

REVEALING MARGINALIA: MATTIOLI'S ANNOTATED COPY OF THE
DISCORSI (1544)

by

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This article presents the discovery and analysis of Pietro Andrea Mattioli's annotated copy of the 1544 *Discorsi* on Dioscorides' *De materia medica*, preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale de France. The marginalia reveal Mattioli's working methods during the preparation of the expanded Valgrisi edition of 1548 and document the substantial transformation of the text from a medical textbook into a natural historical encyclopaedia. The annotations include additions, deletions, corrections, new quotations, and critical remarks directed at contemporary authors such as Leonhart Fuchs and Antonio Musa Brasavola. They also show how Mattioli expanded the original scope of the work by integrating personal observations and practical information on simples and their uses. The discovery provides rare evidence of the editorial process behind one of the most influential Renaissance medical commentaries and illustrates how a philological enterprise developed into a pedagogical and natural historical project.

Keywords: Pietro Andrea Mattioli; Dioscorides; marginalia;
Renaissance botany; materia medica; medical history

INTRODUCTION

Few texts in history have enjoyed the success of Mattioli's *Discorsi* (1544) and *Commentarii* (1554) on Dioscorides' *Materia medica*, whose influence extended over two centuries (1544–1744). Reprinted, translated, illustrated, annotated, and occasionally criticized, they represent one of the most important scientific works of the Renaissance. In terms of readership alone, more than 30,000 copies were printed in Mattioli's lifetime, far surpassing Andreas Vesalius' *Fabrica* not only in circulation—with translations also into Polish and Czech—but in authority.¹ This extraordinary reach was accompanied by an equally rare longevity: Mattioli is possibly the only example of a Renaissance author whose work has remained part of university curricula up to the eighteenth century, appreciated and used

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equally by physicians, apothecaries, naturalists, explorers, and missionaries who brought copies with them into the new colonial settings of the West and the East, including China, Japan, and South Korea.

As Paula Findlen has persuasively argued,² Mattioli's chief historical merit lies in expanding the traditional study of *materia medica* into a natural history of plants that included substantial sections on morphology, growth, habitat, climate, and cultivation methods. Mattioli's work also records his personal experience as a herbalist in Gorizia, his travels, and specimen exchange with other physicians, along with culinary preparations and therapeutic applications, with, especially from 1568 onwards, a special emphasis on the making of remedies via distillation processes.³

THE EVOLUTION OF MATTIOLI'S *COMMENTARIES ON DIOSCORIDES*

Mattioli's original work, *Di Pedacio Dioscoride Anazarbeo libri cinque della Historia et Materia Medicinale ... tradotti in lingua volgare con amplissimi discorsi et commenti* (Niccolò Bascari, Venice, 1544), was intended as a vernacular translation of Dioscorides' *De materia medica* addressed to practising physicians and apothecaries.⁴ However, it soon enjoyed such success that, from 1554 onwards, Mattioli decided to translate it back into Latin, under the title *Commentarii*, to make it

