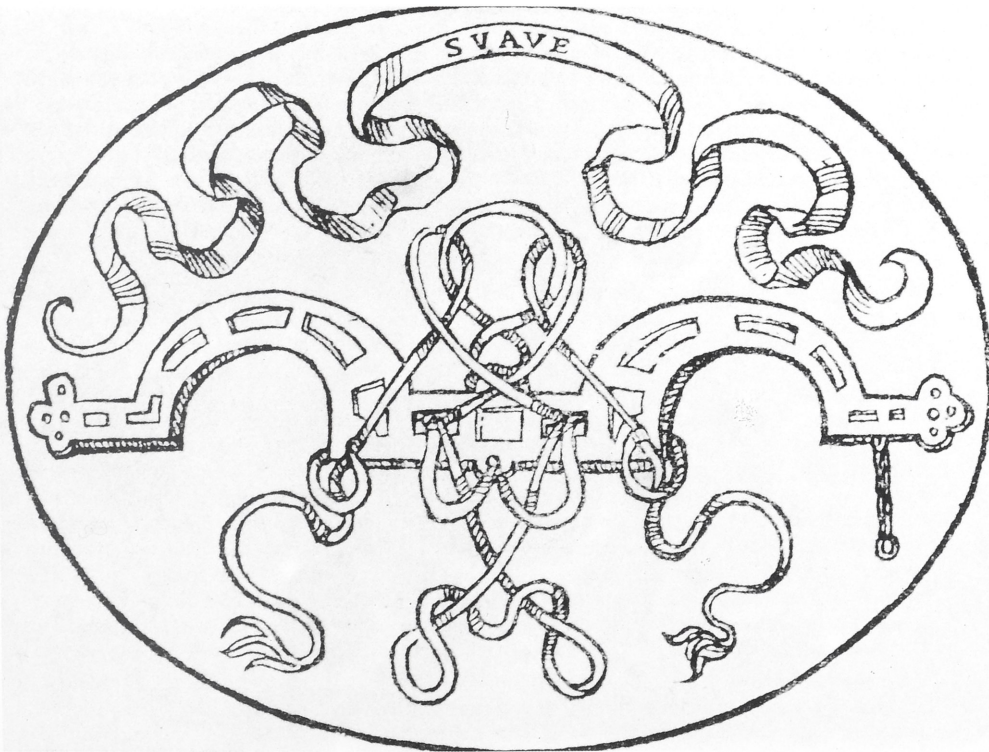


In the opening decades of the sixteenth century a general fascination with the personal impresa had just begun to take hold among the educated and privileged classes of Europe, and before mid-century these emblems gradually came to be regarded as a uniquely eloquent vehicle for a very distinctive sort of personal symbolism.¹ Not merely representative of an identity, and certainly not to be confused with a family crest, the impresa was especially valued for its ability to express a series of ideas about a particular individual, not all of them fully anticipated at the outset. With time and use the impresa would ordinarily acquire new levels of added significance, and the interpretation of the device by others would often enhance this process.² As a special variety of personal hieroglyph, the impresa often developed something of the nature of a symbolic portrait, in which there was a unique sort of reciprocity between reality and the ideal self-image of the bearer. The importance of the symbolic identity, or the tacit relationship between person and symbol in the sixteenth century impresa, should not be underestimated. It endowed these emblems with a peculiar, almost magical character—one that can only be properly understood in the context of a culture in which hermeticism was increasingly not merely an important, but a central element.³

All these factors help to explain the great seriousness with which sixteenth century imprese were created, and the widespread interest in interpretations of their meanings that is amply demonstrated in the many treatises on this subject published during the period.⁴ As one reads these works, it becomes apparent that the success of a personal device was judged at least in part on aesthetic grounds. But perhaps more critical was a recognized capacity to convey an “external”, often obvious meaning, and simultaneously to contain one or more levels of hidden significance that were not immediately apparent to the uninitiated. The motto associated with the corpus of the device was expected to enhance or “animate” the expression of the *concetto* that was given form in the pictorial symbol, and was intimately related to, but not dependent upon the latter. In this way the emblem itself was intelligible without the *anima*, and each could be, and often was, used independently.



1 The Yoke Impresa of Pope Leo X (after *Giovio* [n. 7]).

Moreover, the components of the original device were frequently recombined with other symbolic material to form variants that tended either to emphasize, or de-emphasize, a certain aspect of the primary idea.⁵ Although the science or "philosophy" of the *impresa* was not thoroughly elaborated until mid-century, many examples of these complex images occur earlier. One such device is the yoke emblem of the Medici Pope Leo X, the subject of the present study, and a good example of the sort of polyvalence that would become typical of the later sixteenth century *impresa*.

As the personal device of a pope, it is reasonable to assume that the evidently Christian connotation of a yoke accompanied by the motto SVAVE was intended as the primary external meaning of the *impresa*. This was indeed the understanding of Paolo Giovio, a man who knew Leo X personally. Nevertheless, more recent interpretations have stressed the importance of certain dynastic allusions and political references also latent in the device.⁶ My intention here is to present new evidence which indicates that not only was the Christian meaning of the yoke the most decisive factor in Leo's selection and extensive use of the symbolic device, but that when used in this way, it was initially designed to signify his special destiny as the man chosen by Divine Providence to become Christ's vicar on earth, and to thereby achieve a new era of peace and unity.

Any modern interpretation of Leo's yoke should begin with an analysis of the description of the device and its accompanying illustration (fig. 1) in Paolo Giovio's *Dialogo dell'impresa*.⁷ This important work was written about 1550 in Florence, when the author was in the service of the Pope's god-child, Duke Cosimo I, a descendant of the cadet branch of the Medici family. Having previously served Pope Leo in Rome, whose biography he also later wrote, Giovio's account is clearly a valuable source.⁸ But in considering its content, the circumstances in which it was written must also be taken into account. Aimed at pleasing the Duke to whom the book was dedicated, Giovio's discussion of the emblem was evidently tailored to suit the new mythology concerning Leo X that was developed in Cosimo's Florence, a major tenet of which was a characterization of the Pope as the founder of a new dynasty of Medici "heroes" (that is, Dukes and rulers), of which Cosimo himself was eventually the most illustrious flower.⁹ In this context, Cosimo il Vecchio was designated the founder of the "old" dynasty that was begun anew by his great-grandson, Pope Leo, after the Medici restoration of 1512.

