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### Women in the medieval university: a reappraisal of the life and myth of Bolognese Novella d'Andrea from the fourteenth to the twentieth century

Kobiety na średniowiecznym uniwersytecie:  
nowe spojrzenie na żywot i mit bolonki Novelli d'Andrea  
od XIV do XX w.

**Abstract:** This article analyses the literary sources and accounts of Novella d'Andrea, the daughter of Giovanni d'Andrea, an eminent professor at the Bolognese medieval university. The study examines the unprecedented case of a woman teaching law at the university in the first half of the fourteenth century, casting light on the cultural and family environment in which she grew up. The sources that conserve her memory are analysed, in particular the account provided by Christine de Pizan, with a new interpretation of her passage, but also those sources that have disseminated misleading information, generating confusion about the historical figure of Novella d'Andrea. The visual works of art that, like the literary accounts, have fuelled her myth include a work that has hitherto been ignored by historiography on Novella d'Andrea, the fourteenth-century woman who broke the glass ceiling.

**Keywords:** Novella d'Andrea, medieval Bologna, women and university, Christine de Pizan

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**Streszczenie:** Przeanalizowane w artykule źródła literackie i relacje dotyczą Novelli d'Andrea, córki Giovanniego d'Andrea, wybitnego profesora Uniwersytetu Bolońskiego. W niniejszym studium analizie został poddany bezprecedensowy przypadek kobiety wykładającej prawo na uniwersytecie w pierwszej połowie XIV w.; sportretowano także jej środowisko kulturowe i rodzinne. Wśród przeanalizowanych tu źródeł rejestrujących pamięć o niej znalazła się w szczególności relacja Krystyny de Pizan, której fragment poświęcony Novelli został na nowo zinterpretowany, jak również źródła rozpowszechniające mylące informacje, generujące wiele niejasności wokół historycznej postaci Novelli d'Andrea. Do analizowanych tu dzieł sztuk wizualnych, które, podobnie jak dzieła literackie, podsycały mit Novelli d'Andrea, zalicza się też to, które dotychczas było ignorowane przez historiografię poświęconą postaci owej XIV-wiecznej kobiety, która przebiła „szklany sufit”.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Novella d'Andrea, średniowieczna Bolonia, kobiety i uniwersytet, Krystyna de Pizan

*In memory of my father,  
to whom I owe my love of history.*

## Introduction<sup>\*</sup>

While it is well known that “The world of the medieval student was thoroughly masculine. For the girl or woman student this world had no place,”<sup>1</sup> there are exceptions, and this is what this article is concerned with. Research has cast light on women engaged in the life of medieval universities – in particular, on the production of university textbooks. With its significant population of scholarly readers, Bologna developed into one of the leading centres for the production of manuscripts and textbooks south of the Alps. Manuals of canon and Roman law were an important segment of the book trade, a mass market in which thousands of textbooks

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<sup>1</sup> R. C. Schwinges, *Student education, student life*, in: *A history of the University in Europe*, vol. 1: *Universities in the Middle Ages*, ed. H. de Ridder-Symoens, W. Rüegg, Cambridge 1992, p. 202.

for the law curriculum were made available to students. In medieval Bologna, female artisans were involved in the printing and publishing of books,<sup>2</sup> whereas research on other university towns and cities such as Paris and Oxford shows that there were no gender distinctions in the production of manuscript books. Although the number of men occupied in the book trade was undoubtedly much higher, the fact that women served in different roles with a certain amount of career progression (starting as apprentices and then going on to be masters of their craft) shows that it was not a totally male-dominated trade, and a significant female presence is indisputable.<sup>3</sup>

Archival evidence that women officially taught in medieval universities has not yet come to light. However, it emerges from narrative sources that in the fourteenth century one woman lectured in law in Bologna to replace her father, Giovanni d'Andrea (ca. 1271–1348), when he was incapacitated.<sup>4</sup> This was Novella, his youngest daughter, who was named after her paternal grandmother.<sup>5</sup> It is now seven centuries since the case of the fourteenth-century Novella teaching law at the university attracted the attention of scholars and artists. Almost as soon as this interest arose, inaccurate tales began to circulate that have tended to undermine the authenticity of the story. Regrettably, some inaccurate reports continue to circulate to this

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<sup>2</sup> R. Smurra, *Women's contribution to manuscript textbook production in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Bologna*, in: A. Alexiou, R. Roberto, *Women in print 1 design and identities*, Oxford 2022, pp. 9–31.

