**LONG ABSTRACT:**

**Documenting early medieval *medici* in Italian charters, AD 800-1100**

**Luca Larpi**

This paper discusses some issues raised by my survey of *ca.* 17,000 charters, aimed at identifying individual doctors active in early medieval Italy, and the subsequent undertakings to create an online database to make the gathered material available worldwide.

The medici database was one of the main outcomes of “I sign therefore I am. The occupational identity of doctors in Italy, ss. IX-XI”, a Wellcome-funded project designed by Clare Pilsworth (University of Manchester), whose goal was documenting medical practitioners in the early Middle Ages using records of legal transactions from several kingdoms across the Italian peninsula. In 2012 I joined in as Research Associate with the job of making a systematic survey of charters held in the archives of twelve Italian cities.

The surveyed collections were chosen on the basis of their geographical distribution and the number of available documents, in order to provide a set of data reflecting as much as possible the varying realities of early medieval Italy. They are the following:

* Piedmont: Asti and Novara;
* Lombardy: Milan and Bergamo;
* Veneto: Vicenza;
* Emilia-Romagna: Piacenza, Reggio-Emilia and Ravenna;
* Tuscany: Lucca and Pistoia;
* Lazio: Rome;
* Campania: Naples and Salerno.

178 documents mentioning 109 individual *medici* were identified across the peninsula.

**The database**

One of the main outcomes of the project was the compilation of a [database](http://www.alc.manchester.ac.uk/subjects/history/research/projects/italian-doctors/), accessible and searchable online via the University of Manchester website.

The *medici* database is typological in nature, as it lists almost exclusively medical practitioners attested in early medieval Italy, and small in dimensions: 178 attestations are not exactly what one might call “big data”. The database, however, is proving useful for a number of reasons. First of all, it provides useful guidance for any scholar trying to find his or her own way in the labyrinth of multiple editions of medieval Italian charters. Secondly, the search page allows a user-friendly way to have a quick access to specific documents. But it is perhaps when it is used in connection with other, wider data collections that the database shows its full potential.

An example could help to clarify this point. I spent last year working on the material I gathered for early medieval Salerno. I was interested in analyzing in detail the references to medical practitioners in this area, before the emergence of the so-called Medical School around the end of the eleventh century. Before starting this work, all I had was a list of charters attesting medici active in Salerno between the ninth and the eleventh century. Sometimes all the database recorded was the name of the practitioner and his role in the transaction, but in some cases it also gave the names of the father and other relatives. This would bring me only so far, and it was evident that if I wanted to learn more about these people, I had to look somewhere else. A solution could have been going through the ten volumes of the Codex Diplomaticus Cavensis, which published most of the available charters relative to Salerno, currently held in the archive of the Abbazia della Santissima Trinita’ in Cava dei Tirreni. I had to face two problems, however. The first was practical: working in Manchester, I could not have an easy access to the series. The second was the nature of CDC – as eight of the current ten volumes were published in the second half of the nineteenth century, I could not count on very reliable indexes.

Luckily for me, the whole Codex is now available online via ALIM (Archivio della Latinità Italiana del Medioevo), an ambitious project sponsored by the Unione Accademica Nazionale (U.A.N.) aiming at making available the whole corpus of writings produced in Italy during the Middle Ages. Charters obviously form an important part of this database, and they can be searched by edition, place and type. ALIM is the exact opposite of my medici database. By its very nature, it is very generic and “shapeless”, containing thousands of data about all sort “medieval writings”. The richness of information it can provide is almost overwhelming, unless one knows exactly what he/she is looking for.

And this is where the medici database is useful. When I tried to search the specific data gathered there in ALIM, looking for not just for people labeled as medici but also people with the same name, same family connections and affiliations, I came across a great deal of unexpected findings.

For example, I was able to reconstruct the family tree of a Petrus clericus et medicus, attested in Salerno only once in 1054.

This Petrus is an interesting figure: a prominent physician at the court of the last Lombard prince of Salerno, Gisulf II, he had two brothers, Adelarius and Mascinus, important landowners in the north-west area of the principate. His family and social networks, plus the fact that he disappears from our documentation after 1050s might suggest a possible identification with Petrus Germanus, the first magister of medicine ever attested in Salerno, killed by prince Gisulf ‘in order to steal his property’, as Amatus of Montecassino puts it in his Historia Normannorum IV.41.

Neither Petrus’ hypothetical family tree, not his possible identification with Petrus Germanus however appear in the medici database. Since this records only charters directly attesting a medicus, all you will find here is a reference to Petrus son of Romualdus. Simply put, there is no space for any hypothesis around this individual.

The question I am asking myself – and I am asking you today – is how this kind of information can be shown in the rigid framework of a database. In a critical edition of a text, the critical apparatus provides the editor with an useful tool to inform the reader of the choices he made when reconstructing the text, providing, at the same time, a list of possible alternatives. Should we think about something similar in a database?