

Title: Padua on the Prairies: How a 17th century *diploma di laurea* brought Enlightenment to Winnipeg.

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Abstract :

In 1953, University of Manitoba President Dr. A.H.S. Gillson presented the new Dafoe Library with a collection of rare books, manuscripts and incunabula that he had accumulated over a period of several years. Each item was selected as an exemplar of early European publishing, connecting the new Prairie library to the history of the book. One of the most beautiful, yet most obscure, items in the collection was an exquisitely ornamented leather-bound booklet, issued by the University of Padua in 1684. For five decades, all that was known about this document was that it was a diploma of some sort.

In 2007/08, University of Manitoba librarian Betty Braaksma undertook an investigation of the diploma. During the course of her research, she uncovered a wealth of Enlightenment art, science, symbolism and culture, all evident in the diploma's pages. She also found a treasure trove of other diplomas from the universities of Northern Italy, scattered in collections throughout the world.

This paper will outline that journey of discovery and examine the critical role that Internet resources played in a search for information that spanned continents, cultures and time. Finally, the paper will outline how the diploma's story is being interpreted in a multimedia tutorial designed to teach University of Manitoba students about primary research methods and information literacy techniques.

Full text:

In 1953, University of Manitoba President Dr. A.H.S. Gillson presented the newly-opened Elizabeth Dafoe Library with a collection of rare books, manuscripts and incunabula that he had accumulated over several years. Named in memory of former University Chancellor Andrew Knox Dysart, the collection was intended to bring some of the history and antiquity of Europe to the young Prairie library.

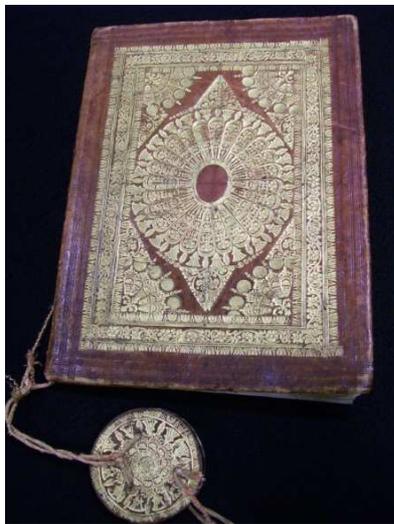
Twenty years later a major exhibition at the university featured the works of the Dysart Memorial Collection. The exhibition catalogue reminded people that the collection had been brought to Winnipeg with the intention to give:

“students in the School of Art an opportunity to study manuscripts and books of preceding ages...The subtleties of the typographical design reflect the artistic attitudes of the various periods and the cultural significance of artist-designers, publishers, and authors. This gives the present-day student insights into the intricate harmony of a complex design problem. The material is of superb quality and illustrates the place of the

book as the instrument of civilized thought through many centuries of Western civilization”¹

Among the 9 illuminated manuscripts in the Dysart collection is an exquisitely ornamented leather-bound booklet, issued by the University of Padua in 1684. In the 1973 catalogue it was described as a

"Doctor's diploma presented to Gaudentius Carnerius, January 31, 1684. An Italian illuminated manuscript on vellum with many words in letters of gold. Each page is surrounded by a decorative border composed of flowers, insects, birds, fruit, and conventional foliage. On the first leaf is a miniature portrait of Gaudentius Carnerius. The last page contains his arms. It is bound in red morocco, gilt tooled. Attached is the seal of the university within a red morocco container, gilt tooled." ²



For three decades, nothing more was known about the document. No research was done into its provenance, text, illustrations or even the graduate himself. It was often featured in displays and exhibits because of its beauty, but it was always “just a pretty book”³. However, in 2005, while discussing possible sabbatical projects, University Archivist Dr. Shelley Sweeney suggested that a document from the Dysart Collection would be a suitable object of study. The Carnerius diploma was an easy choice.

Choosing how to research the document was not as easy. Textual analysis would seem obvious, but unlike its modern counterparts, the Carnerius diploma isn't “just a piece of paper”. It is also a very beautiful example of the traditional arts of bookbinding, calligraphy and

¹ University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections. “The Dysart Memorial Collection of Rare Books and Manuscripts”.

<http://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/archives/collections/type/rarebooks/dysart/index.html>

² Ibid.

³ Shelley Sweeney, email correspondence. April 30, 2009.

illumination. Looking at the diploma as an artifact, rather than as simply a document, allowed new doors of inquiry to open: Were there others like it? Were these diplomas typical for 17th century universities in Europe? Were they uniquely Italian? Was the graduate someone special? Were the images of flowers, fruit and mythological beings significant to the graduate, did they have a deeper meaning, or were they merely decorative? In very simple terms, why does the diploma look this way? The research project would examine the diploma as Dr. Gillson intended, as evidence of the “artistic attitudes of the various periods and the cultural significance of artist-designers, publishers, and authors.”

The next challenge was to begin finding the sources to answer these questions...but how does one discover the background of 17th century Italian diploma currently housed in a university on the Canadian prairies? Until fairly recently, this would have involved long hours of library-intensive research, copious correspondence and expensive travel. It is likely that these constraints were what kept the Carnerius diploma’s story a mystery for so long. Today, the power of Internet search capabilities, combined with the ever-increasing online content of full-text electronic publications, digital repositories and virtual collections from libraries, museums and galleries, means that undertaking primary research on rare documents can be done with relative ease anywhere in the world.

The research on the Carnerius diploma began with a translation of the ecclesiastical-style Latin text, to see if the content of the diploma itself could offer any clues as to its origin or makers. The translation revealed that the diploma is written in the longwinded and flowery language of the time and consists of prayers, lists of dignitaries and the accomplishments of the graduate, Gaudentius Carnerius, possibly a Latinized version of the name Gaudenzio Carneri. We also learn the name of the graduate’s father and place of residence, and see that Carnerius received a Doctor of Laws degree.

