

L'Agiatissimo Madonna dell'Arcadia:

Bianca Laura Saibante and the Arcadian Inspiration of
the *Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati* (1750-1756)

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I hereby declare that, in line with the Faculty of Arts' code of conduct for research integrity, the work submitted here is my own original work and that any additional sources of information have been duly cited.

A la douce mémoire de ma tante Rita Mannerie (1938-2024)

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Figure 1, portrait of Bianca Laura Saibante Vannetti (1723-1797) by Frisanco Adriano.¹

¹ Frisanco Adriano, "Riproduzione di un ritratto a disegno di Bianca Laura Saibante Vannetti," in *Scrittori ed artisti trentini* (Zippel, 1883), 41.

1. Introduction

The question of whether a woman could – and should – hold a position in academic, educational and intellectual circles is part of a deep-rooted debate in European history.² This section of the broader, centuries-long dispute on the nature and status of women, commonly described in historiography as the *querelle des femmes*, also took centre stage in the public discourse of the Age of Enlightenment.³ At this time, questions regarding women’s intellectual position were re-evaluated through the increasing variety in places of learning and their growing accessibility to women.⁴ An important cause of this early eighteenth-century re-evaluation was the introduction of a constitutional policy that, from 1700 onwards, prescribed the *official* admission and equality of women within Italy’s national literary academy, the *Accademia dell’Arcadia*.⁵ By the end of the *primo Settecento*, Arcadia’s unprecedented, egalitarian attitude towards women had brought about a significant change in the academic possibilities of women in the public sphere.⁶

Responding to the increased participation of women in early eighteenth-century intellectual circles, this thesis, taking a micro-historical approach, will examine the central role that Enlightenment intellectual Bianca Laura Saibante (1723-1797) played in the foundation and early development of the *Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati* (1750) in the Tyrol region. Given the dominant influence that the Arcadia Academy had exercised across the Italian peninsula by the middle of the eighteenth century, the thesis will pay special attention to how the national literary academy helped shape the constitution and academic practices of the Agiati Academy.⁷ To do so, the thesis will take a comparative approach, connecting the first term of the Arcadia Academy under the custodianship of Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni (1690-1728) to the formative years of the Agiati Academy (1750-1756). By combining the Arcadia and Agiati Academies, a hitherto unestablished connection will be drawn between two academies that were prominently known across Italy’s larger network of Enlightenment academies.⁸

² Rotraud von Kulessa, “Between Defence and Affirmation: The Discursive Self-Representation of Eighteenth-Century Women Authors in France and Italy,” in *Portraits and Poses: Female Intellectual Authority, Agency and Authorship in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Beatrijs Vanacker and Lieke van Deinsen (Leuven University Press, 2022), 73.

³ Paula Findlen and Rebecca Messbarger, *The Contest for Knowledge. Debates Over Women’s Learning in Eighteenth-Century Italy*, eds. Paula Findlen and Rebecca Messbarger (The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 2.

⁴ Rebecca Messbarger, *The Century of Women. Representations of Women in Eighteenth-Century Italian Public Discourse* (University of Toronto Press, 2002), 7-8.

⁵ Elisabetta Graziosi, “Revisiting Arcadia: Women and Academies in Eighteenth-Century Italy,” in *Italy’s Eighteenth Century. Gender and Culture in the Age of the Grand Tour*, eds. Paula Findlen, Wendy Wassying Roworth and Catherine M. Sama (Stanford University Press, 2009), 107.

⁶ Susan M. Dixon, “Forum: Women in Arcadia,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 3 (1999): 372; Findlen and Messbarger, *The Contest for Knowledge*, 9; Graziosi, “Revisiting Arcadia,” 122.

⁷ Graziosi, “Revisiting Arcadia,” 122.

⁸ Ritchie Robertson, “Sociability,” in *The Enlightenment. The Pursuit of Happiness, 1680-1790* (Penguin Books Limited, 2020).

Moving beyond the level of a case study, this project is strongly committed to examining Saibante's activity in the Agiati Academy and the institution's interaction with Arcadia as two larger, phenomena on the rise in Italy's *Settecento*. Namely, the hitherto underestimated prevalence by which women, in formal or informal manners, initiated and contributed to the establishment of academies, and the extent to which the Arcadian legacy of the Crescimbenian term lived on in these newly founded institutions.⁹

1.1. Enlightenment women and the public sphere: A historiographical overview

The intellectual movement of the European Enlightenment is characterised by an increasing presence, participation and dominance of women within the expanding variety of centres for learned conversation.¹⁰ This interrelated trend has, in recent decades, been studied vigorously by cultural and feminist historians as well as literary scholars. Special attention has been devoted to women's prominent role in salons and coterie. This "shadow academic world," as widely agreed upon by scholarship, was made up of liminal spaces that were situated "somewhere" between the public and private spheres.¹¹ It is commonly accepted that these "informal" gatherings constituted "a privileged space for female action" as it enabled women to engage with intellectuality "from within the domestic sphere."¹² Intellectual centres situated in the public sphere, on the other hand, were less accessible to women. For instance, participating in the activity of an academy – "membership institutions devoted to the common pursuit of literature, science, philosophy or the arts" – meant facing the difficulty of gaining admission and exchanging a "safe" liminality for an entrance into the public world.¹³ Though not unrecognised, the role of Enlightenment women in the public sphere has so far been of considerably less interest to scholars than the established feminine dimension of the salon and coterie. In addition, in these studies that focus on the "shadow academic world," historians and literary scholars alike have been particularly intrigued by the role of the *salonnière*, a decidedly leading and active part that women could play with the intellectual culture of the Enlightenment.¹⁴ It is thus commonly agreed upon that, within this role, women had the opportunity to exert cultural, literary or scientific influence from a position of leadership

⁹ Messbarger, *The Century of Women*, 7-8.

¹⁰ James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹¹ Findlen and Messbarger, *The Contest for Knowledge*, 7; Beatrijs Vanacker and Lieke Van Deinsen, "Portraying Female Intellectual Authority. An Introduction," in *Portraits and Poses: Female Intellectual Authority, Agency and Authorship in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Beatrijs Vanacker and Lieke van Deinsen (Leuven University Press, 2022), 8; Alexis Wolf, *Transnational Women Writers in the Wilmot Coterie, 1798-1840: Beyond Borders and Boundaries* (Boydell & Brewer, 2024), 15.

¹² Antoine Lilti, *The World of the Salons. Sociability and Worldliness in Eighteenth-century Paris* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 39; Jane E. Everson and Lisa Sampson, "Introduction," in *The Italian Academies 1525-1700. Networks of Culture, Innovation and Dissent*, eds. Jane E. Everson, Denis V. Reidy and Lisa Sampson (Taylor & Francis, 2016).

¹³ Margaret Hunt, "Civil Society and the State," in *Women in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Pearson Education Limited, 2010), 297-298.

¹⁴ Findlen and Messbarger, *The Contest for Knowledge*, 7.

and authority. Due to the scholarly fascination with the *salonnière*, far less attention has so far gone to the leading positions that women, especially when they were not of noble birth, could hold in intellectual centres situated in the public sphere.¹⁵

One explanation for the lack of research on women intellectuals and their leading positions in the public sphere of the eighteenth century is related to the traditional geographical focus of Enlightenment scholarship. That is, scholars have so far given special focus to studying women's activity in geographical territories that have conventionally been considered as the dominant intellectual centres of the Enlightenment, mainly England and France.¹⁶ Recent projects such as Mónica Bolufer's [CIRGEN](#) have recognised that scholarship's great emphasis on these centres has caused the development of the Enlightenment and women's intellectual activity in Italy, and by extension in Southern Europe, to remain understudied.¹⁷ However, the concurrent development of the Italian Enlightenment (1700-1789) and the *querelle des femmes* had a significant impact on women's access to the public sphere and is deserving of further scholarly development.¹⁸ As underlined by Rebecca Messbarger and Margaret Hunt, and widely agreed upon by scholarship, during the Italian Enlightenment, women were even in a unique position to move beyond the liminality of the private sphere as opposed to opportunities in the national past and contemporary state of affairs in the accepted intellectual centres of the Enlightenment.¹⁹ This is illustrated by, for instance, Laura Bassi Veratti (1711-1778) and Cristina Roccati (1732-1797) who earned their doctoral degrees and held paid professorships at the University of Bologna, as well as Elisabetta Caminer Turra (1751-1796) and Eleonora de Fonseca Pimentel Chavez (1752-1799) who were the directors of their own literary and political journals.²⁰

¹⁵ See, for instance, Élisabeth Badinter, *Maria Theresia van Oostenrijk (1717-1780). Heerseres over de Zuidelijke Nederlanden en het Heilige Roomse Rijk* (Noordboek, 2023).

¹⁶ Mónica Bolufer and Laura Guinot-Ferri, "Towards a Gendered, Decentred History of Cultural Mediation in the Eighteenth Century," in *Gender and Cultural Mediation in the Long Eighteenth Century: Women across Borders*, eds. Mónica Bolufer, Laura Guinot-Ferri, Carolina Blutrach (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 12; For the English context, see Jacqueline Labbe, *The History of British Women's Writing, 1750-1830*, ed. Jacqueline Labbe (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and Susannah Gibson, *Bluestockings. The First Women's Movement* (John Murray Press, 2024). For the French context, see Antoine Lilti, *The World of the Salons. Sociability and Worldliness in Eighteenth-century Paris* (Oxford University Press, 2015) and Rebecca Cypess, *Women and Musical Salons in the Enlightenment* (University of Chicago Press, 2022).

¹⁷ Bolufer and Guinot-Ferri, "Towards a Gendered, Decentred History," 7.

¹⁸ During the eighteenth century, before the unification in 1861, present day Italy was divided into (major and minor) states. Due to this division, scholarship has tended to determine the periodisation of the Enlightenment separately, based on particular circumstances or developments within the different states (for instance, the 'Tuscan Enlightenment' is commonly situated between 1737 and 1790). This project, instead, adheres to the comprehensive approach of the Italian Enlightenment and situates it between 1700 and 1789, a periodisation that reflects significant changes in socio-political discourse in general and, more specifically, in the dispute on women's position in response to the French Revolution (see Findlen and Messbarger, *The Contest for Knowledge*, 1).

¹⁹ Messbarger, *The Century of Women*, 7-8; Hunt, "Civil Society and the State," 297-298; Bolufer and Guinot-Ferri, "Towards a Gendered, Decentred History," 12.

²⁰ In 1732, Laura Maria Bassi Veratti became the first woman to obtain a doctorate in science and, in 1750, Cristina Roccati was awarded a doctorate in physics. Elisabetta Caminè Turra directed the literary journal *Il Giornale*

Given scholarly consensus on women's unique intellectual options during the Italian Enlightenment, great attention has recently been devoted to re-evaluating the broader societal role of women in Italy's *Cinque-* and *Seicento*.²¹ This same trend is also carried through in studies on academies, for instance, as part of Jane Everson's project [The Italian Academies 1525-1700](#).²² However, Italy's broad eighteenth-century array of women's intellectual possibilities in the public sphere included the chance of becoming active members of academies as opposed to the exceptional, honorary and virtual statuses that women held in the academic context during the earlier centuries that are currently under close observation.²³ The eighteenth-century opportunity to become a licensed academic was a unique possibility for women that has hitherto received significantly less scholarly attention. Historians occupied with the history of academies in the Italian context, among whom Michele Maylender, Susan Dixon, Elisabetta Graziosi, Jane Everson and Lisa Sampson, are in agreement that the widespread presence of women as certified academics in the intellectual sphere can be linked to the laws established in 1700 by the first custodian of the Arcadia Academy, Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni, which legitimised women's participation through a previously lacking "normative declaration."²⁴ Because of Arcadia's standardising approach to the admission of women, the Academy became a known phenomenon in gender history and resulted in the development of the [Donne in Arcadia \(1690-1800\)](#)-database by Tatiana Crivelli in 2010.²⁵ Regardless of the established scholarly consensus on Arcadia's pivotal role and Crivelli's gender-based initiative, both the *Accademia dell'Arcadia* as a cultural institution, its greater admission of women and the influence on women's opportunities in the broader academic context have received "little scholarly attention" and have so far remained an unpopular topic of study.²⁶

Enciclopedia between 1774 and 1782 and even oversaw her own publishing house, the *Stamperia Turra*. Eleonora de Fonseca Pimentel Chavez was director of the republican newspaper *Il Monitore Napoletano*, also known as *Il Monitore partenopeo*, between 1793 and 1799.

²¹ For instance, Meredith Ray, *Twenty-Five Women Who Shaped the Italian Renaissance* (Taylor & Francis, 2023).

²² See Jane E. Everson, Denis Reidy and Lisa Sampson, *The Italian Academies 1525-1700: the first intellectual networks of early modern Europe*, eds. Jane E. Everson, Denis Reidy and Lisa Sampson (Routledge, 2016). See also, for instance, Simone Testa, *Italian Academies and Their Networks, 1525-1700. From Local to Global* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

²³ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 104; Susan Dixon, *Between the Real and the Ideal: The Accademia Degli Arcadi and Its Garden in Eighteenth-century Rome* (University of Delaware Press, 2006), 105; Everson, Reidy and Sampson, *The Italian Academies*. These statuses are illustrated, for instance, by female poet Tarquinia Molza's nickname "l'Unica," to be translated as 'the Unique One', among the members of the *Accademia degli Innominati di Parma* in the late sixteenth century (Jane Everson and Lisa Sampson, "L'Unica – and others. Women and the Italian academies, 1525-1700," *TLS. Times Literary Supplement*, no. 5740 (2013): 15). The translation of "L'Unica" was made by Jane Everson and Lisa Sampson in the cited article. All the following translations from Italian are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

²⁴ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 107.

²⁵ Tatiana Crivelli, "Archiviare in rete per non archiviare il caso: note sulle poetesse d'Arcadia," *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica* 1 (2010).

²⁶ Dixon, "Forum," 371-375. From 2019 onwards, the *Accademia dell'Arcadia* has held the annual Arcadia – Nicola Maria de' Angelis-competition with the aim of stimulating research on the Academy. The competition is open to doctoral dissertations with a focus on Arcadia. However, due to a lack of interest, the prize has so far only

By recognising the foundation of Arcadia as a watershed moment in women's engagement with the academic context, scholars, when referring to the Academy, have occasionally tended to be overly optimistic with regard to the degree of leeway women were afforded within the Arcadian context, omitting, for instance, women's complete absence from leadership roles and the legal offices of the Arcadia Academy.²⁷ Though emerging from and inspired by a female patron, queen Christina of Sweden, the fourteen founding members of the Arcadia Academy did not include female participants.²⁸ In line with the formal establishment of its Roman headquarters, as literary historian Elisabetta Graziosi has explained, the foundation of the Arcadian colonies, branch academies, and its "offices" were similarly a "male perquisite" and female members were, officially, barred from adding to the elaboration of Arcadia's internal constitution from a position of higher authority.²⁹ However, in the decades following the establishment of the Arcadia Academy and its colonies, academies independent of, though often inspired by, Arcadia were founded across (and far beyond) the Italian peninsula, prominently showing women among the circle of founding members and as active literary-scientific contributors.³⁰

1.2. Bianca Laura Saibante and the Arcadia and Agiati Academies: A micro-historical case study

This thesis will add to the gap in the available historiography on 1) the activity of Enlightenment women in the public sphere and 2) the engagement of newly founded public institutions with the Arcadia Academy. This thesis will therefore focus on a *case study* that exemplifies two broader developments in the academic lives of women that were brought about during the first half of the eighteenth century under the influence of the Arcadia Academy: the changing presence of women in academic constitutions (chapter 2) and their increasing participation in academic life (chapter 3). To do so, this thesis proposes a comparative, micro-historical approach. This methodology, frequently followed by scholars in research on class, gender and race, is focused on undertaking in-depth studies of individuals and institutions with the aim of improving our understanding of broader tendencies considered characteristic

been awarded once, namely in 2020 to Marco Capriotti for his doctoral project, now published in book form: *L'improvvisazione poetica nel Settecento italiano: la storia e le forme* (Accademia dell'Arcadia, 2020) and *L'improvvisazione poetica nel Settecento italiano: un catalogo* (Accademia dell'Arcadia, 2020).

²⁷ For instance, in her article "Women and the Academies in Seventeenth-Century Italy: Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia's Role in Literary Academies," Patrizia Bettella states that women no longer held "a minority status" within the Arcadia Academy (*Italian Culture* 36, no. 2 (2018): 105). However, as examined thoroughly by, among others, Susan Dixon, women indeed enjoyed a somewhat improved status, but nevertheless remained a minority compared to their male counterparts (*Between the Real and the Ideal*, 105).

²⁸ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 112.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 111.

³⁰ Other examples of Italian academy founders are, among others, the Genoese philosopher, mathematician and scientist Clelia Grillo Borromeo (1684-1777) and the Pisan poet and translator Maria Selvaggia Borghini (1656-1731).

of a particular historical period.³¹ Thus, to come to a closer understanding of the broader influence that the Arcadia Academy had on the academic context of the *primo Settecento*, particularly regarding women's presence in constitutions and in academic life, the thesis will focus on Tyrolean intellectual Bianca Laura Saibante and the 1750 foundation and formative development (1750-1756) of the *Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati*.

As will be amply demonstrated, Saibante serves as the central individual of this thesis because her academic activities exemplify the gaps in the available historiography on women in the public sphere. That is, Saibante formed part of the founding circle of a newly established *public* institution, took up (formal and informal) administrative duties and visibly contributed to the academy's literary-scientific projects. The Agiati Academy, then, was chosen as the central institution of this thesis because its formative years illustrate the broad influence that the Crescimbenian term of the Arcadia Academy had exerted on the broader intellectual sphere by the middle of the eighteenth century.³² Moreover, during the early post-constitutional years of Agiati, Saibante was the only one among the founding members of the Tyrolean institution who held a membership to the Roman base of the Arcadia Academy, which establishes a clear link between the two institutions, justifies a comparative approach and reaffirms the centrality of Saibante.

As an extension of its micro-historical approach, this thesis also includes an interview with the current president of the Agiati Academy, Patricia Salomoni (chapter 4). Since the 1970s, oral history has become "a vital and necessary tool" in women's studies that serves to document the distinctiveness of the (personal and professional) lives of women.³³ This interview, however, was not conducted in person, but carried out via written correspondence in August 2025. The interview with President Salomoni nevertheless serves the purpose of creating a "unique document" that contributes to "a new kind of women's history, a new kind of women's literature" in which we validate the lives of "the women who preceded us and are forging direct links with our own past."³⁴ In other words, by means of President Salomoni's reflections, this thesis will be able to reconsider Bianca Laura Saibante's authoritative legacy in the Agiati Academy, and by extension the public sphere of the *primo Settecento*, through the experiences of the first female president to follow her. Moreover, President Salomoni's reflections offer a valuable lens through which to examine topical questions on women's intellectual leadership. In its

³¹ Examples of micro-historical studies are Francesca Antonelli, Antonella Romano and Paolo Savoia, eds. *Gendered Touch. Women, Men, and Knowledge-making in Early Modern Europe* (Brill, 2022) and Efrén Cuevas, *Filming History from Below. Microhistorical Documentaries* (Columbia University Press, 2022).

³² Dixon, *Between the Real and the Ideal*, 105; Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 122.

³³ Susan H. Armitage, Patricia Hart and Karen Weathermon, eds. *Women's Oral History. The Frontiers Reader* (University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

³⁴ Sherna Berger Gluck, "What's So Special about Women?" in *Women's Oral History. The Frontiers Reader*, eds. Susan H. Armitage, Patricia Hart and Karen Weathermon (University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 19.

broadest sense, the interview emphasises the immediate relevance of studying the larger topic of this thesis, women in the public sphere, both in the past and in the present.

To undertake this comparative, micro-historical case study, this thesis will, in addition to the interview, employ a variety of sources housed at the historical archives of the Arcadia Academy in Rome and the Agiati Academy in Rovereto.³⁵ The relevant sources fall into two categories: (1.2.1.) institutional documentation, consisting of constitutions and membership catalogues, and (1.2.2.) literary production, including institutional anthologies and academic sessions. These sources will be subjected to qualitative and quantitative content analysis. In line with the micro-historical approach of this project, the content analysis that this project envisages, following Klaus Krippendorff, will be used to make “valid inferences” from the selected primary source material “to the contexts of their use,” allowing for the historical “attitudes, views, and interests” of individuals and institutions to be made into the central focus.³⁶ For this project, a *qualitative* approach to content analysis will prevail because its central focus lies on arriving at an understanding and interpretation of the selected primary source material. However, the sources will also be approached from a *quantitative* perspective.

1.2.1. Institutional documentation: constitutions and membership catalogues

First of all, this thesis will offer a qualitative reading of the content of the constitutions of the Arcadia and Agiati Academies, serving both the second and third chapters. The constitutions contain a wealth of information regarding the administrative and authoritative positions (2.1.), the admission policies and procedures (2.2.), the underlying motives of women’s admission (2.3.) and the literary genres and subjects that members could work on (3.1.). With regard to the Arcadia Academy, this thesis will consider both the original 1695 laws, the Latin *Leges Arcadum*, and the amended 1700 laws, included in an institutional publication of the first custodian, Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni’s *Storia*

³⁵ Since 1941, the collection of printed books, manuscripts and historical archives of the Roman Arcadia Academy have been deposited at the Angelica Library in Rome. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dott.ssa Sarah Malfatti and Dott.ssa Elisabetta Balducelli for their prompt responses, helpful insights and willingness to provide me with photographs of requested archival material. The collection of the Agiati Academy, consisting of manuscripts and printed works, is housed at the current seat of Agiati on the Piazza Rosmini in Rovereto, province of Trentino-Alto Adige. I would like to express my profound gratitude to Dott.ssa Ingrid Zenari for her guidance in navigating the abundance of archival material and providing me with scans. I would also like to thank Prof. Corrado Viola (Univr) for putting me in contact with Dott.ssa Paola Maria Filippi, who provided me with hitherto unpublished background information on Bianca Laura Saibante and the Agiati Academy. Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the current president of the Agiati Academy, Dott.ssa Patricia Salomoni, who was kind enough to supplement this thesis with a last-minute interview that carefully connects the past with the present, emphasising the immediate relevance of the broader subject of this thesis.

