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MARRIAGES OF WARDS OF ROME'S HOLY SPIRIT HOSPITAL IN THE 17th AND 18th CENTURIES

The problem of foundlings, that is, unwanted children, was one of the most important social questions, especially in large European towns, a question which was difficult to solve. In 1198 Innocent III, in order to solve the problem, founded the Holy Spirit hospital which was run by monks of the Holy Spirit order. In accordance with the founder's intention, the main task of the order was to bring up children born "out of wedlock".

The construction and layout of this hospital–almshouse was planned and designed in such a way as to guarantee full anonymity and confidentiality to persons wishing to desert their babies. As soon as the child was taken in by the hospital it was entrusted to a wet–nurse, who looked after it for some time. Since infants constituted the overwhelming majority of the foundlings, breast–feeding was the basic task of the wet–nurses².

The exposure of children had from ancient times been common practice in Rome and its neighbourhood. It assumed mass proportions in the 17th

¹ Many studies on the Holy Spirit hospital are obsolete and too general; the most important are: A. Canezza, *Il Pio Istituto di S. Spirito e Ospedali Riuniti di Roma*, Roma 1933; P. De Angelis, *Innocenzo III (1198–1216) e la fondazione dell' Ospedale di S. Spirito in Saxia*, Roma 1948; idem, *L' Ospedale di S. Spirito in Saxia e le sue filiali nel mondo. L' assistenza medica e sociale dal secolo XII al secolo XIX in Europa, Asia, Africa, America*, Roma 1958; idem, *L' Arciospedale di Santo Spirito in Saxia nel passato e nel presente*, Roma 1959; idem, *L' Ospedale di Santo Spirito in Saxia*, Vol. I: *Dalle origini al 1300*, Roma 1960, vol. II: *Dal 1301 al 1500*, Roma 1962; idem, *Guido de Montpellier, Innocenzo III e la fondazione nell' Ospedale Apostolico di S. Spirito in Santa Maria in Saxia*, Roma 1962; idem, *L' Ospedale di Santo Spirito in Saxia in Roma e nel mondo*, Roma 1966; Benedetto (P) da Alatri, *L' Ospedale romano di S. Spirito in Sassia e i Cappuccini. Note storico commemorative del primo centenario dell' assistenza spirituale ai Cappuccini 1856–1956*, Roma 1956.

² M. Surdacki, *Dzieci porzucone w Rzymie i okolicach w XVIII wieku (Exposed Children in Rome and Its Neighbourhood in the 18th Century)*, "Roczniki Nauk Społecznych", vol. 22, 1994, № 2, pp. 98–104. For the women wet–nursing exposed children see: C. Schiavoni, *Le balie del brefotrofio dell' ospedale di Santo Spirito in Saxia di Roma tra '500 e '600*, "Archivi e cultura", 25–26, 1992–1993, pp. 177–242.

century when 1,000 children, and in some years even as many as 1,400, were brought to the Holy Spirit hospital every year. In the 18th century the scale of this practice diminished considerably. In the first half of the 18th century only 500–700 children and in the second half 750–900 (in 1783–1797) were entrusted to the hospital. The drop in the number of exposed children was due, among other things, to the establishment of a branch of the Holy Spirit hospital at Viterbo. The number of foundlings increased again in the 19th century, mostly as a result of the political and economic situation of the papal state and frequent natural calamities, such as drought and epidemics³.

The foundlings came mostly from Rome as well as small towns and localities lying within a radius of up to 100 km from the capital of the papal state, particularly north of it⁴.

In accordance with Innocent III's idea, the Holy Spirit hospital–almshouse was to look after illegitimate children. The almshouse preserved this principal function, which was confirmed in later centuries by many other popes, including Sixtus IV, until about the middle of the 19th century. The recommendation that only illegitimate children be accepted was repeatedly confirmed in 17th and 18th century edicts and regulations issued by the hospital authorities⁵.

A child left in the almshouse did not necessarily stay there for a long time. The hospital authorities sought to entrust as many foundlings as possible to the care of women living in Rome or other localities. By virtue of a law, these children had to return to the almshouse when they were 11 (girls) or 12 years old (boys)⁶. However, sometimes, e.g. in the middle of the 17th century when V. Spada was Superior General (*Commendatore*) of the hospital, the children were ordered to return as soon as they turned seven⁷.

³ M. Surdacki, *Dzieci porzucone*, pp. 85–87. See also: G. Di Giorgio, *Gli esposti dell'ospedale del Santo Spirito nella seconda metà del settecento*, "Storia e Politica" 21, 1982, N° 3, pp. 480–518; C. Schiavoni, *Gli "esposti" (o "proietti") alla "Ruota" dell'Archiospedale di Santo Spirito in Saxia di Roma dal 1700 al 1824*, in: *La Demografia Storica delle Città Italiane*, Bologna 1982, pp. 663–679; idem, *Gli Infanti "Esposti" del Santo Spirito in Saxia di Roma tra '500 e '800: Numero, allevamento e destino*, in: *Enfance abandonnée et société en Europe XIX–XX siècle. Actes du colloque international, Rome, 30 et 31 janvier 1987*, Rome 1991, pp. 1017–1064.

⁴ M. Surdacki, *Dzieci porzucone*, pp. 90–91; C. Schiavoni, *Gli Infanti "Esposti"*, pp. 1056–1060.

⁵ M. Surdacki, *"Figli legittimi" w Rzymie i w Państwie Kościelnym w XVII wieku ("Figli legittimi" in Rome and in the Papal State in the 18th Century)*, "Roczniki Nauk Społecznych", vol. 23, 1995, N° 2, pp. 87–100.

⁶ All the sources used in this article can be found in *Archivio di Stato di Roma* in the section *Archivio dell'Archiospedale di Santo Spirito* (henceforward referred to as *ASR*). The numbers in the footnotes denote the files in which the quoted sources can be found. *ASR*, N° 1305, *Stato della Casa dell'Archiospedale di Monsignor Spada l'anno 1661*, pp. 6–8.

The girls who returned from their wet-nurses' homes, called *zitelle* from then on, were placed in *Conservatorio*, and the boys were put in separate quarters in the hospital, *Scuola dei Putti*⁸.

During their stay in wet-nurses' homes the children continued to belong to the Holy Spirit hospital and were under its constant care and control. The foster families had no rights with regard to them. For financial reasons the children and their guardians were linked by temporary ties. But as time went on, these ties frequently assumed the character of emotional family ties. The mutual attachment and love which developed between the guardian and their wards were the reason why even after their return to the hospital the children maintained contacts with their former foster mothers. A document of 1661 shows that the foundlings, when they were back in the hospital, continued to love their guardians as if they were their own parents, visited them from time to time and gave them many gifts (*portargli mille regalucci*)⁹.

It is because of these emotional reasons that many guardians wanted to go on bringing up their wards. As a rule, the hospital authorities agreed to such requests, but this meant that these 11-year-old girls and 12-year-old boys — *bambini esposti* — left the hospital for good. Their childhood was to be linked to the persons who took them under their care and in adult life they were left to their own devices. Three forms of care over children were possible, depending on the will of the potential guardian. The first, which linked the child the most strongly and permanently to its guardians, was adoption (*adozione*). Adoption gave the *fanciulli proietti* all the rights enjoyed by children born and brought up by natural parents. Foundlings of both sexes could be adopted. Another form of care, applied only to deserted girls, was to put them under the care of foster parents *a tempo nubile*. This was a looser, less responsible link than adoption. Persons who chose this type of care committed themselves to give the girls accommodation, food and upbringing until they got married or became independent. Formally, these children continued to belong to the hospital and could return to it at their discretion. An analogous form applied to boys was to entrust them to various persons, in particular craftsmen, *ad artem*. The main reason why

⁷ ASR, N° 1414B, *Stato dell'Officij, Provisioni e Salarjati del Ven. Archiospedale di S. Spirito, tanto di Roma quanto di Campagna*, p. 12.

