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ROME'S PHYSICIAN: GUIDO BACCELLI AND HIS LEGACY IN THE NEW ITALIAN CAPITAL

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SUMMARY

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Many Italian physicians played a more or less relevant role in the military, social and political events which paved the way to and accompanied the birth of the unitary State, which 150th anniversary falls in 2011, but probably just one of them, Guido Baccelli (1832-1916), left so many traces in the very landscape of the present-day Italian capital. Even if the millions of tourists pouring into Rome every year are not aware of it, the vision and tenacity of this celebrated physician lay behind quite a lot of the most typical and popular places of the Eternal City. Baccelli, as a politician, took care of his home town with the same kindness and effectiveness he put, as a physician, in the care of the sick.

In 2011 Italy celebrates the 150th anniversary of its national unification, that is the birth of a unitary State from the seven little States which filled the Italian peninsula until then. But that process, started in 1861, would be accomplished only in 1870, with the conquest of the Papal States and the move to Rome of the capital city of the new Reign.
Many Italian physicians played a more or less relevant role in the military, social and political events which paved the way to and

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accompanied the birth of the unitary State[1], but probably just one of them, Guido Baccelli (1832-1916), has left so many traces in the very landscape of the present-day Italian capital. Even if the millions of tourists pouring into Rome every year are not aware of it, the vision and tenacity of this celebrated physician lay behind quite a lot of the most typical and popular places of the Eternal City. Baccelli, as a politician, took care of his home town with the same kindness and effectiveness he put, as a physician, in the care of the sick.

Guido Baccelli as a physician

Before considering in detail the achievements of Baccelli in the cultural, artistic and urban fields, it is necessary to get an idea, even if only impressionistic, of his medical and scientific stature. Only his prestige as a clinician and a university teacher can account for his subsequent enormous influence on fields so varied and distant from Medicine.

Guido Baccelli spent almost his entire clinical and teaching life in the environment, covered with glory but by that time decaying and unfit, of the mediaeval hospital of Santo Spirito in Saxia (Fig. 1), between the Tiber and the Vatican[2].

Its old wards, which aroused one of the very few praises of Martin Luther for Rome ("Cleanliness is admirable")[3] ,witnessed Baccelli's pioneering use of the stethoscope - up to the point that he was known among the common people as "the physician who examines the sick with the trumpet"[4] – and, later on, of the intravenous therapy[5].

In the rooms of Santo Spirito, Guido Baccelli successively welcomed the two future Nobel Prizes Alphonse Laveran (in 1882)[6] and Camillo Golgi (in 1893)[7] who were looking for confirmations of their theories about the origin and evolution of malaria, in the *Campagna Romana*, at that time dreadfully scourged by the disease[8], and in the very Hospital where Cinchona's bark had been used for the first time, in the17th century, against malarial fevers[9].

Fig. 1 Old wards of the Hospital of Santo Spirito in Saxia, Rome, where Guido Baccelli was in charge for most of his professional life and pioneered the use of the stethoscope. Photo by the Author

Baccelli himself took active part in the scientific and medical debate about the aetiology and the best preventive or curative methods for malaria. Slow as he was to accept the anopheles as the sole vector in the transmission of the illness[10], his role became crucial when the young Italian State pointed out the struggle against malaria – which literally besieged the Capital town – among its social priorities, with huge projects for the drainage of the Pontine Marshes and the distribution of quinine[11].

Although his rather rebellious character and liberal ideas were manifest from his very youth[12], Baccelli obtained important clinical and academic appointments by the Pontifical Government which entrusted him ini-

tially with the teaching of Forensic Medicine (1856) and then of Clinical Medicine (1862) inside the Pontifical University of "La Sapienza"[13].
At the end of the temporal power of the Popes, in 1870, the new Italian government, after receiving an oath of allegiance, confirmed Baccelli in the chair and directorship of the *Clinica medica*, two appointments Baccelli maintained almost lifelong, jointly with the Presidency of the National Board of Health (*Consiglio Superiore di Sanità*) from 1872 to 1877 and again from 1887 to 1915[14], a few months before his death.
His research activity mainly yielded in the fields of abdominal and thoracic symptomatology, with important works on the pathology of the heart and aorta, and with the discovery of new symptoms and morbid features, as the phenomenon of aphonic pectoriloquy, a modification of the voice heard on auscultation, which is still known as Baccelli's sign[15].
Baccelli was a very successful teacher and "his medical lectures draw perhaps a larger audience than those of any other teacher in Rome", as a *special correspondence* to the British Medical Journal stated in 1881[16]. He systematically linked the clinical observation to the anatomical pathology investigation and his teaching was constantly aimed to develop critical thought and autonomy of judgment among his students.
Augusto Murri, the most famous among Baccelli's Italian disciples, so remembered his master's school in 1888:

> *When I entered his clinic [1870] I had spent two years in the schools of France and Germany, but in neither of them freedom of scrutiny, respect for absolute independence of thought and word, was so religious and sincere, as in that Clinic situated one hundred meters from the Vatican. -Think with your own brain; never bow to authority, believe only in facts and reason, but in nothing else; don't believe in me, but in your judgment-. Such were the sentences our Master repeated us every single day*[17].

The international appreciation of Guido Baccelli was also remarkable. Enough to say that in such occasions as the momentous International Congress of Medicine in Berlin (1890), or during the celebration of Rudolph Virchow's 80th birthday (1901), Baccelli was usually associated with Joseph Lister as the most distinguished participant to the meeting[18].

It was Virchow himself who drew a parallel between the two scientists by saying that "what Lister did for the body's surface, Baccelli did for blood crasis[19]". Robert Koch, on his part, in 1890 entrusted Baccelli with the first samples of tubercolin intended for testing in Italy[20].

But now, we will see that clinical practice, research work and medical teaching were not sufficient to run out Guido Baccelli's physical and mental energy.

Baccelli as a Capital-city planner

Member of the Italian Parliament since 1874 and of the Town Council of Rome since 1875, Guido Baccelli had an increasing and lasting political prestige that gave him the possibility of designing and accomplishing many ambitious projects, all of them destined to eventually change the look of Rome during the decades between the 19th and 20th centuries.

Guido Baccelli was Minister of Education six times and once Minister of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce, for a total period of almost ten years, between 1881 and 1903. In short, he had plenty of occasions to wield power.

Moreover, it's important to underline, on this point, that in Baccelli's time, the enormous archaeological and artistic heritage of Rome fell within the competence of the Ministry of Education, through its Office for Antiquities and Fine Arts[21].

Therefore, we can say that Guido Baccelli, deeply fond of his home town with its ancient glory, as well as strong upholder of a new greatness for the young Italian capital, could put together ideas and

resources to fulfil them. Needless to say, that was not without oppositions, bureaucratic delays, difficulties and hesitations.

The Pantheon

The first ideal link, in Baccelli's mind, between the ancient Rome and the modern one ruled by the Savoy monarchy, was to be found in the Pantheon, one of the most characteristic buildings of the City. The ancient temple for the worship of *all the gods* had been commissioned by Agrippa, son-in-law of the Emperor Augustus, but, after a fire had destroyed it, had been entirely rebuilt by Emperor Hadrian in about 126 AD. The Pantheon was the first pagan temple to be transformed into a Christian church, at the beginning of the 7th century, and this fact protected it from mediaeval spoliations of marble and other precious materials which affected so many ancient buildings of Rome.

In 1632 two bell towers, designed by the famous architect Gian Lorenzo Bernini, were added to the ancient structure. They gave rise to many controversies and eventually became known, in popular language, as the "donkey's ears" of the Pantheon. When Guido Baccelli was made Minister for the first time, he very quickly promoted some important restoration works of the monument, which, at the death of King Vittorio Emanuele I in 1878, had been turned into a *sacrarium* for the reigning house. The works aimed to set the Pantheon free from the buildings leaning against it (1881-1882) and to remove the notorious "donkey's ears" (1883): by doing so Baccelli restored the Pantheon to its unique original shape[22].

He also wanted some big bronze letters, identical to the ones existing in ancient times, to be placed on the facade of the restored temple in memory of Agrippa's work. The great historian of Rome, Theodor Mommsen, strongly opposed this scheme as "barbarous", but Baccelli didn't grow shy and kept going his own way, replying to the historian that *restauratio est continuata creatio* (restoration is an

ongoing creation). And we can still read these bronze letters today: M. AGRIPPA. L. F. COS. TERTIVM. FECIT (Marcus Agrippa, son of Lucius, Consul for the third time, built this[23]).
In conclusion, as stated rather emphatically by the celebrated archaeologist Rodolfo Lanciani, Baccelli "freed the Pantheon from its ignoble surroundings[24]".