³⁶ Klaus Krippendorff, “Conceptualizing Content analysis,” in *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (University of Pennsylvania, 2004), 18; James W. Drisko and Tina Maschi, “Introduction,” in *Content analysis* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.

dell'Accademia degli Arcadi istituita in Roma (1712).³⁷ Even though Crescimbeni's *Storia* was written and published with the central aim of promoting the institution, spreading its ideology and increasing its membership, this was also the main source studied by literary historian Elisabetta Graziosi and art historian Susan Dixon for their quantitative and typological overviews of Arcadian women, which offers proof of the validity of this source.³⁸

Whereas the two relevant constitutional sources of the Arcadia Academy have been digitised and are open access, retrieving the original constitution, and other eighteenth-century institutional documentation, of the Agiati Academy was slightly more challenging. As stated by Marcello Bonazza in his introduction to the official inventory of Agiati's historical archive, the state of the eighteenth-century section of the academic archive is characterised by "documentazione mancante" (missing documentation).³⁹ Fortunately, regardless of apparent gaps in eighteenth-century documentation, the original 1750 *Costituzioni* of the Agiati Academy were transcribed in 1901 for an institutional publication in honour of the Academy's "centocinquantesimo anno di vita" (150th anniversary).⁴⁰

Next, this thesis will offer a quantitative analysis of the catalogues of the Arcadian and Agiati members, which will also be of great importance to both the second and third chapters. A closer look at the catalogues will allow us to ascertain which women fit the profile of Arcadia and Agiati and were thus *actually* admitted to the Academies (2.4.). These names will inevitably return throughout the third chapter when their literary output will be studied in more detail (3.2.). With regard to the Arcadia Academy, this thesis will employ Crivelli's previously mentioned database and rely on the numbers researched by Susan Dixon.⁴¹ As recommended by the archivist of the Agiati Academy, Dott.ssa Ingrid Zenari, this thesis will study the catalogue transcribed in the same 1901 publication, which also includes short biographies of the Agiati members.⁴²

³⁷ Giovanni Vincenzo Gravina, "Leges Arcadum," in *Orationes et Opuscula* (Gulielmum vande Water, 1713), 242-248; Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni, *Storia dell'Accademia degli Arcadi istituita in Roma* (Bulmer e co., 1804).

³⁸ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 108; Dixon, "Forum," 372.

³⁹ Marcello Bonazza, *Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati. Inventario dell'archivio (secoli XVI - XX)* (Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, 1999), XIX.

⁴⁰ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," in *Memorie dell'I.R. Accademia di Scienze Lettere ed Arti degli Agiati in Rovereto. Pubblicate per commemorare il suo centocinquantesimo anno di vita* (Stabilimento Tipografico Grigoletti, 1901), 12-17.

⁴¹ Dixon, "Forum," 372; Dixon, *Between the Real and the Ideal*, 105.

⁴² Agiati Academy, "Parte III," in *Memorie dell'I.R. Accademia di Scienze Lettere ed Arti degli Agiati in Rovereto. Pubblicate per commemorare il suo centocinquantesimo anno di vita* (Stabilimento Tipografico Grigoletti, 1901), 243-926.

1.2.2. Literary production: institutional anthologies and academic sessions

In addition to the institutional documentation – the constitutions and catalogues – this thesis will also study the literary production of the Arcadia and Agiati Academies. These sources are of importance to the third chapter as they can be used to supplement the constitutional theory of the academies with the academic practice, and thus give us an idea of the increased participation of women in academic life. That is, this selection of sources will enable us to examine the *reality* of the academic activity of women members (3.2.) which, as we will see, is not always represented accurately by the constitutional rules (3.3.). In addition, these sources will allow us to ascertain if and how the Arcadian influence extended to the literary production of Agiati, so that our current notion of Arcadia’s impact will no longer be limited to the legal, constitutional aspect (3.4.).

With regard to the Arcadia Academy, the most relevant sources of literary production are the institutional anthologies, known as the *Rime degli Arcadi*. These collections of literary compositions were published in fourteen volumes between 1716 and 1781, nine of which were compiled and printed during the Crescimbenian term of the Arcadia Academy. For a quantitative analysis, the thesis will, again, rely on the numbers researched by Susan Dixon while also consulting the full repertoire of the anthologies, edited and published by Maria Luisa Doglio and Manlio Pastore Stocchi.⁴³ As with the constitutional sources, the relevant volumes of the anthologies are digitised and open access.

In contrast to the Arcadia Academy, the Agiati Academy did not publish anthologies with the collected compositions of its members. Of primary importance to the formative years of the Agiati Academy were the *Tornate*, the academic sessions. However, the literary-scientific contributions presented during these academic sessions were not published for the broader public, as the Arcadian anthologies were. For this reason, compiling the relevant texts was, again, slightly more challenging. Fortunately, the missing documentation in the eighteenth-century section of Agiati’s academic archive does not regard the literary works presented during the *Tornate* because at the time, it was believed that “soltanto la produzione scientifico-letteraria era sentita come effettivamente pertinente” (only scientific-literary production was felt to be actually relevant).⁴⁴ According to this reasoning, it is understandable that detailed minutes of these sessions have not survived and can therefore not be consulted.⁴⁵

As will be explained in greater detail in the second chapter, Saibante made annotations during these *Tornate* and set up a chronological system, which was taken over by Bonazza under his inventorial section “Attività scientifico-letteraria: manoscritti (1750-1987).”⁴⁶ First, this list will be used to conduct

⁴³ Maria Luisa Doglio and Manlio Pastore Stocchi, eds. *Rime degli Arcadi I-XIV. 1716-1781. Un repertorio* (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2013).

⁴⁴ Bonazza, *Inventario*, XIX.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 38-78.

a quantitative analysis to ascertain how many female members of Agiati got to present their work during the sessions held between 1750 to 1756, providing crucial insight into the hitherto unestablished participation of female members of the Agiati Academy (3.2.). Second, through a qualitative approach, this thesis will offer an interpretation of several of the literary texts contributed to the *Tornate*, including sonnets, novellas and discourses, written and recited by, mainly, Saibante, but also by two other Agiati members, namely Diamante Medaglia Faini and Clemente Baroni Cavalcabò (3.1., 3.2., 3.3., 3.4.). The collection of literary texts that will be studied will advance our current understanding of the (controversial) subjects discussed during the academic sessions which, in turn, will lead to a clearer grasp on the position of the Agiati Academy in the broader debate on women's increasing presence and participation in the public sphere.

2. The changing presence of women in academic constitutions during Italy's *primo Settecento*

At the turn of the eighteenth century, the Arcadia Academy officially opened its doors to women. Although the Italian academic circles of the Renaissance and Baroque periods were not without female influence, Arcadia was a pioneer in incorporating constitutional clauses regarding the admission of women.⁴⁷ In doing so, the Arcadia Academy not only distanced itself from the honorary and exceptional female integration that had been characteristic of previous centuries, but also turned the tide of the seventeenth-century *querelle des femmes* which strongly influenced the (national and international academic field).⁴⁸ Yet, what exactly did Arcadia's constitutional articles on women's admission stipulate, and were there broader aims to the inclusion of these articles? And, given Arcadia's influential position, to what extent was the Arcadian constitutional theory on women taken over and adapted by other, newly founded academies, like the Agiati Academy? Through a qualitative analysis of the constitutions of the Arcadia and Agiati Academies, the first two steps of this chapter will shed new light on those in charge of admissions as well as the policies and procedures by which women came to be admitted. In a third step, the chapter will uncover the strategic, underlying motives of women's official integration. Finally, in a fourth step, the chapter will quantitatively explore the member catalogues of Arcadia and Agiati to provide an illuminating insight into the profiles of the women that were *actually* admitted to both Academies.

2.1. Authority and administration: from *il Custode Arcadico* to *l'Agiatissimo Madonna*

2.1.1. The Arcadia Academy

On 5 October 1690, a group of fourteen learned men convened on Rome's *Gianicolo* to recite pastoral poetry. During this informal meeting, one of the attendees, abbot Agostino Maria Taja, exclaimed that "egli mi sembra che noi abbiamo oggi rinnovata l'Arcadia" (it seems to me that, today, we have revived Arcadia).⁴⁹ Five years later, in 1695, this revived Arcadia became a formalised academy through the inauguration of the Latin *Leges Arcadum*, or Arcadian Laws, that are, to this day, memorialised in marble on the Janiculum Hill. From this moment onwards, the members of the Arcadia Academy and their academic activities were directed and overseen by a broader body of decision-makers with their own authoritative duties, including a general custodian, two sub-custodians, a pro-custodian, a superintendent and a group of twelve Arcadians who made up the *Collegio*, a body of twelve elite Arcadian men.⁵⁰ As

⁴⁷ Everson and Sampson, "L'Unica – and others," 14-15; Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 106.

⁴⁸ Messbarger, *The Century of Women*, 8; Findlen and Messbarger, *The Contest for Knowledge*, 9; Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 105-106.

⁴⁹ Alfonso Bertoldi, *Studio su Gian Vincenzo Gravina* (Zanichelli, 1885), 38.

⁵⁰ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 11-12.

Arcadia was, by its 1695 Laws, closed to women participants, the offices of the Academy, its authoritative and deciding positions, were also exclusively held by male members.⁵¹

Within the Arcadia Academy, the highest office was held by the general custodian. At the foundational meeting of the Academy in 1690, the founders elected poet and literary critic Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni (1663-1728) to be the first to take up this office, as indicated on the figure below: “Alphesiboeus Caryus,” the pseudonym by which Crescimbeni was known in the Academy, was the “Arcadiae custos generalis” (general custodian of Arcadia).⁵² According to the Arcadian Laws, the custodian general was re-elected “per polizze segrete ogni Olimpiade, cioè ogni quattro anni compiuti” (by secret ballots every Olympiad, that is to say every four completed years).⁵³ However, all those who became general custodian throughout the eighteenth century maintained their posts until their death, governing on average at least one decade or, usually, several decades.⁵⁴ Crescimbeni himself directed the Arcadia Academy for 37 years, from 1690 to his death in 1728.

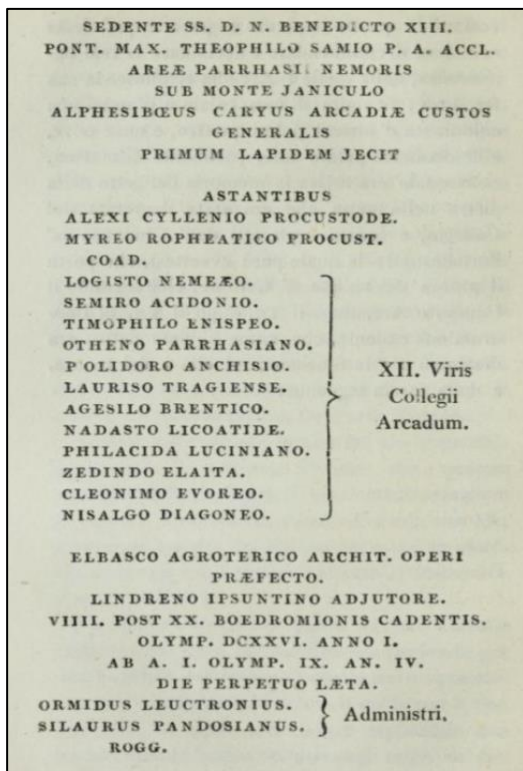


Figure 2, Latin typescript of the first part of the marble memorial on the Janiculum Hill in Rome, showing the various offices of the Arcadia Academy and by whom they were held in the first year.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Graziosi, “Revisiting Arcadia,” 111.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 10. The Arcadians used to date any proceedings concerning the Academy according to the Greek calendar by measuring time by Olympiads and adopting the Greek names of the months (Barbara Tellini Santoni, *Inventario dei Manoscritti*, ed. Barbara Tellini Santoni (La Meridiana Editori, 1991), 7).

⁵⁴ Francesco Lorenzini succeeded Crescimbeni in 1728 and remained custodian until his death in 1743. During the further course of the eighteenth century, Crescimbeni and Lorenzini were succeeded by Michele Giuseppe Morei (1695-1767) who governed from 1743 until 1766, Giuseppe Brogi (1702-1772) who governed from 1766 until 1772, Gioacchino Pizzi (1716-1790) who governed from 1772 until 1790 and Luigi Godard (1740-1824) who governed from 1790 until 1824.

⁵⁵ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 80.

The person elected as custodian general was expected to fulfil a broad array of administrative and deciding tasks, only a limited part of which asked for participation of the *Collegio*.⁵⁶ Most importantly, the custodian was asked to govern the *Serbatojo*, the office that served as archive and secretary.⁵⁷ As part of this administrative function, the custodian was in charge of institutional publications that served to promote the Academy and its literary output to the broader public.⁵⁸ From Crescimbeni's term, an extraordinarily broad range of such publications have been preserved, a quantity that would strongly decrease during the term of his successor.⁵⁹ Finally, as administrator of Arcadia, the custodian was also expected to convene the Arcadians, at least twice a year, for the *Chiamate Generali* (General Conventions).⁶⁰ With regard to deciding tasks, the custodian had the final say. That is, in matters that required voting, the custodian always had two votes at his disposal.⁶¹ Holding fast to their origins, the Arcadian offices remained, throughout the most defining century of the Academy, strictly a "male perquisite" and the various *Collegi* of the Arcadia Academy would not elect a woman as custodian until the appointment of Maria Teresa Acquaro Graziosi in 2000.⁶²

2.1.2. *The Agiati Academy*

On 27 December 1750, sixty years after the informal discussion on the *Gianicolo* in Rome, a similar meeting took place in the Borgo Santa Caterina in Rovereto, a small town situated in an Italian area of the Tyrol region.⁶³ During this meeting, it was equally decided that an academy would be founded. However, the Roveretan gathering was in at least one respect very different from the Arcadian one: the five founders included a "fondatrice," or woman founder, namely poet and *salonnière* Bianca Laura Saibante.⁶⁴ The *Costituzioni* that were drawn up during the foundational meeting of the Agiati Academy equally differ from the Arcadian *Leges* at one important level: authority would no longer be reserved for male members of the Academy. This can be inferred from the procedure by which the highest office of Agiati was appointed. The president of the Agiati Academy was selected not by "polizze segrete" (secret ballots) that were the privilege of an all-male *Collegio*, but rather depended on the Academy's Catalogue of members:

⁵⁶ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 11.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Dixon, "Forum," 372.

⁵⁹ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 116-117.

⁶⁰ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 11.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 15.

⁶² Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 111.

⁶³ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 7; Miriam J. Levy, *Governance and Grievance. Habsburg Policy and Italian Tyrol in the Eighteenth Century* (Purdue University Press, 1988), 2.

⁶⁴ Agiati Academy, "Parte III," 284.

“Si farà ogni mese un Capo col nome di *Agiatissimo*, a distinzione di tutti; alla qual carica senza estrazione sarà assunto il primo che è notato nel Catalogo, e così a vicenda l’un dopo l’altro nel medesimo ordine discendendo fino all’ultimo, dopo al quale subentrerà a sua stagione ancora il primo in guisa, che a ciascuno degli Accademici tocchi il suo mese.”⁶⁵

(Each month, a Head shall be made with the name of *Agiatissimo*, in distinction of all others; to which office, without drawing lots, the first person noted in the Catalogue shall be appointed, and so, one after the other, in the same order, down to the last, after which the first shall take his place again in his season, so that each of the Academics shall have his month.)

As the Agiati Catalogue also included Bianca Laura Saibante, she was, equal to her male counterparts, given the role of *presidente pro tempore* at the appropriate months according to the cited article above, becoming *Madonna Agiatissimo* (Madam President) as opposed to *Messer Agiatissimo* (Mister President). Saibante’s first term as president was for the month of March 1751, whereafter she would take up the role three more times, on 31 July 1751, 30 April 1752 and 29 April 1755.

In the *Costituzioni* of the Agiati Academy, the Second Constitution specifically regards the role of the *Agiatissimo* who was held to seven authoritative articles.⁶⁶ By virtue of this Constitution, the *Agiatissimo* was expected to fulfil the duty of “convocare l’Accademia” (convening the Academy) at the beginning of his or her regiment, which was mandatory, but the same also had “la facoltà di convocarla in qualche occasione necessarissima per onore o vantaggio dell’Accademia” (the power to summon you on any occasion necessary for the honour or advantage of the Academy).⁶⁷ On the mandatory occasion of convening the Academy for a *Tornata*, the *Agiatissimo* was to address the assembled members with a *prolusione* (prologue), which could be supplemented with compositions in verse.⁶⁸ Considered one of the optional occasions, the *Agiatissimo* was able to convene the founding members of Agiati to discuss the Academy’s “regolamento,” or regulation.⁶⁹ During this facultative meeting, it was expected of the *Agiatissimo* to make propositions regarding the academic regulations and, when any suggestions were voted on, the same would have two votes.⁷⁰

The preserved documentation from Saibante’s regiments amply demonstrate that, from the very first time that she took the highest office at Agiati, the status of president, when given to a woman, was not

⁶⁵ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 10; “Parte I.,” 14.

⁶⁶ Agiati Academy, “Parte I.,” 14-15.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

an honorary one.⁷¹ On the contrary, Saibante was expected to fulfil all seven authoritative articles of the Second Constitution that specifically applied to the *Agiatissimo*.⁷² In addition, the preserved documentation also reveals that Saibante fulfilled a range of administrative tasks that are not detailed in the *Costituzioni*. For instance, the presentations that were given by the academic members during the *Tornate* were written down in full and annotated by Saibante. Because of her curation, the readings of these literary-scientific texts “si sono conservati con una certa completezza per i primi anni” (were preserved with a certain thoroughness for the first few years).⁷³

Thus, whereas the Arcadians would officially not have a woman at the helm of their Academy and its administration until centuries after its foundation, the Agiati members were, by virtue of their constitution, presided over by an *Agiatissimo Madonna* only three months after the official foundation of the Academy. In conclusion, the *Costituzioni* of Agiati, in contrast to the Arcadian one, enabled women to direct a transregional academic community through which they could exert an influence on the broader academic landscape of the Italian *Settecento* from an official position of higher authority, “a distinzione di tutti” (in distinction from all others).⁷⁴

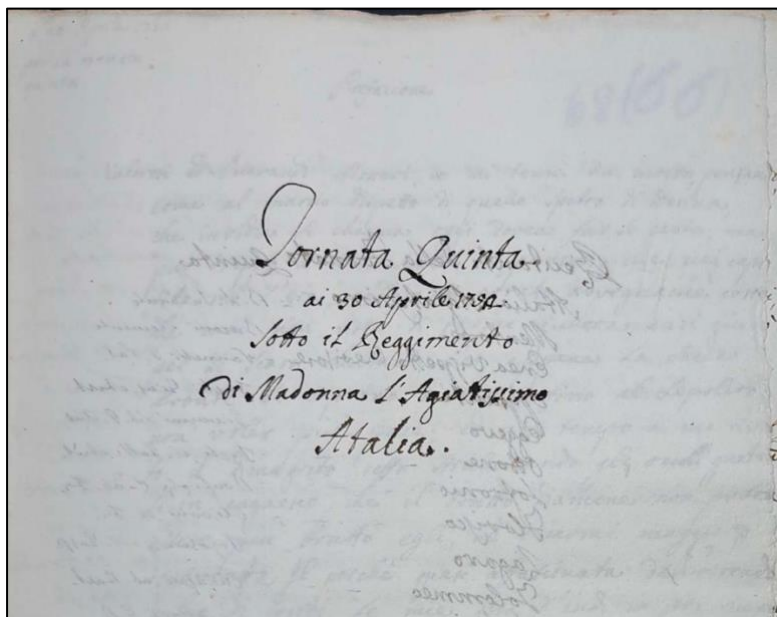


Figure 3, title on the manuscript of the third *Tornata* presided over by Saibante (*Atalia*) as *Madonna L'Agiatissimo*.⁷⁵

⁷¹ For instance, in the previous century, Elena Cornaro Piscopia (1646-1684), the first woman to receive a doctoral degree (1678), was given the office of the Prince of Venice's Academy of the Pacifici, yet this nomination was eventually only for show (Graziosi, “Revisiting Arcadia,” 111).

⁷² Agiati Academy, “Parte I,” 14-15.

⁷³ Bonazza, *Inventario*, 38. In addition to this unofficial task of annotator and curator of the academic sessions of Agiati, Saibante also held the constitutional position of the treasurer between 1756 and 1758 (Bonazza, *Inventario*, 638).

⁷⁴ Agiati Academy, “Parte I,” 14-15.

⁷⁵ The inscription reads “Tornata quinta ai 30 Aprile 1752 Sotto il Reggimento di Madonna L'Agiatissimo Atalia,” or Fifth Session on 30 April 1752 Under the Regiment of Madonna L'Agiatissimo Atalia (Bianca Laura Saibante, *Prolusione alla tornata e anacreontica, 30 Aprile 1752*, 128.5, Box 21, *Attività scientifico-letteraria: manoscritti (1750-1987)*, Archivio Storico dell'Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, Rovereto, Italy).

2.2. *An academic's resume: admission policies and procedures*

2.2.1. *The Arcadia Academy*

In 1700, Crescimbeni made amendments to the original *Leges Arcadum*, which can be found in his 1712 *Storia dell'Accademia degli Arcadi istituita in Roma*. In altering the *Leges Arcadum*, Crescimbeni introduced new articles in the Arcadian constitution that applied specifically to women applicants.⁷⁶ If a woman had the ambition to embark into the public sphere, she could, from 1700 onwards, fulfil it by applying for a membership of the *Accademia dell'Arcadia* which would allow her, for the very first time, to become a licensed academic.⁷⁷ In Crescimbeni's *Storia*, we are presented with two requirements that both male and female candidates had to comply with upon admission. Firstly, Arcadia preferred its members to be a minimum age of twenty-four years old.⁷⁸ With this age requirement, Crescimbeni wanted to ensure that Arcadia "was not made into an antechamber of matrimonial negotiation."⁷⁹ That is, according to the standards of the time, this age group primarily included married women; wives, widows, female heads of household and, potentially, *salonnières*.⁸⁰ Secondly, the Academy expected its members to be civilised and to act in good manners.⁸¹

Following these two requirements, the *Storia* is continued with an article regarding the different intellectual experience that is required for male and female candidates. Whereas it was expected for men to be known for their erudition in at least one of the principal sciences, "rispetto alle dame, si richiede *di più*, che attualmente professino poesia" (with respect to the ladies, more is required, that they currently practice poetry).⁸² Asking women for more was, in reality, asking them for less because obtaining erudition, as was required from male applicants, was a far more complex endeavour for women than practicing the composition of poetry. At the time, poetry was considered "almost an obligation in social life," at least for women who had been fortunate enough to learn to read and write, a privilege often reserved for those belonging to the middle and upper classes.⁸³ Thus, from this article, we can infer, in the first place, that Arcadia expected its women applicants to have a certain social standing that afforded them access to a basic education allowing them to acquire the skill of poetic composition.⁸⁴ However, Crescimbeni's verb *professare* requires us to make a side note to this inference. That is, this nuanced

⁷⁶ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 107.

