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Utrum sapienti competat prolem habere?

An Italian debate

Sylvain Piron

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One of the major accomplishments of Constant Mews has been his effort to establish Heloise as a thinker and a writer in her own right. Long before he joined her name to that of her husband in the title of a volume dedicated to “Great medieval thinkers”,¹ he already had pinpointed her intellectual impact on Abelard in an important article devoted to their readings of Jerome.² Of the pair, she clearly was the one who had a greater familiarity with the Church Father. Asserting this fact was instrumental soon afterwards in Constant Mews’s identification of Heloise as the women in the *Epistolae duorum amantium*, whose intimate knowledge of Jerome is remarkable.³ Jerome is also a central [228] reference in what has to be considered as Heloise’s intellectual masterpiece. Her famous “Dissuasion from marriage” (*dehortatio matrimonii*), inserted within Abelard’s *Historia calamitatum*, relies heavily on arguments to that effect borrowed from Jerome’s *Contra Jovinianum*. It is unfortunate that the study of misogynistic prejudices is itself sometimes encumbered by misogynistic preconceptions. Scholars often doubted that Heloise could have really built on her own a complex argumentation, putting to use a large number of classical examples. Since Abelard also used many of them in his *Theologia christiana* (written in or soon after 1122), it seemed logical to infer that he first gathered them at that time, before putting them to use again in the *Historia calamitatum* (around 1131)⁴. Yet, a

¹ Constant J. Mews, *Abelard and Heloise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

² Id., “Un lecteur de Jérôme au XIIe siècle: Pierre Abélard”, in *Jérôme entre l’Occident et l’Orient*, ed. Y. M. Duval, Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1988, p. 429-444, repr. in C.J. Mews, *Abelard and his Legacy* (Aldershot: Variorum, 2001).

³ Id., *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard. Perceptions of Dialogue in Twelfth-Century France* (New York: Palgrave, 1999).

⁴ See, for instance, John Marenbon, “Abélard: les exemples de philosophes et les philosophes comme exemple”, in *Exempla docent. Les exemples des philosophes de l’antiquité à la Renaissance*, ed. Thomas Ricklin, with Delphine Carron et Emmanuel Babey (Paris: Vrin, 2006), 119-133, see p. 129; Philippe Delhaye, “Le dossier anti-matrimonial de l’Adversus Jovinianum et son influence sur quelques écrits latins du XIIe siècle,” *Medieval Studies* 13 (1951): 65-86, see 73-74: “on ne peut s’empêcher de douter de la véracité du récit. On a vraiment trop l’impression que les paroles rapportées ici ne sont pas d’Héloïse mais de l’auteur de la *Theologia Christiana*”.

closer textual analysis reveals that, in that chapter of the *Historia*, Abelard is indeed reporting extracts of the authentic letter Heloise had sent him around 1117, while refusing the wedding plans he had designed with her uncle Fulbert. The insertion within her distinctive prose of a few remarks that clearly bear the stamp of Abelard is a sure sign that he was incorporating in his narration extracts of a document that laid before his eyes.⁵ The concern she expressed in the first letter she sent him upon receiving the *Historia* was not that he had misrepresented her arguments. She recognized her own words, but complained that he had left aside the part in which she was explaining why it was wrong for her to marry, focusing only on the reasons showing it was improper for him to enter a marriage.⁶ The fact that Abelard repeated the same arguments in his theological writings a few years after their disastrous marriage demonstrates that he kept this letter in his possession, and took very seriously what she had written. There can hardly be a stronger proof of the intellectual respect he had for her.

Heloise, then, is the first medieval author who reintroduced the classical *topos* of the impropriety of marriage for a philosopher. After Abelard in the *Theologia christiana*, John of Salisbury and Walter Map gave it even wider echo. Silvana Vecchio has devoted some important studies to the discussion that went on during the XIIIth and XIVth centuries.⁷ Besides philosophical and moral treatments of that issue, many writers used it as a literary theme, from Jean de Meung's *Roman de la Rose* and Chaucer's [229] Prologue to the Wife of Bath's tale, up to Rabelais whose *Tiers livre* is entirely built on deciding whether Panurge should marry or not⁸. A late resurgence of this medieval and Renaissance *topos* features in Friedrich Nietzsche's rejection of marital life as a deadly impediment to the practice of philosophy: "Thus the philosopher abhors marriage, together with that which might persuade to it [...] A married philosopher belongs in comedy, that is my proposition – and as for that exception, Socrates - the malicious Socrates, it would seem, married ironically, just to demonstrate this position".⁹

The theme on which I would like to focus constitutes somehow a side issue of this wider debate. To borrow a concept dear to Constant Mews, it will lead us to explore some specific "communities of learning", formed by lay intellectuals active in central and northern Italy in the decades around 1300. At that time, a number of remarkable cultural personalities were active in and circulating between and around the university

⁵ Sylvain Piron, "Heloise's literary self-fashioning and the *Epistolae duorum amantium*", in Lucie Doležalová ed., *Strategies of Remembrance. From Pindar to Hölderlin* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 103-162, see p. 116-127.

⁶ *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, ed. D. Luscombe, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013), 132.

⁷ Silvana Vecchio, "De uxore non ducenda. La polemica anti-matrimoniale fra xiii e xiv secolo", in M. Picone, C. Cazalé Bérard, *Gli Zibaldoni di Boccaccio. Memoria, scrittura, riscrittura*, Firenze: Cesati, 1998, p. 53-64; Ead., "Les deux épouses de Socrate. Les philosophes et les femmes dans la littérature des *exempla*", in *Exempla docent*, p. 227-239.

⁸ Michael A. Screech, *The Rabelaisian Marriage. Aspects of Rabelais' religion, ethics and comic philosophy*, (London: Arnold, 1958); Katherina M. Wilson, Elizaabeth M. Makowsky, *Wykked Wyves and the Woes of Marriage. Misogamous Literature from Juvenal to Chaucer*, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1990).