<sup>3</sup> R. H. Rouse, M. A. Rouse, *Manuscripts and their makers. Commercial book producers in medieval Paris, 1200–1500*, Turnhout 1999; G. Pollard, *The university and the book trade in medieval Oxford*, in: *Beiträge zum Berufsbewusstsein des mittelalterlichen Menschen*, “Miscellanea Mediaevalia”, vol. 3, eds. P. Wilpert, W. Eckert, Berlin 1964, pp. 336–44; M. A. Michael, *English illuminators c. 1190–1450: A survey from documentary sources*, in: *English Manuscripts Studies 1100–1700*, vol. 4, eds. P. Beal, J. Griffiths, Toronto 1993, pp. 62–113, at 69. See also M. A. Michael, *Urban production of manuscript books and the role of the university towns*, in: *The Cambridge history of the book in Britain*, vol. 2, eds. N. J. Morgan, R. M. Thomson, Cambridge 2008, pp. 168–194.

<sup>4</sup> M. T. Guerra Medici, *Di padre in figlia. Novella di Giovanni d' Andrea e Cristina di Tommaso da Pizzano (Christine de Pisan) nella scuola di Bologna*, “Rivista internazionale di Diritto Comune” 2016, vol. 27, pp. 329–344.

<sup>5</sup> A number of women in the same family had the same name, and this has generated a certain amount of confusion.

day, despite the fact that Guido Rossi, an Italian legal historian, published a seminal essay in 1957 clarifying many aspects of Novella's life.<sup>6</sup>

As various inaccuracies about Novella persist today, a useful starting point is an analysis of the sources, beginning with those more or less contemporary with Novella, in order to try to understand what elements cast a shadow on the reliability of the tale, leading to the creation of the Novella 'myth'. Furthermore, in order to cast light on Novella's personality, it is necessary to identify the characteristics of the family she was born into and the one she married into, because even in relation to these matters, and especially the latter, various accounts have been put forward over the centuries and even today there are those who continue to disseminate misinformation, perhaps through negligence.

### Novella's family background

What we know about Novella, daughter of Giovanni d'Andrea, a well-known professor of canon law at the Studium (university) of Bologna, is that she was born in 1312 and that in 1326, at the age of 14, she married a civil law professor of the Studium, Filippo Formaglini. Although verifiable in the sources, these facts were distorted quite early on.

Giovanni d'Andrea, who was born in or around 1271, was the son of Novella – the first woman with this name in this family – and Andrea, a grammar school teacher from a village in the Bolognese mountains, who moved to Bologna when Giovanni was still a child, and opened a grammar school attended by the children of influential Bolognese families such as the Galluzzi. They lived in a house located between the Galluzzi tower and the

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<sup>6</sup> G. Rossi, *Contributo alla biografia del canonista Giovanni d'Andrea (L'insegnamento di Novella e Bettina sue figlie ed i presunti «responso di Milancia sua moglie»)*, "Rivista trimestrale di diritto e procedura civile" 1957, vol. 4, pp. 1451–1502. In the footsteps of Guido Rossi recent works have also tried to bring order to the information on Novella, such as for example M. T. Guerra Medici, op. cit., pp. 329–344; N. Wandruszka, *Novella und Christine. Zur Historizität gelehrter Frauen an der Universität Bologna*, Fargau, 28.4.2013, <https://www.wandruszka-genealogie.eu/Literatur/Novella%20und%20Christine%202013.pdf> (accessed: 29/12/2020).

family church of S. Maria Rotonda dei Galluzzi. Giovanni began studying at an early age, devoting himself to legal studies. His teachers were some of the most important lecturers in Bolognese legal studies between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: the civil law specialists Martino Sullimani and Egidio Foscherari, whose mausoleum is located in Piazza S. Domenico, formerly the cemetery annexed to the basilica, and most importantly the canon law specialists Marsilio Mantighelli and Guido da Baisio, with whom Giovanni completed his studies in 1298, with the conferral of the title *doctor decretorum*.<sup>7</sup>

By 1302, Giovanni was already a prominent professor, so much so that in the following year he was appointed to be a member of a panel of experts and jurists commissioned by the municipality. This academic and public position enabled him to enjoy a prosperous lifestyle. He gave a respectable dowry to his sister Bartolomea, who went on to marry the notary Michelino Zagnoni,<sup>8</sup> and he himself married extremely well, although the exact date is unknown, taking Milancia, daughter of Bonincontro dallo Spedale,<sup>9</sup> as his wife, who was also a professor of canon law and leader of the so-called *Guelfi bianchi* (moderate) faction. Probably after his marriage, Giovanni went to live in the parish of S. Geminiano, in the area where the Schools of Jurists were concentrated.