⁷⁷ Even though women were not yet admitted to the Arcadia Academy through a normative declaration, women were present. In fact, noblewoman Prudenza Gabrielli Capizucchi (1654-1709) and queen consort of Poland Marie Casimire d'Arquien (1674-1696) are considered to be the first 'unofficial' members of Arcadia as they were present in the academy in 1695 and 1699, respectively (*Ibid.*).

⁷⁸ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 13.

⁷⁹ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 108.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 13.

⁸² *Ibid.* 14. My emphasis.

⁸³ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 108.

⁸⁴ Dixon, "Forum," 372.

verb does not imply that women applicants had to *actively* exercise poetry or publish their texts.⁸⁵ Rather, this verb indicates that the reading and appreciation of poetry sufficed: a passive participation in the literary world was required of women rather than the active formation of it.⁸⁶ Thus, in theory, the profile of Arcadia's ideal woman applicant required her to be of such social standing that she had received the kind of education that enabled her to cultivate an appreciation for poetry, not necessarily an extraordinary skill for composition.

If these stated requirements were met, men and women could then apply for a membership to Arcadia, a procedure by which they could gain the title of *pastori* (shepherds) and *pastorelle* (shepherdesses), official members of the Arcadia Academy. The Academy had five official admission procedures that depended on the applicant, one of which “*si pratica colle dame*” (is applied to women), a mode of admission that was “more guarded than others.”⁸⁷ Through this method of admission, women were nominated before Arcadia's *Collegio*.⁸⁸ Upon this nomination, the individual members of the *Collegio*, the *colleghi*, were then expected to cast their vote secretly. The manner of secret balloting was instated, as explained by Crescimbeni, to avoid any prejudices.⁸⁹ Each academic year, six places were reserved for female candidates, four of which could be requested by the *Collegio* and two by the custodian.⁹⁰

2.2.2. *The Agiati Academy*

Whereas Arcadia defined its admission requirements and the related procedures based on whether the applicant was male or female, the *Costituzioni* of the Agiati Academy, drawn up half a century later, do not reveal such a distinction. In fact, throughout the entire document, not one mention of differences between male and female applicants is made. The seventh clause of the First Constitution, which specifically regards the governing of the Academy, states:

“Che all'Accademia non possa esser ascritto chi per anco non avrà compiuto il corso della Filosofia ... eccetto però quegli, che per Opere già pubblicate [sic], o per erudizione e scienza fosse già chiaro e noto; e salvo il caso, in cui il maggior utile e splendore dell'Accademia, a parere dell'Adunanza, altrimenti richiedesse.”⁹¹

(Those who have not yet completed a course in Philosophy may not be admitted to the Academy ... except, however, for those whose Works have already been published, or whose erudition and knowledge are already clear and well known; and except in those cases

⁸⁵ Graziosi, “Revisiting Arcadia,” 108.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 15; Dixon, “Forum,” 372.

⁸⁸ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 10.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 16.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 15.

⁹¹ Agiati Academy, “Parte I,” 13.

in which, in the opinion of the *Adunanza*, the greater usefulness and splendour of the Academy would require otherwise.)

The Agiati Academy, unlike the Arcadia Academy, thus held all its candidates to the same standards, regardless of their sex. However, the relevant standards, completing a course in Philosophy, being a published author or being known for one's erudition, implied a woman's presence in the public sphere and, in this respect, are of a similar nature to the one standard that was specifically required of male applicants to the Arcadia Academy. Women who aspired to be admitted to Agiati were thus expected, *before* their application, to have met higher standards than was required for an Arcadian membership, which, even in the 1750s, were still more difficult to achieve for women than for men.⁹²

Regardless of the high standards, a notable number of women succeeded to comply with the requirements and was admitted to the Agiati Academy in its early post-constitutional years, as will be illustrated in more detail further on (see 2.4.). In contrast to Arcadia, the Agiati Academy held fast to a single procedure by which applicants were admitted and, again, refrained from making a difference based on the applicant's sex. This single procedure is explained in the third clause of the Second Constitution:

“Se alcuno si insinuasse per entrare, dovrà Egli pure esaminare il Saggio dal Novello presentato in Compagnia de' due revisori annui; e trovandolo, buono, darà ordine al Segretario, che il nome di lui sia inserito nel Catalogo.”⁹³

(Should someone wish to enter, [the *Agiatissimo*] shall, in the company of the two annually elected *Revisori*, also examine the Essay submitted by this novice; and if [the *Agiatissimo*] is convinced of its merit, the *Segretario* shall be instructed to include the name of the novice in the Catalogue.)

Thus, in this clause, it is revealed that anyone who wishes to be admitted to Agiati is required to submit a “Saggio” for examination (Essay).⁹⁴ This Essay will then be assessed by the *Agiatissimo pro tempore* who will discuss it with the two annually chosen *Revisori* (Revisers).⁹⁵ If the *Agiatissimo* is pleased with the submitted Essay, the applicant will be added to the academic Catalogue by the *Segretario* and will officially become a member of the Agiati Academy.⁹⁶ Thus, whereas the decision to admit a member, male or female, to Arcadia was a privilege reserved for the all-male *Collegio*, applicants to Agiati could, in theory, also be admitted by a woman, as the final decision lay by default with the *Agiatissimo*, who could be of either sex.

⁹² Dixon, *Between the Real and the Ideal*, 105.

⁹³ Agiati Academy, “Parte I,” 15.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

2.3. Strategic admissions: a constitutional equality principle

2.3.1. The Arcadia Academy

Regardless of the differences in the admission requirements and protocols of Arcadia and Agiati, the constitutions of both Academies are nevertheless organised around one core principle, equality. In Crescimbeni's *Storia*, the concept of equality is emphasised and explained in the very first paragraph. The present Arcadia of 1712 is described as emerging from “une Conversazione letteraria in forma di repubblica democratica” (a literary *Conversazione* in the form of a democratic republic) which sought to avoid “ogni riguardo di preminenza e precedenza tra i personaggi che la dovevano formare” (any sense of pre-eminence and precedence among the persons who were to give shape to it).⁹⁷ Following his description of the five different modes of admission, Crescimbeni again emphasises this principle: “[b]enche varj sieno i suddetti modi d'aggregare, nondimeno gli Arcadi sono tutti eguali” (even though the above-mentioned modes of aggregation differ, the Arcadians are all equal).⁹⁸

Arcadia's foundational aim to carry out academic activity through an equality policy, was achieved by means of, in the words of literary historian Silvia Tatti, “un travestimento pastorale” (a pastoral disguise).⁹⁹ Indeed, as stated in Crescimbeni's *Storia*, it was decided from the very foundation of the Academy that all its members were to go “mascherati sotto la finzione de' Pastori dell'antica Arcadia” (masked under the guise of the Shepherds of ancient Arcadia), the direct inspiration of the Academy.¹⁰⁰ The pastoral disguise that was to ensure equality among the Arcadians was broad and even encompassed, among many other things, the very identity of the members. That is, social identities were concealed behind the mandatory “nome pastorale” (pastoral name) that each member was to go by.¹⁰¹ These academic pseudonyms consisted of two parts: the first one was given to the member by the Arcadian officials who drew it by lots while the second one was a personal choice which had to refer to a place, preferably in Ancient Arcadia but this was not mandatory.¹⁰² For instance, Bianca Laura Saibante was surnamed *Ismene* by the officials, referring to the sister of the Grecian mythological figure Antigone, and she chose to supplement it with *Ripense*, referring to Noricum Ripense, a province of the Roman Empire that bordered the Tyrol region.¹⁰³ Indeed, the figure below, which shows an extract from the Arcadian *Catalogo* kept by custodian Michele Morei, confirms Saibante's 1752 enrolment at the Arcadia Academy as well as her pseudonym:

⁹⁷ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 5.

⁹⁸ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 16.

⁹⁹ Silvia Tatti, “I *Giocchi olimpici* in Arcadia,” in *Atti e Memorie dell'Arcadia* (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2012), 72.

¹⁰⁰ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 5.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 14.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 14.

¹⁰³ The second part of Saibante's pseudonym is commonly mistaken by scholars for ‘Dipense’. This is, in part, due to the incorrect recording of the pseudonym in the *Donne in Arcadia (1690-1800)*-database.



Figure 4, official registration of Saibante to the Arcadia Academy under the pseudonym Ismene Ripense, supplemented with catalogue number 1460.¹⁰⁴

The equality principle that Arcadia had instated as part of its constitution by which all members, including women, were, in theory, to be on an equal footing, was implemented as a means to accomplish the principal purpose of the Academy: “risvegliare in buona parte d’Italia il buon gusto nelle lettere umane, ed in particolare nella Poesia Volgare” (to rekindle in the greater part of Italy the good taste in the humanities, and in particular in Vernacular Poetry).¹⁰⁵ The *buon gusto* that Crescimbeni aimed to reawaken in Italy was Renaissance classicism, to which will be returned in great detail in the following chapter. This style had been completely obliterated by the Baroque that dominated the humanities from the late sixteenth century onwards. Women were considered to be closely associated with the decadence of the Baroque style, in terms of inspiring, writing and consuming it.¹⁰⁶ Thus, if the Arcadia Academy was to significantly reform the current taste of the public, it had to acknowledge women’s increasing influence in the arts and take on the pedagogical responsibility of educating and supporting women in the development of the classicist style which, simultaneously, meant formally including and welcoming them into the public sphere.¹⁰⁷ The broad admission of women as students of the classicist style, and thus as practitioners of literary-cultural reform, ensured that, as early as 1712, Crescimbeni could proudly state that the Arcadian movement had successfully spread beyond the Roman headquarters, in the form of at least forty colonies (branch academies) that were scattered across the peninsula, and exerted a dominant influence on the intellectual development of the Italian *primo Settecento*.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ The inscription reads “1460, Ismene Ripense, Bianca Laura Saibante di Rovereto” (1460, Ismene Ripense, Bianca Laura Saibante from Rovereto). *Cataloghi degli Arcadi 4* (Biblioteca Angelica, Archivio dell’Arcadia).

¹⁰⁵ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Dixon, *Between the Real and the Ideal*, 105. Italian women that became famous for their Baroque style were, for instance, Margherita Costa (c. 1600-1657) in literature and Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653) and Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677) in the visual arts.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 5.

2.3.2. *The Agiati Academy*

By the 1750s, the pastoral programme and pioneering equality principle of Arcadia had become a distinctive characteristic of the Academy and even managed to reach the further corners of the peninsula, stretching even beyond “i monti” to Tyrol’s Italian areas (the mountains).¹⁰⁹ In fact, during the foundational meeting of the Agiati Academy, the founding circle made a decision for the policy of their Academy that is strikingly similar to the Arcadian equality principle.¹¹⁰ That is, it was decided that other members were to be admitted to the Academy and that for each of these members “un nome accademico” (an academic name) would be chosen with the purpose of “evitare così le differenze dei casati eguagliando le condizioni differenti delle persone” (avoiding the differences of lineages and equalise the different conditions of the persons).¹¹¹

The *Costituzioni* of Agiati indicate that the procedure by which the members came by their proper academic names was slightly less elaborate than was the case for Arcadia. In the Fourth Constitution, which regards aggregation, it is stated that, once the candidate is approved for admission by the *Agiatissimo pro tempore* and the two *Revisori*, the *Agiatissimo* will instruct the *Segretario* to send the novice “il Diploma, e ‘l nome, che dall’Accademia gli sarà posto” (the Diploma, and the name, which will be assigned to him by the Academy).¹¹² The documents do not elaborate further on the procedure, but as far as can be inferred, the pseudonyms were thus given to the candidate rather than being a personal choice. Instead of Grecian figures and place names, the Agiati pseudonyms were anagrams of the personal names of the members yet were, nevertheless, intended to retain “un sapore pastorale” (a pastoral feel).¹¹³ For instance, as can be inferred from the figure below, Saibante became *Atalia Sabina Canburi*:

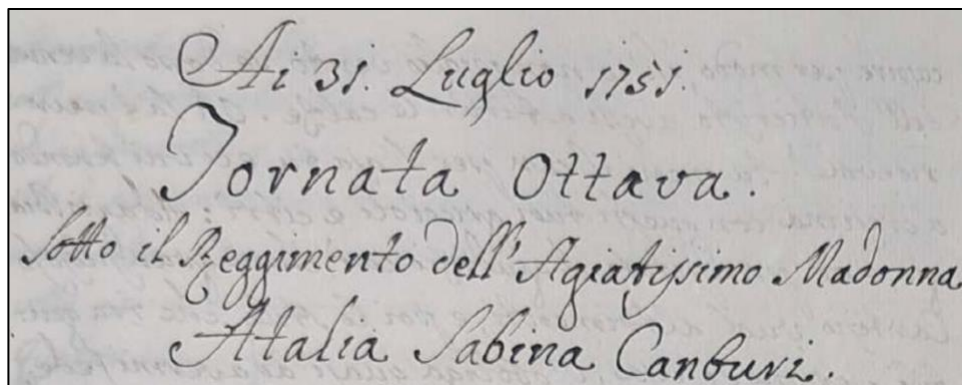


Figure 5, manuscript with inscription of Saibante’s Agiati pseudonym, *Atalia Sabina Canburi*.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 5; Levy, *Governance and Grievance*, 5.

¹¹⁰ Agiati Academy, “Parte I,” 12.

¹¹¹ Agiati Academy, “Parte II,” 164.

¹¹² Agiati Academy, “Parte I,” 15.

¹¹³ Marcello Bonazza, *L’Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati* (Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, 1998), 10.

¹¹⁴ The inscription reads “Ai 31 Luglio 1751, Tornata Ottava. Sotto il Reggimento dell’Agiatissimo Madonna Atalia Sabina Canburi” (On 31 July 1751, Eighth Session. Under the Regiment of Agiatissimo Madonna Atalia

Following the first six decades of its establishment, Arcadia had not only made the equality principle and its pastoral disguise known across Italy's broader network of academies, but, by this time, the Academy had also demonstrated the considerable benefits of the application of such a principle.¹¹⁵ The Arcadia Academy had, through this policy, accepted women as members by means of relatively limited admission requirements through which the institution was able to reach and influence an audience that was crucial to the literary reform that it had initially envisaged. In a similar vein, the Agiati Academy intersected the application of a pastoral equality principle with the admission of women to obtain its own objectives.

One of Agiati's aims was to promote, or at least retain, the *italianità* of Rovereto as it was "now separated from beautiful Italy" by Habsburg policy.¹¹⁶ Another academic aim was to further enhance the prosperity and cultural prestige of Rovereto.¹¹⁷ By virtue of its equality principle, highly characteristic of the Arcadia Academy that envisaged a reform by returning to Renaissance forms of vernacular poetry, Agiati was able to accept a number of women who were native to different parts of the Italian peninsula and brought with them their regional heritage, thereby contributing to the Italian spirit of the Academy. In addition, by supplementing this principle with higher admission requirements that demanded a broader intellectual background, Agiati's group of Italian women included those who were most prominent and acclaimed at the time and, uncoincidentally, members of Arcadia. In doing so, Agiati enhanced not only the prestige of its own institution, but also of the town in which it was situated.¹¹⁸

2.4. The (un)registered: the profile of Arcadian and Agiati women

2.4.1. The Arcadia Academy

Even though Crescimbeni did not alter the Latin *Leges Arcadum* to include articles on female membership until 1700, Arcadia was, unofficially, frequented by women from the very first years of the Academy. Often considered as the earliest female associate of Arcadia and as precursor to the first official women members of the Academy is the Italian Countess Prudenza Gabrielli Capizucchi (1654-1709).¹¹⁹ From 1695 onwards, Countess Capizucchi was known among the Arcadians as Elettra Citeria.¹²⁰ Even though at the time of her early association with Arcadia, the Academy was still governed

Sabina Canburi). Bianca Laura Saibante, *Prolusione alla tornata con novella e sonetto*, 31 July 1751, 127.8, Box 21, Attività scientifico-letteraria: manoscritti (1750-1987), Archivio Storico dell'Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, Rovereto, Italy.

¹¹⁵ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 113.

¹¹⁶ Giuseppe Valeriano Vannetti cited in Levy, *Governance and Grievance*, 38.

¹¹⁷ Levy, *Governance and Grievance*, 3.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 112. For more information on Countess Capizucchi, see Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni, *Notizie Istoriche degli Arcadi Morto. Tomo Terzo* (Antonio de Rossi, 1721), 14-17.

¹²⁰ Crescimbeni, *Notizie Istoriche*, 15, 8.

according to the *Leges Arcadum*, the profile of Countess Capizucchi met the requirements that Crescimbeni would lay out in the 1700 constitution. To begin with, the countess had the social standing that enabled her to receive the sort of education that led to an interest in poetry and even a skill in writing poems. Moreover, Countess Capizucchi was also a *salonnière*, hosting a weekly, much-attended literary *Conversazione* at her palace in Rome.¹²¹ In addition, the countess was also married and forty-five years old upon her entrance, well beyond Crescimbeni's minimum age of twenty-four. With this profile, Countess Capizucchi provided Arcadia with a role model to which the first official generation of women Arcadians was to aspire. Belonging to this first generation are marchioness Petronilla Paolini Massimi (1663-1726) and Faustina Maratti (ca. 1679-1745), to whom will be returned in the following chapter.

Granting Countess Capizucchi an association to Arcadia was also a strategic move that considerably benefited the Academy, strongly resembling the equality principle that would be introduced in 1700. That is, in the first decade following its foundation, the Academy did not yet have an official protector or a secure meeting place, two essential elements that the Countess could provide.¹²² As explained by Elisabetta Graziosi and confirmed by Crescimbeni, Countess Capizucchi was a host and organiser for Arcadia who "carried out low-level patronage" in the halls of her palatial residence in Rome.¹²³ Thus, even though the original laws of Arcadia did not include a policy for female membership, women were nevertheless important links in administrative and governmental matters, providing not only protection but also "the centers, halfway between academy and salon, by means of which the female presence in the central and peripheral Arcadias was multiplied."¹²⁴ The sponsorship and logistic support of local Roman women of high standing indeed ensured that the Arcadia Academy could expand further and, as of 1700, could attract and admit larger numbers of women through the official acceptance policy. Indeed, as researched by Susan Dixon, during Crescimbeni's custodianship between 1690 and 1728, seventy-four women became official members of Arcadia.¹²⁵ This group of women accounts for slightly less than three per cent of the Academy's total admissions in this period, a high number considering that women could not follow official admission procedures of Italian academies before the foundation of Arcadia and were given, at most, an honorary status.¹²⁶

2.4.2. *The Agiati Academy*

While the original Arcadian Laws prevented women from becoming official members, during Agiati's early post-constitutional years, an interesting group of eleven women followed the admission procedure

¹²¹ According to Graziosi, Countess Capizucchi's *Conversazione* was attended by at least two of the Arcadian founders, Giovan Battista Zappi and Vincenzo Leoni ("Revisiting Arcadia," 112).

¹²² Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 112.

¹²³ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 113; Crescimbeni, *Notizie Istoriche*, 14-17.

¹²⁴ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 112.

¹²⁵ Dixon, *Between the Real and the Ideal*, 105.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

and successfully obtained their membership statuses. The first woman member of Agiati was admitted during the foundational meeting of 27 December 1750. This member was, unsurprisingly, the Academy's co-founder Bianca Laura Saibante. In the Catalogue, Saibante is listed as Agiati's fifth member, following other co-founders.¹²⁷ As can be inferred from the left-hand side of the table below, seven women were admitted to Agiati during the first academic year, including, successively, Camilla Solar d'Astri Fenaroli, Diamante Medaglia Faini, Isabella Pignone del Carretto, Livia Accarigi, Maria Maddalena Morelli Fernandez, Cristina Roccati and Giulia Baitelli. During the following academic year, two other women members were admitted, namely Laura Maria Bassi Veratti and Luisa Bergalli Gozzi, respectively. For the third academic year, only one female member is noted down, Maria Maddalena Trotti Bevilacqua. After her 1753 admission, the acceptance of women to Agiati slowed down. In fact, the catalogue does not reveal another female member until the acceptance of Elena Teresa Belli in 1758. Over the next three decades, Agiati would admit only eight other women as members, the same number as during the first academic year. These members were, successively, Giovanna Marcello-Rigo (1759), Gioseffa Naturani (1760), Catterina Gualtieri-Loschi (1766), Francesca Roberti Franco (1773), Catterina de Candi (1773), Anna Vettori de Paltrinieri (1778), Elisabetta Caminer-Turra (1779) and Paolina Secco Suardi Grismondi (1782).¹²⁸

Academic member		In Agiati	Catalogue	Year of admission	In Arcadia	Catalogue	Year of admission
1	Accarigi, Livia. Siense extemporaneous poet (1719-1786)	<i>Argivi</i>	73	1751	<i>Delinda Calcidica</i>	770	1743-51
2	Baitelli, Giulia. Brescian classicist and scholar (1706-1768)	<i>Atilia</i>	96	1751			
3	Bassi Veratti, Laura Maria. Bolognese physicist and professor (1711-1778)	<i>Urasia</i>	121	1752	<i>Laurinda Olimpiche</i>	TBD	1728-43
4	Bergalli Gozzi, Luisa. Venetian poet and translator (1703-1779)	<i>Elisia</i>	147	1752	<i>Irminda Partenide</i>	246	1725
5	Morelli Fernandez, Maria Maddalena. Florentine improviser and extemporaneous poet (1727-1800)	<i>Damerilla</i>	74	1751	<i>Corilla Olimpica</i>	482	1747
6	Medaglia Faini, Diamanta. Brescian poet and scientist (1724-1770)	<i>Dalinda</i>	65	1751	<i>Nisea Corcirese</i>	1955	1757
7	Pignone del Carretto, Isabella. Neapolitan duchess, salonnière and poet (TBD-TBD)	<i>Genoalba</i>	70	1751	<i>Belisa Larissea</i>	TBD	1738
8	Roccati, Cristina. Venetian poet, physicist and university graduate (1732-1797)	<i>Artisia</i>	75	1751	<i>Aganice Aretusiana</i>	152	1743-51
9	Saibante, Bianca Laura. Roveretan poet, salonnière and academy founder (1723-1797)	<i>Atalia</i>	5	1750	<i>Ismene Ripense</i>	1460	1752
10	Solar d'Astri Fenaroli, Camilla. Brescian poet, salonnière, physicist and scholar (1711-1769)	<i>Clarina</i>	64	1751	<i>Bersinda Aliense</i>	350	1743-51
11	Trotti Bevilacqua, Maria Maddalena. Ferrarese marchioness and poet (1719-1783)	<i>Ersilia</i>	204	1753	<i>Climene Teutonia</i>	580	1743-53

Table 1, schematic overview of women admitted to the Agiati Academy during its early foundational years, supplemented with the details of their Arcadian membership.

