

Scholars and Literati at the Agiati Academy in Rovereto (1750–1800)

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This note is a summary description of the set of scholars and literati at the Agiati Academy in Rovereto between its creation in 1750 and 1800. For more detailed information about these individuals, please visit the comprehensive database available at <https://shiny-lidam.sipr.ucl.ac.be/scholars/>.

1 THE ACADEMY

In 1750, a group of intellectuals from Rovereto - a town in northern Italy in the Trentino region - decided to found a new academy, called the “Agiati” (literally, “those who go slowly,” referring to the calm deliberation necessary for intellectual activity). Leading this group was Giuseppe Valeriano Vannetti, who worked alongside his wife, Bianca Laura Saibante; her brother, Francesco Antonio Saibante; Gottardo Antonio Festi; and Giuseppe Felice Givanni (Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati 2024).

After only three years, the Agiati Academy received official royal recognition from Maria Theresa, the Empress of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This recognition provided royal protection and granted the academy permission to incorporate the royal emblem into its own. The original emblem, designed by Bianca Laura Saibante, depicted a snail slowly ascending a pyramid of knowledge, to which the royal insignia was subsequently added (Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati 2024).

Following its foundation, the Academy entered a period of remarkable cultural productivity and gained international prestige, particularly under the secretariat of Clementino Vannetti, the son of Giuseppe Valeriano Vannetti and Bianca Laura Saibante. However, like many intellectual institutions, the Agiati Academy was forced to suspend its activities during the Napoleonic era (Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati 2024).

2 SOURCES

On the occasion of its 150th anniversary, the Accademia Roveretana published the work “*Memorie dell’I.R. Accademia di Scienze Lettere ed Arti degli Agiati in Rovereto. Pubblicate per commemorare il suo centocinquantesimo anno di vita,*” (1901) a celebratory volume that retraces the history of the institution and its contributions to culture. The “*Memorie*” not only highlight the key moments in the life of the Academy but also compile essays, articles, and studies produced by its members over the years. Lastly, a third section is dedicated to the biographies of the academicians from 1732 to 1901, allowing us to precisely reconstruct their biographical information, which we supplemented in some cases with the Treccani Encyclopedia (1961).

3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 displays some descriptive statistics. We found 633 members from the foundation of the Agiati Academy in Rovereto until 1800. In our sources, there is no distinction between ordinary and corresponding members. Information on the places of birth was found for more than 80% of members, which is slightly above average compared to other academies. However, we only found

Period	nb. obs	birth date known	birth place known	mean age at appoint.	mean age at death	with Wiki.	with VIAF
1734–1800	633	51.3%	80.7%	39.2	69.3	22.6%	38.4%

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

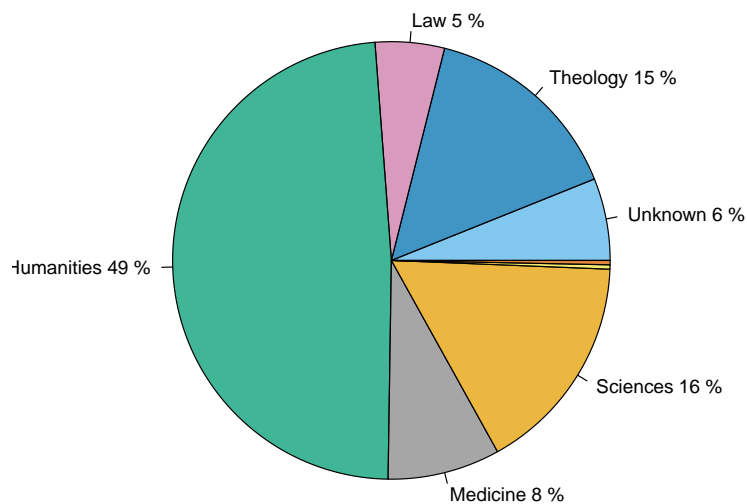


Figure 1: Broad fields at the Agiati Academy in Rovereto (published scholars only)