⁸ In the 17th and 18th centuries the number of deserted girls aged over 7 (so-called *zitelle*) living in the almshouse (*Conservatorio*) of the Holy Spirit hospital oscillated between 400 and 800. A mere 50 boys lived in *Scuola dei Putti*. See ASR, N° 1305, *Regolamenti che si praticano nell'Archiospedale di Santo Spirito in Sessia di Roma per il buon servizio di tutti gli Esposti, 1754*; N° 1414B, *Stato dell'Officij*, p. 12; N° 1305, *Offizio della Priora del Conservatorio*.

⁹ ASR, N° 1305, *Stato della Casa dell'Archiospedale di Monsignor Spada l'anno 1661*, p. 6.

male foundlings were put under the care of craftsmen was to ensure that they learn a trade or get trained to carry on some craft. There was no unanimity over the age when boys should be apprenticed. A 17th century document permitted this to be done from the age of seven¹⁰. But the most suitable age for starting to learn a craft, and the one that was most often recommended by the hospital authorities, was when a boy turned 13 (*d'anni 13 in circa*). The training lasted six or seven years; when the boy reached adult age (about 20), he gained full freedom and was able to decide what he would do¹¹. By virtue of a decree of 1740, craftsmen who took boys into their homes were obliged to give them not only training but also board, lodging and clothing until they turned 18¹². This means that the hospital authorities were not very particular about the age when the male founding could become fully independent of the authority and protection of their masters and guardians. The criterion must have been the boys' physical maturity and individual predispositions, that is, the ability to find work, carry it on and shift for themselves.

In addition to the social and material care of the foundlings, one of the basic tasks of the Holy Spirit hospital was to prepare the children for independent adult life. It was the hospital authorities' wish that as many children as possible should join in the normal life of society by setting up a family of their own. But while boys were left much freedom in the choice of their way of life, great care and attention were paid to the future married life of teen-age girls.

The hospital authorities attached great importance to the girls' future and the persons wishing to marry them were set extremely rigorous demands and conditions. All candidates for husbands had to be well known to the hospital authorities. Cardinal Acciaioli's decree of 1679 allowed the hospital authorities to agree to the marriage of *zitelle proiette* only to well known and well-to-do men (*persone conosciute e benestanti*) who could guarantee security and success to their future wives. In order to avoid mistakes, one or two persons of unimpeachable integrity were set the task of collecting detailed information about the candidates for husbands. It was on the basis of their opinion that the hospital authorities agreed to a wedding¹³.

However, general information was not enough; the man wishing to marry *zitelle del Conservatorio* had to present a whole number of various

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

¹¹ ASR, N° 1296, *Intorno a quello spetta a Monsignore Commendatore: ... sono in stato libero d'andare dove li pare ...* The papal inspector of the hospital, Cardinal Lanfredini, stated that boys could not be put *ad artem* before they turned 13; ASR, N° 3098, subtitle of the set *Buste Miscelanae — Indulgenze*.

¹² ASR, N° 1305, *Visita de Proietti ed utili. 1740. Giovanni Battista Ferrini Vice Commissario*.

¹³ ASR, N° 1305, *Decreti di Visita dell'Emminentissimo Cardinal Acciaioli 15 giugno 1679*, p. 74.

documents: a certificate of bachelorhood issued by local episcopal curia, a baptism certificate issued by the parish priest and sealed by the bishop and the municipality (*Comunità*), a document issued by the parish priest certifying that the candidate was well acquainted with the Christian faith, was receiving the Holy Sacraments, was morally faultless, conscientious in the carrying out of his trade, had no bad habits, no criminal record, and generally speaking, was a righteous, honest man. The candidate could not be a spendthrift or a profligate (*sprecatore, dilapidatore*), a gambler (*giocatore*) or a man leading a scandalous life (*scandaloso*). His family, too, had to enjoy an irreproachable reputation. Another document, signed by the parish priest, was to precisely characterise the candidate's family situation and specify the Christian names and surnames of his parents, siblings and relatives. The hospital authorities also demanded that a certificate from the local secular administration office (*Comunità*) should specify the candidate's financial status and all the properties belonging to him and his father and that it should accurately define these properties, their boundaries, quality and value. The source and way in which the property had been acquired (inheritance, purchase) had to be confirmed by a notary. The certificate issued by the municipal authorities (*Comunità*) had to specify whether other members of the candidate's family had a share in the property mentioned by him, whether the property was debt-encumbered and if so, how big the debt was. One of the reasons why this document was required was that the hospital wanted to know whether the candidate's property was worth at least 100 *scudi*, equivalent to the dowry it used to give to the wards when they got married. The veracity of all these documents had to be confirmed by the oath and signature of the persons who issued them, by the chancellery seal and by the local parish priest. If the candidate lacked any of these certificates or if errors or inaccuracies were discovered in them, he was eliminated¹⁴.

It was also demanded in the instructions defining the details of the wards' marriage that the candidate should bring a person who would stand security for his financial status. This person had to produce documents specifying in detail his/her property and its value. The candidate had to come to the hospital in the company of his father, if he was alive, who had to personally guarantee and regulate the financial matters connected with his son's marriage. If the father was unable to come, he had to present a

¹⁴ ASR, N° 1305, *Istruzione chiunque verra in Roma per sposarsi con alcuna delle Zitelle del Conservatorio del Ven. Archiospedale di S. Spirito in Sassia, dover avere l'infrascritti requisiti e documenti; Editto Pietro de Carolis Patrizio Romano Arcivescovo di Traianopoli, Commendatore del Sacro, et Apostolico Archiospedale, e Casa di San Spirito in Sassia di Roma, e di tutto l'ordine di San Spirito Generale Maestro 1731; Ordini da osservarsi per le Balie di Campagna ... Gio. Battista Spinola ... 1688.*

notarially authenticated guarantee that he would see to all these matters. A widower suing for a ward's hand had to present a certificate signed by the parish priest stating whether he had any offspring by his previous marriage¹⁵. However, these additional requirements, i.e. that the father or some other person should guarantee the candidate's financial status, were not always mentioned in the hospital's regulations concerning the *zitelle's* marriages.

In a regulation of 1759 the Superior General of the hospital, G.M. Castelli, forbade permissions to be given for marriages with men of greatly advanced age (*uomini di molta maggior età*). In his view, girls who married old men ran the risk of becoming widows when still young, and this would mean an unhappy life and exposure to many moral dangers¹⁶.

These requirements show that the hospital authorities were solicitous not only for their wards' material conditions but also for a high moral and religious level of their future family life.

