

The role of calligraphy in the Italian schools of modern times*

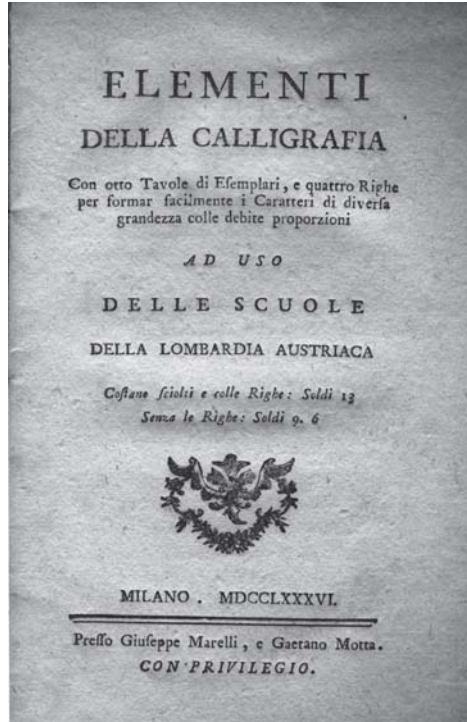
Francesco Ascoli

Introduction

Calligraphy began to be in Italy a part of the *cursus studiorum* through the Napoleonic experience from one side, and the Austrian from the other¹. It's not by chance that the word "calligrafia" began to be used at the end of 18th

* This contribution represents an anticipation of a larger study about the history of calligraphy in modern times in Italy that will be shortly published.

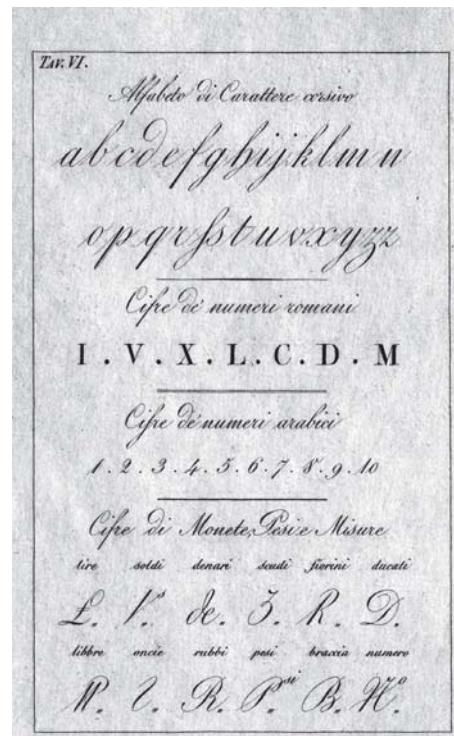
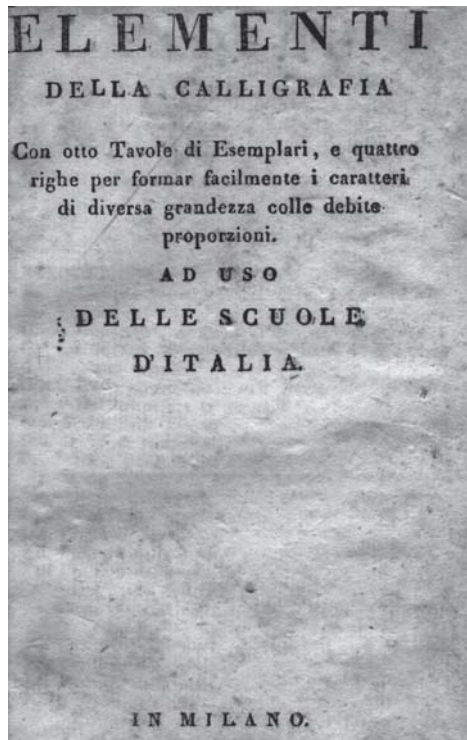
¹ An institutionalized teaching of calligraphy began with the Teresian educational reform in Italy at the end of 18th century where it was organized and arranged in a wider and structured school system. The Napoleonic era introduced new secondary schools named «liceo» where actually calligraphy was not first included, but subsequently added in the so called «licei convitti» (boarding schools) where younger pupils were admitted. For a general arrangement of these subjects, see J. Van Horn Melton, *Absolutism and the eighteenth-century origins of compulsory schooling in Prussia and Austria*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988; P. Brotto, V. Mazzucchelli (eds.), *Problemi scolastici ed educativi nella Lombardia di primo Ottocento*, Milano, SugarCo, 2 voll., 1977; S. Bucci, *La scuola italiana nell'età napoleonica*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1976, P.L. Ballini, G. Pécout (eds.), *Scuola e nazione in Italia e in Francia nell'Ottocento*, Venezia, Istituto Scienze Lettere e Arti, 2008; E. Pagano, *La scuola nelle Marche in età napoleonica*, Urbino, Quattroventi, 2000. See also, with a large amount of references the important contribution of S. Polenghi, *From Vienna to Milan: the Austrian reform of the Gymnasium and its implementation in Lombardy during the Restoration, with some data on the Ginnasio di Brera*, «History of Education & Children's Literature» vol. II, n. 2, 2007, pp. 101-126.



Pic. 1. Titlepage from one of the first editions of Francesco Soave's *Elementi della calligrafia* printed in Milan, in 1786. (All the pictures reproduced in the article, refer to items from the Author's private collection, which is currently kept by the Foundation *Per Leggere*, "Raccolta Ascoli", Abbiategrosso, Milan, Italy).

Pic. 2.a. Titlepage from a later version of the same work without date, but maybe of the beginning of the 19th Cent. If we take note of the mention of its destination «ad uso delle scuole d'Italia» (*for the use of the Italian schools*) that could mean that this booklet has been printed during the Napoleonic period. Both of these works do not mention the author. This particular could suggest that this work could not completely have been compiled by Soave.

Pic. 2.b. Table from the same *Elementi della calligrafia*.



century mainly through the Francesco Soave booklet *Elementi della calligrafia* published about in 1786².

The debate about teaching of reading and handwriting, vigorously started with the beginning of the educational mission of the European states, opened to experiments and new formulas: the mutual teaching³, the simultaneous teaching of reading and writing were questions for which calligraphy did not obtain the right to discuss about. That does not mean that there was a lack of new initiatives by part of writing masters that proposed new solutions and new methods. Many were in fact the calligraphers that tried to spread an own method of handwriting based on empirical methods of various nature, such as different kind of pens or exercises books. The methods concerning the goal for a better handwriting often involved a competition for improving writing instruments and performance, rather than a trial of enhancing the teaching quality as attempt. Therefore many masters and teachers invented new kind of pens, such as pens with a more capacious ink reservoir or new pen holds⁴. Others suggested various systems as guide lines or other kind of writing materials or inks, but their contribution did not succeed to participate to the pedagogical debate in a meaningful manner, especially in Italy where the calligraphical tradition had been interrupted or at least less meaningfully reduced already since a long time⁵.

² Francesco Soave, a priest from Lugano, was the organizer of the school text books in the reform of the Italian Austrian dominations that published since 1786. His calligraphy text book was one of the first that spread all over the Italian peninsula. About this text, see my contribution: *Gli elementi della calligrafia dell'abate Soave*, from the Acts of the congress held in Rovereto between 25 and 27 October 2007, *Navigare nei mari dell'umano sapere. Biblioteche e circolazione libraria nel Trentino e nell'Italia del XVIII secolo*, Rovereto, 2009, pp. 155-168.

³ Some words should be spent about the mutual teaching that started from the experience of Bell and Lancaster and that have a large consent and diffusion everywhere, and therefore also in Italy. See P. Brotto, *Le scuole di mutuo insegnamento*, in P. Brotto, V. Mazzucchelli (eds.), *Problemi scolastici ed educativi nella Lombardia di primo Ottocento*, quoted above, I. *L'istruzione elementare*, Milano, Sugarco, 1978, pp. 187-300. For what concerns the teaching of handwriting, it was joined with that of reading; calligraphy skill was welcomed and sometimes some schools used a calligrapher for its class as in the case of Pesaro, a city in the Church State, where it was decided to pay a writing master in order to send him to learn the mutual method in Florence; see A. Ascenzi, G. Fattori, *L'alfabeto e il catechismo. La diffusione delle scuole di mutuo insegnamento nello Stato Pontificio (1829-1830)*, Pisa, Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 2006, p. 156. The simultaneous teaching of reading and writing began just with the lancasterian schools, but was particularly introduced at the end of 19th century.

