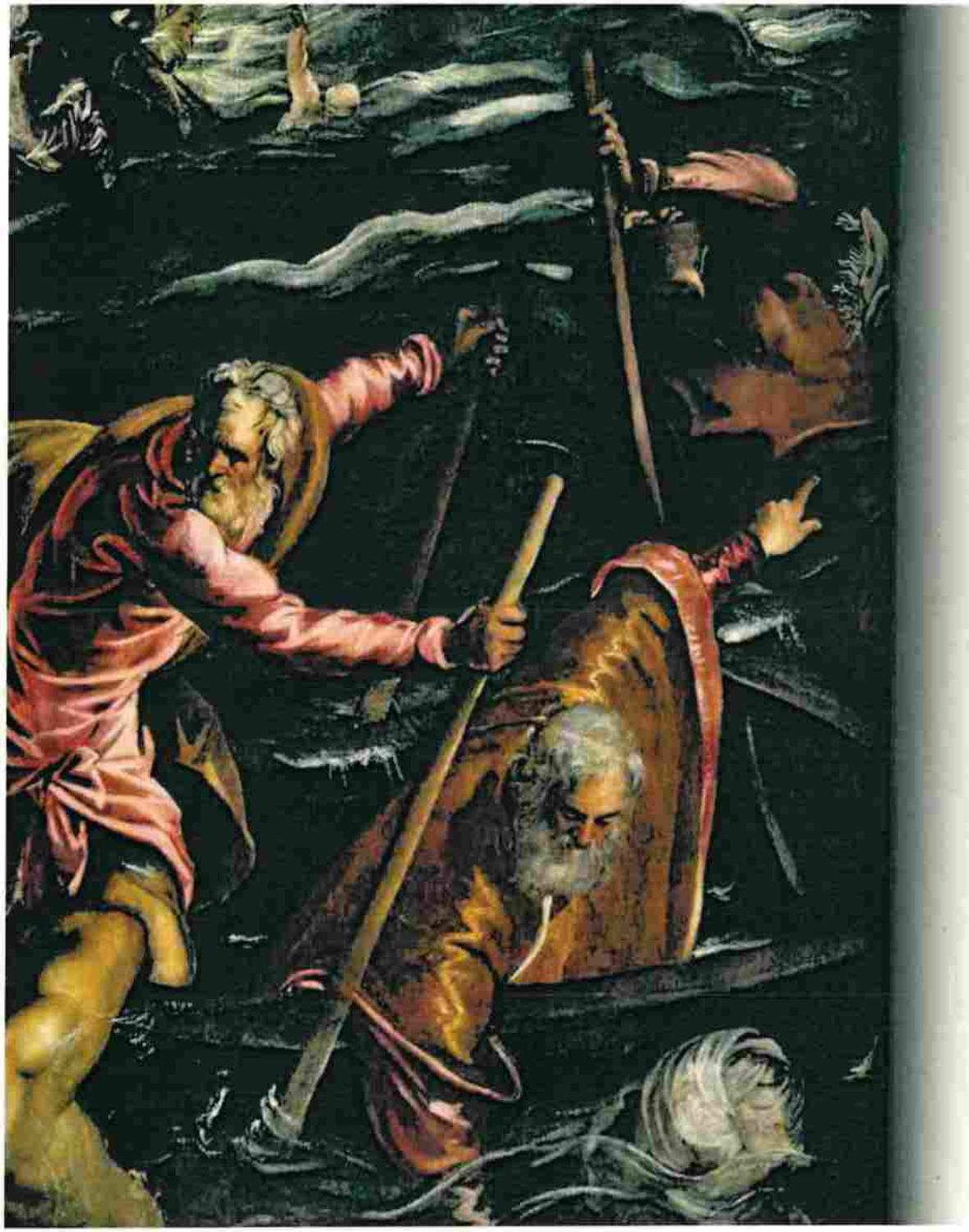


AND (NOT JUST MEDICAL) ART

Sabrina Minuzzi

ONE OF THE most representative figures of sixteenth-century Venetian medicine, with regard both to its practice and to the embedding of the profession in the social fabric, was undoubtedly Tommaso Giannotti Rangone, who is well known thanks to the marked narcissism that induced him to leave indelible traces of himself all over the city and his era. Tommaso was active on several fronts: he published books that disseminated his medical knowledge; he had medals struck and statues sculpted to immortalize his effigy among symbols of the art of medicine; and, finally, he commissioned paintings of sacred subjects that celebrated his devotion to Saint Mark. He dedicated his books to popes, doges, and doges' wives, and he placed statues and pictures in key places of worship, making religious faith the background and the ideal setting for his image as a physician.

