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**Artykuły i rozprawy**

**Articles and Dissertations**

**Beiträge und Abhandlungen**



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## **An introduction to Michele Savonarola's (1385–1446) treatise entitled *Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium*\*\***

The treatise by Italian physician Giovanni Michele Savonarola (†1464) entitled *Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium* is regarded as the first written discourse in 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy that was dedicated entirely to gynecology, obstetrics, and pediatrics, and was written in the national language<sup>1</sup>. The treatise differs from other 15<sup>th</sup> century medical papers in the choice of subject, language, the target audience, and the manner in which it conveyed knowledge. Gynecology, obstetrics, and pediatrics were not popular topics of discussion at the time. Most medical papers presented these subjects in a succinct manner, discussed the most common problems, or focused on a selected topic<sup>2</sup>. Separate written works addressing specifically diseases of the female reproductive system, infertility, pregnancy, birth, and care of the mother and the child, in a comprehensive manner, were rarely published. *Liber de sin-*

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<sup>1</sup> The following treatises dedicated to the subject were published in subsequent years: *Le medicine partenenti e alle infermità delle donne* by Giovanni Marinello and *La comare o la ricogliatrice* by Scipione Mercurio.

<sup>2</sup> Fertility problems and pregnancy were discussed by Antonio da Scarperia (†1433) in *Consilium ad concipiendum*, Arnold of Vilanova (†1312/1313) in *Compilatio de conceptione* and *Consilium contra sterilitatem*, Bernard de Gordon († ca. 1308) in *De impregnacione*, Gentile da Foligno († after 1348) in *Consilium ad conceptionem*, Johannes Pataranus († c. 1382) in *Regimen de conceptione in complexione flegmatica*, and Petrus de Nadillis († ca. 1374) in *De impregnacione*. Alessandro Sermoneta (†1492) wrote about miscarriage in *Consilium ne mulier abortiat*, and menstruation was discussed by Constantin the African († before 1098) in *Contra fluxum menstruorum*.

*thomatibus mulierum* by Trotula of Salerno, a medical practitioner who lived in Italy in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, was one of such examples<sup>3</sup>. Her work enjoyed considerable popularity in the Middle Ages, but it failed to reach (at least initially) midwives who had the greatest need for practical knowledge<sup>4</sup>. Women who had an interest in this compendium of knowledge were faced with at least two problems: most of them were illiterate, and those who could read were not familiar with Latin<sup>5</sup>.

The main aim of this article was to discuss the work of Giovanni Michele Savonarola, a Medieval physician who is relatively unknown in Poland, but is regarded as one of the most prominent medical practitioners in 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy<sup>6</sup>. Savonarola's treatise entitled *Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium* was also analyzed as a source of information on Medieval knowledge about infertility, pregnancy, birth, and care of the child until seven years of age<sup>7</sup>. Savonarola's treatise makes numerous references to Galen, Rhazes, and Avicenna, but it is not a mere compilation of their works. When writing the discussed document, Savonarola had already accumulated significant medical experience, and he presented his observations and views on infertility, pregnancy, birth, the postpartum period, and child care, which make a significant contribution to the discussed work.

Giovanni Michele Savonarola, the grandfather of Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola († 1498), was born around 1385 in Padua to a wealthy merchant family<sup>8</sup>. Very little

<sup>3</sup> *Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum*, [in:] Trotula. *Un compendio medievale di medicina delle donne*, ed. H. Green, Firenze 2009.

<sup>4</sup> The treatise was eventually translated to national languages, but the use of Latin words and phrases suggests that it had been originally addressed to educated readers. More information about *Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum* in Polish, refer to A. Głusiuk, *Concepto impeditur tam uicio uiri quam mulieris – kobięca i męska niepłodność na podstawie traktatu Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum*, "Medycyna Nowożytna" 2020, no. 2, pp. 101–1016.

<sup>5</sup> For more information about literacy levels and knowledge of Latin among female medical practitioners in the Middle Ages, refer to M.H. Green, *Books as a source of medicinal education for women in the Middle Ages*, "Dynamis: Acta Hispanica and Medicinae Scientiarumque Historiam Illustrandam" 2000, no. 20, pp. 331–369.

<sup>6</sup> Giovanni Michele Savonarola was discussed in a small number of Polish-language articles, including *Kopernikowski inkunabul medyczny w Olsztynie* by S. Flis, "Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie" 1970, no. 4, pp. 589–606, and *Inkunabuły „medyczne” z Biblioteki Wyższego Seminarium Duchownego w Kielcach* by P. Kardyś, "Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne" 2022, no. 118, pp. 141–170, in particular 148–152.

<sup>7</sup> This paper belongs to a series of research articles on gynecology and obstetrics in Medieval Italy. The following articles have been published by A. Głusiuk: *De regimine infantis – opieka nad dzieckiem w średniowiecznej Italii na podstawie Ad mulieres Ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium Michele Savonaroli*, "Medycyna Nowożytna" 2021, no. 1, pp. 63–79; eadem, *Ciąża, poród, opieka nad matką i noworodkiem na podstawie traktatu Michała Savonaroli Ad mulieres Ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium*, "Almanach Historyczny" 2021, no. 23, vol. 2 – special edition: *Medicina antiqua, medievalis et moderna. Historia – filozofia – religia*, ed. J. Legieć, pp. 167–184; eadem, *Michał Savonarola o trudnym porodzie Ad mulieres Ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium*, "Medycyna Nowożytna" 2022, no. 1, pp. 55–71; eadem, *W jaki sposób należy opiekować się dzieckiem w pierwszych tygodniach jego życia? Zalecenia autorów wybranych średniowiecznych traktatów medycznych*, "Saeculum Christianum" 2022, no. 2, pp. 17–30.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. G. Zuccolin, *Michele Savonarola medico Humano. Fisiognomica, etica e religione alla corte estense*, Bari 2018, p. 63.

