

The physician Romolo Spezioli (1642 -1723) and his private library in the Public Library of Fermo

Summary

The Public Library of Fermo in the Italian Marches, houses an almost unknown treasure for historians of medicine, the personal library of Romolo Spezioli. Spezioli was born in Fermo in 1642 and died in Rome in 1723. He was the personal physician of Cardinal Decio Azzolini junior, Queen Christina of Sweden and Pope Alexander VIII. There are almost 12,000 books, dating from the sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries, almost all of them on medicine or science. They are housed in the Globe Room, whose creation was made possible by the generosity of Cardinal Azzolini. The library was opened to the public in 1688.

Résumé

La Bibliothèque municipale de Fermo, est située dans la région des Marches, au centre de l'Italie. Elle héberge un trésor presque inconnu des historiens de la médecine : il s'agit de la collection personnelle du médecin Romolo Spezioli. Spezioli naquit à Fermo, en 1642 et mourut à Rome, en 1664. Il était docteur en Médecine et en Philosophie de l'Université du lieu. Il s'installa ensuite à Rome où il fit une brillante carrière, devenant médecin personnel de la reine Christine de Suède, du cardinal Decio Azzolino junior ; il fut aussi l'archiâtre du pape Alexandre VIII. Spezioli légua sa collection personnelle à sa ville natale, la destinant ainsi aux étudiants de médecine de l'Université de Fermo.

Le fonds contient plus de 12.000 volumes imprimés, datant des XVème., XVIème. et XVIIème. siècles. La plupart de ces ouvrages sont des traités de médecine ou de science. Cette collection, entreposée dans la Bibliothèque municipale de Fermo, contient les catalogues manuscrits ; elle peut être consultée dans la salle dite « de la Mappemonde ». La création de la collection est due à la générosité du cardinal Azzolino. Depuis 1688, la Bibliothèque de Fermo est ouverte au grand public.

The Public Library of Fermo in the Italian Marches houses an unknown treasure for historians of medicine : the personal library of Romolo Spezioli¹ (Fig 1, Romolo Spezioli's portrait, Fermo, Palazzo dei Priori, Mayor's room) who was the personal physician of Queen Christina of Sweden.

It is preserved in a room that was created in 1688 as the first part of the Library and was intended to be open to all scholars. Today, it is called the Globe Room (Fig 2, The Public Library of Fermo. The Globe room), because of the presence of a large terrestrial Globe that was made, in 1713, by the cartographer and instrument maker Silvestro Amanzio Moroncelli. Behind the old main door of the Globe Room, the unique atmosphere of the room, with its splendid baroque ceiling and woodwork, is completely unexpected. Its original wooden bookcases contain about twelve thousand books from the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, almost all of them on medicine and science. But how and why did they find their way to the Public Library of Fermo ?

Over the main entrance to the Globe Room, there is an old, wooden, coloured medallion, upon which is written simply: "*Chhstinae*". This important name explains the whole history of the library. The room is dedicated to the memory of Queen Christina of Sweden (Stockholm, 1626 -Rome, 1689) who was linked to Fermo in the seventeenth century by two important personalities :the cardinal Decio Azzolino *junior* and her personal physician Romolo Spezioli². Cardinal Azzolino (Fermo, 1623 - Rome, 1689), one of the most powerful personalities at the papal court in Rome³, was a member

of a noble family that dominated Fermo, in the seventeenth century. As a result of his great skills in politics and diplomacy (he was nicknamed the "Eagle"), the cardinal became a great friend of Queen Christina of Sweden after her abdication and move to Rome, helping and protecting her until the very end of her life. He was also the patron of the people of Fermo who came to Rome and it was he who, in 1675, introduced the newly arrived Romolo Spezioli to Queen Christina⁴ as a possible new personal physician. Spezioli was particularly fortunate because Christina's personal physician Cesare Macchiati had just died and she was looking for a suitable person to fill this position. Cesare Macchiati too, had come from the county of Fermo, a further proof of the importance of Fermo for the study of medicine in the Papal States. Its university, founded in the XIV century, had gained a solid reputation for its graduates in medicine, theology and philosophy and Spezioli, himself, had graduated there on 22nd April 1664.

