

# The Scolari. Counterpoints of university life Brawls, books, and *libertas*: the volatile tapestry of student life in early modern padua

Los Scolari. contrapuntos de la vida universitaria  
Peleas, libros y libertad: el volátil tapiz de la vida estudiantil  
en la Padua de principios de la Edad Moderna

Alessandro Benedusi  
*Università di Padova*

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*Resumen:* This panel delves into the multifaceted and often volatile existence of the Paduan scholars during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a period where the pursuit of high culture frequently collided with the rowdy reality of the city's streets. Through a close reading of contemporary chronicles and university acts, the narrative reconstructs the delicate equilibrium between the cherished ideal of patavina *libertas* and the explosive "town and gown" tensions that repeatedly tested civic order. Beyond the anecdotes of revelry and violence, this analysis underscores the profound economic and political synergy between the Studium and the Republic of Venice. Ultimately, it reveals the student body not merely as a transient

*Abstract:* Este panel profundiza en la existencia polifacética y a menudo volátil de los scholares paduanos durante los siglos XVI y XVII, un periodo en el que la búsqueda de la alta cultura chocaba frecuentemente con la realidad estrepitosa de las calles de la ciudad. A través de una lectura detallada de crónicas contemporáneas y actas universitarias, la narrativa reconstruye el delicado equilibrio entre el apreciado ideal de la patavina *libertas* y las explosivas tensiones entre la ciudad y la universidad (town and gown) que pusieron a prueba repetidamente el orden cívico. Más allá de las anécdotas de juerga y violencia, este análisis subraya la profunda sinergia económica y política entre el Studium y la República de Venecia. En última instancia,

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\*alessandro.benedusi@unipd.it

population, but as a dynamic, disruptive, and indispensable force that shaped the social and cultural identity of early modern Padua.

*Palabras clave:* Early Modern university history. Academic privileges. Town and gown relations. Urban conflict and social identity.

revela al cuerpo estudiantil no simplemente como una población transitoria, sino como una fuerza dinámica, disruptiva e indispensable que moldeó la identidad social y cultural de la Padua de la Edad Moderna temprana

*Key words:* Historia de la universidad en la Edad Moderna. Privilegios académicos. Relaciones entre la ciudad y la universidad. Conflicto urbano e identidad social.

### 1. The “Shipwreck” on Dry Land: A Chronicle of Student Revelry

To address the daily life of scholars in Padua between the 16th and 17th centuries, one must look beyond the solemnity of the lecture halls. A humorous event described by a contemporary Paduan chronicler, Nicola Rossi, offers a perfect entry point. When we consider the routines of young university students –alongside crowded lectures, overflowing libraries, and elite cultural circles– we must also recall the rowdy songs sung by groups of students returning home after an evening of drinking. Rossi’s chronicle shows us how certain habits have remained remarkably unchanged over the centuries..

On an unspecified night in 1572, approximately fifteen students gathered in the house of a fellow reveller and consumed a significant quantity of alcohol. As a result, in Rossi’s words, they “si ubbriarono di sì fatta maniera, che cominciarono credere d’esser sopra una Galera agitata stranamente dall’onde del mare”<sup>1</sup> (they became so intoxicated that they perceived

<sup>1</sup> This narrative, by Nicolò Rossi, extracted from ms. Padua, Biblioteca Civica, B.P. 147 pp. 43-44 (hereafter Rossi, *Cronica*) held at the Biblioteca Civica in Padua, is reproduced here in its entirety to elucidate its nature as a verisimilar account. Likely emergent from oral tradition, the episode functions as an aetiological device intended to substantiate a toponym that was well-established at the time of the chronicle’s compilation.

*Alcuni Scolari, radunatisi una sera insieme ad un convitto in una cavanella, [in] contrà di Ruina, si ubbriarono di sì fatta maniera che cominciarono credere d’esser sopra una Galera agitata stranamente dall’onde del Mare. Et essi, temendo che la Galera s’affondasse, gettarno fuori delle finestre letti, tavole, casse, scanni, careghe et ogni sorte di massaritie che erano in casa, parendo loro che li nocchieri comandassero [ciò] per alleggerire la nave. Li Barigelli della Giustizia, passando per di là, non sapendo il caso, entrarono in casa e li trovarono tutti chi qua e chi là per terra al n. di 15 che niente sentivano, ma tanto li scossero che si destarono un poco, e li domandarono quello che volevano fare. Risposero che il travaglio del Mare gli haveva sì fortemente stancati che non [ne] potevano più, et anco per la fatica fatta in scaricar la Galera. Li Offitiali accertisi del fatto, e non potendo fargli ravvedere della loro folia, li dissero che si guardassero per l’avvenire dal troppo bere. I Giovani non conoscendoli li ringraziarono promettendoli che se uscivano di tanta fortuna di mare, et che arrivassero*

themselves to be aboard a galley violently tossed by the sea). In this altered state, fearing the vessel would sink, they proceeded to jettison “cargo” out of the windows, throwing beds, boards, chests, benches, and baskets into the street. The noise quickly drew the attention of the *Barigelli della Giustizia* –the city’s provosts of justice– who intervened to restore order. Upon realizing the nature of the “shipwreck,” the officers issued a stern warning to moderate their drinking and left the young men –who had since fallen into a deep sleep– to sober up. This account serves the chronicler to explain why the site became known as the *Casa della Galera*, but it also provides a vivid testimony that bridges the gap between the 16th-century student and the modern undergraduate, opening a window into the complex relationship between scholars, public power, and the citizenry.

