



Vernacular Aristotelianism in Italy from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Century







Warburg Institute Colloquia
Edited by Charles Burnett and Jill Kraye

29

Vernacular Aristotelianism in Italy
from the Fourteenth to the
Seventeenth Century

Edited by Luca Bianchi, Simon Gilson and Jill Kraye

The Warburg Institute
London 2016





Published by

The Warburg Institute
School of Advanced Study
University of London
Woburn Square
London WC1H 0AB

© The Warburg Institute 2016
ISBN 978-1-908590-52-7
ISSN 1352-9986

Typeset by Waveney Typesetters, Wymondham, Norfolk
Printed by Henry Ling, The Dorset Press, Dorchester, Dorset





Table of Contents

- vii Contributors
- 1 Introduction
Luca Bianchi, Simon Gilson and Jill Kraye
- 00 Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum* and the Vernacular Translations: The Reception of the Aristotelian Tradition and the Problem of Courtesy
Fiammetta Papi
- 00 Uses of Latin Sources in Renaissance Vernacularizations of Aristotle: The Cases of Galeazzo Florimonte, Francesco Venier and Francesco Pona
Luca Bianchi
- 00 Alessandro Piccolomini's Mission: Philosophy for Men and Women in Their Mother Tongue
Letizia Panizza
- 00 Francesco Robortello on Popularizing Knowledge
Marco Sgarbi
- 00 Aristotelian Commentaries and the Dialogue Form in Cinquecento Italy
Eugenio Refini
- 00 Aristotle's *Politics* in the *Dialogi della morale filosofia* of Antonio Brucioli
Grace Allen
- 00 'The Best Works of Aristotle': Antonio Brucioli as a Translator of Natural Philosophy
Eva Del Soldato
- 00 Vernacular Meteorology and the Antiquity of the Earth in Medieval and Renaissance Italy
Ivano Dal Prete
- 00 Vernacularizing Meteorology: Benedetto Varchi's *Comento sopra il primo libro delle Meteore d'Aristotile*
Simon Gilson





00 Bartolomeo Beverini (1629–1686) e una versione inedita della *Metafisica* di
Aristotele

Corinna Onelli

00 Index of Names





Contributors

Grace Allen, Warburg Institute

Luca Bianchi, Università del Piemonte Orientale

Ivano Dal Prete, Yale University

Eva Del Soldato, University of Pennsylvania

Simon Gilson, University of Warwick

Jill Kraye, Warburg Institute

Corinna Onelli, London

Letizia Panizza, Royal Holloway, University of London

Fiammetta Papi, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa

Eugenio Refini, Johns Hopkins University

Marco Sgarbi, Ca' Foscari, Università di Venezia





Vernacularizing Meteorology: Benedetto Varchi's *Comento sopra il primo libro delle Meteore d'Aristotile**

Simon Gilson

Benedetto Varchi's concern with the vernacularization of ancient works is relatively well known, and it encompasses not only his printed translations of Boethius's *Consolatio philosophiae* (1551) and Seneca's *De beneficiis* (1554), but also manuscripts containing translated sections of books or parts of books of Virgil and Ovid, and verse by Theocritus, Horace and Catullus.¹ It is, however, far less known that Varchi was interested in making Aristotle available in the vernacular by translating and commenting on Books I of the *Prior Analytics* and of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and by providing a further translation and commentary on Book I of the *Meteorology*. These works date from the late 1530s and early 1540s; and they are all extant in autograph manuscripts and some scribal copies in the tenth *filza* of the Filze Rinuccini in Florence's National Library.² In the case of both the *Priora* and the *Etica*, we are dealing with translations and commentaries, which include close textual exposition, what Varchi calls 'spositione et dichiaratione delle parole' (fol. 423^r) at one point in the *Priora* commentary. For the *Meteore*, although the title-page speaks of a translation from Greek into Tuscan, 'tradotto di greco in lingua toscana', no such copy is known to exist. What this autograph contains instead is a lengthy prologue and other prefatory discussion related to Book I of the *Meteorology*. The scholarly neglect of Varchi's Aristotelian production can be

* I am grateful to Luca Bianchi, David Lines, Jill Krave and Ivano dal Prete for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

¹ For the printed versions of his vernacularizations of the *Consolatio philosophiae* and the *De beneficiis*, see *Della consolazione della filosofia*, Florence, 1551, and *De' benefizii*, Florence, 1554 (both printed by the ducal publisher, Lorenzo Torrentino). '[Le] nostre traduzioni sopra l'opera d'Aristotile' are mentioned in the prologue to the *De' benefizii*, sig. Aiiiii^r. For a modern critical edition of the Boethian *volgarizzamento*, see *Il Boezio di Benedetto Varchi*, ed. D. Brancato, Florence, forthcoming. For Varchi's manuscripts and working copies of Theocritus, Horace and Catullus, see MS Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, II.VIII.146. For his translations of *Metamorphoses* XIII (before May 1539) and *Aeneid* IX (before July 1541), see *Opuscoli inediti di celebri autori toscani, l'opere dei quali sono citate dal Vocabolario della Crusca*, ed. L. Fiacchi, II, Florence, 1809, pp. 12–28, 167–89. See also A. Andreoni, *La via della dottrina. Le lezioni accademiche di Benedetto Varchi*, Pisa, 2012, pp. 53–4; A. Siekiera, 'Varchi, Benedetto', in *Autografi dei letterati italiani. Il Cinquecento*, ed. M. Motolese, P. Procaccioli and E. Russo, I, Rome, 2013, pp. 337–51 (341).

² See Benedetto Varchi, *Comento sopra il primo libro dell'Etica di Aristotile ...*, in MS Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Filze Rinuccini 10, fols 74^r–192^r (a partial scribal copy is found at fols 14^r–71^v); *Comento sopra il primo libro della Priora d'Aristotile*, in MS Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Filze Rinuccini, 10, fols 360^r–411^r (a scribal copy is found at fols 416^r–504^r); *Comento primo ... sopra il primo libro delle Meteore d'Aristotile, tradotto da lui di Greco in lingua Toscana*, in MS Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Filze Rinuccini 10, fols 220^v–44^r. Hereafter in the notes and main text these works are cited as *Etica*, *Priora* and *Meteore*: punctuation and capitalization have been modified, and abbreviations have been expanded. Translations of the Italian and Latin throughout are mine.



SIMON GILSON

attributed to the fact that the works remained in manuscript with a limited circulation throughout the sixteenth century and also that they were not included in the major nineteenth-century editions on which modern scholars have tended to rely, but which have afforded a somewhat partial vision of his production and interests.³ As a result, almost no critical attention has been paid to Varchi's translations of and commentaries on Aristotle. Annalisa Andreoni, who was one of the first to draw attention to them, has published his prologue to the vernacular commentary on Book I of the *Ethics*; and, more recently still, Salvatore lo Re and Anna Siekeira have also made some reference to them.⁴ We remain, however, without either an edition of the texts or any close contextualization and analysis of them. This essay attempts to address some of these omissions and has two main aims: it first sets out the contexts and significance of Varchi's three Aristotelian 'comenti'; and it then offers a focused treatment of the *Meteore*, with particular reference to the prologue, by outlining and assessing its structure, content, concerns, citational practices and relationships to existing traditions of Aristotelian commentary.

Let us begin with a broader consideration of all three works, examining the contexts and circumstances in which they were drafted, the likely readerships for which they were composed and, where evidence is available, contemporary reactions to them. The translations and commentaries are important for at least four reasons. First of all, these are among the earliest works which made Aristotle 'volgare' in sixteenth-century Italy, and, in particular, they are the *first* extensive set of vernacular commentaries on Aristotle in late Renaissance Italy.⁵ Second, all three works are undergirded by an acute consciousness of the need to develop the linguistic capacities required to put Aristotle into the vernacular; that is, they show us, as Anna Siekiera, in particular, has argued and

³ Benedetto Varchi, *Lezioni sul Dante e prose varie*, ed. G. Aiazzi and L. Arbib, Florence, 1841; Benedetto Varchi, *Opere ... ora per la prima volta raccolte*, 2 vols, Trieste, 1858–9.

⁴ A. Andreoni, 'Benedetto Varchi all'Accademia degli Infiammati. Frammenti inediti e appunti sui manoscritti', *Studi rinascimentali*, 3, 2005, pp. 29–44 (41–2). See also V. Vianello, *Il letterato, l'accademia, il libro. Contributi sulla cultura veneta del Cinquecento*, Padua, 1988; S. Lo Re, *Politica e cultura nella Firenze cosimiana. Studi su Benedetto Varchi*, Manziana (Rome), 2008, pp. 224–30; Andreoni, *La via della dottrina*, pp. 43–4, 44–5, 47. See also A. Andreoni, 'Luoghi aristotelici nelle lezioni accademiche di Benedetto Varchi', in *'Aristotele fatto volgare': Aristotelian Philosophy and the Vernacular in the Renaissance*, Pisa, Scuola Normale Superiore, 27–28 September 2012, ed. D. A. Lines and E. Refini, Pisa, 2014, pp. 000; and A. Siekeira, 'I lettori di Aristotele nel Cinquecento: i libri e le carte di Benedetto Varchi', *Studi linguistici italiani*, 39.2, 2013, pp. 1–21. For recent attention to the *Priora* commentary, see M. Sgarbi, *The Italian Mind. Vernacular Logic in Renaissance Italy (1540–1551)*, Leiden, 2014, esp. pp. 82–8, 93–6; on Varchi's interest in Aristotelian logic, see also Siekiera, 'I lettori'. On Varchi's interest in Aristotelian psychology, see the short treatises in MS Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, II.VII.136; on which, see Andreoni, *La via della dottrina*, pp. 116–17 and nn.

⁵ On Varchi's likely priority in translating Aristotle, see S. Lo Re, 'Piccolomini tra Varchi e Speroni', in *Alessandro Piccolomini (1508–1579). Un siennois à la croisée des genres et des savoirs*. Actes du colloque International (Paris, 23–25 septembre 2010), ed. M.-F. Piejus, M. Plaisance and M. Residori, Paris, 2011, pp. 39–51 (43). But see also del Soldato, 'Le opere migliori', in this volume. For paratextual elements in fifteenth-century translations, see E. Refini, "'Aristotele in parlare materno". Vernacular Readings of the *Ethics* in the Quattrocento', *I Tatti Studies*, 16, 2013, pp. 311–42.

