

## Doctor or junk man? What we wouldn't do to have the personal books of Cesare Frugoni or Vincenzo Monaldi

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It all began when I was browsing through the advertisements in the magazine *Famiglia Cristiana* and I came across: *For sale: academic and personal texts of Prof. Cesare Frugoni*. There was a Rome phone number.

Cesare Frugoni (born in Brescia in 1881, died in Rome in 1978) was the famous Director of the Medical Clinic of the University of Rome from 1931 to 1951. He was also President of the Superior Council of Health from 1950 to 1966, long-term President of the Italian Company of Internal Medicine, author of over 200 publications, including three books of clinical lessons and a famous treatise on functional diagnostics. He was an excellent researcher in various fields of clinical medicine, for example, anaphylaxis, allergies, asthma, myasthenia, splenomegaly, thrombophlebitis, hemorrhagic diathesis, etc.

The specialties of allergology and clinical immunology began in Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century thanks to his research on allergies. He was also the personal doctor of many famous personalities of the time, such as Guglielmo Marconi, Benito Mussolini, Palmiro Togliatti, King Fuad of Egypt, Arturo Toscanini and many other rulers, heads of state, industrialists, writers, famous artists and scientists (Figure 1).

I cut out the page of the magazine with the advertisement and put it in my wallet. I decided to contact the seller as soon as possible, although it was over two months before I could do so.

In the meantime, however, I was able to satisfy a wish I had had for more than ten years. I was looking for a cast iron spiral staircase to go up from the terrace of my house to the attic. I was lucky enough to find

what I wanted by clicking on *cast iron stairs* on the site of a dealer on the outskirts of Bologna (power of the web!). The price was unbeatable and the affair was immediately concluded. However, there was a problem: the cost of transportation from Bologna to my house was arguably too expensive, almost more than the cost of the staircase itself. I decided, therefore, to collect the first 10 steps in my car, and then I could go back to collect the others the next time I was in that area for a meeting at the castle of Bertinoro. About a month later, I was finally in possession of the other steps of the staircase and, pleased with my winnings, I set off for home.

As I got nearer to Rome, I remembered the advertisement for Prof. Frugoni's books, and decided to contact the sellers. I went to their home where a nice couple received me with great hospitality. You can imagine my excitement leafing through books that had belonged to and had been touched by one of the great myths of Italian medicine.

From a scientific point of view, I have always considered Prof. Frugoni my *spiritual grandfather* since I had had the pleasure of studying with Prof. Sergio Vultnerini and Prof. Vito Cagli who had themselves been taught by him for many years and who were, therefore, his *spiritual children*.

You can imagine, then, my pleasure in looking through the books and knowing that I was touching something that had belonged to him, something that he had certainly used in his studies. I could not believe my eyes. After a short negotiation, we agreed on a good price. As far as I was concerned, a book that had belonged to Frugoni had no economic value, but rather a sentimental one and, as is well known, sentimental value has no quantifiable price in common currency.

Some books are real historical relics, unique and unrepeatable, like the signed copy of Prof. Vincenzo Monaldi's book *Phthisis and Chronic Tuberculosis*, a gift to Frugoni from the author himself.

Prof. Monaldi (1899-1969) had been a famous phthisis-respiratory physician, a university professor, founder of the School of Specialization in physiology, Director of the *Principe di Piemonte* sanatorium in Naples (which, at his death, took his name), and the inventor of some highly original therapeutic techniques for tuberculosis. He was also extremely active in politics. He was mayor of his town at the young age of 20, he was a Senator of the Republic, and the first Italian Minister of Health.

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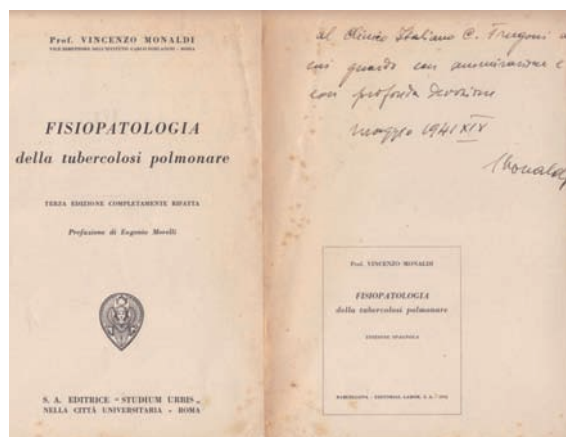
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After exchanging a few words with my gracious hosts, it was time to go. There was just one big problem: I did not want them to see the staircase I had in the car.

I was determined not to open the trunk in their presence. I was afraid of being mistaken for a second-hand junk man, so I insisted on carrying the very heavy boxes containing the books on my own. Unfortunately, the man insisted all the more to help me carry them. There was no way to dissuade him and I was forced, therefore, to allow him to help me carry the boxes to the car. What a look of surprise and disappointment came on his face when I opened the trunk and he saw the staircase. I could have died on the spot.