- 1 The number given by Valgrisi was 32,000 copies; for a discussion of these data see Ilaria Andreoli, "A voi gran lodi e allo stampatore gran guadagno." Vincenzo Valgrisi stampatore e libraio del "Dioscoride" del Mattioli", in *I Commentarii ai Discorsi ne i sei Libri della Materia Medicinale di Pedacio Dioscoride Anazarbeo*, pp. 69–85 (Aboca, Sanssepulcro, 2015); Franco Ottaviani, 'Pietro Andrea Mattioli e la sua impresa editoriale (1544–1568)', *Studi trentini di scienze storiche. Sezione prima*, **74** (2), 179–195 (1995); Tiziana Pesenti Marangon, 'Il Dioscoride di Pietro Andrea Mattioli e l'editoria botanica', in *Trattati di prospettiva, architettura militare, idraulica e altre discipline* (ed. D. Gioseffi), pp. 61–103 (Neri Pozza Editore, Vicenza, 1985), especially pp. 82–94. Little has been written on Mattioli's life in English, and even the Italian scholarship on the subject remains patchy. For fundamental orientation about Mattioli's life and work, see Sara Ferri (ed.), *Pietro Andrea Mattioli (Siena 1501–Trento 1578): la vita e le opere con l'identificazione delle piante* (Quattroemme, Ponte San Giovanni–Perugia, 1997) and Cesare Preti, 'Mattioli, Pietro Andrea', *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 72 (Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Rome, 2008), [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pietro-andrea-mattioli_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pietro-andrea-mattioli_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) (accessed 8 November 2025). Specific contributions have appeared recently both in English and Italian; see for instance Francesca Sboarina, *Il lessico medico nel Dioscoride di Pietro Andrea Mattioli* (Peter Lang, Lausanne, 2000); Luca Ciancio, 'Botany and diplomacy: Pietro Andrea Mattioli and his Flemish correspondents in Constantinople (1557–1568)', in *Epistemic practices and plant classification in premodern European botanical knowledge. An interdisciplinary treatment* (ed. F. Baldassarri), pp. 119–154 (Amsterdam University Press, 2025); *id.*, "'Per questa via s'ascende a magior seggio': Pietro Andrea Mattioli e le scienze mediche e naturali alla corte di Bernardo Cles", *Studi trentini. Storia* **94** (1), 159–184 (2015); Alessandra Quaranta, 'The Consilia by learned physicians Pietro Andrea Mattioli and Francesco Partini: dialectic relations between doctrine, empirical knowledge and use of the senses in sixteenth-century Europe', *Social Hist. Med.* **35** (1), 20–48 (2022). On Renaissance botany, especially in Tuscany, see Cristina Bellorini, *The world of plants in Renaissance Tuscany: medicine and botany* (Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey, 2016).
- 2 Especially, Paula Findlen, 'The formation of a scientific community: natural history in sixteenth-century Italy', in *Natural particulars: nature and the disciplines in Renaissance Europe* (ed. A. Grafton and N. Siraisi), pp. 369–400 (MIT Press, London, 1999). More generally, on Renaissance natural history, see Paula Findlen, 'The death of a naturalist: knowledge and community in late Renaissance Italy', in *Professors, physicians and practices in the history of medicine* (ed. G. Manning and C. Klestinec), pp. 127–167 (Springer, Cham, 2017); Brian W. Ogilvie, *The science of describing* (University of Chicago Press, 2006); Paula Findlen (ed.), *Empires of knowledge: scientific networks in the early modern world* (Routledge, London and New York, 2018).
- 3 On Mattioli and distillation, see Michela Pereira, "'Utiles segreti". Strumenti per lambiccare e acque distillate nei *Discorsi*", in *Pietro Andrea Mattioli (Siena 1501–Trento 1578): la vita e le opere con l'identificazione delle piante* (ed. S. Ferri), pp. 281–303 (Quattroemme, Ponte San Giovanni–Perugia, 1997). On the scientific context of Mattioli's work and its application to therapy, see Fabrizio Bigotti and John Wilkins, 'Beyond decline: the long life of Galenic pharmacopoeia', in *Galen's remedies in the early modern period: traditions, theories, transformations, and trades (1400–1750)* (ed. F. Bigotti and J. Wilkins), pp. 15–65 (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2026).

accessible to what Mattioli calls the 'botanical republic' of European scholars.⁵ In the process, the text massively expanded in length and content and was lavishly illustrated, in a trend that reached its peak with the 1568 edition illustrated by Gherardo Cybo (1512–1600) for Giovanni Maria II della Rovere, Duke of Urbino (1549–1631).⁶ This gradual transformation of Dioscorides' text had begun in 1548, when the second edition of the *Discorsi* appeared in Venice with the printer Vincenzo Valgrisi. The Valgrisi edition became the nucleus on which all subsequent versions were based, and the start of a long and very fruitful editorial collaboration.

While scholars have noted the significant shifts between the different editions and translations,⁷ very few have had the privilege of witnessing Mattioli's work in the making. The discovery of Mattioli's own annotated copy of the first edition of the *Discorsi* (Niccolò Bascarini, Venice, 1544) finally closes this gap, shedding new light on the methods and interests of arguably the most prominent of Renaissance herbalists.

Mattioli's work, a commentary, is by its very nature a multi-layered text, in which information is selected and organized to identify a specific simple so as to allow a reader to handle it. The intellectual and material processes by which such information is structured are therefore vital.⁸ As shown by Bettina Dietz, in fact, herbals can be investigated not only for their contents but also for their annotations, as a medium through which herbalists continually registered, codified, and organized new information about specimens, including their local names, uses, and availability.⁹ Mattioli's marginalia represent an exceptional testimony to this practice.¹⁰ In criticizing nearly the whole pantheon of Renaissance medical botany prior to him, he devotes particular attention to correcting names and reporting errors in classification, often in German, a language he knew well.

His strategy in establishing epistemic orthodoxy and authorial privilege also emerges clearly. Notorious for his vitriol, Mattioli reveals in his annotations an even harsher tone, bordering on what today would be labelled 'character assassination'; a tone that was diluted or subdued in subsequent editions, arguably out of fear that it might backfire and hinder

4 For an insightful comparison between the first edition and the subsequent editions (specifically 1554 and 1583) of the *Discorsi*, see Vivian Nutton, 'Mattioli and the art of the commentary', in *La complessa scienza dei semplici. Atti delle celebrazioni per il V centenario della nascita di Pietro Andrea Mattioli* (ed. D. Fausti), pp. 133–148 (Accademia dei Fisiocratici Onluns, Siena, 2004).