Tommaso was born in Ravenna on August 18, 1493, to a family of small means.[1] After an initial study of the classics, as a result of which he assumed the title of *Philologus* beginning in 1513, he took courses in philosophy and medicine in Rome, Ferrara, and Bologna, interspersed with intervals of teaching to fund his studies. In Bologna he defended his thesis on medicine on March 13, 1513, and graduated in *artibus et medicina* on August 21, 1516.[2] From the end of 1516 to 1520 he taught sophistry at La Sapienza in Rome, astrology in Bologna, and mathematics and astrology at the University of Padua. However, he soon gave up teaching to enter the service of Count Guido Rangone in the capacity of physician and astrologer at his small court in Modena, at that time a papal stronghold. During the 1520s he accompanied the count on his military campaigns. Writing prognostications for the count and popes brought him to the attention of the courts, but these activities also entangled him in the controversy over judicial astrology, seen by detractors as an insidious and effective way of interpreting political moods and manipulating collective fears.[3] Then, while maintaining excellent relations with the count, who even allowed him to adopt his own surname, in the early 1530s the forty-year-old Tommaso moved to Venice to devote himself to the practice of medicine, "not caring to exercise the profession of astrology in Vinegia [Venice]."[4] Indeed, while natural astrology was an established subject at universities, undifferentiated even in name from what we call astronomy today, in the late fifteenth century the debate over judicial astrology, which interpreted the influence of the planets on human destiny in a deterministic manner, had flared up again, eventually prompting the

Church to condemn it as heresy.[5] Tommaso was quick to perceive the decline of astrological prediction and ceased to practice it.

TOMMASO'S MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION

After moving to Venice, Tommaso devoted himself to his medical practice with such success that he was able to secure a very comfortable standard of living. In 1532 he moved into one of the new houses on the western side of Piazza San Marco, next to the church of San Geminiano, a building that no longer exists today, for which he paid an annual rent of over twenty-five ducats. He also took full advantage of the fact that the city was the center of the European printing industry in the sixteenth century. At a time when some physicians were still reluctant to make use of the possibilities offered by the printing press, he grasped the opportunity the medium offered to further his career. He wrote short scientific texts and published them, at first in Latin and then more and more frequently in the vernacular, dealing with highly topical themes and exploring subjects that were to become increasingly popular. The only true limitation of his output was pointed out as early as the eighteenth century by Girolamo Tiraboschi, who, while recognizing Tommaso's "skill in treatment" as a doctor, criticized his "cumbersome and obscure" style of writing.[6] However, if we overlook this objective flaw, his works allow us to glimpse the full extent of the vitality of medical culture in sixteenth-century Venice.

His *Mali Galeci sanandi: vini ligni, & aquae, unctionis, ceroti, suffumigii, praecipitati, ac reliquorum modi omnes* was printed between 1537 and 1538, and it was extremely topical. The text focused on syphilis, a real scourge in Europe at the time, and it discussed its origins and looked at possible treatments, illustrating the preparation of formulas for syrups, pills, and poultices, some of which Rangone had concocted himself. This short document, which was published only in Latin because it was aimed at an educated readership, reveals Tommaso's relative modernity as a physician who was interested in the unfamiliar plant species that were arriving from the New World, and who was ready to make use of their healing powers. Tommaso devoted three enthusiastic chapters to *lignum vitae* (guaiacum), introduced to Europe by the Spanish in the first decade of the sixteenth century, and in subsequent editions he dedicated more and more space to the properties of exotic plants. The Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice still possesses a printed copy of the first edition of the *Mali Galeci*, studded with corrections and additions in Tommaso's own hand: a summary of the laboratory work of a Renaissance doctor who was aware of the development of scientific knowledge and at the same time the antigraph used for the typesetting of the second edition of 1545.[7] A third edition was brought out two years before his death (1575), with the number of pages increased by a third, many of them devoted to new botanical discoveries like cinchona, sarsaparilla, *caravalgio*, *huysan* root, and