... this same Gaudentius Carnerius [is] a very learned man indeed and [is] so by all gifts of nature adorned that nothing more can be desired in him; in the name of God we have approved him and we wish him to be approved...to be raised up to the power and authority of the master’s chair; and the insignia of Doctor to be sought by his Examiners and these things to be received from the Examiners themselves and by the Examiners these things conferred...and so with the highest praise and with great honour the aforesaid Gaudentius Carnerius came to the highest degree of Doctor, as God wills it.⁴

The high-flown text of the diploma has a certain ritualistic quality and may have followed a standard template, as modern diplomas do. Closer examination of the calligraphy shows that the graduate’s name might even have been inserted after the text was written, which raises the possibility that these diplomas were mass-produced in an assembly-line process.

The second step of the research started in cyberspace with a simple Google search to see if other diplomas from the University of Padua existed. That question was settled immediately

⁴ From a translation of the Carnerius diploma by Carol Steer, University of Manitoba Libraries. June 29 2007.

when several references were found to diplomas in archival collections in England. The search also showed that those extant diplomas were granted to physicians, not lawyers like Carnerius. One of these physicians was Sir William Harvey, who was credited with the discovery of the human circulatory system, and who graduated from the University of Padua in 1602. His diploma has survived intact and currently resides in the Archives of the Historic Library of the Royal College of Physicians in London.⁵

Along with locating Harvey's diploma, the search also retrieved a study on it, published in 1908. *Notes to Accompany a Facsimile Reproduction of the Diploma of Doctor of Medicine Granted by the University of Padua to William Harvey 1602 with a Translation* was written by J.F. Payne as a companion piece to the publication of a commemorative facsimile edition of the diploma. Today, in a bit of irony, a facsimile of Payne's book can be found on the Internet Archive thanks to the Google book digitization project.⁶

Although it is now itself a century old, Payne's study proved to be a key element in providing further context for the Carnerius diploma. He also decided to study Harvey's diploma as an artifact, noting that it "has some features worth noting from an archaeological point of view. The reader may naturally ask: Why has the Diploma this particular form? What is the meaning of the decoration? Who are the persons referred to in the Document? and so on."⁷

He began his analysis with a translation of the diploma's text, and found that the "grandiloquent language was a common form, and occurs in several Paduan diplomas which I have seen...Harvey's Diploma was neither more nor less than the usual one."⁸ The translation strongly resembles the translation of the Carnerius diploma, and confirms the hypothesis that standard wording was used.

In his "archaeological" analysis of the Harvey diploma, Payne answers one of the fundamental questions about its appearance, and by extension the appearance of the later Carnerius diploma:

Diplomas in the form of a small quarto book, with the special style of decoration seen in this one, and in a handsome binding, seem to have been peculiar to Venice (where they were granted by the College of Physicians and by the Company of Aromatarii or Apothecaries) and the Universities of Northern Italy, viz.: Padua, Pisa, Pavia, Perugia, Bologna, and perhaps others. In the southern Universities, Rome and Naples, diplomas

⁵ Royal College of Physicians. "Historic Library". <http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/heritage-centre/library/Pages/Historic-Library.aspx>

⁶ Joseph Frank Payne. *Notes to Accompany a Facsimile Reproduction of the Diploma of Doctor of Medicine Granted by the University of Padua to William Harvey 1602 with a Translation*. London: Chiswick Press, 1908. <http://www.archive.org/stream/notestoaccompan00padogoo>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

seem to have been on a single sheet. Diplomas in book form were not given, so far as I know, by the French, German, or English Universities.⁹

He goes on to note that the diplomas are

“much like in outward form to the Venetian official documents called Ducali [dogale] which name comprises the oath taken by a Doge of Venice on admission to office, the commissions of Deputy Governors, Procurators and others, and similar official warrants or permits. Many of these documents are in the form of a small book, often illustrated with a portrait of the chief personage concerned and other figures, also sometimes with a shield of arms and small landscapes or other pictures in panels. The decoration was in many cases executed by eminent artists, so that some Ducali are highly valued as works of art.”¹⁰

Payne observes that while they were also ornamented, the Padua diplomas were not as splendid as the ducali/dogale, and that “probably the amount of decoration depended upon how much the new Doctor was prepared to spend; for some diplomas, even of Padua, are comparatively plain.”¹¹ Based on his viewing of several diplomas he suggests that a standard template for the overall design was used, consisting of a frontispiece, portrait, “sacred invocation”, ornamental borders, floral elements, illuminated capitals and coat of arms. He also notes, rather sourly, that “this fashion in diplomas lasted till late in the eighteenth century, but the art got worse and worse.”¹²

Payne’s study was a significant find, answering a number of important questions. First of all it was clear that other diplomas existed and that they broadly resembled the Carnerius diploma. It was also evident that these kinds of diplomas were unique to the universities of Northern Italy, and followed a design template influenced by official Venetian documents. It was a surprise to learn that the graduate himself would have commissioned the diploma, rather than receiving it directly from the university. It was also gratifying to learn that as commissioned pieces of craftsmanship, they were as valued as in their own time as they are today.

While some questions were answered, more arose. Payne hinted that while a design template was followed, the quality of the work varied from graduate to graduate, and that “the diploma being an individual possession, no two specimens are precisely alike”¹³. Did it the design also vary from university to university and program to program – i.e. was a physician’s diploma the same as a lawyer’s diploma?”¹⁴ Did individuals select designs from a pattern book, did the university stipulate that certain images or symbols had be included, or did students request specific images?.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Payne admitted that he didn't have the knowledge to comment on the aesthetics of the diploma, so at this point the objective of the Carnerius research came into sharper focus. With the question of the document's uniqueness settled, the search now turned to comparing the artwork of the Carnerius diploma to other diplomas, to look for common elements and to see if the designs changed over time or varied by university. More specifically, the search also aimed to find out if the illustrations in other diplomas were rendered with the same degree of skill as the ones in the Carnerius diploma, if they had any significance, and if the artist could be identified. A related objective was to find other studies like Payne's.