5 Findlen, *op. cit.* (note 2), at p. 379.

6 The coloured copy of this work, *I discorsi di m. Pietro Andrea Matthioli sanese, medico cesareo, et del serenissimo principe Ferdinando archiduca d'Austria &c. nelli sei libri di Pedacio Discoride Anazarbeo della materia medicinale* (Vincenzo Valgrisi, Venice, 1568), Inventory no: LA 1001571; Shelfmark: RARI 278, is currently kept at the Biblioteca Universitaria Alessandrina in Rome.

7 Sara Ferri, 'Il "Dioscoride", i "Discorsi", i "Commentarii": gli amici e i nemici', in *Pietro Andrea Mattioli (Siena 1501–Trento 1578): la vita e le opere con l'identificazione delle piante* (ed. S. Ferri), pp. 15–48 (Quattroemme, Ponte San Giovanni, Perugia, 1997). See also Pesenti Marangon, *op. cit.* (note 3).

8 For a general introduction to the use of marginalization in literature and the difference between 'marginalists and extractors' see Daniel Ferrer, 'Towards a marginalist economy of textual genesis', *Reading Notes (Variants: The Journal of the European Society for Textual Scholarship 2–3)* (ed. Dirk Van Hulle and Wim Van Mierlo), pp. 7–18 (Rodopi, Amsterdam/New York, 2004).

9 Bettina Dietz, 'Herbaria as manuscripts: philology, ethnobotany, and the textual–visual mesh of early modern botany', *His. Sci.* **62** (1), 3–22 (2024), esp. 6, 17–20.

10 A similar case, in terms of genre, importance, and mutual rivalry, is that of Conrad Gessner (1516–1565), whose annotated library stands out as a testimony of how he assimilated and transformed what he read. Among Gessner's many annotations, not surprisingly, Mattioli's work is also present, as the two engaged in a rough quarrel over the identification of *aconitum primum* from 1555 onwards; see Urs B. Leu, Raffael Keller and Sandra Weidmann, *Conrad Gessner's private library* (Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2008), and Candice Delisle, 'The letter: private text or public place? The Mattioli–Gessner controversy about the *aconitum primum*', *Gesnerus* **61**, 161–176 (2004).

the very effect the criticism was meant to produce. Yet, from a broader medical–historical point of view, these annotations allow us to achieve a far more important task: by providing evidence of which subjects, authorities, and aspects were at each time deemed worth preserving, expanding, or criticizing, they show how the transition from medical botany to natural history worked in detail.

ESTABLISHING AUTHORSHIP

The annotated copy of Mattioli's *Discorsi* is kept at the National Library of Paris (BNF), under shelf mark: Réserve des livres rares, RES-TE138-46; and is extensively annotated, containing everything that would later be incorporated into the 1548 Valgrisi edition, and much more besides (figure 1).¹¹ A quick comparison between the two editions shows that the notes amount to an expansion of the original material by about sixty per cent. The work grows from 470 pages in the Bascarini edition to 756 in Valgrisi's, which additionally features a sixth book dedicated to poisons, adding an extra 128 pages to the count.¹²

Authorship is indisputable. Mattioli consistently writes in the first person (*dico però, dichiaro, non ritrovo, come ho visto*), and the marginalia, with the exception of a few that were deleted, slightly changed or adjusted, were carried into the 1548 edition. Importantly, the hand is stylistically and consistently the same across all marginalia and the handwriting is the same as that in Mattioli's autograph manuscript *Il magno palazzo del cardinale di Trento* (ante 1539, Biblioteca Comunale di Trento, MS BCT1-1795, pp. 2–134) (figure 2).¹³

Dating can also be established securely. Thanks to marginal notes on pages 9, 274, and 400 referring to Antonio Musa Brasavola's reprint of the *Examen omnium simplicium medicamentorum* (Vincenzo Valgrisi, Venice, 1545),¹⁴ and to one on page 49, referring to manna raining in Gorizia and Friuli in May–June 1546 (figure 4), we know that the revision process dated approximately 1546–1547.

CONTENT AND THEMES OF THE MANUSCRIPT NOTES

In terms of content, annotations vary widely. They range from new entries to the index, to list varieties, morphology, and refined products (such as yeast), to corrections, deletion of entire passages and corresponding integrations, as shown on page Bk IV: 333A–B–C (figure 3).

Another recurrent element is the extensive addition of captioning—one of the main features of Mattioli's later editions, absent in the first. They attract the reader's attention to misleading naming, or classification of plants, occasional revision of Dioscorides' text (Bk 1: 39C) and other notable pedagogical indications, directed to both physicians and apothecaries, for instance how to recognize natural from artificial products at the market (Bk I: 21A–B, on Balsam; Bk 1: 53B, on camphor), the various existing opinions about the