It was the hospital's policy and strategy to marry off the greatest possible number of the *zitelle*, financial considerations being one of the reasons. The marriage of a girl from the *Conservatorio* relieved the institution from the duty of maintaining her¹⁷. Since life in the *Conservatorio* was enclosed, the candidate for husband had no opportunity of becoming acquainted with his future wife. The selection of the spouse was fortuitous and the decision was taken quickly. In this situation the *zitelle's* weddings were devoid of emotional aspects; the girls were not motivated by feeling and the marriage resembled the conclusion of a strict contract. In order to at least partly diminish the severity of the procedure and give candidates a certain possibility of making their choice, three times a year (on the second Sunday after the Epiphany, on April 25th — St. Mark's Day, and on Easter Monday) processions were organised from the Holy Spirit hospital to St. Peter's Basilica and from there to the church of St. John Lateran with the participation of the wards of the hospital. The processions had a solemn colourful setting and were attended by members of the papal Swiss guard, the hospital's cantors and monks of the Holy Spirit order. The men who watched the procession singled out a suitable candidate for a future wife and then reported to the hospital's superior with the required documents to ask for permission to marry the girl they had chosen¹⁸.

¹⁵ ASR, N° 1305, *Istruzione chiunque*.

¹⁶ ASR, N° 1305, *Relazione delle Cose della Casa del ... Castelli l'anno 1759*, p. 148.

¹⁷ C. Schiavoni, *Gli Infanti "Esposti"*, p. 1042.

¹⁸ S. Pagano, *Gli esposti dell'ospedale di S. Spirito nel primo ottocento* "Ricerche per la Storia Religiosa di Roma", 1979, p. 360.

It was only the inhabitants of Rome who had an opportunity of choosing their wives in this way. They constituted but a small percentage of the men who married hospital wards, for an overwhelming majority of the candidates for husbands lived outside Rome. For them the only way of coming to know their future wife was to pay a visit at the hospital. After presenting the required documents, which were checked by an archivist, the candidate was taken by a commissioner to the door of the *Conservatorio* where the prioress showed him marriageable *zitelle*. When he made his choice and both sides expressed their readiness to marry, the young people went back to the archivist to draw up the marriage contract. The wedding took place immediately afterwards in the parish of the hospital (*nella Parocchia di Casa*)¹⁹. According to S. Pagano, the wedding usually took place in St. Thecla's chapel in the *Consevatorio*. The ceremony was simple, austere and devoid of all emotional elements characteristic of ceremonies of this kind²⁰. It was customary for the bride to be escorted to the place where her husband lived by a woman specially brought for the purpose. It was recommended that the person accompanying the young wife home should be a close relative of the bridegroom and enjoy great respect, esteem and moral reputation. These qualities had to be certified by a document issued by her parish priest²¹.

The law envisaged that before marriage each girl had to be asked whether she was willing to marry the man who had chosen her. The girls had to take the decision of their own free will; the hospital superiors could not force them to agree to marriage by threats or maltreatment²². But in practice many abuses were committed. The documents of an inspection initiated in 1737 by Cardinal L. Porzia indicate that each candidate who came to the hospital was shown one three girls out of whom he could choose his future wife. Even if the chosen girl had no inclination to get married and had no kindly feelings for her future husband, the commissioner or the prioress forced her by threats to accept the decision taken against her will. In order to prevent this, the Superior General, in addition to dismissing the persons responsible for these irregularities, gave orders that in the future the commissioner should ask all girls whether they wanted to get married and draw up a list by name and age of all those who did. It was also recommended that the oldest girls (*zitelle più anziane*) should be married off first. Hospital clerks were forbidden to accept tips and gifts during the whole

¹⁹ ASR, N° 1305, *Regolamenti che si praticano*.

²⁰ S. Pagano, *Gli esposti*, p. 370.

²¹ See fn 14.

²² ASR, N° 905, *Ordini e Decreti della Santa Visita Apostolica 1737*, p. 25, N° 1414B, *Stato dell'Officij*, p. 14.

procedure²³. This was probably done to prevent male candidates from giving bribes to be allowed to choose a “better and more attractive” wife and not the first one on the list of marriageable girls. The practice of drawing up lists of marriageable girls existed already in the 17th century. These lists, which specified the age and state of health of each ward, were compiled during periodic confessions²⁴.

The introduction of a ban on forced marriages and of the custom of drawing up lists of girls willing to get married indicates that many *zitelle* had a negative attitude to married life. Judging by a 17th century document, few hospital wards were inclined to get married²⁵. The girls’ disinclination to leave the *Conservatorio* was due to the bad experiences of married wards, who were frequently maltreated by their husbands. A large proportion of the men, most of whom came from villages or small towns, married “hospital girls” because of the profitable dowry the wards received from the hospital when they got married. The 100 *scudi* they were given, an equivalent of a hospital caretaker’s 11-year wages or of an annual salary of a physician in the 18th century, was a large capital which induced many peasants to marry wards of the Holy Spirit hospital. The craving for the dowry was so strong that frequently three brothers married three hospital wards at the same time. In the 1730s a father and his three sons married four hospital wards during a single ceremony. In the 18th century the hospital sometimes organised a joint marriage ceremony for 10 or even 15 *zitelle*. All this discouraged the abandoned girls and was the reason why they had a negative attitude to marriage²⁶. The comfortable life in the *Conservatorio* was another reason why the girls were reluctant to marry. Not being encumbered with excessive duties and leading a carefree life, the *zitelle proiette* preferred celibatarian life in the hospital to the toils of marriage. Their stance was strengthened by the Nuns Superior and nuns (*Maestre, Monache*) who in the 17th century lived with them in the monastery. Taking advantage of the girls’ work for their own purposes and drawing large profits from this (sale of the products made by the *zitelle*), the Nuns Superior discouraged the girls from marriage. Married life was presented to the hospital wards as a calamity and disaster (*andare al macello*). “The marriage sentence” was regarded as a kind of punishment by the prioresses. This is why the worst girls, ill-bred, unedu-

²³ ASR, N° 902, *Visita Apostolica deputata della Santità di N. S. Papa Clemente XII nel Sagro et Apostolico Archiospedale, Casa e Banco di S. Spirito in Sassia di Roma, principiata dall’... Signor Cardinal D. Leandro Porzia Visitatore Apostolico, il dì 22 Settembre 1737*, p. 59; N° 905, *Ordini e Decreti della Santa Visita Apostolica 1737*, p. 15v.

²⁴ ASR, N° 1414B, *Stato dell’Officij*, p. 14.

²⁵ ASR, N° 1305, *Stato della Casa dell’Archiospedale di Monsignor Spada l’anno 1661*, p. 8.

²⁶ C. Schiavoni, *Gli Infanti “Esposti”*, p. 1043.

cated, spoiled and deceitful, were selected for marriage²⁷. In 1677 the hospital was full of women who were unfit for marriage and greatly advanced in age (*impotenti, o totalmente avanzate negl'anni*). This was a result of abuses and of the wrong attitude of the Superiors who made it difficult and even impossible for their wards to marry at the proper time or go into service outside the hospital. The result was that the hospital had to bear the enormous costs of maintaining old women until their death, costs which could have been avoided if young wards had been married²⁸. A similar situation occurred earlier in 1661 when the monastery was full of old, useless, deaf, blind and disabled women. As many as 410 of them were between 30 and 70 years old. According to the Superior General, V. Spada, this ran counter to the will of the founder, who wanted all wards of the Holy Spirit hospital to get married or take the veil when they reached adult age. In order to prevent a similar overcrowding in the future, the hospital decided to strengthen the rigours of the *zitelle's* life. Greater poverty and more duties and work were recommended. Severe everyday existence in the convent was expected to induce the wards to look a more comfortable and happier life in marriage or in service. Hardships were expected to teach them diligence and modesty, that is the virtues and qualities which could attract persons looking for a wife or a servant. These measures were expected to eliminate the wards' aversion to leaving the convent and consequently reduce the number of women in it by at least a half (from 400 to 200)²⁹. The frequent appeals to marry off adult girls were also intended to make room for the constant inflow of younger girls who up to the age of eleven were brought up by wet-nurses and their families outside the hospital³⁰.