## 2. Rites of Passage and the Friction of Factions

To understand what it meant to be a scholar, we must recall their arrival in Padua. After matriculating into a *natio*<sup>2</sup>, students were required not only

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*a buon porto salvi, riconosceriano la salute loro da quelli, e d'indi in poi fin hoggidì si addimanda la Casa dalla Galera.*

A group of scholars, having gathered one evening for a banquet in a *cavanella* [a small tavern] in the district of Ruina, became so profoundly intoxicated that they began to believe themselves aboard a Galley, violently tossed by the waves of the sea. Fearing that the Galley might founder, they cast out of the windows beds, tables, chests, benches, chairs, and every manner of household goods within the house, under the impression that the mariners had commanded such actions to lighten the vessel. The *Barigelli della Giustizia*, passing by and unaware of the circumstances, entered the house and found some fifteen of them scattered across the floor, insensible to all. They shook them until they stirred slightly and asked what they intended to do. They replied that the travail of the sea had so utterly exhausted them they could endure no more, spent as they were from the labor of unloading the Galley. The officials, realizing the nature of the event and unable to disabuse them of their folly, merely warned them to guard against excessive drinking in the future. The youths, not recognizing them, offered their thanks, promising that should they escape such a tempest and reach a safe harbor, they would owe their salvation to them. From that day to this, the place is called the House of the Galley.

<sup>2</sup> The University of Padua functioned as a self-governing corporation of scholars drawn from across the European continent. This autonomous body was administered by a *Sindico* and operated under the jurisdiction of the Rector—both of whom were students, typically elected for a single academic year, though their mandates were occasionally extended. The Rector, supported by a freely appointed Vicar, presided over a dual institutional framework: the ultramontani (those hailing from beyond the Alps) and the citramontani (Italians from the peninsula’s various states). These two branches were further articulated into ethnic-linguistic

to engage in subjects such as law, philosophy, medicine, and theology but also to participate in the political life of the *Studium*. This involved electing representatives and participating in community life, from religious services to the funerals of fellow students. However, there were also constant opportunities for celebration, which often targeted younger pupils. In Padua, the traditional ceremony of passing from “novice” to “scholar” was called the *spupilo*; this involved a monetary payment by new students. During the 16th and 17th centuries, this goliardic practice became increasingly onerous and frequently resulted in violent disputes.

Seeking to illuminate the internal friction defining university life, we find compelling evidence within the records of the German students, where events concurrent with the farcical ‘galley’ affair offer a more sobering glimpse into the era’s institutional volatility. The election of Rectors, councillors, or professors represented the primary point of debate among scholars, often leading to deep-seated tensions. For instance, in 1573, a rift emerged between the German and Polish factions following a disputed election at the University of Artists. The Germans expressed discontent over the “usurpation” of the title *Consiliarius Bohemicus*, which the Polish faction had renamed *Polonicus Consiliarius*. While the *Podestà* managed to resolve this, ultimately restoring the original designation to the German faction, the situation reached a boiling point in October with the election of the General Beadle, described as “admodum turbulenta.”<sup>3</sup> The *universitas* was convened for the occasion, split

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nationes, the fundamental units of student identity. Each nation elected a consiliarius who, as part of the *banca* (the rectorial council), provided counsel and administrative support to the Rector—a role that, until the mid-fourteenth century, was notably shared by a pair of Rectors to ensure balanced representation for both the *ultramontani* and *citramontani* (See A. BENEDESI - F. BENUCCI, *Araldica studentesca a Padova. Cicli, memorie e monumenti del Bo*, Cleup, Padova 2025, p. 8; for a detailed account, see D. GALLO, *L'età medioevale*, in P. DEL NEGRO (ed.), *L'Università di Padova. Otto secoli di storia*, Signum, Padova 2002, pp. 15-33)

<sup>3</sup> See A. FAVARO, *Atti della Nazione Germanica Artista nello Studio di Padova*, I, Emiliana, Venezia 1911, p. 91; the records of the *Natio Germanica* report the episode in these terms:

Verum ad propositum ut revertamur, consumtis prioribus apud Dominum Praefectum comitis in recuperando nostrum Bohemicum, qui mutato nomine prius Polonicus dicebatur, Consiliarium, paucis diebus post idibus scilicet Octobris apud eundem Praefectum denuo Universitas fuit convocata de electione pedelli generalis quae fuit admodum turbulenta. Cum enim hac de causa Brixienis animi invicem partim distracti essent, partim aliqui eorum Veronensibus sese coniunxissent unius supra citati hominis astutia, unaque pars priorem potius Universitatis ministrum confirmandum quam alium eligendum stauisset, altera autem Veronensibus iuncta et nobiscum confederata eundem, quem ante biennium proposuerat, eligendum potius decrevisset, multis hinc inde motis atque allatis, tandem eo res devenit ut, Clarissimo Capitaneo sic volente et iubente, Innocentius nomine

into its two customary factions: the *Bresciani* and the *Vicentini* – represented, in this specific instance, by the *Veronesi*<sup>4</sup>. In a deliberate attempt to mitigate the mounting friction between these groups, Andrea Talento was ultimately elected with the mediation of the Paduan *Capitano del Popolo*. However, the defeated candidate, Innocenzo Bibliopola, orchestrated a brutal reprisal; on a Carnival night, supported by a contingent of scholars, he stabbed Talento to death. The legal resolution of the tragedy was delayed until the following March, when primary sources<sup>5</sup> confirm that the perpetrator –widely presumed to be Bibliopola himself– was sentenced to perpetual banishment, while the victim’s eldest son was appointed to the position of General Beadle.

