

Intellectual-historical analysis of Galeotto Marzio's *De doctrina promiscua*

Galeotto Marzio's *De doctrina promiscua*, dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici around 1490, is a treatise dealing with medical astrology, astronomy, herbs, and medicines. My intention in this dissertation is to analyse the medical-astrological, physiognomical and astronomical theories and topics related to the history of sexuality. The research on Galeotto has examined his works so far mainly from its literary and philosophical aspects, but hasn't focused yet on his knowledge of astrology and astronomy. The mode of my approach follows the subjects and methods of the recent studies of intellectual history, the intention of which is to examine together literary, political, philosophical texts and also works from the field of history of science.

In the first chapter I outline the history of the research related to his works and the main phases of Galeotto's life and also our knowledge about the relationship between him and Lorenzo de' Medici. The Umbria-born humanist studied in Ferrara, in Guarino Guarini's school from 1445. Later on, he was educated in medicine at Padua where he simultaneously gave lectures on literature. From 1461 onwards, he frequently stayed at the Buda court of King Matthias Corvinus, where, so he claims, he was very popular due to his erudition and witty manners. In the 1460s-70s, he gave lectures on poetics in the Studio of Bologna. In 1477, he was accused of heresy and arrested on his estate of Montagnana by the Venetian Inquisition because of the doctrines he put forth in his treatise entitled *De incognitis vulgo*, where, among other things, he claimed that the immortality of the soul cannot be proven through rational arguments. I emphasise this statement of Galeotto here because the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is a key element in the works of Ficino, whose importance in contemporary Florentine intellectual circles is well known. After his release from prison, he resided again for a short time at the court of Buda, and subsequently returned to Italy. Here he completed his *De doctrina* in 1489 and dedicated it to Lorenzo de' Medici. Since Galeotto's earlier friends and patrons in Hungary had died following the failed conspiracy against King Matthias in 1472, and since the conflict with the Ottomans and Emperor Frederick III took up most of the time and attention of the king, who, furthermore, resided more often in the newly occupied Vienna after 1485 than in Buda, Galeotto had to look for a new patron. Therefore it seems plausible that Galeotto intended to obtain some position (perhaps a professorship) with the help of Lorenzo de' Medici in Italy.

Galeotto had contacted Lorenzo previously: in 1478, he wrote a letter from the prison of the Venetian Inquisition, asking for Lorenzo's help. Pope Sixtus IV had released Galeotto soon afterwards, but we have no evidence whether Lorenzo actually interceded or not on Galeotto's behalf. Since Galeotto addressed his petition to Lorenzo right after the repression of the Pazzi Conspiracy, we may presume that it was, rather, King Matthias who mediated between Galeotto and the Pope, since, owing to his military actions against the Ottomans, he enjoyed a good reputation at the papal court whereas Lorenzo did not. Galeotto's other influential Hungarian acquaintances might also have come to his aid. Lorenzo's intercession seems all the more unlikely as Galeotto makes no reference to this event in his *De doctrina* that he dedicated to Lorenzo, although he frequently praises him and his family in the text. Moreover, in the same work, he lays emphasis on Lorenzo's role in releasing Giovanni Bentivoglio, captured after his daughter Francesca had murdered her husband, from the prison of the Faenza family. A copy of Galeotto's *De doctrina* had also reached Lorenzo's library; its reception among contemporary Florentine humanists, however, cannot be traced. The first edition of the work was published relatively late, in 1548, in Florence.

An intriguing aspect of the relation between Galeotto's treatise and the dedicatee is the fact that the author's doctrines often contradict the ideas generally held by leading Florentine intellectuals around the Medici family. For instance, he mockingly calls "dead" the Neoplatonist philosophers who, as he puts it, desired to break away from their bodies already in their lifetime. In his work, Galeotto repeatedly stresses that body and soul constitute a single inseparable unit. His works reflect not that kind of person who would have given up his principles only to flatter someone, yet he must have chosen the dedicatee consciously. He emphasises several times in the text how much Lorenzo appreciates scholars and that they enjoy not only honour, but also Lorenzo's financial subsidy. In the final chapter of his work, Galeotto explicitly offered to dedicate his next work to Lorenzo if he received financial support from him in exchange. For this reason, I intend to examine the subjects which, despite Galeotto's bold way of thinking, might have met a favourable reception in the contemporary Florentine intellectual milieu. I suppose that one of the aspects that Lorenzo himself appreciated may have been the choice of a predominantly astrological topic for the treatise. Therefore, I wish to present in brief the astrological concepts formulated in the *De doctrina*, then I will examine how they are related to the presence of astrology in contemporary Florence.