The process of locating more collections and studies consisted of a combination of Google searching and searching the online catalogues of libraries, museums and archives around the world. The most important library-based resource was OCLC's WorldCat, which claims to be "the world's largest network of library content and services."¹⁵ WorldCat's emphasis is on library materials, but it also includes some archival and museum content. Its multinational coverage provides invaluable "one stop shopping" and proved instrumental in finding records for an additional 23 diplomas from Padua and Bologna in several libraries in Europe and North America, including the Wellcome Trust Library in London, Princeton University's Scheide Library, the Pierpont Morgan library and the University of Houston, as well as several additional titles at the Royal College of Physicians. As a Web 2.0 program WorldCat allows for personal customization of search results and will permit the researcher to create a personal space within the system, provided they have signed up for a free account. Features include the ability to save searches and format them into bibliographies, and to set up a feed to alert the researcher to new additions to the catalogue. It was through this alert service that records for 10 more diplomas came to light when McGill University Library in Montreal loaded their records into WorldCat.

Another web-based alerting service brings the full power of Google to the research process. Google Alerts allows the researcher to customize queries and then store them for regular email updates by the Google search engine. Through the Google Alerts service, references and images were found for Padua diplomas being offered for sale by antiquarian book dealers. It was surprising to see that a few of these diplomas can still be purchased on the open market.

The European Digital Library was another meta-library site that was searched, with disappointing results. Since the EDL focuses on the collections of national libraries and since the diplomas are almost always held in the archives of universities or research institutions, it was not a useful resource in this case.

A variety of university and museum catalogues were also used with mixed results, before turning to a more local source of information. As a major Canadian research institution, and as a member of the Association of College and Research Libraries and other consortia, the University of Manitoba has an extensive collection of electronic databases and journals, and belongs to the academic interlibrary loan network. The journal literature was extensively searched, using the University of Manitoba's own collections. Combined with Google Scholar

¹⁵ <http://www.worldcat.org/whatis/default.jsp>

searching, three more studies on Padua diplomas were found. All were obtained using the University of Manitoba's document delivery/inter-library loan service, and all gave more insight into the history and making of Padua diplomas.

The first study was a short analysis of the diploma of Copilius Pictor (Jacob Mehler) by Dr. Harry Friedenwald.¹⁶ After describing the few facts known about the graduate's life, Friedenwald goes on to comment on the role of the University of Padua in providing European Jews with an opportunity to obtain a medical degree. It was one of the few institutions to do so, although it was not an easy road for the students, who were required to pay substantial bribes in order to graduate.¹⁷ The presence of other non-Catholic students also posed a problem to the university administration at graduation time, since:

It was the bishop, presiding as chancellor of the University, who bestowed the diploma of the "Sacred College"...The ceremonies, therefore, had a religious character; German Protestants and Orthodox Greeks not infrequently declined, rather than recite, the Catholic articles of faith. It therefore became necessary to make an exception in the case of non-Catholics and to grant them diplomas through intermediary non-clerical officials and later through the Venetian College (Collegium Venetum) specially founded for this purpose."¹⁸

This accommodation for different faiths, remarkable for its time, also had an influence on the diploma's design. Friedenwald compares Pictor's diploma with Richard Mead's diploma, both issued in 1695. "While Mead's, like Harvey's and others, begins with the invocation "In Christi Nomine Amen", Pictor's begins with the words: "In Nomine Dei Aeterni". This was evidently done in consideration of the fact that Pictor was a Jew. ..One is forced to the conclusion that in making these changes from the prescribed form, the University showed a degree of consideration far beyond what we would expect."¹⁹

Friedenwald's article also includes a photo of the frontispiece of the Pictor diploma. It shows a design very similar to the Carnerius diploma, with a portrait of the graduate in a central medallion, guarded by two rather overpowering putti and supported by two floral cornucopias. Instead of Carnerius' gods and goddesses, the Pictor diploma has a bearded, bareheaded figure in scholarly robes in the top and bottom medallions. In the lower one he is measuring a globe with a compass. These images are surrounded by a border pattern consisting of trailing flowers and vines. These do not resemble the Carnerius florals, although some of the motifs are similar.

The second study, by Bruno Kisch, was published in 1949. It looks at the life of Cervo Conigliano, who graduated from the University of Padua in 1743 with a physician's degree, like

¹⁶ Harry Friedenwald, "Manuscript copies of the medical works of Isaac Judeus. The diploma of a Jewish graduate of medicine of the University of Padua in 1695" reprinted from the *Annals of Medical History, New Series* Vol. 1 No. 6 pp 629-639 1929.

¹⁷ Ibid., p 636

¹⁸ Ibid., p 636

¹⁹ Ibid., p 637

Harvey, Mead and Pictor.²⁰ In his description of university life, the graduation ceremonies and the diploma, Kisch repeats much of Payne's earlier work. However, he does have an interesting insight into the artwork of the diplomas:

The picturesque embellishment of Cervo Conigliano's diploma was probably not done by the scribe Modelli, who signed the diploma...but by a special artist equipped and qualified for such work. His name does not appear on the diploma. However the style of the painting is very similar to that used in the surgical diploma of Jacobus Ricchius, issued in 1700 by the University of Padua. The artistic work of this painter, although by no means bad, gives no evidence of outstanding talent. It is not comparable to another diploma of Padua...which was artistically executed and signed by a first-rate miniator by the name of Jo.Aloy.Foppa...It is a doctor's diploma for the physician Jacobus de Curnis, and was issued on December 16, 1670. The painter's work is very elaborate."²¹

The last statement doesn't do justice to the rather grainy reproduction included in the study, which shows a stunning portrait of the graduate painted onto a banner supported by what appears to be the Three Graces, who in turn hand a shield or mirror to a hovering cherub. The floral border is expertly rendered, and stylistically resembles similar borders in medieval books of hours. It is also very close in style to the Carnerius diploma, especially with the addition of realistically painted insects.