Novella, the protagonist of this article, was the last of the offspring (five legitimate children) born of the marriage between Giovanni and Milancia, to which we must add an adopted son and a natural son. All the sons, with the exception of Francesco, the natural son, followed in their father's footsteps, whereas the daughters married law professors. It should be clear from this brief description that a dynasty of law professors, mostly canon law professors, was thus founded by Giovanni d'Andrea. He gave his eldest son the name Bonincontro, the name of his wife's father, as a mark of respect and gratitude towards his father-in-law, an eminent professor of canon law.

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<sup>7</sup> G. Tamba, sub voce *Giovanni d'Andrea*, in: *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 55, Roma 2001, pp. 667–672.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 668.

<sup>9</sup> M. Sarti, M. Fattorini, *De claris Archigymnasii Bononienses professoribus a saeculo XI usque ad saeculum XIV*, vol. 1–2, Bologna 1772.

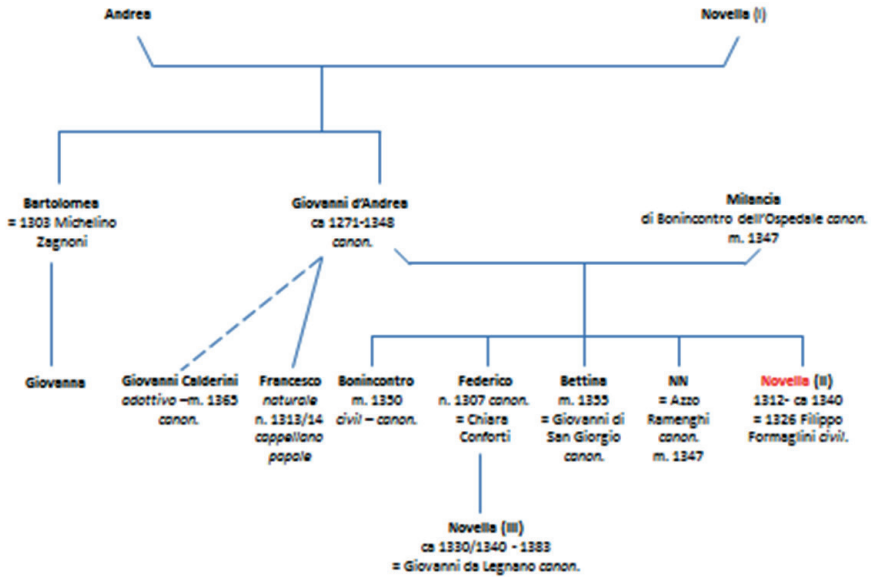


Fig. 1. Family tree of Novella d'Andrea

Source: © Author.

This remarkable dynasty of jurists, which began with Giovanni's marriage to Milancia, was severely affected by the Black Death of 1347–1348. Giovanni, his wife Milancia and one of their sons-in-law, the canonist Azzone Ramenghi, perished during that terrible plague pandemic. Tragically, Bonincontro, the eldest son of Giovanni, who was a professor of law and heavily involved in local politics, was captured and beheaded on 16 June 1350 for allegedly conspiring against the Pepoli, who ruled the city.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> A. L. Trombetti Budriesi, *Bologna 1334–1376*, in: *Storia di Bologna. Bologna nel Medioevo*, ed. O. Capitani, Bologna 2007.

## Bologna and the Studium in the lifetime of Novella

Novella was born and raised in an environment in which she was surrounded by many jurists (father, brothers, husband, brothers-in-law)<sup>11</sup> although her death in around 1340, before the Black Death, predates that of the other family members. The years of Novella's childhood were challenging, due to the political turmoil and the turbulence taking place in the Studium, with the two themes always closely intertwined. An episode that encompasses the two issues, and which – as I will discuss later – may have had a bearing on the narratives that have arisen around Novella, is the one summed up in the *Pietra della Pace*.<sup>12</sup>

In March 1321, Iacopo da Valenza, an Iberian canon law student, together with sixteen other armed students, attempted to kidnap Novella's cousin Giovanna, daughter of the notary Michelino Zagnoni and Bartolomea, sister of Giovanni d'Andrea. A violent brawl ensued between the students and the girl's neighbours, until the Valencian student and other companions were arrested. If the matter had stopped there, it would have been an episode that was not unusual in a university town at the time. Instead, the podestà (chief magistrate) applied the law strictly to the letter and sentenced the Valencian student to death. The judicial proceedings were influenced by the political situation that saw a division within society: the father of Giovanna, the victim of the attempted kidnapping, belonged to the *Maltraversi* faction (those who in Florence were called *Guelfi neri*), an opposing faction of the *Scacchesi*, led by Romeo Pepoli, who aspired to become the ruler of Bologna with the support of the Pope, and the King of Naples. In spite of the resources deployed by Pepoli to free the student, he was not saved and was subject to summary trial and beheaded on 30 March. The student's decapitation prompted a full-blown revolt, especially on the part of the students who felt they had been unfairly treated, and who no longer felt safe in Bologna. The students of civil and canon law, but later

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<sup>11</sup> S. K. Wray, *Law faculty wives of Trecento Bologna*, in: *Bologna. Cultural crossroads from the Medieval to the Baroque: Recent Anglo-American scholarship*, eds. G. M. Anselmi, A. De Benedictis, N. Terpstra, Bologna 2013, pp. 47, 50, 55–56.

