

Italian reception, tradition and translation of Giovanni Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*

1. Introduction

Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* is a collection of women's biographies written in several stages between approximately 1360 and 1370. In the 14th century, it was translated at least twice into the Italian vernacular (a process that we shall here call vulgarization¹): once by Donato Albanzani (c. 1326 – c. 1411) and once by Antonio da Sant'Elpidio (c. 1330 – post 1386). Following the diffusion that had begun in the late 14th century, after 1400 the work crossed the Alps, spreading through translations, forgeries and imitations.² The reception in the Italian Peninsula was more modest during this century and was revitalized in the Cinquecento,³ especially due to a third vulgarization, that of Giuseppe Betussi (c. 1515–75) who sympathized with the mistreated and scattered condition of the Boccaccian work, “come s'in se non contenesse merito alcuno” (Betussi 1545, n.p.).

Overall, the enthusiasm for the compendium waned in the 17th and 18th centuries in both the Italian Peninsula and the rest of Europe. While Boccaccio's literary production was still recognized, his work as a scholar must have seemed then somewhat obsolete. At least in Italy, it took until the 19th century for interest in Boccaccio's scholarly Latin works to reappear. This recovery happened at the hands of a young neo-Guelph priest from Montecassino, Luigi Tosti (1811–97), who published Albanzani's vulgarization (Boccaccio 1836 and 1841) based on a codex from the abbey's archives. Another edition of Albanzani's work (Boccaccio 1881 and 1882) appeared a few decades later, having been finished by the Republican

¹ The neologism, coined from the Italian *volgarizzamento*, will be used to refer to translations into a Romance language, whether medieval or modern. The word “vulgarization,” rather more related to haphazard propagation and popularization, is to be avoided.

² “Amara sorte quella del Boccaccio latino nel Quattrocento e nel Cinquecento! La sua fortuna fu insieme la sua sfortuna,” says Zaccaria (1977–78, 295–96) regarding the plagiarism and appropriations suffered by the *De mulieribus claris* in this period.

³ For a further examination regarding the return to relevance of the *De mulieribus claris* in 16th-century Italy, see Kolsky 2005.

Count Giacomo Maria Manzoni (1816–89), who was avowedly motivated by a desire to correct the problems in Tosti's version.

The latest complete Italian translation, prepared by Vittorio Zaccaria (1916–2015), was published in 1967, six hundred years after that of Albanzani's esteemed precursor. This translation (Boccaccio 1970 in the 2nd ed.) was based on the Latin text established by Zaccaria himself from Boccaccio's autograph manuscript, which was identified in 1959 by Pier Giorgio Ricci (1912–76). On the one hand, Zaccaria's bilingual (Latin and Italian) publication had the merit of disseminating the *De mulieribus claris* as well as expanding access to the work through its translation. On the other, the implication that a text thus established would diminish the value of studies of other witnesses of the tradition may have obliterated the “non-official” editions.⁴ Even though Zaccaria's publication was widely accepted, it stopped being printed after its second edition in 1970, which led to another limitation of readers' access to the work.⁵ As the scholar Elsa Filosa (2012, 38) once lamented, it is impossible to find it even in antiquarian bookstores.

The text established by Zaccaria has been reproduced and used as a touchstone for translation in other bilingual editions, such as Virginia Brown's (1940–2009) Latin-English (Boccaccio 2001), Violeta Díaz-Corrales's Latin-Spanish (Boccaccio 2010) and Jean-Yves Boriaud's Latin-French (Boccaccio 2013). In Brazil, some Latin chapters of Zaccaria's edition were partially reproduced and translated into Portuguese by Talita Janine Juliani (2011 and 2016) during her master's and doctoral research. A complete translation of the work in Portuguese, prepared by the present author, is scheduled to be published in 2023 by the Federal University of Paraná Press.

⁴ “Poiché l'autografo, fortunatamente conservatoci, rappresenta l'ultima fase di redazione, [...] il problema del testo del *De mulieribus claris* è alquanto semplice e si riduce al controllo dell'autografo con gli altri manoscritti, per correggere eventuali errori materiali di trascrizione” (Zaccaria 2001, 13). In other words, there would be no reason to study the other manuscripts, witnesses of other phases, except as a counterpoint to the autograph. This gap has been flagged by tradition, for whom the witnesses of the “non-definitive” phases “meriterebbero un più stringente e persuasivo inquadramento stemmatico e storico-culturale” (Malta 2013, 197).

⁵ A digitized version of Zaccaria's edition was made available on the Ente Nazionale Giovanni Boccaccio website by January 24th, 2022. Recently (January 13th, 2023), the Ente informed via its *Facebook* page that, thanks to the efforts of Valentina Rovere e Nicola Esposito, all the volumes in Branca's *Tutte le opere* series are now available at <https://www.enteboccaccio.it>.

Among the Italian editions prior to Zaccaria's translation, the one by Manzoni stands out as the most philologically and editorially polished. The edition is especially relevant for its textual and paratextual particularities. The text contributes to the history of the work by presenting previously unpublished information on the date of Albanzani's vulgarization. It should be noted that the actual date depends on the identification of the second Marquis d'Este, who died in 1388, as the dedicatee (Boccaccio 1882, 391), and not the third, as was previously believed. This identification has been ignored even by 21st-century scholars who either overlook the Manzonian edition or have not read it carefully. Consequently, the date of 1395, known to be incorrect since the late 19th century, has been repeatedly attributed to Albanzani's work until the present day. Additionally, paratextual elements, such as Manzoni's notes and comments, offer a privileged view of social, political and linguistic issues of pre- and post-Unification Italy. Its relevance has led to a specific study of Manzoni's edition and of his (and Tosti's) recovery of a vernacular text of the *De mulieribus claris* within the 19th-century context.