In addition to speculating on the presence of different artisans working on different parts of the diplomas, Kisch notes that in Conigliano's diploma, "the space within the wreath on page 7, unquestionably spared for the doctor's picture, remained empty. It may have been a financial problem that determined whether or not the physician's portrait was inserted in his diploma, for it is missing also in other diplomas of Padua."²² This supports the idea that the Carnerius diploma may have also passed through several hands, and points to the possibility of a workshop or studio producing these documents in assembly line fashion, or perhaps in a master-apprentice arrangement.

The final study, published in 1957, was another commentary on William Harvey's diploma, by Joshua O. Leibowitz.²³ This study adds nothing new to the understanding of the artistic conventions used in the diplomas, and reiterates that the unique administrative structure of the University of Padua and the subsequent ability to issue secular diplomas "made it possible especially for Jewish students to graduate from north-Italian universities."²⁴

²⁰ Bruno Kisch, "Cervo Conigliano: A Jewish graduate of Padua in 1743". *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*. Volume IV 1949. pp 450-459.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p 452

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Joshua O. Leibowitz, "William Harvey's Diploma from Padua, 1602" *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*. 1957 XII: 264-265; doi:10.1093/jhmas/XII.4.264

²⁴ *Ibid.*

While the records for the diplomas found in WorldCat and Google were very encouraging, they did not include images of the diplomas. The grainy black and white photos in the Friedland and Kisch papers were useful to a point, but did not have enough detail to allow for a closer examination. It was evident that in order to do a meaningful comparison of the Carnerius diploma to other extant diplomas, it would either be necessary either to travel to the collections or to find images online. Given the expense of traveling to Europe and the increasing accessibility to online collections of digitized materials, the natural next step was to undertake an online image search.

It was equally natural to turn to the Google universe to look for those images. Google Image search is part of the Google speciality search product line that includes Google Earth and Google Scholar. Image Search advertises itself as “the most comprehensive image search on the web” and therefore seemed like a promising place to begin the quest.

Initially only five images of other diplomas were found, but unlike the images in the Friedland and Kisch articles, these were in colour. One image was a photo of the first two pages of the Harvey diploma from the Royal College of Physicians, which showed that it has some similar features to the Carnerius diploma.²⁵ Another image was a from rare book dealer²⁶, another was on a site dedicated to the restoration of looted World War II art²⁷ and a third was featured in an online exhibition.²⁸ All of them substantiated Payne’s theory that a standard design template was used, since they all have similar page layouts and decorative Baroque motifs. The most significant image was found on the website of the Umberto Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art in Jerusalem.²⁹ This image, which was available online until March 2009, showed a document that appeared remarkably similar to the Carnerius diploma, but the image was too small to permit a closer inspection. It appeared that the Nahon Museum document also had a portrait of the graduate, surrounded by floral images and peacocks, although the colour palette of blues and yellows differed from the primarily red palette of the Carnerius diploma. The Nahon Museum site also led to a virtual exhibit of illuminated kettubot, or marriage certificates, many of which were produced in Padua. The illuminations on these documents strongly resemble the illuminations on the diplomas, providing more evidence of a flourishing document production system in northern Italy.³⁰

After a promising start generated by the Google Image Search, the research then moved on to other digital image sites. The first one selected was the Digital Scriptorium, an online “image database of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts that unites scattered resources from many

²⁵ Royal College of Physicians, “Harvey’s Life”. http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/heritage/harvey/exhib_harvey_life.htm

²⁶ Roger Friedman Rare Book Studio <http://www.rarebookstudio.com/illustrated.htm>;

²⁷ “Surgery diploma of the University of Padua for Nicolaus Tonegazzo”. In the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism, *ArtRestitution.at*, *Art Database of the National Fund*. http://artrestitution.at/frontend/content/get_file.php?id=1802

²⁸ Arts Judaica Gallery. “Trees.” *Jewish Heritage Online Magazine*. <http://www.jhom.com/arts/gallery/index.html>

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³⁰ Jewish National and University Library, *the David and Fela Shapell Family Digitalization Project – Ketubbot Collection*. <http://jnul.huji.ac.il/dl/ketubbot/Nahon/Nahon0461b.jpg>

institutions into an international tool for teaching and scholarly research”³¹ The institutions are all found in the United States and include Harvard University’s Houghton Library, the Columbia Rare Book Library and the New York Public Library. This search yielded records and images for three more diplomas. Aside from following the standard diploma layout, the first two had little in common with the design of the Carnerius diploma. The third diploma, housed at the University of Notre Dame, was issued in 1690 and while more crudely rendered than the Carnerius diploma, contains similar motifs of fruit, flowers and peacocks.³²

Since the Digital Scriptorium contains images from only select American university library collections, it was also necessary to search European collections. The selection of other digital collections to search was challenging, since there are many individual websites produced by the great libraries, archives and museums of Europe. The process was made easier by the use of the Digital Librarian’s Archives and Manuscripts website, which keeps an updated list of most, if not all, of the known digital collections on the Internet.³³ Numerous searches were conducted on most of the sites. It soon became clear that the emphasis of many of these collections is either on medieval manuscripts, which are too early for this study, or contemporary works, which are too late. This searching was time-consuming and not very fruitful. It was finally time to consider traveling to selected archives to view the actual diplomas.

Before that happened, however, one more search was undertaken. Given the stunning beauty of the Carnerius diploma and others like it, it seemed unlikely that they would have gone unstudied or unexhibited. One final search was done using Google, this time looking specifically for exhibition catalogues.

