

La battaglia dell'antimonio

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SUMMARY

«**The antimony conflict**». *Antimony, which was already well known to the ancients, in the Middle Ages was known as Lupus metallorum – the grey wolf – a key material in alchemists' attempts at purifying gold. Over subsequent centuries antimony returned within the bounds of conventional scientific and experimental knowledge, but inspired numerous studies, works of literature and investigations in important fields of medicine. Antimony has always aroused more interest than one might expect from a simple metal. The fact that it has been used since ancient times in cosmetics and then in alchemy gave it both positive and negative connotations, reflecting its possible uses and the benefits for health but also the potential harm. For a certain period antimony was virtually the symbol for a range of uses in alchemy or empirical medicine, in the face of modern scientific knowledge, and aroused debate that went well beyond its actual physical and chemical properties. Bernardino Ramazzini's work in the 17th-18th centuries signalled the recognition that the use of antimony was linked to health risks. Today it is put to many uses in many fields of industry and medicine, so our interest in this metal is no longer exclusively a question of history, but is highly topical.*