Sopra tutti non solamente i Principi dell'Italia, ma etiando sopra quelli della Casa de' Medici suoi maggiori ne trovò una bellissima Giovanni Cardinal de' Medici; il quale fù detto poi Papa Leone: e fù dopo ch'esso per mano dell'armi Spagnuole fù rimesso in Fiorenza, essendo stato diciott'anni in esilio l'impresa fù un Giogo come portano i buoi, et il motto diceva, SVAVE, per significare di non esser ritornando à voler' essere Tiranno della Patria col vendicarsi dell'ingiurie fattegli da suoi contrari e fattiosi cittadini, pronuntiando loro che'l suo principato sarebbe stato clemente e soave: col motto della Sacra Scrittura, conforme all'habito sacerdotale, che portava, cavato da quel, che dice, Iugum meum suave est, et onus meum leve. E certamente quadrava molto alla natura sua, e fù tale inventione del suo proprio sottile, et erudito ingegno, anchor che paia che'l detto giogo fusse prima del gran Cosmo; il quale quando fù richiamato dall'esilio alla patria, figurò in una medaglia Fiorenza assettata sopr'una sedia col giogo sotto i piedi, per dinotare quasi quel detto di Cicerone, Roma Patrem Patriae Ciceronem libera dixit. Et per la bellezza fù continuato il portarlo nel pontificato di Leone, e merito d'essere istampato nelle monete di Fiorenza.

(Above all, not only among the princes of Italy, but even among those of the Casa de' Medici before him, I think that Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici who was later called Pope Leo found the most beautiful. Having been eighteen years in exile, it was after he was restored to Florence with the aid of the Spanish army, that he invented the *impresa* which was a yoke, like those used for oxen, with a motto that reads SVAVE. This was to signify that he had not returned to be a tyrant, with a desire for vengeance against those contrary and factious citizens who had done him injury, but to announce to them that his rule would be clement and gentle. And the motto that it bore was from Holy Scripture, as was suitable for his priestly vestments, which comes from that place which says "my yoke is easy and my burden is light." And certainly, it was the very image of his nature, and was the invention of his subtle and erudite mind, even though it appears that the yoke was once a device of the great Cosimo [il Vecchio] who, when recalled from exile back to Florence had issued a medal showing a figure of Florence seated on a chair, with a yoke under her feet. This was perhaps to signify what was said of Cicero: In a free Rome Cicero was called father of the fatherland. And because of its beauty, Leo continued to use the Yoke throughout his papacy, and deemed it worthy to be stamped on a Florentine coin.)

Giovio's interpretation of the device is as interesting for what it stresses as for what it fails to mention. Citing the scriptural text from Matthew (11:30) concerning the yoke of Christ, Giovio identified a primary Christian meaning for both the image of the yoke and for the motto SVAVE that, as he points out, was certainly well suited to Leo's ecclesiastical vocation. Regardless of what other meanings the *impresa* may have had, as used by Pope Leo X, the emblem was readily associated with Christ's peace, and therefore with Leo's role

in bringing that peace to the world. We shall return to this point, but there were, of course, other meanings potentially implied by the device. Giovio also informs us that the *impresa* was meant to denote Cardinal Giovanni's peaceful and conciliatory intentions toward Florence after the Medici restoration; achieved (as was later Cosimo's ducal throne) with the aid of the Spanish army. However, he further distinguishes the significance of the *impresa* by adding that the Yoke/SVAVE formula was Leo's own invention, even though, it seemed, that in adopting it he was recalling the precedent of his ancestor Cosimo il Vecchio, another returned exile. Here Giovio appears to have been confused, as it is well known that the medal to which he refers was not issued by Cosimo himself, but in all probability by his son Piero de' Medici to commemorate the posthumous conferral of the title *Pater Patriae* on his father in 1465.¹⁰ But Giovio's distinction between the two devices should be carefully noted since, as his text implies, the meaning of the yoke *under* the feet of Florence in the fifteenth century medal was clearly negative (i.e. the yoke of tyranny firmly conquered) as opposed to the positive Christian significance later given to the symbol by Leo X. His reference to Juvenal's comment about the "free Rome" that had honored Cicero was meant to suggest an analogy with the "free Florence" that had similarly honored Cosimo de' Medici after successfully throwing off the yoke of the tyrannical Albizzi.¹¹

Still interesting is the possibility that between the earlier medal and the adoption of the *impresa* by Leo X, Piero's son, Lorenzo il Magnifico, may have been the first member of the family to perceive the potential of the yoke as a positive political symbol based on ancient precedents. A yoke is depicted as a border device in some of Lorenzo's manuscripts, dating, notably, from the period shortly after his greatest accomplishment as a statesman, the Peace of Bagnolo, which was concluded in 1484.¹² If they are contemporary with the original decoration, the yokes appearing in these manuscript borders accompanied by the motto SVAVE would probably have alluded to the political unity and concord achieved by Lorenzo's diplomacy. This use of the yoke strongly suggests an awareness of the similar connotation given to the symbol in ancient Rome, and to depend upon knowledge of imperial prototypes such as the reverse of a silver denarius of Domitian (fig. 2), or of other coin types from the reigns of Augustus and Titus.¹³ While Lorenzo's awareness of such examples is clearly not impossible, they are more likely to have been known later to the archaeologically inclined Cardinal Giovanni in Rome. Giovio makes no mention of Lorenzo's use of the yoke. Given his long and close relationship with the Medici family this can only suggest that if it had been one of his emblems, in Cosimo I's Florence Lorenzo was no longer associated with it, or, that by mid-century his relatively minor use of it had been completely overshadowed by the much more significant employment of the symbol as a personal device by his son, Pope Leo X.¹⁴

Giovio's account of the origin and meaning of Leo's Yoke is actually more seriously compromised by a mistaken chronology for the latter's adoption of the *impresa*, as there is no other evidence that Cardinal Giovanni ever used the yoke in this way *before* he had attained the papal throne. There is, in fact, much evidence to the contrary. For example, in the lavish carnival pageant staged in Florence about a month before Leo's election in March of 1513, the thematic stress was Medici renewal, and with it the return of the golden age of Lorenzo il Magnifico, already made legendary by this date. In this elaborate display, which featured a procession of floats culminating in one that explicitly enacted the rebirth of the golden age from a great Medici *palla*, familiar



2 Silver denarius of Domitian (after H. A. Seaby [n. 13]).



3 Yoke/SVAVE/N device, *L'Anima pellegrina*. Rome, Biblioteca Corsiniana.

symbols of renewal were employed to encourage acceptance of Lorenzo the Younger, Cardinal Giovanni's nephew-protégé and representative in Florence. For this reason, the Medici laurel, or *lauris triumphis* which will sprout new leaves even when cut back, was the predominant metaphor for dynastic continuity, the primary political message of the event.¹⁵ In all this, the Yoke of Leo X was conspicuously absent and, to my knowledge, there are no examples of the device in any other decorative context before Leo's Lateran *posse* in mid-April of that year. Contemporary descriptions of the later procession in Rome are the first to specifically mention the appearance of the Yoke on Leo's papal livery, as well as in other parts of the decoration.¹⁶