Queen Christina was fascinated by the broad culture and the serious intelligence of the young physician from Fermo, appointing him as her personal physician and arranging for him to teach practical medicine at the University "La Sapienza", in Rome. Spezioli enjoyed spectacular success throughout his whole career in Rome. He taught practical medicine at the University from 1675 until 1722, a year before his death, as well as being the private physician of Cardinal Azzolino and of the noble Ottoboni family, in Rome. When the cardinal Pietro Ottoboni was elected Pope as Alexander VIII, in 1689, Spezioli was appointed also as his personal

physician, the highest and the most prestigious office for a physician in Rome, in the seventeenth century. He also took care of Cardinal Azzolino and Queen Christina until their deaths, in 1689.

Shortly before he died, Cardinal Azzolino decided to make a special gift to his native Fermo : a Public Library. Although there had long been a university at Fermo, there was no public library for its students. It was Cardinal Azzolino who gave the money to change the Globe Room, (which had been used as a little theatre for performances of religious works), into the first room of the Public Library of Fermo. He probably wanted to dedicate the room to Queen Christina, in memory of the most educated and intellectual woman of the seventeenth century, but he died in 1689 before he could see the completion of the work on the Globe Room and Christina, herself, followed soon after.

Although Spezioli lived in Rome, from 1675 until the year of his death in 1723, he never forgot Fermo and, like the Cardinal, he left to his birth-place a most precious legacy, his personal library. It offers an insight into his life and his thought and holds up a mirror to the scientific and medical culture in baroque Rome. At the time when Spezioli first decided to leave his library to Fermo, in 1705, he was in Rome. Since he wanted to help the library, as Cardinal Azzolino had done before him and, in particular, the students of medicine⁵, the first part of his library to be sent to Fermo was entirely composed of medical books. In his autograph testament⁶, dated 25th November 1722, shortly before his death, the next year, he left orders for the rest of his library, with books about "all other subjects", and his manuscript catalogues to be transferred to Fermo. In this way, the Public Library of Fermo houses a substantial number of other books about theology, philosophy, literature and all other matters considered essential to the education of a physician, in the seventeenth century. Spezioli himself was very religious and belonged to the order of canons regular of St. Peter's, in Rome. He made the monastery of the Jesuits at Fermo his main heirs, ordering the erection of a new altar, in the church of San Martino, the monastery church, to be dedicated to his three patrons, Cardinal Decio Azzolino, Queen Christina of Sweden and Pope Alexander VIII.

The whole world of seventeenth-century Rome is reflected in his library. It shows his links with religion and, in particular, with the scientific culture of the Jesuits, the scientific world of the Queen Christina's court, the conservative and the new "progressive" medical theories of the university, the formal, practical medicine of a papal court and the 'informal' medical knowledge that had been placed on the Index *Librorum Prohibitorum*.

His library is like a baroque picture, full of contrasts. The most useful keys to decoding this complicated world are the seven manuscript catalogues of the library, which are like seven different photographs. The most important is Spezioli's own autograph catalogue of the first part of the library⁷, dedicated entirely to medicine and dated 6th February 1706. The volumes are organised firstly by size and, secondly, by the name of the author. In this catalogue, one can find all the major authors of the Renaissance, like Adrian van der Spiegel, Conrad Gessner, Thomas Sydenham, Thomas Willis, William Harvey, Gaspar Hoffmann, Thomas Bartholinus, Marcello Malpighi, Bartolomeo Eustachi, Girolamo Mercuriale, Girolamo Fabrizi D' Aquapendente, Giambattista Delia Porta, Fortunio Liceti, Paracelsus, Jean Riolan and Athanasius Kircher, as well as many commentaries on Galen and Hippocrates.

There are two copies of the first edition of Vesalius' "*De humani corporis fabrica*", printed in 1543, in one⁸ of which some of the illustrations have been coloured in by hand (Fig 3 Andreas Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica*, Basileae, 1543, p. 174). In particular, this copy of the *Fabrica* is very interesting because the watercolour of the illustrations has not only an artistic significance but also a scientific purpose. In fact, different colours are used to paint the anatomical parts : the red is used for the muscles and for the heart, light yellow for the bones and green for lymphatic ducts. Spezioli's library includes other important books on anatomy⁹: a copy of the *Opera omnia* of Adrian van der Spiegel printed in Amsterdam in 1645, the *Opera Chirurgica* of Girolamo Fabrizi D' Aquapendente (Padova, 1666, *in folio*), the *Opera omnia* of Gabriele Falloppio (Frankfurt, 1600, *in folio*), the *Tetras anatomicarum epistolarum de lingua, et cerebro* of Marcello Malpighi (Napoli, 1665). There are some important incunabula in Spezioli's library too : a copy of *Canon medicinae*, Avicenna (Lyons, Johann Trechsel e Johann Klein, 1498) with rubricated capital letters, the volume of *Hortus Sanitatis* (Mainz, Jacob Meydenbach, 1491), with rubricated capital letters and woodcut illustrations of plants and animal, three different copies of *Libellus de conservatione sanitatis*, Benedetto da Norcia — the oldest copy is printed in 1475, in Rome — , a copy of *De aegretudinibus et remediis infantium*, Paolo Bagellardo¹⁰ (Padova, 1487).

