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Tommaso Duranti. *Mai sotto Saturno: Girolamo Manfredi, medico e astrologo*  
*Mai sotto Saturno: Girolamo Manfredi, medico e astrologo* by Tommaso Duranti

Review by: Monica Azzolini

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Tommaso Duranti. *Mai sotto Saturno: Girolamo Manfredi, medico e astrologo*.

Bologna medievale ieri e oggi 10. Bologna: CLUEB, 2008. 212 pp. index. illus. tbls. chron. bibl. €19. ISBN: 978-88-491-3129-1.

In this study Tommaso Duranti examines the life and works of the Bolognese physician and astrologer Girolamo Manfredi. Now known only to a handful of historians, Manfredi lived and operated with remarkable success in fifteenth-century Bologna, rising to a notable level of prominence both within the university and at the court of the Bentivoglio of Bologna. As indicated in the foreword by medieval historian Carla Frova, this book is essentially the biography of a fifteenth-century intellectual. It is divided into four chapters, starting with Manfredi “the man,” to continue with Manfredi “the university professor,” followed by “the doctor” and concluding with “the astrologer.” A short epilogue on Manfredi’s death and burial brings the book to a close.

The first, brief chapter takes as its departure the relatively well-known story of Manfredi’s involvement in a spate of negative prognostications against the Duke of Milan in 1474. With their public prognostications for the year, Manfredi and other astrologers from Bologna and Ferrara displeased greatly the Duke of Milan, Galeazzo Maria Sforza, who read the prognostication of the death of an Italian prince as a veiled allusion to his own death. A series of diplomatic documents (some already known, others presented here for the first time) document the intervention of Galeazzo’s ambassador and other Sforza courtiers in order to rectify the situation and discourage the astrologers — even at the cost of issuing death threats — from repeating such mistakes in the future. This chapter seems to serve the purpose of introducing the book’s character to its reader, and anticipates some of the aspects of Manfredi’s life that are treated in more detail in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 is articulated into three parts: the first, very broad and general, on the University of Bologna and its faculty of arts and medicine, the other two on Manfredi’s academic career and his participation in the publication project of Ptolemy’s *Geography*. Chapter 3 is, once again, introduced by a very general section on the place of medicine in late medieval society, and proceeds with four other sections, each dedicated to one of Manfredi’s works: respectively his *De homine*, his treatise on plague, his unpublished *Anatomia*, and his *Centiloquium de medicis et infirmis*. Like the other chapters, chapter 4 is prefaced by a general section on the place of astrology in medieval society, followed by some considerations on the various astrological traditions and authorities present in the period, continuing with a brief outline of Pico’s polemics against astrology and concluding with a more detailed analysis of Manfredi’s annual prognostications.

This is a useful and readable book: it has the merit of unearthing a number of unpublished documents on Manfredi, and offering a good overview of Manfredi’s teaching and his published and unpublished work. While it fulfills its aim of providing a short biography of a lesser-known figure of the Italian Renaissance, however, the book could have been more ambitious in its aims and results. We

certainly gain better knowledge of Manfredi's activities, and particularly of his involvement in Bolognese publishing enterprises (53–65) and his attempts, which were met with some success, to gain the patronage of Giovanni II Bentivoglio, to whom he dedicated all but one of his books, but we still lack much of the context surrounding his teaching and writing within a Bolognese, and to a greater extent, Italian context. This may be due to a lack of documentation, but judging from the introductory sections that preface the more analytical aspects of Duranti's work, where he reads and analyzes Manfredi's medical and astrological works, it seems more likely that this was a conscious choice by the author. Establishing an intended audience for such a book is not easy: historians of medicine and astrology will find the book relatively useful as an introductory work on a lesser-known author, but they will be hard-pressed to place Manfredi and his work within the broader context of Renaissance medicine. While attempts in this direction are sometime present, like in the case of Manfredi's *Trattato della pestilentia*, they are immediately abandoned in favor of the functional use of secondary sources in lieu of primary texts, thus providing a rather hasted and superficial picture. More significantly, especially for an international readership, Duranti's broad contextualization is grounded almost exclusively in Italian scholarship, some of which is rather dated or very general (notable by its absence, however, is Andrea Carlino's *La fabbrica del corpo. Libri e dissezione nel Rinascimento*), while completely ignoring important studies in English by Nancy Siraisi and Katharine Park on medieval and Renaissance anatomy and medical university teaching, and by Laura Smoller, Robert Westman, and Darrel Rutkin on medieval and Renaissance astrology.

MONICA AZZOLINI

University of Edinburgh