

Disseminating knowledge, refashioning tradition: Francesco Sansovino and the popularization of Italian agronomic literature (*)

Florentine by ancestry, Roman by birth and Venetian by adoption, Francesco Sansovino (1521-1583) was one of the most prolific polygraphs operating in mid-16th-century Venice ⁽¹⁾. Born Francesco Tatti, he was the son of Florentine artist Jacopo Tatti ‘il Sansovino’, who settled in Venice after the sack of Rome in 1527 ⁽²⁾. In Venice, Jacopo held the prestigious office of Proto for over forty years, allowing Francesco to receive a solid humanistic education. The law degree he obtained in 1543 gave Francesco access to public office, but he decided to pursue a literary career instead. By the early 1540s he had already begun collaborating with several printing firms, including important publishers such as Vincenzo Valgrisi and Gabriele Giolito. In these years, he mostly worked on historical, literary and rhetorical subjects, entering into the linguistic debate that pervaded Renaissance Italy and siding decidedly for the dignity of the vernacular.

Sansovino’s career in the printing business came to a turning point in 1560, when he managed to establish his own firm in Venice. His ability to sense and satisfy the taste of the contemporary marketplace enabled him to issue some highly successful titles, such as *Del segretario* (1564 ; see Bonora : 1994, pp. 139-162 ; Braida 2007 ; and Panzera : 2018, pp. 187-240) and *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare* (1581 ; see Bonora : 1994, pp. 163-194 ; and Bonora : 2000). As a publisher, he set an editorial line largely coherent with his previous experience, keeping a strong literary and historical focus. However, he also attempted to expand his activity in technical fields: between 1560 and 1568, he translated, compiled and printed a few works on medicine and agriculture.

This essay focuses on Sansovino’s agronomic corpus, which is still partially neglected by modern historiography. When addressing it, scholars have mostly focused on specific aspects

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⁽¹⁾ Bonora : 1994 is still the reference work on Sansovino. Important bio-bibliographical information is also provided by the studies of Emanuele Cicogna (1834, pp. 31-91) and Claudia Di Filippo Bareggi (1988). Interest in Sansovino’s polyhedral activity has risen over the last decades (recent surveys are provided by Celani : 2019 ; and Testa : 2019 ; see also D’Onghia and Musto : 2019). On the role of editors and polygraphs in 16th-century Venetian book market, see at least Trovato: 1991 ; and Richardson : 1994.

⁽²⁾ As the most promising apprentice of sculptor Andrea Contucci da Monte San Savino (also known as Andrea Sansovino), Jacopo had been using his mentor’s nickname since at least 1511. See Beltramini : 2019.

or isolated works ⁽³⁾. An overview has been provided by Lara Michelacci (2007 ; 2009), who has sketched some key-features of the polygraph's technical writings ⁽⁴⁾. Building on (and moving beyond) Michelacci's contributions, this article will try to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Sansovino's agronomic publications. Although later works will also be considered, the focus will be on the early stages of his publishing career (1560-1561). In this timespan, the polygraph issued three texts: a compendium of agriculture (Sansovino : 1560), a translation of Palladius's *Opus agriculturae* (Palladius : 1560) and another translation, of Pier de Crescenzi's *Liber ruralium commodorum* (Crescenzi : 1561). Given Sansovino's training and work experience, the decision to publish agronomic treatises may seem unexpected. On closer inspection, however, it was underpinned by both commercial and ideological considerations which were consistent with his cultural background (both as a polygraph with a long-standing involvement in the print business, and as a member of several academies within and outside Venice). As this paper aims to highlight, Sansovino's project was determined by the perception of a broad potential readership, eager for updated agronomic knowledge but still undersupplied by existing texts in mid-16th-century Italy. At the same time, the polygraph's linguistic choices and paratextual strategies reflected his involvement in the contemporary debates over the Italian *questione della lingua*, placing his self-constructed literary *persona* as a cultural mediator between old (Tuscan) texts and modern (mainly non-Tuscan) readers.

1. Re-fashioning the agronomic tradition: Sansovino's paratextual strategies

By the time Sansovino started his business, most classical and medieval agronomic knowledge was already easily available in the vernacular (Gaulin : 2007, pp. 147-152). Palladius (late 4th - 5th century A.D.) and Pier de' Crescenzi (ca. 1230-1320) had long-established fortune, with the first vulgarizations of their works dating back to the 14th century ⁽⁵⁾. The advent of the printing press allowed for a wider dissemination of the western farming tradition: the ancient *Scriptores rei rusticae* (Columella, Palladius, Cato and Varro) had been first printed in Latin in 1472, while

⁽³⁾ For a linguistic analysis of Sansovino's translations, see Camillo : 1991 ; and Campetella : 2017. For Sansovino's role in the broader picture of the history of western European agriculture, see Ambrosoli : 1992. For the iconography of Sansovino's agronomic treatises, see Olmi : 2007.

⁽⁴⁾ Michelacci points out the tight connection between agriculture and medicine established by Sansovino, the role played by the polygraph's experience in influential Italian academies in orienting his editorial policy, and the link between his agronomic project and the increasing attention payed by the *Serenissima* to the mainland.

⁽⁵⁾ With regard to the editorial history of Crescenzi and Palladius in Renaissance Italy, see Ambrosoli : 1992, pp. 26-27, 47-55. For the extant Renaissance Italian editions, see the online databases ISTC (Incunabula Short Title Catalogue: <https://data.cerl.org/istc>) and EDIT16 (Censimento nazionale delle edizioni italiane del XVI secolo: http://edit16.iccu.sbn.it/web_iccu/ihome.htm).

Crescenzi's *Liber ruralium commodorum* had been reprinted several times throughout Europe, both in Latin and in vernacular tongues. As for the Italian setting, during the 16th-century the format of the vulgarized *Liber* had progressively shifted from the expensive in-folio to more agile in-quarto and in-octavo editions, still essentially based on the 14th-century translation. In the meantime, Pietro Marino da Foligno had re-translated Palladius's *Opus agriculturae* (a main source for Crescenzi), which was printed in Siena (1526) and Venice (1528). In 1538, the publisher Bernardino di Viano da Lessona stressed the bond between Crescenzi and Palladius by simultaneously issuing both authors in the vernacular. Overall, Crescenzi remained the most frequently printed agronomic author until the mid-16th century – the last edition *ante* Sansovino was published in 1553 ⁽⁶⁾.

Apart from the translations of Crescenzi and Palladius, few vernacular treatises on agriculture circulated in print before 1560, and those that did still described either ancient or foreign realities ⁽⁷⁾. An early attempt at a modern and autochthonous agronomy was provided by Antonino Venuti's *De agricultura opusculum* (1516), which enjoyed a discrete success, despite its narrowed focus on southern Italian arboriculture. Overall, Italian authors had mainly explored other literary genres, praising villa life in dialogues, letters and Georgic poems ⁽⁸⁾.

Where did Sansovino want to place himself in this field? How did he intend to contribute successfully to the dissemination of agronomic literature? Although he probably lacked first-hand expertise on this technical subject, he had spent the last twenty years of his life translating, epitomising and re-fashioning literary traditions: it was in this direction that he oriented his efforts. Striving to find his niche in an increasingly crowded marketplace, he aimed to disseminate a 'refreshed' version of agronomic heritage, suitable for what he perceived to be the needs of his contemporaries. This *renovatio* relied on a threefold strategy, typical of the editorial habits of the second part of the century: synthesis of existing traditions, creation of extensive paratexts, and linguistic renewal.

The first step in Sansovino's agronomic project was to write and publish a compendium of classical and medieval agronomy, *Dell'agricoltura* (1560). The polygraph organized it in five

⁽⁶⁾ On the reasons behind this long-lasting success, see Gaulin : 2007, pp. 151-154 ; and Ambrosoli : 2007.

⁽⁷⁾ Ancient sources translated into the vernacular included Columella's *De re rustica* (1544) and the byzantine *Geoponica* (1542). As for modern foreign texts, Pietro Lauro translated some of Charles Estienne's agronomic essays (*Plantarium*, *Seminarium* and *Vinetum*; 1545), while Mambrino Roseo translated Gabriel Alonso de Herrera's *Obra de agricultura* (1557).

