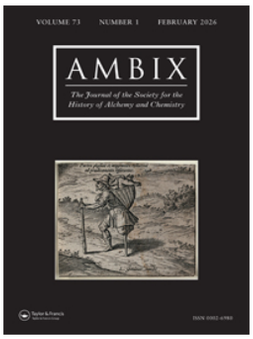

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Aristotelianism and Hermeticism in Renaissance Naples: Francesco Storella and the Secrets of Alchemy

DONATO VERARDI

Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage, Ca' Foscari University, Venice, Italy

This article examines the role of the logician Francesco Storella (active ca. 1550–1575) in contributing to the intellectual and social legitimation of alchemy in mid sixteenth-century Naples. Storella achieved this by leveraging the tradition of the "Hermetic Aristotle," focusing on his 1555 edition and commentary of the *Secretum secretorum*. The study first analyses Storella's philological strategies, including the historicisation of the text and the use of the *Tabula smaragdina*, to firmly link Aristotle's authority to the Hermetic foundation of alchemy. Second, it demonstrates how Storella mobilised his philosophical logic to defend the *ars alchemica* as a rational and demonstrable discipline, compatible with a physico-astrological framework (Albertine tradition) necessary for achieving genuine metallic transmutation. Finally, the study reconstructs the Neapolitan intellectual network linking Storella with the philologist Domenico Pizzimenti and the young naturalist Giambattista della Porta. This confluence, unified by a commitment to the rational justification of *singularia* and an Albertine-influenced physics, highlights Naples as an exceptional point of convergence where academic theory, philological rigour, and experimental practice merged. This robust synthesis conferred a decisive epistemological and social status upon alchemy within Renaissance Aristotelianism, providing the essential cosmological and rational justification for the transmutation of metals.

Introduction

The tradition of a "Hermetic Aristotle," regarded as possessing a consummate knowledge of occult properties and astral influences, has long engaged academic

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attention. Scholars such as Charles B. Schmitt, William F. Ryan, and Charles Burnett, among others, have explored the medieval origins of this peculiar image of the Stagirite. Schmitt's work, which includes the foundational cataloguing of spurious works like the *Pseudo-Aristoteles Latinus*, established the philological basis for understanding how Aristotle's authority was leveraged to legitimise a vast corpus of pseudo-epigraphic writings on magic and the occult.[1] The Philosopher's authority proved essential for the inclusion of disciplines like alchemy and natural magic within medieval and Renaissance learned discourse.[2]

This legitimation was conveyed from the initial reception of the pseudo-Aristotelian corpus in the Islamic Middle Ages via texts such as the *Sirr al-asrār* (*Secretum secretorum*), the pseudo-Aristotelian *Hermetica*, and the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* (an Arabic paraphrase of Plotinus's *Enneads* IV-VI together with Porphyry's edition), all of which fostered this conception.[3] Burnett then traced the channels of transmission of these texts, demonstrating that, in the Latin Middle Ages, they continued to circulate not only through Arabic mediation but also, in some cases, as translations directly from Greek, further disseminating the image of an Aristotle skilled in the occult philosophy.[4]

While the medieval tradition of this image is of long standing and continuous study, the specific trajectory of the Hermetic Aristotle as a Magus in the Renaissance has received less systematic attention.[5] Following a line of inquiry

[1] Charles B. Schmitt, *Pseudo-Aristoteles Latinus: A Guide to Latin Works Falsely Attributed to Aristotle before 1500* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1985).

[2] William F. Ryan and Charles B. Schmitt, eds., *Pseudo-Aristotle, The Secret of Secrets: Sources and Influences* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1982). For the broader context of the reception and scholarly awareness of these spurious texts and the persistence of the Aristotelian tradition, see also Charles H. Lohr, "The Sixteenth-Century Transformation of the Aristotelian Natural Philosophy," in *Aristotelismus und Renaissance. In memoriam Charles B. Schmitt*, eds. Eckhard Kessler, Charles H. Lohr, and Walter Sparn (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1988), 89–99; Steven J. Williams, "Defining the Corpus Aristotelicum: Scholastic Awareness of Aristotelian Spuria in the High Middle Ages," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 58 (1995): 29–51. On Aristotelian editions and commentaries in the Renaissance, see at least, respectively, F. Edward Cranz, *A Bibliography of Aristotle Editions, 1501–1600*, 2nd ed., with addenda and revisions by Charles B. Schmitt (Baden-Baden: Verlag, 1984); Charles H. Lohr, *Latin Aristotle Commentaries II: Renaissance Authors* (Florence: Olschki, 1988).

[3] Liana Saif, *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy* (London: Palgrave, 2015). On the Arabic tradition of the pseudo-Aristotelian and occult sciences, and their diffusion, see also Manfred Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam*, Handbuch der Orientalistik (Leiden: Brill, 1972), supp. Vol. 6, 76–77, 220, 406, 424–25; David Pingree, "The Diffusion of Arabic Magical Texts in Western Europe," in *La diffusione delle scienze islamiche nel medio evo europeo*, ed. Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1987), 57–102.

[4] Charles Burnett, "Arabic, Greek and Latin Works on Astrological Magic attributed to Aristotle," in *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages*, eds. Jill Kraye, William F. Ryan and Charles B. Schmitt (London: The Warburg Institute, 1986), 84–96; Charles Burnett, "The Establishment of Medieval Hermeticism," in *The Medieval World*, eds. Peter Linehan, Janet L. Nelson and Marios Costambeys (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 111–30; Charles Burnett, "Late Antique and Medieval Latin Translations of Greek Texts on Astrology and Magic," in *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium*, eds. Paul Magdalino and Maria Mavroudi (Genevra: La Pomme d'or, 2006), 325–59; Charles Burnett, "Aristotle as an Authority on Judicial Astrology," in *Florilegium Mediaevale, Études offertes à Jacqueline Hamesse à l'occasion de son éméritat*, eds. J. Meirinhos and O. Weijers (Louvain-la-Neuve: Brepols, 2009), 41–62; Charles Burnett, "Translation and Transmission of Greek and Islamic Science to Latin Christendom," in *The Cambridge History of Science, vol. 2, Medieval Science*, eds. David Lindberg and Michael Shanks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 341–64.

[5] A significant exception, useful for investigating the lines connecting "magical" Aristotelianism and, more generally, the trajectories of influence of knowledge of Arabic origin and its impact on Early Modern Occult Philosophy, is the work of Saif, *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy*. For a broader overview of the relationship between Aristotelianism and Magic, extending even to the threshold of the eighteenth century, see Donato Verardi, ed., *Aristotelianism and Magic in Early Modern Europe: Philosophers, Experimenters and Wonderworkers* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023).

inaugurated by Schmitt, who first drew attention to the 1555 edition of the *Secretum secretorum*,[6] my recent studies have focused on the Neapolitan context and, particularly, the figure of Francesco Storella (ca. 1529, Alessano – 1575, Naples). Storella, a reader of logic in Naples during various periods between 1550 and 1575, grounded his intellectual project precisely on the *Secretum secretorum*. He elaborated this image of Aristotle as a "natural magician" by editing, commenting on, and confidently attributing this pseudo-Aristotelian text to the Stagirite, even though doubts concerning its authorship had arisen early and it had never entered the official university curriculum.[7] Storella's reference to Hermes Trismegistus as Aristotle's master, which he drew primarily from the *Secretum secretorum*, served to emphasise the philosophical and Hermetic legitimation of this discipline.

Building upon these lines of inquiry, the present article analyses how Storella's peculiar conception of Aristotle as a Hermetic *magus* (of which the *Secretum* is a testament), as a skilful investigator of nature's occult properties, and as a "wise man" (*sapiens*) devoted to the good, contributed to the intellectual and social legitimation of alchemy in the Renaissance. The presence of the *Tabula smaragdina*, the cardinal text of alchemy attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, in the *Secretum secretorum* reinforced Storella's view that acknowledging the influence of Hermes's teachings upon Aristotle meant recognising Aristotle, first and foremost, as an alchemist.

Understanding this convergence is essential, as it was precisely in Naples (a city where, in the 1550s, humanist philology, Aristotelianism, and magic coexisted in unusual proximity) that alchemy acquired a decisive epistemological and cultural role.[8] During these years, Naples became one of the most fertile centres where alchemy, integrated into the reassessment of natural magic, served as a core discipline that redefined the boundaries between Aristotelian philosophy and practical experimentation. Figures like the natural magician Giambattista della Porta (1535–1615) shaped this synthesis of speculative reasoning and empirical investigation, while university scholars like Storella, and his contemporary Domenico Pizzimenti (fl. ca. 1550–1585), a philologist, translator, and della Porta's alchemy master, provided that synthesis with philosophical and philological legitimacy. The Neapolitan case thus offers a privileged lens through which to observe how alchemy, "naturalised" within a framework that was simultaneously magical and Aristotelian, came to be interpreted, in the mid sixteenth century, as a legitimate means of investigating nature's arcana.

[6] Charles B. Schmitt, "Francesco Storella and the Last Printed Edition of the Latin *Secretum Secretorum* (1555)," in Kraye, Ryan and Schmitt, *Pseudo-Aristotle The Secret of Secrets*, 124–131.

