# THE MYTH OF BOLOGNA? WOMEN'S CULTURAL PRODUCTION DURING THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

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# CHAPTER I

# WHY BOLOGNA? ASSEMBLING THE FRAGMENTS OF EARLY MODERN WOMEN'S HISTORY

Italian Baroque art is known for its drama and its naturalism, but not necessarily for its women artists. Arguably, no period really is.[1] The lack of general knowledge about early modern women artists might lead to the assumption that there were none, or at least, none of importance. Assumptions like these are not only false but are damaging to women's history as a whole because they perpetuate narratives that women were not dynamic contributors to history, even though there are plenty of cases in which they were. During the seventeenth century, for instance, the city of Bologna had as many as fifty active women artists. The names of several of these women are known to scholars, including Caterina Vigri (1413-1463), Properzia de’ Rossi (1490-1530), Lavinia Fontana (1552-1614), Elisabetta Sirani (1638-1665), and Ginevra Cantofoli (1618-1672), but they have yet to become part of the mainstream narrative of art history. Knowing the vast accomplishments of these women offers a direct challenge to the assumptions that although the early modern era did have women artists, it lacked any who were successful or important and emphasizes the fact that the field of art history has largely overlooked women, especially in this period.

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[1] Many scholars have confronted this issue, asking why women artists of the past have been left out of art history or have been considered to be much less skilled in their respective trades. Linda Nochlin, "Why have there been no great women artists?" In *Women in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness,* edited by Vivian Gornick and Barbara Moran (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 229-233 uses a feminist perspective, to address this question and discusses how the art-historical framework is built in a way which excludes women from being discussed as great artists. Other works, such as Barbara Ehrlich White, "A 1974 Perspective: Why Women's Studies in Art and Art History?" *Art Journal* 35, no. 4 (1976): 340-44, approach this question by analyzing how art history is studied to challenge the negative views of women's studies that were prominent at the time. White also confronts the sociocultural reasons women in the past had less access to artistic communities. Germaine Greer's, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979) also approaches this question by addressing the challenges of past women artists and how they were able to overcome some obstacles, but still found other insurmountable. Her discussion includes what she describes as "the Bolognese phenomenon," which, as I will discuss, stands out among women's art history. Also see, Fredrika H Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, for a discussion more specifically on Renaissance women artists and how art criticism and the foundations of art history have largely kept women from being considered as serious and great artists. Works such as, Marsha Meskimmon's, *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012) take a more global look at art history and how women have been left out of the discussion.

Even more important than the recognition of the names of women artists in Bologna is understanding their legacy in the city—a legacy that points to a story of female participation in early modern history that is unparalleled and unprecedented. Women thrived in the artistic sector of seventeenth-century Bologna and this situation begs the question: Why? Why were these women able to be so influential and why did Bologna have so many prominent women artists? And if there were so many, why do we rarely hear about these women and their experiences? These questions all derive from what I have termed the “myth of Bologna”—a phrase that refers to the city being renowned for its women citizens and their accomplishments, but with the answers as to why remaining shrouded in mystery.

The question “Why Bologna?” is not new among art historians focusing on early modern Europe. In 1907, Laura Ragg published a pioneering work that provided an overview of the role of women in the famous artistic tradition of Bologna, sparking the mythic narrative of women artists in the city.[2] After the publication of Ragg's book, consideration of women artists across Italy expanded, but a specific focus on Bolognese women artists would not return to scholarship until three decades later with further studies into women such as Caterina Vigri.[3] Even so, research on Bolognese women artists was sparse for much of the twentieth century. More recently, art historians have once again been inspired by Ragg's work and have analyzed the women artists of Bologna through multiple different lenses. While some art historians have produced biographies of Bologna's women artists,[4] others have considered the sixteenth-century religious reform's influence on the women artists of the city, leading to the discovery of more information about Bolognese women artists and the work done by their hands. [5]

A good example of recent scholarship on the women artists of Bologna is the work of Babette Bohn, who has published a variety of studies related to the activities of Elisabetta Sirani.[6] In her most recent book, Bohn explores the question of why women artists were so influential in early modern Bologna as she investigates over sixty women artists across the period, some previously unknown.[7] Bohn's latest publication should prove to be an important work on the topic of women artists in early modern Bologna. However, there is much more to Bolognese history than what can be gleaned from the life of a single artist or the artistic tradition; the question of "why Bologna?" cannot be answered through art historical research alone.

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[2] Laura M. Ragg, *The Women Artists of Bologna*, (London: Methuen & co., 1907).

[3] Lina Lugaresi Mondini and Francesco Lugaresi, *Caterina de' Vigri: (S. Caterina da Bologna): musicista e pittrice* (Imola: P. Galeati, 1939). Therese Schwartz, "Catarina Vigri and Properzia de Rossi," *Women's Studies* 6, no. 1 (December 1978): 13-21. doi:10.1080/00497878.1978.9978461. For a recent example of a study on Caterina Vigri, see Kathleen G. Arthur, *Women, Art and Observant Franciscan Piety: Caterina Vigri and the Poor Clares in Early Modern Ferrara, Visual and Material Culture, 1300-1700*: 2, Amsterdam University Press, 2018.

[4] For example, see Therese Schwartz, "Catarina Vigri and Properzia de Rossi," *Women's Studies* 6, no. 1 (December 1978), 13-21, doi:10.1080/00497878.1978.9978461. Also, see Nancy Baker, "Elisabetta Sirani: Her Life, Her Influence, and Her Legacy." Masters diss., University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, 1995. And Adelina Modesti*, Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuosa': Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna.* Late Medieval and Early Modern Studies 22 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2014).

[5] See Patricia Rocco, *The Devout Hand: Women, Virtue, and Visual Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017).

[6] Some of her studies include Babette Bohn, "The Antique Heroines of Elisabetta Sirani." *Renaissance Studies 16*, no. 1 (2002): 52-79. www.jstor.org/stable/24413226. Babette Bohn, "Collecting Women's Art in Early Modern Bologna: Myth and Reality," in *Reframing Seventeenth-Century Bolognese Art: Archival Discoveries*, eds. Bohn Babette and Raffaella Morselli, 73-94, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019) doi:10.2307/j.ctvnwbzm1.9. And Babette Bohn,

As seemingly more and more art historians are turning their attention to the women artists of Bologna, the broader history of women in the city is still somewhat underdeveloped. In part, this situation may be a product of a relative lack of knowledge of the city's history especially when compared to cities like Rome, Florence, or Venice. Nonetheless, Bologna, as the capital of the Emilia Romagna region, has garnered its fair share of scholarly consideration. Cecilia Ady wrote an in-depth history of the Bentivoglio family—the leading family in Bologna for around sixty years during the fifteenth century—in 1937.[8] Other twentieth-century scholars focused on anything from the history of the University of Bologna[9] to even the Etruscan heritage of the city.[10]

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"Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices in Early Modern Bologna." *Master Drawings* 42, no. 3 (2004): 207-36. www.jstor.org/stable/1554659.

[7] Although her new book could not be considered here, as it was published shortly before my defense, I mention it to highlight that the exploration of Bolognese women artists is still growing.

[8] Cecilia M. Ady, *The Bentivoglio of Bologna: A Study in Despotism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937).

[9] Paul Oskar Kristeller, *The University of Bologna and the Renaissance* (Bologna: Università degli studi, 1956). See, Lowrie J. Daly, *The Medieval University, 1200-1400* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961). Also, Hunt Janin, *The University in Medieval Life, 1179-1499* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2008). And Paul F. Grendler, "The University of Bologna, the city and the papacy." Renaissance Studies 13 (1999): 475-485.

[10] Giuseppe Sassatelli, "Archeologia e Risorgimento. La Scoperta Degli Etruschi a Bologna / Archaeology and Risorgimento. The Discovery of the Etruscans in Bologna." *Storicamente* 7, no. 33 (October 1, 2011): 1-21. Also, see Larissa Bonfante Warren, "Etruscan Women: A Question of Interpretation," *Archaeology* 26, no. 4 (1973): 242-49, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41685321.

Nevertheless, scholarship concerning women's participation in Bologna beyond their artistic influence has only emerged in recent decades. There are just a handful of works on women in Bologna written before 2000 and, as a result, there is still much to be discovered about women and their lives in the city. The research that has been undertaken concerning women's history in early modern Bologna has discussed important female religious figures such as Saint Catherine and the influence of nuns,[11] the role of noblewomen and women educated by the University of Bologna,[12] along with overarching studies on the role of gender in early modern society.[13] Even though these studies take on a variety of approaches, the extent to which Bologna provided women with distinct opportunities during the early modern era is still being revealed.

As varied as the topics of interest are, a majority of the research being done today into Bologna and its women citizens remains separated by discipline or by theme. Although taking a more specific approach towards history—for instance, only looking at the economics or politics of a specific period or region—is common and useful, such an approach prevents a fuller understanding of the past and is insufficient in answering the question of "why Bologna?" When it comes to women's history, the inadequate nature of this approach is especially true because our basis of knowledge on past women is already fragmented. A large part of women's history is having to look for experiences of the past that are "unspoken, interstitial, and repressed, but constantly and insistently present," and therefore, a narrow approach that isolates women's experiences from one another will never be effective.[14]

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[11] Joseph R. Berrigan, "Saint Catherine of Bologna," In *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation,* ed. Katharina M. Wilson, 81-95 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987). Also, see Craig A. Monson, *Divas in the Convent: Nuns, Music, and Defiance in 17th Century Italy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012); And Danielle Callegari and Shannon McHugh, "Playing Papal Politics: Senatorial and Monastic Allies in Early Modern Bologna." *Renaissance Studies* 32, no. 4 (2017): 602–18, doi:10.1111/rest.12357.

[12] Caroline P. Murphy, "'In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna': The Image and Identity of the Sixteenth-Century Bolognese Female Patriciate." *Renaissance Studies: Journal of the Society for Renaissance Studies* 13, no. 4 (December 1999): 440–54, doi:10.1111/j.1477-4658.1999.tb00090.x.

[13] Marina Addis Saba, Susanna Noack, and Tobe Levin, "Women's Studies in Italy: The Story of Feminist Historiography," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 20, no. 3/4 (1992): 116-26, www.jstor.org/stable/40003709; Also, see Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Studying women's history in this way is like attempting to put together a puzzle, but you have no reference of what it is supposed to look like, and all the pieces are circular. It might be possible to group the pieces based on similar themes, but there is no way of knowing how each individual piece actually fits together because there are no connecting prongs bridging the gaps left between the rounded edges. Each piece is effectively an island separated from the larger picture. The current state of research on women of early modern Bologna is like this puzzle—plenty of pieces are present, but no real attempt has been made to connect them, something I hope to remedy with my thesis. And beyond just Bologna, the challenges created by narrow approaches in women's history as a whole parallels this puzzle. For this reason, an interdisciplinary perspective is essential for the study of women in the past.

Historians have begun to recognize this problem, and many modern-day scholars are attempting to address it by utilizing more varied source material and diversifying the lenses they use when studying the past. However, a lot of work is still left to be done. Some of the history being taught today is still of the understanding that the experiences of

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14. Sarah C. Maza, "The History of Whom?" In *Thinking about History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 44.

the masses are inaccessible or even insignificant and this perspective has largely left women out of the historical narrative.[15] We have only recently—in the last few decades or so—gotten to the point where women's history is even recognized as a legitimate field, and scholars are no longer having to prove that "women had a history" sometimes different than that of their male counterparts.[16] Although the field of history has begun to move beyond this outdated point-of-view, these barriers to women's history have lingered and are still challenging how women of the past are perceived and represented today.

To combat the issues brought about by outdated perspectives, some historians are critically analyzing the way in which we approach women's history and history in general. Their work is transforming the field of history and has informed my outlook on how historical research can and should look. Historian Jim Sharpe argues that we must look beyond "the doings of the great" and instead, start looking at history from below: considering and analyzing the experiences of the masses previously thought to be inaccessible. [17] The work of Sarah Maza is also particularly important because she has actively challenged the discipline by asking: "whose history?" Questions like these force us to consider what part of human activity and the human past matters, and fosters discussions surrounding the fact that any and all history can be important. [18] Finally, the work of Judith Bennett has also informed my outlook on women's history through her argument that the traditional "history-as-transformation" perspective is another way in which women's history is overlooked. Instead of looking only at periods of change, Bennett believes that the themes and experiences that remain the same throughout time periods can be just as telling for women's past experiences because the timeline of important eras in history, as defined by historians, largely excludes women. If history is based on the male experience, then important eras such as the Renaissance, for example, might not align with the experiences of women—as argued by Joan Kelly-Gadol in her groundbreaking essay—making it all the more important to note the periods when women did thrive, even if they do not necessarily align with the conventionally defined periods of transformation.[19] Each of these approaches looks at history in a more holistic way and in doing so, confronts the issues of traditional historical research that limit and define women's history to a subfield. Such perspectives further bolster my argument in this thesis that women's history is not a jumble of separate stories, but rather, is the sum of all its parts.

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[15] Jim Sharpe, "History from Below," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. by Peter Burke (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 25.

[16] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1054, doi:10.2307/1864376. For more on this perspective, see Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, eds. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, 137–64, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

[17] Sharpe, "History from Below," 25.

[18] Maza, "The History of Whom?" 12.

The early modern history of Bologna is no exception to this understanding. Previous scholars have attempted to consider a few aspects of the city together when researching women, but none have really employed insights from multiple disciplines or encompassed a wide range of experiences in the early modern era. The lack of an interdisciplinary approach to the uniqueness of seventeenth-century Bologna has left the question of “why Bologna?” still partially unanswered. Approaching this question from only one perspective is not enough because women in seventeenth-century Bologna led nuanced and multi-faceted lives, and the influence of women had an impact various aspects of the city including art, politics, economics, education, and religion. Bologna was a unique city in the early modern period because of the combination of many factors: its place as a Papal State, its university, its burgeoning art sector, and its silk trade—all of which were informed by and relied on female participation during the seventeenth century. Each of these facets and its connection to women deserves its own focused research, but the vast importance of women to early modern Bolognese history and culture is only illuminated when we focus on the connections between these different parts of the city’s identity.

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[19] Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 74. Also see Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, eds. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, 137–64, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

Beyond asking the question of why Bologna provided a unique level of opportunity to its women citizens, it is also important to address to what extent the myth of Bologna translated to the actual experiences of women. Just as this thesis focuses on three different types of sources—historical, visual, and material—it will also take into account three different groups of women. Even though Bologna gave women, in general, a prominent role in society, women’s level of access varied based on their social status. Elite women, including wives of politicians, mothers and daughters of prominent families, and many women artisans had different experiences in the city as compared to lower-class women who worked in the silk industry, while the experiences of religious Bolognese women seemed to overlap both those of elite and non-elite women. Addressing the differences between these three groups of women—elite, religious, and non-elite—allows us to not only expand upon the question of "why Bologna?" but also to explore how the myth functioned for different groups of seventeenth-century Bolognese women.

To remedy the shortcomings of previous scholarship on the women of Bologna, each of the following chapters explores why the city seemingly provided women with greater access to positions of authority, influence, and professional activity across three different lenses and three different groups of women. Chapter II entitled "Foundations of the Myth: Nuns, *Professoresse*, and Matriarchs" follows the religious, political, and intellectual history of Bologna and the role women had as active members of society through each of these facets. By considering Bologna's role as a Papal State, Counter Reformation effects on the city, the influence of nuns and convent culture, the University of Bologna and its female students, and the discussion of women of Bologna through literature, I will argue that many of the most important traditions of Bologna were intrinsically linked to women, fostering a distinct civic-identity in the seventeenth-century city that praised its women citizens.

Chapter III entitled "'La gemma d'Italia, il sole della Europea:' Women Artists and Visual Culture" discusses the visual culture of the city and the role women played in creating the Bolognese artistic tradition. To have more than fifty active women artists in the city during the seventeenth century is truly unheard of and serves as the foundation for the myth of Bologna. I will consider the connections between religious and artistic reforms and how this greatly affected women's participation in the artistic sector. I will also discuss the multiple women artists who broke through barriers and encouraged other women to get involved, and the works of art made by their hands in order to highlight the special artistic environment of Bologna. Through this analysis I will argue that the Baroque artistic tradition of the city was greatly informed by women's participation, and due to the foundation of a unique civic identity that valued its women citizens, women artists were able to thrive in Bologna.

Chapter IV entitled "Challenging the Myth: *Filatrici di Seta* and Material Culture" concludes my analysis of "why Bologna?" by introducing a challenge to the myth of Bologna through the discussion of the role of women in the silk trade. The previous chapters largely focus on women of elite status, but an understanding of their experiences is not sufficient to properly answer the question of "why Bologna?" Women formed a large part of the labor force in Bologna's profitable silk trade, and by looking at the material culture and the processes through which they were made, I will argue that the myth of Bologna does encompass lower-class women, however, not always in the same manner as their elite counterparts. Bolognese women had greater access to textile manufacturing in the city as compared women in Genoa or Lucca, for example, which also had growing textile trades, but analyzing the experiences of women in the Bolognese silk trade reminds us of the seventeenth-century context of the city. [20] For non-elite women, greater access did not necessarily translate to fair or equal access. The mythic quality to the city is complicated by the stories of laboring women, but nonetheless, no

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20. Paola Massa Piergiovanni, "Technological Typologies and Economic Organization of Silk Workers in Italy, from the XIVth to the XVIIIth Centuries." *Journal of European Economic History* 22 (1993): 552.

history of the city would be complete or accurate without consideration of their experiences.

Through this thesis I hope to expand our perspective on what women's history can be and grow our understanding of why Bologna provided its women citizens with various opportunities across the religious, artistic, and economic communities in the city. If we can understand "why Bologna?" through an interdisciplinary lens, our perception of women during the early modern era will be expanded beyond its current limitations and we will be able to start bridging the gaps between the fractured pieces of women's history. Asking "why Bologna?" forces us to consider "why not somewhere else?"

# CHAPTER II

# FOUNDATIONS OF THE MYTH: NUNS, *PROFESSORESSE*, AND MATRIARCHS

Almost all Italian cities claim ownership of a prized religious icon or artifact, such objects are not only said to have miraculous properties that can aid those who pray in its presence but also tie the city to a legitimizing Christian heritage. For Bologna, this icon is the Byzantine painting of the *Madonna di San Luca* (Figure 1).[21] The work is believed to have been "painted by the hand of Saint Luke himself," and points to the importance of the participation of women in the Christian origins of Bologna.[22] The icon is held in a sanctuary located on the *Monte della Guardia* (the Guardian Mountain),[23] which is considered to be a highly spiritual place because the hilltop sanctuary was allegedly founded in the early eleventh-century by a young girl. Legend states that this girl, no older than sixteen, chose to follow the life of a hermit—a rare occupation for a woman to choose, especially at that time. She removed herself from society and eventually founded the sanctuary making its foundations literally and figuratively connected to this young woman.[24] The icon arrived at the sanctuary about one hundred years later when, according to legend, the Madonna herself instructed a pilgrim to bring the icon from Constantinople to the small church of San Luca.[25] Eventually the icon fell under the care—and remains under the care—of the nuns of San Mattia. Their convent is located in the city center, but they send nuns up to the sanctuary on a continuous rotation to take care of the icon. The nuns of San Mattia also parade the icon through the city once a year as a part of the procession for Ascension week—a highly significant event in the annual Bolognese civic cycle.[26] The most important piece of art in the city to this day is the *Madonna di San Luca*—attaching Bologna to Saint Luke and symbolizing that the city had been chosen by Mary herself.

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[21] For a more in-depth study on the *Madonna di San Luca* see Mario Fanti and Giancarlo Roversi, *La Madonna di S. Luca in Bologna: Otto secoli di storia, di arte, e di fede* (Bologna: Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna, 1993).

[22] Danielle Callegari and Shannon McHugh, "Playing Papal Politics: Senatorial and Monastic Allies in Early Modern Bologna." *Renaissance Studies* 32, no. 4 (2017): 606, doi:10.1111/rest.12357. The icon has also been tested through modern techniques and is wholly Byzantine in origin according to Patricia Rocco, *The Devout Hand: Women, Virtue, and Visual Culture in Early Modern Italy*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press: 2017), 89-90. Many other countries claim to have the "real" icon painted by Saint Luke coming from Constantinople. One of the more famous works is the Virgin of Vladimir in Russia, although the connection to Saint Luke is no longer attributed. More comparative research needs to be undertaken between the various icons allegedly by the hand of Saint Luke and their importance in their respective cities, but for more on the importance of the *Madonna di San Luca* in general, see Mario Fanti and Giancarlo Roversi, *La Madonna di S. Luca in Bologna: Otto secoli di storia, di arte, e di fede* (Bologna: Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna, 1993).

[23] All Italian phrases have been translated by me unless otherwise stated or included in a quotation from another author.

We begin with the story of the *Madonna di San Luca* because it exemplifies the importance of women to Bologna, its history, and its civic identity. After all, not only does the painting depict a mother but it also resides in a church that has been cared for by nuns for much of its existence and was rumored to have been established by a young girl. As this chapter will show, women continued to play an important role in Bologna throughout the late medieval and early modern periods. The recognition of the unusual prominence of women in the history of Bologna is not new. However, none of the existing studies have emphasized the multi-faceted historical realities that promoted the

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24. Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 89. Female Hermits were almost unheard of; very few are mentioned even in the Bible.
25. Callegari and McHugh, “Playing Papal Politics,” 606.
26. Callegari and McHugh, “Playing Papal Politics,” 606; Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 90.

participation of women including a renowned artistic tradition, the prominence of the silk trade in city life, and the city's position as a Papal State second only to Rome. Bologna was not unique solely because it provided women with greater access to their community, as this was happening (to various degrees) across the Italian peninsula. Seventeenth-century Bologna was unique because women were involved across many, if not all aspects of society including religion, politics, economics, art, and culture due to a foundation of female participation established early on within the city. Modern scholarship has only analyzed women in Bologna within a specific context—keeping their roles in economics, education, and religion separate from each other—which ignores the full scope of their influence across the evolution of the city.

In strictly looking at the written records of Bologna, it is evident that it became the city it was in the seventeenth century because of its traditions. Moreover, many of these traditions were intrinsically linked to women. The influence of women in Bolognese society leading up to and during the seventeenth century can be best understood by looking at the role of Bologna as a Papal State, the importance of convents in the city, and the way in which education and literature functioned in emphasizing the perceptions of women. Female involvement in Bolognese society during the seventeenth century was a layered and highly nuanced tradition spanning most, if not all, facets of city life. However, the significance of women in Bolognese history was not celebrated until the seventeenth century and this is exactly "why Bologna": women's involvement had been incorporated into the foundation of many components of society by this time and grew into an integral part of Bolognese identity.

The city itself has deep historical roots. Founded around 510 BCE, the Etruscans built a town near modern-day Bologna and named it Felsina, which literally translates to a "hospitable place." Later, the Romans changed the name to Bononia, which eventually became known as Bologna, and that is largely the story of how the city was created. For most Italian cities, the origin story fostered pride in the city's identity because many of these stories harkened back to Roman or Christian myths, like the story of Romulus founding Rome, for example. However, there is no consensus around the origin stories of Bologna. Although, the origins of female participation in Bologna are clearly represented by the legends of the *Madonna of San Luca*—which also includes a legitimizing Christian heritage—there is no prominent legend for the origin of the city itself. What is certain, though, is that Bologna has a strong Etruscan heritage that is not only pre-Roman, but unsurprisingly, also has a connection to women.

Etruscan culture perplexed the Greeks and Romans who noted that Etruscan women "took fastidious care of their bodies…took part in toasting…enjoyed important legal and social prerogatives…had their own names, and hence, distinct identities" and "appear to have been more literate than Greek or Roman women."[27] The Etruscans less patriarchal culture possibly set both the literal and symbolic precedent for a later Bologna, whose origin myths—as varied as they may be—all mention the Etruscans. Although the region had influences from other cultures, such as the Celts and Romans leading up to the formal founding of Bologna, to find a tradition of greater female access

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27. Larissa Bonfante Warren, "Etruscan Women: A Question of Interpretation," *Archaeology* 26, no. 4 (1973): 242-245, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41685321. The observations are according to the Greek historian Theopompos who wrote in the fourth century BCE, but Theopompos was also drawing on earlier accounts not specifically mentioned by Warren.

in this region spanning back to a culture pre-dating the Romans is particularly interesting. And as a city with a tendency to resist the dominion of the Papacy as will be later discussed, this connection to a pre-Roman lineage enabled Bologna to separate their identity from the ever-growing control of the *Roman* Catholic Church. Though the cultural links between seventeenth-century Bologna and the Etruscans were recognized by the citizens of Bologna,[28] they have yet to be fully researched in conjunction with the city's origin myths. Despite this, it is still compelling and distinctive that a city with a strong female presence in later eras would have had a parallel tradition dating back to its very origins.

In the seventeenth century, the city of Bologna was teeming with activity. The city boasted a population around 60,000 people that grew to 70,000 by the mid-eighteenth century. Although early modern life was certainly not easy—as the city would experience a plague outbreak in the middle of the century and some economic decline towards the end of the period—Bologna still had many advantages over other city-states. The city's location in the plains of the Emilia Romagna region of Northern Italy, situated between the powerful states of Milan, Venice, and Florence, proved to be advantageous for its local senate. The senate was successful in removing the city from conflicts between the more powerful city-states which provided their economy and populace with a sense of relative safety as well as the space to grow into an educated and somewhat wealthy city.[29] However, the city's beneficial location was not their only advantage. Bologna had a booming silk export trade, fertile farmland, and, starting in the sixteenth century, had risen to great importance in the Papal empire, second only to Rome as a key Papal State—an important layer among the traditions that gave rise to expanding opportunities for women by the seventeenth century.

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[28] A famous art historian in the seventeenth century, Carlo Cesare Malvasia, titled his work on Bolognese artists *Felsina pittrice* as a direct reference to the Etruscan name of their city. More on his work will be discussed in the following chapter.

Bologna's relationship with Rome and the Church began long before it became an official Papal State. Various Popes held control of the city in some smaller capacity from the fourteenth century until 1506, when it was officially brought into the territories of the Church under the rule of Pope Julius II. However, there was a period during the fifteenth century (ca. 1416-1419) when Bologna was completely independent from the Church and formed a short-lived republic.[30] The republican era was romanticized and glorified throughout Bologna's conflicts with the Church even after 1506 and served as a point of reference for the local senate during the seventeenth century. One of the leading families in the city, the Bentivoglio—more specifically, Sante and Giovanni II Bentivoglio, who ruled over the city during the years 1446-1506 and ushered in a "golden age of Bologna"—had familial ties to this short-lived republic of 1416-1419, resulting in an reemphasis on Bolognese liberty throughout their rule. [31] The romanticization of a

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[29] Caroline P. Murphy, "'In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna': The Image and Identity of the Sixteenth-Century Bolognese Female Patriciate," *Renaissance Studies: Journal of the Society for Renaissance Studies* 13, no. 4 (December 1999): 441, doi:10.1111/j.1477-4658.1999.tb00090.x.

[30] Tommaso Duranti, "*Libertas*, Oligarchy, Papacy: Government in the Quattrocento," in *A Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Bologna* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2018), 261-263, doi:10.1163/9789004355644_012. Around 1419 the Papacy reinstated their claim over Bologna, although some semblance of autonomy remained in the city, with periodic bursts of rebellion against Papal rule breaking out between 1419 and 1506.

[31] Ceclilia M. Ady, *The Bentivoglio of Bologna: A Study in Despotism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), 1.