⁽⁸⁾ Examples include Bartolomeo Taegio's *La villa* (1559), Alberto Lollio's *Lettera in laude de la villa* (ca. 1540), Luigi Alamanni's *La coltivazione* (1546) and Giovanni Rucellai's *Le api* (1539). On 16th-century Italian works on agriculture and their perception of villa life, see Lanaro Sartori : 1981 ; and Ackerman : 1995, pp. 108-123.

books: the first dedicated to the structure and management of the villa and to the cultivation of cereals and legumes; the second focused on vineyards; the third (which constitutes the main section of the work) dealing with vegetables and herbs; the fourth tackling arboriculture; and the fifth embracing a broad spectrum of subjects including pests, apiculture, breeding, and meteorological and astrological notes.

Sansovino published this work under a partial pseudonym, signing the address to the reader as Giovanni Tatti (using his original family name). This choice might have been dictated by prudence: although the polygraph had already established a name for himself as a capable disseminator in the field of the *humanitates*, his voice lacked the same authority on agronomic subjects. This compendium, moreover, was not accompanied by the copious paratexts that Sansovino had often provided in previous works and which constituted a distinguishing mark of his activity (cf. Richardson : 1994, pp. 110-118). Indeed, as a divulgator his authority relied not only on his knowledge of the subject treated but also – and especially – on his ability to make that subject accessible to lay readers, a task that, by the mid-16th century, was greatly aided by paratextual tools ⁽⁹⁾. In this context, *Dell'agricoltura* appears to be a rather hasty work, scarcely searchable due to the absence of indexes and tables of contents; Tatti himself recognizes these shortcomings, and apologizes for them in the foreword, explaining that while compiling this text he was also working on other projects (cf. Sansovino : 1560, f. *3v). By disguising himself as Tatti, therefore, Sansovino cautiously preserves his *persona* as a reliable mediator between text and reader on other topics.

Although he concealed his name, Sansovino also attempted to craft an authoritative voice for his alias. The dedicatory letter emphasizes Tatti's learning through historical references and anecdotes praising villa life (*Ibidem*, f. *2r) ⁽¹⁰⁾ while the foreword to the readers focuses on promoting and defending the compendium. Through Tatti's voice, Sansovino also works to disparage previous agronomic literature in the vernacular. In the foreword, he deplores the defective translations of classical and medieval texts circulating at the time, referring first and foremost to Pier de' Crescenzi's treatise (*Ibidem*, f. *3r). On an immediate level, these accusations serve to further enhance the authority and usefulness of Sansovino's compendium. If considered within the publisher's editorial plan, however, Tatti's contemptuous words take on another and more subtle commercial scope. By drawing attention to the agronomic subject

⁽⁹⁾ See Richardson : 1999, pp. 153-155. On 16th-century paratexts see at least Santoro : 2000 ; and more recently Smith and Wilson : 2011.

⁽¹⁰⁾ The anecdotes were actually plagiarized from Alberto Lollio's *Lettera* (cf. n. 7). This 'pseudo-erudition' has been identified as distinctive of late 16th-century plagiarism (Cherchi : 1998, p. 16).

and the need for a trustworthy translation of Crescenzi, Tatti's *Agricoltura* prepares the ground for the next step of Sansovino's editorial plan: the refashioning of the agronomic tradition.

Having tested the receptivity of the market with a pseudonymous compilation, Sansovino was now ready to publish his own translations of Crescenzi's *Liber ruralium commodorum* and Palladius's *Opus agriculturae*. He issued the two treatises almost simultaneously, between 1560 and 1561, but clearly gave the starring role to Crescenzi, confining Palladius to a more ancillary position. In the prefatory letter attached to the translation of Palladius, in fact, Sansovino deals prominently with the translation of Crescenzi, advertising it and confidently inviting the readers to make their own comparison between his rendition and the old one ⁽¹¹⁾. Only towards the end of the letter does Sansovino dedicate a few lines to Palladius's *Opus*, noting that, since the late-antique author was the main source for Crescenzi, it was appropriate (necessary, even) to re-translate and publish his treatise as well (Palladius : 1560, ff. *3v-*4v).

As Sansovino himself is keen to stress in this letter, his publications display more extensive paratexts than any previous editions of the treatises, making them more accessible and useful. Indeed, issues of readability and comprehensibility seem to have oriented Sansovino's choices regarding the paratextual tools added to Crescenzi's *Liber*, which include tables of contents, pictures of instruments used in the villa, a corrigendum, a glossary of difficult words, and an ample set of illustrations of plants and animals. Similar tools were provided for the *Opus Agriculturae*, although the latter lacks illustrations and contains only a shortened version of the glossary that appears in Crescenzi.

Sansovino seemingly presided over all the steps in the production of these three volumes, trying to maximize profits at a minimal expense of time and money. After this first intense phase, the agronomic theme only resurfaced sporadically in Sansovino's production. In 1564 a second edition of his Crescenzi (this time *in-octavo*, with finer illustrations) was printed by Francesco Rampazetto (Crescenzi : 1564). This might have been an independent initiative, but it should be noted that Sansovino often resorted to Rampazetto's types for works he had authored or edited ⁽¹²⁾. The new edition, printed in a smaller format (*in-octavo*) and illustrated with finer woodcuts, retained to a large extent the paratexts of the previous one, with the addition of a short, unsigned treatise at the end of the book (ff. 450v-467r). The treatise dealt with the medical

⁽¹¹⁾ For the strategies of self-promotion enacted by Renaissance translators, see Rizzi : 2018.

⁽¹²⁾ On Sansovino's long-standing collaboration with Rampazetto, which has led scholars to suggest a partnership between the two printers, see Marazzini : 1983, pp. 194-195 ; and Trovato : 1991, p. 300.

properties of sixteen plants, each one given a one-page description and represented in a full-page picture.

Finally, in 1568 Sansovino edited and printed a new edition of Gabriel Alonso de Herrera's *Obra de agricultura* in the Italian translation by Mambrino Roseo da Fabriano (Herrera : 1568). The features of this last publication provide another example of Sansovino's refashioning of a text by means of paratextual tools. Firstly, the iconographic choices differ from those of the first Italian edition (published in 1557) as Sansovino's book features fewer pictures of plants but includes several elegant illustrations of monthly activities in the villa, while recycling the plates of farming tools used in his edition of Crescenzi. Moreover, Sansovino cuts Herrera's original and lengthy prologue (which is kept in the 1557 edition), except for the aphoristic 'rules of thumb' enumerated at the end. Some excerpts of this prologue are then recycled in Sansovino's own dedicatory letter, in which the polygraph plagiarizes Herrera's appraisal of country life, contrasting its virtuosity with the corruption rooted in urban mercantile practices. Finally, Sansovino adds an index with the Spanish names of some *simplices* (whose retention he justifies in the dedication) and their Italian translations, as well as a list of authorities.

2. Agriculture and medicine

Contemporaneously to the translation, compilation and publication of agronomic texts, Sansovino ventured into the medical field. Elena Bonora (1994, pp. 64, 72) has suggested that this decision might have been prompted by the physician Niccolò Tinto, Sansovino's business partner between 1560 and 1561. Tinto himself revised an edition of Giovanni da Vigo's best-selling *Pratica in cirugia* (Da Vigo : 1560) for Sansovino. Always keen to offer a competitive product, Sansovino enriched this edition with two original treatises by the surgeon Andrea della Croce and with a few illustrations of plants (in book 7) and arrowheads (in Della Croce's second treatise).

In 1561, Sansovino translated *De medendis humani corporis malis enchiridion*, a book of medical practice structured in recipe-form written by the physician Pietro Bairo (1468-1558). Sansovino shrewdly renamed the book *Secreti medicinali* (cf. Bairo : 1561), in a relatively successful attempt to disguise this medical *vademecum* under a much more popular label, that of a 'book of secrets' (cf. Camillo : 1986 ; on books of secrets see at least Eamon : 1994). In this regard, it is worth mentioning that a few years later Sansovino again tried to take part in

this successful literary genre by editing Girolamo Ruscelli's *Secreti nuovi di maravigliosa virtù* (1567), although this volume encountered little success ⁽¹³⁾.

It also seems relevant that while translating Bairo's *Enchiridion* Sansovino resorted once more to his alias Giovanni Tatti to protect his *persona* as a cultural mediator. Although this edition was made more easily searchable by an index and a table of contents, Sansovino declined to produce a technical glossary, the tool that characterized his agronomic translations. Most importantly, his prefatory letter warns the readers about the presence of some unfamiliar terms pertaining to medicine which "cannot be expressed clearly enough in this language" ⁽¹⁴⁾. This recognition of the insufficiency of the vernacular medical lexicon, if asserted with his own voice, would have undermined Sansovino's authority as a scientific vulgarizer. Such authority, conversely, was firmly upheld by the polygraph in the simultaneous translation of Crescenzi, as I will argue in the following pages.

