

Padua in Crisis and Transition Around 1400

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The years around 1400 were very critical ones for all involved at the University of Padua.¹ After years of conflict and a brief subjection to the Visconti of Milan,² the city of Padua in 1390 once again achieved its independence under the leadership of Francesco il Novello da Carrara who immediately set about improving the situation for the city and the university. To be sure things did improve and the university was flourishing in the 1390s but the problems of war, threats and an Italy in a general state of turmoil could not be ignored. The new government spent a good deal of time seeking alliances and getting involved in a number of affairs that were of importance to the city and its people as well as to the university. One such matter was naturally enough the attempts to resolve the Great Western Schism which had divided Western Europe since its outbreak in 1378. Padua with its strong faculty in law could not remain on the sidelines in such an issue and so the Carrara leader, Francesco il Novello, sought in 1398 to intervene diplomatically with the papal claimant of the Roman Obedience, Boniface IX, but very little was accomplished.³ Then in rapid fashion the situation across Europe was radically changed by what might be called revolutionary actions in three countries. First in France, the church there under the leadership of its king and his council and with the advice of prominent figures from the University of Paris and the hierarchy renounced its obedience to the papal claimant of the Avignon Obedience, Benedict XIII, in 1398.⁴ Secondly the English in 1399 witnessed an

1. Benjamin G. Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara 1318-1405* (Baltimore and London, 1998); Attilio Simioni, *Storia di Padova dalle origini all' fine del secolo XVIII* (Padova 1968); and Laura Gaffuri e Donato Gallo, "Signoria ed episcopato a Padova nel trecento: spunti per una ricerca," in *Vescovi e Diocesi in Italia dal XIV alla meta del XVI secolo* [Atti del VII Covegno di Storia della Chiesa in Italia (Brescia, 21-25 settembre 1987)] a cura di Giuseppe De Sandre Gasparini, Antonio Rigon, Francesco Trolese, Gian Maria Varanini, 2 vols. [=Italia Sacra, 43-44] (Roma, 1990), II:923-956.

2. Gaffuri e Gallo, "Signoria ed episcopato," p. 951.

3. Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p. 311ff.

4. Howard Kaminsky, "The Politics of France's Subtraction of Obedience from Benedict III, 27 July 1398," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 115 (1971), 366-397; *idem*, *Simon de Cramaud De subtraccione obediencie* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), and *idem*, *Simon de Cramaud and the Great Schism* (New Brunswick, 1983).

upheaval as the contentious Richard II was ousted and killed, and thus Henry IV of Lancaster took the throne.⁵ Thirdly in 1400 the princes in Germany had their fill with what they saw as the ineptitude of King Wenceslaus of Bohemia and in fact at what they also saw as his subservience to the leader of the Visconti house in Milan, Giangaleazzo Visconti.⁶ Thus they removed Wenceslaus from his position as Emperor-Elect and chose a new person to occupy this position, Ruprecht of the Rhine Palatinate.⁷

Now all of these changes had implications for Padua and thus for its university. The Visconti family of Milan, Carrara's enemy, had a link with France by marriage of one of the daughters to Louis, Duke of Orleans, the younger brother of the king. In addition, il Novello immediately sought to strengthen his own ties to Germany by approaches to the newly elected Ruprecht, and along with Florence, Padua joined in urging the new ruler to come down to Italy to assert his authority, humble the haughty Milanese who had obtained the title of Duke of Milan from the deposed Wenceslaus, and perhaps even obtain coronation as emperor as a consequence of victories over his opponents who were dividing Italy.⁸ The results were, however, a catastrophe for Ruprecht and nearly led to immediate disaster for Padua. In fact it would only be the sudden death of Giangaleazzo Visconti in September 1402 that would save Padua and its ruling family from the consequences of its policies towards Milan at this time.⁹ But the respite was only a brief one.

