
Médecine, astrologie et magie entre Moyen Âge et Renaissance: autour de Pietro d'Abano edited by Jean-Patrice Boudet, Franck Collard, and Nicolas Weill-Parot

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Reviewed by
Laura Ackerman Smoller
University of Arkansas at Little Rock
las Smoller@ualr.edu

This volume brings together essays arising from a colloquium held in Paris in 2006 devoted to the celebrated physician, philosopher, and astrologer Pietro d'Abano (1250/1257–1315/1316). Best known today for his massive collection of medical *quaestiones*, the *Conciliator differentiarum philosophorum et precipue medicorum*, Pietro also authored treatises on poison (*De venenis*), physiognomy (*Liber compilationis phisionomie*), astronomy/astrology (*Lucidator dubitalium astronomie*, *De motu octave sphere*, *De imaginibus*), and Aristotle's *Problemata* (*Expositio problematum*). His works have inspired a number of studies and critical editions in recent years [e.g., [Paschetto 1984](#), [Seller 2009](#), [Cadden 2013](#), [Federici Vescovoni 1988](#)], and the papers presented here amply demonstrate the depth and breadth of recent scholarship on the Paduan physician and, more broadly, on the history of science and magic in the later Middle Ages. As the enlightening introduction by Jean-Patrice Boudet points out, Pietro enjoyed quite a reputation in the Renaissance and early modern period not just for his medical and astrological learning—his major works were widely printed in the 15th and 16th centuries—but also for his supposed expertise as a magician (and necromancer). He was, after all, twice summoned before inquisitors in Paris and Padua, and was burned posthumously in effigy as a heretic. Together, the scholars represented here all seek in some way to unpack the subsequent image of Pietro as famous scholar or as heretical magician (or rationalist martyr to the church), whether through intensive study of Pietro's own works, consideration of his reception by contemporaries and later readers, or analysis of works spuriously attributed to Pietro.

As several of the studies presented here make clear, Pietro d'Abano's own understanding of astrology would not have seen him performing necromantic rituals. In her essay 'L'astrologie comme science théorique, rationnelle et autorisée dans le *Lucidator* de Pietro d'Abano', Graziella Federici Vescovini demonstrates that Pietro presented astrology (or more properly, astronomy/astrology) not simply as a rational and theoretical science (*scientia*), but also, in fact, as the most important of the sciences, prior to all others, and certainly not equivalent to magic. Pietro d'Abano rejected both the distinction between art (*ars*) and science (*scientia*), and the subordination of all sciences to metaphysics, since all sciences, in his reckoning, had the same subject, namely, being. But whereas metaphysics considered being as being, physics (of which astrology and medicine were branches) regarded being through movement, whether future (astrology) or past (medicine). Pietro's schema in fact placed astrology as privileged among sciences in being necessary and indispensable to both philosophy and theology. Since God is not knowable except through effects produced by mediation of the movements of the heavenly bodies, astrology, whose object is the study of those movements, is in effect the science of the knowledge of God's actions. Furthermore, by insisting that the stars and planets were neither minor gods, nor demons, nor celestial intelligences, Pietro retained for astrology its character as a mathematical science, effectively denying that it was a form of magic. In fact, in the *Lucidator*, he came down hard against practices that smacked of necromancy or of the 'detestable' astrological images decried in the *Speculum astronomie*, although he perhaps softened that pose in the *Conciliator*. Even there, however, by insisting that the planets acted not through an occult substantial form but rather by means of a medical-sounding *complexio*, Pietro d'Abano pulled the theoretical rug out from under the practice of astral magic.

In Nicolas Weill-Parot's 'Pietro d'Abano et l'occulte dans la nature: Galien, Avicenne, Albert le Grand et la *differentia* 71 du *Conciliator*', Pietro d'Abano appears, again, not as a magician, even in one of the most extensive scholastic musings on occult virtues, difference 71 of his *Conciliator*. As Weill-Parot notes, 'occult' in Pietro's parlance referred not to the supernatural but to natural phenomena whose causes were unknown and which could be explained by hidden properties in things. Pietro's experience as a physician was certainly helpful in his understanding of occult virtues, as Avicenna (following Galen) had discussed medicines that worked not because of their elemental qualities (cold, hot, wet, dry) but thanks to their 'specific form'. Weill-Parot

demonstrates the ways in which Pietro d'Abano's treatment of occult virtues (in a question devoted to the nature of the specific form) was particularly indebted to the discussion of the specific form in Albertus Magnus' *De mineralibus* (although Albert is not mentioned in Pietro's text). According to Weill-Parot, Pietro d'Abano delineated a purely natural occult (such as the effects of certain stones) and a magical occult (involving human operation, such as astrological images). Pietro's concern in the *Conciliator* was with both of these sorts of occult virtues (he was one of the great proponents of medical astrological images). Weill-Parot also notes Pietro's insistence that the specific form can be known neither by reason nor by the senses, but only by its effects. This assertion of the limits of human knowledge, according to the author, is precisely what allowed scholastic authors to offer a rational explanation of such *mirabilia* as the magnet's attraction of iron. For Pietro d'Abano, in fact, the effects of occult specific forms were so 'normal' that one would do better to marvel at the properties of fire than to wonder at the powers of a magnet.