2. The reception of the *De mulieribus claris* in relation to its compositional stages

After Attilio Hortis (1850–1926) realized, in 1879, that the *De mulieribus claris* existed in more than one version, Guido Traversari and several other scholars set out to investigate the compositional stages of the work.⁶ Traversari (1907a) provided a significant contribution to the topic and prepared a chronological bibliography of Boccaccio's critical fortune (Traversari 1907b) based on his own and others' studies. This list, which records and describes 1124 publications (the first from 1467 and the last from 1906), allows us to identify the main moments of the Italian reception of the *De mulieribus claris*. In Traversari's bibliography, the first explicit mention of the work is in regard to the 1545 vulgarization by Giuseppe Betussi⁷ (Boccaccio 1545). Three centuries then pass before the second explicit mention: Luigi Tosti's 1836 edition and its 1841 reprint of Albanzani's vulgarization (Boccaccio 1836 and 1841). Titles such as these, which deal exclusively with the *De mulieribus claris*, reemerged in the second half of the 19th century, notably after 1875, the 500th anniversary of Boccaccio's

⁶ Although it was aimed to inform the birth and death dates of deceased Boccaccian tradition authors, no data was found on Traversari.

⁷ It is noteworthy that the compiler did not include Betussi's translation in the onomastic index entry devoted to *De mulieribus claris* (which appears as *De claris mulieribus* in the bibliography).

death. Among them were a study by Hortis (1877), Albanzani's vulgarization by Giacomo Manzoni (Boccaccio 1881 and 1882), first edited in 1875, two German articles (from 1892 and 1895) regarding *De mulieribus claris* manuscripts, the studies by Laura Torretta (1876-1965) (1902a and 1902b) and the aforementioned study by Traversari (1907a), dated however 1906. Works non-exclusively addressing the work appear in 1873, 1875, 1876, 1877 (2), 1879 (2), 1888, 1891 (2), 1892 (2), 1895, 1898, 1899, 1900, 1902, 1903 and 1905 (Traversari 1907b, pp. 242–43). In total, the list registers 24 works on the *De mulieribus claris*, four of them dedicated to its compositional stages.

The hypothesis regarding the compositional stages of the *De mulieribus claris* was originally formulated by Hortis during research on other subjects carried out in Italian and other European libraries. Collating Boccaccian codices by chance, Hortis identified at least two witnesses (BML, ms. Pluteo LII 29, and BAV, ms. Urbinate 451) containing readings and configurations distinct from the those of the 1539 Bern Latin edition, familiar at the time (Hortis 1879, 912 and 915), which comprised 106 biographies distributed in 104 chapters, with the last one dedicated to Queen Joanna I (1326–82). The biographies were followed by a conclusion and preceded by a dedication to Andrea Acciaiuoli (1320–73) — sister of Niccolò Acciaiuoli (1310–65), grand seneschal of the kingdom of Naples — and by a proem to the readers. Because it was not possible in Hortis' time to know with certainty that the Bern edition's configuration (except for the biography of Brunhilde, not included by Boccaccio) was the definitive one, scholars commonly speculated on the collection's compositional stages and the 'actual' configuration. Both documents found by Hortis contained neither the chapter on Queen Joanna nor the conclusion, and biographies were organized in a different order. Moreover, one of them (BML, ms. Pluteo LII 29) contained lengthier biographies. For Hortis, these facts indicated the careful attention Boccaccio devoted to the composition of his writings, “rifacendone talora interamente i singoli capitoli. Che questi del codice laurenziano *presentino la prima versione*, non sarà dubbio a chi vorrà confrontarli co' già stampati” (Hortis 1879, 111, emphasis added).

Later research validated and refined Hortis' findings. Oskar Hecker (1902, as cited in Torretta 1902a, 259 and Traversari 1907a, 226) confirmed the existence of at least two redactions of the *De mulieribus claris*, as well as the presence of a dedication to Andrea Acciaiuoli already in the first. Hortis, noticing that the dedication to Andrea addressed her as Countess of Altavilla, concluded that it was written after 1357, since her brother had addressed her in a letter of this same year by the title of her first husband, Count of Monteodorisio. Indeed, the fact that Boccaccio de-

scribed her as having “joyous youth and floral loveliness” suggested a composition not much later than 1357 since, according to the conceptions of that time, Andrea would already be considered mature at the age of 37.⁸ Regarding the dating, Hortis endorses Marcus Landau’s hypothesis (1877, 213, as cited in Hortis 1879, 89 n. 2) that the first composition could be no later than 1362. Similarly, Boccaccio’s allusion in Queen Joanna’s biography to her husband’s “grim ways” — “austeros mores” — must refer to a period before May 26, 1362, when Luigi di Taranto (1320–62), the monarch’s second husband, died. Likewise, it could not be a reference to her third marriage, contracted in December 1362 with Jaime of Majorca IV (1336–75), of whom Boccaccio had a good opinion. Thus, the version of the *De mulieribus claris* that includes the biography of Joanna was likely composed during the seven months in 1362 when the queen was widowed and unmarried. In fact, this same period coincides with Niccolò Acciaiuoli’s invitation to Boccaccio to come to the Neapolitan court. These two milestones — after 1357 and summer/autumn of 1362 — will be considered the dates, respectively, of the work’s first and second compositional stages since the dedication to Andrea appears in both, while the biography of Joanna is present only in the second. This same conclusion is reported in Torretta’s study (1902a, 259–60), which also quotes Landau’s interpretation of the passage the “grim ways of her husbands.” Hortis’ initial hypothesis and its confirmation by Hecker, as well as his hypotheses regarding the dating of the two stages, are summarized and affirmed by Traversari (1907a). An examination of codices from the *De mulieribus claris*’ first and second compositions allowed him to refine his findings regarding the different orders of the biographies in each phase, further narrowing the period during which the second compositional stage could have been completed: ultimately it must have been composed not between May and December, but between May and October of 1362. Traversari surmises that Boccaccio would have already released the first version prior to this period, dedicating it to the sister of Niccolò Acciaiuoli. As our author was later invited to the Neapolitan court, he would have made additions and corrections. These changes, which characterize the second composition, include the addition of the biography of the recently widowed queen, to whose favors Boccaccio was not indifferent. Notably, he added a statement about the innocence of Queen Joanna who had been accused of the murder of

⁸ Hortis 1879, 89, n. 2. Other studies suggest 1353 as the year of Andrea’s marriage to Bartolomeo di Capua, the Count of Altavilla, which would move the first composition’s *terminus post quem* back by a few years (Argurio and Rovere 2017, 18).

her first husband, Andrew of Hungary (1327–45).⁹ This defense would have gained legitimacy by being included in a volume intended to be historical and “objective” (Traversari 1907a, 234–35). Accepting Hortis’ hypothesis of 1357 as *terminus post quem*, Traversari proposes as *terminus ante quem* 1359, after which Boccaccio would have become occupied with Leontius Pilatus’ Greek lessons and the translation of Homer (Traversari 1907a, 235). He also hazards a historical-temporal reference for the dedication’s *incipit*, in which Boccaccio affirms that he wrote the work when he was distant from the vulgar and free from other thoughts.¹⁰ For Traversari, this moment must have been after 1355, the date of the *Corbaccio*, and before 1359, by which time Boccaccio was studying Greek (1907a, 236).