This search yielded unexpected and rich resources in the form of an exhibition website at the University of Urbino for an event called: *Honor & Meritus: Diplomi di laurea dal xv al xx secolo*.³⁴ The exhibition, which was held in 2006 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the University, featured a display of Italian university diplomas, including several of the Carnerius type. This website was naturally in Italian, which proved to be somewhat of a barrier, but it listed the names of the contributors to the exhibition catalogue. One name was in English, that of James Clough. Through Google searching once again, email contact information for Mr. Clough was found and correspondence started. Mr. Clough is a professor at the Politecnico di Milano and he contributed an analysis of the calligraphy the diplomas for the exhibit catalogue. He loaned his expertise to the Carnerius research study and also arranged a meeting with the owner of the bulk of the diplomas in the Urbino display, Signore Avvocato Gianfranco Nucci, a private collector who has been accumulating law diplomas from European universities for many years.

³¹ “About Digital Scriptorium”. <http://www.scriptorium.columbia.edu/about/>

³² Notre Dame University Libraries, Department of Special Collections. *MS.41*
http://app.cul.columbia.edu:8080/exist/scriptorium/individual/InNdHLSp-MS41.xml??querytype=advanced&order=lo&field1=any&term1=diploma&stringtype1=all&operator1=and&field2=any&term2=padua&stringtype2=all&operator2=and&field3=any&term3=&stringtype3=all&begin=&end=&single=&DatedOrNot=&Document=&figure=&country=any&repository_code=any&howmany=30

³³ *Digital Librarian: A librarian’s choice of the best of the web. Archives and Manuscripts.*
<http://www.digital-librarian.com/archives.html>

³⁴ *Honor et Meritus Diplomi di laurea delle università italiane dal xv al xx secolo.* Urbino, Palazzo Ducale, Sala del Castellare. 14 Gennaio-31 Marzo 2006 <http://1506.uniurb.it/mostre/mostra-honoretmeritus.html>

His personal collection contains more than 100 diplomas, of which nearly 40 are of the Carnerius type. Both Mr. Clough and Mr. Nucci were happy to meet to discuss the diplomas, and Mr. Nucci indicated he would be willing to show them as well.

At this point it finally became both necessary and prudent to travel to Europe to view collections of diplomas. Appointments were arranged with archives with the largest holdings: the Royal College of Physicians and the Wellcome Trust Library in London, Mr. Nucci's collection at his home in Rimini, and because of flight routing, the Newberry Library in Chicago. Links to images of the Carnerius diploma on Flickr were sent to all of the prospective contacts, enhancing the legitimacy of the search request, and opening doors. The Flickr images were also sent to archives and museums that could not be visited, such as the Scheide Library at Princeton and the Umberto Nahon Museum in Jerusalem. The administrators of these collections were kind enough to provide photos and photocopies of their diplomas to assist with the comparisons.

In addition to *Honor & Meritus*, (which turned out to be a coffee-table book rather than an exhibition catalogue), Mr. Clough and Mr. Nucci recommended another study that did not turn up in any Google search. *Diplomi di Laurea all'Università di Padova (1504-1806)* was issued to showcase diplomas held in collections in the city of Padua.³⁵ In addition to the images of 45 diplomas, the volume also contains analyses of various aspects of the diplomas. This book was available at the University of Padua bookstore, so an additional trip to Padua was arranged.

After months of online searching and viewing images of uneven quality online, it was tremendously exciting to see and handle many of the original Padua diplomas in the various collections, and to speak with two men who have studied them for some time. It was also somewhat anticlimactic. Although ultimately over 100 diplomas were viewed, either in collections or in facsimile in books, it became clear that none of them were of the same quality as the Carnerius diploma. Mr. Nucci, who is probably the foremost expert in these documents, feels that it is unique in terms of its craftsmanship.

It was also interesting to learn that in-depth academic study of the diplomas is quite recent and has yet not encompassed artistic or iconographical analysis to any great extent. The focus has been on the texts, provenance or historical context, with some work being done on the coats of arms and seals. The work is also very local, with the books being produced by publishers in Padua and Rimini.

Nevertheless the work is enlightening. The diploma scholars (and Mr. Nucci) confirmed that scribal studios were attached to the universities in Padua and Bologna, and that they turned out diplomas in a distributed system, with "illuminators who were responsible for the pictorial part and by decorators-calligraphers who added decorations."³⁶ Giordana Canova Mariani's extensive study of the miniatures of medieval Padua, cited by the diploma scholars, has

³⁵ Giovanna Baldissin Molli, Luciana Sitran Rea and Emilia Veronese Ceseracciu, ed. *Diplomi di Laurea all'Università di Padova (1504 -1806)*. Padova: Università degli studi di Padova, 1998.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p 53.

established beyond a doubt that the city was a centre of mastery in the arts of illumination and calligraphy, and she calls the diplomas the “continuation of a tradition” into the modern era.³⁷

On the question of format, diploma scholar Anna Cerboni argues that the decorated quarto format originated in Padua and had no connection at all to the ducal papers of Venice, as Payne had speculated.³⁸ Mr. Nucci believes that the quarto style evolved so that the graduates could more easily carry their credentials with them, and that the documents were elaborately decorated to advertise the graduates’ wealth and taste.

The Italian diploma studies have identified several of the prominent artists working around the time that the Carnerius diploma was made. One of these men was Johannes Aloysius Foppa, who was also identified in 1949 by Kisch as the creator of the de Curnis diploma. Foppa “was elected writer of degrees [on] March 1, 1682, having presented three models, costing respectively 12 lire and 8 soldi, 18 lire and 12 soldi, and 24 lire and 16 soldi, according to the complexity and richness of the writer and painter, ‘to please the graduates who were looking for more elaborate work’”³⁹ However not all of Foppa’s work was elaborate or complex, as Molli suggests. The diploma of Hyacinthus Mopianus (Giacinto Mopiano) 1688, is held at the Wellcome Trust Library Archives, and is signed by Foppa. It is two pages shorter than other Padua diplomas, and has no ornamentation other than a gilt-illuminated initial. Another Foppa-signed diploma at the Wellcome Library belonged to Bartholomeus Pergamus, 1690. It is relatively plain also, with a coat of arms, ornamental border and gilt capitals, but no florals or figures. There is, however, one perfectly rendered, almost trompe l’oeil housefly with gleaming gilt eyes, sitting in the middle of one page.