Overall, these medical writings appear to have been dictated by opportunity, rather than by a precise editorial plan. Nonetheless, their publication in the same years as Sansovino's agronomic works suggests a tight link between agriculture and medicine. The polygraph endorsed this connection (which had already been made in the 14th century by Crescenzi himself) in his compendium *Dell'agricoltura*, where he reminds those who might criticize his work as 'too medical' of the many herbs with medical virtues, and considers health one of the most valuable aspects of agriculture (Sansovino : 1560, f. *3r). As a consequence, Sansovino/Tatti dealt extensively with simples and their properties, disseminated botanical illustrations throughout the text, listed medical *auctoritates* (Dioscorides, Galen) among the sources in the compendium, and dedicated the work to his business partner, the physician Tinto. The binomial 'agriculture-medical botany' was also retained in the second edition of Sansovino's Crescenzi, whose only addition to the *princeps* was indeed a "treatise on some herbs described by Pietro Crescentio and by other authors, with their medical virtues" ⁽¹⁵⁾.

⁽¹³⁾ The book was never republished, although it has attracted the attention of modern historiography for two reasons: firstly because it contributes to the debate on the authorship of the most famous 16th-century book of secrets, the *Secreti del reverendo donno Alessio Piemontese*, issued in Venice in 1555 (see Celaschi and Gregori : 2015, pp. 206-221); and secondly, its prefatory letter contains a thorough description of the *Accademia secreta*, an institution known exclusively from this account which – if it truly existed – would have been one of the first scientific academies established in Italy (see Eamon and Paehau : 1984).

⁽¹⁴⁾ "Voci non così comuni agli orecchi del volgo, perciò che elle son proprie della medicina, oltre che non si possono dir così a punto in questa lingua a bastanza" (Bairo : 1561, f. *2r).

⁽¹⁵⁾ "Trattato di alcune herbe descritte da Pietro Crescentio et da altri autori. Con le loro virtù medicinali" (Crescenzi : 1564, f. 450v). See also Michelacci : 2007, p. 42.

Also exemplary of this direction is Sansovino's simultaneous compilation of *Della materia medicinale* (1561). Presented as a medical compendium but largely indebted to his agronomic works, this book can be considered the apex of Sansovino's activity in the scientific field. It consists of two main sections, the first structured as a herbal treatise (books I-II) and the second as a recipe book (books III-IV). Here the polygraph collects a large quantity of information derived from various authorities (physicians and botanists, but also agronomists like Crescenzi), most of whom he had already exploited in previous works. The fact that – for once – these sources are not only quoted almost *verbatim* but are also mentioned in the margins throughout the text, provides precious insight into Sansovino's working practices and compiling strategies.

3. Recycling the text, picturing the book

It is clear by now how Sansovino frequently resorted to recycling and plagiarism, practices that certainly helped him to issue almost thirty titles between 1560 and 1562, and to enter the print business at a pace befitting that of other popularizers active on the Venetian book market ⁽¹⁶⁾. With regard to his agronomic (and medical) works, one of Sansovino's main sources was Pier Andrea Mattioli's translation and commentary of Dioscorides's *Materia medica*. Sansovino probably had access to more than one vernacular version of this work. A comparison conducted on the Mantuan edition printed by Giacomo Roffinello (Mattioli : 1549) and one of the Venetian editions issued by Vincenzo Valgrisi (Mattioli : 1555) suggests that he excerpted texts and paratexts from both ⁽¹⁷⁾.

Sansovino's textual re-use went hand-in-hand with iconographic recycling. As maintained by Giuseppe Olmi (2007, pp. 98-99), the illustrations adorning his works provide a good example of the mobility of plates in the 16th century (on this topic see also Kusukawa : 2012, pp. 64-6 ; and Griffiths : 2016, pp. 141-2). Olmi draws attention to some cases of plate-recycling by comparing Sansovino's *Dell'agricoltura* and his translation of Crescenzi with the first Italian edition of Herrera's *Obra de agricultura* (printed in 1557), but the phenomenon is much more widespread. In fact, Sansovino's iconographic choices are largely indebted to the above-mentioned editions of Mattioli's work: most of the plates used for the pseudonymous

⁽¹⁶⁾ In his prefaces, Sansovino is often keen to remark how frantically he worked to provide the public with as many new texts as possible. This attitude can be seen as a form of *prestezza*, a market-oriented value which has been examined with regard to other polygraphs, like Anton Francesco Doni and Pietro Aretino, and artists like Tintoretto. On this regard see Nichols : 1996 ; Biow : 2010, pp. 174-177 ; and Bragantini : 2014.

⁽¹⁷⁾ The descriptions of simples in the treatise added to the 1564 edition of Crescenzi are taken *verbatim* from the Mantuan edition; while the preliminary paratext of Sansovino's *Della materia medicinale* is copied from the Valgrisi edition. On recycling and plagiarism in the 16th-century printing business, see at least Cherchi : 1998.

Agricoltura, and then for Crescenzi, had already been employed in Mantua by Roffinello ⁽¹⁸⁾; whereas the compendium *Della materia medicinale* and the second edition of Crescenzi share much of their iconography with the Valgrisi edition of Mattioli's *Discorsi*.

Sansovino's (re-)use of illustrations constitutes a fitting example of his understanding of the contemporary marketplace. The polygraph was probably inspired by the recent proliferation of botanical treatises in Italy and Europe, and by the new attitude towards iconography displayed by their authors.¹⁹ In fact, late Renaissance naturalists were striving to establish exact correspondences between words (literary tradition) and objects (direct observation). Their works provided detailed information and multilingual nomenclatures, often supported by new illustrations depicted *ad vivum*. By the mid-16th century this "union between visual representation and verbal description" (Tosi : 2016, p. 191) was increasingly accepted as an effective method of scientific knowledge, especially with regard to botany ⁽²⁰⁾.

The success of medical botany and the centrality acquired by iconography in this genre were noticed by Sansovino, who was also well aware that pictures were still scarcely used in contemporary agronomic publications (see Olmi : 2007). Indeed, while the concern for lexical accuracy had already surfaced in the essays issued in Paris by Charles Estienne and partially vulgarized in Italian by Pietro Lauro in the 1540s (see Carlino : 2009, pp. 26-27 ; and Campetella : 2018), agronomic texts still lacked the visual support that characterized contemporary medical botany. In the Italian scenario, with the exception of the aforementioned translation of Herrera's treatise (1557), only Crescenzi's late 15th- and early 16th-century editions had been illustrated. Pushing into the mid-16th-century, Italian printers had often sacrificed iconography while reducing the format of the text. A different trend had, however, emerged outside of Italy: in 1548, a new Latin edition of the *Liber ruralium commodorum* was printed in Basel by Heinrich Petri, who chose to enrich it with several engravings of herbs, animals and farming activities. Sansovino, who seemingly modelled his translation after the Petri edition (Ambrosoli : 1992, pp. 47, 55), followed his example also in this regard, illustrating his pseudonymous *Dell'agricoltura* and re-introducing pictures in the Italian tradition of Crescenzi's *Liber*. Taking full advantage of the contemporary success of medical botany, in

⁽¹⁸⁾ Roffinello issued the first illustrated edition of Mattioli's commentary. The iconographic history of this 16th-century best-seller has been thoroughly investigated by Tiziana Pesenti (1985, pp. 77-83).

⁽¹⁹⁾ On the rise of Renaissance natural history (and especially botany), see Ogilvie : 2006, pp. 25-86. In the Italian panorama, the more wide-spread treatise on medical botany was undoubtedly Mattioli's commentary to Dioscorides, constantly reprinted and implemented by the author throughout the 16th-century. Outside Italy, significant contributions came from Konrad Gessner, Hieronymus Bock and Leonhard Fuchs.

⁽²⁰⁾ For a recent and in-depth study on the features and functions of iconography in Renaissance botanical treatises, see Kusakawa : 2012.

both cases he focused his iconography on the simples (a choice that also endorsed his association between agriculture and medicine), for which many new and more lifelike plates had recently become available on the marketplace.