The early-20th-century works by Torretta and Traversari are based on, and consolidate, the efforts in the last quarter of the 19th century to date the *De mulieribus claris*. This interest in Boccaccio’s writing tradition seems to increase throughout the 20th century, as evidenced by the volume by Vittore Branca (1913–2004), *Tradizione delle opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, a product of at least twenty years of contact with more than 1,500 witnesses of Boccaccio’s literary legacy (Branca 1958, ix). In this bibliography, Branca mentions the preparation of a collection, organized by him, of the complete works of Boccaccio (1958, xxxix, n. 1). The tenth volume of this collection would include the Latin-Italian *De mulieribus claris* edited by Vittorio Zaccaria (Boccaccio 1970). Branca organized the *Tradizione* according to the language (vernacular Italian and Latin), then by titles in alphabetical order (except for the *Decameron*, which is prior to all others) and then by the cities of the libraries and collections that house the witnesses. The Laurentian Library in Florence appeared as the owner of ms. Pluteo 90 sup., 98¹ (Branca 1958, 93), already listed by Hortis (1879, 912) and consulted by Manzoni (1882, xxviii) for his edition of Albenzani’s vulgarization. This is the autograph manuscript that will be identified by Pier Giorgio Ricci during the preparation of his edition of Boccaccio’s works, published in 1965, to which he acknowledges the invaluable contribution of Branca’s list (Ricci 1965, 1259, n. 1, and 1275). Ricci’s volume is part of the refined collection *La letteratura italiana: storia e testi*,

⁹ Although she was probably not the principal, the queen was close to the accomplices in the crime (Kiesewetter 2001).

¹⁰ “Pridie, mulierum egregia, paululum ab inerti vulgo semotus et a ceteris fere solutus curis, in eximiam muliebris sexus laudem ac amicorum solatium, potius quam in magnum rei publice commodum, libellum scripsi” (Boccaccio 1970, 18): “A short time ago, gracious lady, at a moment when I was able to isolate myself from the idle mob and was nearly carefree, I wrote — more for my friends’ pleasure than for the benefit of the broader public — a slim volume in praise of women” (Boccaccio 2001, 3).

from 1951, published by Riccardo Ricciardi. Ricci is in charge of the collection's ninth volume, the second one¹¹ containing works by Boccaccio. The edition presents copies, in full or partial form, of the work in verse, the *Corbaccio*, the *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, epistles, and the Latin prose, in which the *De mulieribus claris* is included. From it, Ricci selects the dedication, preface, conclusion, and 19 biographies, including the one of Joanna. This content is published in Latin, coming from the autograph manuscript and other texts of the tradition, and also in Italian. The source of the Italian version is Albanzani's vulgarization in Manzoni's edition but revised according to the editor's taste (Ricci 1965, 1259 and 1261).

In the critical notes of this partial edition of *De mulieribus claris*, Ricci (1965, 1275–76) mentions the discovery of the autograph manuscript. He believes that this finding had broken once and for all with the “errori penosi” of the old editions and the “pazze congetture” regarding the work's dating and definitive composition. Besides the opportunity to read the work in the author's last version, having a secure text at one's disposal would unravel (*disincagliare*) studies on the *De mulieribus claris* from its “prolungato abbandono”; in Ricci's opinion, all that had been written up to that point in the 20th century would be summarized as only a few contributions, among them the works of Torretta (1902a; 1902b) and Traversari (1907a). Citing his own (Ricci 1959) and Zaccaria's (1963) studies, he concludes that the autograph is datable to the final years of Boccaccio's life (c. 1370). Ricci agrees with Zaccaria that the first compositional phase (of 74 biographies) took place in 1361 and the second (of 106) in the summer of 1362, and then goes on to break the two periods into seven distinct writing stages (Ricci 1965, 1276–77). Zaccaria later divided the composition into nine: five in the first phase (I to V) and four in the second (VI to IX). The autograph — probably a copy to be gifted — provides evidence for the last two stages: the eighth in text and the ninth in corrections (Zaccaria 1963, 324–25). In a later work, Zaccaria identifies Albanzani's vulgarization as a witness of writing stage VI; i.e., of the first stage of the second compositional phase (1977–78, 289). This stage already possesses the definitive structure of the work, but not some lexical changes that Boccaccio would add later.¹²

¹¹ The first one was published in 1952, in the eighth volume, edited by Enrico Bianchi, Carlo Salinari and Natalino Sapegno, which contained the *Decameron*, *Filocolo*, *Ameto* and *Fiammetta*.