The year’s unrest, however, did not conclude with this judgment. In the wake of the Easter holidays, a fresh conflict erupted between the German and French nations, leading to the wounding of a German student and an ensuing armed “manhunt” through the streets of Padua that eventually drew in the local citizenry<sup>6</sup>. While this specific crisis was de-escalated without fur-

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dictus cui nostri faverunt ante biennium sit reiectus, Andreas autem Talentus ut qui eruditione et multarum rerum usu praeditus esset confirmatus, quam tamen confirmationem male ipsi cecisisse, ex sequentibus palam erit. Nam ab eodem Innocentio Bibliopola vel per alium, quem substituerat in Bachanaliis, secunda hora noctis pugione fuit interfectus, quo negocia (ut vocant) practicarum magis fuere aucta, nos autem pluribus quam antehac non sine metu et periculo obruti molestiis.

<sup>4</sup> It was a well-known custom for the student body to express itself through conflicts between factions, traditionally referred to by the cited terms ‘Bresciani’ and ‘Vicentini’, particularly during the elections for the office of Rector and for the lecturers of certain extraordinary chairs, who were often students nearing the end of their studies. Such factions were groupings of *nationes* which shifted as student ‘alliances’ changed (see. F. PIOVAN, *Trasgressione e violenza a Padova tra XVI e XVII secolo*, in M.C. LA ROCCA - G. ZORNETTA (eds.), *Stranieri. Itinerari di vita studentesca tra XIII e XVIII secolo*, Donzelli, Roma 2022, pp. 141-152: 144-46). The issue arising from the factionalism among students during the election of rectors also emerges clearly from another authoritative source: the report by Andrea Barbarigo, Captain of Padua in 1577: “*Un altro gran disturbo danno alli Rettori et alla città le pratiche di scholar, intervenendo le elettion delli rettori loro [...] onde che ne nascono rixe, adunation di arme, question tra loro scolari*” Another great disturbance is caused to the Rectors and the city by the activities of the students, occurring during the elections of their rectors [...] from which arise brawls, the gathering of arms, and disputes among the students themselves (*Relazioni dei Rettori veneti in Terraferma*, vol. IV, *Podesteria e Capitaniato di Padova*, A. TAGLIAFERRI (ed.), Giuffrè, Milano 1975, p. 53).

<sup>5</sup> See FAVARO, *Atti della Nazione Germanica*, p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> Even in the account of this episode, the records provide interesting details for understanding the dynamics of such events:

Post ferias Paschales corpus Nationis nostrae Germanicae multis modis fuit a Gallis laesum, sic ut eosdem diu erga nos invidia et odio clandestino flagrasse facile colligere potuerimus: primo enim studiosum iurisprudentiae germanum prope suas aedes ves-

ther grave consequences, save for a minor nocturnal skirmish, the authorities remained vigilant. Upon learning of the incident, the *Capitano*<sup>7</sup> formally barred the French scholars from entering the city walls while armed, compelling them to pursue a diplomatic reconciliation with their German counterparts. This history highlights that the challenge of coexistence extended beyond the Studium to encompass the entire city.

The influx of young adults, often from aristocratic backgrounds, was perceived by citizens as a source of instability. While Paduans were not immune to disorder, the threat to the “honor” of young girls and the constant “hunger for money” among foreign students were seen as significant problems. Chronicles document numerous “pavano hunts” – episodes where students injured or killed citizens for trivial reasons. A tragic example occurred in 1603, when Francesco Cisotto, a scholar from Vicenza, was killed by a Paduan painter of German origin in the Contrada del Pozzo Dipinto (not far from the university seat). The painter had caught Cisotto in bed with his wife and, realizing the gravity of killing a student, immediately reported the

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peri stantem, ac nihil quicquam talia suspicantem, eorum sex adorti sunt graviterque vulneraverunt ita ut et de vita eius dubitaretur. Res haec omnibus ut nova et inopinata, sic et iniqua videbatur. Et saepius hac re diligenter deliberata tandem conclusum fuit ut quisque nostrum, quantum fieri posset, sese muniret armis aliisque ad haec necessariis. Et ut aliqua ex parte hoc manifestaretur, se fere nostrorum ad aedem Divi Antonii sese colligerunt ac obambulando plateas Gallis conspiciendos sese tradiderunt. At nullus Gallorum ea die est visus et latitantes domi, qua via alia sinistre denuo nos adirentur deliberarunt. Nam paucis diebus plurimi inter nobiliores Germanos, ex convivio alterius nobilis hinc discedentis, domum se conferentes, hora secunda noctis (in quorum numero et Consiliarius legistarum Germanus fuit, simul ad convivium accersitus) fuere laesi sic tamen ut nostri, subito hac audita concursatione non obscura et contentione ad vicinos delata, victoriam obtinuerint, omnibus Gallis, qui huic factioni intererant in unam domum compulsis. Quod sequenti die cum Clarissimus Capitaneus rescivit, hinc inde nostris eiusmodi iniuriam a Gallis illatam perpendens, vehementer fuit commotus sic ut Gallis arma saepius interdixit, neque perturbatores communitatis studiorum essent, serio iniunxerit; nostros autem obnixè rogaverit ut tranquillitati studentes denuo cum iis reconciliari concederent, quod tandem multis Gallorum precibus a nostris fuit impetratum, confoederatione generali facta in aedibus Domini Obitii nobilissimi patricii Patavini. Cum Vicentinis autem, qui prioris factionis dicebantur authores, ut similiter in gratiam rediremus adhuc saepius a nostris est efflagitatum et tandem iis promissum sequentibus conditionibus, a ipsis primo propositis, a nobis autem emendatis, tandemque a Clarissimo Praetore confirmatis.