Foppa was succeeded by Pellegrino Marcon sometime in the late 1680s or early 1690s. Giovanna Baldissin Molli credits Marcon with:

the insertion of naturalistic character in the classic circular structure. We...note the representations of small flies, mosquitoes, butterflies, dragonflies, spiders, and small multicoloured birds. There are also peacocks in the degrees of Bonini and Dotto...the small images of the Madonna, roses, strawberries, spiders, violets, the lily of St. Anthony and peacocks; all this is in Francesco Brescia of Treviso’s diploma (1691). What is important for us is that it is signed: Pellegrino Marcon of Padua.⁴⁰

The presence of the fly in the Pergamus diploma would seem to cast doubt on Marcon being the originator of this style, but it may be that a Foppa/Marcon studio adopted naturalism as its

³⁷ Giordana Canova Mariani, Giovanna Baldissin Molli and Federica Toniolo, *La Miniatura a Padova dal Medioevo al Settecento*. Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 1999. p417.

³⁸ Anna Cerboni Baldari, “Santi cornice e stemmi: appunti sui diplomi italiani dipinti di una collezione privata” in *Honor & Meritus: Diploma di Laurea dal xv al xx secolo*. Rimini: Panazzo Editore, 2005. pp 53-75.

³⁹ Giovanna Baldissin Molli, “La decorazione pittorica nei diplomi dell’Università di Padova” in Molli et. al. *Diplomi di Laurea all’ Università di Padova (1504 – 1806)*. Padova: Università degli Studi di Padova, 1998. p

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p41.

signature style, without it necessarily being attributed to one individual. Marcon may have also simply recycled earlier images. The Chester Beatty Library in Dublin shows a page from an evangeliary, painted by Padua artist Benedetto Bordone in 1523.^{41 42} The border is composed of flowers, fruit and insects, many of them similar to the ones in the Carnerius diploma. The Beatty page even features a peacock at the bottom of the page.

The third artist of note was Rocco Maria Castelli, also active at the time of the Carnerius diploma, and the successor to Foppa and Marcon as the official diploma master. Castelli's work is distinctive in that it exhibits a bold, almost 20th century graphical style, featuring vivid colours and muscular cherubs reminiscent of some of Michelangelo's sturdy figures. Several Castelli-signed diplomas can be seen at the Wellcome Library, and the Royal College of Physicians also has one which belonged to Richard Mead (1695), another physician of note in 17th century England. An unexpected treasure that gave a glimpse into Castelli's life was found at the Newberry Library in Chicago. They hold his copybook, a small dog-eared notebook with samples of his calligraphy, showcasing various fonts, alphabets and flourishes, all done in pen and ink. The title page opens with a prayer and reads "Caratteri diuersi di Rocco Maria Castelli da Bologna, scrittore, grammatico, arimmetico, e pittore, allieuo delle Scuole Piè di detta città, e presettore della Misericordia di Vicenza."⁴³ It is a young man's book, as suggested by the somewhat boastful list of attributes and the term "allieuo/allievo" or student. The Newberry library dates it to around 1660, 35 years before the assured and mature style of the Mead diploma. The copybook is a rare and personal link to the world of the Padua diplomas, made even more poignant by the presence of Castelli's ink-smudged fingerprints on the pages. As moving as Castelli's work is, it is evident that he was not the creator of the Carnerius diploma, since the style is very different. While his work does include floral motifs, they are symbolic or decorative images rather than faithful renderings.

Based on Molli's analysis and the evidence of the diplomas in England, it would seem likely that the Carnerius diploma was produced in Padua by a Foppa/Marcon workshop, because of the "naturalistic elements" she describes. This agrees with Friedland's photo of the de Curnis diploma, which is earlier but very similar in style and signed by Foppa. Closer in time are the Jacob Levi diploma in the Umberto Nahon Museum and the Girolamo Maschi diploma at Princeton,⁴⁴ both of which were produced in 1684. Each of these has motifs that are almost identical to the Carnerius diploma, including the portrait medallion, peacocks, thistles, roses, tulips and insects, although the work is not as finely executed. Unfortunately neither diploma is signed.

⁴¹ "Chester Beatty Library Image Gallery." [Chester Beatty Library | The Chester Beatty Library website](http://www.cbl.ie/cbl_image_gallery/image.asp?ID=152&Collection=Western&ImageNumber=T0000630). 4 May 2009

http://www.cbl.ie/cbl_image_gallery/image.asp?ID=152&Collection=Western&ImageNumber=T0000630.

⁴², Giordana Canova Mariani, Giovanna Baldissin Molli, and Federica Toniolo. [La Miniatura a Padova dal Medioevo al Settecento.](#) Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 1998.p413.

