Laura Maria Caterina Bassi Encyclopedia Article

Laura Maria Caterina Bassi

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Laura Maria Caterina Bassi

1711-1778

Italian physicist who was not only the first woman to graduate from the University of Bologna, but received an official post at the university. Laura Bassi was born into wealth and home schooled with the assistance of her family physician. A child prodigy, she excelled at mathematics, philosophy, anatomy, natural history and several languages, which earned her entry to the University of Bologna, from which she received a Doctor of Philosophy degree. In 1745, she attained a monumental honor from Bologna's scientific community when she was awarded a post with the Benedictines of the Academy of Sciences established by the Pope. From 1745 to 1778, she gained respect for her research on mechanics, hydrometry, elasticity and other properties of gases, just as she earned widespread criticism for being a woman in a male-dominated field.