

## Databases for the study of the student populations in Italy (1500-1800)

### The Project

By Gian Paolo Brizzi

Student mobility in the early centuries of the age of universities means a specific category of individuals granted legal recognition and imperial *tuitio* in the *Habita* of 1155 by Emperor Frederick I. Their identity was encapsulated in the definition *amore scientiae facti exules*, (hence the ASFE acronym of our database), meaning those who left their home town to study elsewhere. From the time of Emperor Frederick's *I Habita*, they enjoyed a series of privileges granted by popes, emperors, local sovereigns or city governments recognizing, for instance, their right to tax exemption, to their own magistrates and own courts. These privileges, by contrast, were not granted to students attending university schools in their home towns, such as the young of Bologna at their Alma Mater or young Parisians at the schools there. Hence students enjoying legally recognized status were by definition foreigners or «non-citizens», and it was precisely to reduce difficulties caused by this status that students were accorded privileges and also in consideration of the advantages to society as a whole with the consequent spread of technical, legal and medical expertise.

The ASFE database has a multilevel aim. Firstly, to record all information on students and graduates at the Alma Mater studiorum (the project «La storia sui muri» or «History On Walls»). Secondly, to record the entire *corpus* of graduates at an Italian *studium* in the Modern Age (1500–1800), transferring into the database previously published catalogues for other Italian universities (the project «Percorsi delle università storiche» or «A Journey Through Historical Universities»). Thirdly, to include in the database, for the period indicated, foreigners involved as students or graduates with an Italian university and, where possible, to reconstruct the various stages of their *iter italicum*, an aim which the documentation available makes more feasible for German students than other nationalities (the project *Iter italicum*). A proper explanation of the nature and origin of this research, however, requires us to take a step back and look once again at the stages of an ongoing experience that began ten years ago.

In 2000, Bologna University appointed myself and several other cultural institutions to undertake research on wall decoration in the building known as L'Archiginnasio. This was the first permanent location of the schools of Bologna University or, to be more accurate and employ the Latin title, of the *studium universitatum scholarium*

*iuristarum et artistarum*. And like the *Studium* itself, the wall decorations reflect the corporate character of the student body. The project was entitled «La storia sui muri» (History On Walls) and was intended to stress how extraordinary these decorations are as a document of the history of Bologna University and also, more generally, as an important source for the history of European cultural identity.

6,254 coats of arms survive on the walls of schools, porticos, courtyards, corridors and staircases and cover all the space available. At times they were evidently painted over other series from earlier decades. All of them prove that student mobility already existed and that Bologna University was a hub of that mobility throughout the modern age, because only students with the role of councillor in a student *natio* could paint their coats of arms. Local students from the city were excluded since they could not have their own *natio* and so belong to one of the two *universitates*. The coats of arms of Bolognese students make up barely 2% of the whole *corpus*, and belong mostly to students with roles related to teaching. Of the surviving 6,254 coats of arms, 4,154 remain at least partly legible. The *corpus* of the students' armorial work is unequalled in other Italian university cities, partly because Jacobin iconoclasts were more successfully active elsewhere and partly because of the original size of the building, dubbed by contemporaries «the most beautiful university in the world». The other university building comparable to Bologna is the Bo in Padua which has preserved some 3,000 student coats of arms and teacher memoirs.

Our project was intended firstly to be educational, enabling visitors to get beyond the mere colors painted on the walls and identify forenames and surnames, place of origin and the year when each stem was put up. The second aim was related to conservation and restoration. We intended to rectify any errors often affecting a student's name, place of origin and heraldic symbols caused by the large amount of restoration work over the last two centuries. We also intended to relate each coat of arms to all known information on the student who had commissioned it, i.e. period of attendance at Bologna University, courses of study and any positions held in student magistratures. The coats of arms are often arranged like a crown around a stone celebrating a teacher then active in the schools, which makes them an ideal starting point to study the influence of a certain type of teaching in the areas from which those particular students came. My approach differed from that previous studies and cataloguings of the coats of arms and monuments of the graduates of the Archiginnasio in that I concentrated on sources. Attention had previously been limited to information deduced from a decoration itself, regardless of its state of preservation, and subsequent studies merely updated this. I, however, based my approach on those who had commissioned the work, drawing on sources that help identify the students who had had their coats of arms painted. Thus the *corpus* of student coats of arms was simply one of many sources available for studying the student population and so needed to be integrated and compared with other sources more traditionally used for that purpose. In many ways it is not a typical source and since it is limited to council members, it cannot provide exhaustive data on students as such. It is, however, of major importance because it is tangible evidence of the ability of the universities of the past to participate

in the construction of a European cultural identity, on a par with other intellectual groups such as humanist circles or the Republic of Letters.