[7] Donato Verardi, "Francesco Storella e l'Aristotele Negromante," *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 25 (2019): 541–49; Donato Verardi, "The Image of Aristotle as a Magus and the Aristotelian Foundation of Magic in Early Modern Italy," in Verardi, *Aristotelianism and Magic in Early Modern Europe*, 61–81.

[8] On the scientific context of the Neapolitan Renaissance, in relation to natural magic, see Donato Verardi, *La scienza e I segreti della natura a Napoli nel Rinascimento* (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2018). On alchemy and its connections with the tradition of natural magic in early modern Naples, see Lorenza Gianfrancesco, "Books, Gold, and Elixir: Alchemy and Religious Orders in Early Modern Naples," *Ambix* 65 (2018): 250–74; Antonio Clericuzio, "The Emergence of Chemical Medicine in Early Modern Naples (1600–1660)," *Ambix* 71 (2024): 1–19. On the Neapolitan scientific context of the early modern period see also *The Science of Naples: Making Knowledge in Italy's Pre-eminent City, 1500–1800*, eds. Lorenza Gianfrancesco and Neil Tarrant (London: UCL Press, 2024): https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10192731/1/The-Science-of-Naples.pdf (accessed 8 December 2024).

The discussion is structured as follows. Section II reconstructs Storella's philological and hermeneutical work in regard to the *Secretum secretorum* and related manuscripts (particularly the Ambrosiana S. 79 sup.), analysing his criteria for attributing alchemical writings to Aristotle and the editorial strategies through which he recovered and transmitted Hermetic-alchemical materials (including his treatment of the *Tabula smaragdina*).[9] Section III examines some of Storella's key-writings, specifically *De definitione logices*, *De utilitate logices*, and the *Tractatulus quinquaginta contradictionum*, to show how his conception of logic was mobilised to defend alchemy as a rational and demonstrative *ars* compatible with Aristotelian natural philosophy and the astrological premises of natural magic.[10] Section IV places these intellectual moves within the Neapolitan environment, tracing Storella's relationships with Pizzimenti, and analysing Pizzimenti's role as a key philologist and translator of essential Greek alchemical texts such as the *De arte magna* attributed to Democritus. It also reconstructs the channels (textual, institutional, and social) through which university Aristotelianism intersected with the circles of practical alchemy and experimental inquiry.[11] By weaving these threads together, the article aims to demonstrate that the convergence embodied in Storella's project – philology, logic, and Hermetic-alchemical practice – played a formative role in redefining the epistemic status of alchemy in early modern Naples, paving the way for the distinctive Neapolitan synthesis of learned investigation and experimental practice that would characterise Della Porta's work.[12]

The Conclusion will show that Storella's critical mediation provided the robust theoretical – practical framework necessary for this shift. By grounding alchemy in Albertine physico-astrology and simultaneously justifying alchemy through Aristotelian logic, Storella legitimised the *ars alchemica* as a rational and verifiable discipline, thereby meeting the intellectual and operative demands of the Neapolitan research environment.

Aristotle as an alchemist

The doctrinal problem and Storella's solution

Storella's project of reading Aristotle as an alchemist was defined by the potential doctrinal tension between the pro-alchemical views promoted by

[9] Francisci Storellae Alexanensis Philosophi … Catalogus ac censura operum quae an Aristotelea sint est dubitatum. Enumeratio librorum Aristotelis qui perierunt vel nondum in lucem venerunt. Observationes ex Graecis super Aristotelis commentariis., Ambr. S. 79 sup. Sec. XVI, cart., misc., 219r–249v; *Secretum secretorum Aristotelis ad Alexandrum Magnum* (Naples: Matthiam Cancer and Venice: n. p., 1555).

[10] Franciscus Storella, *De definitione Logices* (Naples: M. Cancer, 1553); Franciscus Storella, *Tractatulus quinquaginta contradictionum …* EIUSDEM *Libellus de utilitate Logices* (Naples: R. Amatus, 1561).

[11] Democritus Abderyta, *De arte sacra, siue De rebus naturalibus. Nec non Synesii, & Pelagii in eundem commentaria Dominico Pizimentio interprete* (Naples: apud Iosephum Cacchium, 1570).

[12] For the Neapolitan context of this synthesis, particularly Della Porta's natural magic and its relationship to learned investigation and experimental practice, see: Luisa Muraro, *Giambattista Della Porta mago e scienziato* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978); William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 194–233; Donato Verardi, *La scienza e i segreti della natura a Napoli nel Rinascimento. La magia naturale di Giovan Battista Della Porta* (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2018).

pseudo-epigraphic texts and the Stagirite's canonical natural philosophy – a conflict that, in turn, formed part of a broader Renaissance effort to negotiate alchemy's epistemic status within the Aristotelian framework. As Craig Martin has highlighted, in the context of Renaissance Aristotelianism this debate actively revolved around the exegesis of fundamental texts, such as the *Meteorologica IV*.[13] This text provided the necessary material foundation for alchemical discussion, as its suggestive distinction between natural and artificial processes, encapsulated in the phrase "art imitates nature," was appropriated by alchemists to argue for the possibility of artificially manufacturing genuine gold.[14] However, the text presented a severe doctrinal challenge for those seeking a literal Aristotelian defence of alchemy. The Aristotelian model's description of metals as composed of earth and water, not sulphur and mercury, appeared to directly contradict the prominent alchemical theory.[15] Moreover, Aristotle's discussion also implied the incoagulability of mercury, undermining the fundamental premise that metals could be fully solidified.[16] This text was consequently interpreted by critics as containing arguments against the possibility of metallic transmutation (the *telos* of alchemy), thereby establishing the basis for Aristotle's supposed opposition to the art.[17] The anti-alchemical interpretation was powerfully reinforced by the inclusion of the pseudo-Avicennian *De mineralibus* at the end of Book IV, which explicitly contained the famous injunction against transmutation (*Sciant artifices*).

Nevertheless, a community of Renaissance Aristotelians developed strategies to circumvent or reconcile this perceived condemnation. In Padua, where a prevalent trend among university Aristotelians maintained a rigid skepticism, some, like Cesare Cremonini (1550–1631), epitomised this skeptical view, arguing that art's imitation of nature had fundamental limits, but others actively sought to integrate alchemy with Aristotelian thinking. Among the latter was Storella's contemporary, Francesco Piccolomini (1523–1607), who maintained a somewhat "idiosyncratic" view among commentators on *Meteorologica IV*. Piccolomini argued for the utility of alchemy by linking it to natural magic, interpreting alchemical manipulations as licit manipulations of the active and passive elements of nature, perfectly compatible with the Aristotelian physical order.[18]

Storella himself, who was active in Naples but had been educated within Paduan intellectual circles, aligned with this integrationist approach. However, rather than grounding alchemy in a commentary on the Aristotelian *Meteorologica*, he focused his efforts on the *Secretum secretorum* – a work in which alchemy was already

[13] See Craig Martin, "Alchemy and the Renaissance Commentary Tradition on *Meteorologica IV*," *Ambix* 51 (2004): 245–62.

[14] On the potential support for alchemical theories within Aristotle's writings, see Cristina Viano, "Aristote et l'alchimie grecque: La transmutation et le modèle aristotélicien entre théorie et pratique," *Revue d'histoire des sciences* 49 (1996): 189–213.

[15] Aristotle, *Meteorologica*, IV, ed. and trans. by H. D. P. Lee, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), 384b32–35.

[16] Aristotle, *Meteor.*, IV. 385b1–5.

[17] Martin, "Alchemy and the Renaissance Commentary Tradition," 249.

[18] Martin, "Alchemy and the Renaissance Commentary Tradition," 245–48, 255–58.

framed and reconciled within a general theoretical context of natural magic. To reconcile the presumed anti-alchemical prohibition of *Meteorologica IV* with the pro-alchemical authority of the *Secretum secretorum*, he explicitly adopted the hermeneutic strategy of Petrus Bonus of Ferrara (fl. 1330–1339). Bonus was active at the beginning of the fourteenth century, during a period of intense alchemical debate. A Doctor of Medicine, he wrote from a peripheral setting in Istria and Dalmatia, and his major work, the *Pretiosa margarita novella* (*The Precious Pearl*), was based almost exclusively on textual analysis due to his admitted lack of practical experience.[19] His primary goal was to preserve Aristotle's authority given the clear contradiction between the condemnation of alchemy in the fourth book of the *Meteorologica* and the defence of alchemy in the *Secretum secretorum*. To address the problem, Bonus focused on the attribution of critical passages in the *Meteorologica*. Although he knew that many scholars (such as Albertus Magnus) attributed the final part (*De mineralibus*) of Book IV to Avicenna, Bonus resolutely rejected this attribution.[20] Instead, he resorted to Avicenna's *Epistola ad Hasen*, a text he considered authoritative, and which Avicenna had used as a methodological model for his own inquiry.[21] According to Bonus's interpretation, Avicenna himself, in the *Epistle*, testified that the condemnation of alchemy had been pronounced by the Philosopher (*scilicet Aristoteles*). In effect, Bonus used Avicenna to confirm the Aristotelian authenticity of the entire *Meteorologica*, including the *De mineralibus* appended to its final section.[22]

Storella's justification for including alchemy within the Aristotelian canon relies on a sophisticated, three-part hermeneutic and philological argument, building directly upon the strategy of Petrus Bonus. This defence aimed not merely to support alchemy, but to definitively establish its foundation within the authentic corpus of Aristotle's works.[23] His primary argument is chronological and

[19] On Bono, see Chiara Crisciani, "Aristotele, Avicenna e *Meteore* nella *Pretiosa Margarita* di Pietro Bono," in *Aristotele chemicus. Il IV libro dei Meteorologica nella tradizione antica e medievale*, ed. Cristina Viano (Sankt Augustin: Verlag, 2002), 165–82; Bruce Moran, *Distilling Knowledge: Alchemy, Chemistry, and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 34–35.