VERNACULARIZING METEOROLOGY: BENEDETTO VARCHI'S *COMENTO SOPRA IL PRIMO LIBRO DELLE METEORE D'ARISTOTILE*

exemplified, Varchi forging a philosophical language in Italian.⁶ This preoccupation is made explicit in the *Priora* and the *Etica*, and, though not stated directly, it remains an underpinning concern in his *Meteore*.⁷ A third point – one which is closely related to questions of language and the choice of the vernacular – is the programmatic nature of the vernacularizations and the sense of mission which informs them. Varchi aims to diffuse ancient philosophy in Italian ‘so that not only the knowledgeable but those who have not studied and also the unlearned are capable of understanding it’,⁸ in line with a deep-seated belief that ‘people, wherever they are and whatever language they speak, are all by nature not only keen to hear the truth about things but also able to understand that truth’,⁹ and that the Italian language (to return to my second point) ‘is able to deal with all fields of knowledge and can express and make clear any concept abundantly and easily and elegantly in all the arts and disciplines, even though many would deny it’.¹⁰ These views are set out passionately in both the *Priora* and the *Etica* (from which two of the above quotations are taken) and in ways which allow us to reflect on Varchi’s intended readership. In the *Priora*, he clarifies his readership further when, in the midst of the exposition itself, he notes that he intends the work to satisfy both the Latin and non-Latin literate. In particular, he expresses his wish ‘to do something which is pleasing not only for those who do not know Latin, for whom we are in the main undertaking this enterprise, but also for those who, though they know Latin, do not however have Greek. For, as far as I know, no one has translated Alexander [of Aphrodisias] on this book, nor John the Grammarian [sc. John Philoponus], and we will follow both of these as closely as possible, imitating and translating not only the concepts and *sententiae* but their words, too, and their locutions.’¹¹ We have here an explicit concern, then, with a twofold readership: on the one hand, those readers who are interested in the Greek commentaries

⁶ A. Siekiera ‘Aspetti linguistici e stilistici della prosa scientifica di Benedetto Varchi’, *Studi linguistici italiani*, 33, 2007, pp. 3–50; reprinted with the same title in *Benedetto Varchi nel quinto centenario della nascita*. Atti del Convegno (Firenze, 16–17 dicembre 2003), Florence, 2008, pp. 319–76. See also A. Cotugno, ‘Osservazioni linguistiche sull’*Instrumento del filosofo* di Alessandro Piccolomini: testualità, lessico, procedimenti espositivi’, in *Aristotele fatto volgare* (n. 4 above), pp. 000; Siekiera, ‘I lettori di Aristotele’, and her ‘L’eredità del Varchi’, pp. 145–71.

⁷ For the *Priora* and the *Etica*, see the quotations in nn. 8–12 below. For the *Meteore*, see n. 56 below.

⁸ *Priora*, fol. 28r: ‘accioché non pure gl’intendenti, ma quelli ancora i quali studiato non hanno e gli idioti parimente, ne siano capaci’.

⁹ ‘De’ mostri’ (c. 1544), in Benedetto Varchi, *Lezioni ... lette da lui pubblicamente nella Florentina Accademia*, Florence, 1590, p. 89: ‘gl’huomini, dovunque siano, e di qualunque idioma, sono tutti da natura non pure desiderosi d’udire la verità delle cose, ma capevoli d’intenderla’.

¹⁰ *Etica*, fol. 75r: ‘questa lingua è capevole d’ogni scienza et può non meno abbondevolmente che agevolmente et acconciamente in tutte l’arti et discipline, il che molti non credevano, sprimere et manifestare qualunque concetto’.

¹¹ *Priora*, fol. 429r: ‘di far cosa grata non solamente a quelli che non sanno la lingua Latina, per gli quali principalmente ci affatichiamo, ma a quelli ancora i quali, havendo la lingua Latina mancano però della greca, non essendo ancora stato tradotto da alcuno ch’io sappia né Alessandro sopra questo libro, né Giovanni Grammatico, i quali noi andiamo seguitando quando potemo il più, imitando et traducendo non solamente i concetti et sentenze loro, ma le parole ancora et i modi del favellare’.

SIMON GILSON

on Aristotle which are not available in Latin; and, on the other, those who have no classical languages at all. Varchi's translation and commentary in Italian will thus serve both publics at the same time. In a related vein, the prologue to the *Ethics* commentary offers an arresting declaration of the corruption and decline which has ensued from the enslavement to 'words' at the expense of 'things' and a powerful call to open up philosophical riches to all, affirming his belief in the ability of the 'volgare', that is, the lay vernacular reader, to understand truth and of the vernacular language to express it fully.¹² Translating Aristotle is, in this way, closely bound up in Varchi with ideas of intellectual betterment, moral growth and civic well-being. Both 'comenti' are closely linked to his Paduan experience: they can be related to the University of Padua and the emerging Academy of the *Infiammati* at which Varchi had given lectures, initially in the vernacular, on the *Ethics*.¹³ Within this environment, he had learnt to read Aristotle in the light of his ancient Greek commentators, had developed a strong interest in rhetorical and dialectical techniques, and had become convinced of the need to elaborate a philosophical language in the vernacular.¹⁴

As well as priority, an underlying passion for linguistic and intellectual reform, and openness to a broader public, the fourth thing to observe about these commentaries is

¹² Text in Andreoni, 'Benedetto Varchi', pp. 41–2, and *La via della dottrina*, pp. 331–2: 'a me giovarà d'essere stato il primo che, imitando il santissimo et dotto Boetio et molti altri eccellentissimi ingegni, habbia osato provare di tradurre dal felicissimo idioma Greco nella nostra favella toscana et derivare da sì ampi fiumi, o più tosto mari, nei, piccioli rivi, anzi fossati nostri, quello che essi con grandissima loda di sé et infinita utilità d'altri tradussero et derivarono nelle lingue loro, l'opere dei quali se o per la lunghezza del tempo, o per l'ingiuria delle guerre, o per la trascuraggine dei Principi non fussero ite male, <sarebbe> buono per questo secolo, per ciò che io tengo fermamente che la corrotella dei costumi et vivere nostro sia proceduta in buona parte da gli studi e scienze corrotte' (*Etica*, fols 74^v–75^v). See also Varchi, *Opere* (n. 3 above), II, p. 483 (final *Lezione* on Petrarch, *Rerum vulgariarum fragmenta* 72, 13 August 1545): 'in luogo delle cose ci contentiamo per lo più delle parole, le quali per avventura, ci potrebbero fare o ricchi o riputati, ma non già né dotti né buoni ... le lingue non s'imparano per se stesse ma per intendere le cose'. Varchi's motivations in vernacularizing Aristotle could not be more distant from a 'commercial operation' such as that of Brucioli; on the latter, see Del Soldato, 'Le opere migliori' in this volume.

¹³ On these lectures (October–November 1540), see Andreoni, *La via della dottrina*, pp. 43–4; Lo Re, *Politica e cultura*, pp. 217–24; R. S. Samuels, 'Benedetto Varchi, the *Accademia degli Infiammati*, and the Origins of the Italian Academic Movement', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 29, 1976, pp. 599–633 (621–2).

¹⁴ See C. Vasoli, 'Benedetto Varchi e i filosofi', in *Benedetto Varchi nel quinto centenario della nascita*, pp. 403–34 (420–6); S. Lo Re, 'Piccolomini tra Varchi e Speroni'; S. Caroti, 'L'*Aristotele italiano* di Alessandro Piccolomini: un progetto sistematico di filosofia naturale in volgare a metà '500', in *Il volgare come lingua di cultura dal Trecento al Cinquecento*, ed. A. Calzona et al., Florence, 2003, pp. 361–401. Of course, the recourse to the Greeks was a recurrent feature of late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Aristotelianism, and was also influenced by Varchi's contact with professional philosophers such as Lodovico Boccadiferno, Francesco Verino, Pier Vettori, Marcantonio Zimara (see Varchi, *Lezioni* [n. 3 above], p. 174, where he remarks on Zimara's precociousness in following the Greeks) and others, as well as with his close contacts with Alessandro Piccolomini. On the recovery of Greek commentators in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italy, see E. P. Mahoney, 'Neoplatonism, the Greek Commentators and Renaissance Aristotelianism', in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. D. J. O' Meara, Albany, 1982, pp. 169–77 and 264–82; C. H. Lohr, 'Renaissance Latin Translations of Greek Commentaries', *Humanism and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. J. Krayer and M. W. F. Stone, London and New York, 2000, pp. 24–40. On the role of Nicolò Leonico Tomeo at the University of Padua in the decades straddling 1500, see D. J. Geanakoplos, 'The Career of the Little-Known Greek Scholar Nicolas Leonicus Tomacus', *Byzantina*, 13, 1985, pp. 355–72.

VERNACULARIZING METEOROLOGY: BENEDETTO VARCHI'S *COMENTO SOPRA IL PRIMO LIBRO DELLE METEORE D'ARISTOTILE*

their sophistication in explaining in the vernacular Aristotelian texts which were traditionally taught in Latin and were staple items on university curricula. In all three 'comenti', Varchi shows a keen interest in Greek commentators (this was, as we have seen, a motivation for producing the *Priora* commentary and a pervasive feature of it). Also notable and characteristic of his predilections is the way he constantly enriches his discussion of Aristotle with a rich field of reference and citation which goes beyond philosophy. The autograph pages of the *Meteore*, like the two other earlier works, contain accounts of the views of Aristotle's Greek, Arabic and medieval Latin commentators. But that is not all. Varchi includes erudite quotations (several quite extensive ones in Latin) and allusions to classical and vernacular poets. He also discusses by name the ideas and works of several contemporary philosophers. Thus, if we restrict ourselves only to the *Meteore*, Varchi mentions Greek commentators – Simplicius, Philoponus, Ammonius, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Olympiodorus, Andronicus of Rhodes – and he names Arabic and medieval commentators, in particular, Averroes and Thomas Aquinas. He quotes extensively from Virgil and Lucretius; he refers to Cicero, Seneca and Pliny the Elder; and he alludes to medical authorities such as Hippocrates, Galen and Avicenna. Among the moderns, he explicitly names and quotes from works by Giovanni Pontano and Gaspare Contarini. He also lavishes particularly ardent praise on his 'praeceptor', Lodovico Boccadiferro, whose lectures he frequented at the University of Bologna (1538, 1541–2) and to whom we shall return.¹⁵

The work of vernacular meteorology which is closest in date to Varchi's is a printed compendium published in Venice in 1542 by Fausto Sebastiano da Longiano, a *poligrafo* active for some time in that city and the vernacularizer of several other classical works, including Dioscorides and Cicero.¹⁶ The address in Longiano's compilation expresses the concern to 'giovare' and 'dilettare' its reading public, but his *Meteorologia* is ultimately a very different product from Varchi's treatise. This can be shown by a comparison of its citational practices with those of Varchi. For example, Longiano