⁴³ The Newberry Library. <https://i-share.carli.illinois.edu/nby/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&v1=1&BBRecID=288804>

⁴⁴ *Diploma delivered by the University of Padua to Girolamo Maschi, Doctor of Laws*

[http://catalog.princeton.edu/cgi-](http://catalog.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?v2=2&ti=1,2&SEQ=20090501171132&Search%5FArg=padua%20diploma&Search%5FCode=GKEY%5E&CNT=50&PID=tGImSNw1qSm-NZQjF-zuaFfsTMBg&SID=2)

[bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?v2=2&ti=1,2&SEQ=20090501171132&Search%5FArg=padua%20diploma&Search%5FCode=GKEY%5E&CNT=50&PID=tGImSNw1qSm-NZQjF-zuaFfsTMBg&SID=2](http://catalog.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?v2=2&ti=1,2&SEQ=20090501171132&Search%5FArg=padua%20diploma&Search%5FCode=GKEY%5E&CNT=50&PID=tGImSNw1qSm-NZQjF-zuaFfsTMBg&SID=2)

The Carnerius artist took the naturalistic style to another level and transformed it into something very close to botanical illustration. Who was this person? The name “Valerio Vincent” appears in tiny print at the bottom of coat of arms on the last page of the Carnerius diploma. This name is not seen on any other diploma, and has not been identified by any of the Italian diploma scholars. It is not even certain that this was the artist’s name, since in other diplomas the artist’s signature appears on the same page as the signatures of the academics and dignitaries who granted the degree. It would appear that the artist of the Carnerius diploma had interests that went beyond livening up official documents with charming natural motifs, and instead his aim was to record an almost scientific level of botanical documentation.

Could this artist have been influenced by the exquisite floral still lifes that were popular in the Netherlands at about this time? Did he have some botanical training? It may be that the proximity of the University of Padua’s Orto Botanico/ Botanical Garden had some influence. The Orto Botanico is the oldest continuously used botanical garden in Europe, having been founded in 1545. It was, and still is, associated with the university’s medical school.⁴⁵ Certainly many of the plants depicted in the Carnerius diploma were grown in the Orto Botanico, according to a plant inventory published in 1591⁴⁶ as well as in 17th century herbaria (books of pressed plants), made in the garden by the head gardener himself. Some of the Padua herbaria still exist in the botanical vaults of the Natural History Museum in London today.⁴⁷

It is also possible that the floral images served a symbolic as well as decorative purpose. There is a long tradition in Western art of conveying a message by the use of plant imagery, and the medieval painters of Padua certainly employed plant images in their work. Think of the Virgin Mary, with her roses and lilies, or the ancient Greek and Roman gods with their laurel wreaths. A complete analysis of the floral imagery in the Carnerius diploma is out of the scope of this paper; however, suffice it to say that enough evidence exists to suggest that the selection of the types of flowers and fruit in the diploma may have been intended to convey a message about Carnerius’ deep faith and devotion to the Virgin.

Similarly it is possible that the animals portrayed in the diploma have a symbolic meaning, or they may simply be creatures found in northern Italy at the time. Medieval books of hours often had insects in the margins, which have been described as “verminous whimsies”⁴⁸ with no function other than to delight. The insects of the Carnerius diploma are rendered in such fine detail that if one looks closely, their shadows can be seen. The Carnerius fly is almost identical to the unexpected fly in the Pergamus diploma, which appears to have just landed on the page. This once again points to an artist who was not only a master of the miniature technique, but also someone who had an interest in, or who was trained in, the life sciences. We know that

⁴⁵ The Botanic Garden. <http://www.cbft.unipd.it/pdtour/garden.html>

⁴⁶ Alessandro Minelli, ed. *The Botanical Garden of Padua, 1545-1995*. Venice: Marsilio, 1995. pp207-241

⁴⁷ Charles E. Jarvis, “Seventeenth century collections from the botanic garden of Padua in the herbarium of Sir Hans Sloane.” *Museol. Sci* 14(1) Suppl.: 145-154, 1998.

⁴⁸ Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*. London: Reaktion Books, 2004. p.18 http://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=_qpwnJ-v5aEC&oi=fnd&pg=PA7&dq=insects+medieval+books+hours+decay+symbol&ots=w6AYSt9ttO&sig=SpwFiwt2BfO3F6_oGLG1e-Lbe8#PPP1,M1

Foppa claimed creatorship of the Pergamus diploma, (as well as several others), yet he did not sign the Carnerius diploma, even though it is arguably a finer work. Could the fly on the Pergamus diploma be a master's gift to an apprentice, where Foppa allowed his pupil to add his own flourish in the form of a small creature? We will never know, unless a diploma identical to the Carnerius diploma is found, with a signature.

There is also the question of the classical/mythological beings in the Carnerius diploma. There are certainly other diplomas that feature putti, the Graces, and other classical beings. Until the translation of the diploma was completed, it was thought that perhaps Carnerius was a physician because of the presence of a figure holding a caduceus, the ancient medical symbol. Since the University of Padua was, and continues to be, one of the most renowned medical schools in Europe, the presence of medical imagery in one of their diplomas is not surprising, but its appearance in a law degree is unusual.



It is possible, as Walter J. Friedlander says, that by the sixteenth century, “the symbol of Mercury, the caduceus, would be taken as a sign of having wisdom.”⁴⁹ Another possible explanation veers into the occult. There is evidence to suggest that through its symbolical linkage to Mercury/Hermes, the caduceus was also tied to Hermeticism. This mystical belief system, studied in detail by Frances Yates and her successors, was known in medieval Padua and had a foothold among the educated classes throughout 17th century Europe.⁵⁰ Was Gaudentius Carnerius/Gaudenzio Carneri an adept of the works of Hermes Trismegistus, or is the caduceus simply there to signal his wisdom and learnedness? The significance of the caduceus to the Carnerius diploma is unclear and is deserving of more study.

Since we now know that the diplomas were commissioned by the graduates, a clearer picture of the significance of the Carnerius images might emerge if we knew who he was. This is not yet the case. Genealogical records available through RootsWeb⁵¹ indicate that the Carneri name

⁴⁹ Walter J. Friedlander, *The Golden Wand of Medicine: A History of the Caduceus Symbol in Medicine*. Contributions in Medical Studies, Number 35. New York: Greenwood Press, 1992. p. 84.

⁵⁰ Frances Yates. *The Art of Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.