While the presence of incunabula and manuscripts is important for showing the medieval medical knowledge represented in Spezioli's library, the most important part of the library is formed by the printed books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Spezioli's library includes not only medical treatises, but other fundamental books for different scientific subjects

closely linked to medicine, like natural history. The library has a copy of *Historia animalium* of Konrad Gessner : it is composed of three volumes that belong to different editions, printed in Germany (Frankfurt, Heidelberg), from 1586 until 1606. It was easier to catalogue Ulisse Aldrovandi's works because they are all collected in *Opera omnia*, printed in Bologna, in 1599. The linking of Spezioli's library with the scientific culture of Jesuits is well documented by Athanasius Kircher's works : there are copies of *China Monumentis* (Amsterdam, 1667, in folio), *Mundus subterraneus* (Amsterdam, 1678, in folio), *Ars magna lucis et umbrae* (Roma, 1646, in folio), *Musurgia universalis* (Roma, 1650).

The classification system used in the seven catalogues of Spezioli is extremely interesting for showing the scientific and bibliographic models of a medical library of the seventeenth century. The oldest manuscript among the seven, a manuscript with an old parchment binding, is listed in my first book as "Bibliography", after the reconstruction I made of the *stemma codicum* of the seven manuscripts. It has the bibliographical references without the classmarks, so it has to be studied as a bibliography, rather than as a catalogue. Its importance lies in the probability that this was the bibliographical model that guided the growth of Spezioli's library. It can be collated with those books of Spezioli's library that still have both their original classmarks and Spezioli's autograph signature, on the inner part of the binding, to help reconstruct the original library. So far we have succeeded in identifying the books on alchemy, seventeen in all, and the thirty-seven books that were in the *Index*. Alchemy is a very important scientific feature of Spezioli's library for biographical and scientific reasons ; Queen Christina of Sweden and Cardinal Decio Azzolino were both interested in alchemy and they probably had an influence on Spezioli's scientific thought, but alchemical knowledge was a hermetic philosophical component of medicine, in the seventeenth century too. This explains the presence of works by Jean Pierre Fabre and Gerhard Dorn, as well as four different editions of the famous *De Re Metallica* by Georg Agricola. Two are translated in Italian, being published in Venice in 1550 and in Basle, in 1563 and both, have illustrations about the extraction and working of metals, the copy of 1563 having an interesting manuscript note about the features of some metals. The other two were published in Latin, in Wittemberg in 1612 and in Basle, in 1657. The copy printed in Wittemberg is important because it has the original numerical signature and the manuscript note of the class "Alchemy", in front of the binding.

It is important to emphasize that Paracelsus's *Opera omnia*, published in 1659, is not listed among the alchemy

books but among those on the *Index*. Spezioli identified these forbidden books in his autograph catalogue of the library, with a symbol like an asterisk or a cross and with a double zero, on the binding. The classmark of forbidden editions also has a particular symbol written on the binding : a double zero. It is not difficult to explain how he could find these books. He lived in Rome where the trade of books was well developed in the seventeenth century but he probably had a lot of contacts with booksellers of Northern Europe, for many of his books were printed in Germany, England, Holland and Belgium, although few books were printed in France. This North-European origin might be explained by Spezioli's cultural relationship with Queen Christina of Sweden. Not only did Spezioli live in Christina's palace in Rome and look after her until her death, but in her will, Christina granted him an annuity for life. Very unusually, Spezioli rejected this annuity in exchange for some of the Queen's precious books and manuscripts". This was perhaps the only way to get books from Christina's library which he would never have been able to buy himself, and shows his passion for books and culture. The most beautiful of all his acquisitions is a devotional Book of Hours, an illuminated manuscript¹² of the early sixteenth century, that had belonged to Queen Christina.