⁴ An important bibliography for writing instruments now exists, but conceived mainly for collectors. For a general survey from a different point of view, see the exhibition catalog *Penna, inchiostro e calamaio: gli strumenti per la scrittura e la loro storia*, Torino, U. Allemandi, 2008, also with english text, with a personal contribution about writing instruments in modern times.

⁵ If we examine the publications of writing manuals in Italy, we actually note a strong slowdown in the second half of 17th century, greatly due to the crisis that struck the Italian peninsula. Concerning Italian writing copy book in that period with a chronological list, see A.S. Osley, Luminario, *An introduction to the Italian writing books of the 16th & 17th centuries*,

Little by little, a lot of discussions about the teaching of calligraphy assumed new dimensions and characteristics and a different didactics with common objectives and methods was claimed. Soon arose questions about which was the most suitable school handwriting style; each nation praised also for its own⁶. Not only formal question were discussed, but also more pedagogical issues, such as how to structure and organize a graduated teaching, how to simplify language, nomenclature and procedures. So the debate began to exceed the calligraphy entourage. The era where the ancient writing master represented a member of a privileged class with its obscure language and rituals was going to disappear; he had somehow to democratize its matter. Thus, the calligraphers were not involved only in a transmission of a graphical knowledge, but also a pedagogical one more general such as how to assemble and run a classroom or keeping a class register diary, or using new evaluation methods.

1. *Joseph Carstairs method*

Joseph Carstairs⁷ was a teacher author of a new handwriting method published at the beginning of the 19th century in England. This method met the much needed requirements of a speedy and fluent handwriting style, making use of a particular forearm movement and tying hand and arm with strips. This method spread all over the western countries, including

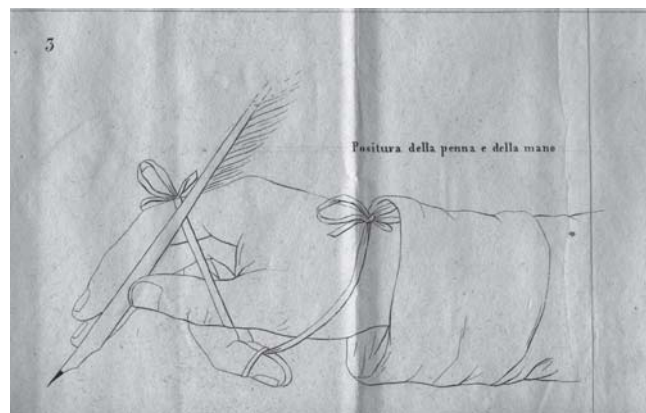
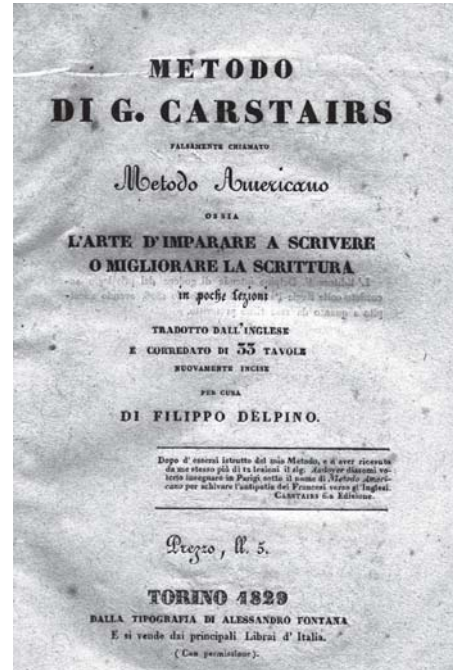
Nieuwkoop, Miland Publishers, 1972. In the first half of the following century, copybooks are scarce; the publications regain ground from about 1766 onwards, with Peiraud's *Nuovo libro di scrittura* published for the Reycends about that date in Turin and over all with F. Decaroli huge masterpiece *Ammaestramenti teorico-pratici* published also in Turin in 1772.

⁶ The question assumed in fact a political aspect: this is well represented by the Belgian experience where, after its unification process in 1830, it was thereafter decided in 1849 by the War Ministry to establish a competition for a national style of handwriting. Its program, published in the *Journal militaire officiel* stated that it was necessary distant from the French Magnée system: «Donner un système d'écriture dont le type se rapproche de la batarde... qui soit moins penchée, plus serrée, et plus nourrie que celle du calligraphe Magnée». The winner, J. Dierckx, in his *Historique de l'art d'écrire* published in 1857 discussing about the question of handwriting nationality, confirmed that belgians did not have a national handwriting system. Dierckx was also in contact with an italian school journal, the «Avvenire Educativo» published in Palermo at the end of 19th century that hosted some of his contributions, dealing for a reformation of the teaching of calligraphy and against the roundhand. See: G. Chiosso (ed.), *La stampa pedagogica e scolastica in Italia (1820-1943)*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1997, pp. 79-80, where nevertheless the Dierckx participation is not mentioned.

⁷ Joseph Carstairs was an English master born in England in 1783; he is famous for his *Lectures on the art of writing* that he published in London in 1816 that introduced a new handwriting teaching system involving forearms and muscular movement; in the same period he also published a book about stenography with the title *Tachigraphy or the flying pen*.

Pic. 3.a. Titlepage from F. Delpino, *Metodo di G. Carstairs falsamente chiamato Metodo Americano ossia l'arte d'imparare a scrivere o migliorare la scrittura in poche lezioni tradotto dall'inglese e corredato da 33 tavole nuovamente incise per cura di Filippo Delpino*, Torino, Dalla Tipografia di Alessandro Fontana, 1829.

Pic. 3.b. Table from the same work (F. Delpino, *Metodo di G. Carstairs...*, cit.) that reports the characteristic tie of the hand in this system.



Germany and over all, in America more than in Europe⁸, where it appeared like a meteorite, and it fade away rather rapidly where the new born national

⁸ For the development of Carstairs methods in America through Foster's works, see Thomson H. Littlefield, *Before Spencerian: the development of B.F. Foster and the American system*, «Print» 3, Fall 1945, pp. 32-40; The Carstairs method also appeared in Germany, for ex., through the work of Philipp Jakob Nägelin who published the following *Methodische Anleitung zum Schön- und Schnellschreiben nach Carstairs'schen Grundsätzen für lateinische, Gewerbe-, Real- und Elementarschulen bearbeitet*, Stuttgart, about 1840.

education system imposed their own and the diffusion of the steel nib made the rest of the job. Raffaello Lambruschini, an eminent Italian pedagogist, in his famous *Guida dell'Educatore*⁹, after having dealt about Audoyer's forgeries of Carstairs works, states: «The real method of Carstairs is but a forgery»; he adds that this method is not suitable for children, because it takes off the learning of the arm and he suggests the Mulhauser method instead, a Swiss adaptation of Carstairs.

The first time that a Carstairs method appeared in Italy was probably from a translation of Chandelet's version: *Sistema americano ossia metodi di Carstairs e Chandelet per apprendere la scrittura inglese*, Verona, Minesso 1828, pp. 31 with 20 engravings. The "American" denomination was probably given by the frenchman, not to offend the anti-british feelings of those times¹⁰.

The following year a first translation from the original was published, carried out by Filippo Delpino¹¹, calligrapher and stenographer (and also a member of the local masonry) coming from Turin with the title: *Metodo di G. Carstairs falsamente chiamato americano ossia l'arte d'imparare a scrivere o migliorare la scrittura in poche lezioni tradotte dall'inglese e corredato di 33 tavole nuovamente incise per cura di F.D.*, Turin 1829.

This is an abridged edition (63 pages instead of 273). Another edition was published some years later with a slightly different title: *Manuale di calligrafia metodo compiuto di G. Carstairs detto americano ossia l'arte d'imparare a scrivere o migliorare la scrittura in poche lezioni*.