As already hinted at, the group of women admitted during the first three active years of the Agiati Academy, indeed fit the highly demanding intellectual profile of an ideal Agiati member, as described in the admission policy of the academic constitution. For instance, though largely forgotten today, two

¹²⁷ Agiati Academy, "Parte III," 284-286.

¹²⁸ For more clarification on the profiles of the women who joined the Agiati Academy, see Appendix A. Biographies of the Agiati Women.

close friends from the Brescia region Giulia Baitelli and Camila Solar d'Astri Fenaroli were well-known and respected figures in their day. Baitelli, before her 1751 admission to the Agiati Academy, published works of poetry and prose, and gained renown in the Brescian intellectual circles.¹²⁹ Baitelli was praised for her erudition by the scholars of the University of Padova, especially by the esteemed philosophy professors Domenico Lazzarini (1668-1734) and Giovanni Antonio Volpi (1686-1766) who encouraged her to further her literary, linguistic and scientific studies.¹³⁰ In addition, Baitelli corresponded with renowned local and foreign scholars who relied on her knowledge of Greek for their own interpretations of classical texts: "Era già dalla fama conosciuta per donna erudita, quindi non è meraviglia se alcuni illustri scrittori, come il canonico Gagliardi, la consultasse sopra la interpretazione di alcuni passi difficili de' santi Padri Greci" (She was already renowned as an erudite woman, so it is no wonder that some distinguished writers, such as Canon Gagliardi, consulted her on the interpretation of certain difficult passages from the Greek Church Fathers).¹³¹

Women like Baitelli, who had already made an appearance on the Italian literary scene through publications and were, as a result, known and acclaimed for their intellectuality, were thus welcomed at the Agiati Academy. However, similar to the strategic admission of Countess Capizucchi and Arcadia's broader acceptance of women after the implementation of the 1700 equality principle, Agiati's choice of women applicants indeed reveals two underlying motives: Italian descent could help retain and promote the *Italianità* of Rovereto while intellectual fame could simultaneously enhance the cultural prestige of the remote town. Another element of Italian prestige that most of these women could cite as part of their application to Agiati was their membership to the esteemed and influential Arcadia Academy. As can be inferred from the right-hand side of the table above, the vast majority of the early post-constitutional Agiati members (eight out of eleven, to be exact) were admitted to Arcadia *before* they were admitted to Agiati, namely academic members 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 10 and 11.¹³²

¹²⁹ Agiati Academy, "Parte III," 336. One of Baitelli's epistles, "Epistola ad Antonium Vulpium," was published in 1742 in a collection of Latin poems by Antonio Volpi *Joannis Antonii Vulpii carminum libri quinque* (J. Cominus, 1742). In addition, two of Baitelli's sonnets were published in 1746 in the collection *Componimenti detti in una letteraria adunanza nel nuovo tempio de' p.p. di s. Filippo Neri della congregazione di Brescia* (Giammaria Rizzardi, 1746). Baitelli published other poems before and after her admission to Agiati in 1751. The praise that she received before her admission grew even further in the final two decades of her life. In 1785, a correspondent of Baitelli, the Brescian poet and historian Antonio Brognoli (1723-1807), dedicated a eulogy to her and a co-member of the Agiati Academy Camila Fenaroli. Brognoli calls out the mistreatment that Italian women intellectuals had to endure and encourages them to continue their studies (see "Elogio della nobile Signora Giulia Baitelli. 1768. E della nobile Signora Camilla Solar d'Asti Fenaroli. 1769." in *Elogio di Bresciani per dottrina eccellenti del secolo XVIII* (Vescovi, 1785), 170-214).

¹³⁰ Agiati Academy, "Parte III," 336.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² The exact years in which academic members 1, 8, 10 and 11 were accepted to Arcadia remain unresolved to date. As explained to me by the archivist of the Arcadia Academy, Sarah Malfatti, these eight women all became members of Arcadia between 1743 and 1766, the period corresponding with Michele Morei's custodianship of the Academy: "durante il custodiato di Morei (1743-1766, appunto) nei cataloghi non veniva specificata la data esatta dell'annoverazione, ma solo il nome del nuovo membro" (during Morei's custodianship (1743-1766, to be precise),

2.5. Conclusion

Through a comparative analysis of the constitutions and member catalogues of the Arcadia and Agiati Academies, this first chapter aimed to provide new insights into the changing presence of women in academic constitutions over the course of the Italian *primo Settecento*. In a first of four steps, central focus was given to examining the positions of authority and the supporting administrative forces that the academic constitutions allowed for. Even though the authoritative and administrative positions of the Arcadia and Agiati Academies are of a similar nature and have corresponding responsibilities, this chapter nevertheless uncovered an evolution from Arcadia's male-dominated management to Agiati's more progressive interpretation that allowed for even the highest position of authority to be filled by either a man or a woman, an *Agiatissimo Messer* or an *Agiatissimo Madonna*. Following this, the thesis brought focus to the admission policies and procedures that the academic governments established for aspiring academics. Whereas the Arcadia Academy amended its original laws with specific articles on women's admission, the Agiati Academy refrained from doing so. As Agiati did not differentiate between the sexes, its high intellectual standards equally applied to both men and women.

Despite Arcadia's seemingly divisive admission policy and procedure, the Academy gained renown in the Republic of Letters for its constitutional article stipulating the equality of all its members, which it sought to implement through a pastoral disguise. By taking a closer look at this pastoral equality principle and its broader influence, the third step of this chapter revealed that the Agiati Academy adopted this article in virtually unchanged form. It became clear, however, that the admission of women through this pastoral equality principle had strategic, underlying motives that served the foundational aims of both Academies. While the Arcadia Academy perceived women as a fundamental link in supporting and spreading their literary reform programme, Agiati saw similar benefits in women's admission, aiming for an increased Italian spirit and cultural prestige in the town of Rovereto. Indeed, as analysed in the fourth and final step of this chapter, the member catalogues of Arcadia and Agiati reveal that the profiles of the first female partners and members carefully aligned with the founding principles of both academies.

the catalogues did not specify the exact date of admission, but only the name of the new member, Sarah Malfatti, E-mail to author, April 7, 2025). Since Morei's membership catalogues indeed do not contain exact years, one option could be to try to trace the admission years of these four women using the minutes of Arcadia. However, as Sarah Malfatti also explained, with this approach "non abbiamo molta fortuna perché nei verbali c'è una lacuna dal 1728 al luglio 1772" (we are not very fortunate because there is a gap in the minutes between 1728 and July 1772, Sarah Malfatti, E-mail to author, April 7, 2025). By relying on the recently added catalogue numbers of the members whose year of admission is confirmed in other sources, I was able to derive the results presented in Table 1: academic members 1, 8 and 10 were accepted to Arcadia between 1743 and 1751, and academic member 11 between 1743 and 1753. There are other, more rigorous ways to determine the exact admission years of these four women, but this requires more intensive archival research, which is not required for this thesis and would far exceed its scope.

3. The changing participation of women in academic life during Italy's *primo Settecento*

The previous chapter has outlined, in four steps, the changing presence of women in the constitutions of Italian academies during the first half of the eighteenth century. In the final step, a quantitative analysis revealed that women, both as unofficial partners and as certified members, were part of both the Arcadia and Agiati Academies from the very beginning. Yet, if we combine the constitutional sources with institutional anthologies and academic sessions, to what extent, then, did women *actually* participate in public, academic life, both as part of their informal association and through their certified membership to the Arcadia and Agiati Academies? Did successfully passing an official admission procedure mean that women also *actively* participated in the academic circles in question, or was their certified membership merely an honorary title that benefited the Academies more than women themselves? The first two steps of this chapter will outline the literary opportunities that women enjoyed at both the Arcadia and Agiati institutions, in terms of genre, subject and visibility. Then, in the following two steps, a qualitative analysis of the anthologies and academic sessions will add additional insights into the views that Arcadian and Agiati members held with regard to the opportunities that women were offered in the early eighteenth-century academic field.

3.1. *Limitations and freedoms: genres and subjects*

3.1.1. *The Arcadia Academy*

The equality principle that Arcadia had instated in 1700 as part of its amended constitution, in theory, applied to all those who joined the Academy, referring not only to class but also to gender. Idealistically, then, the *pastori* and *pastorelle* of Arcadia, the official male and female members, held an equal status within the democratic republic that the Academy aspired to create.¹³³ According to Crescimbeni, the differences in men's and women's admission requirements and procedures would not affect the envisaged equality between the academic members: "Benché vari sieno i suddetti modi d'aggregare, nondimeno gli Arcadi sono tutti eguali" (Even though the above-mentioned modes of aggregation differ, the Arcadians are all equal).¹³⁴ In practice, however, this equality principle applied more to the status of the members rather than to their academic opportunities. That is, the equality principle was not reflected in the literary compositions that the men and women of the Arcadia Academy could work on, revealing a traditional division in genre and subject based on contemporary propriety.¹³⁵

The attitude of the Arcadia Academy towards women, as observed by Susan Dixon, "was both egalitarian in recognizing their status as professional poets and traditional in its insistence on defining

¹³³ Crescimbeni, *Storia*, 5.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 16.

¹³⁵ Dixon, "Forum," 372.

typical feminine behavior.”¹³⁶ The traditional approach that Dixon describes predominantly refers to the limited literary genres and subjects that the Academy reserved for women.¹³⁷ According to Dixon, “simpler sentiments were reserved as poetic subjects for women, while literary exercises requiring reasoned opinion and strong emotion were the domain of men.”¹³⁸ Women were expected to compose short poetic forms like madrigals and, especially, Petrarchan sonnets on subjects that included romantic and maternal love and, even more prominently, the delicacy of nature.¹³⁹ Alternatively, women were also encouraged to praise famous or recently deceased (Arcadian) figures in these same poetic forms.¹⁴⁰ The male counterparts of the *pastorelle*, on the other hand, were given the opportunity to practise a broader range of literary genres, including various forms of prose as well as classical poetic styles, such as eclogues and anacreontic epigrams.¹⁴¹ Similar to the women members, the *pastori* were also encouraged to compose sonnets, Arcadia’s signature genre, but were invited to write on a much wider array of topics, such as the physical beauty and virtuous qualities of their female counterparts, passionate romantic love, recent political events, religious celebrations and, finally, archaeological, art historical and scientific cases.¹⁴² Even though the genres and subjects that the male and female members of Arcadia worked on were thus, for the most part, different, the *pastori* and the *pastorelle* were nevertheless equally expected to take inspiration from ancient Greek and Roman pastoral literature.¹⁴³ By the 1750s, the combination of classical and Renaissance genres with pastoral themes and references to Grecian and Roman mythology had become the signature literary style of the Arcadia Academy.¹⁴⁴

3.1.2. *The Agiati Academy*

At first glance, the 1750 constitution of the Agiati Academy, drawn up during the foundational meeting, provides a sharp contrast with the Arcadia Academy. As with its admission policy and procedure, the constitution of Agiati indicates that the Academy did not distinguish between male and female members in terms of genres and subjects. In fact, the Agiati constitution does not make many detailed stipulations as to proper genres or subjects in general. In the ninth article of the First Constitution, we find a general guideline that applies to the Agiati members and their activities during the *Tornate*, or institutional sessions, that took place nine times a year, on average:

“Che sia permesso a ciascuno di quella Colonna, cui tocca la volta del dire, recitare in prosa o in verso sopra qualunque materia letteraria, tanto nell’italiana favella, quanto nella

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* 373.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 373.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 373.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 373.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* 373.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 373.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 371.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 371.

Latino; compiuta la recita di quella Colonna, possa altresì chiunque volesse dell'altra produrre alcuna cosa, ma solamente in verso.”¹⁴⁵

(Each member of that *Colonna* who is called upon to speak may recite in prose or verse on any literary subject, in either Italian or Latin. Once that *Colonna* has finished reciting, anyone who wishes to do so may recite, but only in verse.)

According to this article, each present member, which could apply to both men and women, could be called upon to speak during the institutional sessions. Upon such occasion, the member in question could recite either in a prose or poetic genre. Once the first *Colonna*, groups into which the members were divided, had finished, members from the other *Colonna* were free to recite other verse compositions. Thus, from this article, we can infer that the Agiati members could work on any prose and poetic genre, but that the focus on poetry was slightly greater.

The chronological system set up by Saibante in her annotations and taken over by Bonazza for his inventory sheds light on the interpretation that the Agiati members gave to the relatively limited constitutional guidelines regarding poetic and prose genres. For the early post-constitutional years of the Academy, the chronological list includes a variety of poetic and prose forms, but two clearly stand out: the sonnet and the novella, two genres that find their origin in the Italian Renaissance. Two inferences can be made from Agiati's extensive use of these two forms of poetry and prose. In the first place, Agiati's focus on the sonnet confirms, once again, the dominant and far-reaching influence of the Arcadia Academy and its literary reform programme. That is, by the 1750s, at the time of Agiati's foundation, the revival of the Renaissance sonnet after the Baroque period had already become a defining characteristic of the Arcadia Academy.¹⁴⁶ Thus, by means of sonnet-writing, the Agiati Academy formed an association with Arcadia in order to share in the institution's high status.

In the second place, given Arcadia's successful implementation of reform through sonnet-writing, it is likely that Agiati saw parallel benefits in the novella, a genre that has a strikingly similar national origin and regard to the sonnet.¹⁴⁷ Similar to the sonnet, the growth of the genre of the novella during the early *Trecento*, as explained by literary historian Gloria Allaire, suitably met the “needs of a new linguistic culture.”¹⁴⁸ That is, in their origins, the sonnet and novella were prominently used by authors like Dante Alighieri, Francesco Petrarca and Giovanni Boccaccio to promote literature in (Tuscan) vernacular.¹⁴⁹ As students of classical and Italian literature, Saibante and the other co-founders would have recognised that the origins of these genres served the linguistic and cultural promotion of Rovereto as an Italian and

¹⁴⁵ “Parte I,” 13.

¹⁴⁶ Dixon, “Forum,” 371.

¹⁴⁷ Gloria Allaire, “Introduction,” in *The Italian Novella*, ed. Gloria Allaire (Routledge, 2003), 2.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

esteemed centre of literary production.¹⁵⁰ Thus, in addition to Arcadia's constitutional equality principle, the sonnet and novella similarly worked to bring the Agiati Academy an increased sense of *italianità* and cultural prestige through Arcadian association.

As with their ideas on genre, the Agiati Academy did not make a distinction with regard to the subjects that male and female members were allowed to work on. The general guidelines drawn up in the ninth article of the First Constitution, cited above, indicate that, in addition to freedom in genre, the Agiati members were also encouraged to work on "qualunque materia letteraria" (any literary subject).¹⁵¹ Saibante's chronological list indeed indicates that a wide variety of subjects was discussed during Agiati's *Tornate*. In addition, the list demonstrates that women wrote on subjects that Arcadia reserved for its male members, such as Saibante's text on "simbologia nella pittura" (symbolism in painting).¹⁵² Upon closer inspection, however, one thematic interest functions as a common thread throughout the list of academic sessions: pastorality, the concept that lies at the heart of the establishment of the Arcadia Academy and is strongly present in the institution's literary output. According to Saibante's list, this theme is particularly prominent in Agiati's poetic compositions. Figure 6 includes one of Saibante's many sonnets that are steeped in pastoral imagery. This sonnet is a representative example of the Agiati poems that take clear inspiration from the Arcadian literary programme, portraying a peaceful and idealised countryside and referring to figures from classical literature, such as Corydon, a traditional name for a shepherd in ancient Greek pastoral poems and fables.

Saibante's chronological list also indicates that the prose and poetic compositions of the Agiati members frequently responded to the prevalent cultural, social and political conditions of women. In this respect, Agiati's promotion of the novella is especially interesting. The text that is often considered as the "stylistic model *par excellence*" for the Italian novella, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, has also commonly been perceived as "the first major European feminist text" because of the critique of women's societal constraints.¹⁵³ Figure 7, a novella written by Saibante, presents us with an example in which the origins of the novella still strongly resonate. The novella is written in a humorous tone and intended to satirise eighteenth-century gender norms. It tells a story of how an aging noblewoman, Sofia, reclaims dignity and status by disregarding contemporary standards that tend to connect a woman's young age and beauty to her overall worth. Following an interaction with a younger gentleman, Conrado, Sofia decides to wilfully embrace a male-coded identity.

¹⁵⁰ Agiati Academy, "Parte III," 284.

¹⁵¹ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 13.

¹⁵² Bianca Laura Saibante, *Ragionamento sulla simbologia nella pittura*, 27 August 1752, 128.9, Box 21, *Attività scientifico-letteraria: manoscritti (1750-1987)*, Archivio Storico dell'Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, Rovereto, Italy.

¹⁵³ Allaire, *The Italian Novella*, 3.

Della Medesima.
Sonetto.

In questi boschi, Caridon, vedrai,
Volare i capri miei dal pino al faggio;
E in sul colle aver del sole i rai,
Là ve la greggia suol guidar l'eraggio;
E a noi Flora ne' giorni lieti e gai
D'erbe privo, e di fior aduarsi Maggio,
E ogni tinta pe' campi in sola omai,
Senza temer de' Fauni alcun oltraggio;
E vedrai senza pesci il mare; e l'Rio
Preispitar non più dal monte al gorato,
E co' lupi scherzar l'armento mio;
E annunziar la cornice amico fatto
Pria ch'io su la mia cetra unque più torni
Di te a cantar in questi almi voggjorni.

Figure 6, manuscript of a pastoral sonnet recited by Saibante (Atalia) during Agiati's academic session of 31 July 1751, over which she presided as Agiatissimo Madonna.¹⁵⁴

la bella cosa che la dee essere fiamma, meseri, che
la merchia, mettia da disciogliere, e perciò il nostro
colloquio di Mel per la strada del palazzo della ragione
a vendicare ogni reo, e ha per veniero sbarcozzato,
ed io stessa meo buona. Ma io m'arveglio, ch'io dico
troppo lungo, ed ho trascurato di que, che sanno che
non è sì bella canzone, che non invecchi; perciò a
questa mia senza capo fare, che vuol sia una lun-
ga coda, che merita di una novellotta, or ora alla-
mente venutami, senza narro io la appiccico.

Novella.

Quasi anni non sono passati, che in una di quelle
Città della Germania, ove più è usata cirimonie,
colle donne religiosamente si costuma esser
che rispetto non fatti pe' ambuoy, vivea una gentil
donna nominata Otia, ricca, ed accostumata di molti,
ma bene avanti negli anni, come la rugosa fronte
e le scarse chiome, coserte di neve, ad evidenza
la dimostravano. La quale conosciuochè vedova, non
semplice, e senza figliuoli rimasta sola, e dal
marito, dell'amore di cui sempre bene fu, ed ogni
sua scelta lasciata erede vedgendosi, spesse volte
stendeva di darsi buon tempo grande, e questa vi-
ta menando, ora nella propria casa deati donne,
e Cavalieri accogliendo, e quando con sciamòvole
amistade queste nelle case loro visitando, seio si
strattenora a giuoco, che per essa era il maggio-
diverimento, che sear se sapete, impensochè avveniva
il suo della volte, che dalla buona fortuna molto fa-
vorita era. Stando pertanto, che tenendo sotto un gior-
no l'invito d'una sua parente, anno la quale buon num-
mero di Cavalieri e Donne di bella Città che forestieri
venuti, fu dalla Padrona di Casa posta a tavola con
un gentiluomo detto per nome, Conrado, alui giovane,
ma altrettanto avveduto, di nazione Italiano. Il
perchè con lui lungamente quacando come che di sua
na somma di danajo la cosa di una parte di ago
non per questo dal costume del due e incoraggiato, che
gli uomini dalle Donne oncano, torca il cielo, che nul-
la in accocchia giammai ponessero, dava molto spacio
beato all'umore, anzi suoi gaja che mai non mostrava,
che a veduta così rugosa, passava la Marfisa in figura
Quindi Conrado il vinuto, mentre fra se la vince-
rà dello spirito, coll'antichità del volto, esaminando
già, che che in cuor si sentisse, Mel, or Domoneo nel
dica. Ma alla per fine giunti, all'ultimo questo Con-
rado quasi estuso di starsi più con lei, tutta la vinta
somma tirato a se la prese, in accocchia, ed accomi-
tato, e gentilmente via andonne. Otia intanto,
cui quella usanza non garbava, strattasi in di parte
inominato di dar foco alla bombardia, torse voltan-
do la punta a Conrado, e dicendo, ch'egli non sapia
cia di creantia, che colle Donne sue, suoi non se-
vuol far di queste, e che tanti capelli già non presi
pava se in testa avere, quanto fiato veniale di
avere.

Figure 7, manuscript of a novella written by Saibante (Atalia) for Agiati's academic session of 31 July 1751, over which she presided as Agiatissimo Madonna.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Bianca Laura Saibante, *Prolusione alla tornata con novella e sonetto, 31 July 1751, 127.8, Box 21, Attività scientifico-letteraria: manoscritti (1750-1987), Archivio Storico dell'Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, Rovereto, Italy.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

3.2. Public visibility: the institutional representation of women

3.2.1. The Arcadia Academy

Whereas the Arcadia Academy imposed tight restrictions on women's literary opportunities in terms of appropriate genre and subject, the constitution of the Agiati Academy seemingly provided its members, both male and female, with greater freedom of choice in these two areas. This marked contrast highlighted in the previous section can be expanded to include the degree of 'institutional representation' that women were offered at these two Academies. That is, building on Susan Dixon's framework, the inclusion of women in the institutional activities of both Academies, which inevitably took place in the public sphere.¹⁵⁶ In the case of Arcadia, this focus on institutional representation concerns women's presence in promotional publications, and in the case of Agiati, women's contributions to academic sessions. These two options, publishing literary work and speaking from recognised centres of intellectual exchange, as explained by historians Paula Findlen and Rebecca Messbarger, were increasingly exercised by women during the *primo Settecento*.¹⁵⁷ Thus, in the first place, we can question whether the Arcadian restrictions on literary genres and subjects was reflected in the degree of institutional representation of Arcadian women, and whether greater freedom of choice then implied a stronger representation of Agiati women. In the second place, we can question to what extent the degree of institutional representation of women, either in publications or academic sessions, contributed to the underlying motives of their admissions.

