ch/fileadmin/DECS/DS/Rivista_scuola_ticinese/ST_n.121/ST_121_Mondada_Stefano_Franscini.pdf, gives 1827. ↩
4. "La prima legge sulla scuola" (above). ↩
5. Ibid.; Marazzi, review of Lacaita (above). ↩
6. Marazzi, review of Lacaita (above). ↩
7. Sciancalepore, study of nineteenth-century demography, *Scuola ticinese*, no. 102, table I, https://m4.ti.ch/fileadmin/DECS/DS/Rivista_scuola_ticinese/ST_n.102/ST_102_Sciancalepore_per_storia_demografica_del_XIX_secolo.pdf; Lisa Bottinelli and Pier Zanetti, "Un secolo e mezzo di censimenti a Villa Ciani", *Dati (USTAT)*, 2007, no. 1, https://m4.ti.ch/fileadmin/DECS/DCSU/Documenti/Franscini_censimento_1850.pdf. ↩
8. Marazzi, review of Lacaita (above). ↩
9. Marcacci (above). ↩

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