

# Premise

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This volume collects the proceedings of the International Conference “Hunting Secrets. Giovan Battista Della Porta and the Invention of Experimental Magic,” held at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice on 29 September 2025. The conference was conceived as a key part of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) project, “SECRETS—The Academia Secretorum Naturae: Magic, secrets and instruments of Experimental Science in the Sixteenth Century Naples” (GA 101148607), funded by the European Union.

In an academic landscape increasingly embracing open science, this volume reflects that spirit. This collection is published in open access to encourage the widest possible dissemination of its research, fostering new opportunities for scientific collaboration. It is our hope that this initiative will contribute significantly to advancing our understanding and fostering a more connected academic community.

While not failing to make the necessary comparisons, when necessary, with the first *Magia naturalis libri IV* (1558) the contributions of this volume focus mostly on the *Magia naturalis libri XX* (1589). They attempt to reconsider the role of this capital work in the history of knowledge of early modern Europe from multiple points of view: from the scientific-experimental (Eamon, Jalobeanu), to natural magic and hieroglyphs (Kodera), to the epistemology of collective knowledge and secrecy (Verardi), to the musical (Cypess), from the artistic (Riout) to that of gender (Sammern and Jocher), thus contributing to unravelling the intricate threads that bind Della Porta’s biography, the European context in which he worked and the complex textual and conceptual dynamics that were intertwined in the reform of magic implemented in this work and in the other works connected to it.

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Through an interpenetration of approaches and disciplines, this volume presents some significant aspects of the kaleidoscopic image of *Magia naturalis*: its sinuosities, the complexity of the conceptual plot underlying a skillful use of ancient sources, and its experimental background. Furthermore, it highlights the multiplex relationships that linked its author with the cultural and scientific context of the sixteenth century and explores new aspects of its reception in the seventeenth century. From this perspective, the volume presents itself as a stimulus for further investigations aimed at understanding ever more deeply the actual place that *Magia naturalis* had in the history of knowledge.

Probably no work better represents the complex emergence of a new world at the dawn of the modern age than Della Porta's *Magia naturalis*. Beginning to rethink the *Magia naturalis*—the way in which this work marked a redefinition of the very meaning of nature and magic—therefore means casting a further glance at the deepest and therefore truest roots of our present, at its doubts as well as its certainties.