result of what Tommaso repeatedly calls "Hispanorum diligentia [et] solertia" (Spanish diligence and ingenuity) and brought to Venice from the Americas by new trade routes. Another occasion to celebrate "Hispanorum diligentia [et] solertia", as well as "Lusitanorum navigatio" (Portuguese navigation), which had brought so many new medicinal plants to light, was provided by the publication of his *De vita hominis ultra CXX anno protrahenda* (1550). This was a thick quarto pamphlet of 120 sheets, reprinted in 1553 and 1560, and published once in the vernacular in 1556 "in a smaller volume for women," that is, in a reduced format (octavo) made up of only around eighty sheets.

His greatest success, however, was a slim work based on the model of the *regimen sanitatis* (rule of health), a genre whose manuscript tradition dated back to Classical Antiquity and which had flourished in the Middle Ages before taking on more popular forms with the invention of the printing press.[8] In 1565, 1570, and 1577 Tommaso published the *De vita Venetorum semper commoda Consilium*, both in Latin and in a vernacular translation, bringing out a total of eight editions (three of them in the vernacular 1577; the edition sometimes quoted as printed in 1558 is probably a bibliographic phantom). A handy octavo booklet of just sixteen sheets, it was a guide for the average Venetian to the so-called "six non-naturals", that is, the six external factors that influence health: air, food and drink, conditions of excretion and retention, exercise and rest, sleeping and waking, and the passions of the soul. The booklet examined the city's climate and its most common pathologies, providing advice on how to prevent them: it recommended frequent bathing and changes of clothing, carrying out all daytime and nighttime activities with the maximum restraint, avoiding intense passions, be they positive or negative, and applying moderation to the consumption of any kind of food. It was a modern text in its careful combination of the paradigm of prevention with the strictly therapeutic one of the medicinal secrets (or remedies) illustrated in other books: no medicine, argued Tommaso, could be effective if taken while leading a disorderly life.[9]

With an eye on Venetians' health and on the therapeutic innovations coming from the New World, Tommaso became much in demand as a doctor among both private individuals and local authorities. In 1534 he acted as medical officer to the Capitano Generale da Mar (admiral) Vincenzo Cappello and the following year he was asked by the health officials known as the Provveditori alla Sanità to write a report on how to clean the city's air.[10] In 1538 he was the medical officer for the Venetian fleet engaged in battle against the Turks. For the most part, however, Rangone consolidated his status as physician of the Venetians in the 1540s, with a clientele that included illustrious names such as the acclaimed architect Jacopo Sansovino, the sculptor Alessandro Vittoria (one of the executors of Tommaso's will), the troubled lawyer Mario d'Armano, nephew of painter

CAT. 71

CAT. 72

PALAZZO RAVENNA, THE MEDALS, AFFILIATIONS, AND COMMISSIONS OF ARTWORKS

Having made himself known through his "skill in treatment" and his books, from the early 1550s through to the 1560s, Tommaso carried out a series of initiatives that were both charitable and self-aggrandizing. Mindful of his own modest beginnings, in October 1552 he founded, in Padua's Palazzo Gritti, a building he had acquired, a college for thirty-two deserving students with limited means, to be recommended by Venetian parish priests. The same year, he struck the first of eight commemorative medals that he defined by their dimensions, *minimum*, *minus*, *medium*, *magnum*, and *maximum*. Some of these medals portrayed him in profile, while others illustrated myths or bore parenthetical or celebratory inscriptions. Five of them were the work of Alessandro Vittoria, one of Martino da Bergamo, and two of Matteo Pagano, an engraver and printer who had published the 1545 edition of the *Mali Galeci sanandi*. The production of medals was flourishing in Venice at the time, and Tommaso took advantage of its promotional potential, utilizing his medals — like his books — as visiting cards made of bronze, silver, and gold. At the time of their entry into Palazzo Ravenna, for example, members of the college received a *maximum* medal with his profile on one side and, on the other, a woman (representing Virtue) crowning an ox (Hard Work) in the presence of God, with the motto *Virtute parta Deo et labore* (Virtue Gained Through God and Works), executed with Alessandro Vittoria's typical stylistic concision.[11] When, in 1564, he became a member of the Venice College of Physicians, and one dispensed from payment of the *benintrada* (entrance fee) because he was at the peak of his career, Tommaso "gave [...] all the members of the College a silver medal with his likeness, and the College a book he had written *de proroganda vita usque ad annum 120*."[12]