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, New York, Vintage Books, 1967, p. 107.

cities of Bologna, Padua and Arezzo and the merchant city of Florence, sharing a number of distinctive features. They were all involved in communal politics and administration, interested in philosophy and in various sciences, and eager to recover and sometimes emulate Roman classical texts. Most of them were also writing poetry in Latin and in the vernacular, and sometimes in both languages.¹⁰ Dante Alighieri is of course the most famous figure among this network, but he is only one among many similar characters. Like Dante, in stark contrast to the later generation of Petrarch and Boccaccio, all members of these circles had not taken even the lowest of sacerdotal orders.¹¹ Being immersed in civil and active life, the question for them was therefore not to discuss the benefit or disadvantage of marriage, since they were all married. They would rather twist the discussion to one of the core consequences of marriage: is it better to have or not to have children?

Constant Mews' research into the *Epistolae duorum amantium* provided an important methodological lesson for historians. We should not be intimidated by monuments of medieval Latin literature, and leave such sources to the sole care of philologists and literary scholars. To the contrary, it is necessary to approach them as cultural artifacts that deserve to be read as [230] historical documents, in order to cast light on the social and intellectual life of the milieu within which they were produced. Actually, the first item we shall discuss is not totally ignored by historians. It is fairly well known as one of the most striking productions of the Padua "prehumanist" circles active around 1300. It consists in an exchange of ten poems (six sonnets, two shorter poems and two distich serving as conclusions) in which the leading figure of this group, Lovato Lovati, and his most important associate, Albertino Mussato, discuss whether a man endowed with children is happier than one who has none.¹² Ronald Witt has briefly commented upon this debate, that still awaits a modern critical edition.¹³ The five preserved manuscripts, all produced in the Veneto in the late XIVth and early XVth centuries, describe this exchange of poems as a "Quaestio de prole" or under another title evoking a disputed question.¹⁴ Such a description is revealing of the reception of this literary production. Yet it is misleading for a correct assessment of its conception, since the whole process out of which these pieces emerged has little to do with a scholastic context or model. Instead, this poetical dialogue should be qualified

¹⁰ Emanuele Coccia, S. Piron, "Poésie, science et politique. Une génération d'intellectuels italiens (1290-1330)," *Revue de Synthèse* 129 (2008): 549-586. I am currently expanding this article into a monograph together with Giuliano Milani and Antonio Montefusco, whose support in preparing the present study I wish to acknowledge, as well as good advices from Didier Lett.

¹¹ Carlo Dionisotti, "Chierici e laici," in Id., *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana* (Torino: Einaudi, 1967), 47-73, see 49-52.

¹² The letters were first edited in Luigi Padrin, *Lupati de Lupatis, Bovetini de Bovetinis, Albertini Mussati necnon Jamboni Andreae de Favafuschis carmina quaedam ex codice veneto nunc primum edita* (Padova: Tipografia del seminario, 1887). I haven't been able to access this rare volume, and have relied on the electronic edition provided by the project *Poeti d'Italia in lingua latina* [on line] <http://www.poetiditalia.it>. For the story of the text, see Enzo Cecchini, "La *Quaestio de prole*: Problemi di trasmissione e struttura," *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 28 (1985): 97-105.

¹³ Ronald G. Witt, "*In the Footsteps of the Ancients*". *The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 106-108.

¹⁴ An alternative title to "Quaestio de prole" is: "Utrum sit melior conditio, an habencium filios an non habencium", Venezia, Bibl. del Civico Museo Correr, Codd. Cicogna, 2408. See Carla Maria Monti, "Per la fortuna della *Quaestio de prole*: i manoscritti", *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 28 (1985): 71-95.

as a *tenzon* which, quite uniquely, is formulated in classicizing Latin hexameters. Although it may be argued that such oratory encounters are universally found, the XIIIth-century Occitan troubadours devised a specific type of poetical joust, made of alternating stanzas composed by two or more poets. This pattern of repeated queries and counterattacks had a strong impact on the Italian vernacular poetry of XIIIth century. As a rule, Italian *tenzoni* only comprised sonnets – and it must be noted that the poems forming the core of the “Quaestio” are indeed Latin sonnets comprised of fourteen verses. While love was the only topic discussed within that form in the Sicilian tradition, Tuscan writers could also use it to debate political issues. When it takes a comic tone, sometimes loaded with obscene or insulting innuendos as in Dante’s exchange with Forese Donati, the antagonism displayed in the *tenzone* does not imply any real hostility between the partners involved. Lovato’s challenge to Mussato has to be seen in that light. This background should help us in discerning the humorous and ironic aspect of the discussion. [231]

Lovato starts with an allusion to his friend’s Latin nickname – *Asellus* (Donkey), he himself being *Lupus* (Wolf) – before raising the issue: “Take two men, one lacking children while the other has plenty; tell me which of them was born under the better star?”¹⁵ In his first answer, Mussato states ingenuously that “when progeny comes happily, it is the most precious gift, for what makes happy is good; its possessor is blessed by the stars.”¹⁶ The role of a child as a support in the father’s old age is also evoked. Lovato has an easy job in reversing the proposition: “Clouds do not resolve a doubt; for the one who lacks children, if this pleases him, I judge him happy in that regard”. Presenting Mussato with a list of fathers who had to witness the death or ruin of their children, from Lycurgus to Priam, he confronts the naivety of his friend: “among such thousands, search for one father who has not been tormented by an extreme fear or grief for the sweet love of children”.¹⁷ Priding himself with optimism (“*Spes est mihi gloria semper*”), Mussato adduces in his response the case of Anchises, whose son Aeneas carried him on his back away from the destruction of Troy, and objects that Lovato is himself an example of the natural tendency to surpass one’s father¹⁸. In his third round, Lovato insists that there are more reasons to fear than to hope, and doubts that his friend’s descent will keep his fame intact, to which Mussato replies by opposing virtue to fear¹⁹. As an envoi, both authors juggle with the authority of Euripides (known through Boethius’ *Consolatio philosophiae*) who claimed himself happy to be childless; this was, Mussato argues, only one misfortune among many

¹⁵ “Quaestio”, poem 1, v. 6-7: “Et duo sint, alter natis caret, alter abundat / Dic uter in lucem meliori venerit astro.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, poem 2, v. 9-11 : “Progenies si laeta venit, ditissima res est / Nam bona si laeta est: huius possessor ab astris / Diligitur ...”