After the first public appearance of the new papal emblem amid the extravagant and impressive ephemeral decorations of the *posse*, the Yoke alone, or the two elements of the *impresa* were inventively combined with other symbolic material to appear literally everywhere in Leo's public imagery, from the lost Florentine coin that Giovinio mentions, to the attributes of the stucco angels of the Vatican Loggia who alternately carry the Yoke and the Medici ring. This combination was first noted by John Shearman who suggested that the composite device thus formed can be explained by the text *anulus necit et jugum suave* (the ring unites, the yoke is easy), from which the alternative *anima SVAVE/N* was derived.¹⁷ We find this variant in different contexts, both public and private, from manuscript borders (cf. fig. 3), to the carved doors and inlaid floor of the Stanza della Segnatura.¹⁸ The dedication page of a manuscript begun before Leo's election, but completed within the first year of his reign, shows yet another early variant. Here the Yoke, the ring, and SVAVE are combined with the Medici *palle* and the papal tiara and keys bearing a scroll reading *IN ALTUM ASCENDIT*, specifically associating the Yoke with Leo's elevation (fig. 4).¹⁹

Leo's Yoke was once again prominent in the princely *apparato* staged for his entry into Florence in 1515. Although largely ephemeral, an important and permanent aspect of these decorations were Pontormo's frescoes in the Cappella del Papa in the convent of Sta. Maria Novella. In the vault (fig. 5), Leo's Yoke/SVAVE (combined with the Medici ring and three feathers, and the *palle*) was depicted between roundels representing symbols of the Passion, and surrounding a central image of God the Father. If this decoration does not specifically allude to Leo's Christ-like forgiveness of the Florentines later mentioned by Paolo Giovinio, it clearly does underline a Christ-Leo X analogy that is symbolically implied by the Yoke *impresa* itself. Over the entrance to the chapel Pontormo's fresco representing *St. Veronica with the Sudarium* continues this theme by recalling the popular allusion to Pope Leo as a new *Christus medicus*, an epithet easily derived from the almost irresistible pun on the name Medici well established by this date, particularly at the Vatican itself. Leo's mission as a healer of ills, not merely in Florence, but throughout the world was openly and repeatedly acclaimed by his many apologists and adulators, and was stressed in his imagery throughout his papacy.²⁰

The association of Leo's *impresa* with the emblems of Christ, as well the underlying reason for its extensive use in his public and private imagery can, however, only be fully understood by reference to the critical fact

that the yoke was adopted by him as a *personal symbol* in direct response to his elevation to the papacy in 1513. Two related themes of Leo's early reign are the most pertinent here: first, the Christlike rule of peace which his election had given so many reasons to hope for, and second, but no less important, Leo's belief in his destiny to become Pope that had been manifest in the stars at his birth to those who had known how to perceive it.

Leo's anticipated rule of peace and moral integrity was hailed allegorically in the many tableaux and inscriptions that were arranged along the papal route of his Lateran *possesso*. These have fortunately come down to us in detailed contemporary accounts that indicate the extent to which the spectacle was intended to evoke an *adventus regis*, or liturgical reception ultimately modeled on Christ's entry into Jerusalem. Though redolent of the royal and imperial symbolism appropriated by the papacy since the middle ages for such events, most strongly in evidence was the theme of the *felix adventus* or epiphany of the *Rex pacificus*, the Prince of Peace, and the messianic "Prince of Promises."²¹ Many of the inscriptions alluded to Leo's appearance as *soter*, and to his long awaited salvation of Rome and restoration of the Church, strongly implying a prophetic fulfillment in his coming to power. One of these described his accession as the reign of Minerva succeeding that of Mars (Julius II) and Venus (Alexander VI), while another showed him at the fixed apex of a great wheel of fortune. Still another saluted him more mystically as the EXOPTATAE TRANQUILLITATIS NOVO SIDERI (that new star of peace so long hoped for). Above the arch with this inscription was a frieze featuring the yoke emblem and lions.²²

The Pope himself both approved and promoted this general enthusiasm for his mission of peace, and in sharp contrast to the reign of his predecessor, Julius II, the achievement of universal concord was at the heart of much of his papal propaganda.²³ Not long after his coronation, Leo issued at least two bulls calling for the suspension of hostilities between the Christian princes of Europe²⁴, and soon began to dream of leading a Crusade against the Turks that would halt their alarming westward advance, as well as effectively unite a divided Christendom against a common enemy. Although his aims were far more grandiose, and his thinking far less pragmatic, Leo's attempts to emulate his father's balance-of-power politics that had once resulted in



4 Dedication page, IN ALTUM ASCENDIT, *L'Anima pellegrina*. Rome, Biblioteca Corsiniana.



5 Pontormo, vault fresco detail. Florence, S. Maria Novella, Cappella del Papa.

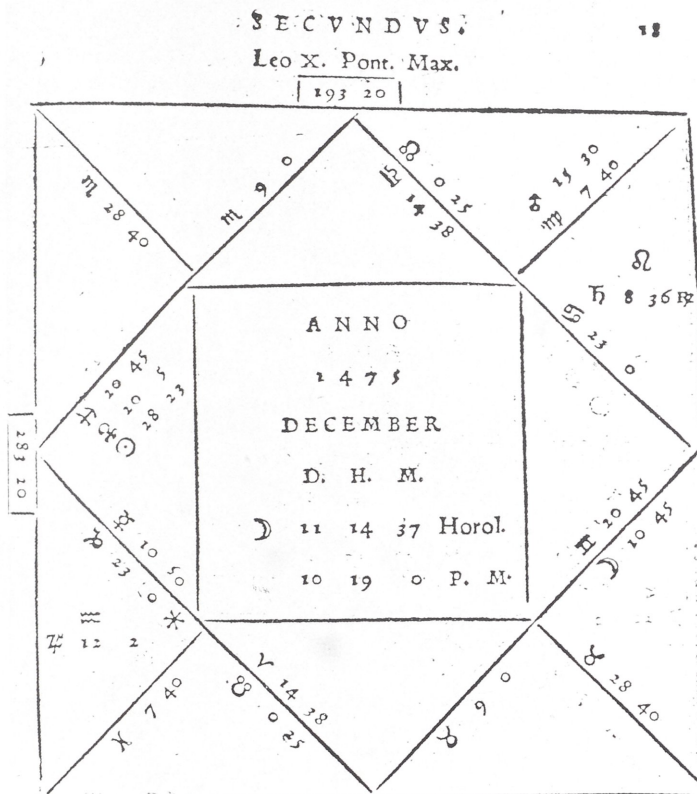
a general peace in Italy were a primary characteristic of his early pontificate, and despite the continual failure of his actual political conduct to achieve and sustain the desired effect, it would be unfair to imagine that his stated hopes for peace were not sincere.

Many of these ideas are reflected in Pope Leo's artistic commissions. These show a consistent self-image as God's chosen leader, capable of stopping the advances of the Infidel (as seen for example in Raphael's *Repulsion of Attila*, 1514, and his *Battle of Ostia*, 1516), or to calm the flames of war (as suggested in *The Fire in the Borgo*, 1516). In these scenes from the Stanze, it is Leo X's portrait that represents the earlier Popes Leo as the specifically appointed agent of God's peace. The motif had been already expressed in a silver triple *giulio* issued early in his reign which featured Christ giving his peace to the Apostles, and inscribed PACEM MEAM DO VOBIS.²⁵ Other examples could be cited here, but the point remains the same.