¹⁵ References in order: Simplicius (fol. 222^v), Philoponus (fol. 227^r), Andronicus of Rhodes, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Olympiodorus (all three at fol. 227^r in a marginal annotation in Varchi's hand); Alexander of Aphrodisias (fol. 232^v); Ammonius (fol. 228^r); Thomas Aquinas (fol. 243^v); Averroes (fol. 227^r in marginal annotation in Varchi's hand); Virgil (fol. 222^v, quoting *Georgics*, I.463–4; *Aeneid*, IV.206, 208–10); Lucretius (fol. 222^v, quoting *De natura rerum*, VI.50–1; fol. 227^r, quoting *De natura rerum*, III.1–13; Dante (fol. 224^r); Cicero (fols 222^v and 235^v); Seneca (fol. 235^v); Hippocrates and Avicenna (fol. 222^r), Avicenna (fol. 233^v); Galen (fols 228^v, 229^v, 231^r and 235^r); Pontano (fol. 236^v: quoting *Meteorum Liber*, vv. 551–63, most probably via the Aldine print *Opera Urania sive De stellis libri quinque*, Venice, 1513, fol. 119^v; Contarino (fol. 231^r: *De elementis*); Boccadiferro (fol. 227^r). Varchi's interest in Ammonius's commentary on the *Predicamenta* is shown by the translation of his life in MS Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Filze Rinuccini, 10, fols 34^r–36^v ('Vita d'Aristotile tradotta dal Comento d'Ammonio sopra i Predicamenti'); there is a scribal copy at fols 12^v–14^v. On Ammonius, see Bianchi, 'Uses of Latin Sources' in this volume. See also the letter to Vettori (n. 20 below). Pontano is also quoted extensively in the Latin paraphrase and commentary by Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and his student Johannes Cochlaeus, *Meteorologia Aristotelis elegantia paraphrasi explanata*, Nuremberg, 1512, e.g., fol. IX^v (where the same verses are quoted from *Meteorum Liber* as those cited by Varchi).

¹⁶ See F. Pignatti, 'Longiano, Fausto da', in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, XLV, Rome, 1995, pp. 394–8.



SIMON GILSON

quotes Aristotle and the Greek commentators only very rarely. What is more, his compendium does not follow Aristotle's exposition closely; rather, it arranges meteorological phenomena under headings, its treatment of such topics remains quite basic and superficial, and attention is also paid on several occasions to the marvellous aspects of the science.¹⁷

All three of Varchi's commentaries are valuable in helping us to reflect on debates related to the readership of the vernacular Aristotle in the late 1530s and early 1540s, as well as, more broadly, the reception of vernacular philosophical translation and some related controversies in this period.¹⁸ It is worth recalling Varchi's comment that, in spite of his belief in the capacity of the vernacular to deal fully and elegantly with philosophical ideas, 'many would deny this'. We are fortunate to have correspondence pertaining to the circulation of manuscript copies of the *Priora* in the form of letters between Varchi and Francesco del Garbo, on the one hand, and between Varchi and Pier Vettori, on the other. These epistolary exchanges help to illustrate further the degree to which vernacularization of Aristotle could indeed be a cause of contention. The del Garbo letter, which shows that *Priora* was circulating in Florence in the autumn of 1540, maintains that Aristotelian logic is not the favoured subject-matter of vernacular readers, because even if logic were to be rendered into a language with which they were familiar, its content remained too obscure and difficult. Those who are interested in such topics – del Garbo goes on to suggest – will go immediately to the Greek text. Aristotle can be vernacularized, but 'it would be better to start with one of those books of Aristotle which might be more useful and enjoyable than these ones for a certain kind of people, that is, those who read

¹⁷ Fausto Sebastiano da Longiano, *Meteorologia, cioè Discorso de le impressioni humide et secche generate tanto ne l'aria, quanto ne le caverne de la terra non per via di tradizione, ma di scelta*, Venezia, 1542, fol. 2^r: 'non solamente dilettevole, ma utile a' molti'. Longiano treats the influence of the sun and moon in the opening sections, and then proceeds under headings such as 'rugiada', 'brina', 'manna', 'nebbia', 'nugole', 'mare' and 'pianeti'. Moderns and ancients are mentioned here, and Aristotle is named and praised for his theory of the rainbow, though this is updated (see fols 10^r, 11^r, 39^v and 42^r) and sections from Seneca's *Naturales quaestiones* are added (fols 40^r–41^r). On marvellous lore, see, e.g., fols 12^r–13^v, 25^r and 41^r. On Longiano, see also Dal Prete, 'Vernacular Meteorology' in this volume. For further discussion, see C. Martin, 'Meteorology for Courtiers and Ladies: Vernacular Aristotelianism', *Philosophical Readings*, 4:2, 2012, pp. 3–13; D. Verardi, 'I *Meteor*i di Cesare Rao e l'aristotelismo in volgare nel Rinascimento', *Rinascimento meridionale*, 3, 2012, pp. 115–27. More erudite vernacular treatments of Aristotelian meteorology include: the treatises by Francesco de' Vieri, *Tratto di nel quale si contengono i tre primi libri delle Metheore*, Florence, 1582 (as noted by Martin, 'Meteorology', p. 10), and Cesare Rao (see Verardi, 'I *Meteor*i'); the dialogues by Niccolò Gozze, *Discorsi sopra le Metheore d'Aristotele, ridotti in dialogo, & divisi in quattro giornate ...*, Venice, 1585, and Vitale Zuccolo, *Dialogo delle cose meteorologiche*, Venice, 1590. This is not an exhaustive list, and all these works merit further study; see now C. Martin, *Renaissance Meteorology: Pomponazzi to Descartes*, Baltimore, 2011.

¹⁸ For questions of readership, see L. Bianchi, 'Per una storia dell'aristotelismo "volgare" nel Rinascimento: problemi e prospettive di ricerca', *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 15, 2009, pp. 367–86, and his 'Volgarizzare Aristotele: per chi?', *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 59, 2012, pp. 480–95; E. del Soldato, 'An Aristotelian in the Academy: Simone Porzio and the Problem of Philosophical Vulgarisation', in *Bilingual Europe. Latin and Vernacular Cultures, ca. 1300–1800*, ed. J. Bloemendal, Leiden, forthcoming, and her 'The Elitist Vernacular of Francesco Cattani da Diaccetto and its Afterlife', *I Tatti Studies*, 16, 2013, pp. 343–62; Refini, "'Aristotile in parlare materno'".





VERNACULARIZING METEOROLOGY: BENEDETTO VARCHI'S *COMENTO SOPRA IL PRIMO LIBRO DELLE METEORE D'ARISTOTILE*

vernacular books more than any other kind'.¹⁹ In a later letter addressed to Pier Vettori (29 November 1540), and in which Francesco Verino is also named as sharing the views expressed by Vettori, Varchi attempted to defend his translation and commentary from these and related objections, above all those which criticized the expansiveness and obscurity of the work. Varchi comments on the length of his work, and he argues that a lengthy treatment is needed because he is presenting it to those who understand very little: it is for this reason, he states, that he has included material from the Greek philosophers. Clarity of exposition is, moreover, essential because of the deficiencies of the Latins who have obscured the text. This is a point to which he returns repeatedly in the *Priora* commentary.²⁰ Here again, then, we note the extent to which the capacity of the vernacular to expound philosophical material is placed on the same level as the classical languages. In this letter, Varchi also pursues questions of linguistic equivalence between Greek and the vernacular, by asking his correspondent whether the vernacular version is as comprehensible as the Greek text. Another letter by Varchi (22 December 1542), addressed again to Vettori, does not enter into matters of dispute as such, but shows us that, in late 1542, Varchi was still intent on completing his Aristotelian 'project', since he refers again to his 'translations of Aristotelian things'.²¹ The atmosphere of discouragement regarding his vernacular translations of Aristotle is later presented by Varchi in retrospect in his posthumous linguistic treatise, the *Hercolano*, composed in the early 1560s and printed in 1570.²²

¹⁹ Francesco del Garbo, letter to Varchi (11 November 1540), in *Prose fiorentine: Lettere*, V.2, ed. C. R. Dati, Florence, 1735, pp. 110–11: 'Io ho veduto la vostra traduzione, e interpretazione della Priora, la quale mi piace assai, e mi pare molto bene intesa, e racconcia, e similmente piace agli amici nostri, che l'hanno veduta. Trovo concorde il giudizio di tutti, che fia meglio cominciare da qualcuno di quei libri d'Aristotele che possono giovare e dilettere più che questi una certa sorte d'uomini, che sono quelli che leggono più i libri volgari che gli altri; perché quelli che si dilettono oggi delle scienze, la prima cosa pensano alla lingua greca, dove quelle sono scritte; quelli che non sanno la lingua e che si sono tardi avveduti d'attendere alle scienze, non potranno conseguire la logica ad ogni modo, ancorche sia in lingua quale intendano benissimo, perché la cosa è tanto difficile che la difficoltà della lingua non impedisce l'acquistarla.' For a further discussion (in a *Lezione on Purgatorio XXV* in July 1543), see Varchi, *Lezzioni* (n. 3 above), p. 145: 'io dico queste cose [discussion of soul] per quelli, i quali non havendo altra lingua, che la Fiorentina, vorrebbero bene, ma non possono studiarle & saperle da se stessi, & questi, se non intenderanno così ogni cosa, non debbono né maravigliarsi, né dolersi, conciosia cosa, che in tutte le lingue avvenga il medesimo, a tutti quelli, che non sono esercitati nella loica, & non sanno i termini di quella scienza, della quale si ragiona'.

²⁰ Varchi, letter to Vettori (29 November 1540), summarizes the criticisms raised as follows: 'E in somma io sono con voi e con il Verino che trattare di logica sia fastidioso, lungo e forse con non molta utilità, et che non riceve ornamenti.' In spite of his apparent agreement with their views, Varchi nonetheless asks for their opinion on whether it is possible to write in the vernacular in a way which can be understood 'come in greco'; he also justifies his lengthy treatment because of the need both to follow the Greeks, especially Alexander of Aphrodisias and Philoponus, and to include 'questioni'; see MS London, British Library, Add. 10273, fol. 223^r–224^r. For the concern in the *Priora*, see, e.g., fols 392^{r-v} and 429^r.

²¹ Varchi, letter to Vettori (22 December 1542): 'disiderando homai di vivermi in pace et quietamente et vedere di condurre a fine qualcuno dei disegni et principii miei circa la traduttione delle cose d'Aristotile', in MS London, British Library, Additional Manuscripts 10273, fol. 240^r. See also in *Benedetto Varchi*, pp. 95–8.

