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Traces de la Verité: the reappropriation of ancient wisdom in early modern natural philosophy

VERITRACE addresses the influence of ancient wisdom writings on the development of early modern natural philosophy. During the Renaissance, works such as the Chaldean Oracles, the Sibylline Oracles, the Corpus Hermeticum and the Orphic Hymns were rediscovered and reappropriated into a *prisca sapientia*, a perennial tradition that considered these writings to contain truths about God, mankind, and the cosmos. Johannes Kepler, Francis Bacon, Pierre Gassendi, Isaac Newton, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, foundational for the development of modern science, all ascribed to this tradition, and with them many others; yet so far no comprehensive account exist of exactly what they took from these ancient wisdom writings and how the idea of a perennial truth influenced their knowledge-making.

This project focuses on the influence of the Renaissance *prisca sapientia* on early modern natural philosophy in its broadest sense by deploying bespoke techniques for distant reading on a large corpus of early modern printed works. It traces how the most prominent ancient wisdom writings returned in the natural philosophical discourse, what exactly natural philosophers took from these writings, and how these writings functioned in the economy of early modern science. Moreover, it traces the debate surrounding these ancient wisdom texts and the supposed truths contained therein throughout early modern Europe, differentiating between the various sentiments with which these texts were perceived, read, and discussed. As such, VERITRACE fills in a major lacuna in our understanding of the emergence and development of early modern science, focussing not on isolated episodes but covering the overall dissemination and influence of the ancient wisdom tradition, while making use of state-of-the-art digital techniques adapted for an early modern environment.