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# Aristotelis Libellus de admirandis in natura auditis. Antonio Beccaria interprete

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## Review by

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An integral part of the Aristotelian corpus by the end of Antiquity, the Pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mirabilibus Auscultationibus*, to give it its standard Latin title, was rendered into Latin in the thirteenth century at the Neapolitan court of King Manfred of Sicily by Bartholomew of Messina. Only one complete manuscript of Bartholomew's version survives, reflective of its small currency in the Middle Ages. Hardly more successful in the fourteenth century was the translation made by the Greek émigré Leontius Pilatus at the urging of Giovanni Boccaccio. Only fragments of Leontius' translation survive. In mid-fifteenth century Italy, the Veronese humanist Antonio Beccaria produced yet a third Latin version. Beccaria's translation enjoyed a better fate than its predecessors (hence the edition under review), but only to a limited extent. It survives whole in two manuscripts, one where it is bizarrely ascribed to Raymond Lull, and another copied from the sole printed edition of the text and therefore of no critical value in establishing the text. In 1493 in Venice, it appeared as an item in the collection of Aristotelian extracts put together by the Dominican friar Theophilus de Ferrariis and printed by Johannes and Gregorius de Gregoriis for the publisher Alexander Calcedonius (ISTC ifoo117000; uniquely amid the extracts the *De Mirabilibus Auscultationibus* was printed whole). Strange to say, despite being included in Aldus Manutius' epochal edition of the Greek text of Aristotle in Venice in 1495-98, this Pseudo-Aristotelian collection of supposed fabulous natural wonders and stories did not appear again in any collection of Aristotelian works until the *Opera Omnia*

published by Ioannes Oporinus in Basel in 1538, and this time in yet a fourth version made by an anonymous translator. This new rendering would then appear in many other Aristotelian *Opera Omnia* through the sixteenth century (thirteen in all), but not without competition from still two other translations, first by Dominicus Montesaurus (printed ten times), and then by Natalis de Comitibus (printed only once).<sup>[1]</sup>

Clearly, Antonio Beccaria's translation of the *De Mirabilibus Auscultationibus* is not a text that exercised much influence or enjoyed much circulation apart from its inclusion in the odd collection of Aristotelian extracts edited by Theophilus de Ferrariis in 1493. Nonetheless, Ciro Giacomelli's edition of it is valuable on a number of counts. To start with a surprise, Giacomelli provides an appendix in which he identifies and edits fragments of Leontius Pilatus' lost translation in the writings of Boccaccio and his contemporaries Domenico Silvestri and Lorenzo Astemio. Giacomelli published in 2021 an outstanding study of the manuscript tradition of the *De Mirabilibus Auscultationibus* (*Ps.-Aristotele, De mirabilibus auscultationibus. Indagini sulla storia della tradizione e ricezione del testo*, Berlin: De Gruyter), which is important for the manuscript tradition of a whole set of Aristotelian texts. Giacomelli is also publishing a critical edition of the Greek text in the *Bollettino dei Classici* of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei of Rome. So, with magisterial control of the manuscript tradition, he was able in the appendix to identify *on the basis of the fragments* Leontius' Greek exemplar as MS Marc. gr. IV, 58 of the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice (= B), and to clarify a small but interesting detail in the *fortuna* of this pseudonymous text.

Giacomelli proves that Beccaria's translation also had B or an apograph as its exemplar and that it therefore fits securely within the  $\alpha$  branch of the manuscript tradition and offers no manuscript readings outside the  $\alpha$  family. Consequently, the textual value of Beccaria's translation resides in what conjectures he might provide *ope ingenii*. Although Beccaria's method of translation was in the mode of *oratoria libera* as opposed to the *verbum ad verbum* practice of Bartholomew of Messina and even of Leontius Pilatus, and even though he committed his share of errors, he did make some very competent conjectures, such as essentially anticipating Otto Apelt's conjecture of  $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu\tau\iota$  at 834b4 (Giacomelli, 48) and anticipating the solution to the confusion in chapter 51 (*ibid.*, 48-49). It should be noted that the sequence of chapters in Beccaria's translation in no way corresponds to what is found in modern editions of the Greek text. So, the only way to match up the chapters in Beccaria's

translation to the Greek text is to consult the concordance on p. 82 of the edition. In the text proper of the translation Giacomelli also adds between parentheses at the start of each chapter the corresponding number in the Greek text.

Antonio Beccaria belonged to the second tier of Italian Renaissance humanists and his translation of the *De Mirabilibus Auscultationibus* cannot be counted among the more significant translations of the Quattrocento. But to understand and to take the measure of an age one must study in detail not only its most brilliant and famous figures, but also its more average—one might say, normative—figures and their work in order to grasp the capacities and outlook of the time compared to what came before and what would follow after. In this sense, Giacomelli has made a valuable and quite interesting contribution to our understanding of the Italian Fifteenth Century.

## Notes

[1] See F. Edward Cranz and Charles B. Schmitt, *A Bibliography of Aristotle Editions, 1501-1600* (Baden-Baden: V. Koerner, 1984, p. 184.