5. Lynn Staley, "Gower, Richard II, Henry of Derby, and the Business of Making Culture," *Speculum* 75 (2000), 68-96; F. R. H. Du Boulay and Caroline M. Barron, eds., *The Reign of Richard II. Essays in Honour of May McKisack* (London, 1971); Peter McNiven, "Legitimacy and consent: Henry IV and the Lancastrian Title, 1399-1406," *Mediaeval Studies* 44 (1982), 470-488.

6. E. R. Chamberlin, *The Count of Virtue. Giangaleazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan* (New York, 1965), p. 201.

7. E. Delaruelle, E.-R. Labande, Paul Ourliac, *L'Eglise du temps du Grand Schisme et de la crise conciliaire (1378-1449)* [=Histoire de l'Eglise, 14, 1] (Paris and Tournai, 1962), p. 102.

8. Simioni, *Storia de Padova*, p. 554ff.; Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p. 318ff.; John Julius Norwich, *A History of Venice* (New York, 1982), p. 266.

9. D. M. Bueno de Mesquita, *Giangaleazzo Visconti Duke of Milan (1351-1402). A Study in the Political Career of a Italian Despot* (Cambridge, 1941), p. 279-293; Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p. 325.

One might have thought that the near disaster of 1402 would have tempered the rashness of Francesco il Novello but his conduct in the immediate wake of being almost miraculously saved showed what at best would be described as a slow learning process. During the critical years of dispute with Milan one of the things that had been constant was the continued appeal of the Carrara ruler of Padua to get out of what he saw as the harsh terms of his treaty with Milan after earlier defeats,¹⁰ but now il Novello at once tried to exact all he could from the surviving widow in Milan. He appeared to be demanding far more than his pound of flesh. Even more ominous il Novello instituted a strategy that would in time permanently alienate Venice. He had started down the path to destruction and his days were numbered. In the wake of this doomed venture, the University at Padua was left to toss and turn with the flow of events and with no concern on the part of the ruler for the consequences for the faculty and students and the school in general.

To be sure life had not been easy for the university and its scholars even before this date. We know that in 1393 the opening of the academic year had to be postponed from October to early December because of an outbreak of an epidemic and that even at this late date so few students had dared to appear in this threatening situation so that the school year did not start in earnest even in December.¹¹ But then things had appeared to settle down; the city was recovering slowly and both students and faculty were busy with their academic work,¹² and for the faculty there was also often diplomatic and other activity for the Carrara regime, as for example the visit of Antonio Gaetano, the Patriarch of Aquileia in 1395,¹³ and the embassy to Boniface IX in 1398¹⁴

10. Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p. 309.

11. Thomas E. Morrissey, "Ein unruhiges Leben. Franciscus Zabarella an der Universität von Padua (1390-1410). Die Welt, die Nikolaus von Kues vorfand," *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus Gesellschaft* 24 (1998), 5-40, at p. 12 and n. 32-33.

12. Franciscus Zabarella had been appointed along with two others on May 17, 1399 to end the disputes that had been tearing the university apart, specifically the conflicts between the law and arts faculty and the *cismontani* versus the *ultramontani*. Eventually Zabarella's solution was accepted by all involved; Andrea Gloria, ed., *Monumenti della Università di Padova (1318-1405)* 2 vols. (Padova, 1888), II:342-345 #2049.

13. The text of Zabarella's address is found in Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codices Latini, Ms. 5513, fol. 194r-196r. On Gaetani's career over the next decade, see Dieter Girgensohn, "Kardinal Antonio Gaetani und Gregor XII. in den Jahren 1406-1408: Von Papstmacher zum Papstgegner," *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 64 (1984), 116-226, esp. 123-124.

which had taken place in the context of a wider diplomatic effort by the Carrara regime in attempting to solidify and stabilize Padua's relationships with Milan, Venice, Bologna, Ferrara and Mantua and which achieved a treaty in May 1398.¹⁵

