

## Historic Research about the First Dermatology Book and Its Author: Hieronymus Mercurialis

Sir,

The first printed book of Dermatology was written in Venice by Hieronymus Mercurialis [Figure 1] and was entitled “De morbis cutaneis et omnibus corporis humani excrementis tractatus”, which means “Of all skin diseases and waste treatment of the body.” The book followed galenic principles and covered the treatment of dermatological pathologies, both localized and generalized, from a holistic perspective. The manual also contained topics on body secretions and their connection to body physiopathology, such as urine, feces, sweat, tears, and sputum. Despite basing a large part of its conclusions on observations and

own experience -as well as on the translation of hippocratic and galenic principles- it is considered the first scientific text in the field of dermatology.

Its author, Hieronymus Mercurialis, was a physician, naturalist, philosopher, and Italian pedagogue of Renaissance period. His most important contributions consisted in the recovery of the ideas that Galen had in relation to the care of human body, which together with his own contributions, gave back to physical activity value as a way to preserve health.<sup>[1]</sup>

Mercurialis took his medical degree in Bologna and Padua. In the latter, he received his doctorate in 1555. Later, he settled in Forlì - his hometown - and then traveled to Rome, where he lived under the patronage of Cardinal Alejandro Farnesio (1562). In this city, he spent around 7 years, dedicated to the practice and teaching of Medicine. He made favorable contacts and had free access to the great libraries where, with great enthusiasm, he studied the classical and medical literature of Greeks and Romans, which facilitated the writing of his compendium “De arte gymnastica” (Gymnastics of the ancients). With its explanations about the principles of physical therapy, it is considered the first book on sports medicine.<sup>[2]</sup>

Mercuriale quickly became famous in the vicinity, thanks to the publication of its book, fact that facilitated him the opportunity to exert medicine in Padua, city to which he would move in 1569. In this period, he was dedicated to the translation and interpretation of Hippocrates books. Based on the knowledge of Classical Culture physicians, he published his dermatological treatise “De morbis cutaneis” in 1572. In addition, he made contributions to pediatrics, obstetrics, ophthalmology, and other branches of medicine, based on own observations and adaptations of ancient texts.

In 1576, Venetian government summoned Mercuriale so that, together with another professor of medicine, Girolamo Capodivacca, they would take the necessary measures for the management of the plague in Venice. However, both agreed that the disease that punished Venice was not the plague, so they withdrew quarantines and other preventive strategies. The mortality due to the disease increased drastically, which meant a severe declination in his reputation. Nevertheless, this fact facilitated him the publication of “De pestilentia,” a book about this illness, in 1577. He remained in Padua until 10 years later, when he moved to Bologna city, where he would work as a teacher until 1606. At this time, he returned to his hometown and died a few months later.<sup>[3]</sup>



Figure 1: Hieronymus Mercurialis. Line engraving, 1688. Submitted with the permission of Wikimedia Commons

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### Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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