

# Scholars and Literati at the Academy of the Gelati (1588– 1799)

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This note is a summary description of the set of scholars and literati who were members or associates of the Academy of the Gelati from its inception in 1588 to the end of its activity, around 1799.

## 1 THE ACADEMY

The *Accademia dei Gelati* was founded in Bologna in 1588 by Melchiorre Zoppio, and brothers Camillo, Cesare, and Berlinghiero Gessi. At first, the Academy was mainly composed of writers and poets, who would present their work to the other members in their meetings. Later, the Academy also started including some representatives of other disciplines, such as philosophers and lawyers. From its foundation until the end of the 18th century, the Academy of the Gelati published numerous volumes of literary works authored by its members. From its early years, the Academy benefitted from the protection of important benefactors; the first and most relevant one was Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, who would later become Pope under the name Urbano VIII. The Academy of the Gelati was active in Bologna until the end of the 18th century. The Academy had a specific emblem, designed by Agostino Carracci, representing a forest of trees covered in frost, accompanied by the Latin motto "Nec longum tempus." The symbology suggests the hope that the scholars would not remain "frozen" for long, but that they would flourish within the Academy.

## 2 SOURCES

The main source used was the website *Database of Italian Academies*, which provides information about publications from the main Italian academies, from 1525 to 1700, collected in the British Library. From this source, we were able to retrieve information about 212 members of the Academy of the Gelati. Another important source was the book published in 1672 by Valerio Zani, a member of the Academy of the Gelati, and addressed to Cardinal Francesco Barberini, an honorary member and protector of the Academy at the time. This book, *Memorie, imprese, e ritratti de signori accademici Gelati di Bologna*, was used to complete the information on about 180 scholars active in the Academy between 1590 to 1672. We also consulted the collection of orations written in honor of Benedict XIV, where we found some names of members, particularly for the 18th century (*Accademia dei Gelati 1753*). To complete the biographical information, we used the dictionaries of Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana (1929), more specifically the online section "Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani."

## 3 SOME STATISTICS

Table 1 shows some descriptive statistics. We know the year of birth for 60.4% of the members, meaning that we can compute age at nomination and at death for a large sample of them. The mean age at nomination is 27.1 years. In the case of the Academy of the Gelati, we observe that the longevity (average age at death and expected age at death when 30) is slightly lower than for

example the University of Bologna (De la Croix and Vitale 2021a). The birth place is known for 86.3% of the people. The median distance between birth place and Bologna is 90km. Finally, 33% of the scholars have a Wikipedia page (in some language), which is a relatively high number, and 55.2% of them have left a footprint in the catalogues of the libraries of the world, Worldcat.

Period		nb. obs	% birth year known	mean age at appoint.	mean age at death	exp. age at death
Start	End					
1527	1617	59	45.8	22.3	61.5	49.3
1618	1685	138	63.8	31.7	63.3	57.7
1686	1733	14	85.7	27.5	63.1	62.5
1734	1800	1	100	NaN	67	30
1000	1800	212	60.4	27.1	62.9	54.1
		% birth place known		median distance birth-institution	% with Wikipedia	% with Worldcat
1527	1617	72.9		40	27.1	47.5
1618	1685	90.6		102	35.5	58
1686	1733	100		127	28.6	57.1
1734	1800	100		143	100	100
1000	1800	86.3		90	33	55.2

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

## 4 FIELDS

Figure 1 shows the relative importance of fields, broadly defined. The main fields at the Academy of the Gelati were humanities and law, which account together for almost three quarters of the occupation of the Academy, confirming its original vocation. In addition to scholars belonging to the medical and scientific fields, a significant share of the remaining members had an honorary status.

