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### Ignazio Dominelli and the founding of the Veterinary School of Napoli

Nicola Maio<sup>1\*</sup>, Antonio Calamo<sup>2</sup>, Fulvia Marino<sup>3</sup>, Carlo Rinaldi<sup>4</sup>

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#### \*Correspondence:

[nicomaio@unina.it](mailto:nicomaio@unina.it)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2304-5565>

#### Affiliation:

<sup>1</sup> Dipartimento di Biologia, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, Napoli, Italia

<sup>2</sup> Museo di Anatomia Veterinaria, Dipartimento di Medicina Veterinaria e Produzioni Animali, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, Napoli, Italia

<sup>3</sup> Biblioteca di Area Agraria, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, Portici (Napoli), Italia

<sup>4</sup> Direzione Servizi per la Ricerca, Università degli Studi di Milano, Milano, Italia

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#### Abstract

Ignazio Dominelli (1758-1827), educated in Messina and Napoli, in 1785 was sent to the Alfort School and other leading European schools to specialize in veterinary medicine. In 1795 he was commissioned to establish the new veterinary school in Napoli within the "Serraglio delle Fiere" (Menagerie of the wild beasts), known as the "Lionera" (Lion House), built by Guglielmo Sanfelice near the "Ponte della Maddalena", commissioned by Carlo di Borbone to house the exotic animals. Based on Dominelli's design, Carlo Vanvitelli adapted three rooms originally intended for elephants for the "School of Veterinary Arts" in Napoli. The correct date of foundation should be brought forward to 1796, even though it was inaugurated in 1798. This first school, under Dominelli's direction, was closed down in 1799 because of the revolutionary uprisings and the flight of the Bourbons to Sicily. Reopened in 1802, again under Dominelli's leadership, the second school was closed in 1806 following the French invasion. The first chair of veterinary medicine in the Southern Italy had actually already been established in Palermo in 1786 but was abolished a few years later due to a lack of students. During his stay in Sicily, Dominelli, attempted to establish a real veterinary school in 1812, but his plan remained unrealized. In 1815 Dominelli was tasked with re-establishing the school for the third time in Napoli at the new site of the convent of S. Maria degli Angeli alle Croci. Due to conflicts with superiors, colleagues and students, Dominelli was removed from the school's management in 1824 and forced into retirement. A pioneer of "comparative medicine" in Southern Italy, Dominelli sought to promote scientific innovation in animal care for the benefit of the Kingdom's rural economy. He supported health instructions and vaccination against sheep pox, promoting collaboration between the veterinary school and various public institutions in the Kingdom.

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Edoardo Razzetti

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**Keywords:** History of Veterinary Medicine; Ignazio Dominelli; Menagerie of the wild beasts; Veterinary School of Naples; Veterinary School of Palermo.

## Riassunto

Ignazio Dominelli (1758-1827), formatosi tra Messina e Napoli, nel 1785 fu inviato alla Scuola di Alfort e nelle principali scuole europee per specializzarsi in veterinaria. Nel 1795 fu incaricato di fondare la nuova scuola di veterinaria a Napoli nel "Serraglio delle Fiere" chiamato la "Lionera", realizzato da Guglielmo Sanfelice presso il Ponte della Maddalena, per volere di Carlo di Borbone per ospitare animali esotici. Su progetto di Dominelli, Carlo Vanvitelli riadattò tre locali originariamente destinati agli elefanti per la "Scuola dell'arte veterinaria" di Napoli. La data corretta di fondazione va anticipata al 1796 anche se fu inaugurata solamente nel 1798. Questa prima scuola sotto la direzione di Dominelli venne soppressa nel 1799 a causa dei moti rivoluzionari e della fuga dei Borbone in Sicilia. Riaperta nel 1802 sempre sotto la guida di Dominelli, la seconda scuola venne chiusa nel 1806 con l'invasione francese. La prima cattedra di veterinaria del Sud Italia era stata in realtà già istituita a Palermo nel 1786 ma fu soppressa pochi anni dopo per mancanza di allievi: Dominelli, durante la sua permanenza in Sicilia, tentò di fondare una vera scuola di veterinaria nel 1812, ma il suo progetto rimase inattuato. Nel 1815 Dominelli ebbe per la terza volta l'incarico di rifondare la scuola a Napoli presso la nuova sede del convento di S. Maria degli Angeli alle Croci. A causa dei contrasti con superiori, colleghi e studenti, Dominelli fu rimosso dalla direzione

della scuola nel 1824 e collocato a riposo. Pioniere nel Sud Italia della "medicina comparata", Dominelli cercò di promuovere l'innovazione scientifica nella cura degli animali a vantaggio dell'economia rurale del Regno. Sostenne le istruzioni sanitarie e la profilassi vaccinale contro il vaiolo ovino, promuovendo la collaborazione tra la scuola veterinaria e le varie istituzioni pubbliche del Regno.

**Parole chiave:** Storia della Veterinaria; Ignazio Dominelli; Serraglio delle fiere; Scuola Veterinaria di Napoli; Scuola Veterinaria di Palermo.

## Education and training

Ignazio Dominelli was born in Messina on September 12, 1758, to Rosario, a pharmacist, and Maria Cali. He first studied pharmacy and graduated in medicine and surgery around 1780 from the University of Messina, where he was a disciple of Giuseppe Salemi. There he met Giuliano Pollio, honorary surgeon to the King's Chamber, who had been called to Palermo to operate on the Prince of Castelforte and stopped in Messina on his return journey to Naples. Pollio advised Dominelli to follow him to the capital to perfect his surgical skills. He therefore went to Napoli where, for four years, he was a pupil of Antonio Pettinati in "theoretical surgery", at the time Michele Troja's substitute in teaching "Diseases of the eyes and bladder" at the Regia Università, which was held at the "Ospedale degli Incurabili" (Anonymous, 1778, 1787, 1793, 1797; Del Gaizo, 1899) and Pollio, also a surgeon at the Ospedale degli Incurabili, for "practical surgery" (Borrelli, 2000a, 2011).

On the recommendation of Pettinati (Oreste, [1910]), in February 1785, Dominelli was chosen by the King Ferdinando IV to learn practical knowledge about horse breeding in Northern Europe and sent to the Veterinary School of Alfort in France. He left for Paris on

June 1, 1785, and remained in Alfort from August 1785 to October 1789. There, under the general direction of Philippe Chabert and the scientific one of Pierre Flandrin, his teachers included figures such as the anatomist Félix Vic d'Azyr, the naturalist and physician Louis Jean-Marie Daubenton, and the assistant director François-Hilaire Gilbert. After completing his studies, he went on to attend lectures at the veterinary schools of Lyon, directed by Luis Bredin and Jaques-Marie Hénon, assistant director; Copenhagen, directed by Peter Christian Abildgaard; Hanover, directed by August Conrad Havemann; and Vienna, founded and directed by surgeon Johann Gottlieb [Giovanni Amedeo] Wolstein, and perhaps also in England. In Bruxelles, he also met Italian veterinarians Antonio Ferdenzi (whose name was first Frenchified to Antoine Fredesj and then, using his middle names, to Jean-Baptiste Fredesj or Fredes) and Luigi Ponti (later Frenchified to Ponty). Ferdenzi had been sent to the Veterinary School of Lyon, and Ponti to that of Alfort for the establishment of the "Scuola Minore di Milano", but then, on the Austrian government's reconsideration, they were both sent to the Austrian Netherlands (now Belgium) (Lanzillotti-Buonsanti, 1891; Armocida & Cozzi, 1992; Madella, 2020) in anticipation of the possible foundation of a school in Brussels. Dominelli then moved to Northern Italy, where he studied at the school in Torino, directed by Giovanni Brugnone, in Milano, at the "Scuola Veterinaria Minore" (opened on February 1, 1791), under Dr. Franchetti, a deputy superintendent of the Imperial Royal Austrian Council (mistakenly called 'Richetti' in Baldassarre, 1911), where he was taught by Giovanni Battista Volpi and Giovanni Battista Lucchini (Lanzillotti-Buonsanti, 1891), and finally, at the school in Padova directed by Giuseppe Orus (or Aurus) (Rinaldi et al., 2022). Upon his return to Napoli, Dominelli was appointed veterinarian of "Reali Cavallerizze" (Royal Cavalry) (Figures 1a-d, 2).