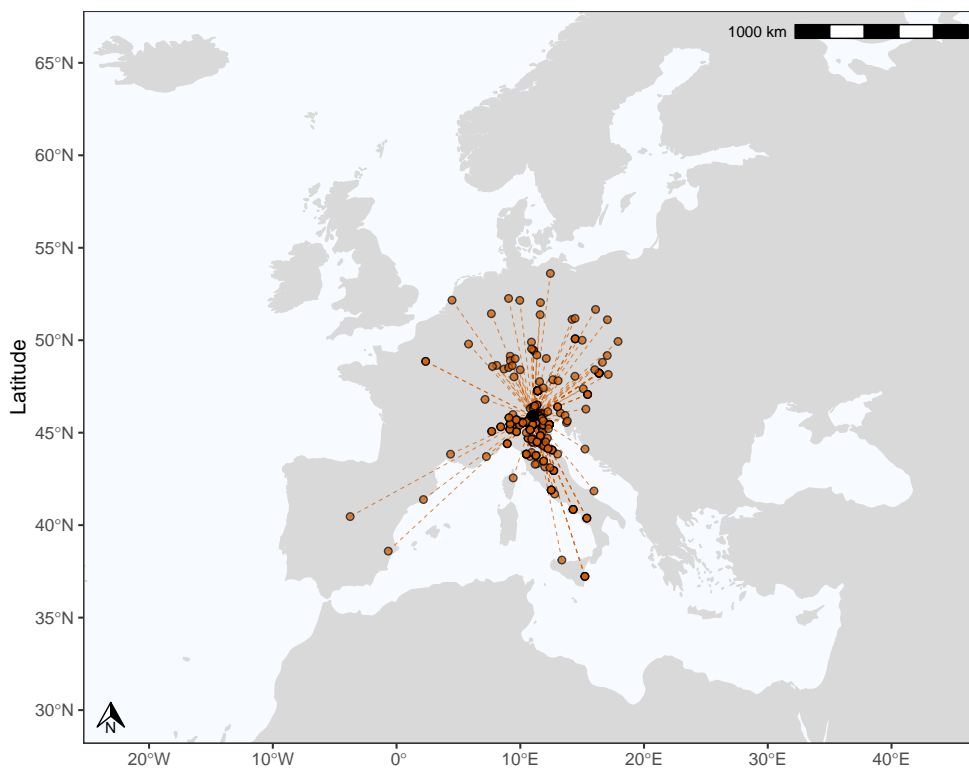


Figure 2: Places of birth of the members of the Agiati Academy in Rovereto

the years of birth for half of the members. The scholars involved became members when they were around 39 years old (the average is about 37 years old, see Zanardello (2024)). They also remained members for the rest of their lives (mean age at death is 69.7 years, see Zanardello (2024)). The percentage of scholars who left a footprint is considerably low compared to similar academies of the time (Zanardello 2024). We find only 38.4% of the members in the VIAF catalogue, and 22.6% in Wikipedia.

4 FIELDS

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of academic disciplines within the Agiati Academy in Rovereto. We consider only publishing scholars, meaning only those with a VIAF and/or Wikipedia page. Half of these members were in the humanities, and together with the percentage of lawyers and theologians, it appears that the academy was clearly focused on those fields. On the other hand, the sciences and medicine represent less than 25% of the total publishing scholars, which is unusual considering that the academy was active when the scientific academy movement peaked (McClellan 1985; Applebaum 2003; Zanardello 2024).

5 PLACE OF BIRTH

Figure 2 shows the documented birthplaces of the ordinary members active at the Agiati Academy in Rovereto. It is evident that most scholars came from the immediate surroundings of Rovereto and Northern Italy. Nevertheless, the academy attracted personalities from farther afield, both from southern Italy and northern Europe, such as what is now Germany and eastern France. Interestingly, there were also some ordinary members from Spain, which was unusual in the context of academies.

6 HUMAN CAPITAL OF SCHOLARS AND LITERATI

For each person in the database, we compute a heuristic human capital index, identified by combining information from VIAF and Wikipedia using principal component analysis. The details are given in Curtis and De la Croix (2023). Figure 3 shows the names of all the scholars with a positive human capital index at the Agiati Academy in Rovereto. Given the significant number of women admitted to this academy, we have highlighted them in green.