is known about his childhood and early education. According to Italian researcher Gabriela Zuccolin<sup>9</sup>, Savonarola could have been schooled by the renowned educator Giovanni Conversini (1343–1408)<sup>10</sup>, but there is insufficient evidence to substantiate this claim. Historical records indicate that Savonarola was a student of Paolo Veneto (†1429)<sup>11</sup> and Biagio Pelacani (†1416)<sup>12</sup>. As a medical student in Padua, Savonarola was tutored by Giacomo della Torre (†1414)<sup>13</sup> and Antonio Cermisone (†1441)<sup>14</sup>. He graduated in 1413, and a year later, he married Caterina, the daughter of Pietro da Pernumia (†1393) who was the personal physician of Francesco I da Carrara. Savonarola had eight children – three sons and five daughters<sup>15</sup>. After graduation, Savonarola practiced medicine in Padua, and became a lecturer at Padua university in 1433. In September 1440, he moved to Ferrara, where he replaced Hugo Benzi<sup>16</sup> (†1439) as the court physician to

<sup>9</sup> Gabriela Zuccolin has authored numerous research papers on Savonarola and his work, including: G. Zuccolin, *The Speculum phisionomie by Michele Savonarola*, [in:] *Universalità della ragione. Pluralità delle filosofie nel Medioevo*, eds. A. Musco et al., Firenze 2012, pp. 873–887; eadem, *Il ruolo dell'exemplum nella produzione medica e religiosa di Michele Savonarola (1385–1466)*, [in:] *Exempla medicorum. Die Ärzte und ihre Beispiele (14.–18. Jahrhundert)*, eds. M. Gadebusch Bondio, T. Ricklin, Firenze 2008, pp. 109–128; eadem, *Princely virtues in De felici progressu of Michele Savonarola, court physician of the House of Este*, [in:] *Princely virtues in the Middle Ages 1200–1500*, eds. I.P. Bejczy, C.J. Nederman, Turnhout 2007, pp. 237–258; eadem, *Medici a corte e formazione del signore*, [in:] *Costumi educativi nelle corti di antico regime*, ed. M. Ferrari, Milano 2010, pp. 77–102.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. G. Zuccolin, *Michele Savonarola medico Humano...*, p. 63.

<sup>11</sup> Paolo Veneto was an Italian philosopher and theologian who studied in Oxford and Padua. Veneto lectured at universities in Padua, Bologna, Sienna, and Florence. He was the ambassador of the Republic of Venice to the Polish King in 1413. Veneto wrote numerous treatises on logic, theology, and philosophy, including *Logica magna*, *Quadratura*, *Sophismata*, *Summa philosophiae naturalis*, *De anima*. Cf. A. D. Conti, *Paolo Veneto (Paolo Nicoletti)*, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/paolo-veneto\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/paolo-veneto_(Dizionario-Biografico)) (accessed: 4 XII 2022).

<sup>12</sup> Biagio Pelacani was a logic and philosophy lecturer at universities in Pavia, Padua, Florence, and Bologna. Cf. G. F. Vescovini, *Biagio Pelacani (Blasius de Pelacanis de Parma)*, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/biagio-pelacani\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/biagio-pelacani_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/) (accessed: 4 XI 2022).

<sup>13</sup> Giacomo della Torre was born in Forlì between 1360 and 1362. He studied medicine, probably in Padua. In 1400, he was lecturer in Studio Paduano Medicorum. Between 1404–1407, he taught medicine in Sienna, and then he took the chair of medicine in Padua. Giacomo della Torre authored numerous papers in which he commented on the work of Galen, Hippocrates, and Avicenna. His seminal works include *In aphorismos Hippocratis expositiones cum quaestionibus*, *Super tres libros Tegni Galieni*, and *Super primum librum Canonis Avicennae*. He died probably in 1414. Cf. A. de Ferrari, *Della Torre (Iacobus a Turre, de la Turre, Dalla Torre, de Forlivo, Forliviensis, Foroliviensis, Ferolivias)*, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giacomo-della-torre\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giacomo-della-torre_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/) (accessed: 26 XI 2022).

<sup>14</sup> Antonio Cermisone was born in Padua in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. He studied medicine in Padua and received the degree of doctor in 1390. Between 1393 and 1399, Cermisone taught medicine at universities in Pavia and Piacenza. Around 1411, he returned to Padua, where he continued his academic career. He is the author of *Consilia medica contra omnes fere aegritudines a capite usque ad pedes*, and he has been also credited with the authorship of *In re medica commentaria* and *De sanitate tuenda*. Cf. F. di Trocchio, *Antonio Cermisone*, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/antonio-cermisone\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/antonio-cermisone_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/) (accessed: 26 XI 2022). For more information about Antonio Cersimone, refer to T. Pesenti, *Professori e promotori di medicina nello Studio di Padova dal 1405 al 1509*, Padova–Trieste 1984, pp. 72–91.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. R. Simonetti, *Savonarola Michele*, [in:] *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Roma 2018, p. 151.