**Figure 1:** a) Portrait of Ignazio Dominelli reproduced in Baldassarre (1911). b) Marble bust displayed in the corridor on the first floor of the former Convent of S. Maria degli Angeli alle Croci, now home to the Dipartimento di Medicina Veterinaria e Produzioni Animali, dell'Università di Napoli Federico II, in Via Federico Delpino, 1 (photo by A. Calamo). c) Reconstruction of the portrait in figure 1a processed with Gemini AI. d) Reconstruction of the portrait in figure 1b processed with Gemini AI.

**Figure 2:** Original signature of Ignazio Dominelli reported in Baldassarre (1911).

## The "Teatro delle Fiere" at the "Ponte della Maddalena"

After his return to Naples on January 28, 1795, Dominelli was commissioned by a "Royal Order" to study and propose a project for the foundation of a "school of veterinary art" and to draw up the relevant regulations "de' Studii" (of studies). In March of the same year, he was commissioned to inspect the premises of

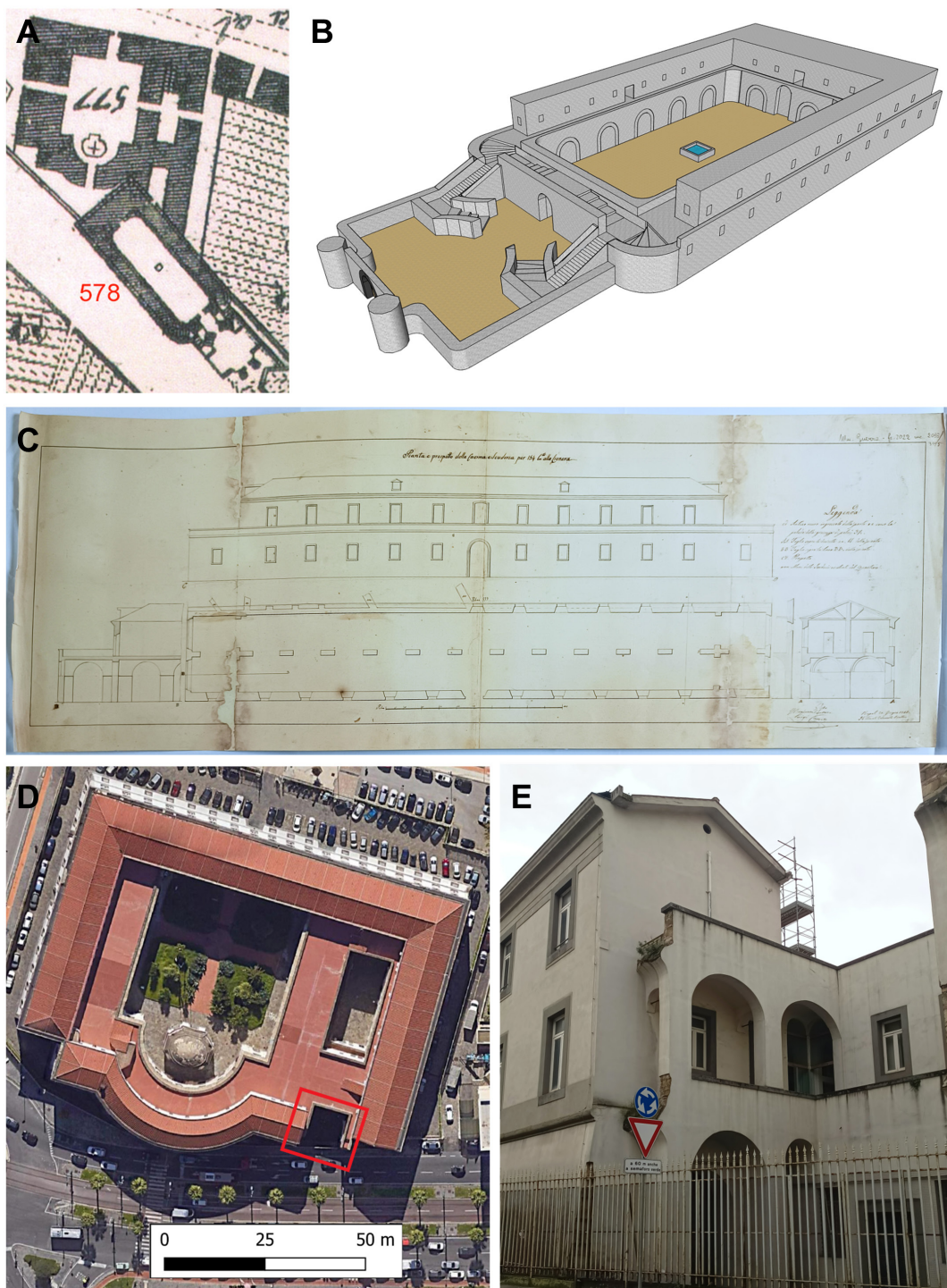
the “Serraglio delle Fiere” (Menagerie of the wild beasts), near the “Ponte della Maddalena” (Maddalena Bridge), a building nicknamed the “Lionera” (or Leoniera or Leonera, “Lion House”), designed in 1741 by the renowned architect Ferdinando Sanfelice in the “royal cavalry quarter” (in the former Mercato district, now the 2<sup>nd</sup> Municipality of Napoli city, Figures 3a-e, 4a-h). This construction was begun at the behest of King Carlo di Borbone in May 1742 and largely completed in June 1744, initially to host circus and hunting shows, but as the work was not completed, it was then used to keep the King’s exotic animals in captivity (Aprato, 1964; Furia, 1992; Di Mauro, 2005).

This structure bears a striking resemblance to the menagerie in Parma, which had existed since the 16th century in the Farnese Ducal Park, and most likely, in the northern part of the “complesso monumentale della Pilotta” (Monumental Pilotta complex) in the North Wing (former stables), and specifically in the areas known as the “Cortile del Guazzatoio”. As can be seen from the chronicles of the time, this menagerie was constructed with arches designed to mimic caves, serving as a shelter for exotic animals brought from Africa (Cicogna, 1842; Mambriani, 2006), much like the one in Napoli (Fig. 5). From 1710 to 1731, as documented in the Farnese papers preserved in the historical archives, the Farnese dukes organized various spectacles in the park, during which lions, tigers, and other wild beasts were also used for fighting (Anonymous, 2024). Carlo di Borbone served as Duke of Parma and Piacenza from 1731 to 1735, and it is highly likely that he drew inspiration from the Farnese menagerie when constructing his own in Naples.