[20] The *De mineralibus* appended, in medieval Arabic-Latin versions, to the fourth book of the *Meteorologica* of Aristotle. It is partly a translation and partly a résumé of passages in Avicenna's *Kitâb al-shifâ'* (*Book of the Remedy*), made by Alfred of Sareshel. This short text immediately acquired the authority of a genuine Aristotelian work, since it appeared to be the conclusion of the *Meteorologica,* fourth book, becoming a *locus classicus* for all subsequent attacks on alchemy. See Avicennae, *de congelatione et conglutinatione lapidum*: *Being Sections of the Kitâb al-shifâ' / The Latin and Arabic Texts*, edited with an English translation of the latter and with critical notes by Eric John Holmyard and Douglas C. Mandeville (Paris: P. Guethner, 1927).

[21] On this text, see Georges Chehata Anawati, "Avicenne et l'alchimie," in *Oriente e Occidente nel Medioevo: filosofia e scienze* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1971), 285–341.

[22] Petrus Bonus, *Pretiosa Margarita Novella De Thesavro, Ac Pretiosissimo Philosophorum Lapide* (Venice: Apvd Aldi Filios, 1546), 84rv.

[23] *Secretum secretorum*, 41rv:

> Caput hoc triplici nomine supposititium esse iudico. Primo nam duo vetustissimi codices istud non agnoscunt; secundo quia Bonus Ferrariensis, qui anno Domini 1338 claruit, in sua *Pretiosa Margarita*, sustinens librum *De mineralibus* esse Aristotelis, inquit: Etsi eo in libro Aristoteles Alchimiam negarit velut iuvenis et inexpertus, tamen senex effectus eam subtilissime inquisivit, et per antiquorum dicta, et ipsam cum ratione possibili perpendit veram, et ipsa experientia habuit et oculis vidit, et manibus tetigit, et ideo scripsit eam Alexandro Regi discipulo suo, libro *De secretis secretorum*, capitulo *De lapidibus pretiosis*, eo modo quo antiqui Philosophi alii scripserunt, sed occulto, figurato et velato sermone. Immo totus iste liber est velatus

evolutionary. Citing Bonus explicitly in his commentary on the *Secretum secretorum*, he maintained that the key to resolving the apparent contradiction between texts lay in the evolution of Aristotle's thought. The anti-alchemical passages in *Meteorologica IV* and *De mineralibus* (which Storella affirmed as genuinely Aristotelian) were composed, he claimed (reiterating the exact words of Bonus), when Aristotle was young and inexperienced (*iuvenis et inexpertus*), and had based his skepticism on pure theoretical speculation. Conversely, the *Secretum secretorum*, which affirms alchemy, was a product of Aristotle's old age (*senex effectus*).[24] At this mature stage, the Philosopher had the benefit of long experience (*experientia*), and crucially, he confirmed the truth of alchemy because he had seen it with his eyes and touched it with his hands (*oculis uidit, et manibus tetigit*). By strategically adopting and emphasising this final, empirical affirmation, Storella transformed Aristotle into the ultimate textual authority for alchemy itself.[25] He then reinforced this claim with a second philological argument, declaring that a key anti-alchemical passage within the *Secretum secretorum* itself was the result of an interpolation (*supposititium esse iudico*).

The chapter Storella deemed spurious was precisely the one that presented a fundamental contradiction: while seemingly offering an alchemical process, it simultaneously undermined the core premise of transmutation. The passage in question reads: *Per alchimiam non uerè, sed secundum accidentia transmutari metalla, transmutandique Secretum declaratur. Sciendum tamen & scire producere argentum aurum verum est impossibile: quoniam non est possibile equiparari Deo altissimo in operibus suis proprijs*. ("By alchemy, metals are transmuted not truly, but according to accidents, and the secret of transmuting is declared. It must be known, however, that it is impossible to truly produce silver and gold, because it is not possible to be equal to God most high in His own works.")[26] The text then follows with a recipe using *auripigmentum* and *argentum vivum* to produce something described using both Arabic and Hebrew terminology (*achauo* and *peres*). Thus, the text condemns the goal of true transmutation on theological grounds while engaging in the practice of changing metallic appearance through secret knowledge.[27]

Storella supported his claim of interpolation on the basis of three main arguments. The first consisted of negative textual evidence, asserting that the condemnatory passages were absent from Aristotle's oldest manuscripts (*duo vetustissimi codices istud non agnoscunt*).[28] Secondly, Storella used Bonus's own intricate

[23] *Continued*
et mysticus. Quod si hoc caput, quo Alchimia damnatur, non esset supposititicium, quomodo diligens ille vir ista scribere ausus esset? Tertio nam opinionis motivum frivolum esse videtur. Agricola siquidem, per artis principia operante natura, triticum producit, velut Alchimista metallum; et tamen gloriosissime Deo non ob hoc aequiparatur.

[24] This element finds confirmation in the *Praefatio* of the *Secretum*. See *Secretum secretorum*, *Praefatio*, 9r.

[25] *Secretum secretorum*, 41rv.

[26] *Secretum secretorum*, 40v.

[27] *Secretum secretorum*, 41r.

[28] This passage, absent from Roger Bacon's edition, was included in the previous edition of the *Secretum secretorum* edited by Achillini. Storella follows Achillini's edition but, strategically, rather than suppressing the passage, he

defence as indirect proof of interpolation. He argued that if the condemning chapter were truly authentic and definitive, the necessity for Bonus to write such an elaborate and complex interpretation (where he argued that Aristotle had changed his mind about alchemy over time) would not have arisen. Finally, Storella utilised a natural-theological argument to rebut the objection that alchemy was illicit because it presumptuously attempted to replicate divine creation. He dismissed this notion as frivolous (*opinionis motivum frivolum esse videtur*) by using the analogy of the farmer. The alchemist, like the farmer, does not replicate God's creative act, but merely works with nature, producing metal in accordance with the operations of nature and the principles of art (*per artis principia, operante natura*). Storella's assertion that the alchemist merely works with nature thus positioned him within the long-standing scholastic debate on the Aristotelian maxim, "art imitates nature," a debate which, in the Renaissance context, became specifically concentrated on the exegesis of the *Meteorologica*.[29] To provide a definitive, authentic Aristotelian justification for his possibilist reading of that maxim, Storella locates his crucial textual foundation in the very chapter of the *Secretum secretorum* dedicated to precious stones. In that passage, the text defines the scope of the art, stating that alchemy is not a true science, "unless it is referred to a reason that has its origin from plowing and seeding" (*nisi aratio et seminatio*).[30] While critics of alchemy typically emphasised art's fundamental weakness – a mere, and often poor, imitator of nature – Storella interprets this crucial qualifying clause as confirming the most possibilist view of Aristotle's own philosophy. He argues that the alchemist is not a creator but a facilitator who works directly with the generative principle (*semen*) of metals – a process exactly analogous to the farmer utilising the principles of art (plowing and sowing) to ensure that nature successfully produces grain. Storella's argument thus aligns with what can be defined as a possibilist Aristotelianism – an approach that was similarly supported in Padua by authors like Piccolomini – one that endorsed art's capacity to collaborate with and accelerate natural processes. Thus, just as the farmer is not equated with the most glorious God (*gloriosissime Deo non ob hoc equiparatur*), the alchemist's art is natural, legitimate, and fully compatible not only with the Aristotelian physical and moral order but also, crucially, with a truly operative vision of its philosophy.[31]

The Secretum secretorum and the Hermetic Aristotle

Having negated the anti-alchemical passages of the *Secretum secretorum* on philological grounds, Storella immediately moved to the following chapter, *De alchimia*,

[28] *Continued*
publishes it while explicitly declaring it spurious in his commentary. See *Aristotelis philosophorum maximi secretum secretorum ad Alexandrum De regum regimine: de sanitatis conseruatione: de physionomia. Eiusdem de signis Tempestatum: Ventorum: & Aquarum. Eiusdem de mineralibus. Alexandri Aphrodisei clarissimi peripatetici. De Intellectu. Auerrois magni commentatoris De Anim[a]e beatitudine. Alexandri Achillini Bononiensis De Vniuersalibus. Alexandri Macedonis in septentrione monarche De Mirabilibus Indi[a]e. Ad Aristotelem* (Bologna: 1501), 12r.

[29] Martin, "Alchemy and the Renaissance Commentary Tradition," 249.

[30] *Secretum secretorum*, 43r.