¹² In fact, in 2001 Zaccaria published a volume with studies on Boccaccio's Latin production, in which he proposes corrections to his own edition of the *De mulieribus claris* and expresses the hope that they will be welcomed in an eventual new edition. Zaccaria

It is intriguing that Ricci and Zaccaria place the first composition of the *De mulieribus claris* in 1361 and not around 1357, as tradition would have it. In their opinion, the dedication to Andrea would not have been part of the first three compositional stages. Instead, it must have been included in a manuscript of the fourth stage, written in 1362, after Niccolò had invited Boccaccio to the court of Naples. The fact that this dedication appears in all the witnesses, including those from before 1362, would be explained by Zaccaria as a later addition made by Boccaccio to these earliest versions (1963, 293). Another justification has to do with Boccaccio's reference in the dedication to a period of solitude away from the common people. Our author had indeed been in voluntary exile in Certaldo in 1361 (Zaccaria 1970, 3–4) as a precaution against possible accusations of involvement in the conspiracy, in which some of his friends were implicated, that took place in Florence at the end of 1360. In Filosa's opinion (2015–16, 166),¹³ the 1361 hypothesis is further reinforced by a textual construction of the dedication's *incipit*, in which “praise of women” and “comfort to friends” are placed on the same level as motivations for the composition of the work.¹⁴

Other scholars, however, disagree with these positions. Giuliano Tanturli and Stefano Zamponi regard the arguments for the 1361 hypothesis as tenuous and uncertain (2013, 63), while Silvia Argurio and Valentina Rovere (2017, 18) consider the reference as rhetorical rather than historical. At any rate, the information related to Andrea Acciaiuoli's marriage seems historically valid. Since the dedication is already shown in the codices of the first stage, only a witness from that stage in which the dedication was absent could invalidate the 1357 hypothesis. In short, some of these date limits, proposed between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, re-

bases some of these amendments on witnesses of stage VI because they “ristabiliscono quasi sempre la lezione esatta o almeno più verosimile” (Zaccaria 2001, 14 and 20).

¹³ See also Monti: “questa datazione [1361] troverebbe conferma nella dichiarazione [from Boccaccio] di scrivere non per il vantaggio dello Stato ma a consolazione degli amici: l'opera è dunque da porre in stretta relazione con l'esito della crisi politica e della decisione di ritirarsi a vita privata” (2021, 219).

¹⁴ In Latin: “[...] in eximiam muliebris sexus laudem ac amicorum solatium, potius quam in magnum rei publice commodum, libellum scripsi” (Boccaccio 1970, 18, emphasis added). Zaccaria (Boccaccio 1970, 19) translates *amicorum solatium* as “conforto degli amici.” Guarino (Boccaccio 1963, xxxiii) and Brown (Boccaccio 2001, 3) translate it in English as “friends' pleasure.” The ‘conspiracy explanation,’ therefore, depends on taking *solatium* to mean comfort rather than pleasure. Even if Boccaccio's motivation was the pleasure of friends, the friends to whom he refers may not be those involved in the plot. For recent information on the historical circumstances of Boccaccio's exile in Certaldo, see Filosa 2022.

main true to this day. New data — obtained with the recognition of the autograph manuscript and its philological analysis — demonstrate that Boccaccio continued to polish the text throughout the 1360s. If the dedication of the first composition indicates Niccolò Acciaiuoli as the one from whom our author might expect favors, the inclusion of Joanna in the second composition and the polishing in the final stages of this phase suggest that Boccaccio recognized the queen’s importance. Since Acciaiuoli died in 1365, however, it was not his favor that our writer was seeking when preparing the *bella copia* in the early 1370s. On the other hand, the moment coincides with the most fortunate period of Joanna’s reign, between 1366 and 1378 (Kiesewetter 2001), when she ruled with relative autonomy, without the marital pressures faced until then (Cerentini 2021).

Be that as it may, Boccaccio’s project of occupying a place in that “tanto amata corte angioina che fino agli ultimi anni di vita fu al centro delle sue speranze e delle sue delusioni” (Argurio and Rovere 2017, 25) did not come true. He dies in 1375 and, a few years later, when Joanna is also no longer alive, Donato Albanzani presents his volgarization to the public, but in a version different from the one Boccaccio last knew. Among other modifications,¹⁵ Albanzani adds a far less prestigious sequel to the biography of the queen, in which he also criticizes Boccaccio for his unfounded praise of the monarch.¹⁶

Before turning our attention to this volgarization, it is useful to consider the circulation of *De mulieribus claris* since its composition in the 14th century until its recovery in the 19th century.

3. The manuscript and print tradition

We have already seen that the reception of *De mulieribus claris* was intense between the 14th and 16th centuries but diminished in the 17th and 18th until its revitalization in the 19th. One way of understanding these trends is through the analysis of bibliographies, whose listings and descriptions of codices, incunabula and printed material give us a glimpse of the diachronic evolution of the *De mulieribus claris* tradition. One of the most reliable of these bibliographies is the catalog of 13th- and 14th-century vernacular works printed in the 19th century that was organized by Francesco Zambrini and published in 1857, 1861, 1866, 1878 and 1884.

¹⁵ Albanzani excluded the dedication to the Countess of Altavilla, the biography of Julia Soemia (mother of the emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, known widely as Helio-gabalus), the proem and Boccaccio’s conclusion.

¹⁶ For a semiotic study on the discursive strategies operated by Boccaccio in the structure of the *De mulieribus claris* and Joanna’s biography, see Baggio 2022.

In the preface to the inaugural volume, Zambrini does not hide his affiliation with purist language movements. The author believed that the numerous extant examples of printed late-medieval texts demonstrated the interest in *trecentista* Tuscan and legitimized its recovery as the national language (Zambrini 1857, vii–xv). The first three editions of Zambrini’s volume cite Albanzani’s vulgarization in Tosti’s two editions. In the fourth (published in 1878), he also records the first version of Manzoni’s edition, published in 1875. Manzoni’s 1881–82 version is listed in the appendix of the 1884 catalog, along with other data from the 1875 edition that is quite significant, if true, as they describe an apparently lost publication.¹⁷ It is believed that the volume was 176 pages long (compared to the 400 of the later edition) and that a few copies were dedicated to Certaldo’s mayor and other city officials on the occasion of the fifth centenary of Boccaccio’s death (Zambrini 1884, column 17).

The celebrations of 1875 also saw the publication of Alberto Bacchi della Lega’s original bibliography related to Boccaccio’s works, covering Latin and vernacular printings, translations and transformations. Concerning the *De mulieribus claris*, five Latin titles are cited, as well as four in German, three in French, two in Spanish, one in English and ten in Italian — including Tosti’s two editions and Manzoni’s 1875 edition (Bacchi della Lega 1875, 21–26).