²² Varchi, *Hercolano*, ed. A. Sorella, 2 vols, Pescara, 1995, II, p. 901: 'quando era scolare in Padova e cominciai a tradurre la loica e la filosofia d'Aristotele nella lingua volgare, dove quasi tutti gli altri me ne sconfortavano'. On





SIMON GILSON

The *Meteore*, which is certainly after the *Priora* and *Etica*,²³ may well respond to del Garbo and others through its very choice of text and the heavy stress which Varchi gives to utility in the prologue. The *Meteorology* is the Aristotelian work which had the most extensive earlier life in European vernaculars, especially French and Italian. Aristotelian meteorological lore had, in fact, established itself as part of an Italian vernacular patrimony by the late thirteenth century. A Tuscan *volgarizzamento*, the *Metaura*, dates from the middle of the thirteenth century, and it emerged in a context of earlier vernacularization and the flourishing of vernacularized treatments of scientific lore.²⁴ The precocious entry of meteorology into the vernacular and its pervasive, almost capillary, presence can be seen in the close attention paid to weather effects in late Duecento and early Trecento Italian poetry, in sermons, in the prose works of Brunetto Latini and Ristoro or Restoro d'Arezzo, in Dante's *Comedy* and the extensive annotations found in the Trecento commentary tradition, as well as in other translations and vernacular compendia of various kinds.²⁵ This rich seam of medieval vernacular works continued to percolate away in the sixteenth century, as Varchi's own references to Dante's meteorological interests both in the *Meteore* and elsewhere suggest.²⁶ The most direct later manifestation of the medieval tradition in print is a 1554 Venetian quarto based on the tradition of the medieval *Metaura* which was produced by the shop of

other instances of discouragement and indeed hostility towards philosophical vernacularization in Florence during the 1540s, see S. Bionda, 'Aristotele in Accademia: Bernardo Segni e il volgarizzamento della *Retorica*', *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, n.s. 13, 2002, pp. 241–62 (243–4, 258–62); Lo Re, *Politica e cultura*, pp. 226–30; R. Ridolfi, 'Bernardo Segni e il suo volgarizzamento della *Retorica*', *Belfagor*, 17, 1962, pp. 511–26 (514–17)

²³ *Meteore*, fols 221r: 'come s'è detto nella loica', and 224v: 'lasciando stare l'ethica, della quale favellammo lungamente nell'Etica ...'

²⁴ See R. Librandi, *La 'Metaura' d'Aristotile: volgarizzamento fiorentino anonimo del 14. secolo*, 2 vols, Naples, 1995. For further commentary, see R. Librandi, 'Ristoro, Brunetto, Bencivenga e la *Metaura*', in *Lo scaffale della biblioteca scientifica in volgare, secoli 13.–16.* Proceedings of the Colloquium, Matera, October 14–15, 2004, ed. R. Librandi and R. Piro, Florence, pp. 101–22; A. Cornish, 'The Vulgarization of Science: Dante's Meteorology in Context', in *Science and Literature in Italian Culture*, ed. P. Antonello and S. Gilson, Oxford, 2004, pp. 53–71, drawing attention to *La composizione del mondo colle sue cascioni*, *Il libro di Sidrach*, *Questioni filosofiche* and the Tuscan translation of Brunetto Latini's *Trésor*, the *Tesoro*. See also C. Marchesi, 'Di alcuni volgarizzamenti toscani in codici fiorentini', *Studi romanzi*, 5, 1907, pp. 123–236 (123–49). Some works which predate the return of Aristotle in the Latin West (e.g., Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, Adelard of Bath's *Quaestiones naturales*) also contain meteorological lore which is vernacularized.

²⁵ On poetic appropriations, see P. Boyde, *Dante Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos*, Cambridge, 1981, pp. 74–95; Cornish, 'The Vulgarization of Science'; J. Ducos, *La météorologie en français au Moyen Âge (XIII^e–XIV^e siècles)*, Paris, 1998. On meteorology in the tradition of Dante commentary, see Cornish, 'The Vulgarization' (n. 24 above); and S. A. Gilson, 'Scientific Glosses in Cristoforo Landino's *Comento sopra la Comedia*', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 23, 2005, pp. 31–54 (esp. nn. 15, 29). On evidence of mercantile interest in the *Metaura*, see Refini, "Aristotile in parlare materno".

²⁶ For reference to Dante in Varchi's *Meteore*, see n. 15 above. See also Varchi, *Lezzioni* (n. 3 above), p. 432: 'Di queste impressioni e alterazioni meteorologiche, cioè sublimi, e che si generano nelle regioni eteree sopra il nostro capo favellò Dante divinamente, come suole, nel ventunesimo canto del Purgatorio'; and Varchi's correction of Landino on Dante's use of 'brina' in his *Lezzioni*, p. 620. See also *Lettoni d'accademici fiorentini*, Florence, 1544, p. 32.



VERNACULARIZING METEOROLOGY: BENEDETTO VARCHI'S *COMENTO SOPRA IL PRIMO LIBRO DELLE METEORE D'ARISTOTILE*

Comin da Trino.²⁷ This is interesting insofar as its very existence rubs up against the views expressed in one of Sperone Speroni's dialogues, the *Dialogo della rettorica*, where a character comments that early vernacular versions of scientific texts are too antiquated and lacking in reputation to represent reliable linguistic models for sixteenth-century authors.²⁸ Following Brancato's studies of Varchi's Boethian translation, we know that he had recourse to medieval vernacularizations. For the *Meteore*, however, there seems to be very little evidence of a similar influence, though, in part, this may be because we do not have Varchi's translation as such. It may well be, however, that Varchi was targeting, at least implicitly, the *Metaura* in one passage where he strongly criticizes its title.²⁹

Let us turn now to a more focused examination of Varchi's *Meteore* and, in particular, its prologue section. The *Comento* is made up of nearly fifty manuscript pages in Varchi's own hand, with a notable number of marginal and interlinear integrations and interpolations. The writing becomes denser and less legible as we move past the prologue section into what Varchi calls the 'questioni', that is, a series of six headings which offer additional preliminary discussion of topics related to the first chapters of the *Meteorology*. The title-page states: 'Comento primo di Benedetto Varchi Fiorentino sopra il primo libro delle Meteore d'Aristotile tradotto da lui di Greco in lingua Toscana al molto Illustrissimo et Eccellentissimo Signore il Signore Cosimo de Medici Duca di Firenze' (fol. 220^v). Both Andreoni and Lo Re have suggested that the work might be traced back to his period of exile (the *Hercolano* speaks only of translations of 'filosofia') and might date back, like the *Priora* and *Etica*, to Varchi's involvement with the *Infiammati* during 1539–41.³⁰ We do know that the *Meteore* (or at least the extant draft) is later than the *Priora* and *Etica* from two internal references, and that it is not later than 1544, since the *Meteore* is mentioned by name in two treatises produced by Varchi in that year, one on heat and the other on alchemy.³¹ We also know that Varchi made prominent use of

²⁷ *Opera nuova la quale tratta della filosofia naturale, chiamata la Metaura d'Aristotile; chiosata da San Thomaso d'Aquino, dell'ordine de i frati predicatori. Partita in tre libri*, Venice, 1554. The work is more heavily dependent on Albert the Great's *Metaura* than on Thomas's incomplete exposition; see Librandi, *La 'Metaura'* (n. 24 above), I, introd.

²⁸ *Trattati del Cinquecento*, ed. M. Pozzi, 2 vols, Milan and Naples, 1996, II, p. 651: 'Ben v'ha di quelli che furno ardit in tenar le scienze, ma pochi sono e senza fama e sì antichi che 'l ragionare co' vocaboli loro, per la loro vecchiezza via più strani che i latini non sono, sarebbe opra perduta.'

²⁹ I am indebted here to Dario Brancato, who shared with me his findings on Varchi's reliance on earlier *volgarizzamenti* ahead of the publication of his critical edition (n. 1 above). For one possible convergence between the medieval *volgarizzamento* and Varchi's *Meteore*, see n. 56 below, and for possible updating, see n. 46 below.

³⁰ Lo Re, p. 230; Andreoni, *La via della dottrina*, p. 52, has signalled one of Varchi's letters to Pier Vettori (20 February 1537), in MS London, British Library, Add. 10273, fol. 207r: 'Io odo il Bocca di Ferro, ma non son tan'oltra ch'io ne cavi el terzo che del Verino; e legge la *Meteora*, che pure è più agevole.'

³¹ 'I calori', in Varchi, *Lezioni* (n. 3 above), pp. 248, 250: 'come havemo dichiarato [sc. on movement of Sun] ampiamente ne i principi della *Meteora* al benignissimo, e serenissimo Duca di Firenze Signor nostro, e padrone sempre osservandissimo', and 'di questo [sc. elemental heat] non diremo altro, dovendone parlato lungamente nel libro della *Meteora* allegato di sopra da me'; Benedetto Varchi, *Questione sull'alchimia codice inedito* (1544), ed. D. Moreni, Florence, 1827, ch. 1, pp. 8–9: 'noi avemo dichiarato lungamente nel libro dei principia della *Meteora*



SIMON GILSON

meteorological lore in his early lectures on Petrarch at the Florentine Academy, soon after his return from exile in April 1543. In particular, as Andreoni has shown, Varchi utilized Aristotle's *Meteorology* in the oral exposition of three Petrarchan sonnets (*Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* 41–3) when examining the interactions between meteorological conditions and the amorous vicissitudes of the lover-poet.³²

Such evidence helps to support the view that the autograph represents a preparatory version for a presentation copy, probably drafted (although there is nothing to prevent the hypothesis that it was based on notes linked to his Paduan sojourn) during or quite soon after return from exile in the early part of 1543. Further additional support for this dating is provided by another internal reference in a fascinating page in one of the 'questione', where Varchi discusses the Aristotelian theory of four causes and uses as an example the fountain being fashioned by his friend the sculptor, Tribolo, at Cosimo's villa at Castello in the hills northwest of Florence:

... affine che meglio si comprenda proponghiamo la fonte, che fa il Tribolo, scultore come ognuno sa e architetto tanto buono quanto valente, nel Giardin di Castello villa paterna del Duca Cosimo, non guari lontano da qui ... dove scrivo queste cose, qualunque sieno, al luogo di messer Carlo Strozzi amicissimo nostro ...³³

[So that we can better understand this, let us take the example of the fountain which Tribolo, that most excellent and worthy engineer and sculptor as we all know, who, in the Gardens of the Medici villa of Castello, which is hardly any distance from here where I am writing these things, whatever their worth, at the place of messer Carlo Strozzi our most cherished friend.]

It is well documented that Tribolo was involved, from 1538 onwards, in a hydrographic and sculptural project for the gardens of the Medici villa of Castello, and we know from other sources that at least three of the sculpted river gods for this project were seen and praised by Niccolò Martelli in 1543. We also know from Vasari about Varchi's likely role in helping to devise the iconographical programme.³⁴ The reference to the 'luogo di

all'Ecclle. et Ill. Sig Cosimo de' Medici'; see also p. 42: 'aliti, vapori et esalazione' which follows the phrasing at the beginning of the *Meteore* (fol. 221r): 'aliti ovvero esalazioni o vapori'. On these works, see Andreoni, *La via della dottrina*, pp. 127–30. See also *Lezioni*, p. 240, where Varchi translates three quotations from Averroes's *Meteorologica* into Tuscan.