11 The copy is available for online consultation at: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1501630w>.

12 Also published as an independent book by Valgrisi in the same year.

13 Available for online consultation at: <https://bdt.bibcom.trento.it/Manoscritti/15998#page/n5>.

14 See Pesenti Marangon, *op. cit.* (note 1), at p. 75.

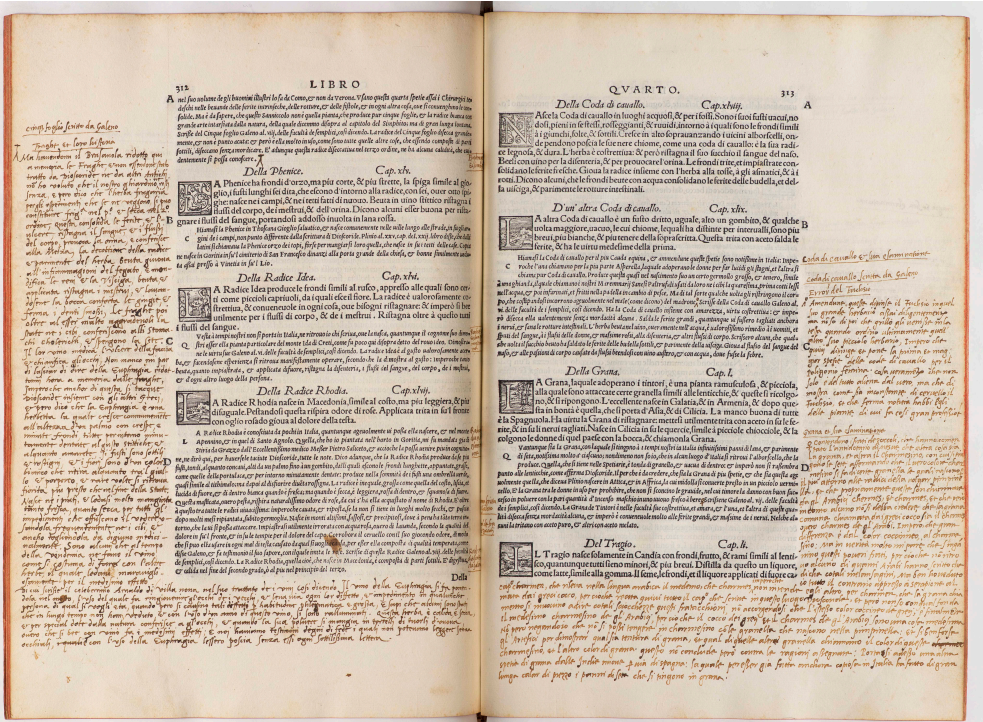


Figure 1. Mattioli's annotations and revisions to Bk IV, pp. 312-313 of the *Discorsi* (Niccolò Bascariini, Venice, 1544). Réserve des Livres Rares, shelf mark: RES-TE138-46, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

generation of Ambra (Bk I: 23D) or how should oils be prepared by apothecaries (Bk 1: 32B).

Some notes are added to the page; some others, although very few, are written on a different paper and then glued to the page (Bk I: 22B–C; Bk III: 47D; 205C–D; 284D[?]; Bk IV: 315D, 336C–D; Bk V: 400B–D).

Criticism of contemporary or past authors is a constant, both in marginal rubrics (*Errore del Brasavola*, *Errore del Manardo*, *Errore del Fuchsio*, *Errore dei frati che hanno commentato l'Antidotario di Mesue*) and in the core text. While the majority are tough but still academic, a few stand out as *ad hominem*, vitriolic denigration preferentially addressed to Brasavola and Fuchs, which were later revised.

An example is the marginal note on prunus (I, cxxxviii. 103D) where Mattioli targets Leonhart Fuchs's *De medendis singularum humani corporis partium* (Andrea Arrivabene, Venice, 1541), accusing the author of being inconstant of mind, not teaching real medicine and—playing on the German word *Fuchs*—to be like a fox, a comment that was later softened—as far as was possible for someone like Mattioli (table 1).

A similar treatment is reserved for Brasavola, which in 1544 Mattioli labels as one 'foolishly deceived' (*scioccamente s'inganni il Brasavola*), whereas in 1548 the epithet is softened to 'obstinate' (*perstinacia del Brasavola*) and the period slightly revised (in italics in table 2).

