

Informing matters and enmattered forms

The notion of “power” (*dynamis/potentia*) in ancient and early modern theories on the nature and action of the semen

Roberto Lo Presti

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

<http://www.klassphil.hu-berlin.de/avh-professur/Personen/lopresti/>

In this paper I will investigate how the ancient and the early modern embryological discourse made use and developed the notion of “power” (*dynamis; potentia*) with specific regard to the account of the nature, origin and action of the semen and in the broader context of the definition of the soul and its properties. The starting point of my analysis will be a comparison between the different ways of conceptualising the notion of *dynamis* in the Aristotelian and Galenic accounts of the semen as we find them, respectively, in the first book of the *De generatione animalium* and in *De semine*.

In the second part of my paper I will focus on how the Greek notion of “*dynamis*” was understood, assimilated and rethought by the early modern Latin-speaking embryological discourse. I will take into account first of all Theodorus Gaza’s translation of Aristotle’s *De generatione animalium* and the Renaissance translations of Galen’s *De semine*. I will then move to the analysis of the notion of “power” in the following accounts of the nature of the semen: Cesare Cremonini’s *De semine*, Hieronymus Franzosius’ *Tractatus apologeticus de semine pro Aristotele adversus Galenum*, and Harvey’s *Exercitationes de generatione animalium*.