Ongoing research to identify Christina's books and manuscripts in Spezioli's library has still much to reveal about the history of this library and its links with Christina's court. It is also an important index of medical and scientific culture in baroque Rome, comparable only to that of the physician Giovanni Maria Lancisi, now preserved in the Roman hospital of Santo Spirito, in Sassia. The comparison is valuable not only because Lancisi and Spezioli were contemporaries and colleagues at the Sapienza and at the Papal Court. Spezioli was born in 1642 and died in Rome, in 1723 ; Lancisi was born in 1654 and died in 1720.

The architectural structures of both old libraries are very similar. They both have their original wooden bookcases and old globes. The comparison of their manuscript catalogues is very interesting because it shows the scientific originality of Spezioli's library, with its many editions printed in Northern Europe. The two libraries have some different features: Lancisi's library includes more medical manuscripts, especially letters of physicians, but Spezioli's library is more complete for the medical and scientific printed books of the seventeenth century. The libraries used different systems of classification, showing the philosophical difference between the system adopted by Lancisi¹³ and that of Spezioli's library¹⁴. The first is more specific with more medical subdivisions, while the second is more universal, from a bibliographical point of view, and is very close to Gessner's bibliographical model.

The reasons for this difference may be two : Lancisi's library was built in a hospital to educate the young physicians who practised medicine there ; whereas Spezioli's library was a private medical bibliographical collection without at first the features of a "public library". Above all, Queen Christina's influence on Spezioli's scientific knowledge is the most important clue towards the correct reading of Spezioli's library. A preliminary census of the scientific and medical editions printed in Northern Europe shows that Spezioli's library displays a very particular feature : it is far closer, from a bibliographical point of view, to a German or English private medical library. Christina could be the link with the new scientific culture. Her palace on the river Tiber was home to a marvellous library as well as to many intellectuals from all over Europe. She probably had a lot of contacts with booksellers of Northern Europe who informed her librarians about new publications. This could explain the presence of the numerous forbidden editions in Spezioli's library too. It is important to highlight that the most important of the editions printed in Northern Europe are books of medicine and philosophy.

These include the works of Bacon¹⁵ and Descartes, atomism, as represented by Godsend's *Opera omnia*⁶ and the hermetical neo-Platonism of the *Opera omnia* of Marsilio Ficino¹⁷. The study of these philosophical editions allows us to understand the position of Spezioli in the philosophical and scientific discussion of the seventeenth century, especially in the complicated cultural universe of Queen Christina. This is only one of the aspects still to be studied in a comparison between the libraries of Spezioli and Queen Christina, not least because the manuscript inventory, Vat. Lat. 12637¹⁸, offers a good deal of interesting information about both of them.

Much research will still be required to uncover the real face of Spezioli's library. But, once achieved, the complete reconstruction of this almost forgotten library will not only offer new sources of information on medicine, in the seventeenth century to historians of medicine, it will also illuminate the life and work of a leading figure, in Baroque Rome.

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Notes

1. This article is based on F. Zurlini, *Romoio Spezioii (Fermo, 1642-Roma/1723) : un medico fermano nel XVII secolo a Roma*, Manziana (Rome), Vecchiarelli, 2000.

2. See : V Nigrisoli Warnhjelm, *I Fermani alla corte della regina Cristina di Svezia*, in, "*Cristina di Svezia e Fermo*", Atti del Convegno Internazionale "La Regina Cristina di Svezia, il cardinale Decio Azzolino junior e Fermo nell'arte e la politica della seconda metà del Seicento", Fermo, Auditorium S. Martino, 3-4 ottobre 1995, (a cura di)

VNigrisoli Warnhjelm, Fermo, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Fermo, 2001, pp. 105-121.

3. See: M.L. Roden, *Church Politics in Seventeenth-Century Rome: Cardinal Decio Azzolino, Queen Christina of Sweden and the Squadrone Volante*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2000.

4. See: F. Zurlini, *Romoio Spezioii...*, p. 16.

5. See: F. Zurlini, *Romoio Spezioii...* pp. 84-85. The transcription of Spezioli's autograph letter of 11th July 1705 explains very clearly his plans for the future of the library.

6. See: F. Zurlini, *Romoio Spezioii...* p. 16, pp. 73-80.

7. Idem, p.83-102. The first results of the complicated study of the catalogues are published in chapter 2. Vera Nigrisoli Warnhjelm was the first to study the catalogues of Spezioli's library. See : V Nigrisoli Warnhjelm, *Romoio Spezioii, medico di Cristina di Svezia*, in, "Settentrione", nuova serie (1994), pp. 25-38.