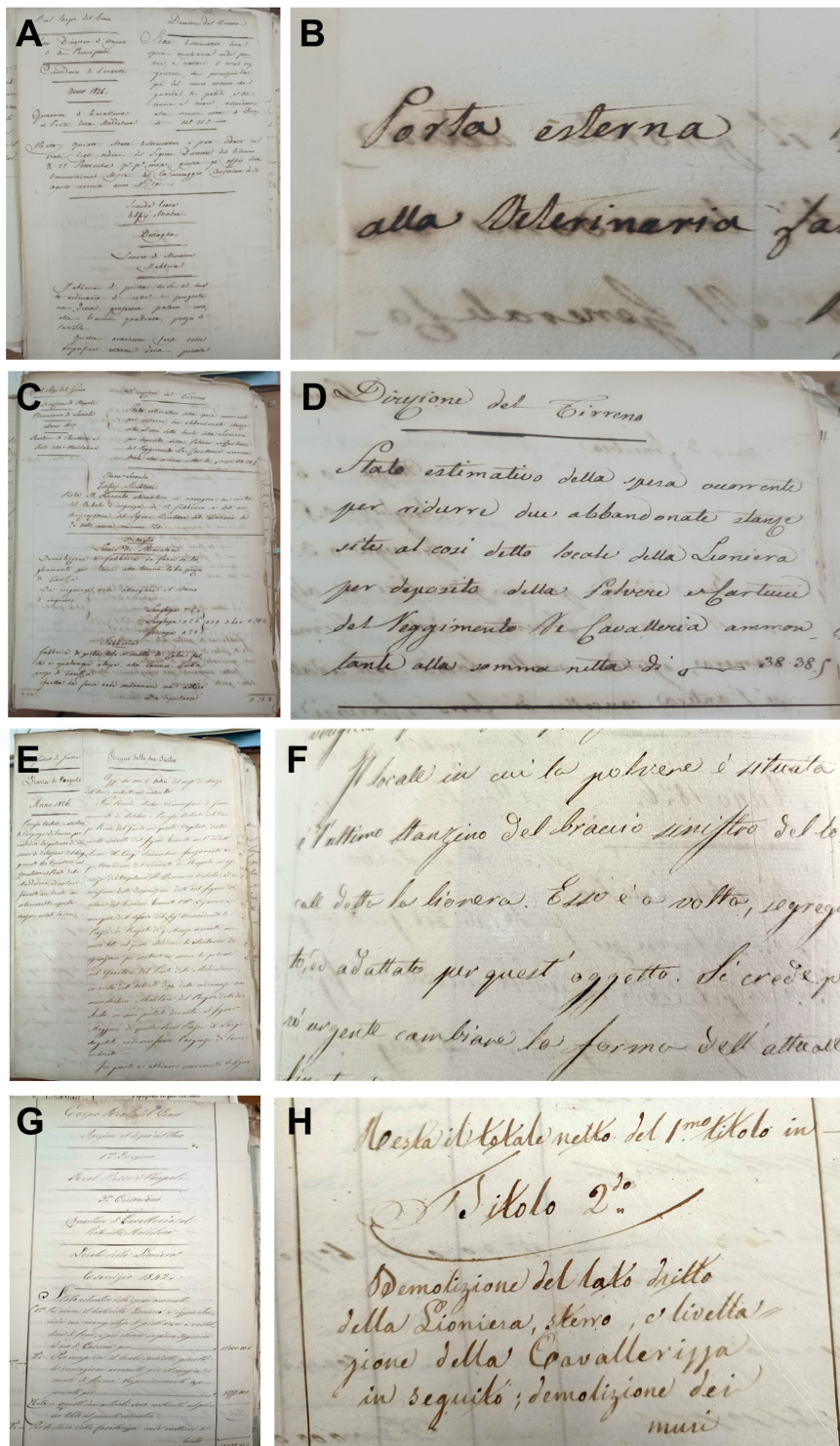
The factory building of “Lionera” had a rectangular structure (although in many documents it is referred to as “Trapezio” (“Trapezoidal”), almost entirely in tuff, which was accessed through a large piperno portal leading to the first internal courtyard. It featured a majestic double staircase which, in turn, led through

another portal both to the upper part of the building, 90 m long and 40 m wide, both to a second large internal courtyard (Figure 3b). This building consisted of two long symmetrical wings (65 m × 8 m), closed in a U-shape with rounded corners and vaulted ceilings, which surrounded the second courtyard mentioned (measuring approximately 65-70 m × 20-22 m), where the games were to be held. The staircase reached the first floor, where there was a terrace covering the two rows of rooms and where the spectators were presumably intended to be accommodated (Aprato, 1964; Chiarini, 1860).

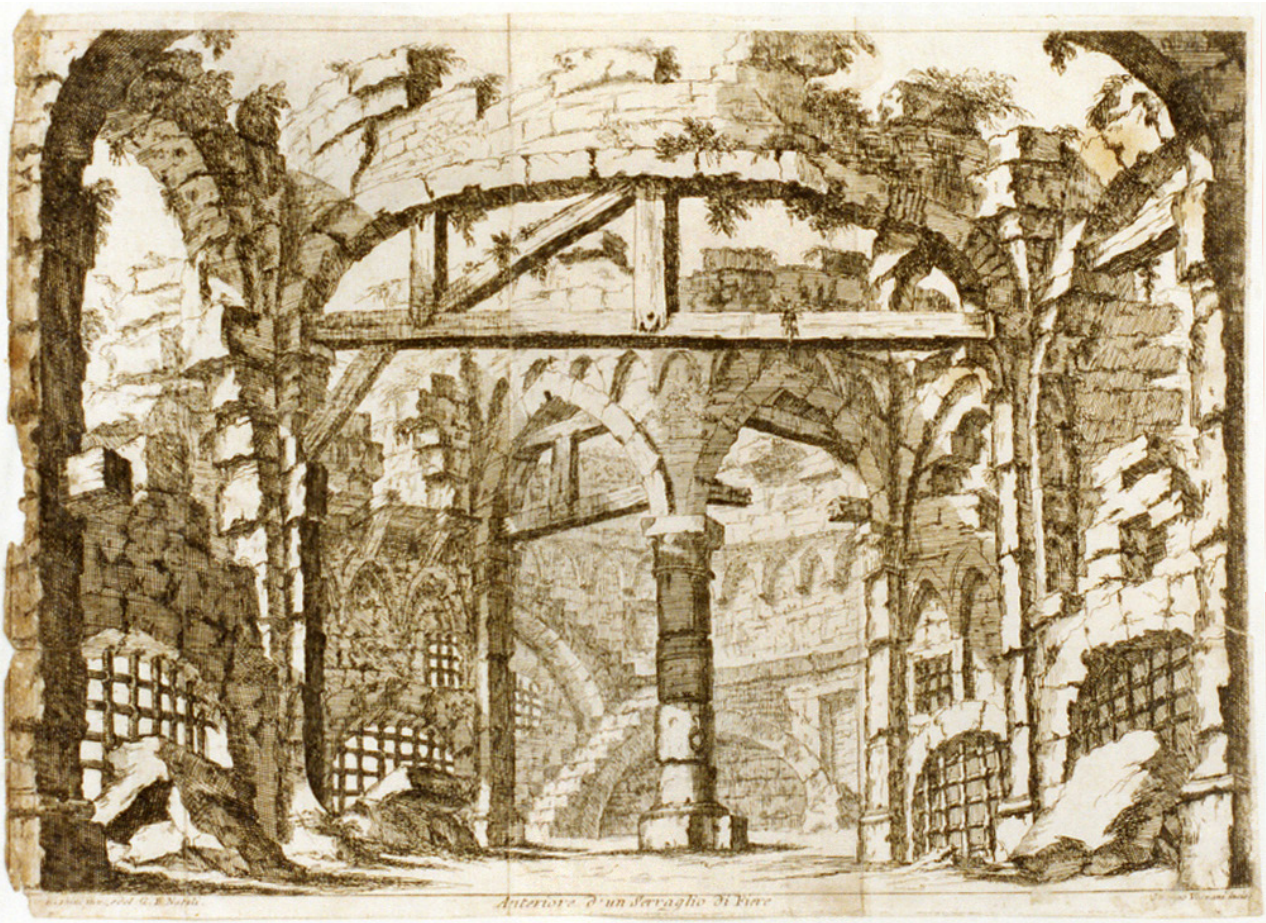
The entire complex of the latter was, then, partially incorporated into Luigi Vanvitelli’s cavalry barracks, completed in 1764 (later called the “Bianchini Barracks” and now the headquarters of the “Agenzia delle Entrate” (Revenue Agency, Figures 3c-e). The “Teatro per la Fiera (sic!) al Ponte della Maddalena” (“Theater for the Fair (sic! Recte “wild beasts”) at the Maddalena Bridge”) had “trentasei camerette con cortili scoperti per le Fiere, tre cameroni grandi per l’Elefante, due altri cameroni per li cameli [molto probabilmente dromedari], due altre stanze con giardino per gli sturzi [struzzi]; ma più d’ogni altra è meravigliosa la scala, che dal primo cortile si ascende alle logge superiori” (“thirty-six small rooms with open courtyards for the wild beasts, three large rooms for the Elephant, two other large rooms for the camels [most likely dromedaries], two other rooms with a garden for the ostriches; but most of all, the staircase is marvelous, which ascends from the first courtyard to the upper loggias”, leading to the “piano di una loggia coverta fatta per S. M. [Sua Maestà] quando vuol vedere le cacce” e si divideva in “una a destra e l’altra a sinistra, che ascendono alle logge laterali attorno a sì gran Teatro” (the floor of a covered loggia made for His Majesty when he wants to watch the hunts and divided into one on the right and one on the left, which ascend to the side loggias around such a great theater) (De Dominicis, [1743]). The