[31] *Secretum secretorum*, 41v.

where he explicitly sought to connect Aristotelian alchemy to the Hermetic tradition. This linkage was intrinsic to the *Secretum secretorum* itself, which features Aristotle referring on several occasions to Hermes Trismegistus, thereby constructing a "Hermetic Aristotle" who bridged Peripatetic philosophy and Hermetic thought.[32]

In his commentary on this chapter (*De alchimia*), Storella reveals that his Neapolitan circle provided him with a valuable, divergent textual version of this foundational Hermetic passage. He mentions a "very ancient" manuscript, containing a variant of the most secret secret of Hermes (*abditissimum Hermetis secretum*), which his student Torboli had procured in Naples:

> Here it is worthy of note that this most secret secret of Hermogenes, or rather of Hermes, in a certain ancient code, which I obtained in Naples through the care of our Anelli Turboli, I found somewhat different from that published. But in order not to leave unsatisfied the desire of those who seek in every way the secrets of nature, I have decided to insert it here.[33]

Storella notes that he decided to publish this version because it differed slightly from the one already circulating, a detail he considered particularly valuable for those seeking nature's secrets (*naturae arcana*).

> Father Hermogenes, threefold in Philosophy, said, prophesying: It is true, without falsehood, certain, most true: that which is above is like that which is below, and that which is below is like that which is above, to accomplish the miracles of the One Thing. As all things were born from the single meditation of the One, so all things were born from

[32] Storella's engagement with Hermeticism must be understood within the Renaissance context, where Hermes Trismegistus was associated not only with the philosophy of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, but also with a body of alchemical writings and fragments translated from Arabic, including the foundational *Tabula smaragdina*. Among these was the earliest known version of the *Tabula smaragdina*, whose Latin transmission was significantly shaped by Roger Bacon's edition of the *Secretum secretorum*, which incorporated his own adaptation of the text. Storella's engagement with this Hermetic material thus places him within a broader intellectual tradition that sought to harmonise Aristotelian and Hermetic thought in the service of natural and alchemical inquiry. Between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the *Tabula smaragdina* also circulated as a text included in works titled *Liber Hermetis de alchimia* or *Liber dabessi*. On this tradition, see Robert Steele and Dorothea Waley, "The Emerald Table," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 21, no. 3 (1928): 485–501. For a concise reconstruction of the historiographical debate and relevant bibliography concerning the dating and transmission of the *Tabula Smaragdina* from the Arabic to the Latin world, see M. David Litwa, *Hermetica II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 314–15. For its impact on the Latin world, see Michela Pereira, "Heavens on Earth: From the 'Tabula Smaragdina' to the Alchemical Fifth Essence," *Early Science and Medicine* 5 (2000): 131–44. See also Stanton J. Linden, *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 27; Mark Haeffner, *The Dictionary of Alchemy* (London: The Antiquarian Press, 1991), 118; Irene Caiazzo, "Note sulla fortuna della Tabula smaragdina nel Medioevo latino," in *Hermetism from Late Antiquity to Humanism*, eds. Paolo Lucentini, Ilaria Parri, and Vittoria Perrone Compagni (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 697–709; Jean-Marc Mandosio, "La *Tabula smaragdina* nel Medioevo latino, I. La *Tabula smaragdina* e i suoi commentari medievali," in Lucentini, Parri, and Compagni, *Hermetism from Late Antiquity to Humanism*, 681–96; Sylvain Matton, "Hermès Trismégiste dans la littérature alchimique médiévale," in Lucentini, Parri, and Compagni, *Hermetism from Late Antiquity to Humanism*, 621–49; Graziella Federici Vescovini, *Medioevo Magico. La magia tra religione e scienza nei secoli XIII e XIV* (Turin: Utet, 2008), 24–27.

[33] *Secretum secretorum*, 42r:

> Hic illud est adnotatu dignum, quod hoc abditissimum Hermogenis vel potius Hermetis secretum in quodam vetustissimo codice, quem Neapoli diligentia nostri Anelli Turboli sum nactus, ab invulgato haud parum diversum inveni. Ne autem desiderio naturae arcana perscrutantium in quo possum non satisfaciam, illud hoc in loco apponere decrevi: est autem huisusmodi.

> one thing, through its ordering. Its father is the Sun; its mother is the Moon. The Wind carries it in its belly; its nurse is the Earth. The father of the whole talisman of the world is here. Its power is whole if it is turned into Earth. You shall separate the Earth from the Fire, the subtle from the gross, gently and with great skill. The Stone ascends from the Earth to the Sky, and descends again from the Sky to the Earth, and receives the power of the Above and the power of the Below, and thus you will possess the glory of the brightness of the whole world, and all darkness will flee from you. This is the strength of all strengths, for it will conquer all that is subtle and penetrate all that is firm and dense. Just as the world was created, so in this matter there shall be marvelous adaptations and dispositions, whose manner is this. And so I was called Hermes, having the three parts of the philosophy of the whole world. It is complete, as has been said, in the work of the Sun and Moon.[34]

The *Tabula smaragdina*, in the version adopted by Storella, thus articulated the fundamental principles of a general natural magic. It provided the theoretical framework for connecting the celestial world (the "above") with the terrestrial world (the "below"), establishing the concept of universal sympathy and correspondence that governs all creation. Without descending into specific operative details, the text defined the essential components and processes for the transmutation of nature: the universal matter ("born from one thing"); the primary celestial influences ("Sun" and "Moon"); and the ultimate objective, the "Stone," which ascends and descends to integrate the superior and inferior powers. The version published by Storella further accentuates the text's alchemical-operative dimension through the explicit inclusion of the term *Lapis* (Stone) in the description of the material's cyclic movement: *Ascendit lapis de terra ad coelum, et iterum descendit de coelo in terram* (The stone ascends from the earth to the sky, and descends again from the sky to the earth). This explicit reference to the ultimate alchemical goal was absent in the version of the *Tabula smaragdina* present in the paragraph of the *Secretum* that Storella was commenting upon, and thus served to reinforce and complete the alchemical reading of the original Aristotelian text. This cosmic cycle of integration, based on the principle of universal correspondence ("as above, so below"), serves as the divine model that the alchemical *ars* must necessarily imitate to achieve genuine transmutation. This comprehensive, non-technical cosmic-physical vision posited the heavens as the ultimate model for all sublunar operations.

[34] *Secretum secretorum*, 42rv:

> Pater Hermogenes, triplex in Philosophia, profetando dixit: Verum est, sine mendacio, certum, verissimum: Quod est superius est sicut illud quod est inferius, et quod est inferius est sicut illud quod est superius. Ad perpetrandum miracula rei unius. Sicut omnia fuerunt ex una sola meditatione unius, ita omnia fuerunt nata ex una sola re, ordinatione ipsius. Pater eius est sol. Mater eius est luna. Portat eum ventus in ventre suo. Nutrix eius est terra. Pater totius coelestini totius mundi hic est. Virtus eius est integra si fuerit versa in terram. Separabis terram ab igne, subtile ab spisso, suaviter cum magno ingenio. Ascendit lapis de terra ad coelum, et iterum descendit de coelo in terram, et recipit vim superiorem et vim inferiorem, et ita habebis gloriam claritatis totius mundi et ab te fugiet omnis obscuritas. Hic est fortitudo totius fortitudinis. Quoniam vincet omne subtile, et penetrabit omne firmum et densum. Sicut mundus creatus est, ita erunt in re ista adaptationes, et dispositiones mirabiles, cuius modus hic. Et ita vocatus sum Hermes, habens treis partes philosophiae totius mundi. Completum est, quod dictum est, in operae Solis et lunae.

The view provided the philosophical and theological sanction for any discipline aiming to manipulate the *naturae arcana* through art. It thereby legitimised the alchemist's claim to imitate a superior natural process.

A comparative reading of Storella's transcription and the versions of the *Tabula smaragdina* strongly suggests that Storella had access to a manuscript belonging to the family of codices that coalesced into the *Liber Hermetis de alchimia*, or one highly influenced by that tradition. This inference is supported by two crucial textual variants found in Storella's text.

First, Storella's choice of *Verum sine mendacio, certum, verissimum,* rather than the more common *Verum sine mendacio, certum, certissimum,* links his version to two manuscripts preserved at the British Museum, namely Harley 3528 (H) and Sloane 2327 (B), both from the fifteenth century. Second, the phrase *Pater totius coelestini totius mundi hic est* is absent in all the manuscripts consulted by Steele and Singer for their 1928 edition. The version of this sentence closest to Storella's text is contained in manuscript Arundel 164 (also at the British Museum, fifteenth century), where it reads *Pater omnis Thelesi* [later corrected to *Thesalini* (i.e. talisman)] *tocius mundi hic est*.[35] As the context confirms, the term *coelestini* in the text reported by Storella is probably a corruption of *Thesalini* and should therefore be understood in the sense of talisman.[36]

By providing this second, more explicitly operative version of the *Tabula*, a version that includes details critical for the investigators of the most occult secrets of nature, Storella was purposefully inserting his hermeneutical and philological work into the trajectory of a vibrant interest in alchemical practice in Naples, directly addressing and validating the concerns of his local audience. This strategic move not only reinforced the syncretic synthesis already begun by scholars like Roger Bacon but did so using unique textual evidence from the Neapolitan context, thereby cementing the identity of Aristotle as a figure whose authority sanctioned both philosophy and Hermetic alchemical practice, as well as the natural magic based on the fundamental principle of cosmic correspondence and natural sympathy between "the above" and "the below".