<sup>16</sup> Hugo Benzi was a physician and author of medical treatises, including *Tractato utilissimo per la conservatione de la sanitate and Consilia saluberrima ad omnes aegritudines*. Cf. R. Gualdo, *Il lessico medico del De regimine pregnantium di Michele Savonarola*, Firenze 1996, p. 12, in particular footnote 12. For more

Niccolò III d'Este (†1441). Initially, Savonarola also lectured at the faculty of medicine in Ferrara, but in the following years, he gave up his tenure and focused on his duties as the court physician<sup>17</sup>. Savonarola quickly gained the esteem of Leonello d'Este (†1450), the son of Niccolò III d'Este, who granted Ferrarese citizenship to Savonarola and his children on 28 January 1443<sup>18</sup>. In 1450, Leonello d'Este appointed Savonarola his personal physician and presented him with the right to the royal tithe levied on Sant'Elena nel Rodigino in recognition of his medical achievements and written works. The document confirming the royal grant clearly indicates that the marquis highly valued Savonarola's talents, and it makes a direct reference to this father Niccolò III d'Este's decision to bring Savonarola to Ferrara ten years earlier: "suo ingegno singolari, sua in curandis humanis corporibus providentia in arte, suisque voluminibus et libris, quos plures condidit, medicine disciplinam maxime illustravit"<sup>19</sup>. It should be noted that Savonarola's fame spread beyond Ferrara, and in 1452, Pope Nicholas V appointed him Knight Templar of Jerusalem, but released him from the monastic vow of chastity (the physician had been already married and had children<sup>20</sup>). Savonarola was a man of many talents, and, according to Gabriella Zuccolin, he was also a banker in the d'Este court<sup>21</sup>.

Savonarola dedicated the last years of his life to writing. He died in Ferrara between 8 March and 28 July 1466<sup>22</sup>.

Savonarola authored numerous treatises dedicated not only to medicine, but also to politics, history, ethics, and esthetics<sup>23</sup>. It is worth noting that Savonarola wrote in both Latin and the national language, which enabled him to reach a wider audience<sup>24</sup>.

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information about Hugo Benzi, refer to A. Garosi, *Siena nella storia della medicina (1240–1555)*, Firenze 1958, pp. 197–220; *Benzi Ugo*, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ugo-benzi\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ugo-benzi_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/) (accessed: 29 XI 2022).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ch. Crisciani, *Michele Savonarola, medico: tra università e corte, tra latino e volgare*, [in:] *Filosofia in volgare nel medioevo. Atti del convegno della Società per lo studio e del pensiero medievale* (S.I.S.P.M.), Lecce, 27–29 settembre 2002, eds. N. Bray, L. Sturlese, Louvain-La-Nueve 2003, p. 437; A. Segarizzi, *Della vita e delle opere di Michele Savonarola medico padovano del secolo XV*, Padova 1900, 11. For more information about the status of court physicians, refer to T. Pesenti, *Medici di corte e università*, "Medicina nei secoli, arte e scienza" 1997, no. 9/3, pp. 391–401.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. G. Zuccolin, *Michele Savonarola medico Humano...*, p. 66.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 66–67.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 67.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 68.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. R. Simonetti, *Savonarola Michele...*, pp. 151–152. Savonarola's political treatises include *De felici progressu*, *De vera republica et digna saeculari militia*, and *De nuptiis Batibecho et Serabocha*. Savonarola commented on historical events in *Libellus de magnificis ornamentis regie civitatis Padue*, and he addressed ethical and moral issues in *De sapiente et insipiente*. For more information about Savonarola's political writings, refer to G. Zuccolin, *Michele Savonarola medico Humano...*, pp. 207–228.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Ch. Crisciani, *Michele Savonarola, medico...*, pp. 445–449; eadem, *Nota introduttiva*, [in:] *Michele Savonarola. Medicina e cultura di corte*, eds. Ch. Criscini, G. Zuccolin, Firenze 2011, pp. XIII–XV.

Savonarola's works can be divided into two distinctive periods: his life in Padua<sup>25</sup> and his stay in Ferrara<sup>26</sup>. The quote from the cited document clearly indicates that Savonarola had been recognized as the author of numerous literary works already before his arrival in Ferrara, but researchers analyzing the chronology of his treatises agree that most of them were written in Ferrara<sup>27</sup>.

*Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium* belongs to the latter group of works, but it cannot be reliably dated based on the existing source materials. The treatise contains several clues that could be helpful in estimating the year in which it was written. The words *Ad mulieres ferrarienses* in the title suggest that the treatise was addressed to the female residents of Ferrara, therefore, the it must have been written after 1440. The second clue can be found in the part of the treatise dedicated to childbirth, which contains the words "in questa mia decrepita età"<sup>28</sup> (in my older age). However, this description is too general to speculate about Savonarola's age at the time these words were written. In his treatise, the author addresses his readers in a fatherly manner, which indicates that the Italian physician had friendly relations with his female patients. As the court physician and, initially, a university lecturer, Savonarola was too busy to deal with the medical problems of the common folk; therefore, the process of building good relationships with the women of Ferrara and learning about their problems probably took many years<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> In Padua, Savonarola wrote *Directorium ad actum practicum*, *Practica canonica de febris*, and *Practica Major*. The latter is regarded as one of Savonarola's most seminal works which, according to Jole Agrimi and Chiara Crisciani, is a prime example of an academic book for medical educators and practitioners. Cf. J. Agrimi, Ch. Crisciani, *Edocere medicos. Medicina scolastica nei secoli XIII–XV*, Napoli 1988, 167, note 38. For more information about *Practica Major*, refer to Ch. Crisciani, *Michele Savonarola, medico...*, pp. 437–438. For more information about Savonarola's writings in Padua, refer to G. Zuccolin, *Michele Savonarola medico Humano...*, pp. 68–72.