⁵¹ Rootsweb: Finding our roots together. <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/>

was known in Trento and Cles, but can offer no direct link to Gaudenzio or his father Simon. Based upon the family name, there may also be an association with the sculptor Mattia Carneri,⁵² who worked in Padua, Venice, Innsbruck and Trento some years before Carnerius graduated, but again there is no direct evidence to link the two. It is tempting to think that if Carnerius was connected to an artistic family, that his extraordinary diploma might have been a labour of love, a gift from one of those artistic relations. We simply do not know.

What is next for the Carnerius project? After this long research journey, will the diploma go back to being just a pretty book? We can be assured that the diploma will never again be a hidden gem in the University of Manitoba's collections. Instead, the results of the Carnerius research project have already been used at the University in a number of ways. The first is to inform the university community about the Archives' collections and services. There has been a well-attended lecture on the Carnerius project, and the diploma is now featured on the Archives website as part of the Dysart Memorial Collection's Virtual Exhibition.⁵³ The diploma is also being used as teaching device to supplement the university's Archival Studies program. A video, "Rare Research" has been produced, and focuses exclusively on the Carnerius diploma and the questions it generates. This video is available as a link on the Rare Book Collection page and on the University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections' YouTube channel UMA-TV⁵⁴. The video is designed to be an introduction to a web-based instructional unit on doing research with primary materials. The unit is currently under development and is expected to be available for use in September of 2009.

The Carnerius project also resulted in reflection on the process of doing research in an Internet-saturated world. Until quite recently, the idea of using Google for serious research would have been unheard of in academic circles. Many library instruction classes still spend a significant amount of time teaching students about the perils of unfettered web-surfing, and many professors still routinely forbid the use of "Internet sources" in student papers. Instead, students are directed to use only "authoritative" sources, meaning information found in books or academic journals. One must question whether this is a realistic way to view the Web 2.0 world, where libraries, museums and galleries are openly sharing their collections online, and where collaborative user-generated content can also contribute to the sum of knowledge. Even commercial content can be useful in some kinds of primary research, as was demonstrated in the Carnerius project, where diploma images were found on antiquarian bookseller sites. Rather than worrying about the medium, researchers and academics should open their eyes to the message and consider how that message is understood and interpreted by the end user.

The potential to use the Web 2.0 world for closer international collaboration is also great. It was evident from the Carnerius research that even though Padua diplomas reside in many collections around the world, scholars and archivists seemed to be unaware of any outside of their own home collections. This paper would appear to be the first time that the disparate

⁵² Stradario di Trento. Mattia Carneri (via) <http://www.comune.tn.it/trento/trento65.nsf/-stradario/56BB616433B79A7BC12574E90025B187?Opendocument>

⁵³ <https://umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/archives/collections/rarebooks/dysart/exhibition.html>

⁵⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/umarchives>

collections have been profiled and compared. A “Padua Diploma Blog”, for instance, might be able to facilitate further research and identify even more resources.

The dream of shared international knowledge bases has been around for many years and an examination of all the issues surrounding this idea is beyond the scope of this paper. It is evident that progress is being made and work is being done, as evidenced by projects like the Digital Scriptorium, UNESCO’s Memory of the World program and the newly launched World Digital Library. This conference, with its theme of building on cultural heritage and sharing knowledge among libraries, is also a promising development. There is still a long way to go, and creating a collection of northern Italian diplomas will not be high on anyone’s priority list.

In the meantime, however, conversations could start by examining uniform institutional approaches to image access. During this research journey, online access to diploma images varied widely from institution to institution and ranged from completely free and open access to restricted access. At the “restricted” libraries and archives, no online images were available and photos could only be obtained by request. These photos would be supplied by the institution at a cost, which was usually quite prohibitive, unless a grant was obtained to pay for them. Image use was restricted to research purposes only, with legal hurdles to jump over if publication rights were requested. In between open and restricted access were the institutions which allowed personally-taken photos, or the ones which supplied photos or photocopies upon request for little or no charge. Even after they received free access via Flickr to the images of Manitoba’s Carnerius diploma, some of the pay-per-view libraries did not reciprocate with images of their own. Clearly the idea of “ownership” of heritage collections needs to be examined, especially when more and more of the world’s great historical and artistic collections are going online, and the norm seems to be evolving toward more open access. We are comfortable with sharing catalogue records online, and the journal literature is moving towards open source. What if all libraries and museums offered access to their image collections through the gateways of Google Image Search or Flickr?

The theme of this conference is about balance and bridges, how libraries balance the preservation of the past with the technologies and information demands of the future. The quest for answers about the Carnerius diploma showed that while the technologies of today have eliminated many of the barriers of the past by making a wealth of material available online and searchable from anywhere in the world, the balance is still shifting and has not yet found an even keel. Libraries and other cultural institutions should continue to strive toward “paving the way to the development of society, to promote better quality of life and encourage contacts between different civilisations and cultures all over the world” by embracing and developing the technologies that will promote more open access to their heritage collections.

⁵⁵ World Library and Information Congress: 75th IFLA General Conference and Assembly. "Libraries create futures: Building on cultural heritage" <http://www.ifla.org/annual-conference/ifla75/callinfo-en.htm>

Finally, the diploma itself is also a bridge, from the past to the present, from Enlightenment Italy to 21st century Canada, from the University of Padua to the University of Manitoba, from book-based research to web-based research, and from a collector in Rimini to a librarian in Winnipeg. The diploma is not only a rare and beautiful object held in a climate-controlled room, it is also an artifact of 17th century education, wealth & faith, an original work of art, unique among other Italian diplomas, a snapshot of botanical science in its infancy, and a glimpse into a world of academia that is at once alien and familiar. Now it is also a virtual object residing in cyberspace, where anyone with an Internet connection can see it, study it, comment on it and share their own understanding of what it represents. In this way, the Carnerius diploma serves as a link between the artists, scribes and scholars of the past and the students, researchers, and technologies of today. It has ceased to be just a pretty book, and instead has become, as Dr. Gillson intended, an “instrument of civilized thought through many centuries of Western civilization.”

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