<sup>12</sup> The *Pietra della Pace* is currently exhibited in the Museo Civico Medievale of Bologna.

also those of medicine, left the city together with a group of academics to go to Imola. At one point the students going into exile included Francesco Petrarca.<sup>13</sup> The situation then deteriorated, with other cities offering to take in the students and their masters. Siena, then Padua and Florence, offered the professors generous salaries, since they were expected to attract many fee-paying students on account of their reputation.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the above circumstances, the Studium and the Commune of Bologna finally negotiated a reconciliation in 1322, with pacts that marked the triumph of the students, represented by their rectors. They obtained many favourable conditions, including the erection of the Chapel of Peace at the expense of the Commune.<sup>15</sup> Unveiled on 30 April 1322, the event was solemnised with the *Pietra della pace*, depicting, alongside the Virgin Mary, the rectors of the students, but significantly no representative of the Commune.

The question arises as to the part played by Giovanni d'Andrea in this episode that disrupted the Studium for more than a year, since he was not only the uncle of the young woman who was the victim of the attempted kidnapping but also the professor of the canon law students on which the Commune had imposed a sentence deemed to be excessively harsh. It was certainly an episode that seriously affected the family circle of Novella, who at the time of the tragic event was about ten years old. Politically, the family was not clearly aligned, as one side supported the rule of Taddeo Pepoli,<sup>16</sup> while in the following years the dissenting members of the family continued to oppose the regime, supporting the *Maltraversi* faction until they were banished in 1337. Among the dissenters was Filippo Formaglini, professor

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<sup>13</sup> F. Filippini, *L'esodo degli studenti da Bologna nel 1321 e il "Polifemo" dantesco*, "Studi e memorie per la storia dell'Università di Bologna" 1921, pp. 107–150.

<sup>14</sup> P. Nardi, *La migratio delle scuole universitarie da Bologna a Siena: il problema della continuità istituzionale*, in: *L'Università in tempo di crisi. Revisioni e novità dei saperi e delle istituzioni nel Trecento*, eds. B. Pio, R. Parmeggiani, Bologna 2016, pp. 128–132.

<sup>15</sup> The chapel no longer stands, it was located in Via d'Azeglio, on the site of the present-day no. 57, between Via Castelfidardo and Via Mura di Porta d'Azeglio (Porta San Mamolo).

<sup>16</sup> M. Giansante, sub voce *Taddeo Pepoli*, in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 82, Roma 2015, pp. 284–288.



of civil law and, from 1326, Novella's spouse, and the young couple opted for self-imposed exile. Giovanni d'Andrea proudly recalled his son-in-law Filippo for his legal wisdom, and with great sadness lamented the fact that he was banished due to the usual calamity in the Italian states at the time (i.e. the clash of factions), which led to the death of Filippo and Novella in around 1340.<sup>17</sup>

Before her sad demise in exile, Novella had enjoyed the visit of distinguished guests at the homes both of her father and her husband.<sup>18</sup> The poet Francesco Petrarca, after the episode in 1321 mentioned above, sojourned in Bologna between 1323 and 1326, as evidenced by a number of *Lettere familiari*. Petrarca also enthusiastically described the Bolognese milieu of those years in Letter II of book X of *Lettere senili*, comparing it with the situation on his subsequent visit, that of 1365, in which he complained of the decadence of the Studium, as well as the political state of affairs.

In 1324, Cino da Pistoia (1270–1336/7) had also been a guest in Giovanni d'Andrea's house:<sup>19</sup> known for his innovative *stil novo* poetry, he should also be remembered as a jurist.

The Formaglini household, to which Novella moved after her marriage in 1324, hosted eminent visitors. In addition to Filippo Formaglini's friendship with Petrarch, we know of his friendship with Pietro, the son of Dante Alighieri, who was also a student in Bologna. In 1323, Pietro and his brother Iacopo, who had frequented the Formaglini house, brought a complete copy of the *Divina Commedia* to Bologna.<sup>20</sup>

## Novella d'Andrea: myth and reality

Novella's short and intense life took place in an intellectual context of the highest level, though politically very troubled. Of all of Giovanni d'Andrea's

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<sup>17</sup> J. Andreae, *Additiones ad Speculum iudiciale Guilelmi Duranti* (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Monaco di Baviera), 1346–1337, lib. IV, pars IV.