In the second chapter I present the main medical issues treated in this work, and Galeotto's beliefs about the human soul, that also influenced the ideas of his works. Finally I

present the role of the Antique literature in the *De doctrina*.

The treatise consists of thirty-nine chapters, in most of which Galeotto discusses astrological, medical astrological and astronomical questions. In the third chapter of my dissertation I examine these views and I intend to reveal his main sources. The final result of my examination is that Galeotto followed in issues of medical astrology the Paduan philosopher-astrologer Pietro d'Abano. In the first chapter of his treatise, he deals with the celestial origin of names: he claims that we give names to our children under celestial influences, and that our entire fate is comprised in our names. For instance, he derives the name Medici from the word *medicus*, that is, 'physician,' as the Medici cure the diseases of the society just as doctors cure physical illnesses. (This metaphor recurs frequently in the text when Galeotto praises Lorenzo.) Then he continues, quoting ancient examples to illustrate that rulers of antiquity – Hermes Trismegistus, Mithridates or Numa Pompilius, for instance – were also proficient in astrology. In Galeotto's view, the letters of the alphabet are also subordinated to the planets: for example, the letters *a*, *b* and *c* are under the influence of Saturn. He brings the seven planets known at that time into connection also with the Medici coat of arms: according to Galeotto the seven *palles* symbolise the planets. Later on, he discusses how each humour, just like each metal, disease and part of the body, corresponds to one planet. He argues that the knowledge of astrology is indispensable for medicine, and without it, the physician is nothing more than an apothecary. In issues of medical astrology, Galeotto quotes Pietro d'Abano's *Conciliator*, Avicenna, Hippocrates and Galen as the main authorities.

In the *De doctrina*, we encounter doctrines of medical astrology that date back to antiquity: for instance, Galeotto emphasises the significance of the date and time of taking a certain medicine, and that of the planetary conjunctions which also affect the healing process. He states that the date of birth of a patient should also be considered. Conforming to the teachings of the *lunaria*, he describes which activities are recommended in accordance with the path of the Moon, and expounds the theory of *zodiologia* that reveals the effects of the conjunction of the Moon with each sign of the zodiac (for example, when the Moon is in Cancer). Although Galeotto did not rank magic among the sciences which he considered "rational", unlike astrology, he still quotes several examples to illustrate the role of talismanic magic in medicine. He states, for instance, that the imprint of a lion-figure on a gold leaf, under certain celestial constellations, is effective to cure kidney pain. Galeotto also discusses the relation of astrology to physiognomy: he writes that the sign of the zodiac in which we are born, determines our appearance, as we resemble the animal the sign is named after. A

particularly interesting feature of the work is the astrological interpretation of ancient myths and literary works: for instance in Galeotto's view the story of Phaeton actually symbolises a constellation when the Sun leaves its normal path.

Galeotto does not remark upon contemporary criticism of astrology, yet, he admits that some may find his reasoning superstitious and in conflict with religious doctrines. Thereupon he quotes St. Thomas Aquinas who states, in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, that God allows us to consult the stars in certain cases, such as the physician in medicine, the peasant on the field, or the soldier before the battle. St Albert the Great also argues that religion and belief in the stars are reconcilable, since God uses the stars as instruments in order to accomplish His will.