**Figure 3:** a) Detail of the “Mappa Topografica” of the city of Napoli by Giovanni Carafa, Duke of Noja, dated 1775: no. 578 indicates the “Serraglio delle Fiere” built by architect Sanfelice (Aprato, 1964). b) A hypothetical reconstruction of the structure of the “serraglio delle fiere” created using 3D modeling software based on information gleaned from contemporary archives and bibliographic sources (Drawing by G. D’Alterio).c) Map, elevation, and section of the “Serraglio delle Fiere” according to the 1842 modification project (ASNA, Pizzofalcone section, “Ministero di guerra e marina, fascio 2022”) (photo by N. Maio). d) Building of the former cavalry barracks by architect Luigi Vanvitelli, later “Caserma Bianchini” and now home to the offices of the “Agenzia delle Entrate” after recent restoration. The red box indicates the area where the menagerie building once stood (file Qgis QuickMapServices ESRI Satellite, scale 1:1000. By S. Viglietti). e) Detail of the panel with some of the walls of the former Caserma Bianchini building, where the ancient “Serraglio delle Fiere” once stood (photo by N. Maio).



**Figure 4:** a) 1826 cost estimate for the modification of external walls of the building near the "Ponte della Maddalena" (ASNA, Pizzofalcone section, Ministero della Guerra, fascio 2168). b) Detail referring to premises that once belonged to the "Veterinaria". c) Cost estimate from 1827 for the modification of two rooms of the "Locale della Leoniera" into a powder and cartridge store (ASNA, Pizzofalcone section, Ministero della Guerra, fascio 2168). d) Detail. e) Minutes concerning the work to be done in the "ultimo stanzino del braccio sinistro del locale detto la Lionera" (last room of the left wing of the premises known as the Lionera), 1827 (ASNA, Pizzofalcone section, Ministero della Guerra, fascio 2168). f) Detail. g) Cost estimate from 1842 concerning the reduction of the "Lioniera premises" to a double stable attached to the Plan in Figure 3c (ASNA, Pizzofalcone section, Ministero della Guerra, fascio 2022). h) Detail referring to the demolition of the right side of the "Lioniera".

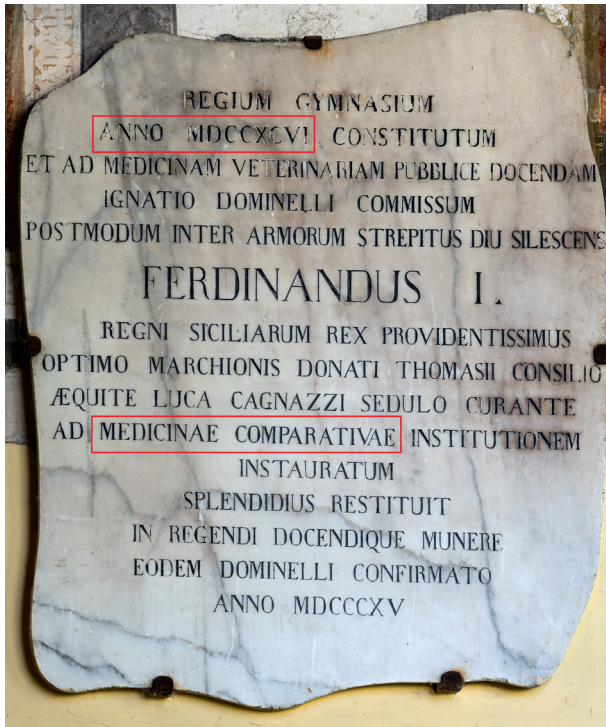


**Figure 5:** Print using the “etching” technique entitled: “anteriore d’un serraglio di fiere” (front view of a menagerie of wild beasts) depicting one of the sets from the opera titled “Medo,” published in Parma in 1728 (Engraver: Giacomo Vezzani; Librettist: Pietro Righini; Illustrator Giovanni Battista Natali, text by Innocenzo Frugoni, music by Leonardo Vinci) and which was to be performed at the “Ducal Teatro di Parma” in the spring of 1728. Specifically, this is plate 8 of Act III, Scene XI, entitled “Orrido serraglio di fiere nella Reggia” (Horrid menagerie of wild beasts in the Royal Palace). Catalogo dei beni culturali. Print housed at “Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe”, Certosa e Museo Nazionale di San Martino, Napoli. National Catalogue Code 1500318898. Inventory Number 29042. Courtesy of “MiC [Ministry of Culture] - Fototeca dei Musei Nazionali del Vomero, Napoli”. Prot. N. MIC|MIC\_MN-VOMERO|19/03/2026|0000703-P.

reference to the “elephant” most likely refers to the famous Indian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) that arrived at the Royal Palace of Portici on November 1, 1742, and which evidently had to be housed in the menagerie at certain times of the year or perhaps on the occasion of some event (Maio et al., 1995).

In the “bello Anfiteatro (...) in un ampio cortile, sono racchiuse moltissime fiere come Leoni, Tigre, Pantere, Gattopardi, Elefanti, Struzzi ed altre, ciascuna in due stanzine che circondano tutto il piano del Cortile” (beautiful amphitheater (...) in a large courtyard, there are many wild beasts such as lions [hence the nickname],

tigers, panthers, wild cats, elephants, ostriches, and others, each in two small rooms that surround the entire courtyard) (Palermo, 1792a). In fact, there is documented evidence of the presence in the “Real Serraglio delle Fiere” (Royal Menagerie of wild beasts) since October 1745, of a tiger brought from Tripoli (probably through intermediaries of the Ottoman Empire), and of another elephant, at least since 1775, the year in which architect Carlo Vanvitelli was approved to carry out work to adapt the premises that housed the elephant (Furia, 1992). This specimen is probably the same animal that came from Roma, kept for a few days



**Figure 6:** Commemorative plaque celebrating the founding of the School, established in 1815 and inaugurated in 1816, displayed in the portico of the cloister of the former Convent of S. Maria degli Angeli alle Croci, now home to the Dipartimento di Medicina Veterinaria e Produzioni Animali dell'Università di Napoli Federico II (photo by A. Calamo). The upper panel indicates the date of 1796 when the school was first established, while the lower panel refers to "comparative medicine". Translation from Latin: "The Royal School, established in 1796 and dedicated to the public teaching of veterinary medicine, was entrusted to Ignazio Dominelli. Subsequently, after a long period of silence amid the clamor of arms (alluding to the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars), Ferdinando I, very provident King of the Sicilies, with the excellent advice of Marquis Donato Tommasi and the assiduous care of Cavalier Luca Cagnazzi, re-established it in a more splendid (improved, expanded) form for the institution of comparative medicine, confirming Dominelli himself in the position of director and teacher in 1815".

in the Royal Palace of Caserta and lived in the "Lionera" until September 1787 (Furia, 1992). Therefore, at least until 1792, as confirmed by Palermo (1792a, 1792b) in his editions of Celano's work, the menagerie was used as a stable or stabulario for exotic animals, but subsequently, various works modified its use and purpose (Figures 4a-h). In fact, by Royal

Order of August 18, 1795, based on Dominelli's proposal, the premises were renovated by architect Carlo Vanvitelli, and the three large rooms of the building "dove un tempo abitava l'elefante" (where the elephant once lived) were assigned to the newly established veterinary school (Figure 5).

