



***Virgo, Mater, Nutrix.* Women in the writings of a doctor from Arezzo in the 17th century: Emilio Vezzosi (1563-1637)**

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Abstract

This article aims to highlight philosophical and scientific thought in both published and unpublished writings by Emilio Vezzosi, a physician from Arezzo. The article concerns the role of women in society and their education in the early modern age.

Women as objects of investigation occupy a large space in his scientific and literary production. Physician and poet, he obtained his degree in Pisa in 1589; 'Prince' of Discordi's Academy and polygrapher, he was born in Arezzo in 1563, and died in 1637. He focused his scientific interests on women, their education (*De instituenda Virgine*, MS. 31, Library "Città di Arezzo"), their health as mothers (*Gynaecyeseos, sive De mulierum conceptu, gestatione, ac partu*, 1598, Library of the Academy "Francesco Petrarca", Arezzo), with field medical consultations and investigations (*De partu mirabili Alexandriae Spathariae iudicium Aemilii Vezosi medici aretini*, MS. 38, Library "Città di Arezzo"), as well as on to their role as nurses (*Nutrix sive De alenda sobole*, MS. 41, Library "Città di Arezzo"). His correspondence was also extensive; it remained unpublished and was addressed, above all, to his students.

This article intends, therefore, to fill a historiographical gap as regards the consideration of the female body and its dignity in early modern times, but also as regards the conception of women's role in society, in relation to men and religion (*De Nuptiarum dignitate*, MS. 39, Library "Città di Arezzo"), and with science.

Keywords

women's history, breastfeeding, female education, Arretine medical class

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Women in Arezzo: the context

The aim of this essay is to highlight philosophical and scientific thought in both published and unpublished writings by a physician from Arezzo, Emilio Vezzosi (1563-1637). Studies on Vezzosi are rare, and especially those on the scientific aspects of his medical production. His works mostly concern the role of women in society and their education in the early modern age.

Women as objects of investigation occupy a large space in his scientific and literary production. It is significant that Vezzosi dedicated some of his works to women and, in particular, to the women from Arezzo. This article can therefore fill a historiographical gap as regards the consideration of the female body and its dignity in early modern times, but also as regards the conception of women's role in society, in relation to men, religion and science.¹

During the Renaissance, we can identify different reactions to the statement of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) about the imperfection of women. For example, in a commentary on *Genesis* Martin Luther (1483-1546) states that a woman is in no way a 'botched' man, but it is rather those who accuse her of being such that 'are themselves monsters and the sons of monsters.' This hostility toward Aristotle and Aquinas contrasts with his avowed belief in women's inferiority to men. Furthermore, in the Renaissance, there was

¹ At the end of the Renaissance, there was a greater discrepancy between social realities and the current notion of woman than at the beginning. Ian MacLean noted that these presuppositions had emerged from his investigations into feminist writings in France in the first half of the seventeenth century. There are three broad areas of inquiry to be pursued: the notion of woman itself; the idea of sex difference; and the relationship between sex differences and other differences (cf. Ian MacLean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman. A study in the fortune of scholasticism and medical science in european intellectual life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 1-16). In the Renaissance, the set of Pythagorean opposites (male-female; limited-unlimited; odd-even; one-plurality; right-left; square-oblong; at rest-moving; straight-curved; light-darkness; good-evil) was known not only through Aristotle's account of it, but also through the Hippocratic corpus, in which it was implicit (cf. MacLean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman. A study in the fortune of scholasticism and medical science in european intellectual life*, 3). For example, Pierre de la Ramée's (1515-1572) dichotomies are found in many texts of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, too; in particular, his theory of division was inherited by Plato. It would be wrong to suggest, however, that humanist activity and scientific inquiry are alone the cause of change in the notion of woman. André Tiraqueau (1488-1588) establishes women's inferiority to men, and Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529) in *Il cortegiano* (1528) reproduced the case for and against female inferiority. In the distinction between masculine and feminine, we could discern Aristotle's general tendency to produce dualities in which one element is superior and the other inferior. In Aristotle, Nature would always wish to create the most perfect thing, which is the most completely formed, the best endowed, with the power of procreation. Such a creature is the male, who implants his semen in the female for the purpose of procreating males (cf. Maurizio Mamiani, *Storia della Scienza moderna* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1998), 61).

one notable debate on this subject: women would not be human beings. This debate was connected with the Anabaptist cause and forcefully rejected in Italy by women writers such as Arcangela Tarabotti.²

Another debate is also about the great contrast between *mala mulier* and *bona mulier*. A 'good' woman was a pure, well-mannered woman, faithful to her husband and devoted to God, submissive to social customs and family rules.³ Tertullian (c. 155-c. 222) in *De Cultu Feminarum* I, 1 spoke of women in terms of *diaboli ianua*, descending from Eve and therefore to be considered as the greatest obstacle to salvation.

Since her birth, every girl was considered in a relation to a man: first her father, then her husband or her religious confessor.⁴ Illegitimate daughters were soon separated from their mothers and forcibly 'interned' in convents or poorhouses by men.

In 1523, Jean Louis Vives (1493-1540) published *De Institutione Feminae Christianae*, a work in which there are reiterated mentions to the separation of the sexes, to the priority of housework over reading and writing, and to the caution about women being initiated into Latin. The Counter-Reformation accentuates the educational action of the Church on women. The goal of such education is to train good mothers.

The purpose of marriage was mainly the continuation of the species, although infant mortality was high. The main maternal role was to feed her children, and educate them. However, some women were strongly criticized for their prolonged breastfeeding. At the end of the seventeenth century, for example, a debate whether entrust or not their children to a wet nurse emerged in philosophical and medical treatises.⁵ Three types of women usually sent their children to a nurse: aristocrats, middle-class women, and workers. There were also different categories of nurses: healthy and well-nourished women, poor women, and women who served foundling hospitals.

However, for many centuries, there had been a real suspicion towards the body, and, because for a long time women had been identified with their bodies, there was suspicion towards them, too. Furthermore, during the Modern Age, there was a widespread prejudice about the dangerousness of baths, ointments, powders, and perfumes. Additionally, there was a rebirth of modesty, an attitude based on the idea that the roundness of the body is a

² Arcangiola Tarabotti, *Che le donne siano della spetie degli Huomini, un trattato proto-femminista del XVII secolo*, ed. Susanna Montioni (Capua: Artetetra Edizioni, 2015).

³ Cf. Francesco Santi, *Marbodo di Rennes e lo sguardo sulle donne nel «Liber decem capitulorum»*, in *Natura, scienze e società medievali*, ed. by Claudio Leonardi, Firenze, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2008, 245-270; cf. Marbod of Rennes, *Marbodi liber decem capitulorum*, ed. Rosario Leotta (Roma: Herder, 1984).

⁴ Cf. *Dal Rinascimento all'età moderna*, ed. by Natalie Zemon Davis, Arlette Farge, in *Storia delle donne in Occidente*, ed. by Georges Duby, Michelle Perrot (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1991).

⁵ Cf. Ambroise Paré, *Oeuvres* (A Paris: chez Gabriel Buon, 1575).

symbol of beauty. This also determined the evolution of eating habits in elite groups.⁶

Through women, in seventeenth-century Italy, we witness the spread of the ‘culture of persuasion’ in civil society, a culture that penetrated families through gifts and privileged relationships with clergy. The role of women is therefore limited to being educators and mediators. Traditional misogyny responds, in this sense, to a need for order, according to a precise system of rules and hierarchical relationships. Renata Ago,⁷ speaking about seventeenth-century Rome, defined these relationships as a ‘team play’: women are partners and, at the same time, strangers to the power group constituted by men. A good aristocratic wife is expected to weave family and social relationships and to wisely manage economic resources. In particular, there is a privileged bond between the lady of the house and her ecclesiastical brother-in-law, who provides and facilitates advantageous careers for the male children of the family. The perfect wife, for the Jesuitic spirituality, is opposed to the perfect nun. The first one is devoted to her spouse, the second one to God, although any miraculous aspect or any excess of religion or mystical ecstasy must be avoided.⁸

If it is true that there is adequate documentation regarding male citizen’s wealth conditions as well as their professional, cultural and institutional roles, the same cannot be said for women. The case of Arezzo is certainly not exempt from the shortage of documentary sources that impacted the Italian and European archives during that period. However, especially since the sixteenth century onwards, a copious ordinary production was generated within families, much of which remained unknown, although it shows that women’s accounts of their life experiences and writing had become more frequent. Women’s writings are an invaluable resource for gaining insights into daily activities, family events, parental relationships, political careers, alliances, health, and devotion. In cultural salons, the controversy over women’s culture is the fashionable topic of conversation. Private places of education are homes, convents, and primary schools.