The first problem, therefore, was the quality of the sources available and their ability to document student presence thoroughly, starting with matriculation of new students, to recreate as completely as possible the *Onomasticon* of all those who attended the *Studium* of Bologna. Since 1988, I had expressed an opinion on matriculations at our universities and my reasoning had been criticized by Jacques Paquet who, in a note in his excellent study on *Matricules universitaires*, claimed that my conclusions were unconvincing. I will therefore take up the argument from that point. Jacques Paquet focused attention on the type of university matriculations and stressed their characteristics. He stated that the greatest information in this regard comes from general matriculations, i.e. those listing in chronological order all the members of the university from the date of their enrolment, rather than from matriculations related to faculty or *nationes*. I do not believe that this is generally applicable in the case of Italy for most of the modern age. Although a variety of situations existed, Italian universities had a number of factors in common of major importance when deciding how to carry out a census of university students.

1. Early in the modern era, general matriculations were fairly rare and the known cases cannot be taken as a sufficiently complete indication of student numbers. I will give just two examples. In 1543, the university magistrates in Pisa made matriculation compulsory for all students. This pressing order in the name of Duke Cosimo was issued four times but to utterly disappointing effect. Similar summons and dispositions were issued several times over the next few years, yet 79% of the students holding the office of councillor had apparently not matriculated despite the statutes expressly allowing only matriculated scholars to be an active electorate, and despite the Duke extending this clause to the passive electorate also. Daniela Novarese has shown that things went no better some 90 years later for Philip IV of Spain who attempted to impose a similar discipline on students at Sicilian universities but who met with passive resistance from part of the university bodies. Thus even explicit regulations failed to make large numbers of students comply with obligatory general matriculation. This might simply have been an attempt to avoid paying a matriculation fee, but was more likely a form of resistance to the steady erosion of student privileges. In Pisa the new rector Scipione Torquato confirmed that he would consider as students all those who «in scholis intraverint», i.e. even those who had not matriculated as the sovereign had decreed. Again in Pisa at the end of the modern era there were those who cited the *Habita* of Frederick I in stating that «a person becomes a scholar in accordance with the rule law when for reasons of study he moves to places having a university», a status therefore that was acquired regardless of any matriculation.

2. Most of the few surviving matriculation documents from the early modern era are not general – and many of those were not introduced before the Napoleonic period –

but were often drafted by the notary of the chancellor or prior of a student university. And even these particular documents do not provide a sufficiently complete picture of student numbers. This source is fragmentary due to the nature of the documents themselves, which were functional to the *universitas scholarium*, (e.g. election of the student magistratures), and so useful only for extremely short periods, such as a year or little more, due to rapid turnover of travelling students and their magistratures. This has facilitated the loss or destruction of these sources. In fact, the *universitas scholarium*, though also adopted by universities starting life or refounded in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, was seriously affected by the gradual erosion of student-related privileges, and that in turn had a serious effect on matriculations. Indirect proof of this is the decision to apply for matriculation in those *nationes* offering greater protection and privileges: a good instance among the better known *nationes* is the *natio germanica* of Bologna where, in the period allowing cross-checks, only 4.3% of those matriculating in that *natio* had also matriculated in the *matricola* of the university. Although there was a higher percentage (25%) of students in the *natio polona*, this confirms that matriculation is not a sufficiently accurate indicator of student numbers.

3. The increasing control exercised over students and the various rules and regulations that were passed facilitated the introduction of general matriculation but only where the university was under the close control of the sovereign, as in Turin after the d'Aguirre reform or in Modena after the 1772 reform. It should be stressed, however, that these were exceptions to the general rule and that university bureaucracy still found it difficult to make the general student public recognize the value of that bureaucracy's functions. In Bologna, for example, although the equivalent of general matriculation termed the Syllabi was introduced in 1740, the *universitas scholarium* continued a matriculation of its own.

