

written over a long period of time in their “raw” form—just as they first appeared. It is a compromise, of sorts: the writer of the articles does not have to put much time or effort to see his or her work published in one volume; readers do not have to search for scattered articles; and the publisher does not invest greater resources into printing the book. This arrangement has attracted a significant number of historians of science and the Series has been a huge success in terms of its importance for the history of ideas. With the publication of his *Science in the Medieval Hebrew and Arabic Traditions* Gad Freudenthal has joined such respected names as C. E. Bosworth, Edward S. Kennedy, Franz Rosenthal, A. I. Sabra, and Roshdi Rashed, all of whom have published in this Series.

Freudenthal's collection of sixteen articles, written over a period of twenty years, is thematically divided into three sections: Science in the Medieval Hebrew Tradition: Socio-Cultural Considerations (two articles); Maimonides, Gersonides and Some Others (eight articles); and Reverberations of Greek Theory of Matter in Arabic and Hebrew (eight articles).

The occasion of this collection's publication also gave Freudenthal an opportunity to reminisce; the short preface provides insight into his career, scholarly interests, and friendships. Written primarily for specialists, this collection of articles is useful as a barometer, telling us much about the obsessions and ideas of a particular generation of historians of science concerned with two non-Western scientific traditions which never intersected in real time, but which have remained closely associated with each other because of their common view of nature: Jewish and Muslim philosophers of the past shared a certain common domain which made it possible for them to study nature in a like manner; this common dimension can be seen in the third section of this book. The title of the book is somewhat misleading, as there are only three articles out of sixteen which deal with Arabic Tradition.



William R. Newman and Anthony Grafton (eds.):
Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe
 Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press 2001, 443 pp, HC
 ISBN 0-262-14075-6

To the modern mind, uttering the word “alchemy” conjures images of a

remote past filled with charlatans claiming to turn base metals into gold through their craft. To those not accustomed to examining the present in more than its immediate context it may, therefore, be shocking to realize that it was only toward the beginning of the eighteenth century that there emerged a marked tendency to sequester alchemy from the new science of chemistry and, although the divorce is now irredeemable, alchemy retains its own place in the annals of human thought. Notwithstanding its centuries'-old history, modern historians have little time for alchemy—those who do spend a paragraph or two in their accounts of the sciences treat it as no more than a precursor to modern chemistry. This view led people to conclude, as Titus Burckhardt notes in his magisterial *Alchemy*, “that an insatiable desire to make gold had persistently caused men to believe in a heap of fantastic prescriptions, which, rightly seen, were nothing more than a popular and superstitious application of natural philosophy of the ancients”.

Secrets of Nature reexamines this idea and similar popular views about alchemy and astrology. Divided into eight chapters, this book with its beautiful dust-cover jacket presents the work of ten historians of science who examine the subject from various perspectives, ranging from problems of historiography to contemporary attitudes and practices in astrology and alchemy.

The book is unevenly divided between astrology and alchemy, with a greater portion devoted to the former. Special attention has been paid to several individuals including Johannes Kepler, Galileo Galilei, the Renaissance astrologer Girolamo Cardano, the Rosicrucians, John Dee, and the medical alchemist Simon Forman by devoting chapters to specific aspects of their work. The fourth chapter, for instance, examines dedicatory letters by Kepler and Galileo which accompanied their seminal works—*Astronomia Nova* (1609) and *Sidereus Nuncius* (1610)—bringing into sharp relief the wider socio-political milieu of the two scientists. The fifth chapter explores the legacies of Johannes Trithemius and John Dee. The book is an important contribution in the current attempts to reexamine the past from new perspectives.

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