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, poem 3, v. 2-10: “Nubila non solvit dubii; nam et prole carentem / Si sibi laetitiae est, reor hac in parte beatum / ... Seu bona seu mala sit, prolis flet dona Lycurgus, / Nauplius, Evander, Priamus, Nestorque Creonque. / Innumeros taceo; tu de tot milibus unum / Vestigato patrem quem non stimularerit ingens / Aut timor aut fletus pro dulci prolis amore.”

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, poem 4, v. 13-14 : “et tu, melior patre, iungito patrem / Quem superas, propriis sic et superabere natis.”

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, poem 5, v. 8 : Heu quanto spes est minor illa timor”; poem 6, v. 6-8: “semper metuendane mors est? / Quod toti morimur Seneca improbat et Cato [...] virtutem oppone timori.”

others²⁰. The fact that the exchange closes by appealing to a judge is the surest sign that the debate was indeed conceived as a *tenson*. The chosen arbiter, Zambono di Andrea de Favafuschis, using the nickname of *Bos* (Ox), proceeds by repeating the whole discussion [232] in his own words before awarding the prize to Lovato. As Mussato objected, Zambono sent a further poem to another companion, Benvenuto Campesani, asking him to serve as an appeal judge and suggesting that Mussato should offer them all a dinner. This conclusion is a good reminder of the friendly and witty nature of the discussion. Besides sharing literary tastes, both debaters belonged to the Paduan college of judges, while Zambono and Campesani were prominent notaries in Padua and Vicenza. Performing such sophisticated literary exercise was an element of sociability among the cultural elite of the commune.

A historical reading of the whole sequence has to take into consideration the personal situation of each author. Deducing Lovato's status from the position he defended in the "Quaestio", Ronald Witt considers him childless²¹. Actually, this was not the case. Married to Jacopina di Vincenzo da Solesino, he could pride himself with at least three sons, Rolando, Polidamante and Giordano, and a daughter, Beatrice.²² The unusual name given to his second son was supposedly that of the son of Antenor, the mythological founder of Padua, whose tomb Lovato claimed to have identified on the occasion of extension works of an hospital in his neighborhood, and for whom he had a monument built in 1283.²³ Given the peculiarity of this name, it is highly probable that he is the "Polidamax Paduanus" who appears in a list of Dominican friars belonging to the local convent in March 1299.²⁴ Being a father, Lovato would yet depict fatherhood as a misfortune. This does not imply any lack of affection for his children nor a disappointment that they could not match the literary achievements of his nephew, Rolando da Piazzola, another major figure of the same circle; as a matter of fact, Lovato could have considered as his own son Rolando who had lost his father at an early age. The solution should rather be sought for in the relationship between the two debaters. Born in 1240, Lovato was an experienced man, by twenty years older than his friend. Mussato had married sometime before 1294 a daughter of the rich Lemizzi family. His only son we know of, Vitaliano, took his name from an important character on the mother's side.²⁵ He also had daughters [233] whose names are not documented. There is no sure ground for a precise dating of the "Quaestio", but

²⁰ *Ibid.*, poem 7, v. 1-2 : "Censuit Euripides ipsius nube sinistri / Felicem qui prole caret"; poem 8, v. 1-2: "Euripides inter reliqua infortunia dixit / Felices qui prole carent." See Boethius, *De consolazione Philosophiae*, III, 7, 6.

²¹ Witt, *In the footsteps*, p. 106.

²² Benjamin G. Kohl, "Lovati, Lovato", *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Roma: Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, 2006), t. 66, p. 215-220.

²³ Roberto Weiss, "Lovato dei Lovati (1241-1309)", *Italian Studies* 6 (1951): 2-28, see p. 8.

²⁴ *Il "Liber contractuum" dei frati Minori di Padova e di Vicenza (1263-1302)*, Elisa Bonatto ed. (Roma: Viella, 2002), 766. The dates could even suggest that Polidamante was given his name as a celebration of his father's discovery of Antenor's tomb, a few years before the monument was erected in 1283.

²⁵ Vitaliano del Dente Lemizzi, half-brother of Mabilia di Guglielmo Dente Lemizzi, was an important money lender and a prominent political figure, neighbour and step-brother of Enrico Scrovegni, cf. Giuliano Milani, *L'uomo con la borsa al collo. Genealogia e uso di un'immagine medievale* (Roma: Viella, 2017).

Mussato's marriage provides at least a sure *terminus post quem*, since the first poem describes him as a father. This very verse could in fact provide a reasonable explanation for the whole *tenson*: "The world admires you as such a fortunate father!"²⁶ More than stating a fact, this line rather sounds as if recording an event. In other words, the reason for the whole exchange could have marked an occasion, inspired by the birth of Mussato's first child. Instead of simply congratulating him, Lovato would have warned his friend against the hardships of fatherhood, the high risk of having to mourn a newborn child or a reckless youth and the perpetual anxiety caused by the love of fragile children. In sum, his part in the controversy offers a wise and learned advice from a senior man to a fresh and ingenuous young father. Is it up to the reader to decide whether some element of affectionate irony is also present in his speech. At any rate, his warnings were not unfounded. Vitaliano eventually caused the political downfall of his father, while taking part in a failed coup in Padua, at a time when Albertino was still active as an ambassador for the city. In his exile, the poet lamented this foolishness.²⁷ Yet he also dedicated to his son a series of poems based on Ovid's *Tristia*.²⁸

The Paduan erudites were not attempting to shape their lives on patterns set by ancient models, in the way Heloise once imagined her destiny as a protagonist of Ovid's *Heroides*. The classics were providing them with a moral and emotional repertoire out of which they could reflect on a life determined by very different principles. To achieve the status of leading political and cultural figures in Padua's civic life, there was no alternative to marriage, and preferably marriage into an important family, as Mussato had done. In turn, marriage entailed the production of an offspring. Medieval masculine identity implied fatherhood as a necessary attribute.²⁹ The lament of having children amounts to the lament of a social duty, not a rejection of it. Yet, it is interesting to note that this discussion is entirely conducted on a personal level and does not invoke the requirements of civic life. Although Mussato was later praised as a hero of the Commune for his chronicles as well as for [234] the *Ecerinis*, a tragedy inspired by Seneca depicting the tyranny of Ezzelino da Romano, his defense of fatherhood has no clear political justification, if only a general reference to the glory of Anchises' lineage.