With the same order, the King also approved the proposed expenditure of 190 ducats "per i lavori da farsi in detti cameroni per ridurli ad uso di detta Scuola, giusta la richiesta del Veterinario Dominelli" (for the work to be done in the aforementioned rooms to adapt them for use by the School, as requested by Veterinario Dominelli) and approved "la spesa di ducati trenta per vari utensili necessari nell'aprirsi la Scuola" (the expenditure of 30 ducats for various tools necessary for opening the School) and also ordered "che la spesa di ducati 100 all'anno circa per cadaveri cavallini e pecorini, materie d'iniezione, carboni, acquavite ed altro, si faccia con tutto il risparmio" (that the expenditure of approximately 100 ducats per year for horse and sheep carcasses, injection materials, charcoal, brandy, and other items, be made with all possible savings). With the same order, he also approved the negative opinion of the Prince of Butera, Cavallerizzo Maggiore [a senior official responsible for the management of the royal stables, the training of horses, and the organization of jousts], who was to supervise the school, regarding the establishment of the Hospital (Royal Dispatch September 1, 1795 in Baldassarre, 1911).

### **The birth of the School in Napoli: the correct date of its first foundation**

In the Royal Dispatch of August 23, 1797, the sovereign clearly refers to "l'ordinata Scuola di Veterinaria, sotto la direzione di Ignazio Dominelli" (the orderly School of Veterinary Medicine, under the direction of Ignazio Dominelli) and emphasizes that "trova necessar-

ia, necessarissima, tale scuola" (he finds such a school necessary, most necessary, this school) so the date of its foundation must be prior to this order. There are good reasons to believe that 1796 is the correct date of establishment, as confirmed by Dominelli himself in a letter to the King dated between 1823 and 1824 ("V. M. [Vostra Maestà] si compiacque farmi istallare una Scuola Veterinaria, che si aprì nel 1796" "[Your Majesty] was pleased to have me establish a Veterinary School, which opened in 1796") reported by Baldassarre (1911), and above all the commemorative plaque still on display today in the portico of the cloister of the former convent, now home to the "Dipartimento di Medicina Veterinaria e Produzioni Animali dell'Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II" (Figure 6). The same date is confirmed by an article published in 1842 in the "Annali Civili del Regno delle Due Sicilie", the official organ of the Royal Ministry of Internal Affairs (Anonymous, 1842), and again by Salvatore De Renzi (1845) in his "Topografia e Statistica medica della città di Napoli".

With a Royal Dispatch dated November 22, 1797, it was decided to admit 12 pupils "ben istruiti nel leggere e nello scrivere" (well educated in reading and writing) from regiments of the Royal Cavalry to the school, starting in March and April 1798. The school was placed under the supervision of the Cavalier Maggioro as administrative manager, reporting to the Royal Secretariat (Ministry) of State and War, while the scientific direction and teaching were entrusted solely to Ignazio Dominelli, who was also granted a sum to pay for a medical and surgical student as a "ripetitore" (repeater).

With the Royal Dispatch of May 13, 1797 (Baldassarre, 1911), it was also decided to use the

upper part of the "Lionera" premises as a dormitory for staff and students and the lower part (the "camerette delle fiere" little rooms of wild beasts) as an infirmary for army horses "sospetti od attaccati da Verme, Morbo o Spogna" (suspected of or infected with Worm, Morbus or Spogna)<sup>1</sup>. For this reason, the following month, the blacksmith of the "Real Razza di Persano" (Royal Persano Breed) was assigned to the hospital. The Royal Persano Breed was a hunting estate belonging to the King where horses selected for their particular beauty and elegance were bred.

In August, funding was approved for the construction of a machine called a "travaglio" (an ancient instrument, similar to a cage or frame made of wood or iron, used to restrain horses and large cattle, especially when it was necessary to shoe them, treat them, or perform veterinary procedures), based on a design by Dominelli, and orders were given to also accommodate students from other countries. The school was officially inaugurated in the last months of 1798, most likely in November (Dominelli, 1798). It was also planned to add two more professors, chosen from among the doctors of the capital, but after a few months, the French invasion forced the Bourbons to flee Napoli in December 1798, and Dominelli followed the royal family to Sicilia. Following the political events of the 'Neapolitan Revolution', which led to the establishment of the transitional "Neapolitan Republic", the school was closed in January 1799.

## The second foundation

With King Ferdinando's return to Napoli in June 1802, after the repression of the Jacobin

<sup>1</sup> "Verme o Malattia del verme" (Worm or worm disease), "Morbo (morbus) o Moccio" e la "Spugna (sponge) o Spogna" were three diseases that frequently affected military horses and could be severely debilitating and even fatal: the first two are identifiable with + "morva" (glanders), respectively with its cutaneous manifestation or "farcino" (farcy), and with its complete manifestation that also affects the respiratory tract, caused by the etiological agent *Burkholderia mallei*, a gram-negative aerobic bacterium, identified in 1885 as *Bacillus mallei*, which is also transmissible to humans. The third disease was an inflammatory-suppurative manifestation of the dermis of the foot, probably attributable to a severe form of foot rot.

uprisings and Cardinal Ruffo's regency in the previous two years, the school was reopened by Royal Dispatch on September 2, 1802, in the same premises as the "fabbrica altra volta addetta per la medesima, sita dietro il Quartiere del Ponte della Maddalena, ove si custodivano le fiere" (factory formerly used for the same [School], located behind the Maddalena Bridge district, where the wild beasts were held," under the authority of the Royal Secretariat (Ministry) of War and Navy. Dominelli remained the director of the school, and Andrea Masone (Pietralcina, Benevento, September 14, 1765 - Napoli, February 4, 1831), who had also been sent to attend courses in Alfort from February 1788 to May 1792 and who, since his return to Napoli, had been appointed "veterinarian of all the royal cavalry corps". Sixteen students were admitted, and, for the first time, the school was also made accessible to civilians who served in the Royal Cavalry as well as to students from other countries. Among these civilians who obtained their qualifications ("brevetti") during those years there was Bonaventura Gambardella of Napoli, who, in 1817, took part in the public competition for the chair of Anatomy at the new veterinary school, together with Crescenzo Rispoli, who eventually won (Maio et al., 2024; 2025b).

In February 1806, after the Borbone fled Napoli once again following the occupation by Napoleon's troops, Dominelli was commissioned by King Ferdinando to take part of the royal horse breeds to Sicily. The School was closed again and its holdings, probably including anatomical specimens used for teaching purposes, were handed over to the Royal Museum (now named Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, MANN). Unfortunately, we do not know whether this material was recovered at a later date, as is likely, because there are currently no documents in the Museum's historical archive relating to this collection (A. Gioia, MANN Ufficio Museologia e documentazione storica, personal communication).