There can be no doubt that the source of Leo's continued self-confidence, despite his many difficulties and failures, was his profound and abiding faith in the favor that he believed Divine Providence had shown toward him in the stars at his birth. This belief, which by Renaissance standards was hardly unfounded, can be demonstrated to have exerted an even greater influence on the formation of Leo's personal imagery, as well as on his policies, than any other single factor. As the son of Lorenzo il Magnifico, and the pupil of the philosopher and magus Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni de' Medici had become a devotee of astrology at an early age. He had many noted astrologers in his service, both before and after he became Pope, and almost immediately following his coronation he established a chair of Astrology at the Sapienza in Rome.²⁶ Predictions of his accession had been numerous. The earliest of these, and the one most interesting to us here, was made by Ficino himself on the basis of the infant Giovanni's horoscope. This influential prediction, which may even account for Lorenzo's unusually early placement of the boy in holy orders at the age of eight, was recorded in a number of sources, including Paolo Giovio's biography:²⁷

Dicevasi anchora che Marsilio Ficino, il quale era stato astrologo di grande autorità, per sua felice et real natività, essendo egli fanciullo, ne posto in ordini sacri, gli haveva promessa il papato.

(It is said that Marsilio Ficino, who was an astrologer of great authority, the boy being still very young and placed in holy orders, had already promised him the papacy on the basis of his royal and auspicious geniture.)



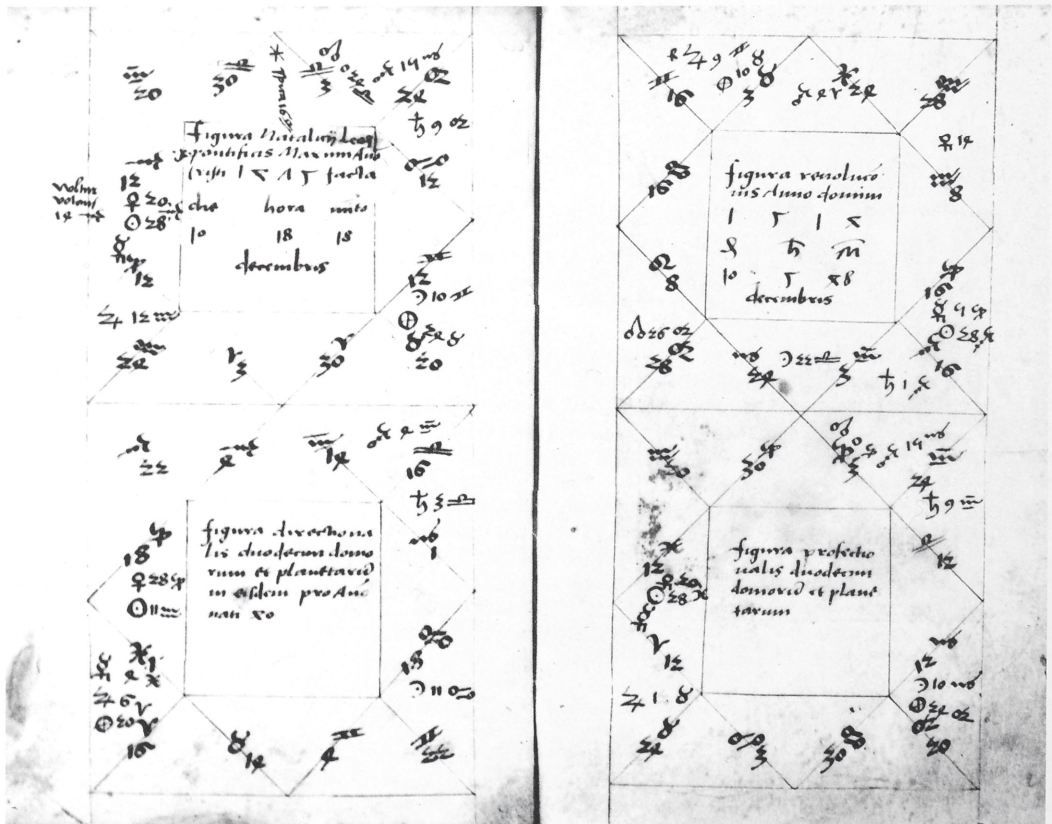
6 Luca Gaurico, Natal horoscope of Leo X. *Tractatus astrologicus...*, 1552.

There are a number of surviving horoscopes for Leo X from the sixteenth century, and the geniture was published (i.e. printed) at least three times after the Pope's death. We may consider the natal chart erected by Luca Gaurico, a celebrated astrologer who was among Leo's intimates, and who, by his own testimony, had predicted the papacy to him on its basis (fig. 6). This chart, which appeared in Gaurico's *Tractatus astrologicus* published in 1552²⁸, is probably identical to the one that the astrologer had cast decades earlier. Its data coincides with other printed examples (within the normal standards of the period), and with an unpublished geniture now in Lucca erected by the Polish astrologer Jacobus Iszla of Cracow, who was at Leo's court in Rome in 1514-15 (fig. 7).²⁹ Gaurico's chart clearly shows the striking aspects of Giovanni's "royal and auspicious geniture" that, by Renaissance standards, would have been the grounds upon which he and Ficino made their predictions.³⁰ These were the positions of the zodiac Signs and the planets, particularly at the Ascendant, or eastern astronomical horizon (marked by the little box at the left center) and at the Mid-Heaven, or culmination of his natal sky (marked by the box at the top of the chart). These points, or "angles", had been thought since antiquity to be the most sensitive to astral influences, and the most telling in general about a person's life and career.

The chart shows that Leo X was born about one-half hour before sunrise, so that the sun was found near the Ascendant. This meant Leo's Sun was considered *Hyleg*, or the "giver of life" by Renaissance astrologers, and was therefore both prominent and very benefic.³¹ The Sun (shown in the chart by the symbol ☉) was closely preceded by the planet Venus (♀), another benefic. Both the Sun and Venus, and the Ascendant itself were located in the Sign of Sagittarius (♏). This configuration was favored by the participation, or "help" by placement and aspect, of the planet Jupiter (♃) which is traditionally held to be the ruler of Sagittarius. Because Jupiter rules the Sign of Sagittarius, the astrologers designated it the "Lord of the Ascendant", meaning of the whole configuration at that angle, and it was thus considered the most "dignified" planet in the chart.