Preceded to all intents and purposes by his own fame, Tommaso naturally found his way into the social fabric of the Venetian Republic. In 1559, he was admitted as a nobleman to the Scuola Grande di San Marco, of which he became Guardian Grande in 1562, and again in 1568, a privilege reserved for

CAT. 71, 72
MATTEO PAGANO (attrib.), *magnum* medal depicting *The Origin of the Milky Way* (verso) and with a *Portrait of Tommaso Giannotti Rangone* (recto), c. 1562

CAT 9.
DOMENICO TINTORETTO, *The Origin of the Milky Way* (from original by Jacopo Tintoretto, c. 1578–80), beginning of the seventeenth century

CAT. 9

FIG. 6
JACOPO TINTORETTO,
Saint Mark Rescuing a Saracen from Shipwreck, c. 1564.
Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia

native-born citizens of Venice or those who had belonged to the confraternity for at least twenty years, but which was barred to Venetian patricians.[13] He was also Guardian Grande of the Scuola di San Teodoro (1563), and procurator of a number of parish churches: San Geminiano, San Zulian, San Giovanni in Bragora, San Sepolcro, Santi Giovanni e Paolo, and Santa Maria dei Frari. The Venetian authorities only hindered his more self-aggrandizing initiatives, as they had been traditionally condemned in the oligarchic republic: in 1552 the Senate rejected Rangone's plan for a design for the façade of San Geminiano that had already been accepted by the parish church and commissioned from Sansovino, and ten years later the Scuola Grande di San Marco turned down the commission of a statue for its façade. Sometimes, fate got in the way. This was the case with the accord of April 1569, when Rangone was prior. In this year, the plan to build a new seat for the College of Physicians next to the church of San Geminiano, an extremely central location and one that was practically adjacent to his own home, fell through.[14]

Tommaso commissioned more and more works of art, and they were intertwined with one another, linked by frequent symbolic echoes. The year 1562 was a crucial one: Tommaso set up an annual grant of twenty ducats to provide dowries for poor girls on the feast day of Saint Geminianus; he was bestowed the title of Knight of Saint Mark by the doge; and he was appointed Guardian Grande of the Scuola di San Marco. To celebrate these honors he had Matteo Pagano strike a *magnum* medal (cat. 71–72) with a bust of him draped in a toga and crowned with his old and new titles on the recto, and a myth he was particularly fond of on the verso.[15] This device showed Jupiter in the form of an eagle holding the newborn Hercules to Juno's breast so he can suck the milk of immortality, while a few drops are scattered into the sky, giving rise to the Milky Way, and others, falling to earth, sprout as three lilies alternating with three birds. There are many correspondences with each other and with the divine: the Earth and living creatures (microcosm) are made of the same substance as the stars (macrocosm); the physician investigates both (flora in particular) to prolong the taste of immortality that the divine has allowed humanity. In addition, the three lilies and three birds were also elements of the coat of arms to which Tommaso had become entitled when he had assumed the title and surname of Count Rangone. It was a highly self-referential myth that symbolized his studies and his book on medicine, inspired by a Byzantine book on agriculture, the *Geoponica*, published in Venice a total of five times between 1538–54, in Italian and Latin. In chapter twenty, dedicated to the "History of the Lily," there is a precise description of the scene represented on the back of the medal. Also probably suggested, if not commissioned by Tommaso, was a painting by Jacopo Tintoretto that reworked the allegory of the medal cast by Pagano, *The Origin of the Milky Way* (c. 1575), only the upper two thirds of which have survived, and is now in London's National Gallery.[16] In the painting, the