<sup>26</sup> In Ferrara, Savonarola wrote, among others, *De aqua ardentis*; *Speculum phisionomiae*; *De praeservatione a peste et eius cura*; *Libellus de magnificis ornamentis regiae civitatis Paduae*; *De balneis et thermis naturalibus omnibus Italia sicque totius orbis proprietatibusque earum*; *De la decorante Ferrara*; *De tutte le cose che se magnano comunamente*; *De non dietantis filiiis*; *Ad mulieres Ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium*; *Confessionale I*; *Confessionale II*, *Ad Laurentium adolescentem monachum de fortitudine et poenitentia*; *De lepra*. For more information about Savonarola's writings, refer to T. Pesenti, *Michele Savonarola a Padova: l'ambiente, le opere, la cultura medica*, "Quaderni per la Storia dell'Università Padova" 1977, no. 9–10, pp. 45–102; G. Zuccolin, *Michele Savonarola medico Humano...*, pp. 72–78.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. G. Zuccolin, *Michele Savonarola medico Humano...*, p. 68; T. Pesenti, *Michele Savonarola a Padova...*, pp. 45–102.

<sup>28</sup> *Il trattato ginecologico-pediatrico in volgare di Michele Savonarola. Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium*, ed. L. Belloni, Milano 1952, pp. 112.

<sup>29</sup> In the treatise, Savonarola describes a growing mass in the uterus which he had frequently diagnosed in Ferrarese women. He was probably referring to a molar pregnancy which was often mistaken for pregnancy by even the most renowned doctors. Cf. *ibidem*, p. 51: "E per tal mio dire voglio tu frontoso sapere che se ritrova una dispositione in le donne somegliante a la impregnatione, mola nominata, ne la quale molti eccellenti e famosi doctori rimasi sono inganati, iudicando tal molatica essere gravida [...]. Et imperò, a ciò che le obsterice ferrarexe seppa biem distinguere fra la mola e la impregnatione, cussi iungerò a questo capitolo i segni di la molla, a ziò che la sia bien cognosuta, cumcessia che in Ferrara se ne ritrove habundantia". He also reported on the high prevalence of kidney stones among Ferrara's residents, and attributed this affliction to the high intake of ricotta. Also: p. 79: "E l'uxo di la poviana fa generare la pietra ne le rene, anco la zonchata: dove, frontosa, ti

In his treatise, Savonarola assumes a fatherly tone and addresses his readers as “fiole mie”<sup>30</sup> (my daughters), “mie fiole ferrarexe”<sup>31</sup> (my daughters of Ferrara), “done/donne/ /madone mie”<sup>32</sup> (my ladies), and “donne mie ferrarexe”<sup>33</sup> (my ladies of Ferrara). The author communicates directly with his readers by using phrases such as “ti consiglio”<sup>34</sup> (I advise you) and “se ami”<sup>35</sup> (if you love). The introductory chapter suggests that the treatise was written upon the request of Ferrarese women. It is unlikely that such a request would have been made if Savonarola did not have good and strong relationships with his patients. According to Remy Simonetti, *Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium* was written around 1460<sup>36</sup>. The treatise is written in a language that was spoken in the Ferrara region, and it probably took Savonarola several years to master the local dialect and write in it. It should be noted that the linguistic diversity of Medieval Italy had been described already by Dante Alighieri (†1321) in *De vulgari eloquentia*<sup>37</sup>. These observations support Simonetti’s theory that the treatise was written around 1460 when Savonarola was nearly seventy-five.

The discussed treatise is composed of three parts. *Regimen pregnantis* gives advice on the optimal childbearing age and the pregnant woman’s lifestyle; *regimen enixe* focuses on parturition and the postpartum period, and *regimen infantis* discusses child care between birth and the age of seven years<sup>38</sup>. The treatise belongs to a category of *regimina*, namely diet and lifestyle guides that were popular at the time. Savonarola was one of the few authors who compiled detailed and essential knowledge about pregnancy, parturition, the postpartum period, childcare, childhood diseases, and child-rearing in a single publication. He was aware that the treatise was a helpful tool not only for professional midwives, but also for expecting mothers. *Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium* was to serve as a guide which discusses the above issues in a plain language. Savonarola was convinced that his work would make a valuable contribution to knowledge, and this belief is expressed in the introduction: “My dear ladies, by reading this work, you

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consiglio non essere troppo desiderosa [E nota che a Ferrara forsi tanti se ritrovano calculoxi per tanto suo uxo di piovine e di tante facte cum quelle]”. Cf. R. Gualdo, op. cit., p. 215.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Il trattato ginecologico-pediatrico*..., pp. 3, 4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 4, 111.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 3, 5, 18, 54, 131, 133, 143, 167, 186, 187.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 55, 166, 199.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 182.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 75.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. R. Simonetti, *Savonarola Michele*..., p. 152. According to Gabriella Zuccolin, the treatise was written before 1460. Cf. G. Zuccolin, *Michele Savonarola medico Humano*..., p. 75.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, introduzione, traduzione e note V. Coletti, Milano 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Il trattato ginecologico-pediatrico*..., p. XV. In this work, Savonarola makes a reference to *De non dietandis filiis*, a treatise that was probably dedicated to the education of children. However, this work has not been preserved to the present time. Cf. *Il trattato ginecologico-pediatrico*..., p. 198.



will become the physicians of your and your children's bodies and souls"<sup>39</sup>. The phrase "mediche corporale" suggests that by reading the treatise, women would acquire the skills and competencies that were held by physicians, at least in the area of the discussed subject<sup>40</sup>. Savonarola used the word "mediche" (physician) instead of "ostetriche" (midwife), which placed his readers much higher in the hierarchy of medical professionals. Towards the end of his work, the author argued that the effort invested in reading and studying the treatise would enable women to take better care of their children's and their own health<sup>41</sup>. It should also be noted that the third part of the treatise discusses not only childhood diseases, but also child-rearing and education.