From 1666 on, old, weak and infirm *zitelle* who were unfit for marriage were separated from the others and placed in the convent. The aim was to change the young girls' negative attitude to marriage. The nuns who looked after the girls and administered the almshouse (*Conservatorio*) were replaced by lay women, many of whom had children of their own³¹. The remedial measures taken in the second half of the 17th century with a view to control the question of marriage turned out to be partly successful. Information on irregularities and abuses in the procedure of marrying off the *zitelle* or on the wards' prejudice against it and their aversion to marriage is rarely found in 18th century documents.

²⁷ ASR, N° 1305, *Stato della Casa dell'Archiospedale di Monsignor Spada l'anno 1661*.

²⁸ ASR, N° 1305, *Stato della Casa di S. Spiritus di Monsignor Febei l'anno 1677*, p. 68.

²⁹ ASR, N° 1305, *Stato della Casa dell'Archiospedale di Monsignor Spada l'anno 1661*, p. 14.

³⁰ ASR, N° 1305, *Ordini circa il Conservatorio di S. Spirito Francesco Maria Febei. 1679*, p. 73.

³¹ C. Schiavoni, *Gli Infanti "Esposti"*, pp. 1042–1043.

All these reflections concerned the marriages of girls domiciled in the *Conservatorio*. It is known, however, that a large number of the hospital wards were in service. They lived in their guardians' homes until they got married. The men who decided to marry these girls had first to apply for permission to the hospital commissioner. It was only when a written permission was obtained that the wedding took place in the bridegroom's domicile³². By virtue of a regulation of 1760, the weddings which took place outside the hospital had to be registered by local clergymen in parish books³³.

All girls living in the *Conservatorio* received a dowry worth 100 *scudi* from the hospital when they got married. In the second half of the 17th century the dowry was paid out in two forms: 20 *scudi* were given in the form of textiles and linen and the remaining 80 *scudi* were paid in cash. The money was always paid out in two instalments. The first 30 *scudi*, together with cloth, were given to the newlyweds in the hospital immediately after the wedding; the remaining 50 *scudi* were not paid until one year after the marriage³⁴. The dowry paid to the hospital wards did not change in the 18th century; e.g. C. Schiavoni says that in 1731 changes concerned only the value and proportion of the individual cash payments³⁵. According to him, after the wedding the bride received 30 *scudi* in cash and 40 *scudi* worth of clothing, underwear and shoes, while the remaining 30 *scudi* were paid one year after the marriage³⁶. The kind and sort of clothing were not defined precisely and kept changing. For example, in 1748 the hospital gave each bride 2 shirts, 2 aprons, a pair of stockings, a corset, a dress of black cloth, 6 diapers and a piece of linen cloth³⁷.

In accordance with tradition, the final instalment of the dowry had to be paid one year after the marriage. However, it was sometimes paid 20 or even 25 months after the wedding³⁸. Particularly worthy of mention is the

³² ASR, N° 1410, *Ordini da osservarsi per le Balie di Campagna, ed anche di Roma ... Zosimo Valignani ... Commendatore Generale dell'Ordine di S. Spirito. 1721*; N° 1305, *Editto Pietro de Carolis ... 1731*; N° 1305, *Istruzione chiunque*.

³³ ASR, N° 1305, *Editto Ludovico Caliano Patriarca d'Antiochia, Vescovo... Commendatore Sagro Apostolico Archiospedale, e Casa di Santo Spirito in Sassia di Roma, e di tutto l'Ordine di D. Spirito Generale Maestro. 1760*.

³⁴ ASR, N° 1414B, *Stato dell'Officij*, p. 14.

³⁵ ASR, N° 1305, *Editto Pietro de Carolis ... 1731*. Throughout the 16th century the dowry was lower than in the next two centuries. In 1519 it was worth 35 *scudi* while in 1586 it amounted to 60 *scudi* plus clothing.

³⁶ C. Schiavoni, *Gli Infanti "Esposti"*, pp. 1042–1043.

³⁷ ASR, N° 1305, *Regolamento delle Zitelle del Conservatorio di Monsignore Pallavicini Commendatore. 1748*, p. 18.

³⁸ ASR, N° 1340, *Dote delle Zitelle di Casa dal anno 1724 al 1728*.

marriage contracted by a hospital ward on 7 September 1730. The first two instalments of the dowry (40 and 20 *scudi*) were paid the same year, the third (6 *scudi*) on February 5, 1731 and the fourth and fifth instalments as late as March (20 *scudi*) and December (14 *scudi*) 1739. The reason for this delay is not known; some difficulties must have arisen for a note made in the document after the payment of the second instalment says that no further instalments should be paid without a special permission of the superior of the hospital. It is also worth emphasising that this dowry was paid out in five instalments, while it was usually paid in two and only seldom in three or four instalments³⁹.

Although the value of the dowry was fixed, the hospital authorities could increase it in exceptional circumstances. For instance, in 1765, in order to encourage men living in the hospital's property, Monte Romano, to marry *zitelle del Conservatorio*, the Superior General (*Commendatore*) increased the first instalment of the dowry to 70 *scudi* (plus cloth worth about 30 *scudi*) and offered an additional 15 *scudi* and a bed⁴⁰. However, the same period also witnessed regulations which reduced the wards' dowry. By virtue of a regulation endorsed in 1754 by Superintendent (*Ispettore*) G.B. Ferrini, out of the first 40 *scudi* the newlyweds received immediately after marriage they were obliged to transfer 10 *scudi* as alms (*a titolo dell'Elemosina*) to the hospital⁴¹. Some reductions of the dowry were legal, but it also happened that hospital wards and their husbands were deceitfully deprived of the money due them. The inspections carried out in 1738–1740 revealed that money had been frequently embezzled by the hospital treasurer, who illegally withheld a part of the dowry which the young couples should have received⁴². The newlyweds also sometimes resorted to cheating. In order to prevent abuses, the hospital authorities introduced a strict control of the identify of women collecting the dowry and of the documents produced by them⁴³. As a rule, the spouses who wanted to get the second instalment of the dowry had to be accompanied by the person who had guaranteed the bridegroom's financial status (*Sicurta*)⁴⁴.

If the bride had been living with foster parents *a tempo nubile*, a part of the dowry was provided by them; the rest was paid by the hospital. The part paid by the hospital had to be collected personally by the spouses in the

³⁹ ASR, N° 1341, *Libro delle Dote delle Zitelle dal anno 1729 a tutto l'1735*.

⁴⁰ ASR, N° 1305, *Memorie dell'Archiospedale di S. Spirito di Calino dell'anno 1765*, p. 205.

⁴¹ ASR, N° 1305, *Regolamenti che si praticano*.

⁴² ASR, N° 902, *Visita Apostolica deputata 1737*, pp. 59–60.

⁴³ ASR, N° 1305, *Memoriale della Casa di S. Spirito del Castelli dall'anno 1758 al 1759*, p. 149.

⁴⁴ ASR, N° 1305, *Ordini da osservarsi per le Balie di Campagna ... Gio Battista Spinola ... 1688*.

presence of a third person who by his/her own capital guaranteed that the bridegroom had a property of his own. The guarantee and the bridegroom's property had to be certified by appropriate documents. The most important document was the marriage certificate issued by the priest of the parish in which the wedding took place, authenticated by the bishop and the local municipality⁴⁵.