The logical and physical basis of alchemy

Alchemy, according to Storella, is an integral component of Aristotelian philosophy, as evidenced by Aristotle's own engagement with the discipline in the *Secretum secretorum*. From this premise, Storella draws a significant conclusion: if Aristotle practiced alchemy, then the discipline must necessarily be compatible with Aristotelian logic, and thus justifiable as a legitimate branch of philosophical inquiry. This operation required, in Storella's view, a repositioning of the function of logic itself – as it was perceived by some protagonists of the contemporary philosophical debate

[35] See Steele-Waley, "The Emerald Table," 492.
[36] I am grateful to Charles Burnett for his help on this specific point.

– not only as a speculative science, but as one with an operational dimension.[37] In his *Libellus de definitione logices*, published in Naples in 1553, Storella argues that logic is a speculative science, insofar as it originates from intellectual operations. However, he adds that logic does not remain confined to pure speculation; it extends *extra intellectum*, beyond the mind, toward practical application. In this way, Storella reconciles logic's speculative character with its instrumental role, situating it as an auxiliary discipline applicable across the philosophical sciences.[38] His *De utilitate logices*, published in Naples in 1561 and based on university lectures held in that city in 1558, was written with the explicit aim of demonstrating the essential role of logic (understood as an "instrument") in the learning and practice of all disciplines, from theology to the natural sciences, including natural magic and alchemy.

Within this framework, Storella links the logical instrument directly to the praxis of the occult arts, arguing for an intellectual chain of knowledge: Logic serves as the foundation for astrology (based on mathematical logic, as taught by Ptolemy), which in turn constitutes natural magic – the art of producing wonderful effects by teaching the application of celestially-imprinted active virtues to receptive passive matter (*applicare actiua passivis, admirabiles effectus producendos*).[39] It is within this comprehensive natural-astrological framework that Storella, invoking the necessity of rational method, proceeds to justify alchemy by imposing the use of logic on its practice and defending it against accusations of sophistry or impossibility, a stance which Storella attributes to Averroes:

> Should someone arise, saying, 'I do not wish to practice any of these arts, but I desire to be an Alchemist,' does logic profit alchemy? First, let him know this: not only is the proverb well-worn that every alchemist is either a beggar or a sophist, but also that Averroes, in his *Natural Disputations*, denied the possibility of alchemy. Secondly, let him go to the Most Ancient Morienus and he will find him speaking these words: 'Whoever follows this art ought to know the other arts, and especially dialectics. [i.e. logic].[40]

Morienus Romanus, a legendary Christian hermit and alchemist, features prominently in the early Arabic-to-Latin alchemical text *Liber de compositione alchemiae* (*Testamentum Morieni*). The opening of the *Testamentum*, affirms that Hermes Trismegistus, regarded as the progenitor of all alchemical knowledge, had attained

[37] On Storella's participation in the broader sixteenth-century debate on the nature of logic, with particular regard to his polemic with the logician Girolamo Balduino and his followers, see Antonio Antonaci, *Francesco Storella filosofo salentino del Cinquecento* (Galatina: Editrice Salentina, 1966), 24–32 and 181–89.

[38] Franciscus Storella, *De definitione Logices* (Neapoli: M. Cancer, 1553), 14v–17v.

[39] Francescus Storella, *De utilitate Logices* (Neaples: Matthias Cancer, 1561), 26v.

[40] Storella, *De utilitate logices*, 26rv:

> At insurget aliquis dicens, nullam harum artium excercere volo, sed Alchimista esse desidero, nunquid alchimiae logica prodest? Primo hec sciat nedum tritum esse proverbium quod omnis alchimista aut mendicus aut sophista, sed etiam Averroem in suis Naturalibus disputationibus Alchimiae possibilitatem negasse. Secundo adeat Antiquissimum Morienum et inveniet eum haec verba dicentem, Quicunque hanc artem sectatur, caeteras et precipue dialecticam scire debet.

perfection in "every part of philosophy."[41] In this opening line, Storella discerned an implicit endorsement of the necessity of logic as a component of philosophical inquiry and thus as a legitimate scientific foundation for alchemy. This position, Storella implicitly traced back to Hermes Trismegistus himself, thereby founding both alchemical practice and the logic underpinning it within the Hermetic tradition. Given Storella's prior work establishing Aristotle as an acolyte of Hermes in the *Secretum secretorum*, this appeal to a Hermetic authority (Morienus) to correct the line traced by Averroes is not surprising. By requiring the use of logic to complete practice, Storella implies that rational method (logic) must necessarily be integrated with the knowledge of occult properties to achieve full scientific validity. In doing so, he shifted the debate from abstract speculation to the concrete applicability of logic to the observable phenomena of natural science, including those, like natural magic and alchemy, that studied the occult qualities of nature in their concrete, singular manifestations – in other words, the secrets of nature.[42]

This logical argument was itself contingent upon a physical worldview that validated these secrets of nature as tangible, natural phenomena capable of being rationally scrutinitised. The specific physical doctrine that provided this foundation was that of astrological influence (*influxus*). This was a key medieval concept introduced to provide a rational, naturalistic explanation for the latent powers imparted to specific terrestrial materials by precise celestial configurations. This concept, extending well into the Renaissance, constituted the foundational physical principle of natural magic.

In Naples, the doctrine of the *influxus* was by no means novel. It had found a profound and influential articulation in the earlier work of the humanist Giovanni Pontano (1429–1503). According to Pontano, celestial aspects activate the occult virtues inherent in matter, causing them to pass from potency (their latent potential) to act (their realised, observable state).[43] The philosopher Giovanni Battista Abioso

[41] -"Liber de compositione alchimiae, quem editit Morienus Romanus," *in* Jean-Jacques Manget, *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa* (Geneva: Chouet, 1702), vol. 1, 510: "Omnes Philosophiae partes, mens Hermetis divina plenariae attigit. Quum autem ille per annos multos in magisterii superioris inventione et editione studuisset, tandem magisterium invenit primus et editit." See also *The Book of the Composition of Alchemy*, trans. Adam McLean (Glasgow: Adam McLean, 2002), 7 and *De Re Metallica, Metallorum Transmutatione, et occulta summague Antiquorum Medicine Libellus*, (Paris: 1564), f. 1r. See also Marion Dapsens, *Les Masa'il Kha lid li-Marya nus al-ra hib dans leurs versions arabe et latine. Éditions critiques et traductions* (Florence: Sismel, 2024).

[42] This shift toward an "operational" logic was central to Storella's project. He challenged the methodological constraints of critics like Girolamo Balduino, who argued that scientific demonstration could only proceed from universal premises, not from singular, observable effects (what Storella called the *hic et nunc*, or "here and now"). Storella, by contrast, championed the validity of reasoning from the particular, observable effect back to its hidden, occult cause, thus providing the crucial logical licence for the experimental investigation of nature. On this specific polemic, see Donato Verardi, *Logica e Magia. Giovan Battista Della Porta e i segreti della natura*, (Lugano: Agorà, 2017), 23–30.

[43] See Verardi, *La scienza e i segreti della Natura a Napoli*, 51. Pontano grounded astrological prediction in Aristotle's *philosophia naturalis*, calling him the "most assiduous investigator of the nature of things" (*rerum naturae indagator solertissimus*). See Ioannis Iovani Pontani, *De rebus coelestibus, libri XIIII*, (Basel: Andreas Cratander, 1530), 1. However, as evidence of the complexity of the relationship between Aristotelianism and Hermetism during this particular and sensitive historical-cultural juncture, in his commentary on the *Centiloquium* – which is configured as a text of astrological medicine with "magico-operative" emphases – Pontano revived the therapeutic qualities of Hermetic images and astrological amulets, elements that had been excised in the commentary by Alī. See *Pontani commentationes super centum sententiis Ptolemaei* (Naples: Ex officina Sigismundi Mayr Germani, 1512). On

(fl. 1550s), a student of Pontano, further cemented this Neapolitan tradition by directly linking this robust physico-astrological framework to the alchemical theme of the Fifth Essence.[44]

This Neapolitan philosophical lineage was part of a broader Renaissance tradition which, for the investigation of nature's secrets, found a key authority in the teachings of Albertus Magnus. It was against this background that, in defining the theoretical conditions of the art, Storella strategically engaged with Albertus Magnus as the tradition's pre-eminent figure.

Storella's approach was not one of blind acceptance. His strategy was to expose a critical metaphysical dilemma at the heart of the alchemical tradition, specifically highlighting an inconsistency within Albertus's own corpus. In the *Tractatulus quinquaginta oppositionum*, published alongside *De utilitate logices* in 1561 and conceived as a neutral exercise aimed at highlighting inconsistencies across fifty philosophical questions,[45] Storella drew attention to an inconsistency in the writings of Albertus Magnus regarding the nature of metals. In the *Opusculum de alchimia*, a text now considered apocryphal, though accepted by Storella as authentic, Albertus maintained that metals differed only in their accidental forms, not in their substantial essence, a position that strongly supported the possibility of transmutation.[46] By contrast, in Book III of *De mineralibus*, Albertus argued that metals differed in their essential forms.[47]

The contradiction highlighted by Storella is indeed reflected in the two texts. In *De mineralibus*, Albertus rejected the alchemical claim that all metals share a single substantial form, asserting: "For the varied forms of things are attributed to the varied proportions of their constituents; and in metals there are variations both in the constituents and in the blending."[48] Although Albertus Magnus criticised the theory of matter underlying the alchemical view of Callisthenes (likely a mistaken reference to the Arab alchemist Khalid ibn Yazid), he did not reject the possibility

[43] *Continued*
this, see Graziella Federici Vescovini, *I sistemi del mondo. Il cammino dell'astrologia da Tolomeo a Copernico* (Lugano: Agorà & Co, 2018), 167.

