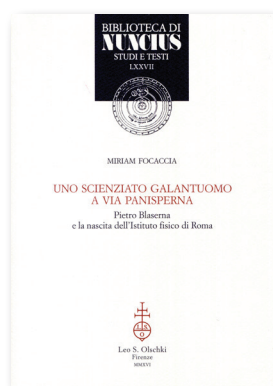


BOOK REVIEWS, NOTES AND COMMENTS

Edited by

Federica Napolitani Cheyne



**UNO SCIENZIATO
GALANTUOMO
A VIA PANISPERNA**
**Pietro Blaserna e la nascita
dell'Istituto fisico di Roma**

Miriam Focaccia
Firenze: Leo S. Olschki; 2016.

202 p.

ISBN 978 88 222 6441 1

This book does justice to the importance of the Italian physicist Pietro Blaserna, well known to historians of science, but relatively unknown to the general public.

As a practicing physicist, Blaserna was active on a number of heterogeneous subjects in the first phase of his career, and some of his achievements (described in detail in the book) are noteworthy. However, the main reason for which Blaserna deserves a place in the history of Italian physics is his unflagging activity as promoter of a modern organization and management of science at the dawn of modern physics, first as university professor (in Palermo, then in Rome), later as a senator.

He was much ahead of his time in revolutionizing the teaching of physics in Italy, borrowing from European universities (that he toured on purpose) the concept of well equipped and organized laboratories accessible to the students at various levels, and developing very modern mentorship practices.

Blaserna understood the value and the potential of initiatives to foster the formation of national scientific communities, e.g. through the foundation of the Italian Physics Society and the Institute of Meteorology and Geodynamics (later to become the National Institute of Geophysics), and promoting their international dimension through several series of international conferences. He was also the founder of the Physics Laboratory in Via Panisperna, later famously home to Enrico Fermi's group.

The book provides an extensive and detailed account of Blaserna's life and work, with interesting excerpts from documents of the time.

Especially enjoyable is the collection of original writings by Pietro Blaserna reproduced in the last 50 pages or so of the book. They cover a range of subjects reflecting the wide spectrum of scientific interests spanned by Blaserna: we learn about technical issues involved in controlling balloons flight (with a lively account of an amusing demonstration indoor!); we are engaged in the evaluation of evidences in favor or against the existence

of the "Open Polar Sea" (at the time, the conjecture of an ice-free sea surrounding the North Pole was widely held plausible and motivated adventurous expeditions); we read a passionate description of the advantages of a musical scale Blaserna proposed, and the construction of a harmonium implementing the proposed scale; and more.

The life of Pietro Blaserna was deeply intertwined with the historical processes across the unification of Italy and the subsequent, difficult path to a true cultural unification. In the political turmoil, he provided an early example of the role of science in establishing bridges and crossing borders.

Paolo Del Giudice

Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, Italy

paolo.delgiudice@iss.it



CANI E UOMINI
**Una relazione
nella letteratura italiana
del Medioevo**

Marco Iuffrida
Catanzaro: Rubbettino
Università; 2016.

112 p.

ISBN 978-88-498-4830-4.

12,00 €

*[Dogs and humans: their
relationship in Medieval
Italian literature]*

In the brief, yet definitely brilliant Introduction we find that dog strains were already genetically "connoted" at the beginning of the Middle Ages, selected for a variety of purposes (for hunting, or as shepherds or guardians for long-distance wandering herds, along with trained falcons, auks, or ferrets) some of which have very little scope in present days, especially in affluent Western societies. Here dogs, and pets in general, simply represent affiliate partners, due to the rarefaction and difficulties of establishing and maintaining the natural numerosity and variety of inter-human bonds, particularly in highly urbanised, inner city ecosystems.

This little essay consists of a reasoned, very well selected bibliography of Italian characters who populated Italy in the Middle Ages and were established enough

to leave written records of their activities. From archival sources therefore Marco Iuffrida graciously resurfaces “lived lives”, writings, poems, sketches, and well chosen proverbs of ancient roots. Some bibliographic entries also refer to the French context, particularly for issues dealing with falconry, a nobleman activity permeating this historical period and still having its followers and passionates, even in our old Europe, yet mostly highly priced in rather distant geographical and cultural areas having South Arabia as epicenter. The volume opens presenting dogs as man’s best friends but also in dark Medieval times taken as precious allies for men in the “perennial war” against fox-women (paragraph 1.4).

Among the characters enlisted and reviewed, Giacomo da Verona emerges (p. 29-33), likely having been in direct contact with the Florentine poet Dante Alighieri himself and having lived around the half of the 13th century. He was a friar somehow obsessed with devils howling like wolves and barking as dogs. Terrible devils indeed, depicted as hideous monsters. Bovesin de la Casa was born around 1240-45 and passed away ca 1235, possibly born in Milan or surroundings, he was a renown teacher: among his well written *bestiaria* with moral intent, he wisely recommends not to caress dogs or cats while eating, however more as a bon-ton rule than as a public health regulation.

A third pivotal character is Ruggieri Apuliese (from the Latin Apulia, Puglia, a Southern Italy region), mentioned on p. 49-51, a refined poet and bird hunter, with nets or fishing lines, who reports of some methods and motivations to train specific dog strains, the hounds (*bracchi*): in times when the *ars venandi* was a relevant survival skill and a major source of proteic intake. Finally, a fourth well narrated figure is Antonio Fileremo Fregoso (p. 89-98), knighted in 1478 and depicted in one of his most renowned poems, he when looking for and strenuously chasing a she-deer, with his dogs Desio (Desire) and Pensiero (Thought).

The Author Iuffrida has excellent academic credentials, being specialised at the illustrious School of Biblioteconomy of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, obviously located in Rome and having selected the human-animal relationship as a major theme of his scientific interests.

Our journal *Annali ISS* has regularly dedicated, specially in the last decades, a great attention to the animals/humans relationship and to their convolute and reciprocally-shaper evolution in contemporary times. This because of the relevance acquired by bioethics in contemporary biomedicine, and because of the fact that since the end of the seventies (of the former century) ISS exerted a central role in regulating the delicate and hot issue of formally counselling our Ministry of Health in releasing permits to carry out experiments on vertebrate animals, including dogs, cats and monkeys. We therefore provide a short, final bibliography that may possibly function as a general framework for our editorial efforts in promoting zoo anthropology at the national and European level.

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Enrico Alleva and Stella Falsini
Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, Italy
enrico.alleva@iss.it