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The apothecary Diacinto Cestoni

I want to call your attention to the figure of an apothecary researcher and Diacinto Cestoni seems to me, really, an interesting case.

He was born at Montegiorgio, near Ascoli Piceno, in Marche (Italy), in 1637 and he made his studies in Rome and Marseille, choosing Leghorn, as free port, rich of trades and of people of every kind, as the best place for opening his pharmacy¹.

Curious of everything he soon became friend of Francesco Redi, physician of the Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinand II of Medici. Redi was the best interpreter of the galileian thought in medicine². It was necessary to do experiences many and many times, not less than twelve, before speaking of science and Cestoni used the experimental method for all his long life.

The diseases of sailors were the most commune in a port and Cestoni, with his friend Cosimo Bonomo, a physician, observed with a simple microscope, with one lens, the scabies, discovering in 1687, for the first time, the “sarcoptes scabiei” and their action, as diggers, on the skin³.

Cestoni and Bonomo told to Redi the clamorous discovery but he observed that the “sarcoptes scabiei” were the effect and not the cause of the disease, like the worms in a wound, doing an incredible mistake. Only in 1834 the french physician Renucci told again that the cause of the scabies were the “sarcoptes”, opening the street to pharmacological researches.

¹ G. CESTONI, *Epistolario ad Antonio Vallisnieri*, Introduzione a cura di S. Baglioni, Roma, Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1940-1941.

² *Francesco Redi un protagonista della scienza moderna. Documenti, esperimenti, immagini*, A cura di W. Bernardi e L. Guerrini, Firenze, Olschki, 1999.

³ M. L. ALTIERI BIAGI – B. BASILE, *Scienziati del Seicento*, Milano-Napoli, Ricciardi, 1980.

Studying the sperm, as Anthony van Leeuwenhoeck, Cestoni perceived in 1699, for the first time, that the “animalculi spermatici”, the spermatozoa, not only were present but also active in the reproduction process.

To observe with his microscope it was the most important thing for him, for seeing the true aspects of the nature. I am as Saint Thomas, he liked to say and Francesco Redi, describing him, was really clear: He is an apothecary but he knows more than forty physicians.

Enemy of the theory of the spontaneous generation, so dear, in that moment, to the famous german jesuit Athanasius Kircher⁴, Cestoni observed many and many times rare animals and in particular the chameleons. There was a tale: The chameleons never eat, living just of air⁵ and Cestoni, that had many chameleons, told, of course, the truth speaking of their long, speedy tongue.

His famous pharmacy in Greca street, in Leghorn, was a center of scientific culture and Cestoni, for his knowledge and his way of thinking, was touch with Antonio Vallisnieri, Marcello Malpighi, Giuseppe Zambecari, the Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinand II and the King of Denmark Frederick IV.

He died in 1718, in Leghorn and offers the perfect image of an apothecary researcher at the downing of the Enlightenment.

We have of Cestoni only short writings and a large number of letters, the main source for understanding his incredible personality. For this reason the Italian Academy of History of Pharmacy, established the Cestoni prize and this year, this prize is offered to Prof. Mueller Jahncke, past president of the International Academy of History of Pharmacy, for his important studies.

⁴ G. CIPRIANI, *Il trionfo della ragione. Salute e malattia nella Toscana dell'Età Moderna*, Firenze, Nicomp, 2005, p. 90 ss.

⁵ Th. BROWN, *Saggio sopra gli errori popolareschi, ovvero esame di molte opinioni ricevute come vere che sono false o dubbiose*, Venezia, Coleti, 1737, tomo I, p. 336 ss.