However, the case of Arezzo is not different from the European context. Limiting the research to our case means considering three determining and characterizing factors. The first factor is the local socio-cultural environment, which was dominated by civil institutions, religious orders, and lay ‘companies’ with a long historical tradition of preserving the testimonies, including those of female members. The second consideration is that gender conditions require alternative sources to institutional ones, such as letters, books of mem-

⁶ Cf. Londa Schiebinger, *Nature’s Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

⁷ Cf. Renata Ago, “Giochi di squadra: uomini e donne nelle famiglie nobili del XVII secolo”, in *Signori, patrizi, cavalieri in Italia centro-meridionale nell’età moderna* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1992), 256-264. Cf. Renata Ago, *Carriere e clientele nella Roma Barocca* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1990).

⁸ Cf. *Barocco al femminile*, ed. by Giulia Calvi (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1993); cf. *Per Lettera. La scrittura epistolare femminile tra archivio e tipografia, secoli XV-XVII*, ed. by Gabriella Zarri (Roma: Viella, 1988).

ories, and poetic compositions. Third, the demographic and anthropological conditions of Arezzo during this period can be investigated through the archive of the “Fraternita dei Laici”. The archive of this institution preserves the names of those born and died *intra moenia* in its precious *Vacchette dei battezzati e dei morti in Pieve e Vescovado*. These documents consistently indicate the name of the father of the woman, whether born or deceased, or, in certain instances, their profession or the certificate of nobility of their family.⁹

According to this documentation, the Arretines have four categories of social origin: nobles, in the baptismal records in which the name of the godmother or an influential godfather is often also reported (especially if she was a firstborn); common people, daughters of apothecaries, wool workers, tanners, or farmers, and servants; illegitimate daughters who were acknowledged by their noble or commoner fathers; and finally the ‘gettatelle’, no one’s daughters, who were ‘thrown’ at the mercy of the begging’s hospital or left to the ‘wheel’ of the convents. However, as with male births, there is a fundamental distinction between *intra-moenia* and *extra-moenia* births.

The city was surrounded by a belt of poverty beyond the boundaries of the ‘Cortine’ and the ‘Camperie’. This distinction also gave rise to administrative and fiscal differences. Business, trade, intrigue, and relationships were inside the city; the rest ‘in villa’ for the lords and the hard work on the fields for the farmers were outside. The rhythms and the timetables were also different: the frenzy of holidays and the walks of ladies and gentlemen on the one hand and the peasants’ hard life on the other. The city and its charm were still an unattainable destination, a mirage, for the peasant woman who went to the fair on the occasion of Saint Donato’s¹⁰ celebrations from the Chiana Valley or the Tiber Valley. She was an ‘extraneous’ (from *extra-moenia*); she was considered differently by the citizens. Nevertheless, the *cursus honorum* that the Arretine noble male is required to achieve appears to be equally demanding. He was able to acquire the third degree of aristocracy thanks to his merits. Subsequently, he could acquire the second and first ones from his personal resources. This was true for Redi’s family, too.

The providential institution of Fraternita fits into this rigid social and fiscal structure. The Community Magistrate managed hospitals, schools, the dowries for the poor spinsters, and the student places at the Collegio Ferdinando in Pisa. He was responsible for safeguarding “gettatelli” and orphans, providing assistance to the impoverished people and debtors.¹¹

⁹ Cf. *Il patrimonio della Fraternita dei Laici. Libri, manoscritti e documenti tra biblioteca e archivio*, ed. by Antonella Moriani (Firenze: EDIFIR, 2014).

¹⁰ Saint Donato is celebrated on August, 7 of every year.

¹¹ Cf. Antonella Moriani, “Fonti per la storia dell’assistenza e della sanità in territorio aretino: L’archivio dell’Ospedale di S. Maria Sopra i Ponti di Arezzo”, *Annali Aretini* V (1997): 81-98; cf. Antonella Moriani, “La famiglia predicata e contraddetta: i gettatelli”, in *Storie di violenza. abusi, prepotenze e ingiustizie nell’Arezzo del passato*. Sussidio didattico dell’Archivio di Stato di Arezzo (Provincia di Arezzo: Progetto Archivi, 1989), 63-74.

In addition to the nobility, a significant proportion of the populace is composed of clergy, consisting of both religious men and women. Despite the predominantly masculine-centred historical narration, these religious women's names fill the dusty records of the chronicles in the Bishop's Archive in Arezzo. They were Sister Agata Smeralda, Sister Diomira Osmida, and Sister Chiara Maddalena, among others.

However, among the Arezzo brides, there were also those who did not shy away from the competition with men and affirmed their own worth among the academics of the city. This is the case of the poetess Faustina Azzi Forti (1650-1724).¹² They were courageous women who are regrettably recalled rarely traces in men's documents, correspondence, diaries and letters. Writing is a true instrument of redemption for them - a slow but constant, unstoppable redemption.

During the Renaissance and early modern age, women provided a fundamental contribution to the production of knowledge.¹³ For example, in the female writers' works of this period are now more than ever conspicuously focused on natural sciences. As historians increasingly emphasize, literary practice and representation are closely connected. Furthermore, science was not studied and practiced only in universities, laboratories, anatomical theaters, and other public places. Indeed, natural science research was conducted in alternative contexts, which were more favorable to female participation, such as convents, private residences, and pharmacies.¹⁴ For example, one of the most significant gynaecological treatises of the Middle Ages (the so-called *Trotula* or *De sinthomatibus mulierum*, *De curis mulierum*, *De ornatu mulierum*) was attributed to a doctor from Salerno (named Trota) and it provided remedies for typical women's ailments as well as recipes for cosmetics.¹⁵ It was published in 1544.¹⁶ Furthermore, transmutation (i.e., the highest goal

¹² Cf. Giovanni Bianchini, "Faustina degli Azzi nei Forti (1650-1724): tra polemica e impegno accademico", in *Arezzo e la Toscana tra i Medici e i Lorena (1650-1765)*, ed. by Franco Cristelli (Perugia: Edimond, 2003), 179-197; cf. Neda Mechini, "Lettere di donne nel Carteggio Albertgotti del Seicento", in *Gli Albertgotti. Famiglia, memoria, storia* (Firenze: Edifir, 2006), 165-200; cf. Maria Chiara Milighetti, "Anna, Cecilia e le altre... scritture femminili nei carteggi di matematici e scienziati aretini tra Seicento e Settecento", *Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia 'F. Petrarca' di Arti, Scienze e Lettere di Arezzo LXXI* (2009): 327-352.

¹³ Cf. Meredith K. Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy: Women and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 1.

¹⁴ Cf. *La grande storia dell'artigianato*, ed. by Franco Franceschi, Gloria Fossi (Firenze: Giunti, 1999).

¹⁵ Monica H. Green, "In search of an Authentic Women's Medicine: the Stranges Fates of Trota of Salerno and Hildegard of Bingen", *Dynamis* XIX (1999): 25-54.