It should be added that the Ascendant Sign of Sagittarius, and its ruler Jupiter, were traditionally associated with wisdom and religion, and this arrangement would have in itself suggested exaltation in the Church. Still more interesting in the present context is the fact that, following a mathematical ratio that results automatically from Leo's birth data, the Sign which marked the Mid-Heaven, and in a sense "crowned" the whole chart with its peaceful influence, was Libra, or as the ancients also called it, the Yoke.³²

In addition to these propitious influences from the Signs and the planets to which we will presently return, Leo's nativity was also considered to have been extraordinarily well aspected by fixed stars in constellations parallel to the Ascendant and Mid-Heaven angles. These are not actually marked in Gaurico's chart, but they are implied by the figures of Right Ascension shown in the above mentioned boxes at these angles, and are graphically noted on the Lucca horoscope.³³ An emphasis on the influence of fixed stars parallel to sensitive zodiac positions in the natal horoscope was a very important and characteristic feature of Renaissance astrology. Not only are such influences always mentioned in contemporary prognostics, but they are also extensively discussed in astrological treatises of the period, together with charts and listings of the constellations and their positions for correct calculations.³⁴ Although these cannot be considered here in detail, it must be understood that the arrangements of the fixed stars parallel to the Ascendant and Mid-Heaven of Leo's natal sky were the surest augury of his accession, as was explicitly stated by the astrologer Francesco Giuntini in his sixteenth century commentary on notable papal horoscopes.³⁵ Being parallel to the Ascendant and Mid-Heaven angles, these stars, or the constellations of which they were a part, could be used to stand for the Signs that marked these sensitive points in the natal chart. It was these same angular constellations which were depicted in the monumental decorative complex of the Sala dei Pontefici in the Vatican Palace to celebrate the destiny that Leo's nativity had presaged, and to invoke their benefic influence in the critical last years of his reign.³⁶



7 Jacobus Iszla of Cracow, Natal horoscope of Leo X. Lucca, Biblioteca Statale (upper left).



8 Master of the Die (after Giovanni da Udine), Tapestry design, *Giuochi di Putti*. Rome, Gabinetto delle Stampe.

In both his life and in his art, Giovanni de' Medici strongly identified with the prominent aspects of his auspicious nativity which he believed had destined him for the papal throne. Of these, the life-giving power of the rising Sun in his Ascendant was expressed by the Sign of Leo, the Sun's zodiacal house. Most obvious in this connection was his choice of the papal name Leo, a name which also permitted his eulogizers to continually compare him to the rising Sun itself, as well as (among other things) to the Lion rising out of Judah—epithets which had been traditionally applied only to Christ. In addition to the ubiquitous lion's heads found in his papal imagery, we find the biblical metaphor specifically expressed in the coin reverse of a silver *giulio* figuring a strident lion, his front paw on a globe being crowned by a flying Victory and inscribed VICIT LEO DE TRIBU IUDA/ROMA.³⁷

The name Leo had other interesting associations. According to ancient astrological tradition, the Sign of Leo was said to rule the city of Rome. Contemporary poets did not miss the opportunity to exploit this conceit, also embodied in a tapestry designed by Giovanni da Udine (fig. 8) as part of a series possibly intended for the Sala dei Pontefici, in which putti are made to act out the personal iconographic themes of Leo X. Here we see the sacred Sun-Pope, the keys of Peter in one hand, and the royal staff of temporal power in the other. His right foot rests on an orb, and a halo surrounds his royal crown. Above him, against the shining disk of the Sun, is the zodiacal Leo, Pope Leo's celestial counterpart.³⁸ Other artistic and literary examples of this emphasis on solar imagery are plentiful, but it is equally clear that the ideal nature of Leo's reign, as well as its divine origin, were even more frequently represented symbolically by his personal emblem, the Yoke.

As we have noted, the Yoke was an ancient Greek name for the Sign that the Romans called Libra or the Balance. Identified by Ptolemy as the *Zugon*, or Celestial Yoke, the Sign was understood to signify balance, justice, harmony, peace, love, and union. As the Sign of the autumnal equinox, Libra was seen to divide the Zodiac into two equal halves, which it "yoked" together. Thus, Manilius spoke of the Yoke as the Sign which gives proper measure to all things, which balances the seasons, and which brings the hours of the day and night in a perfect equilibrium.³⁹ Ruled by the planet Venus, the influence on the world of this Sign was belie-



9 Juan de Herrera, Medal for Philip II, SIC ERAT IN FATIS.

ved to be unity and reconciliation, and the bringing of peoples and nations together under the gentle “yoke” of a common law. Associated therefore with the unity of the Empire under Augustus (born with the Sun in this Sign), Libra was assigned rulership of Rome in the widest sense; that is of the lands united by the law of Rome. A later sixteenth century representation of Libra as the imperial Yoke can be seen in a medal made for Philip II (fig. 9). Designed by Juan de Herrera, Philip’s medal shows the Yoke symbolizing the King’s Ascendant in Libra, and a pair of hands symbolizing Gemini, in which there was a special conjunction of Venus and Jupiter at the time of his birth.⁴⁰ Given Renaissance awareness of these traditional meanings and associations, it should not be difficult to see that for Pope Leo, the Celestial Yoke which had crowned his own natal sky with an augury of his *imperium ecclesiasticum* was metaphorically close to that gentle yoke which Christ had called his own. To a mind trained to make every effort to reconcile pagan and Christian tradition, such an analogy would not have seemed at all irreverent.

Clearly, as an *impresa*, the Yoke was a congenial selection being inherently polyvalent; at once astrological, political, and Christological. But to connect all these allusions even more closely with Leo X, we must return to Marsilio Ficino’s early prediction of his papacy discussed above. In doing this, it is essential to keep in mind that such predictions, and indeed the whole basis of this kind of thinking in the Renaissance were morally permissible because the stars were viewed as ministers or heralds of God’s will, whose influence could not compromise the free will of the individual.⁴¹ So far from being considered heretical, the humanists of Ficino’s circle in particular argued that without knowledge of the stars no one could have a secure understanding of God’s will, which He, in his great goodness, makes manifest to us in the positions of the stars at birth; a view which became generally accepted in the following decades.⁴² In short, knowledge of this kind was considered prudent, and the lack of it, deliberately ignorant.

We may recall then that Ficino, who was called a great authority in such matters, had deemed Giovanni de’ Medici’s geniture both “royal and auspicious”, and from its details, he had predicted that the boy would be called to become Christ’s vicar. We have also seen what the prominent details of that geniture were: a Sagittarius Ascendant, with the Sun and Venus in it, helped by Jupiter, and the Yoke of Libra shining above.