Savonarola's motives behind writing the treatise should also be considered. The author was undoubtedly aware that no single publication contained detailed and accessible knowledge about all of the discussed topics. Conception was a subject that stirred considerable interest and was frequently discussed<sup>42</sup>, but the remaining issues, as previously mentioned, were largely neglected by the contemporary medical writers. It appears that Savonarola's main motivation for writing the treatise was to increase the midwives' knowledge in order to decrease maternal and infant mortality<sup>43</sup>, and reduce the risk of disability<sup>44</sup>.

As previously mentioned, the treatise was written specifically for the female residents of the Ferrara region<sup>45</sup>. The author addressed his readers as "donne mie ferarexe"<sup>46</sup> and "Ferrarexe"<sup>47</sup>. In the introduction, Savonarola stated that he wrote the treatise as

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, p. 5: "Si che, donne mie, per tal mio volume doventerete mediche corporale e spiritual di vui e di vostri fanzuoleti".

<sup>40</sup> In the introduction, Savonarola makes a reference to the third part of the treatise and argues that the acquired knowledge would endow women with the skills of a trained physician. Cf. ibidem.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. ibidem, p. 199: "Si che, madonne mie ferrarexe, a le quale pure il libretto mio drizato ho, cussi in questo studiare e lezere vogliate, e non temiate la fatica, a bene utile vostro e di fantini vostri".

<sup>42</sup> The most notable examples include *Physionomia* by Michael Scot, *De secretis mulierum* which was attributed to Albertus Magnus, *De formatione corporis humani in utero* by Aegidius Colonna, and *Expositio super capitulum Avicennae de generatione embrionis cum Questionibus* by Giacomo della Torre da Forlì. Cf. R. Gualdo, op. cit., pp. 16–17.

<sup>43</sup> The second part of the treatise lists the main reasons for labor complications, including low midwife skills. Cf. *Il trattato ginecologico-pediatrico...*, p. 116. Savonarola uses the words "midwife" and "accoucheuse" interchangeably.

<sup>44</sup> In another part of the treatise, Savonarola writes that many residents of Friuli, in particular members of the lower social classes, were physically disabled. Also: ibidem, pp. 142–142. Refer to footnote 53 for more information.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, p. 3: "Imperò, done mie ferrarexe, non vogliandomi essere inver di vui per tanto amore e beneficii da vui ricevuti ingrato, quelli sempre a memoria retenendo, ho voluto questo mio volume a vostro nome e gran cuccorso componere e per vui tanta fatica portare, come chiaramente vederete, per esservi buom padre da vui cussi chiamato, a vui, fiole mie, in grande vostro alturio in tante vostre fatiche e pericoli i quali scorette ne la impregnatione vostra e in lo vostro parturire pensandomi a vui beneficio verun mazore e di vostro più contento far potere".

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, pp. 55, 166, 199.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, pp. 56, 77, 78, 111.

a legacy that would be passed on to the future generation of female readers who would become his heiresses<sup>48</sup>. He also assured the readers that he would do everything in his might to meet their expectations<sup>49</sup>, which suggests that the treatise had been written at the request of Ferrarese women.

The language of the treatise is yet another issue that deserves attention. In the introduction, Savonarola noted that he was forced to use the local language because his target audience did not speak Latin: “non havendo vui il litteral sermone, cussi stato mi è necessario quello in vulgare scrivere”<sup>50</sup>. In addition, by choosing to write his work in a language that was used only in the Ferrara region, the author was aware that the treatise would not be understood by readers outside the region. Savonarola was convinced that the conveyed knowledge was highly needed in “every fatherland”<sup>51</sup>, and it was his hope that the treatise would be eventually translated to Latin<sup>52</sup>, which, in his opinion, would not be a complicated task<sup>53</sup>. Savonarola also hoped that the treatise would reach “all Italian women”<sup>54</sup>. The words “tutte le donne taliane” reflect the author’s belief that the work would be translated to other languages that were used in various regions of Italy. He was undoubtedly aware that a Latin publication would attract the interest of many medical communities in Europe, but it would not reach uneducated readers who were his target audience.

The subject matter of the treatise is an important factor that differentiates this work from other publications that were available at the time. Even if the problems relating to reproductive health, pregnancy, and parturition had been previously addressed in other manuscripts, such as the works attributed to Trotula<sup>55</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> century *De secretis*

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, pp. 3–4: “Certo, done mie, ziò ho voluto fare come uno testamento, nel qual vui, fiolle mie, ho voluto herede lassiare, e non havendo vui il litteral sermone, cussi stato mi è necessario quello in vulgare scrivere”.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, p.4 : “Si che ho voluto per tanta mia fatica a vui, mie fiolle ferrarexe, in quella parte che potuto ho, di tanti beneficii vostri satisfare”.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, p. 4: “Considerava ancora che le ultramontane, di tal vulgare indocte e dil volume, cussi poterano quello lezermente in litteral sermone far tradure”.

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem: “Considerando che facil cosa serà quello in litteral sermone transferire”.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, p. 5: “Spero a vui, mie ferrarexe, et anche a tutte le done taliane fructuoso molto essere dovere per gran contento per vui e per i vostri fanzuoletti e generalmente a tutte quelle le quale del nostro scrivere se delecterano”.