4. Crescenzi's *Liber* and the Venetian marketplace

The decision to invest in iconography plays an important role in Sansovino's attempt to renew the Italian agronomic tradition, particularly with regard to Crescenzi. Such renewal was meant to affect the *facies* of the text on several levels. Distancing it from previous editions, Sansovino produced an elegant volume in Italic script, illustrated and complemented by numerous paratextual tools. This operation was meant to present his book as more accurate, useful and beautiful (briefly: more appealing) than all former editions, bringing together *utilità* and *diletto*, two *topoi* widely deployed in agronomic treatises since the 14th century (see Gaulin : 2007, pp. 152-153 ; and Miglio : 2007).

This dual dimension sheds light on what might have been Sansovino's targeted audience. In fact, compared to most agronomic works published up to 1560, Sansovino showed a less contemplative take on the subject, with the declared intent to make Crescenzi's *Liber* more comprehensible and applicable ⁽²¹⁾. He therefore renewed the earlier iconography and increased it with a few illustrations of farming tools, including a *legenda* of their names, where he often registers regional synonyms (Crescenzi : 1561, cc. 243v-244v; see E. Camillo : 1991, p. 146, n. 102). This effort suggests that Sansovino had in mind a reader who needed to visualize objects that were extremely common in rural areas, but less easily identified by an urban audience – especially one that had for centuries made its living from sea commerce.

In fact, during the 16th century, two concurrent phenomena characterized a new approach to agriculture in the Venetian Republic. On the one hand, both external and internal circumstances lead the *Serenissima* to pay increasing attention to its dominions on the *Terraferma*; policy that resulted in massive operations of land reclamation and extensive purchases of land by citizens of the major Venetian urban centers ⁽²²⁾. Ruggiero Romano has noted how operations of land reclamation mainly benefited Venetian patrician families, while worsening the living conditions of farmers ⁽²³⁾. Turning their investments into agricultural

⁽²¹⁾ On the mostly contemplative attitude of humanistic writers towards villa life, see Ackerman : 1995, pp. 108-123.

⁽²²⁾ See at least Ventura : 1964 ; Woolf : 1968 ; Ventura : 1968. The Venetian shift from the 'Stato da mar' to the 'Stato da Terra' has been abundantly studied over the last decades. For a recent overview on the historical trends and lines of research that have emerged over the years, see Pezzolo : 2011.

⁽²³⁾ The scholar has considered the Venetian case within the broader context of what he has called 'a revival of the feudal system', typical of Renaissance Italian agriculture (Romano : 1971, pp. 51-68 ; 1974, pp. 1901-1906).

activities, these new landowners needed to know how to manage their estates, but they might have also felt the need to ennoble their new interest in villa life ⁽²⁴⁾. In this sense, displaying knowledge of ancient and medieval agronomy (as represented in Palladius's *Opus* and Crescenzi's *Liber*) would give an erudite whiff to their rural occupations. Moreover, ancient Rome provided an illustrious precedent for the positive judgement and prestige of agriculture (a *topos* that Sansovino employed in the dedicatory letters to all his agronomic treatises): Roman philosophers, politicians and military leaders not only praised villa life in their writings, they actively engaged with their land estates. It could be argued that the Venetian ruling class would have benefitted from showing a similar attitude towards agriculture, as its strategies of self-representation relied on a set of moral values that often echoed those upheld by the Roman Republic ⁽²⁵⁾.

On the other hand, there was an equally increasing interest in gardening: late Renaissance practices of observing, experiencing and 'possessing nature' (the expression is borrowed from Findlen : 1994) lead to the foundation of gardens and *horti simplicium*, where utility and delight were combined under the auspices of curiosity ⁽²⁶⁾. Gardens served esthetic as well as practical purposes: they were places of rest and leisure but also of study and teaching, and close-to-hand repositories of simples for apothecaries and practitioners ⁽²⁷⁾. They also had a performative value: to gather rare and exotic specimens and to organize them in a flourishing garden was a way to exert control over nature, but also a matter of prestige and self-representation (see Lauterbach : 2016).

This is particularly relevant in the context of Venice, where a distinctly political shade can be isolated in this performative act. In fact, the ability to grow gardens in a city constantly battling against the sea participated in the mythopoeic strategies of the Venetian State (see Hunt : 2009, pp. 17, 46): gardens had been preponderantly displayed in visual representations of Venice

⁽²⁴⁾ It also helped that in 16th-century Italy the villa was already undergoing a process of ennoblement, with intellectuals praising it as a place of purity and leisure and a refuge from frantic urban life (see Lanaro Sartori : 1981, pp. 286-287).

⁽²⁵⁾ This hypothesis cannot be further investigated in this site, but a deeper analysis might highlight the appraisal of agriculture as one of the mythopoeic strategies enacted by the Venetian Republic. For the (self-) representation of Venice as heir to ancient Rome, see Queller : 1986, pp. 3-28.

⁽²⁶⁾ This phenomenon interested most of Europe, with princely and civic gardens proliferating during the early modern period. See on this topic Fischer : 2016.

⁽²⁷⁾ The first university botanical gardens appeared in Italy in the 1540s while the pharmaceutical market flourishing in Italy (and especially in Venice; see De Vivo : 2007) contributed to the widespread presence of private gardens, not only for medical purposes but also as part of larger collections owned by apothecaries such as Ferrante Imperato and Francesco Calzolari. See Findlen : 1994 ; and Egmond : 2010, pp. 73-105.

since the early 16th century ⁽²⁸⁾ and Sansovino himself, in his later best-selling *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare*, praised their abundancy and quality, even making a census for each *sestiere*. In his own words (Sansovino : 1581, f. 137r):

[In Venice] ci sono etiandio diversi giardini, oltre ai comuni di semplici, notabili e famosi per piante nobili et rare, cosa incredibile ai forestieri, poiché essi pensano che l'acqua salsa non possa cedere all'artificio humano.

This excerpt accounts for the multiple meanings of the Venetian city garden: the medical utility of the many gardens providing simples ⁽²⁹⁾; the esthetic and performative value of exotic, precious collections; and, finally, the ability of human craftsmanship (“artificio humano”) to arouse wonder and overcome nature (embodied by the “acqua salsa” of the Adriatic Sea).

In summary, at the time of Sansovino’s publications there was in the Republic of Venice an urban, middle- and upper-class audience increasingly oriented towards agriculture (on both a large and small scale) eager to acquire a better understanding of this art. This heightened the demand for agronomic treatises in the vernacular, which in 1560 was yet to be properly supplied. Sansovino perceived this editorial gap and tried to fill it; in so doing, he anticipated the stream of agronomic works that appeared on the Venetian book market in the following years ⁽³⁰⁾.

5. Natural knowledge, vernacular and the Italian academies

Commercial reasons alone, however, do not fully explain the meaning of Sansovino’s project; if the existence of a gap in the book market prompted him to venture into agronomic literature, his choices – especially the linguistic ones – were also deeply influenced by his juvenile and mature experience in three prominent Italian academies ⁽³¹⁾. Between 1536 and 1543, before actively engaging with the Venetian book market, Sansovino had studied law in Padua and Bologna, with a short stay in Florence between 1540 and 1541. In those years he had joined the Paduan *Accademia degli Infiammati* and the Florentine *Accademia degli Umidi* (which

⁽²⁸⁾ The most notable of such representations was undoubtedly Jacopo de Barbari’s birds-eye view of Venice (c. 1500). See Hunt : 2009, pp. 39-47.

⁽²⁹⁾ Sabrina Minuzzi (2016, p. 94) has suggested that the proliferation of private orchards might have been stimulated by the lack of a botanical city garden.

⁽³⁰⁾ Some examples include Agostino Gallo’s *Diece giornate dell’agricoltura* (1564), Camillo Tarello’s *Ricordo d’agricoltura* (1567) and Africo Clemente’s *Dell’agricoltura* (1572). See Tarello : 1975 ; Lanaro Sartori : 1981 ; and Gualdo 2015.

⁽³¹⁾ On academies and their role in early modern Italy, see Maylender : 1926-1930 ; and Testa : 2015. On the frequent affiliation of Italian polygraphs to one or more academies, see Di Filippo Bareggi : 1988. pp. 125-145.

afterwards fell under the direct influence of Cosimo de' Medici and was re-named the *Accademia Fiorentina*). Both academies were invested in the *questione della lingua* ⁽³²⁾, advocating for the dignity of the vernacular. Especially among the *Infiammati*, the spectrum of applications sought for the *volgare* (vernacular) was broadened to include scientific and philosophical subjects ⁽³³⁾. This feature clearly emerged from the literary production of several members (chiefly Alessandro Piccolomini ; see at least Siekiera : 2011), and found clear expression in Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo delle lingue* (1596, pp. 101-129), in which Speroni's characters express various contemporary viewpoints on the vernacular and its cultural dignity ⁽³⁴⁾. Through the character of Peretto (the nickname of Speroni's mentor, Pietro Pomponazzi), the author enhances the idea that each language was "an artificial tool to communicate the meaning of concepts" (Katinis : 2019, p. 40), therefore denying the scholarly idea that Latin and Greek were the only languages intrinsically fit for cultural exchange and openly privileging concepts over eloquence. While also contesting the superiority of Tuscan over other regional varieties, the character of Pomponazzi expresses a hope that one day the Latin and Greek *corpus* of knowledge will become fully available in all vernaculars.