[44] Iohannes Baptista Abiosus, *Divinus tractatus terrestrium et celestium trutina artem exhibens* (Treviso: [s.n.], 1498). On this, see Verardi, *La scienza e i segreti della natura a Napoli*, 52–55.

[45] Franciscus Storella, *Tractatulus quinquaginta contradictionum* (Naples: R. Amatus, 1561).

[46] *Libellus de alchimia* ascribed to Alberus Magnus, translated from the Borgnet Latin edition, introduction and notes by Sister Virginia Heines (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), 7–8:

> Metals differ from one other only in their accidental form, not in their essential form; therefore, the stripping of accidents in metals is possible. Hence, it is also possible, through this art, to bring about a new body, since all species af metals are produced in the earth from a commixture of sulfur and quicksilver or because of foetid earth.

[47] Storella, *Tractatulus quinquaginta contradictionum*, *Quadracesima tertia*, 14v. On Albertus Magnus' alchemy, see Pearl Kibre, "Albertus Magnus on alchemy," in *Albertus Magnus and the sciences: commemorative essays 1980*, ed. James Athanasius Weisheipl (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), 187–202; Robert Halleux, "Albert le Grand et l'alchimie," *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 66, no. 1 (1982): 57–80; Antoine Calvet, "L'alchimie du Pseudo-Albert le Grand," *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge* 79, no. 1 (2013): 115–60.

[48] See Albertus Magnus, "The Opinion of Callisthenes, who Postulated Only One Form of Metal," Book III, chapter 7 in *Book of Minerals*, trans. Dorothy Wyckoff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 171–74 (on 173).

of alchemical practice in his *De mineralibus*. Within the framework of a physicalised version of Avicenna's notion of species, Albertus proposed that the alchemist, much like a physician, could, in theory, replace the specific form of base metals with that of more noble ones. This process involved annihilating the specific form of a base substance and replacing it with the form of a precious metal, a substitution made possible only by directly exploiting the celestial *influxus* that governs the specific forms of metals and their accidents, the occult qualities, inherent in them.[49]

In the system articulated by Albertus, without astrological power, the alchemical operation would be transitory and unstable. For this reason, the alchemist had to follow the order of nature and, imitating nature, through art, perfect it. In this, as William R. Newman has noted, Albertus harks back to the Aristotelian distinction (*Physics*, ii. 8, 199a) where the Stagirite "mentions one sort of art which perfects that which nature cannot do, and another that merely imitates nature." According to Albertus, "the alchemist both imitates and perfects."[50]

It's worth noting that, elsewhere, *De mineralibus* had offered a sophisticated physical-astrological reading of the *Tabula smaragdina*, reinterpreted and adapted to the astrological physics of occult qualities underlying Albertus's work,[51] thereby circumventing both the thesis of a single substantial form (Callisthenes) and the doctrine of multiple occult forms (Hermes) for all metals.[52] Storella could therefore confidently interpret the astrological and cosmological demands of the *Tabula*, and of the *Secretum secretorum* in general, through the rigorous physics of *De mineralibus*, which served as a powerful interpretive tool for his commentary on the *Secretum*.

As we have seen, in his commentary on the *Secretum secretorum*, Storella had already employed both philological and theological arguments to refute the authenticity of the passage in which Aristotle insisted that "by alchemy, metals are transmuted not truly, but according to accidents." The fact that Storella sought to invalidate this passage suggests he recognised its fundamental weakness: it lacked

[49] Albertus Magnus, *Books of Minerals*, 173–74 and 177–79. Albertus found empirical support for the possibility of altering the specific form by observing the alchemical coagulation of mercury (*argentum vivum*). In his commentary on the *Meteorologica*, he deviated from Aristotle's assertion that mercury is incoagulable, arguing that the irreversible solidification of mercury by sulphur and heat demonstrated a fundamental change in species rather than a mere modification of accidental qualities. See Albertus Magnus, *Liber quartus Meteororum* in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 4, ed. August Borgnet (Paris: L. Vivès, 1890), 773–74. On this, see Martin, "Alchemy and the Renaissance Commentary Tradition," 250–51. This conclusion validated the alchemical possibility of turning the liquid metal into a solid, aligning it with the principles of form substitution detailed in *De Mineralibus*.

[50] William R. Newman, "Introduction," in *The* Summa Perfectionis of Pseudo-Geber*: A Critical Edition, Translation and Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 17–20 (on 19).

[51] Albert the Great, *Book of Minerals*, II.i.3, 63:

> Of all the ancients, Hermes gives the most probable reason for the powers of stones, since we know for a fact that all the powers of things below come from above. For [the stars] above, by their substance and light, position, motion, and configuration pour down into things below all the noble powers they possess. Nevertheless, this statement is not enough for natural science, although perhaps it may be sufficient for astrology and magic.

See also Albert the Great, *Book of Minerals*, III.ii.1, 186, where Albertus refers to a key maxim of the *Tabula Smaragdina* ("The Mother of metal is Earth, that carries it in her belly") to explain the liquefaction of metals.

[52] Albert the Great, *Book of Minerals*, III.i.7–8, 171–77.

the philosophical rigour and causal foundation required for permanent, authentic change. As Albertus Magnus himself recalled in *De mineralibus*, the art of the alchemist echoed that of the farmer who, "by ploughing and sowing," aids nature,[53] an interpretation that Storella did not fail to link to the lesson of Aristotle himself in the *Secretum*'s chapter dedicated to precious stones.[54] The outcome of Storella's strategic engagement with the Albertine tradition was the establishment of celestial causality (*influxus*) as the necessary prerequisite for achieving any substantial change through art. The contested passage, conversely, deemed any philosophical foundation for alchemy impossible – a position unacceptable to Storella and, even more so, inconsistent with the alchemical mission (cosmologically grounded thanks to the strategic insertion of the *Tabula smaragdina*) of Aristotle's *Secretum* itself.

Consistent with these premises, Storella championed, in *De utilitate logices*, celestial *influxus* as the highest common factor and the indispensable foundation for natural science. As with natural magic, alchemy was founded upon the close connection between earth and heaven ("That which is below is like that which is above," as Hermes stated in the *Tabula smaragdina*), a bond the alchemist, like the *magus*, had to recognise and reconnect. The pragmatic effect of Storella's argument was to subordinate the metaphysical distinction between essential and accidental forms (the Albertine contradiction, which he tellingly left unresolved) to the unifying causal requirement of *influxus*. By prioritising this shared physical framework (the *Opusculum* did, in fact, seem to implicitly maintain an astrological setting for the art),[55] he pushed for the liberation of alchemy from empty metaphysical speculation on the nature of form and reoriented it toward an operational dimension. This methodological shift, rooted in the celestial necessity of *influxus*, was, in essence, the core of Storella's reform. It established astrology (the science governing *influxus*, which, as he had argued, was itself founded on mathematical logic)[56] as the indispensable precondition for any experimental discipline, thereby guaranteeing a permanent and legitimate change. As for the natural magician, the alchemist's task, therefore, was to recognise this celestial necessity using the tools of logic and to operate consequently upon matter and its inherent possibilities.

Storella and the Neapolitan alchemists: Domenico Pizzimenti as philologist and alchemical mediator

Storella's effort to shift the debate from abstract speculation to the concrete applicability of logic found a significant and immediate echo beyond academic circles.

[53] Albert the Great, *Book of Minerals*, III.i.7, 174.

[54] *Secretum Secretorum*, 41r.

[55] Although the *Opusculum* doesn't explicitly state its astrological dimension, it's traceable in the reference to the alchemist's necessity to respect the timing of the art – an element that a Renaissance man would have easily, and correctly, traced back to the observance of the astrological times underlying the craft. See *Libellus de Alchimia*, 12–13: "The third one [precept of the art] is that he [the alchemist] should observe the time in which the work must be done and the hours for sublimations and solutions."

[56] Storella, *De utilitate Logices*, 26v.

This response established a vital link between academic learning, which could supply a theoretical justification for the *ars alchemica*, and the operative needs of contemporary practitioners.

The figure who best personifies this bridge is Domenico Pizzimenti (fl. ca. 1550–1585). A learned philologist and translator, Pizzimenti's work provides the crucial connection between Storella's Aristotelian synthesis and the emerging experimental culture of the young Giambattista della Porta, the most famous exponent of a new generation dedicated to investigating nature's secrets.

Active roughly between 1540 and 1570, Pizzimenti combined mastery of Greek and Latin with an interest in medicine, natural philosophy, and alchemy.[57] His most significant contribution lies in his Latin translation of a manuscript titled *Physikà kai mystikà*, attributed to several Greek alchemists: pseudo-Democritus, Synesius of Cyrene, Pelagius, Stephen of Alexandria, and Psellos. A first version of the work was printed in Naples in 1570, and then, augmented, in Padua in 1572 under the title *Democritus Abderita de arte magna, sive de rebus naturalibus*.[58]

[57] Vito Capialbi, *Domenico Pizzimenti*, in *Biografia degli uomini illustri del Regno di Napoli*, vol. 8 (Naples: Nicola Gervasi, 1822); Vito Capialbi, *Memorie delle tipografie calabresi. Con appendice sopra alcune biblioteche, la tipografia Montelionese, la coltura delle lingue orientali, gli archivi della Calabria* (Naples: Tipografia di Porcelli, 1835), 200–04; Vito Capialbi, *Memorie delle tipografie calabresi. Con appendice sopra alcune biblioteche, la tipografia Montelionese, la coltura delle lingue orientali, gli archivi della Calabria* (Rome: 1941–1942), with introduction and updates with respect to the first edition, edited by Carlo Felice Crispo, taken from Capialbi's manuscript notes.

