

Lorenzo Bianchi, Antonella Sannino (eds.), *La magia naturale tra Medioevo e prima età moderna*, Micrologus' Library 89, Firenze, SISMEL – Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2018, 368 pp., ISBN: 9788884508485. Cloth: €55

Reseñado por ANDREEA-MARIA LEMNARU
Paris Sorbonne Université, FR
amaría.carrez@outlook.com

This book is a collection of ten multidisciplinary essays which study the continuity and discontinuity between medieval and Renaissance modern natural magic. It is the result of ten years of an eponym seminar conducted by Lorenzo Bianchi and Antonella Sannino between 2005 and 2015, which brought together scholars decided to put forward the originality of various magical traditions. Their methodological departure point is to consider magic as a «crossroads point» between popular religion and philosophical enquiry, Western and near Eastern traditions, and most of all, as an operative knowledge. It contains three very useful indexes curated by Massimiliano Chianese.

Representative pseudo-epigraphical traditions and texts from the magical Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era that escape aristotelian categories are studied from a specific point of view: their epistemological, cosmological and eschatological dimensions, but also their political or economic issues.

The introduction of the book, written by Lorenzo Bianchi and Antonella Sannino, is a precious overview of its issues and epistemological approach, and offers a historiography of the notion of *ars magica naturalis*, at the crossroads of theological and scientific disputes. Medieval magical hermetism depends on several cosmological laws, identified by Bianchi and Sannino: the occult properties of natural realities, the *simpatia universalis*, the *actio distans*, the *incantio verborum* and the *fascinatio*. Magic in the modern era, especially between 1550 and 1650, that was influenced by the traditionalist major works of Giordano Bruno, Paracelsus, Cornelius Agrippa and Robert Fludd, is addressed from a specific point of view: is there a limit between philosophy, science and magic? Can we account for it, and where does this limit stand? Last but not least, how did the great philosophers and mages cope with Newton's, Leibniz's, Descartes' and Bacon's scientism and rationalism?

The first paper (pp. 15-37) addresses magic in Arabic medieval culture. For this purpose, Carmela Baffioni offers us an analysis of the Epistle 52 of the Ikhwân al-Safâ's (the Brethren of Purity, a secret society of Iraqi philosophers) «Sulla magia» based on Callataÿ's most recent critical edition. While last part of the treatise addresses the evil eye, talismans and ornithomancy, the first part is a historiographical account of magic according to Greek, Quranic, Hebraic, Christian, Sabian, Harranian and Ḥanīf

traditions. Carmela Baffioni gives us an important insight on the structure on «Sulla magia»'s structure, with an enumeration of five esoteric sciences, namely alchemy, astronomy and astrology, medicine, ascetism, and magic, all depending on a Neoplatonic and Hermetic conception of the World Soul.

In his paper titled «La cosmologie néoplatonicienne du *Kitab Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*» (pp. 38-54), Daniel de Smet reconstitutes the neoplatonic background (mostly the influence of Proclus and Pseudo Ammonius) of the *Kitab Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (known as the *Picatrix* in his Latin translation), before studying the major question of Arabic Hermetism, enlightened by the testimonies of Nicola of Cusa, Taddeo da Parma and Guglielmo d'Alvernia. He most interestingly focuses on the *Picatrix*'s theory of talismans, that originated according to its author in an esoteric understanding of Plato's works, especially the *Timaeus*, in which Plato would have taught who knew how to read him how to walk on water, start or stop rain, fly and speak to the spirits of the dead. The will of the magician to become like God (Plato's ὁμοίωσις θεοῦ) is another main issue of Daniel de Smet's study. Although it can indeed be interpreted as divine power over nature through knowledge, this resemblance may also bear another meaning. If the magician is God's «lieutenant on Earth» (*Picatrix*, 335), it may mean that he is supposed to take care of nature, instead of trying to dominate it. De Smet emphasizes on the theurgical dimension of the *Picatrix*, in a religiously Islamized cultural context where planets are no longer considered as visible gods. Although they are considered as ensouled and given power by the World Soul, their powers all come from God. However, the *Chaldean Oracles* bear a similar conception of a hierarchy between the demiurge and the planets, and a precise study of their legacy in the *Picatrix* would be of great value.