Béatrice Delaurenti's 'Pietro d'Abano et les incantations. Présentation, édition et traduction de la *differentia* 156 du *Conciliator*' examines one of the most seemingly 'magical' topics treated in Pietro's great medical compendium: incantations, or verbal formulas, designed to produce a definitive effect and which were not infrequently utilized in medical practice. Again, however, it is difficult to discover the *magus* of later legend in Pietro's authentic writings. Rejecting the hypothesis that the words of the incantation themselves had some intrinsic force, Pietro named a number of different possible causes by which incantations might work, ranging from the qualities of the human soul itself to the actions of God, angels, demons, stars, or the agent intellect. He took pains to argue against the conclusions of William of Auvergne and Augustine that all incantations involved an implicit pact with a demon. Rather, for Pietro, demonic intervention took place only when incantations were uttered by the unlearned (such as the inevitable *vetula*): in the hands of a learner practitioner, particularly one experienced in astrology, incantations worked through an entirely natural process, whether because of the patient's own sense of hope and trust in the physician or by the cooperation of astral influences. Finally, Pietro also implied—with a touch of comic scepticism—that an incantation might work simply by accident, as in the case of a noble whose outburst of laughter upon an old woman's pronouncing the ridiculous incantation 'two and three make five; three and two also' expelled the fishbone stuck in his throat about which he had consulted the *vetula*. What Pietro did in

differentia 156, urges Delaurenti, was to minimize the notion of supernatural causes behind the force of incantations in favor of emphasizing their natural causes: the soul and the stars. Delaurenti stresses the audacity of Pietro's position, coming as it did in the opening years of the 14th century, just as the preoccupation with demons was sharply increasing in Europe; but she also underscores the ultimately tentative character of his writing. She concludes the essay by looking at the subsequent fate of *differentia* 156, which could be repurposed to argue for the role of demons in incantations or to link more closely medical incantations to works of magic and necromancy. Pietro's own ambiguities and hesitations, she suggests, themselves left open the possibility of alternate (more sinister) interpretations of his writings and his career.

As a number of essays in this collection demonstrate, even if Pietro d'Abano was not himself a necromancer, he did assign astrology a greater role in medical theory and practice than did many contemporaries. But he also was aware of the practical (and theological) limits to astrological science. In this light, Giovanna Ferrari, in 'La durata della vita: *humidum radicale*, medicina e astrologia nel *Conciliator* di Pietro d'Abano', looks at the Paduan physician's treatment of the concept of radical moisture, a topic that received much discussion in 13th-century philosophy, medicine, and theology, as authors tried to clarify the origin of this substance, which, together with innate heat, was thought to play a role in the sustenance of human life. Pietro, in *Conciliator diff.* 111–113, addressed three specific questions concerning radical moisture: its origin and nature, the feasibility of its being restored or replenished through diet, and the possibility of thereby prolonging human life. In tracing radical moisture's origins in generation, Pietro placed particular emphasis on a *virtus informativa*, an agent linked to celestial influences. In order to leave physicians room for action in restoring radical moisture, however, with the possibility of thereby lengthening life, even though Pietro contended that the stars at the moment of generation determined the quality of innate heat and radical moisture, he also admitted limits to astrologers' ability to predict such details as the length of life accurately. Hence, Ferrari argues, Pietro—the great proponent of astrology—acknowledged the limits of astrological prediction in order to safeguard the physician's scope of action.