The sources at our disposal, though not always precise and not fully reliable, make it possible to ascertain the number of marriages contracted by the *zitelle del Conservatorio* every year in the 18th century. The figures will be more meaningful if we compare the number of *zitelle* given away in marriage every year with the total number of girls living in the *Conservatorio* and with the situation in an earlier period.

At the turn of the 16th century, some 10–20 girls got married every year. From 1625 until the end of the century, this average, despite many fluctuations, tended to rise, reaching the climax in 1679, when 138 marriages were registered. This marked increase in the number of marriages was throughout the second half of the 17th century accompanied by a gradual decrease in the number of *zitelle* living in the *Conservatorio*. This was due to the hospital authorities' deliberate policy to relieve the institution of financial burden by marrying off its wards. A particularly tough and consistent policy in this respect was conducted by *Commendatore* Francesco Maria Febei (1663–1681), who isolated young healthy girls from old disabled women and nuns, depriving the latter of the right to run and administer the almshouse and replacing them by lay women. The influence of nuns and old infirm women not only made young wards reluctant to marry but also led to breaches in discipline and to insubordination. Febei recalls that 600 rebellious young women barricaded themselves in the *Conservatorio* and warned that they would rather set it on fire or jump out of the window than obey the nuns' orders. The reforms introduced by F.M. Febei were so effective that Pope Alexander VII, who visited the almshouse several years later, was fully satisfied with the peace and discipline reigning there. This was due to the fact that the function of Superior of the *Conservatorio* had for the first time been entrusted to a lay woman, a widow experienced in spinning work. The changes also resulted in a rapid increase in the number of contracted marriages. In 1679 every second ward was married off⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ ASR, N° 1305, *Istruzione chiunque*; N° 1410, *Ordini da osservarsi... 1721*; N° 1305, *Editto Pietro de Carolis ... 1731*.

⁴⁶ C. Schiavoni, *Gli Infanti "Esposti"*, p. 1045.

Table 1. Wards of the Holy Spirit Hospital Married off in the 18th c.

Year	Number of girls	Year	Number of girls	Year	Number of girls
1700	52	1734	89	1768	46
1701	44	1735	113	1769	51
1702	39	1736	81	1770	59
1703	68	1737	67	1771	65
1704	42	1738	158	1772	70
1705	47	1739	123	1773	65
1706	42	1740	101	1774	45
1707	34	1741	82	1775	59
1708	49	1742	72	1776	58
1709	61	1743	62	1777	52
1710	56	1744	91	1778	35
1711	62	1745	92	1779	30
1712	61	1746	90	1780	36
1713	38	1747	111	1781	60
1714	39	1748	139	1782	74
1715	72	1749	148	1783	79
1716	55	1750	190	1784	49
1717	44	1751	190	1785	53
1718	37	1752	179	1786	47
1719	36	1753	128	1787	62
1720	72	1754	101	1788	66
1721	45	1755	125	1789	69
1722	100	1756	122	1790	66
1723	119	1757	128	1791	61
1724	70	1758	113	1792	59
1725	107	1759	108	1793	68
1726	107	1760	132	1794	65
1727	94	1761	106	1795	54
1728	111	1762	89	1796	33
1729	108	1763	90	1797	56
1730	102	1764	69	1798	41
1731	97	1765	53	1799	5
1732	97	1766	33	1800	17
1733	88	1767	45		

The situation changed radically in the last few years of the 17th century and the first two decades of the next one, when the number of marriages dropped rapidly; this led to a gradual increase in the total number of *zitelle* in the ho-

spital⁴⁷. In the first 22 years of the 18th century the number of wards married off by the hospital every year oscillated between 34 and 72, while in the last quarter of the previous century it was, as a rule, twice as high. As regards the number of *zitelle* living in the *Conservatorio* the situation was opposite. Whereas in the last twenty years of the 17th century their number usually oscillated between 300 and 400, in the first quarter of the next century it increased gradually from about 500 to 800. At best, only every tenth girl or woman living in the almshouse got married at that time⁴⁸. This led to overcrowding and consequently, to the institution's economic crisis. A breakthrough was achieved in 1722 when 100 weddings were recorded. This positive trend lasted until the end of the 1760s, with more than 100 weddings taking place every year. The record was broken in the 1750s, especially in 1751 and 1752, when 190 and 179 marriages were contracted. The result was the outflow of *zitelle* from the *Conservatorio* and consequently, a decrease in the number of wards. In the last forty years of the 18th century the number of marriages dropped again to 60–80 a year. The number of *zielle* living in the almshouse kept stable (at about 400)⁴⁹. Let us add for the sake of comparison that in the first half of the 19th century only sporadic weddings were recorded, a few or about a dozen a year⁵⁰. However, these figures concern only girls living in the *Conservatorio*; hospital wards who were in service also got married. The register for the years 1727–1743 shows that during that time (17 years) 1272 *zitelle del Conservatorio* were married off as well as 406 girls who had been placed with foster parents *a tempo nubile*. This means that the marriages of girls living in the hospital were three times as frequent as the marriages of those who were in service. On the average 24 girls in service got married every year, the fewest (12) in 1732. It is said in the register mentioned above that the wards who got married outside the *Conservatorio* were paid the promised part of the dowry by the hospital⁵¹.

⁴⁷ See Table 1. The figures in the table come from the following sources: ASR, N° 1325, *Repertorio delle Proiette maritate e Proietti concessi ab anno 1659 usque ad annum 1712*; N° 1326, *Repertorium Generale Proiettarum Desponsatarum ab anno 1711 usque ad 1736*; N° 1328, *Rubicella Puellarum Desponsatarum et Concessarum ab anno 1736 usque ad 1765*; N° 1329, *Rubicella Puellarum Desponsatarum et Concessarum ab anno 1765 usque ad annum 1930*. The number of *zitelle* used in the comparisons that follow have been taken from the articles by M. S u r d a c k i, *Dzieci porzucone*, pp. 85–89, and C. S c h i a v o n i, *Gli Infanti "Esposti"*, pp. 1051–1055.

⁴⁸ It was so in 1727–1738, see ASR, N° 1305, *Ristretto delli Proietti di S. Spirito di Roma dell'anno 1727 a tutto l'anno 1738*.

⁴⁹ C. S c h i a v o n i, *Gli Infanti "Esposti"*, pp. 1044–1046.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 1046.

⁵¹ ASR, N° 1305, *Nota delle Zitelle di S. Spirito maritate e concesse, che si sono poi maritate, e che gli e stata pagate la rata della Dote promessali dalla V. Casa, ricavata dall'Istromenti nell'Archivio dal 1 gennaio 1727 fino alli 14 giugno 1743*.

