

Reviews

Seneca e le scienze naturali. Edited by MARCO BERETTA and FRANCESCO CITTI. Pp. 273, illus., index. Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki: Firenze. 2012. €29. ISBN: 978-88-222-6189-2.

The volume includes eleven essays mainly dealing with Seneca's *Natural Questions* (hereafter *NQ*), a work that, often underestimated or neglected in the past, has been more systematically investigated over the last few decades. *NQ* is indeed essential for gaining a deeper understanding of Seneca's scientific *discourse*, and this volume surely contributes to the recent 'rediscovery' and reassessment of the treatise. Because of its encyclopaedic character, the work requires an interdisciplinary approach, able to explore and discuss a variety of questions: the order of the books, their manuscript tradition, Seneca's originality in respect to his predecessors, the interplay between ethics, politics, and natural philosophy, Seneca's rhetorical strategies for describing and explaining natural phenomena. The first part of the book addresses many of these questions, which are discussed within the wider framework of Stoicism and Seneca's philosophy and biography. The second part explores some aspects of the reception of *NQ* in early modern times.

Marco Beretta's contribution investigates the concept of 'natural law' by contrasting Stoic providentialism with Epicureanism. Specific attention is devoted to the tension between a descriptive vs. a prescriptive use of this concept, as emerging in Lucretius's *De rerum natura* and Seneca's *NQ*. Piergiorgio Parroni discusses the role played by poetry in Seneca's scientific prose, and highlights instances of hidden quotations from Lucretius and Ovid in *NQ*. Harry M. Hine carries out a detailed examination of both the structure and contents of Book 2 of *NQ* (e.g. Seneca's discussion of Etruscan divination, and his concern about terminology). The book represents a paradigmatic example, in which Seneca provides "a demonstration of how a Roman should do physical science." The next four chapters investigate three specific topics discussed in *NQ*, Books 3, 4, and 6, respectively: (1) the deluge, (2) the flooding of the Nile, and (3) earthquakes. Francesca Romana Berno deals with Seneca's literary strategy for describing the final deluge: she emphasises both Seneca's philosophical premises (the theory of the four elements) and his reuse of Ovid (in particular of Pythagoras's speech in *Met.* XV). Pasquale Rossi and Daniele Pellacani discuss how Seneca accounted for the various explanations given by his predecessors for the Nile's inundation (Thales, Anaxagoras, Euthymenes of Massalia, and Diogenes of Apollonia). Arturo De Vivo emphasises the autobiographical components of *NQ* (composed when Seneca was in exile), in particular in Book 6, where Seneca deals with earthquakes. Francesco Citti provides an in-depth analysis of *De otio* 4,2, where Seneca stresses the centrality of natural philosophy alongside ethics and theology. Among the topics that must be covered by a proper scientific investigation, Seneca also includes the shape of *oecumene* and the nature of rivers and underground waters, themes that are fully explored in *NQ*.

In the second part of the volume, Hiro Hirai explores how stoicism and Christian religion were harmonised in Lipsius's work. After discussing the reception of Seneca's writings in Lipsius, Hirai focuses on *NQ*: in particular, the preface to Book 1, and Books 2–3 play a relevant role in the *Physiologia Stoicorum*, which emphasises the moral aim of natural philosophy. Bardo Maria Gauly examines the reception of Seneca's theory of comets (with particular attention to the epilogue of *NQ*, Book 7) in the sixteenth century, especially its influence on Tycho Brahe, Galileo, and Kepler. Finally, a broader approach to the reception of *NQ* is provided in the long chapter that closes the volume, where Fabio Nanni and Daniele Pellacani give a useful overview of the main authors who took the work into

account from Antiquity up to the twentieth century. A variety of themes attracted the attention of ancient authors over the centuries, many of which are discussed in the volume, which offers a rich insight into Seneca's *NQ* and represents an important reference for any scholar interested in this treatise.

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Manuscripts chemica in Quarto. Universitätsbibliothek Kassel. By HARTMUT BROSZINSKI. Pp. 671, illus., index. Harrassowitz Verlag: Wiesbaden. 2011. €198. ISBN: 978-3-447-06494-1.

Since the turn of the seventeenth century, Kassel has been home to one of the largest collections of alchemical manuscripts in Germany. Their collector, Maurice “the Learned,” Landgrave of Hesse-Kassel (1572–1632), had such a keen interest in things medical and chymical that he built and maintained a laboratory at court. Maurice shared his enthusiasm for alchemy with Rudolph II and other influential men across the Holy Roman Empire, whose names and lives are interwoven with the history of his library. Both product and documentation of early modern scientific culture, this body of *alchemica* has been of central relevance to the history of alchemy since it was first compiled. A catalogue interpreting and making this collection more widely accessible has been eagerly awaited by the scholarly community for many years.

The present volume captures 164 of Maurice's 256 alchemical volumes, viz. those of quarto format, equating to 108 shelfmarks. Compiled by Hartmut Broszinski, erstwhile librarian at Kassel, this bibliography represents the counterpart to his catalogue of *Manuscripta medica* (1976). The content produced beyond the catalogue entries proper is, accordingly, informed and intriguing. The introduction provides a detailed account of the history of the Landgrave's *alchemica*. Particularly interesting are letters to Maurice, supplemented with his own annotations and kept as part of the collection, which elucidate his library's evolution. Broszinski further highlights clusters of manuscripts related by origin and material peculiarities, such as the large number of fragments in the collection. In footnotes and in passing, this introduction also provides an overview of seminal (mostly German) scholarship on the history of alchemy.

The main part of the bibliography follows a traditional arrangement, its rationale not declared explicitly but followed consistently. Each entry consists of a précis title and inventory of all texts. Known works are identified, unknown texts summarised, and incipits for all major texts, sections, and commentaries given. Major or noteworthy recipes are treated like prose texts; the existence of those added in a later hand or shorter in scope (often appearing in clusters) simply noted. References to printed versions of major texts and secondary literature make this bibliography specifically useful, as do cross-references to related items within the collection.

The manuscript description (date, provenance, associated persons, scope, format, condition, etc.) also indicates the presence of images, if without description. Fortunately, sketches of apparatus are specially mentioned. A dedicated paragraph on each manuscript's original shelfmark (if still extant) and its position within the inventory drawn up after Maurice's death follows. Modern secondary literature on the entire manuscript concludes each entry.

About a third of this bibliography is dedicated to supplementary information. A list of incipits as well as an index of persons, places, and subjects takes up much of this section. Vital for tracing the collection's history is a list of historical shelfmarks, both for collections whence the quarto manuscripts were sourced for Maurice's library and for the aforementioned inventory drawn up in 1632. The latter is explored and listed in full in an article by Kassel librarian and bibliographer Konrad Wiedemann. Minor quibbles about presentation (which does not aid the reader's navigation of the volume) or occasional infelicities aside, this is an expertly produced, useful resource.