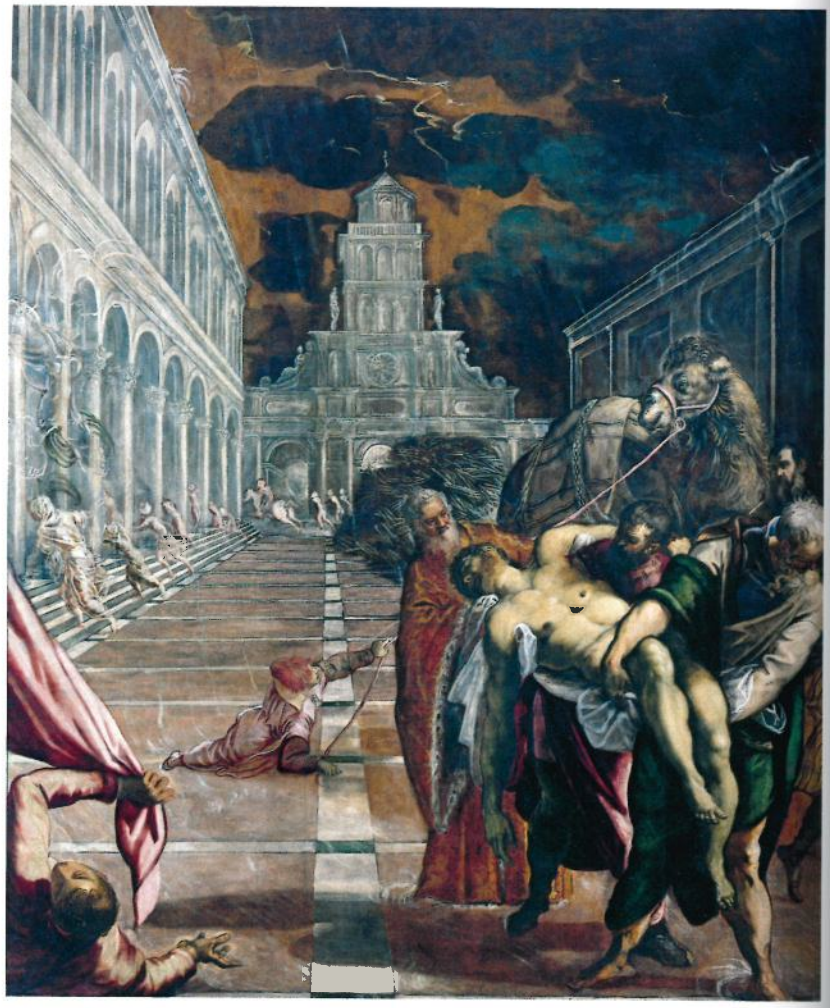


FIG. 7

medal's lilies were transformed into a female figure with fingers in the form of flowered branches (*Flora*), now visible only in a late seventeenth-century copy and in two drawings in watercolor and bister, one of which is in the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice (cat. 9).

Also in 1562, Rangone commissioned three large canvases from Tintoretto for the Sala Capitolare (Chapter Hall) of the Scuola Grande di San Marco: *Miracles of Saint Mark* (fig. 3), the *Rescue of the Body of Saint Mark* (fig. 7), and *Saint Mark Rescuing a Saracen from Shipwreck* (fig. 6). Tommaso makes an appearance in each scene, dressed in a patrician toga or in a glittering ducal robe. In 1573, irritated by the client's self-promotion, the brothers had the canvases taken down and returned to Tintoretto's studio so that he could finish them "perfectly by removing the figure of the Ravennate," but in the end they were put back in place without alterations.[17] The ties between the forty-year-old Tintoretto and the physician in his sixties must have been strong. They certainly shared an aggressive style: Jacopo in the art market, which he liked to manipulate by offering pictures of large size painted in rapid and vigorous brushstrokes at knockdown prices or even by anticipating commissions; Rangone in the stubbornness with which he insinuated his own image into sacred and profane spaces.[18]

FIG. 7
JACOPO TINTORETTO,
The Rescue of the Body of Saint Mark,
c. 1564. Venice,
Gallerie dell'Accademia