(FAVARO, *Atti della Nazione Germanica*, p. 94)

<sup>7</sup> The *Capitano* was one of the two main Venetian governors of a subject city. While the Podestà handled civil administration and justice, the *Capitano* was primarily responsible for military matters and public order.

adultery and the murder to the authorities. By producing an arquebus he claimed Cisotto had used to defend himself, he negotiated a plea bargain of exile instead of death<sup>8</sup>.

The common thread in these tragedies was the problematic issue of weapons. The right of students to walk the city armed had been debated since 1331<sup>9</sup>, when the statutes allowed weapons only if one's life was in danger, a concession easily abused. Consequently, a series of *ad hoc* measures was ratified to regulate this practice. From 1531 onwards<sup>10</sup>, the authorities intensified efforts to enforce the prohibition on carrying weapons without a formal permit. The intervention of the Venetian state –most notably through the Council of Ten and the Paduan Rectors– became increasingly pervasive, impacting an ever-growing student population.

Although initiatives to address the issue continued throughout the 17th century, even a cursory examination of the historical records reveals the limited effectiveness of these measures.

- On 2 January 1577, a group of students interrupted an anatomy lesson to protest the ban on carrying weapons imposed by the *Podestà*.<sup>11</sup>
- On Good Friday 1583, during the procession of the Crucifix, students engaged in a violent clash, drawing swords and assaulting bystanders who were attempting to flee<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> [...] *Un altro caso miserabile successe che Francesco Cizoto scolaro Vicentino e gratioso figliuolo su ammazzato da un pittore tedesco, mentre che egli lo ritrovò in casa sua con la moglie giovine bellissima nella Contrà del Pozzo dipinto, il quale fatto il delitto si appresentò alla Giustizia nelle prigioni con una Pistola che egli levò dalle mani del morto, la quale era stata dal Cizoto scaricata verso lui [...] la moglie, il marito e il fratello della donna furono tutti banditi.*

Another wretched case occurred when Francesco Cizoto, a Vicentine scholar and a charming young man, was killed by a German painter who found him in his house with his beautiful young wife in the Contrà del Pozzo Dipinto. Having committed the deed, the painter surrendered to the authorities at the prison, carrying a pistol he had seized from the dead man's hands, which Cizoto had discharged toward him [...] the wife, the husband, and the woman's brother were all banished

Rossi, *Cronica*, p. 219

<sup>9</sup> The earliest extant statutes of the University of Jurists include a section concerning *qualiter scolares possint deferre arma* (see. *Statuta Universitatis scholarium iuristarum studii generalis Paduani ab anno 1331 ad annum 1404 (Codex Bibliothecae Cathedralis Gnesnensis 180)*, T. BABNIS (ed.), Universitet Opolski, Opole 2020, p. 194).

<sup>10</sup> P. DEL NEGRO, *L'Età Moderna*, in IDEM, *L'Università di Padova*, pp. 41 et sqq.

<sup>11</sup> See n. 7; for the account ROSSI, *Cronica*, p. 86.

<sup>12</sup> See IDEM, *Cronica*, pp. 111-112; and R. SOFFIATO, *Giovini di genio discolo e seditioso. Criminalità e scolari dello Studio patavino nei secoli XVI e XVII*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2021, p. 61.

- In 1585, the *Podestà* Andrea Bernardo reported several armed confrontations that had to be promptly suppressed<sup>13</sup>.
- In mid-November 1589, a dispute arose between German and Polish students. Initially a disagreement over matters of precedence in the streets, the conflict quickly escalated into open combat. The German faction took up arms –so much so that the records speak of a metamorphosis of “studious men into soldiers” (*homines scilicet studiosos in milites conversos*<sup>14</sup>)– leading to a shoot-out and a fortnight of reprisals across the city. The *Podestà* eventually mediated a peaceful resolution, and on 9 December, the peace pledges were read aloud in the *Palazzo Pretorio*.

However, on 5 January 1590, two Germans and two Poles met near the Basilica of St. Anthony. Violating the peace treaty, they resumed their armed confrontation, nearly resulting in the death of the Pole Andreas Zavitsch.

Meanwhile, a conflict also erupted between Milanese and Bergamasque students. According to the chronicler Nicola Rossi, as many as 506 arquebus shots were fired; remarkably, despite the intensity of the fight, no casualties were reported. Consequently, the Milanese were banished, while the Bergamasques were imprisoned<sup>15</sup>.

- On 29 June 1590, solemn vespers at the Basilica of St. Anthony were disrupted by a brawl involving students brandishing swords<sup>16</sup>.
- On 13 March 1593, Pietro Alzano, the Rector of the Jurists, was murdered by masked assassins in the *Contrada* of San Bernardino, at the crossroads with the *Beccherie* (butchers). The perpetrator was likely Alessandro d’Este, who had taken offense at being denied precedence. D’Este successfully evaded justice<sup>17</sup>.