<sup>18</sup> G. Rossi, op. cit., pp. 401–403, 424–425.

<sup>19</sup> M. Marti, sub voce *Cino da Pistoia*, in: *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. 1, Roma 1970, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> F. Filippini, op. cit., p. 147.

children – those born in wedlock (five), the adopted son, and the illegitimate offspring (perhaps more than one) – Novella is the one he mentions in his work, as, for example, when he states that his daughter was born on 20 April 1312, on the day her mother died, and that he intended to name his daughter after her paternal grandmother. In addition, Giovanni chose the title *Novella* for his *Commentaries* on the five books of the Decretals of Gregory IX.

At the end of the fourteenth century, the dynasty of Giovanni d'Andrea had died out, but the descendants of his adopted son Giovanni Calderini survived.<sup>21</sup> It was precisely then that Novella's life and times began to appear in the literature. In a period between 1380 and 1387, the earliest reference is found to an unnamed daughter of Giovanni d'Andrea, who was said to have lectured in law. Reporting such remarkable news is Jehan Le Fèvre de Ressions, a Parisian lawyer mainly engaged in literary pursuits, who included this information in his poem in verse *Le Livre de Leesce*, written in defence of women as a riposte to *Les lamentations* by the misogynist Mathéolus.<sup>22</sup>

It was a woman who made Giovanni d'Andrea's daughter even more famous. This was the celebrated writer Christine de Pizan, or rather Cristina da Pizzano, daughter of Tommaso da Pizzano, who took his name from Pizzano, a settlement not far from Bologna. There is widespread agreement among scholars that Christine was acquainted with episodes of university life in Bologna through the accounts of her father, who was a reader of astrology from 1340–1341 until probably 1353–1354.<sup>23</sup> The story of Novella masterfully narrated by Christine is to be found in her *Le livre de la Cité des dames* (written in 1404–1405), a work that addresses the role of women in society. The passage deserves particular attention, as it contributed greatly to

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<sup>21</sup> H. J. Becker, sub voce *Calderini (Caldarino, de' Calderari)*, *Giovanni*, in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* vol. 16, Roma 1973, pp. 606–608.

<sup>22</sup> J. Le Fèvre de Ressions, *Les Lamentations de Matheolus et Le Livre de Leësce*, vol. 1, ed. A. G. Van Hamel, Paris 1892, p. 36, v. 1140–1154. Le Fèvre de Ressions composed the poem in Old French by vulgarising the *Lamentationes Matheoli*, a Latin poem composed around 1290 by a cleric originally from Boulogne.

<sup>23</sup> T. Duranti, sub voce *Tommaso da Pizzano*, in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* vol. 96, Roma 2019, pp. 151–154.

creating the myth of Novella which, it should be remembered once again, underwent considerable alterations over the centuries:

Similarly, to speak of more recent times, without searching for examples in ancient history, Giovanni Andrea, a solemn law professor in Bologna non quite sixty years ago, was not of the opinion that it was bad for women to be educated. He had a fair and good daughter, named Novella, who was educated in the law to such an advanced degree that when he was occupied by some task and not at leisure to present his lectures to his students, he would send Novella, his daughter, in his place to lecture to the students from his chair. And to prevent her beauty from distracting the concentration of her audience, she had a little curtain drawn in front of her. In this manner she could on occasion supplement and lighten her father's occupation. He loved her so much that, to commemorate her name, he wrote a book of remarkable lectures on the law which he entitled *Novella super Decretalium*, after his daughter's name.<sup>24</sup>

Compared to Le Fèvre's account, Christine de Pizan added fundamental details such as the name of Giovanni d'Andrea's daughter, the city where the episode took place, an exact chronological element, Giovanni's support for women's education, the fact that Novella occasionally replaced her father in teaching, and the presence of a curtain to prevent students from being distracted by Novella's beauty.<sup>25</sup> Christine also sought to emphasise the father's love for Novella by mentioning that he entitled a work in honour of his daughter. It is perhaps superfluous to say that the detail of the curtain to prevent students from being distracted by Novella's beauty sparked the imagination of those who subsequently narrated her story. It is worth

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<sup>24</sup> Ch. de Pizan, *The book of the City of Ladies*, transl. by E. J. Richards, New York 1982, b. II, ch. 36.3; The work by Giovanni d'Andrea mentioned at the end of the passage by Christine de Pizan is a well-known textbook of canon law titled *Novella in quinque Decretalium libros commentaria*.