4. In most cases, individuals who had not matriculated, taught or attended courses. Admission to the equivalent of today's «finals» did not require university registers to be checked for attendance but statements signed by lecturers on the courses which a student had attended. For instance, approximately half the graduates at Pisa between 1543 and 1609 had not complied with the obligation of general matriculation. Even the obligation to matriculate at the *universitas scholarium*, as laid down in its own statutes, appears to have been widely ignored. For example, 65% of graduates in law and 75% of graduates in medicine at Bologna did not matriculate. Further, those statements signed by lecturers referred to earlier show that many students had private tuition from *dottori* who did not teach at a public *Studium*. We cannot at the moment say how widespread this practice was but there are data suggesting it was hardly a negligible occurrence and that at times it was actively supported by the local authorities, eager not to have too many youngsters concentrated in university cities, especially at times of crisis in public life, (revolts, food shortages, health emergencies, etc). An good example is Naples where the proliferation of private tuition was first accepted, then encouraged and finally

regulated by law in the various cities of the Kingdom. Indeed, until 1860 this phenomenon was widespread in almost all the states of Italy. Obviously, the major effect of all this was that «special» matriculations, (at the *universitas scholarium* and the *nationes*) or the few general ones are barely representative. In sum, at least until the Napoleonic period, matriculations are a thoroughly insufficient source for censuses of the student population at Italian universities. While they cannot be ignored, they need to be read alongside a series of other documents. The sole viable approach is to use secondary sources and devise an open-ended archive combining main and secondary sources, thus creating a database with an architecture able to integrate all available information on a particular student which will then be put into a single file.

In the case of Bologna, we kept to a strict hierarchy of sources. First we created files of the series of graduates: these series have been preserved in their entirety and were recorded both by the notary and the prior of the doctoral college to guarantee authenticity. For degrees *in utroque iure* regarding two colleges – civil and canonical – and their respective priors, there are four registrations, plus the nominations of the examination *promotores*, a document which can provide extra information on the graduates, e.g. place of origin, father and social status. Thus for each graduate we may have information ranging from a single registration, as in the case of the theology students, or as many as 5 in the case of graduates *in utroque*. The situation is very different with students who did not graduate and who accounted for the great majority. During the 296 years which we examined, matriculations in Bologna at the *universitas scholarium*, (the sole existent type until 1740), cover only 91 years in the case of law students and 159 years in the case of arts students. These have been combined firstly with the few surviving matriculations of the *nationes* – the German and Polish – covering 50 and 131 years respectively, then with the councillors of the *nationes*, (the data being sourced from the minutes of the *universitas scholarium*), and with the *fides matriculandum*, i.e. statements signed by lecturers at the *Studium* certifying that an individual was a student. This particular document was required for matriculation and may be useful to fill gaps related to that. The Syllabi are the equivalent of general matriculation and have only existed fragmentarily since 1740. We then filed the catalogues of the student colleges that had preserved their documents: Antonio Pérez Martín has shown the extent to which the student history of a particular university can be enriched by using college files. These colleges housed students from Hungary, Croatia, Spain, Flanders, Parma, Le Marche and Tuscany. Together with internal documentation, secondary sources such as the coats of arms at the Archiginnasio were crucial to our project, although our survey would ideally include the systematic cataloguing on file of the *Stammbücher* belonging to students who attended at least one Italian university.

The *Onomasticon* could then be complemented with information on student presence from the archives of central and local institutions, with special focus on the archives of those magistrates who dealt with university matters. The acts of the civil and criminal courts can also provide us with useful information, as can – to an even greater extent – the archives of the public notaries, especially of those working for the university.

This approach has already proved invaluable in providing surrogates for *acta graduum* documents, as the cases of Padua, Ferrara, Pavia have shown. Ecclesiastical archives also require careful investigation for acts and deeds belonging to the notary of the university chancellor, a position normally filled by the bishop, but also for the acts of the ecclesiastical courts, ecclesiastical benefits and certificates of admission to holy orders which normally contain a statement issued by lecturers on the nature of a student's university studies. The eight volumes published by Armando Verde on students at the University of Florence are an example of how it is possible, in the absence of primary sources, to reconstruct the student population of a university, drawing on the main civil and ecclesiastical sources. Research of this kind is undoubtedly not easy to replicate and even more difficult to expand on.