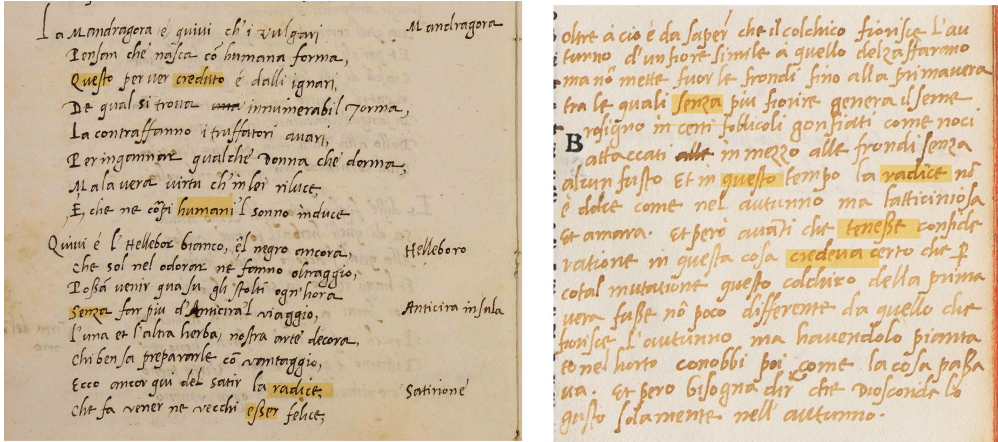


Figure 2. Comparison between Mattioli’s handwriting style in *Il magno palazzo del Cardinale di Trento* (Biblioteca Comunale di Trento, MS BCT1-1795, p. 20, left) and in the 1544 annotated edition of the *Discorsi*, Bk IV, lxxxvii, 333A–B (right, and in figure 3).

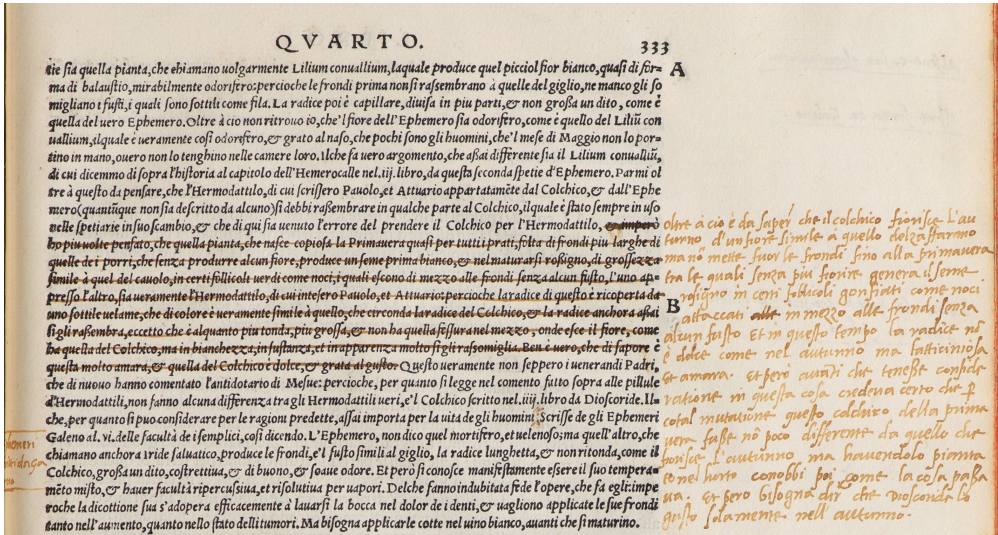


Figure 3. An example of deletion and integration of passages. Mattioli, *Discorsi* (1544), annotated copy, Bk IV, lxxxvii, 333A–B.

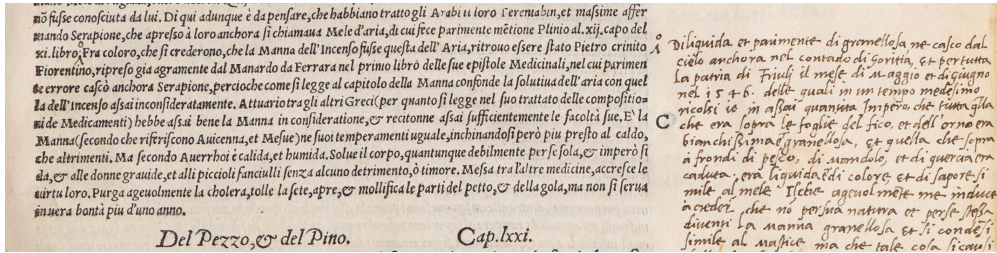


Figure 4. Mattioli's marginal note on the raining of manna in Gorizia in 1546 ('nel contado di Gorizia, et per tutta la patria di Friuli il mese di Maggio e di Giugno 1546'); from Mattioli, *Discorsi* (1544), annotated copy, Bk I, lxx, 49B–C.

Table 1. Marginalia with Mattioli's criticism of Fuchs

Mattioli, <i>Discorsi</i> (Bascarini 1544) [BNF: RES-TE138-46], handwritten marginal note to Bk I, cxxxviii, 103D:	English translation
<Et no[n] di meno nella sua pratica doue insegna a medicare i morbi in vari e diversi luoghi usa egli i sebesten nelle medicine solutive il che arguisce che incostanza grandissima debbi esser nel cervello del Fuchsio, et che no[n] realmente insegni egli la medicina: et pero ben gli sta quel nome Fuchsio perchio dir in lingua Thedescas no[n] rileva altro Fuchsio che volpe.>	<And nonetheless, in his practice, where he teaches how to treat diseases in various and different places, he uses Sebesten in laxative medicines, which shows that there must be great inconsistency in Fuchs's brain, and that he does not truly teach medicine. And therefore, that name Fuchs suits him well, since in the German language Fuchs means nothing other than 'fox' >
Mattioli, <i>Discorsi</i> (Valgrisi 1548), Bk I, cxxxviii, 175:	English translation
Et no[n] di meno nella sua pratica doue insegna a medicare i morbi in vari, e diversi luoghi, usa egli il Sebesten nelle medicine solutive. Il che arguisce che più intento sia il Fuchsio al cavillare, che allo scrivere realmente la verità delle cose.	And nonetheless, in his practice, where he teaches how to treat diseases in various and different places, he uses Sebesten in laxative medicines. This shows that Fuchs is more intent on quibbling than on truly writing the truth about things.

