

Court doctors in Modern Europe: Cesare Macchiati (1629-1675) a doctor travelling with Queen Christina of Sweden

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Abstract. *Background and aim:* Court doctors have long been a neglected topic for medical historians as they often represent minor figures with a little editorial production at a scientific level, more relevant for the political and diplomatic role played at court rather than for their medical one. Only recently, medical historians have understood their importance, starting to investigate the relationship between court medicine and the medical context of the society of the time. Among these still little-known figures, to whom historiography is paying attention, there is Cesare Macchiati (1629-1675), a doctor at the Roman court of Queen Christina of Sweden from 1659 to 1675. *Materials and Methods:* As a court doctor, Macchiati joined the Queen on two journeys to Northern Europe, towards Sweden, respectively between 1660 and 1668, leaving about fifty letters, addressed to Cardinal Decio Azzolino Jr, as a documentation of these journeys. *Results:* From the study of these letters, it is possible to deduce some biographical information on court medical practice, the queen's temperament and illnesses and the circulation of a new medical knowledge at the court, which was favoured by the journey. *Conclusions:* The biography highlights how the role of a court doctor, which was consolidated by the experience of the journey to Europe in Macchiati's case, becomes a prerequisite for a professional rise on his return to Rome in the most important city medical institutions, such as the university, the Roman medical college at the pontifical curia, characterized by a cosmopolitan context thanks to the international professional background, developed at the Queen's court.

Key words: Cesare Macchiati, Early Modern court medicine, Christina of Sweden, medical correspondence, travel literature

Introduction

Christina of Sweden, a leading figure in the European cultural context in the seventeenth century, had changed her Swedish court at the Royal Palace in Stockholm into a real modern cultural centre, a seat for academies and a rich book and museum collection, which was able to attract international scholars, such as Descartes, the best-known example. Scientists, doctors and philosophers played a leading role at the Swedish court. This is a model, which Christina also re-proposed in Rome when she definitively settled there (1).

After abdicating the throne in 1654, Christina had triumphantly arrived in Rome on December 20th, 1655, and was welcomed by Pope Alexander VII into St. Peter's Basilica on Christmas Day (2). He granted her to the young and brilliant Cardinal Decio Azzolino Jr from Fermo in order to be introduced into the Roman context. But her stay was short because Christina took refuge in France at Louis XIV's court in June 1656 in order to escape the plague. She returned to Rome on May 15th, 1658, firstly living in Rospigliosi Palace and then in Villa Farnesina in Via Lungara. Only in 1659, she moved across the street to Riario Palace in

Via Longara, which became her definitive residence in 1663, after returning from the two-year journey, which had taken her to Sweden (3). Here the queen created a court, which hosted illustrious philosophers and scientists, re-proposing her image of the Minerva of the North with different aspects in the Roman context (4). Christina also resumed the activity of the academy, which had already seen its first moment of life in 1656 (5). The doctor Cesare Macchiati had entered at the service of the sovereign in 1659, exactly in the same year when Cardinal Decio Azzolino had taken over the reins of Christina's court, replacing ambiguous figures with people he trusted due to their ties of friendship and kinship (6). It is already known how the cardinal had recreated a small "court like the one in Fermo" within the royal court with this aim, favouring people coming from Fermo among members (7). Among them, there is Cesare Macchiati, who was originally from the March of Fermo like Cardinal Azzolino.

After having found a stable home at Riario Palace with her court, the restless sovereign left her new residence only once, venturing on a new journey towards Northern Europe between 1666 and 1668. The reasons for her journey were linked to her finances: Christina had to closely monitor her income deriving from the provinces between Sweden and Germany, because she was afraid to be deprived of it by the Swedish government, which was not certainly very favourable to her, especially after her cousin Charles Gustaf X's death in 1660. She had a small court travelling with her on these journeys, which included the doctor Cesare Macchiati. What remains as an exceptional testimony to her journeys is a correspondence of about fifty letters, which were written between 1661 and 1668 and addressed to Cardinal Decio Azzolino in Rome. This is a precious source, given the scarcity of documentation, which was directly produced by court doctors, allowing us to reconstruct the role and the function of a court doctor in the modern age, which was strongly pervaded by international scientific, cultural and political instances, as the queen's age was.

