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## MEDICINA NEI SECOLI

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Corresponding Author:

marco.cilione@uniroma1.it

## Introduction Giorgio Valla's Medical Humanism

*Berenice Cavarra*

Department of Biomedical, Metabolic and Neuroscience -  
University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy

*Marco Cilione*

History of Medicine and Bioethics Unit, Faculty of Medicine and  
Surgery - Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

The figure and work of Giorgio Valla, humanist and physician from Piacenza (1447-1500), represents a significant *specimen* of the virtuous interaction between philology and natural science in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. However, if we exclude some fundamental stages in the history of studies on this author<sup>1</sup>, the contributions that have appeared over the years have always concerned partial aspects of his composite scientific personality, as can be seen from the bibliographic review edited by Amedeo Raschieri<sup>2</sup> and the main digital repertoires. Above all, the often valuable studies dedicated to Giorgio Valla seem to have little dialogue with each other. Yet, perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Valla case, together with that of the translation from Greek to Latin, is precisely the overlapping of several characteristic aspects of humanistic civilization and the possibility of a multidisciplinary approach to his activity. The desire to fill this gap has therefore inspired a project by the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, entitled *From Byzantium to Modena. Translating and editing for a refoundation of the philosophy of science and medicine in Humanism*, with the funding of the Modena Foundation (FOMO), which intends not only to examine the cultural complexity of the author, but also to enhance a resource of the territory, namely the collection of his Greek manuscripts preserved in the Estense University Library of Modena, especially those relating to medicine and natural science. The two issues that *Medicina nei*

*Secoli* dedicates to Giorgio Valla are part of the initiatives promoted by this project. The topic perfectly expresses the periodical's vocation to explore territories that are still little known not only in the history of medicine but also in the history of ideas, welcoming very different but always mutually functional disciplinary perspectives. The collection of contributions by important scholars and researchers was inspired precisely by the intention of proposing a portrait of the author, contemplating almost all aspects of his multifaceted cultural relevance. The first concerns the humanistic training of Giorgio Valla who, in a constant dialogue between literature and philosophy of nature, embraces a wide variety of texts, as can be seen from the titles of his personal library and from the review of translated, edited and commented works, including those pseudonymous or edited by his adopted son Giovan Pietro Cademosto, which M.T. Laneri (pp. 9-42) has punctually surveyed here.

This assiduous literary attendance profoundly affects the strategies of transcoding from Greek texts on medicine and natural philosophy. In his construction of a modern lexicon of science, in fact, Valla can count on a precious reservoir of linguistic resources that in many cases represent a valid alternative to medieval translations into Latin or Arabic or to the undemanding solution of the linguistic loanword.

The close relationship between book collecting and the laboratory of translation of ancient and Byzantine medical treatises is particularly evident in the case of the manuscript Mutinensis α.U.9.4 (gr. 61), datable to the 15<sup>th</sup> century that T. Miguet describes in detail from a palaeographic and content point of view and of which he highlights the link with other manuscripts copied by Demetrius Damilas in the last decades of the 15<sup>th</sup>. Valla translated three treatises of the manuscript: Theophanes' *De alimentis*<sup>3</sup>, Symeon, Seth's *De alimentorum facultatibus*<sup>4</sup> and Ps.-Galen's *Praesagitio*. The translation of the first two, together with the section of Apicius' *De re coquinaria* dedicated to condiments, forms a dietary triad that Valla places in bk. 42 (*De oeconomia*) of his encyclopedia *De expetendis et fugiendis rebus opus* (Venice, 1501)<sup>5</sup>. As a matter of fact, among the duties of the good father of a family for the correct administration of the house there is also the choice of food in relation to its function of preserving health. The selection is consistent with the tripartition that Theophilus Protospatharius proposes for dietetics, which the Byzantine author divides into γηροκομικόν, ἀναληπτικόν and προφυλακτικόν.

The contribution of S. Fortuna and Ch. Savino is dedicated to translations from Greek, by Galen specifically, to their use in Valla's encyclopaedia and to the impact they had on the complete translation of the treatises by Marcus Aurelius' physician. The scholars, in addition to identifying the Greek manuscripts on which Valla works, undertake a stylistic and linguistic investigation of the humanist's translation strategies through a particularly seductive methodological approach. Their evaluation goes so far as to identify evolutionary lines in Valla's translation style that allow us to define a relative chronology of his translations. The choice to evaluate synchagorematic particles, where the translator's attention level is lower, is reminiscent of C. Ginzburg's

Morellian method: the editors have had the opportunity to explore the possibilities of this approach in some Greek forgeries that use dialect traits as a falsification strategy. The results of this analysis are undoubtedly promising and testify to how productive the approach to the Valla case is from so many different perspectives.

The history of language and the history of ideas, which leaves its mark on the semantic adaptations of words, has inspired the contribution of the editors, B. Cavarra and M. Cilione. The attention that Valla devotes in his encyclopedia to the theme of the physiology of perception<sup>6</sup> allows us to analyze its relationship with another very significant source: the treatise *De natura hominis* by Nemesius of Emesa. However, there are many aspects that this section of the *De exp.* allows us to analyze and many research approaches that trigger the issue. Particular attention has been paid to Valla's translation strategies through comparison with the choices of Alfano of Salerno and Burgundio of Pisa: in some cases, the humanist makes use of the vastness of his readings to accurately render the physiological nuances of the Greek word, demonstrating a good knowledge of the technical-scientific literature in Latin.

One of the most interesting aspects that emerges from the study of Valla's personal collection of Greek manuscripts is precisely the network of friendships and cultural relationships that characterizes his humanistic activity linked to his specific interest in medicine and natural science. Starting from the codicological and palaeographic analysis of a manuscript containing the five books *De materia medica* by Dioscorides (Mutin. α.P.5.17), M. Cronier reconstructs, through the identification of the antigraph (Ambros. L 119 sup.)<sup>7</sup>, the double level of book relations and personal interactions, especially those between Valla, Ermolao Barbaro and his prestigious intellectual circle. The first issue concludes with the study that C. Giacomelli dedicates to the success of three Vallian translations of Aristotle, to the Greek models used by the humanist and to the creation of his library. The translations, namely *Magna Moralia*, *Poetica* and *De coelo*, are contained in a fascinating incunabulum, published in Venice by Simone Bevilacqua in 1498. The titles collected in the book embrace the various fields of knowledge with the intention of constructing a sort of encyclopedic compendium according to a criterion that from heaven to earth, from soul to body, seems to reaffirm the conviction of ancient thinkers in a strong ontological continuity between man and cosmos on the one hand and in an intimate relationship of the psychosomatic plexus on the other. C. Giacomelli reconstructs the meaning of this laborious recovery of identity through the solidity of his palaeographic and philological study and suggests us a further research on the fortune of the translations of the properly medical treatises contained in the Vallian incunabulum.

To sum up, this brief review of the contents of the first issue testifies to the complexity of an author who expresses all aspects of medical humanism. The contributions as a whole represent a significant starting point for all future studies on Giorgio Valla thanks also to the variety, creativity and rigor of their research approaches.

## Notes

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