This list could be extended considerably, yet these examples sufficiently demonstrate how frequently weapons were used in grave incidents over a relatively short period. These clashes were not limited to student feuds, altercations with residents, or aristocratic disputes; they also inclu-

<sup>13</sup> See TAGLIAFERRI, *Relazioni dei Rettori veneti in Terraferma*, pp. 77-79.

<sup>14</sup> FAVARO, *Atti della Nazione Germanica Artista*, p. 281; full account *ivi*, pp. 280-284, and in ROSSI, *Cronica*, p. 152.

<sup>15</sup> ROSSI, *Cronica*, p. 155.

<sup>16</sup> *Ivi*, p. 161.

<sup>17</sup> *Ivi*, p. 167, and SOFFIATO, *Giovini di genio discolo*, pp. 69-70.

ded episodes of serious confrontation between the university community and the Paduan authorities.

### 3. *The 1580 Insurrection: Narrative Construction, Armed Resistance, and the Ritual of Retribution*

The analytical core of this report necessitates a rigorous examination of a seminal crisis that threatened the very structural continuity of the Paduan Studium: the violent insurrection of January 1580.

This pivotal event is not merely a footnote in local history but a multi-layered narrative reconstructed through the convergence of diverse primary sources, including the chronicles of Paduan citizens Nicola Rossi and Fabrizio Abriano<sup>18</sup>, the official Acts of the *Natio Germanica Artistarum*, the judicial records of the Criminal Court<sup>19</sup>, and the seventeenth-century historiography of Giacomo Filippo Tomasini in his *Gymnasium Patavinum*<sup>20</sup>.

The ignition point of this turmoil occurred on January 2, 1580<sup>21</sup>, when two Milanese scholars, Giovanni Tommaso Crivello and Marc' Antonio Visconti<sup>22</sup>, were intercepted by civic patrols near the city's medieval bastions. They ventured into the public sphere without authorization, their sides girded with swords, and thus wandering, [they made their way to] the "Campana" inn<sup>23</sup>, representing a defiant transgression of the prevailing statutes prohibiting the carrying of arms within the city walls.

Given the routine presence of police contingents in such sensitive locations, the students' behavior suggests a performative provocation: a deliberate challenge to the Podestà's authority. As the German records elucidate,

<sup>18</sup> F. ABRIANI, *Annali di Padova*, ms. Padua, Biblioteca Civica, B.P. 149.

<sup>19</sup> ARCHIVIO DI STATO DI PADOVA, *Foro giudiziario criminale*, b. 1, f. 1, cc. 88v-90r, ed in SOFFIATO, *Giovini di genio discolo*, pp. 119-120.

<sup>20</sup> G.F. TOMASINI, *Gymnasium Patavinum*, tipographia N. Schiratti, Udine 1654, pp. 421-422.

<sup>21</sup> This account is further substantiated by SOFFIATO, *Giovini di genio discolo*, pp. 55-65, whose analysis is bolstered by meticulous and punctual references to the primary sources; a reference to the matter can also be found in A. CITTADELLA, *Descrizione di Padoa e suo territorio con l'inventario Ecclesiastico brevemente fatta l'anno salutare MDCV. Et in nove trattati compartita. Con tavola copiosa*, 1606 [ms. Padua, Biblioteca Civica, BP 324], p. 75.

<sup>22</sup> See ROSSI, *Cronica*, p. 97.

<sup>23</sup> The occurrence is exhaustively documented within the archival records of the *Natio Germanica* "Secundo Ianuarii die quidam Mediolanenses nobilissimi sine licentia, gladiis accinctis, in publicum prodeunt sicque deambulantes diversorium Campanae" (FAVARO, *Atti della Nazione Germanica Artista*, pp. 165-166).

the transition from a customary interrogation to a lethal escalation was instantaneous<sup>24</sup>; a verbal altercation dissolved into a physical struggle where prohibited blades were used to inflict mortal wounds upon Constable Sebastiano Giantino, head of the Capitano del Popolo's guard, and the knight Sigismondo Speronello. The resulting chaos was not confined to a singular gate but multiplied across the urban landscape, as other students joined the Milanese in a generalized riot.

The subsequent historiographical discrepancy is telling: while Rossi emphasizes the "seditious" brutality of the scholars –alleging they gouged out the eyes of officers<sup>25</sup>–, the account by Einrich Megabach the editor of the German records for this year, portrays the students as a besieged minority, forced to seek sanctuary within the Basilica of St. Anthony. The Podestà mandated the overnight detention of the two Milanese students, along with several accomplices, pending the determination of a suitable punitive measure. This decree provoked fierce resistance from the broader Milanese student body who, failing to find a diplomatic resolution, mobilized the entire student community to join an armed insurrection on the morning of 3<sup>rd</sup> January. The rallying point was the *Collegium Furlanorum* (familarly known as the *Collegio Pratense*), situated adjacent to the Basilica of St. Anthony. Upon receiving intelligence of the impending uprising, the Podestà took immediate strategic action, ordering the closure of all city gates and the fortification of access points to neighbouring territories. This decisive manoeuvre was designed to abruptly suppress the student-led revolt and forestall the escape of its primary instigators.

The escalation reached its zenith when 300 to 400 scholars seized control of Porta Santa Croce<sup>26</sup>, south entrance to the city, securing an escape

<sup>24</sup> Ivi, p. 165.