In answering these questions with regard to the Arcadia Academy, it is useful to return to Dixon's statement cited above. In terms of literary genre and subject, the Arcadia Academy indeed held fast to a more "traditional" attitude towards women, limiting them to pastoral-infused sonnets and madrigals on conventional 'feminine' subjects.¹⁵⁸ However, as observed by Dixon, the Arcadia Academy also took an "egalitarian" position on women.¹⁵⁹ This approach is reflected, in the first place, in the admission policy and procedure that enabled women to become official members. In the second place, Arcadia's egalitarianism is mirrored in the strong representation of the *pastorelle* in Arcadia's institutional anthologies of poetic compositions.¹⁶⁰ These anthologies, known as the *Rime degli Arcadi*, were published in fourteen volumes between 1716 and 1781. According to Dixon, who conducted broader quantitative research, women account for eight per cent of the poems in the nine anthologies that were published during Arcadia's first term, corresponding with Crescimbeni's custodianship between 1690

¹⁵⁶ Dixon, "Forum," 371-390.

¹⁵⁷ Findlen and Messbarger, *The Contest for Knowledge*, 18.

¹⁵⁸ Dixon, "Forum," 372.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

and 1728.¹⁶¹ That is, out of the 237 contributors, twenty were women.¹⁶² As concluded by Dixon, these twenty women represent twenty-seven per cent of the female membership of Arcadia, which means that over a quarter of the women members of the Academy were, in fact, published authors.¹⁶³

Countess Capizucchi, or more specifically Elettra Citeria, the precursor to the first generation of official Arcadian women members, is also recorded in these anthologies. In the third edition of the *Rime*, published in 1716, as many as twenty-seven of her poetic works were included.¹⁶⁴ The countess' important position in this volume of the *Rime* further illuminates the Academy's strategic association to local noblewomen as well as the underlying motives of Arcadia's equality principle, instated more than a decade before the publication of this anthology. That is, these institutional anthologies were known to be one of Arcadia's most important "self-promoting publications."¹⁶⁵ Emphasising the name and poetic works of a high-standing Roman countess in an institutional publication worked to increase the social standing of the Academy. Furthermore, the wide range of poetic works by the countess included in this anthology stressed that women who followed the ideal example of the Arcadian woman poet, as embodied by the countess, could be rewarded with equally broad representation in these distinguished institutional publications.¹⁶⁶ Thus, the inclusion of the countess worked to promote not only the prestige of the Academy, but also to underline the "explicitly exemplary" disposition that Arcadia expected of its women members, characterised by ideal "female comportment."¹⁶⁷

3.2.2. *The Agiati Academy*

Thus, even though the Arcadian *pastorelle* that were admitted during Crescimbeni's guardianship were limited in terms of their literary freedom, they nevertheless enjoyed a strong representation in the series of highly important institutional publications of the Arcadia Academy, an opportunity that reinforced their image as professional poets while simultaneously protecting and underlining their virtuous qualities. Did the group of eleven Agiati women enjoy a similar degree of institutional representation during the early post-constitutional years of the Academy? To begin with, it should be recalled that the Agiati Academy did not publish institutional anthologies that are of a similar nature to the *Rime degli Arcadi*. Rather, the Agiati Academy placed great emphasis on preserving and indexing the literary compositions that were written and recited on the occasion of the *Tornate*. Indeed, in the tenth article of the First Constitution, we read that:

¹⁶¹ Dixon, "Forum," 372.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ "Elettra Citeria," in *Rime degli Arcadi. Tomo Terzo*, ed. Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni (Antonio Rossi, 1716), 107-122. It should be emphasised that at the time of the publication of this volume in 1716, the countess had already passed away.

¹⁶⁵ Dixon, "Forum," 372.

¹⁶⁶ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 112.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

“Che ciascuno degli Accademici sia tenuto di consegnare i suoi componimenti recitati di mese in mese al Segretario, o subito dopo l’Accademia, o alla più lunga dentro lo spazio di otto giorni.”¹⁶⁸

(Each member of the Academy is required to submit their recited compositions to the *Segretario* on a monthly basis, either immediately after the Academic meeting or within the space of eight days at the latest.)

The recited compositions that were given to the *Segretario* of the Agiati Academy were then carefully placed in the academic archive, an initiative that would become even more important over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁶⁹ However, as a precaution, Saibante took it upon herself to write down and annotate the readings of the same literary-scientific texts that were recited during the academic *Tornate* during the early post-constitutional years of the Agiati Academy.¹⁷⁰ Of the eleven women admitted to Agiati between 1750 and 1756, for how many of them can we find evidence that they recited compositions during the institutional sessions?

Academic member		Academic year 1	Academic year 2	Academic year 3	Academic year 4	Academic year 5	Academic year 6	Total
1	Accarigi, Livia							
2	Baitelli, Giulia							
3	Bassi Veratti, Laura Maria							
4	Bergalli Gozzi, Luisa					1		1
5	Morelli Fernandez, Maria Maddalena							
6	Medaglia Faini, Diamante			2				2
7	Pignone del Carretto, Isabella							
8	Roccati, Cristina							
9	Saibante Vannetti, Bianca Laura	9	7	9	10	6	6	47
10	Solar d'Astri Fenaroli, Camilla			1		2		3
11	Trotti Bevilacqua, Maria Maddalena							

Table 2, schematic overview of contributions by women during the academic sessions of the Agiati Academy between 1750 and 1756.

Based on the table above, we can draw several inferences. The table demonstrates that four out of eleven women contributed literary compositions to the institutional sessions of Agiati during the Academy’s

¹⁶⁸ Agiati Academy, “Parte I,” 13.

¹⁶⁹ Bonazza, *Inventario*, XXIII.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 38.

early post-constitutional years. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the table reveals Bianca Laura Saibante to have been the most active female contributor to Agiati's academic sessions, reciting at least forty-seven literary compositions during the sessions held over the course of six full academic years.¹⁷¹ Also a contributor to the academic sessions was Luisa Bergalli Gozzi, who was invited, along with twenty-three other members, to compose a poem for the "Tornata straordinaria tenuta in onore di S.M. l'Imperatrice Maria Teresa" held on 17 March 1754 (Extraordinary Session held in honour of Her Majesty the Empress Maria Theresa).¹⁷² The table also reveals contributions made by two Brescian poets, Camilla Solar d'Astri Fenaroli, who presented at least three poems during the third and fifth academic years, and Diamante Medaglia Faini, who wrote two sonnets for the Agiati session of 30 June 1753.¹⁷³

Thus, as far as the records show, the academic sessions of the Agiati Academy were not particularly marked by the voices of the highly esteemed female members who were admitted between 1750 and 1756, with the exception of the co-founder of the Academy. Two reasons can be suggested. First, it should be recalled that the Agiati Academy is located in Rovereto, in the far north of present-day Italy. During the 1750s, as explained by Elisabetta Graziosi and Ricciarda Ricorda, Italian women had few opportunities to travel.¹⁷⁴ It would thus have been more difficult for members based in more distant regions, like Emilia Romagna (3), Tuscany (1, 5, 11) or even Campania (7), to attend academic sessions in Rovereto, explaining the slightly higher attendance of the Brescian and Venetian members (4, 6, 10). It should also be noted that prospective members did not need to be physically present in Rovereto to follow the membership procedure of the Agiati Academy, which was done by two-way correspondence. Second, while it is remarkable that Agiati recruited ten of the most highly acclaimed Italian women within the first few years of its foundation, it should not be forgotten that Agiati was a newly established institution that had not yet acquired the prestige of Academies that had existed for several decades or even centuries, like the *Accademia della Crusca* (1583). In addition, the women that became members

¹⁷¹ Saibante's and Bonazza's lists do not always indicate the exact number of poems that an Agiati member composed for an academic session, although a number beyond two does not appear to be very common. It should thus be noted that Saibante's 'forty-seven' recitations is a *minimum* and that the number could be slightly higher. However, determining the exact number requires broader archival research and would far exceed the scope of this thesis. What is relevant here is that the records of the academic sessions of Agiati clearly demonstrate that Saibante was the most active female contributor, as is evidenced in the Table above.

¹⁷² "Parte II," 178; Tornata straordinaria del 17 marzo 1754, 17 March 1754, 130.4, Box 22, Attività scientifico-letteraria: manoscritti (1750-1987), Archivio Storico dell'Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, Rovereto, Italy.

¹⁷³ Camilla Fenaroli, Sonetti a proposta e risposta, 31 July 1753, 129.8, Box 22, Attività scientifico-letteraria: manoscritti (1750-1987), Archivio Storico dell'Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, Rovereto, Italy; Camilla Fenaroli, Due sonetti, 27 March 1755, 131.7, Box 23, Attività scientifico-letteraria: manoscritti (1750-1987), Archivio Storico dell'Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, Rovereto, Italy; Diamante Medaglia Faini, Due Sonetti, 30 June 1753, 129.7, Box 22, Attività scientifico-letteraria: manoscritti (1750-1987), Archivio Storico dell'Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, Rovereto, Italy.

¹⁷⁴ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 103; Ricciarda Ricorda, "Travel writing, 1750-1860," in *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*, ed. Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8.

of Agiati were *already* held in high esteem and were part of other academies, such as the national Arcadia Academy.¹⁷⁵ These two arguments could indicate that the Agiati Academy, a brand-new institution founded with the central aim of enhancing the cultural prestige of its remote town, needed the membership of this important group of women more than these women themselves needed the Agiati Academy.

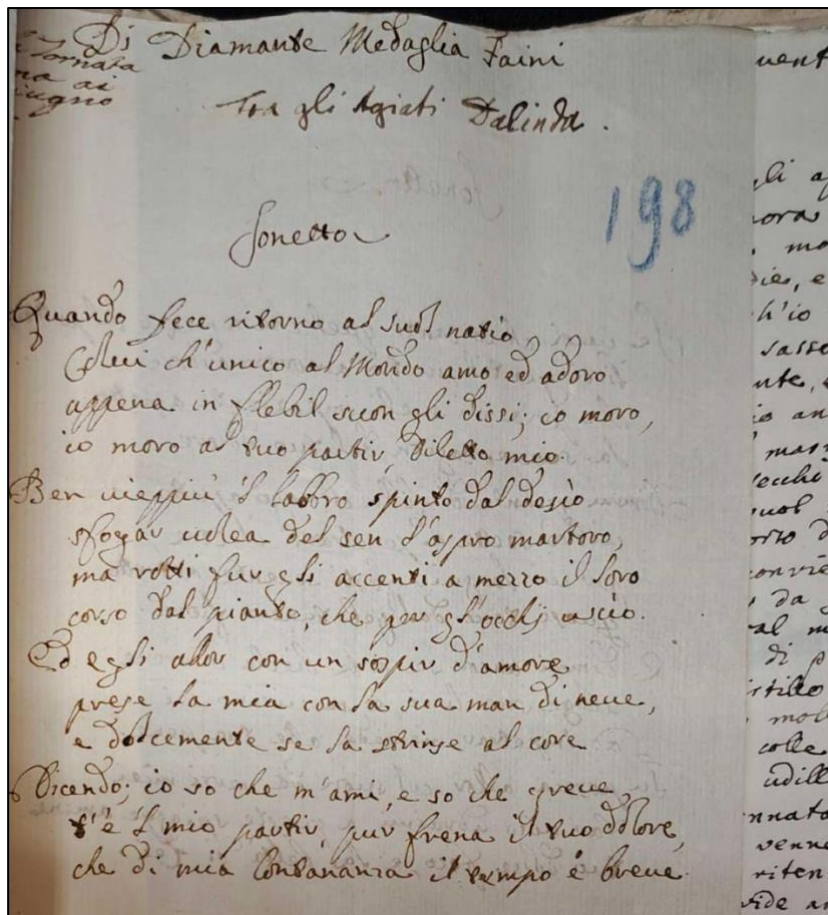


Figure 8, manuscript of one of the two sonnets recited by Diamante Medaglia Faini (Dalinda) during Agiati's academic session of 30 June 1753, presided over by Chiusole Bartolameo (Tolomeo) as Messer Agiatissimo.¹⁷⁶

This main conclusion is further strengthened by the contributions of one of the Brescian poets, Diamante Medaglia Faini (1724-1770). Moreover, Faini's contributions shed light on a crucial function of the

¹⁷⁵ Regardless of their high esteem, only one out of the ten women who were members of both Agiati and Arcadia was published in the *Rime degli Arcadi*, namely academic member 5, Maria Maddalena Morelli Fernandez. While this might call into question the importance of this group of women, it should be noted that their absence from the institutional anthologies is due to the fact that, during the entirety of Morei's custodianship, only three volumes were published (10-12). In addition, Morei developed other methods to promote women's visibility in the Arcadia Academy, reducing the importance of these publications. For more information on women's position in the Arcadia Academy under Morei's custodianship, see "Paola Giuli, "'Monsters of Talent': Fame and Reputation of Women Improvisers in Arcadia," in *Italy's Eighteenth Century: Gender and Culture in the Age of the Grand Tour*, ed. Paula Findlen, Wendy Wassying Roworth and Catherine M. Sama (Stanford University Press, 2009), 320.

¹⁷⁶ Diamante Medaglia Faini, Due Sonetti. The recitation of Faini's two sonnets preceded Saibante's reading of a pastoral canzone. Faini's sonnet is similar to Saibante's sonnet in Figure 6: it relies on a reference to Tirsi (or Thyrsis), a common name for a shepherd in Greek and Roman pastoral poetry. The sonnet hints at Faini's ambition to become an Arcadian member and underlines the inspiration that Agiati took from the national literary academy.

Agiati Academy, which the other women members no longer required. Although biographical information is sparse, by the end of the 1740s, Faini was a known ceremonial poet.¹⁷⁷ As suggested by historian Paula Findlen, due to her achievements as poet, Faini was granted her first academic membership by the Agiati Academy in 1751.¹⁷⁸ At this point in Faini's career, membership to Agiati would still have been a welcome honour. In fact, the first sonnet that Faini recited during Agiati's academic session of 30 June 1753, as displayed in the figure above, also claims the very first place in Faini's 1774 publication, her first published collection, comprising over 120 of her poems and prose pieces.¹⁷⁹ Thus, it is not unlikely that Faini herself, and the editor of the poetry collection, considered her membership to Agiati as the *official* starting point of her career that helped her fulfil and broaden her literary ambitions, for example through an acceptance to the Arcadia Academy, which she was indeed granted in 1757.¹⁸⁰ The Agiati Academy fulfilled a similar function for Saibante, who was granted admission to the Arcadia Academy in 1752, four years after the establishment of her literary *Conversazione* and two years after co-founding the Agiati Academy. Like Faini, Saibante also became a published author of a collection of discourses and letters in 1781 through her collaboration with Countess Francesca Roberti Franco, a member of both the Arcadia and Agiati Academies.¹⁸¹ Even though the collections by Faini and Saibante were not published by Agiati, their membership to the Academy receives an honourable mention in Faini's preface and on Saibante's titlepage.

Thus, through an examination of the preserved literary output of the Arcadia and Agiati Academies – the institutional publications and academic sessions – we can conclude that, during its first term, the Arcadia Academy offered women an unprecedented degree of public visibility despite severe literary restrictions. The Agiati Academy, on the other hand, was more progressive in theory, yet provided fewer opportunities for public visibility. Nevertheless, Agiati's academic sessions and the possibility of participating in them presumably served as a (final) stepping stone for women who were already well on their way to becoming part of Italy's most highly esteemed *letterate*, all of whom were, by the 1750s, centred on the Arcadia Academy. However, both at Arcadia and Agiati, women's academic contributions were not just shaped by the literary restrictions and liberties that the constitutions laid out for them, but also by the underlying institutional motives for admitting them as members, which were often more strategic than egalitarian. Yet, did the *pastorelle* recognise and accept the restrictions that the Arcadia

¹⁷⁷ Paula Findlen, "Becoming a Scientist: Gender and Knowledge in Eighteenth-Century Italy," *Science in Context* 16, no. 1-2 (2003): 73.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Diamante Medaglia Faini, *Versi e prose di Diamante Medaglia Faini con altri componimenti di diversi autori e colla vita dell'autrice: il tutto insieme raccolto, e dato alla luce*, ed. Giuseppe Pontara (Bartolomeo Righetti, 1774), 1.

¹⁸⁰ Findlen, "Becoming a Scientist," 73.

¹⁸¹ Bianca Laura Saibante Vannetti, *Discorsi, e lettere di Bianca Laura Saibante Vannetti fra gli agiati di Roveredo Atalia, lette nell'Accademia de' medesimi, con una lettera alla stessa della Signora Contessa Francesca Roberti Franco* (Stamperia Coletti, 1781).

Academy imposed on them as *women* writers, as opposed to their male counterparts? Or did they find ways of responding, negotiating or even subverting these limitations? And to what extent does the progressive constitution of the Agiati Academy show progress in opportunities for women academics, compared to male Agiati members?

3.3. A woman's right to reason: from rebellious protests to academic speeches

3.3.1. The Arcadia Academy

By the end of the Italian *primo Settecento*, developments in Enlightenment ideals of rational civil law, secular moral philosophy and utilitarian social ethics had ensured that the woman question had become a subject that required serious intellectual discussion, an “academic exercise.”¹⁸² Indeed, during the first half of the eighteenth century, it is notable that Italian academies became popular venues for holding debates on women’s proper degree of education and appropriate place in the public sphere.¹⁸³ On 16 June 1723, for instance, the renowned *Accademia dei Ricovrati* in Padova hosted a public debate centred on the probing question of “Se debbano ammettersi le Donne allo studio delle Scienze e delle belle Arti” (Whether Women should be admitted to the study of the Sciences and the noble Arts).¹⁸⁴ Simultaneously, women also began to feature more prominently as active participants and even as instigators of these academic discussions.¹⁸⁵ For instance, in the summer of 1727, Maria Gaetana Agnesi (1718-1799), at the very young age of nine years old, voiced her opinion on women’s access to education to an audience of patricians in the form of an academic oration, “The Studies of the Liberal Arts by the Female Sex Are by No Means Inappropriate.”¹⁸⁶ Both developments, the woman question as academic debate and women as active instigators and participants, find an important origin in the Arcadia Academy, the institution that sparked great national and international controversy and turned the tide of the seventeenth-century *querelle des femmes*.¹⁸⁷ Yet, what shape did the woman question take at the Arcadia Academy during its early post-foundational years? And how did these same issues manifest themselves at the Agiati Academy, half a century later?

To begin with, it should be noted that there is no evidence that, in its early years, the Arcadia Academy organised public and physical debates on women’s education in a manner comparable to that of the Ricovrati Academy and enabled its women members to participate. This does not in the least imply that

¹⁸² Findlen and Messbarger, *The Contest for Knowledge*, 3-4; Messbarger, *The Century of Women*, 69.

¹⁸³ Messbarger, *The Century of Women*, 71.

¹⁸⁴ It is interesting to note that whereas the Arcadia Academy was the first to admit women as official members, the Ricovrati Academy was the first to award *honorary* membership to women (Messbarger, *The Century of Women*, 21).

¹⁸⁵ Messbarger, *The Century of Women*, 71.

¹⁸⁶ For more information on Agnesi’s oration, see “Maria Gaetana Agnesi,” in *The Contest for Knowledge*, 117-140.

¹⁸⁷ Messbarger, *The Century of Women*, 8.

these issues were not crucial to the Academy's activities. Rather, the Arcadia Academy acted as *inspiration* to these two developments through the implementation of at least two controversial policies. The broader admission of women as certified members through an official admission policy and the strong representation of women members in institutional publications increased, encouraged and legitimised the presence of women in the public sphere, direct causes of the later debates that were organised with the central aim of discussing and disputing these very developments. In addition, the point that the Arcadia Academy did not organise such debates does not imply that the Arcadian members refrained from responding to the position and policies of their institution during public events, of which we do have evidence.

Even though the public events of the Arcadia Academy were not organised with the central aim of debating the woman question, the issue was not left unaddressed.¹⁸⁸ A representative incident took place during an edition of one of the most significant public events hosted by the Arcadia Academy, namely the *Giuochi Olimpici*, or Olympic Games. In contrast to the athletic and physical trials of the ancient Olympics, the Arcadian *Giuochi* focused on the practice of poetry. Despite this different interpretation, the Academy drew inspiration from the structure of the ancient Olympics by creating their own 'Arcadian pentathlon'.¹⁸⁹ The "atleti-autori" (athlete-authors), as Tatti refers to them, could compete in five games, all complete with their own rules and aims.¹⁹⁰ After the implementation of the admission policy for women in 1700, female members were invited to compete in these events, yet not on an equal basis with their male counterparts. That is, out of the five *giuochi poetici*, there was only one in which women were allowed to participate, namely, the fifth game, *le Ghirlande* (the Garlands).¹⁹¹ In line with the Arcadian guidelines on proper genres and subjects, the participants of the *Ghirlande*-game were expected to compose and present madrigals on types of flowers, herbs or fronds, the best of which would be announced the winner of the game.¹⁹² Figure 9 presents an example of one of the madrigals that was written for the Olympic Games of 1710. This madrigal, "Ghirlanda d'Erbe, Fronde, e Fiori diversi" (Garland of Herbs, Leaves, and Various Flowers) was written and presented by Faustina Maratti (or rather Aglaura Cidonia) in the form of an acrostic for Countess Prudenza Gabrielli Capizucchi (Elettra Citeria). The madrigal honours the recent passing of the countess, who was a close friend and academic

¹⁸⁸ For more information on women's engagement with the Arcadian *Giuochi Olimpici*, see my thesis "The Poetical Amusements of an 'Arcadian Patroness': The Arcadian Roots of Lady Miller's Batheaston Poetry Contests (1774-1781)," accessible via KU Leuven's repository of dissertations.

¹⁸⁹ The Ancient Olympic Pentathlon consisted of the stadion, the javelin throw, the discus throw, the long jump, and wrestling. Silvia Tatti relates the content of the five Arcadian games to the ancient ones, clarifying their connection ("I Giuochi Olimpici in Arcadia," 70).

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 64.

¹⁹¹ Dixon, *Between the Real and the Ideal*, 29.