Bolognese republic gave rise to a Bentivoglio-led rebellion against the Church in 1447, as they wished to once again obtain the status as an independent city-state. [32] To end the conflict, an agreement was eventually reached between the city's governmental group and the Pope at the time, Nicholas V, who conceded "a series of privileges to the city in exchange for its recognition of papal sovereignty."[33] The legal agreement that came out of this resolution would still be used by the seventeenth-century Bolognese senate to legitimize their power no matter how or when papal leadership changed, even though by the 1600s, the Papacy only saw the agreement as a technicality.

The Bentivoglio reign, which began with such a fervent ideological conflict, came to a quick end. In 1506, the family lost popular support and control over the city as conflicts between Bologna and the Papacy flared up again upon the arrival of a new Pope. Unlike the lasting family despots in neighboring cities, Bologna's most powerful family was only in control for sixty years when, in 1506, Julius II recovered "direct rule of the Church over Bologna, which had always evaded full subjection" ever since the fourteenth century.[34] Just four decades after Bologna became a Papal State, another great change occurred with the formation of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the religious mandates that came out of the Counter Reformation.[35] Bologna's tendency to buck against the dominion of the church was only exacerbated by the reforms, through which the Papacy "exercised strong central rule, limit[ed] local autonomy, abolish[ed] privileges, and exact[ed] obedience" to ensure the needs of the Church were met by each state.[36] Although the Bolognese ideals of sovereignty were being challenged, being under the Church's dominion did provide a sense of stability that families constantly fighting for control of the city could never provide. However, the memory of the republic and the rule of the Bentivoglio remained fresh in the minds of the Bolognese across the following century and into the seventeenth century, where conflicts surrounding concepts of liberty commonly arose.[37]

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[32] Callegari and McHugh, "Playing Papal Politics," 604.

[33] Scholar Angela de Benedictis, as mentioned by Callegarie and McHugh, even went as so far to label Bologna as a "republic by contract." Callegari and McHugh, "Playing Papal Politics," 602, 604.

[34] Tommaso Duranti, "*Libertas*, Oligarchy, Papacy: Government in the Quattrocento," in *A Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Bologna* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2018), 281, doi:10.1163/9789004355644_012. For reference, the Medici family of Florence ruled over the city for around three hundred years, and so while sixty years may seem like a long time to have someone in power to us, this is why the Bentivoglio's rule is considered quite short for the time period.

During the seventeenth century, the citizenry's outlook was still strongly informed by ideals of sovereignty, but this sensibility was at odds with the Counter Reformation mandates that were hampering the freedoms of Bologna. The city was in a distinct position because the local senate was constantly having to vie for control of their city as each Pope imposed different rules to varying degrees of severity, all while the culture of the city was adjusting to the new religious reforms that sought to expand "the clericalization of the state, with a confusing mix of temporal and spiritual jurisdictions."[38] The complexity of the Bolognese and Papal relationship resulted in the Bolognese senate, which was made up of forty senators chosen from elite families, being "forced to perform a careful balancing act" of trying to align with public opinion against Rome, while relying on the Church's support in backing the authority of the senators against any popularizing movements.[39] In many cases, the senate did as much as possible to side with its people and maintain a certain illusion of Bolognese independence, clinging onto the idea of a republican Bologna before Papal Statehood. The foundation of pride for an independent Bologna, along with the growing role of clerics in the city, would support the relationships between the Senate and religious women, who both were facing growing attempts to take away their power and control. In Bologna, religious women played an important role in reinforcing a sense of sovereignty in the city since the nuns became symbols of the fight against the Church's domination.

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[35] There is a debate among scholars surrounding the use of the term "Counter Reformation" because it is seen today as somewhat of a loaded phrase. For more on this debate, see John W. O'Malley, Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era. [Third printing, First Harvard University Press paperback] (Harvard University Press, 2002), 4-5. This period of change for the Catholic Church is referenced as the "Counter Reformation," "Catholic Reformation," "Tridentine Reformation," and O'Malley has argued for the adoption of "Early Modern Catholicism." Although I will not devote much time discussing this debate, I have chosen to use the phrase "Counter Reformation" to describe this era in the Catholic Church as I believe it is the most recognizable, while also pointing to my main concern around its discussion: the reforms themselves.

[36] R. Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770*, Second edition, New Approaches to European History: 24 (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 107.

[37] Callegari and McHugh, "Playing Papal Politics," 604. Also see, Duranti, "*Libertas*, Oligarchy, Papacy," 282-283.

Before we can discuss the relationship between religious women and the rest of Bolognese citizens in the seventeenth century, to fully understand the scope of religious women's significance in the city, we must once again begin our analysis in the fifteenth century with the case of Caterina Vigri (1413 – 1463).[40] She was a nun in Bologna known for her religious virtues and even artistic talent who was canonized in 1712. Her

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38. Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal*, 106.
39. Callegari and McHugh, "Playing Papal Politics," 605.
40. For a more in-depth study on Vigri's life from the time period, see Dionisio Paleotti, *The Rule of the Holy Virgin S. Clare. Together with the Admirable Life, of S. Catharine of Bologna of the Same Order,* trans. attributed to Catharine Bentley or possibly Elizabeth Evelinge, (Saint-Omer: English College Press, 1621).

path to becoming Saint Catherine of Bologna was made possible, in part, by the dedication of Bolognese citizens who kept her legacy alive. As a result, Vigri set the foundation for all religious women in the city as an exemplary example of not only a pious woman, but a pious *Bolognese* woman.

Caterina Vigri was born in Bologna to a father from Ferrara and a Bolognese mother, but because of her father's place in the court of Ferrara, she grew up in the neighboring city. She eventually became the lady-in-waiting to Margaret d'Este, a member of the ruling family of Ferrara.[41] She received her education and training "as a calligrapher and miniaturist" in Ferrara as well and was taught both Latin and Tuscan; her strong command of language prominently shown in many of her written works, the most well-known being her *Weapons of the Spirit* that she allegedly wrote in 1438.[42] She was known for her prudence, modesty, and her pious behavior at a young age, leading her to an adult life devoted to religion.[43] Her reputation in Ferrara grew so much that she was called to be an Abbess in a new convent in Bologna, specifically at the request of the learned citizens who saw her as Bolognese, dubbing her Catherine of Bologna long before she actually achieved sainthood.[44] During her free time within the convent walls, she wrote and drew—sometimes doing both in a single work—and her talents as an artist

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41. Joseph R. Berrigan, "Saint Catherine of Bologna," in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. by Katharina M. Wilson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 81; and Dionisio Paleotti, *The Rule of the Holy Virgin S. Clare. Together with the Admirable Life of S. Catharine of Bologna of the Same Order*, trans. attributed to Catharine Bentley or Elizabeth Evelinge (Saint-Omer: English College Press, 1621), 84-85. Paleotti was a seventeenth-century author and likely sympathetic to Vigri and her story, possibly writing this biography to help her become canonized.
42. Berrigan, "Saint Catherine of Bologna," 81, 83.
43. Paleotti, *Life of Saint Catherine*, 86.
44. Paleotti, *Life of Saint Catherine*, 115-116.

soon “won her the title of patron of the arts;” a title she still holds in the city today.[45] She would not reach sainthood until after the seventeenth century, but the lists of miracles she performed during her life became well known throughout the city and were not only numerous, but a majority of them aided young children and woman.[46] Although Caterina Vigri was a great and influential woman, she also served alongside many other woman who devoted their lives, just as she did, to God. Countless nuns of Bologna followed in the footsteps of Caterina Vigri, and understanding their experiences helps inform our perspective of seventeenth-century Bologna as a city where women had a substantial role within its religious foundations.

Although convents did provide opportunities for women throughout the Italian peninsula during the early modern period, in Bologna they played a more prominent role and, as a result, their history highlights the distinct nature of women’s experiences in the city. Even if women in the convents were given greater access to art, music, and literature, convent life came with rigid guidelines. These rules were only reinforced by the Counter Reformation mandates that sought “strict closure for female convents” and created “strong molds of conformity” for nuns.[47] Despite the growing reforms, by the mid-seventeenth century, there were reportedly ninety-six convents within Bologna and along its borders—a number that was reputed to be higher than any other Italian.[48] The

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45. Berrigan, “Saint Catherine of Bologna,” 83.
46. Paleotti, *Life of Saint Catherine*, 152-190. Each paragraph in these pages lists a specific miracle performed by Saint Catherine. Out of the specific ones mentioned (not including general references to fellow nuns being aided by her miracles) I noted 59 total miracles (give or take a few), with 41 of those 59 referencing a young child or a woman being the one who received her help.
47. Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal,* 23, 147.
48. Gabriella Zarri, “I monasteri femminili à Bologna tra il XIII e il XVII secolo,” in *Atti e memorie della Regia deputazione di storia patria per le provincie di Romagna*, v. 24, 133-224 (Bologna:

number of convents in the city seemingly grew because the early 1600s was an era of expanding convent populations in Bologna, as elite families attempted to circumvent rising dowry prices. In a little over two generations "the percentage of the city's total *female* population who lived behind convent walls in 1631 had climbed to 13.8" from 4.2 percent in 1595.[49] Although these women did not always consent to convent life—even though the Council of Trent did state that the Church forbade parents to force their daughters to become nuns—once they arrived within the convent walls, these women played a "perhaps unwilling but prominent part" of Bolognese seventeenth-century society simply because there were so many of them.[50] And many times, the nuns of Bologna were able to circumvent the reforms, much like their counterparts in the senate, because of their prominence in the city.[51] Their distinctive reality gave them a notably public voice by the seventeenth century, something many women, and even many nuns across Italy, did not have.

In 1601 a conflict would arise between the women of the San Mattia convent and Pope Clement VIII over the miraculous painting that was introduced at the beginning of this chapter: the *Madonna di San* Luca. As described by Danielle Callegari and Shannon McHugh, this conflict is one great example of the agency and participation of Bolognese

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Stab. tip di G. Monti, 1973). I am still waiting to receive this article through ILLIAD to confirm these numbers.

[49] Craig A. Monson, *Divas in the Convent: Nuns, Music, and Defiance in 17th Century Italy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 6, 18.

[50] Monson, *Divas in the Convent,* 6. As previously mentioned, during the seventeenth century it was common for families to send their younger daughters into convents as the rising dowry prices strained families with multiple daughters.

[51] Callegari and McHugh, "Playing Papal Politics," 602. The strategy of finding loopholes within the vague Reformation rhetoric became a Bolognese skill.

nuns in their community as well as a testament to the nun's relationship with the citizens of Bologna. The events that transpired illustrate the role convents had in the city, not just due to their sheer number, but because civic pride was directly tied to the women and this conflict with the Church. The Pope wanted the icon to be removed from the convent because caring for the icon provided the nuns with a level of independence, through events like its procession in the city, that challenged Counter Reformation mandates that sought to restrict the livelihoods of women in the convents. However, Camillo Gozzadini, the ambassador sent to Rome on the convent's behalf, warned that this action would have "grievous consequences" as it was not only displeasing to the women and the local senate, but especially to "'tutto cotesto popolo'—all the citizens of Bologna."[52] The conflict was not just a matter of wanting to keep something that the sisters saw as rightfully in their possession, but it became a dispute that was seen as a symbol of the fight against the Papacy's dominion by the entire Bolognese populace. Through understanding the conflict for the *Madonna*, we can begin to peel back another layer as to how and why Bologna viewed its women in the way that it did.

The dispute over the painting began solely between the women and the Papacy, as the sisters of San Mattia broke the new statutes of the Tridentine Church through their possession and public procession of the icon. Because the women were the sole caretakers of the Byzantine portrait, it allowed them "to move openly between their primary inhabitance in the heart of Bologna and the smaller, older sanctuary on the hill" where the painting had been housed for centuries.[53] Not only were the women, then, directly in the public gaze, but the annual procession of the icon would attract many visitors due to the painting's miracle working powers, encouraging more interaction between the nuns and the public than was seen to be appropriate. The Church wanted to reclaim the painting specifically because it was an example of the "scandal of public female power" that the Reformation mandates were trying to suppress.[54] The icon was no longer just an important work to the Church because it was allegedly painted by Saint Luke; it was a painting that gave the nuns access to the outside world—access they were not supposed to have. What mattered to the Church was control. However, the sisters of San Mattia were not exempt from Bologna's tradition of pushing back against the Papacy's power.[55] All of the mounting tension, which began with the Council of Trent, came to a head in 1601 as the efforts to claim the icon were renewed on both sides, leading the prioress of the convent, Portia Bolognetti, to write to the Bolognese ambassador to Rome asking for his help in keeping the *Madonna* within their realm of control.[56] The meeting was met with a resolution in which the women would maintain claim over the icon, but these events provide insight into the relationship between the women in the convents and the citizenry of Bologna.

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[52] Callagari and McHugh, "Playing Papal Politics," 602.

The women of San Mattia not only contacted the ambassador to Rome, but also reached out to the local senate to request their help and support, and this act would place the nuns at the symbolic center of Bologna's greater conflicts with Rome. Although the alliance between the important secular and religious entities of Bologna may seem counterintuitive, both groups "perceived the encroaching papal power as a threat to their sovereignty." [57] The women of San Mattia knew losing the icon would mean losing the only thing allowing them outside the convent walls and the senators saw growing Papal control as a challenge to Bologna's republican past. Therefore, these two groups recognized the strength that could be gained from a combined Bolognese offensive, placing the nuns in the privileged position as partners to the senate. The nuns knew the only way to keep the icon was to leverage the support of Bologna against the Church, but the documents that came out of these correspondences and the turmoil leading up to the meeting in Rome reveal just how influential the nuns were within perceptions of Bolognese sovereignty.

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[53] Callegari and McHugh, "Playing Papal Politics," 607.
[54] Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal*, 36.
[55] Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal*, 42, 147.
[56] Callegari and McHugh, "Playing Papal Politics," 608.

In the senate's documents to the Pope, there are no fewer than three examples in which these elite men emphasize that the sisters' role as guardians of the icon "has garnered the pleasure and devotion 'of the whole city, and its people' (di tutta questa città, et popolo)." [58] Such phrasing mirrored the rhetoric used by the ambassador to Rome and connected these women not just with the icon itself, but fighting in a conflict that was seen as integral to the success and pride of their city. However, this assertion does not stop here, as the senators pushed the argument even further by echoing the exact wording used by the nuns in the appeal written to the senate, "relying on them for the invention of effective rhetoric"—a rhetoric that would have been seen as inappropriate for the men to

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57. Callegari and McHugh, "Playing Papal Politics," 603.
58. Callegari and McHugh, "Playing Papal Politics," 611.

utilize. [59] The success of the sister's argument relied on their ability to use "feminine pathos" to their advantage, meaning not only that the city would have lost the icon without the aid of the women, but the nun's relationship with the senate was not one-sided.[60] These women saw themselves as citizens who partook in the republican desires of Bologna, and their city also accepted this idea, defending their participation to the Pope.[61]

The experiences of Bolognese nuns also saw expanded opportunities through family ties, writing, and music, further creating the unique convent culture to come from Bologna and supporting an environment of female participation throughout the city. Although a tradition of writing or music within convent walls is not necessarily uncommon, Bologna serves as another intriguing case study in which the sisters of the city fostered a "close and fertile relationship with local and national secular poetic

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59. The translation of each letter, one from the nuns to the senate and one from the senate to the ambassador—provided by Callegari and McHugh—are copied here, with my added emphasis, so that the parallels between the wording can be referenced. The letter from the nuns to the senate: "**The poor mothers** of San Mattia, your flesh and blood, beg your most illustrious lordships to favor them with a warm and efficacious letter, and to request that His Holiness not tolerate the removal of that **most sacred Virgin** of San Luca, as Monsignor Visitor claims he must carry out by order from Rome. **It has been many, many years that they have cared for her**." And the letter from the senate to the ambassador: "**The poor mothers** fear that, if the Visitor were to follow that order, they would be deprived of the **care and governing, which they have performed for many, many years**, of that **most sacred** image of the most blessed **Virgin**, who normally resides in the convent of San Luca, to the infinite satisfaction and with the devotion of this entire city and all of its people." Callegari and McHugh, "Playing Papal Politics," 612.
60. Callegari and McHugh, "Playing Papal Politics," 615.
61. Callegari and McHugh, "Playing Papal Politics," 612. Once again, reference the translations of their letters. The nuns described themselves to the senate as "your flesh and blood," appealing both to family ties between the senators and the nuns but reminding the senators of their Bolognese citizenship. The senate then extended not only their own support, but that of "this entire city and all of its people," (as previous quoted) proving that they too saw the nuns as important figures in the city.

trends."[62] The tradition of literature in convents was established long before the seventeenth century, but the circumstances of early modern Bologna—which already cherished its convent culture—fostered this tradition beyond what had been experienced in previous centuries.  By the sixteenth century, the first ever collection of devotional poetry written by women was published in Bologna, and it saw a fair amount of popularity with the local population.[63] Leading up to the seventeenth century, as the Council of Trent's reforms weighed on the convent community, there was the creation of a poetic style "situated on the threshold of convents, poised between secular and spiritual worlds."[64]

The nun Girolama Castellani, who published her work under the name Sor Geronima Castellana during the sixteenth century, is a perfect example of this poetic style. She was a Bolognese Dominican nun who was "the first Italian nun to see her verse published under her name in her lifetime," but what is particularly stunning is she was the first nun who was documented using "a modern, Petrarchist style."[65] Her works unsurprisingly focused on religious subjects; however, she utilized a modern poetic style—placing her work between religious convention and modern innovation. The style she employed, which grew in popularity by the seventeenth century, is reflected by events like those between San Mattia and the Papacy, wherein the nuns were literally situated between the secular senate and the rule of the Church. The literary work of nuns

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62. Abigail Brundin, "On the Convent Threshold: Poetry for New Nuns in Early Modern Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (2012): 1131, doi:10.1086/669347.
63. Brundin, "On the Convent Threshold," 1131
64. Brundin, "On the Convent Threshold," 1133.
65. Virginia Cox, *Lyric Poetry by Women of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 211.

highlights their unique status in Bologna, emphasizing the ability nuns had in garnering support from the public.

As a new mode of poetry emerged in response to Counter Reformation mandates, nuns also turned to music—another highly restricted art form in convents at this time—because just as the metaphorical nature of poetry "could convey different meaning in different contexts," music proved to be "a valuable and persuasive tool of convent women's culture."[66] Music provided another avenue in which nuns could subvert "the formal prescription imposed upon them by the church's external hierarchy," and in recent years, more than 150 women musicians have been rediscovered in Bolognese convent archives.[67] One of the more well-known nun musicians of seventeenth-century was Lucrezia Vizziana. She was the only nun of the era to have her compositions printed, and her work is also situated on the threshold between what was seen as appropriate for convent music and what was happening in the field of music outside of the convent walls. Her work defiantly mixes the more traditional style that was required by the Counter Reformation with the modern style developing in the seventeenth century that was not approved by the church.[68] Even though the new forms of music were effectively banned from convents, Vizziana was able to access them because all convents in Bologna took after the women of San Mattia—having a long tradition of petitioning Rome against the reforms and reinterpreting the rules imposed on them. [69] Although more could be said about the musical and poetic contributions of Bologna's nuns, these few examples show

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[66] Monson, *Divas in the Convent*, 45; Also see Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal*, 146.
[67] Monson, *Divas in the Convent* 7, 13.
[68] Monson, *Divas in the Convent,* 60-63.
[69] Monson, *Divas in the Convent*, 64.

how the sister's involvement in Bolognese culture politically, spiritually, and linguistically was a careful balance between reform and defiance which earned respect across the city.

Aside from the powerful religious role women filled in Bologna, they were also involved in the university tradition which was another point of pride for the city. By 1601, sixteen universities had been founded in Italy. The University of Bologna was the first, allegedly established as early as 1088.[70]Arguably, the university was not just the first in Italy, but it also claims to be the first in Europe. Although the traditional account states that sometime during late eleventh century Bologna's university was founded as a school of law, not enough organization likely existed "to merit the term *university* before the 1150s."[71] No matter if it was in fact the first university in all of Europe or not, the University of Bologna was indeed the first in Italy, and it would provide "the model for all others in southern Europe," legitimizing Bologna's intellectual heritage.[72] Given the centuries-old foundation of the university and the lasting tradition of an educated populace, it makes sense as to why the university is another important layer to the question of "why Bologna?" But it is not just enough to assume the correlation, as many scholars do; it is imperative to also look at direct ways that the university shaped the role of women and reflected the larger public view of the female population of Bologna.

Legend has it that the first female student to attend the university was the Bolognese noblewoman Bettina (or Bitisia) Gozzadini who dressed as a man to attend

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70. Paul F. Grendler, "Bologna and Padua," in *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 5.
71. Grendler, "Bologna and Padua," 5-6.
72. Grendler, "Bologna and Padua," 5, 7.

courses, later receiving her doctorate in 1237 and then subsequently teaching at the university at their request.[73] Even though the documentation is vague and fragmented—as is the case with most legendary tales—scholars have confirmed that Bettina was a real woman, and it is generally accepted that she did indeed attend the university. Whether or not Bettina actually attained a degree and taught lectures, however, remains unclear.[74] Whatever the case may be, this legend was not some obscure myth in the city but one that the Bolognese took great pride—as represented by a bust of her that was created circa 1680-1690.[75] Gozzadini's name and story was honored in the city, and even though no records directly detail her life or her experience at the university, her memory has been carried through generations, memorialized in art and in city lore. Although oral history can certainly hyperbolize reality or only pick and choose certain aspects of the real historical truth, the fact that a *woman's* story had been passed down for generations in the city is a striking example of how proud the Bolognese were of the illustrious women its city seemed to boast so many of.

Even though it is still debated whether or not Gozzadini was the first woman to attend the University of Bologna, "it has long been accepted that while female students were never numerous…women had been allowed to attend since its inception (albeit with a restricted curriculum)."[76] Many women exemplify this legacy, but most of them came from noble families. For example, Novella Calderini followed closely behind Gozzadini, attending the university by 1340. The details of her story and Gozzadini's are slightly intermixed, as both are thought to have taught behind a curtain or while wearing a veil as to not distract their students, but Calderini is also claimed to have taught her husband's lectures during his absences to Rome.[77] The university records list many more women including the likes of Tedora Crisolora, who supposedly taught Greek in the fifteenth century,[78] Dorotea Bocchi, who was "evidently allowed to study medicine in some form" and possibly "awarded a salary of her own as a lecturer" by 1519,[79] and Giovanna Bianchetti, who was "fluent in Greek, Latin, German, and Polish, and learned in philosophy" after her studies at the university around the end of the sixteenth century.[80] These women, along with countless unknown others, not only built a foundation for women's education in the city, but also gave "two or three hundred years' worth of precedent to level against doubters who treated women's education as a dangerous innovation."[81] The women who attended the university were seen as "worthy ancestors, outstanding precursors of the living female elite" by the seventeenth century, whether or not the details of their stories were fully historically accurate.[82] Even though the answer to why Bologna allowed women into the university in the first place has been lost to history, understanding the other layers and female-centric traditions of the city help to illuminate this question even if it is not a direct answer. The concept of female virtue and civic pride was deeply connected to the university tradition which was unlike any other city in Italy at the time, and considering this concept can help illuminate another facet of the Bolognese myth.

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[73] Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna," 444.

[74] See Jane Stevenson, "Italy: Renaissance Women Scholars," in *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8, doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198185024.003.0008.

[75] The bust of Bettina Gozzadini, along with other busts of prominent women in Bolognese history, will be discussed in the next chapter.

[76] Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna," 444.

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[77] Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna," 445.

[78] Stevenson, "Renaissance Women Scholars," 9.

[79] Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna," 445; and Stevenson, "Renaissance Women Scholars," 7.

[80] Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna," 445.

[81] Stevenson, "Renaissance Women Scholars," 9.

[82] Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna," 444, 445.

Even though having an educated female populace in the city did not necessarily mean they were all welcomed into and were permitted to attend the university, being educated was an important part of female virtue in Bolognese society—and one that was publicly celebrated. For any city to have even "a handful of women poets and scholars" was an important symbol of civilization during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, making women scholars and writers "very definitely valued."[83] Though this perspective spread across Italy, Bologna was distinctive at the time because the city did not just have a few learned women, but many dozens of them. Bologna boasted women that were successful in literature, language, art, music, and religion. However, what many of these women—if not most of them—have in common is the reality of already being provided some sort of access, usually in the form of a wealthy or elite family association. Just as with their cloistered sisters, the noblewomen of Bologna were points of pride for the city because they were seen as representatives of the virtuous nature of Bologna.

The concept of female virtue and its emphasis during the seventeenth century was not special to Bologna, but what was unique was the way in which female virtue—especially connected to noblewomen—was a form of civic pride in the city. Due to

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83. Stevenson, "Renaissance Women Scholars," 3.

Bologna's role as a major Papal State by the seventeenth century, the city was constantly visited by foreign dignitaries and ambassadors from Rome. In addition, many elite Bolognese men were also ambassadors to Rome and, as a result, would spend a lot of time away from Bologna. The influx of important dignitaries coupled with somewhat absent husbands provided women with a growing role in political relations. Women's "appearance, apparel, presentation, conduct, and their minds [were] admired by all in the city and by visiting dignitaries," which surely put pressure on them as local representatives of their city with expectations to uphold a certain level of virtue. However, to the Bolognese, the noblewomen in this role were deemed worthy of great praise.[84] Along with the growing foot traffic through the city, when the noblemen went away to Rome, many noblewomen "were officially left by their husbands *in vivo* in control of family finances for months at a time" meaning that elite women were also involved as temporary economic leaders as well. [85] Understanding the role of noblewomen in the city adds another facet to Bolognese female virtue because women maintained both symbolic and physical leadership. While husbands were gone in Rome, women kept the city running. And when the men returned, elite women continued to lead it symbolically as representatives of Bolognese virtue—something the population recognized and celebrated.

One of the more interesting aspects of the role that virtue played in Bologna was the new variation to a genre of writing called the *laude*. The poetic style got its start in thirteenth century religious poetry, but by the seventeenth century, it was common to see works categorized under the *laude* genre focusing on women.[86] Even though it was not necessarily unique to Bologna, the genre expanded in the city very quickly and even attracted non-local writers, highlighting the fact that Bolognese women were viewed as extraordinary. The new form of the genre was established in the city by the fifteenth century when Sabadino degli Arienti wrote his *Gynevra delle Clare Donne*, in which he "praised thirty-two women of particular worthiness, most of them dead, not all of them local in origin, remarkable for piety, scholarship, sometimes as power-brokers and even as warriors."[87] Arienti's work was split into two parts: the first part discussed the important women of antiquity, and the second was "dedicated to the living noblewomen of Bologna."[88] He viewed these women as "an intrinsic part of his city…and indeed of his physical and intellectual cosmos," which once again set a precedent in Bologna where women were praised for more than just their beauty but for their education and their role within the community.[89] The celebration of women in the city and all the roles they undertook manifested in literature throughout the early modern era, proving that Bolognese citizens of the seventeenth century recognized the importance of women within their community.

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[84] Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna," 442.
[85] Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna," 422.

As noted by Caroline Murphy in her work on the women patricians of Bologna, the *laude* tended to place the women as "legatees of the intellect and beauty of earlier remarkable Bolognese women," once again, establishing the sense of tradition surrounding virtuous women in Bologna during the early modern period, and validating the active participation of women in seventeenth-century Bologna through precedent. The written tradition of *laude* in Bologna during this time provide these women with a context, as their names are recorded not only in conjunction with important women of Bolognese past but are placed along this timeline. The women in these *laude*, therefore, are "endowed with a sense of identity and hence a sense of self" that was rarely attributed to women at the time. Their inclusion in this form of literature ensured their legacy continued on for the next generation beyond the seventeenth century.[90] Furthermore, the tradition of great women in the city meant that historians of today, and even those in the seventeenth-century, have been able to trace family trees through maternal links with much greater ease than normal, as surname changes and lack of record keeping can make following the maternal line very difficult.[91] Although the men studying women and writing these stories of praise most likely did not have these lofty reasons in mind for why they were describing the illustrious nature of the women, one thing is certain: "…as the names of these women [were] inscribed in history, so [was] the name of Bologna," helping to form the foundation for the Bolognese myth.[92]

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[86] Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna," 440.
[87] Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna," 440.
[88] Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna," 440.
[89] Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna," 441.