Nevertheless, soon the name of Carstairs vanished, and remained that of "American" and all following writing manuals with this kind of method, called them simply "American".

Many Italian calligraphers of the first half of the 19th century that published writing manuals, also included in their works some engraved sheets of carstairsian models calling them «American hand».

Some quarrelled about this method, calling it like a last-minute-method for quickly improving the hand, in which one could learn to write in very few lessons, while traditional calligraphers knew that, for learning, handwriting is a time consuming activity. Actually, many improvised writing masters, often coming from abroad, went through the Italian peninsula teaching (or trying

⁹ «Guida dell'Educatore», nn. 31-32, July-August 1838, pp. 223 and ff.

¹⁰ About this edition and, in general, the diffusion of the Carstairs' method in Italy, see F. Ascoli, *Carstairs in Italy*, «Wes, Journal of the Writing Equipment Society», n. 68, Autumn, pp. 34-35. For Carstairs pen-holds see also R. Sassoon, *Handwriting in the twentieth century*, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 2.

¹¹ Filippo Delpino from Genoa was the organizer of the stenographic service at the Deputy Chamber in Turin and member of the masonic lodge "Ausonia". He published in 1819 an Italian version of the Samuel Taylor's stenography book, *Universal System of Stenography or Shorthand Writing*, published in London in 1814, a very well known English system.

to teach) handwriting easily and in few lessons, also as a testimonial of the spreading of literacy requests in Italy.

2. *Some notes about pre-unification handwriting methods*

Besides the Carstairsan method, many more or less famous writing books were published in the same period: if we examine the pedagogical offer related, we can see that most of these manuals had few printed explanations letting to the images the major teaching task. The offer of various kind of characters styles was still important in that period: that's why many calligraphers show as more alphabets as they can, in various size and slope, both for meeting different handwriting quest and demand, both for showing their degree of knowledge and skill as an action of self promotion.

Riccardo Castellani from Leghorn in his *Raccolta di esemplari di caratteri moderni, varj, ornati ed a capriccio* published in 1810 supplies with one alphabet in normal size («intero»), one of half size («mezzano»), and others even smaller and smaller («mezzanetto», «minuto» and «minutissimo»), as well as various alphabets such as gothic and ornamental, a roman one, and a large one («grosso»). A most famous penman such as Ignazio Contessi from Ravenna in his *Arte dello scrivere* published in 1815 and dedicated to the Italian youth shows also characters in the three size dimensions: large, medium and small («grande», «mezzano», «piccolo») adding the French character known as «ronde» («rotondo»), the bastard («bastardo»), a running hand («corsivo») and also a backwards sloped hand («rovesciato»).

Others instead, like Gaetano Giarrè and his Florentine famous school¹², proposes not only various kind of alphabets, but also a little tablet for beginners use, and other peculiar instructions such as tracing meaningless words and exercises for loosening hands¹³. We could anyhow argue from these very few notes two important issues: a calligraphical offer rather large and diversified buy joined to a meaningful lack of pedagogical handwriting instructions, even if some new proposals in this sense was effected by the most shrewd calligraphers. But another question must be added: the missing of a common debate about this question. Each master penman performs his own choice and proposes his own solution without real discussions and interactions. It will be only with the Unification, and with common regulations and standardization of rules that

¹² Gaetano Giarrè was a well famous calligrapher and engraver, son of a painter and pupil of the engraver Giovacchino Frosini. He was active about the turn of 18th century in Florence where he opened a very attended school. He published many writing copy books, some together with his sons Raimondo and Brunone.

¹³ See F. Ascoli, *Il contributo della calligrafia nell'insegnamento della scrittura*, «Materiali di lavoro» n.s., nn. 2-3, 1992, pp. 169-179.

calligraphers, now state school professors, will begin to discuss among them, but not only about their art and techniques, but over all about their very poor life condition.

3. *Giacomo Castelli and his observations*

After Unification, not few calligraphers actually were involved in the teaching of handwriting and a quantity of books were published, some of which were methodical treatises about how to teach calligraphy, especially after the July 1888¹⁴, when the regulations for teachers diploma exams were published. Among this kind of publications, we can report that of Giacomo Castelli¹⁵, a calligrapher from Turin author of a spread off series of writing copybooks entitled *L'insegnamento della calligrafia in Italia. Osservazioni e proposte di G. Castelli*. In the dedication he states that «I think that the writing I present here is the first that deals largely this subject up to nowadays neglected»¹⁶. In this work he criticizes the expedients utilized by some teachers like little ropes or arm/bands employed to tie hands obliging them to write in a determinate way (like in Carstairsain method) or calligraphical tutors (little rings to be added to the nibs or directly to the fingers, both to improve the flow of ink and to achieve a comfortable pen grip). His critics involved also those who provided teaching a running hand in a very few lessons, but overall the empirical methods, such as we have above mentioned.

For Castelli «The good teacher must not only know the practical side, but also the philosophical one of the matter he teaches»¹⁷. The author complains about the little consideration about his matter, adding that «In no other country than Italy, calligraphy is so little considered... as in our reborn Italy»¹⁸. He actually detects some important points such as lacking of a set of rules legislation, insufficient teachers qualification; nevertheless, he proposes only formal remedies, such as some slight change or a general increase to school hours dedicated, or a different nomenclature of writing characters.

¹⁴ The July 1888 regulations stated the rules for obtaining the faculty of teaching calligraphy, inserting qualifications exams.

¹⁵ Giacomo Castelli was a very famous calligrapher active in Turin at the end of 19th century, author of many writing models, very critical about ancient methods and sponsor of new points of views on this subject, also declaring that handwriting depends on geometry and is a kind of drawing, formed by circles, ellipses and so on, provoking large disagreement reactions by part of the traditionalists.

¹⁶ «Lo scritto ch'io ti presento, credo sia forse il primo che tratti un po' a lungo una materia, la quale finora si lasciò alquanto negletta».

¹⁷ «Il buon insegnante deve sapere non solo la parte pratica, ma altresì la filosofica della materia che professa».

¹⁸ «Presso nissun popolo incivilito la calligrafia è tenuta in sì poco conto... come qui nella nostra risorta Italia».

4. *City competitions*

It was not completely true that the question of the calligraphical teaching was not considered at all by school institutions or pedagogists. Up to Daneo-Credaro's laws¹⁹, elementary schools depended on the municipalities, and only the most important among them could afford to pay qualified teachers for calligraphy for assisting the others in their task. Some municipalities, such as of Turin or Florence, have been involved in this sense with conferences, publications or competitions.

A Florentine city council resolution of July 8th 1869 resolved to call for a competition to establish a new calligraphic method to be used in elementary schools. This competition stated:

Is is now open a new contest to present before next Oct. 15th a calligraphic method to be applied in the elementary schools in Florence according to the program drawn up by the school commission, and approved by the council on the last June 16th²⁰.

The year before, the Commission charged to review textbooks had disclosed the opportunity of such a competition, in order also to utilize such new methods in the rest of the country. The resolution opened with this competition took part 58 competitors. Only 5 were declared deserving mention and none had the honour to win. Another competition was declared, but it never took place. The judging commission was composed by 5 members, among which two of the most renowned writing masters at that time, Raimondo Giarrè, Gaetano's son, and Giuseppe Bertolla²¹, that had worked in Lucca and Parma at the local royal courtes.

In 1898 a similar competition was held in Turin; among the proposed methods, we find those of Giovanni Tonso²², Cobianchi, Domenico Martuscelli from Naples, Giuseppe Forzani, A. and C.²³ and Giovanni Thevenet from Milan.

¹⁹ The Daneo-Credaro laws, enacted in 1911, established that elementary schools had to be financed also by the state, no more only by the municipalities, as it was before. See S.Q. Angelini, *La scuola tra Comune e Stato. Il passaggio storico della legge Daneo-Credaro*, Firenze, Le Lettere, 1998; G. Bonetta, *L'avocazione della scuola elementare allo stato*, in L. Pazzaglia, R. Sani (eds.), *Scuola e società nell'Italia unita*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2001, pp. 231-237.