Tommaso's artistic projects always involved prominent figures that were turned into emblems of his personal mythical and allegorical constructions. To make up for the 1552 rejection of Tommaso's plans for San Geminiano's façade, Vittoria made a bronze bust for him that was located under the porch near the sacristy, and, in 1570, the sculptor also produced a statue of Saint Thomas — a metonym for himself — for the portal of the monastery of San Sepolcro. Vittoria produced the only monument to Tommaso that is still in place in the city: the bronze statue of his seated figure in the central lunette of the façade of San Zulian, built to Sansovino's design. Its celebration of Rangone's personal mythography is something that scholars are still interpreting in sophisticated ways today (fig. 8).[19] San Zulian's façade includes three inscriptions, in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, which express Tommaso's trilingual aspirations and also describe the actions for which he wished to be remembered: in Greek, he told of the prestige he had imparted to the universities of Bologna, Padua, and Rome with his teaching; in Latin, he recalled how in San Zulian he had erected, with the money earned from his work, a temple to devotion, after having built one in Padua to excellence (Palazzo Ravenna), the latter a monument to the spirit and the former to the body as well; finally, in Hebrew, he spoke of himself as the author of many books and a doctor able to extend a patient's life.[20] At the sides of the bronze statue, bas-reliefs of the celestial (macrocosm) and terrestrial (microcosm) globe, above which extends the physician's arm with two shoots of plants from the New World, identifiable as guaiacum and sarsaparilla. All around are set bas-reliefs of open and closed books, laid flat and placed on a lectern, offering a summary of the sixteenth-century doctor's universe.

EPILOGUE: EIGHT OPEN BOOKS

For years Tommaso had been thinking about his last will and testament, although he did not have it definitively drawn up until a few days before his death, on September 10, 1577. The long will, originally compiled in triplicate, consisted largely of detailed instructions for the funeral procession, which had to pass through over a hundred places around the city, including the three most meaningful places of his life in Venice: San Geminiano, Santi Giovanni e Paolo, and San Zulian. Tommaso had also planned the display of about 260 books, his medals, portraits, drawings, astronomical instruments, and plans of the renovations he had funded. One of the will's more generous provisions

FIG. 8

was the donation of his magnificent personal library to the city for public use, with the acquisition of suitable premises in the central area of the Mercerie. Unfortunately, however, this plan was never realized: the books were transferred at first to the Capuchin library at Il Redentore, and then dispersed in 1810 following the Napoleonic suppressions. However, a partial inventory of that library (1561) has survived, along with a few copies of its books, still recognizable by their elegant, somber customized morocco binding, with linear gold tooling and the words *THOMAS* and *RAVENAS* in gold letters on the boards, sometimes accompanied by his coat of arms and other times by an ornament (cat. 36).

The procession certainly followed the planned route, though perhaps with less pomp than Tommaso would have liked, as the city had only recently emerged from an outbreak of the plague (1575–76). This is how the event was recorded by the College of Physicians on September 13, 1577:

> Funeral of Tomaso Philologist from Ravenna famous doctor and d. at the age of 94 [actually 84] *vivens semper sine ulla corporis molestia* having survived the danger of contagion, and ordered among other things that three funeral orations be given, one in San Giminian his parish church and made by a Rev. priest, one in San Gio. Polo and made by Belisario Gadaldin, one in San Giulian where his body is laid.[21]

While not as many as he would have desired, he was almost certainly accompanied on his last journey by the set of eight volumes that he wanted to be placed open around his coffin.

FIG. 8
ALESSANDRO VITTORIA, *Portrait of Tommaso Giannotti Rangone*, c. 1556–57. Venice, façade of the church of San Zulian

CAT. 36

First, behind his head, he wanted the history of the city of his birth, Ravenna, open to a precise page. It was probably a magnificent illustrated manuscript of large format, like the other volumes.[22]

