
ALESSANDRA SCIMONE, *Galenus Latinus*. La traduzione di Burgundio da Pisa del *De causis pulsuum* (Micrologus Library 131 / La scuola medica salernitana 12). Firenze: SISMEL – Edizioni del Galluzzo 2025. vi, 410 pp. – ISBN 978-88-9290-442-2 [open access](#)

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Burgundio of Pisa (c. 1110–1193) is one of the most compelling figures of twelfth-century Italy. He successfully combined a civic career as a judge with extensive output as a translator from Greek into Latin. The texts he selected for translation are particularly revealing of the cultural shift underway during his lifetime: a movement to which he made a pivotal contribution. Burgundio produced new translations of legal, philosophical, and theological texts, returning directly to the original Greek sources that remained inaccessible to most of his contemporaries. His work exercised a profound influence on medieval universities: his Aristotelian translations were incorporated into the philosophical curriculum, whilst his rendering of John of Damascus's *De fide orthodoxa* was promptly cited by Peter Lombard in his *Sentences*. It was, however, to scientific and medical texts that Burgundio dedicated the better part of his career: he translated approximately twenty Galenic treatises and completed the pre-existing Latin version of the *Ars medica*. In many cases, the attribution of these translations – frequently transmitted anonymously and superseded in the thirteenth century by more ‘modern’ renderings – rests upon the seminal research conducted by RICHARD DURLING in the latter half of the twentieth century. His pioneering studies laid the groundwork for a further critical breakthrough in Burgundio scholarship, achieved more recently by NIGEL WILSON, who identified Burgundio's own Latin annotations within a group of Greek manuscripts copied in Constantinople under the supervision of the twelfth-century scribe Ioannikios. Furthermore, WILSON assigned these manuscripts to the twelfth century, overturning the long-standing scholarly consensus that had dated them to the fourteenth. The majority of these codices are today preserved at the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence.

In the volume under review, ALESSANDRA SCIMONE provides the first annotated critical edition of Burgundio's translation of Galen's *De causis*

pulsuum. This work forms part of the sphygmological collection, which gathers four treatises devoted to pulses (*De differentiis pulsuum*, *De dignoscendis pulsibus*, *De causis pulsuum*, and *De praesagitione ex pulsibus*). In the sixth century, this collection was incorporated into the Alexandrian canon and became a core component of the standard medical curriculum. It enjoyed wide circulation, initially across the Greek-speaking world, before being translated into Syriac, Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin.

Prior to Burgundio's translations, Galen's sphygmological doctrine was known in the West solely through Agnellus of Ravenna's commentary on *De pulsibus ad tirones* (dating to the second half of the sixth century). Burgundio subsequently translated *De pulsibus ad tirones*, *De differentiis pulsuum*, a pseudo-Galenic *Synopsis pulsuum*, and *De causis pulsuum*. Of the twenty-five manuscripts that transmit Burgundio's translation of *De causis pulsuum*, only eight explicitly attribute it to him. Furthermore, only Books III and IV of the original treatise were rendered into Latin; these provide a detailed lemmatic commentary on chapters 9 to 12 of *De pulsibus ad tirones*, a text frequently transmitted immediately preceding *De causis* in the Latin manuscript tradition.

Did Burgundio, then, translate only this latter part of the text? His Greek exemplar is extant: it is Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pluteo 74.18, which preserves the complete text of *De causis*. While it is impossible to rule out the possibility that a Latin translation of the first two books was lost early in its transmission, SCIMONE makes a compelling case for a deliberate, partial translation: the content of Books III and IV was of direct relevance to the Latin reception of Galenic physiology.

SCIMONE's book is structured in two parts: a general introduction and the critical edition of the text. The former offers concise, up-to-date information on Burgundio's career as a translator, an overview of the Latin translation of *De causis pulsuum* and its reception, and a detailed analysis of Burgundio's approach to the Greek source text. This is by far the richest section of the introduction and represents, to my knowledge, the most comprehensive study of Burgundio's translation technique produced to date. The survival of Burgundio's Greek exemplar allows for a remarkably detailed assessment of his work as both translator and philologist. It is fascinating to observe that even within a *verbum de verbo* rendering such as his, Burgundio was able to emend his source by collating it with the text of *De pulsibus ad tirones* – from which the commented lemmata derived, and which he read in Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pluteo

75.5. SCIMONE demonstrates once more how much-maligned medieval word-for-word translations are, in fact, highly sophisticated gateways to their source texts. Her analysis of Burgundio's methodology is exceptionally thorough: she scrutinises how Burgundio rendered characteristic Greek syntactic structures into Latin, and how he sought to balance a strict adherence to the original wording with the demand for textual clarity. The treatment of lexical choices is particularly illuminating, even if relatively brief – as the author frequently refers the reader to her other publications on the subject. As one would expect, SCIMONE conducted comparative research encompassing Burgundio's other published translations, aiming to reconstruct a relative chronology of the texts in question. She tackles the issue through a twofold approach: on the one hand, following BOSSIER, URSO, and GUNDERT, she examines homogeneous series of basic terms that trace back to a shared semantic field (e.g. ἐνέργεια, translated as *actio*, *actus*, *motio*, and *operatio*, or transliterated and glossed as *energeia id est actus/actio*); on the other, adopting the methodology pioneered by LORENZO MINIO-PALUELLO, she focuses on syncategorematic words – linguistic units devoid of independent lexical meaning yet highly significant from a stylistic perspective. In particular, the varying renderings of the original Greek particles (whether simple or composite) provide compelling evidence in support of dating this translation to the second phase of Burgundio's career, between 1165 and 1178/1179. Further valuable insights into Burgundio's translational methodology derive from his use of doublets or alternative renderings – a phenomenon recurring in the work of several medieval translators, though often obscured in textual transmission. Resorting to two alternative translations for a single Greek term reveals the limitations of Burgundio's technical vocabulary and frequently highlights interpretative difficulties arising from existing lexicographical aids.¹ The nature of the dictionaries and reference tools employed by medieval translators remains a complex subject that calls for a fresh, comprehensive study comparing surviving lexica – which often offer a decontextualised, one-to-one equivalence for each word – with Latin renderings. To be sure, one might argue that medieval translators possessed a practical command