The *Laude delle Donne Bolognese* written by philologist Claudio Tolomei in the sixteenth century is an important example of this genre of literature.[93] Even though Tolomei was Sienese, the subject of his laude was the women of Bologna. He never wrote a comparable piece about the women of Siena, nor really any piece focused on

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90. Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna," 444.
91. Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna," 448.
92. Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna,"445.
93. Claudio Tolomei, *Laude delle donne Bolognese* (Bologna: Per lustiniano da Rubera: 1514).

women before or after publishing this work. His later writings concentrated on the study of languages, as his profession would allude to. He was in Bologna to study law at the university and it was during this time that he wrote his *Laude delle Donne Bolognese*. The *Laude* not only shows his skill as someone who studied Italian languages, with his verses being written in octaves—a style considered to be invented by Boccaccio—but also provides the perspective of a foreigner who chose to praise Bologna's women. However, the reason he chose to write this *Laude* is not particularly obvious. He may have been inspired by the women studying and teaching at the university during the period. Alternatively, it is possible the elite women of the city were his patrons and paid him to write his *Laude*, or he might have simply just wanted to write some poetry. Whatever his reasoning was, his work on Bolognese women is especially remarkable considering the fact that it was rare for an Italian from another city-state to praise a competing state for any reason, making his claims about Bolognese women that much more interesting. Even though Tolomei's *Laude* was written in the sixteenth century, the genre continued into the seventeenth century, and analyzing his work helps us to understand the foundations of this practice and why it took hold in Bologna.

Tolomei's *Laude* is split into three *libri* each following a poetic structure. The first section takes an allegorical approach to Bolognese history, discussing the foundations of Bologna aligning with myths of the Roman pantheon of gods whose "le grazie unire ad bologna" (graces unite in Bologna).[94] His second and third *libri* focus on Bologna specifically, with his second *libro* praising the city and its women in general, complimenting on the first page of the chapter “La patria, le virtu, l’ingengo & l’arte” (the homeland, the virtue, the ingenuity, and the art) of Bologna.[95] He ends his second chapter listing specific names of Bolognese women with a verse or so about their worthy attributes, including Caterina Biachetta, Ginevra Lambertina and Ginevra da la Ringhera, Valeria de le Arme, Emilia Fodaza, Camilla Poeta, Dorothea di Magnani, Beatrice da Catel, and at one point just simply, Helena.[96] Although Tolomei’s work deserves a much greater analysis than the more general overview I can provide here, his focus on Bolognese women proves that “what makes Bologna different is that no other city in early modern Italy seems to have felt that its noblewomen were such a vital part of its identity.”[97] Women across Italy were praised, but Bolognese women were valued.

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[94] Tolomei, *Laude*, 43.

The history of Bologna and its civic identity during the seventeenth century was intrinsically tied to women. The city’s status as a Papal State, the conflict between Counter Reformation restrictions and Bolognese republican ideals, convent culture, the university, and the role of the elite all helped to create a city that relied on its female population not only as mothers and as wives, but as active members of a society who took pride in their virtues. In almost all of the prominent facets of the city, there was a connection to women, but beyond that, the contributions of women were openly celebrated and valued among Bolognese citizens. Why Bologna provided so many opportunities to women was simply because the precedent to do so was already set and was only further reinforced by changes in the seventeenth century. Traditions that included women's participation, such as women attending the university from its beginning or the nuns care of the city's icon, end up being bolstered by conflicts over Counter Reformation mandates, leading to Bolognese women being seen as symbols of the fight against the Papacy and representative of the city's virtue. No matter if the focus on Bologna's early modern history is political, religious, social, or intellectual, women were active members who influenced the culture of the city.

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[95] Tolomei, *Laude,* 37.
[96] Tolomei, *Laude*, 53-73.
[97] Murphy, “In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna,” 453-454.

One historical irony is that Bologna seems to be a city that lacks an origin story. However, I would contend that the origin story for seventeenth-century Bologna is encompassed by the legends of the *Madonna di San Luca*. The prized icon is a symbol of the feminine heritage of Bologna and perfectly encompasses the question: "why Bologna?" As an image of the Mother of God herself, reputedly from the hand of Luke, gospel writer and first portraitist of the Virgin, it provides the city with the honor of being the chosen resting place for the painting by the Virgin Mary herself. The icon represents the larger story of female participation through its care-taking nuns and the young girl who founded the sanctuary it calls home, as well as the fact that it was widely celebrated throughout the city, just as the women of the seventeenth century were. The *Madonna di San Luca* is thoroughly situated within the women's history of Bologna, but it is also connected to another tradition that played a key role in the foundation of the myth of Bologna: Bolognese Baroque art.

# CHAPTER III

# “LA GEMMA D’ITALIA, IL SOLE DELLA EUROPEA:” WOMEN ARTISTS AND VISUAL CULTURE

Tucked away in the collections of the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna, also known as the Carisbo Foundation, sit many priceless artifacts important to the artistic and cultural heritage of Bologna. The collection includes a cycle of twelve busts that were made in the seventeenth century by an unknown artist. Originally housed in the Renaissance style Palazzo Felicini (now the Palazzo Felicini Fibbia), but not acquired by the museum until 2007, these busts would have been on prominent display in Bologna by the end of the seventeenth century.[98] The twelve sculptures are terracotta, and each one has a base that names the figure being depicted, although the descriptions are significantly deteriorated on some. Thankfully, as listed with the bust’s information on the museum website, a manuscript found in the collections of the Archiginnasio of Bologna—the building once home to the University of Bologna and which now houses the largest library in the entire Emilia-Romagna region—made note of the text on each bust before they reached their current illegible state, preserving the identities of those depicted and even allowing historians to identify two of the busts that were without an inscription.[99]

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[98] I was unable to acquire the book mentioned in the bibliography on the busts listed on the museum website (I reached out to the National Gallery of Art’s library, but they are closed due to the pandemic, so I was unable to get scans), but I have included the citation of the book here for reference, Stefano Tumidei, *Dell’eccellenza delle dame di Bologna: dodici busti di donne illustri bolognesi* (Firenze: Giovanni Pratesi Antiquario, 2003).

What stands out about this specific cycle of busts, and makes it particularly pertinent here, is that each one depicts a different illustrious woman from Bolognese history dating back to the thirteenth century. Many of them are women mentioned in the previous chapter—Bettina Gozzadini, Novella Calderini, Dorotea Bocchi, Giovanna Biachetti—while others will be new to this chapter such as the artists Lavinia Fontana, Properzia de'Rossi, and Elisabetta Sirani (Figures 2.1-2.7).[100] The busts are physical representations of the tradition of women being active participants in the city. Significantly, these busts parallel the tradition of celebrating famous men (and sometimes women) in sculpture or fresco cycles found in *studioli* of wealthier Renaissance households. For these women, along with five others not mentioned here, to be presented in such a prestigious manner—with their likenesses on display in a historic Palazzo starting in the late seventeenth century—is a testament to their importance to the history of Bologna as recognized by the Bolognese people. What is even more telling is the fact that a fourth of the busts depict a woman artist, highlighting the centrality of the artistic tradition within the civic pride of Bologna. And although these works are not done in a particularly precious material or by a prestigious artist (that we know of), the fact that this collection of busts was made at all is astounding. It was common at the time for a portrait to be commissioned by a woman's husband or by the woman herself as a mark of her status, but to have twelve sculptural portraits of past Bolognese women that were made simply in celebration of them is unprecedented. These busts are a witness to the legacy of these women in the city—a legacy discussed, highlighted, and expanded within the artistic tradition of Bologna.

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[99] I had attempted to locate the manuscript in the Archiginnasio mentioned in the information with the bust, but what I assume to be the manuscript has not been digitized and would require me to visit the archives. Along with the fact I was unable to obtain a copy of Stefano Tumidei's book listed in the above footnote, unfortunately, I will not be able to provide any further provenance or historical background of the busts.

[100] All of these women have pre-seventeenth-century connections to the University of Bologna as mentioned in Chapter 2. For more on these women see, Caroline P. Murphy "'In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna': The Image and Identity of the Sixteenth-Century Bolognese Female Patriciate." Renaissance Studies: Journal of the Society for Renaissance Studies 13, no. 4 (December 1999): 440–54. doi:10.1111/j.1477-4658. 1999.tb00090.x; and Jane Stevenson, "Italy: Renaissance Women Scholars," in Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2007),1-47, doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198185024.003.0008.

The female citizens of the city saw economic, educational, and religious opportunities unlike any other in the region, a situation that gave rise to the Myth of Bologna. However, this chapter will focus on the role women played as artists in the city because the myth of Bologna, as much as it was integrated into many aspects of the city, was founded because of the proliferation of women artists during this time period. Various studies of women artists in the city (many of which are considered here) mention that their participation in the artistic sector was exceptional and, in fact, it was the introduction to a specific female Bolognese artist that sparked the question of "why Bologna?" in my own research.[101] The profound roles of women in the community—including their participation in the university and in religious life—are mirrored by their participation in the artistic culture of Bologna. Due to the representational quality of the arts and the stylistic changes taking place during the Baroque period, art provides both a snapshot of life at the time and the perceptions and critiques of social norms and expectations as held by artists. To have works made by the hands of women is a rare but extraordinary glimpse into their world, and it is no surprise that in a city so heavily influenced by female participation, Bologna's artistic tradition was one in which women could thrive—a phenomenon truly unique to the city. The inclusive environment of the artistic sector developed in the decades leading up to the seventeenth century bolstered an artistic style founded in naturalism and narrative storytelling. The style soon became a Bolognese touchstone that helped to ensure women's participation in the arts by the seventeenth century. However, it began with the Carracci family in the century prior.

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[101] That artist being Elisabetta Sirani, who will be discussed more in depth later on in this chapter. For more on her specifically, see Nancy Baker, "Elisabetta Sirani: Her Life, Her Influence, and Her Legacy." Masters diss., University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, 1995; and see Adelina Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuosa': Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna*, Late Medieval and Early Modern Studies 22 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2014) for more on women in the artistic sector of Bologna.

To truly understand the greatness of Bolognese Baroque art, grasping its foundations in the Carracci tradition is of the upmost importance. The prominence of the Carracci grew in the second half of the sixteenth century and it would be three members of the family—brothers Annibale and Agostino, along with their cousin Ludovico—who would trigger "the artistic efflorescence that ensued."[102] Tired of the mannerist style with its acidic colors, elongated proportions, and overly imaginative portrayals of traditional figures, the Carracci looked towards a tradition in northern Italy focused on naturalism and *colore*, which is connected to artists such as Titian who used broad swatches of color to suggest space and to create shape and form.[103] After overcoming some initial opposition to their approach, the brothers and cousin expanded the style further, implementing elements of the Florentine *disegno* style that was revered at the time.[104] This synthesis of styles formed a uniquely Bolognese tradition that was then taught to followers of the Carracci through their *Accademia degli Incamminati* which emphasized the study of nature and the importance of drawing from life. The Carracci approach would reflect Counter Reformation changes that required a painting style to be both accurate in the telling of religious stories and true to nature, while still breaking away from tradition to form their new style—creating the artistic climate that would reach its pinnacle in the seventeenth century.[105]

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[102] David J. Drogin, "Art, Patronage, and Civic Identities in Renaissance Bologna." in *The Court Cities of Northern Italy: Milan, Parma, Piacenza, Mantua, Ferrara, Bologna, Urbino, Pesaro, and Rimini Artistic Centers of the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Charles M. Rosenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 146.

[103] Lin Barton, C. van Tuyll van Serooskerken, Nicholas Turner, and Daniele Benati. "Carracci family," Grove Art Online, 2003..

Although the Carracci certainly had a large impact on Baroque art, there were two other key figures who fostered an artistic perspective in Bologna that, whether intentionally or not, ensured women had a place at the easel. These two men were prominent figures in sixteenth century Bologna, and it was their respective philosophies that laid the foundation for women artists to prosper. One of these men was the naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1605). He contributed greatly to the "intellectual vibrancy of the city," as his desire for detailed scientific illustration "fostered the style of precise naturalism distinctive to Bologna" through artists like the Carracci.[106] Aldrovandi had one of the largest known natural science collections in the country, one that he kept open

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104. Barton, "Carracci family."

105. For an example of this discussion on the role of the Carracci and Counter Reformation changes, see Livia Stoenescu, "Annibale Carracci and the Modern Reform of Altar Painting," (*RACAR: Revue D'art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 35, no. 2, 2010): 65-80. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42631309.

106. Patricia Rocco, *The Devout Hand: Women, Virtue, and Visual Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 7.

for artists to study. He also opened it to artists so that he could employ them to illustrate his collection in a detailed catalogue he was compiling, as he believed artistic representations held a kind of descriptive power that words did not.[107] Even though his desire for naturalism in art was more scientific in its reasoning, one of his close confidants was the archbishop of Bologna who would also play a large role in creating an emphasis on naturalism in art through supporting religious reforms and, as a result, ended up encouraging the participation of women in the arts due to their connection to this natural style in the city.

The archbishop Gabriele Paleotti was an influential religious figure both in the city and the Counter Reformation movement as a whole. It was Paleotti who, after attending the Council of Trent that was briefly housed in Bologna during the late-1540s and early-1560s, "spearheaded an artistic movement associated with the Catholic reform."[108] Although this reform is known historically for disrupting artistic and intellectual life across the peninsula, Paleotti was able to "[protect] the university and Bologna's cultural vitality," because his outlook matched that of the naturalist tradition found in the city's university, in the establishment of the Carracci tradition, and subsequently among intellectuals like Aldrovandi.[109] Paleotti understood that the piety desired by the Church in Counter Reformation art required a high level of naturalism—the same naturalism bolstered by Aldrovandi's employment of artists—because to reduce the Mannerists style's popularity, art reform must deviate from its unnatural approach.

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107. Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 7.
108. Drogin, "Art, Patronage, and Civic Identities," 246.
109. Drogin, "Art, Patronage, and Civic Identities,"290.

Paleotti wrote his famous *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane* with these concepts in mind, and ended up finding a solution through female participation in art.[110]

Within his *Discorso*, Paleotti described the concepts of *artefice cristiano* and the *maniera devota* or the "devout painter" and the "devout style" which would be some of the most influential aspects of reform that allowed for women artists to prosper in Bologna. The archbishop "called for women's participation in religious reform" which provided "women in Bologna with greater agency than elsewhere and [produced] opportunities for the first successful group of women artists" because he saw the connection in his city between devout practices and women.[111] As a city with countless convents, possessing an icon intrinsically and directly connected to women, and a proud tradition of feminine knowledge and virtue—women's connection to religion provided the support not only for the religious reforms themselves, but how they could then be implemented in art. Paleotti's Counter Reformation vision of religious art as informed by the Bolognese artistic tradition required detailed naturalism, but it would also require the participation of women because they were seen as the guardians of the religious virtue of the city.

Paleotti not only wrote about these reforms, but he also put them into practice himself. He chose a contemporary female painter, Lavinia Fontana to create a work of the Assumption in his own private chapel in the cathedral of San Pietro in Bologna. His choice was a direct representation of his belief in the reforms, but also "indicates his

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110. Rocco, *The Devout Hand,* 43.
111. Rocco, *The Devout Hand,* 7.

approval of the feminine element in devotional practice" which was so prominent in seventeenth-century Bologna.[112] Paleotti even donated to the city's dowry fund, the *Monte del Matrimonia*, opening "twenty-five accounts registered to poor maidens" to ensure the urban population of women in the city were further supported.[113] However, to discuss the rhetoric of the reforms without mentioning how they influenced the development of art and the production of a broad participation of women in the artistic sector of Bologna would fail to show the significant effect the Counter Reformation figures of Paleotti and Aldrovandi had on creating the mythic Bologna revered by scholars.

The term *maniera devota* was not one created by Paleotti but was originally used to describe the Flemish artistic style that was also popular with some Italian artists of the fifteenth century and known to those like the Carracci. This style was based in naturalism and piety and was said to inspire the "devotion of the viewer."[114] The Flemish tradition was emphasized by Counter Reformation figures like Paleotti who connected this style with another—the *mano donnesca*, or womanly hand. The term *mano donnesca* was actually used as a critique during the time, as it was said to describe an approach that was "overly labored" or less refined, "thus considered appropriate only to female artists" who were seen as less skilled or relegated to specific lower-level genres of art.[115] However,

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[112] Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 46.

[113] Mauro Carboni, "The Economics of Marriage: Dotal Strategies in Bologna in the Age of Catholic Reform." *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 39, no. 2 (2008): 379, doi:10.2307/20478892.

[114] Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 5.

[115] Rocco, *The Devout Hand,* 5.

Paleotti, recognizing the influential role of women in the religious community of Bologna, utilized the once pejorative term to help create something uniquely Bolognese.

Artistic style being gendered was also not new, stemming from the debate between the *colore* and *disegno* styles as aforementioned. The former, a Venetian style, was described as feminine and the latter, a Florentine tradition, was considered to be masculine—rather than being associated with the artist's gender, it was the style in which they worked that took on a gendered label.[116] However, for women, they were seen as being inherently attached to the feminine style and it was rare for them to be described as otherwise. The gendering of styles ended up aiding female participation in the arts in Bologna because the *maniera devota* desired by the Counter Reformation, that at times was seen as too feminine for the male artists of Italy (being literally described in the feminine form of the language), was successfully created by a more *mano donnesca,* or literally by a woman's hand. Paleotti recognized the convergence of the two approaches, and although men continued to participate in the devotional style, it was Bolognese women who would flourish within the artistic reforms due to their connection with both the *maniera devota* and the *mano donnesca*, cementing women as active participants in yet another aspect of Bolognese city life.

Beyond the rhetorical and thematic changes that encouraged women artists, those who commissioned art were also highly influential in the creation of an environment that supported women artists. Patrons would not only decide what the subject of the piece

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116. Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 17. This debate took place within the city walls of Bologna as well, with the famous Guido Reni being described as having a womanly style while the Carracci tradition played into both *colore* and *disegno* traditions.

was, but also how the story was portrayed—shaping the general trends in artistic production throughout the century. Due to the fact that Bologna did not have a single ruling family during the seventeenth century, there was great opportunity for various groups to commission works of art. Of the inventories that list obtaining or commissioning works by women during this time period, around half of them document collections of citizens that were not noble but instead were merchants, artists, bankers, university professors, and even butchers.[117] The diverse backgrounds of patrons meant that female artists would have been able "to paint more varied subjects, to specialize in the prestigious genre of history painting, and to produce a greater number of lucrative public altarpieces as well as works for private collections."[118] Obviously, patrons would have been crucial for the proliferation of women artists in the city because these artists would need to be funded. Nevertheless, given the sheer number and diversity of Bolognese patrons, the restrictions on what was appropriate for a woman to paint would have been much more relaxed because the demand for artists was higher.

Although patrons in general provided many opportunities for women artists, Bologna also saw a greater participation of female patrons in commissioning and purchasing art than in other comparable city-states.[119] Noblewomen would commission art for their family chapels rather than noblemen, nuns were patrons of many works within their chapels and convents,[120] and women would commission portraits directly from female artists especially early on in the century.[121] Women would have been slightly more restricted as patrons, only able to commission the art that was seen to be appropriate for a woman to have at the time, such as religious works or portraits. However, these restrictions did not affect their ability to employ women artists because women artists were mostly expected to create religious art and portraiture. Women were involved in all aspects of artistic culture in the city, from patronage to producing the art themselves, which provides the city another unique facet in its perceptions of women and the opportunities provided to them.

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[117] Bohn, "Patronizing *pittrici*," 114; and Bohn, "Collecting Women's Art," 78.
[118] Bohn, "Patronizing *pittrici*," 113.
[119] Bohn, "Patronizing *pittrici*," 114; and Rocco, *Devout Hand,* 136.
[120] Craig A. Monson*, Divas in the Convent: Nuns, Music, and Defiance in 17th Century Italy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 32.

The changing rhetoric around religious art and the growing pool of patrons in Bologna, although important, were not the only causes for the rise in women artists. Women's participation in the visual culture of the city certainly culminated in the seventeenth century, during which there were at least twenty-two or at most forty-four active women artists as mentioned in written documents, archives, or through extant works.[122] Nonetheless, women artists were not a new phenomenon in seventeenth century Bologna. The foundation for women's participation in visual culture was already laid long before the turn of the century, and even though women might not have always thrived in the city, as will be highlighted in the following chapter, women artists seemingly did. We know about the many women artists of Bologna because the city was committed to remembering them. The civic pride of Bologna was largely connected to women, as exemplified by the cycle of busts that were introduced at the beginning of the chapter.[123] Women artists are present throughout the city's history, beginning with Caterina Vigri (1413-1463), also known as Saint Catherine of Bologna, as noted in the previous chapter.

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[121] Bohn, "Patronizing *pittrici*," 119.

[122] Babette Bohn, "Female Self-portraiture in Early Modern Bologna," in *Renaissance Studies 18*, no. 2 (2004), www.jstor.org/stable/24413408, 239; and Babette Bohn, "Collecting Women's Art in Early Modern Bologna: Myth and Reality," in *Reframing Seventeenth-Century Bolognese Art: Archival Discoveries*, ed. Bohn Babette and Raffaella Morselli (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 73, doi:10.2307/j.ctvnwbzm1.9. There is still debate over how many women artists were active at the time because of the fragmental nature of archival information concerning women artists and the lack of works that survive today.

Vigri's influence on religious life in the city cannot be overstated, and she became the patron saint of artists in the city for a reason. Living during the fifteenth century, Vigri was a contemporary of the artists Masaccio, Donatello, and Uccello. Just like these men in their home city of Florence, Caterina Vigri was known to all of Bologna; she was quite the Renaissance woman—"a painter, writer, doctor and pharmacist, and also the abbess of a convent…tutored in Latin, literature, music and art."[124] Her presence in the religious community overlapped with her artistic presence as her paintings decorated churches and her own convent, along with her many works on paper which illuminated her manuscripts.[125] Stand-alone self-portrait paintings were rare in this period, but artists often hid their self-portraits in narrative works. One of the earliest examples of this phenomenon in Bologna is considered to be a manuscript illumination by Vigri that shows "a nun who has been identified as the artist, kneeling before the crucified Christ."[126] In addition, her small miniature paintings are the earliest surviving works on paper produced by a woman in the city, placing Vigri at the starting point of the artistic tradition to follow (Figure 3). And for a city so proud of its female artists, it is no surprise they would choose the earliest known female artist in the city to be a patron of the arts. Vigri set the historical precedent for women artists of Bologna, which not only made the vocation "more socially acceptable for women in Bologna than it was in other cities," but provided the foundations for Bolognese attitudes towards the connection between religious reform and women artists.[127]

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[123] Bohn, "Female Self-portraiture," 239.

[124] Therese Schwartz, "Catarina Vigri and Properzia de Rossi," *Women's Studies* 6, no. 1 (December 1978), 13 doi:10.1080/00497878.1978.9978461.

[125] Schwartz, "Catarina Vigri and Properzia de Rossi," 14; and Babette Bohn, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices in Early Modern Bologna," *Master Drawings* 42, no. 3 (2004), 208, www.jstor.org/stable/1554659.

[126] Bohn, "Female Self-portraiture," 271-272.

The next important female artist in Bologna after Vigri was Properzia de' Rossi—a Renaissance sculptor who lived from 1490-1530. She is described as somewhat of a child prodigy, carving into fruit pits as early as eight years old, some of which were collected and preserved.[128] One of her more famous works is the *Grassi Family Coat of Arms,* which displays her carved fruit pits in place of gems—all the carvings depicting one of Christ's apostles on one side, and female saints on the reverse (Figure 4.1). She was the only woman to have an entire chapter devoted to her by Vasari in the first edition of his famous *The Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1550) and he praises her sculpting ability saying that "all the men…were envious of her" and that her fruit-pit carvings "were singular and marvelous to behold, not only for the subtlety of the work, but also for the grace of the little figures."[129] Small carvings like these were seen as an appropriate task for women to undertake, but de' Rossi quickly broke that mold.

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[127] Babette Bohn, "Patronizing pittrici in Early Modern Bologna," in *Bologna. Cultural Crossroads from the Medieval to the Baroque: Recent Anglo-American Scholarship*, eds. Gian Mario Anselmi, Angela De Benedictis, Nicolas Terpstra, (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2013), 115; and Bohn, "Female Self-portraiture," 240.

[128] Schwartz, "Catarina Vigri and Properzia de Rossi," 15; and Rocco, *Devout Hand*, 34-35.

[129] Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors & Architects*, vol. 5, trans. by Gaston du C. De Vere (London, Macmillian. 1912-1915), 124.

Commenting on her impressive marble relief, *Joseph Fleeing Potiphar's Wife* (Figure 4.2), Vasari gave more consideration to the apocryphal story of her work representing her unrequited love for a nobleman, trivializing her as a "poor love-stricken young woman," rather than discussing her as a sculptor with obvious command of the growing Renaissance sculptural style.[130] She gained a high degree of acclaim in Bologna during her lifetime—sculpting on the facades of cathedrals and attracting many patrons—but because few works by her hand have been solidly attributed, most of what is known of de' Rossi concerns her legal affairs more so than her artistic ones.[131] She was praised for her beauty, intellect, and artistic talent, but her reputation towards the end of her life faltered. She died at thirty, nearly bankrupt and alone in a Bolognese hospital.[132] Women were always judged based on societal expectations, artist or not. The fact that de' Rossi's legacy was allowed to continue on in the city, even though she was not seen as a particularly pious woman, is unprecedented. Through works like her bust in the Palazzo Felicini and the few pieces by her hand that remained, she was celebrated throughout the seventeenth century. De' Rossi was not used as a warning, she was just another artist, signaling that there was a sense of pride surrounding all Bolognese women artists, no matter how much they lived up to the social expectations of their sex.

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[130] Vasari, *Lives*, 125.
[131] Schwartz, "Catarina Vigri and Properzia de Rossi," 15.
[132] Schwartz, "Catarina Vigri and Properzia de Rossi," 15-16.

Although the two previous women were known for being talented artists, they did not have a professional career in the arts.[133] Lavinia Fontana, of the later sixteenth century (1552-1614), would be the first Bolognese woman to do so, making her an extremely important matriarch among the masters of Bologna. She began her career much later in life than what was traditional—she was well into her twenties by the time she started painting—but her works would become well known and revered for their naturalism.[134] Key to understanding her and the important role she played in the artistic scene is her marriage contract. She married a poor nobleman from a nearby town and their contract stipulated "she would provide no dowry but would support her husband" through her work in her father's workshop, as he too was a well-known painter at the time.[135] What makes her so extraordinary beyond her role as the breadwinner, is the fact that she also had no fewer than eleven children during her active years as a painter.[136] She was the prime example of Bolognese feminine virtue: a provider, a mother, and a successful artist who upheld the naturalism and piousness required by artistic reform.

Fontana was known mostly for her portraits—the art form deemed most "appropriate" for women at the time—and she was praised for their accuracy and detail. For example, her drawn portrait of one of the daughters of Pedro Gonzalez expertly portrays the fact that the young girl was afflicted by the same condition that afflicted her father: hypertrichosis, which causes excessive amounts of hair to grow all over the body

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[133] De' Rossi likely made a living through her sculpture, but there is some disagreement among scholars on who was the first professional woman artist in Bologna.