In 1558, Sansovino entered the *Accademia Veneziana*, or *Accademia della Fama*. Although short-lived, this institution was well structured and had an editorial plan of its own, largely influenced by the ideals of the *Infiammati*. The sciences and the vernacular played an important role in its encyclopedic aims ⁽³⁵⁾. Among the members of this academy were Niccolò Tinto (Sansovino's business partner) and Sebastiano Fausto da Longiano ⁽³⁶⁾, author of the dialogue *Del modo de lo tradurre* (1556), the first theoretical Italian work on translation (on this topic see Guthmüller : 1990 ; and Gatta : 2010). Flouting contemporary taste for free translation (*ut orator*), which was considered more elegant in style, Fausto supported a literal rendition of the original text (*ut interpres*). In his dialogue, he claims that the translator should preserve the value and virtue of the words chosen by the author, as long as these convey the original meaning, that is, the concepts, of the text. Fausto considers this the most difficult way of

⁽³²⁾ For a synthesis of this pivotal aspect of Renaissance culture, see at least Trovato : 1992, pp. 75-121 ; and Marazzini : 1993, pp. 241-279.

⁽³³⁾ A recent survey with bibliography on the *Infiammati* is provided by Girardi : 2015.

⁽³⁴⁾ On the role of Sperone and the *Infiammati* in the vernacularization of philosophical and scientific knowledge, see Vasoli : 2003 ; and Sgarbi : 2014.

⁽³⁵⁾ The editorial plan, both a list of *desiderata* and a manifesto of the Academy's encyclopedic instances, was published in 1558 and translated into Latin in the following year. For a recent synthesis and updated bibliography on this institution, see Guarna : 2019. For a study especially focused on the civic, philosophical and scientific scopes of the institution, see Rose : 1969. Sansovino's links with this academy and his contributions to its project have been highlighted by Testa : 2018, pp. 108-112.

⁽³⁶⁾ Tinto and Fausto were listed as members in a document signed by Federico Badoer, founder of the academy (John Rylands Library, Aldine Collection, 636; see Pellegrini : 1808, pp. 62-64).

translating, because it requires not only an in-depth knowledge of both languages involved but also of the subject treated. Moreover, despite considering words and concepts as essentially related to each other, Fausto ultimately privileges concepts over words, stating that the latter serve primarily to ‘dress’ and express the former.

Sansovino moved in these stimulating milieus and was likely well aware of the latest works concerning the *volgare italico*, such as the dialogues by Sperone and Fausto. His activity as translator, polygraph and printer (with a catalogue displaying almost exclusively Italian works) is evidence of his advocacy for the cultural dignity of the vernacular ⁽³⁷⁾. From the time of his early undertakings, he also devoted remarkable attention to linguistic (and especially lexicographic) issues. In 1546, while approaching the *questione della lingua* with his *L’arte oratoria* ⁽³⁸⁾, he edited Boccaccio’s *Decameron* for Gabriele Giolito, producing – among other paratextual tools – a rich glossary (cf. Boccaccio : 1546) ⁽³⁹⁾. Among the distinguishing features of this *Dichiaratione* (reprinted in many subsequent editions of the *Decameron*), Christina Roaf has highlighted how Sansovino “concentrates on the unfamiliar and even the bizarre” (Roaf : 1988, p. 117), often explaining 14th-century social customs, toponyms, proverbs, puns, domestic and technical (including agronomical) terms which might have been outdated or scarcely comprehensible for non-Tuscan readers.

Such *dichiarationi* soon became a distinguishing mark of Sansovino’s works. Remarkable examples include the glossaries prepared for the Rampazetto edition of Sannazzaro’s *Arcadia* (1559 ; see Trovato : 1991, pp. 299-300) and for his own sumptuous edition of Dante’s *Commedia* (1564). In the 1560s, Sansovino republished Francesco Alunno’s famous dictionary *La fabrica del mondo* (1560), compiled and published the *Osservationi intorno alla lingua volgare* (1562), and, finally, with the later *Ortografia, overo Dittionario* (1568), gave his most significant contribution to 16th-century lexicography (see Marazzini : 1983 ; and D’Onghia : 2019).

Sansovino’s concern with linguistic issues was therefore constant throughout his whole career, but it was not limited to literary works: with his editions of Palladius’s *Opus agriculturae* and Crescenzi’s *Liber ruralium commodorum* the polygraph undertook the troublesome task of translating technical texts in the vernacular. What is perhaps most noteworthy about these works

⁽³⁷⁾ On the role played by Venetian printers and editors in the *questione della lingua*, see Trifone : 1993, pp. 433-435. See also Trovato : 1998, pp. 131-171.

⁽³⁸⁾ Here Sansovino appears substantially aligned with Bembo in considering Boccaccio the best model for literary prose (Sansovino : 1546, ff. 53v-55r).

⁽³⁹⁾ See Trovato : 1991, pp. 225-227 ; and Richardson : 1994, pp. 110-112.

is the rejection of 14th-century literary Tuscan as a model for technical writing. Sansovino conveyed his firmest stance in this direction, as well as his most organic self-defense as a scientific vulgarizer, in the foreword to Palladius, which focused on the criteria that guided his translation of Crescenzi.

6. Sansovino's agronomy and the *questione della lingua*

In mid-16th-century Italy, the vernacular editions of Crescenzi's *Liber* were still based on the rendition from the 14th century, which was appreciated for its 'Tuscaness' by humanists aligning with Bembo's linguistic ideals. Bembo himself had praised the language of this treatise, referring to Crescenzi as a writer whose prose was "not to be disdained" (Bembo : 1525, f. 21r), thus suggesting that the vernacular version of the *Liber* had been written by Crescenzi himself. This positive judgement was confirmed by the *Accademia della Crusca*, whose members preferred this text and the 14th-century version of Palladius (also produced in Tuscan milieu) to Sansovino's translations as the main sources for the agronomic lexicon of their *Vocabolario* (1612 ; see Camillo : 1991, pp. 137-138) ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Sansovino did not share their view: he rather (and justly) believed that Crescenzi had only written the *Liber* in Latin, and that after a short time the work had been vulgarized by an anonymous translator. Playing on the widespread *topos* of the restoration of a corrupted textual tradition ⁽⁴¹⁾, in the foreword to Palladius Sansovino deplores the 14th-century rendition of Crescenzi, produced by someone certainly knowledgeable in Tuscan language ⁽⁴²⁾ but not careful in his work. The polygraph is particularly contemptuous of the frequent misinterpretation of the Latin text, which has rendered the work's concepts "imperfetti et guasti" (Palladius : 1560, f. *3r). Despite these mistakes, the text was not truly corrected until Sansovino's edition. Francesco blames the greediness of publishers for this lapse, together with those who sought Crescenzi's text only for its *elocutioni*, and maintains that he is more concerned with the contents than with conformity to the linguistic canon proposed by Bembo. As he states:

Io non ho voluto perder, o trasandar i concetti, per conservar le parole, le quali non sono ancho in tutto o Fiorentine, o Toschane. Né mi dee alcun imputar a prosuntione

⁽⁴⁰⁾ The agronomic *corpus* remained unvaried until the third edition of the vocabulary, issued in 1691 (see Cortesi : 2018).

⁽⁴¹⁾ "Là onde vedend'io quanto questo scrittore fosse posto nelle tenebre, et quanto danno ne patissero gli studiosi delle cose sue, ho voluto condurlo di nuovo alla luce, riparando al danno e all'ingiurie che gli erano state fatte dal tempo" (Palladio : 1560, ff. *3v-*4r).