[58] *Democritus Abderita De arte magna sive de rebus naturalibus nec non Synesii et Pelagii et Stephani Alexandrini et Michaelis Pselli in eundem commentaria* (Padua: apud S. Galiganum, 1572). The first version of the work, published in Naples in 1570, contained the commentaries of Synesius of Cyrene and Pelagius: *Democritus Abderyta. De arte sacra, siue De rebus naturalibus. Nec non Synesii, & Pelagii in eundem commentaria Dominico Pizimentio interprete* (Naples: apud Iosephum Cacchium, 1570). On this version, see P. Manzi, *La tipografia napoletana nel '500. Annali di Giuseppe Cacchi, Giovanni Battista Cappelli e tipografi minori* (Florence: Olschki, 1974). Didier Kahn and Alfredo Perifano also refer to this version of the work. See D. Kahn and A. Perifano, "Giambattista della Porta e l'allegoria alchemica de phoebi et pythonis pugna," in *Il cenacolo alchemico. Incontri ed eventi ispirati al pensiero di Giovan Battista della Porta*, eds. Alfonso Paolella and Gennaro Rispoli (Naples: Il faro di Ippocrate, 2018), 27–48 (on 44, n. 44). On the dating of Pizzimenti's edition of *De arte Magna* see Maria R. Formentin, "Domenico Pizzimenti Vibonense: maestro, interprete, copista del sec. XVI," in *Testi medici latini antichi. Le parole della medicina: Lessico e Storia*, eds. Maurizio Baldin, Maria Luisa Cecere and Daria Crismani (Bologna: Pàtron, 2004), 691–701 (on 692 n. 7); John Ferguson, "On the First Editions of the Chemical Writings of Democritus and Synesius," *Proceeding of the Philosophical Society of Glasgow* 16 (1884–1885): 36–38. Pizzimenti's translation of Synesius' dialogue was also reprinted by Fabricus alongside the Greek text in the eighth volume of his *Biblioteca Graeca* (233–48), see Sylvain Matton, "L'influence de l'humanisme sur la tradition alchimique," *Micrologus* 3 (1995): 309–41. See also Matteo Martelli, "Introduction," in *The Four Books of Pseudo-Democritus*, ed. Matteo Martelli (London: Routledge, 2014), 1–73 (on 4–5). The Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele III in Naples preserves four codices owned by Pizzimenti, marked with the signatures Neap. III D 17–19 and 23. III D 17 is a collection of alchemical and physical works, signed in 1565 by Cornelio Mursis on f. 189. The manuscript includes most of the texts whose Latin version will be included in the edition of *De arte magna*. The manuscript also contains texts such as Zosimus' *De confectione vivi argenti*, a *De ponderibus et mensuris* attributed to the alchemist Cleopatra, and a series of alchemical textes under the names of Olympiodorus, Eugenius, Cristhianus, Zosimus, Pappus, Moyses, Heliodorus, Archelaus. The manuscript also contains various anonymous fragments on the preparation of gold and silver. III D 18 presents some alchemical works and excerpts, some of which overlap with those present in III D17 (such as *De ponderibus et mensuris* by Cleopatra), as well as, between others, a *De confectione Rhasouchti* by Cosmas hieromonachus and a *De Diuina et sacra arte chrysopoeiae* by Pelagius. III D19 contains a *Manuale chemicum*, an anepigraphic manual on the nature of minerals and their pharmacological application. III D 23 contains works on pharmacology and diagnostics: *De simplicibus* (spur.) and *De arte medica* by Dioscordides, as well as *De pulsibus* and *De urinis* by Avicenna. On Pizzimenti's alchemical library see also Formentin, "Domenico Pizzimenti Vibonense: maestro, interprete, copista del sec. XVI," and the more recent acquisitions of Giorgia Pausillo, "Nuove considerazioni sui manoscritti alchemici di Domenico Pizzimenti," *Scripta* 13 (2020): 141–59.

The culmination of years of philological and conceptual engagement with the Greek alchemical tradition and its texts, this work was dedicated by Pizzimenti to Cardinal Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle (1517–1586), an alchemist and the viceroy of Naples from 1571 to 1575. The dedication (dated 1 September 1570, while Granvelle was in Rome) was strategically addressed to a powerful figure whose commitment to alchemical studies was well established, and whose interests were demonstrably shifting towards the rising trend of Paracelsianism.[59] Pizzimenti's translation, which revived the Greek alchemical tradition, was thus situated in a Neapolitan and European context where alchemy was a vibrant discipline in dialogue between the authority of the ancients and the innovations of Paracelsian iatrochemistry.

Pizzimenti maintained close ties with Storella, dedicating an encomium to the latter's *Logicalium capitum decas prima*, published in 1555, the same year as the *Secretum secretorum*.[60] Significantly, during these same years, Pizzimenti was also collaborating with a young della Porta. Della Porta was then engaged in preparing his first work, the *Magiae naturalis, sive de miraculis rerum naturalium*, published in 1558 by Matthias Cancer – the same publisher who had released Storella's *Secretum secretorum* three years prior.[61] Fourteen verses by Pizzimenti prefaced the *Secretum*, offering praise to his fellow townsman Ettore Pignatelli II, Duke of Vibo Valentia, the father of the Ettore Pignatelli who would later participate in the Accademia degli Otiosi with della Porta and to whom the *Secretum* was dedicated:

[59] Granvelle was introduced to Paracelsus's doctrines through the influential *Compendium* by the French diplomat Jacques Gohory (1567) and received the manuscript of the fundamental alchemical treatise *Clavis totius philosophiae chymisticae* from Paracelsus's disciple, Gérard Dorn (1567), confirming his centrality in the contemporary alchemical and iatrochemical circle. On Granvelle, see François Secret, "François Rossellet, le cardinal de Granvelle et l'alchimie," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 35 (1973): 499–531; Didier Kahn, "Les débuts de Gérard Dorn d'après le manuscrit autographe de sa *Clavis totius Philosophiæ Chymisticæ* (1565)," in *Analecta Paracelsica. Studien zum Nachleben Theophrast von Hohenheims im deutschen Kulturgebiet der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Joachim Telle (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1994), 59–126; Tobia R. Toscano, "Le vice-roi Granvelle et les hommes de lettres napolitains," in *Les Granvelle et l'Italie au XVIe siècle: le mécénat d'une famille*, eds. Jacqueline Brunet and Gennaro Toscano (Besançon: Éditions Cêtre, 1996), 225–51. On Paracelsus and the "Paracelsians" in the Renaissance context, particularly regarding the tension between Hermeticism and Aristotelianism at the dawn of the Scientific Revolution, see Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 67–98.

[60] Franciscus Storella, *Logicalium capitum Decas prima* (Naples: In Platea Sancti Laurentij excudebat Raymundus Amatus, 1555), fol. 18v: "Solum collisne credas nubem furentem / Vibrare inter terras tela trifulca Iovem, / Aspice quam valide iaculetur fulmina, quæque / Intonet Hydrunti gloriam magna sophos / Nemo igitur contra sumptis spem ponat in armis: / Cæperit hæc siquis arma, repente cadet." My translation:

> Do you believe that only the raging cloud / Is vibrating, among the lands, the three-pronged darts of Jove (Jupiter), / Behold with what force he hurls the thunderbolts, and how / The great sage at Otranto makes his glory thunder! / Let no one, therefore, place hope in arms taken against (him): / If any man shall have taken up these arms, he shall fall suddenly.

[61] Giambattista della Porta's *Magiae naturalis* clearly echoes this intellectual project. The work reflects an Albertine interpretation of alchemy, similar to that championed by Storella, which grounded the whole of natural magic in the doctrine of astrological *influxus*. At the same time, della Porta's *Magia* claimed its own philosophical foundation to legitimise and guarantee its experimental dimension, declaring at the opening of the text: "Those who do not believe in the miracles of nature are somehow attempting to abolish philosophy." See Io. Baptista Porta, *Magiae Naturalis sive de miraculis rerum naturalium libri IIII* (Naples: Matthias Cancer, 1558), preface.

