



**FIRENZE
ISTITUTO DEGLI INNOCENTI**

CLINICAL RESEARCH IN PEDIATRICS

MARCH 13-14, 2015



BRIEF HISTORY

On March 13th - 14th 2015, Fondazione Internazionale Menarini promotes and organizes the International Symposium on Clinical Research in Pediatrics under the auspice of the University of Florence, the Meyer Children's Hospital and the Pediatric Ethical Committee of Tuscany Region. The venue is the Florentine Institution that welcomed, fed, educated and provided care of infants and children continuously for more than five centuries since mid-1400: the *Istituto degli Innocenti* also called *Spedale degli Innocenti*.

The charity institution has a long history and it is known as the first specialized Foundling Hospital in Europe. It was born in 1400, during the Renaissance period, where the humanism movement believed that it was the citizen's responsibility to be involved in civic issues. Its benefit purpose was to house, assure care, education and teach a trade to neglected children.

It was called *Spedale degli Innocenti* as the name evoked the unforgettable biblical massacre of the innocents ordered by king Erode. The infanticide was painted in 1610 by Bernardino Poccetti in the old refectory, one of his several ceiling frescoes in the Hospital.

Innocenti was the last name assigned to the foundlings by the children's caretakers, up to the end of 1800.

The Hospital was officially inaugurated on January 25th, 1445 by the Florentine Archbishop Antonino Pierozzi and, ten days later, on February 5th, the first baby was left anonymously and then christened *Agata Smeralda*. She was abandoned in a kind of stone holy-water basin, called "pila", which stood under the front portico in the outside wall, next to a iron grated window. In the second half of the XVII century the basin was replaced by a "wheel", such as the one installed in S. Spirito in Saxia in Rome. It was a door with a revolving horizontal wooden cylinder that brought into the building the unwanted babies, called "nocentini" or "gettatelli" (i.e. "thrown away" children), without the parents having to reveal themselves. Aside, there was a little bell to alert carers when a baby was left, often wearing sort of identifying trinkets, and a slit in the wall to leave offers or letters.

Poor mothers or prostitutes were often forced to give up there their children through poverty, famine or illness hoping the baby could survive and get food, health care and education they couldn't provide.



Still today two inscriptions are visible on the foundling wheel. The above one is in Latin taken from the salm XXVI: "Pater et mater reliquerunt nos, Dominus autem assumpsit" (Our fathers and mothers abandoned us, but the Lord has taken us). The other underneath says: "Questa fu per quattro secoli fino al 1875 la ruota degli Innocenti, segreto rifugio di miserie e di colpe alle quali perpetua soccorre quella carità che non serra porte" (For four centuries this was the wheel of the Innocents, secret refuge from misery and shame for those to whom charity never closed its door).

Children who survived were assigned to farmers families in the province and cared for and weaned by wet-nurses who were paid to raise them. After fifteen months the foundlings returned to the Institution which provided care to them until eighteen years. At the age of seven or eight, the boys were send to



Florentine artisans to learn a profession, while the girls were offered hospitality until they married or became nuns. They were also often sent to serve in the affluent homes of the city to earn money for their dowry. Women, who did not become nuns nor married, were trained for a trade and manual labor. They were taught to sew and to weave silk and then sent to work in the silk production.

During 1700 the Institution became important for possessing a laboratory to produce vaccines for all of Tuscany against the violent epidemic of smallpox. For the first time in Italy, the physicians Giovanni Targioni Tozzetti and Lodovico Scutellari inoculated six orphans with the smallpox virus anticipating the discoveries of Edward Jenner in 1798, in England. Even the Grand Duke Peter Leopold of Lorraine himself, his family and the famous abbot Felice Fontana underwent vaccination by the physician Angelo Gatti from Mugello. This practice was then followed by the Republic of Venice and Napoli.

In 1756, thanks to Grand Duke Francis Stephan of Lorraine, the *Spedale* hosted the first obstetrics school in Italy to teach the orphaned girls theory, but especially practice, for the midwife profession. The so-called “surgeons of the woman” taught in the school: Giuseppe Vespa, who perfected his skills in Paris, and the physician Francesco Valle. The school aimed to provide knowledge of rigorous scientific ideas and of basic hygiene standards to substitute the traditional prejudices on the childbirth. Starting in 1776, an “obstetrical practice” with a midwife and surgeon was set up in every district of the city.

In 1802, the first Chair of Paediatrics was established in the structure, first entrusted to Professor Gaetano Palloni and from 1806 to the physician Giuseppe Galletti. Both cared for the professional training of midwives and surgeons using wax models. In 1815, a Maternity Hospice, adjacent to the *Spedale*, was instituted also to host and promote assistance to the “hidden pregnant”, namely the single mothers.



