

## **Spanish physicians in Rome between the Renaissance and the Counter-Reformation. Protagonists, practices and the circulation of knowledge (1492-1598).**

Elisa Andretta

My research sets out to investigate the presence, whether transitory or permanent, of physicians belonging to the Spanish *natio*, one of the most influential communities in cosmopolitan sixteenth-century Rome. Spanish physicians were a constant feature of the Roman medical scene in the group of pontifical physicians, and as personal doctors of ambassadors and cardinals, and in the city's largest hospitals. The inquiry into these doctors' scientific and professional personalities and their integration into Roman circles can provide a bird's eye view not only of the city's medical system but also of the scientific and cultural relations between the Holy See and the Catholic monarchy. More generally, it can help shed light on the ways in which medical knowledge and practice was processed and transmitted in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The research has two main objectives:

Firstly, I would like to identify the professional group of Spanish physicians active in Rome and to focus on their place within both the Spanish community and the political and cultural framework of the city, in order to shed light on their strategies for constructing a professional identity within Roman medical circles and integrating into the polycentric system of Roman scientific patronage. Studying the Spanish physicians' presence in Rome will also clarify the tensions and negotiations within the medical *milieu* itself during years that were crucial for the definition of the profession. For a cosmopolitan city such as this, the relationship between Roman and foreign doctors was indeed an influential factor in the balance of city life. Lastly, as recent studies have shown for other contexts, the intellectual and social standing of the physicians often led them to play an important part beyond their own field of expertise. Spanish physicians are thus to be considered political, religious and cultural brokers in the broadest sense.

Secondly, I would like to illuminate the composition of multiple "Roman medicines" through the practices and knowledge brought to the city by the Spaniards. A specific analysis of the background, intellectual production, and medical practice of Iberian physicians in Rome will provide the basis for investigating how they contributed to the development of medical knowledge and practice specific to the Roman context. I have identified two distinct phases. The first corresponds to the major enterprise of retrieval and translation of the classics that involve a number of renowned Spanish (often Jewish) philologists and translators and in which in early sixteenth century pontiffs invested substantial resources. The second stage corresponds to the systematization and integration of new knowledge within the traditional frames of reference and the difficulty of reconciling the Ancients' heritage with the new Counter-Reformation paradigm. Studying the exchange and circulation of ideas and practices among the actors who embody different cultural and religious traditions might provide new keys for reading this crucial process. Two realms in particular will be examined: the relationship with ancient Greco-Roman and Arabian medical knowledge, and the development of the science of anatomy.

Some initial results allow me to argue that Spanish institutions, protectors, physicians and the knowledge and practices they developed were an integral, constitutive part of the Roman medical system. The city accepted, transformed, capitalised on and spread the knowledge that these doctors had brought with them but at the same time it influenced --often deeply-- their professional identity and their conception of medicine. In this sense this research is shedding a different light on Roman scientific universalism and calling into question the monolithic idea of Roman centrality that the powers within the city were pursuing.