In spite of the fact that there is no evidence that Galeotto – like many contemporaries – was a practising astrologer and, as such, made prognostications on commission, in the *De doctrina* he often refers to himself as a person who makes use of his knowledge also in practice. Through these self-references, the author seems to be trying to convince Lorenzo of his astrological expertise. He mentions, for instance, that in his earlier work, entitled *De incognitis vulgo* dedicated to King Matthias Corvinus, he cast the horoscope of the Emperor Augustus, while in the *De doctrina* he predicts when the plague would strike Padua. The reason why he refers to his horoscope of Augustus might be that Lorenzo was also born in the sign of Capricorn, just like the Emperor. He also boasts of having prescribed medicines for patients in several countries during his journeys, and he calculates the course of the planet Venus for the following year. In the *De doctrina*, we encounter two examples of the political use of astrology that can be interpreted also as a form of humanist flattery. In the first, he states that on the basis of the constellation of the stars the son of Lorenzo, Giovanni de' Medici, has glorious prospects for the future. Elsewhere, he explains that the natives of Genoa are outstanding personalities because the city is under the influence of Scorpio: Genoa hence gave several popes to the church, such as his contemporary, Innocent VIII, whom he praises in his dedication too. Presumably, these gestures towards the pope are to be explained by Galeotto's earlier encounter with the Inquisition.

If we examine the high esteem of astrology in the Medici milieu, we can ascertain that in this respect Galeotto's views, unlike his other statements, were not that different from those of the Florentine philosophers. His belief in the stars contradicts the idea of free will, and the critics of astrology, like Pico della Mirandola, made objection precisely against this determinist doctrine. Yet, Galeotto's work is dominated not so much by the *astrologia iudiciaria* (that is, divinatory or judicial astrology), but by medical astrology which can be traced in Ficino's philosophy as well. As is well known, Ficino's views on astrology were

rather ambiguous: while he condemned the use of this science to make predictions, in his *De vita* he argued for the usefulness of medical astrology. A number of similarities can be noted between Galeotto's *De doctrina* and Ficino's *De vita*: the humours, melancholy, the concept of *spiritus*, the influence of the planets on human life and talismanic magic are the main topics of Ficino's work as well. He finished the third book of the *De vita*, the *De vita coelitus comparanda*, exactly when Galeotto was working on his *De doctrina*, and dedicated it to King Matthias, the former patron of Galeotto. Astrological reasoning and magic are important components also of the Hermetic writings that Ficino himself translated for Cosimo II Vecchio. These texts contain several references to the significance of the Sun, the key role of which is repeatedly emphasised also in Galeotto's *De doctrina*. Citing Lucan's *Pharsalia*, he claims that the Sun rules the planets and directs their motion with its rays. May I here recall briefly that it was Gemistus Pletho who initiated the cult of the Sun, and whose influence on Florentine Neoplatonism is also well known.

In Florence, the science of astrology did not have such traditions as in Bologna, Padua or Ferrara, where Galeotto himself had absorbed the doctrine of celestial influence. Yet a number of indications suggest that many Florentines believed in the stars. In the church of San Lorenzo, for instance, the ceiling of the sanctuary of the *Sagrestia Vecchia*, the burial chapel of the Medici family is decorated with an astrological image. Capricorn and Lorenzo's ascendant, Scorpio, were to be seen on the helmet that he wore at the *giostra* of 1469. Astrology was taught also at the University of Pisa, and the Medicis patronised the Florentine confraternity called *Compagnia dei magi*. In this context their patronage is particularly interesting, since the biblical Three Magi were considered astrologers at that time, and the members of the Medici family were often represented as the three kings from the East. Soon after the completion of the *De doctrina*, in 1490, Lorenzo composed a poem himself, entitled *Canzona de' sette pianeti*, in which he sings of the influence of the planets on human character. The poem was written on the occasion of the carnival of 1490, where it was recited accompanying a triumphal procession of the seven planets.