The "Passeggiata archeologica"

But the Pantheon's restorations were only the prelude to the biggest among Baccelli's historical and archaeological projects: the town-planning promotion of the ancient monumental area of Rome, known as the "*Passeggiata archeologica*" (archaeological park, or walk).
Since his second and third terms as Minister of Education, between 1882 and 1884, Baccelli fostered a vast campaign of excavations and rearrangement of the Roman Forum (Fig. 2). It needed cleaning up, the removal of some modern buildings which altered its classical landscape – some period photographs, for example, show just behind the Arch of Titus a plain two floors construction hosting an "Iron bedsteads" factory![25] - and the deletion of at least two of the streets which crossed it, damaging the harmony of the monumental complex[26]. The discovery of the House of the Vestal Virgins, explored in 1882-1883 by Rodolfo Lanciani, was the main result of the archaeological excavations of those years[27].
But halfway through the eighties, a grand new plan formed in Baccelli's mind: a complete protection and cultural exploitation of the huge monumental area including a lot of fascinating and symbolic places such as the Roman Forum, the Palatine Hill, the Colosseum and the Baths of Caracalla. A rather uncontrolled and indiscriminate urban growth, quite typical of those first few years of the new Italian capital, endangered one of the areas that are more pregnant of history in the entire world[28].
Keeping this project in sight, Guido Baccelli became reconciled with writer and journalist Ruggero Bonghi, his traditional political oppo-

Fig. 2 Panoramic view of the Roman Forum, Rome. Guido Baccelli, as a Minister of Education, between 1882 and 1884, fostered a vast campaign of excavations and rearrangement of this monumental area. Photo by the Author

nent, and in 1887 introduced a draft bill to the Parliament concerning a "Plan for the arrangement of the protected monumental zone in Rome" which was passed after a few months.

The new Bill "tied up an enormous area (the Roman Forum with a little part of the Imperial Fora, the Colosseum, the Baths of Trajan, part of the Caelian Hill, Palatine Hill, Forum Boarium, Circus Maximus, Aventine Hill, the Caracalla Baths, Appian Way as far as the Aurelian Walls) as an archaeological park, making an exception to the town plan of 1883; works had to be finished in 10 years by means of compulsory purchases arranged between the Municipality and the Ministry of Education[29]".

All sorts of difficulties soon appeared, as Baccelli himself recalled after many years to his son Alfredo:

> *now a Minister of Treasury behaved sparingly, then archaelogists wanted to excavate everything turning this garden into a quagmire, one moment the snarling know-alls, with insincere respect, scribbled poor blame on ignorant newspapers, the next everything stopped due to some conspiracy of silence*[30].

The battle was doomed to go on for years but its promoter didn't omit any argument in order to win it, starting - needless to say - with the health-related and sanitary ones. For example, during a Parliamentary speech in 1893, he stressed the necessity of investing on the monumental area of Rome in order to reduce risks for the public health:

> *Do persuade yourselves, Gentlemen, that a primary need for your staying in the capital consists of making it healthier and healthier; and it should be noted that among the most degraded and nearest to built-up areas is the one which boundaries are the Palatine, on one side, the Colosseum at its back, and the Baths of Caracalla on the right; and so the sarcastic smile of present unhealthiness faces the grandness of ancient monuments. This area at the very heart of the city is among the most saddened by malaria: there are undisciplined waters, ditch reed growing, many differences in the ground level, everything one can be afraid of as possible cause of insalubrity. Don't you value the health of this city you have to inhabit, before the bridges, before the palaces, even before the general hospital itself*[31]*?*

Baccelli's grand plan was revisited and somehow scaled down during the following decades, but eventually the battle was won and today the *Passeggiata archeologica* remains the heart of every tourist journey to Rome.

The National Gallery of Modern Art

As a matter of fact, the interests and dreams of Guido Baccelli were not confined to ancient Rome and archaeology. In his mind, also

contemporary art had to be promoted as a driving force and a proof of Italian national revival; therefore Baccelli conceived a new plan for a great national artistic collection devoted to modernity, where the new State could collect "excellent works of painting, sculpture, drawing and engraving, without distinction of genre or manner (...) by living artists[32]".