7 TOP 5 SCHOLARS

We provide a brief overview of five members in the top seven with a high human capital index, skipping the fourth and the sixth (Francesco Scipione Maffei, member of at least 8 academies, and Josef von Sonnenfels, member of at least 4 academies) who have already been described in other issues of RETE.

Carlo Goldoni (Venezia 1707 – Paris 1793) was a playwright and librettist, widely regarded as one of the fathers of modern Italian comedy. While Goldoni is associated with various genres, including drama, tragedy, and opera librettos, he is best known for revolutionizing Italian comedic theater. His success largely stemmed from his ability to depict the middle-class society and bourgeoisie of the time, which contrasted with the *Commedia dell'Arte* tradition. Some of his famous comedies are “The Servant of Two Masters” (1745) and “The Mistress of the Inn” (1753). He also made significant contributions to opera, collaborating with famous composer Antonio Vivaldi on at least two operas, including “Griselda” (1735). After relocating to France in 1762, he entered the court of Louis XVI, where he wrote plays in French, including “Le Bourru Bienfaisant” (The Beneficent Bear) for the Théâtre-Français in 1771. Goldoni wrote in multiple languages: Italian, the Venetian dialect, and French later in his career. His legacy is honored through statues in cities like Venice and Paris.

Giovanni Battista Morgagni (Forlì 1682 – Padova 1771) was a physician, widely regarded as the father of anatomical pathology. This medical specialty focuses on diagnosing diseases by examining organs and tissues through a range of methods including macroscopic, microscopic, biochemical, immunological, and molecular analyses. Giovanni Battista Morgagni began studying medicine at the University of Bologna at the age of fifteen, where he was mentored by renowned anatomist Antonio Maria Valsalva, eventually becoming his assistant. In 1706, Giovanni Battista Morgagni published his first work, "Adversaria anatomica prima", which garnered him significant recognition across Europe, though his ideas faced resistance from local scholars. He left Bologna for Venice, where he refined his anatomical skills under the guidance of Giovanni Domenico Santorini. In 1715, he secured the prestigious chair of anatomy at the University of Padua, a position he would hold for the rest of his life. In 1761, Giovanni Battista Morgagni published "De Sedibus et causis morborum per anatomem indagatis" (Of the seats and causes of diseases investigated through anatomy). His most significant contribution to science, which laid the foundation for the study of pathology, compiled six decades of anatomical research based on seven hundred autopsies. He asserted that most diseases originated in specific organs or tissues. Among his observations was the earliest recorded description of what would later be named Crohn's disease. This work was translated into French, English, and German during the second half of the eighteenth century.

Gérard Van Swieten (Leiden 1700 – Wien 1772) was a Dutch physician and scientist. He was forced to resign from his position as Chair of Medicine at the University of Leiden due to his Catholic faith. Van Swieten later moved to Vienna, where he served as personal physician to Empress Maria Theresa. He is credited with introducing the principles of experimentation and observation into the medical practices of the time. Van Swieten played a key role in developing the Habsburg Empire's scientific infrastructure, establishing important institutions such as the anatomical theater, the chemistry laboratory, and the botanical garden at Schönbrunn. His contributions to medicine were significant, particularly in neurology and the treatment of venereal diseases. He developed a mercury-based elixir used to treat syphilis, which Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, a friend of Van Swieten's son, is known to have used. Van Swieten also championed Enlightenment ideals, combating superstition and ignorance. His report on vampire folklore led Empress Maria Theresa and Pope Benedict XIV to prohibit the superstitious practices used to ward off vampires. Furthermore, Van Swieten intervened in the case of Magda Logomer, preventing her from being condemned for witchcraft, thus effectively ending witch trials in Croatia.