The famed canonist and professor of law at Padua, Franciscus Zabarella (1360-1417), was asked at this time for his legal opinion on the binding force of a promise made by Francesco il Novello and the ruler of Mantua to the ruling forces in Bologna on the disposition of some strategic properties.¹⁶ This was clearly part of the diplomatic dance that was in process. Then in 1402 this same professor was called on to deliver a formal address to celebrate the wedding which bound together the Carrara house of Padua with the ruling family in Mantua in the aftermath of the death of Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan.¹⁷

In October 1403 other negotiations continued while delegates were chosen to travel to Milan hopefully to work out a peace treaty. During that same year Padua suffered a loss when one of its most respected military leaders, Zacoari [Pataro] Buzzachinis of Padua, a relative by marriage of il Novello, died and Zabarella was again selected to deliver a formal address but this time as a funeral eulogy for the fallen hero.¹⁸ At this time the situation was rapidly deteriorating for

14. Terenzio Sartore, "Un discorso inedito di Francesco Zabarella a Bonifacio IX sull' autorità del Papa," *Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia* 20 (1966), 375-388; Dieter Girgensohn, "Francesco Zabarella aus Padua. Gelehrsamkeit und politisches Wirken eines Rechtsprofessors während des grossen abendländischen Schismas," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Kanonistische Abteilung* 79 (1993), 232-277, at p. 261-262.

15. Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p. 312-314; Simioni, *Storia di Padova*, p. 529-568; John J. McManamon, S. J., *Pierpaolo Vergerio the Elder. The Humanist As Orator* [Medieval and Renaissance Texts and studies, 163] (Tempe, 1996), p. 71. In the *Acta* edited by Gloria, we see Francesco il Novello seeking an alliance with Ladislas of Naples, *Monumenti*, II:432, #2272, and in fact any place from which he might possibly get help, *ibid.*, II:433.

16. Consilium # 85 in *Consilia* (Milan, 1515), fol. 38v-39r; also Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p.315. Of course the ultimate ruling power in Bologna at this time was Boniface IX, at least in theory.

17. E. Pastorello, "Un' orazione inedito del Car. Zabarella per le nozze di Belfiore Varano con Giacomo da Carrara," *Atti e Memorie della R. Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Province della Marche*, Nuova serie, vol. 8 (1912), p. 121-128.

18. The Buzzacarini family had served the Carrara family since the 1360s in a variety of functions and had strong ties with them; Benjamin G. Kohl, "Government and Society in Renaissance Padua," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance studies* 2 (1972), 205-221, at p. 211. The text of Zabarella's address on this occasion was published in G. Zonta, *Francesco Zabarella (1360-1417)* (Padova, 1915), p. 142-143 based on the text found in Padua, Museo Civico, 133 xv saec. XVII/XVIII, but it also exists in other codices, e.g., Wien, 5513, fol. 190v-191v and 165v-166r;

Padua and its implications for the university were very undesirable. Over the previous decade Padua had been favorably viewed and in many cases supported by the regimes in Florence and Venice. To the complaints in the 1390s of il Novello that he continued to have financial problems and wanted out of his obligations toward the league Padua had joined, Florence had granted a sympathetic ear. Padua, however, in the later years of that decade did little to improve its situation in Florentine eyes. Venice in the meantime had remained quite flexible and understanding, even going so far as to help underwrite the dowry payments in 1396 involved in a marriage of a Carrara heir to Alda Gonzaga of Mantua.¹⁹ Venice likely saw this alliance as a stabilizing element on this frontier of its territory and increased its willingness to accommodate the needs of Padua during the last years of the century as can be seen in a series of agreements down to 1399.