<sup>25</sup> "[...] *oltre che molte volte erano stati di giorno fuggati et assaltati li sbirri dalli scolari e accompagnati con l'armi nude fino su le scale del Palazzo, e fra le altre fughe che diedero li scolari alli sbirri fu che li tagiorno tutto il naso ad esso Contestabile, et a due altri suoi seguaci tagiato il viso, at ad uno altro cavato un occhio nella contrada vicina al Sole dove si fece un gran menar di mani.*"

[...] furthermore, on numerous occasions during the day, the police officers had been assaulted and routed by the scholars, who pursued them with unsheathed weapons to the very steps of the Palace; among the various retreats forced upon the officers by the students, one resulted in the Constable's nose being entirely severed, while two of his followers suffered facial mutilations, and another had an eye gouged out in the district near the *Sole*, where a violent fray ensued.

ROSSI, *Cronica*, p. 97

<sup>26</sup> See ROSSI, *Cronica*, p. 98, and FAVARO, *Atti della Nazione Germanica Artista*, p. 166 (Tertio itaque Ianuarii die convocati, armata manu Mediolanenses committamur, quorum pars Ferrariam usque profecta, pars autem domum statim a porta Crucis reversa est [...]).

route toward Ferrara. For an interval of four hours, the gate remained unsecured, permitting the Milanese contingent and their associates to depart the city without impediment. However, the students' hold over the bastion was eventually relinquished following the forceful intervention of Captain Moretto Calabrese and his company. Dislodged from their position, the fugitives retreated toward the town of Monselice, situated to the south of Padua. The scholars were relentlessly pursued by a disparate force of cavalry, constables, and opportunistic bounty hunters – individuals of ill repute lured by the promise of financial reward. To evade capture, the students sought sanctuary within the rugged terrain of the Euganean Hills, dispersing across the countryside or even plunging into the frigid, subterranean-temperature waters of the Battaglia river, which traverses the plains from Padua to Monselice (a harrowing feat, considering the depths of the January frost).

Upon reaching Monselice, according to Abriani's testimony<sup>27</sup>, a contingent of students attempted to negotiate with the local Podestà. Yet, any hope for a diplomatic resolution was shattered by a fresh surge of violence, ignited when a volatile officer discharged his weapon, wounding a scholar and inciting a panicked flight among the survivors. In a notable display of grassroots defiance, a significant number of local peasants – disregarding official prohibitions – offered the students sustenance and clandestine refuge. Abriani's account further elucidates the mounting frustration of the Paduan police; unable to locate the scattered fugitives in the hills, they eventually intercepted a vessel transporting a sizeable group of students attempting a clandestine return to the city. Seizing this opportunity, the authorities apprehended the scholars, promptly escorting them to the state prisons of Padua.

This cycle of violence was ultimately punctuated by a somber ritual of state power: the public execution of a Mantuan scholar – variously identified as Giulio Andreasi or Pietro Raimondi<sup>28</sup> – on January 9, 1580, a death inten-

<sup>27</sup> ABRIANI, *Annali di Padova*, p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> Regarding the identity of the uprising's principal instigator, a significant historiographical discrepancy emerges among the contemporary sources. In a marginal gloss to his chronicle, Nicola Rossi identifies the protagonist as the Mantuan Giulio Andreasi (ROSSI, *Cronica*, p. 98: *Giulio Andriasio Scolaro Mantovano decapitato*). Conversely, Giacomo Filippo Tomasini disputes this attribution, asserting that the individual was in fact Pietro Raimondi, a native of San Martino dell'Argine—a locale situated in the Mantuan frontier (TOMASINI, *Gymnasium Patavinum*, p. 422: *Petrus Raimundus ex oppido S. Martini agri Mantuani*). This latter version finds indirect corroboration in the account of Fabrizio Abriani, who alludes to a 'generic priest from Cremona'; it is noteworthy that San Martino dell'Argine fell under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Diocese of Cremona, thereby lending further evidentiary weight to Tomasini's identification (ABRIANI, *Annali di Padova*, p. 20).

ded to serve as a collective atonement, where one man's blood *pro omnibus reliquis persolvit*<sup>29</sup>. Giacomo Tomasini concludes his account with a thought-provoking observation: '*Sic maxima scholarium libertas repressa fuit*' ("Thus, the greatest freedom of the scholars was suppressed")<sup>30</sup>.

#### 4. *The Architecture of Libertas: Economic Sovereignty and the Paradox of Student Privilege*

The concept of *libertas* in the closure of Giacomo Filippo Tomasini carries a weight distinct from its modern interpretation. In the sixteenth century, the "*Patavina libertas*" was primarily understood as the safeguarding of ancient privileges granted to the student body. However, as the seventeenth century approached, the term evolved, increasingly reflecting Venice's pragmatic religious tolerance amidst the escalating conflict between Catholic and Reformed Europe. These privileges were the lifeblood of the Studium of Padua, ensuring its enduring appeal across the continent. Consequently, any attempt by civil authorities to infringe upon student autonomy was met with fierce resistance<sup>31</sup>, often involving threats to move the entire student body to Ferrara or Bologna –such as in 1560, when the Venetian Republic revoked the students' long-standing right to elect professors to the minor (extraordinary) chairs<sup>32</sup>– a move that would have deprived Padua of immense prestige and wealth.

This brings us back to 1580, the year in which Nicola Rossi captures the pervasive anxiety felt by the Paduan citizenry, in late January, after the terrible rebellion. Following a brutal crackdown that resulted in the death

<sup>29</sup> FAVARO, *Atti della Nazione Germanica Artista*, p. 166.