Although Hortis did not publish any bibliographies, he included them in his study on the Latin works of Boccaccio (Hortis 1879, 756–63, 797–819, 895–98, 912–15, 928–30, 930–32). The lists include titles consulted both directly (library collections, including his own) and indirectly (bibliographies organized by other authors). The study produced a list of 36 codices in Latin and other languages (excluding Italian) and 14 codices in Italian vernacular, 11 of which by Antonio da Sant’Elpidio and three by Albanzani. As for the incunabula and other printed works, 16 are in Latin and other languages (French, German, Spanish and English) and seven in Italian. From other bibliographers, the Hortis registered two French editions, four Italian, one Spanish and five German. Regarding the editions of Albanzani’s vulgarization in the 19th century, Hortis cites Tosti’s works from 1836 and 1841 in the direct consultation list and Manzoni’s 1875 edition in the indirect (Hortis 1879, 896), collected from the catalogs of Zam-

¹⁷ Hortis (1879, 896) cites the existence of a copy of this edition in the Vittorio Emanuele Library (now the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma). This information would have come from the philologist and librarian Enrico Narducci in 1876. Currently, however, the work does not appear in the Italian Catalogo del Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale (<https://opac.sbn.it>).

brini, Bacchi della Lega and Enrico Narducci. There is also a mention of Manzoni's edition that would be published in 1881–82, and which, at that point, was “già sotto i torchi” (Hortis 1879, 104–05, n. 4).

In the early 20th century, Laura Torretta (1902b, 50–65) analyzed the plagiarists, imitators and continuators of the *De mulieribus claris*, especially those concentrated in the 15th and 16th centuries, and Guido Traversari published his own bibliography of Boccaccian writings just five years later (1907b). He includes the Betussi incunabulum (Boccaccio 1545) and the Tosti (Boccaccio 1836; 1841) as well as Manzoni's printings (Boccaccio 1881 and 1882) for containing, in addition to the text of the work itself, studies on *De mulieribus claris* or its author.

The first volume of Branca's list of codices was published in 1958.¹⁸ Regarding the *De mulieribus claris*, Branca lists and reports the location of 84 documents (and 11 more that are now lost) in Latin distributed among 48 libraries in 42 cities, mostly in Europe, but also in the United States and New Zealand (Branca 1958, 92–98). On that list is ms. Pluteo 90 sup., 98¹, which would be recognized only a year later as an autograph manuscript of the work's last compositional stage. More recently, the Boccaccian tradition has been mapped out in studies of volgarizations and also in the catalog of the exhibition *Boccaccio autore e copista* (De Robertis et al. 2013, 433–36), which, however, does not organize the witnesses by work as Branca had done.

Hortis' important bibliography of volgarizations (1879) was updated, as mentioned above, by Branca (1958), Zaccaria (1977–78) and, much more recently, by Cristina Dusio on Antonio da Sant'Elpidio and by Alessia Tommasi on Donato Albanzani. Dusio (2017, 30–31) reports that the volgarization of Sant'Elpidio is represented by at least 12 codices (one more than in Hortis' list). Tommasi (2020) lists 11 Albanzani codices (8 more than in Hortis' list), one of which she herself first identified in the University Library of Pisa (Tommasi 2021).

Having now concluded this brief overview of extant bibliographies, we may deduce certain facts regarding the tradition of the *De mulieribus claris*. First, the distribution of bibliographies and studies by century clearly shows that Boccaccio's work received attention in waves. Zambrini's more general bibliographies date from the early second half of the 19th century, but specific listings on Boccaccio appear from 1875 onwards (Bacchi della Lega 1875, Hortis 1879, Traversari 1907b). Branca's bibliography (1958)

¹⁸ The author was unfortunately unable to consult the second: *Tradizione delle opere di Giovanni Boccaccio. Un secondo elenco di manoscritti e studi sul testo del Decameron*. Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1991.

was released when critical editions of Boccaccian works (specifically those by Branca and Ricci) were being prepared and published. The most recent studies on vulgarizations (Dusio 2017 and Tommasi 2020) appeared after the 700th anniversary of Boccaccio's birth, which was celebrated with the aforementioned exhibition and its dense catalog (De Robertis *et al.* 2013).

A second outline of the tradition emerges when the witnesses of the *De mulieribus claris* cited in those lists are visualized according to chronological and quantitative distribution (Table 1). We see more clearly that the work had a wide dissemination in the 14th and 16th centuries only to be then relatively forgotten until its recovery (at least in the Italian context) in the 19th century.

The distribution of editions recorded in bibliographies and studies is arranged by date (when possible) and by the language of the printing or manuscript. The editions collected by Hortis (1879) placed in parentheses refer to the entries that the philologist cites from other bibliographies. The bibliographies are indicated by the reference to their authors and arranged in chronological order of publication.

The printed works date mainly from the 15th and 16th centuries, following the technological shift that came with the invention of the printing press. The codices, in turn, are especially from the 14th and 15th centuries. Although most of the Latin codices lack dates in Hortis, many or perhaps all the codices cited by Hortis also appear in Branca's work, which always specifies each witness' date or date range, despite occasional uncertainty. Another data point that stands out is the difference between the number of Sant'Elpidio and Albanzani codices listed by Hortis: eleven and three, respectively. The Albanzani codices listed by Hortis are different from those adopted by Tosti (1841) and Manzoni (1882) for their editions. The Casinese codex adopted by Tosti is not listed by Hortis, nor are the two witnesses from Turin that Manzoni used. Only the Florentine witness used by Manzoni is on Hortis' list. Not counting this single overlap, the sum of known Albanzani codices during the 19th century doubles to six.

