

Giovanni Michele Alberto Carrara (1438 - 1490)

He was born in Bergamo in 1438 to Guido, a doctor and humanist. His father forced him to follow an extensive programme of classical readings, so that even as a boy he could recite Virgil by heart. In 1458, he was in Padua, where he was awarded the title of doctor of medicine. He had already begun his literary activity: among the poetic compositions of this period are the epigrams addressed to southern humanists, the Panormita and especially the Porcellio, as well as the *Armiranda*, a long autobiographical comedy. Apart from some attempts at editions in the 18th century by scholars from Bergamo, his production largely failed to attract the interest of publishers. In the 15th century, only the *De omnibus ingeniis augende memorie* was printed, which was readapted in *De memoria reparanda augenda servandaque*, by the Bergamasque doctor Guglielmo Grataroli (1516-1568), and had a vernacular adaptation by L. Dolce, *Dialogo nel quale si registra del modo di accrescere e conservare la memoria*. The text is important not only for its Aristotelian derivations, but above all because it shows the close connection between art and medicine, discussing diseases that hinder the use of memory and rules concerning nutrition and physical activity. Moreover, his treatise *De pulsibus* was incorporated into a collection of texts by medical authorities while he was still alive. For him, the world was essentially centred in the Bergamo area, which was also the background to his activity as a humanist. His poetic works also include around 250 poems in Latin and a

poem in Dante's tercets, the *Comedia*. The 15 *Sermones obiugatorii* and some religious texts use a moralising register. He also wrote a cosmology (*De constitutione mundi*) and several scientific texts. With regard to medical texts, three have survived, namely the one on memory and the treatises *De pulsibus* and *De pestilentia*. He died in Bergamo on 26 October 1490.

In this volume, the author interprets Aristotelian observations on order as real rules of the *ars memorativa*, suggesting the construction of a "local memory" based on the division of animal bodies into five parts. Within the pages some interesting autobiographical insights can be found, illustrating a *modus operandi* typical of mnemonics, namely the creation of a visual alphabet based on places and images. However, the importance of Carrara's text is mainly attributable to the close connection between the art of memory and medicine. First, the localisation of memory is discussed, then the author talks about the main diseases that hinder the use of memory and presents a series of rules concerning the use of food and drink in a real recipe book. The text would later be quoted extensively by the doctor and scholar from Bergamo, Guglielmo Gratarolo, in his treatise on mnemonic medicine.