DOMENICO PIZZIMENTI / TO HECTOR PIGNATELLO
Duke of the Vibonesi.
Once, Troy was safe enough thanks to its Hector,
And seemed not to have feared hostile hands.
Thus this excellent book, recalled from the Stygian shadows,
Will be safe here by the mere name of Hector.
Only you, Hector, the new glory of the great world,
O good Duke, were worthy of a divine gift.
Caesar had entrusted the secrets of a mighty kingdom,
But a greater honor arises for you in this time.
For Nature, the parent, sprinkled with ambrosial liquid,
Names the secrets of the world in this little book.
Other things they [the presses] had given to the people; yet among all,
The presses themselves acknowledge this one work as the most beautiful.
Therefore, let fair Vibo (Valentia) raise its head above the other cities,
Born to be governed by an illustrious Prince.[62]

Pizzimenti's encomium serves as more than a mere patronage gesture; it frames the *Secretum secretorum* as the ultimate synthesis of authority. Playing on the Duke's name, Pizzimenti casts "Hector" as a heroic shield against oblivion, guarding a text of supreme value. Crucially, he elevates Pignatelli's status above that of Caesar himself: while the Roman emperor commanded only political power (*regni secreta*), the Duke safeguards the far superior "secrets of the world" (*orbis secreta*) entrusted to him by Nature (*parens*). This rhetorical distinction – placing natural knowledge above temporal power – not only underscores Pizzimenti's intellectual allegiance to Storella's enterprise but also firmly establishes the "investigation of secrets" as the shared, defining ethos of this Neapolitan circle.

These details illuminate the strong connections linking informal circles of alchemical experimentation (della Porta's circle) with Storella's university environment, simultaneously demonstrating how both contexts recognised Duke Ettore Pignatelli as a powerful political patron. The relationship provides valuable insight into the coherence between Neapolitan Aristotelianism, alchemy, and the intellectual environments in which a seminal work like della Porta's *Magia naturalis libri IV* was composed. Furthermore, it fixes a *terminus post quem* (1554–1555) for Pizzimenti's own interest in alchemy.

[62] See *Secretum secretorum*, 1r:

> DOMINICUS PIZIMENTIUS / HECTORI PIGNATELLO / Vibonensium Duci. / Olim tuta suo fuerat satis Hectore Troia, / Visa nec hostiles pertimuisse manus. / Sic liber eximius Stygis revocatus ab umbris / Hectoris hic solo nomine tutus erit. / Hoc magni solus Hector nova gloria mundi / Dux bone divino munere dignus eras. / Crediderat Caesar regni secreta potentis, / Hoc tibi sed maior tempore surgit honos. / Haec orbis natura etenim secreta libello / Nuncupat, ambrosio sparsa liquore parens. / Res alias populo dederant; tamen omnibus ipsa / Pulchrius hoc unum praela fatentur opus / Ante alias Vibona igitur caput efferat urbes / Candida, ab insigni Principe nata regi.

Given Pizzimenti's established philological expertise, especially his work in translating Greek alchemical and classical texts, it is highly plausible that his collaboration with Storella went beyond simple support and extended to the textual analysis of the *Secretum secretorum*'s sources. The simultaneous immersion in these foundational alchemical traditions – Arabic-Latin sources for Storella and Greek sources (which Pizzimenti was key in making known) for himself – raises the significant possibility of an interpretative syncretism, and suggests that their joint work may have aimed to unify, or at least cross-reference, the philosophical and technical concepts from these distinct traditions, forging a comprehensive, unified reading of the *Secretum* within a broader intellectual framework.

In this context, the remarks of Nicolás Guibert (ca. 1547–ca. 1620), a French alchemist familiar with the Neapolitan scene, are particularly instructive. In his *Alchimia ratione et experientia expugnata*, Guibert referenced Pizzimenti's translation of the *De arte magna*, explicitly linking it to the *Tabula smaragdina* of Hermes – a key text in Storella's reading of the *Secretum secretorum*.[63] Although Guibert intended to attack the authenticity of both works, his critique inadvertently illuminates the syncretism of the period: he implicitly connected the "medieval" Hermes of Storella with the "Greek" Hermes of Pizzimenti.[64] This identification was crucial, as it allowed for a conceptual fusion of the Hermes of the *Tabula smaragdina* (associated with Aristotle) with the alchemist Hermes of the Greek texts. Beyond this reliance on ancient authority, the theoretical bond between Storella and Pizzimenti is clearly traceable in the dedicatory letter to Cardinal Granvelle at the opening of the *De arte magna*. Here, aligning with Storella's approach, Pizzimenti reaffirmed the idea of an art founded on the study of nature. He stressed that alchemy must strictly imitate natural processes, arguing that failures in the discipline arise precisely because practitioners "do not imitate Nature, the parent in the generation of all things."[65] This philosophy finds a clear precedent in the *Magia naturalis* (1558) of his young collaborator, della Porta – for whom Pizzimenti acted as a mentor. In that earlier work, della Porta had famously declared that the works of natural magic were nothing other than "the works of nature," with art serving merely as its "minister."[66] Crucially, Pizzimenti's dedication further argued that this approach must shun abstract disputes over "form and privation" to commit instead to the

[63] Nicolaus Guibertus, *Alchimia ratione et experientia ita demum viriliter impugnata et expugnata, una cum suis fallaciis et deliramentis, ecc.* (Strasbourg: Lazarus Zetzner, 1603), 63:

> Liber qui a chymistis tribuitur Democrito Abderitae *de arte sacra seu Chymia cum comentariis Synesii et Stephani cuiusdam*, quos olim Dominicus Pizimentius Calaber, dum viveret amicus meus de Graeco in Latinum convertit, tam est Democriti, quam *tabula smaragdina* Hermetis, id quod praeter alia argumenta satis indicant dicta et sensa inepta ac stulta et ridicula, quae in eo continentur. Etsi antea creditum esset librum illum a Democrito scriptum, tamen id falsum esse oportet convinceretur ex Laertio a quo Democriti opera enumerantur.

[64] On Graeco-Egyptian Alchemy, see Michèle Mertens, "Graeco-Egyptian Alchemy in Byzantium," in Magdalino and Mavroudi, *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium*, 205–30.

[65] *Democritus Abderita De arte magna,* 2r.

[66] Porta, *Magiae Naturalis sive de miraculis*, 1: " … nil aliud Magiæ Naturalis opera credatis, quam naturæ opera: ars autem illius est ministra, ac naturæ sedulo famulatur."

investigation of "particular and admirable things"[67] – an empirical stance that would come to define della Porta's own operative work.

This potent convergence in the Neapolitan milieu was, therefore, a reciprocal one. The young della Porta was not simply an apprentice; he was an active contributor whose 1558 *Magia* helped define the atmosphere from which he also drew support. This shared environment rested on three distinct pillars: first, a logical-philosophical justification for investigating secrets grounded in the doctrine of astrological *influxus* (derived from Storella); second, an empirical approach that shunned abstract metaphysics (shared by Pizzimenti and della Porta); and finally, the critical application of philology as an integral part of the alchemist-magus's laboratory. Together, these elements established the peculiar conceptual boundaries of operative alchemical practice in late Renaissance Naples.

Conclusions

The *Secretum secretorum* occupied a central position in Storella's philological and philosophical work. He structured his arguments around this text, utilising it both to support the work's attribution to Aristotle and to define the conceptual framework of alchemy within an Aristotelian philosophy that was, in turn, anchored in Hermeticism.

Philological analysis and theoretical reinterpretation of the philosophical tradition thus proceeded in tandem, aiming to construct, in Storella's view, a coherent image of Aristotle and Aristotelianism as deeply intertwined with alchemy. When certain texts attributed to Aristotle (such as the entire *Meteorologica*, which included the spurious *De mineralibus*) appeared to challenge this coherence, Storella adopted a strategy already employed by Petrus Bonus: the historicisation of Aristotle's corpus. He placed the Stagirite's most explicit endorsement and conceptualisation of alchemy within the *Secretum secretorum*, positing its composition during Aristotle's later years and grounding its cosmological justification in the Hermetic tradition exemplified by the *Tabula smaragdina*.

This philological – hermeneutic operation, articulated through Storella's edition and commentary on the *Secretum*, was accompanied by a logical justification of alchemy. His logical writings were deployed to defend the *ars alchemica* as a rational and demonstrable discipline (*ars*) – specifically by justifying the logical investigation of the singular, observable "secrets of nature" – fully compatible with Aristotelian natural philosophy. In addressing the utility of logic in alchemical practice, Storella invoked the authority of the ancient Morienus Romanus (and, implicitly, Hermes, whose teachings he believed Aristotle had adopted directly in the *Secretum*). This defence was intrinsically linked to the physico-astrological interpretation of alchemy, which Storella regarded as essential for achieving genuine metallic transmutation.

[67] *Democritus Abderita De arte magna*, 2r.

Storella's intellectual enterprise provided the precise theoretical justification that contemporary Neapolitan practitioners were seeking. Figures like Pizzimenti – who, in active collaboration with della Porta, was already working to justify alchemical practice through philological inquiry and direct experimentation – actively engaged with Storella's academic project. This convergence used Aristotelian rigour to legitimise operative needs, forging a distinctive Neapolitan synthesis of Aristotelian logic and workshop practice.

Storella's contribution was therefore twofold: philological, in demonstrating Aristotle's engagement with alchemy within the tradition of Hermes; and logical-practical, in establishing a rational foundation for the operative investigation of the secrets of nature, thereby securing its social legitimacy in late Renaissance Naples.

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Notes on contributor

Donato Verardi is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy. He is a historian of philosophy and science specialising in the relationship between magic and modern science. His work explores the role of magic, alchemy, and material culture at the dawn of the modern world. He is currently researching Giambattista della Porta's Academia secretorum naturae. Address: Malcanton Marcorà, Dorsoduro 3484/D, 30123 Venice, Italy. Email: donato.verardi@unive.it.

ORCID

Donato Verardi http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3625-1181