³² Andreoni, 'Luoghi aristotelici', pp. 000. Two of these lectures were published in *Raccolta di prose fiorentine. Lezioni*, ed. C. Dati, Florence, 1730, pp. 1–47 and 48–73. On these Petrarchan readings, see also B. Hüß, "Il Petrarca, che ordinariamente suole essere Platonico". Die Petrarca-Exegese in Varchis Akademievorträgen', in *Questo leggiadrissimo Poeta! Autoritätskonstitution im rinascimentalen Lyrik-Kommentar*, ed. G. Regn, Münster, 2004, pp. 297–322.

³³ On the explanatory power of examples, see, e.g., the 1544 treatise 'De' mostri', in Varchi, *Lezioni*, pp. 244–5: 'perché gli esempj dichiarano le cose meglio, che le parole, devemo sapere ...'; Varchi, *Opere* (n. 3 above), II, p. 799. The role of 'domestic' or even 'campanilistic' exemplification in vernacular philosophical works would merit further study; for early examples of its presence in Ristoro d'Arezzo and Dante, see respectively *La composizione del mondo colle sue cascioni*, I.xv and II.v.8, ed. A. Morino, Florence, 1976, pp. 22, 129; *Convivio* III.v.10–12.

³⁴ See Claudia Lazzaro, 'Personifying Nature: River Gods in Sixteenth-Century Italy', *Renaissance Studies*, 25, 2011, pp. 70–94 (86–92). On Castello, see also Lazzaro, *The Italian Renaissance Garden*, New Haven, 1990, pp. 167–89.



VERNACULARIZING METEOROLOGY: BENEDETTO VARCHI'S *COMENTO SOPRA IL PRIMO LIBRO DELLE METEORE D'ARISTOTILE*

messer Carlo Strozzi' very close to the Medici villa at Castello may well indicate Villa Petraia, less than a kilometre to the east. However that may be, the passage demonstrates that Varchi's work, or at the very least the section from this chapter onwards, was written near to Florence, probably after the return from exile in 1543.³⁵

The text of the *Meteore* itself begins with nine 'capi', or headings, which are really a kind of extended introduction to the text, or *accessus ad auctores*. These 'capi' cover the following topics, several of which are indeed familiar headings in the *accessus* tradition:³⁶ 'l'intendimento' ('aim'), 'il subbietto' ('subject'), 'l'utilità' ('usefulness'), 'il titolo et nome del libro' ('the title and name of the book'), 'che questo libro è legittimo' ('that this book is authentic'), 'sotto quale parte di filosofia si riduca il presente libro' ('under which part of philosophy is the current book to be placed'), 'l'ordine' ('the order'), 'la divisione' ('the division'), 'il modo della dottrina' ('the mode of doctrine'). Strong parallels and several overlaps exist with the headings of the prologue material in Varchi's two earlier vernacular commentaries and in other works. In the *Priora*, he notes that he is following the seven 'capi' – all the above except for 'il subbietto' and 'il modo della dottrina' – introduced by John Philoponus; and, in the *Etica*, Varchi adds one further heading to these seven, by including 'il modo della dottrina'. There is a further correspondence between the *Meteore* and the *Etica*, for the latter, like *Meteore*, is much more expansive in explaining the usefulness of the work.³⁷ Varchi's liking for both such prefatory discussions and for questions of method is a notable and defining feature of his output *tout court*. In the period 1543–55, he prepared short philosophical treatises with titles such as 'Che sia metodo', 'Degli ordini delle dottrine, cioè in che modi si debbino insegnare l'arti e le scienze', and 'Prolegomeni', in line with what Lo Re has called his preoccupation with 'una sorta di precettistica della "sposizione e dichiarazione"'.³⁸ Not surprisingly, then, we find various shared material between the Aristotelian vernacular prologues and these

³⁵ I wonder whether a further motivating factor may be Cosimo's own interest in the subject. In 1543–4, Varchi's close friend and correspondent, Luca Martini, was active in land reclamation and sanitation projects ordered by Cosimo in the Pisan environs. Baccio Baldini, in his later biography, refers to Cosimo's intense interest in matters related to the 'malvagità de i vapori' (*Vita di Cosimo de Medici Gran Duca di Toscana*, Florence, 1578, p. 33). The benefit of meteorological knowledge to civic sanitation is nonetheless a recurrent *topos* in the Latin tradition of commentary on the *Meteorologica*; see, e.g., Boccadiferro in n. 44 below; and A. Nifo, *In libris Aristotelis meteorologicis commentaria*, Venice, 1547, fol. III^r.

³⁶ On the *accessus* tradition, see A. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd ed., Aldershot, 1988.

³⁷ See *Priora* (fol. 416^r) which has seven 'capi' following Giovanni Grammatico (i.e., John Philoponus), which are identical to those found in the *Meteore*, except for the 'subbietto' and 'il modo della dottrina'; the *Etica* commentary (fol. 29^r) has eight 'capi'.

³⁸ The treatises in question, dating from 1543–64, are 'Del metodo', 'Divisione della filosofia', 'Prolegomeni', 'Ordini delle dottrine' and 'Delle vie delle dottrine'; see 'Che sia metodo', BNF IL.VIII.136, fols 107^r–121^r; 'Degli ordini delle dottrine, cioè in che modi si debbino insegnare l'arti e le scienze' (fols 121^r–126^r); and 'Prolegomeni' (fols 127^r–47^r), all printed in Varchi, *Opere* (n. 3 above), II, pp. 794–6 ('Divisione della filosofia'); II, pp. 796–800 ('Del metodo'); II, pp. 801–2 ('Degli ordini delle dottrine'); II, pp. 805–12 ('Dei prolegomena o precognizioni'). In the treatise on 'Prolegomeni' there are seventeen 'capi'. On Varchi's interest in prologue material, see Lo Re, 'Piccolomini tra Varchi e Speroni'.

SIMON GILSON

short works, above all in the form of identical arguments and *auctoritates* cited, as well as some close parallels in phrasing.³⁹ What is most significant, however, is that there seems to be no model for such an extensive *accessus* in the Latin tradition of the *Meteorologica*. Boccadiferro, who is – as we shall see – one of the more important intermediary source for Varchi's *Meteore*, offers four relatively brief headings covering 'intentio', 'pars philosophiae naturalis', 'utilitas' and 'divisio'.⁴⁰ At this level, then, however much Varchi may owe to earlier and contemporary traditions, perhaps especially of Latin commentary, his own commentary on the *Meteorology* remains a personal re-elaboration.

The opening two headings succinctly establish the aim and subject matter of the work: the material and efficient causes, the timing, modalities, and underlying reasons, 'di che, et da chi, ma quando ancora et come, et perché' (fol. 221^r), for the generation of 'tutte le passioni overamente impressioni, o imagini' (ibid.) which occur or appear in the three regions of air, water, and earth. These sections allow Varchi to state his basic point (*Meteorology*, I.3, 340^b27–30) that all impressions or passions are generated by two 'aliti overo esalazioni o vapori' (fol. 221^r), that most of these – phenomena such as 'i tuoni, i baleni, le saette, et così la poggia, la neve, la grandine, la brina, la rugiada' (ibid.) – occur in the region of air, that some, such as saltiness, occur in that of water, and that others, like ice and springs, are found in the ground. Finally, Varchi notes that there is a further set of phenomena which are produced beneath the ground such as gold, silver, metals and precious stones.

Under the third heading, Varchi's treatment of utility is particularly expansive. Here, he first pivots the discussion on a bipartite subdivision based on understanding the soul's nature and faculties. Thus, he treats utility according to the soul's own twofold nature, as both contemplative and practical, and as pertaining to the cognitions respective to each. The contemplative dimension, though it is the primary one, is treated expeditiously: 'è manifestissimo, essendo la cognizione della Meteora scienza contemplativa, il cui fine è sapere et intendere solamente, che la principale utilità di questo libro è far perfetta la piu nobile parte dell'anima nostra cioè l'intelletto speculativo' ('it is most evident, since the cognition pertaining to meteorology is a contemplative science, and such sciences have as their end to know and understand alone, that the principal utility of this book is to perfect the most noble part of our soul, that is, the speculative intellect': fol. 222^v). Varchi then considers the practical benefits of meteorology at great length. He proceeds

³⁹ The sixth 'capo' includes topics treated in the 'Divisione della filosofia', II, p. 794 (division of philosophy into speculative and practical; tripartite subdivision of speculative branch; four further subdivisions to mathematics); the seventh 'capo' has material in the 'Prolegomeni', II, pp. 809–10 (order of nature and doctrine, total and partial sciences, Aristotle's method); the ninth *capo* treats topics found in 'Del metodo', II, pp. 796–7 (definitions of method, fivefold division of 'modi delle dottrine'; examples from Galen; reference to Ammonius, following Porphyry).

⁴⁰ L. Boccadiferro, *Lectiones super primum librum meteorologicorum Aristotelis*, Venice, 1555, fol. 1^r: 'Pro altiori introductione huius libri, quem prae manibus habemus, inter alia, quatuor principaliter videbimus primo quae intentio, secundo quot fit pars philosophiae naturalis, tertio quae utilitas, quarto quae divisio eius, in partes suas.'