¹⁶ Trota's works have circulated widely and have been translated into several languages. Cf. Monica H. Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); cf. Monica H. Green, "Reconstructing the Oeuvre of Trota of Salerno", in *La Scuola medica Salernitana: Gli autori e i testi*, ed. by Danielle Jacquart and Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, Edizione Nazionale 'La Scuola medica Salernitana',

pursued by alchemy) is often described as a phenomenon that occurs within the female womb. Women practiced science at home, using techniques drawn from alchemy and medicine to take care of their family members and manage the household.¹⁷

Practice and literature are also interconnected, and there is a link between scientific knowledge and various literary forms (treatises, epistles, and dialogues). For example, there is a vast tradition of women's recipe books, which were later printed as 'books of secrets'.¹⁸

A fundamental work, *De Mulieribus Claris* by Giovanni Boccaccio,¹⁹ was important for the so-called *querelles des femmes*. In fact, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, women had begun to participate in scientific discussion in more explicit and structured forms. They published scientific treatises on natural philosophy, joined scientific academies, and maintained epistolary correspondence with some of the greatest scientists of the time.²⁰

In Arezzo, there were various institutions and individuals, both public and private, whose efforts were dedicated to men's education and development. There were various types of schools, including academies, municipal schools, episcopal seminaries, and private schools. Positions for private and shop masters were available in Arezzo. It was contingent upon their level of nobility, their origin and profession. Nonetheless, women's education was frequently restricted to lessons imparted by a private tutor or religious educator. Tutors were primarily employed by the most affluent families, and young women were inevitably destined for marriage or a secluded existence. Nonetheless, there were frequently pockets of widespread and rampant illiteracy that lacked the prospect of social and cultural redemption, even among the upper-class male children.

Few are the studies conducted on male education and instruction in Arezzo in the modern age;²¹ we know very little about female education. This is due to the limitations of institutional documentary sources and the fragmentation of informal ones. However,

1 (Florence: SISMELE/Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2007), 183-233.

¹⁷ Cf. Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*; Anders Jette, 33 *Alchemistinnen, Die verborgene Seite einer alten Wissenschaft* (Berlin: Vergangenheitsverlag, 2016); Tara Nummedal, *Anna Zieglerin and the Lion's Blood: Alchemy and End Times in Reformation Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

¹⁸ Cf. Katharine Park, *Secret of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origin of Human Dissection* (New York: Zone Books, 2006).

¹⁹ Cf. Giovanni Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris*, ed. by Vittorio Zaccaria (Milano: Mondadori, 1967); cf. Lodovico Dolce, *Dialogo della institutione delle donne* (Venezia: Gabriel Giolito de' Funari, 1545).

²⁰ Cf. Virginia Cox, *The Prodigious Muse: Women's writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); cf. Kathleen P. Long, *Gender and Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Culture* (London: Routledge, 2016).

²¹ Cf. Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy. Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600* (Baltimore-London: J. Hopkins University Press, 1989).

some information can be obtained from the State Archives of Arezzo.²²

In Arezzo, an institution of established fame in the field of female education and instruction was actually the ‘educatorio’ of “S. Caterina d’Alessandria”. Arretine girls were originally gathered here in order to make them learn the sacred writings and catechesis for the sacraments. Later, the monastery became a real educational institution, especially during the period of greatest splendor, which can be dated around the middle of the 16th century. Due to the presence of Abbess Maria Maddalena Dal Monte, the granddaughter of Julius III, the convent received significant benefits and privileges. Another educational institution was ‘Le Derelitte’, also known as ‘Le Suorine’, which was founded by the municipality of Arezzo in 1596. It was almost a mendicants’ hospice for lower-class girls. However, the level of female education in Arezzo, and more generally for 17th-century girls, was lower than that of the male peers of the same class and economic conditions.

The ritual of the doctoral celebration was intended to initiate a well-off young scion into a professional or ecclesiastical career. In the case of young women, this ritual was replaced by the worldly or religious wedding ceremony. This was an obligatory passage towards adulthood and maturity, towards physical and spiritual motherhood. Young women prepared to become mothers, mistresses or, in some cases, abbesses or prioresses. And the few, very rare, women who remained spinsters were destined to a future of rejection, social marginality and slow psychological and relational isolation. For a man, being a bachelor was considered an elitist and frequently sought-after decision. Indeed, misogyny was a part of the taste of the century, sometimes more motivated by the general trend of the time than by personal psychological convictions. Unmarried women had no social or family function. She was supposed to help the rest of family and take care of grandchildren and brothers.²³

However, the cultural context of Arezzo was also affected by the presence of some important medical figures as well as by the emergence of new philosophical and scientific tendencies. Representatives of these new trends included Andrea Cesalpino (1524-1603), Girolamo Borri (1512-1592), Vezzosi’s master in Pisa, Tommaso and Marco Cornacchini, and Gregorio Redi.

Cesalpino, who also was from Arezzo, pursued his studies in Pisa under the guidance of Realdo Colombo (1516-1559) and Luca Ghini (1490-1556), whom he succeeded as director of the ‘Orto dei Semplici’. Cesalpino’s botanical work, *De Plantis libri XVI*, was published in 1583, after he had already left his duties at the garden. It is an Aristotelian work that contributed to a meticulous classification of plants. In 1571, he published the

²² Cf. ASA, Serie IV, Stanza A, Armadio D; cf. Ottavio Andreocci, *Delle scuole femminili Popolane e Cittadine e degli istituti ospitalieri* (Firenze: Tipografia Bencini, 1865); cf. *Il conservatorio di S. Caterina in Arezzo, Le sue origini - La sua storia, 1333-1963* (Roma: INADEL, 1963).

²³ Milighetti, “Anna, Cecilia e le altre...”: 327-352.

philosophical text *Quaestiones Peripateticae libri V*, which was reprinted in 1593 together with *Quaestionum Medicarum libri II*. His medical research on the small circulation and absence of intraventricular pores prompted William Harvey (1578-1657) to present the theory of blood circulation in 1628. Because of several personal disagreements at the University of Pisa, Cesalpino moved to Rome where he became a papal doctor and taught medicine at the Roman University.

Girolamo Borri (1512-1592) was repeatedly incarcerated by the tribunal of the Inquisition on suspicion of heresy, and in 1561, he published a work devoted to Giovanna of Austria, the duchess of Tuscany, titled *On the flux and reflux of the sea* (Lucca, Busdrago, which is paired with *Ragionamento di Telifilo Filogenio della perfettione delle donne*, translated by Girolamo Ghirlanda). This work is structured as a dialogue.

In a clearly concordant approach, at the beginning of his work Borri shows his admiration for the Latin tradition of Aristotle and Plato (425 ca. BC-348 BC). Then he proceeds to expose his cosmological system, according to the usual Aristotelian structure. However, in this system, Arab and Neoplatonic traditional themes and doctrines also find their location in a naturalistic key.

Telifilus Filogenius' reasoning for women's perfection was included in the previous work. It is part of the long list of books that were published in the second half of the sixteenth century in Italy in favor of women, after the publication by Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535) of *The Nobility of Women*.²⁴ The orator, who has a clearly allusive name, accepts the invitation to discuss the perfection of women while he is a guest at the Medici villa in Agnano, near Pisa. He is accompanied by six ladies at the residence of Elisabetta Cibo Della Rovere. To date, the text has been little known and practically unstudied.²⁵

The arguments pertaining to female superiority are partially influenced by the traditions of 'Dolce stilnovo', and Neoplatonism, which consider women as an 'emanation' of the Divine and a sign of transcendental happiness. Additionally, the writings of Agrippa (and the work of Borri) hold that Eve is superior to Adam because God created her directly out of the human body, whereas Adam was shaped by the vile earth. According to Agrippa (and Borri), the Holy Scriptures would also affirm the superiority of women over men:

Nondimeno esso Iddio, dico Giesù, non volse esser figliuolo dell'huomo, ma della donna la quale honorò tanto che pigliò carne da lei sola. Certamente Christo fu chiamato figliolo dell'huomo non per cagione del maschio ma per rispetto della femina. Et questo è quel gran

²⁴ Cf. Alessandro Piccolomini, *Della nobiltà et eccellenza delle donne, dalla lingua francese nella italiana tradotto, con una oratione di M. Alessandro Piccolomini in lode delle medesime* (In Vinegia: appresso Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, 1549).