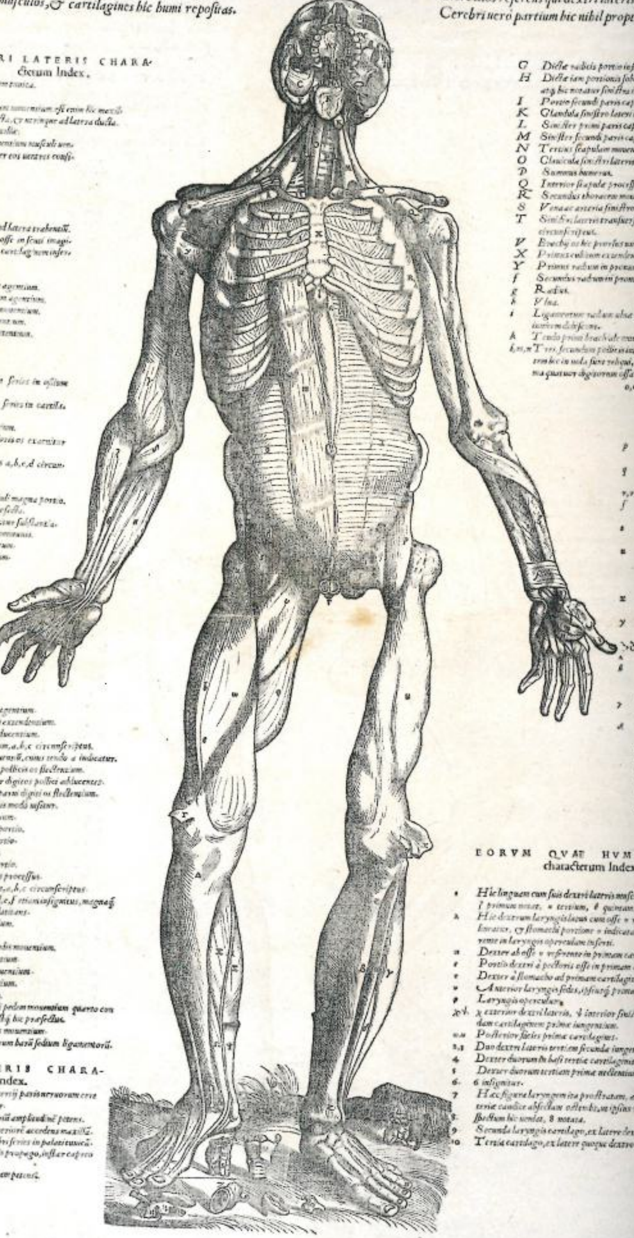
Second, Rangone selected Vesalius's *Fabrica* and *Epitome*, which doubtlessly was the majestic printed volume now held in the Biblioteca Marciana, with Tommaso's original binding, and described in the inventory of his library as "Vesalii Anatome seu Humani corporis fabrica Epithome, Basilee impressi 1543 folio reali maximo corio rubro auro decorata ac litteris."[23] Bound together, the book comprises Andreas Vesalius's masterpiece, *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem* (Basel 1543), and his *De humani corporis fabrica librorum Epitome*, with the same colophon, whose twelve foldout plates presented the most up-to-date anatomical knowledge of the day. It is even possible for us to identify at precisely which plates it was kept open on the day of the funeral at Tommaso's behest, since they are indicated in the will as the "tertia et secunda humana figura masculos [*sic*] demonstrante bini completa" (cat. 36).

The next three volumes he wanted displayed around him were part of an unpublished work by Giannotti on the natural kingdoms, also opened at precise illustrations: the volume on quadrupeds shows two fantastical animals (the asymmetrical *daru* or *dahu*, whose legs were believed to be shorter on one side than on the other, and the *hircocervus*, believed to be half-goat and half-stag); the one on birds must have shown a bird of paradise from New Guinea, as well as a crow and a European roller; the one on sea life showed the sea cucumber, a starfish-like echinoderm, and the *sea monk*, a fanciful interpretation of a giant squid.

CAT. 36
ANDREAS VESALIUS, *Andreae Vesalii Bruxellensis, ... De humani corporis fabrica...*, Basel, 1543

TERTIA MVSCVLOS OSTENDENTIVM FIGVRA, PRIMAM ET SECVNDAM
QVITVR, MVSCVLOS ILLIS QVOS IPSAE SINISTRIS LATERIBVS REFEREBANT PROXI
succumbente, dextro latere in anteriori facie proponens, dein sinistro ... atere illos referens qui dextri lateris subsunt musculis ... ter lingua ... laryngis musculos, & cartilagines hic humi repositas. Cerebri uerò partium hic nihil propter capitis in ... reflexum occurrit.

DEXTRI LATERIS CHARActerum Index.