VERNACULARIZING METEOROLOGY: BENEDETTO VARCHI'S *COMENTO SOPRA IL PRIMO LIBRO DELLE METEORE D'ARISTOTILE*

to discuss the utility of the science for ensuring that habitations are healthy, for the understanding of humours by physicians, for astronomers, for peasants and shepherds who can be forewarned about floods, for sailors and captains of ships to avoid storms. The economic value of meteorology is shown through the celebrated example of Thales of Miletus and his prediction of a bumper olive harvest. Ethics is well served by meteorology since an understanding of dramatic weather effects can be used to inspire fortitude and to resist fear of the unknown. The final 'utilità' is that afforded to historians and poets. This section of the 'capo' reads as follows:

La seconda utilità che si cava della scienza di questo libro è grandissima et varia, percioche oltre il piacere indicibile et meravigliosa che ne arrea il saper le cagioni di tante e così belle cose et così diverse, in tutti gli animi nobili et generosi ella giova et non mezanamente a 'l conoscere i luoghi più et men sani ... Et oltre a questo ancora molti altri commodi prevederà, se le infermità saranno calde e secche o calde e humide, secondo la temperanza o l'intemperanza delle regioni, de' fonti, de' fiumi, e altre circostanze, come ne mostra Hippocrate nel terzo aformismo et Avicenna nella particella del 4°. et Arist[otele] ne' problemi dove egli insegna i pronostici delle malattie future. Giova a gl'Astrologi, i quali, mediante le cose che si dichiarano in questo libro, possono predire molte volte molte cose aversive stando l'apparenze delle comete, et altri imagini che si vedeno bene spesso nell'aria, come fiamme accese, capre saltanti, stelle volanti, tizoni ardenti, color sanguigni et altre figure somiglianti. Giova ai nocchieri et piloti percioche, mediante il soffiare de' venti, et mediante quelle corone et cerchij, che appariscono nel tuono, alla luna, et tal volta ancora circa il sole, che i Greci chiamano *haloni* cioè *areae* antiveggono le tempeste, et antiveggendo possono sé ritirarsi in qualche golfo o spiaggia, et così salvare insieme coll'havere et vita loro propria, le robe altrui et le persone. Giova ai pastori et a' contadini meravigliosamente, conciosia cosa che oltre il conoscere le varie spezie di succhi di diverse terre, et i tempi atti a piantare e seminare, si guardano dalle guaze, schifano le brinate, fuggono gli acquaroni, et molte altre incomodità, che nocivi sono così alle biade come alle bestie. Onde divinamente, come fa sempre, disse ne l'altre cose, Vir[gilio] nella *Georgica* [I.463–4]: 'Sol quoque signa dabit, solem quis dicere falsum audeat?' Giova ancora all'Economica cioè alla cura familiar della casa, come si può conoscere per l'esempio di Talete Milesio, il quale, come racconta M. Tullio nel primo libro della divinazione [I.49.111–12], havendo preveduto che l'anno seguente devono essere molte abbondanza d'olio, et l'altro dii poi carestia grandissima, compresi tutte l'ulive ... La qual cosa essendo avvenuta secondo il suo avviso, la donò ogni cosa el commune, et gli bastò di haver mostrato, che poteva arricchire, ma che non voleva. Et non meno all'Etica overo scienza moral, et massimamente intorno alla forteza, la quale et ci insegna le cose terribili et spaventose, et la cognizione della Meteora ci insegna insieme colle cagioni di dispregiare tutte le paure vane et però dottamente introduce Vir[gilio] nel quarto libro della sua divina Eneida [IV.206–10] il Re Iarba [i.e., Iarbas] ... che dice: 'Iuppiter omnipotens, an te cum fulmina torques / Nequiquam horremus, caecique in nubibus ignem / terrificant animos et inania murmura miscent?' Et non meno dottamente, né forse men leggiadramente Lucrezio nel principio del sesto libro [*De rerum natura*, VI.50–1]: 'Caetera, quae fieri in terris, coeloque tuentur mortales: pavidis cum pendent mentibus saepe', con tutto quello, che seguita. Et così intorno alla ambizione, mostrando questa scienza non solamente quanto sono poche et picciole le cose mortali, ma quanto ancora devemo fornire tosto tutte quante. Ma per non istare a raccontare a uno a uno tutti i giovamenti della Meteora che sono quasi infiniti, dirò solo che niuno scrittore in niuna lingua ci può in molti





SIMON GILSON

luoghi intendere perfettamente ... massimamente i poeti et gli storici senza la cognizione et dottrina delle cose che si trattano et dichiarano in questo libro.⁴¹

[The second utility which can be gained for this science is very great and varied. For, in addition to the inexpressible and marvellous pleasure which noble and generous minds gain from knowing the reasons for so many and such pleasing and diverse things. meteorology is useful (and in no small way way) for knowing which places are most sanitary and those that are not And, in addition to this, the science allows for many other benefits, according to whether infirmities are hot and dry or else hot and humid, according to the temperate nature or otherwise of the regions, of sources of water, of rivers and other circumstances, as Hippocrates shows in his third aphorism and Avicenna in the *particella* of his fourth book, and Aristotle in his *Problems*, where he teaches the signs which foretell future illnesses. Meteorology is useful to astrologers, who, by the things which are taught in this book, can often predict many unfortunate phenomena according to the appearance of comets and other images which are often seen in the air, such as burning flames, jumping she-goats, shooting stars, flaming torches, bloody colours and other similar figures. It is useful to sailors and captains of ships because, by knowing about the strength of winds and those corona and circles which appear during storms around the moon and sometimes even near to the sun and which the Greeks call *haloni*, that is, *areae*, such men can foresee storms and in foreseeing them take refuge in some gulf or on a beach, thereby saving both their property and their lives, other people's goods and other people. It is marvellously useful to shepherds and peasants, since – in addition to knowing the various kinds of humours produced in different lands, and the times in which it is best to sow and gather crops – they avoid bad crops, frost, floods and many other kinds of misfortune which are damaging to both crops and beasts. And hence, as he always does, Virgil wrote divinely in his *Georgics* [I.463–4]: ‘The sun will bear meaning to you; who dares to call the sun false?’ Meteorology is useful, too, to oeconomics, that is, to the care of the household, as one can see in the example of Thales of Miletus, who, as Cicero tells us in the first book of *On Divination* [I.49.111–12], bought up the entire crop, having foreseen that there was to be a great abundance of olives one year and a great shortage the following one. And when this happened as he had predicted, he gave the crop to the city, and it was enough for him to have shown that he could have become rich, not that he wanted to. And the science is no less useful to ethics or moral philosophy, especially with regard to fortitude, which teaches us about terrible and fear-inspiring things, and knowledge of meteorology teaches us, together with the causes of these phenomena, to dispel all vain fears; and thus Virgil in learned fashion introduces in the fourth book of his *Aeneid* [IV.206–10] King Iarbas who states: ‘All-powerful Jupiter do we shudder in vain with fear when you throw down your bolts? And are they blind those fires in the clouds that terrify our minds are they empty rumblings that they stir?’. And no less learned nor perhaps less elegantly does Lucretius write in the beginning of his sixth book [*De rerum natura*, VI.50–1]: ‘The things that take place on earth and in the heavens, when often they are frozen with a terror-stricken mind’, and all that follows there. And so with regard to ambition, this science shows not only how small and ineffective are mortal things but also how we must provide for all things. But so as not to have to recount one by one all the benefits of meteorology – for these are almost infinite – I shall say only that there is not a single writer in any language who can be understood properly ..., above all, poets and historians without the knowledge and tenets of things which are treated and expounded in this book.]

⁴¹ *Meteore*, fols 222^r–223^r.



VERNACULARIZING METEOROLOGY: BENEDETTO VARCHI'S *COMENTO SOPRA IL PRIMO LIBRO DELLE METEORE D'ARISTOTILE*

This catalogue is not all Varchi's own work. We know from the inventory of books made at his death that his personal library contained a wide range of medieval scholastic commentaries on Aristotle, including medieval ones. The relevant entries indicate that he owned several commentaries on the *Meteorology*, including printed editions and manuscripts of Thomas Aquinas's medieval exposition, the late fifteenth-century printed commentary by Gaetano da Thiene and more contemporary works such as those by Pietro Pomponazzi and Alessandro Piccolomini.⁴² Some elements in Varchi's 'capo' on utility – the references to sailors and astronomers, to Thales's bumper olive harvest – are *topoi* in late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Latin commentaries on the *Meteorology*.⁴³ Yet on closer examination of the Latin commentary tradition, we can begin to appreciate better Varchi's working method. When the passage is examined against likely antecedents, it becomes clear that he is especially indebted, both here and elsewhere in his *Meteore*, to Lodovico Boccadiferro's lectures on the first book of Aristotle's *Meteorology*, which we know he attended in 1538 and probably also in 1541–2. It seems likely that Varchi had his own personal copies of these lectures; and, though these are no longer extant, the Venetian printings of the lectures allow us insight into his teachings.⁴⁴ Under the heading utility in Boccadiferro's commentary on Book I of *Meteorology*, we find not only the same division of the material in accordance with the two souls, but also references to the same professional groups which benefit from the practical applications of the science (astrologers, physicians, sailors, farmers), the example of Thales of Miletus and some precise citations of authorities named by Varchi, including a cluster of references to

⁴² The list provided in the 'Inventario di libri del Varchi' includes commentaries on the *Meteorology* by Alessandro Piccolomini, Jean of Jandun, Gaetano da Thiene, Thomas Aquinas, Agostino Nifo ('Meteorum cum Sessa in fol': see n. 35 above), Pietro Pomponazzi, and Francisco Torres; see MS Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale, II.VIII.142, esp. fols 37^v and 65^r; at fol. 85^r and under the heading 'libri in penna', there are a further nine texts, including Pomponazzi (Perreto), Turriano (i.e., Francisco Torres) and Thomas Aquinas ('Meteorum Chiose di S. T.'). The most likely printed copies owned by Varchi are: the 1532 and 1537 editions of Thomas Aquinas's exposition printed by Lucantonio Giunta in Venice; Gaetano da Thiene, *Quattuor Aristotelis meteorum expositio* (1476); and Pomponazzi, *Expositio in Aristotelis libros de meteoris* (1522) [MS or print]. On the Latin tradition of meteorology, see G. Hellmann, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Meteorologie*, Berlin, 1917; and now Martin, *Renaissance Meteorology* (n. 17 above).

⁴³ See, e.g., A. Nifo, *In libris Aristotelis meteorologicis commentaria* (n. 35 above), fol. III^v.

⁴⁴ See *Lezioni*, fol. 3^v, where Razzi, the editor of the 1590 edition, writes that 'haveva scritte a mano buona parte dell'opere che poi furono stampate di esso Boccadiferro, sì come hanno veduto e sanno tutti gli amici suoi'. On Boccadiferro and Varchi, see U. Pirotti, *Benedetto Varchi e la cultura del suo tempo*, Florence, 1971, pp. 63–108 (though to be treated with some caution); B. Nardi, *Studi su Pietro Pomponazzi*, Florence, 1965, pp. 326ff (MSS Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 4701 and 4710), and his *Saggi sull'aristotelismo padovano dal XIV secolo al XVI*, Florence, 1958; Andreoni, *La via della dottrina*, pp. 144–53. For recent evaluations of Boccadiferro, see L. Bianchi, 'Fra Ermolao Barbaro e Ludovico Boccadiferro: qualche considerazione sulle trasformazioni della "fisica medievale" nel Rinascimento Italiano', *Medioevo*, 29, 2004, pp. 341–78, and his 'Ludovico Boccadiferro, commentateur du De generatione', in *Lire Aristote au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance. Réception du traité Sur la génération et la corruption*, ed. J. Ducos and V. Giacomotto-Charra, Paris, 2011, pp. 249–58. See also Bianchi's essay, 'Uses of Latin Sources', in this volume. See also C. Lohr, 'The Aristotelian Commentaries of Ludovicus Buccaferrea', *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, 1984, pp. 107–18, 1482–1545.



