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Abstract

L’Offiziolo di Carlo VIII fu commissionato a Giovan Pietro Birago dal duca Ludovico il Moro, per essere offerto come dono al re di Francia, in occasione della discesa di quest’ultimo a Milano, nel 1494. Il mio articolo propone un approfondimento di natura iconografica sulle miniature presenti nel calendario incluso nella prima parte dell’offiziolo. Lo studio delle raffigurazioni zodiacali e delle attività dei mesi presenti nelle miniature porta alla luce due aspetti significativi che caratterizzarono la corte milanese di fine Quattrocento: l’interesse verso l’astrologia e l’importanza accordata alla produzione agricola.

The precious Officium parvum Beatae Mariae Virginis per annum (Venezia, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, inv. 2502/4), decorated by Giovan Pietro Birago, received renewed scholarly attention on the occasion of the catalogue: Le miniature della Fondazione Giorgio Cini: pagine, ritagli, manoscritti (2016)¹. The diminutive manuscript was commissioned by the Duke of Milan Ludovico Maria Sforza, otherwise known as il Moro, between the end of 1493 and 1494. It was intended to be presented to Charles VIII of France, on his visit to Milan in preparation for the Crusade against the Turks. This study is an interdisciplinary approach to the miniatures of the calendar, located in ff. 1v-19r.

The zodiac signs and the labours of the months depicted in the calendar convey important aspects that have yet to be fully explored (Figs. 1-3, pl. XV). A study of these illustrations will shed new light on two key features characterising the Milanese court of the late fifteenth century: the interest in astrology and the importance given to agriculture, particularly to viticulture, both seen under the umbrella of good governance.

Alessandro Cutolo was the first to identify the provenance of this codex and to speculate on its early history. His ideas are still widely accepted by scholars. Cutolo recognised the stylistic and iconographic resemblance between the Offiziolo and the Bona Sforza Hours (c.1490-1494, London, British Library, Add. 34294), and attributed the main decoration of both manuscripts to the same, albeit anonymous illuminator, now recognised as Giovan Pietro Birago, a favourite artist at the Milanese court. The calendar of the Cini Offiziolo is generally ascribed to a second Lombard illuminator of the late fifteenth century, of a lesser artistic ability, whose identification is subject to debate. More recently, Gnacolini suggested that the first sixteen pages of the calendar, characterised by a simplified treatment of shadows and folds, were executed by the workshop on Birago’s drawings, while the remainder were decorated by the master himself (17v-19r).

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Books of hours were portable compendia of devotional texts for private use. They were modelled on the Breviary, a book containing the liturgical texts for the Office, recited in the choir or in private during the eight canonical hours of the monastic day. In Italy, books of hours were also called ‘offizioli’, and were produced between the end of the thirteenth and the middle of the sixteenth century. The offizioli were highly personal objects, created according to the taste of their owners, who included their coat of arms, emblems, portraits, personalised prayers, and cycles of illustrations. They were objects of piety as well as of wealth⁶.

The years of Ludovico il Moro (1451-1508) were characterised by the production of luxurious books of hours, amongst them the Cini Offiziolo (inv. 2502/4). This codex is exceptionally small, measuring only 59 × 35-36 mm (text-block: 34 x 23 mm). Pier Luigi Mulas placed this manuscript within a corpus of late fourteenth- and beginning of fifteenth-century books, created as objects of marvel, such as the Torriani Hours (Chantilly, Musée Condé, 83-1385, 72 x 57 mm). He convincingly postulated that the Offiziolo of Charles VIII was destined for a cabinet of curiosities, rather than actual devotional practice, in accordance with the diplomatic role of the manuscript⁷. The pages of the Offiziolo of Charles VIII include, amongst the monogram of the commissioner Ludovico il Moro (ff. 19v, 124r), references to the king of France and the imminent crusade (ff. 119v-120r). As Marco Pellegrini observed, Milan did not hold a leading place within international affairs and its position was under threat by the dynastic claims of Louis of Orléans⁸. Moreover, Ludovico il Moro came into power through usurping the regency

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of his nephew, Gian Galeazzo, from Galeazzo’s mother Bona of Savoy, in 1480. Il Moro, therefore, had to legitimise his rule both internally and internationally through diplomacy.

The use of books as political gifts was part of Ludovico’s diplomatic norms. Two of Sforziada’s editions, decorated by the same Birago, were possibly offered to Gian Galeazzo (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Vélins 724) and to Galeazzo da Sanseverino (Warszawa, Biblioteka Narodwa, Inc. F. 1347), respectively⁹. The practice was already attested in Milan during the Visconti rule. Francesca Manzari noticed the case of the Offiziolo of Gian Galeazzo (Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, B.R. 397, Landau Finaly 22). The latter was not intended for devotional purposes, but was “a new type of luxury book that served as an instrument for the promotion of dynastic power”¹⁰. The Offiziolo commissioned by il Moro for Charles VIII was intended for the same role. As stated by Luisa Giordano, il Moro employed an iconographic programme which had the purpose of promoting his image as successor and re-founder of the Sforza dynasty¹¹.