He didn't say anything, but I could clearly see from the look on his face what he was really thinking: *This man claimed to be a Director of a hospital, a lover of old books and of the history of medicine, and instead he's probably cheated me. He's not a doctor, but a second-hand junk dealer who knows how to speak well and sell big. So, is he a doctor or a junk man?*

I was so embarrassed I didn't have the courage or



**Figure 2.** Cover of the book *Fisiopatologia della tubercolosi polmonare* (Pathophysiology of pulmonary tuberculosis) signed by Prof. Monaldi: *To the Italian clinician C. Frugoni with admiration and deep devotion - V. Monaldi. May 1941, XIX* (i.e. nineteenth year of the fascist era).



**Figure 1.** Prof. Cesare Frugoni.



**Figure 3.** Prof. Monaldi speaking at a conference in 1958 in Lacco Ameno, Ischia, as Minister of Health, and when he comes down from the stage greeting Prof. Frugoni.

strength to speak, and also because the story itself was too long to tell. Neither did the man demand an explanation he was so stunned.

After putting the books in the car in silence, I closed the door of the trunk and I went back into the house. I sat in the living room and put my hand to my wallet to pull out my chequebook to pay (I didn't have much cash with me).

At this point the man could no longer restrain himself and exclaimed: *But what do you want to give me? A cheque?! And after a long pause, he added: and it's Saturday, too!*

I knew very well that they thought they had brought a fraud into the house, someone who had taken them for a ride. I realized that nothing I could say would help and happily I remembered that I had in my car a copy of the book of the acts of the congress that I had organized a few months before with photos of me, my articles, the name of my hospital and my colleagues, and so on.

Without speaking and just making a sign to them to wait, I rushed to the car and brought the small volume into the house. *I know what you're thinking and I understand your concerns, but I really am a doctor, even though, until a few minutes ago, I looked like a junk man. Let me show you this book.*

I finally saw their faces calm down and saw again the warm smile that I had received on my arrival. And then the lady said: *Will you give us your congress book?* And I said: *It's no use to you, but if it makes you feel more confident in me you can keep it.*

Calm and confidence had been found again and the woman cancelled any last trace of embarrassment by going into another room and coming back with a beautiful big old shell: *We must make amends. This shell was on Prof. Fugoni's desk. He used it as a paper-weight. I would like you to have it. I hope you like it.* I accepted the gift with great pleasure since I'm also a collector of shells that I've found while diving in various parts of the world but I still wanted to emphasize: *This is of immense value to me and I will certainly put it on my desk...* and so I did.

Back at home with my precious cargo, I wondered what my wife would say: *What, still more books?! And now where will we put them?* But when I told her the story, and on seeing how rare they were, she was happy for me. Over the following evenings we read the books together, one at a time, page by page, with all the respect due to them, and found so many pleasant surprises as we took up each new volume.

We discovered that there was more than one of Prof. Monaldi's books and they all had a personal dedication to Prof. Frugoni. It was evident that the great physiologist and the Italian Minister of Health had great respect for the recipient of the books (Figures 2 and 3).

Equally interesting is the book of Prof. Omodei Zorini, with a personal dedication. Even here, the handwritten date of Prof. Zorini shows the sign of the times

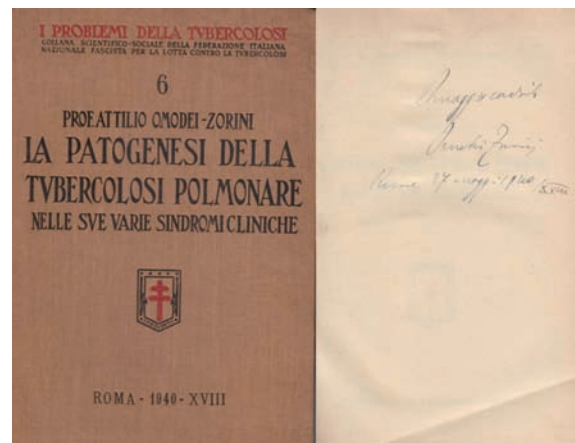


Figure 4. Cover of the book written by Prof. Zorini and signed: *A friendly greeting - Omodei Zorini - Rome, May 27, 1940/XVIII (i.e. eighteenth year of the fascist era).*

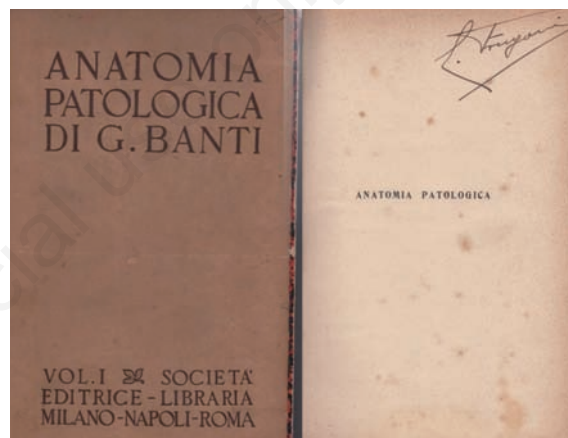


Figure 5. The pathology book written by G. Banti with Prof. Frugoni's distinctive signature (top right).