In March 1400 Venice had achieved a peace agreement with Milan for both itself and Padua.²⁰ One benefit for Padua of this agreement was the reduction in the annual indemnity Padua owed to Milan. Then an outbreak of the plague which hit Italy that summer brought most activities to a standstill.²¹ As noted above, Padua in the succeeding months had turned more toward Florence and the recently elected-emperor Ruprecht of the Rhine Palatinate and even after his ill-fated expedition down into Italy had turned sour, Padua continued to show the utmost courtesy and deference to him as well as misplaced hopes in him. When he finally arrived in Padua on his meandering journey homeward, the noted law professor Pietro Alvarotti gave an address of welcome for the occasion.²²

Stift St. Paul in Lavanthal, 31/4, fol. 115v-116v; Pommersfelden, 168, fol. 133v-134v; Padua, Biblioteca del Seminario, 578, p.71, Zeitz, Stiftsbibliothek, 2^o, 48, fol. 219r.

19. Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p.310.

20. McManamon, *Pierpaolo Vergerio the Elder*, p. 108 says that Venice forced the peace on Padua which Norwich described as an "uneasy peace" *History of Venice*, p. 266.

21. Wien, Ms. 5513, fol. 207r, "tardius ex eo incepti quia pestilencia hanc urbem oppressit" and " propter epidemiam dilatio fuit initii studii usque ad diem primam decembris."

22. This distinguished jurist had received his licentiate and doctorate under the direction of Zabarella and then was often involved with him in the activities of the law faculty at Padua; Gloria, *Monumenti*, II:278, #1868 records the licentiate of Alvarotti on 16 October 1393 and his doctorate in civil law on 18 October 1394, Gloria, *Monumenti*,

The struggle against the Visconti had continued and when cold war had flamed into active hostilities, the results were a disaster for il Novello as his forces were routed in a battle near Bologna and even worse, almost the entire Paduan contingent, including two of his sons, were taken prisoner.²³ It is no wonder that the news of Giangaleazzo Visconti's death of fever on 3 September 1402 was seen as a Godsend by il Novello. But unlike Coluccio Salutati in Florence who saw this stroke of luck as an opportunity to make a lasting peace for the area,²⁴ il Novello expanded his scheming and planning. By December 1402 a peace which was "more a truce than peace" was reached with Milan.²⁵ But in April of the following year a new anti-Visconti league took shape with France, Florence, Pope Boniface IX, Padua and Ferrara and the d'Este leader as head of its forces.²⁶ By this time Venice was becoming more and more alarmed at the recklessness and impetuosity of its erstwhile protegee in Padua. In June 1403 the Venetian regime wrote a letter of warning to Francesco il Novello and ominously referred back to its view of Padua, that it had expressed in 1356 as "a land of tyrants".²⁷ Venice tried to enlist Padua in support of a policy of peace and accommodation with the Visconti interests (now that the far more dangerous Giangaleazzo Visconti was no longer around to threaten everyone). But with encouragement from other allies il Novello opted for open warfare against Caterina Visconti,

I:199 and n. 3. An earlier pioneer study on Zabarella, August Kneer, *Kardinal Zabarella (Franciscus de Zabarellis, Cardinalis Florentinus) 1360-1417. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des grossen abendländischen Schismas*. Erster Teil (Dissertation; Münster, 1891), p. 53-54 gave the date as 1395. Gaffuri and Gallo, "Signoria ed episcopato", p. 934 point out that the Alvarotti family was one of the influential families in Padua which had extensive and close ties with the ruling Carrara family.

23. Simioni, *Storia di Padova*, p. 556; Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p. 324.

24. Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p. 325-326; Vergerio's writing at this time can also be seen as a warning to il Novello to seek the path of peace, McManamon, *Pierpaolo Vergerio the Elder*, p. 116.

25. Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p. 326; G. Romano, La pace tra Milano ed i Carraresi nel 1402," *Archivio storico lombardo* N. S. 18 (1891), 841-857.

26. Simioni, *Storia di Padova*, p. 558-559; Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p. 327.

27. Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p. 327. Dieter Girgensohn has published a detailed analysis and study of the regime in Venice at this period in his *Kirche, Politik und adelige Regierung in der Republik Venedig zu Beginn des 15. Jahrhunderts* [Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte, 118] 2 vols. (Göttingen, 1996).