The later legends surrounding Pietro d'Abano sometimes made of him an alchemist (as was the case with many medieval authors, Pietro had an alchemical treatise spuriously attributed to him). What might have been the

Paduan physician's actual attitudes towards and knowledge of alchemy forms the subject of Chiara Crisciani's enlightening 'Pietro Abano, alchimia e alchimisti'. As Crisciani notes, physicians (and even some theologians) in the 13th century did not share the concerns of contemporary jurists about the relatively new practice of alchemy, considering it a technique with potential usefulness for medicine. Pietro d'Abano, inasmuch as he dealt with alchemy in his *Conciliator*, appears by and large to have concurred in that judgment. Three sections in the *Conciliator* touch upon alchemy, all, as Crisciani points out, drawn from work's third section which is devoted to practical medicine and pharmacology. In all three cases, alchemy appears largely as metallurgical in nature: Pietro does not portray the alchemists' elixir as a potential pharmacological agent for humans. Pietro's discussion of quicksilver in *differentia* 151 reveals his familiarity with alchemical texts—he has read the pseudo-Geber *Summa perfectionis*, for example—as he addresses the debate whether minerals originate from mercury alone or from mercury and sulfur together. In *differentia* 178, devoted to the discussion of theriac, Pietro draws an analogy between the making of theriac and the alchemists' processes (without evincing interest in any specific details of their operations, however). In both cases, he says, art and nature are seen to cooperate. In *differentia* 219, however, while discussing the preparation of a *medicina solutiva* or solutive purge, Pietro insists that art can produce only an inferior copy of nature and points to the superiority of natural gold over alchemical gold. As Crisciani reveals, these three *quaestiones* hardly present a consistent or deliberate statement of Pietro's thinking about alchemy. It is clear that he accepts alchemy's validity, as do other contemporary physicians, and considers it a subject with which he, as a physician, should keep current. Yet, as Crisciani perceptively notes, for Pietro and his contemporaries, alchemy was still primarily seen as an affair of metallurgy, not medicine. How then to explain a statement in the *Lucidator* that appears to paint alchemy in a much more negative light? Crisciani suggests that scholars have misread this puzzling passage, which may instead imply that some detestable magicians have hidden behind the respectable labels of physician and alchemist.

In 'Genèse et postérité du commentaire de Pietro d'Abano sur les *Problèmes* d'Aristote. Le succès d'un *hapax*', Maaïke van der Lugt examines Pietro d'Abano's commentary on the *Problemata* attributed to Aristotle, a work that was translated between 1258 and 1266 and that treats a variety of questions with unknown or debated answers, often regarding the explanation

of particular observed facts for which the cause was hidden. As van der Lugt shows, the commentary was completed in Padua in 1310 but was most likely begun in Paris in the 1290s before Pietro journeyed to Constantinople to learn Greek. In keeping with his general intellectual preoccupations, Pietro often proposes astrological explanations for Aristotle's 'problems', although he is careful to show the complexity of the disputed points. Van der Lugt devotes the final section of her essay to the reception of Pietro's commentary, which was, as her title indicates, in many respects one of a kind. It was certainly the most influential commentary on the *Problemata* and frequently Pietro's own paraphrases actually served as a substitute for the rather obscure translation itself. Yet subsequent commentaries that used Pietro's as a basis lacked the ambition and scope of the Paduan physician's work, whether by vulgarizing the text, removing any of the sense of debate from Pietro's comments, or reorganizing the commentary alphabetically into what was effectively a popularizing encyclopedia. Van der Lugt speculates on the reasons why Pietro's commentary remained a *hapax*, pointing to the unusual nature of the *Problemata*, focused as it was upon particular cases rather than upon the generalizing principles of Aristotelian *scientia*. As she notes, medical authors, by contrast, were by definition focused upon the particular; not surprisingly, the *Problemata* and commentaries on it tended to be copied with medical texts more often than philosophical ones. Finally, she suggests the very 'virtuosity' [181] of Pietro d'Abano's exhaustive commentary dampened future authors' enthusiasm for attempting to produce their own versions.

If Pietro d'Abano's own works reveal little that could substantiate his later reputation as a necromancer, his reception among Italian readers in the early 14th century similarly does not help to explain his subsequent renown as a physician. So demonstrates Joël Chandelier in his 'Pietro d'Abano et les médecins: réception et réputation du *Conciliator* en Italie dans les premières années du XIVe siècle'. As Chandelier points out, the first evidence of Pietro's fame as a physician dates only from the years 1420–1440. Chandelier's examination of medical texts from northern Italy of the first decade after the redaction of the *Conciliator* in 1310 yields, in fact, no explicit mention of Pietro's great medical work. When the *Conciliator* finally did appear in a 14th-century medical text, Gentile of Foligno's commentary on Avicenna's *Canon*, it came up for criticism and, as Chandelier demonstrates, Gentile's original version from the 1320s, while clearly tracking Pietro d'Abano's text,