In 1834, the Institution became a public health place for the free vaccination practices and in 1862, a charity organisation subsidised by the Government. Towards the end of 1800 the whole building was renewed and passed from the reception to the only care of the children with a health archive.

In 1875, the “rota” system was walled up and the structure became a Public Institution for Assistance and Charity (IPAB). During the government of Mussolini a childcare practical training centre and a maternity home were established. In the following years the *Spedale* hosted foster homes for temporary accommodation of mothers in difficult situations, for children and adolescents followed by the social services and for minors accompanied by a parent in need or requesting refugees. In 2004, the Unicef Innocenti Research Centre (IRC) was there established to promote the respect and research for the human rights of children.

Today, the *Istituto degli Innocenti* is always active in social and educational child protection and has become a public company (with the law n. 43/2004 of Region of Tuscany) housing two nurseries, one pre-primary-school, foster houses for mothers and children in need, offices and the Agata Smeralda project to sponsor distant adoptions.

The importance of the *Spedale* is not only in social, educational and public health history but also in the art history. It is in fact one of the most important buildings of 1400 in Florence and houses a significant historical and artistic heritage made of the historical Archive and the Hospital Gallery with remarkable works. The *Spedale* is considered the highest expression of the humanistic culture and the first building in the Renaissance manner which became an example for the following dwelling. It was designed and realized by Filippo Brunelleschi, architect, engineer, sculptor, mathematic, goldsmith, stage designer and author of the famous nearby



dome of the Cathedral. The commitment was the Guild of the Silkworkers, protector and educator of the city's abandoned and needy children since 1294. The project also became the favours of the reigning dynasty of the Medici Family in order to improve the health and welfare conditions of the citizens.

Brunelleschi started the *Spedale* in 1419 after a long journey to Rome with his friend Donatello to study the ancient Roman ruins to gain inspiration. He followed the working project for seven years, until 1426, and then let his Florentine colleague Francesco della Luna finish the new structure. With this new building he abandoned the old scheme of a medieval hospital and founded a new model. He designed a functional U-shaped plan with the structures facing each other: a front portico, a square courtyard, the refectory, the men's cloister with painted decorations, the long graceful women's cloister, the dormitory for the children, the infirmary, the church dedicated to *Santa Maria degli Innocenti* and the workshop and school area in the basement.

His originality lies in the simplification of the structures to give a sober and rational sense of proportion. He used geometric modules based on the "braccio fiorentino" (the Florentine unit of length corresponding to 0,583 meter) and its multiples that permitted him to rationalize the space. He used the classical Roman principles of order, proportion, regularity and design with essential decorations and obtained an elegant, clear and clean structure. The long portico, facing out over the piazza, was composed of a staircase with nine steps, nine round arcades separated by round columns, nine spans covered with groin vaults, nine windows with classical pediments above the arches. Only the middle nine architectural elements are original, the rest were added in the XVI and XVII century. Brunelleschi decisively returned to Antiquity and the Classic orders he studied during his stay in Rome.

To emphasize the structure he used poor and economic architectural elements: the grey *pietra serena* (serene stone) for the Corinthian columns and the white plaster for the walls, creating a simmetrical bichromy of gray and white which became a characteristic of the Florentine Renaissance architecture that he later reused in S. Lorenzo and S. Spirito churches.

Originally, between the arches were round concavities and, in 1487, they were covered with ten (later, twelve) glazed terra-cotta reliefs of swaddled babies made by the Florentine artist *Andrea della Robbia*. They represented the work of the Foundling Hospital and has become its symbol for ever.

The *Spedale* hosts a Museum Gallery opened in 1971 and arranged in the

long open space room above the main portico facing piazza SS. Annunziata. It exhibits a collection of fifty paintings from XV to XVII century, marble busts, manuscripts, ancient furniture pieces which are gifts, bequests or works commissioned by the Institution. During the years many works were dispersed or sold to finance renovations.

Among those left the most important are:



the processional banner of the Spedale by Domenico di Michelino representing the Holy Mary protecting the Foundlings under her mantle, 1445;



The *Madonna with Child, Angels and Saints* by Piero di Cosimo, 1490;



The altarpiece the *Adoration of the Magi* by Domenico del Ghirlandaio with two wounded children, symbol of the Foundlings, presented to the Madonna, 1488;



Madonna with Child and Angel by Sandro Botticelli,

influenced by the copy at the Uffizi by his master Filippo Lippi, 1467;



The *Madonna with Child* glazed terra-cotta by Luca della Robbia, 1448.