Another less well known document may confirm this interpretation of the "Quaestio". It will take us to a similar milieu in Tuscany, a decade or two later. Geri d'Arezzo is now almost forgotten as an author, but Coluccio Salutati, chancellor of Florence in the last decades of the XIVth century, celebrated him on par with Mussato for his Latin eloquence, and considered them both as the sole forerunners of the

²⁶ Quaestio, poem 1, v. 11: "Sic fortunatum videant te saecula patrem".

²⁷ Giovanna Gianola, "Ipotesi su un'edizione trecentesca delle opere storiografiche di Albertino Mussato", *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 50 (2009): 123-77. See p. 170: "Et rerum mundanarum variatio fili, et urbis nostre status immutatio, nec non et morum tuorum vix unquam mihi credita depravatio, nos a rudimentorum tuorum serie et proposito inanis utilitatis abduxit."

²⁸ Jean-François Chevalier, "Albertino Mussato o la figura del poeta esiliato : edizione di un centone autobiografico dai *Tristia* di Ovidio", *Studi umanistici piceni* 30 (2010): 111-31

²⁹ Didier Lett, Aude-Marie Certin, "Ouverture," in Aude-Marie Certin ed., *Formes et réformes de la paternité à la fin du Moyen Age et au début de l'époque moderne* (Frankfurt : Peter Lang, 2016).

humanism he was propounding.³⁰ Holding a doctorate in civil law, active as a judge in various important positions in Central Italy, Geri had also been educated in the high literary tradition of his hometown.³¹ Among his poems and writings preserved in only one manuscript, a beautiful letter of consolation is addressed to a friend, Cambio di Poggibonsi, another learned lawyer, active as a judge in Florence and Bologna in the 1310s and 1320s.³² Cambio was in need of comfort for he frequently complained that his wife did not bear him a child.³³ Geri was compassionate. Admittedly, while the desire for children is natural for women, a man who remains sterile is of despicable condition.³⁴ Yet he should avoid dubious treatments against sterility, such as going to public baths for that purpose, drinking potions, or wearing magical phylacteries³⁵. Nor should he, in his pursuit of procreation, exceed the demands of modesty (the acceptable frequency of sexual intercourse is not explicitly stated). After these general observations, the core of the advice is grounded on personal experience. Geri claims to be in a good position to judge, since he has a first-hand knowledge of all possible situations. While his first [235] and now deceased wife had remained infertile, his second spouse gave him many children, some of whom died in infancy, only three of them surviving.³⁶ One son, Giovanni, became a notary in Arezzo, while another, Federigo was involved in literary activities and at times a correspondent of Petrarch.³⁷ As he tries to list all the inconveniences of paternity, Geri provides one the most poignant medieval expression of fatherly tenderness.³⁸

³⁰ Coluccio Salutati, *Epistolario*, ed. F. Novati, vol. 3 (Roma: Forzani, 1896), 84. Geri was rediscovered by Roberto Weiss, *Il primo secolo dell'umanesimo. Studi e testi* (Roma: Storia e letteratura, 1949), 51-66.

³¹ Helene Wieruszowski, "Arezzo as a Center of Learning and Letters in the Thirteenth-Century", *Traditio* 9 (1953): 321-391.

³² Geri d'Arezzo, *Lettere e Dialogo d'amore*, ed. Claudia Cenni, with Patricia Stoppacci (Pisa: Pacini, 2009), 78-82.

³³ *Ibid.*, "Sepenumero de fortune malignitate conquereris, domine Cambi, quod coniugem puerperam non habes, que et tui sui que voti in suscipienda sobole non compos anxiat.".

³⁴ *Ibid.*, "Indulgendum est enim si mater esse desiderat ; feminarum namque precipuum munus est concipere tuerique conceptum : quod ubi non datur, apud viros, quamvis uxorios, contemptui se esse arbitrantur". This point is confirmed by Coluccio Salutati, *Epistolario*, vol. 2, p. 368: "cuius rei gratia viros ac mulieres sterilitate notatos, vix homines et defectivos homines reputamus." More generally, see Didier Lett, *L'enfant des miracles. Enfance et société au Moyen Âge (XIIe-XIIIe siècles)* (Paris: Aubier, 1997), 242-244.

³⁵ Geri, *Lettere*, p. 78: "Neque enim illos tulerim steriles viros, qui ob id balnea frequentant, peregrinarum succos herbarum potant, potiones sorbillant et, quod ridiculosius est, anicularum imprecationibus credunt usque ad phylacteria curiosi et cartularum virginalium appendia, quo nichil profecto insulsius." Potions, syrups and baths are treatments suggested by the contemporary Montpellier doctor Bernard de Gordon in his *Tractatus de sterilitate mulierum* (Valladolid: Universidad, 1999).

³⁶ Geri, *Lettere*, p. 78: "Precessit uxor alia istam quam habeo dilectissimam michi : illa me patrem non fecit, infecunda ; ista plurium parentem effecit, quorum alii non ista, sed perpetua et vera luce perfruuntur, in ipso pene vite lumine revocati."

³⁷ Simona Foà, "Geri d'Arezzo", *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, t. 53, 2000, p. 412-413.

³⁸ For the expression of such feelings, see Didier Lett, *L'enfant des miracles. Enfance et société au Moyen Âge (XIIe-XIIIe siècles)* (Paris: Aubier, 1997), p. 154-156.