<sup>25</sup> Recently, Pascale Bermon drew attention to the fact that the theme of the woman teaching behind a curtain is a circulating topos in the Mediterranean area at the end of the Middle Ages: P. Bermon, *Les femmes dans le milieu éducatifs au Moyen Âge (XIII–XIV siècle)*, in: *Regards masculins, regards féminins du Moyen Âge sur la femme*, eds. P. Bermon, D. Poirel, Paris 2022, pp. 180–182.

reflecting once more on Christine's mention of that element of "separation" between Novella and the students that the writer presents as a device to prevent the distraction of the audience, which we know was male since women were not allowed to attend. Aware of Christine's accuracy and depth of thought, the question arises as to whether, with the image of the curtain that prevented students from seeing Novella, she had not in mind the serious episode of 1321, mentioned above, which involved Giovanna, a cousin of Novella's, the victim of the attempted kidnapping by university students. The tragic event, which ended with the beheading of one of the students, had serious consequences not only for the family, but also for the university and the city.<sup>26</sup> The introduction of the detail of the curtain could arguably be interpreted as an effective and elegant literary device used by the writer to allude to what had already happened and the risk that such episodes might be repeated. It is a matter of speculation that we cannot prove, but it is evident that Christine de Pizan was familiar with the events in Bologna, and this is also clear from the chronological clarification within the passage on Novella in which Christine informs us that sixty years had not passed since the death of Giovanni d'Andrea, which we know took place on 7 July 1348.

The degree of accuracy of Christine de Pizan's account of Novella is not replicated among her contemporaries or later authors. As noted above, over the centuries Novella's story has been altered several times and some important details of her life inaccurately recorded.<sup>27</sup> One of the first inaccuracies concerned the identity of Novella's husband, whom the canon law professor Antonio da Budrio (ca. 1338–1408) mistakenly identified as Giovanni da Legnano (ca. 1317–1383), also a professor of canon law at the Studium of Bologna.<sup>28</sup> This marriage is disproved by archival evidence such as the wedding contract of 24 September 1326 between Filippo Formaglini and Novella d'Andrea, who was 14 years old at the time, drawn up by the fathers of the bride and groom. The document was published in 1904

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<sup>26</sup> See above the section on *Bologna and the Studium in Novella's time*.

<sup>27</sup> Many of these inaccuracies were uncovered by G. Rossi, *op. cit.*, and by N. Wandruszka, *op. cit.*

<sup>28</sup> B. Pio, *Giovanni da Legnano, Un intellettuale nell'Europa del Trecento*, Bologna 2018.

by Emilio Orioli.<sup>29</sup> Under the terms of this contract, Giovanni d'Andrea gave 600 lire of bolognini as a dowry for his daughter Novella to Dino Formaglini and his son Filippo. As partial justification for the negligence of Antonio da Budrio, it must be borne in mind that it was a different Novella, the daughter of his brother Federico, who had married Giovanni da Legnano.

After Antonio da Budrio the list of authors who persisted with the series of inaccuracies is rather long, but it is worth at least mentioning that at the end of the sixteenth century, a baseless report circulated according to which Giovanni d'Andrea was adopted by Giovanni Calderini. This misleading claim became so stubbornly entrenched over the centuries that Novella and her sister Bettina were known as Novella Calderini and Bettina Calderini.<sup>30</sup> Further confusion was generated by misleading claims that both sisters were granted the right to teach university classes;<sup>31</sup> in addition, several erroneous dates were given especially in relation to the death of Novella.<sup>32</sup> The incorrect information circulating among Italian writers was subject to critical scrutiny in 1775 by Girolamo Tiraboschi, librarian at the well-endowed Biblioteca Estense in Modena, who considered Christine de Pizan to be a reliable source.<sup>33</sup> Tiraboschi's attempt to rectify the inaccurate information was not however successful, so much so that in 1890 Emma Tettoni, Giosuè Carducci's pupil and writer, lamented the confusion that reigned over No-

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<sup>29</sup> E. Orioli, *Il matrimonio di Novella di Giovanni d'Andrea – Nozze Vicini-Premoli*, Bologna 1904, pp. 15–16.

<sup>30</sup> See for example F. Serdonati, *Giunta al libro delle Donne Illustri di messer Giovanni Boccaccio*, Firenze 1596, pp. 568–569; C. Bronzini, *Della dignità e nobiltà delle donne*, Firenze 1625, pp. 24–25; P. A. Orlandi, *Notizie degli scrittori bolognesi*, Bologna 1714, p. 218; C. Bonafede, *Cenni biografici e ritratti d'insigni donne bolognesi*, Bologna 1845, pp. 161–165.