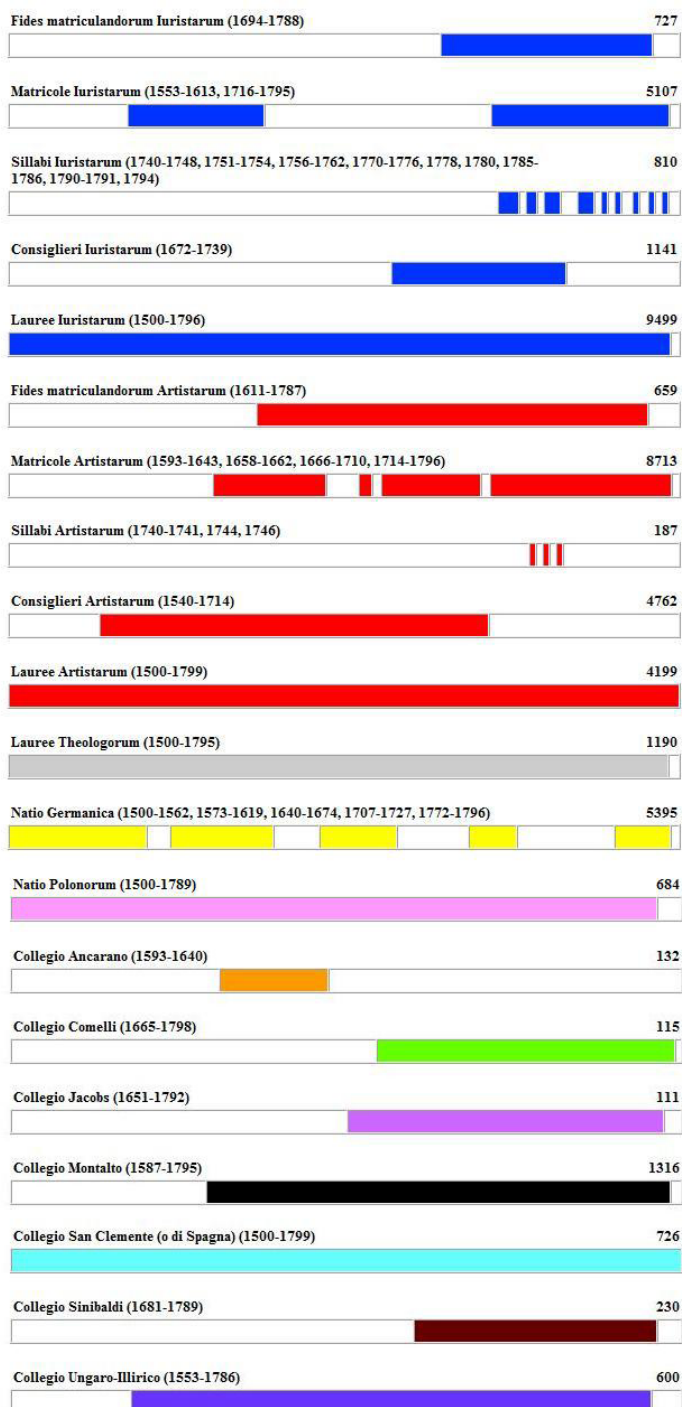
ASFÉ is not yet on line but the database has already achieved our first aim («La storia sui muri/History On Walls» project). Over the next few months, data will be available on line concerning students and graduates at Bologna University in the modern age (46,573 files) and all information on students and lecturers contained in the wall decorations at the Archiginnasio will be published on paper. The section on Italian university graduates is ongoing (currently 52,950 files) and the third section of the project (*Iter italicum*) currently has 35,704 files, solely for students belonging to the *natio germanica*.

In the meanwhile, a project has been launched by the universities of Bologna, Pavia, Padua, Siena and Pisa called «Percorsi delle università storiche» («A Journey Through Historical Universities»). One of its aims is to investigate the mobility of lecturers, (to be studied by the Siena group led by Paolo Nardi), and students, (to be studied by the team from Bologna). Here also we intend to use the ASFÉ data base and insert the printed catalogues of students from Bologna and the other Italian universities with only the essential data regarding inscriptions, (name, surname, place of origin, date of enrolment), which could certainly be expanded upon but which, at this stage, we are unable to consider.

