



# The life of Gabriele Falloppio (1523–1562) and his contributions to medical terminology

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## His life

Gabriele Falloppio, one of the most precious anatomists of the sixteenth century, was born in 1523 in Modena, Italy, with the better-known Latin name “*Fallopius*” (Fig. 1).

His father, Geronimo Falloppio, died of syphilis when Gabriele Falloppio was only 10 years old. Falloppio, who was in financial difficulty following his father’s death, joined the clergy at the church and became a priest at the age of 19 [1–3].

Later, as his financial position improved, he began studying medicine in Modena under the direction of Niccolo Machella. Meanwhile, he performed dissections on the cadavers of executed criminals [3, 4]. As a result, he moved to Ferrara due to study medicine at the University of Ferrara, which is regarded as one of the best medical schools in Europe.

He graduated in 1548 after studying under the supervision of the expert doctor and botanist Antonio Brassavola [5]. At the age of 25, he was honored as a head of anatomy at the University of Pisa by Cosimo de Medici, Duke of Florence, and maintained that position until 1551. During his time in Pisa, he specialized not only in anatomy but also in chemistry and botany [3, 5]. It is also known that Falloppio also performed vivisection during these years [3].

In 1551, he was honored by the Venetian Senate as professor of Anatomy, Surgery and Botany at the University of Padua. He remained in this position for the rest of his life. His superior dissection abilities and powers of observation

contributed to his career as an anatomist. Falloppio, a well-known physician, was the doctor of numerous aristocratic figures, including the pope’s brother [1].

Falloppio died in Padua on October 9, 1563, at the age of 40. The cause of his death was probably tuberculosis [1, 3].

## Career and achievements

In 1561, Falloppio published his book *Observationes Anatomicae* in Venice (Fig. 2 and Cover). This was the only book that was published during his lifetime. This publication, which did not include any illustrations or figures, had



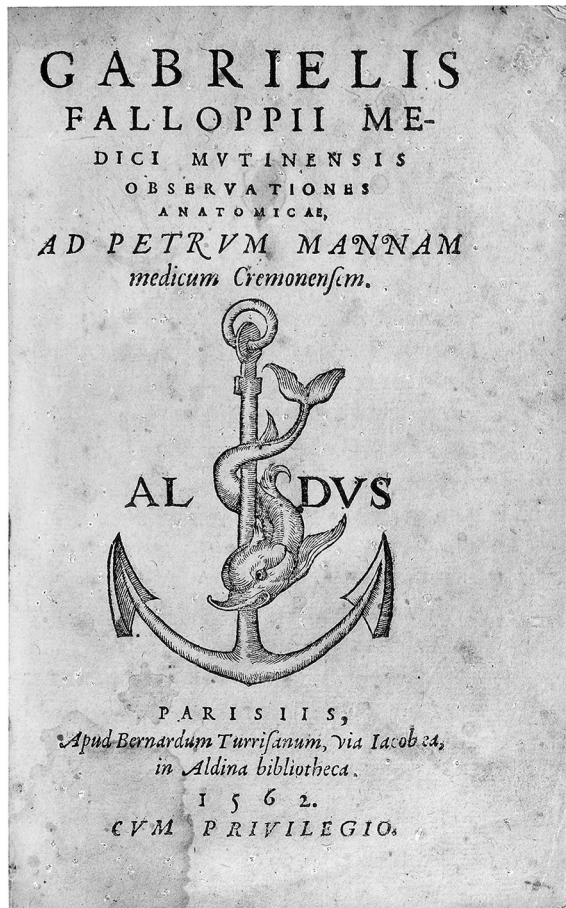
Fig. 1 Gabriele Falloppio, an Italian priest, anatomist, and physician