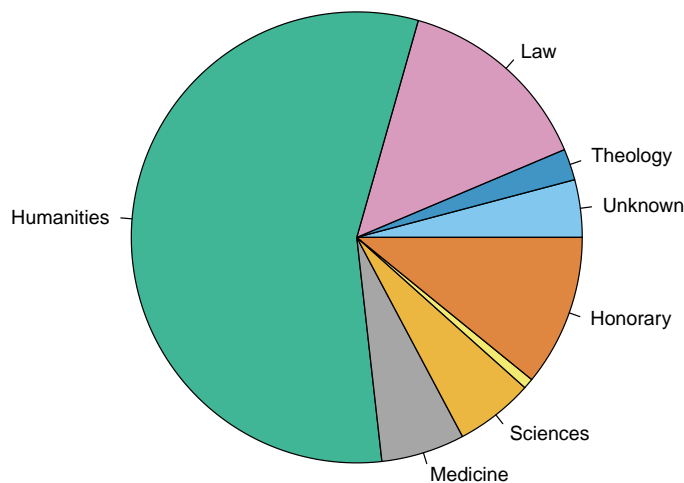


Figure 1: Broad fields at the Academy of the Gelati

## 5 PLACE OF BIRTH

Figure 2 is a plot of the places of birth of the Gelati members. The members of the Academy of the Gelati were predominantly from Bologna or from Northern Italy. This can be explained by the small size of the academy, which had set a limit on the number of members, and by the explicit will to preserve the elitist nature of its members (Gardi 2011).