In a sermon probably delivered at Christmas or Epiphany between 1474-1477, Ficino presented a rather interesting analysis of the nature of the Star of Bethlehem, as well as his calculation of Christ's natal sky. The sermon was very likely delivered to the Confraternity of the Magi in Florence of which the Medici had long been members, and which was then under the special protection of Lorenzo il Magnifico, Ficino's patron.⁴³ After an opening prayer that indicates that the sermon was intended for the one or the other of the above feast days (both of obvious importance to the Confraternity), Ficino discusses the manner in which the Star itself had been predicted by Balaam in *Numbers* (24:17). When it at last appeared over Judea, the Magi of the East, "most skillful priests of astronomy wisely ruling over the people as kings", knew that it was the star predicted by the prophet Balaam which would "rise out of Jacob...". Ficino continues to show that the star must have been a comet⁴⁴, which the Magi understood to portend good—in particular a King whose marvellous authority would reform the world for the better. He then demonstrates that this comet must have had the nature of the Sun, Jupiter, and Venus by its color, and by the fact that it rose before the dawn. Since Christ was born before the dawn according to the Scriptures, Ficino mathematically concludes that He must have had a Sagittarius Ascendant, with the Sun and Venus in it, and helped by the benefic rays of Jupiter. With a Sagittarius Ascendant, Christ would, of course, also have had a Libran Mid-Heaven. Obviously, all this practically describes the horoscope of Giovanni de' Medici, who was born in December, 1475!⁴⁵

We can be fairly certain that Leo X, once elected to his destined role, was well aware of the analogy between his natal stars and those of Christ according to his teacher Ficino. For his Lateran *possesso* in April 1513, at which the Yoke first appears as his personal device, Leo issued 100,000 ducats to be distributed to the cheering crowd in the form of an unusual 2 1/2 ducat gold coin (fig. 10).⁴⁶ The reverse of the coin, inscribed LUX VERA IN TENEBRIS LUCET, depicts the Three Magi on horses following their star shown as a comet. Three rays extend from it: one each for the Sun, Venus, and Jupiter. The obverse shows a portrait of the new Pope. Divine affirmation was appropriately demonstrated by a real comet which was seen from November 1513 to February 1514 that was generally interpreted as a sign of God's favor at the advent of Leo's papacy.⁴⁷ One must admit, nothing could have been clearer.

Leo X's desire to be known as healer and peacemaker, and the stated goals of his reign—unity, balance-of-power, and reconciliation—were succinctly represented by the Yoke emblem. Although the primary or external biblical allusion was fundamental to its meaning, this was only the beginning of its importance to him as a personal device. While the *impresa* may have had earlier uses, and, was later interpreted in different ways, for Leo X it was a symbol that connoted his unique vocation, not only in becoming Pope, but, as both he and his supporters fervently hoped, in being that divinely appointed shepherd chosen to lead the world to a new age of peace, understood to have been augured in his natal stars.



10 Gold 2 1/2 *ducato* of Leo X. Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Medagliere.

NOTES

- ¹ Cf. R. Klein, *La Théorie de l'expression figurée dans les traités italiens sur les imprese, 1555-1612*, in: *La Forme et l'Intelligible*, Paris 1970, pp. 124-150, similar discussions in Praz, pp. 55-82; E. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, London 1972, pp. 160-180.
- ² A particularly interesting and well documented example of this phenomenon is the interpretation of the PLVS ULTRA impresa of Emperor Charles V. See M. Bataillon, *Plus Oultre: La Cour découvre le Nouveau Monde*, in: *Les Fêtes de la Renaissance, II: Fêtes et Ceremonies au temps de Charles Quint*, Paris 1960, pp. 13-27; E.E. Rosenthal, *The Invention of the Columnar Device of Emperor Charles V at the Court of Burgundy in Flanders in 1516*, in: *Warburg Journal*, XXXVI, 1973, pp. 198-230.
- ³ See J. Burke, *Hermeticism as a Renaissance World View*, in: *The Darker Vision of the Renaissance*, ed. R. Kinsman, Los Angeles 1974, pp. 95-117. For further references see C. Rousseau, *Cosimo I de' Medici and Astrology: The Symbolism of Prophecy*, Ph.D. Columbia University, 1983, pp. 97-98.
- ⁴ For a list of many such works see Klein (n. 1), p. 150; Praz, pp. 352-354, *et passim* for the diffusion and importance of this kind of literature in the sixteenth century.
- ⁵ Compare the definition of the impresa given by Scipione Ammirato: "L'impresa...non direi che ella fosse altro che una significazione della mente nostra sotto un nodo di parola e di cose... Et in questa guisa ne l'anima viene ad esser' interprete del corpo, ne il corpo dell'anima. Ma dall'anima e dal corpo insieme congiunti si interpreta da colui, che vede, e che legge l'occulto pensiero dell'autore quasi per hierogifici sotto il nodo di quelle due cose spiegato...l'impresa e una filosofia del cavaliere, come la poesia e una filosofia del filosofo." (*Il Rota, overo dell'Imprese. Dialogo del S. Scipione Ammirato...*, Naples 1562).
- ⁶ Cf. J. Cox-Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art*, Princeton 1984, pp. 36-40.
- ⁷ *Dialogo dell'impresie militari et amoroze di Monsignor Gioivo, Vescovo di Nocera, con un ragionamento di messer Ludovico Domenichi nel medesimo soggetto*, Lyons 1559, pp. 39-40, illustrated on p. 39.
- ⁸ The first edition of this work, published in Rome in 1555, carries a dedication to Duke Cosimo I, at whose court the author had died in 1552. On Gioivo's life and work, see W. Roscoe / L. Bossi, *Vita e Pontificato di Leone X*, vol. X, Milan 1817, pp. 66-76, and the summaries given in M. Perry, *Candor Illaesus: The Impresa of Clement VII and other Medici Devices in the Vatican Stanze*, in: *Burl. Mag.*, CXIX, 1977, p. 679, and Rousseau (n. 3), pp. 64-65.
- ⁹ Cf. Vasari-Milanesi, VIII, p. 162: "...perché tutti gli eroi di casa Medici hanno avuto il principio da Papa Leone."
- ¹⁰ For this most reasonable suggestion see G.F. Hill and G. Pollard, *Renaissance Medals from the Samuel H. Kress Collection*, London 1967, pp. 47-48, nos. 245-247.
- ¹¹ Cicero was never actually granted the title *Pater Patriae*, but was named *parens patriae* in the Senate by Catulus in 63 B.C. (T. Mitchell, *Cicero: The Ascending Years*, New Haven-London 1979, p. 240). For Gioivo the image of Florence with the yoke beneath her feet seemed to symbolize this parallel. See also M. Winner, *Cosimo il Vecchio als Cicero. Humanistisches in Franciabigios Fresko zu Poggio a Caiano*, in: *Zs. f. Kgesch.*, XXXIII, pp. 270-271, 290-291, n. 28, who cites the same analogy elsewhere in Gioivo's writings, as well as other parallels drawn between Cicero and Cosimo beginning in the fifteenth century.
- ¹² On the pan-Italian Peace of Bagnolo, and Lorenzo's statesmanship in these years, see F. Guicciardini, *The History of Italy*, trans. and ed. S. Alexander, Princeton 1984, pp. 4-7, and R. Palmarocchi, *La politica italiana di Lorenzo de' Medici: Firenze nella guerra contro Innocenzo VIII*, Florence 1933, pp. 229ff. Lorenzo's intervention between the warring Ferdinand of Naples and Pope Innocent VIII brought these two to terms in 1486. According to *D'Ancona* (La miniatura fiorentina, Florence 1914), none of the three manuscripts recently cited in this connection by Cox-Rearick ([n. 6], pp. 36-37) was decorated before 1486. However, the appearance of the yoke device in these manuscripts is far from unequivocal. Laur. MS Plut. 53.21 (*D'Ancona*, no. 1617, Cox-Rearick, pl. 20) is catalogued as a sixteenth century manuscript, and it seems likely that this work was dedicated to Duke Lorenzo I (the Younger) whose initials "L I" are found in the frieze on fol. 3v (Cox-Rearick, pl. 27). The depictions of the device in MS Plut. 35.2 (previously noted by Winner [n. 11], p. 294) and MS Plut. 37.14 (*D'Ancona*, nos. 1615 and 1616) are also problematic, and may well have been added at a later date. *D'Ancona* (vol. I, p. 106) also notes that the groups (nos. 1610-1622) to which these belong were apparently commissioned for King Matthias of Hungary, but that almost all of them today bear the emblems of Leo X. Good examples are nos. 1614 and 1619, fifteenth century manuscripts which bear the Pope's emblems and his initials "L. X. P. M." Cox-Rearick's assertion that the Yoke is enclosed in a *diamante* with the motto SVAVE/N in MS Plut. 35.2, fol. 2r is incorrect. A passage in Giambullari's description of the Medici imprese displayed at Cosimo I's wedding in 1539 (*Apparato et feste nelle nozze dello Illustrissimo Signor Duca di Firenze...*, Florence 1539, p. 20) names the "antico giogo del Magnifico Lorenzo", but specifically assigns the N/SVAVE variant to Leo X. The literary evidence of two