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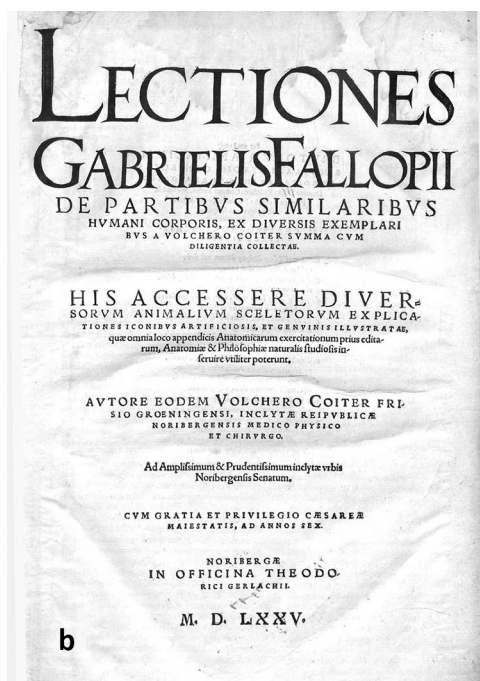
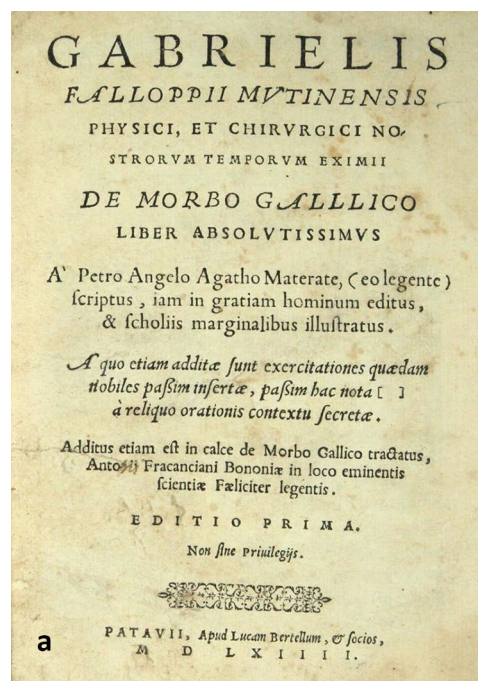
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**Fig. 2 and Cover** The only book named *Observationes anatomicae* that has been published during Falloppio's lifetime

**Fig. 3 a** The *De Morbo Gallico Liber Absolutissimus* book published after his death. **b** The *De Partibus Similaribus Humani Corporis* book published after his death



many new anatomical discoveries. Furthermore, Falloppio in his book also included information that corrected some inaccuracies in *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* of Andreas Vesalius, who lived in the same period [1, 3].

He discovered the *uterine tube* (fallopian tube) that has his name. Also, he studied the female reproductive system and introduced the terms *placenta* and *vagina* into terminology [4, 6].

His work on bones is highly valuable. He described the ossification of the occipital bone and sternum as well.

He described the “*Fallopian Hiatus*,” a canal where the major superficial petrosal nerve enters the petrous bone, and the *Fallopian Canal*, a canal where the facial nerve runs in the petrous part of the temporal bone.

Falloppio also defined the chorda tympani, lacrimal bone, and lacrimal duct structures [1, 3, 4].

One of his most important legacies was his discoveries into ear anatomy. He was the first to describe the round and oval windows, semicircular canals, cochlea, and scala vestibules with validity, and identified the tympanic cavity known as “*Cavum tympani*.”

Although Falloppio is best known for his work as an anatomist, he was also a competent clinician.

He put forward the idea that condoms are useful against syphilis, and tested the sheaths made from linen on more than 1000 males, observing that none of them was infected [5, 6].

After his death, his books *De Morbo Gallico Liber Absolutissimus* (Fig. 3a) and *De Partibus Similaribus Humani Corporis* (Fig. 3b) were published in 1564 and 1575, respectively.

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## Declarations

**Ethics approval and consent to participate** Not applicable.

**Consent for publication** Not applicable.

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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