Illumination was a favourite media, and Ludovico’s books were richly decorated with coats of arms, portraits and emblems. Given the attentive use of imagery by il Moro, there is little reason to believe that the calendar included in the Offiziolo escaped the celebratory intent of the duke. The idea is further reinforced considering the prominence held by the miniatures of the calendar with respect to the text. This, together with the extensive use of gold and the reduced scale of this manuscript, produce the overall impression of a real jewel, fit to impress the king of France.

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¹⁰ MANZARI, Books of Hours Reconsidered cit., pp. 190-191.

The calendar opens with the only full-page illumination, representing two peasants felling trees as the occupation for the month of January (f. 1v). The scene is presented within a golden framed rectangle, crowned by a fleur-de-lis on a blue background, a clear reference to Charles VIII of France. Except for January, which spans four folios, the other months each occupy three folios. Every month is preceded by its occupation, described within vignettes of variable size (Fig. 1, pl. XV). The first page of the month begins with the initials ‘KL’ in gold within rectangles of alternating colour. The twelve zodiac signs are depicted on the bas-de-page against a light blue background, decorated with gold painted stars (Figs. 2-3). A golden disc in the upper part of the image suggests the annual movement of the sun through each zodiac constellation, similar to the calendar of the Hours of Borromeo, c.1471 (Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S.P.42, ff. 2r-13v), where the sun is seen instead passing through the centre of the signs (Fig. 4)\(^{12}\).

The focus of the calendar of the Offiziolo of Charles VIII (inv. 2502/4, ff. 1v-19r) is on episodes of peasant life, in contrast to the typical inclusion of courtly scenes in Medieval and Renaissance cycles\(^{13}\). One explanation might be that the labours of the months illustrated in the Cini manuscript reproduce the background occupations of the dispersed calendar of the Bona Sforza Hours. Scholars have remarked upon the strong resemblance between the two calendars decorated by Birago, suggested by the surviving folios of the Sforza Hours, namely the occupations of the month of May (London, British Library, Add. 62997) and October (London, British Library, Add. 80800; Fig. 5)\(^{14}\). Evans and Gnaccolini considered the rarity of

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\(^{12}\) *Il libro d'ore Borromeo alla Biblioteca Ambrosiana*, a cura di Luca Beltrami, Milano 1896, tav. I-XII.


the Bona Sforza calendar within the Italian panorama of the fifteenth century, both in terms of full-page illuminations and the combination of courtly life and agricultural activities within the same image\textsuperscript{15}. The two scholars suggested the direct influence of the calendar of the \textit{Très Riches Heures} (Chantilly, Musée Condé, 65-1284, ff. 1v-13r), but similar compositions were already present in Italian monumental cycles, in the frescoes of Torre Aquila (end of the fourteenth to the beginning of the fifteenth century)\textsuperscript{16} and in the Hall of the Months from the Palazzo Schifanoia, in Ferrara (c.1470)\textsuperscript{17}. It is plausible that the iconographic programme of the Cini manuscript was repeated in the lost months of the Bona Sforza Hours, indicating the existence of common preparatory drawings\textsuperscript{18}. The diminutive occupations depicted on the background of the Sforza calendar were suited to the small size of the Offiziolo, and this might explain the omission of the larger aristocratic scenes. The relative importance attributed to agricultural labours was in accordance with the interest of Ludovico il Moro in promoting his farming enterprise.

The second half of the fifteenth century brought significant changes in Italian country life. New irrigation and drainage campaigns were undertaken across the valleys of the rivers Po and Arno by local rulers, eager to celebrate their agricultural endeavours with commissions of artworks and literature. The great farming projects followed the enthusiastic reappraisal of classical agricultural texts\textsuperscript{19}. For example, the 1490 catalogue of the Sforza library located in Pavia castle, included key texts by Cato, Varro, Palladius, Pliny and Pietro de’ Crescenzi\textsuperscript{20}. This


\textsuperscript{18} Mulas, \textit{L’Offiziolo di Carlo VIII} cit.