²⁵ Cf. Angelo Rella, "'Tutto quello che allo improvviso si disse della virtù e grandezza delle donne sotto il cielo senza pari'. Prime riflessioni sul Ragionamento di Telifilo Filogenio della Perfettione delle Donne di Girolamo Borri", *Cartaphilus I*, vol. 19 (2021): 316-333.

miracolo del quale oltramodo si stupisce il Propheta, che la femina circonda il maschio; ilche è mentre il sesso è divorato dalla Vergine, et quando porta Christo nel corpo. Similmente risurgendo Giesù da morte prima apparve alle donne, che a gli huomini.²⁶

The Virgin Mary would be the culmination of creation, and the incarnation would represent God's victory over Satan. In the case of incarnation, transmutation is a phenomenon that takes place inside the Virgin's womb. Just as the pregnant Earth generates the *puer philosophicus*, so the Virgin Mary gives birth to Christ.²⁷ The Earth and the Virgin are therefore mothers and nurses. The influence of the tradition of the Fathers of the Church is strong in both Catholic and Reformed writings. The Scholastic practice of outlining comparisons with Roman law, Aristotelian medicine and ethics continued during the Renaissance. Several questions arise. Is a woman a human being? Was she made in the image of God? How does a woman relate to a man in matters of sin and malediction? In which ways is she equal to man? Is she superior to men?

Alchemical themes return, instead, in Cornacchini's studies. Tommaso Cornacchini was a teacher of medicine in Pisa (1551-1554 and 1577-1584), of philosophy (1554-1557), and practical medicine for about thirty years; he was the author of a work dedicated to rational and empirical practical medicine, and wrote some *Tabulas Medicas*²⁸ that were disclosed by his son Marco.

Marco Cornacchini,²⁹ another doctor from Arezzo, was a follower of Andrea Cesalpino and tried to outline a medical science that might be open to a new rationality. His expertise was based on extensive experience, keen observation, and intuition. He inherited from his father and Girolamo Mercuriale a proclivity to reassess Greek medicine, specifically Hippocratic medicine. In the final years of his life, his name was connected with the popularization of an antimonial medication, referred to as "Cornacchini's powder", which he attempted to scientifically validate within the framework of Galenic medicine.

Another notable doctor in Arezzo and the Florentine milieu is Gregorio Redi, a prominent grand ducal proto-doctor, the father of Francesco, who succeeded to the same position at the court of Florence in 1670. Gregorio, who was 'Discordi's academician' and an

²⁶ Piccolomini, *Della nobiltà*, f. 15 r.

²⁷ Cf. Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*: xvii.

²⁸ Tommaso, Cornacchini, *Tabulae medicae. In quibus ea fere omnia, quae a principibus medicis Graecis, Arabibus, & Latinis de curationis apparatu, capitis ac thoracis morbis, febribus, pulsibus, urinis scripta sparsim reperiuntur, methodo adeo absoluta collecta sunt, ut & illa, & loci, unde sunt hausta, sub unum cadant oculorum obtutum. Opus ab ipso, dum practicam medicinam publice Pisis doceret, elaboratum, recens vero in lucem editum a Marco, & Horatio* (Patau: ex officina Petri Pauli Tozzij, 1605).

²⁹ Cf. ASA, *Registri dell'età dei cittadini*, 1, f. 30 v; *Filze di provanza di nobiltà dell'anno 1750*, 1, ff. 442 v-443 r.

authentic celebrity in Arezzo, was considered as a ‘forerunner’ for numerous Arretines at the Grand Ducal Court.

Women in Vezzosi’s works

This is the cultural context within which Vezzosi carried out his profession as a physician. His production was influenced by the humanistic tradition. However, it is significant that treatises that he composed in a strictly scientific context are about women, and in particular, about women from Arezzo. His science is therefore somehow addressed to women, as it is practical and capable of altering the conditions of his patients, specifically female patients. It is a science with an educational purpose. It tends to educate rather than to provide a cure, to prevent rather to heal. Nonetheless, this science is not distinct from women’s moral, physical, and cultural education.

For example, MS. 31 of the Library “Città di Arezzo” hosts the work *De instituenda virgine*, a treatise in poetic form consisting of two books.³⁰ It was transcribed from the original by the scholar and librarian Lorenzo Loreti (1734-1789) at the end of the 18th century, and it outlines what a young woman’s education should look like. The book, in particular, opens with a quote from Plutarch:³¹

Puellarum mores principio apte concinnegere fingere conveniet.
Illa namque novella aetas ad fingendum facilis, et tenera
est, et ipsarum animis, dum molles ad huc extant, disciplinae
melius instillantur. Difficilius autem quae dura sunt molliuntur.
Ita et doctinae, dum puerilis ad huc animus est,
inscrelpuntur.

The author starts by asserting that the process of shaping minds and habits would be less challenging for young women than for the more mature ones. Vezzosi emphasized the importance of moral, religious, intellectual and physical education for women. Here the references are Pseudo-Plutarch (*De liberis educandis*),³² Saint Jerome (*Epistles on the education of women*), and Juan Luis Vives (*De institutione foeminae christianae* (1523)). The chaste, modest, silent, submissive, pious wife emerges as the model of this author’s moralistic work.³³ Vezzosi emphasized the centrality of prayer in women’s but also young men’s education. The virgins must be modest, and their purity must shine, especially on their

³⁰ BCA, MS. 31, *De instituenda virgine*, Liber I and II, ff. 21r-29 r and ff. 30 r-37 r.

³¹ Pseudo-Plutarch, *De Liberis educandis*; cf. Plutarco, *Come educare i figli*, ed. by Giuliano Pisani, in *Tutti i Moralia*, ed. by Emanuele Lelli, Giuliano Pisani (Milano: Bompiani, 2017), 2-25.

³² Cf. Pseudo-Plutarch, *De liberis educandis*.

³³ Cf. MacLean, *The Renaissance notion of Woman*, 59.

wedding day. The traditional approach to women's life conditions (virgin, bride, widow) is closely linked to their social role as well as their sensibility, sexuality and religiosity. It is far from aiding in diminishing the complexity of Vezzosi's interpretation of the female figure. In fact, another source of inspiration for Vezzosi's work is almost certainly Plutarch's *Mulierum virtutes*.³⁴ Courage, wisdom, cunning, but also modesty, loyalty, pride and perseverance are some of the main qualities that characterize the women described by Plutarch in *Mulierum virtutes*: young or old, mothers or daughters, sisters, wives, or companions. He argued that male and female virtues are identical by recalling famous historical examples of heroic deeds performed by women.³⁵

In his work *Gynaecyeseos sive De mulierum conceptu, gestatione ac partu*, Vezzosi demonstrated the mechanisms that lead to the conception, gestation, and birth of the unborn child. The choice of the form of *Gynaecyeseos* is not causal; *Gynaecyeseos* was written at the end of the sixteenth century and was published in Venice in 1598 in three books. Each book is introduced by a very short preface by Antonio Biondo, in the form of questions. Vezzosi answered these questions within every single book. This work portrays a woman as the protagonist and architect of her unborn child's life and well-being. The selection of language, specifically Latin, is significantly important for a proficient reader, or an 'insider'. However, if the subject is considered important, the form must also be elegant, incisive and persuasive. In the treatises of the sixteenth-century and late Renaissance, there are numerous pedagogical, didactic, and moralizing themes that are also present in Vezzosi's scientific production. It is significant to note that in 1596, Scipione Mercurio published what can be considered the first Italian treatise on obstetrics: *La commare o riccoglitrice*,³⁶ and in 1566 (with a third edition in 1586) *Gynaeciorum libri* was published too.³⁷ However, the progress in obstetric studies was not accompanied by a progress in childbirth assistance; for reasons of modesty, obstetric care remained an exclusive privilege for women.

Vezzosi's work is dedicated to Clarice Palombara, the wife of the Roman noble Lucio Savelli:

Cum sponsa Clarice tua,
clarissima Mundi lumina adeste mihi;
Iani dum nitor ad Aram
Foemineum vobis properatum dicere carmen;

³⁴ Cf. Plutarco, *La virtù delle donne. (Mulierum virtutes)*, ed. by Fabio Tanga (Berlin: Brill, 2019).

³⁵ Cf. MacLean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, 54.

³⁶ Scipione Mercurio, *La commare o la riccoglitrice, divisa in tre libri* (In Venezia: appresso Giovan Battista Ciotti, 1596).

