

*objets quotidiens comme des objets d'épopée, pour susciter une émotion mais aussi un sentiment du beau où l'humain sans cesse se refonde, pour nommer et renommer les choses. C'est précisément dans ce passage du morcellement à l'unité et de la rupture à l'ouverture que l'exister dans l'infini trouve sons sens, selon Blay; comme une naissance au poétique toujours à renaître pour ne pas étouffer dans le silence du penser avec l'infini. Une résurgence comme une résistance, un appel à la résistance.*

## Matteo Martelli

*The Four Books of Pseudo-Democritus*

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In the span of the last decades, interest for the Greek alchemical tradition has reanimated, after a long period of time, during which the main subject of research was Latin alchemy. The first collection of Greek alchemical manuscripts was the edition by M. Berthelot and Ch.-Em. Ruelle, *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs*,<sup>1</sup> published at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It included several works by Alexandrian and Byzantine writers, with the exception of the work of Stephanus of Alexandria, which was edited by Ideler<sup>2</sup> four decades ago.

The next important project was the series *Catalogue des manuscrits alchimiques grecs*, under the direction of J. Bidez, F. Cumont, A. Delatte, O. Lagercrantz and J. Ruska. The series consisted of eight volumes, published between 1924 and 1932.

The 1970s' work on Greek alchemical manuscripts by e.g. R. Halleux, M. Mertens and C. Viano renewed the interest for Greek alchemy. Following this, a series of researchers are at this point studying the manuscripts under a new epistemological view.

Matteo Martelli is among the researchers who have already produced fruitful work on Greek alchemy. His last book, *The Four Books of Pseudo-Democritus* was published in 2014 as part of a new series of publications which presents critical editions of core texts in the history of alchemy and early chemistry. The book was published by the

1 Bertellot, M., Ruelle, Ch.-Em. (eds) (1887-1888), *Collection des Anciens alchimistes grecs*, vol. I-III. Paris, Georges Steinheil.

2 Ideler, J.L. (ed.) (1841), *Physici and medici Graeci minores*. Berlin: G. Reimer.

Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry with an introduction by L.M. Principe and J.M. Rumlping.

The text of Pseudo-Democritus, one of the earliest alchemical works, was composed in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. and was a fundamental reference for most later Greek speaking alchemists, such as Zosimus of Panopolis, Synesius, Olympiodorus and the Byzantine alchemists – and not only for the Greek speaking. The *Four books*, ascribed for a long time to the ancient atomist philosopher Democritus, winded up in different forms, epitomes and fragments in the three main collections of alchemical treatises which were composed between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, there are three Latin translations of the book, dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Matteo Martelli presents not only a new edition and an English translation of the surviving Greek fragments from this masterwork, but also includes additional material that has been inherited to us in Syriac for the first time. The writer's aim is to reconstruct the original *Four Books* using the Greek manuscripts, the indirect references by later alchemists, the direct tradition via Syriac manuscripts and the Latin translations.

After an extensive introduction, Martelli's work presents the Greek and the Syriac texts translated in English. The third part of the book presents Zuber's unpublished Latin translation from 1606, while the last part consists of commentary on the original texts.

The introduction is a very interesting part of this book. Here, Martelli firstly presents the difficulties of his project concerning both material and method, beginning of course with the false name of the writer, Democritus. After this, Martelli explains the way in which he tried to solve the problems of reconstruction, using the material of the direct transmission of the *Books* (epitomes of Greek text and its Syriac translation), and other sources. The dating of the original text consists another obstacle which Martelli overcomes in his work.

Martelli proceeds by providing a detailed presentation of the modern editions and the direct manuscript tradition, in Greek and Syriac. The indirect tradition, such as Synesius' commentary and the Chemistry of Moses comprises the next section and the dating of the text follows. The background behind the attribution of these books to Democritus or Bolos is another difficult and interesting subject Martelli focuses on. Martelli examines the Eastern tradition and a lot of other sources very carefully before reaching his conclusions. The next section of the introduction concerns a commentary on the Pseudo-Democritus work, the dialogue between Synesius and Dioskorus. Here, Martelli examines the problem of Synesius' identity and his false identification, an issue which has occasionally led scholars to false conclusions. The last sections consider the relation between the Pseudo-Democritus' work and the definition of Greek alchemy, the Egyptian background of the text and some Persian elements about Democritus and the alchemist Ostanos.

In the second part of his work, Martelli firstly presents the original Greek text of *Four Books* ("On the Making of Purple and Gold: Natural and Secret Questions" and "On the Making of Silver") and its English translation. The Greek excerpts from "The Chemistry of Moses" and the "Notes on Democritus' Book", by philosophers Synesius to Dioskoros follow.

After the Greek texts, we can find the original Syriac fragments along with their English translation under the titles "Book of Democritus: On the making of Shiny Gold" and "Second Book by the Philosopher Democritus" and "Again by Democritus: I Greet you Wise Men".

As mentioned above, the Latin translations of the Pseudo-Democritus work, "Democriti naturalia et arcana", "De obscura confectione", "Synesii philosophi ad Dioscorum in librum Democriti tanquam in scholiis" and "De dealbatione", by Zuber, consist the last section of this part.

Furthermore, the book includes two very useful indexes of the Greek and Syriac names of substances and relevant terms.

Conclusively, in this book we are presented with the work of Pseudo-Democritus edited as comprehensively as possible for the first time. Thus, everyone of us working in the field of alchemy should be thankful to colleague Matteo Martelli for this very laborious and successful project.