EORVM QVAE HVMI IACENT characterum Index.

SINISTRI LATERIS CHARActerum Index.

SECVNDA COMMONSTRANDIS MVSCVLIS PARATARVM FIGVRA, POSTERIOREM CORPORIS SEDEM ITA PROPONIT, VT PRIMA ANTERIOREM. IN DEXTRO ENIM LA-
tere musculos ostendit cuti subtensos, in sinistro autem latere eos qui illis sectionis serie subijciuntur. Praeterea caput etiam sectionis ordi-ne primae figurae capiti pulchrè succedit.

SINISTRI LATERIS CHARActerum Index.

DEXTRI LATERIS CHARActerum Index.

I PRIMA

For the sixth volume, devoted to simple plants used for their medicinal properties, Tommaso chose the *Commentarii in sex libros Pedacii Dioscoridis Anazarbei de Medica Materia* by Pietro Andrea Mattioli, open at the colored woodcuts of the *Peonia mascula et foemina* on pages 914–15. The edition referred to is the Venetian Folio One printed by Vincenzo Valgrisi in 1565, the only one in which the illustrations are on those pages.

Tommaso's seventh choice belonged to the genre of Catholic devotion: a Roman Missal open at the engraving of *Christ Crucified* ("Missali a sole majori cartis 130 Jesus Christus cruci affixus") that coincides with the rare "Missale a sole reali folio Venetiis, a Juntis 1557" in his library: an illustrated folio volume with a splendid woodcut of *Christ Crucified* on sheet 130v.

To crown this translation of the human, animal, and vegetable microcosm into book form, Tommaso selected the "Ptolommei Cosmographia respiciens mapamundo," that is, the woodcut world map of the Strasbourg edition of 1525, the *Geographicae enarrationis libri octo*, of which he possessed a copy in his library: "Cosmographia vulgo Ptolomei Geographia impressa 1525 folio reali, corio vario aureo filo ac litteris cum annotationibus Montis Regii cum tabulis Terrae nove et modernis." Rangone's interest in geography was deep and constant, as the Veronese engraver Paolo Forlani declared when dedicating the plate of Africa to him on May 9, 1562.[24]

Altogether, these eight volumes are the fruit of the bibliographical choices of a Renaissance physician who tried to keep as up-to-date as possible; they include the most innovative printed texts and personal compilations (the ones on the animal kingdoms), where exhaustive printed editions were still lacking. Vesalius's *Fabrica* and *Epitome* represented a high point in anatomical studies owing to the critical attitude they took to ward the authorities of classical anatomy, who were corrected and amended in light of what had been learned from the practice of dissection — a critical revision that some within academic circles found hard to accept. The *Commentarii a Dioscoride* of the Sienese doctor Mattioli were, after Vesalius, the most significant example of medico-scientific publishing in the sixteenth century, with fundamental effects on the field of pharmacology. Most notably, Mattioli correctly identified the medicinal plants described, in the first century AD, by Dioscorides, whose writings had been corrupted in the process of copying the manuscripts; and, in each edition, Mattioli added new plants and descriptions, tripling the number of simple plants and thus the stock of medicinal herbs that European apothecaries could use with confidence. Finally, Ptolemy's *Geographia* (first-second centuries AD), but with the corrections made by Regiomontanus, represented an important step toward modern geography, with maps of new and modern lands, as Tommaso explained in the inventory of his library. These new lands were also the source of innovation in treatments offered by medicine in his century.

previous pages
CAT. 36
ANDREAS VESALIUS, *Andreae Vesalii Bruxellensis, ... De humani corporis fabrica librorum Epitome*. Basel, 1543

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12 BNM, Ms. It. VII 2342(=9695), c. 12v.

13 On this subject, see the essay by P. Benussi.

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19 M. Morresi, *Jacopo Sansovino* (Electa: Milan 2000), 132–34, 262–64, 297–305; A. Gallo, "In forma di microcosmo. Tommaso Filologo e il portale della chiesa di San Zulian," in *Cose nuove e cose antiche. Scritti per monsignor Antonio Niero e don Bruno Bertoli*, ed. F. Cavazzana Romanelli, M. Leonardi, and S. Rossi Minutelli (Venice: Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, 2006), 493–510.

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