Giangaleazzo's widow in Milan, and moved against Verona and Brescia.²⁸ After a quick and upsetting defeat il Novello continued his wild swings of policy; first opting for a truce and even considering peace while ignoring all warnings from Venice to continue on a peace policy. Even worse Padua seemed clearly bent on an expansionist policy in the direction of Venice and its lands.

But by now Venice's hands and forces had been freed up by its defeat of a Genoese fleet in Autumn 1403.²⁹ They tried once again for a peaceful settlement with Padua. Il Novello seemed obsessed with the hope of possible support from Florence and from Emperor-Elect Ruprecht who was however far away on the other side of the Alps and had earlier shown himself to be a very weak reed to rely on. The Paduan ruler was seemingly oblivious to the real danger his schemes and ambitions were leading him into and to the growing exasperation of Venice with him. Thus the plans to divide up the Visconti domains of Vicenza and Verona went apace with the growing alarm il Novello was causing in both Milan and Venice. Then suddenly the world was turned upside down. Venice took control of Vicenza and the drums of war between Venice and Padua began their slow but accelerating beat. At each step il Novello found himself forestalled by Venetian action or by the fact that his own rash actions had undermined all trust in him.³⁰ Thus in June 1404 Venice and Padua were at war as Venice had decided to deal with their troublesome neighbor once and for all.³¹

Initial successes for Padua were soon offset by the growing power and pressure that Venice could exert and by failure of any realistic hope for Padua from would-be or supposed allies. The few remaining supporters of il Novello fell off one by one.³² A desperate plea for help expressed

28. Simioni, *Storia di Padova*, p. 558.

29. Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p. 329.

30. Norwich, *History of Venice*, p. 267.

31. McManamon, *Pierpaolo Vergerio the Elder*, p. 108; Simioni, *Storia di Padova*, p. 564; Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p. 330.

32. Simioni. *Storia d Padova*, p. 558; Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p. 331-332.

by an embassy to the court of France in late 1404 and early 1405 fell on deaf ears. Florence too had its own concerns and was now far more intent on the acquisition of Pisa which it accomplished in 1406 and thus it had little time for its Paduan ally. All that this alliance brought in reality was a refuge for some members of the Carrara family who had the foresight to go into exile there before the end.³³ By 1406, when Pisa was in Florentine control, there was no longer any Carrara regime in Padua to which they might have sent assistance. Capture of other members of the Carrara family and divisions within the city further weakened Padua's ability to hold out. Still il Novello schemed and a fake plan of abdication and buy out, when it was revealed that it was all a plot to buy time, sealed his doom.³⁴ By late November 1405 the struggle was over, il Novello and several of his sons were prisoners of Venice and soon to be executed, and loss of independence of Padua was a finality.³⁵

What was life like at the university during these crises? It is known that in an ultimately unsuccessful struggle of life and death, the Carrara regime had little time, energy or money for what they quite naturally would call less important matters and these would include the university, scholars and humanists. During this period the early humanist, Giovanni da Conversino di Ravenna left Padua (as did others) and took up residence and service at Venice where the prospects appeared brighter.³⁶ In the Summer of 1405 an outbreak of disease in the city, likely an effect of the siege and blockade, caused widespread loss of life. Some have even

33. The most significant of the group that left for Florence was Stefano da Carrara, who had served as administrator from 1396 and then as bishop-elect of Padua since 1402, Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p. 333. Girgensohn, "Francesco Zabarella", p.272, reported that Zabarella had been invited at this difficult time to leave Padua and been offered a position back in Florence.

34. Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p. 333-334.