Vicenzo Monti (Alfonsine 1754 – Milano 1828) was a poet, playwright, translator, and leading figure of Italian Neoclassicism. After studying medicine and law at the University of Ferrara and joining the Arcadian Academy, Monti was invited to Rome by Cardinal Scipione Borghese, where he became the court poet for Pope Pius VI. His poem "Bassvilliana" was highly acclaimed and served as a critique of the French Revolution. In 1797, Monti eventually aligned himself with Napoleon and opposed the Pope, subsequently relocating to Milan. He later spent time in Paris, where he translated works from French and Latin, with his most notable translation being Homer's "Iliad." Upon his return to Italy, Napoleon appointed him as Professor of Poetry at the University of Pavia and as his historiographer. Monti was also honored with the titles of Chevalier of the Legion of Honor and of the Iron Crown. Following Napoleon's defeat, Monti shifted once again his allegiance to the Austrians.

Heinrich Johann Nepomuk von Crantz was a botanist and physician. Crantz studied medicine in Vienna under the mentorship of Gerard van Swieten and specialized in obstetrics in Paris and London. He lectured at St. Mary's Hospital in Vienna before teaching physiology and materia medica at the University of Vienna. He significantly contributed to improving hygiene methods for midwives. The plant genus *Crantzia* (Gesneriaceae) was named in his honor by Thomas Nuttall.