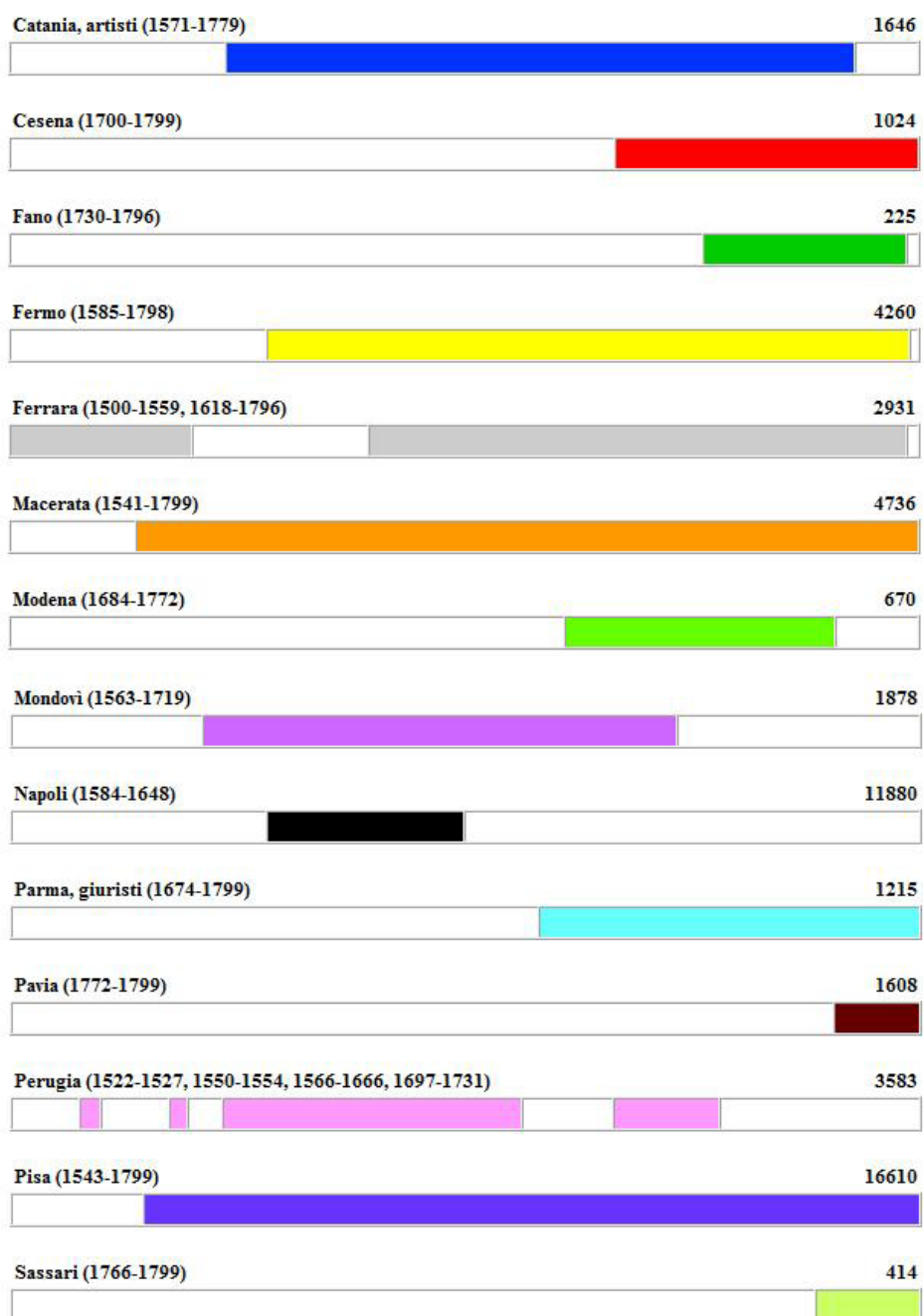
We are fully aware of the challenges posed by this stage of the work. Many past projects have been aborted and left on the drawing-board, even when promoted by experienced scholars. Thus, the project headed by Sven Stelling Michaud intending to reconstruct the *corpus* of foreign students at the University of Bologna from 1270 to 1500 merely produced fragmentary data for Polish students only. It is precisely for this reason that, for the moment, our project will remain limited solely to printed sources.