35. Simioni, *Storia di Padova*, p. 568; Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p. 335-336.

36. Nicolai Rubinstein, "A Grammar teacher's Autobiography: Giovanni Conversini's *Rationarium vite*," *Renaissance Studies* 2 (1988), p. 161; Benjamin G. Kohl, "The Manuscript Tradition of Some Works of Giovanni da Ravenna," *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Amstelodamensis* [Proceedings of the 2nd International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies, Amsterdam 19-28 August, 1973] ed. P. Tuynman et al. (München, 1979), p. 613. Pierpaolo Vergerio, another humanist who had been resident at Padua, a student of and close friend of Zabarella. also left Padua in 1405 to join the Papal Court, McManamon, *Pierpaolo Vergerio the Elder*, p. 121.

estimated the deaths in the hundreds per day at its worst point.³⁷ Clearly a city and its university in the midst of disease and a war zone were not an attractive place. There were fewer students and less activity of an academic nature. To illustrate this we give an example from just one member of its law faculty, Franciscus Zabarella. For the years prior to the war there were numerous students completing their doctorates and being promoted by him right down to 1404 and even into 1405. But in the immediate aftermath of this the numbers dropped off precipitously. Between 1406 and 1408 we find only three students of his promoted to the doctorate in law, compared with six for 1402, five for 1403 and at least nine for 1404 but only three for 1405. Since the years required to attain this level of study and achievement were many it is not surprising that there was a real dearth of doctoral students for several years and only in 1409 and 1410, the last two years of Zabarella's teaching at Padua did the numbers recover and actually surge to new heights.³⁸

The maneuverings and schemes of the Carrara regime then created a desperate crisis at the University of Padua at the turn of the fourteenth into the fifteenth century. By early 1406 the very survival of the university was in jeopardy. There were major questions to be answered and needs to be met. For example, who would be the university's chancellor since the former chancellor, Stephanus de Carrara, il Novello's natural son, had prudently left for Florence in the waning months of the old regime and thus had saved his skin. The Venetian government soon resolved this question by selecting one of its own, Albanus Michiel, as the new bishop (and so new chancellor of the university) and he was installed in June 1406.³⁹ Even before this the

37. Kneer, *Kardinal Zabarella*, p. 34. McManamon, *Pierpaolo Vergerio the Elder*, reported that the plague hit Padua very hard in 1400 after ravaging Bologna and Florence in the two previous years (p. 87) but then the outbreak of disease and famine in 1405 was devastating to the city, Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, p.333.

38. For the details and evidence for the names and numbers of students completing their studies and achieving their doctoral degrees in law under Zabarella's direction in these years, see Morrissey, "Ein unruhiges Leben," p. 16-18 for the years 1399-1405 and p. 20-22 for 1406-1410.

39. Thomas E. Morrissey, "Ecce Sacerdos Magnus': On Welcoming a New Bishop: Three Addresses for Bishops of Padua by Franciscus Zabarella," in *Nicholas of Cusa on Christ and the Church* [Essays in Memory of Chandler McCuskey Brooks for the American Cusanus Society] edited by Gerald Christianson and Thomas M. Izbicki (Leiden, 1996), 57-70.

faculty of the university had petitioned the government of Venice to act on behalf of the decimated university. The Doge's response was not long in coming and soon the Venetians proved to be as good as their word, funding was restored, and in time the university was not only back on its feet but flourishing so that one might speak of a new golden age for it.⁴⁰ Earlier that same year some of the leaders of the university had been delegated to be part of the group that performed the formal ceremony of surrender of the city on 2 January 1406 and some of these same people were the ones who approached Doge Michele Steno on the plight of the university and on the next day he issued the Golden Bull restoring the rights and privileges of the university and guaranteeing its status.⁴¹ In September 1407 Venice made provisions for further funding for the university which was given a privileged status in that it was to be the only one allowed within the Venetian territory.⁴² It appeared that the crisis in Padua for the people and the university was over and they had survived.

40. Lucia Rossetti, *The University of Padua. An Outline of its History*, translated by Alice W. Maladorno Hargreaves (Trieste, 1983) p. 21.

41. Gloria, *Monumenti* II:444 #2308; Girgensohn, "Francesco Zabarella", p. 261-262.

42. Peter Burke, *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy 1420-1540* (New York, 1972), p. 47.