poems also cited by Cox-Rearick for the yoke/SVAVE having been a Laurentian device is more compelling, but the extent to which the emblem was publicly associated with him before Leo X's accession is at best unclear.

- ¹³ Cf. nn. 32 and 39 below. For coin examples see: *H.A. Seaby*, *Roman Silver Coins: Tiberius to Commodus*, vol. II, London 1968, p. 45, no. 67, (Titus); p. 61, no. 393 (Domitian, showing clasped hands holding a legionary eagle on a prow, above a yoke with a wreath); *C.H. Sutherland*, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. I, London 1984, p. 60, no. 272. As an attribute of Venus, the yoke was also associated with happy accord among the Romans, and with marriage. Cf. *Valeriano, Ieroglyphici*, Venice 1602, p. 746, citing Horace, refers to the "yoke of Venus", and adds that the yoke symbolized the law of the Roman empire.
- ¹⁴ Subsequent to the reference in Giambullari's letter of 1539 (n. 12 above) there is no literary mention of the yoke as a device of Lorenzo's, nor did Cosimo I adapt the symbol for his own use as he had done with other Medici family devices early in his reign. Cf. *Rousseau* (n. 3), pp. 39-40.
- ¹⁵ *Vasari-Milanesi*, VI, pp. 250-255; *Rousseau* (n. 3), pp. 135-136; *Cox-Rearick* (n. 6), pp. 26-27. Manuscripts dedicated to Cardinal Giovanni, i.e. before he became Pope Leo X, also lack the yoke device, e.g. Laur. MS Plut. 77.1 (*D'Ancona* [n. 12], no. 1622).
- ¹⁶ *G.G. Penni, Cronica delle magnifiche et honorate Pompe fatte in Roma per la Creatione et Incoronatione di Papa Leone X. Pont. Max.*, Rome 27 July 1513, repr. *Roscoe/Bossi* (n. 8), vol. V, pp. 192-231.
- ¹⁷ *J. Shearman*, Raphael's Cartoons in the Collections of Her Majesty the Queen and the Tapestries for the Sistine Chapel, London 1972, p. 87. Shearman's source for the motto is *Moroni*, XXXVIII, p. 45. Although generally reliable, the origin of this information is not given in *Moroni*.
- ¹⁸ *Shearman* (n. 17), p. 87.
- ¹⁹ *Fra Tommaso Sardi, L'Anima Pellegrina*, Rome, Biblioteca Corsiniana, MS 612, cos. 55.K.1. fol. 9v.
- ²⁰ The importance of this decoration and its imagery have also been noted by *Cox-Rearick* (n. 6), pp. 38-40. On Leo X as *Christus medicus* see *Shearman* (n. 17), pp. 16-17, 77-78, who notes "the extraordinary frequency [with which] we come across the concept, expressed in the tracts, orations, letters and panegyrics of the period that Leo was a new *medicus* who would cure the ills of the Church."
- ²¹ The specific influence of these ideas on the iconography of the *possesso* has not been previously noted, although *Shearman* (n. 17), pp. 16-17, 82-83, 87, has documented the application of these titles to Leo X, especially early in his reign. The best source for the history and development of this imagery remains *E.H. Kantorowitz*, *The 'King's Advent' and the Enigmatic Panels in the Doors of Santa Sabina*, in: *Selected Studies*, Locust Valley, New York 1965, pp. 37-75. There can be no doubt that the splendor of this event (which *Ciaconius* described as the most elaborate in Rome since the barbarian invasions) was consciously intended to revive the ancient secular tradition as well as to connote the religious implication of an *adventus*. *Penni* describes the scene in just these terms: "Passato che fu cavalchando de uno in altro adornamento, et de pitture, et de panni volendo ciaschuno mostrare la allegrezza che dentro al core havea, mi pareva quel di ch'el Redemptore della humana natura andò in Hierusalem el di delle palme, et per iscambio dire, *Osanna filii David*, gridavano: VIVA PAPA LEONE..." (*Roscoe / Bossi* [n. 8], vol. V, pp. 223-224). Some of this was probably also intended to evoke the contemporary revival of Joachimist prophecies of the *pastore angelico* who would bring peace to all nations and unite them in the faith. On this see *M. Reeves*, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages*, Oxford 1969, pp. 429-436.
- ²² *Penni, Chronica 1513* (n. 16), pp. 212, 219, 224-225, et *passim*. Another early account of these decorations is given in *Francesco Novellus, Vita Leonis Pont. Max.*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana MS Barb. Lat. 2273.
- ²³ Cf. *Shearman* (n. 17), pp. 78-87, n. 13.
- ²⁴ *Bullae*, Rome, Biblioteca Corsiniana, MS Cod. 73.F.15.
- ²⁵ On the coin, and on the probable extent of Leo's own participation in furthering these ideas about himself see *Shearman* (n. 17), pp. 17, 82ff.
- ²⁶ *Rousseau* (n. 3), pp. 138-139, n. 57.
- ²⁷ *P. Giovio, La Vita di Leone Decimo*, trans. L. Domenichi, Florence 1551, bk. III, p. 139.
- ²⁸ *L. Gaurico, Tractatus astrologicus...*, Venice 1552, p. 18.
- ²⁹ *Jacobus. Y. Cracoviensis. Natalis celi constitutio Leonis decimi pontifici maximi exactissime per veramque viam et modum nativitates humanas stabiliendi calculata*, Lucca, Biblioteca Statale, MS 1473, fol. 2v.
- ³⁰ For a more complete discussion, see *Rousseau* (n. 3), pp. 6-10, 139-142.
- ³¹ Rules concerning the determination of *Hyleg* appear frequently in Renaissance astrological texts; e.g. *J. Schoener, Opusculum astrologicum*, Nürnberg 1539, Part II (n.p.). A fuller definition is given by *N. de Vore*, *Encyclopedia of Astrology*, New York 1947, pp. 224-225.
- ³² In the *Tetrabiblos*, Ptolemy sometimes refers to the Sign we call Libra by its ancient Chaldean name, the Claws of the Scorpion, but he more often uses *zugon*, the yoke. While *Chelae*, or claws, occurs in Latin sources, *ζυγός* was translated as *jugum* and used by Latin authors as well as Libra, the Balance.
- ³³ The constellations at the Ascendant are *Aquila Volans* (the flying eagle), *Cygnus* (the Swan), and *Lyra*, (the Lyre or Psaltery). These rise together in a formation called the "summer triangle." The first magnitude