³⁷ Cf. Helen King, *Midwifery, Obstetrics and the Rise of Gynaecology. The Uses of a Sixteenth-Century Compendium* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007).

carmen deductum sterili Soractis ab antro.³⁸

Nonetheless, the treatise assigns women a position of subordination to their spouse, so that her primary responsibility is to produce healthy offspring, according to the traditional role they are given as wives and mothers:

Ut sobolem reddat coniux foecunda Marito,
Aptum connubio tempus, natisque parandis,
aetatem, studiumque canit nuptaeque virique:
naturae sterilis caussis mox prorfusabactis,
signa, quibus soboles cognoscitur abdita pandit.³⁹

Until the child is born, the bride diligently takes care of her weight and sustenance. She preserves the 'seeds' sown in her body. Aristotle considered the reproduction of living things as an extension of the species' development. Early modern medicine is characterized by Aristotelianism-Galenism dualism. For Aristotle, the female body is characterized by incompleteness; for Galen, by the specificity of the uterus. Aristotle considered the woman as the receptacle of the embryo; for Hippocrates, she is its seed and nourishment. Mercurio, for example, tackles the similarity between the uterus and cervix and the male urogenital system. The theory of humors and the great principles of Galenic physiology explain sexual dimorphism. On the contrary, Juan Huarte (1529-1588) in his *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias* (1575), maintained that women, being immersed in their cold humidity, cannot be endowed with the same intellect as men. In his treatise,⁴⁰ Juan de Valverde (1525-1587) represented women with a body closed on itself in a modest posture. Jacob Rueff (1500-1558) was the author of one of the most widespread treatises on obstetrics of the Renaissance: *De conceptu et generatione hominis* (1554).⁴¹ In fact, the work

³⁸ Cf. Emilio Vezzosi, *Gynaecyeseos, sive De mulierum conceptu, gestatione, ac partu libri tres, cum argumentis in singulos libros Antonii Blondii Arretini* (Venetiis: apud Gio. Ant. Rampazettum, 1598), f. 3 v.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 3 r.

⁴⁰ Cf. Juan de Valverde, *Historia de la composicion del cuerpo humano di Juan de Valverde* (Roma: Antoine La Frery e Antonio Salamanca, 1556); Juan de Valverde, *L'anatomia del corpo umano composta da M. Giovanni Valverde* (Venezia: Stamperia de' Giunti, 1586). In the ancient collection of the Library "Città di Arezzo" (Placement Q 79) there is an example of an edition of Valverde's treatise. It is dated 1560.

⁴¹ Jacob Rueff, *De conceptu, et generatione hominis. De matrice et eius partibus, nec non de conditione infantis in vtero, & grauidarum cura & officio. De partu & parturientium, infantiumque cura omnifaria. De differentijs non naturalis partus & earundem curis. [...] libri sex, opera clarissimi viri Iacobi Rueffi, chirurgi Tigurini quondam congesti. Nunc denuo recogniti & in plerisque locis castigati* (Francofurti ad Moenum: apud Petrum Fabricium, impensis Sigismundi Feyrabendij, 1587);

is not addressed to midwives and pregnant women, but also to doctors and general practitioners. Andreas van Wesel (1514–1564), named Vesalius, worked in Pisa in 1544, and his *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543)⁴² may have been printed mainly for the use of students. It is not excluded that Vezzosi read it when he was a student in Pisa. The treatise contains many anatomical tables (some made by Jan Stephan Calcar, a pupil of Titian), which attest to Vesalius' great precision. *Fabrica* opens with two engravings: the frontispiece and a portrait of Vesalius. From the first illustration, we understand the profound novelty of Vesalius' work. In this image, we witness a lesson on dissection, in which the teacher is not in the classroom with a treatise on anatomy, as was common at the time. He dissects the corpse himself, showing the various anatomical parts to the spectators. In the center of the image, the body of a woman is lying down in perspective while a compact crowd is scattered around; on one side, the image represents anatomists of that time who opposed Galen's theories. On the other side, there are his supporters, all gathered around Vesalius in a sort of ideal reconciliation. However, the gap between theory and observation in the *Fabrica* is documented in Vesalius's conclusion on the anatomy of the heart. Having been unable to observe any pores in the cardiac septum, Vesalius praised the wisdom of the Creator, who would have managed to make the blood pass through tiny pores. In all these medical treatises, the relationship between science and art is evident. Thus, Vezzosi's work maintains a close relationship between medical art and poetry, which is significant.

Vezzosi, unlike Hippocrates, was a follower of Aristotle. He believed that, in differentiated sexual reproduction, the male would provide the soul-bearing form, and the female would provide only the matter of the embryo. These themes were discussed throughout the Middle Ages, and their dissemination continued into the sixteenth century. Vezzosi's treatise bears witness to this:

Quo studio Coniux gignat dilecta marito
progeniem; quae cura oneris; quae victus habenda
Sit ratio quanta immineant discrimina iactis
Seminibus, casusque, tener dum prodeat infans;⁴³

However, conception must not occur too late or at an advanced age. In fact, old age can lead to infertility, and a couple will be unhappy without children:

Ne pigeat facti sero, neu denique natos

an edition since 1587 is preserved in the ancient collection of the Library "Città di Arezzo" (Placement II 97).

⁴² Andreae Vesalii, *De humani corporis fabrica* (Basileae: ex officina Ioannis Oporini, 1543); cf. Mamiani, *Storia della scienza moderna*, 67.

⁴³ Vezzosi, *Gynaecyeseos*, f. 3 r.

tum frustra expectes, portum, requiemque senectae,
 nam cunctas haud foecundas natura puellas
 edidit: heu multis, dulci sine munere prolis,
 (coniugium infelix) teritur diuturna iuventus.⁴⁴

The author then discusses the changes that occur in a woman's body after puberty. Her breasts undergo swelling, protrusion, and tension, and menarche comes along. She must not be thin, fat, nor affected by any disease that might compromise conception and the child's health:

Foemina, quae nubit, quamvis sit idonea proli
 septem etiam ante annos; tunc mammae pectore turgent
 extantes, arctumque; sinus disrumpitis amictum;
 tunc et purpurium coepto iam mense cruorem
 Luna movere solet: gracilis, nec obesa deinde,
 nec placet imbellis, nec quae plerunque dolore
 iactatur stomachi, nulla curabilis arte.⁴⁵

It was imperative that virgin women were safeguarded and preserved. It is significant that Vezzosi placed physical virginity in the mind along with the chastity of customs. He then moved on to investigate the causes of the couple's sterility.

Furthermore, in addition to the classical treatises on women's diseases, such as *De natura muliebri*, *De mulierum affectibus* (I-III) and *De virginum morbis* by Hippocrates or *De uteri dissectione* by Galen, there are also some interesting gynaecological treatises. They are written in the vernacular by doctors and expressly addressed to a female audience: *Der Rosengarten* for pregnant women and midwives by the German doctor Eucharius Rösslin (published in Strasbourg in 1513 and then translated into various European languages) or *Le medicine partenenti alle infermità delle donne* by Giovanni Marinello (Venice, De' Franceschi, 1563).⁴⁶ It is important to underline that Marinelli was the father of Lucrezia Marinelli, author of *La nobiltà, et eccellenza delle donne* (Venice, 1600) who took a stand in favor of women's knowledge. Observing the work of the city's midwives, Rösslin noticed how certain aspects of carelessness and imprecision in their habits led to a higher infant mortality rate. We do not know if Vezzosi had read these important treatises.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 5 r.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 5 v.

⁴⁶ The work had three editions, as documented in *Medicina per le donne nel Cinquecento*. Texts by Giovanni Marinello and Girolamo Mercurio, ed. by Maria Luisa Altieri Biagi, Clemente Mazzotta and Paola Altieri (Torino: Utet, 1992), 13-14; cf. Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*.