Early life (1629-1658): From the March of Fermo to Rome

Cesare Macchiati was born from Vincenzo Macchiati and Caterina Sagretti in Carassai, a castle

in the March of Fermo, belonging to the Papal State, in 1629 (8). The professional medical practice was a family tradition: his father Vincenzo graduated in medicine at the University of Fermo in 1625 and was among the members of the medical college in Fermo together with other members of the Macchiati family in 1646. Belonging to a family of renowned doctors in the March undoubtedly favoured Cesare's professional choice in continuity with the tradition. Having graduated in medicine and philosophy at the University of Fermo on November 13th, 1650 (9), he entered at the service of the Queen's Roman court thanks to Cardinal Azzolino's mediation in 1659. Macchiati's career represented the typical course followed by many doctors in that period: the achievement of a degree in medicine at the University of Fermo was usually followed by a period of professional practice in local offices in order to aspire to higher positions in the Roman capital city thanks to the patronage of prelates and nobles in the March (10).

Travelling with the Queen's court: The first and the second journey (1661-1668)

In 1660, Macchiati has been recently hired when he was part of the small court, who travelled with Christina to Sweden during her first journey towards Stockholm, following her cousin Charles X's death in whose favour the queen had abdicated in 1654. In addition to take part in the funeral, Christina wanted to make sure that the Swedish regency government respected the agreements to send the income, which was due to her. With her abdication, the queen had renounced the annuity, which was due to her by birth-right and, for this reason, having to earn her living, she had stipulated a contract with Charles X, the Council of the Swedish Kingdom, the Parliament and the Military Command for which she had the right to receive the annual income of the territories between Sweden and Germany. In fact, with her abdication, Christina had reserved for herself the income from the major Swedish islands, the city of Norrköping and some territories in Germany, which were Swedish at that time. This annuity, which was originally estimated 200,000 Swedish scudo, should have allowed her to comfortably live abroad. However, the administration

of these provinces was under the control of a governor general, who had been appointed by the Council of the Kingdom and several local administrators whose actions Christina did not trust.

Furthermore, given that Charles Gustaf X had left his only son, who was not even five years old, as the heir to the throne, Christina had also returned to claim the right to the throne in case of a lack of male heirs, as indicated in the abdication document, and infant mortality was obviously very high. Her Catholic condition naturally prevented her from making any claims because they were afraid that she would bring the nation back to the Catholic faith if she returned to the throne. During this journey, Christina spent a year in Hamburg to put her finances back in order, which had to make her sure a certain economic tranquillity once she returned to the Roman capital city.

The first results of the prestige, which a journey abroad to a court like the Queen Christina's one could confer, materialized on Macchiati's return when he started his academic career as a lecturer at the University of Rome. From the beginning, his career was characterized by exceptionality thanks also to his two powerful patrons, such as Queen Christina and Cardinal Azzolino. On his arrival at the university in 1664, Macchiati occupied the chair of natural philosophy, which was belonged to Demetrio Fallirei (11) and remained vacant. This chair was considered important as it was believed the first step to have the chairs of theoretical and practical medicine (12). Cardinal Azzolino took part in the first natural philosophy lecture, held by Macchiati at the Sapienza University of Rome on June 16th, 1664. Macchiati was a lecturer of natural philosophy until 1666 when he travelled with the Queen on the second journey towards Sweden on May 22nd. Christina also went home this time because she needed to keep her finances under control, since the income from the territories she had reserved for herself did not regularly arrive.

In order to put her finances in order, the Queen enlisted the help of her banker, the Portuguese Jew Manoel Texeira, who welcomed her with his traveling court in Hamburg. From there the queen undertook her second last journey towards Stockholm in 1667 and then she returned to Rome in the late November 1668.

Materials and methods

Travel diary: Cesare Macchiati's letters to Cardinal Decio Azzolino Jr, 1661-1668

Cesare Macchiati had a weekly correspondence with Cardinal Decio Azzolino Jr in Rome both during the first journey (1660-62) and the second one (1666-68), of which a total of fifty-four letters has remained up to now.

Most of Macchiati's letters are preserved at the Riksarkivet in Stockholm (Azzolinosamlingen K401 and K411) and in a smaller number in the Azzolino collection at the Planettiana Library of Jesi (Azzolino Archive Collection, envelopes 102 and 104).