⁽⁴²⁾ "Intendente della lingua Toscana" (*Ibidem*, f. *3r).

ch'io habbia messo le mani in quello autore: perciocché è mio intendimento che lo huomo si possi servir delle cose, le quali prima non si intendevano. Né per questo ho tolto via la vechia traduttione: perciocché quella servirà per la lingua, et questa mia per le cose, et l'una, et l'altra harà luogo secondo lo humor delle persone. ⁽⁴³⁾

Sansovino's contempt for the old translation certainly served to establish his own authority, but it was by no means purely rhetorical: as shown by Francesco Capaccioni (2008) with regard to the tenth book of Crescenzi's *Liber*, the mistakes deplored by the polygraph were real and mostly stemmed from the anonymous 14th-century translation and its corrupted Latin *exemplar*, which were then inherited by the printed tradition ⁽⁴⁴⁾. The fact that Bembo not only appreciated this translation but even believed it to be authored by Crescenzi himself was inconceivable to Sansovino in light of these misinterpretations. The unsigned treatise added at the end of the Rampazetto edition goes even further in this direction: while this text cannot be ascribed to Sansovino with certainty, its preface reiterates the polygraph's arguments about the early corruption of the original Latin text by a Tuscan translator, ultimately stating that "chiunque ha per opinione che egli [Crescenzi] scrivesse in volgare s'inganna" (Crescenzi : 1564, f. 451r). Although Bembo is not explicitly mentioned, this is a head-on attack against those who valued texts for their linguistic elegance and *buone voci toscane*, rather than the effective rendering of concepts.

Sansovino's foreword reveals a tension between *parole* and *cose* that resonates with the words of other humanists and academicians invested in the vernacularization of non-literary knowledge ⁽⁴⁵⁾. In their incursions into the scientific field, many of these literates understood that technical texts required a different language, whose primary goal was to preserve and express concepts; consequently, their stylistic and linguistic choices reveal a certain freedom from the constraints of literary canons (see Siekiera : 2007 ; and Castagné : 2012, pp. 96-108). In particular, 14th-century literary Tuscan was often seen as inadequate for scientific and technical writing. Sperone had already hinted at such limitations in his *Dialogo delle lingue*, where the character of Bembo ends the conversation by reiterating that literary Tuscan is the

⁽⁴³⁾ *Ibidem*, f. *4r. My emphasis.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ An example occurs when Crescenzi discusses the feeding habits of owls (book 10, chapter 10); the 14th century translator rendered the word *noctuis*, referring to bats, as "owls", therefore suggesting an unlikely cannibalistic behavior in these animals. This plain misunderstanding persisted in the printed tradition until Sansovino restored the original meaning of the sentence (Capaccioni : 2008, p. 367).

⁽⁴⁵⁾ See Sgarbi : 2014, pp. 23-44. Noémie Castagné (2012, pp. 71-91) differentiates the writings of the *lettrés* from those of the *savants* (practitioners writing about their own professions), which were in turn less concerned with metalinguistic discourses. According to Castagné, because the interest taken by literates in scientific and technical texts was often part of projects aiming to broaden the corpus of vernacular knowledge, their discussion of the scientific vernacular should not be seen as an autonomous one, but rather as one tightly linked (if not subordinated) to the contemporary *questione della lingua*, which was mostly a literary debate.

only suitable language for poetry and oratory, but does not contest Pomponazzi's legitimization of other vernaculars as fitting for scientific and philosophical discourse (Speroni : 1596, p. 129). Indeed, in the forewords and dedication letters to many 16th-century scientific and technical texts, translators show a clear preference for a *lingua comune* (or *romana*, or *cortigiana*) open to influences from regional varieties beyond Tuscan (see Gatta : 2011 ; and Richardson : 2019). With regard to agriculture, Sansovino himself saw the Italian translation of Herrera's *Obra de agricultura* by Mambrino Roseo as an example of "lingua Romana moderna, o Italiana comune" (Herrera : 1568, f. (3r). It is worth noticing that when he published Herrera's treatise in 1568, he decided to keep the original translation, stating that it would have been too daring to intervene in someone else's work ⁽⁴⁶⁾. Beyond the rhetorical display of modesty and respect, and besides the usual hastiness of the printing process, Sansovino's reluctance to revise the translation suggests that he substantially agreed with Mambrino's linguistic choice. When faced with the 14th-century vulgarizations of Crescenzi and Palladius, however, he adopted an entirely different approach as, in his attempt to restore and reformulate the agronomic tradition, he distanced himself from the archaic Tuscan rendition. A comparison of Crescenzi's Latin text (**L**; Crescenzi : 1548, p. 72) and earlier translation (**T**; here represented by Crescenzi : 1538, f. 67r) with Sansovino's own rendition (**S**; Crescenzi : 1560, f. 42v) reveals the extent of the polygraph's intervention:

L: "Area longe a villa esse non debet [...] ut fraus non timeatur domini vel procuratoris in civitate suspecta. Sit autem ut Palladius ait, vel strata silice, vel saxo montis excisa".

T: "L'Aia non dee essere di lungi da la villa [...] acciò che per la più pressezza d'altri vicini del signore over procuratore non si generi sospetto, ma sia (come dice Palladio) piana in terra o vero in sul sasso rapianato".

S: "L'aia non debbe esser di lungi dalla villa [...] accioché non si tema della fraude del padrone, o del procuratore per la sospetta vicinità del luogo. Sia (come dice Palladio) saleggiata di selce o tagliata nel sasso del monte".

As this excerpt shows, Sansovino modernized syntax and vocabulary, while at the same time remaining more faithful to the Latin version. By seeking to adhere more closely to the original text and privileging concepts over words, Sansovino's way of translating echoes, to a certain extent, the approach advocated in Fausto da Longiano's treatise.

Elena Camillo (1991, pp. 138-140) has moreover pointed out that in his rendition of Crescenzi Sansovino often rejects what he perceived as strictly Tuscan agricultural jargon. A similar point

⁽⁴⁶⁾ "Sarei stato troppo ardito a metter la mano nell'altrui biade" (Herrera : 1568, f. (3r).

has been made by Moreno Campetella with regard to the polygraph's translation of Palladius, which essentially "engendre un lexique très plat, d'où tout caractère technique ou presque est absent" (Campetella : 2017, p. 53). According to Campetella, on the one hand, this lexical choice reflects Sansovino's unfamiliarity with farming practices; on the other hand, it suited the Venetian upper class, whose new attitude towards land domains (and city gardens) was often a matter of prestige, a *mise en scène*.

The performative nature of this "nouvelle existence terrienne" (*Ibidem*) does not, however, exclude *a priori* an active interest in gardening and farming practices; on the contrary, it might have enhanced the acquisition of an expertise at least sufficient to fruitfully engage with the land (on this see Lanaro Sartori : 1981, pp. 301-303). Moreover, it should be kept in mind that Sansovino was a disseminator and that to strive for a better comprehensibility did not necessarily mean to seek technical exactitude. A highly technical lexicon was of little use to non-specialized readers whereas a 'simplified' language might be much more effective.

Similar observations can be made about some iconographic inaccuracies detected in Crescenzi's *Liber* and in the compendium *Della agricoltura*. In fact, Giuseppe Olmi (2007, pp. 96-7) has observed that Sansovino did not necessarily care about the exact correspondence between the plants and animals described and the images depicting them. For instance, the same plate is related to vultures in the *Agricoltura* and to eagles in the *Liber*. Certainly, such incongruences are primarily due to the availability of plates on the market, the hastiness of the print business, and the need to keep costs under control; but it is also worth noticing that an untrained readership may well have been satisfied with approximations. As a disseminator of technical knowledge, Sansovino aimed to give his audience the means to fathom unfamiliar concepts; such a goal could be more effectively achieved by creating categories based on similarities between objects, rather than by fragmenting the information to display mastery of technical vocabulary or iconographic accuracy. The plate used for both the eagle and vulture is a fitting example of this process. As Olmi (2007, p. 96) has also noticed, the morphology of the bird strongly resembles the heraldic figure of an eagle. To urban readers, such stylized representation was probably just as (or even more) functional as one drawn from nature, given that they might have been more familiar with heraldic eagles than real ones. Indeed, the picture might even be seen as a prototypic representation of a raptor. As such, by using the same plate to represent another raptor (the vulture) Sansovino might have enhanced an initial, although not accurate, understanding of the subject treated through approximation: the readers still did not know what a vulture was exactly, but at least they knew that it was akin to an eagle.

The effort to create comprehensibility is even more marked in the glossary that Sansovino compiled for Crescenzi (and recycled, in a shortened version, for Palladius). Here, the polygraph strove to elicit a representation of objects and concepts, if not necessarily accurate, at least as clear and concrete as possible. To achieve this goal, he defined the entries of his *dichiaratione* through multiple strategies that furthered the association of unfamiliar terms with the reader's (expected) common knowledge.

