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Furnace and Fugue: A Digital Edition of Michael Maier’s Atalanta fugiens (University of Virginia Press, July 2020)
Tara Nummedal and Donna Bilak

Italian Shadows: A Genealogy of Virtual Reality (Stanford University Press, 2021)
Massimo Riva

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Sawako Nakayasu
Furnace and Fugue

A digital edition of Michael Maier's Atalanta fugiens
(MEM) with Scholarly Commentary

CONTENTS
breeze the table of contents

ATALANTA FUGIENS
read and play the digital edition

SCHOLARLY ESSAYS
interact with text and image
How to Read Atalanta fugiens

Maier was in fact quite explicit about how he thought aspiring alchemists should read his book. He titled pages and subheadings in a way that points towards the most straightforward way to approach the book, which is to follow the story of the race, the consummation of Atalanta and Hippomenes' love and, finally, their ultimate transformation into limes. The book first sets out this theme in the margin on the title page. He suggests the story of the Neoplatonics (guarded by a many-headed dragon), Laban, Venus, Cybele, Cangla, Atalanta and Hippomenes (both during their race and after their transformation into limes), all of which outline the tale to follow.

Maier's readers, in short, may have approached Atalanta fugiens with different kinds of expertise and expectations, and this would have produced different kinds of readings and different kinds of lessons. If we envision that our reader has just finished reading and pondering Emblem 11, for example, where might he go from there? Perhaps he would simply flip the page to follow Atalanta and Hippomenes into Emblem 12, reading the emblems "in order." He also might have decided to obey Maier's exhortation to set aside confusing books entirely for the laboratory, putting down Atalanta fugiens and stoking a fire instead. On the other hand, this reader may well have chosen to remain within Atalanta fugiens.
Furnace and Fugue

A Digital Edition of Michael Maier’s *Atalanta fugiens* (1618) with Scholarly Commentary

In 1618, on the eve of the Thirty Years’ War, the German alchemist and physician Michael Maier published *Atalanta fugiens*, an intriguing and complex musical alchemical emblem book designed to engage the ear, eye, and intellect. The book unfolds as a series of fifty emblems, each of which contains an accompanying “fugue,” music scored for three voices. Historians of alchemy have long understood this virtuoso work as an ambitious demonstration of the art’s literary potential and of the possibilities of the early modern printed book.

*Atalanta fugiens* lends itself unusually well to today’s digital tools. Re-rendering Maier’s multimedia alchemical project as an enhanced online publication, *Furnace and Fugue* allows contemporary readers to hear, see, manipulate, and investigate *Atalanta fugiens* in ways that Maier perhaps imagined but that were impossible to fully realize before now. An interactive, layered digital edition provides accessibility and flexibility, presenting all the elements of the original book along with significant enhancements that allow for deep engagement by specialists and nonspecialists alike.

Three short introductory essays invite readers to get acquainted with early modern alchemy, the printing techniques used for the original book, and Michael Maier. Eight extended interpretive essays explore *Atalanta fugiens* and its place in the history of music, science, print, and visual culture in early modern Europe. These interdisciplinary essays also include interactive features that clarify and advance the authors’ arguments while positioning *Furnace and Fugue* as an original, uniquely engaging contribution to our understanding of early modern culture.

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- An innovative open access digital publication
- Fully searchable text in original Latin and German as well as English translation
- High-resolution, zoomable images
- Newly commissioned, manipulable vocal recordings of *Atalanta fugiens*’s music
- Downloadable performance edition featuring modernized musical notation
- Multifunctional space allows users to curate and share their own selection and arrangement of Maier’s emblems