Marienza Benedetto focuses on the representation of magic in Hebraic medieval culture. Her study, «Tra illusione e scienza: la magia nell medioevo ebraico» (pp. 55-79), shows that some magical practices, such as the use of talismans, could be considered as a case of idolatry according to Abraham Ibn Ezra (p. 61). Whereas Maimonides wasn't tender towards magic (pp. 63-65) that he considered as pure illusion, Qalonymos saw in mathematical magic a form of science (p. 73), a branch of physics. The ambivalence of medieval Hebraic philosophers towards natural magic is acutely highlighted by Benedetto.

In her paper «Figure della trasformazione. Circe tra magia e politica» (pp. 175-202), Simonetta Bassi focuses on the character of Circe in Cornelius Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia*, Pomponazzi's *De Incantationibus*, Bodin's *De la démonomanie des sorciers*, as well as Erasmus' and Machiavelli's works and Giordano Bruno's *Cantus Circaeus*. Simonetta Bassi demonstrates that Circe's character oscillates between two extremes: a powerful sorceress (Bruno) and a powerless woman personifying fortune (Machiavelli). According to Bruno's view, Circe becomes able of regenerating nature and the human condition, both threatened by moral decay. By doing so, she restores justice on Earth, which brings her close enough to the Greek goddess Themis, but also

to the lunar Hekate (her mother according to Dionysius of Miletus) in her omnipotent πόντια θηρῶν dimension.

In «La magia naturale a Napoli tra Della Porta e Campanella» (pp. 203-228), Lorenzo Bianchi addresses the principles of natural magic, namely, the laws of *sympatheia*, among which analogy stands as one of the most important. The first part of the paper is devoted to Campanella, while the second part focuses on Della Porta. Lorenzo Bianchi sheds a very interesting light on Della Porta's hermetic influence, especially the *Poimandres* and the *Asclepius*, providing a study that endorses the efficient interdisciplinary orientation of the book. An interesting question to be raised would be the following: in what extent was Della Porta's idea of the world as a single living influenced by his reception of Plutarch (*De Facie Lunae*, 928B-928C), Plotinus (IV, 4, XXXV) and Iamblichus (*De Mysteriis*, IV, 12)?

Oreste Trabucco's paper (pp. 229-274) focuses on the application of the laws of *sympatheia* in Lazare Meyssonier's *La Belle Magie*. Meyssonier was a doctor, astrologer and converted Catholic from Lyon, practicing Paracelsian iatrochemistry. He was having a philosophical dialogue with Descartes and Mersenne, which puts him at the heart of magic and science controversies. Trabucco's analysis of Meyssonier's distinction between magic, medicine and «charlatanerie» is very illuminating. Most interestingly, Meyssonier insisted on the force of unification that keeps together the various parts of the Whole (p. 245), reminding us of Iamblichus's theory of the role of desire in cosmological harmony (*De Mysteriis* IV 12).

The last paper before Massimiliano Chianese's indexes (p. 245-261) is that of Mariassunta Picardi (p. 275-341), « Il ne s'en faut servir que par récréation »: *Charles Sorel, la magia e l'unguento delle armi*. Sorel was a libertine intellectual from the 17th century who wrote a treatise about the *unguentum armarium*, a paracelsian theme, which is a theory based on the laws of *sympatheia*, stating that one could cure an injury without touching it, using a balm on the weapon which inflicted it. Sorel, unlike Goclenio or Croll, refuted the epistemological foundations of this practice, calling for the cautious use of classical medicine that he considered more trustworthy. However, Mariassunta Picardi demonstrates that Sorel was not that skeptical when it came to *extra naturam* phenomena such as possession or witchcraft of which he did not deny the existence, but without explaining them.