8. F. Zurlini, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica di Andre Vesale: un esemplare acquarellato dell'editio princeps nella Biblioteca Comunale di Fermo*, in, Lettere dalla Facolta, Bollettino della Facolta di Medicina e Chirurgia dell'Università Politecnica delle Marche, pp. 15-18, anno VI, n° 6, giugno 2003.

9. The first important research into the medical books of Spezioli's library was by M. Santoro, *Le voci del tempo passato: una sosta tra alcuni libri a stampa di medicina e scienze naturali dei secoli XV, XVI e XVII conservati nella Civica Biblioteca di Fermo*, Fasano, Grafischena, 1985. Prof. Mario Santoro with Prof. Adalberto Pazzini of Rome founded the Institute of Research "Studio Firmano for History of Medicine and Science" in 1955 in Fermo. Santoro was the Director of Public Library of Fermo until 1993.

10. See: N.Tizi, *La cura e l'assistenza all'infante malato nei libri del medico Romoio Spezioii*, in, F. Zurlini, *Romoio Spezioii...* pp. 221-228.

11. F. Zurlini, *Romoio Spezioii (Fermo, 1642 - Roma, 1723): un medico fermano a Roma nel XVII secolo*, Manziana (Rome), Vecchiarelli editore, 2000, pp. 136 -138.

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13. A. Serrai, *La Biblioteca Lancisiana*, in, "Il Bibliotecario", 2, 1995, pp. 25-41. See C. Carsughi, *La Biblioteca Lancisiana ovvero Distinto ragionamento della pubblica libreria eretta l'anno 1714 nel sacro pontificio archiospedale di S. Spirito in Roma*, Rome, per il De Martiis, 1718.

14. F. Zurlini, *Antonio Cocchi, medico, bibliotecario e bibliografo del secolo XVIII*, in, "Culture del testo e del documento, le discipline del libro nelle biblioteche e negli archivi", 8/maggio-agosto 2002, p. I 16-126. This is a first comparative study about the different systems of classification of Spezioli's library in Fermo, Lancisi's library in Rome, Cocchi's library in Florence.

15. Bacon Francis, *Opera omnia*, Francofurti ad Moenum,

typis Matthaei Kempfferi, 1665, in folio see : F. Zurlini, *Romolo Spezioli...*, p. 150.

16. Gassendi Pierre, *Opera omnia*, Lugduni, sumptibus Laurentii Anisson, 1658, in folio. The research into the French editions is ongoing but at first sight they are far fewer than the German and English ones.

17. Marsilio Ficino, *Opera*, Basle, 1561, in folio. The library includes many other editions of Ficino, e.g. *De vita libri tres*, with the *Epidemiorum antidotus ex idiomate Tusco latinitate donata*, Basle, 1532, 8°.

18. Vatican Library, ms.Vat. Lat. 12637, "Inventario del libri della Biblioteca della Regina di Svetia stima fatta da medesimi et alcuni fogli in ord.A li libri e alia compra di d.a. libraria".

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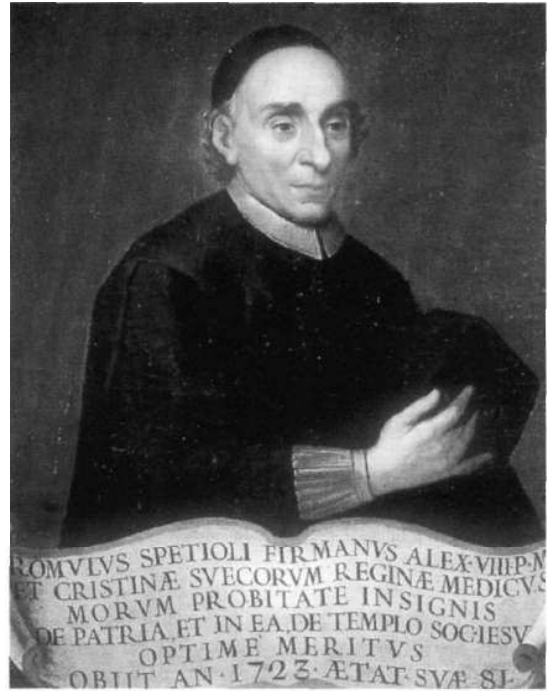


Fig 1. Romolo Spezioli



Fig 2. The Globe Room, The Public Library, Fermo



Fig 3. de humani corporis. Andreas Vesalius