Figure 6. *Ex libris* of Prof. Frugoni.

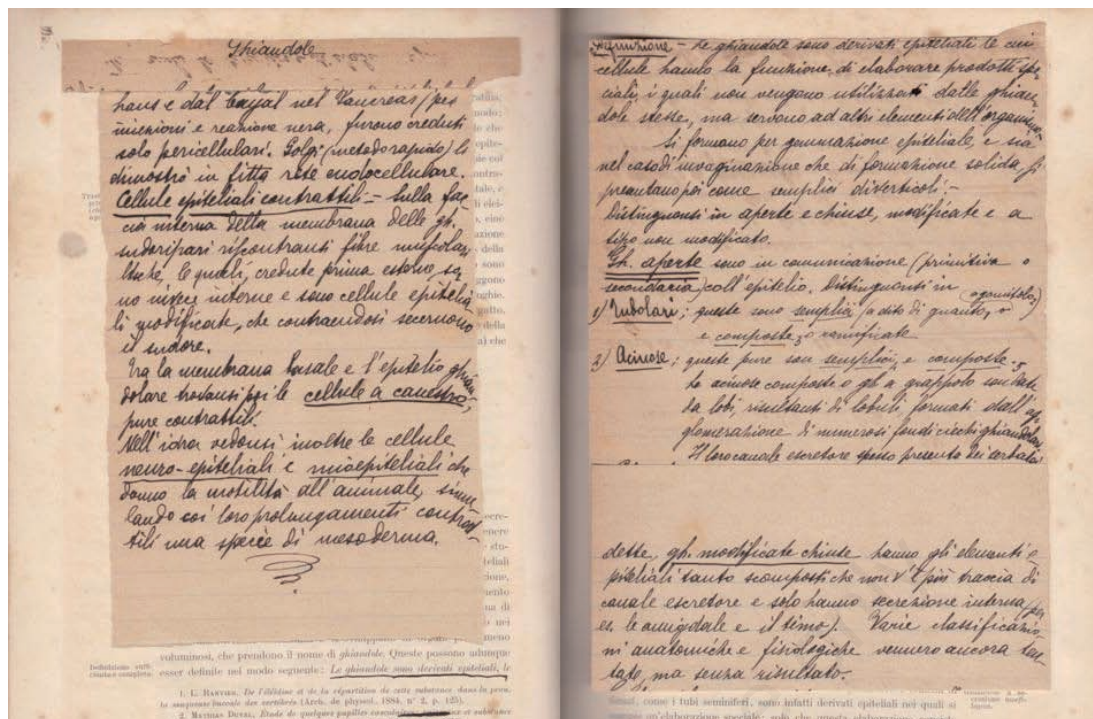


Figure 7. Two pages of the book of histology with Prof. Frugoni's personal notes stuck in with surgical tape.

that had changed the calendar, forcing history to use the term of *the fascist era* (Figure 4).

It was also significant to find Prof. Frugoni's signature on almost all of his books (Figure 5), together with his *ex libris* stamp (Figure 6). Sometimes, in rather unusual ways, the book was signed on the cover, with the unmistakable *F* of Frugoni.

It was exciting and extremely interesting to read through Frugoni's histology book that he must have used in his studies. He had added his own notes in his elegant, clear handwriting onto strips of paper that he had stuck in the book with pieces of surgical tape (Figure 7). They were probably written when he was a student, but it is no surprise that they were also a clipboard that he carried forward into his older years. In fact, Prof. Frugoni used to say: *The Doctor is a student for life*, and he was the perfect example of this.

So, these unique documents are now kept in my study, in the bookcase just behind my desk, in the hope that the spirit of Frugoni, still present among those pages, will make itself felt and help me in my own work. It is with this belief that I sit down at my desk, with the books of Cesare Frugoni on a small shelf behind me, alongside those of William Osler, Vincenzo Monaldi, Omodei Zorini, Giuseppe Daddi, Carlo Forlanini, Giuseppe Moscati, Sergio Vulterini, Serafino Mansueto, Vito Cagli, and others. On my desk in front of me sits Prof. Frugoni's large shell. I have deliberately placed it on top of my prescription pad so I have to pick it up every time I prescribe a drug (Figure 8).



Figure 8. The author's desk and his book collection on the small bookshelves behind. The shell in the foreground cost more than the books!

Everything in life can start with a stroke of luck and as Leonardo da Vinci said: *When Fortune comes, seize her in front with a sure hand, because behind she is bald* (*Quando Fortuna vien, prendila a man salva, dinanzi dico, perchè dietro è calva*).