## The failed veterinary school in Palermo

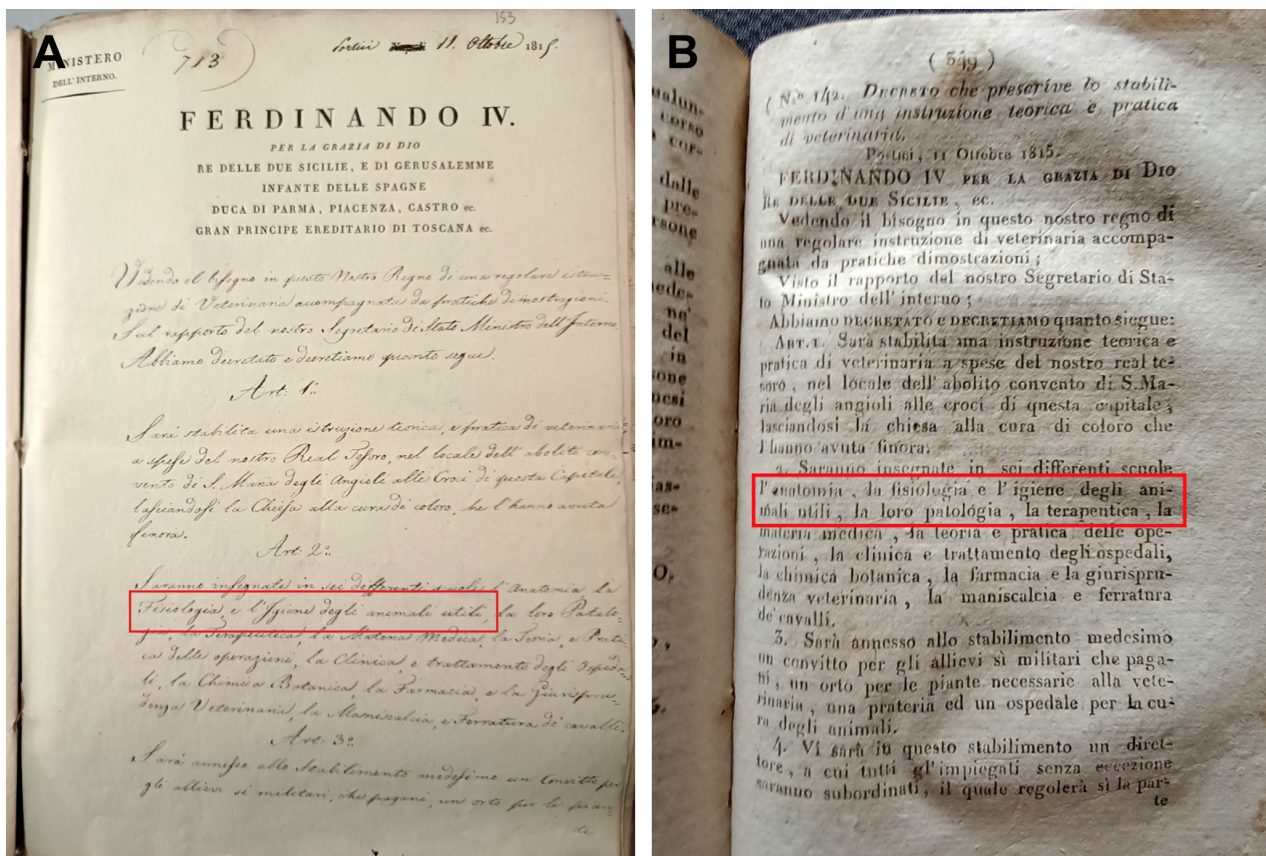
In Palermo, in 1779, the "Regia Accademia de' Studj di San Ferdinando" was founded, with four faculties (law, theology, philosophy, and medicine) and 20 chairs, but it could only award degrees in theology and philosophy. Within the "Facoltà Filosofica" (Faculty of Philosophy), which at the time also taught Natural History and Botany, the chair of Veterinary Medicine was established in 1786, the first in Southern Italy (Cancila, 2006). In that year, the Government, using funds from the "Azienda Gesuitica de' Regj Studj", a complex administrative structure that managed the immense land and real estate assets of the "Compagnia di Gesù" in Sicilia, financed the stay abroad of the most promising young people so that they could complete their training, especially in practical skills. One of these, Vincenzo Palizzotto, was sent to the Veterinary School of Lyon on a study mission and, on his return in 1787, was appointed Lecturer of the new chair (from a manuscript by Dominelli, now lost, reported in Baldassarre, 1911). Unfortunately, this did not attract many students and therefore proved to be 'useless', so in October 1793, the teaching was discontinued (Cancila, 2006).

In August 1805, Ferdinando III (of Sicilia) Borbone decided to recognize the "Accademia degli Studi" as a University, and the first courses began on January 12, 1806, but there was still no veterinary teaching.

In 1812, while staying in Sicilia, where he was appointed attached to the "Regia Giunta di Rimonta" (Royal Remount Commission), Dominelli presented a project for the foundation of a veterinary school in Palermo in the "Casa di S. Giovanni dei Leprosi", which was approved by the "Camera dei Comuni" of the Sicilian Parliament in the same year, as documented by Dominelli himself in a memorandum (Dominelli, 1813). However, the project was never realized, probably due to the political and economic instability of the King-



**Figure 7:** a) Building of the former Convent of S. Maria degli Angeli alle Croci, home since 1815 to the “Reale Stabilimento d’Instruzione Veterinaria”, now home to the Dipartimento di Medicina Veterinaria e Produzioni Animali dell’Università di Napoli Federico II. b) Cloister. (photos by A. Calamo).

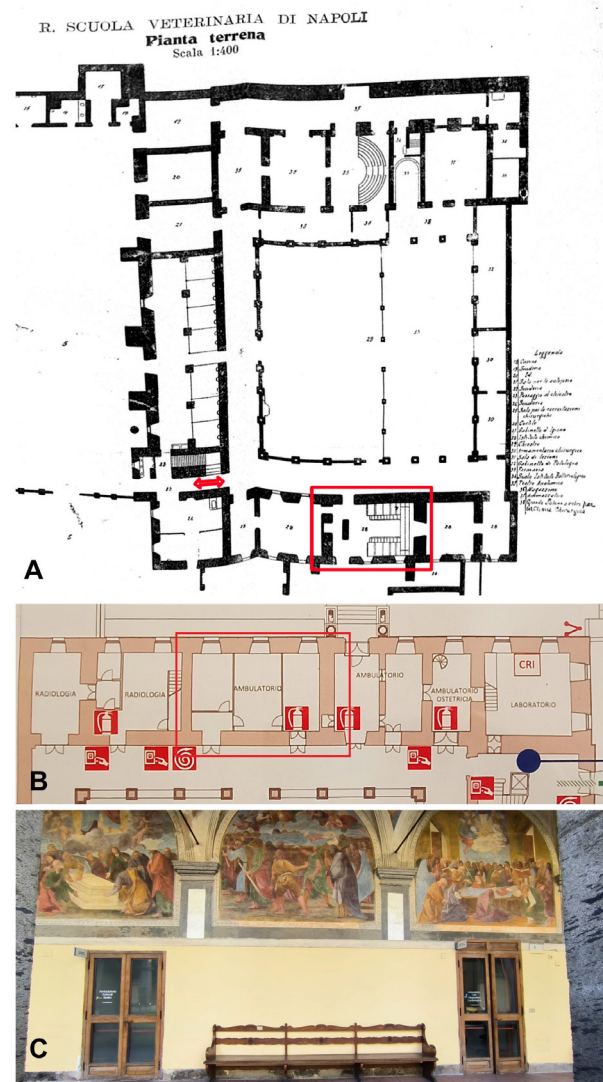


**Figure 8:** a) Decree No. 713 of October 11, 1815, issued by the Minister of the Interior, original preserved in the Archivio di Stato of Napoli (Collezione delle Leggi e Decreti Reali del Regno di Napoli, Leggi e Decreti originali, Locale 51, n. 98) (Photo N. Maio). b) Royal Decree No. 142 of October 11, 1815, published in the “Collezione delle Leggi e Decreti Reali del Regno di Napoli. Anno 1815. Da Maggio a Dicembre. In Napoli. Nella Stamperia Reale” (courtesy of G. Catenacci). In the red boxes, references to the teaching of “Physiology of useful animals” or comparative Physiology.

dom of Sicilia, which had forced Ferdinando to cede the regency to his son Francesco in 1812 and to promulgate the Sicilian Constitution in August of the same year (in this regard, Dominelli's reference to minimizing the costs of the project is clear: "io son pronto a presentare un Piano distinto col maggiore possibile risparmio di spese, e per il Sito, e per i Regolamenti necessarj al bisogno dell' esercizio della Scuola medesima" (I am ready to present a separate plan with the greatest possible savings in expenses, both for the site and for the regulations necessary for the operation of the school itself).