¹⁹² Dixon, "Forum," 373.

colleague of Maratti. The other four *giuochi poetici* were reserved for the *pastori* as they involved forms and topics that were considered more suitable for men.¹⁹³

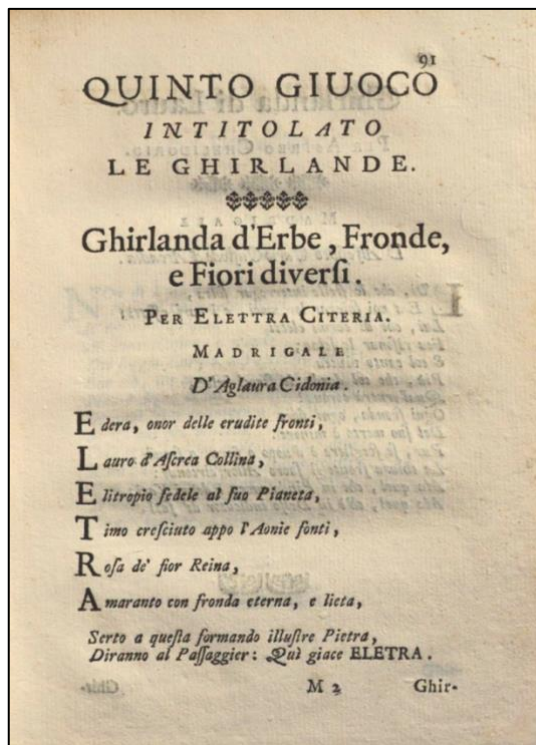


Figure 9, Institutional publication of one of the participating madrigals in the Ghirlande-game played during the 1710 edition of the Arcadian *Giuochi Olimpici*.¹⁹⁴

The *pastorelle* did not miss the opportunity to express criticism on the limits of women's participation in the Arcadian Olympics. In fact, Arcadia would already face such criticism in the first decade following the implementation of the admission policy of women. In this respect, we can refer to a passage from Crescimbeni's *Arcadia* (1708) which describes a rebellious incident that took place during either the 1701 or 1705 edition of the *Giuochi Olimpici* (see Figure 10).¹⁹⁵ The rebellion involved the previously discussed Countess Prudenza Gabrielli Capizucchi (Elettra Citeria) and first-generation members Petronilla Paolini Massimi (Fidalma Partenide) and Faustina Maratti (Aglaura Cidonia). As recounted by Crescimbeni, the three *pastorelle*, much to the astonishment of the present men, interrupted the proceedings of the Arcadian event by staging their own version of one of the four games reserved for the *pastori*, namely *L'Oracolo*.¹⁹⁶ The Arcadian Oracle game, based on the better-known game of *Sibillone*, required the production of "*ragionamenti*, or reasoned arguments," a literary exercise that, in the early decades of the eighteenth century, was still considered unsuitable for women.¹⁹⁷ Even though the *pastorelle* did not center their version of *L'Oracolo* on a subject related to women's socio-cultural

¹⁹³ Dixon, *Between the Real and the Ideal*, 29.

¹⁹⁴ Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni, *I Giuochi Olimpici celebrati in Arcadia nell'Olimpiade DCXXII in Lode degli Arcadi Defunti* (Antonio de Rossi, 1710), 91.

¹⁹⁵ Dixon, "Forum," 373; Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni, "Prosa V. Come le Ninfe fecero il giuoco dell'Oracolo," in *L'Arcadia del Can. Gio. Mario Crescimbeni* (Antonio de Rossi, 1708), 144-156.

¹⁹⁶ Dixon, "Forum," 373.

¹⁹⁷ Dixon, *Between the Real and the Ideal*, 29.

impediments, their public performance clearly illustrates their dissatisfaction with their impact. In addition, the episode demonstrates that Arcadian women fully recognised the limits imposed on them, in terms of genres, subjects and participation.

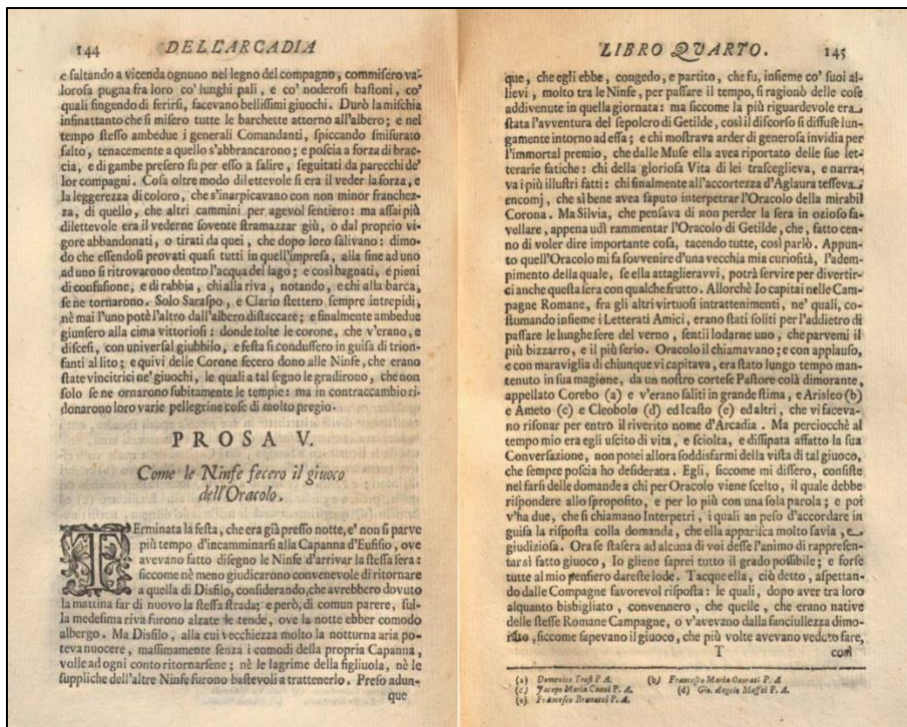


Figure 10, typescript of the incident that took place during the 1701 or 1705 edition of the Arcadian Giuochi Olimpici, “Come le Ninfe fecero il giuoco dell’Oracolo” (How the Nymphs played the Oracle game, included in an institutional publication).¹⁹⁸

3.3.2. The Agiati Academy

The rebellious version of the Arcadian Oracle game staged by Elettra, Fidalma and Aglaura in the first decade of the eighteenth century is an important precursor to the later debates organised by women academics with the central aim of reasoning on issues relating to their current socio-cultural position (cf. Maria Gaetana Agnesi’s 1727 academic oration). Whereas the *pastorelle* were still protesting for their right to reason, on any subject for that matter, the members of the Agiati Academy interpreted the constitutional request to write and recite “prose” as an invitation to fill their academic sessions with *ragionamenti* and *discorsi*.¹⁹⁹ With regard to the exact topics of these reasonings and discourses, as explained in the previous section, the Agiati members, according to their constitution, were given autonomy to make their own decisions: “Che sia permesso a ciascuno ... recitare in prosa o in verso sopra qualunque materia letteraria” (Each member ... may recite in prose or verse on any literary subject).²⁰⁰ Thus, in keeping with this article, the members of the Agiati Academy, both male and female, had the opportunity to present arguments, against or in favour, of the current position of women in the public sphere. This ninth article from the First Constitution can be supplemented with the fifteenth article, which states:

¹⁹⁸ Crescimbeni, “Prosa V.,” 144-145.

¹⁹⁹ Agiati Academy, “Parte I,” 13.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

“Che venendo in alcuna cosa letteraria, o appartenente alla Accademia contro ragione ingiuriata, o vilipesa l’Accademia tutta, o alcuno del numero degli Accademici quella, o questi debba, ricercandolo, essere assistito e difeso da tutti gli altri coaccademici, dove però l’onore, e il vantaggio di essa accademia lo comporti.”²⁰¹

(If any literary work, or anything belonging to the Academy, is unjustly insulted or disparaged, the entire Academy, or any member of the Academy, shall be assisted and defended by all other members of the Academy, where the honour and advantage of the Academy so requires.)

From this article, we can infer that if the members of Agiati chose to speak on topical and controversial issues of a cultural, political or social nature within the context of their Academy, they could rely on the assistance and defence of their institution in case of disparagements or insults, as explicitly stipulated by their constitution.

Saibante’s chronological list of the *Tornate* indeed reveals a broad range of academic reasonings and discourses on contentious issues, including the current condition of women. A particularly prominent spokesperson on these issues was, perhaps unsurprisingly, Bianca Laura Saibante herself. It is interesting to note that Saibante did not present her reasonings or discourses on the woman question at Agiati’s *Tornate* until after her 1752 admission to the Roman venue of the Arcadia Academy. At this time, Arcadia, and Crescimbeni’s programme that represented women as professional poets, was undergoing a major revival under the leadership of Michele Morei between 1743 and 1766.²⁰² The management of Morei’s predecessor Francesco Lorenzini, who succeeded Crescimbeni and guided the Academy from 1728 until 1743, is characterised by a more exclusionary and conservative approach.²⁰³ That is, Lorenzini refrained from organising Arcadia’s public events, paused institutional publications and severely restricted the admission of women, causing reputational harm to the Academy.²⁰⁴ Morei, in contrast, recognised the broader benefits of women’s admission and followed Crescimbeni’s original programme: he re-opened the Academy to women and strongly encouraged their literary-intellectual production, which restrengthened the reputation of Arcadia.²⁰⁵

During Morei’s custodianship, Arcadia became an environment famed for the presence of the most highly acclaimed women intellectuals from across the Italian peninsula, including *salonnière* and academy founder Bianca Laura Saibante from Rovereto.²⁰⁶ As displayed in Table 1, academic members 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 10 were already members of the Roman Arcadia Academy when Saibante was

²⁰¹ *Ibid.* 14.

²⁰² Graziosi, “Revisiting Arcadia,” 120.

²⁰³ Dixon, *Between the Real and the Ideal*, 108.

²⁰⁴ Graziosi, “Revisiting Arcadia,” 116-117.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 120.

²⁰⁶ Giuli, ““Monsters of Talent”,” 320.

admitted, or they became members in the same year. These women were figureheads of the development of the *querelle des femmes* during the *primo Settecento*. Laura Bassi and Cristina Roccati, for instance, received doctoral degrees at the University of Bologna in 1732 and 1751, respectively. Thus, the Arcadia Academy, Morei's inclusionary programme and the women intellectuals that received membership at this time, offered Saibante an important source of inspiration in forming her opinion on the current condition of women, all of which rings through in the reasonings and discourses that she got to present during the Agiati meetings, in keeping with the constitution. But what exactly did Saibante propose in her academic treatises, and how do they relate to the Arcadian institution? And to what extent were her arguments accepted and followed by the Agiati members?

3.4. The Arcadian manifestation of reasoned arguments: women in the public sphere

As we have seen above, the Arcadia Academy played an important role in reorienting the theoretical focus and physical manifestation of the seventeenth-century *querelle des femmes*, primarily through the official and broad admission of women and their strong representation in institutional publications.²⁰⁷ With these reforms, Arcadia facilitated women's access to the public sphere while simultaneously safeguarding their reputations.²⁰⁸ As described by Elisabetta Graziosi, the Arcadian reforms brought about a "domino effect" in other academies and editorial enterprises, leading to an even broader access to the public sphere.²⁰⁹ This effect, in turn, inspired academic debates on the growing presence of women in public institutions. Yet, as Arcadia had, at this point, fostered a first generation of women that could speak from recognised, public centres of intellectual exchange (academies, universities and publications, both scholarly and popular), women themselves increasingly gained the upper hand in debates on the limits of their own opportunities.²¹⁰

The 1723 debate hosted at the Ricovrati Academy and the 1727 speech delivered by Maria Gaetana Agnesi are prominent examples of the reforms set in motion by the Arcadia Academy and the domino effect that it inspired.²¹¹ Upon closer inspection, however, both events show Arcadian influence not only in terms of topic or spokesperson, but also on another crucial level, namely in their classicist approach. The Ricovrati debate, for instance, was staged in the manner of the "dialectical tradition" of the classical age.²¹² In addition, prior to the 1723 debate, Ricovrati members had already discussed women's political opportunities according to the same tradition, asking what would be more laudable, "il costume d'escludere le donne dal Governo come i Romani, oppure d'ammeterle come i Greci" (the custom of

²⁰⁷ Messbarger, *The Century of Women*, 8.

²⁰⁸ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 114.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 114.

²¹⁰ Findlen and Messbarger, *The Contest for Knowledge*, 18.

²¹¹ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 114.

²¹² Messbarger, *The Century of Women*, 21.

excluding women from Government as the Romans did, or of admitting them as the Greeks did).²¹³ Agnesi, in a similar vein, presented her arguments in the form of a Latin oration, a genre that has its roots in ancient Greece and relies on references to classical times.

Classically styled discussions on the reforms in women's roles that were set in motion by the Arcadia Academy also took place at the Agiati Academy, particularly *after* Bianca Laura Saibante's 1752 admission to the Arcadian institution. Academic women like Agnesi and Saibante, as explained by Paula Findlen and Rebecca Messbarger, who took it upon themselves to speak on the educational opportunities of their own sex, often did so before an audience that was still predominantly, if not exclusively, male.²¹⁴ To get their point across, then, these women necessarily followed the expected "conventions of contemporary intellectual exchange" while adopting a demeanour characterised by "a dispassionate scholarly tone" and "'reasonable' arguments based on *esperienza*" (experience).²¹⁵ While the early Arcadian *pastorelle* were still protesting for access to such a manner of expression, Saibante officially adopted this style in her speeches. As we will see below, Saibante's arguments are repeatedly grounded in logical reasonings which she derives from her 'lived experiences' as a woman. With this approach, she created a niche for herself that other male members were unable to access: they could speak on the subject, but not from their own experience, which, according to the standards of contemporary intellectual discourse, weakened their arguments.²¹⁶ In addition, Saibante's investigations are continuously legitimised through Arcadia's highly esteemed classicist approach and cleverly play on "the traditional notions of women as the keepers of the domestic space" that continued to be the object and nature of women's formal instruction, even during the early *secondo Settecento*.²¹⁷

In the space of three academic years, Saibante presented her fellow academics with at least five of these reasonings and discourses on the changing position of women in the public sphere and their increasing educational opportunities.²¹⁸ One such text was presented during Agiati's academic session of 6 June 1754, under the title "Sulle occupazioni delle donne nell'antichità" (On women's occupations in ancient times; See Figure 11). Saibante's discourse falls into three essential parts, which will be discussed in more detail below: (1) an introductory argument that legitimises Saibante's decision to speak out about the condition of women, (2) a historical and anthropological perspective on that situation, which then leads to (3) a central conclusion linked to contemporary attitudes.

²¹³ Findlen and Messbarger, *The Contest for Knowledge*, 69.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.* 18.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* 18. Original emphasis.

²¹⁶ Findlen and Messbarger, *The Contest for Knowledge*, 18.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.* 18.

²¹⁸ As exemplified in Figure 7, Saibante also commented on the condition of women in the prose (and poetic) compositions that she presented during the academic sessions.

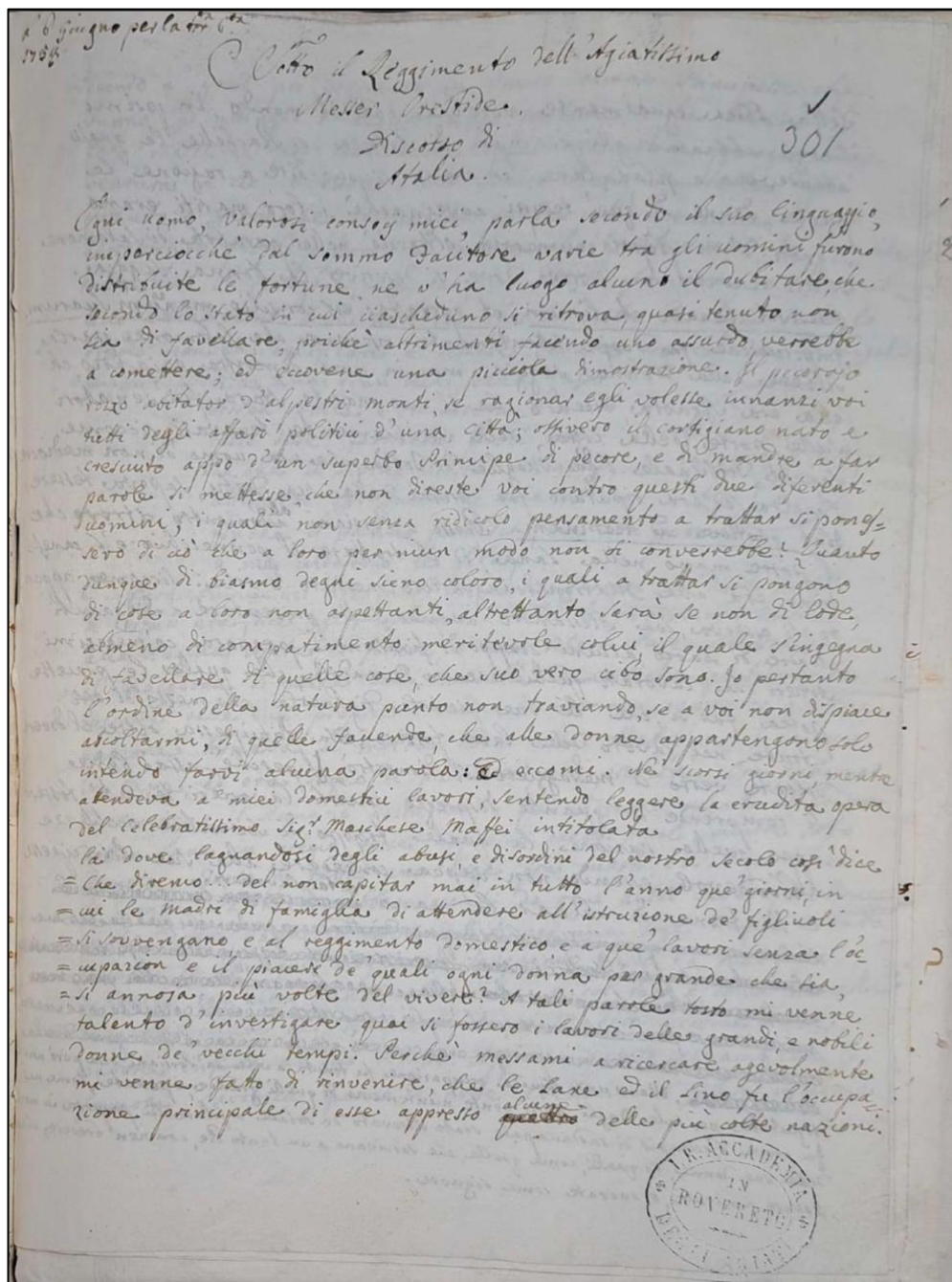


Figure 11, first page of the manuscript of Saibante's discourse "Sulle occupazioni delle donne nell'antichità" (On women's occupations in ancient times), presented during Agiati's academic session of 6 June 1754, presided over by Todeschi Federico (Orestide) as Messer Agiatissimo.²¹⁹

As the minutes of the academic sessions of Agiati have not been preserved, it is uncertain whether or not the present members were aware that Saibante would deliver a speech on women's current conditions (it was also not required for members to announce their subjects in advance, nor does the manuscript

²¹⁹ Bianca Laura Saibante, Sulle occupazioni delle donne dell'antichità, 6 June 1754, 130.8, Box 22, Attività scientifico-letteraria: manoscritti (1750-1987), Archivio Storico dell'Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, Rovereto, Italy.

indicate the title that it was given later on).²²⁰ Saibante, however, clarifies her focus on women at the end of her opening statement, yet not before firmly grounding her choice in logic and reason:

“Il pecorajo rozzo abitatore d’alpestri monti, se ragionar egli volesse innanzi voi tutti degli affari politici d’una città; ossivero il cortigiano nato e cresciuto appo d’un superbo Principe di pecore, e di mandre a far parole si mettesse, che non direste voi contro questi due differenti uomini, i quali non senza ridicolo pensamento a trattar si ponessero di ciò che a loro per niun modo non si converrebbe?” (lines 6-12)²²¹

(If a simple shepherd living in the alpine mountains wanted to talk to you all about the political affairs of a city, or the courtier, who had been reared by a proud Prince, wanted to talk of sheep and of herds, what would you say to these two different men, who, not without ridiculous thought, would discuss what in no way befits them?)

Through a comparison of the well-known, typically Arcadian symbol of the pastoral shepherd with that of the courtier, Saibante reasons that one should speak from one’s own social status and experience. Once this point has been made, she indicates that her choice of topic is equally reasonable: “Io per tanto l’ordine della natura punto non traviando, se a voi non dispiace ascoltarmi, di quelle faccende, che alle Donne appartengono solo intendo farvi alcuna parola” (Therefore, without straying from the order of nature, if you do not mind listening to me, I intend to say a few words about matters that pertain to women, lines 16-19).²²² Her choice of topic is not only strengthened by its foundation in reason, but also by the additional emphasis on being in line with ‘the order of nature’. That is, at this point, it was still commonly argued that it was *unnatural* for women to strive for knowledge.²²³ Thus, by the end of the first part of her discourse, Saibante has not only used an iconic symbol of the Arcadia Academy and its literary programme, but also justified her choice to speak on the condition of women by relying on logical reasoning and her lived experience as a woman, without defying nature.

Following this convincing opening statement, Saibante moves on to the second part of her discourse. This part is opened with a further clarification on the focus of her text, which is again grounded in logic, reason and experience, and also forges a connection to contemporary views:

²²⁰ Bonazza, *Inventario*, XIX.

²²¹ Bianca Laura Saibante, *Sulle occupazioni delle donne dell’antichità*.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ For example, in the 1770s, Petronio Zecchini, an anatomist connected to the University of Bologna, made the claim that while men thought with their brains, women, instead, thought with their uteruses. His reasoning behind this phenomenon of the *l’utero pensatore*, or the ‘thinking uterus’, was that because the uterus, unlike the brain, was a capricious and unpredictable organ, women could not think in the same rational way as men. This was reason enough for Zecchini to argue that women should give up any kind of intellectual pursuits, as explained by Hunt, “Civil Society and the State,” 298-299.

“Nei scorsi giorni, mentre attendeva a’ miei domestici lavori, sentendo leggere la erudita opera del celebratissimo Sig. Marchese Maffei intitolata ... là dove lagnandosi degli abusi, e disordini del nostro Secolo così dice “Che diremo ... del non capitar mai in tutto l’anno que’ giorni, in cui le Madri di Famiglia di attendere all’istruzione de’ figliuoli si sovvenzano, e al reggimento domestico, e a que’ lavori senza l’occupazion e il piacere de’ quali ogni donna per grande che sia, si annoja più volte del vivere? A tali parole tosto mi venne talento d’investigare quai si fossero i lavori delle grandi, e nobili donne de’ vecchi tempi.” (lines 19-29)²²⁴

(In recent days, while attending to my domestic duties, I listened to the reading of the scholarly work by the celebrated Sr. Marquis Maffei, entitled ... in which he complains about the abuses and disorders of our century, saying: “What shall we say ... about those days, which never occur throughout the year, when Mothers of Families, attending to the education of their children, remember their domestic duties and those tasks without which every woman, however great she may be, often finds life tedious??” Upon hearing these words, I was immediately inspired to investigate the tasks of the great and noble women from olden times.)