The strategy to which Sansovino most frequently resorted was the use of regional synonyms, upon which he relied especially when dealing with Tuscan terms ⁽⁴⁷⁾. The diatopic distribution of these synonyms (still 'tuscanized' at a phono-morphological level) ⁽⁴⁸⁾ suggests that Sansovino's linguistic horizon (and therefore also his primary audience) was found in the Republic of Venice. The polygraph essentially aimed to bridge Tuscan and the vernaculars spoken within Venetian dominions, a phenomenon somewhat complementary to the contemporary "encroachment of Tuscan/Italian" on the Venetian literary vernacular (Ferguson : 2007, p. 213 ; see also Ferguson : 2013). The authority and reliability of this mediation was underpinned by Sansovino's Florentine ancestry. In the prefatory letter to Palladius, Sansovino emphatically stresses that the vocabulary serves to clarify (for northern Italian readers) terms used "secondo il costume di Fiorenza mia Patria" (Palladius : 1560, f. *4r) ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

Along with regional synonyms (and often in combination with them), iconography plays an important role in defining material objects, particularly farming tools (to which Sansovino also dedicates an illustrated table). Listing many of these tools in his *dichiaratione*, the polygraph provides synonyms and makes internal references between the entries and their visual representations ⁽⁵⁰⁾. Finally, he often conjures objects and actions through comparisons drawn

⁽⁴⁷⁾ A few examples (cf. Crescenzi : 1560, ff. 245r-252v) : *Citriuoli* Cioè cocomeri alla Lombarda, perciòché i cocomeri in Thoscana son quegli che a Vinetia si chiamano angurie ; *Farinata* [...] chiamato da' Lombardi polenta ; *Tallo* [...] quello che si dice a Venetia un coresino. See Camillo : 1991, pp. 142-145. The same openness towards other regional varieties (particularly from Northern Italy) also characterizes Sansovino's later *Ortografia* (1568 ; see Marazzini : 1983).

⁽⁴⁸⁾ The graphic 'tuscanization' of the regional lexicon had already been perceived by Machiavelli as a necessary practice for non-Tuscan writers addressing "alcun soggetto nuovo dove non habbino exemplo di vocaboli imparati da voi [Tuscan writers]" (Machiavelli : 2014, p. 57), in order to be gain recognition and success.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Although Sansovino had spent little time in Florence (when he was affiliated to the *Accademia degli Umidi*, for instance), to claim the city as his homeland was a shrewd move to strengthen the authority of his linguistic choices; a move that Sansovino made many times in his career and which scholars have widely acknowledged (cf. most recently Langer : 2017).

⁽⁵⁰⁾ *Correggiati due legni appiccati insieme co' quali si batte il grano, chiamati sul padovano battauri. Vedi il disegno* (Crescenzi : 1560, f. 246v); *Roncone stromento da villa; vedi il disegno a suo luogo* (*Ibidem*, f. 250v).

from the domestic sphere ⁽⁵¹⁾ and long periphrases building on daily experience ⁽⁵²⁾. Whether consciously pursued or determined by a lack of more precise wording, this approach allowed readers to grasp the meaning of things through visual aids and by recollecting sensorial experiences. In this regard, the references to urban crafts and activities made by Sansovino throughout the glossary seem particularly relevant, hinting once more at the polygraph's intended audience ⁽⁵³⁾.

7. Fortune

In the short term, Sansovino's project might have succeeded in giving his classics a few more years of crepuscular glory. The new edition of Crescenzi was more readable than any other published before and soon enjoyed a second edition in a smaller format with finer illustrations and an additional treatise on simples. This project, however, had a decisive limit. If the garment (language, paratext) of the book was more appealing, the body (the text itself) still referred to an agriculture practiced three centuries earlier. Sansovino's project could still attract an untrained audience but contemporary readers already involved in farming activities were acutely aware of this limit. What they craved was a modern treatise on agriculture that could be written only by someone capable of combining theoretical knowledge with solid first-hand experience ⁽⁵⁴⁾.

This need was answered in 1564. While Rampazetto was republishing Sansovino's Crescenzi in Venice, the *Diece giornate dell'agricoltura*, written by the agronomist Agostino Gallo, first appeared in Brescia. This work soon arrived in Venice, where it was expanded and reprinted. The *Giornate* grew from ten to thirteen and then twenty, becoming the main reference treatise on agriculture in late 16th-century Italy. Meanwhile, Crescenzi disappeared from the book

⁽⁵¹⁾ Appianare spianare, far liscio con le mani su per la schiena come si fa alla gatta (*Ibidem*, f. 245v); Pallottole quelle [ballotte] che son più grosse, come le pallotte per giuocare ai cioni (*Ibidem*, f. 250r).

⁽⁵²⁾ Rannicchia ritirarsi in sé medesimo come fa uno che habbia freddo che ritira a sé le gambe, e si fa tutto in un grumo (*Ibidem*, f. 250v); Rimbombo: quel suono che fa una stanza vota, quando si favella, o quel tintinito che resta dopo che è tratta la bombarda (*Ibidem*, f. 250v).

⁽⁵³⁾ Aliga, et alica herba che nasce nel fondo del mare, la quale essendo secca è come la paglia, et l'usano i vetriari per metter tra bicchiere et bicchiere accioché non si rompino (*Ibidem*, f. 245v); Lesina è propriamente quel punteruolo acuto, col quale i calzolari forano le scarpe, quando essi le cuciono: id est la subbia (*Ibidem*, f. 248v); Spatola stromento di ferro da speciali, co' quali maneggiano gli impiastri fatta come una paletta da capi (*Ibidem*, f. 251r).

⁽⁵⁴⁾ Such an appeal can be read in a letter addressed by Giovanni Battista da Romano to Agostino Gallo (cf. Gallo : 1566, ff. 200r-203r). Romano made explicit reference to Tatti's *Agricoltura* and to "some modern translations" (*Ibidem*, f. 200r) of Crescenzi and Palladius, lamenting that these works did not adjust the literary tradition in accordance with contemporary agricultural reality, and asking Gallo to write a new agronomy able to satisfy the needs of modern farmers.

market until 1605, when a new edition (modeled, however, on the 14th-century translation) was issued under the aegis of the *Accademia della Crusca* (see Crescenzi : 1605).

In 1568, when the *Giornate* had already been reprinted four times and expanded from ten to thirteen, Sansovino published Herrera's *Opera di agricoltura*. In order to be competitive, he could not avoid acknowledging Gallo's success (or at least pretending to do so). Consequently, when listing the *auctoritates* behind this work, he maintained that he had updated Herrera's treatise, even mentioning Gallo among his sources⁽⁵⁵⁾. Despite his efforts, this edition failed to attract as many readers as Gallo's *Giornate* ⁽⁵⁶⁾. Indeed, Gallo's work likely appealed to the same readership addressed by Sansovino, put the same emphasis on the *utilitas* and *delectatio* of the villa life, and equally enriched the work with useful paratextual tools ⁽⁵⁷⁾. However, what Gallo could offer more than Sansovino was his first-hand knowledge and expertise, which gave him a better understanding of the agronomic reality of contemporary northern Italy.

Therefore, in the long term, Sansovino's editorial plan probably garnered less success than he expected. What the polygraph did not see was a tendency towards new 'national agronomies' that characterized Western European agriculture in the late 16th-century (Gaulin : 2007, p. 162 ; see also Ambrosoli : 2007, pp. 21-22). Once faced with Gallo's modern *and* Italian agronomy, Sansovino's refashioning of an old (Palladius, Crescenzi) or foreign (Herrera) tradition could not be as successful.

8. Conclusions

During the 16th century, Venetian printers and editors fully acknowledged the potentialities of paratexts in making books more accessible, and therefore easier to sell. Francesco Sansovino was sharply aware of this fact: his training in the printing business provided him with solid experience in the production of glossaries, commentaries, prefaces, and tables of contents. As well as being involved in a frenetic, market-oriented environment, Sansovino also had fruitful experiences in academies such as the *Infiammati* and the *Accademia della Fama*, environments that were supportive of the encyclopedic vernacularization of knowledge. The affiliation to the *Infiammati* in his youth probably played an important role in orienting Sansovino's literary

⁽⁵⁵⁾ At first sight, little seems to change in terms of contents: a detailed comparison of Sansovino's edition, the previous Italian translation and the Spanish version is beyond the aim of this contribution, but it might unveil to what end Sansovino's claims were substantiated.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Between 1568 and 1600, Herrera's treatise was reprinted only three times (in 1577, 1583 and 1592; all these editions kept part of Sansovino's paratexts), while Gallo's text enjoyed 19 editions before 1600.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ An example can be found in the many pictures of farming tools already added to the *Tredici giornate* (Venice 1566), which were much more elegant and detailed than those used by Sansovino for his Crescenzi.

career towards the dissemination of knowledge in the vernacular. His later participation in the more structured, albeit ephemeral, *Accademia della Fama* likely contributed (financially and ideologically) to his establishing a printing firm committed to spreading vernacular knowledge.