“I admit that the early childish years are extremely joyful; yet, they are full of tears, to such an extent that every single laughter is accompanied by ten noisy cries, which are very bitter for the parents.”³⁹

The evocation of sleepless nights caused by the noisy cradle is as vivid as the description of a household given by Heloise. Geri raises another important practical issue, perhaps with some degree of exaggeration: as the Tuscan mothers were refusing or neglecting to milk their babies, the cost of wet nurses was bringing families on the verge of ruin.⁴⁰ These young creatures are also frequently prone to untimely death or dangerous illnesses, leaving the parents helpless and continuously destroyed by anguish.⁴¹ Should they survive their early years, when adolescence comes, they succumb to many vices, disappointing their parents’ expectations of support and filial devotion. Ovid is quoted as alluding to sons awaiting their father’s death in order to grab their inheritance. All these negative aspects of having and raising children are meant to counterbalance the frustrated desire from which Cambio suffers. Geri’s conclusion is simply a counsel of patience, proposing that his friend be contented with whatever divine providence has prepared for him. Without explicitly naming him, Geri evokes Euripides as an example of the misfortune of childlessness accepted [236] happily.⁴² His peroration finally brings about a ray of hope. Perhaps God will eventually hear Cambio’s prayers and grace him with some “beautiful children”; for children are usually depicted as “beautiful” in such writings. *Tu interim gaude sorte tua* (“As for you, in the mean time, enjoy your fate”).⁴³

Geri’s letter shares a number of common references with Lovato and Mussato, but he could easily have accessed them on his own. It is therefore difficult to decide if he was aware of their “Quaestio”. Whatever the case, his subtle argumentation resolves the tension expressed in the Paduan debate. Having children is certainly desirable, and socially expected from every married couple, but it is also a terrible emotional and economic burden. The unfortunate parents lacking a descent can therefore find a motive of comfort in contemplating all the worries they avoid. Interestingly, the invocation of providence and the request of patience are shifting the mere erudite reflection on ancient fathers into a more encompassing Christian moral attitude. Yet again, no mention is made of any political duty to have and raise children.

³⁹ Geri, *Lettere*, p. 80: “Fateor etatula illa infantili iocosissimos esse : que tamen plena lacrimulis est, sic ut unus risus decem lacrimas comites habeat vociferas, parentibus amarissimas.”

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* On the early habit of wet nursing, See Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *La maison et le nom. Stratégies et rituels dans l’Italie de la Renaissance* (Paris: Éditions de l’EHESS, 1990), p. 263-289.

⁴¹ Geri, *Lettere*, p. 80 : “Nec prosequor acerbissimos in ipsis flosculis frequentesque obitus, quos cum adhuc dum ordirentur, succisos, inconsolabiliter deflemus: et ubi grandiusculi iam verbula ligatis sonis moliuntur, frequentes egretudines, ut illos sepe collectis protuberatos humoribus dum videmus, exanimemur: et cum ex levissimis causis insperatis febriculis ardere videmus, decoquimur, quibus annorum teneritudo necessarias morbi medelas non recepit. Taceo ad omnem strepitum domus, ad omnes equinos discursus, cordis incussa ex filiorum suspicata pernitie gelidi.” (Should I translate all this page ?)

⁴² Geri, *Lettere*, p. 82: “Meministi, si non decipior, illius, quod per multorum ora tritum non ineleganter evolvitur Greci preceptoris qui carentem liberis infortunio, dixit se esse felicem”. But the rejection of marriage is quickly brushed aside : “Sunt et qui fortunatum putent inuxoratum : sic ille Terentinus et quod fortunatum isti putant uxorem nunquam habuit, a quibus longe dissentio.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*: “Dabit forsitan Deus sollicitis precatibus tuis et votis auditum, ut pulcra faciat te prole parentem. Tu interim gaude sorte tua”.

This discussion, in both forms it takes, demonstrates that these poets-lawyers were aware of the peculiarity of their situation as married intellectuals. The dominant tendency was not an unambiguous celebration of their roles as head of families. Whatever their individual motivations, echoes of the anti-matrimonial discussion were still present in the background, especially in Lovato's case. It is therefore interesting to observe wider tendencies in that regard during this period. Although, in 1277, the bishop of Paris had accused the teachers of the Arts faculty of arguing in favor of the natural character of copulation and of reading Andreas Capellanus' *De amore*, their leading figure, Siger of Brabant, was himself defending an ascetic position, quite akin to that of Thomas Aquinas: marriage is strictly incompatible with philosophy; the search for "intellectual felicity" excludes any other type of pleasure.⁴⁴ In stark contrast, one generation later, the main Averroist philosopher in Italy, Antonio Pelacani of Parma, teacher at Bologna arts faculty in 1306-12 before becoming doctor and adviser to the lord of Milano Matteo Visconti, followed in Mussato's footsteps by marrying into the highest [237] society with the marchioness Mabilia Pallavicini⁴⁵. On the other hand, his contemporary Marsilio Mainardini of Padua, whose father was a friend and associate of Lovato, opted for a clerical status and sought for ecclesiastical benefices in order to achieve a remarkable career at Paris University where he was the first Italian to reach the position of a rector⁴⁶.

The social requirements of intellectual respectability in French and Italian institutions were still at odds. Yet, on both sides of the Alps, around the turn of the century, a growing interest for the pseudo-Aristotelian *Economics* demonstrates a willingness to enter into a philosophical discussion of the household, and thereby a recognition of the social duty of raising a family. An early translation, produced before 1250 and later updated by William of Moerbeke, failed to enter the philosophical curriculum and did not elicit any commentary. The new surge of interest appears to be connected with the more frequent reading of the *Politics*, whose first book contained a brief discussion of the household, as the basis out of which a city is composed. Both works were therefore frequently lectured upon in a row.⁴⁷ In 1295, Master Durand d'Auvergne, procurator of the Paris University at the Roman curia provided a new translation, with the help of two Greek bishops, during a stay at Anagni.⁴⁸ His version

⁴⁴ Siger de Brabant, *Écrits de logique, de morale et de physique*, ed. Bernardo Bazán (Louvain-Paris: Publications universitaires-Nauwelaerts, 1974), 102-3. See Luca Bianchi, "La felicità intellettuale come professione nella Parigi del Duecento," *Rivista di filosofia* 78 (1987):181-199. Alain De Libera, *Penser au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 181-245.

⁴⁵ Dragos Calma, "Pelacani, Antonio," *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, t. 82 (2015), 92-95.

⁴⁶ Yet, his close association with John of Jandun, who followed him in exile at the court of Lewis of Bavaria after the publication of the *Defensor pacis* in June 1324, with absolutely no reason besides their intimate connection, may suggest a different motive to his clerical commitment. Homosexuality could have been a crucial element in his option for celibacy.

⁴⁷ Christoph Flüeler, *Rezeption und Interpretation der aristotelischen Politica im späten Mittelalter*, Amsterdam-Philadelphie: Grüner, 1992) also contains a listing of all commentaries on the *Economics*.