As can be inferred from these lines, Saibante connects her chosen focus to a recent publication by Francesco Scipione Maffei (1675-1755), an influential critic and esteemed figure of the early eighteenth-century development of the Arcadia Academy.²²⁵ By referencing an established authority, Saibante presents the central part of her discourse that is yet to follow, her investigation of the tasks of the great and noble women from olden times, as a *continuation* of an established scholarly concern, rather than as a challenge to it. In addition, Saibante makes sure to point out that she heard the lines of Marquis Maffei’s work while attending to her own domestic duties, reaffirming that the arguments she will present rely on her own experience as a woman with a household to run. Thus, with this approach, Saibante aligns herself with learned opinion and experience, which further justifies not only her chosen subject matter but also her position as spokesperson.

After firmly anchoring the central investigation of her discourse to current, accepted insights, Saibante presents her historical and anthropological overview of women from ancient times to present days, emphasising that it is based on research: “Perchè messami a ricercare agevolmente mi venne fatto di rinvenire, che le lane, ed il lino fu l’occupazione principale di esse appresso alcune delle più colte nazioni” (As I began my research, I easily discovered that, among some of the most cultured nations, wool and linen were their main occupations, lines 29-31). Then, Saibante presents her listeners with a

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ Gaetano Gasperoni, *Scipione Maffei e Verona settecentesca. contributo alla storia della cultura italiana* (Edizioni Valdonega, 1955), 77-78.

broad range of examples of popularly known noblewomen who were, indeed, highly skilled in the typically feminine occupation of needlework and are depicted as such in culturally important publications, both historical and contemporary.²²⁶ In line with the classicist style of the Arcadia Academy, Saibante pays special attention to the Grecian and Roman women:

“Venendo a’ Greci poi veggiamo in Omero alcune Principesse, che vanno ad attigner l’acqua alle fontane, e che lavano da loro medesime la biancheria della casa. Nè si opponga per avventura a ciò l’essere stato Omero Poeta, mentrechè egli quanto è mirabile in ciò che spetta all’invenzione, è pur altrettanto fedel pittore de’ costumi, che praticavansi. In Euripide tuttavia si raccoglie, che le più illustri femmine a tessere il lino attendevano.” (lines 63-71)²²⁷

(Turning to the Greeks, we see in Homer several Princesses who go to draw water from the fountains and wash their own household linen. Let no one dispute this on the grounds that Homer was a poet, for while he is admirable in his inventiveness, he is equally faithful in his depiction of the customs that were practised. In Euripides, moreover, we find that the most illustrious women were engaged in weaving linen.)

“Ora facciamoci ad esaminar il Romano costume, e qui vedremo quanto il lavoro delle lane in pregio fosse appresso questo Popolo, mentre sotto Romolo, e Tazio fu fatta una lega fra questi, e i Sabini, che le Donne Sabine sarebbero esenti da ogni altro lavoro, trattone quello della lana.” (lines 86-91)²²⁸

(Now let us examine Roman customs, and here we will see how highly valued wool work was among these people, given that under Romulus and Tatius, an agreement was made between them and the Sabines, stipulating that Sabine women would be exempt from all other work except that involving wool.)

As can be derived from these examples, Saibante’s presentation of the customs of women of antiquity again relies on descriptions given by established male authorities: classical authors Homer and Euripides, which she adjoins to more contemporary insights made by historian Cardinal Angelo Maria Querini (1680-1755) and hermetic poet Francesco Maria Santinelli (1626-1697) (lines 80, 97). With these references, Saibante establishes her credibility as a female scholar and commands confidence in the conclusion that she is building up to. In addition, Saibante also advances an implicit argument in response to the question posed by Marquis Maffei: Saibante herself, the author of this substantiated and well-reasoned discourse, was known to have her own household as she was married and had recently

²²⁶ Viola Klein, *The Feminine Character: History of an Ideology* (University of Illinois Press, 1971), 20.

²²⁷ Bianca Laura Saibante, *Sulle occupazioni delle donne dell’antichità*.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

become a mother, thus proving that women could successfully attend to their domestic duties while producing scientific insights worthy to be presented in public institutions like the Agiati Academy.²²⁹

At first glance, Saibante's discourse and its presentation during an academic gathering only *implicitly* advocate for women's greater access to the public sphere: her discourse contrasts fairly conservative content with a context, structure and spokesperson that are of a more progressive nature. The conservative aspect of her discourse is strengthened further in the third and final part of her text which includes a defence of women's traditional occupations that are strongly linked to their traditional roles in the domestic sphere. By, again, relying on the work of an established male authority, French historian Charles Rollin (1661-1741) – with which she underlines her knowledge of the French language and her skill of translation – Saibante argues that modern women should not disdain “il patrimonio delle Donne” (the heritage of Women), the occupation of needlework, that has been a source of pride for even the noblest of women (line 116).²³⁰

However, in this third and final part, Saibante also includes an *explicit* defence of women's intellectual formation, which is further developed in the broader range of reasonings and discourses that she presented during the academic sessions.²³¹ While Saibante shows herself to be critical of “frivole conversazioni” (frivolous conversations) and “vani intertenimenti” (vain entertainments) that some of the eighteenth-century women of noble rank had a taste for, she is not opposed to combining household work with “coltivare lo spirito con letture amene, e nel tempo stesso serie, ed utili” (cultivating the spirit with enjoyable, yet serious and useful readings) (lines 123, 124, 133-134). With regard to the broader debate on women's position that was currently taking place, the main argument that Saibante puts forward in her academic speeches, both through the content and her presentation of it, was that women should not have to choose between either a place in the domestic or in the intellectual sphere, but that a woman was more than capable to take up both: one should not exclude the other.

Saibante not only spoke at length on the controversial topic of women in the public sphere, her very presence and authority during the *Tornate* of the Agiati Academy also inspired other members to respond to her ideas and express their own opinions. Particularly interesting in this respect are Saibante's interactions and collaborations with the Roveretan Clemente Baroni Cavalcabò (1726-1796), who was, along with Saibante, one of the most active contributors to the institutional sessions of Agiati.²³² Even though historical sources tend to characterise Cavalcabò as “poco costante nelle sue applicazioni” (not very steadfast in his studies), which, apparently, he himself agreed on, they nevertheless underline a

²²⁹ Agiati Academy, “Parte III,” 284-285.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ See, for instance, Saibante's 1755 *Discorso intorno allo Spirito delle Donne* (Discourse on the Spirit of Women). The main argument of this discourse is that women, similar to men, are fully capable of reaching intellectual excellence.

²³² Agiati Academy, “Parte III,” 293.

certain interest in antiquity.²³³ Interestingly enough, the chronological list of the *Tornate* convincingly suggests that Cavalcabò awakened this interest in antiquity especially when interacting with Saibante and with ideas on women's current position in the public sphere.

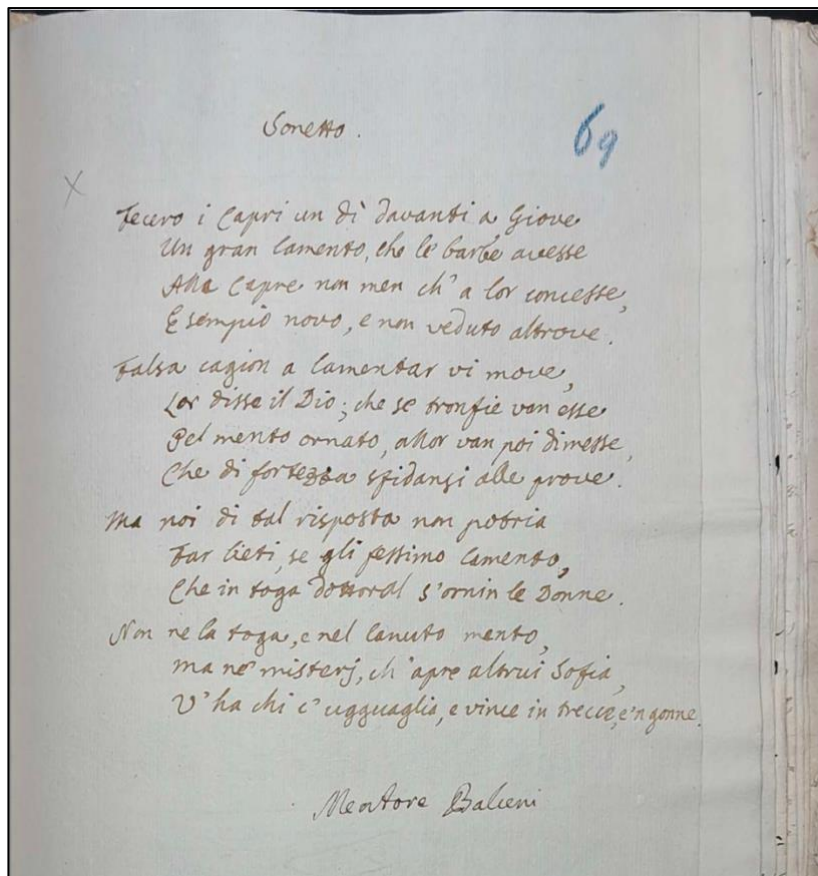


Figure 12, manuscript of a sonnet recited by Clemente Baroni Cavalcabò (Mentore) during Agiati's academic session of 30 June 1752, presided over by Saibante (Atalia) as Agiatissimo Madonna.²³⁴

Especially interesting in this regard is Agiati's *Tornata* held on 30 June 1752, over which Saibante presided as *Agiatissimo Madonna*.²³⁵ The first speaker following Saibante's opening statement was Cavalcabò, who presented a reasoning "Su diverse donne illustri dell'antichità" (On several illustrious women of antiquity) according to the dialectical tradition of the classical era.²³⁶ To support his argument in favour of women's presence in the public sphere, Cavalcabò links women from the classical era to some of the most esteemed women of that day, including Maria Gaetana Agnesi and Laura Bassi. In keeping with Agiati's constitution, Cavalcabò adjoins to his prose reasoning a Petrarchan sonnet in

²³³ Agiati Academy, "Parte III," 293; Christian Zendri, "Clemente Baroni Cavalcabò," Società di Studi Trentini, <https://www.studitrentini.eu/clemente-baroni-cavalcabo/>.

²³⁴ Clemente Baroni Cavalcabò, Sonetto.

²³⁵ Another academic session in which Saibante and Cavalcabò interact with each other and with their views on the current condition of women is, for instance, the *Tornata* of 1 April 1756, during which Saibante presented a reasoning "Sull'uso delle donne di portar Fiori sul capo" (On women's custom of wearing Flowers on their heads) which is written in epistolary form and addressed to Cavalcabò who was also in attendance.

²³⁶ Clemente Baroni Cavalcabò, Su diverse donne illustri dell'antichità, 30 June 1753, 129.7, Box 22, Attività scientifico-letteraria: manoscritti (1750-1987), Archivio Storico dell'Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, Rovereto, Italy.

which he succinctly repeats the central argument of his reasoning (see Figure 12).²³⁷ In typical Arcadian fashion, the sonnet offers a mythological allegory that mocks the growing insecurity of male scholars about the increasing presence of women in intellectual institutions, particularly in universities. In line with the main arguments of Saibante's discourses and reasonings, Cavalcabò argues that intellectual merit should not be linked to one's physical attributes, such as beards or academic robes, but rather in one's wisdom, where women, even while wearing their 'feminine' skirts, are more than capable to equal or surpass their male counterparts.

Even though Saibante was the main spokesperson, and the very embodiment, of the eighteenth-century *querelle des femmes* within the context of the Agiati Academy, her fellow (male) academics dared to venture into her niche by responding to her ideas and supplement them with, it seems, even more progressive views. In fact, the ideas presented by Cavalcabò challenged the accepted beliefs that it was unnatural for women to strive for knowledge.²³⁸ Thus, these intellectual interactions and collaborations that took place during the academic *Tornate* indicate that, within its very first years, the Agiati Academy, and the remote town of Rovereto, became a stimulating environment where controversial topics could be debated and refuted, and where a new, emancipatory vision could be developed, all while remaining within the bounds of the constitution. Moreover, the insights gained in this northern setting had the potential, through its popular Arcadian-inspired classicist frame, to spread and reach the broader network of intellectuals across the Italian peninsula, if not the Republic of Letters.

3.5. Conclusion

By combining the constitutional theory of Arcadia and Agiati with the literary output of both Academies – the institutional anthologies and academic sessions – this second chapter aimed to shed new light on the changing participation of women in academic life during the Italian *primo Settecento*. In a first of four steps, central focus was given to the genres and subjects that both Academies allowed for. As with the admission policies and procedures, the Agiati Academy, in theory, appeared to be more progressive than Arcadia by granting its members, both male and female, an equal freedom of choice. Nevertheless, a closer look into the literary output of Agiati revealed a strong commitment to the production of genres that served the linguistic and promotional purposes of the Academy, namely sonnets, a typically Arcadian fashion, and novellas, Agiati's continuation of the Arcadian reform programme. After outlining the constitutional theory of envisaged literary production, the chapter expanded its focus on literary possibilities to include the institutional visibility that women could expect at both Academies. This second step indicated, by means of a quantitative analysis, that the tight constraints that the Crescimbenian reign imposed on the earliest *pastorelle* with regard to the shape and content of their

²³⁷ Clemente Baroni Cavalcabò, Sonetto, 30 June 1753, 129.7, Box 22, Attività scientifico-letteraria: manoscritti (1750-1987), Archivio Storico dell'Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, Rovereto, Italy.

²³⁸ Hunt, "Civil Society and the State," 298-299.

literary output were not reflected in the broad public representation that they enjoyed in the Academy's promotional anthologies. At the Agiati Academy, on the other hand, the highly esteemed group of admitted women no longer required such representation, as reflected in the academic sessions. Rather, the Agiati Academy functioned as an added credential on women's academic resume that could open doors to even the most prestigious literary institution of the 1750s, Morei's Arcadia Academy.

In the following third and fourth steps, the central focus was shifted to a quantitative analysis of the presence and shape of the 'woman question' at the Arcadia and Agiati Academies. In response to the literary constraints that women faced during the Crescimbenian term of the Arcadia Academy, the earliest *pastorelle* took it upon themselves to protest for their right to partake in the literary exercises of their male counterparts, particularly with regard to the composition of reasonings. In contrast, as this third step further indicated, the Agiati members, both male and female, interpreted the constitutional freedom in genre and subject as an invitation to fill the academic sessions with reasonings and discourses. In a fourth and final step, a qualitative analysis was made of an Agiati-discourse, namely Saibante's speech *Sulle occupazioni delle donne nell'antichità*. The analysis showed that Saibante's speech not only adhered and played on the contemporary standards of intellectual discourse, but that she also framed her arguments according to the classicist approach of Arcadia, reflecting both the theoretical and physical reorientation that the Academy gave to the woman question during the early decades of the *primo Settecento*.

4. The legacy of Enlightenment women: A dialogue with the current *Agiatissimo Madonna*

The increasing presence of women in the intellectual layer of the public sphere was not only central to the Age of Enlightenment, but remains a contentious and highly relevant topic of discussion in our current society. Today, we continue to debate women's inclusion and visibility in academic circles (see, for instance, EWORA's 2025 conference on gender equality in academia).²³⁹ What is the legacy of Enlightenment women like Bianca Laura Saibante, who were among the first generations of women to *officially* speak from public institutions on the changing circumstances of their own sex? With this probing question in mind, I contacted the current President of the Agiati Academy who, as it happens, is the first *Agiatissimo Madonna* to follow Bianca Laura Saibante.²⁴⁰

Born in Rovereto in 1948, Patricia Salomoni has dedicated herself to the teaching of classical languages at secondary schools.²⁴¹ She was appointed by the University of Trento as lecturer in Latin Language and Literature at the *School of Specialisation in Secondary Education*, and later in Greek Language and Literature as part of the *Qualification Courses for Teaching in Secondary Schools*.²⁴² In June 2013, Salomoni was nominated *socia ordinaria* of the Agiati Academy in the class of Literature and Arts.²⁴³ Five years later, she would go on to become Vice-President and, since 2022, she has been at the helm of the Agiati Academy as Madam President.²⁴⁴

During her term, President Salomoni has committed to promoting the legacy of Agiati's female co-founder, Bianca Laura Saibante. Under her leadership, for instance, the Agiati Academy hosted the 2023 conference *Intellettuale, moglie, madre. Bianca Laura Saibante, una donna del Settecento* (Intellectual, wife, mother. Bianca Laura Saibante, an eighteenth-century woman).²⁴⁵ During the interview conducted for the purpose of this thesis, President Salomoni kindly provided us with further insight into her own views on the significance of Saibante's legacy for the Agiati Academy and shared her personal experiences of holding a position of academic authority as a woman.

²³⁹ EWORA, "EWORA Conference 2025," EWORA European Women Rectors Association, <https://www.ewora.org/events/84>.

²⁴⁰ Patricia Salomoni, interview by author, August 7, 2025. The original interview was conducted in Italian. For the purpose of this thesis, I translated the interview to English. For the original Italian version, see Appendix B. Original transcript of the interview with Patricia Salomoni.

²⁴¹ Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, "Patricia Salomoni, Presidente (2022 – in carica)," Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, <https://agiati.org/profilo-patricia-salomoni>.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, "Intellettuale, moglie, madre. Bianca Laura Saibante, una donna del Settecento," Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2023, <https://agiati.org/bianca-laura-saibante-convegno-2023>.

Q: Bianca Laura Saibante was a founding member of the *Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati* and held the role of *presidente pro tempore* several times after its foundation in 1750. As current president of Agiati, do you ever reflect on Saibante's legacy? Does her example influence or inspire the way you think about your own position today?

A: *"Bianca Laura's writings reveal an awareness of gender inequality and, at the same time, a mature gender consciousness that goes beyond defending women's right to participate in the intellectual community. Over a period of about thirty years (from 1751 to the 1780s), nineteen femmes savantes, mainly from the Brescia and Veneto areas, were affiliated with the Accademia degli Agiati. This is a surprising number in comparison to the admissions of the following century. Even if proposed by male figures, the candidacies were nevertheless sent and often brought to the attention of Saibante. In summary, during the governance of Bianca Laura and, later, her son Clementino, a network of relationships was created within which women played important roles, as evidenced by correspondence and their own poetic or scientific production.*

The Accademia degli Agiati therefore bears an interesting legacy, and, for this reason, its governing bodies must now promote gender equality by ensuring a greater female presence than in the past. In research, too, it is necessary to promote the participation of young female scholars and address specific issues that are currently animating the international debate on the status of women. This has been a fundamental principle of my programme."

Q: Bianca Laura Saibante was active at a time when women's participation in public intellectual life was still exceptional and often contested. Do you see any parallels between the challenges faced by women like her in the eighteenth century and those encountered by women in academia today?

A: *"It is difficult to draw parallels; the conditions more than two centuries apart are very different. In the 1700s, the revolution of the Enlightenment also affected women, at least those who were socially and culturally privileged. Gradually, theories began to emerge that challenged the preconception that women were completely incapable of abstract thought, concentration and determination, arguing that the female mind had the same potential as the male mind. Studies on female education were also published. New spaces for 'mixed' socialising opened up in private homes, but it was mainly salons and academies that provided a physical meeting place, offering women a support network.*

Although today, especially in recent decades, rights have been won in every sector and, at least formally in the West, there are no obstacles to higher education and high-level professional careers, prejudices remain and it is not easy for women to reach the top in their professions, especially in certain disciplines or fields of research. Family care work and, in certain regions, the scarcity of nurseries or other family

care facilities still heavily influence gender equality in the workplace and in terms of pay, forcing women to make difficult choices such as working part-time or even giving up work altogether.”

Q: How has your experience as president of the Agiati Academy shaped your understanding of what it means to be a woman in a position of cultural or intellectual authority? Do you ever feel like a minority in these circles?

A: *“I never felt like I was in the minority, even though there were times when not everyone agreed, but that is just part of normal democratic debate. In interpersonal relationships, some older members may have been paternalistic at first, but overall, I have been held in high esteem and have always been listened to. Certainly, some were not used to dealing with a female President and preferred to talk to a man, but these were isolated cases.”*

Q: Is there any advice that you would like to give to young women today who are pursuing academic careers or academic leadership roles, based on your own experience?

A: *“I do not feel comfortable giving advice. I belong to a past generation that paved the way towards independence and autonomy. Although it is not always easy to balance private life and career, I see extraordinary women around me, who I hope will serve as an example for future generations. Education, self-esteem and confidence in oneself are the driving force behind the fulfilment of one’s aspirations.”*

By placing the words of a contemporary woman in academic leadership alongside the legacy of Enlightenment women like Bianca Laura Saibante, this chapter affirms the lasting – and evolving – presence of women within Italian literary academies, a history that *officially* began with the Arcadia Academy. President Salomoni’s reflections extend the central arguments of this thesis to the present day, both at the institutional level and in broader societal terms. In recounting the formative decades of the Agiati Academy, President Salomoni underlines the Academy’s notable admission of women. In addition to revealing that Saibante herself had a say in these admissions – a conclusion that was plausible but could not definitively be proven with the selected source material – President Salomoni explains that Agiati’s early egalitarian legacy has an impact on her own governance. Precisely because Agiati has this progressive legacy of women’s early involvement, it is highly relevant to promote gender equality in the bodies that govern the Academy today.

In addition to the enduring resonance of Saibante’s legacy within the Agiati Academy, this dialogue between past and present also indicates that questions that were once raised by Saibante herself and by other Enlightenment women – about the (in)compatibility of women’s private responsibilities with public aspirations – remain deeply relevant within our current society. Over the past few decades, women

in the West have gained the *formal* right to reach the top in their chosen careers, academic or otherwise. Nevertheless, as observed by President Salomoni, women's increasing presence and leadership in the professional world still arouse prejudice and paternalistic attitudes, even if only in isolated cases. The positive view conveyed by Saibante on the combination of household work with intellectual pursuits echoes in President Salomoni's reflections. She explains, however, that this combination remains to be a strong challenge today, one that hinders gender equality and still determines some women to sacrifice their professional careers. Regardless of the significant challenges faced by women in the public sphere, both in the eighteenth and twentieth century, President Salomoni concludes the interview on a positive note: the current and future generations of aspiring women academics are more than capable to achieve their intellectual ambitions through "Education, self-esteem and confidence in oneself," a suggestion I will personally take to heart.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ Patricia Salomoni, interview by author, August 7, 2025.