SIMON GILSON

Hippocrates, Avicenna and Aristotle, and the quotation from Virgil's *Georgics*.⁴⁵ The passage provides a good example of how the Latin tradition of contemporary commentary is re-elaborated and woven into the textual patchwork of Varchi's 'comento'.⁴⁶

The shorter fourth heading deals with the title of the book and is illustrative of Varchi's interest in language. He digresses on the Greek name of the treatise, mentions rather disparagingly alternative names and etymologies (and here one thinks of the medieval vernacular *Metaura*), and discusses the rendering of the Greek title into the vernacular:

I Latini ... chiamano questo libro *Meteora*, benché alcuni filosofi scrivono *Methaura*, la quale voce non vuol dire nulla che sappia io, anchora ch'essi le danno molte interpretazioni et etimologie degne, non so se di riso, o di compassione, ma *Meteora* nel numero del più non significa altro appo i Greci, che cose sublimi et sospese, cioè alte et pendenti. Et di qui trassero i Toscani il nome et titolo di questo libro, ritirandolo però nel numero del meno, et aggiugnendo secondo il costume della lor lingua l'articolo femminile, perché così dicono la *Meteora*, come l'*Etica*, la *fisica*, la *metafisica*, et altri tali.⁴⁷

[The Latins call this book *Meteora*, although some philosophers write *Methaura*, a word which, as far as I know, does not mean anything, even though they give it many interpretations and etymologies which I do not know whether they are worthy of compassion or derision. But the plural *Meteora*, according to the Greeks, does not mean anything other than sublime and suspended things, that is, positioned on high and hanging. And from here the Tuscans derived

⁴⁵ Boccadiferro, *Lectiones*, fols 2^r-3^r: 'De tertia vero, scilicet utilitate huius libri. Dico quod secundum quasdam est primaria, quae scilicet est perfectiva animae rationalis, quia perfecta cognitio harum passionum, quae fiunt in sublimi, perficit animam rationalem, licet non eo modo ut cognitio artificialium. Sicuti enim duplex est pars animae rationalis, una quae dicitur pars practica, altera pars speculativa, ita est & duplex cognitio, scilicet speculativa, & practica, convenienter respondens illi duplici parti animae ... principaliter enim perficit partem speculativam animae rationalis, & haec est principalis, & primaria utilitas huius scientiae Alius dicitur esse finis secundarius, seu utilitas secundaria huius scientiae, et iste finis secundarius multipliciter est, & multis scientiis, & artibus prodest. Confert enim ipsi Astrologo, quia ex declaratis in hoc libro, multa praedicit, ex terraemotu, vel cometis ... praedict de bello, de morte principum, & et alijs huiuscemodi. Est utilis & ipsi medico secundario & per accidens, quia ex his sumit, & eligit medicus quatenus habitatio sit vitae humane utilior, & ex his medicus prudens praedict de qualitate aegritudinum futurarum, an sint futurae calidae, & siccae, an calidae & humidae, etc. Et hoc ex intemperie regionum, et ex fontibus & fluminibus, & aquis, ut dicit Hipp. in 3. Aphor & Avicen 1. Canone & Arist. in proble', ubi docet signa futurarum aegritudinum prognostica. Est etiam utilis arti navigandae, quia nautae ex flatu ventorum, ex grandine, & alijs signis iudicant tempestates, & serenitates, & ipisus maris procellas, & tranquillitatem Iste confer agricolis ut docet Verg. in Georg. Item, utilis est patrifamilias, nam ex istis praedict penurias futuras, ut patet in exemplo Thaletis, qui cum praevidisset multam olei penuriam in anno futuro, sibi magnam copiam emit, & cum venit tempus penuriae, totum oleum populo donavit, non curans utilitatem. Potest addere quod etiam est utilis scientiae moralis, ut testator Seneca. & primo quod ad fortitudinem. Quia ut tertio Eth. in fine, & in principio 4. Eth. Fortitudo est circa terribilia. Haec autem scientia docet expellere omnem metum, quia docet, quod Montes, maria, urbes evanescent. Cum autem haec fiant ex necessitate naturae, non timebit. Tollit etiam ambitionem ...' (punctuation and spelling amended; abbreviations not resolved).

⁴⁶ For further examples of Varchi's borrowings from Boccadiferro, see nn. 51, 53, 56 below. Further work is needed on Varchi's 'questioni' to establish the precise nature and range of the indebtedness and also to appreciate the extent of Varchi's own personal interventions. On the idea of *bricolage*, see Bianchi, 'The Uses of Latin Sources' in this volume.

⁴⁷ *Metaura*, lib. I, ed. Librandi (n. 24 above), I, p. 157: 'Questo libro si chiama la *Metthaura* d'Aristotile; e questo è nome Greco, ed è composto a *metha*, ch'è a dicere trans, e thor, che tanto è a dire come contemplation delle cose che trapassano queste cose disotto.'





VERNACULARIZING METEOROLOGY: BENEDETTO VARCHI'S *COMENTO SOPRA IL PRIMO LIBRO DELLE METEORE D'ARISTOTILE*

the name and the title of this book, restricting it to the singular and adding, as is the custom in their language, the feminine article, thus, they say, in this way, *Meteora*, like *Etica*, *Fisica*, *Metafisica* and other such terms.]⁴⁸

In the next 'capo', on the authenticity of the work, Varchi has no doubt that it is indeed Aristotelian. One sign of the work's genuineness is its difficulty, both conceptual and stylistic, and Varchi criticizes Aristotle in quite resolute terms for his obscurity.⁴⁹ If Aristotle is obscure and clumsy in all his works, he is 'scurissimo et malagevolissimo' (fol. 223^v) in this one. He notes, moreover, following Simplicius and other Greek commentators, that such qualities are intentional, even though 'ogni volgare, et i contadini medesimi possono molte volte in alcune cose contraddirgli et riprovarlo' ('all common people and peasants themselves can very often in some things contradict him and reprove him') (fol. 224^r). Aristotle's authority is not impugned as such, and he remains 'un mostro o più tosto un miracolo della natura' ('a monster or rather a miracle of nature', recalling Averroës's celebrated formulation, who knew 'tanto quanto può sapere un'huomo naturalmente' ('all that a man can know naturally')).⁵⁰ All the same, the Stagirite is noted for having made more errors in this science than in any other, especially regarding the formation of the Milky Way and the rainbow:

errò più in esso et più manifestamente che in alcuno degli altri, come apparirà chiarissimamente nell'Iride che si chiama volgarmente l'arcobaleno, et più nella via lattea, che alcuni chiamano la strada romana, et Dante nel suo *Convito* la via di San Jacopo, come la chiamano ancora i contadini et le donne (fol. 224^r).

[He erred more in this book and more manifestly than in any of his others, as will be most clearly seen in the treatment of the rainbow, which is known in the vernacular as the *arcobaleno*, and more still in relation to the Milky Way, which some call the Roman road and which Dante in the *Convivio* calls the way of St Jacob,⁵¹ as peasants and women still call it.]

In the sixth heading of his preliminary discussion, Varchi deals with the branch of philosophy to which meteorology should be assigned. This is said to be natural philosophy; but Varchi again uses the 'capo' for a characteristic digression ('benché sia stata fatta da noi altre volte in altri luoghi assai compiutamente', fol. 223^v) on the general

⁴⁸ The neuter plural 'Metaura' is the form used by Dante (*Convivio*, II.xiii.21), following the Latin form 'Methaura' (though 'Metheora' is also found) in the medieval Latin translations of the work. See also Cristoforo Landino, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, ed. P. Procaccioli, 4 vols, Rome, 2001, I, p. 373: 'chome tracta Aristotele nella sua Meteora, la quale molti chiamano Metaura per ignorantia della greca lingua' (*Inferno*, III.1–2 *ad loc.*). Further sixteenth-century criticism is found in Lefèvre d'Étaples, *Meteorologia Aristotelis*, fol. III^r: 'Corrupto vocabulo a quibusdam inscribuntur libri Methaurorum.'

⁴⁹ On Aristotle's obscurity, see C. B. Schmitt, 'Aristotle as Cuttlefish: The Origin and Development of an Image', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 12, 1965, pp. 60–72; on his fallibility, see also L. Bianchi, *Studi sull'Aristotelismo del Rinascimento*, Padua, 2003, pp. 101–24. For a related criticism in the *Priora*, see fol. 464^r.

⁵⁰ Averroës, *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De anima libros*, ed. F. Stuart Crawford, Cambridge, MA, 1953, p. 433.

⁵¹ *Convivio*, II.xiv.5–8.





SIMON GILSON

division of philosophy into contemplative and practical branches, with a further subdivision of the contemplative branch into metaphysics, mathematics and natural philosophy (following the standard classification of Aristotelian philosophy, logic is treated separately as an instrumental discipline).⁵² The seventh heading deals with the orders of nature and doctrine, in line with his philosophical treatises related to method and prolegomena mentioned above. The order of nature proceeds from things which are simpler, and the order of doctrine from things which are composite and more known to humans. Varchi takes a position here against those who maintain the need to teach natural philosophy before all other subjects. On the subject of meteorology, he notes that it should be ordered according to the order of nature and that it comes fourth in the order of the *libri naturales* (fol. 226^v).

The eighth heading deals with the order of the work, and Varchi here notes the dispute among philosophers regarding the authenticity of the fourth book and shows his preference for Boccadiferro's view that it was genuine. This is the only time that Boccadiferro is explicitly mentioned in the manuscript, and it is evident that Varchi's account follows his teacher's lectures closely, including the citation of Greek authorities:

Dividesi dunque tutta la Meteora in 4 libri, et benché non pure il grande Averrois tra gli Arabi, ma etiandio Andronico, Olimpiodoro et Alessandro, tre grandissimi, divinissimi et riputabilissimi Greci, voglion altramente, allegando molte authorità et ragioni le quali si reciteranno nel libro delle quistioni, tuttavia questa è la sentenza, contro il parere loro, non solamente di Giovanni grammatico huomo dottissimo et diligente ma ancora dell'eccellentissimo signore Lodovico Boccadiferro mio maestro, principe per quanto posso giudicare io, di tutti i filosofi di questo tempo, al quale tanto mi sento obbligato, et si volentieri gli debbo, che spesse volte rivolgendomi a gli occhi della mente a lui, gli canta tacitamente questi versi miracolosi ...' (fol. 227^r).⁵³

[This book is, then, divided into four books; and although not only the great Averroes among the Arabs but also Andronicus, Olympiodorus and Alexander – three most great, divine and reputable Greeks – claim otherwise, setting forth many authoritative sources and arguments which will be recounted in the book of questions, this opinion is nevertheless opposed by John the Grammarian [i.e., Philoponus], a most learned and diligent man, but also by my teacher, the most excellent master Lodovico Boccadiferro, the prince – as far as I can see – of all the philosophers in the current age and to whom I feel so indebted and to whom I owe so much that turning my mental gaze towards him, I silently chant these miraculous verses ...]

⁵² Similar terminology is utilized by Alessandro Piccolomini in defining philosophy and in his account of order; see his *Instituzione di tutta la vita de l'huomo nato nobile*, Venice, 1545, e.g., fols 48^r–49^r [III.1 and 3].