### The third and final foundation in Napoli

In May 1815, after the Restoration and the definitive return of the Bourbons to Napoli, Dominelli was once again tasked with re-establishing the school. For this reason, he was asked to review Nicola Rispoli's proposal for the new headquarters in the Convent of "S. Maria degli Angeli alle Croci", which had been suppressed on July 25, 1812. The project, supported by Abbot Archdeacon Luca De Samuele Cagnazzi, influential Head of Ripartimento (Department) of the Ministry of the Interior, was approved by a special decree on March 16, 1815, just a few months before the fall of Murat (Maio et al., 2025a) (figures 7a,b). Dominelli, appreciating Rispoli's project, presented a new plan, unfortunately now lost, concerning "il sito, le fabbriche, studii, persone e spesa annuale per lo stabilimento della Scuola Veterinaria con il Convitto degli allievi ed Ospedale" (the site, the buildings, studies, personnel, and annual expenditure for the establishment of the Veterinary School with boarding facilities for students and a hospital," which was approved by Royal Decree No. 142 of October 11, 1815 (Decree No. 713 of the Minister of the Interior) (Figures 8a-b). With two other decrees, issued on the same



**Figure 9:** a) Ground floor map reported in Baldassarre (1911). The box indicates the location of the only classroom used for school lessons until 1877, which was then transferred to the Chemical Institute. The arrow indicates the current entrance. b) Map of the same room indicated in the box, which now houses an "ambulatorio di Ecografia" (ultrasound clinic). The blue dot indicates the current entrance. c) Current photo of the room (Photo by A. Calamo).

day, the budget was approved and Dominelli was appointed, once again, director of the "Reale Stabilimento d'Instruzione Veterinaria" (Royal Veterinary Training Institute) in Napoli (with a monthly salary of 60 ducats), as commemorated by the marble plaque still displayed today in the portico of the "Dipartimento di Medicina Veterinaria e Produzioni Animali dell'Università di Napoli Federico II" (Figure 6).

This plaque is particularly significant, as it not only commemorates the event, but above all celebrates the restoration of the monarchy after the war events linked to the French Revolution: it claimed the continuity of the Bourbon state after the Napoleonic wars, extolling science as an instrument of progress but, above all, "legitimizing" the power of the sovereign as "restorer of order." In the same decree of Dominelli, six other professors were also appointed: in addition to Andrea Masone, five doctors and naturalists who had also been sent to Alfort during the Murat reign were appointed: Nicola Rispoli, Vincenzo Fimiani, Nicola Covelli, Luigi Chiaverini, and Vincenzo Granchi (Cecio, 2000). The six professors were to teach the following subjects: "Anatomy, Physiology, and Hygiene of Useful Animals, Pathology, Therapeutics, Materia Medica and Theory and Practice of Operations, Clinical Medicine and Hospital Treatment, Chemistry, Botany, Pharmacy, Veterinary Law, Farriery, and Horseshoeing." In December 1815 (or 1816 according to Oreste [1910]), Francesco Mery (of French origin) was added as "Instructor of forging and shoeing." It is interesting to note that Nicola Rispoli was the first teacher in Southern Italy, and probably in Italy, to teach "comparative physiology" (i.e., "of useful animals") alongside anatomy (Maio et al., 2025a; Figures 8a-b).

The new school was solemnly inaugurated in October (according to Oreste [1910]) or, more likely, on November 7 (according to Baldassarre, 1911) 1816 in the presence of King Ferdinando, the teachers and students of the "Real Collegio Medico-cerusico" (Royal Medical-Surgical College): it was under the authority of the Secretary of State Minister for the Interior, and also had a hospital, with five main stables for horses and other smaller ones for animals of different species, a botanical and agricultural garden ("prairie") for plants needed for veterinary medicine, an apothecary (or pharmacy), and a boarding school named "Convitto" to accommodate both military and civilian students (called "pa-

gani"), and there was a single classroom for lessons, now "ambulatorio di ecografia" (ultrasound clinic) (Zuccarelli, 1877; figures 9a,b). The hospital was entrusted to the professor of "clinica veterinaria" (veterinary medicine) (Masone), who could hire a paid assistant. The apothecary and the botanical and agricultural garden were entrusted to the professor of botany, chemistry and pharmacy (or pharmacology) (Covelli). All the facilities were then headed by Director Dominelli, who was responsible for "sia la parte economica che l'istruttiva" (both the economic and educational aspects).

In 1817, regulations were published introducing the figure of a "prefect," a priest with the duties of a chaplain, whose task was to "vigilare al buon costume degli allievi, istruendoli ed ammonendoli di continuo nei doveri di buon cristiano e di buon suddito" (supervise the good behavior of the students, instructing and admonishing them continually in the duties of good Christians and good subjects)". The course lasted four years. Fifty students were admitted (17 or 18 among the military and 32 or 33 among the "pagani") and had to be between 15 and 25 years of age, demonstrate "valida salute" (good health) and have "tenuto il vaiuolo naturale o d'innesto" (had natural or grafted smallpox), be "avvezzi ad una vita laboriosa" (accustomed to a hard-working life), and know how to write Italian correctly, know the principles of arithmetic, and have a certificate of "buona vita e di buoni costumi" (good life and good morals) from their mayor as well as their parish priest. In addition to these students, who were paid by the state or municipalities, "pensioned students" could also be accepted, meaning they paid their own expenses privately. In addition to these students, who were paid by the State or municipalities, "allievi pensionisti" (pensioned students) could also be accepted, meaning they paid their own expenses privately.

In the early years, it was difficult to find stu-

dents, as confirmed by Dominelli's letters preserved in the "Archivio di Stato" of Teramo ("Intendenza borbonica" division), sent to some intendencies of the Kingdom to urge the selection of students for the "piazze franche," i.e. the school admission places paid for by the various provinces (D'Annunzio, 2016). In 1820, due to unrest among military and civilian students, it was decided to separate the two groups and transfer the former to premises in the "Cavalry quarter at Ponte della Maddalena", probably in the building once used as the school's first headquarters (Figures 4a-b). The teaching of the latter was entrusted to Antonio Miglia, the veterinarian of the "Treno della Guardia Reale" (Treno is a specialized corp for logistics and military transport: artillery, equipment and services for troop movements), who graduated from the school in Torino in 1808 and was also the author of a treatise on horses (Miglia, 1824), while the management was given to a Lieutenant General of the Cavalry (Baldassarre, 1911). This particular military school was then abolished in 1821 (Oreste, [1910]).

Due to the unrest of 1820-21, which directly involved students and teachers at the school, in July 1821, the King was persuaded to appoint Fabrizio Capece Minutolo, Superintendent of the School, an high official with powers superior to those of the director. Unfortunately, the unrest continued and, in a vain attempt to resolve the problems, from September 1822, the "Reale Stabilimento" was placed under the "supervision" of the Royal University, still presided over by a high prelate. Finally, with a decree of September 1823, the school was placed under the authority of the "Giunta di Pubblica Istruzione" (a central supervisory body created to oversee schools, colleges and licei), and then a Rector was also appointed, a new figure always represented by a priest, to assume the Director's responsibilities for the economic management of the school, with whom Dominelli immediately came into conflict. With the new Regulations of 1823, two

control commissions were also established, an "administrative" one, composed of the Rector, the Director, and two teachers from the institute, renewed every two years, with the task of supervising the economic management of all aspects of the school, and a "Commissione d'Istruzione" (Study Commission), composed of the Director, all the teachers of the school, and two other professors of human medicine and surgery from the University, chosen directly by the Minister of the Interior, which had the task of examining the students in their final exams and deciding on the study plans. The latter commission was also responsible for supervising the running of the "Convitto", the botanical garden, the pharmacy, and the hospital, and was also responsible for the conservation and expansion of the first study collections, which were evidently already present in the school for educational purposes in 1823 (Maio et al., 2024).