simply referred to its ideas as those held by 'quidam modernorum'. Similarly, once more in the 1320s, when Dino del Garbo (a pupil of Taddeo Alderotti's) cited the *Conciliator*, it was again to disagree with several of Pietro's conclusions, which he criticized as 'ridiculous and vain' [191], eventually opining that the author should better be known as the Corruptor than the Conciliator. And in a short treatise from the 1340s, Gentile da Foligno again criticized positions outlined in the *Conciliator*. The *Conciliator* was not often referred to in the 14th century and was copied in manuscript and reproduced in print considerably more frequently in the 15th and 16th centuries than in the 14th. How to explain Pietro d'Abano's strikingly poor reputation amongst 14th-century physicians? Chandelier suggests a certain closing of the ranks of Italian university physicians against one who stood somewhat outside that group and its norms both in his training and in the originality of his medical thought. In particular, Pietro's emphasis on astrology cut against the grain of the teaching of Italian faculties of medicine in the 14th century. As astrological medicine came more into vogue in 15th-century Italy, Chandelier comments, so too did Pietro d'Abano's fame rise.

Pietro's posthumous reputation again comes under scrutiny in Franck Collard's contribution, 'Le *De venenis* de Pietro d'Abano et sa diffusion: d'une traduction à l'autre (1402–1593)', examining two French translations of Pietro's brief treatise on poisons, a work that Collard notes could have but seems not in actuality to have played a great role in the construction of the 'black legend' of Pietro d'Abano's expertise in occult sciences. The work enjoyed a great success in manuscript and print (from the 15th century) and had a great influence on later poison treatises. Comparing the two translations, one in manuscript and dating to 1402, the other printed in Lyon in 1593, leads Collard to some interesting observations about the uses of Pietro's treatise. The translation of 1402 was made by a Carmelite friar named Philippe Oger for Jean le Meingre (Boucicaut), who, after he had recently been named governor of Genoa, clearly sensed that a plot to poison him was a real possibility and was seeking practical advice in a language that he could read. The translator in 1593, Lazar Boet, was unaware of the earlier translation but appears to have plugged into a large vogue for vernacular translations of medical treatises as well as a resurgent interest in poisons in France since the 1560s. And, again, the treatise, printed in a small, pocket-sized format, appears to have been destined for practical ends. Neither translation, however, Collard concludes, had much influence or did much to expand the

diffusion of Pietro's work on poisons. In the first instance, Collard speculates that the treatise may have appeared as a work too dangerous to allow vulgarizations since it divulged information about poisonous substances. In the later translation, the author suggests that the publication simply came too late, the vogue for treatises on poisons having subsided after the 1580s.

Some of the possible reasons for Pietro d'Abano's brushes with ecclesiastical authorities become apparent in Danielle Jacquart's 'Autour de la *Compilatio phisionomiae* de Pietro d'Abano'. She examines the oldest copy of Pietro's commentary on the *Compilatio phisionomiae*, bearing the date 1295 and contained in BNF MS Lat. 16089, a collection of texts that includes a significant number of treatises concerned with prophecy, astrology, and magic, some of which raise issues condemned in Paris in 1277. As Jacquart notes, towards the end of Pietro's treatise, he laments that a copy of the text had fallen into the hands of a certain scoundrel in Paris, forcing him to recompose the treatise in a longer and better redaction. Pietro d'Abano, like other university authors of the late 13th century, sought to endow physiognomy with the character of *scientia*. For Pietro, that meant explaining how physiognomy could function as a sign by reference both to theories about generation and to astrological causes. The difficulty was that physiognomy was supposed to give clues about the soul (permitting an astute observer to ascertain his true friends, for example), and Pietro took some pains to circumscribe the science to the 'natural' and not to humans' actions owing to the use of reason and free will. Key to this balance was Pietro's description of generation of the soul and its relation to the body. Given certain statements in the later *Conciliator*, Jacquart suggests quite convincingly that these passages of the *Compilatio phisionomiae* in which Pietro relied heavily on the Aristotelian notion of the *intellectus vocatus* were in fact those that raised the eyebrows of Parisian Dominican friars, one of whom would then be the 'scoundrel' to whom he alluded near the text's end.