[134] Bohn, "Patronizing *pittrici,*" 115.

[135] Bohn, "Patronizing *pittrici,*" 115; and Rocco, *Devout Hand*, 31.

[136] Rocco, *Devout Hand*, 31.

(Figure 5.1). With a simple red and black chalk drawing, Fontana successfully highlights the extent to which the hypertrichosis affected the young girl, while still depicting her in a dignified pose and a noble style of dress. Her choice of color and attention to detail even within this simple portrait study is representative of the naturalism in all her portraiture. However, what is most striking is the fact that, rather than depicting the young girl as the oddity or outcast she would have been in society, Fontana sketches her with a sense of presence and decorum just as with all her other female clients. The portrait study provides a glimpse into the motherly side of Fontana who has shown much care and compassion to this young girl through her portrait, and rather than attempting to hide her ailment, Fontana represents her as she would any other sitter—a treatment that was probably not afforded to the young girl very often.

Another kind of portrait undertaken by Fontana, her self-portraits, are of particular interest because at least two of the four attributed to her reference her labor as an artist. Portraits that portrayed the artist as such were uncommon for the sixteenth century. Fontana's portraits are greatly significant for the understanding of women's role in art within the city because "the two earliest Bolognese self-portrait paintings that allude directly to artistic labor, predating even Annibale Carracci's works," are by Lavinia Fontana, a woman.[137] These two works are her *Self-Portrait at the Keyboard* (Figure 5.2) and *Self-Portrait in the Studiolo* (Figure 5.3).[138] In both of these works she

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137. Bohn, "Female self-portraiture," 253.

138. The *Self-Portrait at the Keyboard* is her earliest self-portrait and was completed in 1577. Her *Self-Portrait in the Studiolo* was completed in 1579. These works are solidly attributed to her because all of her four self-portraits are signed and dated. For more on this, see Bohn, "Female self-portraiture," 251

depicts herself caught in the act of something, gazing out at the viewer who seems to be interrupting her work—her spinet lesson in the former, and her drawing practices in the latter. Her attire signals her high status as she took great care in depicting the sumptuous fabrics and lace that adorn her in both portraits.

Fontana's *Self-Portrait in the Studiolo,* however, is unlike her others (Figure 5.3). The portrait is a *tondo*, or a round painting, and what is most compelling is the way she constructs her identity as an artist in this work. She portrays herself just about to begin a sketch of a miniature figure in front of her, as the shelfs of her studio recede into the darkness behind her—each one filled with various other busts and human models for her to study. She is the first artist in Bologna to depict herself in this manner; Fontana is a career artist and the master of her studio, firmly placing her within the artistic tradition of Bologna. Her career would span forty years during which she also received twenty-three commissions specifically for altarpieces, situating her prominently in the *maniera devota* style so lauded by archbishop Paleotti.[139] Her artistic prowess and skill left a lasting legacy by the turn of the century and helped to not only continue the timeline of women artists in the city, but to solidify their importance on Bolognese art as a whole.

Lavinia Fontana's command of narrative painting laid the foundation for the proliferation of women history painters in the seventeenth century, which became one of the most prosperous periods for women in art in Bologna.[140] The reason this century experienced such a blossoming of women in the arts is of course due in part to Fontana and the other women before her, but it also owes a lot to a painter by the name of Elisabetta Sirani (1638-1665). Although there were female painters between the twenty-four years after Fontana's death and the birth of Sirani, it would not be until, during, and after Elisabetta Sirani's career that Bolognese women artists would truly prosper. Sirani's influence is emphasized by the fact that Carlo Cesare Malvasia, an "amateur painter, accomplished poet, antiquarian, and lawyer," who is a famous figure in Bolognese art history for his detailed accounts of the city's artists, devoted an entire chapter to Elisabetta in his *Felsina pittrice*.[141] Not only is the title itself a combination of the Etruscan name for Bologna—which is both a feminine term and derived from a culture that gave women greater access to society as previously discussed—but *pittrice* is the term used specifically for women artists, which places women at the center of his argument surrounding the greatness of the Bolognese artistic tradition.[142] Both Paleotti's *Discorso* and Malvasia's *Felsina pittrice*—two of the most important works of literature on art from Bologna—emphasize the role of women in the trade. Beyond the title and the work's influence on the region, Malvasia's chapter on Sirani is particularly telling. He included Sirani in the second volume of his book which focused on his contemporaries. In this volume he provided a biography for forty-two artists, listing Elisabetta along with Baroque masters including Guido Reni, Agostino Tassi, and Giovanni Francesco Barberi (Guercino). He devotes thirty-four pages to Sirani, a few of which discuss her father as well, and she is the only woman in his book who is given an entire chapter of her own.

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[139] Bohn, "Patronizing *pittrici*," 116. It is also assumed that she would have made a few illustrations for Aldrovandi's collection as her father was known to work with him. For more on this relationship, see David J. Drogin, "Art, Patronage, and Civic Identities in Renaissance Bologna," in *The Court Cities of Northern Italy: Milan, Parma, Piacenza, Mantua, Ferrara, Bologna, Urbino, Pesaro, and Rimini Artistic Centers of the Italian Renaissance*, edited by Charles M. Rosenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 290.

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[140] Bohn, "Female Self-portraiture," 274.

[141] Babette Bohn, and Raffaella Morselli, "Introduction," in *Reframing Seventeenth-Century Bolognese Art: Archival Discoveries*, eds. Bohn Babette and Raffaella Morselli (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 15. Malvasia did devote some time to discussing Lavinia Fontana in the previous volume of his *Felsina pittrice*, however, his discussion of her is brief and attributes much of her success to her patrons rather than to her own skill.

[142] Babette Bohn, "Collecting Women's Art in Early Modern Bologna: Myth and Reality," in *Reframing Seventeenth-Century Bolognese Art: Archival Discoveries*, eds. Bohn Babette and Raffaella Morselli (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019),77, doi:10.2307/j.ctvnwbzm1.9; and Rocco, *Devout Hand*, 119.

Looking at his actual descriptions of Elisabetta and her artistic talent, Malvasia not only points out the tradition of the modern-day women in the arts who "han qui sequito la scorta de loro Progenitori" (have here followed the path of their ancestors), but highlights Sirani among them as "la gloria de sesso donnesco, la gemma d'Italia, il sole della Europea" (the glory of the female sex, the gem of Italy, the sun of Europe).[143] He compliments Sirani's utilization of naturalism, stating that she "d'imitare la sola Natura come gran Maestra" (only imitated nature as a great teacher) and later goes on to argue her artistic skill and prowess alongside various other Bolognese greats.[144]

Accompanying the many pages of praise, Malvasia included a copy of the artist's oeuvre that was given to him after her death. The list was written out by Sirani herself and notes her creation of over one hundred and fifty pieces of art between the years 1655 and 1665.[145] This list of Sirani's works spans nine pages and for the most part includes a description of each of her works along with the name of the patron who commissioned the piece. The detailed documentation of Sirani's artistic output is imperative to understanding her artistic approach and is truly one of a kind in the study of women artists during this period. There are references to portraits she made of her students like that of Ginevra Cantofoli,[146] a half figure portrait of an allegory of Poetry that was made as a gift for a music teacher,[147] and even the detailed descriptions of a painting of two women, which lays out what each hand of the respective figures was depicted to be holding.[148] These specifics are not just rare, but of the upmost importance because many women artists are only known through one extant work or from a brief mention in a text no longer than a few sentences. Malvasia helped to ensure Elisabetta Sirani's legacy carried on, but she too fostered the continuation of her legacy not only through her impressive artistic skill but also from her commitment to helping future female artists.

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[143] Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice: vite de pittori bolognesi* (In Bologna: Per l'erede di Domenico Barberi, 1679), 454, 456.

[144] Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 461.

[145] To put Sirani's oeuvre into perspective, Guido Reni—a great artist she has commonly been compared to—completed around 140 known works across his almost forty-year career. Although we can not directly compare the two as you would have to take into account aspects such as the length of commissions and the size of the works, it is still quite impressive that Sirani produced more paintings in ten years than Reni did in forty.

Elisabetta Sirani is described by Babette Bohn, who is one of the leading scholars on Bolognese women artists and more specifically on Sirani, as "the most prolific female painter and draftsperson of early modern Italy."[149] Bohn's assertion is bolstered by Sirani's quick rise to fame in seventeenth century Bologna, attracting countless foreign visitors to the city.[150] The daughter of a painter, Sirani had many advantages. Having access to her father's extensive library collection and his workshop meant her intellect and artistic talent were fostered very early on in her life, resulting in her earliest commission for the church of San Girolamo della Certosa coming at the young age of nineteen. Entitled *The Baptism of Christ* (Figure 6.1), this painting was the largest painting of her career which she boldly signed her name to. Although this commission is certainly not her most innovative or captivating piece (as public commissions commonly had to meet specific guidelines from the patron), what is notable is that she was paid 1000 lire for her work.[151] Such an amount was not only comparable to her male counterparts but was more than what her father earned for a painting of the same size for the same church, suggesting the existence of equal pay or at the very least, competitive pay, for women artists in the artistic sector—something certainly not shared by their sisters in textile production as will be discussed in the following chapter.

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[146] Sirani lists "il ritratto della signora Ginevra Cantofoli Pittrice," (the portrait of the painter, Ms. Ginevra Cantofoli), to have been completed in 1656. Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 467.

[147] Sirani lists "Una mezza figura significante la Poesia per regalo al mio maestro da suonare," (a half-figure signifying Poetry for a gift to my piano teacher) to have been completed in 1660. Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 469.

[148] Sirani lists "Due testa del naturale di donne: l'una e coronate di fiori, tenendo con la destra mano un bicchieri, e nell'altra una vaso di vino, l'altra coronata di spiche, e si stringe sotto un braccio un ruzolo di pane. Per il sig. Lorenzo Zagoni." (Two heads of natural women: one is crowned with flowers, holding a glass in the right hadn, and in the other a vessel of wine, the other crowned with spikes, under one arm a roll of bread. For Mr. Lorenzo Zagoni). Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice,* 470.

[149] Bohn, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices," 209.

[150] Many of these visitors early on would come to see Elisabetta work because they thought her father was peddling off his own work as hers in order to gain publicity. Visitors would soon realize this

Sirani was only twenty-seven when she died, but her known oeuvre contains around two hundred paintings and drawings, many of which can still be attributed to her due to the fact that she often signed and dated them and they can then be cross referenced with the list of over one hundred and fifty pieces in Malvasia's *Felsina pittrice*.[152] Although Fontana was the first women in Bologna to produce a large number of history

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was not the case upon arrival as Elisabetta is said to have worked constantly and at a rapid pace which became a spectacle even foreign diplomats would come to see. For more on this, see Bohn, "Female self-portraiture," 262.

[151] Bohn, "Patronizing *pittrici*," 123.

[152] Bohn, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices," 210; and Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, 467-476. It is also important to note that some seventy percent of her extant works are signed, which is a very high percentage for anyone in the period, much less for a woman artist. She was known to sign her works in creative ways, incorporating her name into the embroidery on a figure's dress or on the stone of a well. For more on Sirani's signature see Bohn, "Patronizing *pittrici*," 123.

paintings, Sirani was the first to *specialize* in them, which was a powerful assertion of her skill as "the woman artist was still regarded as an exception to the natural order," much less capable of performing well in the male-dominated history-painting genre.[153] Beyond her experiences as a painter, her paintings specifically—although certainly fitting into the naturalistic *maniera devota* style required by her city and century—pushed the boundaries of what was expected. She painted traditional subjects in innovative new ways by showcasing the female characters and their narratives beyond what was traditional. Even though many of her paintings depicted women known for their feminine virtue, because of her varied artistic approaches—such as her impressive skill as a draughtsman (or draughtswoman, if you will)—and her powerful narrative style, she was considered to possess masculine artistic virtues.[154] Elisabetta Sirani is one of the rare examples of a woman walking the line between both gendered styles that were present in the Bolognese artistic tradition.

Sirani's *Portia Wounding her Thigh*, encompasses her bold and innovative approach to depicting classic narratives about women (Figure 6.2).[155] The story of Portia, the wife of Brutus, the senator of ancient Rome, is typically one overshadowed by the male protagonist in her life. Many paintings of Portia depict her suicide which was lauded as an act of fidelity and submission to her husband after his death.[156] The act of a woman's suicide was also typically sexualized in this era by Sirani's male counterparts. However, Sirani chose to instead paint a different scene from Portia's life altogether. She depicts the moment Portia wounds herself, cutting her thigh, which was an act to prove to her husband she would be able to remain strong and keep his plot to assassinate Julius Caesar a secret.[157] Not only does Sirani show a specific moment of fortitude and action rather than the story of her submissive act of suicide, she also removes Brutus from the scene entirely. The man in Portia's story is absent, leaving Portia only in juxtaposition to the more ordinary women in the background who are partaking in the familiar task of embroidery. Portia is portrayed in a very feminine manner, with her sumptuous gown and sensually exposed leg and shoulder, and yet, she is also shown with the masculine virtue of fortitude. Nowhere is this comparison clearer than in the weapon Portia brandishes to inflict her wound—an embroidery needle.[158] Portia's violent and masculine act is shown by Sirani as being enacted by a tool and tradition that in Bologna was overwhelmingly feminine.[159] Sirani walks the line between masculine and feminine art practices, but she also portrays her female subjects in the same manner, providing them with the very sense of strength and pride that the city imparted onto its female citizens.

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[153] Bohn, "Female Self-portraiture," 270.

[154] For more on Sirani's drawings, Babette Bohn has an entire article, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices," focused solely on this subject.

[155] Other history paintings by Elisabetta Sirani that focus on the stories of women include her *Cleopatra*, *Timoclea Kills the Captain of Alexander the Great*, and *Judith with the Head of Holofernes.*

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156. For example, see Jacques Bellange, *The Suicide of Portia,* ca. 1612-1616, etching with stippling and engraving, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/369048.
157. Bohn, "Patronizing *pittrici*," 119-120.
158. Bohn, "Patronizing *pittrici*," 119-120. It is important to also note that this work was commissioned by a well-known local silk merchant, Simone Tassi, which also points to her attention to the fabrics surrounding Portia and the domestic act of textile production. For more on this see Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 133.
159. The point being made here will be discussed in the following chapter in much greater detail.

However powerful Sirani's history paintings may be, what makes her legacy that much more potent in Bologna is the fact that she effectively eradicated the lingering narrative that women could only have a limited career as a painter. In the short decade or so that she was active in the art scene of Bologna, she opened a school for women artists—the very first of its kind. All of her students followed in her footsteps, producing history paintings, altarpieces, and some even continuing her drawing practices. By the end of the seventeenth century, there were more professional women artists in Bologna than ever before.[160] The students of Sirani would carry on the legacy of women artists in Bologna throughout the remainder of the century and would continue to legitimize women's participation in yet another aspect of the city's culture. Elisabetta's school fulfilled Paleotti's philosophy while also expanding upon it. Women were not just important to the new *maniera devota,* but were now imperative to the entire culture and tradition of Bolognese art.

The names of many of Sirani's students are known to us today through works like Malvasia's which aimed to record as much information as possible about the legacies of their city. However, much of the art produced by these women has been lost to history in some way or another. One of the reasons many of these works did not survive was due to the suppression of the Bolognese convents in 1799 by Napoleon Bonaparte. Because many of the paintings made by women artists during the centuries prior dealt with religious subjects and were thus housed in convents and churches, they were more likely subject to being destroyed or ripped from their context by Napoleon and his troops, making them disappear from the historical record.[161] Such actions have resulted in current-day difficulties in not only attributing works to women of the period, but finding any information about them at all—these women being left only as a brief mention by writers like Malvasia with no extant works left to discuss.

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[160] Bohn, "Collecting Women's Art," 92-93.

As bleak as these circumstances may seem, many extant works and a good amount of biographical information connected to Sirani's students still remains. Her two younger sisters, Anna Maria and Barbara Sirani were known to have attended her school and they would continue her legacy after her death, producing sketches and paintings—although nothing comparable to the amount and skill of their older sister. Two other students, Lucrezia Scarfaglia (active 1677–1678) and Ginevra Cantofoli (1618–1672), employ the teachings of Sirani in their self-portraits, mirroring Sirani's basic format—portraying themselves in half- or bust-length and with their brushes and palette in hand opposite a canvas. Just as Sirani did, Scarfaglia and Cantofoli aligned themselves as virtuous history painters through their self-portraiture (Figures 6.3 and 7).[162] Even though little is known about Scarfaglia, Cantofoli is one of Sirani's followers who actually has a significant surviving collection of works with around forty-four paintings and drawings attributed to her.[163]Angela Teresa Muratori, who worked at the latter end of the century and was likely also a student of Sirani's, is one of the more active female painters of the time and, most notably, was the only woman to paint in fresco during the period.[164]

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[161] Rocco, *Devout Hand*, 120.

[162] Bohn, "Female Self-portraiture," 268.

[163] Bohn, "Collecting Women's Art," 85. Cantofoli was already painting around the time Sirani was born, and although it is likely she learned under Sirani later in her life, she is considered a follower of Sirani's more so than a direct student. For more on this, see Rocco, *Devout Hand*, 138.

[164] Rocco, *Devout Hand*, 139; and Bohn, "Patronizing *pittrici*," 124.

Another student of Sirani's, or someone who was at least greatly influenced by her work, Veronica Fontana (no relation to Lavinia Fontana) continued the tradition of detailed naturalism espoused by Paleotti and Aldrovandi through her engravings which were commissioned by some of the city's most important patrons.[165] The names of these women are just a few among the possible forty-four active women artists during this period, but their participation in the artistic sector during the seventeenth century allowed for the continuation of women's participation in art throughout the centuries to follow in Bologna.

Women artists of the seventeenth century in Bologna were able to thrive, in part, because of a foundation formed in the centuries prior that included the Counter Reformation's reframing of religious art and the growing trend of naturalism in the Bolognese artistic tradition as proliferated by figures such as Aldrovandi and the Carracci. As a result, the city fostered an artistic ideology that emphasized piety through naturalism which was directly linked the *mano donnesca,* or womanly hand, by Gabriele Paleotti. The art reform mixed with growing demand in Bologna, as more patrons, both men and women, created the groundwork for the seventeenth century where women could prosper in the arts. In the Bolognese artistic tradition, women artists were fundamentally required.

However, women thrived not just because of cultural changes and the support of patrons but also because of their own active efforts and skill in the fine arts. Women were not passively included in the Bolognese artistic tradition, instead, they pushed boundaries, challenged long-held conventions of how certain stories should be depicted, and helped to foster the Baroque Bolognese style into a unique and prosperous tradition. Although the Counter Reformation art reforms and the figures who implemented them created an ideological foundation for women to expand into Bologna's artistic sector, the precedent of having important woman artists in the city was set long before the Council of Trent ever took place. The city's patron of the arts, Saint Catherine of Bologna, marks the beginning of this timeline back in the fifteenth century. Her legacy as both a religious figure, but also as an artist, would live on throughout the following centuries, influencing Bolognese perceptions of women in the arts and their deep connection to religious works. Following along the timeline of important women artists in the city, there are plenty of key names and works that exemplify the diverse talents of women artists throughout the city's history. By the end of the seventieth century, many women had followed in the footsteps of Saint Catherine, including Properzia de' Rossi, Lavinia Fontana, Elisabetta Sirani and her students, along with many others—all of these women adding their own legacies to the artistic heritage of the city.

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[165] Rocco, *Devout Hand,* 155.

The question of "why Bologna?" cannot be properly answered without considering the prolific artistic tradition of the city and the role that many named and nameless women had in creating it. We began this chapter discussing the twelve busts made for the Palazzo Felicini because although they are works of art, the busts are also testaments to the integral role women artists played in Bolognese society. Women not only helped to foster the unique Bolognese style, but their successes bolstered the perceptions of Bolognese women in general. Many cities across the Italian peninsula had distinctive artistic traditions develop in the seventeenth century, but none are comparable to the Bolognese tradition, that blossomed because of the women who were so deeply involved in its proliferation.

Women artists would also come to play an important role as inspiration for women in the textile industry, and in the next chapter we will explore the realities of the every-day women who kept the city running.

# CHAPTER IV

## CHALLENGING THE MYTH: *FILATRICI DI SETA* AND MATERIAL CULTURE

Three women with beautifully draped and yet somewhat tattered clothing stand in a nondescript setting, each one holding instruments used for spinning textiles (Figure 8). Seventeenth century Bolognese engraver, Francesco Curti, chose to depict this scene: women, possibly even lower-class women, interacting with one another while holding thread and scissors. Curti lived in Bologna his whole life and the fact that that he would depict women in the practice of textile production—as he did in many of his other works— is not surprising because Bologna had an extremely prosperous silk trade that relied on female labor.[166] Even if the engraving is not usually understood as an allegorical work, Curti's three figures are posed in a manner reminiscent of the three fates of Roman mythology who were commonly depicted holding string and scissors—determining the futures of individuals with the snip of their shears. Although their classically inspired garb suggests lofty status, the tools in their hands convey a humbler occupation. Curti might have intended for these three women to represent the women of Bologna as a whole; he was certainly aware of the connection between common women and the production of textiles in the city. Whether intentionally allegorical or not, these women in Curti's work represent the experience of countless women of Bologna who would become laborers of the silk and textile industries. At the same time, this image represents the complex relationship between the women of Bologna and the material culture of their city. The city provided various opportunities for women in the economic sector, but their growing involvement also came with exploitation, confounding the myth of Bologna as presented in the previous chapters.

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[166] For more on the Silk trade in Bologna see Paola Massa Piergiovanni, "Technological Typologies and Economic Organization of Silk Workers in Italy, from the XIVth to the XVIIIth Centuries." *Journal of European Economic History* 22 (1993): 543-564. The importance of women in the silk trade is also discussed by Nicholas Terpstra, "Working the Cocoon: Gendered Charitable Enclosures and the Silk Industry in Early Modern Europe," in *Worth and Repute: Valuing Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe,* edited by Kim Kippen, Lori Woods, and Natalie Zemon Davis, 39–72, Publications of the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies: Essays and Studies: 25, (2011) Toronto, ON: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies. Rocco also touches on the silk trade in her book *The Devout Hand: Women, Virtue, and Visual Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017); The silk trade route between Bologna and Prato has even become a popular hiking route (https://blog.travelemiliaromagna.com/wool-and-silk-road).

To fully understand the scope of female participation in Bolognese society during the seventeenth century, we must look beyond textual sources because not all classes of women are represented in them. Scholars tend to gravitate towards the stories of extraordinary women due to the accessibility of source material. As a result, they fail to consider the various perspectives of the female population.[167] Focusing solely on the great or noble individuals of a period helps to create myths like the one I am confronting here: that Bologna celebrated its women citizens and provided unique opportunities for them unlike any other city in the Italian peninsula. However, myths like these—even ones based on historical documents—can overlook the ways in which women were actually experiencing the early modern world by limiting women's stories to the extraordinary few or even the extraordinary many as is the case in Bologna. Seventeenth-century Bologna cannot boast its mythic reputation as a place of growing opportunity for women if it was only true for the elite.

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[167] For examples of the extraordinary women of Bologna see Joseph R. Berrigan, "Saint Catherine of Bologna," in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. by Katharina M. Wilson, 81-95 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987); Maria Cieślak-Golonka, and Bruno Morten, "The Women Scientists of Bologna: Eighteenth-century Bologna Provided a Rare Liberal Environment in Which Brilliant Women Could Flourish," *American Scientist* 88, no. 1 (2000): 68-73. www.jstor.org/stable/27857965; and Nancy Baker, "Elisabetta Sirani: Her Life, Her Influence, and Her Legacy." MA thesis, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, 1995.

Even though we cannot always access the lives of everyday women through textual sources, we can infer something of their activity through material culture because Bologna relied on the labor of these women for much of their textile production. The level of access given to women in the textile industry of Bologna is much greater than in other cities,[168] but studying the city's material culture shows that a greater access to society for women was not always to their own benefit. In some cases, the city could take advantage of women's participation by paying them less for their work or employing them in tedious and physically demanding jobs. Although this situation is not shocking in the context of women's history, insight into their experiences slightly challenges the perceptions of the city that persist in scholarship today. The myth of Bologna may not be as pristine as once thought.

This chapter will focus on women's roles in the household and the silk trade, with special attention to the practice of embroidery, as key facets of the experiences of Bolognese woman.  Material culture must be considered if the question of "Why Bologna?" is to be answered properly not only because women's work was imperative to the textile trade, but also because material culture provides a perspective beyond the experiences of elite women, who were not fully representative of the entire female population. By studying the material culture of Bologna, we are able to more directly compare the experiences of elite and non-elite women and, as a result, we can test the myth of Bologna to see if it holds true across social classes.

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[168] Paola Massa Piergiovanni. "Technological Typologies and Economic Organization of Silk Workers in Italy, from the XIVth to the XVIIIth Centuries." *Journal of European Economic History* 22 (1993): 553-554.

The first place to consider when researching women's experiences and women's material culture is, unsurprisingly, the home. The study of women in their homes is certainly not novel.[169] Although looking at all the ways that women provided for their society outside the walls of their homes can be exciting, just as with their convent sisters, what happened inside could be just as influential. Mothers and wives, even if they were not the heads of the household, did have the ability to be the cultural curators of their homes. The extent of women's control over the home would vary from culture to culture, town to town, and even house to house, but one thing is certain: if one intends to study women of the past as cultural producers, it is imperative to begin by looking inside the home where the norms and values of culture are taught and passed on.[170] The importance of understanding material culture begins here in the city of Bologna, because "the employment of domestic material culture" across social classes was used not only to inform the next generation, but also was a major educational force for young women, teaching them the skills that were expected of them as future wives.[171] In a way, the role of the home in enforcing cultural norms through the use of material goods made mothers “guardians of culture” and this dynamic was particularly present in Bologna.[172]

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[169] For example, see Raffaella Sarti, *Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture 1500-1800*, trans. by Allan Cameron, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); and Norman J.G. Pounds, *Hearth and Home: A History of Material Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

[170] I will begin my analysis of Bologna's female material culture by looking at the material culture of the home, given the fact that a majority of women experienced life through the lens of motherhood or wifehood. This choice is not meant to overlook the women who were neither mothers nor wives. Instead, it is a reflection of the historical record since much the material culture which remains from the seventeenth century that pertains to women is connected to domestic life. No matter how unique Bologna may be in the various opportunities it provided to its female citizens, the social expectations of the era remained: women were to become wives and mothers, and material culture provides insight on what this might have entailed within a city claiming to be so unique.

Before we can focus on the middle- and lower-class women of Bologna, to have a point of comparison, it is important to understand how material culture functioned both similarly and differently for the elite. As noted in the previous chapters, the wealthier wives of Bologna had a somewhat larger role in society due to their husbands’ frequent travels to Rome. Being a Papal State required the city’s diplomats—who were patriarchs of many important families in the city—to be absent from their homes for extended periods. As a result, the wives of these diplomats had increasing control over the home. A crucial facet of any wealthy home was having a space that would impress your guests and reflect your status—for Italians, and certainly for the Bolognese, this meant collecting ancient and Renaissance artifacts for display. Famous works of art, classic literature (usually in Latin), and even the ancient or Renaissance artifacts themselves were seen as the epitome of high class because they symbolized having both material wealth and a wealth of knowledge. The purchasing and ownership of these objects “became a metaphor for the acquisition of knowledge,” which was an important virtue in Bolognese society especially because of the university tradition.[173] Even more so, for Bolognese citizens, owning ancient artifacts or copies of classical literature was “an expression of

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[171] Michele Nicole Robinson, “The Material Culture of Female Youth in Bologna, 1550–1600,” in *The Youth of Early Modern Women*, eds. Cohen Elizabeth S. and Reeves Margaret (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 237, doi:10.2307/j.ctv8pzd5z.14.