²⁰ «È aperto un concorso per presentare dentro il 15 ottobre prossimo avvenire un metodo di calligrafia da applicare alle scuole elementari del Municipio di Firenze secondo il programma compilato a cura della commissione direttrice della scuola, e approvato dalla giunta con deliberazione del dì 16 giugno scorso».

²¹ Giuseppe Bertolla was another well known calligrapher, author of splendid calligraphic works, such as an in-folio Album calligrafico. Trattato storico teorico pratico published in Lucca and dated 1840 with 40 engraved leaves.

²² All of these people were well imposed writing masters; especially Giovanni Tonso from Turin (1855-1909) was one of the best penman at those times.

²³ Under the initials A. and C. signed two priests, Giovanni Battista Andorno and Giuseppe Cathiard of the Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane in Turin who wrote out numerous school books

5. *Gio. Battista Scotti's booklet*

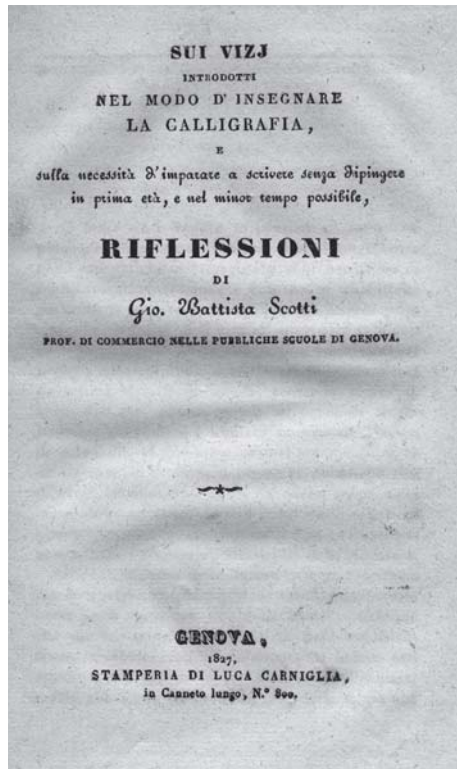
As calligraphy tradition began to be considered obsolete with its unnecessary drills and obscure language, opponents began to give fight. A pamphlet published in 1827 with the title: *Sui vizj prodotti nel modo d'insegnare la calligrafia* by Gio. Battista Scotti, a teacher of commercial subjects in public schools in Genoa represents a real offensive to the calligraphical tradition that he attacks from different points of view. First, for the author, it's much less then drawing («figlia spuria del disegno») stating that calligraphers «ignore the power of pencil and brush» («ignorano il potere della matita e del pennello»); secondly, he declares that calligraphical methods are a waste of precious time, subtracted to that of other important subjects. He suggests the Carstairan's method, but without, from the other hand, suggesting a real pedagogical alternative. The rising of positivism ideology claimed for new pedagogical methods and instruments, criticizing calligraphy also from another point of view, that of hygiene. So, new debates arose in order to establish the best class desk, but the very important battle began to rise up with the question about upright or slanted handwriting that occupied for many years the attention of physician, optometrists, general scientists. In this sense, the pioneer may be represented by Emile Javal²⁴. In an increasing role of medicine, hygiene sciences and pedagogy, the calligraphical tradition was losing ever more its appeal²⁵.

It's not therefore a surprise that Italian regulations warned the elementary schools masters not to exaggerate with calligraphy. The 1867 regulations stated that it was not elementary schools task to form calligraphers: «It is not a task of elementary schools to form calligraphers» («Non è ufficio delle scuole elementari il formare dei calligrafi»). From the other hand, it could not be expected that these were themselves also calligraphers when they often scarcely were able to read and write. Nevertheless, some big communities like Milan and Turin, accepted for a while to have some writing masters to help regular staff. It was only in secondary schools that calligraphy continued to be of some importance.

that had a valuable editorial success. See P. Savio, *I Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane autori ed editori per la scuola*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. II, n. 2, 2007, pp. 92-93.

²⁴ Emile Javal was an optician who dedicated his investigation about the reasons of myopia in schoolboys, so letting himself involved in the question of the teaching of handwriting; he wrote a famous treatise *Physiologie de la lecture et de l'écriture*, published in 1905 where he sided with the upright handwriting style and that had an immediate success and it was reprinted several times soon becoming a benchmark.

²⁵ About the loosing of calligraphy and its medicalization process, see. F. Ascoli, *La scrittura fra igiene e sanità: storia del pensiero medico sulla scrittura*, contribution to the congress about disgraphia held in Faenza on 12 and 13 April 2008; now available at the website <<http://www.pergialtri.it/convegnodisgrafia/public/genpags/biggs/FrancescoAscoli.pdf>> (last access: 31st October 2009).



Pic. 4. Titlepage of: G.B. Scotti, *Sui vizj introdotti nel modo d'insegnare la calligrafia e sulla necessità d'imparare a scrivere senza dipingere in prima età, e nel minor tempo possibile*, Genova, Stamperia di Luca Carniglia, 1827.

Actually, after the Unification, many masters or pedagogists published methods and discussions about handwriting in elementary schools, at least up to Giovanni Gentile's reform in 1922²⁶.

²⁶ Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944): philosopher and professor, one of the most important exponent of the idealistic philosophy in Italy. Minister of Education in 1922 and sponsor of a famous school reformation that, breaking with the past, developed an elite school system, based on the prevalence of philosophy and classical studies. His programs slashed the importance of calligraphy, in elementary schools superseded by the locution «bella scrittura» (fine handwriting). About Gentile and his work in the schools, see G. Spadafora (ed.), *Giovanni Gentile, la Pedagogia, la Scuola*, Roma, Armando, 1996. For, in general, school under Gentile's era, see: G. Charnitzky, *Fascismo e Scuola*, Firenze, Nuova Italia, 1996.

6. *Calligraphy in elementary schools*

In the instructions of the Casati laws of 1860²⁷ calligraphy is a part of the curriculum starting from the second year, stating that «[the master] will train pupils especially in the fine and running hand» («[il maestro] eserciterà specialmente gli alunni nella scrittura fina e spedita») without specifying what was intended for this kind of style. Many calligraphers, like Castelli, argued that it's not possible for kids in a short time to draw small characters quickly²⁸. 1888 programs foresaw the simultaneous reading/writing process, stating also that pupils must write «running hand neatly and rapidly». Nevertheless, only elementary school teachers were involved, not calligraphers, these were actually no more interested, even if some of them still published methods also for this kind of schools, both because they felt morally responsible for that task, both because the publication represented somehow a revenue, even if small. The question of a good qualification for elementary schools still remained, however, so some of them and some pedagogists prepared textbooks and primers for masters. One of the most famous was of A. and C., *Guida teorico pratica per l'insegnamento e la correzione della scrittura*, published in 1869.

After that, other pedagogical issues came into the limelight, like simultaneous reading/writing methods, phonematic and syllabic methods. Another ghost on the end of 19th century began to disturb the dreams already agitated of calligraphers: the question of upright/slanted hand. In France, during some congresses held in 1862 and 1879²⁹, physicians and hygienists condemned the slanted Roundhand, considered a source of trouble for the eyes and for the back. The debate about upright/slanted style was vivid and close. The question was taken again and discussed in the first (but also unique) calligraphy teachers and handwriting experts congress held in Rome on Dec. 1901.

One of the speakers, Giovanni Colombini, director of «Scuola fiorentina», a periodical school magazine, outlined its history, supporting vigorously

²⁷ Gabrio Casati's 1859 law established the founding schooling system after Unification. Its instructions were published on Sept. 15th of the following year. The bibliography about Casati and its law is rather abundant. See, among others, M.C. Morandini, *Da Boncompagni a Casati: la costruzione del sistema scolastico nazionale 1848-1861*, pp. 9-46, in L. Pazzaglia, R. Sani, (eds.), *Scuola e società nell'Italia Unita. Dalla Legge Casati all'Italia Unita*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1991. About Italian elementary school programs, see E. Catarsi, *Storia dei programmi della scuola elementare (1860-1985)*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1994, where the programs are fully transcribed; see p. 189 for the text here quoted.