The two final essays in the volume by Jean-Patrice Boudet and Julien Véronèse directly confront the Paduan physician's later reputation as a *magus* by examining two overtly magical treatises attributed to Pietro d'Abano during the Renaissance. In 'Magie et illusionnisme entre Moyen Âge et Renaissance: les *Annulorum experimenta* attribués à Pietro d'Abano', Jean-Patrice Boudet discusses a text largely devoted to creating illusions. The *Annulorum experimenta*, known in at least six manuscripts from the 15th

and 16th centuries, appears in a list of *libri de magia suspecti* compiled by Johannes Trithemius in 1508. The *Annulorum experimenta* certainly partakes of the tradition of astral magic, basing its *experimenta* on the 28 lunar mansions, although Boudet points out that the author has made a number of errors which reveal his rather low competence in astrology. Boudet summarizes the general procedure for the 40 experiments in the treatise, which involved a number of rituals and invocations. While the majority (27/40) of the *experimenta* in the treatise are aimed at producing illusions and thus served largely for entertainment, Boudet points out that the instructions that seem to have raised the greatest interest were those for summoning one's own private demon, who would respond to any question put to him. As Boudet notes, contemporary legal sources show people being brought to trial for just such demonic magical practices.

In 'Pietro d'Abano magicien à la Renaissance: le cas de l'*Elucidarius magice* (ou *Lucidarium artis nigromantice*)', Julien Véronèse looks at another text attributed to Pietro d'Abano, one known as the *Elucidarius magice* and by other similar names, which Trithemius labeled 'vain and superstitious'. Trithemius's judgment about this treatise, which seems to date from the latter part of the 15th century, was a response to its overt orientation towards conjuring spirits. Véronèse nicely reveals the differences between the multiple versions of the text (two in 16th-century manuscripts and one from the initial printing in 1565). The operations described in the text, which have a heavy overlay of astral magic, involved an operator who had been spiritual purified, a number of sacramentals (such as holy water), the construction of various circles in which to operate the ritual, and finally a set of invocations and suffumigations. Although the spirits invoked are not labeled as demons in the text, the fact that they are somewhat unreliable indicates that they are in fact demons. Tracing the sources of the *Elucidarius magice*, Véronèse discovers a fascinating interpenetration of various ritual magic texts: the famous Munich Clm 849 studied by Richard Kieckhefer [1988], the *Clavicula Salomonis*, the *De quatuor annulis*, and the *Liber juratus* of Honorius. Finally, Véronèse notes that, since Trithemius asserted that there were many fables recounted about Pietro d'Abano, it seems quite plausible that Trithemius viewed the attribution of this text of spiritual magic to the Paduan philosopher to be one of those myths.

A number of appendices to individual entries greatly enhance the works presented here. To begin there are editions of the important Difference 156 of the *Conciliator* (edited by Béatrice Delaurenti), the *Annulorum experimenta* (edited by Jean-Patrice Boudet), an Italian version of the same (the *Trattato degli anelli*, edited by Stefano Rapisarda), and the version of the *Elucidarius magice* found in Vat. Reg. Lat. 1115 (transcribed by Julien Véronèse). None of these works has appeared in a modern edition and to have them here is of invaluable service to scholars working on the history of magic in medieval and Renaissance Europe. The authors and the press are to be commended for making them available to other historians. Further, Delaurenti offers in addition a French translation of *Conciliator diff.* 156, accompanied by a number of extremely useful annotations. Joël Chandelier's discussion of the reception of Pietro's medical teaching is supplemented by a helpful listing of the manuscripts and printed editions of the *Conciliator*. And Jean-Patrice Boudet provides a detailed inventory of the contents of Paris, BNF MS Lat. 7337, which contains not simply the *Annulorum experimenta* discussed in his essay but also a number of astrological, medical, and magical texts, described here in enough detail to whet any researcher's appetite to see the manuscript itself.

It is truly a pleasure to read a collection of essays that are tied together in such a close thematic way. Perhaps because the contributions do all speak in one way or another to the central *problématique* of Pietro's later image in a way unusual in such volumes, the whole really is greater than the sum of its parts. One comes away, for example, with a clear sense of the importance of astrological explanations—and frequently of one going back to the central moment of conception—in a number of Pietro's medical theories, a point that recurs in many of the studies here. But a reader seeking a simple answer to the question of why this brilliant philosopher, physician, and astrologer attained a later reputation as a necromancer is likely to come away disappointed. Upon reading these essays, Pietro d'Abano's later fame as a *magus* in some ways becomes even more puzzling than before: in his authentic works, while certainly astrology (and indeed astrological images) held a central place, Pietro took pains to distinguish his practices from forbidden magic and to present astrology as a legitimate *scientia*. He noted, with a certain amount of pique, places in which the Parisian Jacobins who hounded him had clearly misunderstood his words. In the end, however, as Boudet points out in his introduction, just as with Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, and Arnald of Villanova, Pietro sailed close enough to the limits of

the permissible to enable subsequent generations to imagine him having gone beyond safe waters. As the authors of this remarkable volume amply have demonstrated, historians still have much to learn about this brilliant and enigmatic thinker.

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