
This is an erudite work that struggles to contain the many varied strains of scholarship that it explores in the service of its central argument. Luisa Capodieci’s aim is to study astrological images, by which she means works with an explicitly talismanic quality and intent to effect, possessing a virtue that come from the stars. Her focus is to examine where these images occur in the figurative arts and to analyse precisely what they were intended to achieve. She makes clear that her focus is la magie savante, not demonology or popular witchcraft. Capodieci studies the epistemological traditions in which the programme of the images (as well as their talismanic effects, if any) is based.

Where Frances Yates’s work sought to prove that magical meanings did pervade the culture and arts under the later Valois, Capodieci sets out to isolate specific instances and to determine what their meanings were. If the work of Yates serves as one springboard for the study, so too does that of her supervisor, Philippe Morel. His 2008 Mélissa: magie, astres et démons dans l’art italien de la Renaissance which analysed Italian Renaissance paintings with
magical or talismanic significance offers a contemporary culture to which Capodieci can compare Valois France.

Capodieci’s project spans from the arrival of Catherine de Medici in France in 1547, to 1581 with the *Balet comique de la Royne*, which, she argues, is the final demonstration of Catherine’s power before her death in 1589. A driving question for Capodieci is to determine what role Catherine played in this field. However, readers expecting Catherine to be the heart of the study will be disappointed. Many of the works analysed are not directly related, or attributed, to Catherine, who is the explicit focus of only the book’s first section. Here, Capodieci recaps the long tradition of her reputation of a practitioner of the ‘dark arts’, a discussion that surprisingly does not consider whether Catherine’s gender might be a factor in the negative interpretations of her use of astrology.

Other chapters explore items that have only speculative (and typically seventeenth- and eighteenth-century) attributions to Catherine. These include a manuscript merging classical, Greek, and Hebrew ideas about the power of angels, a bracelet combining features of an amulet and talisman, and books held in the Royal Library. Even acknowledging the uncertainty of their connection to Catherine, Capodieci concludes that their purposes were largely acceptable practices, protective rather than malefic, and within mainstream platonic and hermetic traditions. Capodieci then explores the capacity of *impresa* to be magical objects in the sense that they encapsulated the soul of their subject in word and image, and allowed humans to access divine truths. This leads to an examination of Henri II and Catherine’s choice of symbols (the moon, Juno, candles, butterflies, and Prudence among them). Catherine’s rainbow imagery, for example, may have represented a bridge between divine and terrestrial spheres, but Capodieci suggests again that contemporary functions of such images appear conventional rather than as talismanic.

The second section commences with a detailed examination of philosophical and theological principles behind the potentialities of astrological images. Capodieci then studies the decorative programme in the Ulysses Gallery at Fontainebleau. Her highly detailed description of the various components of the ceiling’s design (no longer extant), and of the multiple interpretations of the figure of Ulysses in contemporary texts, leads to the conclusion that it was not a talismanic image. Likewise, analysis of the astrological intent of the ceiling in the Pavilion des Poëles suggests that its significance is largely horoscopic, reflecting expectations about the king’s destiny as a great ruler. This contributes to Capodieci’s building argument that the Valois did not present evidence of any sophisticated use of astral magic that warrants the dark reputation Catherine de Medici gained.
Capodieci further studies the role of images of prodigious signs such as comets and stars, as well as horoscopic references, on medals and tokens linked to the Valois kings. These demonstrate that in general such images – not surprisingly – were incorporated into a programme of propaganda designed to prop up the weak reputation of the final Valois kings. Capodieci also explores whether there were potential relationships between the painting and ceremonial work of Antoine Caron intended to serve a magical purpose. However, Catherine’s choice of symbols (including the sybil, Artemesia, and the fountain) and their applications, it seems, serve to emphasize rather more concrete aims, such as Catherine’s importance in the fulfilment of her children’s prophetic destiny, than any deeper supernatural role.

Finally, Capodieci turns to an analysis of festivals and other ceremonial events, including analysis of imagery, clothing, dances, and music. Her study of royal entries traces the use of the Graeco-Roman pantheon as metaphors for the relationship between the king and his people, and charts historicized, then more biblical, emphases under successive monarchs. Here she poses the provocative question of whether the entire royal entry was in itself a ritual of evocation–invocation, designed to provide celestial benefits to the people, but the answer, she suggests, is no. An analysis of royal attire in such ceremonies confirms that these were all designed with largely encomiastic, rather than magical, purpose in mind. Other ceremonial occasions analyzed include the Catherine de Médicis (Travaux d’Humanisme et Renaissance, 584), Geneva, Librairie Droz, 2011; pp. 728; 122 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. US$130.00; ISBN 9782600014045.

This review is a study in astroseological images, in which Capodieci works with an implicit but highly critical notion of the inherent divine in celestial images that derive from the stars. Her focus is on overarching ideas of what she terms "la magie savante", not demonology or popular witchcraft. Capodieci studies the epistemological traditions in which the programme of the images (as well as their talismanic effects, if any) is based.

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own way, the work is an attempt to rehabilitate the reputation of Catherine de Medici by demonstrating how much French interest in astrology predated Catherine and held (unlike in the contemporary Italian states) a largely eulogistic or encyclopaedic value. It is a pity then that, by linking these elements to her in the title, no doubt playing to reader assumptions, the work continues to make that very connection.

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