Bibliography	Medium	Language		Period						
				?	14th	15th	16th	17th	18th	19th
Bacchi della Lega (1875)	Printings and incunabula	Latin		1	-	2	2	-	-	-
		Italian		1	-	-	6	-	-	3
		German		1	-	3	-	-	-	-
		Spanish		-	-	1	1	-	-	-
		French		-	-	1	2	-	-	-
		English		-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Hortis (1879)	Printings and incunabula	Latin		-	-	3	2	-	-	-
		Italian		-	-	-	5 (3)	-	-	2 (1)
		German		-	-	4 (1)	2 (4)	-	-	-
		Spanish		-	-	(1)	1	-	-	-
		French		-	-	1	2 (2)	-	-	-
		English		-	-	-	-	-	1	-
	Codices	Latin		18	3	5	-	-	-	-
		French		4	-	5	-	-	-	-
		English		1	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Italian	Albanzani	2	1	-	-	-	-	-
Sant'Elpidio	3		1	5	-	-	-	-		
		2		-	-	-	-			
Branca (1958)	Codices	Latin		-	14	64	3	1	-	-
					1 (14th-15th) 1 (15th-16th)					
Dusio (2017)	Codices	Italian	Sant'Elpidio	3	1	7	-	-	-	-
					2 (14th-15th)					
Tommasi (2020)	Codices	Italian	Albanzani	-	-	7	-	1	-	
					3 (14th-15th)					

Table 1. Number of editions of the *De mulieribus claris* listed by bibliographic registers in each century, by medium type and language.

If these results are accurate, this quantitative update (three to six) does not change the fact that, at the time Tosti's and Manzoni's editions were published, there were far fewer known codices containing Albanzani's than Sant'Elpidio's vulgarization. If Sant'Elpidio's witnesses were more numerous, why then was none of them considered for these editions? The answer to this question requires one to consider that both Tosti (1841) and Manzoni (1882) published texts from codices available in the libraries where they worked: the former in the Montecassino abbey archive, the latter in the Biblioteca dell'Università and the Biblioteca Reale in Turin. None of the Sant'Elpidio codices listed by Hortis was to be found in any of these locations. However, even if Sant'Elpidio's vulgarization had been accessible to publishers, it still might not have been suited to their intentions. The text of the codices was already that of another version: it had been adapted from the Marchigiano of Sant'Elpidio into the Florentine by Niccolò Sassetti.¹⁹ As if this were not enough, by the early 16th century, this Florentine version had been appropriated in Venice and published as penned by Vincenzo Bagli. In a context such as that of the *Risorgimento*, steeped in the revival of the *trecento* language and the Italian spirit of its Tuscan origins, it would not have made sense to re-edit an already published work that was 'contaminated' by the 16th-century vernacular and two idiomatic translations. Betussi's own 16th-century translation was never re-edited either. Albanzani's vulgarization, on the other hand, remained unpublished as a book. More than this, it was a witness of 14th-century Italian taken directly from Boccaccio's text and by someone close to him.

It is worth remembering that the *De mulieribus claris* was 'rediscovered' in the 19th century in a vulgarization, not its original Latin. In fact, the last Latin printing on record before Zaccaria's 1967 edition is the German one from Bern, dated from 1539: almost 400 years earlier. Thus we may surmise that Tosti, followed by Manzoni, was interested not solely in the content of Boccaccio's work, since in that case a Latin re-edition, or even a new Italian translation, would serve better. What must have really interested the publishers, the institutions to which they were affiliated, and their audiences was Boccaccio's work as polished by Albanzani's Italo-linguistic (and perhaps moral) Trecentist rigor.

¹⁹ Sources for the dates of birth and death of the merchant-translator Niccolò Sassetti were not found. Francesco Guidi Bruscoli (2017) supposes that the scarcity of news on the Sassetti family is due to its long-lasting Ghibelline affiliation.

4. The vernacular Italian translations

As we have already seen, the *De mulieribus claris* was rendered into the Italian vernacular as early as the 14th century, probably while Boccaccio was still alive. It is possible that the first volgarization is that of Donato Albanzani, a friend of both Boccaccio and Francesco Petrarca. Despite this chronological precedence, it is on account of his importance that he was considered last in this section dedicated to the Italian translations, after Betussi and Sant'Elpidio.

One of the codices listed by Hortis as a version of Antonio da Sant'Elpidio's *De mulieribus claris* is from 1370. Cristina Dusio identifies it as a volgarization of a witness of the fifth or seventh writing stage and dates it to 1371 (2017, 32). As already seen, the Sant'Elpidio version was soon rendered into Florentine by Niccolò Sassetti, as proven by an inscription of another codex (Hortis 1879, 931). What is known of Sant'Elpidio comes from records from between 1358 and 1386. Originally an Augustinian friar from the Marches, he held positions, it seems, in various scriptoria and spent time in Rimini, Rome, the kingdom of Naples and Hungary (Giacomini 1961). Sassetti, on the other hand, worked in the family's mercantile business and lived in Montpellier, Barcelona and Lisbon. In fact, the Sassetti house was known for combining artistic-literary activity with commercial enterprises (Bruscoli 2017). Sassetti's version of the volgarization of Sant'Elpidio was printed in 1506 in Venice and attributed to Vincenzo Bagli, a translator 'created' by the publisher and printer Zuan da Trino (or Tacuino) (Dusio 2017, 31). This appropriation was already suspected when Hortis confirmed the real authorship of the text (1879, 603–04). In his study, Hortis reproduced two biographies of the Bagli printing and compared them to the some from Sant'Elpidio/Sassetti codices, proving the aforementioned suspicions as well as pointing out that Bagli had not faithfully adhered to the text (Hortis 1879, 94–95, n. 1).

Bagli's edition retains the 104 biographies and the author's proem from the structure of the Boccaccian text, but not the conclusion. The dedication to Andrea Acciaiuoli appears, but with no mention of her; the text is modified with the addition of a dedication to Lucrezia, daughter of Rodolfo Baglioni. The printing attributed to Bagli inaugurates the golden period of the *De mulieribus claris* in the vernacular, a period in 16th-century Venice of flourishing interest, thanks to the editions of Giuseppe Betussi.²⁰ Born

²⁰ For information on Betussi and his work, see Hortis (1879, 678–95) and Zaccaria (1977–78). Zaccaria also presents an important overview of Boccaccio's Latin tradition in Venice.

in Bassano del Grappa around 1512, Betussi achieved a satisfactory Latin and vernacular cultural preparation by virtue of his family's comfortable financial situation. He moved to Venice in 1542, where he began his literary life, likely having worked in 1544 as a proofreader and editorial consultant at the typography of Gabriele Giolito de' Ferrari, focused on publishing works in the vernacular. Soon afterwards he became secretary and protégé of Count Collaltino di Collalto, during whose service he starts his work as a translator: his vulgarizations of the *De mulieribus claris* (published in 1545 by Comin da Trino di Monferrato's printer), of book VII of the *Aeneid* (1546) and of other Boccaccian works, such as the *De casibus virorum illustrium* (1545) and the *Genealogia deorum gentilium* (1547), are all from this period.