²⁸ G. Castelli, *L'insegnamento della calligrafia in Italia. Osservazioni e proposte*, Torino, Camilla e Bertolero, 1874, p. 51: «Perciò l'insegnare la calligrafia alle anzidette classi inferiori è un controsenso. S'insegni in esse una scrittura semplice, nitida, intelleggibile, di forma facile... » («To teach calligraphy in inferior classes is therefore a nonsense. A simple, neat, intelligible, easy to form handwriting is to be taught... »). The same author puts in note that he also wrote a writing method for elementary schools and for illiterate adults.

²⁹ See F. Buisson's *Dictionnaire de Pédagogie et d'instruction primaire*, Paris, 1878-1887, under the voice «Ecriture», where these debates are largely described.



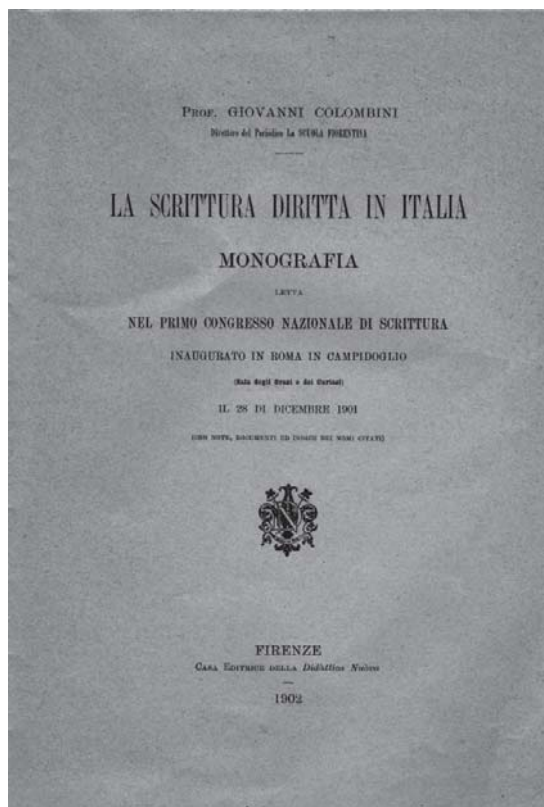
Pic. 5. Titlepage of: A. e C., *Guida teorico-pratica per l'insegnamento e la correzione della scrittura adorna di molte figure inserite nel testo*, Torino, Presso Eugenio Barone, 1869.

the upright hand, while boycotting the slanted one. Colombini wrote in his report³⁰: «The Parisian Medicine society with unanimous approval condemned in 1879 the sloping handwriting»³¹. In 1882 a similar vote was expressed by the International Hygiene Congress in Geneva). In 1881 Javal, in the «Revue scientifique» reported the slanted style as cause of myopia suggesting the upright handwriting, following George Sand's famous motto: «Ecriture droite, papier droite, corps droit». Numerous initiatives followed. The hygiene congress in London and the medicine Academy sided in favour of the upright style. An inquiry conducted by F. Buisson, E. Javal and others also established that this style was preferable. The difference between the French hypothesis and the Italian, was that, while here, substantially, the upright style was actually a Roundhand straighten up, for Frenchmen, it meant to return back to an old style before the spread of the Roundhand, that is the old «ronde».

In every case, calligraphers were obliged to support one or the other, and many were those shocked for the non respect of the tradition, defended

³⁰ Giovanni Colombini participated to the Rome 1902 calligraphers congress where he presented a memory about the upright style in Italy. This work also appeared as an offprint with the title *La scrittura diritta in Italia*, Firenze, Casa Editrice della Didattica Nuova, 1902.

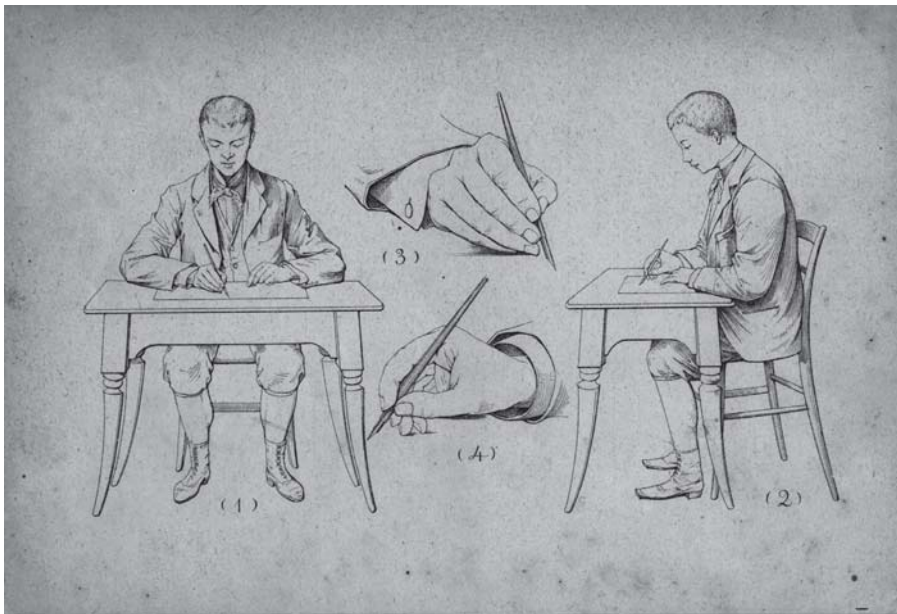
³¹ «La Società di Medicina di Parigi con voto unanime nel 1879 condannò la scrittura pendente. Nel 1882 un simile voto fu espresso dal Congresso internazionale d'igiene di Ginevra».



Pic. 6. Titlepage of: G. Colombini, *La scrittura diritta in Italia. Monografia letta nel primo congresso nazionale di scrittura inaugurato in Campidoglio il 28 dicembre 1901*, Firenze, Casa Editrice della Didattica Nuova, 1902.

tenaciously the old slanted character. Colombini continued listing numerous experiments where he praised with vaunting accents the success of the upright model everywhere. In January 4th, 1899 a certain prof. Uberto D., charged by the minister Baccelli presented a favourable report about Colombini's method that was also presented in Naples the following year at a physical education international congress. Other experiments followed in Florence and Lucca.

In Trieste, however, the experiment failed because the method instructions were published in the German language: «If the instructions were given in Italian – reported a master – instead of German, the outcome could have been different». The Rome calligraphers congress opted for a compromise stating that the upright model did not abolish the slanted, but it's to be placed by side and that they could meet together peacefully.



Pic. 7. Table from A. Spes, *La calligrafia verticale*, Torino, 1904. This booklet is one of the first (maybe the first) addressed to elementary school masters concerning the upright style. The table shows the position of the pupil for this kind of handwriting.

The school regulations gradually received these needs, starting from Orlando's programs in 1905³² that began to suggest, beside the slanted style, the new one, just until gradually to admit the upright model as a unique handwriting style as in the 1945 programs stated «for hygiene reasons» («Per ragioni igieniche si prescrive l'uso della scrittura diritta»), a disposition repeated in the new programs 1955.

Calligraphy in elementary schools passed through a non lineal itinerary. In the first national school programs, handwriting and Italian language were put together in a unique subject; and it's understandable so: the situation to face was of double difficulty. It was not only a question of simple literacy, but also of Italian language that many Italian students didn't know perfectly, as they generally spoke their native dialect, so that handwriting became an obliged way for them to learn Italian. Calligraphy was expressly displayed from the second class onwards with «graduated exercises».

³² See E. Catarsi, cit., p. 262: «esercizi metodici di scrittura diritta o di corsivo ordinario» and p. 287: «Il programma ammette che si adoperi la scrittura diritta o il corsivo ordinario». See also G. Santucci, *Scrittura e bella scrittura nei programmi della scuola primaria italiana dal 1860 al 1955*, «I problemi della pedagogia», a. XI, n. 6., nov.-dec. 1965, pp. 694-702.