Channeling all of these experiences into a niche in the scientific book market, Sansovino managed to balance commercial pressure and ideological convictions. Indeed, his identity as both a polygraph and an academician played a role in his decision to publish agronomic texts. From a commercial point of view, the moment was undoubtedly favorable. The increasing interest in cultivation (at least within Venice and the Venetian Republic), whether genuine or a simple matter of prestige, was not yet adequately met by updated agronomic treatises. Sansovino took advantage of this opening by offering a *summa* of the agronomic tradition and adapting two classics of the genre, Palladius and Crescenzi, for modern readers. His association with the physician Niccolò Tinto and the long-lasting collaboration with several major Venetian printing houses probably made it easier for him to find the literary and iconographic materials he needed.

Sansovino minimized costs and time by personally editing, translating, compiling and publishing the agronomic works, in what emerges as an organic and well-defined project (with expectable overlaps between the texts and paratexts). First, he tested the receptivity of the public with a compilation written under a pseudonym whose prefatory letter highlighted the need for good translations of agronomic treatises, chiefly of Crescenzi's *Liber*. After using the voice of Giovanni Tatti, Sansovino attempted to satisfy that same need with his own edition of Crescenzi, whose revised translation and many paratextual tools were advertised in the simultaneous edition of Palladius. With one eye on the book market and one on his potential readership, he concentrated his efforts on the renewal of Crescenzi's text, which in mid-16th-century Italy was still the most successful agronomic treatise. The modernized language of his rendition (the first consistent linguistic revision since the 14th century) and the paratextual strategies that he enacted made his publication a novelty within the Italian tradition of the *Liber*. The need to produce marketable books was, for Sansovino, intertwined with the ideological stances circulating in the milieus that he frequented. While this agronomic excursus might not have been his most successful enterprise, it bears witness to his involvement in the linguistic debates traversing 16th-century Italy. With his treatises, Sansovino contributed to the dissemination of scientific knowledge in the vernacular urged by the *Infiammati* and the *Accademia Veneziana*. His effort in displaying and explaining villa life, particularly evident in his edition of Crescenzi, aimed to make the text appealing and accessible to a non-specialized

readership. This goal was pursued by reshaping the *facies* of the text and depended heavily on the creation of helpful and appealing paratexts. To ‘new’ readers, whether owners of vast land domains or keepers of small kitchen gardens, illustrations, dictionaries and tables of contents were essential tools for navigating and understanding the text. Equally important in this revision was the technical language disseminated by Sansovino. Only a modern vernacular, receptive to spoken language and regional synonyms, not strictly Tuscan, could serve this goal of diffusion, as seen in Sansovino’s preference for comprehensibility over lexical (and iconographic) exactitude. His was, in sum, an agronomic *lingua comune*, primarily concerned with ‘avoiding confusions’, as Elena Camillo (1991, p. 144) has put it.

In a recent article on Sansovino’s edition of Dante’s *Commedia*, Zoe Langer (2017, p. 19) has convincingly depicted the polygraph as an “innovative and protean editor”, highlighting his ability to recover and refashion a given literary tradition, dressing it with forms and features suitable for a Renaissance audience. Langer’s considerations can reasonably be extended to Sansovino’s agronomic publications. With his modern vernacular and his paratexts, the polygraph strove to project his *persona* as a disseminator of technical knowledge, increasing his authority through his ability to mediate between ancient texts and modern needs. Such a *persona* was inextricably linked to Sansovino’s multi-faceted background: the result of his polygraph’s *prestezza*, humanist’s learning, academician’s ideals, and publisher’s shrewd understanding of the contemporary marketplace.

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Abstract

Disseminating knowledge, refashioning tradition: Francesco Sansovino and the popularization of Italian agronomic literature

This contribution focuses on the agronomic treatises translated, edited and issued by Francesco Sansovino (1521-1583), a prolific polygraph and printer operating in mid-16th-century Venice. This small corpus constitutes only a minor segment in Sansovino's – mostly humanistic – production. Nonetheless, its analysis reveals a precise editorial plan, through which Sansovino aimed to renovate and popularize Italian agronomy. By taking into account the polygraph's cultural background and by contextualizing his activity within the framework of the Venetian book market and cultural milieus, the essay highlights the commercial and ideological considerations that may have encouraged Sansovino to invest time and resources in the publication of agronomic writings, and the strategies he enacted in order to make them appealing to a broad public. Particular attention is devoted to Sansovino's linguistic choices, which are considered within the contemporary debate over the Italian vernacular, and to the paratexts enriching the treatises, which the polygraph cleverly used to refashion a still largely medieval tradition and to project his self-image as a reliable cultural mediator.

Diffuser le savoir, remodeler la tradition : Francesco Sansovino et la vulgarisation de la littérature agronomique italienne.

Cette contribution porte sur les traités agronomiques traduits, édités et publiés par Francesco Sansovino (1521-1583), polygraphe prolifique et imprimeur travaillant à Venise au milieu du seizième siècle. Ce corpus limité constitue une partie minoritaire de la production principalement humaniste de Sansovino. Cependant, l'analyse de ces textes montre l'existence d'un plan éditorial précis, par lequel Sansovino visait à renouveler et à vulgariser l'agronomie italienne. En prenant en examen la formation culturelle du polygraphe et en contextualisant ses activités dans le cadre du marché du livre et des milieux culturels vénitiens, cet article analyse les raisons commerciales et idéologiques qui ont poussé Sansovino à investir son temps et ses ressources dans la publication d'écrits agronomiques, ainsi que les stratégies qu'il met en œuvre afin de les diffuser auprès d'un public large. Une attention particulière est consacrée aux choix linguistiques de Sansovino, examinés dans le cadre du débat contemporain sur la question de la langue italienne, ainsi qu'aux paratextes enrichissant les traités et que le polygraphe a intelligemment utilisés afin de remodeler une tradition encore largement médiévale et afin de se présenter en tant que médiateur culturel fiable.

Kennis verspreiden, de traditie hervormen: Francesco Sansovino en de popularisatie van de Italiaanse agronomische literatuur

Deze bijdrage focust op de agronomische traktaten vertaald, geredigeerd en uitgegeven door Francesco Sansovino (1521-1583), een productieve poligraaf en drukker die actief was in mid-zestiende-eeuws Venetië. Dit beperkte corpus vormt slechts een klein deel van Sansovino's – voornamelijk humanistische – productie. Desalniettemin onthult de analyse ervan een precies redactioneel plan, aan de hand waarvan Sansovino ernaar streefde om de Italiaanse agronomie te vernieuwen en te populariseren. Door de culturele achtergrond van de poligraaf in beschouwing te nemen, en zijn activiteit te contextualiseren binnen het kader van de Venetiaanse boekenmarkt en culturele milieus, brengt deze bijdrage de commerciële en ideologische overwegingen aan het licht die Sansovino ertoe aanzetten om tijd en middelen te investeren in de publicatie van agronomische geschriften, en de strategieën die hij aanwendde om deze aantrekkelijk te maken voor een breed publiek. Er wordt bijzondere aandacht besteed aan Sansovino's linguïstische keuzes, die beschouwd worden binnen het debat over de Italiaanse volkstaal dat toen gevoerd werd; en aan de parateksten van deze traktaten, die de poligraaf handig gebruikte om een nog grotendeels middeleeuwse traditie te hervormen en om zijn zelfbeeld als een betrouwbare culturele bemiddelaar vorm te geven.

Key-words / Mots Clés / Trefwoorden:

16th-century Venice / Venise du 16^e siècle / 16^{de}-eeuwse Venetië

Agronomy / Agronomie / Agronomie

Book market / Marché du livre / Boekenmarkt

Francesco Sansovino

Paratexts / Paratextes / Parateksten

Pietro de' Crescenzi

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