When these hidden causes of sterility were discovered and remedied by the doctor, the woman would become pregnant:

Quin medico interea licuit novisse latentes
coniugij sterilis caussa; morbosque repente
discusso intumuit crescenti pondere venter:
tantum Poeonia omnipotens Deus addidit arti.⁴⁷

The doctor provided the appropriate remedies with his skill. He gave the woman appropriate attention. The theory of ‘humors’ was borrowed here by Vezzosi. The four Hippocratic humors (blood, phlegm, black bile, and red bile) correspond to the four elements (air, water, earth, and fire) and four qualities (hot, dry, cold, and moist):⁴⁸

Arte sua Medicus contra: nam frigida praebet
pocula contendens calidis; domat humida siccis:
neu frigus noceat dirum, flammam evocat intro
vitalem; hinc venis late sitientibus undam
elicit ingentem, dum temperet arida membra.⁴⁹

The text contains a recipe to aid conception, too.⁵⁰ The foetus is similar to an egg, and it is clotted in blood.

Haec infans dat signa tener, dum matris in alvo,
Non perfectus adhuc, concreti sanguinis instar,
Atque ovo similis, tunicis conduditur artis.⁵¹

In the second book, the author addressed the topic of gestation, including its management, encouragement, and enhancement, both on a psychological and physical level:

Hactenus uxores; utero canit inde gerentes:
quid faciant primum? Statio quae cuique paranda?
Quae domus? Ut casus valeat arcere propinquos:
quae ratio victus? Studio quo denique corpus

⁴⁷ Vezzosi, *Gynecyeseos*, f. 9 r.

⁴⁸ Cf. Mamiani, *Storia della scienza moderna*, 63.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 9 r.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 9 v-10 r.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, f. 14 v.

detineant, animumque: nimis ne torpeat aeger.⁵²

The moon used to alter and damage the human body quite much, because its in movement and light are very close to us. The influence of the moon on the formation of the foetus is fundamental in the text:

Multum Luna solet mutare, et laedere corpus
Humanum: quia vel motu, vel lumine nobis
Est vicina nimis: gelidae conformia Lunae
Praeterea sunt nostra magis terrestria membra,
Quam pecudum, et volucrum sudum per inane meantu:
Nos ideo violenta premit, citius lacessit.⁵³

Nature created humans of both sexes so that they could live without any discrimination. This statement is really significant:

Utriusque hominem sexus Natura creavit,
scilicet ut nullo discrimine vivat uterque.⁵⁴

Ultimately, the topic of childbirth (including the proper arrangement of the bed, the appropriate food intake before and after it, and the optimal chair to enhance comfort) is in the third book. Vezzosi discussed breastfeeding and who should come to assist the giving-birth women:

Protinus inclusum signis distinguere sexum
aggreditur; quoque arte sibi paritura cublicum.
Instituat, lectosque cibos, aptum sedile:
quae facilem reddant partu: quae minima porro
edocet, auxilio veniant parientibus aegre.⁵⁵

About the time of delivery, Vezzosi said:

At gravidae contra diversa ad tempora Partus
Convertant sese Matres, ne quando labores

⁵² *Ibid.*, f. 18 r.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, f. 22 v.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 31 v.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 34 v.

Sollicitant, urgentque magis sint cuncta paranda
 Namque licet nono deponat mense peracto
 Plurima ventris onus: multas tamen ante videmus
 Nunc parare infantem dextro, nunc omine laevo.⁵⁶

However, touching the foetus and “picking the ripe apple” is job of the midwife, not of the doctor:

Obstetrix autem, foetum cui tangere cura,
 vestigare caput, taciteque; inferre lacertos,
 Munere fungatur; vinclis, cultroque; parato,
 Una manu properet, maturum carpere pomum:
 Una cibi, potusque; vias infantis in alvo
 Obstruat; atque liget, ventrisque accomodet omnem
 Rite locum: sic ursa solet connix fovere
 Informem sobolem, doctaque; effingere lingua.⁵⁷

In close connection with the topic of raising children, Vezzosi addressed the subject of breastfeeding in MS. 31 of the Library “Città di Arezzo”, which Loreti meticulously transcribed from the original work by Vezzosi, *Nutrix sive de alenda sobole*. He discussed breastfeeding and the importance of mothers in the education and nutrition of their infants.

According to Greek-Roman custom, a woman is considered a mother solely upon providing breastfeeding to her child. Therefore, Marcus Aurelius (121-180 AD) stated that the woman should be half mother and half nurse. Vezzosi seems to have also conceived Marcus Aurelius’ idea of a *mater-nutrix* woman. We do not know if Vezzosi knew *Aureo libro* by Marcus Aurelius, written by Antonio de Guevara and translated by Alfonso Ulloa, in 1562.⁵⁸ The book had a wide circulation and represents one of the references in the work of female authors, who confronted themselves with the medical-scientific knowledge of the time.

In Vezzosi, the role of woman is exclusively identifiable with that of a *virgo-sponsa*, i.e., she lends her body and nourishment to another body: that of her child. The symbolic

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 38 v.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 44 r-v.

⁵⁸ Cf. Antonio Guevara, *Aureo libro di Marco Aurelio famosissimo imperatore, con l’horologio de’ precipi, in tre volumi. Composto per il molto reurendo [...] Antonio di Gueuara. Nuouamente tradotto di lingua spagnuola in italiana dalla copia originale di esso autore. Et perchè à questo ueramente aureo libro niente manchi, l’abbiamo adornato di postille, che per auanti erano grandemente desiderate* (In Venetia: appresso Francesco Lorenzini, da Turino, 1562).

representation of the Virgin Mary has been as a significant reference for women since the Middle Ages and Renaissance.⁵⁹

For the first time, the nutrition of the newborn is mentioned in *Corpus Hippocraticum*, and the mystery of the formation of breast milk is investigated because the Greek doctor hypothesizes a direct relationship between the uterus and the breasts.

Nevertheless, Soranus of Ephesus (second century AD) articulated the initial principles of child care in his literary work, *Gynaecia*,⁶⁰ which bears resemblance to Vezzosi's *Gynecyeseos*. Soranus advised the readers of his treatise to maintain moderation in the frequency of feedings, cautioning against breastfeeding at any time of the day or night or every time the child cries.

Soranus also advised the reader not to attach the baby to the mother's breast earlier than twenty days after the birth. On the contrary Damaste invited the mother to feed the baby immediately. This would allow for a more rapid and abundant milk formation. The transition to 'mercenary' breastfeeding, which involved the use of professional nurses, was not opposed by Soranus, because breastfeeding causes premature aging in women. Soranus' work deals with the choice of the nurse, her dietary rules, and her physical exercises.

Instead, in Rome, breastfeeding was defended by philosophers, doctors, scholars, and jurists. Plutarch (first century AD) asserted that nature had placed breasts high in women's body in order that a woman could hug her child and develop attachment while breastfeeding them. Hence, Vezzosi cautioned Arretine women against abruptly abandoning their children to the hands of "mercenary nurses". This detachment can, indeed, cause severe trauma to both the child and the mother. Vezzosi considered this abandonment to be an act against nature, following the Roman literary tradition.

Unlike the early days of the Roman Republic, when breastfeeding was a fundamental task for mothers, during the imperial age, the custom of mercenary breastfeeding was spreading. Antoninus Pius (86-161 AD) established rewards for women who would breastfeed their own children. Aulus Gellius praised maternal breastfeeding in his *Attic Nights*. Indeed, he defined mercenary breastfeeding as an act against nature because it would cause immediate distancing from the person to whom it is addressed.

According to the Hippocratic scheme of 'constitutions', Galen exalted the perfection of milk, a moist and warm food. Galen focused his attention on the importance of first impressions, which would be fixed through milk on to the soul of the baby. His great intuition is that there would be a kind of transmission between a mother and her child, a transmission of something more than the mere liquid. This evokes a profound fascination with the maternal act of breastfeeding.

⁵⁹ Cf. *La medicina nel basso Medioevo. Tradizioni e conflitti: Atti del LV Convegno Storico Internazionale: Todi, 14-16 ottobre 2018* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2019).

⁶⁰ Cf. Temkin Owsei, *Soranus' Gynecology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956).

Milk, similar to sperm, is derived from a ‘coction’ process, wherein it undergoes cooking and whitening through the circulation of blood vessels. The explanation (the real novelty lies here) is fundamentally centered not so much on the metaphysical principle of vital heat as on the accurate observation of the blood paths in the body, which occurs through the dissection of the veins and arteries; hence the so - called theory of *haemogenesis*. This was very popular until 1700 in treatises on anatomy and physiology. However, sexual relations can interfere with the distribution of blood in the female body. These beliefs had a profound influence on women’s social behavior and sexual habits until the Renaissance.