1. On the importance of these double-renderings, see the recent study by ANNA MARIA URSO, *In Search of the Perfect Equivalence: The *verbum de verbo* Method in Burgundio of Pisa's Latin Translations of Galenic Works*. In: PARASKEVI TOMA – PETER BARA (eds.), *Latin Translations of Greek Texts from the 11th to the 13th century (The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400–1500, 143)*. Leiden – Boston 2025, pp. 234–259.

of Greek acquired during their stays in the East; yet it is implausible to assume that a Westerner could master complex Aristotelian philosophical terminology solely through interactions with diplomats or merchants. Crucially, given the relative consistency with which the same Greek terms are rendered across different texts and over time, one must conclude that reference dictionaries did indeed exist, even if their precise structure remains difficult to reconstruct.

The critical edition of the text is preceded by a ‘Nota al testo’ (pp. 86–146), which outlines the manuscript transmission of the Latin text. Twenty-five manuscripts transmit *De causis pulsuum*, the earliest dating to approximately a century after Burgundio completed his translation. SCIMONE presents the content along with the main palaeographical and codicological features of each witness. Many of these codices contain broader corpora of medical translations, and it is to be expected that the findings arising from SCIMONE’s stemmatic analysis will be corroborated (or challenged) by subsequent studies on other texts. In either case, this textual introduction will prove invaluable to anyone working on medieval medical translations. SCIMONE identifies a small set of errors shared by all surviving manuscripts, pointing to the existence of a common archetype. Reconstructing the precise structure of the *stemma* is far from straightforward due to extensive contamination; nevertheless, two main branches can be delineated, α and β . Only three manuscripts comprise branch α , identifiable through a handful of relatively minor errors, whereas the majority of the witnesses belong to branch β , whose hyparchetype was marred by a high number of innovations. Interestingly, not only does α preserve a significantly superior text, but there are also sound reasons to believe that its hyparchetype contained interlinear variants. Although SCIMONE does not state it explicitly, it is tempting to discern Burgundio’s autograph behind this lost manuscript. The three α manuscripts (B, Y, and M) are independent of one another; it should therefore be possible to reconstruct the reading of their ancestor mechanically. From branch β , three sub-families derive, designated as γ , δ , and ϵ . There are, however, several instances where one of these three hyparchetypes aligns with another in shared errors – a clear indication of contamination. Unsurprisingly, executing a successful *eliminatio codicum descriptorum* proved virtually impossible. SCIMONE thus rightly opts for a pragmatic *eliminatio ex adiuvantibus*, restricting her apparatus to those manuscripts that offer valuable readings. A *stemma codicum* printed on page 146 succinctly summarises SCIMONE’s findings.

Next comes the critical edition itself, which forms the core of the volume under review. SCIMONE has adopted a rather innovative approach: she presents her critical text facing a diplomatic transcription of Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pluteo 74.18 – the very exemplar used by Burgundio. This is a most commendable choice, as it allows the reader to grasp at a glance what Burgundio was reading, how he rendered it into Latin, and how his translation was subsequently altered in the medieval manuscript tradition. This decision also underscores the fact that a modern critical edition of the Greek original is still lacking, forcing scholars to rely on the thoroughly outdated nineteenth-century edition by KÜHN. SCIMONE herself has provided a fresh assessment of the transmission of the Greek text, from which her own critical text has clearly benefited.² While the survival of Burgundio's Greek exemplar represents a major advantage for the constitution of the text, SCIMONE nonetheless faced a formidable task, the rationale for most of her editorial decisions being detailed in a rich philological commentary. The Latin apparatus records all variants, including *errores singulares*. As noted above, SCIMONE has selected a number of representative manuscripts for branch β: ten are collated in full, whereas the readings of two others are reported only selectively. Since all β-manuscripts offer largely unhelpful innovations, one might wonder whether SCIMONE could have been still more selective – perhaps choosing just three manuscripts, one for each sub-branch, and discarding all *errores singulares*.

Between the edition and the commentary, SCIMONE inserts an *apparato greco-latino*, which registers all deviations from the Greek text (such as expressed copulas, omissions, and stylistic adjustments). This section feels somewhat redundant, given that the reader is already provided with a diplomatic transcription of the Greek original; nevertheless, it demonstrates with utmost clarity that the criterion of perfect equivalence, upon which modern editions of Greco-Latin translations so often rely, is largely a myth. Had the Laurentianus not survived, we would in many instances have postulated the existence of an otherwise unattested variant in Burgundio's Greek source text – and we would have been mistaken.

The volume is rounded off by an extensive bibliography and a comprehensive set of indexes covering manuscripts, ancient and modern names, citations, and, most notably, invaluable *indices graeco-latinus* and *latinus-*

2. A. SCIMONE, Sulla tradizione del *De causis pulsuum* di Galeno. Galenos 18 (2024) pp. 127–144.

graecus, which afford immediate access to Burgundio's every translational choice. This edition represents the culmination of a painstaking and truly admirable scholarly effort. It is greatly to be hoped that SCIMONE will extend her research to the remaining sphygmological translations – and, ideally, to a long-overdue critical edition of the Greek original itself.

Keywords

history of medicine; medieval translations; Burgundio of Pisa; Galen