[172] Paula Findlen, "Possessing the Past: The Material World of the Italian Renaissance." *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 1 (1998), 98, doi:10.2307/2650776.

[173] Findlen, “Possessing the Past,” 92.

[their] own identification with [classical antiquity's] material richness."[174] Ownership of such objects provided a direct connection to the Bolognese republican ideals that were derived from Roman law before the Church's dominion. Wealthy families would keep detailed inventories of their possessions, usually listed in wills or dowries, including items from clothing and furniture to even small "children's pots" which probably would have been used by the young daughters of the family to imitate their mother's actions in the kitchen.[175]

Although material culture certainly served an important function in the homes of the wealthy and social elite, the real value in studying material culture is the fact that all people of all classes created material culture in various forms. In Bologna, domestic material culture of the seventeenth century for every-day women mostly falls into two categories: (1) trousseaus, which were a collection of household items that a newly married woman would take with her to her new home and (2) devotional items. The trousseau contents are particularly interesting as most women of middle- to lower-class would be expected to marry, and therefore, their trousseaus provide insight not only into what was thought to be useful for marriage, but also what kind of preparations were made throughout a girl's life leading up to her marriage. As Michele Robinson explains, early modern women "had deep and multifaceted relationships with domestic material culture that began and developed in childhood and youth" and would continue to inform how women would live their lives within Bolognese society.[176] The transactional nature of marriage was not just a product of the monetary amount of a woman's dowry, but also included the items in her trousseau which, if appraised, would have often surpassed the monetary value of her dowry.[177] Therefore, the quality of the materials a women brought to the marriage and the skills she might have learned through making them would be an important financial consideration for a new couple.

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[174] Findlen, "Possessing the Past," 85.

[175] Robinson, "The Material Culture of Female Youth," 245.

[176] Robinson, "The Material Culture of Female Youth," 326.

The category of devotional items, some of which would likely have been part of a woman's trousseau, were both practical and symbolic. A woman's virtue—which had to be upheld for her to be able to wed—was directly linked to her religious piety and chastity, so having devotional items to bring into a marriage helped to present the bride in the appropriate manner. For any early modern woman, the most crucial form of knowledge was religious knowledge.[178] And in a city such as Bologna, where a woman's intellect was already deeply connected to the virtues of the city, her religious intellect would be considered even more important. All women were seen as role models, meant to uphold the proper Christian behaviors and act as teachers for the younger generations, and so these devotional items would symbolize their virtuous nature as they prepared for one of the most sacred of Christian acts: marriage.

However, these items were also a large part of a young girl's upbringing as well. Devotional works were overwhelmingly of the Virgin Mother, as she was seen as the "exemplary figure" for young girls and was "the most commonly represented figure in Bolognese households" during the sixteenth and seventeenth century.[179] The symbolism of Mary in Bolognese homes was certainly not special or unique, as she was an important devotional figure in many cities across the Italian peninsula. However, the women and girls of Bologna's connection to Mary was strengthened by their city's icon, the *Madonna di San Luca*. Nuns were of course the direct caregivers for the icon, but all the women of Bologna were considered "guardians" of the *Madonna* who protected the virtuous reputation of the city through their acts of religious devotion. These devotional images of Mary might also include "images of youthful female saints" such as Saint Clare of Assisi, the patron saint of needlework. The inclusion of female saints was surely meant to inspire girls "to embrace chastity and other important virtues from early in life," but the imagery also allowed for the young girls to see themselves represented in the Christian narrative of Bologna as potential active participants.[180]

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[177] Mauro Carboni, "The Economics of Marriage: Dotal Strategies in Bologna in the Age of Catholic Reform," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 39, no. 2 (2008): 386. doi:10.2307/20478892.

[178] Robinson, "The Material Culture of Female Youth," 239.

[179] Robinson, "The Material Culture of Female Youth," 240.

Although objects of the Virgin and other female saints were intended to inspire young girls to lead pious lives, it is not a stretch to suggest that the presence of theses devotional objects would have affected the young boys in the home as well. For example, the brothers of Bolognese girls would have learned about female virtues from these images and the lessons that their mothers provided them. Devotional images owned by young boys' mothers and sisters would have likely been their first exposure to religious women, as most nuns would have been cloistered away from public view. In addition, because the Bolognese religious tradition was greatly influenced by women, women possibly took on a more central role as religious teachers within the home as well. Whether or not Bolognese homes embraced the ideals that these images represented is difficult to know, but they likely shaped the education of every child in the home, even if a little less so for young boys. Culture is learned and having such a strong presence of female religious figures in the home could have been very influential in creating a foundation for the pride in and positive perception of women within Bolognese culture.

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[180] 180. Robinson, "The Material Culture of Female Youth," 240.

The many forms of textile work that women produced at home were another important category of domestic material culture in Bologna. Whether a woman was taught to weave, spin, or sew would vary between household and social class, but most women "would have been proficient with needle and thread by the time they married."[181] Young girls would have most likely started learning this skill passively, watching from their mother's example—just as with religious practice—and eventually would take up more hands-on learning, even being gifted their own equipment to prepare for use in their future household.[182] The Bolognese viewed needlework as a virtuous activity, but it also allowed these young women to "personalize items for their trousseaux" or even could be "a means of earning money for a dowry," as will be discussed below.[183]

Even though women all around early modern Italy would have learned how to sew or weave during their upbringing, these skills were imperative in Bologna because much of the material culture of the city was centered around the production of textiles. The silk trade in Bologna began as early as the thirteenth century when the leadership of the city began an informal program to encourage economic development. The city promoted the manufacture of textiles, especially silk, originally as a way to attract artists and bring another form of income into the city. [184] However, this humble beginning would soon grow into one of the biggest centers of silk production in early modern Italy. During the city's economic expansion, Bolognese silk workers recognized their rights very early on and they not only organized into guilds much faster than other silk workers around the region, but their guilds "preceded that of the silk merchants," giving workers some power over their employers.[185] More industrial forms of organization for silk entrepreneurs would be in place by the middle of the fourteenth century,[186] and by the fifteenth century, the advent of the *filiatoio idraulico* (hydraulic spinner) in Bologna created a dramatic expansion of production with "more than three hundred silk mills, staffed by some three thousand laborers" and as many as "six thousand other silk workers."[187]

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[181] Robinson, "The Material Culture of Female Youth," 248.
[182] Robinson, "The Material Culture of Female Youth," 247.
[183] Robinson, "The Material Culture of Female Youth," 249.

All of these developments culminated in the Bolognese silk district of the seventeenth century which was "a mixed system of production carried out in homes, workshops and factories."[188] According to the reports of two English travelers—both separately touring Italy in the seventeenth century—Bologna's silk production reached upwards of "a million and two hundred thousand pound weight" sold at the markets to foreign buyers,[189] and more than four hundred silk mills being housed in the city, a jump of one hundred new mills from the previous century.[190] The silk trade being mentioned by two foreign visitors as an important aspect of the city is quite telling, and in fact, the silk district would be one of the largest attractions in Bologna. The silk trade would place women in a central role in the Bolognese economic sector because many of the steps of silk production, such as caring for silkworms, producing thread, and weaving the textiles were seen as women's work. The economic production of the city would not have been possible without the labor and skill of Bologna's female citizens.

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[184] Piergiovanni, "Technological Typologies and Economic Organization." 554.
[185] Piergiovanni, "Technological Typologies and Economic Organization," 545.
[186] Piergiovanni, "Technological Typologies and Economic Organization," 545.
[187] Monson, *Divas in the Convent*, 4.
[188] Piergiovanni, "Technological Typologies and Economic Organization," 559.
[189] John Clenche, *A Tour in France & Italy, made by an English Gentleman*, 1675 London, printed for the author, 1676, 33.

Even across Europe "silk employed many more women than men, in numbers reaching to the thousands in cities the size of Florence, Venice or Bologna."[191] However, what was unique to Bologna was the mix of women's employment with the sheer size of the silk industry. In 1650, around twenty percent of Florence's population was employed in the silk trade, but sixty-three years prior in Bologna "over one-third of the urban population" was already employed in the silk industry.[192] Merry Wiesner-Hanks found that around 84 percent of the laborers in the silk industry of Florence were women.[193] If we are to assume the percentage of women laborers in Bologna would have been comparable to this number, and we know that over one third of the population was employed in the silk trade already by 1587, then around 55 percent of the entire female population in Bologna would have worked in the silk industry by the seventeenth century.

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[190] Maximilien Misson, *A New Voyage to Italy with a Description of the Chief Towns, Churches, Tombs, Libraries, Palaces, Statues, and Antiquities of that Country: Together with Useful Instructions for those Who Shall Travel Thither (*London, Printed for R. Bently and 4-others, 1695), 185.

[191] Terpstra, "Working the Cocoon," 49-50.

[192] Terpstra, "Working the Cocoon," 50-51.

[193] Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 120-121.

Therefore, almost 30 percent of the total population of Bologna, or approximately 20,000 out of an estimated 65,000 individuals, were women silk workers.[194] It would be these women—regular women, often overlooked in the larger historical record—who would provide labor, skill, and stability to Bologna during the seventeenth century through their work in the silk trade.

Beyond just the sheer size of the female labor force in the silk industry of Bologna, many other factors made Bologna's textile production unique. For example, in the various other Italian cities that produced silk or textiles, mechanized production was usually undertaken by men. But once again, Bologna was set apart from its neighbors, "where, as early as the sixteenth century, female labor was used in weaving with women working looms, although they were forbidden to open workshops."[195] Domestic textile production in the city was "an almost exclusively female activity" and merchants organized the weaving that took place within the homes of Bologna, providing workers with the materials and essentially making even the houses of locals places of work.[196] All of these factors meant female textile laborers were not just a majority of the labor force, but that they completely "dominated the field."[197] However dominant they were, it would still not be until the second half of the century that the silk-weavers' guild allowed women to register after a group of women appealed to the guild authorities by emphasizing their abilities as being worthy of guild membership.[198] Once they were allowed, "the number of women registered with the guild exceeded that of the men" in a very short amount of time.[199] Women participated in almost every level of silk production and their labor was central to the success of the economic prospects of the city. The work undertaken by the women included everything from caring for the silkworms in damp and dark environments, to meticulously separating the miniscule strands of silk without tearing them, to weaving the delicate strands of silk together in their own homes. Many of the steps of the production women were involved in were much more laborious and physically demanding than the work undertaken by men, as they had to be incredibly attentive and careful due to the extreme delicacy of silk thread. [200] Yet, this is not to say that they were paid equally or treated fairly for their work.

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[194] I arrived at this estimate using approximately thirty-three percent of the population would have worked in the silk industry, as noted by Terpstra, and assuming that the female population of Bologna was and even fifty percent. Because the numbers I am using are not all from the same year or the same city, it is possible these numbers are lower, or even, higher than what is reported here. More population analysis needs to be done for seventeenth-century Bologna to determine the exact number of women working in the silk industry.

[195] Piergiovanni, "Technological Typologies and Economic Organization," 552.

[196] Raffaella Sarti, "Clothing," in *Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture 1500-1800*, trans. by Allan Cameron (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 192.

[197] Patricia Rocco, "Stitching for Virtue: Women's Work in Embroidery for the *Conservatori* of Bologna," in *The Devout Hand: Women, Virtue, and Visual Culture in Early Modern Italy*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press*, 2017*), 94. Also, see Patricia Rocco, "Maniera Devota, Mano Donnesca: Women's Work and Stitching for Virtue in the Visual Culture of the

Although women seemingly played a larger role in Bologna's textile economy than they did in other cities, this access also meant that their labor could be taken advantage of. Bologna's pride in the women of the city did not necessarily mean all women were treated equally. Women's extensive participation in the Bolognese silk trade and their resulting treatment reflects the nuance of their lives: they had more opportunity

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Conservatori in Early Modern Bologna." Italian Studies 70, no. 1 (February 2015): 76–91. doi:10.1179/0075163414Z.00000000088.

198. Wiesner-Hanks, Merry E. *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 125. This appeal also highlights that the women textile workers were already organized in some informal way before being allowed to join the guild.

199. Piergiovanni, "Technological Typologies and Economic Organization," 552.

200. Terpstra, "Working the Cocoon," 43-45. Young girls were typically employed because their smaller hands would better handle the strands of silk.

to be involved, but only in the aspects deemed appropriate or where their supposed "delicate nature" was beneficial; they could make money, but not to the same degree that their male counterparts could. For example, in Florence, the lowest paid workers of the silk industry were the girls who spun thread, while the male weavers earned salaries "at the top end of the artisanal scale."[201] Bolognese women might have been given more opportunity as compared to women in other cities, but in many cases, there was a catch. At first glance, the silk trade of Bologna appears to be ahead of its time, and in many ways, it was. However, a deeper look into the material culture is imperative because it reminds us that the women of Bologna's silk trade were still set in the context of the seventeenth century, complicating the myth of Bologna ever so slightly.

We can get a sense of women's experience in the textile industry by turning to works of art that depicted scenes of women's everyday lives, including their working environments. Attributed to two successful artists in mid seventeenth century Bologna—etchings by Francesco Curti based on designs by Giovanni Maria Tamburini—the collection of twenty plates entitled *Virtù et arti essercitate in Bologna* (*Virtue and Art practiced in Bologna;* ca. 1640) not only provides a glimpse into everyday life for the Bolognese, but also emphasizes the textile production and local artisans as important facets of society. Two of the plates from the series are of particular interest here. Plate 4 and Plate 13 both depict women out in the streets working on textiles (Figures 9.1 and 9.2). Although the women are included in only two of the twenty etchings, the fact that they are even represented at all—being shown as active participants in the open markets and streets—at least acknowledges the importance of women's involvement in the textile trade. These works are certainly not glorifying the women partaking in the trade, but it does not ignore them either. The women laborers not only left behind a legacy in the silks they made, but their participation in the trade is captured in representations of the era as well.

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[201] Although I could not find exact numbers on the Bolognese wage gap, it is likely that the women of Bologna experienced a similar pay disparity as compared to their Florentine counterparts. For more on this, see Terpstra, "Working the Cocoon," 48.

Looking directly at the etchings themselves, once again the complexity of the experiences of these women in Bologna is on full display. In Plate 4, to the left of the market scene, there are two registers of women, labeled as "Filiere da lana*,"* (spinners of wool) and *"*Filiere da lino*"* (spinners of linen).[202] Even though they are grouped together and somewhat separated from the men in the scene, it is important to note that the women are still incorporated into the events of the market. The women spinning linen are high up on a platform, far above the rest of the workers—workers which include the women spinning wool and another woman holding a baby, labeled as a "Balia d'allattare" (a wet nurse). The etchings are most likely a faithful transcription of the actual set up of textile production in the city, yet, as a composition, the location of the women spinning linen being above all the other workers might allude to their lofty position within the trades. No matter the reasoning behind the composition, the left side of this scene is completely devoted to women working in the textile trade and to women working in professions that encompass both the domestic and public spheres, such as the wet nurse. On the right of the scene, up high on a balcony there is another woman hanging clothing out to dry, labeled as a “lavandaia” (a washerwoman), whose profession once again walks the line between domestic and economic tasks. Below her on the street stands a couple, dressed more nobly than the workers around them. The woman of the couple gestures to a stall where some sort of textile hangs, as if caught in the action of purchasing something—a possible reference to the textile market in the city. The attention to detail across the scene, whether depicting man or woman, is equal, with some figures drawn as if caught mid-song, mouths wide, while others are working intently on their task at hand. There is a sense of movement and activity across the scene as both men and women alike are engaged in the hustle-and-bustle of the trade sector.

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[202] Bologna was also had a growing linen industry and a smaller woolen industry, both of which employed women and girls. For more on this, see Terpstra, "Working the Cocoon," 59.

Plate 13 is another etching of interest; once again the women of the scene are located at the left of the etching—making them the first thing a viewer would see when gazing at the print from left to right. What is particularly fascinating is the inclusion of one of the large silk spinning machines located in the back of the scene behind the women—this is the invention Bologna’s silk industry was famous for, the *filiatoio idraulico*, and it would have been a recognizable symbol of the industry at the time. The artist’s label for the scene taking place in front of the factory (located above the factory window) makes it plain what is being depicted: “Filato filo di seta*”* (spinners of silk thread). The women in the foreground are shown handling the thread and in the process of spinning it into portions that can be sold. They certainly read as youthful women, pointing probably to the employment of young girls in the trade, but their location out in the street, level with all the other tradespeople, is striking. Women were active members of the economy and this role has been immortalized in various works just like these produced by male artists, but also in the works of art that they themselves made.

We can compare the *Virtù et arti essercitate in Bologna* engravings with the image of silk production from Jan van der Straet's *Nova Reperta* (New Inventions) to gain some perspective on the unique nature of Curti's and Tamburini's work. Jan van der Straet (1523-1605), known by his latinized name, Stradanus, was a multi-talented Flemish artist who was drawn to Florence to work at the court of Francesco de Medici.[203] One of his more well-known works, the *Nova Reperta*, highlighted the most important inventions leading up to and during the early modern era. The *Nova Reperta* was completed in two installments: "the first, of nine prints engraved by Theodoor Galle, and the second, of ten additional inventions, originally engraved by J. Collaert."[204] The eighth plate in the first installment focuses on the invention of silk and the process of raising silkworms (Figure 10.1). In the foreground, seated on the right, is Emperor Justinian who was the Byzantine emperor from 527 to 565 CE. He is shown in conversation with two monks in front of him who appear to be presenting him with the new "invention" of silk.[205] One of the monks gestures out the window, where women are depicted in the process of caring for silkworms and turning the silk into useable thread. The fact that women are portrayed is remarkable, but their portrayal differs greatly from the portrayal of women in *Virtù et arti essercitate in Bologna*. In Stradanus's work, the women are enclosed by a frame that completely separates them from the rest of the scene. The men of the image are foregrounded, whereas the women are afterthoughts, even though they are the ones actually re-inventing the silk production in Byzantium through their own physical labor.

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[203] E. H. Gombrich, "Eastern Inventions and Western Response" (*Daedalus* 127, no. 1, 1998), http://www.jstor.org/stable/20027482, 195.

[204] Gombrich, "Eastern Inventions and Western Response," 195.

[205] Nicolas Oikonomidès, "Silk Trade and Production in Byzantium from the Sixth to the Ninth Century: The Seals of Kommerkiarioi," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 40 (1986): 33-53, doi:10.2307/1291528. The production of silk textiles was invented by the Chinese sometime around 3000 BCE, long before it was ever introduced to Europe. The accounts state that Emperor Justinian had two monks smuggle silkworm eggs to Byzantium because the production of silk in China was kept a secret from the rest of the world. The Byzantine access to silkworms allowed for the production of silk to expand throughout the Byzantine empire and eventually reach the west.

A second series by Stradanus important to this discussion is his *Vermis sericus* (The Introduction of the Silkworm). The series consists of six plates depicting the process of silk production in Florence. He drew images of Florentine women and girls raising the silkworms and processing their cocoons to be make into thread, and these depictions were likely true representations of their actual working spaces (Figure 10.2).[206] Unlike Stradanus's *Nova Reperta*, the women of the textile production in Florence now receive their own consideration. However, even though the women are no longer pushed into the background, they are still separated from the rest of the industry. Shown in a dimly lit space, with what appears to be smoke billowing in the background, the women are strained by their working conditions. The harsh environment of the Florentine textile industry is written on the faces of these women—one woman in the background is shown hunched over in an attempt to avoid the smoke with a look of exhaustion on her face. There is no lively marketplace, just a small group of women hard at work, once again separated from the larger narrative of the silk industry in Florence at the time.

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[206] Terpstra, "Working the Cocoon," 44.

Stradanus's images further highlight the fact that the series *Virtù et arti essercitate in Bologna* is an extraordinary glimpse into the every-day economic happenings of Bologna and how imperative women were to it. Unlike Stradanus, who was a foreigner in Florence, both the artist and engraver of *Virtù et arti essercitate in Bologna* were natives of the city, capturing it in-situ—how they would have experienced it. Curti and Tamburini depicted the hustle-and-bustle of the market district, the important textile inventions Bologna was known for, and included the women laborers who made up a substantial portion of the textile workforce within this context. Plates 4 and 13, specifically, highlight the textile trades of the city and represent the women workers no differently from their male counterparts. Stradanus pushed women to the background; even when highlighting their participation Florence's silk industry, he keeps them separated from the rest of the production, which was likely an accurate depiction of the experiences of Florentine women silk workers. However, Curti and Tamburini—also likely showing an accurate depiction of the silk market—showcase women as active members of a lively economy. Once again, Bologna brings awareness to the women citizens it relied on and acknowledges their instrumentality to the trade. Beyond just that, the title of the series is particularly telling: *Virtù et arti essercitate in Bologna*. Even the lower-class women laborers were tied back to the virtue of the city.

The importance of the silk trade cannot be overstated. However, the greatest legacy of female material culture to come out of Bologna was the art of embroidery. As previously mentioned, the act of textile production was a largely domestic undertaking (even the silk trade employed women who worked at home), which remained true for the creation of embroidered cloth. Embroidering was not only a skill taught and used within households but was a dominant (and arguably exploited) skill of young women in the *conservatori* of Bologna. The *conservatori* were "specialized institutions that supported orphaned girls and young women," and they were usually connected to a local convent.[207] Some of the *conservatori* even accepted "the daughters of prostitutes" or "children of nobility who had fallen on hard times," giving them an opportunity to regain their virtue.[208] Bolognese *conservatori* were founded starting in the early sixteenth century, and by the seventeenth century "Bologna had four conservatories housing up to 200 girls and a foundling home with approximately 400 children (the majority of these girls as well)"—all of them having ties to the silk industry either through their founders, donors, or through the employment of the girls as laborers for the silk trade.[209]

Even though these organizations were made with helping young girls in mind, "the very name of these institutions comes from the city's need to preserve its reputation by safeguarding the honor of the girls destined to live in them"—adding another layer to the concept of feminine virtue discussed in the previous chapter.[210] The city saw its pride and virtue reflected in its women, and it could only be celebrated if woman were never at risk of sin. Therefore, the honor of the girls and women of these *conservatori* "was not considered their own: it was thought to belong to the city of Bologna and the city took great care to protect it."[211] Although they might have had ulterior motives for helping women, when compared to other neighboring cities, Bologna "had a better-administered system of care for the poor and disenfranchised than other states, since its institutions were divided into different types and classes" which provided these young girls the opportunity to earn something that in many other cities would not be accessible: a dowry.[212]

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[207] Robinson, "The Material Culture of Female Youth," 237.

[208] Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 93.

[209] Terpstra, "Working the Cocoon," 51, 63. For example, the Santa Croce shelter was founded by a silk merchant by the name of Bonifacio dalle Balle.

[210] Rocco, *The Devout Hand,* 93.

[211] Rocco, *The Devout Hand,* 95.

For the Bolognese, the best way poor young girls could earn a dowry while also ensuring their virtue would remain intact was through the act of embroidery, as it would keep their idle hands free of sin and give them time to contemplate their purity.[213] At the conservatory of Santa Maria del Baraccano, "orphans between the ages of ten and twelve…were set to work weaving and embroidering textiles," which enabled them to earn money towards a dowry that they otherwise never woudl have had as orphans.[214] Beyond the concern of the dowry, these girls were taught that "their virtue could be both maintained and restored through their prayers and pious handiwork," giving lower income women the opportunity to also gain back whatever honor their parents or they themselves might have lost.[215] No matter what family fell on hard times, their daughters would be given the same chance to earn a dowry through their work—a rare example of women being given the same opportunity despite class status.[216] These girls were not only given housing and taught a skill deemed important for a woman of marrying-age to

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212. Rocco, *The Devout Hand,* 94-95.

213. Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 93; and Robinson, "The Material Culture of Female Youth," 250. Normally this sentiment of keeping women's idle hands busy is more so associated with the later Industrial Revolution when more women became involved in factory work, however, as noted, this sentiment was expressed much earlier in Bologna.

214. Robinson, "The Material Culture of Female Youth," 250.

215. Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 93.

216. For more on this topic, see Terpstra, "Working the Cocoon," 40.

have, but this opportunity to earn a dowry was arguably their only avenue (other than joining the cloister) to have a chance to raise their status or at least get out of poverty through marriage.

Although these young women and girls were paid a little better for their embroidery work as compared to the women employed to weave or spin silk, they were not necessarily paid fairly.[217] The discipline of embroidery was harsher due to many factors: they worked where they lived garnering little rest or breaks; a majority of the money they earned went toward their dowry, which meant only their future husband could be their ticket out; and they were typically working upwards of twelve hour days.[218] Once again, by looking at the production of material culture the myth of Bologna is further complicated. Certainly, the silk trade and the demand for skilled labor such as textile making and embroidery encouraged female participation in the economic sector of Bologna, and to a scale that was incredibly unique for the time and the region. And yes, this meant that women and girls, a majority of whom were lower-class or below the poverty line, were given access to dowries and positive reputations that otherwise would have been unattainable. But this opportunity was traded for their labor at an unfair cost. Although I do not believe that this warrants the end of asking questions like "why Bologna?"—as there are still many examples of greater female participation in the city to be considered—understanding the processes of material culture production does help to remove the mythic quality of Bologna's history and presents a nuanced and complicated reality for working-class women during the seventeenth century.

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[217] Terpstra, "Working the Cocoon," 61.

[218] Terpstra, "Working the Cocoon," 61. Also see Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 96.

Beyond the *conservatori's* working environment and the actual processes involved in making the embroidery, the reason Bolognese *conservatori* embroidery holds such a lasting legacy in the material culture of the era is due to its connection to the artistic tradition of the city. In many ways, "early modern embroidery parallels early modern painting" and the conversation taking place between the two art forms is particularly important in Bologna.[219] These young embroiderers working for their dowries would receive commissions from various religious institutions and local patrons to make pieces—a popular type being what was known as *punto pittura,* which was a specific kind of embroidery that would copy famous paintings, typically ones related to female virtue.[220] The embroidered copies were in high demand across Bolognese convents, *conservatori,* and even some churches, and was sometimes even commissioned by specific wealthy women who donated to these institutions.[221] The embroidered works then became a connecting point between women in the Bible, women who might have painted the original scenes, women who commissioned the embroidery, and the embroiderers themselves: a feminine thread woven throughout all levels of Bolognese society from the venerated saints to the orphaned poor.

Many times, the women of the *conservatori* would copy devotional paintings made by the famous female artists of Bologna, most notably Lavinia Fontana and

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[219] Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 177.
[220] Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 93.
[221] Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 92.

Elisabetta Sirani. Copying these specific artists not only linked the women of the *conservatori* to a legacy of great Bolognese women and to the artistic legacy of Bologna at large, but also created a physical and "visual display of female virtue and decorum that spans several generations."[222] Looking upon one of these works, the skill of the embroiderers immediately becomes apparent as they closely copied the paintings and replicated even the smallest of details. The *Madonna and Child with Santa Marta* is a work of embroidery produced by the girls in the *conservatorio* of Putte di Santa Marta after a design by Elisabetta Sirani (Figure 11). The girls took from her work, but also added onto it, replacing certain elements and adding their own—like adding in Santa Marta who was their patron saint.[223] These women also seem to have learned from the tradition of naturalism as discussed in the previous chapter, as it is evident the "ornamental designs such as flowers were taken directly from nature."[224] The practice of copying great works was common in the early modern era, and these women not only created a great sense of space and form in their works, but did so not with paint and brush, but thread and needle. Additionally, the women themselves were most likely having to work off a copy or preparatory sketch, since they would not be allowed to travel outside of the convent walls.