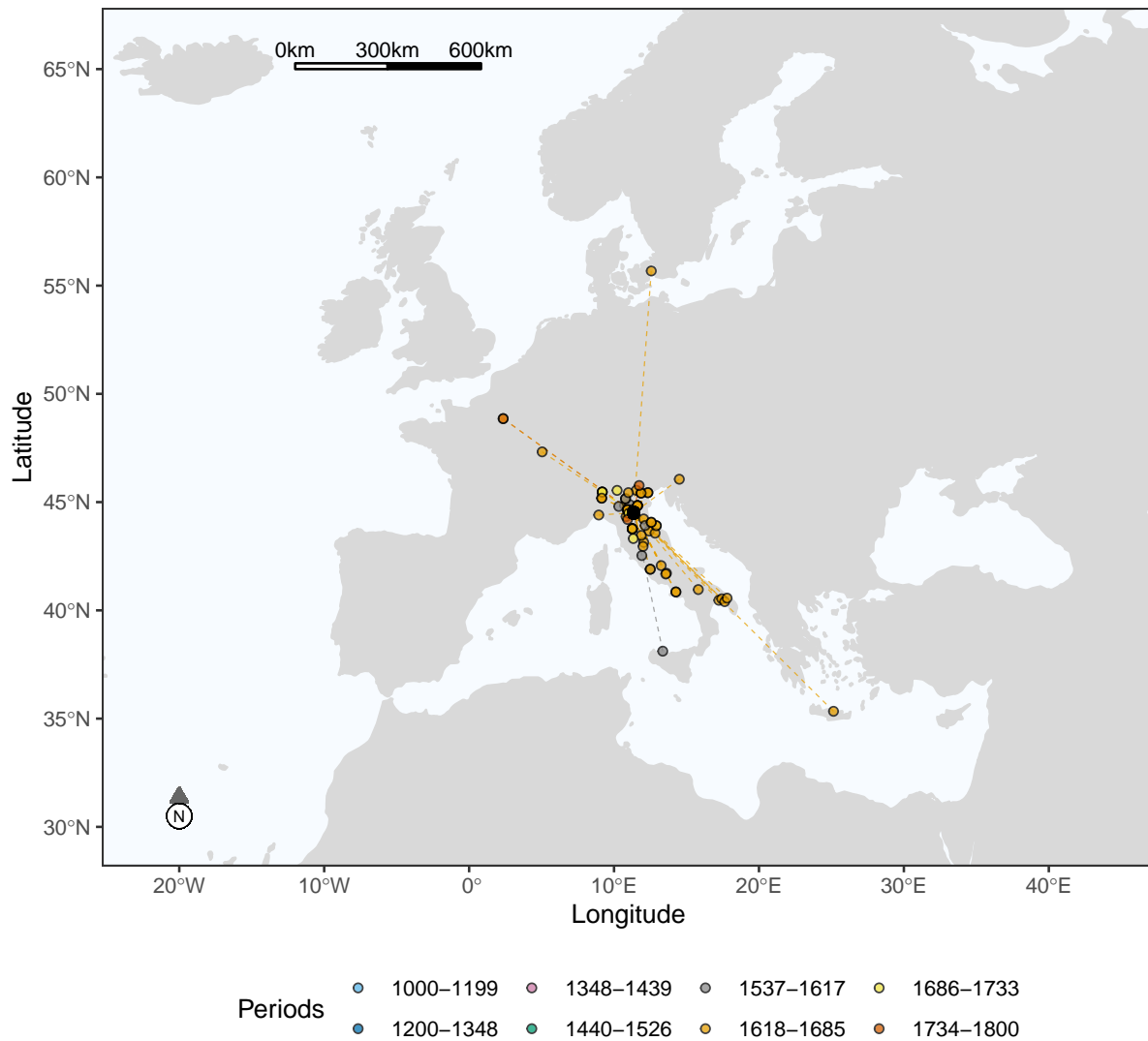


Figure 2: Place of birth of the scholars and literati at the Academy of the Gelati

## 6 HUMAN CAPITAL OF SCHOLARS AND LITERATI

For each person in the database, we compute a heuristic human capital index, identified by combining information from Worldcat and Wikipedia using principal component analysis. The details are given in the Appendix. Figure 3 shows the names of all the scholars with a positive human capital index. The names are placed on the timeline when they started their career, so some scholars appear before the foundation of the Academy in 1588. The vertical green lines (rug plot) show the distribution of all scholars, including the obscure ones, over time. There is a significant decrease in membership in the 18th century. This is explained by a lack of sources for this period and by a progressive phase of decline that led to the closure of the Academy at the end of the century.