<sup>55</sup> For more information about Trotula’s work, cf. J. Benton, Trotula, *Women’s problem, and the professionalization of medicine in the Middle Ages*, “Bulletin of the History of Medicine” 1985, no. 59, pp. 30–53; M.H. Green, *Reconstructing the ‘oeuvre’ of Trota of Salerno*, [in:] *La Scuola Medica Salernitana. Gli autori e i testi*, Convegno Internazionale (Università degli Studi di Salerno, 3–5 novembre 2004), eds. D. Jacquart, A. Paravicini Bagliani, Firenze 2007, pp. 183–233; M.H. Green, A handlist of the latin and vernacular manuscripts of the so-called Trotula texts, part I: *The latin manuscripts*, “Scriptorium” 1996, no. 50, pp. 137–175. The works ascribed to Trotula have been translated into English and Italian in: *The Trotula. An English translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women’s Medicine*, ed. M.H. Green, Philadelphia 2002; *Trotula. Un compendio medievale di medicina delle donne*, ed. H. Green, Firenze 2009. One of the texts attributed to Trotula, *De ornatu mulierum*, has been translated into Polish in recent years. Cf. A.J. Katolo, *Przekład pierwszego w Eu-*

*mulierum* by Pseudo-Albertus Magnus<sup>56</sup>, these publications would have been written in a language that reached a narrow audience. Despite the fact that Savonarola wrote *Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium* in the national language, he was categorically opposed the idea that all medical works should be translated into that language. His main concern was that individuals who did not have sound academic knowledge of medicine and practiced medicine based solely on published remedies would be unable to make a correct diagnosis or administer the correct treatment, and would thus contribute to an increase in mortality rates<sup>57</sup>.

The manner in which Savonarola conveyed his knowledge is also worth exploring. By addressing his treatise to a specific audience, Savonarola was aware that his work would be used by women who did not have medical training. Therefore, to make his treatise more accessible to the common folk, he relied on popular proverbs and folk wisdom<sup>58</sup>, daily life examples<sup>59</sup>, picturesque descriptions of medical problems<sup>60</sup>, and cases

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*ropie traktatu kosmetologicznego De Ornatu Mulierum Trotuli de Rugiero z Salerno" (1035–1097)*, "Archiwum Historii i Filozofii Medycyny" 2019, vol. 82, pp. 63–71.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *O sekretach Bialogłowskich*, eds. J. Krocak, J. Zagożdżon, introduction by J. Zagożdżon, Wrocław 2012.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Il trattato ginecologico-pediatrico...*, p. 166: "Che se volesse scrivere di quelle tute infirmità a compimento che gie pono occorere, cussi seria bixogno traducesse tuta la medicina in vulgare, che seria cossa non di utilità de le donne, neanco di quelli che non fosse literati, et ad me seria grande incargo, e forsi caxuone di far morire più persone che guarire, cussi metendose altrui a medicare senza alcun timore, fondandose solamente su le recepte, non su le regole che insegnano come quelle applicare se debono, come fanno li emperici i quali Idio non temono".

<sup>58</sup> Savonarola quoted many popular proverbs in his work, including: *ibidem*, p. 17: "Dove in Puglia se dice comunamente, vogliendo laudare il cavallo «fuo fiolo di caval vechio»"; *ibidem*, p. 20: "Et ricordate dil proverbio comune «zugno, luio, agosto, femena mia non te conosco»"; *ibidem*, p. 21: "Come dice Aristotele, nè una hirudine fa primavera"; *ibidem*, p. 24: "Ma pure non tacerò quello che proverbialmente se dice «a quel facto ogni omo ge par da mato»"; *ibidem*, p. 142: "Imperò dice il proverbio «chi nase bello, non nase povero»"; *ibidem*, p. 192: "Quod nova testa capit, inveterata sapit"; *ibidem*, p. 192: "Quod nova testa capit, inveterata sapit".

<sup>59</sup> According to Savonarola, miscarriage could be caused by a build-up of liquids ("humors") in the woman's body. He cited a case of a woman from Monteferato who lost many of her pregnancies in the fifth or sixth month due to excess blood. Cf. *ibidem*, p. 83: "E cussi forse per questa caxuone Madona de Monteferato non pota retenire il feto, che spesso se engravidava e in li cinque mexi o sei sempre disperdèa, la quale habundava in molto sangue". Savonarola also described an obese woman who had developed a uterine tumor over a period of twelve years. Also: *ibidem*, p. 52: "Questo dico per la ortulana nostra de piazza, che zìa anni dodexe è molatica, cum il corpo grandissimo: che chi l'aprisse, trovaria ne la matrice uno pezo di carne duro non molto agrativo, che prima fuo molto mole e come carne viva". He also observed that many residents of Friuli, mostly the lower social classes, were physically disabled, whereas this problem was rarely encountered in the upper classes; he attributed this fact to low midwife skills. He noted that unlike women from lower social classes, wealthy mothers-to-be could afford to hire more qualified midwives. *Ibidem*, pp. 142–142: "Dove mi credo che per diffecto de la comare senestre, molti fanzuoleti rimangono manchi o defectosi. Come appare ne la patria de Frioli che gram parte suono zoti, dico spetialiter villani e borgesani, che pochissimi zentilhomini de la patria suono zoti: e per questo mi argomento zìò dire, il perchè i zentilhomini e zentildonne hanno di fanzuoleti suoi migliore cura assa".