<sup>31</sup> The claim that Bettina was appointed to teach at the university is to be found in Giulio Cesare Croce, *La gloria delle donne*, Bologna 1590, pp. 17–18.

<sup>32</sup> Among those providing inaccurate dates for the death of Novella, see C. Bronzini, op. cit., p. 25 (year 1349); P. A. Orlandi, op. cit., p. 218 (year 1366); C. Bonafede, op. cit., p. 164 (year 1366).

<sup>33</sup> G. Tiraboschi, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, Modena 1775, pp. 285–286; in this also followed by F. M. Colle, *Storia scientifico-letteraria dello Studio di Padova*, Padova 1824, p. 44.

vella and Bettina, Giovanni d'Andrea's daughters, though Tettoni did not attempt to rectify the misinformation.<sup>34</sup> The high point of misinformation was reached in 1939 when the legal scholar Piero Addeo published the essay *Eva togata*, in the *Saggi di cultura giuridica e forense* series.<sup>35</sup> Here, among other inaccuracies, Novella is referred to as Novella Calderini, and her death is erroneously stated as taking place in 1386.

Without claiming to list in detail the errors concerning Novella d'Andrea, it may be said that the tangle of inaccuracies in part also occurs in widely circulated and consulted reference works such as the *Macmillan dictionary of women's biography* where Novella d'Andrea is reported to be the wife of John Caldesimus [sic], and her death is given as 1333, the year in which she was still alive, since she died in around 1340. The same entry mentions her sister Bettina, whose date of death is sadly brought forward by twenty years, 1335 instead of 1355.<sup>36</sup>

## Visual representations of Novella

The fame of Novella d'Andrea spans the centuries, leaving traces not only in literature and drama,<sup>37</sup> but also in sculpture and painting. In the visual arts, a similar situation has arisen to that found in literature, where we find those who have been inspired by Christine de Pizan and those who have been guided by those disseminating misleading accounts.

As far as painting is concerned, two portraits are worth mentioning from the period of Romanticism, when examples were drawn from history through the characters of the Middle Ages.<sup>38</sup> In this genre of historical painting, the figure of Novella could be celebrated, highlighting her qual-

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<sup>34</sup> E. Tettoni, *Le scienziate italiane*, in *La donna italiana descritta da scrittrici italiane in una serie di conferenze tenute all'Esposizione Beatrice in Firenze*, Florence 1890, p. 272.

<sup>35</sup> P. Addeo, *Eva togata*, Naples 1939.

<sup>36</sup> J. Uglow, *The Macmillan dictionary of women's biography. The lives of over 2000 remarkable women*, s.v. *d'Andrea, Novella*, London 1982, p. 147.

<sup>37</sup> For an overview reference may be made to G. Rossi, op. cit., pp. 393–400.

<sup>38</sup> F. Bocchi, *La pittura storica dell'Ottocento tra Pietro Selvatico e Jacob Burckhardt*, "Convivium" 1967, vol. 35, no. 6, pp. 674–691.

ities. Mention should be made of two paintings with Novella d'Andrea as their subject, by the French painter François Gérard (1831) and his pupil Marie-Eléonore Godefroid (1843). In both these works, the close adherence to Christine de Pizan's account can be seen, so much so that Godefroid's work, entitled *Novella d'Andrea*, is accompanied by a substantial caption that mirrors Christine's account, which is explicitly cited as the source for the portrait.<sup>39</sup>

Regarding sculpture, Novella and her sister Bettina are portrayed in two of the twelve terracotta busts of illustrious ladies of Bologna executed between 1680 and 1690 for the noble household Fibbia Fabri.<sup>40</sup> Now exhibited in the Museum of the History of Bologna in Palazzo Pepoli, the two busts bear the names Novella Calderini and Bettina Calderini, based on erroneous reports in circulation at the time. As stated above, in the case of the Bolognese poet Giulio Cesare Croce at the end of the sixteenth century, the surname Calderini was employed for the daughters of Giovanni d'Andrea. It comes as no surprise, then, that the busts of the two sisters are identified in this manner, even though in 1840 the magazine *Il caffè di Petronio. Notizie artistiche letterarie ed urbane*, noted that the sisters Novella and Bettina went by the name de' Calderini.<sup>41</sup> The busts are still identified by this surname in the museum, where they are on display to the public.