With the 1888 programs which enlarges the school classes from four to five years, handwriting became a single school subject in the first three years, while calligraphy appeared in the last two, but pointing out that it had to be used for practical purposes («Esercizi di bella scrittura diretta però sempre al fine pratico...»). With 1894 programs calligraphy is foreseen in all classes, adding a fine handwriting test at the end of each class. In 1905 programs, the upright style begins to be recommended, together with «corsivo ordinario» («ordinary running hand») and for the first time, from the second class, calligraphy is joined with drawing. The instructions continue to warn about stressing the importance of calligraphy: «The calligraphical exercise must not be detached from the ordinary handwriting style» («L'esercizio calligrafico non si distacchi tanto da quello di scrittura ordinaria»).

With Gentile's Reformation, calligraphy in elementary schools was superseded by "fine handwriting" and associated with drawing. As in the spirit of Gentile's thought, programmes recommended very little from a methodological point of view, especially for handwriting suggesting only introductory drills. Nevertheless, the instructions concerning the second class, argued again about calligraphy exercises «different for single pupils or groups of them, according to their capacity and defeats acquired by them». They also specified that «the fine handwriting exercises will be optional and executed not on copybooks, but on models traced by the master at the blackboard». Handwriting copybooks therefore disappeared from elementary schools text books, substituted by spelling books in which are shown syllabic or phonetics methods. But Gentile himself in one of his parliamentary speeches³³ talked about nature of pedagogical methods with a scolding accent about traditional handwriting teaching systems:

To me pedagogy is that one which frees from prejudices, that subtracts men to the pedantries of what is to do in a determinate way, because it's always been done that way, and that which does not prescribes no method because method is with life that always renews itself, day by day, moment by moment. I don't mind syllabic or alphabetic method!³⁴

This pedagogical gap was partly filled by different kind of publications that came to help to the teachers. The regime reacted with a wholly political answer with the institution of the commission of exams of school textbooks between 1923 and 1928³⁵ and subsequently with the adoption of the unique text. In the

³³ G. Gentile, *Discorsi parlamentari*, Bologna, Mulino, p. 21, during a speech held on Feb. 5th 1925 about financial questions of the Ministry.

³⁴ «Per me la pedagogia è quella che libera dai pregiudizi, che sottrae gli uomini alle pedanterie di quello che si deve fare a un modo perché a quel modo è stato fatto, quella che non prescrive nessun metodo perché il metodo è con la vita che sempre si rinnova, giorno per giorno, momento per momento. Altro che metodo sillabico o alfabetico...!».

³⁵ The Fascism regime tried to control, through a school text production examination, the entire school system and obtain consent. See A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (eds.), *Il libro per la scuola tra idealismo e fascismo*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2005.

report of this examinations, the comments relating to handwriting were scarce, synthetic and little meaningful, limited to the observation that the authors of a text had chosen the upright style or the phonic-syllabic method. The commission was directed by Lucio Lombardo Radice, was composed, among others, by Alessandro Marcucci, a school inspector, director of the Agro Pontino schools and author himself of school books, some of them dedicated to handwriting³⁶.

7. *Calligraphy in secondary schools*

In 18th century and in the first half of the following, calligraphy played a strategic role in different situations, not only in an educational sphere, but also, for instance, in the military field, where a specific competence for lettering in drawing maps was requested, or in the publishing industry where it was very common to present title pages richly calligraphically engraved.

Even if with the industrial revolution certain circumstances changed and reduced the importance of the calligraphic status, still this art remained as an instrument of educational value for a correct behaviour (with the usual double sense of the word character) and for suggesting a new middle class ethics.

The sentences used for the learning reflected these statements; one of these, drawn from the examples of Francesco Bertolotti³⁷ (beginning of 19th cent.) states: «No other duty is more important than that of citizen. Base of virtue is vice fear. It's the pretext sometimes worst than the mistake» («Al dover di Cittadino ogni altro cede. Base della virtù è il timor del vizio. È la scusa talor peggior del fallo»). The copybooks of religious like that of Fausto Andreotti³⁸, a florentine priest of the so called “scuole pie” similarly quoted: «In fact of religion, no other doctrines are needed if not suitable to Jesus Christs' ones»³⁹. Also the role of women was underlined by in these texts; in one of these, that of Francesco Corsini⁴⁰ published in Naples between at the turn of 19th cent.: «Home is woman's dominion... with sweet manner, softness, kindness joined

³⁶ A. Marcucci, *La bella scrittura nelle scuole elementari*, Milano, Heintze & Blanckertz, 1928, then reprinted in the forties under the title *L'insegnamento della scrittura nella scuola elementare*.

³⁷ Francesco Bertolotti was a writing master from Milan of the first half of 19th century, and author of *Esemplari di calligrafia italiana, inglese e tedesca* published probably at the beginning of 19th cent. The sentence states: «Citizen's duty is superior to others. Virtue's basis is vice's fear. It's sometimes even worst than the fault».

³⁸ Fausto Andreotti, a priest of the so called “Scuole Pie” was a master author of *Esemplari di calligrafia* engraved in Florence about 1840 by Cesare Poggiali. The sentence states: «In fact of religion, no new doctrines are needed if not consistent with that of Jesus Christ».

³⁹ «In fatto di religione non occorre dottrine nuove se non sono conformi a quelle di Gesù Cristo».

⁴⁰ F. Corsini, *Modelli di calligrafia*, Lit. Galeani, 1903.

with intelligence; the woman surrounds her family of a diffused aura of serenity, peace and contentment»⁴¹.

Numerous also the examples in which the words initial letters of the alphabet were like Pacchioni's models⁴² figured letter A as *Amore* [Love], B as *Bene* [Good], and so on up to V like *Virtù* [Virtue]. The romantic, patriotic and Risorgimento's taste was more evident and highlighted in the epigraphs, in those ornamental calligraphic compositions dedicated to popular personalities, protagonists of important and audacious ventures of bold enterprises. The Pacchioni's examples themselves show epigraphs like «Giuseppe Verdi inexhaustible melody maker evoking in weeping and smiling immortal figures, joined to the indefatigable Genius' almightiness men and strong and irreproachable virtues» (*Giuseppe Verdi inesauribile creatore di melodie divine evocatore nel pianto e nel sorriso di figure immortali congiunte alla infaticata onnipotenza del Genio le virtù dell'uomo del cittadino intemerato e forte*) or «Alfredo Cappellini was born on Dec. 19th 1828; in the Nissa battle Captain of the Palestro, disdainful to survive to the missing victory, heroically perished at the sea with his companions, teaching how Fortune can set Triumph to great-hearted, not heroes' death» (*Alfredo Cappellini nacque il XIX Dicembre MDCCCXXVIII, nella battaglia di Lissa Capitano della Palestro, sdegnoso di sopravvivere alla mancata vittoria, sé e gli annuenti compagni sprofondò nel mare insegnando come la fortuna ai magnanimi può porre il trionfo non la morte dei prodi*). Those of Francesco Lamanna in its *Atlante*⁴³ offer other dedications to personages like Umberto Cagni that reports: «Upon the seas and on Libya's land, as already on the polar ices sparkling of glory for admirable sagacity tests and value, the Asti countrymen proud to have it like fellow-citizen. May 7th 1912» («Sui mari e della terra di Libia, come già sui ghiacci polari rifulgente di gloria per mirabili prove di sagacia e di valore gli astigiani orgogliosi di averlo concittadino VII maggio 1912»).

The insertion of calligraphy in technical schools syllabus had not like its scope of building up artists of the pen, but that of furnishing a professional instrument useful for accountants, to the clerks in general for drawing invoices headings, accounting books, balances, balance-sheets.

Also the time scheduled for this subject throws a glimpse of how the artistic side had not to be exalted, and how it had to be functional only for a good accounting book keeping. So stated in fact⁴⁴:

⁴¹ «La casa è il dominio della donna... colla dolcezza dei modi, la soavità, la gentilezza accoppiate ad intelligenza, la donna circonda la famiglia di una diffusa aura di serenità di contento e di pace».

⁴² Enrico Pacchioni was a calligrapher author of a little *Vademecum di calligrafia* published at the beginning of 20th century in Milan.

