

A manuscript worth a villa

Vittorio Putti's acquisition of the Guy de Chauliac manuscript

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Leave your computer keyboard for a while and follow us on a journey back in time to Bologna in Italy in the old monastery (Figure 1) of the Olivetan monks, called San Michele in Bosco, converted in 1880 to a modern orthopedic institute, Istituti Ortopedici Rizzoli. Picture a cold evening on the 20th of February 1929.

Vittorio Putti (Figure 2) still in his white coat walking towards his office. A long-awaited moment after a hard day's work and surgery. He takes the key from its secret hiding place in one of the rooms of his private study and, opening the safe, he takes out the "treasure". He had been nervous since he had seen in the Hoepli (1929) catalogue

that the manuscript would be auctioned on the 18th February in Milan. Now, at last, it was his. Holding it in his hands, he feels an indescribable pleasure. He reads the catalogue description once again:

Guy de Chauliac "Inventaire de Chirurgie". Illuminated manuscript on parchment of the 15th century (1468) (Figure 3). The codex consists of 250 unnumbered leaves in French gothic handwriting, red and light blue headings, ten illuminated frames, ornamental initials. On a frontispiece we read medical aphorisms written by a 15th century owner of the book. In the verso, we see the calendar's prolegomena and



Figure 1. Aerial view of the monastery of San Michele, which is now the Rizzoli Orthopedic Institute, situated on a hill overlooking Bologna. From left to right, the church and bell tower, then the octagonal cloister, the middle cloister and the third large cloister. The "dormitory" is on the first floor running alongside the cloisters, with its rooms on the side of a monumental corridor, 162 meters long, with a Serlian window revealing the city and the immense panorama of the underlying Po valley. On the west side of the complex, overlooking the park, we find Putti's office and the library rooms with marvelous frescos as a testimony to four centuries of Italian painting.



Figure 2. Vittorio Putti (1880–1940) in his office.

chronological clock-face bearing the date of the manuscript: 1468. On fol. 3 recto and the pages following, the calendar is presented in a beautiful frame, richly embellished. On fol. 15 verso, there are two *ex-libris* of previous owners “*Ex-libris Gulielmi Innoncentii Tolosatis chirurgi 1582*” and “*Ex-libris Villar Tolosatis professoris chirurgi 1777*” (Aricò 1969).

Putti admires the skill with which the pages have been illuminated. He turns over the pages of the manuscript in awe, hardly touching the gold leaf that adorns it, for fear of spoiling such expertly illuminated pages. Of course, he thinks, with what I paid for it, 49,000 lire, I could have bought a villa or a brand new sports car (Fiat 525 SS), or even four kilos of gold (Annunci economici 1929, Mazzocchi 1970). But he is true to the motto “*lucra neglecti lucrum*” (spiritual riches as opposed to material wealth) which, by the way, he had engraved on the architrave of his study. A villa, a sports car or gold could not have given him the same pleasure. Moreover, it is the work of a great physician of the past.

Vittorio Putti is fascinated by the history of the copy of the manuscript in his possession. His thoughts go back to the times when the author had followed the same profession as himself. He is so excited to own it that he decides to share his happiness with Fernanda, wife of Ojetti (famous reporter for “*Corriere della Sera*”) who is his very

dear friend. He dips his quill into the inkwell and begins to write: “I saw the manuscript and fell hopelessly in love with it about fifteen years ago. Later I lost sight of it, but I did not forget it. Some strange destiny led me back to it in Milan and this time, despite my gray hair and greater experience, I succumbed. Now I am so happy to have it, to hold it, to run my hands over it, to sense the subtle fragrance which is the “scent of centuries”. Inside it is the soul of an ancient Maestro of my profession, with whom I am in contact and whom I expect to teach and inspire me” (Garosi 1950). Content, he puts his quill down. Now it is late. Tomorrow another long day of work and study awaits him.

In his will, drafted by hand in 1930, he leaves his entire scientific library, including the collection antique books, to the Rizzoli Institute, so that all scholars might benefit from them on condition that the words “*Donazione Putti*” appear on the door.

Vittorio Putti (1880–1940)

Putti was born in Bologna, the son of a surgeon. In 1912, following Alessandro Codivilla, at just 32 years of age he became the director of the Rizzoli Institute—until 1940, the date of his sudden death. Putti, who was interested in all the major prob-



Figure 3. Particular detail of Fol. 17 of the manuscript "Inventaire de Chirurgie" by Guy de Chauliac. A fine miniature shows the Magister (Guy de Chauliac) lecturing, under a sculptured canopy, from a book, open on a bookstand in front of him. St. Cosma and St. Damian stand beside him, while four disciples are seated on carved benches.

lems of orthopedics, introduced new methods and original instruments. He developed an approach to the management of ankylosis, congenital dislocation of the hip, posttraumatic deformities, shortening of the limbs, paralysis and bone tumors. His contributions to the surgery of peripheral nerve injuries and his work on the technique of kineplastic amputations and on arthroplasty of the knee joint placed him in the front rank of European surgeons

(Platt 1950). He was also Professor of Orthopedic Surgery at the University of Bologna, a founder of the S.I.C.O.T. (Société Internationale de Chirurgie Orthopédique et Traumatologie), Honorary Member of the American and British Orthopaedic Associations, and Foreign Editor of the Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery from January 1928 (Putti 1940). In addition to his eminence in the field of orthopedic surgery, Putti gained wide recognition as a medical historian. He wrote a book on Berengario da Carpi (?1470–1530), the surgeon and pre-Vesalian anatomist who first drew anatomical figures from life and depicted the separate muscles, with a translation from Latin of his "De fractura calvae sive cranci" (Putti 1940). He was also a passionate bibliophile and meticulous collector. In his private office, which contains his own library, he collected 1158 rare medical books including 17 manuscripts, 66 incunabula, 238 16th century editions, 957 rare volumes and booklets (17th century). He traveled the world to purchase, from antique dealers, precious antique surgical tools (from Roman times to the 19th century), portraits, incisions, photographs, autographs, and medals of famous old physicians.