5. Conclusion

At the turn of the eighteenth century, the first custodian of the Arcadia Academy, Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni, revised the institution's original laws to include articles on women's admission. These amendments presented women, for the very first time, with the unique opportunity to become licensed academics, as opposed to honorary or exceptional members.²⁴⁷ By the end of the *primo Settecento*, Arcadia's unprecedented, egalitarian attitude had led to an increase in the number of women officially admitted to public institutions, implying women's changing presence in academic constitutions as well as their increased involvement.²⁴⁸ Given this genuine turning point in women's academic history and the significant gaps in the available historiography, this thesis aimed to provide further insight into the early eighteenth-century impact that the Arcadia Academy had on the broader academic field, particularly with regard to the changing role of women academics. Thus, on a macro-historical level, the thesis questioned the extent to which Enlightenment women initiated and contributed to the establishment of academies during the Italian *primo Settecento*, as well as their interactions with the Crescimbenian programme of the Arcadia Academy. However, in order not to exceed its scope, the thesis focused on a micro-historical case study, centering on the role that Enlightenment intellectual Bianca Laura Saibante played in the 1750 foundation and early development of the *Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati*, as well as the extent to which Arcadia inspired Agiati's foundational programme.

The second chapter focused specifically on the shifting representation of women in academic constitutions, tracing an evolution from the original 1695 *Leges Arcadum* and its 1700 amendments to the 1750 *Costituzioni* of the Agiati Academy. The chapter began by shedding new light on the officials in charge of admissions as well as the policies and procedures by which women came to be admitted. On a micro-historical level, these first two steps of the chapter revealed that Saibante played an essential role in the foundation and early development of the Agiati Academy, both through the authoritative position that she was given by virtue of the progressive academic constitution and the (formal and informal) administrative duties that she took upon herself. The following two steps of the chapter focused on the strategic, underlying motives of women's official integration and the profiles of the women that were *actually* admitted to both the Arcadia and Agiati Academies. On a micro-historical level, these two steps, in turn, revealed that the constitution of the Agiati Academy was indeed influenced and inspired by the pioneering Arcadian policies, particularly in terms of its signature principle of pastoral equality.

Given that constitutional theory is not necessarily an accurate representation of the academic activity, the third chapter aimed to provide further insight into the *actual* participation of women in academic life

²⁴⁷ Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 104; Dixon, *Between the Real and the Ideal*, 105; Everson, Reidy and Sampson, *The Italian Academies*.

²⁴⁸ Dixon, "Forum," 372; Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 122.

during Italy's *primo Settecento*. The first two steps of the chapter outlined the literary opportunities that women enjoyed at both the Arcadia and Agiati Academies, in terms of genre, subject and visibility. On a micro-historical level, then, these first two steps provided further evidence of Saibante's essential role during the early post-constitutional years of the Agiati Academy, particularly through the significant number of literary-scientific contributions that she made to the academic sessions. The analysis even showed that Saibante was the most active female member of the Agiati Academy, if not the most involved member overall, regardless of her sex.²⁴⁹ The following two steps of the chapter offered insight into Saibante's 1752 admission to the Arcadia Academy and illustrated the influence that her Arcadian membership had on her own academic output, particularly in terms of the institution's characteristic classicist approach, which proved to be a recurring feature of Agiati's academic output.

At the macro-historical level, the thesis reached two central conclusions. In the first place, the second chapter demonstrated an evolution in the constitutional theory on women's admission to Italian academies. The chapter exemplified that, by the 1750s, women could begin to, or were even *expected* to, comply with admission requirements that presupposed a strong presence in the public sphere, and which were, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, still strictly reserved for their male counterparts. In the second place, the third chapter illustrated that Arcadia's early eighteenth-century reforms – women's official membership and their public visibility – inspired a range of classically stylised academic debates in which women took a leading role, not just as subject but also as foremost spokespersons. Finally, these two conclusions position the Italian *primo Settecento* as a period in which, following Arcadia's legislative precedent, the academic sphere *officially* began to open up to women and in which their ability to participate as public intellectuals was gradually gaining an increased acceptance. These promising insights, obtained from a single case study comparing the foundational programme of the Arcadia Academy with the early governance of the Agiati Academy, invite further research that will strengthen our understanding of the hitherto underestimated impact of the national literary academy on the increasingly leading role of Enlightenment women in eighteenth-century literary-scientific institutions.

By bringing the past into dialogue with the present, the testimony given by President Salomoni emphasised the continuity of women's central role within (Italian) academic circles. President Salomoni's reflections confirm that, although the formal, legal integration of women into academia did indeed begin with the Arcadia Academy and was continued by the Agiati Academy in the second half of the eighteenth century, achieving *true* gender equality is still a work in progress, both in the private and public spheres. In her view, the legacy of Saibante and other Enlightenment women is not a monument to be admired from afar, but a vibrant tradition that will carry the work of inclusion and academic leadership into the future.

²⁴⁹ Agiati Academy, "Parte III," 293.

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Appendix A. Biographies of the Agiati women (1750-1800)

From 1751 to the 1780s, nineteen *femmes savantes* joined Bianca Laura Saibante at the *Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati*. To highlight the diversity of this group of women, the table below provides a chronological overview of their intellectual profiles. The biographical entries are based on and translated from Agiati's 1901 anniversary publication, supplemented with contemporary findings.²⁵⁰

Catalogue	Academic member	Biography
5	Saibante Vannetti, Bianca Laura.	Bianca Laura Saibante Vannetti was born in 1723 in Rovereto. She was educated in the Ursuline Convent in Trento, where she practised 'feminine exercises', such as embroidery and drawing. In addition, she applied herself to modern languages, mainly English and German, and wrote essays. Together with her brother, she was then tutored by the Italian abbot Girolama Tartarotti, who introduced her to the study of letters and philosophy. Saibante wrote a great deal and was the soul of Agiati's academic sessions. In 1754, she married a co-founder of the Academy, Giuseppe Valeriano Vannetti, and had a son, Clementino Vannetti. Saibante was also accepted to several academies, such as the Arcadia Academy and the <i>Accademia degli Occulti</i> . She was favourably written about in several scientific periodicals and by important authors, such as Metastasio, with whom she also corresponded. Saibante survived both her husband and son, passing away in Rovereto on 6 March 1797. ²⁵¹
64	Solar d'Astri Fenaroli , Camilla.	Camilla Solar d'Astri Fenaroli was born in 1711 in the Brescia region. She lost her mother when she was still a child, by which her education was initially abandoned. Fenaroli nevertheless became part of the school of the best writers of Italian poetry. Fenaroli soon became an esteemed poet. She also practised Latin and French, and showed aptitude for the metaphysical sciences

²⁵⁰ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 284-518.

²⁵¹ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 284-286; "Profilo dell'autrice: Bianca Laura Saibante Vannetti," *Donne in Arcadia* (1690-1800), <https://www.arcadia.uzh.ch/donnedetails.php?id=354>.

		from which she readily understood the most difficult and abstruse secrets, so much so that her illustrious friends proclaimed her a profound thinker. She had four children whom she educated wisely, two boys and two girls. She held a literary <i>Conversazione</i> in her home every day, at which distinguished minds convened. Because of her premature death in 1769, Fenaroli's poetry was not published during her lifetime, but it was collected and printed later on. ²⁵²
65	Faini, Diamante Medaglia.	Diamante Medaglia Faini was born in a small village in the Brescia region in 1724. As a young girl, she began to compose verse. Her father took a dislike to her increasing fame and therefore arranged her marriage to Pietro Antonio Faini in 1748. The marriage was an unhappy one, which encouraged Faini to stop writing on the theme of love. Faini continued her studies by applying herself to the French and Latin languages, and also took up mathematics, physics and astronomy. Faini was held in great esteem and admitted to several academies, including the Arcadia Academy and the <i>Accademia degli Unanimi</i> . In 1761, Faini became a founding member of the <i>Accademia dei Discordi</i> . In 1763, she presented a discourse 'on the studies that suit women' at the Unanimi Academy. Faini passed away in 1790 in Salò. ²⁵³
70	Pignone del Carretto, Isabella.	Isabella Pignone del Carretto was a Neapolitan duchess who frequently hosted a literary <i>Conversazione</i> and composed poetry. She was admitted to the Arcadia Academy and was familiar with at least some of its members. The duchess was held in great esteem by the second Arcadian custodian Francesco Lorenzini. Her date of birth and death remain unestablished to date. ²⁵⁴

²⁵² Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 318-319; "Profilo dell'autrice: Camilla Fenaroli Solar d'Asti," *Donne in Arcadia* (1690-1800), <https://www.arcadia.uzh.ch/donnedetails.php?id=165>.

²⁵³ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 319-320; "Profilo dell'autrice: Diamante Medaglia Faini," *Donne in Arcadia* (1690-1800), <https://www.arcadia.uzh.ch/donnedetails.php?id=260>; Findlen, "Becoming a Scientist," 59-87.

²⁵⁴ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 324; "Profilo dell'autrice: Isabella Pignone del Carretto," *Donne in Arcadia* (1690-1800), <https://www.arcadia.uzh.ch/donnedetails.php?id=310>.

73	Accarigi, Livia.	Livia Accarigi was a Sienese noblewoman born in 1719. Accarigi was a talented writer, yet most of her publications were anonymous and have not yet been collected. Accarigi spend her life among esteemed intellectuals, lived modestly and never married. ²⁵⁵
74	Morelli Fernandez, Maria Maddalena.	Maria Maddalena Morelli Fernandez was born in Pistoia in 1727. From an early age, Morelli demonstrated an aptitude for learning, practicing both poetry and philosophy. In the 1740s, she began to rise to fame through her talent for poetic improvisation. She was admitted to the Arcadia Academy in Rome and crowned with the laurel wreath on the Roman Capitol in 1776. Morelli was the only woman ever to be given this honour. Morelli died in Florence in 1800. Her life was later fictionalised by Madame de Staël in <i>Corinne ou l'Italie</i> (1807). ²⁵⁶
75	Roccati, Cristina.	Born in the Veneto region in 1732, Cristina Roccati would become the third woman to earn an official doctorate degree. Roccati was well versed in classical languages and began her career as a poet. She was given permission by her parents to study at the University of Bologna, focusing most of her time on physics and natural science. Roccati also became an esteemed member of several academies, including the Arcadia Academy and the Academy of the Ricovrati. After her family fell into financial ruin, she was forced to leave the University and return to her hometown of Rovigo, where she taught physics and eventually passed away in 1797. ²⁵⁷
96	Baitelli, Giulia.	Giulia Baitelli was born in 1706 in the Brescia region. Baitelli published works of poetry and prose and gained renown in the

²⁵⁵ Agiati Academy, “Parte I,” 324; “Profilo dell’autrice: Livia Accarigi,” *Donne in Arcadia* (1690-1800), <https://www.arcadia.uzh.ch/donnedetails.php?id=1>.

²⁵⁶ Agiati Academy, “Parte I,” 324; Giuli, “Monsters of Talent”,” 307, 318-327.

²⁵⁷ Agiati Academy, “Parte I,” 324; Paula Findlen, “A Forgotten Newtonian: Women and Science in the Italian Provinces,” in *The Sciences in Enlightened Europe*, ed. Jan Golinski, Simon Schaffer, William Clark (University of Chicago Press, 1999), 313-348.

		Brescian intellectual circles. Baitelli was praised for her erudition by the scholars of the University of Padova, especially by the esteemed philosophy professors Domenico Lazzarini (1668-1734) and Giovanni Antonio Volpi (1686-1766) who encouraged her to further her literary, linguistic and scientific studies. In addition, Baitelli corresponded with renowned local and foreign scholars who relied on her knowledge of Greek for their own interpretations of classical texts. ²⁵⁸
121	Bassi Veratti, Laura Maria.	Laura Maria Bassi Veratti was born in 1711 in Bologna. Bassi did not receive formal education, but was tutored by Professor Gaetano Tacconi, who introduced her to metaphysics. In 1732, she obtained a doctoral degree at the University of Bologna, making her the first woman to obtain a doctoral degree in science. In the same year, Bassi was also appointed a professorship. She was also accepted to a number of literary-scientific academies, including the Arcadia Academy. Later on, she would take up the Chair of Experimental Physics at the University of Bologna, a position that she would hold until her death in 1778. ²⁵⁹
147	Bergalli Gozzi, Luisa.	Luisa Bergalli Gozzi was born in Venice in 1703. At a young age, Bergalli showed aptitude for drawing and painting, in which she was instructed by Rosalba Carriera. Bergalli also held an interest in philosophy and (classical and modern) languages. Later on, Bergalli would choose to dedicate herself to dramatic poetry and translations. She was then accepted to several literary academies, including the Arcadia Academy. When Bergalli first began to publish her works, she was offered several esteemed positions abroad, which she would decline in order to remain in Venice. Bergalli published the first anthologies of women's

²⁵⁸ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 336.

²⁵⁹ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 347; "Profilo dell'autrice: Laura Bassi Veratti," *Donne in Arcadia (1690-1800)*, <https://www.arcadia.uzh.ch/donnedetails.php?id=28>; Monique Frize, *Laura Bassi and Science in 18th Century Europe. The Extraordinary Life and Role of Italy's Pioneering Female Professor* (Springer, 2013), 1-7, 39-59.

		poetry, from the classical period to present day. She died in in Venice in 1779. ²⁶⁰
204	Trotti Bevilacqua , Maria Maddalena.	Maria Maddalena Trotti Bevilacqua was a marchioness, born in 1719 in the Ferrara region. Trotti had a career as lady-in-waiting, first to Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici and then at the Court of Parma. Her verses were celebrated, she corresponded with notable figures and was accepted to the Arcadia Academy. Trotti passed away in 1783. ²⁶¹
377	Belli , Elena Teresa.	Elena Teresa Belli was born in Trento in 1758. Belli lived a withdrawn life and devoted herself entirely to her studies. She cultivated the French and Latin language, and made translations from literary texts, which she also published. Her many Italian poems, on the other hand, remained unpublished. Later in life, Belli also took up theology. She passed away in 1783. ²⁶²
391	Marcello-Rigo , Giovanna.	Giovanna Marcello-Rigo was a Venetian poet, who was accepted to the Arcadia Academy between 1743 and 1766. ²⁶³
415	Naturani , Gioseffa.	Gioseffa, or 'Giuseppina', Naturani was born in 1743 in the Milan region. From a young age, Naturani applied herself to her studies. To do so, she moved from her parent's home to that of a family friend, Carl'Antonio Tanzi, the secretary of the <i>Accademia dei Trasformati</i> . During her arranged and unhappy marriage, Naturani continued her studies by transcribing documents from Milanese and Lombard libraries. She corresponded with many scholars and was a prominent figure in

²⁶⁰ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 354-355; "Profilo dell'autrice: Luisa Bergalli Gozzi," Donne in Arcadia (1690-1800), <https://www.arcadia.uzh.ch/donnedetails.php?id=37>.

²⁶¹ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 373; "Profilo dell'autrice: Maria Maddalena Trotti Bevilacqua Cantelli," Donne in Arcadia (1690-1800), <https://www.arcadia.uzh.ch/donnedetails.php?id=403>.

²⁶² Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 437.

²⁶³ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 441; "Profilo dell'autrice: Maria Giovanna Marcello," Donne in Arcadia (1690-1800), <https://www.arcadia.uzh.ch/donnedetails.php?id=248>.

		the Lombard literary-intellectual circles. Naturani passed away in 1825. ²⁶⁴
481	Gualtieri-Loschi , Catterina.	Catterina Gualtieri-Loschi was admitted to the Agiati Academy in 1766. She wrote poetry in Italian and Latin. ²⁶⁵
560	Roberti Franco , Francesca.	Francesca Roberti Franco was a countess, born in 1744 in Bassano. Unlike her two sisters, Roberti was gifted a formal education from her father, receiving instruction in history, philosophy and linguistics. She also applied herself to the French and Latin languages and hosted a literary <i>Conversazione</i> . In 1774, Roberti was admitted to the Arcadia Academy. She retained correspondences with a number of intellectual figures, including Bianca Laura Saibante. Together, they revised and published Saibante's discourses in 1781. Roberti passed away in 1817. ²⁶⁶
561	De Candi , Catterina.	Catterina De Candi was a poet from Padova, who was admitted to the Agiati Academy in 1773. Her date of birth and death are unestablished to date. ²⁶⁷
596	Vettori de Paltrinieri , Anna.	Anna Vettori de Paltrinieri was a poet from Mantova, who was admitted to the Arcadia Academy in 1777 and the Agiati Academy in 1778. Her date of birth and death remain unestablished to date. ²⁶⁸
601	Caminer-Turra , Elisabetta.	Elisabetta Caminer-Turra was born in Venice in 1751. She was instructed by her father and began her career as a translator of foreign plays. From 1774 onwards, she collaborated with her father on the newspaper <i>Giornale Enciclopedico</i> . Later on,

²⁶⁴ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 453; Marco Cantucci, "Giuseppina Naturani," Treccani, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giuseppina-naturani_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giuseppina-naturani_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

²⁶⁵ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 474.

²⁶⁶ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 496; "Profilo dell'autrice: Francesco Roberti Franco," Donne in Arcadia (1690-1800), <https://www.arcadia.uzh.ch/donnedetails.php?id=343>.

²⁶⁷ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 496.

²⁶⁸ Agiati Academy, "Parte I," 509; "Profilo dell'autrice: Anna Paltrinieri Vettori," Donne in Arcadia (1690-1800), <https://www.arcadia.uzh.ch/donnedetails.php?id=291>.

		Caminer-Turra changed the name to <i>Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico</i> . The newspaper was printed all over Europe. Caminer-Turra passed away in 1796. ²⁶⁹
615	Secco Suardi Grismondi , Paolina.	Paolina Secco Suardi Grismondi was a countess from Bergamo, born in 1746. She was encouraged by her parents to take up literary studies. Her verses were held in great esteem by some of the most acclaimed intellectuals of her time, with whom she also corresponded extensively. Secco Suardi was accepted to a number of academies, including the Arcadia Academy between 1772 and 1790. She passed away in Bergamo in 1801. ²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Agiati Academy, “Parte I,” 511; Findlen and Messbarger, *The Contest for Knowledge*, 9.

²⁷⁰ Agiati Academy, “Parte I,” 517-518; “Profilo dell’autrice: Paolina Secco Suardi Grismondi,” *Donne in Arcadia* (1690-1800), <https://www.arcadia.uzh.ch/donnedetails.php?id=368>.

Appendix B. Original transcript of the interview with Patricia Salomoni

Q: Bianca Laura Saibante è stata membro fondatrice dell'Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati e ha ricoperto più volte il ruolo di *presidente pro tempore* dopo la fondazione nel 1750. In qualità di attuale presidente degli Agiati, riflette mai sull'eredità lasciata dalla Saibante? L'esempio della Saibante influenza o ispira il modo in cui concepisce la Sua posizione oggi?

A: *“Dagli scritti di Bianca Laura si evincono una consapevolezza della disuguaglianza dei sessi e al contempo una già matura coscienza di genere che non si limita a difendere il diritto della donna a partecipare alla comunità intellettuale. Nell'arco di circa trent'anni (dal 1751 agli anni Ottanta della seconda metà del secolo XVIII) sono affiliate all'Accademia degli Agiati diciannove femmes savantes, provenienti soprattutto dall'area bresciana e veneta. Si tratta di un numero sorprendente, se confrontato con le aggregazioni del secolo successivo. Le candidature anche se proposte da personalità maschili erano tuttavia inviate e poste spesso all'attenzione della Saibante. In sintesi, durante la governance di Bianca Laura e, in seguito, del figlio Clementino si crea una rete di relazioni all'interno della quale le donne rivestono ruoli importanti testimoniati dagli epistolari e dalla loro stessa produzione poetica o scientifica.*

L'Accademia degli Agiati porta quindi un'eredità interessante e a maggior ragione nell'ambito dei suoi organi direttivi deve oggi favorire l'equità di genere con una presenza femminile più ampia rispetto al passato. Anche nella ricerca è necessario promuovere la partecipazione di giovani studiose e affrontare tematiche specifiche che animano attualmente il dibattito internazionale sulla condizione femminile. Questo è stato un principio fondamentale del mio programma.”

Q: Bianca Laura Saibante era attiva in un'epoca in cui la partecipazione delle donne alla vita intellettuale pubblica era ancora eccezionale e spesso contestata. Vede qualche parallelismo tra le sfide affrontate da donne come lei nel XVIII secolo e quelle che devono affrontare le donne nel mondo accademico oggi?

A: *“Difficile stabilire parallelismi; le condizioni a distanza di più di due secoli sono molto diverse: Nel 1700 la rivoluzione dei lumi investe anche le donne, almeno quelle socialmente e culturalmente privilegiate. A un preconcetto secondo il quale la donna era del tutto incapace di astrazione, concentrazione e determinazione poco alla volta si manifestano teorie secondo le quali la mente femminile ha le stesse potenzialità di quella maschile e si pubblicano studi sull'istruzione femminile. Si aprono nuovi spazi di socialità 'mista' nelle dimore private, ma sono soprattutto i salotti e le Accademie a garantire un luogo fisico di riferimento offrendo loro soprattutto una rete di sostegno.*

Sebbene oggi, soprattutto negli ultimi decenni, siano stati conquistati diritti in ogni settore e, almeno formalmente in Occidente non esistano ostacoli al raggiungimento di studi superiori e carriere

professionali di alto livello, tuttavia permangono pregiudizi e non è facile per una donna raggiungere livelli apicali in ambito professionale, soprattutto in determinate discipline o campi di ricerca. Il lavoro di cura familiare e, in certe regioni, la scarsità di asili-nido o altre strutture di assistenza familiare, condizionano ancora pesantemente l'uguaglianza dei sessi nel settore lavorativo e retributivo, orientando la donna a scelte obbligate come il part-time o addirittura l'abbandono dell'attività lavorativa.”

Q: In che modo la Sua esperienza come presidente degli Agiati ha influenzato la Sua comprensione di essere una donna in una posizione di autorità culturale o intellettuale? Si sente mai come una minoranza in questi ambienti?

A: *“Non mi sono mai sentita in minoranza, anche se ci sono stati episodi di non unanime condivisione, ma questo rientra nel normale confronto democratico. Nei rapporti interpersonali all’inizio da parte di alcuni soci più anziani ci possono essere state forme di paternalismo, ma nel complesso ho potuto godere di molta stima e sono sempre stata molto ascoltata. Certamente per alcuni non c’era l’abitudine a rapportarsi con una presidente donna, preferivano dialogare con un uomo ma si tratta di pochi casi isolati.”*

Q: C’è qualche consiglio che, sulla base della Sua esperienza, vorrebbe dare alle giovani donne di oggi che stanno intraprendendo una carriera accademica o aspirano a ricoprire ruoli di ‘leadership’ nel mondo accademico?

A: *“Non mi sento di dare consigli. Io faccio parte di una generazione passata che ha tracciato un cammino verso l’indipendenza e l’autonomia. Anche se non sempre è facile conciliare vita privata e carriera vedo intorno a me donne straordinarie, che mi auguro siano di esempio per le future generazioni. Studio, autostima e fiducia in sé stesse sono il volano per una realizzazione delle proprie aspirazioni.”*