Another common motif that women of the *conservatori* embroidered was the *Madonnna del cucito* or "the sewing madonna"—and not much imagination is needed to understand why.[225] Surely these young women saw their own identity reflected back at them—a pious woman in the act of needlework. And it is this relationship that is most telling about the legacy left behind by the objects made by these women. The material culture they produced both literally and metaphorically wove women into the story of Bologna, connecting generations of women—from biblical mothers to great matriarchs of the past, to modern day artists and patrons, and finally back to themselves. The girls of the *conservatorio* were not given much agency in their life decisions, but they were able to create their own agency through the connection they wove between themselves and the other great women of Bologna.

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[222] Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 93.
[223] Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 83.
[224] Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 114.
[225] Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 103.

Material culture encompasses not just the physical objects or textiles themselves, but it also includes an understanding of how something was made, why it was made, and by whom. Therefore, the study of material culture in seventeenth-century Bologna illuminates the realities of women in the city who not only experienced harsh working conditions, lesser pay, and pressures to meet virtuous expectations, but also had the opportunity to be involved in almost every level of the production of textiles in the city. Understanding the material culture of Bologna adds to the narratives of greater levels of access and opportunity for women while simultaneously pulling back the mythic curtain to reveal a complex experience for middle- to lower-class women. Items such as a woman's trousseau, her devotional images, and even her sewing and embroidery needles can offer insight into how material culture functioned for women, rather than only considering how women aided in the creation of material culture. The layers of women's involvement with both the use and formation of material culture varied across social class, and only by understanding material culture in Bologna can the differences between elite and lower-class women be illuminated.

Furthermore, understanding the layers of women's participation in the creation of material culture is key to molding our perceptions of Bologna beyond what the myth might have us assume. The early modern period in Italy, and throughout Europe, is not necessarily known for providing women with expansive opportunities. On the contrary, the "advent of modernity in Europe" in women's history is seen as a period of "crisis and decline," where women were "unable to compete" in the rising commercial ventures that emerged in the seventeenth century.[226] Yet, the women of Bologna did not find decline within the economic life of the city, but rather a variety of opportunities. Were they equal opportunities? No. But women were granted the possibility to obtain guild memberships, work in the mechanized section of production, and earn a dowry through their work in the textile industry. When we only consider the noblewomen and religious women of the city, we get a skewed perspective on women's experiences. However, understanding the role of women through the material culture of the city reinserts the seventeenth-century context and helps to get closer to the truth behind women's experiences in Bologna—the truth that social class mattered. Economic status might not have created the same disparity between women as it had in other city-states, but it did have a tangible effect on women's experiences throughout Bologna.

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[226] Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006) 83, 85.

# CHAPTER V:

# THE MYTH AND REALITIES OF WOMEN IN BAROQUE BOLOGNA

Imagine that you are a traveler visiting Bologna for the Ascension week events in May during the latter half of the seventeenth century (Figure 12). You might have made the trek up the *Monte della Guardia* to join the nuns of San Mattia for the procession of their prized icon, the *Madonna di San Luca,* down the almost two-and-a-half-mile long portico that linked the sanctuary to the city.[227] You would have entered the medieval city walls through the *Porta Saragozza*, one of the largest of the twelve city gates. Following the nuns towards the city center, you likely would have passed the city's textile market, watching the thin threads of silk gleam in the sun as they were woven by female hands. The procession would lead to the church of San Mattia, where the nuns would quickly decorate the icon to ready it for public viewing. After the icon was properly decorated, you would have followed the nuns towards the main piazza, passing by the historic convent where Catherine of Bologna lived, possibly meeting eyes with a nun peering out of the convent windows. The crowd would have grown larger as you approached the

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[227] The portico began its construction in the seventeenth century and was paid for by the Bolognese citizens themselves. They wanted to ensure both the icon and the nuns carrying it would be kept safe from the elements while walking down the steep decline of the *Monte della Guardia*. For more on the procession and the relationship between the nuns and the *Madonna di San Luca*, see Mario Fanti and Giancarlo Roversi, *La Madonna di S. Luca in Bologna: Otto secoli di storia, di arte, e di fede* (Bologna: Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna, 1993).

Cathedral of San Pietro, where the procession would meet its end, but just before making it to the Cathedral you would have walked by the building that housed the University of Bologna (now the Archiginnasio). Students—men and probably a few women too—would have waved at the crowd, having taken a break from their studies to watch the procession go by. Once inside the Cathedral you might have caught a glimpse of Lavinia Fontana's *Assumption* in Gabriele Paleotti's private chapel as fellow travelers prayed to the icon. After possibly saying your own prayers or wishes in the presence of the icon, you might have walked to the nearby Palazzo Felicini to rest after a full day on your feet. Here, you likely would have seen the cycle of twelve busts of illustrious Bolognese women on display in one of the main rooms. Ending your day reflecting about your travels, it would not have been lost on you the unique nature of Bologna and the many woman who helped create its history and culture.

Only by assembling the fragments of women's history in Baroque Bologna does our imaginary tour of the city become possible. Moreover, this nearly complete picture suggests that there was some truth to the myth of Bologna. For much of the twentieth century, difficulties in finding source material along with assumptions about the significance (or rather, the insignificance) of women as active members of past societies have resulted in scholars overlooking the experiences of women in early modern history. By drawing on primary sources and recent scholarship, this thesis has shown that critical analysis of the myth of Bologna provides rare insight into the lives of women during the seventeenth century. From the surrounding hillsides to the piazza in the heart of the city, women were active members in Bolognese society. Utilizing an interdisciplinary approach, we have pieced together some of the fragments of women's history in the city and provided a clearer picture of the realities and myths about women's experiences in early modern Bologna.

The chapters of this thesis have focused on the history, visual culture, and material culture of women in Bologna to present the many different perspectives surrounding the myth of Bologna and how it translated to the realities of women in the city. Considered together, these chapters provide a broader picture of the dynamic presence of women in early modern Bolognese society. Current scholarship on the city has largely failed to encourage a conversation across disciplines—a conversation which provides great insight into the main question of this thesis: "why Bologna?" The women of the city during the seventeenth century were situated among a mix of recent societal changes and longstanding local traditions which provided them with a unique level of access to the political, economic, religious, and artistic life throughout their community. Without religious reform, there would not have been the example of the women of San Mattia becoming the symbols of Bologna's fight with the Pope, nor the opportunity for women to expand into the artistic sector due to women's connection to religious art reform. Without the foundation of educated women in the city's history, the women citizens might not have been viewed as favorably—a perspective which inspired the literature and art that praised them. And without the inclusion of women in the silk trade and the practice of embroidery, many religious women would not have had access to the world of Bolognese art.

A disjointed approach to the myth of Bologna creates a surface-level understanding of the women's history of the city, feeding into its mythic quality. However, the experience of women in the city deserves more nuance than any myth can provide. Bologna was unique because of many facets: its university, its Papal Statehood, its artistic tradition, and its silk trade. But it was still a city in a seventeenth-century European world, where gender inequality ran rampant and where women were heavily discriminated against. The myth of Bologna—the idea that Bologna presented unprecedented opportunities for women relative to the rest of early modern Europe—captures some but not all elements of the reality for women in the city. In short, the myth is not as pristine as some scholars may have thought. Only through the combined consideration of written documents, visual culture, and material culture will the experiences of women in seventeenth-century Bologna become clear. Women in the city were not a mythic and extraordinary few, but a group of real women with a vast range of experiences within the opportunities they were given. And yet, the myth of Bologna persists mostly because we allow it to. Yes, elite, religious, and even at times, working women were given a much greater level of access to intellectual, artistic, and economic life in the city, which was extraordinary for the time. But the reason why does not have to elude us, and at the same time, we should not disregard the variable experiences between women of different social classes.

Chapter II demonstrated that the active role women had in the religious, political, and educational life of the city during the seventeenth century was due to Bologna's lasting tradition of active female participation in various facets of society and Bolognese pride in its women citizens. The Bolognese nuns and convents were fundamentally linked to the religious virtue of the city and were symbols of the fight against Papal reforms, exemplified by the sisters of San Mattia and their plea to keep the city's prized icon, the *Madonna di San Luca*—which itself already had many connections to women. The women citizens were able to attend the university since its founding, and intellectual women were revered throughout the community as representatives of Bologna's superior university tradition. Elite women were examples of the city's virtue and this fueled the inspiration of *laude,* which celebrated Bolognese women for their exemplary qualities. The traditions that encouraged the active involvement women since the beginning of the early modern period came to a head by the 1600s, forming a unique environment in Bologna where women could expand their potential beyond what was considered typical for the early modern era.

Chapter III's discussion of the renowned visual culture of the city and its women artists presents another facet of the uniqueness of Bologna. Although the foundation of the myth of Bologna among scholars really began with the consideration of its women artists, it becomes relatively clear why women had so much access in the artistic community. The religious and artistic reforms brought about by the Church were understood in Bologna, by figures like Gabriele Paleotti, to require the inclusion of women because of their connection to the "womanly" artistic style. The interpretation of these art reforms in Bologna included women because, once again, the city already had a tradition of women artists dating back to the fifteenth century. Moreover, the environment of celebrating women was already present in Bologna which ensured women artists would have plenty of patronage and support to fuel their artistic endeavors. By the end of the century, the Baroque style associated with Bologna was greatly influenced by women artists because the city viewed women as instrumental to the creation of the *maniera devota* required by the post-Tridentine Catholic Church.

Finally, Chapter IV presents an adjustment to the myth of Bologna by considering non-elite women. The silk trade of Bologna was one of the main economic activities in the city and women made up the majority of its labor force. The manufacture of silk thread and creation of embroidery by women was important for the Bolognese, and yet, the barriers faced by women during the seventeenth century could not be fully surmounted. The fact that Bolognese women had a greater level of access to the economic life of the city should be highlighted because even these lower-class women still had greater opportunities as compared to lower-class women in other city-states. However, greater access to manufacturing processes, to guild membership, and to work in general still did not equate to equality, nor anything near it. By understanding the complex reality for women who did not have elite status, the seventeenth century context for Bologna can come back into focus—in a way, making the role of these non-elite women, and all Bolognese women, that much more remarkable.

Once we consider the various facets of Bologna that supported and even encouraged women throughout the city, the mythic nature of seventeenth-century Bologna is reframed as reality. Nevertheless, much more about Bologna and other city-states at the time still needs to be considered to provide a fuller picture. As was pointed out in the introduction, the historiography on the women's history of Bologna is disjointed and isolated from its larger context. If we can ask “why Bologna?” it then poses the question, “why not somewhere else?” Although there are some brief comparisons to other city-states in this thesis, the scholarship on Bologna and on women’s history in Italy as a whole, would especially benefit from a more extensive and systematic comparative approach. From my research, the uniqueness of Bologna certainly seems to stand out in the early modern period. However, by directly comparing the role of women in Bologna to the role of women in other Italian city-states of the time such as Florence, Venice, and Milan, the distinct nature of Bologna can be properly measured, and it will allow us to assess the experiences of women across the peninsula. Many of the cities in early modern Italy had similar environments: textile trades, growing religious communities, and prominent art patronage and styles. Comparisons as to how these factors shaped the lives of women in their respective cities, how women of all classes were affected, and which factors had the most impact will help illuminate to what extent Bologna was unique and present a larger picture of women’s early modern history in Italy. The experiences of women across Italy during the seventeenth century deserve a more in-depth comparison because if the environment was “right” in Bologna, it is important to know if it was similarly favorable in other cities, and to what degree.

The women’s history of Bologna also deserves more in-depth archival work. Many times, historians are able to uncover stories of both of the extraordinary and the mundane by digging through the files that are buried deep in the archives, waiting to be read. Primary sources for women in this era can be hard to come by, and therefore, using a multi-disciplinary approach can help to fill in the gaps. However, this thesis relied on mostly what I could find digitally, and many of my searches on archive databases presented interesting possible matches that I was then unable to fully access. For example, the information listed on the website with the cycle of busts of illustrious Bolognese women housed in the Art and History Collection of the Carisbo Foundation refers to a manuscript in the Archiginnasio, but there is no further information concerning the document.[228] If the manuscript has more details about the busts, it might be possible to figure out which artist in the city made them and learn more about their patronage. The story of the myth of Bologna is far from being fully understood and the women of the city deserve to have their stories told through their own perspectives.

Understanding the climate of Bologna and the way in which it aided women is important for history as a whole. The field of women's history is still growing, and many new perspectives are having to combat long-held assumptions about women of the past. By uncovering the myth of Bologna, our understanding of women in history can change and our close relationship with the past can be illuminated because the realities of women today parallel the realities of the women of early modern Bologna. Women not being paid equally, being seen as the guardians of virtue and culture that need to be protected, and only the stories of extraordinary elite women being seen as valuable are narratives that are familiar to many of us. We are not that removed from the early modern era as we

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228. https://collezioni.genusbononiae.it/products/dettaglio/1662. Under the Art Historical notes included with every bust, two sentences reference this manuscript, stating "Un manoscritto conservato presso l'Archiginnasio riporta esattamente il testo completo di tutte le iscrizioni scolpite sui basamenti, oggi molto deteriorate. Grazie a questo documento è stato possibile attribuire l'identità anche ai due busti privi di iscrizione." (A manuscript preserved in the Archiginnasio shows the text exactly, complete with all the inscriptions carved on the bases, which are now very deteriorated. Thanks to this document, it was also possible to attribute the identity to the two busts without inscriptions.)

may like to think, and in a way, the early modern era serves as the foundation for much of our own culture.

Looking at history from above, below, through the middle, and in conjunction with other disciplines provides us with a more complete understanding of not only the past, but how it informs both our present and our future. To examine history through one lens is no longer enough; as the controversies and struggles of gender equity in our own time show, it is of necessity to allow our perspective to encompass many understandings of life in the past. Women’s stories are half of the past and they deserve at least half of the consideration, but as this thesis has shown, there is still much more work to be done.

# LIST OF FIGURES

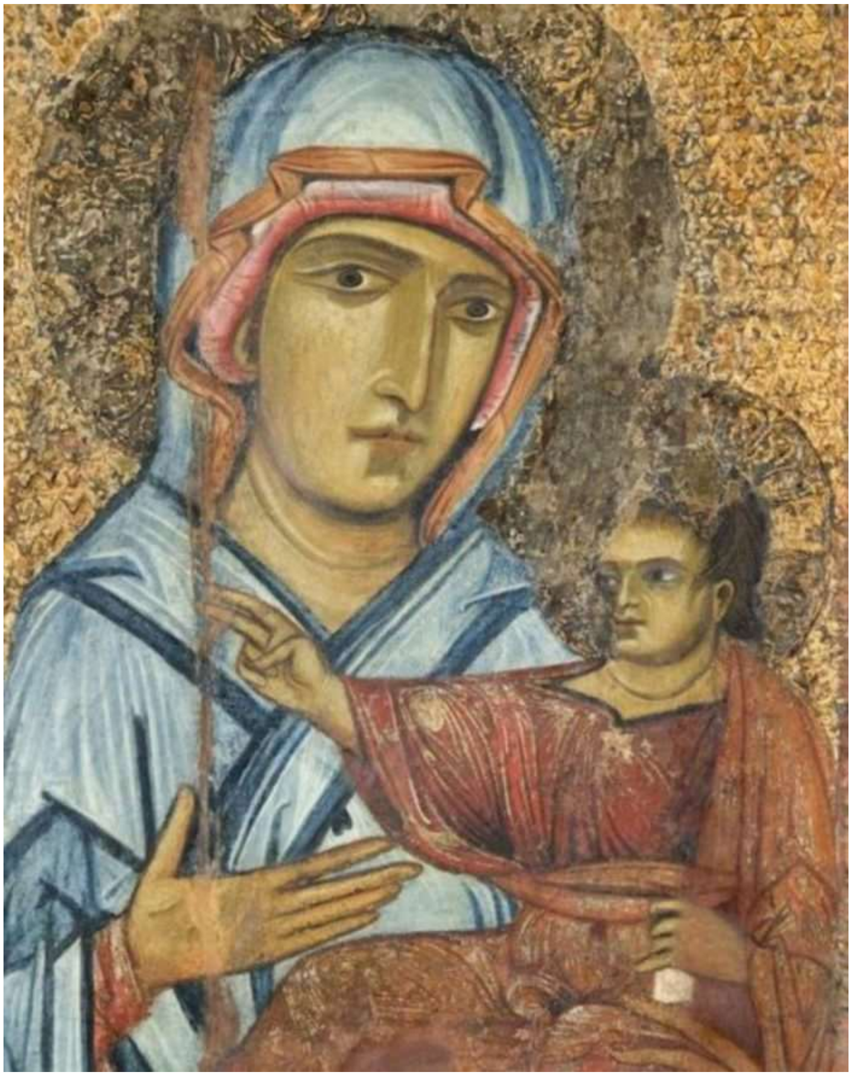

Figure 1: Saint Luke (Attributed), *Madonna di San Luca,* Santuario di San Luca, https://www.santuariodisanluca.it/home/licona/

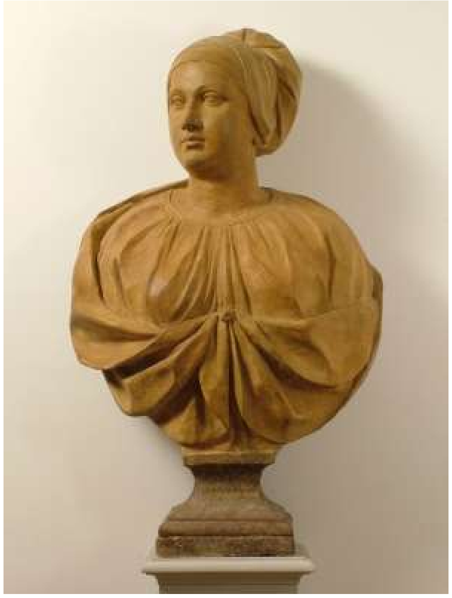

Figure 2.1: Sculptor of Casa Fibbia*, Bust of an illustrious Bolognese lady – Bettinia Gozzadini*, ca. 1680-1690, terracotta, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna, https://collezioni.genusbononiae.it/products/dettaglio/1663

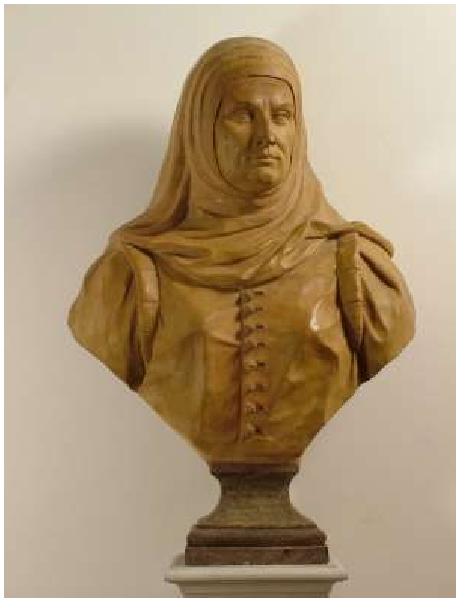

Figure 2.2: Sculptor of Casa Fibbia*, Bust of an illustrious Bolognese lady – Novella Calderini,* ca. 1680-1690, terracotta, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna, https://collezioni.genusbononiae.it/products/dettaglio/1664

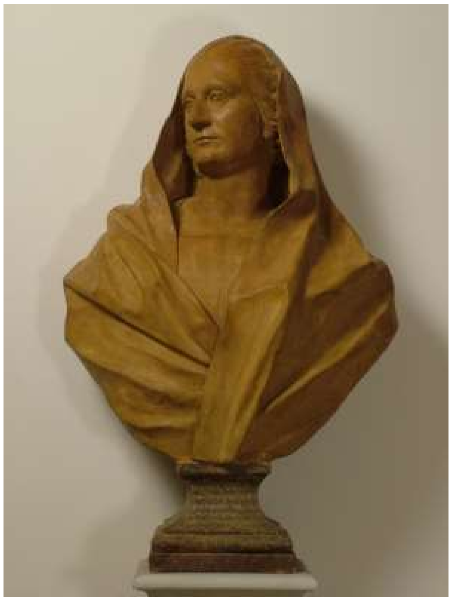

Figure 2.3: Sculptor of Casa Fibbia*, Bust of an illustrious Bolognese lady – Dorotea Bocchi,* ca. 1680-1690, terracotta, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna, https://collezioni.genusbononiae.it/products/dettaglio/1673

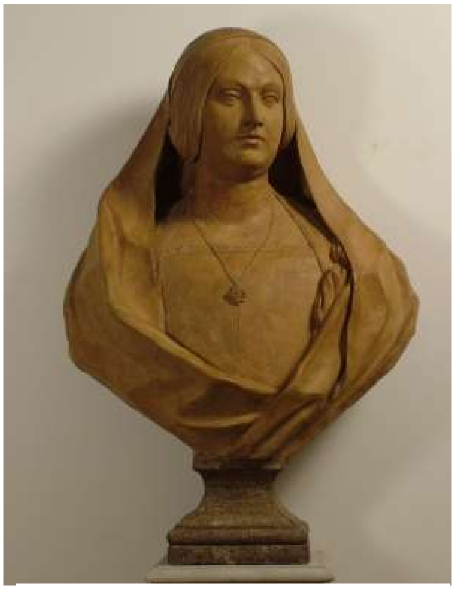

Figure 2.4: Sculptor of Casa Fibbia*, Bust of an illustrious Bolognese lady – Giovanna Biachetti,* ca. 1680-1690, terracotta, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna, https://collezioni.genusbononiae.it/products/dettaglio/1667

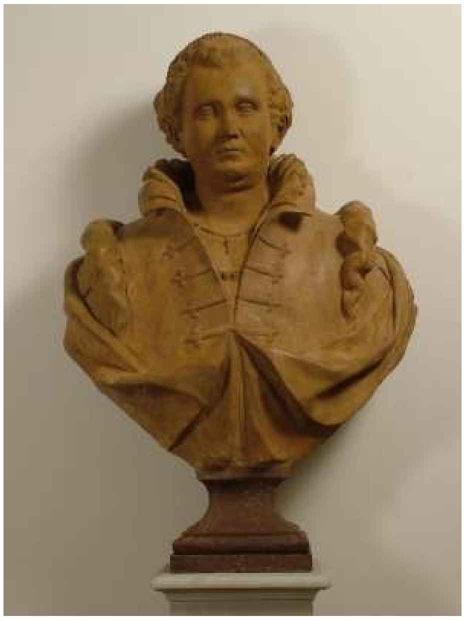

Figure 2.5: Sculptor of Casa Fibbia, *Bust of an illustrious Bolognese lady – Lavinia Fontana,* ca. 1680-1690, terracotta, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna, https://collezioni.genusbononiae.it/products/dettaglio/1668

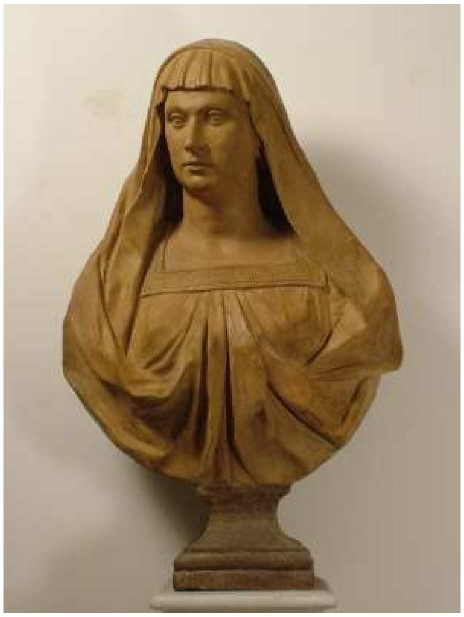

Figure 2.6: Sculptor of Casa Fibbia*, Bust of an illustrious Bolognese lady – Properzia de' Rossi,* ca. 1680-1690, terracotta, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna, https://collezioni.genusbononiae.it/products/dettaglio/1671

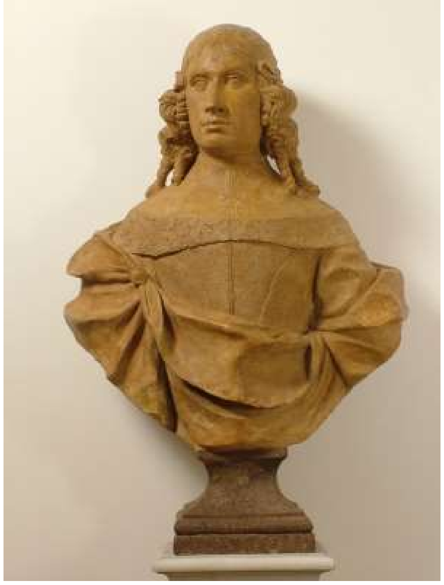

Figure 2.7: Sculptor of Casa Fibbia*, Bust of an illustrious Bolognese lady – Elisabetta Sirani,* ca. 1680-1690, terracotta, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna, https://collezioni.genusbononiae.it/products/dettaglio/1666

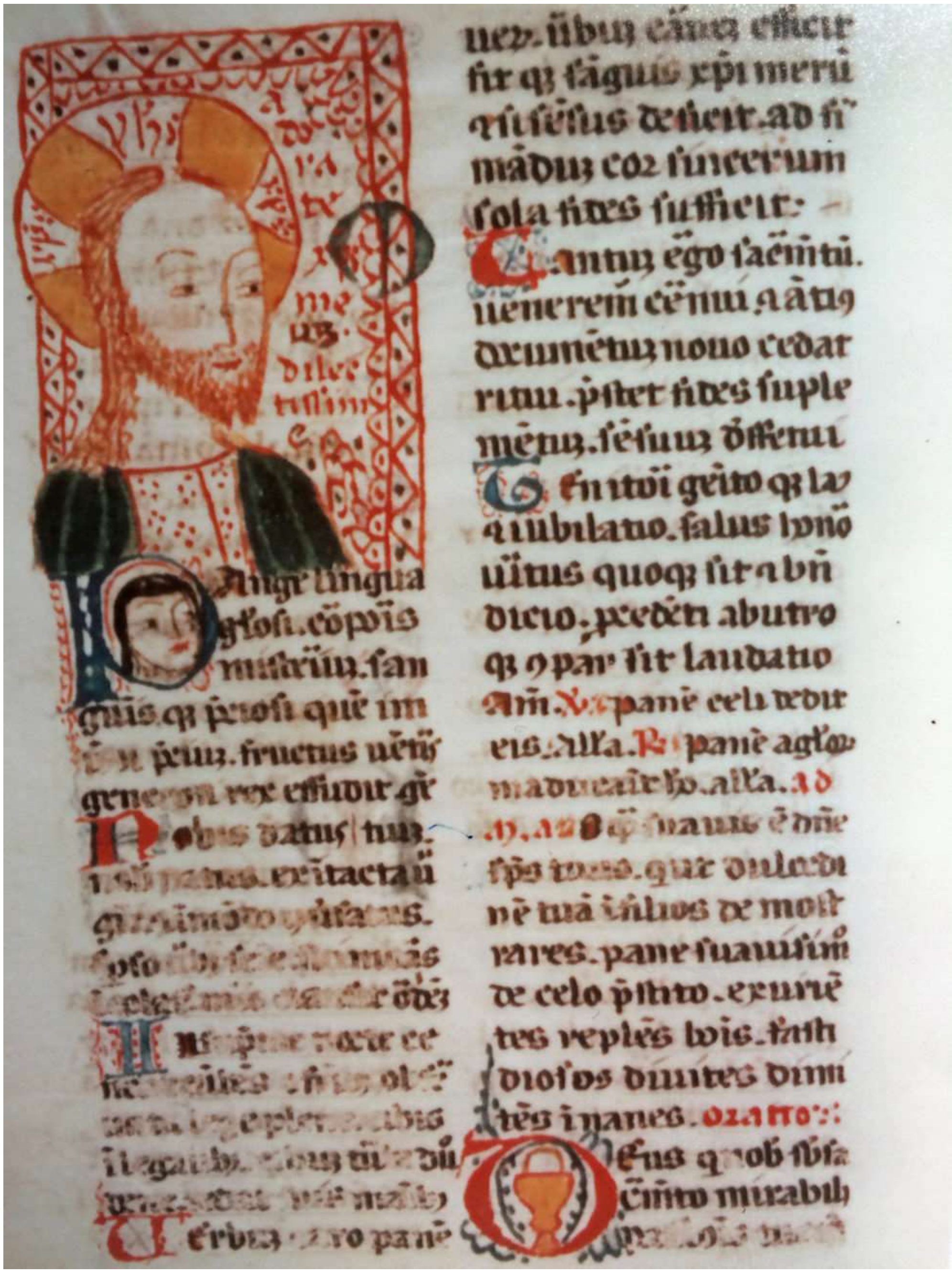

Figure 3: Caterina Vigri, *Saint Catherine of Bologna's Breviary*, ca. 1430s, ink on parchment, fol. 149v. Corpus Domini, Bologna. Courtesy of https://artherstory.net/sister-caterina-vigri-st-catherine-of-bologna-and-drawing-for-devotion/.