At times, Mattioli criticizes the shortcomings in the representation of simples by his predecessors, most notably Fuchs. Such remarks are especially concentrated in the marginalia of Book IV (table 3).

Both types of criticism deserve close attention, as they illuminate not only Mattioli's strategies for establishing authority but also his medical pedagogy.

On the one hand, he chastises contemporaries for their confusion of names and, above all, their ignorance of morphology, which betrays inconsistency and lack of practice. The immediate model for both strategies was Vesalius, whom Mattioli explicitly acknowledges as a precedent in the opening *Letter to the Reader*. A more distant, yet still influential, model was Leonico.¹⁵

Table 2. Marginalia with Mattioli's criticism of Brasavola

Mattioli, <i>Discorsi</i> (Bascarini 1544) [BNF: RES-TE138-46], handwritten marginal note to Bk V, xlix, 400[D]–401[D]:	English translation
<Et pero non posso non maravigliarmi come <i>scioccamente si inganni il Brasavola</i> volendo pure che la squama dello stomoma si facci parimenti di Rame, <i>come se in cambio d'acciorio</i> [sic] <i>s'adoperasse qualche volta il Rame, et pero volendo</i> pur dire la verita siamo costretti à credere che la squama dello Stomoma sia squama d'acciaio ...>	<And yet I cannot but marvel at how <i>foolishly Brasavola deceives himself</i> , wishing that the blade of the stomoma be likewise made of copper, <i>as if copper were sometimes used instead of steel</i> , and yet, wishing nonetheless to speak the truth, we are compelled to believe that the blade of the <i>stomoma</i> is a blade of steel ...>
Mattioli, <i>Discorsi</i> (Valgrisi 1548), Bk V, lxviii, 685:	English translation
Et pero non posso <i>se non</i> meravigliarmi <i>della pertinacia del Brasavola</i> . Il perche volendosi pur dire la verita, siamo costretti à credere che la squama dello Stomoma non sia <i>altro, che</i> squama d'acciaio: ...	And yet I cannot <i>but marvel at the obstinacy of Brasavola</i> . Therefore, since we must tell the truth, we are compelled to believe that the blade of the stomoma is <i>nothing other than</i> a blade of steel: ...

WHAT IS EXPANDED AND WHY

The largest part of the marginalia consists of integrations (*historie* or *esaminationi*) concerning simples, plant morphology, faculties, culinary preparations, and therapeutic use. Mattioli's own research on local simples in Gorizia (Bk I: 4, 49), as well as his occasional exchange of specimens or visits to local gardens is also recorded. For instance, he reports his exchange with the physician Giovanni Merlo from Innsbruck about the presence of *calamo aromatico* (*Acorus calamus*) in Lithuania (Bk I: 5D), or about Maffeo Maffei's garden in Venice, where one could study the *Phillyrea* bush (Bk I: 77C–D). These integrations impart a new direction to the text, transforming it into the kind of botanical encyclopaedia we recognize today.

Some additions complement Dioscorides' text with new literary material from Galen, Pliny, Serapion, and Virgil, but many are entirely new and detailed accounts introduced by Mattioli whenever neither Dioscorides nor Galen provides sufficient information. These include substantial marginalia on the natural history of incense (Bk I: 48B–D), the salinity of water and its effects on the buoyancy of ships (Bk I: 58B), the description of two species of thyme not mentioned by Dioscorides (Bk III: 233B), and a detailed analysis of the bezoar and its tested benefits against poisons such as *Napello* (Bk IV: 417C–D). The marginal note on incense is especially important, as it provides details on the gradation of incense (hot in the second degree, dry in the first) and on its ashes, which—Mattioli contends—is impossible to gather from the Latin translations

15 Both acknowledged in the *Prologo*; see Pietro Andrea Mattioli, *Di Pedacio Dioscoride Anazarbardeo libri cinque della Historia et Materia Medicinale ... tradotti in lingua volgare con amplissimi discorsi et commenti* (Niccolò Bascarini, Venice, 1544), p. 1.