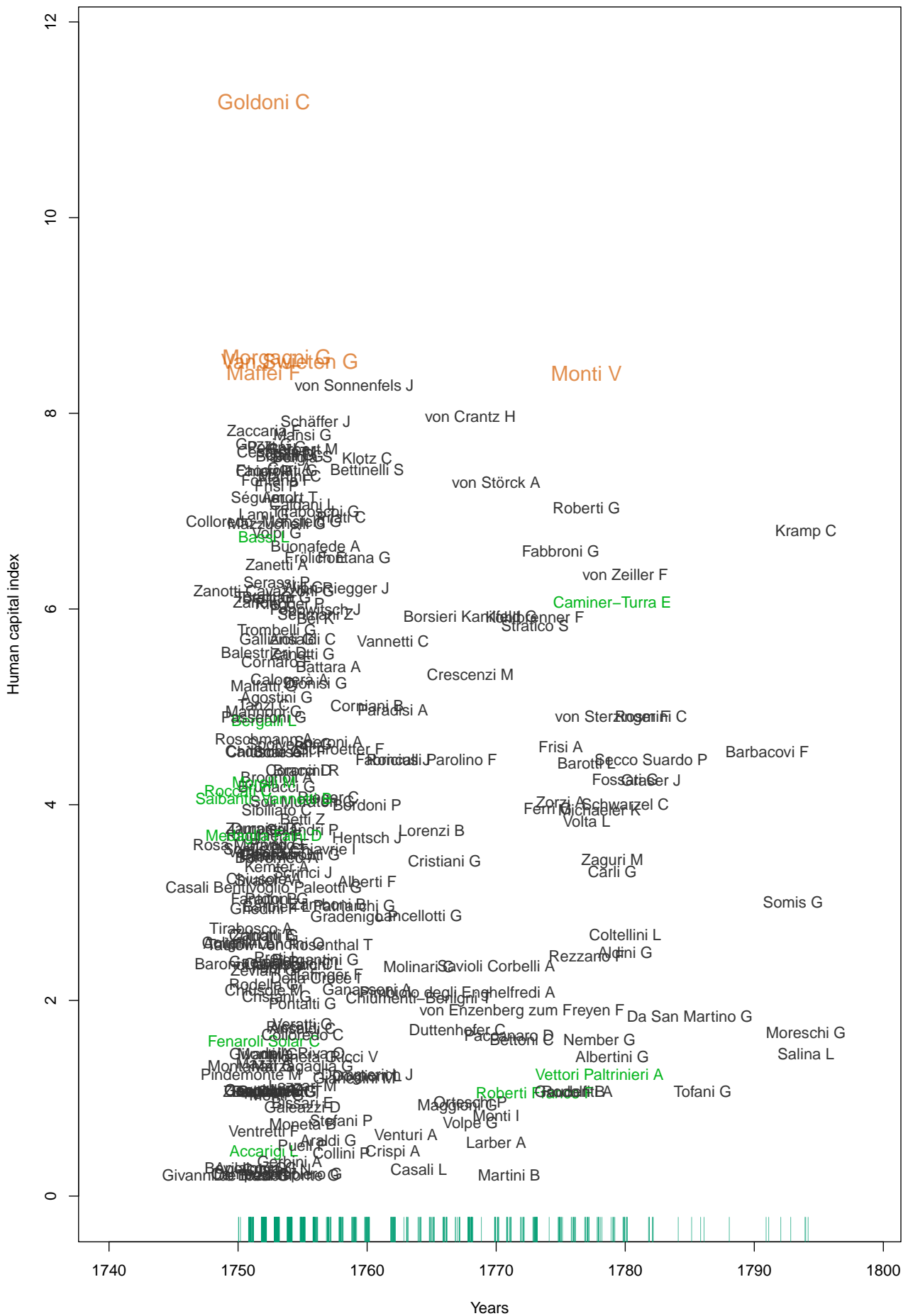


Figure 3: Famous scholars at the Agiati Academy in Rovereto

Name	Affiliation
Accarigi Livia	
Antonelli Caterina	
Bassi Laura Maria Caterina	U. Bologna, Ac. Reggio Emilia, Ac. Bologna, S. Cortona
Belli Teresa Elena	
Bergalli Luisa	Ac. Ricovrati
Bevilacqua Maddalena	
Caminer-Turra Elisabetta	
Candi Catterina	
Dal Carretto Isabella	
Fenaroli Solar Camilla	
Gualtieri-Loschi Catterina	
Marcello-Rigo Giovanna	
Medaglia Faini Diamante	
Morelli Maria-Maddalena	
Naturani Gioseffa	
Roberti Franco Francesca	
Roccati Cristina	Ac. Concordi, Ac. Ricovrati
Saibanti-Vannetti Bianca Laura	Ac. Ricovrati
Secco Suardo Paolina	Ac. Modena
Vettori-Paltrinieri Anna	

Table 2: List of female scholars and their affiliations

8 DIVERSITY

As has been noted, the Agiati Academy boasted numerous members from the territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The recognition granted by Empress Maria Theresa in 1753 placed the Academy under the protection of the House of Austria, bestowing it with great prestige and various benefits. Among these were the right to bear the title of “imperial-regia” and to adorn its coat of arms with the Habsburg’s double-headed eagle. Additionally, the academy was granted the same rights and privileges as other major cultural institutions of the Empire and was exempted from paying any tributes (Bonazza 1998).

9 WOMEN IN ACADEMIA

It has been said that the 18th century, or the Age of Enlightenment, was the century of women (Goncourt and Goncourt 2021). More than in previous eras, women became protagonists both as producers and consumers of culture. In fact, during the Industrial Revolution, with the spread of Enlightenment principles, women from the high nobility and the educated bourgeoisie across Europe founded the most significant literary salons, hosted intellectuals and artists, and led lively cultural discussions. It is also the period when the debate on the role of women in society, family life, and politics intensified. Academies became the preferred venues for these discussions, where women themselves were beginning to take an active part in the debate (De la Croix and Vitale 2023).

The Academy of Agiati in Rovereto, founded by the Vannetti couple, was one of the most vibrant institutions in northern Italy. This academy had another distinctive feature: it included 20 women among its members, a significant number considering the short period examined in our study. Several illustrious names were part of it, demonstrating how including women of cultural value could enhance the prestige of an institution.

In figure 3, we have highlighted the scholars of the academy in green. Out of the twenty women

who contributed to the academic life at Rovereto, twelve have a human capital index of 4 or lower, as they do not have a Wikipedia page or no significant trace of their work has been found in VIAF. The remaining eight, however, have a higher index. Among these prominent figures are Laura Bassi, Elisabetta Caminer-Turra, Luisa Bergalli, Paolina Secco-Suardo, Maria Maddalena Morelli, Cristina Roccati, Bianca Laura Saibanti-Vannetti, and Diamante Medaglia Faina. This data confirms that although they were few in number, their quality was on par with their male colleagues.