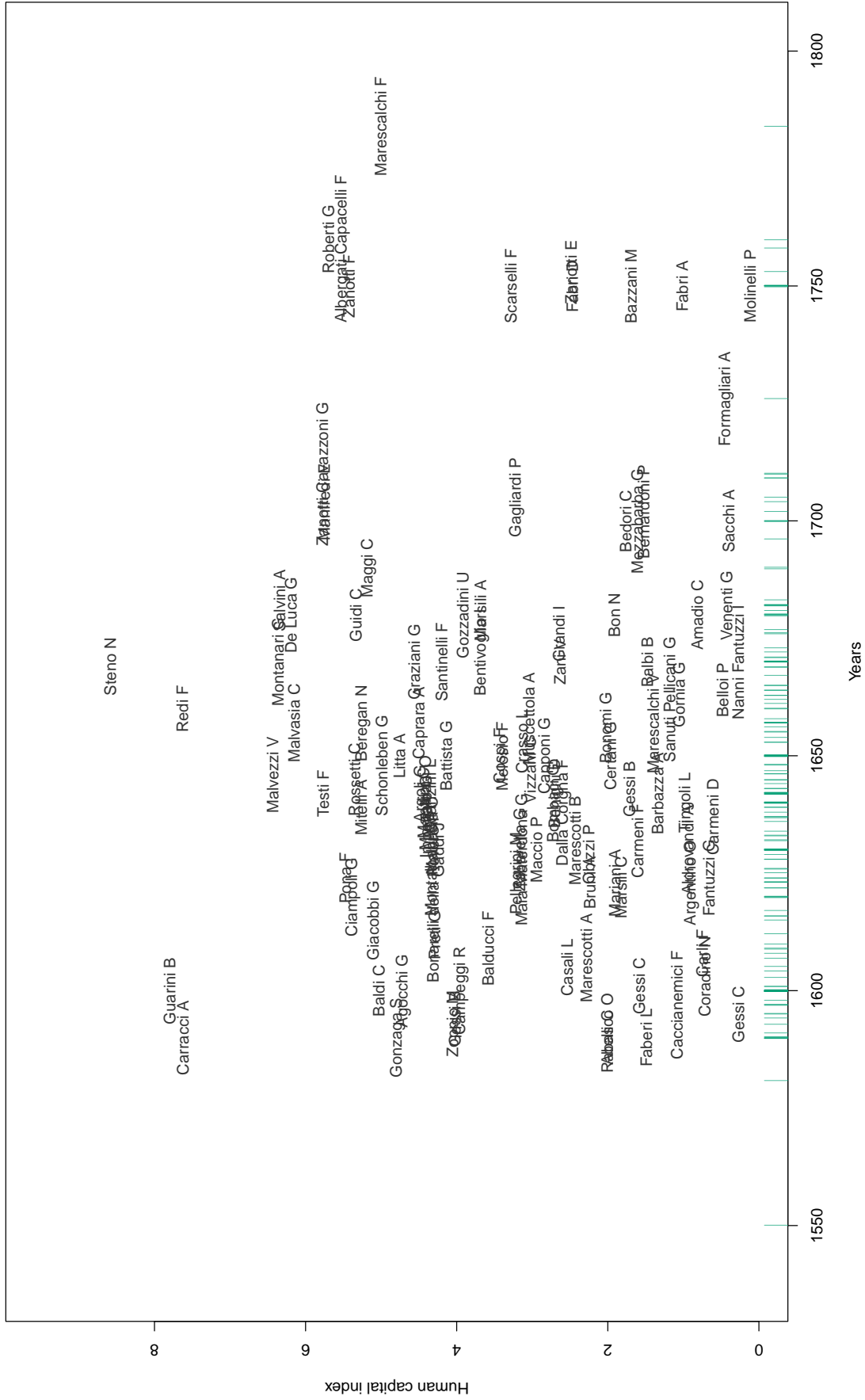


Figure 3: Famous scholars by period

## 7 TOP 5 MEMBERS

We now provide a brief overview of the five members with the highest human capital index.

**Nicolas Steno** (Copenhagen c. 1638 – Schwerin 1686) was a Danish scientist, who made important contributions in the fields of anatomy and geology (see De la Croix (2021)). He completed his medical studies in Denmark, and later started traveling across Europe to continue his studies and research with prominent scholars at many different universities, in the Netherlands, France, and finally Italy. He became a professor of medicine in Padua (De la Croix and Vitale 2021b), and also resided in Florence and Rome. In the field of geology, he was one of the first to question contemporary beliefs on fossils and rock formation; thanks to his groundbreaking intuitions and investigations on this subject, he is considered the pioneer of modern geology. Raised a Lutheran, he converted to Catholicism in the second half of his life, and started devoting his interest mainly to theological studies. He was ordained in 1675 and took active part in the Counter-Reformation movement in Germany in the following years.

**Battista Guarini** (Ferrara 1538 – Venice 1612) was a poet and dramatist. After completing his studies in Padua, he obtained a teaching position at the University of Ferrara. In 1580, he became the official poet of the Este court. It was during these years that he wrote *Il pastor fido*, a pastoral tragicomedy that aroused a great deal of controversy because it subverted the Aristotelian precept that playwrights cannot alternate between tragic and comic elements. He was a member of numerous Italian literary academies.

**Francesco Redi** (Arezzo 1626 – Pisa 1697) was a physician, naturalist, biologist, and poet. He graduated from Pisa with a degree in medicine and philosophy. He was a doctor at the Medici court where for over thirty years he was the personal physician of two successive grand dukes, Ferdinand II and Cosimo III. His most important work *Esperienze intorno alla generazione degli insetti* (1668) is regarded as one of the first fundamental studies in the refutation of 'spontaneous generation' - a theory also known as Aristotelian abiogenesis. His studies on the venom of vipers are also noteworthy, as he showed that venom injected into the body during a bite is deadly, whereas it is not harmful if ingested.

**Agostino Carracci** (Bologna 1557 – Parma 1602) was a painter and engraver, a lover of letters and music. With his brother Annibale and cousin Ludovico, he founded the *Accademia degli Incamminati* around 1582, one of the first Italian art academies, where he taught engraving. He came into contact with the most important artists of the time, such as Tintoretto and Veronese. At the request of the founder of the Academy of the Gelati, Melchiorre Zoppio, Carracci created the engravings of the major work "Ricreationi Amoroze de gli Accademici Gelati" published by the Academy in 1590. In return, he was admitted to the Academy despite his humble origins (the Academy did not accept non-aristocrats).