Another important question is the age at which the *zitelle* married. The registration book started by *Commandatore* Antonio Maria Erba in 1757 shows that an absolute majority of the *zitelle del Conservatorio* were married off at a very young age. 65 per cent of the hospital wards between 14 and 16 at the time of their wedding, the greatest number (30 per cent) being 15 years old; 9 per cent were over 20 and a mere 3 per cent over 30 (the oldest was 36 years old). Even 11 and 13 year-old girls got married (5 per cent of the total number)⁵². C. Schiavoni confirms that the *zitelle proiette* got married at a very young age. According to him, marriages with 12–15 year-old girls were the most frequent in the 18th century; marriages with girls between 16 and 20 were far less frequent and those with women over twenty were an exception. He has even recorded cases of ten-year old girls getting married. What is intriguing is why the hospital authorities allowed their wards to get married at such a young age. In many cases the brides were still children, immature mentally and physically and unprepared for married life. It can be assumed that the main reason was to relieve the institution of the cost of their upkeep. It is more difficult to understand why men married these children. The girls were probably maintained by the bridegroom's family until they reached maturity, and, as is evidenced in local parish priests' records, the spouses were regarded as being temporarily *impotenti* and physically unprepared for conjugal duties⁵³. So in this case, too, the dowry offered by the hospital to its married wards must have played an important role. The men marrying *zitelle del Conservatorio* were usually 17 to 22 years old at the time of their wedding⁵⁴.

For lack of sources it cannot be established how old the hospital wards in service were when they got married. They were probably slightly older than the girls married off from the *Conservatorio*. Unlike the hospital authorities, the foster parents and bosses of these girls were not particularly interested in getting rid of them. When they decided to take in a hospital ward *a tempo nubile*, they were often motivated by utilitarian considerations and treated her as a domestic help and cheap labour.

⁵² ASR, N° 1322, *Descrizione Generale dei nomi e dell'età di tutte le Zitelle, che si ritrovano presentemente in Conservatorio dell'Archiospedale di S. Spirito in Sassia di Roma, coi nomi, e Partite dei Loro Bali così del tempo in cui furono poste nel medesimo, ed annotazioni d'alcune, che hanno varie imperfezioni nei loro corpi, come chiaramente si è osservato sotto il diligentissimo governo dell'... Monsignor Antonio Maria Erba Commendatore delle Luogo Pio. Il tutto fatto il dì 26 febbraio 1757 alla presenza della Priora, e Maestro delle Scuole per suo preciso comando da me Gio. Battista Ferrini Ispettore dell'Archiospedale e Pro Commissario de' Proietti.*

⁵³ C. Schiavoni, *Gli Infanti "Esposti"*, p. 1046.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 1046.

The above-mentioned *Descrizione Generale* ... 1757 indicates that the majority of the *zitelle* who got married were not only very young but also in good health. Of the 158 sick and inform *Conservatorio* inhabitants mentioned in the book only 9 (6 per cent) got married, compared with 46 per cent of the healthy women (360 of 782)⁵⁵. These proportions were undoubtedly the result of men's disinclination to marry women with physical defects, and probably also of the hospital authorities' deliberate selection of healthy marriageable girls.

Judging by the words of the *Commendatore* of the Holy Spirit hospital, V. Spada, the most preferable candidates for husbands were men living outside Rome. According to the *Commendatore*, Rome, being a large city, inclined married women to lead an idle immoral life⁵⁶. The hospital authorities gave preference not only to men from small towns and villages; in 1765, for instance, it was recommended to marry off as many *zitelle* as possible to men living in the hospital's property of Monte Romano. The aim was to increase the population of that locality where as many as 101 people died in 1765. The hospital tried to choose men of good character (*di buona indole*), religious and experienced in agricultural work. The girls selected to be their wives had to be industrious and healthy so as to be able to run the farm and work in the fields together with their husbands. This was a strictly utilitarian approach, caused by the fact that Monte Romano, being the hospital's fief, increased its income. In order to raise the level of agriculture in that locality a recommendation was issued that the hospital dowry given to the spouses should be used to buy livestock and agricultural implements. In order to achieve their aim the hospital authorities instructed their emissaries to personally look for suitable candidates for husbands during their inspections of Monte Romano. Marriages between *zitelle* and men from an estate under the hospital's jurisdiction seemed to guarantee success, for the hospital's officials residing there could control the spouses' life (*stare sotto l'occhio del Superiore e Ministri*). The pressure exerted by the hospital in this matter brought results for in the same year (1765) three *zitelle proiette* married men from Monte Romano⁵⁷.

Like the children entrusted *ad allevare* and girls placed *a tempo nubile*, married *zitelle*, too, were subjected to inspections by representatives of the hospital authorities⁵⁸. The inspection carried out by Sebastiano Pennaschioni in 1705 showed that 473 married wards of the Holy Spirit hospital lived

⁵⁵ ASR, N° 1322, *Descrizione Generale*, 1757.

⁵⁶ ASR, N° 1305, *Stato della Casa dell'Archiospedale di Monsignor Spada l'anno 1661*, p. 16.

⁵⁷ ASR, N° 1305, *Memoriale dell'Archiospedale*, 1765, pp. 204–205.

⁵⁸ ASR, N° 902, *Visita Apostolica deputata*, 1737, p. 97.

in 74 localities. The greatest number of *zitelle proiette* were married to men from Subiaco (34); next came men from Pisciano (30), Supino (28), S. Vito (24), Affile (21), Rocca Canterano (20), Marano (20), Canterano (18), Palestrina (17), Austa (17), Gerano (14), and Monte Lanico (14)⁵⁹. The inspection covered only localities outside Rome. It should however be emphasised that in accordance with recommendations, few *zitelle* found husbands in Rome. In 1720–1732, marriages of hospital wards with natives of Rome accounted for less than 10 per cent of all marriages contracted by the *zitelle*⁶⁰. This trend lasted throughout the 18th century. The registration book from the second half of the 18th century shows that only 7 per cent of the men who decided to marry hospital wards came from Rome; the remaining 93 per cent lived in small localities. As in 1705, the greatest number of *zitelle* were married to men from Subiaco (15); the other girls married men from Anticoli Corrado (13), Roiano (13), Penetina (12), S. Vito (11), Palestrina (8), Rieti, Tivoli and Affile (7 each), Castel Vecchio (6), Sambuci and Velettri (5 each). According to the book, the husbands of the hospital wards came from nearly 100 localities⁶¹. These data concern girls who got married in the *Conservatorio*. The hospital wards who had been adopted or sent into service found their husbands almost exclusively outside Rome. Of the men who in 1779–1800 contracted marriages with adopted girls or wards in service *a tempo nubile*, only 3 per cent came from Rome (7 out of 257 marriages). In this case, too, the hospital wards most often married men from Subiaco (24), and next those from Cave (also 24), Serrone (22), Olevano (19), Anagni (15), Palestrina, Anticoli Corrado and Pisciano (10 each), Cerreto, Roviano, Rome (7 each)⁶².

If we compare the list of localities from which the greatest number of the husbands of *zitelle proiette* came with the list of towns and villages which adopted the largest number of abandoned girls or took them in *a tempo nubile* we shall see that they were closely correlated. In most cases (about 80 per cent) the hospital wards found husbands in the localities in which they lived with their foster parents or guardians. Abandoned girls frequently spent their whole life in one locality. Given away *ad allattare ed allevare*, they were then adopted by their guardians or taken into service and then

⁵⁹ ASR, N° 1305, *Catalogo delli Luoghi dove sono stati visitati li Proietti di S. Spirito dal V. Sebastiano pennacchioni Religioso professo di S. Spirito, e Visitatore Deputato a questo efetto dalli 20 Settembre a tutto il novembre 1705*.

⁶⁰ ASR, N° 1326, *Repertorium Generale Proiettarum*. The information on the localities from which the wards' husbands came concern only the years 1720–1732.

⁶¹ ASR, N° 1322, *Descrizione Generale, 1757*.