Even in *Nutrix, sive de alenda sobole*, the idea of milk as a complete food is present in the treatise. Vezzosi’s youthful poem, composed when he was still a student in Pisa, is divided into two books.⁶¹

Plutarch is cited in the introduction by Vezzosi. Mothers are expected to feed their children personally. They have to offer them their breasts, so that they are raised with greater affection and care. Mothers have to love their babies with their whole being, “with their nails”. Indeed, the affection of wet nurses is insincere and fictitious because it is ‘mercenary love’. Nature also clearly indicates that mothers have to breastfeed and raise their own children. For this reason, every being that gives birth receives the nourishment of milk. With foresight, nature provides two breasts to ensure adequate nourishment:

Oportet, ut mihi profecto videtur, ut Matres Filios
educunt, eisque hubera porrigant: quoniam maiori cum
caritate, et impensa magis diligentia nutrient, ut quae
natos ex intimo, ut dici solet, ex unguibus ament.
Nutrices vero, et alumnae suppositam quondam, et
adscriptitiam benevolentiam habent, ut pote
mercedis gratia diligentes.⁶²

It is significant that Vezzosi’s poem is dedicated to the women of Arezzo. In fact, this work represents a real warning to those women who entrust their children to mercenary nurses, who act without method and (we would add) without love. They do not take care of their children in body and spirit, creating the conditions for their impending death or illness.

⁶¹ BCA, MS. 31, *Nutrix, sive de alenda sobole*, Liber I and II, ff. 1 r-10 v and ff. 11 r-20 v.

⁶² Pseudo-Plutarch, *De liberis educandis*.

Appendix. Emilio Vezzosi, a biographical profile.

Emilio Vezzosi was born in Arezzo on July 7, 1563, to Gaspero of Antonio and Lucrezia of Cristoforo Aleotti. Throughout the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, members of the Vezzosi family had been appointed as judiciaries and to other positions within the 'Fraternita dei Laici', a welfare institution of the city of Arezzo. Vezzosi family was noble.

His first tutor was Guido Zoppici, from Cortona, and since his young age he composed eclogues and Latin poems, which were later collected in a volume entitled *Theatrum Arretinum*.⁶³ All biographers unanimously have recognized him as a great Latin scholar.⁶⁴ In fact, his poetry and scientific production are characterized by elegant Virgilian style.

He studied philosophy and medicine in Pisa with Andrea Cesalpino and Girolamo Borri. Not yet graduated, he composed a treatise in poetic form entitled *Nutrix sive de alenda sobole*, and divided into two books, which was dedicated to the women of Arezzo. The language of the poem is clearly inspired by Virgilian style and is very elegant as for the Latin form.⁶⁵ He then wrote a draft of another poem, *De cura nutricis liber unicus*. In the first case, the text is preserved in MS. 41, an autograph manuscript from the Library "Città di Arezzo" in poetic form composed in the last decade of the 16th century. A later transcription of this text is also contained in MS. 31 of the Library "Città di Arezzo". The copyist is Lorenzo Loreti, a scholar and librarian from Arezzo. He copied the text from the "devilish and abstruse original" in June-July 1786, together with another text that he probably tran-

⁶³ Cf. Giulio Anastasio Angelucci, *Stanze dell'Abate G. Anastasio Angelucci con documenti e note ad illustrazione della città e degli uomini celebri di Arezzo* (Pisa: co' caratteri di Didot, 1816), 165-168; Ugo Viviani, *Medici, fisici, cerusici della Provincia aretina vissuti dal V al XVII secolo d. c.* (Arezzo: Stabilimento Tipografico Beucci, 1923); cf. Marta Paliotti, "Le Accademie aretine del secolo XVII ed Emilio Vezzosi. Parte prima: sguardo generale alla vita e alla cultura aretina nella prima metà del Seicento", *Atti e Memorie Accademia Petrarca VIII* (1° semestre 1930): 111-116; Marta Paliotti, "Le Accademie aretine del secolo XVII ed Emilio Vezzosi. Parte seconda. Emilio Vezzosi (la vita)", *Atti e Memorie Accademia Petrarca IX* (2° semestre 1930): 274-290; Marta Paliotti, "Emilio Vezzosi (gli scritti)", *Atti e Memorie Accademia Petrarca X* (1° semestre 1931): 87-94; cf. Giovanni Bianchini, "Emilio Vezzosi (1563-1637), filosofo, medico, insegnante, accademico, 'devotissimo' alla famiglia Medici", *Studi secenteschi LIX* (2018): 97-114. Cf. MS. 56, Mario Flori, *Vita de' letterati aretini*, ff. 595 r- 606 r e ff. 609 r-634 v.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*: "La Famiglia Vezzosi in oggi estinta godette in Arezzo il grado secondo per molti anni: vedasi libro *VV Deliberazioni* a 80. Nel 1561 si trova estratto dalla borsa ottava dei Priori Gaspar Antonii de La Vezzosa; Lib. *XXJ delle Estrazioni* a 62, ed Emilio di lui figlio fu diverse volte dei Rettori della Fraternita'".

⁶⁵ Cf. Flori, *Vita...*, f. 597 r.: "Questo poemetto è senza dubbio sommamente apprezzabile, mentre oltre il pregio di una virgiliana eleganza, racchiude tutti quei precetti, i quali posti in opera contribuir saprebbero alla salvezza di tanti, e tanti fanciulli [...]". Flori, *ibid.*, says that this little poem is undoubtedly highly appreciable because, beyond the merit of a Virgilian elegance, it contains all those precepts that, if implemented, would contribute to the salvation of many, many children.

scribed in August of the same year, *De instituenda Virgine libri duo, Ad Matronas Arretinas*. This poem ends with a description of the modesty and shyness that arise in every girl on her wedding day. Then, the theme of women's education and medical science becomes significant for this obscure and interesting Tuscan physician. Indeed, the significance of his initial two works addressed to the women of Arezzo cannot be underestimated. He graduated from Pisa in 1589.⁶⁶

After receiving the degree, Vezzosi moved to Sant'Oreste and then to Rome to work as a physician in the house of the noble Savelli family. Here he composed a treatise in poetic form entitled *Gynaecyeseos, sive De mulierum conceptu, gestatione, ac partu*, dedicating it to Lucio Savelli's wife, Clarice Palombara (+1648).⁶⁷ The treatise was printed in Venice

⁶⁶ Cf. Rodolfo Del Gratta, Giuliana Volpi and Leonardo Ruta, *Acta Graduum Academiae Pisanae (1543-1599)* vol. I (Pisa: CNR, 1980), 387. The 'promoters' of his doctorate were Andrea Cesalpino, Baldello Baldelli, a nobleman from Cortona, Leone Maurizi, Bartolo Francucci, Ippolito Accolti and Fabio Sinigardi, other noblemen from Arezzo. Among the "witnesses", we find Francesco Verino (1524-1591) (whose treatise on meteors Vezzosi kept in his library (Francesco, de' Vieri, *Trattato di M. Francesco de' Vieri, cognominato il Verino secondo cittadino Fiorentino, nel quale si contengono i tre primi libri delle metheore. Nuovamente ristampati et da lui ricorretti con l'aggiunta del quarto libro* (In Fiorenza: appresso Giorgio Marescotti, 1582); handwritten ownership note on the front of the second flyleaf: "Emilio Vezzosi"; location: APA, VI-d, 77)), Francesco Buonamici (1533-1603), Damiano Dias, and Jacopo Mazzoni (1548-1598). Francesco Buonamici studied at the 'Studio' of Florence, where he followed Greek courses with the humanist Pier Vettori (1499-1585). Doctor, professor of natural philosophy, and Greek and Latin scholar, he was greatly inspired by the ancient texts. He consulted Aristotle (384-322 BC), Averroes (1126-1198), Nicomachus (60-120 BC), and others. Furthermore, he was one of Galileo Galilei's (1564-1642) teachers at the University of Pisa. Mazzoni taught in Pisa, too. He held the chair of philosophy since November 1588 to 1597. In Pisa, he met Galileo Galilei, at this time a young mathematics teacher, with whom he established an excellent relationships. The Pisan environment was influenced by the significant figure of Matteo Realdo Colombo (1510 ca.-1559). Since 1546 to 1548, he taught at the University of Pisa, where he was called by the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo I de' Medici (1519-1574). In the same years, Andrea Cesalpino (1519-1603) was carrying out his studies in Pisa: it is reasonable to suppose that he owed Colombo's studies on small circulation the development of his research on large circulation. Furthermore, in 1544, Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564) held lessons in Pisa, where the anatomical theater in "Via della Sapienza" had been inaugurated by Cosimo I. In 1544, Juan de Valverde (1525-1587) was also in Pisa. There he anatomized also the body of a woman. The Pisan environment, far from being a stronghold of Aristotelian thought, was instead a fertile ground for scientific innovations.