⁴⁸ While the edition of the various Latin versions of the *Economics* by Christoph Flüeler in the "Aristoteles Latinus" series is still pending (but recently made available on the "Aristoteles Latinus" database), some of the results of his unpublished PhD are presented in Pavel Blažek, *Die mittelalterliche Rezeption der aristotelischen Philosophie der Ehe. Von Robert Grosseteste bis Bartholomäus von Brügge (1246/1247-1309)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007). The colophon of Durandus's translation is quoted in

became the basis for university lectures, among which we possess written traces of classes given by two leading “Averroists” of the following decades, Ferrand of Spain and Jean of Jandun. The most important contribution produced in Paris is the commentary by Bartholomew of Bruges, dedicated in 1309 to Annibaldo Caetani di Ceccano, nephew of the Cardinal Giacomo Stefaneschi, at the time student at Paris arts Faculty.⁴⁹ In the same period at the Montpellier medicine faculty, Armengaud Blaise, nephew of Arnau of Vilanova, translated from the Arabic the pseudo-Galenic *Economics* that [238] covered the same issues: possessions, servants, wife and children.⁵⁰ In Italy, Bartolomeo da Varignana commented upon the pseudo-Aristotle, probably sometime after he left Bologna in 1311, since the local examples he provides regard Venice and Chioggia.⁵¹ For all those authors, following Aristotle in the first book of the *Politics* or the *Economics*, the naturalness of marriage and procreation is taken for granted: “a household is not perfect without the production of children.”⁵² The French maverick political writer Pierre Dubois, who recalls having heard Siger himself lecturing on the *Politics*, went as far as expressing doubts about the relevance of clerical celibacy, in his ambitious plan to populate the Eastern Latin Kingdom.⁵³

Engelbert von Admont, who studied for a decade in Padua before turning back to his Austrian benedictine monastery around 1288, provides an interesting resolution of those conflicting traditions. His short treatise *Utrum sapienti competat ducere uxorem* (“Is it proper for the scholar to take a wife?”) recalls many classic arguments against marriage taken from Jerome, Walter Map and Ovid, before exposing a series of reasons in its favor, that are also backed by numerous literary examples.⁵⁴ The authority of the Aristotelian *Economics* that describes the “most pleasant and holy conjunction of husband and wife” (*jucundissima et sanctissima societas viri et mulieris*) demonstrates beyond any doubt that procreation and marriage are natural and necessary for the perpetuation of the human species. The frequency of misogynistic comments among the classics is explained away by drawing a list of unpleasant and

Nicole Oresme, *Le Livre de Yconomique*, ed. A. M. Menut, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 47-5 (1957) p. 787. On the context of Boniface VIII curia, see Dario Internullo, “Roma e gli ambienti pontifici,” in *Intorno a Dante. Ambienti culturali, fermenti politici, libri e lettori nel XIV secolo* (Roma: Salerno, forthcoming).

⁴⁹ Flueler, *Rezeption und Interpretation*.

⁵⁰ Martin Plessner, *Der Oikonomikos des Neupythagorers ‘Bryson’ und sein Einfluss auf die islamische Wissenschaft* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1928), 205-213, now repr. in Simon Swain, *Economy, Family and Society from Rome to Islam. A critical edition, English translation and Study of Bryson’s Management of the Estate*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 498-503.

⁵¹ Nancy Siraisi, “The *Libri Morales* in the Faculty of Arts and Medicine at Bologna: Bartolomeo da Varignana and the Pseudo-Aristotelian Economics”, *Manuscripta* 20 (1976): 105-118, repr. in Ead., *Medicine and the italian universities 1250-1600* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Roberto Lambertini, “L’arte del governo della casa. Note sul commento di Bartolomeo da Varignana agli *Oeconomica*”, *Medioevo* 17 (1991): 347-389.

⁵² Bartolomeo da Varignana, *Scriptum librum yconomicorum Aristotilis*, Venice, Biblioteca dei padri Redentoristi, Ms. 3, fol. 33r-50r, see f. 35r: “Quod autem domus non sit perfecta nisi adsit productio liberorum patet”.

⁵³ Pierre Dubois, *De recuperatione terrae sanctae. Traité de politique générale*, ed. Ch. V. Langlois, (Paris: Picard, 1891), 51, 121.

⁵⁴ Engelbert Admontensis, *Opuscula philosophica*, ed. C. Hueber (Regensburg: Peezil, 1725), p. 103-142, briefly discussed by P. Blažek, *Die mittelalterliche Rezeption*, who fails to note his Padua background.

evil women from sacred and profane history. Poets and philosophers had dissuaded from marriage with such examples in mind, to which Engelbert opposes a number of laudable ancient matrons. On the whole, marriage as such cannot be rejected for the common people. Yet, it is not fitting for the philosopher who devotes himself to higher speculation. Just like Abelard in the *Theologia christiana*, when speaking of philosophers, Engelbert had monastic life and his personal case in mind. As for the general situation, where marriage is an indispensable [239] social requirement, the final word is interestingly given to Aspasia (quoted through Cicero): “the question is solved when the best wife is married to the best husband”.⁵⁵

Engelbert is a useful landmark since he managed to absorb the best of both philosophical and literary culture available in Padua. Yet, his personal situation is not relevant to our discussion. Turning to Admont as an abbot, his example has little to tell us about the practical advantages and inconveniences of having children. For craftsmen and artists, the transmission of technical skills and know-how within the family was a rule. In the times and areas under discussion, it may suffice to remind the case of Nicola Pisano and his son Giovanni, the most remarkable sculptors of their age.⁵⁶ In the medical profession as well, dynastic transmission was frequent. Among doctors active in Bologna, Dino del Garbo or Bartolomeo da Varignana were born into medical families and had sons who continued their activities, the Florentine Garbo family persisting in the medical trade for centuries.⁵⁷ Poets had fewer skills and secrets to pass on to their descendants, except for the possession of books. If none of the characters under review was surpassed by his sons, a continuation in literary taste and activity is manifest in a number of cases, such as for Geri d’Arezzo. As is well known, two of Dante’s sons contributed to their father’s glory. Iacopo and Pietro Alighieri, who had followed their father in exile, were both among the first commentators of the *Commedia*, Iacopo returning to Florence while Pietro made a career as lawyer in Verona.⁵⁸