⁴³ F. La Manna, *Atlante artistico didattico di calligrafia. Composizioni di epigrafi scritte e miniate ad uso degli aspiranti all'insegnamento e dei cultori di arti grafiche*, Parma, presso l'A. e i principali librai del Regno, first decade of 20th century.

⁴⁴ Secondary schools programs. The sentence states that the goal of calligraphy teaching is to acquire a good handwriting style and skilled teachers are warned not to teach useless ornamentations.

The teaching of calligraphy in technical schools principally aims at making pupils acquire a uniform, neat and clear handwriting. However all teachers, especially accountancy teachers, should care that pupils in 2nd and 3rd classes, when studying characters used for headings, should not neglect continuously to exercise the English running hand, more than is habitual. Again, it is not uncommon that skilled teachers take into great account “epigraphic” characters, friezes and flourishes, putting on display works that are usually closer to drawing, than to calligraphy. This should not happen: if an advantage can be derive from the special tendency of some pupils to this kind of work, nevertheless it is not right that – due to these few skilled pupils – all the others are neglected, including those that are most reluctant and scarcely inclined to this subject, which is modest but most important. The teacher, especially in the 1st class, must insist on the initial fundamental exercises, by repeating them from time to time, and he must ensure a comfortable and healthy posture, as well as the regular and not flawless handling of the pen. In this way calligraphy, patiently and carefully taught, will bear copious and broader fruits⁴⁵.

The normal schools, heirs of the ancient method schools, were established in order to prepare elementary schools teachers. As for the syllabus, the instructions were not very detailed. Also, here a warning not to exaggerate the importance of this subject avoiding gothic character and useless pen flourishes and ornamentations:

The calligraphy teacher shall refrain from exaggerating the importance of his art as certain people do, neither demanding to put it in connection with mathematics⁴⁶, nor wasting precious time in theoretical disquisitions from which pupils cannot derive anything. He shall insist on the correct posture of the writer. He shall choose graduated models containing sentences that are as educational as possible. He shall focus on running hand, capitals included, and shall avoid Gothic writing, decorations and other kinds of merely ornamental exercises. He shall avail himself of the Delpino and Trossi manual⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ «L'insegnamento della calligrafia nelle scuole tecniche tende a far acquistare agli alunni, prima di ogni altra cosa, una scrittura uniforme, nitida, chiara. Epperò i professori tutti, ed in ispecial modo quello di computisteria poi va raccomandato, che nella II e nella III classe, pur quando si studiano i caratteri d'intestazione, non devono trascurarsi i continui e non brevi esercizi sul corsivo inglese, più che comunemente non siasi fatto sin qui. Inoltre non è nuovo il caso che provetti insegnanti tengano più che ad altro, ai caratteri lapidei, ai fregi e ai ghirigori, facendo sfoggio di lavori complessi, che sanno d'ordinario più di disegno che di calligrafia. Ciò non dev'essere: perocché, è vero, trar profitto della speciale attitudine di qualche alunno per lavori siffatti; ma per pochi scolari abili non devono mai trascurare gli altri, anche quelli che più ostinatamente e si mostrano poco inclinati allo studio di questa materia, modesta ma importantissima. L'insegnante deve insistere, specialmente nella I classe, su i primi esercizi fondamentali ripetendoli all'uopo di quando in quando, e deve badare alla comoda ed igienica positura del corpo, nonché ad una regolare e non viziata impugnatura della penna. Così la calligrafia, insegnata con opera paziente ed accurata, darà frutto più copioso e generale».

⁴⁶ It probably refers to G. Castelli's works. See note n. 15.

⁴⁷ «Il maestro di calligrafia si guarderà dall'esagerare l'importanza della propria arte, come fanno taluni i quali pretendono collegarla colla matematica, e spendono un tempo prezioso in teoriche di cui gli allievi non sanno che fare. Insisterà sulla posizione conveniente della persona che scrive. Sceglierà modelli graduati e contenenti sentenze, per quanto è possibile, educative. Si restringerà alla scrittura corsiva, compresa la formazione elegante delle maiuscole, evitando la scrittura gotica, gli arabeschi, gli svolazzi, e simili esercizi di puro ornamento. Si varrà del testo Delpino e Trossi». F. Delpino, G.



Pic. 8. F. Delpino, G. Trossi, *Metodo di scrittura inglese-corsiva per unificare ed agevolare l'insegnamento calligrafico nelle Scuole Elementari*, Torino, Paravia, 1854.

8. Calligraphy from Gentile reform onwards

With Gentile Reform, calligraphy suffered with a drastic reduction, disappearing completely in elementary schools and with a shortened time dedicated in secondary, while two new subjects as typewriting and stenography were added. Particularly serious was its disappearance in normal schools (that took the name of *Istituti Magistrali*) that were the schools for future elementary school teachers. As mechanization of writing advanced, together with depreciation and changing value of handwriting, calligraphy ended with losing more and more value. The profession gradually lost any appeal, neither as a stable employment, even if of modest revenue, starting up and strengthening a process of feminisation that was however already in action. Just as Saverio Santamaita notes: «The feminisation of the teaching body (in the elementary school before, and then in the secondary too) is a phenomenon which goes with the Italian school since its beginnings, and is destined to become more noticeable over the years»⁴⁸. The title of calligraphy professor only was no more attractive, and its qualification will be considered only as a part of a more general curriculum, act only to enhance the own score in sight of the participation to more important professional contests.

Ornamental penmanship had therefore no way admission in the school

Trossi, *Metodo di scrittura corsivo inglese per le scuole elementari approvato e compilato d'ordine del Ministro di P.I. per le scuole primarie del Regno*, Torino, Paravia, 1854.

⁴⁸ «La femminilizzazione del corpo docente (prima nella scuola elementare poi anche nella secondaria) è un fenomeno che accompagna la scuola italiana fin dalla nascita ed è destinato ad accentuarsi nel tempo» (S. Santamaita, *Storia della scuola: dalla scuola al sistema formativo*, Milano, B. Mondadori, 1999, p. 23, at footnote n. 36).

system, neither in the technical or normal school, nor in artistic, where it should have, in spite of a presence of a long and well respected tradition. The most famous writing masters, like Eliodoro Andreoli⁴⁹ and Giovanni Tonso of the turn of 19th century, and, afterwards like Francesco Lamanna or Emilio Ageno⁵⁰ had among their school publications examples of pure ornamental calligraphy, showing not only their own skill, but also the discovery a long tradition. Others, like Marco Turco⁵¹, did not publish, but they were all the same very appreciated pen artists and pergamenists. Nevertheless, being involved in public school teaching, couldn't find the way or the opportunities to bring ahead different cultural initiatives as magazines, courses, or other kind of publications directed to the general public.

Only Nicola D'Urso, a famous teacher active in Rome in the thirties of the past century, had found an artistic review called «Scrittura» just before the first world war and could not prosecute; author of numerous handwriting copybooks and inventor of a stenographic system, was also in touch with many celebrities of his time, including Mussolini himself for whom drew up a parchment diploma celebrating fascism⁵².

9. *Calligraphy beyond school*

Were calligraphers destined only to become teachers or could they aim at other professional outcomes? Their poor salary suggested the most skilled to be more active to resort to other revenues in order to enhance their life style. Calligraphers endowed with engravers skill, for instance, found new job opportunities cooperating with stationery shops for engraving invoices, visit cards and calligraphy exercise copy books, or with publishers for the creation of lithographed title pages. Actually, all or almost all of what we could call modern lettering demands were satisfied and guaranteed by calligraphers, even if, especially with the arrival of new styles like Art Nouveau and with the spreading of design, painters and graphic designers were more and more requested.

Amateurs competed showing their virtuositities such as ornamental penmanship diplomas, ancient writing imitation or micrographies, at national

⁴⁹ E. Andreoli was a very famous calligraphy teacher active in Milan at the end of 19th cent. and author of numerous copybooks and winner of first prizes in international calligraphy competitions. He also used to engrave by himself his works. He was in competition with G. Castelli whose new pedagogical methods and points of view he did not share.