Table 3. Additional marginalia with Mattioli's criticism of Fuchs

Mattioli, <i>Discorsi</i> (Bascarini 1544) [BNF: RES-TE138-46]	English translation
IV, xxxvii, 308D:	
<p>... Herba Giudaica e parimenti Pagana chiamano alcuni quella, che volgarmente chiamano Virga aurea, il cui fusto e' rosso, alto due go[m]biti, e qualche volta maggiore, lucido e liscio, su per il quale produce ella le frondi olivari, per intorno minutissimamente dentate, e liscie nella loro superficie. I fiori produce nella sommità del fusto spicati <(no[n] simili a quelli della chamamilla come nei suoi herbarij la dipinge il Fuchsio)> d' aureo colore, i quali nel maturarsi si convertiscono in leggerissima piuma, e se ne volano all'aria.</p>	<p>... Some call Herba Giudaica and likewise Pagana the plant commonly known as Virga aurea (i.e. goldenrod), whose stem is red, two cubits high or sometimes taller, shining and smooth[.] Along it grow olive-like leaves, very finely toothed around the edges and smooth on their surface. At the top of the stem it bears flowers in spikes <(not like those of chamomile, as Fuchs depicts them in his herbals)>, of a golden colour, which, when they ripen, turn into a very light down and fly away into the air.</p>
IV, xlix, 313C:	
<p>Chiamasi coda di cavallo per il piu Cauda equina, e amendue queste spetie sono notissime in Italia: ... <amendue dipense il Fuchsio in quel suo grande herbario assai diligentemente ma no[n] so di poi che grillo gli venisse nela testa quando ordino ultimamente quell'altro suo picciolo herbario, imperoche quivi dipinge et pone la prima et maggior spetie delle code di cavallo per il poligonio femmina. Cosa veramente che non solo è del tutto aliena dal vero, ma che dimostra come sia incostante di cervello il Fuchsio, et che ferma notitia habbi egli delle piante di cui fa cosi gran professione.></p>	<p>It is most commonly called Cauda equina ('horsetail'), and both species are well known in Italy: ... <Fuchs painted both of them very carefully in his great herbal, but I do not know what whim took hold of him when he later arranged that other small herbal of his, for there he depicts and identifies the first and larger species of Equisetum as the female Polygonum—a thing not only wholly contrary to the truth, but showing that Fuchs is unsteady in mind and possesses but a poor knowledge of the plants of which he makes such great profession.></p>
IV, lix, 316C:	
<p><Il Fuchsio in quel suo grande herbario lo dipinse co[n] frondi simili al Ecchio spinoso et co[n] fiori veramente poco conformi al vero Helicrisio il quale non produce più d'una omb[r]jella per fusto in Toseana nasce pertanto alla campagna: et pero credo che di gran lunga s'inganni.></p>	<p><Fuchs, in that great herbal of his, depicted it with leaves like those of the spiny Echium and with flowers scarcely resembling the true Helichrysum, which bears no more than one umbel per stem, in Tuscany it therefore grows in the countryside; and therefore I believe that he is greatly mistaken.></p>

of Galen's *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis ac facultatibus*, because they rely on a corrupted Greek text.

Integrations are particularly evident in Books IV and V, which deal with the making of textiles, sapphires, and especially the vine, its products, and its varieties. They reflect a growing interest in the medical dimension of everyday life, integrating the doctrine of the six non-naturals and expanding it beyond purely medical concerns. A similar interest would later characterize other physician-naturalists, such as Andrea Bacci (1524–1600), who likewise wrote extensively on the natural history of wines and precious stones.¹⁶

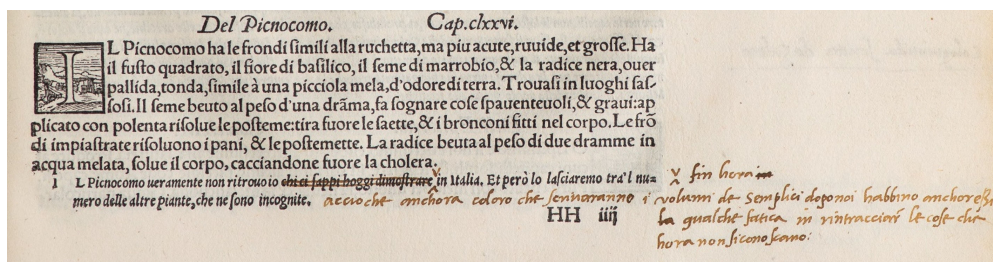


Figure 5. Mattioli's note on the Picnocomo (i.e. *Pycnocomon rutifolium*); Mattioli, *Discorsi* (1544), annotated copy, Bk IV, clxxvi, 371D.



Figure 6. Mattioli's manica about identifying plants' hidden main features ('Percioche malagevolmente si puo determinare di tutte quelle cose che le cui note principali ne sono incognite et nascoste'); Mattioli, *Discorsi* (1544), annotated copy, Bk III, clxxvi, 242b.