**Tab. 1** Project «History on Walls» (1500–1799)

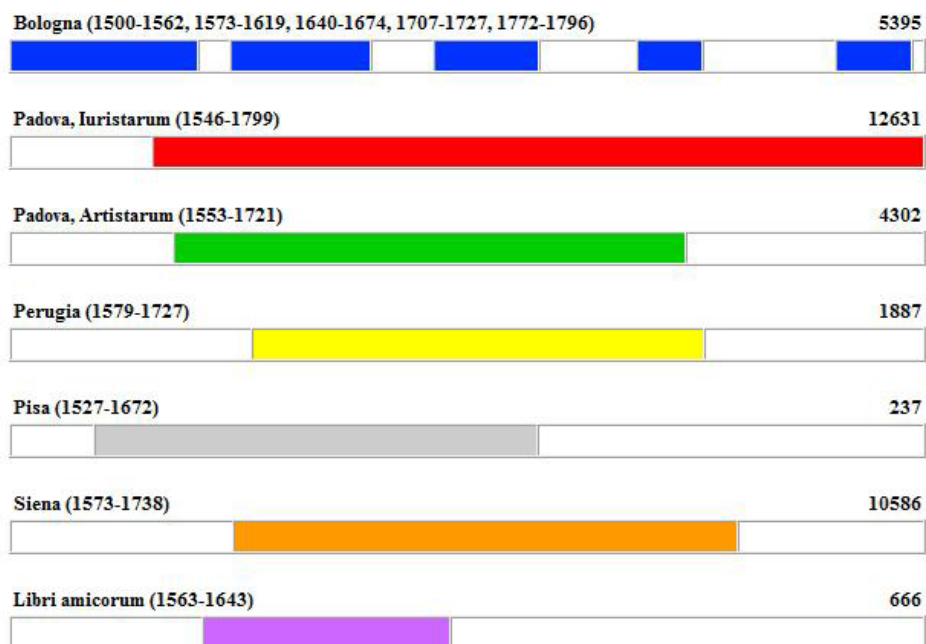


**Tab. 2** Project «A Journey Through Historical Universities» (1500–1799)





**Tab. 3** Project «Iter Italicum» (1500–1799)



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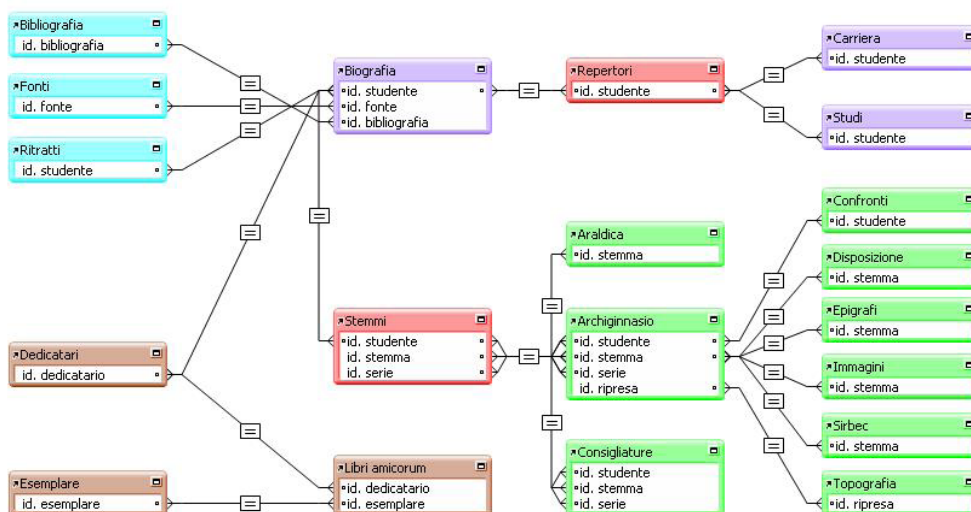
## Database Structure

By Andrea Daltri

The project of the ASFE database originates from the research «History On Walls», aimed at cataloguing the mural decoration of the Archiginnasio palace. At first the project's aim was limited to the construction of an instrument that would enable the identification of the coat of arms' holders. Then the main purpose became the creation of a more complex support, that is to say a relational-oriented one. This strategy entailed the overcoming of several difficulties, due to both the organization of data and, above all, to the choice of the way of presenting the information. The methodological assumption of the new relational structure, which has been created with the software Filemaker, lies in the will to create a display of the available data as integrated as possible. The assignment of a univocal identification code to each student has made it possible at first to select the various documentary information and later on to divide the homogeneous information into three subject areas: the biographical profile, the *curriculum studiorum*, the coats of arms preserved in the Archiginnasio palace. From an information technology point of view the main database characteristics are:

- flexibility of the structure to ease any possibile modification and increase;
- surfing among different layouts;
- information atomisation to enable the combination of data in different possible ways;
- use of scripting instructions to reduce the risk of undesired actions;
- use of calculated fields to automatize the inserting procedure;
- use of value lists to condition the inserting procedure and to avoid the creation of unstandardized forms.