<sup>30</sup> TOMASINI, *Gymnasium Patavinum*, p. 422.

<sup>31</sup> For additional complaints by the Venetian governors of Padua, see TAGLIAFERRI, *Relazioni dei Rettori veneti in Terraferma*, pp. 81-82; 91-92.

<sup>32</sup> DEL NEGRO, *L'Età Moderna*, p. 44. The mid-sixteenth century was characterized by a rigorous season of statutory revisions (see *Ivi*, pp. 41-48), calculated to dismantle entrenched medieval prerogatives and recalibrate the institutional equilibrium between student *nationes*. These maneuvers –often as shrewd in their execution as they were contentious in their impact– fundamentally reshaped the university's internal landscape. A definitive case study in the factionalism that plagued student ranks during this era is the meteoric rise and decline of Jan Zamoyski. A Polish nobleman and Rector of the Jurists, Zamoyski was the primary architect of these statutory reforms. His complex historical trajectory is the focal point of F. BENUCCI, *Il lato oscuro di Jan Zamoyski*, *Rettore dei Giuristi 1563-64*, «Rocznik Filozoficzny Ignatianum – The Ignatianum Philosophical Yearbook» XXXI/2 (2025), pp. 67-89 a seminal work that masterfully synthesizes historiographical precision with an evocative and detailed narrative.

of a student, the city was paralyzed by fear: “Questo fatto dava tanto da ragionare al popolo che per le case et sulle pubbliche piazza non si ragionava d’altro, essendo fama universal che il Studio di Padova non dovesse esser per ritornar così in breve nel pristino suo stato”<sup>33</sup>. The Paduans lived in constant dread that the students, terrified by the repression, would abandon the city forever, taking with them the very identity of Padua itself.

This existential dread was cyclical, as Rossi’s own chronicle vividly illustrates. He records a significant exodus of students to Parma around 1600, following the celebrated Professor Sforza degli Oddi during the re-foundation of the Farnese Studium<sup>34</sup>. In response, authorities scrambled to issue proclamations reminding Venetian subjects of their legal obligation to study only in Padua. Those in defiance were ordered to return within a month under threat of property confiscation. Yet, as often happened, these warnings fell on deaf ears. Rossi seized this moment to underscore the vital importance of the student body, noting that their presence brought: “universal utile alle arti, et a tutta la città per la venditione delle robbe, e datii per accrescimento et utile del Principe”<sup>35</sup>.

The reports of the *Podestà* of Padua frequently corroborate this sentiment. Particularly illuminating is the testimony of Bernardo Navagero (Podestà from 1546-1548). Writing to the Venetian Senate, he argued that Padua’s true strength lay not in its physical defenses, but in its intellectual capital: “voglio che la vostra Serenità sappi che Padua non per la fortezza che è rara, né per la comodità di vivere che è assai conveniente, né per la navigation de’ fiumi, né per la bellezza di edifici, né per la salubrità dell’aere è tanto famosa, quanto è per il Studio”<sup>36</sup>.

Navagero’s report provides a fascinating glimpse into the economic impact of the student population. At the time, an average student spent between 80 and 100 ducats a year on rent, food, and clothing, while wealthier individuals could spend upwards of 500 or even 1,000 ducats. With approximately 1,000 students enrolled, the annual influx of capital was stagge-

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<sup>33</sup> This event gave the people such cause for reflection that nothing else was discussed in homes or public squares; it was universally feared that the Studio di Padova would not be able to recover its former standing in so short a time (Rossi, *Cronica*, p. 99).

<sup>34</sup> Rossi, *Cronica*, pp. 206-208.

<sup>35</sup> Universal profit to the arts, and to the whole city through the sale of goods and the payment of duties, fostering both the growth of the city and the profit of the Prince (Rossi, *Cronica*, p. 208).

<sup>36</sup> I wish to inform Your Serenity that Padua is renowned less for its fortifications –rare as they are– its navigable rivers, its architectural splendor, or its healthy air, than it is for its Studium (TAGLIAFERRI, *Relazioni dei Rettori veneti in Terraferma*, p. 24).

ring – roughly 100,000 ducats. To put this in perspective, Navagero, who had served as ambassador to the Emperor, emphasized that the university's reputation was a form of 'soft power': "li prometto sopra la mia fede, che nella Fiandra, nella Germania, e in quella parte di Franza ove io sono stato ha tanto credito questo studio di Padua, che molti con la sola riputatione [...] sono ammessi ad honori, et maneggi di molta importanza"<sup>37</sup>.

Despite the light shed on the significance of the *Studium* and its flourishing presence within the city, student clashes were not absent even during Navagero's term as Podestà<sup>38</sup>. Decades of recurring compromises, risks, and amnesties did not end the tension; by the early seventeenth century, the clash between students and civic authorities remained as intense as ever: the year 1618 saw a resurgence of unrest, mirroring the 1580 crisis. A violent clash between police and students led by Francesco Sala –resulting in the death of Aquilante Tessaro– nearly forced a mass exodus to Ferrara. Although Podestà Nani eventually secured the *Studium's* survival by facilitating the students' return<sup>39</sup>, the peace remained fragile: just a month later, another armed conflict erupted over a minor personal dispute<sup>40</sup>.

