

Didactic and Scientific Poetry in Latin from Ancient Rome to Modern Times

International Symposium

University of Tokyo, Department of Southern European Languages
and Literatures / Department of Classical Studies
Saturday 16 November 14.00-17.00
Law and Letters - Hobun - Building 1, room 219



- 14.00** Lorenzo Amato and Taro Hyuga, "Introductory Notes"
- 14.15** **Taro Hyuga** (University of Tokyo), "On bugonia in Book IV of Vergil's Georgics"
- 14.45** **Iolanda Ventura** (Università di Bologna) - "A Botanical Best-Seller: Odo of Meung's *De viribus herbarum* ("Macer floridus") from Latin to Vernacular"
- 15.15** **Lorenzo Amato** (University of Tokyo), "Citruses, Silkworms, Soils, and Tobacco: Renaissance Latin Georgics by Giovanni Pontano, Girolamo Vida, Milio Voltolina, and the Esteemed British Doctor Raphael Thorius"
- 15.45** **Outi Merisalo** (Università di Jyväskylä), "The poem Caprarola, by Lorenzo Gambara (c.1496 - 1586)"
- 16.15** COFFEE BREAK
- 16.30** **Roundtable - Discussant Hidemi Takahashi** (end-time around 17.00).

The Symposium will be held in English (発表は英語のみ). It will be possible to participate on-line.

For registration and other questions, please write to amato@l.u-tokyo.ac.jp.

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東大文



ABSTRACTS

Didactic and Scientific Poetry in Latin from Ancient Rome to Modern Times (International Symposium - Saturday 16 November 14.00-17.00)

Symposium Overview

Latin, the language of Rome and its Empire, retained its role as Europe's *lingua franca* well after the fall of Rome. During the Middle Ages, a form of Latin, often called Medieval Latin, became the principal language for literature, theology, and science. Following the Humanist restoration of classical Latin, it continued to serve as the language of scholarship into the early modern scientific era, when thinkers like Erasmus of Rotterdam and scientists such as Isaac Newton and Carl Linnaeus used it as a universal medium for intellectual exchange.

This symposium aims at showing the importance of Latin literature after the end of the Roman Empire, by focusing on the analysis of didactic and scientific poetry. Didactic poetry was a vital literary form for conveying scientific and philosophical knowledge through verse. With roots in ancient Greek poetry, exemplified by Hesiod's *Works and Days*, which held a status comparable to Homer's epics, didactic poetry found fertile ground in Latin. Poets like Lucretius, Vergil, Strabo, and Manilius established a Latin tradition of didactic poetry that would endure until the eighteenth century. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment, poets explored a wide range of scientific topics—medicine, astronomy, agriculture, architecture, herbalism, mineralogy, and more. Their works, translated into various vernacular languages, ensured the dissemination of scientific knowledge, impacting large segments of the European populace and laying foundations for modern science. For instance, Girolamo Fracastoro's medical poem *Syphilis, seu de morbo Gallico* shaped contemporary understanding of the disease so profoundly that the term "syphilis" originates from his verses.

As this symposium examines the evolution of Latin didactic poetry from ancient Rome to early modern times, it highlights the genre's resilience and adaptability. These poems, more than mere instructional tools, enriched scientific and cultural discourse, offering insights that transcended their educational purpose. Spanning from Hesiod to the Enlightenment, didactic poetry bridged the divide between art and knowledge, reflecting humanity's ever-deepening understanding of the natural world.

The symposium participants—Lorenzo Amato, Taro Hyuga, Outi Merisalo, and Iolanda Ventura—come from diverse academic backgrounds, yet all are scholars of Latin literature, spanning the ancient, medieval, Renaissance, and modern periods. They will present various case studies of didactic and scientific poetry across different eras and will discuss their findings together in a final roundtable moderated by the discussant, Hidemi Takahashi. The symposium will be bimodal: it will be held in presence at the University of Tokyo (instructions above), and it will be possible to follow it online, via zoom, through the following link:

<https://u-tokyo-ac-jp.zoom.us/j/85605001884?pwd=WwhuQaYTjRdZ7fYG9N0haiRQ8iigRl.1>

14.15 - 14.45 - Taro Hyuga (University of Tokyo), "On *bugonia* in Book IV of Vergil's *Georgics*"



Taro Hyuga, born in 1965, studied classical literature at the University of Tokyo, where he earned his BA in 1989, LittM in 1992, and LittD in 1999, with a study period at the University of Florence on an Italian government scholarship (1994-1996). After serving as Associate Professor (2009-2018), he has been Professor of Greek and Latin at the University of Tokyo since 2019 and head of the Department since 2020. His publications include a Japanese translation of Paul the Deacon's "Historia Langobardorum" (2016), a study on Propertius (2017), and a monograph in Japanese on Roman elegiac poets (2019).

In the last half of Book IV of the *Georgics* Vergil talks about the resurrection of a swarm of bees lost due to a disease. The poet describes in detail this method, *bugonia*, followed by the story of its cause (*aition*) which is called Arstiaeus *epyllion*.

As Roman technical books on agriculture, prior to Vergil's *Georgics*, we have the *De Agricultura* of Marcus Porcius Cato (234-149 BC) as well as the *De Re Rustica* of Varro (116-27 BC). Therein both writers say that the origin of bees is associated with bulls, but they do not mention the *bugonia* itself. Columella mentions in his work *De Re Rustica* (composed in the first century AD) that besides Vergil a Carthaginian writer, Mago and Democritus write that the bees are generated from the carcasses of bulls.