⁵⁰ E. Ageno, *Esempi originali di peculiare ornamentazione a penna*, Genova, Arti Grafiche Bozzo e Coccarello, 1939.

⁵¹ Marco Turco was a teacher in Turin schools where he was also well known as a penmaster, author of numerous illuminated and calligraphated diplomas.

⁵² See. G. Ansaldo, *Anni freddi*, Bologna, Mulino, p. 184 where this anecdote is reported.



Pics. 9.a-b. Right and back of an original Nicola D'Urso autographed postcard from of a series about San Francesco of the Twenties of the past century. This postcard is addressed to Luigi Soliani of Montagnana in 1934.

and international expositions, hoping to get a prize or at least, a public recognition of their art-crafts. Some representatives of the Milan female aristocracy showed another aspect of the calligraphic amateurism, transcribing for passion only entire books by hand.

At an interesting exhibition held in Milan about *Arti nobili in Milano 1815-1915*⁵³ were shown two manuscripts calligraphied by Francesca Cavalletti Buffini and by Anna Zannini Tinelli. The first reports the history of art lessons of prof. Mongeri in 1884 at the Brera Academy. For this work the author was awarded by a silver medal. Anna Zannini Tinelli instead wrote and decorated a 43 sheets parchment messal. The catalog reports⁵⁴:

Book in 200 leaves, calligraphed and decorated with friezes and initials in tempera and coloured ink. Cm 31,1x22, binding in brown morocco leather. The manuscript gathers in fifty-six lessons the course of art history which was held by Mongeri for the students of the Accademia di Brera in the course year 1883-4. For this work Francesca Cavalletti Buffini, who attended the course in perspective under the guide of Luigi Bisi, received a silver medal by the Academic Council.

Her enterprise still caused interest and curiosity in 1857 when the Brera Academy advertised a competition for a title page for a missal. Her fame was still alive in 1890 when its volume was presented to the Beatrice Exposition in Florence, also gaining a medal, and in 1895 where it appeared at a Eucharistic Exposition in Milan.

It was an example of the medieval taste born with the English Victorian neogothic style; but, while in England this revival gave rise to initiatives and personages that influenced graphic styles including handwriting, in Italy these kind of initiatives remained at the inside of bourgeois sitting rooms. To this well-to-do public was probably addressed Vittorio Vulten's book about miniature published in Turin in 1905⁵⁵. Medieval miniature revival found some followers, as shows the case of Nestore Leoni⁵⁶: self-taught man, produced illuminated

⁵³ The exhibition was held at the Bagatti-Valsecchi palace in Milan from Dec. 6th 1994 up to Jan. 15th 1995; see the relative exhibition catalog, *Arti nobili a Milano 1815-1915*, Milano, Electa, 1994; at p. 109 it reports the titlepage of Francesca Cavalletti Buffini's illuminated «L'arte italiana del Rinascimento. Lezioni del Professore Giuseppe Mongeri».

⁵⁴ «Libro in 200 fogli, calligrafati e decorati da fregi e capilettera a tempera e inchiostro colorato. Cm 31,1x22, legatura in marocchino marrone. Il manoscritto raccoglie in cinquantasei lezioni il corso di storia dell'arte tenuto da Mongeri agli allievi dell'Accademia di Brera nell'anno di corso 1883-4. Per questo lavoro Francesca Cavalletti Buffini, che frequentava i corsi di prospettiva sotto la guida di Luigi Bisi, venne nominata con una medaglia d'argento dal Consiglio Accademico». *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

⁵⁵ V. Vulten, *La miniatura sulla pergamena*, Milano, Binetti Fraschini & C., 1905 (see Pic. 10).

⁵⁶ About N. Leoni, and, in general, the revival of illumination in Italy, see F. Ascoli, *L'enluminure italienne au XIX^e siècle. Un renouveau méconnu*, in: Th. Coomans and J. De Maeyer (eds.), *Renaissance de l'enluminure médiévale*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2007, pp. 197-205.



Pic. 10. Title page of *La miniatura sulla pergamena. Corso teorico-pratico*, di Vittorio Vulten, Milano, Cartotecnica italiana Binetti Freschini & C., 1905.

manuscripts that he offered to kings, princes, ministers or new tycoons. His *Vita Nova* was particularly famous, offered in 1923 to Pope Pius IX; of this manuscript, as well of others, some facsimiles were produced.

Conclusions

Calligraphy maybe represents a sort of compromise between craft and art, balancing aesthetic issue from one side, and a subsidiary but necessary tool from the other. Besides, after Italian Unification, calligraphy could not completely fit to a positivist thought, turned to complete control and measure,

while calligraphy owes a lot to eye and personal taste and aesthetic gesture; but also bad as much as the idealistic Gentile's philosophy, for which this subject didn't have access in the schools, being a self-contradiction, as only copy and imitation, and couldn't rise to a higher degree of art; from the other hand, as a aesthetic teaching it could not take part of a philosophic pedagogy.

The calligraphy crisis, begun in 1923 with Gentile's Reformation, worsened under the darts of the active school principles that considers handwriting only as an expression of the child's personality and therefore calligraphy drills an exhausting training both intellectual and material, completely useless and even harmful, and definitively an obstacle to the growing process to be opposed. Exiled to a little corner of some professional schools, was at the end of the sixties of the past century abandoned, in spite of the activities of some good will teachers like Nino Resegotti or Luigi Soliani⁵⁷.

Calligraphy seemed so to have worked out its message and accomplished its historical and pedagogical duty. Print script first, writing machine thereafter, and finally the computer declared this subject old fashioned and passed beyond the age.

But the artistic side, remained drowsed for a long time, was ready to awake, under the auspices of the calligraphic revival that since the thirties of the past century was born and spread in England, over all due to the figure of Alfraird Fairbank that had rediscovered and spread in Great Britain and in USA the 16th century Italian chancery hand⁵⁸. Nevertheless, these echoes did not reach Italy until the end of the eighties, when designers and lettering artists that had learned in that country gave rise to a new calligraphical association founded finally in 1991⁵⁹. Even if some problems arose (amateurs that after a week end workshop turn themselves to professional calligrapher) a new road was open. In recent times, more and more problems concerning bad handwriting

⁵⁷ Nino Resegotti and Luigi Soliani were two calligraphy professors from Vigevano and Padova very active in the attempts for the revival of their art. For Soliani, see. F. Ascoli, *Calligrafi di ieri: Luigi Soliani*, «Calligrafia», n. 6, 1994, pp. 22-23.

⁵⁸ Alfred Fairbank, calligrapher, pupil of the famous Edward Johnston, the pioneer of the calligraphic revival in England at the end of 19th cent., founded in 1952 the Society for Italic Handwriting where he sponsored the 16th cent. Italian fine chancery hand, related to the most famous pen artists of that period like Ludovico degli Arrighi, Giovannantonio Tagliente and Giovambattista Palatino. This society is still extant. See their website, with other references <<http://www.italic-handwriting.org/>>. The bibliography about italian 16th calligraphy is rather considerable. For a general survey see E. Casamassima, *Trattati di scrittura del Cinquecento italiano*, Milano, Il Polifilo, 1966, S. Morison, N. Barker (eds.), *Early Italian writing books*, Verona, Edizioni Valdonega, 1990.

⁵⁹ The new Associazione Calligrafica Italiana was found in September 1991 in Milan by a group of calligraphers and lettering artists, beside myself; see the website <<http://www.calligrafia.org>>. In the first years, it was also published a magazine with the title «L'Operina», from the title of the first italian writing manual published by Ludovico degli Arrighi in 1522.

had created almost a social alarm⁶⁰ and the press often reports of them claiming to a return of calligraphy classes.

Another task to be accomplished is that of to get acknowledgment of the Italian and European history and tradition, comparing it with that of other countries. This could represent a real opportunity for a reciprocal enrichment of other cultures that have made of handwriting a privileged form of art.

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⁶⁰ Often on the newspapers and on the web social alarm about the incapacity of young people to handle pens and to write properly appear: Umberto Eco wrote on 4th Oct. 2009 on the British journal «The Guardian» an article about this subject stating that «handwriting lost its soul».