### 5. Coexistence and Compromise: The Paduan Model

At this point, one might ask whether peaceful coexistence in Padua was truly an insurmountable challenge. In his report, Podestà Andrea Bernardo suggests that the only viable solution lay in achieving a delicate balance between conflicting parties. When recounting the riots that occurred during his tenure, he emphasizes the effective synergy between Paduan and Venetian authorities<sup>41</sup>. This unified response was fundamental, as it allowed the go-

<sup>37</sup> I can assure you that in Flanders, Germany, and France, this university is held in such high regard that many are granted honors and prestigious military commands based solely on the prestige of having studied here (TAGLIAFERRI, *Relazioni dei Rettori veneti in Terraferma*, p. 24).

<sup>38</sup> See *Atti della nazione germanica dei legisti nello Studio di Padova*, B. BRUGI (ed.), Dep. veneta di storia patria, Venezia 1912, pp. 17-18.

<sup>39</sup> SOFFIATO, *Giovini di genio discolo e seditioso*, pp. 84-87.

<sup>40</sup> *Acta Nationis Germanicae Artistarum (1616-1636)*, L. ROSSETTI (ed.), Antenore Ed., Padova 1968, pp. 44-46.

<sup>41</sup> [Li Scolari] mi diedero qualche pensiero, tuttavia rimediai prestamente con mandar fuori della Città li capi con brevissimo termine di hore [...] et feci metter giù le arme a essi scolari, benchè alcuni giorni doppo asentissi con dignità della giustizia che le potessero portare, et mi contentai anco che parte di essi capi alcune settimane doppo ritornassero in Padova

vernment to implement a policy of prudent moderation and judicial leniency in its disciplinary actions against the student body.

Soffiato's aforementioned study follows a similar line of inquiry, focusing on the rulings of the Venetian courts. He observes that over a span of one hundred and twenty years, extending to the end of the seventeenth century, sentences imposed on students for certain crimes were consistently less severe than those handed down to local citizens for similar offenses. This disparity reveals the political mechanism that allowed Padua to maintain its international appeal for so long: the enduring vitality of the *patavina libertas* was not merely a product of formal privileges, but of a constant, pragmatic practice of compromise with the students.

The University of Padua, therefore, serves as a distinctive vantage point for observing the intersection of diverse cultures, social roles, and interests. The relationship between the city and the was dynamic and symbiotic; though occasionally turbulent, it was ultimately productive. The 'good fortune' of the university did not stem solely from Venice's ability to recruit eminent professors, but rather from its sophisticated management of a vibrant and complex student body that was deeply embedded in the city's social and political fabric.

The intricate and often paradoxical relationship between student defiance and institutional control is perhaps most vividly captured by an episode from July 1621. During a summer night, the renowned bronze statue of Gattamelata by Donatello was covered with a "vile and filthy shroud".

This gesture of mockery and ignominy was not rooted in a clear political cause but appeared to be an act of goliardic entertainment. Nevertheless, the Venetian government's reaction was immediate and draconian: a decree was issued imposing capital punishment on the perpetrators and offering a substantial 500-ducat reward for information leading to their capture.

The resulting manhunt, which gripped the city for days, eventually revealed that the culprits were indeed scholars. The resolution of the case, as recorded by the chronicler Nicola Rossi, underscores the complex social hierarchies that governed Paduan life: one young student was arrested, but his release was secured through the intervention of an influential uncle.

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[The students] gave me some trouble; nevertheless, I promptly provided a remedy by ordering the leaders out of the city within a very few hours [...] and I made the students lay down their arms, though a few days hence I granted, without compromising the dignity of justice, that they might carry them; I also saw fit that part of those leaders return to Padua a few weeks later.

TAGLIAFERRI, *Relazioni dei Rettori veneti in Terraferma*, p. 78

In a striking display of pragmatism and betrayal, the uncle denounced his nephew's accomplices to the authorities, successfully obtaining the boy's acquittal while pocketing the reward money himself<sup>42</sup>. While the fate of the other accomplices remains obscure, the episode serves as a definitive case study of the Paduan model of coexistence. It illustrates the extreme volatility of a student body that viewed the city's monuments and public spaces as stages for disruption. More importantly, it reveals the persistent tension between the state's need to perform "severe justice" and the reality of a social system where privilege, family influence, and student status often provided a way to escape the full weight of the law. Ultimately, the *Gattamelata* incident confirms that the "Patavina libertas" was not merely a legal abstraction, but a lived, contested, and deeply unpredictable reality.

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<sup>42</sup> *Nel principio del mese di luglio [...] fu posta una tenda brutta e lorda attorno al cavallo et alla statua di bronzo di Gattamelata al Santo per vilipendio et ignominia di essa statua, perciò li illustrissimi Rettori mandarono fuori un bando con pena capitale che chi accusava li rei guadagnava 500 ducati [...] finalmente furono trovati esser stati Scolari, et un zio di quelli che fu stimato il principale, per ottener la liberatione del medesimo accusò li complici del delitto, et ottenne non solo la liberatione del nepote, ma anco il benefitio delli 500 ducati.*

In the commencement of the month of July [...] there was placed a vile and filthy shroud about the horse and the bronze statue of Gattamelata at the Santo, in scorn and ignominy of the said image; wherefore the most illustrious Rectors issued an edict under pain of death, declaring that whosoever should denounce the culprits should gain five hundred ducats [...] at length they were discovered to be Scholars, and an uncle of him who was deemed the principal, that he might secure the release of the same, did denounce the accomplices to the crime, attaining thereby not only the acquittal of his nephew, but likewise the bounty of the five hundred ducats.

ROSSI, *Cronica*, p. 309