⁶⁷ Cf. Maria Fiammetta Iovine, *Massimiliano Palombara filosofo incognito. Appunti per una biografia di un alchimista rosacrociario del XVII secolo* (Roma: La lepre Edizioni, 2016); cf. Oddo Savelli Palombara, Principe dell'Accademia degli Umoristi, *Rime diverse*, ed. by Jean Luc Nardone, Maria Fiammetta Iovine (Roma: Edizionidipagina, 2019). Daughter of Camillo Palombara and the noble Ippolita Orsini, Clarice was Oddo V Palombara's, Marquis of Pietraforte, half-sister, and therefore she was Massimiliano Savelli Palombara's (1614-1685) aunt. Massimiliano had

in 1598.⁶⁸ Vezzosi also encountered Torquato Tasso (1544-1595) in the affluent and academic Roman milieu and in the court of the cardinals. The meeting with Tasso arouses great admiration in Vezzosi. However, the court environment, with its intrigues and jealousies, did not suit Vezzosi, who preferred the quiet Tuscan countryside. In fact, at the end of the sixteenth century, Lucio Savelli, probably fallen out of favor, moved with his wife Clarice and his three children (Onorio, Luca, and Camilla) to a rented house in “Rione Pigna” in Rome.

In 1594, Vezzosi returned to Arezzo to practice his profession at the Hospital of “Santa Maria sopra i Ponti”. In the 16th century, several hospitals were established in Arezzo, including that of Santissima Annunciate (created for women who were ill, unmarried, or giving birth).⁶⁹ His activity as a medical doctor is accompanied by the drafting of medical consultations. An example of this is *De partu mirabili Alexandriae Spathariae iudicium Aemilii Vezosi medici aretini* (MS. 38, Library “Città di Arezzo”),⁷⁰ a medical certification that was later used for the beatification of Pope Gregory. Indeed, Alessandra Spadari, a young woman from Arezzo, survived the birth of a dead foetus through the intercession of this saint. Emilio Vezzosi was called to certify, as a medical doctor, the miracle.

Many years later, in addition to his professional role as a physician, he worked as a teacher of rhetoric, grammar, and poetry at the School of Humanities of the city, a cultural institution of moderate prestige.⁷¹ During this period, there exist numerous letters that he addressed to his pupils, which appear to have been systematically documented in 1626 in MS. 37 of the Library “Città di Arezzo” (*Thematum epistolarum quas Aemilius Vezosius discipulis suis dictabat*). This production is noteworthy and will be accompanied by the various *Orations* on the cultural and religious life of the city as well as on some noble families of Arezzo. They are contained in MS. 38, an autograph manuscript of the Library

built in Rome the so-called ‘Magic Door’, the only example of alchemical-magical architecture in the Western world. He was close to the cultural and scientific circle of Christina of Sweden. In Palazzo Palombara, now destroyed, he had built an underground alchemical laboratory. He practiced experiments in the fields of metallurgy, medicinal plants, and the magical virtues of stones and minerals. His father, Oddo Savelli Palombara, was instead elected Prince of the Academy of Humorists in 1633, and was close to the Barberini’s family.

⁶⁸ Vezzosi, *Gynaecyeseos*. The autograph text is also preserved in APA, MS. M IV.1 and in BCA, MS. 41.

⁶⁹ Cf. Silvano Pieri, *La Compagnia della SS. Annunziata dal XIV al XVIII secolo*, in *La Chiesa della SS. Annunziata di Arezzo nel Cinquecentesimo della sua costruzione: Atti del Convegno di Studi: Arezzo, 14 September 1990*, (Arezzo, Accademia Petrarca di Lettere Arti e Scienze, 1993) 21-58; cf. Silvano Pieri, “Notizie sugli ‘hospitalia’ nella diocesi di Arezzo”, *Annali Aretini* V (1997): 5-80.

⁷⁰ A copy is preserved in MS. 56, ff. 589 r-592 r.

⁷¹ His position is regularly recorded in ASA, *Deliberazioni e Partiti dei Priori e Consiglio Generale*, 31, f. 228 v.

“Città di Arezzo”. We know with certainty that some of his students became talented Latin scholars. This is the case of Lorenzo Nardi, who became very skilled in Latin poetry.⁷² Vezzosi’s pedagogical style is ‘epistolary’: in fact, he addressed letters to his students to be translated into Latin.

Upon his return to Arezzo, he married the young Angela Fossombroni, with whom he had three children: Francesco, who died at an early age; Teresa, who took her vows; and Carlo, who was born on April 9, 1617.⁷³ The oration *De nuptiarum dignitatem* in MS. 39 (an autograph from the Library “Città di Arezzo”) is certainly related to his marriage to Fossombroni. Angela belonged to one of the most noble families in the city. This marriage was happy. However, an unknown woman often appears in Vezzosi’s poems. The author identifies her with ‘a pretty woman’. We do not know who she was. Perhaps she is just literary fiction.

He left his teaching position in 1626. However, the educational and training theme of the *Epistolae*, accompanied by the scientific and medical themes of the *Orations* (about sixty), is the backdrop for all the productions by this author that were conceived in an academic environment. Indeed, Discordi’s Academy is present in Arezzo, having been established in 1623, and Vezzosi’s contribution to the academic life of the city is regarded as “one of the most significant”.⁷⁴ The first ‘Prince’ of Discordi was Scipione Francucci. After Francucci’s death, the debate was animated by Vezzosi, thanks to his Latin verses and his epigrams. In the first season, the academic programs mainly focused on studies in the humanities, dealing with plague, idleness, and music. Later, they developed scientific interests, discussing shows that were performed in the theater of the city, and meeting to recite lyric poems and verses on the occasion of famous takings of monastic vows, weddings, or religious celebrations. It is no by chance that the academy is composed of members of the local clergy and small nobility; some of them had received orders. For example, Francucci is an abbot of the Dominican Order.⁷⁵

Vezzosi died in Arezzo on August 9, 1637.

⁷² Flori, *Vita...*, f. 413 r.

⁷³ Cf. Bianchini, “Emilio Vezzosi (1563-1637), filosofo, medico, insegnante, accademico, ‘devotissimo’ alla famiglia Medici”, 102.

⁷⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 105.

⁷⁵ Other figures from the world of the city of Arezzo are part of this academy: doctor Gregorio Redi, father of the more famous Francesco (1626-1697); Girolamo Forti; Bernardino Ton-dinelli; Antonio Graccioni; Pietro Lippi; Jacopo Burali; Giuseppe from Casoli; Paolo Burali; Pietro Guadagni; Bernardino Azzi; Pietro Accolti, jurist, theologian, and philosopher; Angiolo Tenti, priest of the cathedral; Girolamo Ruscelli; Francesco Albergotti; Antonio Nardi, disciple of Galileo Galilei. Cf. Maria Chiara Milighetti, “Da Antonio Nardi (1598-1649 ca.) a Francesco Redi (1626-1697): l’eredità culturale di un galileiano”, *Annali Aretini* XII (2004): 221-238.

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- loci, unde sunt hausta, sub unum cadant oculorum obtutum. Opus ab ipso, dum practicam medicinam publice Pisis doceret, elaboratum, recens vero in lucem editum a Marco, & Horatio. Patauij: ex officina Petri Pauli Tozzij, 1605.*
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