<sup>60</sup> To better illustrate his argument, Savonarola compares the fetal position during birth to the body posture of young boys jumping into water. Cf. *ibidem*, p. 112: "Cuome fano i garzuoni quando se bagnano e voleno fare uno supozo in l'acqua, extendendo le mane sopra le cosse a la longa, e cussi cum il capo se gietano inanti in quella: e cussi per natura fa il feto, per più fazilmente uscire" (As the boys do when bathing and jumping into water – they keep their arms straight in line with their thighs, and they enter the water head down – the fetus assumes the same natural position to leave the mother's body more easily).

encountered during his practice – the phrases “io ho visto/ io vidi/ io ne vedete” (I have seen) appear frequently in the treatise<sup>61</sup>. The analyzed work also makes minor references to the author’s family and acquaintances<sup>62</sup>. When writing about nausea in pregnancy, Savonarola argued that its duration varies and is difficult to predict. He cited the example of his daughter-in-law who experienced morning sickness for two months during her first pregnancy, three months during the second pregnancy, but suffered from nausea even on the day her last child, a son, was born<sup>63</sup>.

However, not all the information provided by Savonarola can be taken at face value. Some of the described cases appear not only improbable, but utterly impossible. According to Savonarola, Niccolò Pallavicini, a member of Gian Galeazzo Sforza’s court, allegedly fathered a son at the age of one hundred years<sup>64</sup>. In another instance, Savonarola alleged that in some regions of Puglia, women “sempre” (always) delivered not only human infants, but also frogs and bats during the same labor<sup>65</sup>. Although various birth defects had been known at the time, such as the two-headed baby which, according to Savonarola, had been born in Padua in 1320<sup>66</sup>, the claim that women delivered animals in addition to human offspring is rather difficult to believe<sup>67</sup>.

Savonarola’s attitude to women is yet another feature that contributed to the unique character of *Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium* relative to contemporary medical writings. For example, Savonarola cautioned parents not to wed their daughters before they reached full physical maturity. He argued that physically immature girls were at greater risk of complications during pregnancy and labor, which could lead to serious disease or even death<sup>68</sup>. In an era when women, especially those from higher social strata,

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 30, 61, 113, 140, 142.

<sup>62</sup> He also makes a reference to his professor of medicine, Giacomo da Forlì. Cf. *ibidem*, p. 98.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 95: “Duove mianuora in tanti suoi parti ha di zio variato molto, che di alcuno parto ha havuto il vomito per fina a dui, alcuna fiata per fina a tri mexi, alcuna fiata per fina a l’ultimo; che di questo ultimo parto suo, e pur di maschio, ebbe il vomito in quel zuorno che parturite”.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10: “E a mio tempo messer Nocolò di Palavexini, compagno del duca di Milano Zuan Galeazo, huomo de anni cento e più, ingravidò la moglie de uno fiolo maschio”.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 143: “È pur vero che forse l’aspecto celeste è in gram caxuone, come è in Puia, che sempre le donne parturisse cum il fanzuoleto qualche mostro, zioè animali, come bisse scudelare, rane, barbastelli, spalivieri e somegliante: e non però intravene in ogni luoco di la Puglia, ma solamente in certi luochi, et imperò di tale effecti se acuxa il Cielo”.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 113: “Apreso, adviene chel feto ha dui capi [...] e uno corpo, e anco tali furono a Padoa del 1320, di questi tali il parto se rende difficile”.

<sup>67</sup> Birth deformities were described by many Medieval writers. Cf. Girolamo Albertucci de’ Borselli, *Cronica gestorum ac factorum memorabilium civitatis Bononiae ad urbe condita ad annum 1497*, ed. A. Sorbelli, in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* 2, XXIII, parte II, Città di Castello 1929, pp. 23, 80, 87; *Croniche di Giovanni, Matteo e Filippo Villani*, vol. 2, Trieste 1858, pp. 10, 122, 254; Luca Landucci, *Diario Fiorentino*, Firenze 1883, pp. 13–14, 57, 314.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. *Il trattato ginecologico-pediatrico...*, p. 18: “In postremis, voglio per le garzuoete aricordare che, non havendo le garzuoete li membri suoi biem compiti a la generatione neccessarii, zioè la matrice per il feto biem contenere, né la via per la quale ussire debe il feto biem larga e naturalmente dilatata come doverebe, cussi quando vengono al parto, incorrono gram dolore e mazor assai, e molto più penano nel parturire per la strictura de la via: che molte cussi si ritruovano mal capitare o per morte o per grande infirmità”.

were expected to have as many children as possible, Savonarola warned the ladies that every pregnancy and delivery posed a threat to their life and health. Savonarola made this claim twice<sup>69</sup>, which indicates that he had a strong opinion on the matter. Savonarola argued that breastfeeding prevented women from conceiving another pregnancy, and he discouraged mothers from hiring wetnurses, which was common practice among the aristocracy, because they could delay the next pregnancy by breastfeeding their own offspring<sup>70</sup>. Savonarola empathized with pregnant women and encouraged them to observe his guidelines to minimize problems during labor<sup>71</sup>. Even more surprisingly, Savonarola urged his readers to scream during labor, even if the pain was tolerable. He argued that by expressing their pain, women would receive a more compassionate response from their husbands and other household members, as well as better care and meals after delivery<sup>72</sup>. Coming from a man, this was an unusual piece of advice, and it indicates that Savonarola was a compassionate physician who not only deeply cared about his patients, but also actively searched for methods to alleviate, shorten, or prevent their suffering.

Michele Savonarola's treatise entitled *Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium* is not only a valuable source of information about the state of medical knowledge in the fields of gynecology, obstetrics, and pediatrics at that time, but it also portrays the author as a skilled practitioner and observer, as well as a highly compassionate and empathetic physician. The treatise was intended to serve as a "guide", and it was written in a colloquial language that was used on a daily basis in the region of Ferrara. The guide was addressed mainly to uneducated women, both midwives and expecting mothers, and its main purpose was to provide them with support during the long months of pregnancy, to prepare them for labor, and to teach mothers how to raise healthy children and take good care of their offspring in the first years of life.