**Tab. 4** Database structure



Let's take a closer look on the table at the configuration of the database. In order to ease the structure readability we have inserted only the main files into the schema and we have provided them with the indication of the most important relations and of the fields where they are based. Actually, the database currently includes about fifty related files and more than a hundred of relations. Some files are used for the storage of data, some exclusively for the synthetic visualization of information, some others as service file for data control and normalization management. Let's analyze into details the structure of the most important files.

The *Biography* file contains the information about the biographical profile of the student (currently the records are 104,161). The data deduced from the sources include first name, family name, place and date of birth and death, father's name, title, condition and place of origin (town, diocese, region and country). Any possible variant found and the normalized form in the respective national languages is reported. Each piece of information comes with its respective documentary or bibliographical references. The frequent presence of variants and discrepancies in the student onomastic forms or in the indications about the student place of origin has brought about the need to face the problem of the reliability and hierarchy to be given to the data deduced from the various documentary typologies.

The data concerning the student *curriculum studiorum* have been included in the *Studies* file (133,977 records): the matriculation in the ranks of the *Universitas scholarium* or of the *Natio*, the subscription into a *liber amicorum*, the admission to a college, the graduation. The available data have been identified on the basis of their typology (e.g. MAT for Matriculation (*Universitas*), NAZ for Matriculation (*Natio*), LAU for Graduation, etc.). For each registration, chronologically ordered, all the information supplied by the respective documentary series is reported: the *Studium*, the *Universitas*, the *Natio*, the date of matriculation, of graduation or of admission to a college; the subject studied and the relative *tutores*; the type of graduation; any possible post held within a *Natio* or a college. The punctual documentary and bibliographical references are placed close to each registration.

The *Career* file contains information about professional activity and held public services (6813 records). For each registration, chronologically ordered, all the information supplied by the respective documentary series is reported: the place, the institution, the office and the chronological extremes.

The file *Repertorium* makes it possible to visualize in a single layout the information stored in the three above mentioned files, allowing to make combined searches as far as their content is concerned.

The *Archiginnasio* file includes the information on mural decoration of the Archiginnasio palace (6,254 records). Without entering a subject that goes beyond our presentation it is however necessary to provide you at least with a piece of information: normally, each coat of arms belongs to a decorative cycle including the coats of arms of those students who, in representation of their *Natio* of origin, held the post of *consiliarius* in the corporative body named *consiliatura* which was elected every year



by the two Bologna *Universitates*. The cataloguing of each coat of arms, of which a digitalized image is supplied, includes the *Universitas* that commissioned the decorative cycle, the dating related to the academic year, the data related to the placement in the palace rooms, the transcription of the present status of inscriptions – that reports the student name, the place of origin, the represented *Natio* (that often does not coincide with that of origin) and any possible post held by the student (*prior, praeses or syndicus*) –, the normalized transcription which takes into consideration the different readings and interpretations proposed by the studies on the Archiginnasio palace decoration and finally the artistic and heraldic description.

The *Coats of arms* file makes it possible to have access to the layout that by synthesizing the results obtained in the identification of the heraldic decoration of the Archiginnasio palace connects the information gathered from paper sources with the iconographic ones. The file combines each student with the pertinent coats of arms chronologically ordered.

In conclusion, we would like to underline the main methodological difficulties faced in the database implementation:

- the risk to create duplicated records due to presence of variants and incongruences in onomastic forms or in the indications about the student place of origin;
- consequently, the need to create a specific form of check that, by using *ad hoc* filters, enables to intercept duplicated records;
- the data dishomogeneity determined by the use of informative materials belonging to different typologies (archive sources, erudite compilations, scientific contributions);
- therefore, the need to elaborate terminological specifications to compile the fields for which it is not possible to condition the data inserting with the aim to harmonize the style of the information stored in the database.

Last but not least, we would inform you that we have planned to publish the database on the web. That decision was determined, not only by the will to ensure a higher visibility to our project, but also by the awareness that, by being on the web, the potentialities of the information contained in the database would be fully developed. The web, in fact, provides the opportunity to make more complex and focused queries and to improve the surfing among the different sections. At present the development of our solution is still at a prototype *status*, that can be exclusively accessed in local-host functionality. To construct the site we used a grammar that combines the traditional html format with a marking language owned by Filemaker and named cdml.