Whereas the terracotta busts with the cycle of eminent Bolognese women are well known and have long attracted the attention of scholars, this is by no means the case for another bust of Novella, this time in marble,

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<sup>39</sup> *Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture, gravure et lithographie des artistes vivants exposés au musée royal le 15 mars 1843*, Paris 1843, p. 68. The caption specifies that the painting was derived from the work of F. Gérard, of whom Godefroy was a pupil.

<sup>40</sup> *Dell'eccellenza delle dame di Bologna. Dodici busti di donne illustri bolognesi*, ed. S. Tumidei, Firenze 2003; S. Massari, *La virtù al femminile: un pantheon d'illustri donne bolognesi. Le dodici donne Bolognesi illustri di casa Fabri*, in: *Antico e moderno. Acquisizioni e donazioni per la storia di Bologna (2001–2013)*, ed. A. Mazza, Bologna 2014, pp. 355–363.

<sup>41</sup> *Biografie di donne illustri*, in: *Il caffè di Petronio. Notizie artistiche letterarie ed urbane*, no. 9, Bologna 1840, pp. 33–34. It must be pointed out that the biographies of the two sisters are replete with inaccuracies.



**Fig. 2.** Novella d'Andrea marble bust by Dora Ohlfsen (1930–1937)  
Source: © University of Glasgow, Hunterian Art Gallery.

executed in the twentieth century. This work is not mentioned in any of the many articles that focus on Novella, which instead often refer to either the terracotta bust of the Fibbia house, the Godefroid painting, or *The dinner party*, a feminist work celebrating the lives and work of 1,038 notable women.<sup>42</sup> This monumental installation, created by Jude Chicago between 1974 and 1979 and exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum, mentions Novella d'Andrea.

The sculpture dedicated entirely to Novella d'Andrea, that is not part of a cycle celebrating remarkable women, is housed in the Glasgow Hunterian Art Gallery in Scotland. It is a marble bust executed between 1930–1937<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Among recent works: D. Tappy, *Des femmes enseignant le droit à Bologne au Moyen Âge? Retour sur les récits concernant la fille de Jean d'André et d'autres prétendues juristes médiévales*, in: *L'insegnamento del diritto (secoli XII–XX)*, ed. M. Cavina, Bologna 2019, pp. 89–109.

<sup>43</sup> University of Glasgow, Hunterian Art Gallery, Object Number: GLAHA 44133. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Peter Black then curator at Hunterian Mu-



by the Australian-born and Italian-based sculptress Dora Ohlfsen (1869–1948). In 1937, the bust was donated by Dr Malcolm Sinclair, a graduate of the University of Glasgow, then a prominent physician practising in Australia. A newspaper article mentions a trip to Bologna by Dr Sinclair where he was impressed by Novella’s story. He then commissioned Dora Ohlfsen, who undertook the Novella project, “absorbed the records of Bologna” and in her Roman studio created the bust of Novella in translucent marble.<sup>44</sup> The interest in Novella d’Andrea’s story by Dr Sinclair, “one of Australia’s leading authorities on tuberculosis”, was even mentioned in an obituary written on the occasion of his death in September 1941.<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusion

Many have wondered if it is true that Novella stood in for her father in some part of his teaching. After so many centuries, it seems difficult to separate reality from the overlapping versions that have been disseminated in popular legend. Those who have misrepresented Novella’s story have not always had the opportunity or the will to consult reliable sources, or have preferred to reproduce the more speculative accounts. Christine de Pizan has indicated a clear way to frame Novella’s narrative. Suffice it consider the facts that are well known: Bologna was a famous university city at the time; the city and university lived in symbiosis; Novella’s family consisted of an elite group of professors; lectures were held close to, if not in, the homes of the law professors. Novella held a *repetitio* or *lectio extraordinaria*, or perhaps it was just the reading and explanation of the summary written by her father, which is also known from other universities where a substitute – male of course – delivered the lectures of the master in his absence.

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seum and Art Gallery, who promptly sent me a scan of an old file photograph with the marble bust.

<sup>44</sup> I. S. Munro, *Gift to Glasgow University. Bust of Novella D’Andrea: Learned lady of Bologna*, “Glasgow Herald”, Thursday, 5 August 1937, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> Glasgow, *Graduate’s death in Australia. University gift recalled*, “Glasgow Herald”, Saturday, 20 September 1941, p. 6.

It was in any case a demanding task, which could only be performed by somebody with a background of knowledge and learning, as was the case of the environment in which Novella was raised.

The marble bust of Novella commissioned in the 1930s, six hundred years after her death, is a striking example of how her story has attracted the attention over the centuries of generations from different backgrounds convinced that articulate and intelligent women in the Middle Ages could, at least on some occasions, break the glass ceiling.