**Virgilio Malvezzi** (Bologna 1595 – Castel Guelfo di Bologna 1654) was a writer and politician. A great scholar, he studied law at the University of Bologna. Later he went to Siena, a lively cultural center at the time, where he cultivated his interests in philosophy and history. He enlisted in the Spanish army, and covered important political positions. In 1645, he was admitted to the Academy of the Gelati under the name "Esposto" (exposed), where he held the position of "Prince" for two years.

## 8 INTERSECTION WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA

Figure 4 shows the intersection between the Academy of the Gelati and the University of Bologna, giving an idea of the extent to which the two institutions were complementary or substitutes. 34 scholars were members of both institutions, but a large majority of scholars were associated with only one of the two. As seen above, the Gelati allowed a limited number of members, who were characterized by their elitist nature.

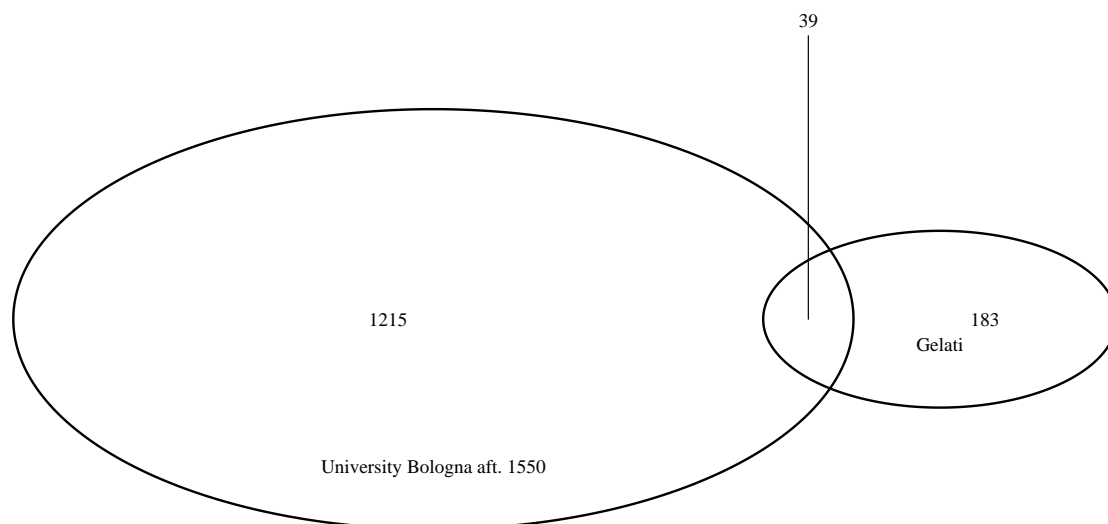


Figure 4: Intersection of the lists of scholars between the Academy of the Gelati and the University of Bologna

## APPENDIX

The individual human capital index  $q_i$  of an individual  $i$  is given by:

$$\begin{aligned}
 q_i = & -1.76 + 0.43 \ln(\text{nb. of characters of the longest Wikipedia page}) \\
 & + 0.40 \ln(\text{nb. of Wikipedia pages in different languages}) + 0.47 \ln(\text{nb. of works in Worldcat}) \\
 & + 0.46 \ln(\text{nb. of publication languages in Worldcat}) \\
 & + 0.47 \ln(\text{nb. of library holdings in Worldcat})
 \end{aligned}$$

We assume that having no Wikipedia page is similar to having one page with a length of 60 characters and that having no Worldcat page is similar to having a page with one work in one language held by one library. The constant  $-1.76$  normalizes  $q_i$  at 0 when there is neither a Wikipedia page, nor a Worldcat page. The weights (0.43, 0.40, etc) are obtained from the first principal component of the five indicators (De la Croix et al. 2020).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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