Despite the unrest caused by the riots and conflicts of jurisdiction, the first eight "brevetti o privilegi" (patents or diplomas), as the "patenti di esercizio" (operating licenses) were called, were granted in May 1823, and two more in September, including one to the future director Ferdinando De Nanzio (Maio et al., 2024).

### The final years of Dominelli's career

Unfortunately, Dominelli's character "notoriamente difficile ed intollerante da urtare quanto avvicinano" (notoriously difficult and intolerant, which offended those who approached him, from a letter by Capece Minutolo reported in Baldassarre, 1911) brought him into conflict first with the lieutenant general who supervised the military cadets, then with several of the cadets who participated in the uprisings of 1820-21, as a result of which he was also forced to leave the school premises where he lived, and later with other teachers,

including Vincenzo Mazza, appointed professor of surgery in 1821 (Maio et al., 2024), and finally with the Superintendent. These disagreements were first brought to the attention of the Presidents of the "Giunta" and the University by Capece Minutolo and later by the Rector, who informed the Minister Secretary of State for Internal Affairs, who in turn reported to the Council of Ministers. Finally, on June 29, 1824, the King was persuaded to sign a decree granting Dominelli retirement with a pension: the position of Director of the School was abolished and replaced by the "Commissione d'Istruzione" chaired by the most senior professor (Masone). However, in recognition of his previous merits, Dominelli was confirmed in his role as veterinarian to the Royal Cavalry, a position he held until his death.

When he was retired, Dominelli had 43 years, two months, and 19 days of service, as shown in the records, and for this reason, based on the laws in force at the time, on June 22, 1824, the Council of Ministers of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies granted him a "pensione di grazia" (pension of grace) and an additional "gratificazione" (gratification) to make up the difference, which together amounted to the "intero soldo" (full salary) he received while working, all paid from the economic fund of the "Stabilimento veterinario". The decree of January 26, 1825, granted Dominelli an annual pension of 450 ducats and a "pension of grace", also annual, of 240 ducats.

He married Mariangela De Benedictis and had three children, one of whom, Rosario, was the School's accountant from 1815 to 1823. He died in Napoli on January 6, 1827.

### The scientific contribution

Three of Dominelli's publications are known to have been printed (Dominelli, 1798, 1813, 1820), and a fourth in collaboration ([Dominelli, Chiaverini], 1820; Vallada, 1871), and at

least six manuscripts that are now lost.

Ignazio Dominelli was the first veterinarian in Southern Italy to speak of "comparative medicine," a term dear to him that he used to refer to veterinary medicine, as evidenced by his works from 1798 and 1820 and by the commemorative marble plaque (Dominelli, 1798, 1820; figure 6). On the occasion of the inauguration of the school's first academic year in 1816, Dominelli read a speech, the manuscript of which has now been lost, in which he emphasized the importance and usefulness of "comparative medicine" in supporting the rural economy of the country. He reiterated the same theme in several letters sent in 1818 to the intendant of the city of Teramo and the sub-intendant of the city of Penne (Abruzzo), in which he emphasized the advantages of knowledge in this field for sheep farming, agriculture, and trade, also urging the collaboration of the mayors (preserved in the Archivio di Stato of Teramo, "Intendenza borbonica" division; D'Annunzio, 2016).

In collaboration with other teachers at the school, including Chiaverini (Cristin, 1861), Dominelli prepared an official document that provided instruction on hygiene and health regulations for prophylaxis and prevention, as well as on the use of vaccination techniques or inoculation of sheep against "sheep and goat pox" (or SGP, a highly contagious epizootic disease caused by a virus of the genus *Capripoxvirus*), known in Southern Italy as "schiavina" (Gulli, 1847). The pamphlet was probably inspired by another published in November 1807 during the reign of Giuseppe Bonaparte, as confirmed by correspondence between the Minister of the Interior and the intendant of Teramo, who sent him a "Memoria di un Medico molto perito in affari di Epizozie (sic!) tendente a guarire le pecore dal morbo della Schiavina dal titolo Istruzione succinta sugli espedienti da prendersi nella Schiavina epizootica delle pecore" (memoir by a doctor highly skilled in matters of epizootic diseases aimed at curing sheep from the

Schiavina disease, entitled “Brief instructions on the measures to be taken in the epizootic Schiavina of sheep”), inviting him to take action to follow the instructions contained in the memorandum (D’Annunzio, 2016). In May 1807, the “Comitato Centrale di Vaccinazione” (Central Committee for Vaccination) (human) was established in the Kingdom of Napoli, with Domenico Cotugno as president and Antonio Miglietta as permanent secretary (Borrelli, 2000b). In the wake of these initial initiatives, in 1809, “Istruzioni su l’inserzione della vaccina alle pecore, per preservarle dalla schiavina” (Instructions on the insertion of the vaccine in sheep to protect them from sheep pox) were issued to all authorities in Napoli (Tanturri, 2014).

The important recommendations of the Central Vaccination Committee were confirmed upon their return by the Bourbons, and with specific decrees between 1821 and 1822, one of the first large-scale and most effective compulsory public vaccination campaigns in Europe was launched (Borrelli, 1997). In fact, after 1820, Dominelli’s pamphlet was published several times in subsequent years and in different locations (there is at least one other edition published in 1821 in Campobasso, Anonymous, 1821, and another in 1822 in the “Giornale dell’Intendenza della Provincia di Aquila, Tipografia Rietelliana, Aquila”), it was then distributed by the Ministry of the Interior to all provinces and districts, and intended for all breeders. Although the grafting of the bovine or human vaccine into sheep was unsuccessful, because the viruses of the two diseases belong to different families and therefore could not have any prophylactic effect (but at the time these notions were not yet known), the ministerial provisions suggested by the school nevertheless represented an important example of the government’s application of veterinary science in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (Borrelli, 1997; 2000b).

Among the manuscripts that are no longer preserved, we recall: an autograph on glan-

ders and health regulations published in France in 1784; a memorandum and motion to establish a veterinary school in Palermo directed and approved by the Sicilian Parliament in 1812 (probably the draft of the text later published in 1813); three speeches read on different occasions: the opening speech for the first Veterinary School established in Napoli in the “Lionera” premises at “Ponte della Maddalena” in 1798 (this too was probably the draft of the text later published in 1798); the speech on the occasion of the reopening of the school, read on November 7, 1816, in front of the teachers and students of the Medical-Surgical College; the third speech was probably that of the inauguration of the school in 1802, the latter two remaining unpublished. A manuscript entitled: “Memoria veridica appartenente alla mia persona, ed i sinceri motivi tanto personali che generali ed incontestabili che mi hanno impedito di fare un dettagliato regolamento delle Reali Razze come più volte mi ha chiesto il sig. Vedore” (True memoir belonging to me, and the sincere reasons, both personal and general and indisputable, that prevented me from drawing up a detailed regulation of the Royal Breeds, as Mr. Vedore has asked me to do on several occasions). Finally, there is a hand-drawn sketch of a horse skeleton with all the nerves labeled in French, which has also been lost (Baldassare, 1911).

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## Author Contributions

Conceptualisation: N.M.

Data Curation: N.M.

Formal Analysis: N.M.

Investigation: N.M.

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