On the other hand, we find in the Byzantine technical writing, *Geoponica*, a series of the description of *bugonia* close to that which Vergil gives in the *Georgics*. The description in the *Geoponica* is ascribed to an author of the third century, Florentinus, who composed 11 books of the *Georgics* in Greek. If Florentinus did not read the Vergilian work, it is probable that the descriptions of both authors depend upon the common source (or upon different sources which can be traced back to common source) which derives presumably from Democritus.

14.45 - 15.15 - Iolanda Ventura (Università di Bologna) - "A Botanical Best-Seller: Odo of Meung's *De viribus herbarum* ("Macer floridus") from Latin to Vernacular"



Iolanda Ventura teaches Medieval Latin Literature at the University of Bologna. Previously, she held the CNRS Chaire d'Excellence in the History of Science at the Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes (Paris/Orléans) and the Université d'Orléans. Her research interests focus on the history of science (particularly medicine and pharmacology) between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and on the reception of these disciplines in scholarly culture through encyclopedic texts.

Written in the second half of the twelfth century by Odo of Meung, a mysterious poet from the Loire Valley, the poem *De viribus herbarum* (often mistakenly referred to as *Macer floridus*) quickly became a bestseller. Describing the medicinal properties of 77 plants, the poem draws from a vast library of Ancient and Early Medieval scientific sources. Its popularity is evidenced by the survival of several dozens, perhaps hundreds, of manuscripts and its extensive use by later sources, along with translations into multiple vernacular languages.

My paper aims to provide an overview of the diffusion of the poem in Latin and its reception in vernacular languages, with a particular focus on the French and Italian cultural milieus during the Late Middle Ages.

15.15 - 15.45 - Lorenzo Amato (University of Tokyo), "Citruses, Silkworms, Soils, and Tobacco: Renaissance Latin Georgics by Giovanni Pontano, Girolamo Vida, Milio Voltolina, and the Esteemed British Doctor Raphael Thorius"



Lorenzo Amato is an Associate Professor of Italian Language and Literature at the University of Tokyo. He earned his PhD from the University of Florence, with a specialization in Renaissance Latin poetry, including an edition of Domenico da Corella's Theotocon, followed by a focus on late Renaissance Italian lyrical poetry. His research interests span the intersections of literature, the arts, and sciences, as well as cross-cultural exchanges among Italian, Latin, French, Finnish, and Japanese traditions.

Since the earliest Greek poetry, specifically Hesiod's *Works and Days* ("Ἔργα καὶ ἡμέραι"), the theme of agricultural work and the relationship with the natural world has been considered among the most important to address in poetry, on par with epic themes. With his *Georgics*, Virgil offered the Latin world a model of an agricultural-themed poem that would become one of the pillars of European culture, imitated since antiquity.

From the Renaissance onward, georgic poetry emerged as a distinct genre, and almost up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, poems in various books of Latin hexameters were printed, covering all kinds of subjects related to agriculture, animal husbandry, and even hunting. They consistently maintain strong ties to the Virgilian model, from the use of mythology or etiological narratives to the quotation of specific verses and passages from Virgil's *Georgics*. Often, the pursuit of neo-Virgilian linguistic purity is combined with significant and innovative practical knowledge, as evidenced by the frequent translations of the most important poems into all European languages.

In my presentation, I will focus on three poems published in Italy in the sixteenth century that were among the most esteemed of the Latin Renaissance: Giovanni Pontano's

De hortis Hesperidum, Girolamo Vida's *De Bombyce*, and Giuseppe Milio Voltolina's *De hortorum cultura*. I will conclude with a brief examination of a poem from a different origin, *Hymnus tabaci* by the English physician Raphael Thorius, who, inspired by Girolamo Fracastoro's *Syphilis*, merges the georgic and the medical genres.

15.45 - 16.15 Outi Merisalo (Università di Jyväskylä), "The poem *Caprarola*, by Lorenzo Gambara (c. 1496-1586)"



Outi Merisalo (Professor of Romance Philology, University of Jyväskylä, Finland) specializes in the history of Latin writing during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, archival documents in Old French, translations from Latin into Old and Middle French, and Italian humanism in Latin and vernacular languages. She has been the Secretary General of the Comité international de paléographie latine since 2015 and has led several research projects on the history of the book, most recently "Late Medieval and Early Modern Libraries as Knowledge Repositories, Guardians of Tradition and Catalysts of Change" (Lamemoli, Academy of Finland and University of Jyväskylä, 2017–2022).

The Brescian priest, translator and poet Lorenzo Gambara spent his life at the Papal court, part of the retinue of the powerful Cardinal Alessandro Farnese (1520-1589), grandson of Pope Paul III (r. 1534-1549). Well versed in Classical literature, he published poetry in Latin, e.g. the Virgilian epic (in hexameters) on the travels of Christopher Columbus, *De navigatione Christophori Columbi* (1581), and translated Greek poetry and prose into Latin, in particular Longus's *Daphnis and Chloe*.

The poem *Caprarola*, published in 1581, is again a Virgilian celebration in hexameters of the achievements of Cardinal Alessandro, through a description of the artistic and architectural marvels of the Villa Caprarola north-west of Rome, built by Vignola between 1554 and 1585. This paper will contextualise the poem from the points of view of the reception and re-use of Classical antiquity in Counter-Reformation Rome.