⁵³ Boccadiferro, *Lectiones super primum librum Meteorum* (n. 39 above), fol. 3^v: 'Alexand[er] Aphrodis[iensis], Hammon[ius] & Olimpiodorus dicunt quod hoc opus dividitur in tres partes: non quidem in tres libros completos: sed dicunt abscondi oportet fine tertij. lib[ri] & totum lib[rum] quartum, & debere addi secundo de generatione. Quia finis tertij & quarti non funt de isto libro Propterea aliter exponit Ioannes Gramm[aticus] & rectius iudicio meo dicit autem hic, quod quatuor sunt libri Meteor[um] neque ulla pars, neque quartus debet abscondi, sed ita debet observari, ut ab Aristotele inscribitur.' More generally on ancient, medieval and Renaissance discussions of Book IV, see *Aristoteles chemicus. Il IV libro dei Meteorologica nella tradizione antica e medioevale*, ed. C. Viano, Münster, 2002; and C. Martin, 'Francisco Valdes and the Renaissance Reinterpretation of Aristotle's *Meteorologica* IV as a Medieval Text', *Early Science and Medicine*, 7, 2002, pp. 1–30.





VERNACULARIZING METEOROLOGY: BENEDETTO VARCHI'S *COMENTO SOPRA IL PRIMO LIBRO DELLE METEORE D'ARISTOTILE*

In the passage which follows, Varchi pays homage to Boccadiferro by quoting the opening thirteen lines of *De rerum natura* III, the celebrated passage where Lucretius praised the illuminating power of Epicurus's doctrine.⁵⁴ The final heading on the mode of doctrine provides a further detailed treatment of questions of dialectic and method. After discussing various meanings of the word 'doctrine', from knowledge, to the exercise of teaching and to what the Greeks call 'method', that is, the way of finding hidden things and teaching them to others, Varchi notes how Aristotle uses all four doctrinal modes – division, resolution, definition and demonstration – in this work.

After these nine headings, there then follow what Varchi terms the 'questioni del proemio' (fol. 227^v), five in total, each given a separate heading in the manuscript: 'Della divisione dell'universo nel mondo superiore et nel mondo inferior'; 'Della divisione dell'aria particolarmente in tre regioni'; 'Dell'esalazioni et vapori'; 'Delle maniere et differenze di tutte l'impressioni et prima delle Quattro cagionii di tutte le cose'; and 'Dei misti perfetti e imperfetti'. Once again the subject topics here, though they evidently follow the Aristotelian text, also seem to owe much to the accounts found in Boccadiferro's lectures on Book I of *Meteorologica*.⁵⁵ Each of these chapters needs careful study in relation to Boccadiferro and the Latin tradition, as well as other sections of Varchi's works where he deals with related topics. This is not the place for a detailed study of the material found there; but it may be helpful to present an overview of the concerns and interests in the opening 'questione' – on the division of the universe into celestial and terrestrial. Naturally, this is a topic widely discussed in the earlier commentary tradition, and Varchi had himself drawn attention to this division in his own lectures on Petrarch.⁵⁶ He provides basic information which is deemed useful and necessary for the 'perfetta intelligenza di questo libro'. Thus, we learn that the aggregate

⁵⁴ 'Le quai parole aeree veramente et degne di viver sempre molto più si convengono a lui di dire et a lui d'ascoltare essendo egli tanto maggiore dell'Epicuro quanto io minore di Lucrezio'. For further encomia to Boccadiferro, see Varchi, *Lezioni sul Dante* (n. 3 above), I, p. 228: 'Ed io ho confessato più volte ed altrove ed in su questa cattedra medesima [sc. the Florentine Academy] ... che quel poco che io so nelle cose della Filosofia, m'è venuto quasi tutto o dalla bocca di lui o sì veramente dagli scritti'; and Benedetto Varchi, *I sonetti*, Venice, 1555, fols 118–19: 'singolare / saggio' (ll. 3–4; sonnet 232).

⁵⁵ See Boccadiferro, *Lectiones super primum librum* (n. 39 above), fols 8^r: 'Secunda suppositio Aristotelis hoc in loco est, quod duplex est mundus, scilicet superior & inferior & quod huiusmodi passiones, seu impressiones sunt partes, non mundi superioris, sed inferioris'; 15^v: 'antequam solvantur quaestiones, primo nota, quod Arist[oteles] supponit elementum aeris dividi in tres regionis ...' (also 20^r); 20^r: 'verum est, quod omnis vapor, & omnis exhalatio calida est, sed differunt in gradu caloris, quia aliquis magis, & aliquis minus; aliquis enim vapor habet remissionem calorem, & intensam frigiditatem, & valde intensiorum, quam calorem. Et ideo concedo, quod omnis vapor fit a calido, non tamen omnis vapor a praedominio est calidus Et ita dico de exhalatione ...'; 20^v: 'dubitatio' on whether or not vapour has substantial quality or not; 21^r: 'In hac difficili & dubia questione mihi videtur dicendum, quod duplex est vapor, & duplex exhalatio. Unus est vapor, & una exhalatio, quae ex corpore simplici generatur: alius autem est vapor, & alia exhalatio, quae generatur ex corporibus mixtis ... non different substantialiter ab elementis ...'. See also *Lectiones*, fols 3^{r-v} and 28^v–29^r, on imperfect mixed bodies and on perfect mixed bodies.

⁵⁶ For Varchi's discussion (citing Aristotle's *Meteorology*) of this topic in the first *Lezione* (15 April 1543) on *Rerum vulgarium* fragmenta VII, see the text in *Raccolta* (n. 32 above), pp. 25–6. On the distinction elsewhere in his writings, see Varchi, *Opere* (n. 3 above), II, pp. 331, 427–8.



SIMON GILSON

of earth and heaven is compared to an egg which contains all things and is divided into two worlds, that Aristotle viewed the superior world as containing all the seven planetary spheres and the heaven of fixed stars, which is incorruptible, without beginning or end. Varchi further observes that, for Aristotle, the fifth body is the principle of all other simple and composite bodies; he again corrects the Aristotelian account when he notes that the fifth element is improperly termed 'elemento primo et semplice'. Varchi passes to the inferior world, that is, the aggregate of things below the Moon, 'nel quale si forma tutte le cose delle quali si ragiona in questo libro'. He now begins to speak of the elements and forms of elemental composition, and their movements ('elementi di composizione', which are dealt with by Aristotle in the final books of *De caelo*, and 'elementi di mistione'). The exposition is, at times, focused on rudiments, foundations and principles; and here we can start to see more clearly how the *Meteora* has permeable boundaries with the academic *lezioni* which Varchi was to deliver at the Florentine Academy.⁵⁷ At the same time, he retains an interest in questions related to enriching the vernacular by means of linguistic transfers; thus in his discussion of elemental movement he notes that:

Il circolare si conviene naturalmente al corpo celeste, nel quale non è principio né forma et il retto è di due maniere, una si parte dal mezzo overo dal centro et va verso la circonferenza, l'altro per l'opposito si parte dalla circonferenza et va ai centri overo ad mezzo. Il primo si chiama da noi, per accrescere la lingua Toscana, et arricchirla così di parole come di termini et modo di favellare tanto greci, quanto Latini, movimento dal mezzo et il secondo movimento al mezzo ... (fols 229^r-230^v).

[Circular movement suits naturally the heavenly body, which has neither a beginning nor form and is governed in two ways: one from the medium to the centre, and the opposite one which moves from the circumference and goes to the centre or medium. In order to expand the Tuscan language and enrich it with words, as well as with technical terms and styles of locution which are based both on Greek and Latin, we will call the first type of motion from the middle and the second motion to the middle ...]⁵⁸

The discussion moves on to consider the relations between the elements and place, and the generation of the elements. There is a lengthy paean to Gaspare Contarini's *De elementis* and an extensive quotation from this work (fol. 232^r), as well as a reference to the treatment of elements and substance in Alexander of Aphrodisias (fol. 232^v). After addressing the other four 'questioni', the manuscript ends with a final set of paratextual

⁵⁷ On the close relationship between written drafts and oral delivery, see Varchi, *Lettere*, p. 97: 'Io seguito così nell'Etica ... a pena sono a tempo a scriverla e come la leggo così la scrivo' (autograph letter, MS London, British Library, Add. 10273, fols 223^v-224^r). For examples of overlap in meteorological material, see the first and second *lezioni* (15 and 20 April 1543), in *Raccolta* (n. 32 above), pp. 25-6, 62-3.

⁵⁸ But cf. *La Metaura*, lib. I, c. 2, ll. 23-4, 28-9, ed. Librandi (n. 24 above), I, p. 160: 'E questi quattro elementi hanno due movimenti: l'uno è dal mezzo ... l'altro è al mezzo'; Boccadiferro, *Lectiones super primum librum* (n. 39 above), fol. 8^r: 'declarans motus eorum elementorum, notificat illos duos motus ex parte medij, dicens, (hunc quidem a medio, hunc quidem ad medium)'.



VERNACULARIZING METEOROLOGY: BENEDETTO VARCHI'S *COMENTO SOPRA IL PRIMO LIBRO DELLE METEORE D'ARISTOTILE*

and prefatory material in the form of a list of chapter headings, which is openly modelled on Thomas Aquinas's commentary, 'the most learned St Thomas', whose presence in Varchi's library we have noted and whose clarity and order receive fulsome praise.⁵⁹

As we have seen, then, Varchi's partial commentary on Book I of *Meteorology* provides us with a suggestive example of his interest in expounding Aristotelian philosophy in the vernacular in the early 1540s, at a time when there was some controversy over the purposes and validity of making Aristotle 'volgare'. His autograph manuscript is a sophisticated exercise in philosophical divulgation which reveals Varchi's interests in the Latin and Greek commentary tradition and in contemporary discussions of various kinds. As we have shown, in spite of the indebtedness to Boccadiferro in several areas of discussion, Varchi's account nonetheless remains notable for the attention he devotes to prefatory remarks and for the way it can be distinguished from the medieval traditions of vernacular meteorology and from near contemporary production such as that by Sebastiano Fausto da Longiano.

⁵⁹ *Meteore*, fol. 244^v: 'Dico dunque seguitando in questa parte per maggiore distinzione et chiarezza l'ordine de' gli spositori latini et spezialmente del Dottissimo San Tommaso che il primo libro si divide in quattro trattati ...'. See n. 41 above for Varchi's ownership of Thomist commentaries in print and manuscript. On Thomas Aquinas in other sixteenth-century vernacular meteorological works, see Martin, *Renaissance Metereology*, pp. 69, 77, and his 'Metereology for Courtiers', pp. 10, 13, and now Bianchi, 'Uses of Latin Sources' in this volume.