Table 4. Mattioli's marginalia on the *Picnocomo*

Mattioli, <i>Discorsi</i> (Bascarini 1544) [BNF: RES-TE138-46], handwritten marginal note to Bk IV, clxxvi, <i>Del Picnocomo</i> , p. 371	English translation
Il picnocomo veramente non ritrovo io ehi ei sappi oggi dimostrare <fin hora> in Italia. Et però lo lasceremo tra'l numero delle altre piante, che sono incognite <accio che anchora coloro che scriveranno i volumi de semplici dopo di noi habbino anchoressi qualche fatica in rintracciar le cose che hora non si conoscono>	I truly have not found <i>anyone who can show us <so far></i> the <i>Pycnocomon</i> in Italy. And therefore we shall leave it among the number of other plants that are unknown <so that those who will write volumes on simples after us too may also have some labour in tracing the things that are not known at present.>

Some minor integrations add important morphological notes absent in Dioscorides, as in the case of *Apios* (Bk IV: 372A–B). Mattioli's personal experience as a herbalist in Gorizia and Venice was also integrated, particularly when he had been unable to locate a simple in Italy (Bk I: 72D; Bk III: 237D; Bk IV: 373D), either because Dioscorides provided little information (Bk III: 361D) or because he doubted the descriptions made by others when they did not match his own observations (Bk I: 72D–73A).

One such annotation (Bk IV: 371D) (table 4) is especially revealing, showing Mattioli's project as ongoing and open to further discoveries and additions (figure 5). This marginal link to two others in Bk III (Ch. lix, *Del Sifone*, 242B; Ch. cii, *Del Policnemone*, 265B). Mattioli himself marked the first annotation with a *manicula*¹⁷ to highlight the difficulty of identifying things whose main features (*note principali*) remain unknown or hidden (*incognite et nascoste*) (figure 6).

As noted above, almost all quotations were transferred to the 1548 edition, with the exception of some that were written and then deleted in the annotated copy (Bk I: 5A; Bk II: 184B; Bk IV: 298A), along with sharp criticisms, captions, and a few marginal notes, mostly references to Aristotle or Galen. I am still at an early stage of reading these notes, so it is difficult to explain why this last group was not incorporated, but the marginalia are minor and were possibly deemed superfluous.

CONCLUSION

The discovery of Mattioli's annotated copy of the 1544 *Discorsi* reveals more than the transformation of classical knowledge or the making of Mattioli's own authority: it illuminates how the Renaissance commentary evolved into a practical instrument of teaching. Indeed, Mattioli's project was as philological as it was also pedagogical. Originally conceived to instruct apothecaries—the lowest rank of medical practitioners, often with limited Latin—the first edition quickly reached a broader, more learned audience in Padua, where it was received with enthusiasm.¹⁸

As noted by Vivian Nutton, one of the reasons accounting for the success of Mattioli's first edition of the *Discorsi* lies in its mastery of 'the art of the commentary'. He has the gift of summarizing complex arguments clearly, and his genius consists in striking the perfect balance between scientific content, elegant and varied prose, practical knowledge, personal recollection, and authority.¹⁹ The ingredients for immediate success were all prepared, but the unexpected readership which sealed it demanded more, offering Mattioli the opportunity to rise from an obscure herbalist in Gorizia to a figure of intellectual prominence.

He responded by reshaping his text substantially: inserting new quotations, pruning others, and adding pointed criticisms to address new, above all didactic, needs. To rival Brasavola and train future physicians, he began with the vernacular—accessible, rigorous, and still widely accessible—before moving to Latin. In this way, the *Discorsi* evolved from a sophisticated manual into a proto *historia naturae*.

Mattioli's enterprise matched Vesalius's in ambition. Both sought to reconcile learned commentary with practical teaching: Vesalius wrote the vast *Fabrica* (1543) and immediately reduced it to an *Epitome* for students; Mattioli began with a vernacular text for apothecaries (1544), then recast it into the monumental Latin *Commentarii* (1554), only to realize that the enterprise had outgrown its didactic purpose and required an abridged *Compendium de plantis* (1571) to grant access to the lower strata of the medical profession. The irony for both was that their success and fame were secured by the publication of

16 See Andrea Bacci, *De naturali vinorum historia* (Niccolò Muzi, Rome, 1596).

17 A similar one occurs at Bk IV: 348D.

18 Ferri, *op. cit.* (note 7), at p. 21.

19 Nutton, *op. cit.* (note 4), at p. 143.

the monumental volumes rather than by their practical abridgements. Yet, despite their similarities in editorial and authorial success, Vesalius' and Mattioli's scientific outcomes differed substantially. In the short run, Vesalius complemented rather than replaced Galen: his *Fabrica* was conceived as a commentary on Galen and never fully escaped the frame Galen had given to anatomy. Mattioli, by contrast, displaced and ultimately supplanted the very authority he commented upon. After 1570, Dioscorides' *De materia medica* came to be read almost exclusively through Mattioli's work—the definitive textbook of medical botany through which generations of students learned to see, name, and understand the natural world.

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DATA ACCESSIBILITY

This article has no additional data.

DECLARATION OF AI USE

I have not used AI-assisted technologies in creating this article.

AUTHOR'S NOTES.

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