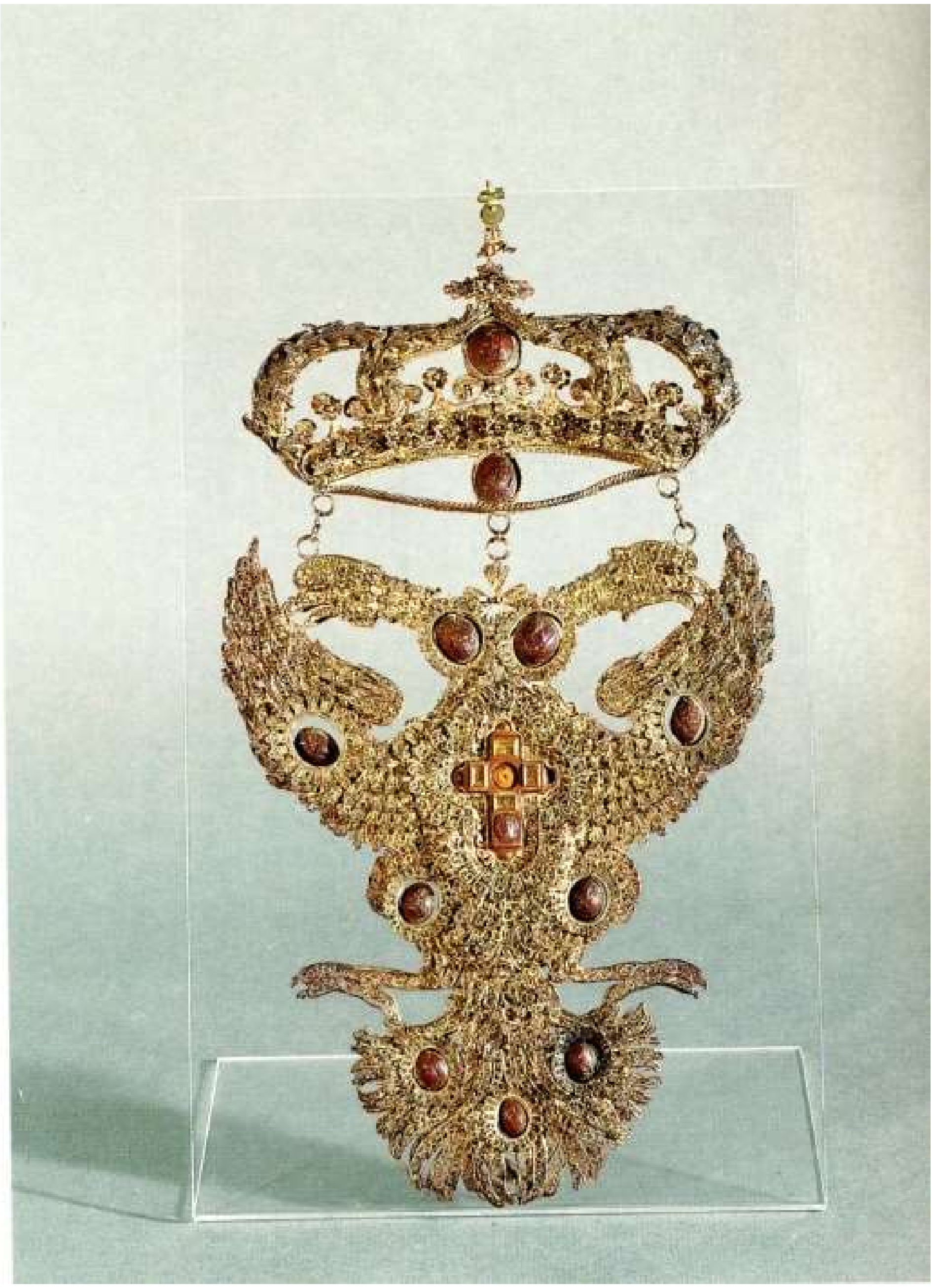

Figure 4.1: Properzia de' Rossi*, Grassi Family Coat of Arms, c. 1510-30,* Museo Civico Medievale, Bologna, Courtesy of https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-woman-renaissances-famous-record-art-history

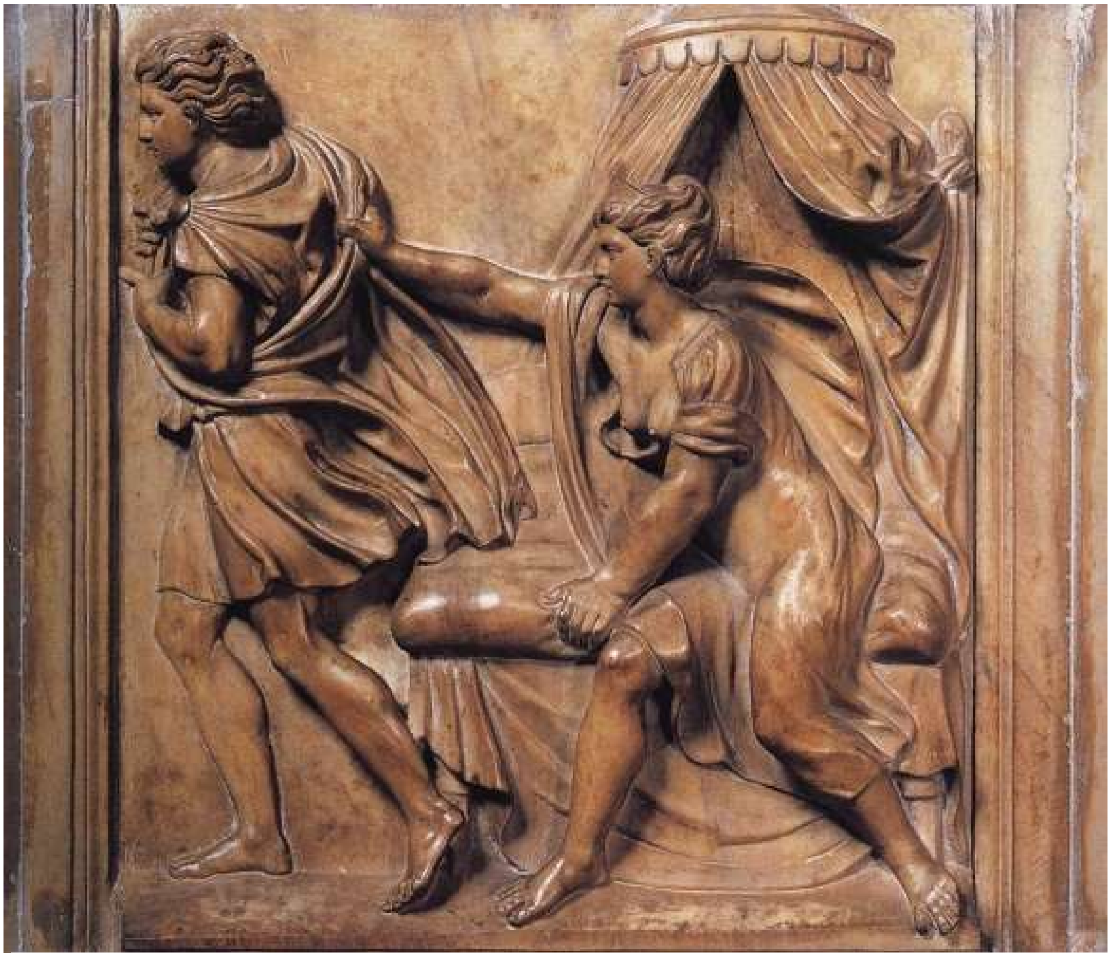

Figure 4.2: Properzia de' Rossi, *Joseph Fleeing Potiphar's Wife*, ca. 1520s, marble, Museo de San Petronio, Bologna, Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joseph_and_wife.jpg.

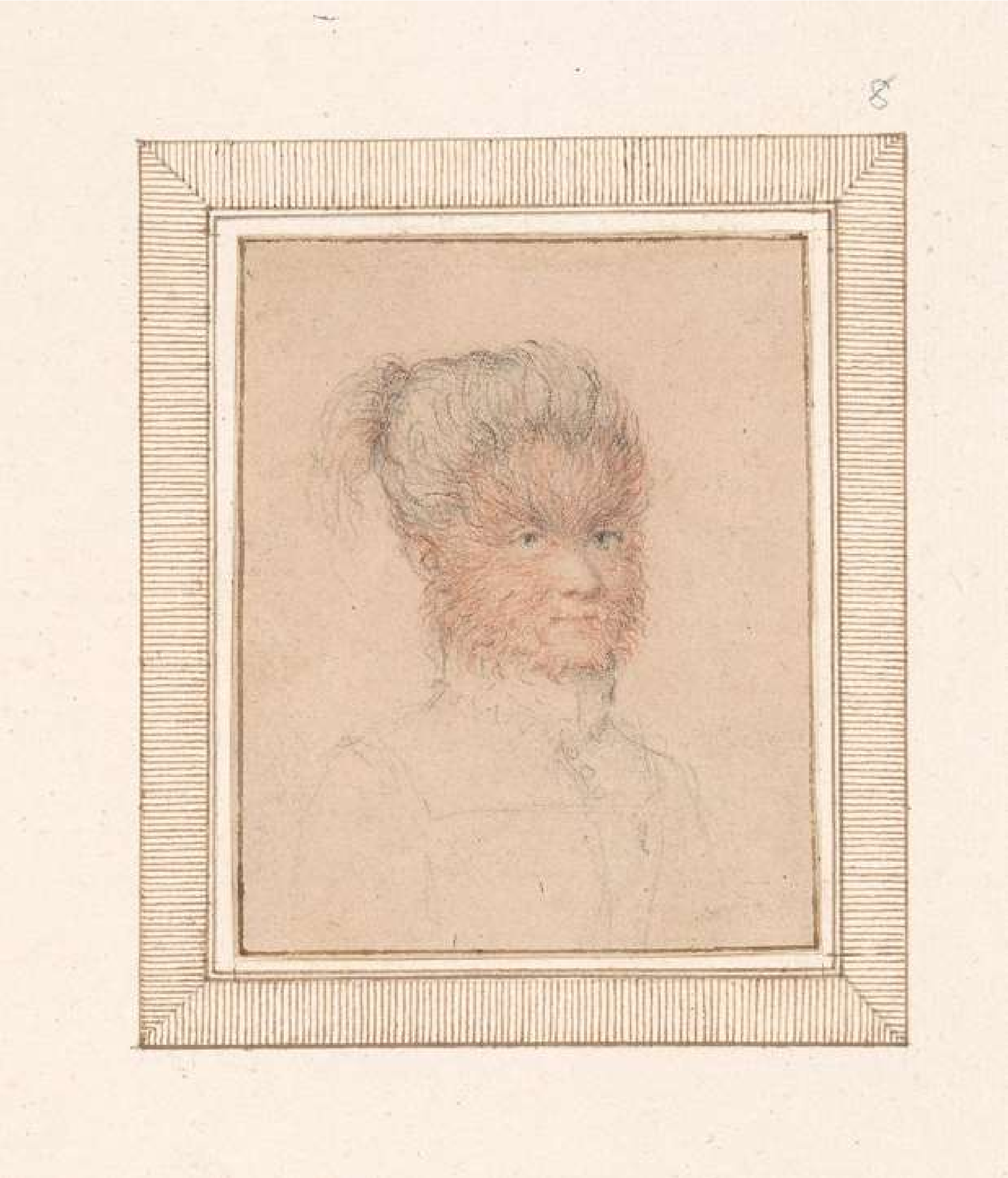

*Figure 5.1:* Lavinia Fontana*, Portrait of the Daughter of Pedro Gonzalez*, c. 1552-1614, IV, 158h, Purchased by Pierpont Morgan in 1909, Courtesy of The Morgan Library and Museum, https://www.themorgan.org/drawings/item/263444.

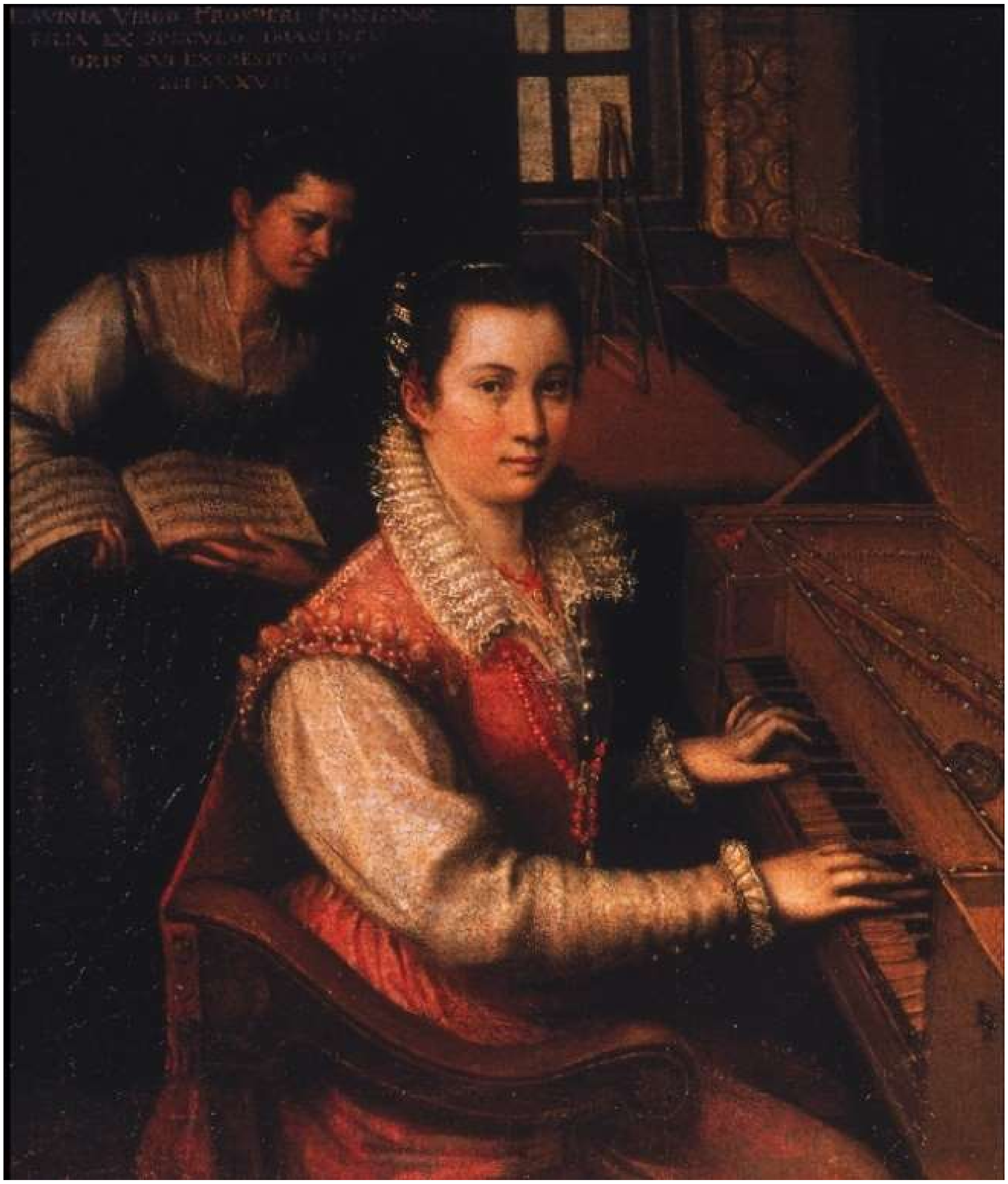

Figure 5.2: Lavinia Fontana, *Self-portrait at the Clavichord,* 1577, Accademia nazionale di San Luca. https://library-artstor-org.proxy.library.kent.edu/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822003064654.

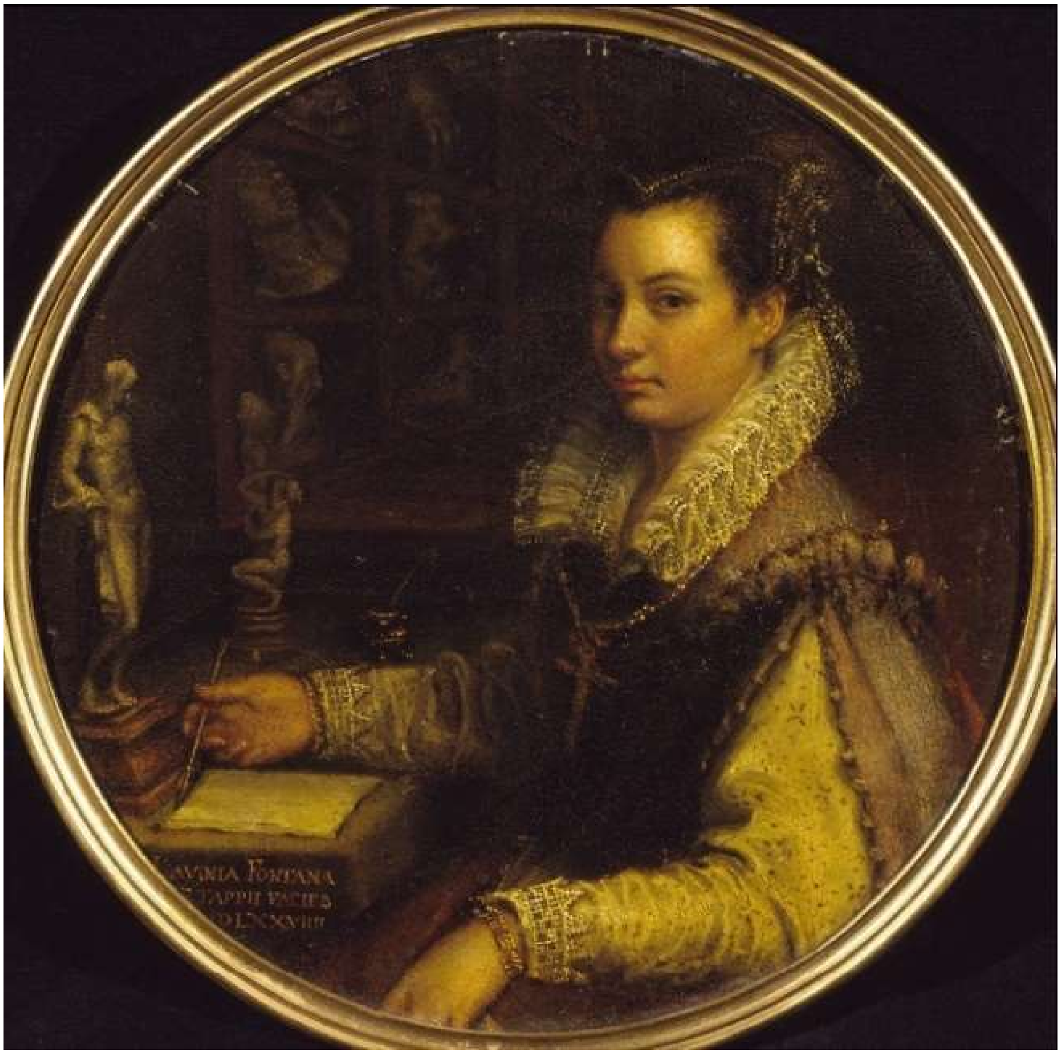
LAVINIA FONTANA
APPII FACIES
LXXVIII

Figure 5.3: Lavinia Fontana, *Self Portrait in the Studiolo.* 1579, painting, Galleria degli Uffizi, https://library-artstor-org.proxy.library.kent.edu/asset/SCALA_ARCHIVES_1039488959.

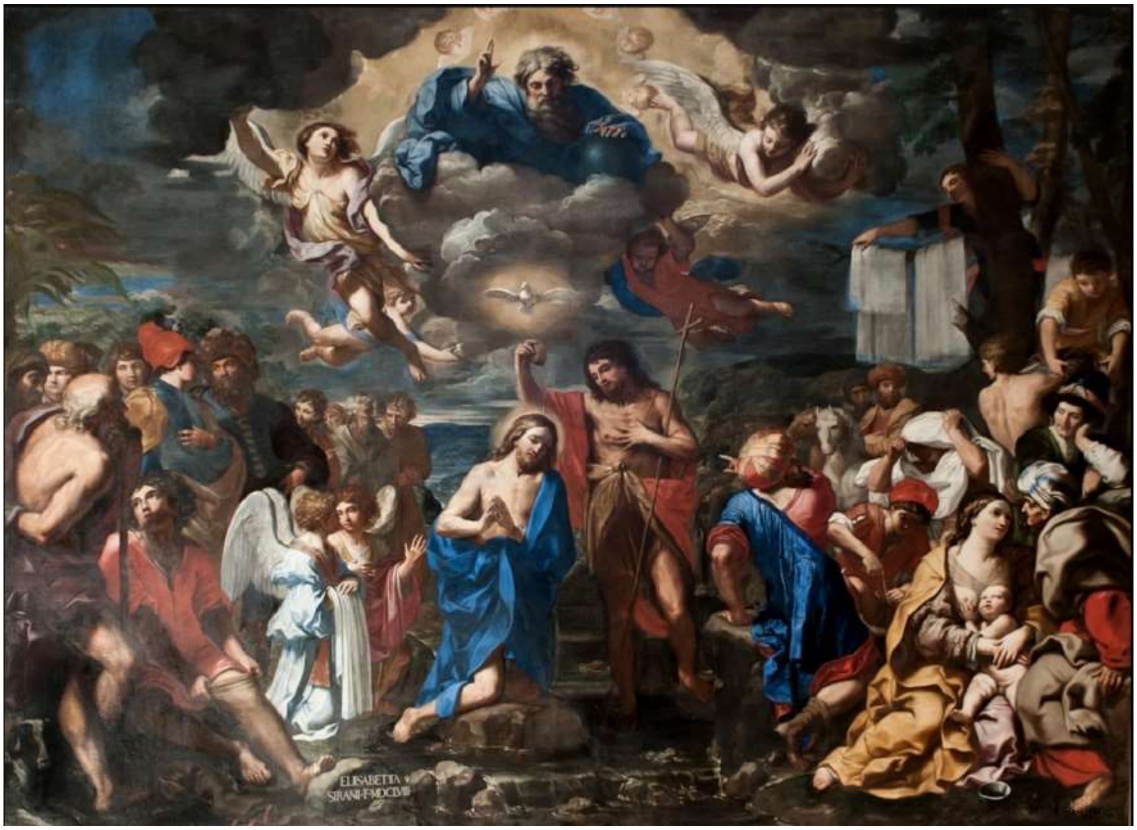
ELISABETTA SIRANI·F·MDCLVIII

Figure 6.1: Elisabetta Sirani, *Baptism of Christ*, 1658, Church of San Girolamo della Certosa, Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Battesimo_di_Cristo_-_E._Sirani.png.

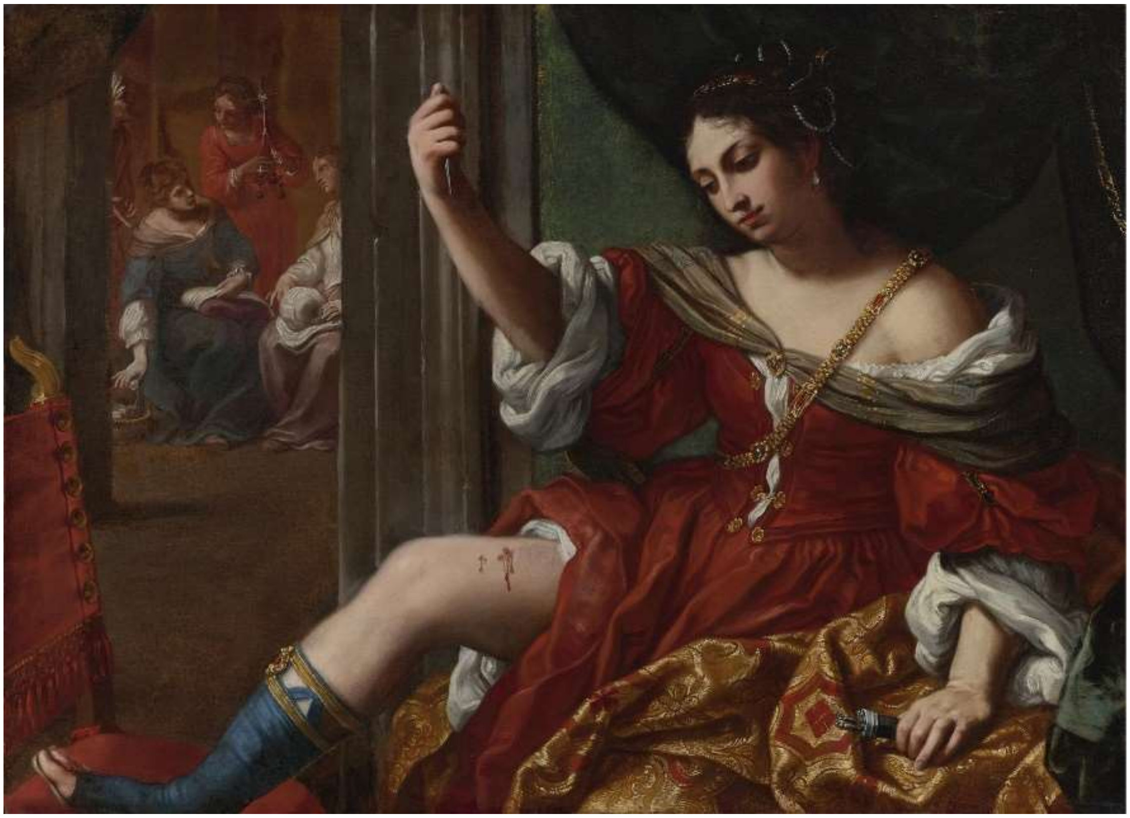

Figure 6.2: Elisabetta Sirani, *Portia Wounding her Thigh*, 1664, oil on canvas, Collection of Art and History in the Cassa di Risparmio Foundation, Bologna, Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Elisabetta_Sirani_-_Portia_wounding_her_thigh.jpg.