⁶² ASR, N° 1317, *Proiette concesse a tempo nubile dal anno 1779 al tutto 1806*.

married to local men. It is worth pointing out that some 75 per cent of the adopted wards or those in service got married⁶³.

As can be seen, the hospital wards' husbands came from the same localities through the 18th century. There was a sort of permanent geographical zone from which the husbands of the *zitelle proiette* were recruited. The hospital authorities' prejudice and dislike of Romans, and perhaps also the Romans' smaller interest in marrying women of a lower social status, were the reasons why marriages with inhabitants of Rome were rare.

The overwhelming majority of the men who married abandoned girls came from localities in Lazio, not more than 50 km away from Rome. Sometimes men from more remote places, in particular from the Kingdom of Naples and Umbria, decided to marry *zitelle*. At the beginning of the second half of the 18th century, Roiano and Penetina in the diocese of Valva in the Kingdom of Naples were places with the greatest number of married hospital wards. A large number of *zitelle* were also married to men living in the dioceses of Rieti, Terni, Todi and Spoleto, quite far to the north of Rome. One of the men who found a wife in the Holy Spirit hospital came from the diocese of Loreto⁶⁴. In the 18th century *zitelle* got married with inhabitants of such remote towns as Naples, Milan, Florence, Genoa, Rimini, Perugia, Ancona and even Palermo⁶⁵. These were by no means sporadic cases, in particular as regards Milan and Florence. This is interesting, for as we know, the hospital authorities reluctantly agreed to their wards marrying men from Rome, regarding this great city as a moral danger to the girls. Were the other large towns of the Appenine peninsula thought to be safer from the moral point of view than the capital of the papal state?

The registers and lists of marriages contracted by *zitelle proiette* seldom contain information on the trade and social status of their husbands, but it is not very difficult to define the social background of the men who married hospital wards. It is no risk to say that they belonged to the lower social strata. An absolute majority of them were peasants, craftsmen or persons engaged in trade (*vignaiolo, campagnolo, mureto, facchino*)⁶⁶. They were from more or less the same social milieu as the persons who took exposed children into their family to feed and bring them up. Since the foundlings'

⁶³ The figures concern the years 1779–1800, ASR, N° 1317.

⁶⁴ ASR, N° 1322, *Descrizione Generale*, 1757.

⁶⁵ ASR, N° 1317, *Proiette concesse*; N° 1340, *Dote delle Zitelle di Casa dal anno 1724 al 1728*; N° 1341, *Libro delle Dote delle Zitelle dal anno 1735*; N° 1342, *Libro delle Dote delle Zitelle dal 1736 a tutto il 1749*.

⁶⁶ ASR, N° 1322, *Descrizione Generale*, 1757.

ties with their wet-nurses and guardians were not of a permanent character and were usually severed after a few years, persons belonging to higher social strata or even social elites sometimes took care of these children. Their care of foundlings was regarded as a form of charitable work. Misalliances between persons belonging to different social strata were out of the question at that time. The *zitelle proiette* were at the bottom of the social hierarchy and could not marry representatives of higher social strata.

The marriage registers indicate that *zitelle proiette* frequently married former wards of the Holy Spirit hospital. Such remarks as, for instance, *Rosa maritata con Proietto di Pisciano diocesi di Palestrina*, clearly indicate that the bridegroom was a man who, having been left at the hospital as a child, became independent in adult age after a period of apprenticeship⁶⁷. The use of the nickname *Proietto* shows that the wards of the Holy Spirit hospital formed a separate estate also in adult life and bore an indelible stamp of their low origin. The information available in sources also indicates that on becoming independent the hospital wards frequently adopted surnames (e.g. ... *maritata con nostro Proietto Lorenzo Piccarelli*)⁶⁸. Only adoption made it possible for the hospital wards to get rid of the stamp of foundling. All these facts, that is, the frequent marriages between former wards and *zitelle proiette* and the former wards' willingness to take care of deserted infants and teach them a trade, testify to the integration, solidarity, self-acceptance and joint responsibility of representatives of this specific social estate, but on the other hand, they show that this was an isolated closed estate. Let us add that marriages between wards of the Holy Spirit hospital were not exceptional in the first half of the 19th century either⁶⁹.

We have already spoken of the emotional ties between the foundlings and the guardians who committed themselves to feed and bring them up, ties which later led to adoptions or to the children being taken in *ad artem* or *a tempo nubile*. These ties frequently had another epilogue, the protector marrying the deserted girl he had brought up. It is difficult to determine what really induced these guardians to marry the hospital wards living in their house. It seems that apart from purely emotional reasons, financial considerations, i.e. the dowry which the hospital guaranteed to its wards, must have also played an important role. The girls entrusted to wet-nurses and their families frequently married the sons of their former guardians⁷⁰.

⁶⁷ ASR, N° 1323, *Esposti. Repertorio delle Proiette a tutto 1799*.

⁶⁸ ASR, N° 1340, *Dote delle Zitelle*.

⁶⁹ S. P a g a n o, *Gli esposti*, pp. 369–371.

⁷⁰ ASR, N° 1323, *Esposti. Ripertorio delle Proiette*.

According to Sergio P a g a n o , marriage marked the end of a certain stage in the lives of *zitelleproiette*, for on getting married they became fully independent of the hospital⁷¹. This is only partly true. Former wards of the *Conservatorio* were until the end of their lives subject to periodic inspections by representatives of the hospital, even when they were married women. This control was not regarded as an interference in the adult life of these women or as a restriction of their freedom but as a form of protection against the dangers to which their married life was exposed. The records of the inspection made by S. Pennacchioni in 1705 reveal some aspects of the life of married hospital wards. Of the 473 *zitelle* who after marriage were supposed to be living in 74 localities outside Rome, 271 had children of their own, 90 had no offspring and another 18 still had no children, having been recently married. Thirteen women were widows (4 with children, 9 without) and 39 had died, 13 of them without offspring. Some childless women moved to another locality after their husband's death and worked as servants. Married hospital wards frequently changed their domicile. One of them, who lived in Affile after marriage, left her husband (*fuggiata da marito*) and moved to Subiaco. Many women left their home and husband for some unknown place (*non sanno dove sia andata a stare*). In many cases the inspector noted only that the women in question were no longer living in the place where they got married; only in some cases did he add the hypothetical place of their residence (e.g. *dicono che sta a Roma*). Although this is not directly stated in the report on the inspection, it can be assumed that the women who left their domicile deserted their husbands. It is not known whether they had offspring. Only one remark says that a ward of the Holy Spirit hospital who was married in Palestrino moved to Rome with her children⁷².

The inspection records do not explain why married women deserted their husbands and moved to some other place. They may have been maltreated. In his report of 1759 the Superior General, Giuseppe Maria Castelli, confirmed this. He stated that hospital wards experienced great troubles in their married life, were wronged and persecuted by their husbands and their families (*vengono molestate*). Being poor and unable to find support from other people, they could not appeal to a tribunal for help. Castelli, trying to help his former wards, appointed a permanent prosecutor who was to defend the women's dignity, rights and interests in critical situations, and apply legal sanctions against their oppressors⁷³. One of the

⁷¹ S. P a g a n o , *Gli esposti*, p. 371.

⁷² ASR, N° 1305, *Nota delle Zitelle maritate nell'Infrascritti Luoghi e visitate nel occasione della Visita de Proiette dalli 20 settembre a tutto l'23 novembre 1705*.