The *Annunciation* a glazed terra-cotta by Andrea della Robbia

Really suggestive and emotional is a small showcase containing a collection of identifying objects strung around the foundling's neck abandoned in the "pila" in the belief that they would help reunite them with their parents in the future: bits of jewelery, halves of coins, magic charms, devotional items, cross-pendants.



The *Spedale* stands in the beautiful piazza of SS. Annunziata designed by Brunelleschi in the actual form with the arcades bordering the three sides of the square and crowning the *via dei Servi* that leads to the Cathedral.



The square dates back to XII century and was a small area next to the church of S. Maria in Cafaggio founded by the Servite Order (the Seven Servants of Mary). In 1250 the church became SS. Annunziata, a place of great Marian devotion and, even now,

the Sanctuary of the Florentines. It contains the miraculous image of the Madonna, begun by a monk in 1252 and finished by an angel. Michelangelo said about it: "Quivi non è arte di pennelli, onde sia stato fatto il volto della Vergine, ma cosa divina veramente" (The face of the Virgin Mary has not been painted with brushes, it is something absolutely divine).

Between 1516 and 1525 Antonio da San Gallo and Baccio D'Agnolo erected in the square the Loggia of the *Confraternita dei Servi di Maria* and in 1601-4 architect Caccini built the *Chiostrino dei Voti*. All them took inspiration from the work of Brunelleschi.



Beside its artistic beauty, the square is also theatre for popular Florentine traditions handed down for centuries. Annually, on March 25th, the Annunciation Day is celebrated here (until 1750 it signed the first day of the Florentine year) and, on



September 8th, the Nativity of Mary with its traditional "Rificolona Festival". It is an ancient funny Florence tradition: once, the peasants and farmers from the surrounded villages used to come to this piazza to celebrate the birth of Mary and to sell their goods on the market day. They carried lanterns at the end of a stick with candles protected by a frame made of thin cloth. Today the tradition continues with the children carrying hand-made paper lanterns walking through the streets of the city and singing a lively singsong.



HOW TO REACH THE CONGRESS VENUE

ISTITUTO DEGLI INNOCENTI - PIAZZA SS. ANNUNZIATA 12, FIRENZE -

By Car

From Highway A1 Autostrada del Sole:

exit to *Firenze Impruneta* coming from the south or *Firenze Aeroporto* coming from the north; follow the signs direction to *City Centre* and *Viali Circonvallazione*; once in viale Spartaco Lavagnini drive into via Santa Caterina d'Alessandria, pass through piazza Indipendenza, turn left into via Guelfa, drive along via degli Alfani, turn left into via dei Fibbiai and you arrive in piazza della SS. Annunziata 12, Firenze. You enter here into a restricted traffic area (zona ZTL) allowed only if you park in the authorised car parks.

From Highway A 11 Firenze-Mare:

exit Firenze; follow the signs direction to *City Centre* and *Viali Circonvallazione*; once in viale Spartaco Lavagnini drive into via Santa Caterina d'Alessandria, pass through piazza Indipendenza, turn left into via Guelfa, drive along via degli Alfani, turn left into via dei Fibbiai and you arrive in piazza della SS. Annunziata 12, Firenze. You enter here into a restricted traffic area (zona ZTL) allowed only if you park in the authorised car parks.

Car parking

1. Santa Maria Novella in Piazza della Stazione;
2. Parterre con ingresso in via Madonna della Tosse, 9;
5. San Lorenzo in Piazza del Mercato Centrale con ingresso da via S. Antonino;
3. Beccaria in Piazza Cesare Beccaria;
4. Sant'Ambrogio in Piazza Lorenzo Ghiberti;

By train

The main railway station is Firenze Santa Maria Novella (SMN) situated in the city centre. It is approximately 1 km away from piazza SS. Annunziata i.e. 15 min walking distance. Taxi fare to the congress venue is approximately 10-15 €. City buses reach the Istituto degli Innocenti in 10 minutes and are:

nr. 6, direction "Novelli", 4 bus stops;

nr. 14 direction "Ripa-Carrozzeria Primavera", 4 bus stops;

nr. 1 direction "Salviati fs", 3 bus stops.

By plane

The *Amerigo Vespucci International Airport* is located 4km north from historical center of Florence. It is connected to the SMN main railway station by shuttle bus every 30 minutes at a cost of 6 € in 20 minutes time. Taxi rate to the centre costs approximately 20 €.

To reach piazza SS. Annunziata from SMN railway station in 10 minutes take the city buses nr 6, 14, 1. Arriving at the *International Airport of Pisa*, 80 km away, you can use either shuttle bus or train to reach SMN main railway station of Florence in 1hour trip. Taxi fare is approximately 100 €.

Florence taxi service:

0039 055 4242;

0039 055 4390;

0039 055 4798

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