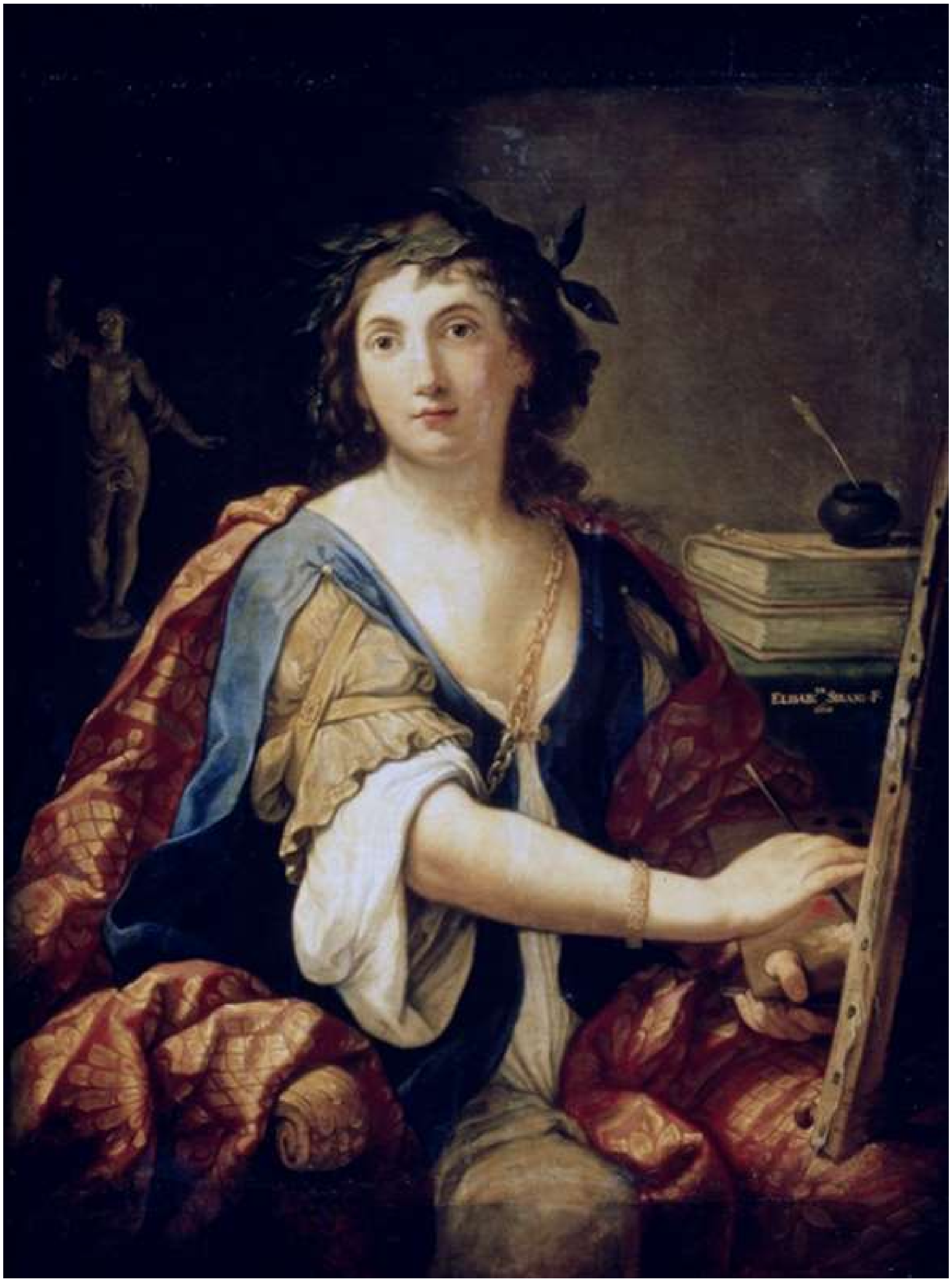
ELISAB. SIRANI F.

Figure 6.3: Elisabetta Sirani, *Self-Portrait*, 1658, oil on canvas, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Elisabetta_Sirani_Autorretrato_Museo_Pushkin_Moscu.jpg.

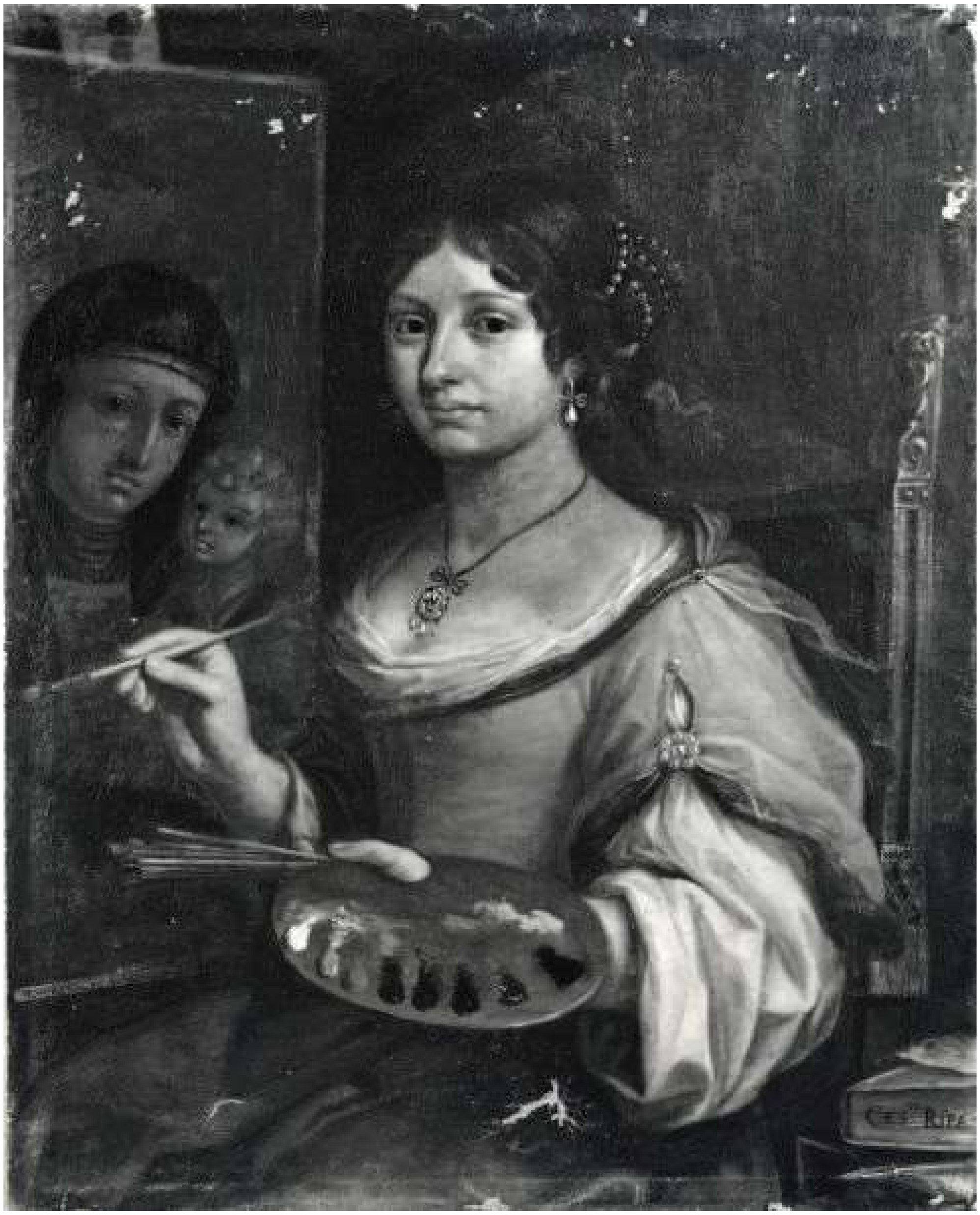

Figure 6: Lucrezia Scarfaglia, *Self-Portrait*, 1678, oil on canvas, Galleria Pallavicini in Rome, Courtesy of the Federico Zeri Foundation at the University of Bologna, http://catalogo.fondazionezeri.unibo.it/scheda.v2.jsp?tipo_scheda=OA&id=57324&titolo=Scarfaglia%20Lucrezia,%20Autoritratto%20di%20Lucrezia%20Scarfaglia&locale=it&decorator=layout_resp&apply=true.

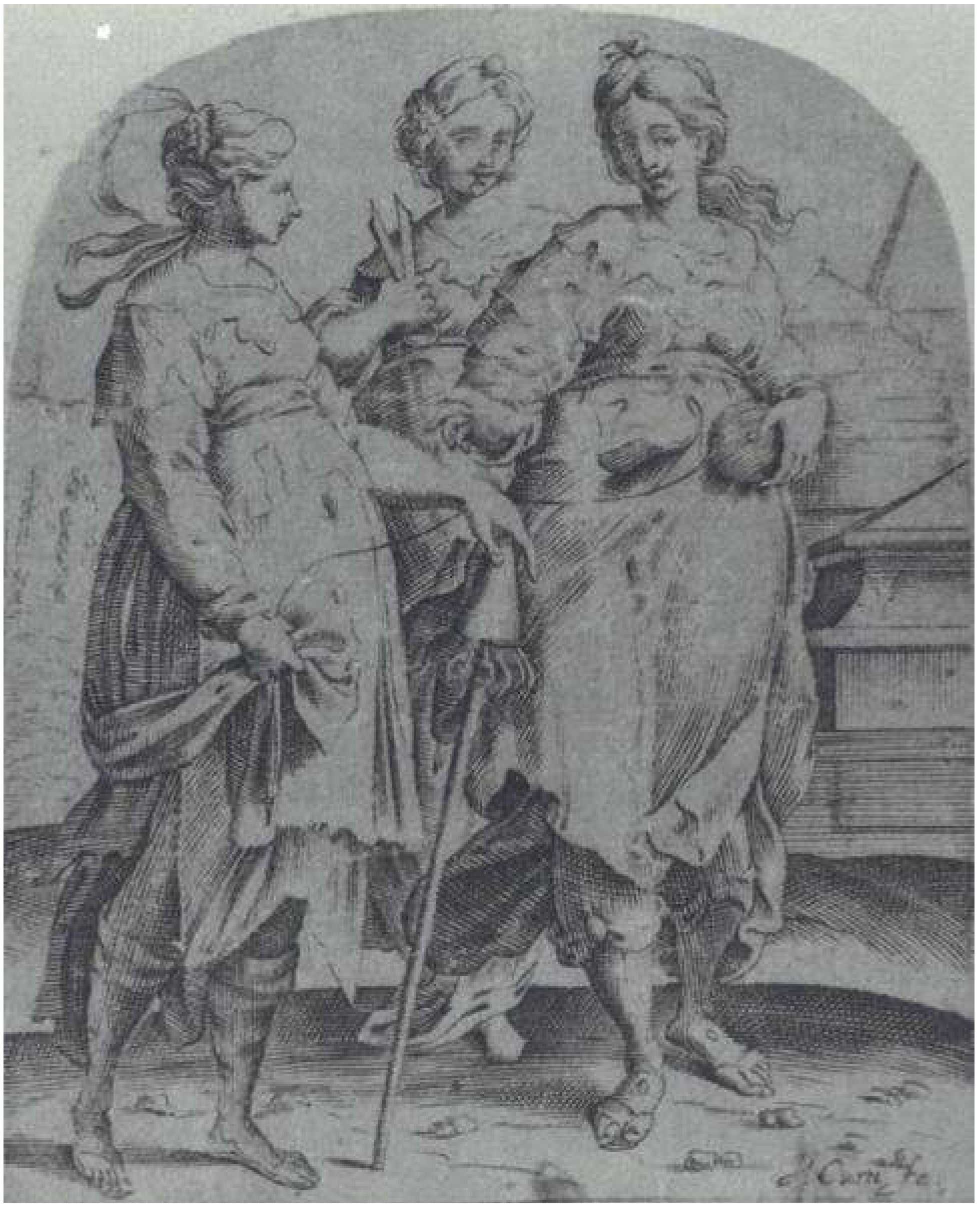

Figure 7: Francesco Curti, *Donne con arnesi per filare [Women with tools for spinning]*, ca. 1625-1649, print, Tosio Martinengo Art Gallery, Brescia, Courtesy of Lombard Cultural Heritage, http://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/stampe/schede/D0080-08030/.

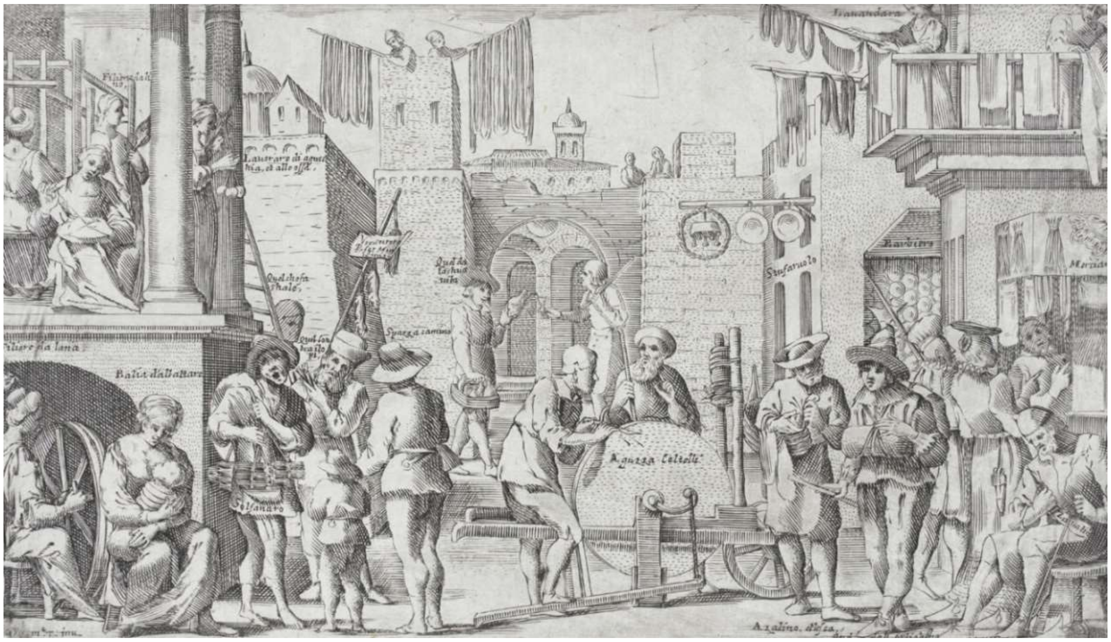
Balia dallattare
Spazza camino
Aguzza Coltelli
Stufaruolo
Barbiero

Figure 8.1: Francesco Curti and Giovanni Tamburini, *Virtù et arti essercitate in Bologna*, Plate 4, ca. 1640s, print, Courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, https://collections.lacma.org/node/236634.

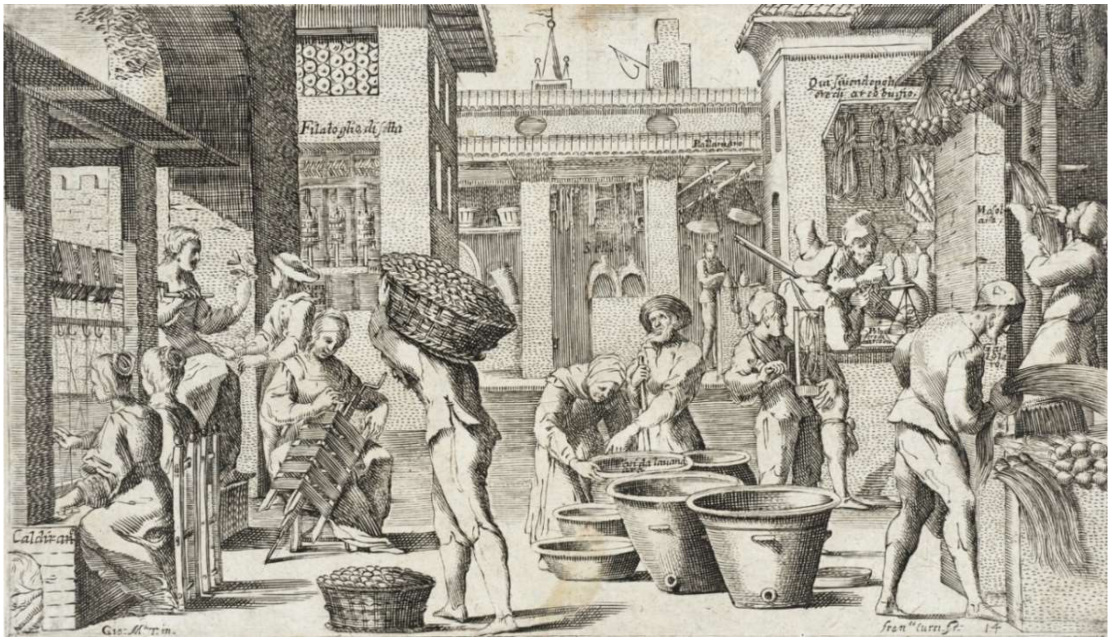
Filatoghi di seta
Caldirari
Gio: M.a T. in.
Fran.co Curti fe.
14

Figure 9.2: Francesco Curti and Giovanni Tamburini, *Virtù et arti essercitate in Bologna*, Plate 13, ca. 1640s, print, Courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, https://collections.lacma.org/node/236635.

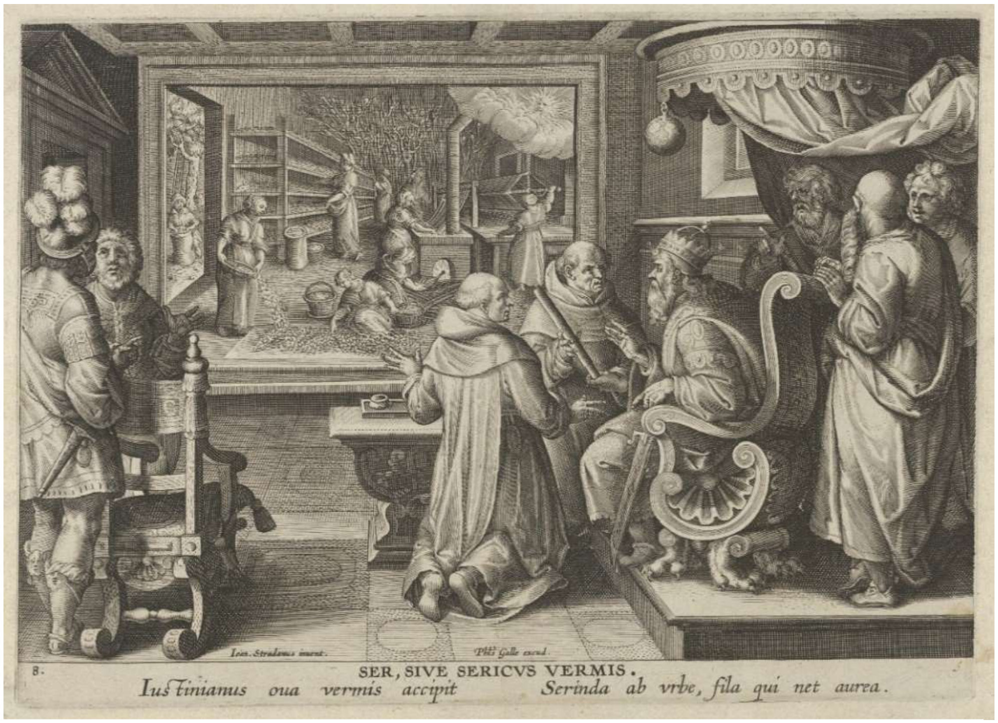
Ioan. Stradanus invent.
Phls Galle excud.
8.
SER, SIVE SERICVS VERMIS.
Iustinianus oua vermis accipit Serinda ab vrbe, fila qui net aurea.

*Figure 9.1: Jan van der Straet, engraved by Jan Collaert I,* Nova Reperta: The Production of Silk*, plate 8, ca. 1600, engraving, Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/659705*.

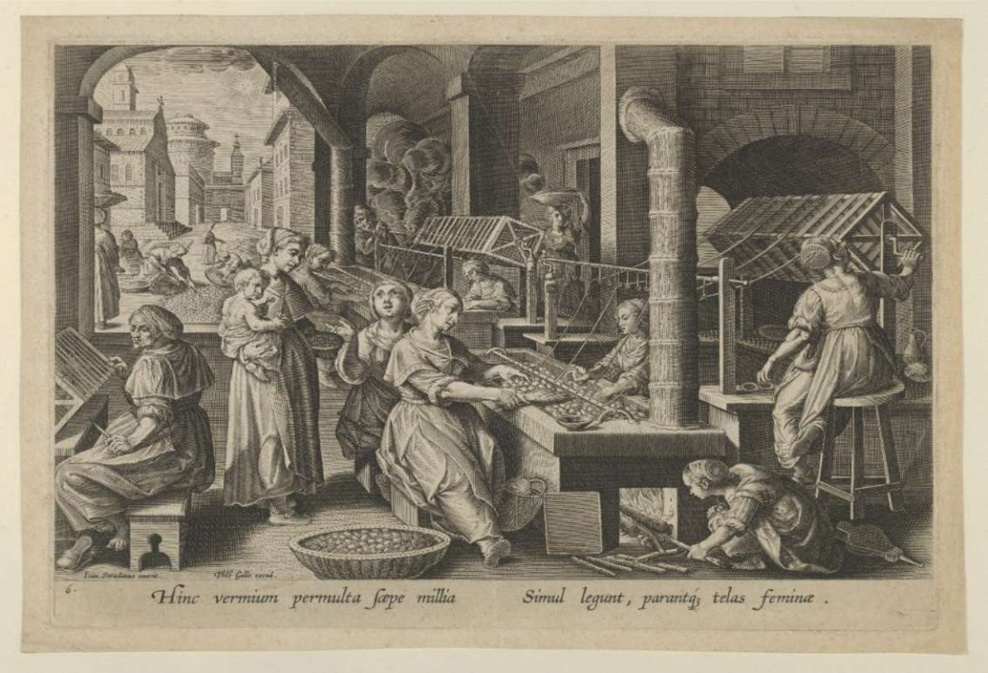
Ioan. Stradanus invent.
Phls Galle excud.
6.
Hinc vermium permulta sæpe millia Simul legunt, parantq; telas feminæ.

Figure 10.2: Jan van der Straet, engraved by Karel van Mallery, *Vermis Sericus: The Reeling of Silk*, plate 6, ca. 1595, engraving, Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/659745

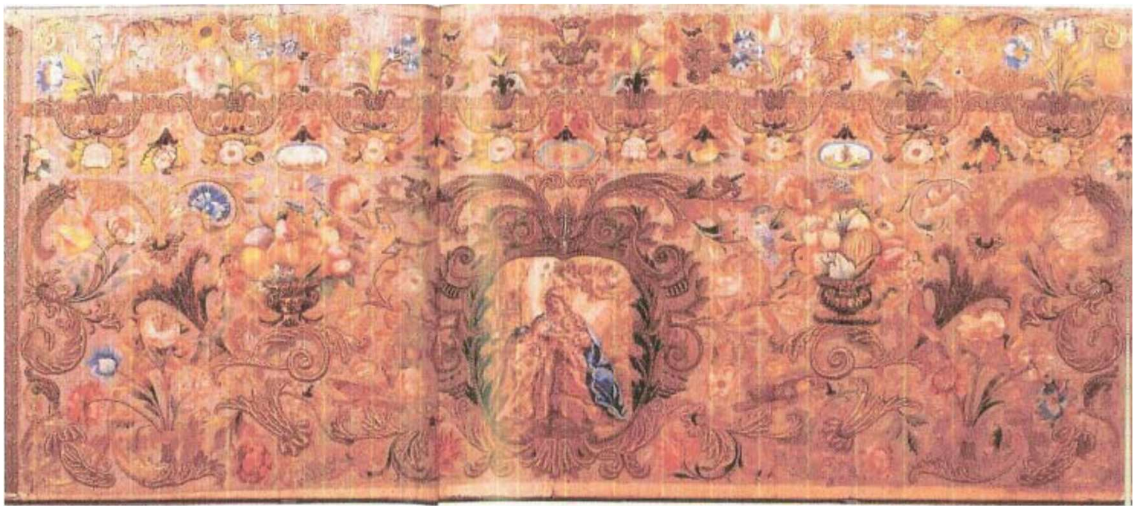

Figure 10: Women of Putte di Santa Marta, Altar Frontal, *Madonna and Child with Santa Marta*, based on a design by Elisabetta Sirani,. Courtesy of Rocco's "Virtue in the Visual Culture of the Conservatori in Early Modern Bologna."

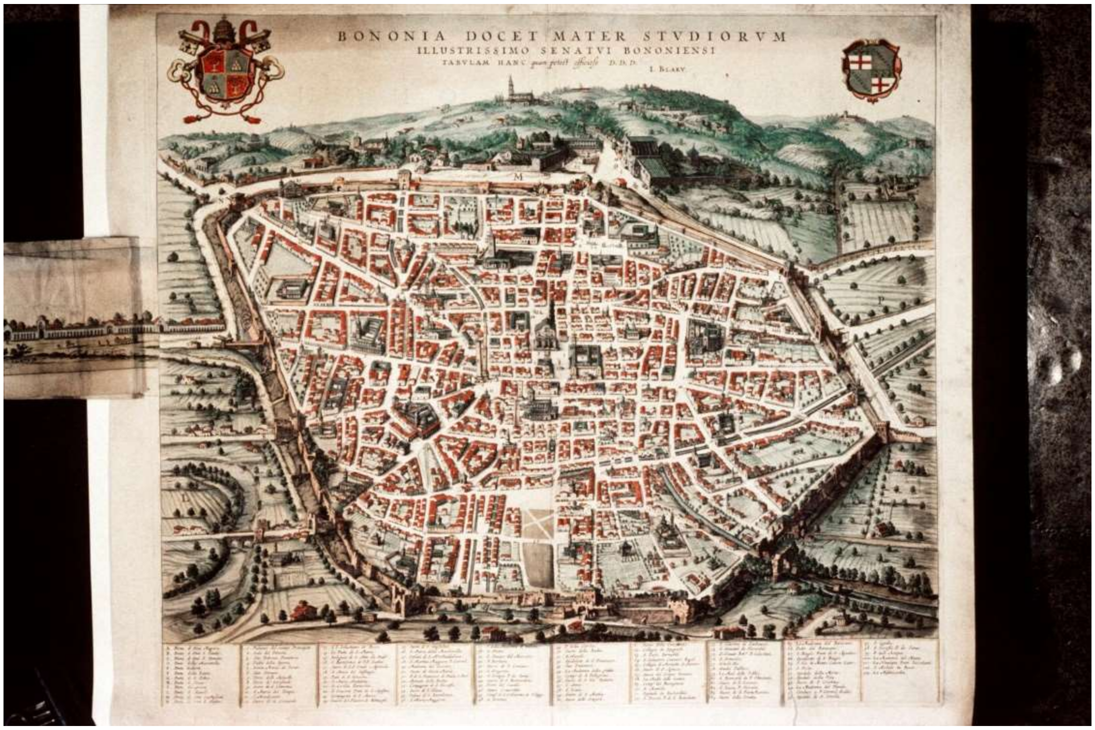
BONONIA DOCET MATER STVDIORVM
ILLUSTRISSIMO SENATVI BONONIENSI
TABVLAM HANC quam potuit officiose D.D.D.
I. BLAEV
M

Figure 12*:* Joan Blaeu*, Bononia Docet Mater Studiorum: illustrissimo senatui bononiensi,* 1663, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/e73215a0-b606-42ab-bd04-974bc5c7e9f4/.

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