Law is another intellectual field in which the practical advantage of raising a family was sometimes obvious. Already in the mid-XIIIth century, Accursius, who had achieved an hegemonic position in the civil law faculty, lead quite an aggressive strategy in favor of his sons, while extorting money from his students through usurious loans. Francesco, born of a first marriage in 1225, achieved a brilliant career of his own, being a successful advisor to the king of England during the period in which the Lambertazzi faction to which he belonged was banished from Bologna. On the other hand, Cervetto, born of Accursius’ second marriage, is the epitome of a spoiled heir. Graduated at the scandalously young age of seventeen, inheriting the whole library of his father, he was a failure when he had to assume political responsibilities, and [240]

⁵⁵ Engelbert, *Opuscula*, p. 142: “et soluta est vobis quaestio, quando optimus optima et optima optimus est conjuncta.”

⁵⁶ Max Seidel, *Father and Son. Nicola and Giovanni Pisano* (München: Hirmer, 2012).

⁵⁷ On this cohort, Nancy Siraisi, *Taddeo Alderotti and his Pupils: Two Generations of Italian Medical Learning* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1981).

⁵⁸ Teresa De Robertis, Giuliano Milani, “Introduction,” in *Codice diplomatico dantesco* (Roma: Salerno, 2016), p. xxix-xxx. This new inquiry into the documentation related to Dante’s family has allowed to identify another son, Giovanni, and two daughters, Antonia and Beatrice.

was mocked for the fatuity of his legal opinions. Upon his return to Bologna, Francesco made sure that his father and himself were cleaned of their usurious reputations, before having a mausoleum built in his honor, emulating those of other important lawyers, in which he was himself later buried.⁵⁹

Taddeo Alderotti was in a similar predominant position within the arts faculty, but could not pass it on, since he only had a daughter and an illegitimate son. Likewise, Cino da Pistoia, the leading figure in civil law in the early XIVth Century, lacked the necessary basis to establish a dynasty. Instead of permanently moving to Bologna, he married in his hometown and chose to lead an itinerant career in various universities in central and southern Italy. Moreover, upon his death in 1337, he left only four daughters, none of whom appears to have married into the legal profession.⁶⁰ By any account, the most spectacular case of a successful family strategy is to be found among canon lawyers. Giovanni d'Andrea, born around 1270 of a modest grammar teacher in Bologna, became one of the most influential canonists in the first decade of the XIVth Century, quickly amassing possessions and prestige.⁶¹ His marriage to Milancia, daughter of the canonist Bonincontro dallo Spedale, played a part in this ascent, and he then applied the same strategy to his offspring. His two legitimate sons, Bonincontro and Federico, both became doctors in canon law, while his three daughters were all married to law professors.⁶² On top of this, he also thought fit to adopt his most talented student, Giovanni Calderini, who had become an orphan. Owing to his political abilities, he was able to remain a central personality in Bologna until his death in 1348, even while his son Bonincontro and the husband of his daughter Novella had to flee as political opponents in 1338. His preeminence was already such by 1317 that he was not only commissioned to write the new statutes of the faculty, but also obtained on that occasion an exorbitant privilege. While a careful distinction was drawn between chairs open to the locals or to foreigners, it was stated that he and his descent, through male or female lineage, could access indifferently any position. And in case he would decide to lecture on the recently published *Clementine* Decretals, regardless of any electoral procedure, he would be entitled to do so.⁶³ Giovanni Calderini, [241] who himself produced five sons in the course of three successive

⁵⁹ Renzo Grandi, *I monumenti dei dottori e la scultura a Bologna (1267-1348)* (Bologna: Istituto per la storia di Bologna, 1982).

⁶⁰ G. Zaccagnini, *Cino da Pistoia* (Pistoia, 1918).

⁶¹ Giorgio Tamba, "Giovanni d'Andrea", *DBI*, 55, p. 667-672.

⁶² He also managed to obtain important benefices in favour of his two illegitimate sons, Francesco and Gerolamo.

⁶³ Carlo Malagola, *Statuti delle Università e dei collegi dello studio bolognese* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1888), 38: "Et ubi forenses inveniri non possent forma predicta servata, tunc in deffectum eligi possit Bononiensis, salvis tamen privilegiis D. Iohannis Andree concessis et per diutinam consuetudinem et observantiam approbatis quod ipse et sui descendentes per lineam masculinam et qui tunc sunt vel fuerint mariti descendendum per eandem lineam ab eodem, libere et per omnia eciam ut forenses ad omnes sedes possint assumi [...] Si tamen contingit dominum Johannem Andree Clementinas legere velle, cesset hoc statutum, nec electus ad Sextum illas tunc legere teneantur." The phrase "et per diutinam consuetudinem et observantiam approbatis" probably represents an addition incorporated to the 1347 renewal of the statutes.

marriages, managed to have at least one of them occupying a chair in canon law, who benefited from this privilege until the very end of the XIVth century.⁶⁴

The extent to which Giovanni d'Andrea dominance over the canon law faculty became a family business is remarkably expressed in the way he refers, on three occasions, to the opinions of his wife Milancia. As Guido Rossi demonstrated, these advices never imply any sophisticated learning, beyond simple common sense.⁶⁵ Milancia is said to have opposed giving detrimental names to children. She also stated that, upon an invitation to lunch, the host should go and fetch the guest only if it were a woman or a person of high status. The third case is slightly more complex. When some leeks are planted in one parish, and then transplanted into a ground belonging to a different parish, to which church should the tithe be paid? Milancia proposed a simile with the mother and the wet nurse of a kid; the feeding of the latter does not obliterate the true motherhood of the first. Instead, Giovanni insisted on the reality of the transplantation in a new ground that did not occur in the case of a child. All in all, these three allusions, whose comic tone is obvious, amount to little more than Inspector Columbo's habit of referring to the sayings of his wife. In doing so, Giovanni d'Andrea demonstrated that he was not setting a barrier between his family life and his role as the leading professor in Bologna.

