

Caterina Imperiale Lercari Pallavicini, marchioness of Mombaruzzo fl. 1721

Caterina Imperiale Pallavicini was an 18th-century Neo-Latin poet from the greater Genoa region. Her work, which was published in the collections of the Pontifical Academy of Arcadia (Pontificia Accademia degli Arcadi), includes epigrams (short, witty, often satirical poems) and elegies (poems of serious reflection, written in elegiac couplets). The Academy of Arcadia was an Italian literary society that had its beginnings in a literary circle created by Queen Christina of Sweden. Queen Christina (1626-1689) was herself so scholarly and intelligent that she defied the expectations of her sexist teachers, forcing them to concede that she was “not at all like a female” because she had “a bright intelligence.”¹ In 1654, Queen Christina abdicated her throne, converted to Catholicism, and moved to Rome. It was there in 1656 that she started gathering literary scholars and writers into her social circle. After the death of this unconventional queen, the group of writers that had gathered formalized their society by creating the Pontificia Accademia degli Arcadi. This academy wanted to move away from the Baroque poetry gaining popularity at the time and instead pursue classic, bucolic poetry in the Greco-Roman tradition. Members of the academy even adopted “pastoral” pen names. Caterina’s pastoral name was Arsinda Poliades. She was considered a full member of the society and had work published in (at least) the 1721 edition of the society’s publication, *Arcadum Carmina*. This edition was also reprinted in 1757. Though many women belonged to the Academy throughout its approximately 200 year history, of the 33 authors present in the 1721 book of poems, Caterina is the only female author to appear. Her work also differs from the work by male authors in the collection because she is one of only six authors to write epigrams. The longer elegy and eclogue (pastoral) formats are much more popular among her male counterparts.

Like so many historical women, we do not know as much as we should about Caterina’s life. What we do know, however, makes it clear that she had access to the Academy of Arcadia and to the education necessary to compose Latin poetry due to her high social status. Caterina was born into and married into extremely important families. During the time of her writing, she was the marchioness² of Mombaruzzo. Mombaruzzo is a municipality in the Asti province in the Piedmont region of what is now Italy, but was being contested by France at the time of Caterina’s life. Mombaruzzo is about 100 km (60 mi) from Genoa, and the Pallavicini family into which Caterina married profited greatly off of Genoan trade for hundreds of years (since the 15th century!). Records suggest that Caterina’s paternal grandfather, Ansaldo Imperiale Lercari, was close trading partners with the Pallavicini family. When Caterina married Paolo Gerolamo III Pallavicini, she brought the Palazzo Cosma Centurione (now a UNESCO World Heritage site) with her as a dowry. This palazzo was in the family of her paternal great-grandfather, Adamo Centurione, marquess of Monasterio, and further illustrates the illustrious background that afforded Caterina the opportunity to learn and be published in Latin.

¹ One wonders how many women would have been “not at all like females” if men had not systematically denied them education.

² The rank of nobility below duchess.

Learn More

Caterina Imperiale Lercari Pallavicini's Poems

Arcadum Carmina: Pars Prior. Rome: Antonius de Rubeis, 1721.

[https://www.google.com/books/edition/_/OuNfAAAAcAAJ?hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUK
EwjuiMvopvjsAhWBKs0KHZ2jD3IQ7_IDMAx6BAGQEAU](https://www.google.com/books/edition/_/OuNfAAAAcAAJ?hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjuiMvopvjsAhWBKs0KHZ2jD3IQ7_IDMAx6BAGQEAU)

Arcadum Carmina: Pars Prior. Rome: J. & P. de Rubeis, 1757.

[https://www.google.com/books/edition/Arcadum_carmina/O9ReAAAAcAAJ?hl=en&gb
pv=0](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Arcadum_carmina/O9ReAAAAcAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)

Caterina Imperiale Lercari Pallavicini's Life and Family

Bologna, Marco. *Gli Archivi Pallavicini di Genova*. Genova: Società Ligure di Storia Patria, 1994 (digitally, 2012).

[https://www.egadimythos.it/___MATERIE/02\)%20LA%20STORIA/ASLi_ns_34_1%20
verifica.pdf](https://www.egadimythos.it/___MATERIE/02)%20LA%20STORIA/ASLi_ns_34_1%20verifica.pdf)

“Genoa: Le Strade Nuove and the system of the Palazzi dei Rolli.” World Heritage Center. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Accessed November 10, 2020. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1211>

Marsilio, Claudio. “Pallavicino, Paolo Gerolamo. Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani - Volume 80 (2014),” Treccani. Accessed November 10, 2020.

[https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/paolo-gerolamo-pallavicino_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)
/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/paolo-gerolamo-pallavicino_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

The Pontifical Academy of Arcadia

Dixon, S. M. (1999) "Women in Arcadia", *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 32(3), pp. 371–375.

Dixon, S. M. (2006) *Between the real and the ideal: the Accademia degli Arcadi and its garden in eighteenth-century Rome* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press).

Queen Christina of Sweden

Popp, Nathan Alan. "Expressions of power: Queen Christina of Sweden and patronage in Baroque Europe." PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) thesis, University of Iowa, 2015.

<https://doi.org/10.17077/etd.117f2yt2>



Palazzo Cosma Centurione
Photo by Antoine Pitrou



Stamp of the Academy of Arcadia
Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni, L'istoria
della volgar poesia, Roma, 1714