According to the analysis conducted by Hortis (1879, 804–09), Betussi's *De mulieribus claris*, entitled *Delle donne illustri* (Boccaccio 1545), was re-edited in Venice in 1547 by Pietro de' Nicolini da Sabbio and in 1558 by Francesco degli Imperatori. Betussi's already expanded translation receives further modifications by the Florentine grammarian Francesco Serdonati (1540–1602?) in an edition published in 1595–96 by Filippo Giunti. Other bibliographers cite a Venetian edition from 1545 published by Nicolini da Sabbio²¹ and two more Giunti editions from 1566 and 1594 (Hortis 1879, 895–96). Bacchi della Lega (1875, 23) mentions an edition by Giunti from 1588, which does not appear in Hortis' catalogue. *Delle donne illustri* presents the entire contents of the *De mulieribus claris* — the dedication to Andrea, proem, conclusion and the 104 biographies — plus 50 more biographies of women who lived before and after Boccaccio.²² The work has two dedications: one to Camilla Pallavicina, marquess of Cortemaggiore, “donna tanto illustre quanto infelice” (Hortis 1879, 682) and, at the end, another to the protector Collaltino di Collalto. The volume also contains a notice to readers in which Betussi corrects or supplements information from Boccaccio's text and provides a biography of Boccaccio.²³ In his dedication to Camilla, Betussi (1545) described the importance of ‘recovering’ Boccaccio's work from the mistreatment it was suffering at the time and explained that he preferred Italian to Latin, so that *De mulieri-*

²¹ This would be Comin da Trino's edition, erroneously attributed to Nicolini da Sabbio (Hortis 1879, 805).

²² “Paragonate ai toni carnali e sanguigni di Boccaccio le aggiunte cinquecentesche del testo di Betussi suonano come i ritratti ufficiali di stato di queste donne: aridi, freddi ed esangui,” notes Leatrice Mendelsohn (1988, 330).

²³ Betussi corrects and extends Boccaccio's biography in his 1547 vulgarization of the *Genealogia deorum gentilium*. This text served as a source for biographers until the 18th century and beyond (Hortis 1879, 688).

bus claris could be read by more people. The numerous reprints of this translation over the course of the 16th century suggest that he was right in his decision. It was due to this and other translations that Betussi is credited with the Renaissance recovery of the Latin Boccaccio (Mutini 1967). The list of 15th-century vulgarizations of the *De mulieribus claris* comprises lastly the version made in 1543 by a Florentine *gentiluomo* living in Lyon, Luca Antonio Ridolfi (or Lucantonio Ridolfi, 1510–70), whose work was commissioned by the noblewoman Maria Albizzi. This version was translated into French and printed in 1551 by Guillaume Rouille but never published in Italian (Hortis 1879, 695 and 800).

We shall return now to the vulgarization of Donato di Lorenzo degli Albanzani (known also as Donato degli Albanzani, Donato da Pratovecchio, Donato del Casentino, simply Donato and l'Apenninigena), who owes all these monikers to his hometown of Pratovecchio, a commune in the province of Arezzo in the Casentino. Albanzani was born before 1328 and was still alive in 1411. In the early 1350s, he met Boccaccio in Ravenna and, towards the end of the same decade, Petrarch in Venice. Albanzani looked after the library of Petrarch, who dedicated to him the *De sui ipsius et multorum aliorum ignorantia* (1371), and received assignments from Boccaccio, who similarly dedicated to him the *Buccolicum carmen* (c. 1368). He vulgarized one work of each poet (respectively, the *De viris illustribus* and the *De mulieribus claris*) and dedicated both to Niccolò d'Este of Ferrara. According to tradition, Albanzani settled in Ferrara around 1380, first as a preceptor of the young marquis Niccolò III and then as his *cancelliere* (Tosti 1841, 25; Hortis 1879, 602, n. 4; Martellotti 1960). Niccolò III, however, was born in 1383 (d. 1441) and became prince of Ferrara in 1397. So, if Albanzani had been called to court in 1380 or 1381 (or even earlier), it would not have been as a preceptor of the unborn Niccolò (Novati 1890, 369). The biographical information provided by tradition may erroneously lead many to assume that the Niccolò to whom Albanzani dedicates the vulgarization of the *De mulieribus claris* is Niccolò III, as its initial rubric contains mentions only the name of the dedicatee, with no generational numbering.²⁴ In this vulgarization, Albanzani developed a continuation of the biography of Queen Joanna in which he mentions her death. As Joanna died in 1382, this is the *termine post quem* of the composition. As for the *termine ante quem*, tradition has followed the supposi-

²⁴ “Incomincia il libro delle famose donne compilato per lo illustrissimo uomo M. Giovanni Boccaccio poeta fiorentino ad istanza della famosissima Giovanna di Puglia, tralatato di latino in volgare da maestro Donato da Casentino, al magnifico *marchese Niccolò da Este principe e signore di Ferrara*” (Boccaccio 1881, 1, emphasis added).

tion of Tosti, who proposed the year of 1397, in which Niccolò III married and ascended to the marquisate. Tosti, however, warns his reader that this hypothesis is entirely conjectural (Tosti 1841, 26).

