Latin Alchemical Literature of Czech Provenance: Proceedings from the Centre for Renaissance Texts Conference (16–17 October 2014). Tomáš Nejeschleba and Jiří Michalík, eds.
Olomouc: Palacký University, 2015. 186 pp. N.p.

This volume takes its name from a conference convened by the Centre for Renaissance Texts at Palacký University in Olomouc, Czech Republic, in October 2014. The alchemical literature under study was for the most part written by non-Czech authors who were attracted to Bohemia, Czech Silesia, and Moravia by prospects of patronage by Emperor Rudolph II and other prominent aristocrats who were interested in alchemy, in part because of its importance in Central European mining and metallurgy, but also because of alchemy's implications for the intellectual milieu of the radical Reformation.

Thus, on the one hand, John Norris's short article on George Agricola's *Bermannus, sive de Re Metallica* (1530) places its humanistically trained author in the early sixteenth-century mining boomtown Joachimsthal (Jáchymov) and in juxtaposition with an educated miner, Lorenz Bermann, whose name is immortalized in the title. This book is well known in the history of science as an early humanist study of mining and metallurgy, translated into English by Lou and (later US president) Herbert Hoover. Norris notes that there has been little attention to Agricola's work recently and draws attention to his departure from traditional sulfur-mercury theory for the composition of pyrites after confronting Bermann's personal experience with the minerals. On the other hand, although Martin Žemla does not explain the Czech provenance of texts attributed to Valentin Weigel, apart from Emperor Rudolph II's possession of a manuscript copy of *Der güldene Griff* (The golden handle, to identify all things without error), it is clear that Weigel's ideas, grounded in Paracelsus's medical and religious thought and a deep reading in medieval German mystical works, were influential among authors who were connected with Bohemia. Drawing on extensive and excellent recent scholarship on Weigel and his intellectual milieu by Siegfried Wohlgast, Andrew Weeks, and especially Carlos Gilly, Žemla elucidates how Weigel's chemico-religious ideas were mediated by alchemical authors close to the imperial court, Oswald Croll and Heinrich Khunrath, and by Johann Siebmacher, influencing the religious conception of authors associated with the continuing Reformation and the roots of Northern pietism, notably Johan Arndt.

All seven contributions are well documented and reflect a good familiarity with recent scholarship on their subjects. Two concern Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum Sapientiæ Æternæ* (1595), which may have been at least partly written before Khunrath left Bohemia in 1593. One of these is of special interest, owing to its novelty. Ivo Purš analyzes the iconography of the well-known illustration of the alchemists' duality of religious purity and pursuit of alchemical work, *ore et labore*, elucidating the emblematic significance of the central vanishing-point perspective, which draws the viewer's attention to a closed door at the center, as a reference to the mystical connection be-

tween the great work and the *donum Dei*, divine sanction for the quest. Purš grounds this in contemporary perspectivist practices, which make clear the illustration's intentionality and its iconographic intertextuality.

Jiří Michalík introduces us to the life and alchemical context of the today-obscure Wenceslaus Lavinius of Ottenfeld, a Silesian Lutheran physician who was educated at several European universities before settling in Moravia as personal physician to the prominent noble politician and member of the Czech Brethren, Charles the Elder Žerotín. Michalík centers his presentation on Lavinius's *Tractatus de Coelo Terrestri*, a short tract that was included in volume 4 of the 1613 alchemical collection *Theatrum Chemicum*. The genealogy of this text is not well understood—Lavinius may have appropriated it from an earlier text of French provenance, or the other way around—but this, along with Michalík's discussion of Lavinius's role in procuring manuscripts for his patrons and his place in the social network of late sixteenth-century alchemy, serves to elaborate the complexity of alchemical culture in the period.

Tractatus de Coelo Terrestri took up an important theme that runs through the alchemical literature that engages in metaphysical discussion—namely, the relationship between celestial and terrestrial natures in substances and how this may relate to the adept's acquisition of powers to separate them, which were presumably used by God in the creation of the world, as described in Genesis. Michalík places this in the broader discussion of the relationship of art to nature in the late Renaissance, a subject treated at length by William Newman in *Promethean Ambitions* (2004). Lavinius blended this aspect of matter theory with a Paracelsian consideration of material perfection aimed at a hermaphroditic unification of identity, which Michalík interprets as a stand-in for discussion of the philosophers' stone, which is unnamed in the treatise as such.

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The "De Subtilitate" of Girolamo Cardano. Girolamo Cardano.
Ed. and trans. J. M. Forrester. 2 vols. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 436. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2013. xlii + 1,058 pp. $125.

This is the first complete translation in English of the 1560 edition of Cardano's *De Subtilitate*. Cardano planned this as an exoteric work, covering everything from elemental physics to the visible natural world and its inorganic and organic constituents—humans, their attributes, and their arts and sciences, with a stress laid on mathematics and mechanics, ending with the spirit world, the universe, and God. An earlier edition of Cardano's encyclopedic work had been rendered into French in 1556 within six years of its first publication by a professional translator, Richard Le Blanc, whose introductory dedication to the sister of Henri II indicates that it