⁷³ ASR, N° 1345, *Cause delle Proiette 1727-1763*.

reasons why many marriages broke up and the spouses separated was that the *zitelle del Conservatorio* married at a very young age. Their mental and physical immaturity and unpreparedness for household work and family duties were the reason why these young women could not endure the hardships of married life and either left home themselves or were expelled by their husbands. Having married early in life, many girls may have suffered from various mental diseases. The inspector described 17 married hospital wards as *graccide*, that is, given to shouting and prattling⁷⁴. It is characteristic that many of the women who deserted their husbands and changed domicile went to Rome. The capital of the papal state, being a great metropolis, lured young immature women and was a place where they looked for attractions and a life of adventure. Some hospital wards remarried after the death of their husband. Most of them had children by their first marriage. However, not all widows decided to remarry. Two of them moved with their children to Rome and wet-nursed foundlings of the Holy Spirit hospital (. . . *stare per Balia a Roma*); one of the widows returned to Rome and lived with her former wet-nurse (*vive vedova in Roma con la sua Balia*). Some former hospital wards returned to the *Conservatorio* after the death of their husband⁷⁵, but not all of them remained there until the end of their life. For example, Teresa Proietta di S. Spirito lived for some time in the hospital after the death of her husband, but in 1760 she got married again⁷⁶.

The report made by the Superior General of the hospital, V. Spada, in 1761 contains interesting statistics concerning the marriages of the *zielle proiette*. It shows that 245 hospital wards got married in the preceding ten years (101 of them in Rome). Of the *zitelle* who got married in Rome only 35 were described as *buone*, that is, well behaved, quiet, gentle, talented women. Nearly as many (32) were evaluated negatively as *cattive*, that is, bad, spiteful, unpleasant women who did not fulfil their conjugal duties satisfactorily. Fourteen of the Rome wives were not found, which means that they had left their home. Another five were deserted by their husbands, 12 had died, three were in service⁷⁷. The conclusions which can be drawn from these statistics do not speak well for the girls brought up in the hospital. Many *zitelle* were not properly prepared for family life. Since they were, on the whole, reluctant to set up a family and were forced to get married, many marriages were unsuccessful. In the opinion of the Superior General, V.

⁷⁴ ASR, N° 1305, *Nota delle Zitelle maritate, 1705*.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁶ ASR, N° 1346, *Registro delle Cause dei Proietti e Proiette. Cause delle Proiette 1759–1760*.

⁷⁷ ASR, N° 1305, *Stato della Casa dell'Archiospedale di Monsignor Spada l'anno 1661*, p. 15.

Spada, the failure of many marriages may also have been due to the ill temper which the *zitelle* inherited from the mothers who deserted them⁷⁸.

Thanks to the large dowry which the girls received from the hospital they were persons of full standing in marriage as well as in social life. Although the dowry was an irreclaimable grant, the hospital reserved for itself the right to get it back in certain circumstances, for instance, when the ward died childless. The husband was then obliged to return the dowry. In practice, it was extremely difficult to force husbands to return the dowry. In such cases the hospital would entrust the task to its representatives who could keep a part of the recovered dowry in return for effective work. Thanks to this practice the hospital sometimes succeeded in recovering its money or property⁷⁹. As a rule, it was the duty of the hospital commissioner to recover the property of the *zitelle* who died without offspring. By virtue of a regulation issued by Cardinal L. Porzia in 1737, the commissioner was obliged to go to law in case of difficulties. But the recovery of property, whether in cash or land, was difficult because the husbands did not inform the hospital authorities of the death of their wife, nor did the hospital know that couple was childless. These facts were usually discovered during inspections, which were not frequent, or some other control. To make the restitution of the dowry more efficient, parish clergymen and local secular managers and administrators were called upon to throw open all documents (records of marriages, deaths, baptisms and *status animarum*) to the hospital commissioner and his actuary and thus make it possible to find men (*mariti debitori*) who were behind in restoring the hospital's money or property⁸⁰. In 1717 the *Commendatore* called on society to report men who after the death of their childless wife retained the hospital dowry. Informers were promised a tenth of the recovered property and full anonymity⁸¹.

The husbands of deceased childless *proiette* seldom returned the dowry of their own free will. They usually did this under the pressure of hospital officials or of a court verdict. In order to recover dowries the hospital used to delegate a prosecutor (*procuratore*) who was obliged to vindicate the property rights of his institution. Judging by the extant records, lawsuits for the recovery of dowries from husbands whose wives died childless were very frequent. In most cases the former husband of a hospital ward was

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

⁸⁰ ASR, N° 1305, *Editto del Cardinal Porzia Leandro del titolo di S. Calisto della Santa Romana Chiesa Prete Cardinal Porzia del Venerabile Archiospedale di S. Spirito in Sassia e suoi annessi Visitatore Apostolico*.

⁸¹ A public announcement published under the title *Notificazione* in 1717, ASR, N° 1410.

ordered to return the dowry⁸². If he was too poor to do so, the hospital tried to exact the money from the guarantor (*sigurtà*) who had stood surety for him. Most probably the hospital sometimes waived its claim. This is the conclusion one can draw from records of an inspection made in 1705 which stated that both the widower and his guarantor were very poor. It is not known how the problem of the dowry was solved if after the death of his first wife the man remarried (these were not sporadic cases). Some men who had no children by their first wife, a ward of the Holy Spirit hospital, married another hospital ward after the first wife's death⁸³.

The dowry which the hospital wards received on their marriage was the cause of many conflicts and misunderstandings. It was always the married *zitelle proiette* who were the wronged side; they were financially exploited not only by their husbands and their husbands' family and relatives but also by their former guardians in whose homes they had been in service and also by the parents who adopted them. One of the hospital wards, Faustyna, was after the death of her husband robbed by his well-to-do family. Wishing to recover her property, she asked both the prosecutor and the *Commendatore* for help and intervention. When Anna, another ward, got married, the single woman who adopted her did not give her the promised 30 *scudi* due her by virtue of law. Anna, too, asked the hospital prosecutor to exact the dowry from her foster mother. Hospital wards in service (*a tempo nubile*) were frequently not given a dowry when they got married. At the request of the wronged side the hospital prosecutor would then intervene and try to exact the dowry, usually between 30 and 40 *scudi*, from the irresponsible guardian or superior. A girl called Violante also came across dishonest guardians; in 1747, when she was 12, she was sent into service with a family living in Frascati. After 13 years of work her guardians expelled her without reason. In 1760, when she was 25 years old, Violante married, but her former guardians did not give her the 40 *scudi* they had contracted to pay her as a dowry⁸⁴.

All this took place in the 1750s when Carlo Evangelisti was prosecutor; delegated to solve such problems, he always defended the interests of wronged hospital wards. Similar conflicts were common also in other periods. The frequency of dowry cases indicates that the persons who adopted hospital wards, committed themselves to bring them up or took them into service did this mostly for financial reasons. Hospital officials,

⁸² Records of law suits from the years 1727–1760, ASR, N° 1345, 1346, 1347, 1348, *Cause delle Proiette*.

⁸³ ASR, N° 1305, *Nota delle Zitelle maritate, 1705*.

⁸⁴ ASR, N° 1345 and 1346, *Cause delle Proiette*.

especially the prosecutor, intervened in the conflicts and difficulties which affected married *zitelleproiette* in order to defend the girls' financial interests and protect them from maltreatment by their husbands. The Holy Spirit hospital looked after its wards throughout their lives. Even adult *zitelle* who had their own families were regarded as members of the hospital community.

(Translated by Janina Dorosz)