The "Donazione Putti" includes Putti's private office, his private library and a room containing the collections. This is located in a part of the monastery overlooking the hill and park (Figure 1). It has been open to scholars since 1940 (Putti 1941).

Guy de Chauliac (1300–1367)

Chauliac was born in Auvergne, France. After his ordination, he studied medicine in Toulouse, Montpellier and Paris, and took a special course in anatomy at Bologna, under Niccolò Bertuccio, a pupil of Mundinus. Here, he assisted in dissections and autopsies, procedures not common in his day (Johnson 1989). He opened a surgical practice in his native diocese of Mende and, after a period in Lyons, moved to Avignon to become physician and chaplain to Popes Clement VI, Innocent VI, and Urban V. His dispute with the poet Petrarch (1304–1374), about the role of the medical profession spread far and wide. It started after an epi-

demic of the plague in 1348 in Avignon; among the victims was Laura, the poet's sweetheart. In a letter to Pope Clement VI, Petrarch expressed his very low opinion of the medical class. The pope showed the letter to his private doctor, Guy de Chauliac, and so there was a quarrel between the doctor and the poet (Castiglioni 1936).

His main work is the "Inventarium or Chirurgia magna", written in 1363, and first printed in a French translation in Lyons in 1478. This book was printed, translated and abridged many times, and in the latter form it became the "vade mecum" or "guidon" of surgical practice even after the 16th century (Garrison 1917). It was immensely popular, as evidenced by the numerous copies which still survive (about 35 manuscripts and many copies of the printed text in different editions and translations) (Klein 1978). In this work, Guy revealed himself to be a greater reader than any previous surgical author, of whom there are about one hundred. He quoted Galen 890 times, Avicenna 661 times, and Hippocrates 120 times (Johnson 1989). The first chapter of the "Grande Chirurgie" contains many interesting generalities pertaining to surgery and summarizes the 14th century surgeon's outlook on his profession, thus providing a history of medicine and a discussion of surgery's place in the medieval world (Rutkow 1993). He considered knowledge of anatomy very important for surgeons and from his work it becomes evident that the Church's edict against human vivisection was slowly being overlooked, while the search for scientific knowledge continued. He counted 531 muscles (the number of skeletal muscles is estimated to be 656 according to modern authors, Testut 1959) in the human body, like Avicenna, and with regard to the nerves, which provide sensation and movement of the muscles and limbs, the author concluded that they were not present in cartilage. Guy de Chauliac founded a school of French surgeons that prepared the way for Ambroise Paré who, in France, is considered to be the father of modern surgery (Castiglioni 1936). Chauliac was the most eminent surgeon of his time; his authority persisted for about 200 years (Morton 1983).

The book that was originally written about 1363, includes Chauliac's views on fractures and dislocations. He wrote about the application of

liniments before carrying out fracture reductions (Franz and Giudici 1966). These can be considered the forerunners of modern muscle-relaxing drugs used today in orthopedic injuries (Franz and Giudici 1966). He described a surgeon's equipment in detail: scissors, speculum, razor, scalpel, needle and lancet (Rutkow 1993)—also the surgical treatment of infections, wounds, inguinal hernia and cataract. *Chirurgia Magna* is considered the greatest surgical text of the time (Morton 1983).

The manuscript

The manuscript comprises two parts. The first part "Segres des dames défendus à reveler" deals with the rules of obstetrics expressed perhaps for the first time in the vernacular. The author of this text is unknown, but it is thought to be a learned doctor and philosopher, a man who was acquainted not only with the work of the masters, but who also with less known doctors.

The second and largest part of the volume contains the "Inventaire de Chirurgie de Guy de Chauliac", the French surgeon's very important work. Among the known manuscripts about this work, this is the most complete. The manuscript undoubtedly dates back to 1468, which appears on the manuscript, and it was probably commissioned by "Katherina virginis et martyris", written in red ink in the calendar, unlike for the other saints.

As the Hoepli catalogue states, and we quote the text: "The manuscript is very rare because, usually, scientific or medical manuscripts were not so preciously illuminated, since they were intended for frequent consultation. It can be inferred that four artists worked on it: a calligrapher for the text, a rubricator for the major headings, a decorator for coloring and gilding the splendid border and the big initials and a skillful "historieur" to whom the beautiful miniature of the lesson is attributed. Judging by the calendar, the first part of our manuscript seems to have been written in Toulouse judging by the phonetic writing of some words. This idea is further supported by the bookplate indicating with certainty that the manuscript had been in Toulouse since 1582."

The manuscript stayed in Toulouse until March 1854, when it was sold at auction by Potier and was bought by Dr. Colson (Hoepli 1929, De Marinis 1943).

The “Putti Legacy” also includes 15 printed editions of Guy de Chauliac’s manuscript dating from 1493 to 1704 (De Marinis 1943).

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