Several elements unite these women. In addition to belonging to the bourgeoisie of their time, they all enjoyed a good education, encouraged by their fathers. From a young age, they were exposed to the cultural world, meeting the scholars of the time and exchanging ideas and knowledge with them.

Most of them were married, and in some cases (Bassi, Bergalli, and Saibanti), their husbands belonged to the academy as well, or to other national and international institutions (such as Turra).

In Table 2, all the female academics are listed. We wanted to highlight that some of them were affiliated with different academic institutions. Laura Bassi's name stands out once again, and we can also observe that the Academy of the Ricovrati, which shared a considerable number of intellectuals with the Agiati Academy in Rovereto, provided significant opportunities for women (Blasutto, De la Croix, and Vitale 2021).

Laura Maria Caterina Bassi (Bologna 1711 – Bologna 1778) was one of the first women in the world to obtain a university chair and the first in Europe to be appointed professor of physics. From a young age, she distinguished herself for her extraordinary intelligence and passion for science. In 1732, at the young age of 21, she earned a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Bologna and obtained a free lectureship in “Philosophia universa” at the same institution (Cavazza 2009). Bassi was a key figure in the Italian scientific Enlightenment and, thanks to her skills, became a member of the Academy of Sciences of Bologna, where she gave lectures, mainly in physics and mathematics. She was a staunch supporter of Isaac Newton's theories, which she promoted and taught in her courses. Her fame and the value of her work in physics and mathematics were highly appreciated in the academic world. This earned her the opportunity to be invited to numerous academies, such as the Academy of Sciences of Bologna (1745), the Academy of Reggio Emilia (1750), the Agiati Academy in Rovereto (1752), and the Botanical Society of Cortona (1750). In 1776, the academic senate of Bologna recognized her merits by awarding her the chair of experimental physics at the Institute of Sciences. During her career, she mentored numerous students, including the renowned Lazzaro Spallanzani. She married Giuseppe Veratti, also a physics professor, with whom she collaborated on various scientific projects and had eight children.

Caminer-Turra Elisabetta (Venice 1751 – Orgiano 1796) distinguished herself as a journalist, translator, and writer. The daughter of a printer and publisher, Elisabetta had access from a young age to an intellectual environment, which allowed her to benefit from a broad education. As a teenager, she began translating works from French, contributing to the spread of Enlightenment thinkers like Voltaire and Rousseau in Italy. In 1772, Elisabetta founded the periodical “Il Giornale Enciclopedico”, a cultural and current affairs magazine in which literary, philosophical, scientific, and political issues were discussed, embracing the reformist ideas of the time. The publication became a significant platform for intellectual debate in Italy and enabled her to connect with prominent figures in European culture.

Bergalli Luisa (Venezia 1703 – Venezia 1779) was an Italian writer, translator, and actress. From a young age, she showed a great passion for culture and literature. She is best known for her work as a translator and editor. She translated several French and Spanish plays into Italian, making them accessible to an Italian audience. Her most important contribution is likely the collection “*Componimenti poetici delle più illustri rimatrici d'ogni secolo*” (1726), an anthology of poems written by Italian women. This work was an important testimony to the role of

women in Italian poetry and served as an essential reference for female authors of the time. Luisa Bergalli was also the wife of playwright and librettist Gasparo Gozzi, with whom she collaborated both in her personal and professional life. Together, they managed a theater in Venice, where Bergalli played an active role both as an actress and playwright.

10 FINAL THOUGHTS

During the 18th century, Rovereto experienced a period of great prosperity, driven by the silk industry and trade. This economic boom had a significant impact on the city's intellectual life, earning it the nickname "the Athens of Trentino." The Agiati Academy in Rovereto was the pinnacle of this intellectual flourishing, embodying the cosmopolitan spirit of the 18th century.

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Homepage: <https://perso.uclouvain.be/david.delacroix/uthc.html>

X: <https://twitter.com/UTHCerc>

Database: <https://shiny-lidam.sipr.ucl.ac.be/scholars/>

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