Some observations: the series of letters with a greater chronological continuity is the one relating to the second journey so it is a more useful source for a more analytical historical reconstruction. In particular, the 46 letters, which are preserved at the Riksarkivet in Stockholm, cover a chronological interval from July 28th, 1666 to August 29th, 1668. There is a greater number of letters – twenty-two – in 1667 when letters follow each other from January 5th to December 7th, 1667. What is common between the two series of letters is their periodicity: Macchiati wrote a letter to the cardinal every seven days and this weekly frequency was respected for long periods as it happened in 1667. The correspondence is preserved at the Riksarkivet in a more compact manner – most of the letters are collected in large numbers in a few envelopes (13) while other letters are found in a fragmentary manner among the general letters, which are addressed to Cardinal Azzolino, in the Azzolino collection at the library of Jesi (14). Their identification is facilitated by the doctor's use of a typical sepia red ink at a material level. The study of letters and the search for other specimens is still ongoing at the archives taken into account (15). The scarcity of letters relating to the first journey is also due to the fate, which the queen's archive had suffered due to her will. Christina had named Cardinal Decio Azzolino as her universal heir in her will, ordering him to destroy all the sensitive correspondence in his archive. But the cardinal died a few months later, on June 8th, 1689, managing to destroy the papers dating up to 1664. Furthermore, the lack of some letters

during the weekly correspondence between the doctor and the cardinal may be due to the fact that they have never reached their destination, they have been destroyed immediately or ended up elsewhere in the archive. Cardinal Azzolino's letters of reply have not been found yet, but some contents of them can be indirectly deduced through Macchiati's letters. Anyway, the epistolary as a whole is a unique collection of primary sources for the research and teaching Early Modern court medicine (16).

Results

Medical practice in a travelling court: The complexity

Medical practice in a court travelling through hostile territories, such as in Northern Europe, caused many problems for the doctor Macchiati, who was in charge of the sovereign and the other court members' health, as emerged from the analysis of the correspondence. The conditions in which he practiced his job were often precarious and full of dangers: starting from the climate of the regions they crossed during their journey – from Northern Germany to Sweden –, which were characterized by harsh and particularly cold winters, the possible accidents and traumas during the journeys by carriages and ships, the different and inadequate food, the precarious, unhealthy and unhygienic accommodations during the journey to the difficulty of finding medicines in the territories they crossed and the need to turn to unknown local barbers and surgeons for bloodletting and similar interventions. Most of the information, which can be deduced about court medical practice, refer to the second voyage. Macchiati continues to rely on the pharmacopoeia of the Roman capital city: a Roman chemist sent him viper powder and herb tea of chicory, oat and plum brandy roots to cure some of the queen's diseases in Hamburg. His distrust towards the medicines available in Germany is filled by a certain curiosity regarding the local "chemical" pharmacopoeia: from the chemists in Hamburg, Macchiati appreciates a chemical medicine, which is not specified in his letters and he has been administering to the queen for ten days for the treatment of a headache,

which the sovereign had after hours of intense study thanks to which she obtained relief from the pain. Just as he has been always turning to a chemical medicine to cure the queen's otitis. Although his practice is based on traditional medicine, the journey compares him with the use and the development of iatrochemistry for which Germany boasted the primacy at a European level in the seventeenth century (17). Christina's interest in alchemy was widely known and her journey to Germany represented an opportunity to experiment with the effectiveness of Paracelsian medicine at the court. Once back in Rome, Christina spared no expense to set up a distillery in Riario Palace (18). The circulation of medical knowledge was also favoured by the consultations to which Macchiati was called due to the generosity of the Queen, who made her personal doctor available to other princes and nobles of the place.

An illustrious patient's portrait

According to the canons of Hippocratic humoral medicine, Macchiati describes the Queen's temperament as hot and dry and her constitution as sturdy. When Christina embarked on the journey, she was already in her forties and suffered from various health problems, despite her energy: frequent acute headaches with nausea and vomit, a biting pain in her left side, which intermittently occurred, especially as a result of physical exertion and cold; colds and inflammations in her throat and ears. The queen's lifestyle, which was already undisciplined in the Roman court, worsened when she travelled because frequent changes in habits aggravated the sovereign's unruliness. She used to spend many hours at the study desk reading even at night. This resulted in chronic health problems, such as headaches, a harmful sedentariness, as well as small accidents and bruises due to the lack of attention she paid while she had been studying for hours and hours in front of the fire, stumbling and falling down when she stood up, since she was so engrossed in reading. It was a habit, which the queen accentuated with her journey: in a letter dating back to December 15th, 1666, Macchiati wrote that the queen stayed all the day reading and closed in a room where she had lunch and she also had a Mass service,