star *Spica* in the constellation Virgo was found exactly on the Mid-Heaven degree. In the Lucca horoscope (fig. 7), these angles are marked “*Voltur volans*” (referring to *Lyra* as the top of the “summer triangle” rising at Leo’s Ascendant), and “*Spica*” at the Mid-Heaven. The positions of these constellations as indicated by *Giuntini* (n. 33), p. 120), were proven by Richard Heuermann of the McDonnell Planetarium in St. Louis in 1981.

- ³⁴ Emphasis on the importance of fixed stars parallel to sensitive points in the natal chart is found in Ptolemy, Firmicus Maternus, and other ancient astrologers, both Greek and Roman. The science of their determination and interpretation was extensively developed in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For references, see *Rousseau* (n. 3), pp. 14-15, nn. 24-26.
- ³⁵ *Giuntini* (n. 33), p. 239r.: “Sed Alexander sextus et Leo decimus feret habent eandem constellationem, quia habuit Aquila volantem in horoscopo in 22 parte Sagittarij, et in medio coeli Spicam, unde ad pontificatum venerunt.” (But Alexander VI and Leo X received support from the same constellations, since each of them had Aquila Volans in the ASC in 22 degrees Sagittarius, and in the Mid-Heaven, the star Spica, from whence they both attained the pontificate.) Elsewhere *Giuntini* (vol. II, 1581, p. 945) also remarked that Spica alone in the culmination of the nativity (as in Leo X’s, in the Sign of Libra) was often an augury of the papacy. I have previously cited the earlier passage in *Rousseau* (n. 3), p. 141. This, and much other material concerning my interpretation of the Sala dei Pontefici vault, and my reading of the horoscope of Leo X, were repeated with ambiguous or incorrect credit in *Cox-Rearick* (n. 6), pp. 179-198.
- ³⁶ *Rousseau* (n. 3), pp. 153-177.
- ³⁷ *Shearman* (n. 17), pp. 17, 76-77, 82. The inscription is adapted from Rev. V:5.
- ³⁸ *Rousseau* (n. 3), pp. 142-143, 169-173. On the tapestries, also see R. *Quednau*, Zeremonie und Festdekor. Ein Beispiel aus dem Pontifikat Leos X, in: Europäische Hofkultur in 16. und 17. Jahrhundert, IX, 1981, pp. 349-358; *Cox-Rearick* (n. 6), p. 112, 140-141, 184.
- ³⁹ *Manilius*, *Astronomica*, IV, 769-772; *Macrobius*, *Saturnalia*, I, 12, 11.
- ⁴⁰ Philip’s medal was used as a foundation deposit in the tabernacle of the Church of the Escorial. See R. *Taylor*, Architecture and Magic: Considerations on the *Idea* of the Escorial, in: Essays in the History of Architecture presented to R. Wittkower, eds. H. Hibbard and M. Lewine, vol. I, New York 1967, pp. 101-102.
- ⁴¹ For a full discussion of this issue see *Rousseau* (n. 3), pp. 42-57.
- ⁴² A. della Torre, Storia dell’Accademia Platonica di Firenze, Florence 1902, pp. 684-685ff.
- ⁴³ M. Ficino, *Opera omnia*, vol. I, Basel 1576, pp. 489-491: *De stella Magorum*. This sermon can be dated by the especially close analogies of its content to passages in Ficino’s *De Christiana religione*, one of the two major works he wrote following his conversion. The *De Christiana religione* was begun early in 1474, immediately upon completion of the longer *Theologica platonica* (1469-1474). It was completed by August, and the Latin version appeared in print in the early fall of the same year. The work was dedicated to Lorenzo il Magnifico, and written expressly to thank him for the rectorship of S. Cristofano. Between 1474-1477 Ficino is known to have frequently expounded the ideas contained in these works to his patrons and friends. (*Della Torre* [n. 42], pp. 598-602). On the Medici and the *collegio Magorum* see R. *Hatfield*, The Compagnia de’ Magi, in: Warburg Journal, XXXIII, 1970, pp. 107-161. Cf. also R. *Trexler*, Lorenzo de’ Medici and Savonarola—Martyrs for Florence, in: Renaissance Quarterly, XXXI, 1978, 3, pp. 293-308, discussing the record and significance of Lorenzo’s own baptism on the Feast of the Epiphany.
- ⁴⁴ By the late fifteenth century there already existed a body of literary and visual tradition identifying the Star of Bethlehem with a comet. See R.J.M. *Olson*, Giotto’s Portrait of Halley’s Comet, in: Comets, special issue of Scientific American, ed. J.C. Brandt, San Francisco 1981, pp. 1-9.
- ⁴⁵ The birth is recorded in the Archivio dell’Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, Reg. Maschi et femmine, 1473-1481, fol. 35r, on 11 December 1475. Both the civil day and the date by astronomical reckoning, 10 December, are shown on Gaurico’s chart (fig. 6). One might speculate that the iconography of Botticelli’s *Adoration of the Magi* has some relation to the birth of the Medici child given Ficino’s remarks concerning his horoscope. This would be especially likely if the painting were originally a Medici commission of c. 1476, and, as Ettliger has suggested (New Books on Botticelli, in: *Burl.Mag.*, CXX, 1978, pp. 397-401), only later acquired for the chapel of Guasparre del Lama in Sta. Maria Novella.
- ⁴⁶ E. *Martinori*, Annali della Zecca di Roma, Serie papale, Parte I, fasc. 7 (Leone X - Adriano VI), Rome 1927, pp. 3ff. The 100,000 ducats were issued from Leo’s personal funds.

Photo Credits:

Author: Figs. 1, 3, 4. - After Seaby (n. 13): Fig. 2. - Gabinetto Fotografico, Florence: Fig. 5. - Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana: Fig. 6. - Biblioteca Statale, Lucca: Fig. 7. - Oscar Savio, Rome: Fig. 8. - After Taylor (n. 40): Fig. 9. - Museo Nazionale Romano, Medagliere: Fig. 10.