<sup>69</sup> Ibidem, p. 29: "E tu, topinella non consideri el periculo tuo de la morte per tanti consequenti parti, i quali serano cum gram mazuor dolori assai de l'uxato e cum gram mazuor pericolo di la vita tua, che pur d'uno stai a tanto pericolo"; ibidem, p. 147: "Moltiplichi i parti, et ogni parto ti dà una gram bastonata a la vita tua, quella sminuendo, e spesso ti conduce a porto cativo, che sempre ne resenti in tua vita, sì che spesso quella finisce inanti hora".

<sup>70</sup> Ibidem, p. 147: "Che cussi non lactendo, tu te engravidì più presto assai, stendo la mazuor parte di l'anno cum l'apetito corrupto, dolore de stomaco, di schiena e somegliante male; moltiplichi i parti, et ogni parto ti dà una gram bastonata a la vita tua, quella sminuendo, e spesso ti conduce a porto cativo, che sempre ne resenti in tua vita, sì che spesso quella finisce inanti hora".

<sup>71</sup> Ibidem, p. 117: "O frontosa, ti ho grande compassione a tutte le donne pregnante, et imperò, a zìo che da te e da tutte le altre sia sempre benedecto, e cussi caxuone hebbano per me Idio pregare, qui apresso scriverò molti modi e regole che le pregnante osservare debbono in havere el parto molto facile". In a different section, Savonarola writes about his compassion for women in labor. Also: ibidem, p. 122: "E il perchè pure intravene che cum tuto il rezimento dicto alquante fiato il parto pur sta forte e difficile di ussire, per non volere mancare di soccorso a le donne, a le quale compassione ho e sempre haverò".

<sup>72</sup> Ibidem, 121: "Se anco non ti dolesse tanto, pur ti consiglio crida forte, a zìo chel te sia creduto il tuo male, havendote compassione il marito e li altri di caxa, asmorzendo tal fuoco grande cum capuoni, confecti e vini avantezati".

The exact year in which the treatise was written remains unknown, but there is evidence to suggest that Savonarola wrote this work in the last years of his life as a highly experienced medical practitioner. In the treatise, Savonarola cautioned parents against forcing physically immature girls into marriage, and he argued that prolonged breastfeeding was an effective method of delaying another pregnancy, which suggests that he was a physician who deeply cared about his patients' welfare. Even if the latter advice is not medically sound or effective, it was believed to be true for many centuries.

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### An introduction to Michele Savonarola's (1385–1446) treatise entitled *Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium*

**Summary:** Michele Savonarola's treatise entitled *Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium* is one of the most important 15<sup>th</sup> century Italian works on gynecology, obstetrics and pediatrics. In addition to detailed information about pregnancy, the mother's lifestyle, childbirth, care of the mother and the child from birth until the age of seven years, the main novelty of the treatise lies in the use of everyday language and the fact that the work was addressed mainly to women. Recognizing that contemporary women had low levels of knowledge, Savonarola wrote his treatise in plain language that was easy to understand. *Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium* was to serve as a "guide" to provide women with the necessary knowledge and to reduce mortality among pregnant women and children.

**Keywords:** Michele Savonarola, treatise, women, pregnancy, offspring



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**Einführung zum Traktat von Michael Savonarola (1385–1446) *Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium***

**Zusammenfassung:** Das Traktat *Ad mulieres Ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium* von Michael Savonarola ist eines der wichtigsten Werke des fünfzehnten Jahrhunderts in Italien über Gynäkologie, Geburtshilfe und Kinderheilkunde. Das Neue an dem Traktat ist neben den detaillierten Informationen über die Schwangerschaft, die Lebensweise der schwangeren Frau, die Geburt und die Pflege von Mutter und Kind von der Geburt bis zum siebten Lebensjahr die verwendete Sprache und die Adressaten, an die es gerichtet war. Savonarola erkannte die unzureichenden Kenntnisse der Frauen seiner Zeit und schrieb ein Traktat für sie in einer zugänglichen Art und Weise, wobei er sich zudem der Sprache bediente, die sie tagtäglich verwendeten. *Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium* ist eine Art Leitfaden, der das nötige Wissen vermittelt und die Sterblichkeit bei Schwangeren und Kindern verringern sollte.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Michael Savonarola, Traktat, Frauen, Schwangerschaft, Nachkommenschaft

**Wprowadzenie do traktatu Michała Savonaroli (1385–1446) *Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium***

**Streszczenie:** Traktat *Ad mulieres Ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium* autorstwa Michała Savonaroli jest jednym z ważniejszych dzieł piętnastowiecznej Italii o tematyce ginekologiczno-polożniczo-pediatrycznej. Nowością traktatu – oprócz tego, że w jednym miejscu podano szczegółowe informacje na temat ciąży, stylu życia kobiety ciężarnej, porodu, opieki nad matką i dzieckiem od narodzin do ukończenia przez nie siódmego roku życia – jest użyty w nim język oraz adresaci. Savonarola, widząc niedostateczną wiedzę ówczesnych kobiet, napisał dla nich traktat w sposób przystępny, językiem na co dzień przez nie używanym. *Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium* jest swoistym „przewodnikiem”, który miał dostarczyć niezbędnej wiedzy oraz wpłynąć na zmniejszenie śmiertelności wśród ciężarnych, jak i nowo narodzonych dzieci.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Michał Savonarola, traktat, kobiety, ciąża, potomstwo