The legend that surrounds the teaching activities of his daughter Novella is even more interesting. The story that captured the imagination of many novelists is exclusively based on the report of Christine de Pizan, who proposed her example in the *Livre de la cité des dames*:

“Giovanni Andrea, the famous legist who taught at Bologna nearly sixty years ago, similarly opposed the view that women should not be educated. He gave his beloved daughter Novella, a fine and lovely girl, such a good education and detailed knowledge of law that, when he was busy with other tasks which prevented him from lecturing to his students, he could send his daughter in his place to read to them from his professorial chair. In order not to distract the audience by her beauty, Novella had a little curtain put up in front of her. Thus she lightened her father's load and relieved him of some of his duties. In his devotion to her, he chose to preserve her name for posterity by writing an important commentary on a legal text which he named *Novella* in her honor.”⁶⁶

As Guido Rossi demonstrated, Christine's father, Tommaso da Pizzano, held a chair of astrology and medicine in Bologna from 1344 to 1356. On at least one occasion, he acted together with Novella's brother in law, Giovanni da San Giorgio. Tommaso certainly had a first-hand knowledge of the Andrea family that he could have easily

⁶⁴ “Calderini, Giovanni”, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 16, 1973, p. 606-608. Interestingly, three of his sons were named after the Magi: Gaspare, Mechiorre, Baldassare. Gaspare is the one who became a doctor in canon law.

⁶⁵ Guido Rossi, “Contributi alla biografia del canonista Giovanni d'Andrea (L'insegnamento di Novella e Bettina, sua figlie, ed i presunti responsa di Milancia, sua moglie)”, *Rivista trimestrale di diritto e procedura civile* 11 (1957) 1451-1502, repr. in Id., *Studi e testi di storia giuridica medievale* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1997).

⁶⁶ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trad. Rosalind Brown-Grant (London: Penguin, 1999), 140-141.

passed on to his daughter, even more so since he held similar views on the education of girls. It should be noted that Christine does not refer to any source, while most of her other Italian stories are drawn from Boccaccio. All the details she provides appears to be accurate, except for the fact that the book was not named after the daughter. Both the daughter and the book, named in the same year (1312), were in fact recording the name of Giovanni's mother who had just passed away. It can therefore be accepted that Novella, on some occasions, did not properly lecture, but read aloud to the students her father's writings while he was busy elsewhere. More than a sign of women entering the public intellectual scene, this episode shows again that Giovanni d'Andrea was conceiving his control over the faculty as a family business.

At the time Christine was writing, in 1405, the discussion about marriage and children had shifted again. In the central decades of the XIVth Century, Petrarch had famously revived the anti-matrimony polemics, in some of his letters, sometimes drawing directly from Heloise,⁶⁷ but even more importantly in his *De remediis utriusque fortunae*. These brief dialogues between Reason and Joy or Grief provide harsh warnings against the worries of marriage and the many burden caused by the offspring, sometimes evocative of Geri's arguments. For instance, as a consolation, Petrarch presents the case of an infertile wife as the best remedy to escape the worries of fatherhood.⁶⁸ In the same period, while portraying a gallery of famous women (*De mulieribus claris*), Boccaccio wrote his deeply misogynistic *Corbaccio*.⁶⁹ The general [243] mood was to change again a few decades later, as demonstrates a long letter written by Coluccio Salutati in 1392, defending the good of marriage against Petrarch's criticism.⁷⁰ Many writings produced in the humanist milieu of the following decades attest to a similar defense of family life, among a new generation of lay intellectuals. More than Alberti's famous *Della famiglia* (1433-1440),⁷¹ Francesco Barbaro's *De re uxoria* (1415), written in Venice but dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici, was the first largely diffused manual on domestic life adapted to this new audience.⁷² Its large circulation was only overshadowed by the new translation and commentary on the *Economics* by Leonardo Bruni (ca. 1421) that achieved an enormous success, with over 200 manuscripts and five printed editions in the XVth century.⁷³

Christine was their contemporary, but she did not belong to the same world. Through her father, she was the heir of the earlier Italian university culture of the mid-XIVth century. But her major intellectual inspiration was drawn from the great French

⁶⁷ See for instance, Francesco Petrarca, *Le Familiari*, ed. Vittorio Rossi (Firenze: Sansoni, 1934), 35.

⁶⁸ Petrarch, *De remediis utriusque fortune. Les remèdes aux deux fortunes*, ed. and trans. Christophe Carraud (Grenoble : Millon, 2002). See I, 67, De uxore fecunda et facunda ; I 70, De ortu filiorum ; I, 71 De filio infante festivo ; II, 12 De numerose prolis gravi sarcina ; II, 22 De uxore sterili.

⁶⁹ Dated to 1365 by Giorgio Padoan.

⁷⁰ Coluccio Salutati, *Epistolario*, vol. 2, p. 365-374.

⁷¹ Leon Battista Alberti, *I libri della famiglia*, ed. Francesco Furlan (Torino: Einaudi, 1994).

⁷² Francesco Barbaro, *The Wealth of Wives: A Fifteenth-Century Marriage Manual*, ed. and trans. Margaret L. King (Toronto-Tempe: Iter Academic Press-Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2015).

⁷³ Josef Soudek, "The Genesis and Tradition of Leonardo Bruni's Annotated Latin Version of the (pseudo-) aristotelian Economics," *Scriptorium* 12 (1958), 260-268; Id., "Leonardo Bruni and his Public: A statistical and interpretative study of his annotated latin version of the (pseudo-) aristotelian Economics", *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 5 (1968): 51-136.

academic Nicole Oresme who produced, among other things, a French commented translation of the *Economics*.⁷⁴ As a widow and mother of three children whom she was raising while making her living as a woman of letters, she had many reasons to fight misogynistic prejudice. The *Livre de la cité des dames* contains a chapter that argues against the irrational habit to prefer having boys rather than girls. Interestingly, Christine manages to quote Petrarch in order to depict the ungrateful behavior of children, which she attributes especially to boys. To the contrary, she insists that daughters are by far less troublesome, and care much more for their aging parents.⁷⁵ I do concur.

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⁷⁴ ed. Menut (*cit.*).

⁷⁵ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, ch. II, 7, p. 101-3.