Two ministerial decrees, in 1881 and 1883, specified the characteristics of the project and gave the go-ahead to the acquisitions, even if the future National Gallery of Modern Art would wait quite a long time for a suitable and definitive site.

The opening of the new collection "took place on the 5th of March 1885, consisting of one hundred and fifteen works of art, all of them packed in three hundred and fifty square metres; such was the total amount of space unwillingly offered by Capitoline government inside the *Palazzo delle Esposizioni*",[33] then recently opened in the downtown *via Nazionale*.

At last, a definitive site for the Museum was found in the *Palazzo delle Belle Arti*, built in 1911 in the urban area of Valle Giulia, on the occasion of the World Exposition of Rome for the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of Italian unification. The early collections of the National Gallery were transferred and arranged in the new site in 1915, a few months before Baccelli's death: since then, they have grown into the biggest Italian collection of nineteenth and twentieth century artistic production[34]. A bronze bust of Guido Baccelli, work of Roman sculptor Giulio Tadolini in 1895, welcomes the visitors of the Gallery remembering its inspirer and first tenacious promoter[35].

The Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei

To sum up this section of the article, we should briefly mention the role played by Guido Baccelli in another relevant cultural operation for Rome as a capital town.

The new Italian government planned to revitalize the historic *Accademia dei Lincei*, the oldest scientific academy worldwide, founded by Federico Cesi in 1603, which counted Galileo Galilei among its first members. In order to revive the Academy's functions of promoting and encouraging "all over the reign scientific investigation and the search for truth[36]", Italian scientist and politician Quintino Sella set out before the Parliament in 1881 the necessity to build a proper seat for the Academy. The project would have taken a very long time, if Guido Baccelli, then the Minister of Education, had not devised and fostered a more practical and prestigious solution: the purchase by the Government of historical *Palazzo Corsini alla Lungara*, one of the most magnificent palaces of 18th century Rome[37].
The new effective insight of Guido Baccelli came quickly to an end, with a preliminary agreement on March 11th 1883 and with a formal contract of purchase signed on May 19th of the same year. It ensured to the *Lincei* not only a seat of great historical and architectural value, but also a very rich picture gallery and library[38].

Baccelli's main dream: the "Policlinico Umberto I"

Soon after the conquest of Rome in 1870, the new Italian government immediately transformed the *Sapienza* from a Pontifical into a Royal University and tried, among many other things, to tackle the problem of the clinical training of medical students. The first solution consisted of distributing the teachings among the many ancient hospitals of the city, but it was soon found to be an inconvenient and inadequate one[39].
Guido Baccelli, who had a direct experience of the insurmountable structural limitations of historical buildings as the Hospital of *Santo Spirito in Saxia*, was one of the first ones conceiving and supporting the ambitious plan of a new University general hospital in Rome: the new buildings would have to meet the modern health requirements and to be endowed with all the appropriate clinical, research and

teaching facilities, in accordance with the higher standards emerging during those revolutionary decades for medicine and healthcare. The future *Policlinico* was to become the greatest of Baccelli's dreams from the very beginning of his parliamentary activity in 1874.
However, as a matter of fact, only his appointment as a Minister, in 1881, gave him the power of propelling such an ambitious project. It was during that very year that Guido Baccelli was able, on one side, to institute and moderate a board of distinguished clinicians called to examine and solve the problems concerning the construction of the new hospital, and, on the other, to obtain the first public financial support for the project with Law N.209[40] and to open a competition for preliminary plans among the Italian architects[41].
The competition was won in 1883 by architect Giulio Podesti but, due to some hesitations about the proper final location of the hospital, only at the end of 1888 Podesti could elaborate the working plan and have it approved[42]. It consisted of a pavilion design – the separate pavilions being connected to each other by typical two level galleries – according to that epoch more advanced conception, supported, among the others, by Florence Nightingale, in order to foster hygiene, the struggle against hospital infections and the specialization of healthcare[43]. A model very similar to the one applied, in that same period, at the new Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, which was inaugurated on May 7th 1889 and was going, in a very few years, to take the leadership of American medical revolution[44].
Back to Rome, a few months before, on January 19th 1888, during a solemn ceremony in the presence of the King and the Queen, the foundation stone of the new general hospital had been laid[45]. On that occasion, particularly happy to him, Baccelli said in his quite typical inflated way: "Here will come people forlorn of all fortune to experience the beneficial effects of an eternal embrace between Science and Charity[46]". King Umberto I, as reported by a sympathetic account on the British Medical Journal, realistically answered to his friend Baccelli "*that gratifying as*