Besides the mention in the initial rubric and in the colophon of some codices, Niccolò d'Este's name appears in Albanzani's sequel to Joanna's biography, as can be seen in Manzoni's edition (Boccaccio 1882). In Tosti's, this sequel was only partially published since the codex he had used was missing a page (Boccaccio 1841, 449), the same page that contained the final passage of Boccaccio's biography of Joanna and the opening passage of Albanzani's sequel. It is precisely in this opening passage, to which Tosti did not have access, that the prior mention of Niccolò d'Este can be read. Hortis noted this oversight in Tosti's edition and published the complete Albanzani sequel that he found in the British Museum's ms. Harley 4923 (Hortis 1879, 114–16). The text, written in Latin and presumably the original source of the sequel, mentions Niccolò d'Este, who is described as eager for books and fond of illustrious stories (Hortis 1879, 115). As is the case with other witnesses, there is no clear indication as to which Niccolò is intended. Hortis similarly chooses not to explain, thereby maintaining a sort of non-committal position (1879, 602). Unlike the codex Tosti used, those consulted by Manzoni contain Albanzani's complete sequel, although in the vernacular. The Count mentions the Latin version of the sequel published by Hortis and recalls his remark about the missing passage in Tosti's edition. Manzoni indicates to the reader that his edition is the first to publish Albanzani's sequel to the biography of Queen Joanna in its entirety and in Italian. This publication is key to dating the work: in the codices consulted by the Count, the Niccolò who is fond of illustrious stories, and who commissions Albanzani to provide them, is identified by number, but this is the second Marquis d'Este (1338–88), not the third:

E questo [recounting Joanna's terrible end] giudicai essere a me Donato del Casentino necessario per il comandamento dell'illustre principe *Niccolò secondo marchese da Este*, il quale ha tanto diletto de' libri, e tanto piacere delle famose storie, che Filadelfo non l'avanzò, essendo io domestico suo famiglia, e da quello essendomi imposto di trovar libri come ad un altro Demetrio. (Boccaccio 1882, 391, emphasis added)

With this information provided by Manzoni's edition, the period of Albanzani's vulgarization is now confined between the dates of 1382, the year of Joanna's death, and 1388, the year of Niccolò II's death. In his sequel, Albanzani highlights the fact that Boccaccio had stopped saying negative things about the queen and addressed only the positive, precisely because she was still living at the time of its writing and Boccaccio wanted the book to reach her hands. Since Joanna had outlived the biographer, Albanzani

took the initiative to say what had happened after the author's death and to speak of what he had not disclosed, being assigned to this task by the Marquis whom he served (Boccaccio 1882, 390–91).

The publication of this sequel could only effectively take place when Boccaccio was no longer alive and could not object to this and Albanzani's other interventions in the original structure of *De mulieribus claris*. However, it is possible that a first version, distinct from this one, had been drafted years earlier with the author's knowledge and approval. Evidence of this would be found in the *Buccolicum carmen*, which Boccaccio had dedicated to Albanzani. The *Buccolicum carmen* consists of 16 eclogues written in Latin, the last of which mentions a still-living son of Albanzani who died in the summer of 1368. Therefore, the work must have been created prior to his passing. Boccaccio and Albanzani had met in Petrarch's house in Venice in the spring of 1367. On that occasion, Albanzani is said to have offered Boccaccio the vulgarization in exchange for the dedication of the *Buccolicum carmen* (Ricci 1965, 694), and the work is said to have been delivered to Boccaccio in July 1368 (Zaccaria 1977–78, 289).

Tommasi points out the fact that Manzoni's edition was widely overlooked and notes that even scholars like Zaccaria had understood Niccolò III to be the recipient of the vulgarization (2020, 136), reiterating the hypothesis that Tosti had already published with caveats as early as 1836. She additionally reports that there had been no changes in the manuscript tradition of vulgarizations since the work of Hortis and Manzoni (Tommasi 2020, 143). Her research led to a new discovery: i.e., the continuation of Joanna's biography was indeed written by Albanzani. Thus, the mention of Niccolò II in several codices consulted by Tommasi, including those on which Manzoni's work was based, would validate the important discovery already made by the Count back in the 19th century. Her study, despite its undeniable importance, does not change the tradition significantly with regard to dating. Tommasi first describes the codices and then mentions that the information found in them is also found in Manzoni. The consequence of ignoring Manzoni's edition is — as was mentioned in this essay's introduction — that many scholars, including contemporary ones, have studied Albanzani's vulgarization without considering this edition, and have thus unknowingly perpetuated a flagrant dating mistake. One may cite, as an example, Chiara Guerzi (2015, 160), who consulted only Tosti's edition and indicates Niccolò d'Este III as the dedicatee of the work. Others actually do refer to Manzoni's edition, but still reproduce the misconception, as is the case of Elsa Filosa (2012, 173) and Margaret Franklin (2017, 11, n. 31, and 131). Finally, there are those who have reiterated the dating error even while directly quoting the Manzoni passage that identi-

fies the dedicatee as Niccolò d’Este II, such as Stephen Kolsky (2003, 222 notes 2 and 3).

Final words

Although it is usually bad form to present a fresh theoretical discussion in an article’s conclusion, it is necessary in this case in order to bring into conceptual focus the three faces of the tradition of *De mulieribus claris* that we have been inspecting here: the reconstruction of its critical fortune based on compositional phases (reception); the diachronic evolution of the work’s reception (tradition); and the overview of vulgarizations that reveals the disappearance of one of its chief witnesses (translation). It was noted that the discovery and publication of the autograph manuscript of the *De mulieribus claris* ended up obscuring the intrinsic importance of other witnesses and relegating them to a subordinate role in determining the urtext. Branca (1958) gave undue consideration to the dynamics of mechanical transmission from copy to copy, but such transmission is of course only one of several complex components of the textual and paratextual tradition of a written work. This is an excellent example of the possible shortcomings of studying only extant witnesses of a fixed and crystallized form. The history of this type of transmission, which Branca called passive and determined, must be complemented by an active and characterizing transmission²⁵ that takes into account additional avenues of philological investigation. From this point of view, the compositional stages of the work are especially worth studying since they dismantle the rigid, almost monolithic conception of the text as something fixed, definitive and immobile.

It is somewhat ironic that the ‘definitive’ edition of the *De mulieribus claris* appeared as a part of the collection directed by Branca, for whom determining a critical edition based on an autograph or archetype could lead to overlooking other valuable manuscripts. Indeed, Manzoni’s edition was (and, indeed, still is) deprived of the attention it deserves, even despite its obvious value. Let us hope that this overview may contribute to raising awareness of the importance of Manzoni’s edition of the Albanzian vulgarization, while also adding further details to the critical fortune of Boccaccio’s work itself.

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²⁵ “Trasmissione attiva e caratterizzante” (Branca 1958, xv).

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