Galeotto was not the only one who dedicated to Lorenzo a work on astrological, or medical topics. Antonio Benivieni, physician of wealthy Florentine families, had dedicated his *Regimen sanitatis* to him (before 1487), as did several other authors of treatises on the plague. In the dedication of his *Breve compendium futurorum eventuum rei rusticae*, Benedetto Maffei argues that the agricultural knowledge contained in the work is also connected to astrology, and might be useful to Lorenzo, too, when he retired to his estate and wanted to tend to his garden himself. Finally, Lorenzo Bonincontri dedicated to Lorenzo his

treatise *Rerum divinarum et naturalium* (1468-72), also largely of astrological content, in the hope that he would be called back from exile. Actually his expectations were not disappointed, and in 1475-78 we find him giving lectures on astrology in the Studio. Similar phenomena can be observed also in the milieu of Borso d'Este: Michele Savonarola, physician of the d'Este family, for instance, dedicated his *speculum principis*, the *Del felice progresso* in which he also discusses issues regarding health, to Borso. In the final chapter of the work, he gives advice to the Duke concerning proper nourishment and sexual life, which can guarantee a long life.

The genre of scientific treatises dedicated to rulers had a long tradition before the fifteenth century. The idea of astrology as useful knowledge for rulers, appears in many medieval works dealing with *philosophia naturalis*, since kings were thought to be able to establish order and harmony in their realm only if they were aware of the rules of the macrocosm. This attitude is reflected already in the scientific texts dedicated to Frederick II in the thirteenth century. Galeotto himself believed in this principle as is testified by his other works as well. In his *De homine* addressed to Johannes Vitéz, Archbishop of Strigonium, in which he focuses on the human body, he praises the astrological and astronomical erudition of the Archbishop. In his *De incognitis vulgo*, he asks for the help of King Matthias to interpret the comet which appeared to the biblical Three Magi, and calls the King “*rex et astrologus*”. Finally, in his *De egregie, sapienter, iocose dictis ac factis regis Mathiae* he explains the King's acute judgement of courtiers by the ruler's expertise in astrology and physiognomy. In *De doctrina*, he often turns to Lorenzo for help emphasising that the Medici family always patronised science and culture. According to Galeotto's conviction, the knowledge we acquire, not through faith but through Aristotelian modes of cognition, that is, through *scientia* and *philosophia*, may contribute to one's happiness even in one's earthly lifetime. For this very reason, he claims that ignorance is the major sin, and he dedicates an entire chapter to it (*De crimine ignorantiae*) in his *De doctrina*. That is why, in his view, it is the rulers' responsibility to dissolve ignorance by supporting scholars. The Medici, as he puts it, did much to save people from sickness caused by the feeling of insecurity.

Galeotto's *De doctrina* has so far been analysed primarily from the point of view of the history of philosophy. In my opinion, however, the analysis of the role astrology played in fifteenth-century Florence, and the study of the relationship between science and politics, can contribute to a better understanding and contextualisation of this particular work of Galeotto's.

In the fourth chapter I analyse Galeotto's chapters on questions of sexuality. The

topics of these chapters dealing with sexuality is the transformation between genders and the physiology of sexual pleasures. Maybe it is not only an accident that the most serious difference between the manuscript and the printed tradition of the text can be caught in this certain chapter, which I have discovered during the textological works done on the critical edition. The next 43-line-part to be examined, which is about the medical judgement and the cultural history of sexual intercourse between men, can be found in both manuscripts while the Florentine *editio princeps* and the later prints omit it. I also examine the possible reasons of this censorship taking into consideration the contemporary judgements about homosexuality.

In the last chapter of my dissertation I examine another work of Galeotto. I focused on his book entitled *De egregie, sapienter, iocose dictis ac factis regis Mathiae (Excellent, Wise, Facetious Sayings and Deeds of King Matthias)* which he completed and dedicated to Johannes Corvinus in 1485. Since its first printed edition of 1563, this work has always been regarded as an important historical source on Matthias' period, while the ideas of Galeotto were not always appreciated by scholarship. The aim of this chapter is to present one aspect of the work, which hitherto has not been studied, namely the analysis of the text in comparison with the *facetiae*-literature, and the examination of the role of the character of *rex facetus*, or *vir facetus* in the elaboration of the ruler's image.

Finally I publish as part of my thesis, a critical edition of selected chapters from the *De doctrina*.