the present occasion was, it would be a happier day for him when the building was completed and he could visit the sick in it[47]".
Unfortunately, the King after whom, since then, the new hospital has been named, would never have such a possibility. Construction progressed slowly and even if, from 1893 on, a new journal called the "Policlinico[48]", founded by Baccelli himself along with surgeon Francesco Durante, tried to rouse people's spirits for the projected hospital, the *Policlinico Umberto I* could be essentially finished only in 1902[49] and officially opened in 1904[50]. Meanwhile, King Umberto I had been murdered by anarchist Gaetano Bresci on July 29th 1900[51]. In 1902[52], on the gable of the surgery pavilion, the *Clinica Chirurgica*, already stood out a big marble bas-relief wanted by Baccelli since 1890 to honour Joseph Lister (Fig. 3[53]), but Guido Baccelli himself would wait until 1906 to have his own internal medicine pavilion, the *Clinica Medica*, solemnly inaugurated. That was on the occasion of the celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of his academic teaching, when lots of Italian and foreign guests arrived to the new hospital and "*professors, residents and assistants exquisitely entertained the visitors, leading them through halls, laboratories and wards*[54]".
Another one of Guido Baccelli's dreams had turned real. The old clinician walked those wards until the end of 1915, seeing them crowded with soldiers injured during the first months of Italy's fight at the side of the Triple Alliance, during World War I[55].

Conclusion

If we can easily draw a parallel, at the level of hospital design, between Baltimore's Johns Hopkins Hospital and Rome's *Policlinico Umberto I*, it would probably be of bigger interest to draw another parallel between the two great humanist physicians who were the life and soul of those institutions at their starting stage: William Osler[56] and Guido Baccelli. This can be the subject for future work. Right now, the only direct link I could establish between the two clini-

Fig. 3 The surgery pavilion of the Policlinico Umberto I, Rome. On its gable, the big marble bas-relief wanted by Guido Baccelli since 1890 to honour his friend Joseph Lister can be seen. Photo by the Author

cians hides inside the celebrated *Bibliotheca Osleriana* where Sir William Osler included, in the biographical section, a French profile of Baccelli ("*Guido Baccelli dans sa Vie scientifique et sociale*") published just on the occasion of the 1906 celebrations[57].

A more complete human and cultural outline of Guido Baccelli would certainly go beyond the possibilities of this article. It should be a very complex work due to the versatility of this figure and his elusiveness in front of any attempt to label him. Guido Baccelli, a Freemason and an anticlerical, on January 16th 1916 wanted "to die as a Christian and a Catholic as he had been educated and as he had lived"[58] and today his moustached face is recognizable in a fresco of the dome in the Chapel of the *Policlinico* dedicated to the "Merciful

Jesus[59]". Moreover, Baccelli's constant reference to Rome's ancient glory made him to be sometimes regarded as a precursor of fascist rhetoric but, apart from the evident anachronism of such an approach, Baccelli's liberal attitude made him absolutely not prone to any drift towards authoritarianism or dictatorship.

During the commemoration of Guido Baccelli which took place at the Chamber of Deputies on March 1st 1916, his affectionate pupil Gian Battista Queirolo, then a deputy and a professor of internal medicine in Pisa, wished among other things that a monument to the memory of Baccelli could soon be erected right in front of the *Policlinico* so tenaciously and deeply wanted by him, so that he could "always contemplate his great accomplishment[60]". The monument was eventually carried out in 1921 in Salerno Square (Fig. 4),

Fig. 4 The monument to Guido Baccelli, Piazza Salerno, Rome. Let's be honest: not very well preserved for a man who did so much for the beauty and dignity of his town. Photo by the Author

not far from - but neither "right in front of" – the *Policlinico*. It's a work of Italian sculptor Attilio Selva from Trieste. Unfortunately, nowadays that classical-style monument has deteriorated quite a lot and has turned into nothing more than a traffic island in the midst of a scene of typical Roman traffic jam[61].

Quite a paradoxical situation for the physician who to his native town – become after so many struggles and such a long wait the capital town of the new Italian state - dedicated a care second only to the care reserved to the sick.

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