while they were in Hamburg. The excesses in study corresponded to the ones in food: although Christina opposed the Swedish custom of excessive drinking, she did not disdain Hamburg beer, which Macchiati found rather unhealthy. The doctor tried to oppose its negative effects on the Queen's humoral balance by introducing cow milk as a drink into her daily diet, being unable to find donkey milk in Germany to be administered three times a day, in the morning and before lunch and dinner. Despite her energy, the queen's state of health was however precarious, while the court was already in Hamburg and Macchiati strongly disadvised to leave to Stockholm in 1667, considering the journey too long and tiring with cold winter temperatures. His advice was obviously disregarded and the court set off for Stockholm. The situation came to a head as Macchiati wrote on May 10th, 1667: Christina had already left Hamburg towards Stockholm and the journey turned out to be rather tiring for the queen whose state of health worsened, as Macchiati had foreseen. Fever, vomit and very sharp pains in her head and throughout her body arose. The queen was forced to stop, staying in miserable places, as Macchiati describes them, and she did not accept the local medicines, which the court doctor managed to obtain with difficulty. The situation would have had a fatal outcome if it had not been for the French Ambassador who was waiting that the queen went past the Great Belt, once he had reached the Danish court. He helped her by offering her hospitality and treatments at his court – a bloodletting was operated by a French surgeon – and the queen's state of health began to improve soon (19). It is one of the various episodes narrated by Macchiati in his letters testifying the complexity of practicing the profession of a court doctor during a journey, which could make even the simplest and the most traditional therapeutic remedies, such as bloodletting, uncertain and difficult to be practiced. The numerous risks to which the queen was subjected during the journey made his role as a guarantor of the sovereign's health and a trusted counsellor more difficult. A fatal illness or accident for the queen during the journey would have significantly jeopardized his professional career, an aspect which has characterized and influenced the particular role of court doctors over the centuries (20).

Return to Rome in 1668: A successful career

Macchiati returned to Rome in the late November 1668. From that moment on, his professional career met with a turning point, which was marked by his role as a court doctor travelling with the Queen on two journeys.

From September 1668 to February 1669, he obtained the position of a doctor at the Hospital of Saint John the Baptist of the Genoans in Trastevere, not far from Riario Palace. But, above all, his academic career benefited from the prestige, which was conferred upon him by the Queen's court by extension.

In 1670, following Clement IX's papal brief, dating back to December 4th, 1669, his chair of natural philosophy was – extraordinarily – exchanged for the one in ordinary practical medicine at the University of Rome due to the doctor Giacomo Sinibaldi's death with a lot of controversy from other lecturers aspiring to that role (21). It seems that there were other possible candidates for the chair of practical medicine, such as Giovanni Torre from Padua, but Macchiati prevailed precisely because of the privileges he enjoyed as the queen's court doctor. The reasons, which made Macchiati a suitable candidate for the chair, are argued in the Papal Brief with some difficulties, trying to put an end to the controversy.

The role of a doctor at the court of Queen Christina, who had now become the symbol of Catholic virtue triumphing over the Lutheran heresy, together with Cardinal Azzolino's patronage, earned him the prestigious appointment to cover the role of one of the two doctors at the conclave, which Pope Clement X elected among the sessions from December 20th, 1669 until April 26th, 1670.

After returning from the journey, Macchiati experienced propitious moments even in his private life: he married the Roman Anna Caterina Arrigoni, who was already Macchiati's neighbour before his journey to Stockholm, at San Salvatore in Onda on September 1st, 1669 (22). There is no doubt that the doctor's economic situation was particularly prosperous with the various roles he received on his return from the journey, in addition to his position as a court doctor.

The first daughter Francesca Maria, who was baptized at the Minor Basilica of St. Lawrence in Damaso,

was born on August 11th, 1670. In 1671, the Macchiati family lived in evident economic comfort, making use of a wet nurse and two servants and also hosting his father Vincenzo and Cesare's sister Elena. Other members of the Macchiati family were constantly in Rome. His father Vincenzo died in 1672, but his brother Giuseppe also arrived in 1674, having graduated in utroque iure at the University of Fermo in 1673 and evidently looking for professional opportunities in the capital city with his illustrious brother's support (23).

Macchiati reached the height of his professional career with the appointment as a Chief Medical Examiner of the Roman Medical College in 1674 (24). It was the highest professional position for a doctor in the capital city, which could be only conferred on the archiater of a pope or an illustrious prince at the end of his career due to the prestige and the power deriving from it. In the case of a doctor, who had begun his profession in a province of the Papal State, such as the March of Fermo, it acquired an even greater value in terms of professional affirmation. Unfortunately, Macchiati could not enjoy this success for long, as he has begun to show health problems since the late 1674. Suffering from acute apoplectic fever, he died in Rome at night, between 3rd and 4th June 1675, and he was buried at San Salvatore in Onda (25).

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