testified to an increasingly humanistic approach towards the study of agriculture, promoted as a noble activity, culminating in the second half of the sixteenth century with the creation of a body of texts, by authors such as Alvise Cornaro, Agostino Gallo and Camillo Tarello. The Italian economy at the end of the fifteenth century was largely agrarian, and the Milanese Duchy prided itself with the most advanced technology of the time. Ludovico il Moro’s innovative and entrepreneurial spirit manifested itself in the governance of his various country estates spread across the area of Lomellina, in the Po valley. Amongst them, the favourite was the farmstead near Vigevano, which il Moro named with the eponymous Sforzesca. His agricultural achievements were listed in inscriptions composed by the humanist Ermolao Barbaro, who, after carefully attesting Ludovico’s dynastic links, praised the peace and fertility he brought to the land. The epigraphs celebrate the expensive canal system which transformed the sterile and uncultivated fields. Il Moro’s model-estate became a centre of innovative experimentation. Ludovico called to Vigevano experts from all over Italy to guide the acclimatisation of the new species of animals and plantations. It is hard to believe that the calendar of the Offiziolo of Charles VIII, which dedicates great space to the various labours characteristic to each month, is indifferent to the ambitious agricultural projects of its commissioner, particularly as the creation of the Offiziolo coincided with a period of intense activity at Vigevano.
Leonardo da Vinci, present at Vigevano during the years 1493-1494, was commissioned with hydraulic engineering works at the Sforzesca. His notebooks record the works undertaken, as well as local agricultural aspects recognisable in the occupations depicted in the Cini Offiziolo. Water is, in fact, a recurrent theme in the Offiziolo, canals are depicted on almost every page of the calendar, and peasants are shown fishing (f. 4v) or carrying buckets of water (f. 7v). References to Vigevano can be noticed in the background of the scenes. The castle’s profile, with the mulberry trees planted around the towers by order of il Moro, appears on the page dedicated to the month of April (f. 6r). The round stone dovecote, depicted in the Offiziolo during the month of November (f. 16v; pl. XV) and in the calendar of the Sforza Hours during October (Add. 80800; Fig. 5), survives to this day in the immediate proximity of the Sforzesca.

Ludovico il Moro took great pride in his farm, which he exhibited to his most important guests. The chronicler Pierre Desrey narrated the visit of Charles VIII to the Sforzesca, in October 1494, and the wonder of the king at the number of livestock. The Offiziolo was possibly offered to Charles VIII shortly before his visit to Vigevano. In view of the political coalition between the two rulers, the pages of the book were filled with references to the French monarch. Whereas, the calendar of the Offiziolo appeared as a celebration of Ludovico’s personal endeavours, testifying to the good governance of his lands, which the king was now able to admire in person.

_Tending to the Vineyard_

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26 MALAGUZZI VALERI, _La corte di Lodovico_ cit., pp. 669-671.
28 GIORDANO, _Le residenze ducali_ cit., p. 36 nt. 37.
29 SCHOFIELD, _Ludovico il Moro_ cit., p. 96.
30 Gnaccolini recounts the evolution of the diplomatic relationship between il Moro and Charles VIII, and how it reflected upon the history and iconography of the Offiziolo: _Le miniature della Fondazione Giorgio Cini_ cit., pp. 444-446.
This study takes as a model the work of Perrine Mane for the identification and re-evaluation of agricultural practices in art\textsuperscript{31}. The methodology is extended to encapsulate the inquiry of agricultural customs within the wider cultural and geopolitical context in which these cycles of the months where created.

One aspect prominently featured in the calendar of the Cini Offiziolo is the special attention devoted to activities concerning viticulture. Four months illustrate occupations related to the tending of the vine: the pruning in March (f. 4v), the harvest in September (f. 13v; Fig. 1), the winemaking in October (f. 15r) and the earthing up of the vine in November (f. 16v; pl. XV).

Today viticulture does not hold a principal role in the context of Lombard agriculture, except for the centres of Oltrepò Pavese, Valtellina, Brescia\textsuperscript{32}. However, this was not always the case: Bonvesin de la Riva described the variety and abundance of the Milanese wines at the end of the thirteenth century in his work \textit{Le Meraviglie di Milano}\textsuperscript{33}. By the end of the fifteenth century, the cellars of the Duchy included precious local and important wines of all varieties and colours, and the lands around Sforzesca were surrounded by vast vineyards\textsuperscript{34}.

The occupations of maintenance and production of the vine are meticulously described in the Northern Italian cycles of the year, such as in the frescoes of the Torre Aquila\textsuperscript{35}, in the Borromeo (S.P.42, ff. 4r, 10r, 12r; Fig. 4) and Torriani Hours (83-1385, ff. 4r, 10r, 12v, 13v), and at the beginning of the sixteenth century, in the series of twelve tapestries designed by Bramantino and woven at Vigevano for Gian Giacomo Trivulzio\textsuperscript{36}. As Monica Visioli considered, the recurrence of the tools and methods used for grape harvesting, transporting and

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item P. MANE, \textit{Calendriers et techniques agricoles (France-Italie, XIIe -XIIIe siècles)}, Paris 1983; MANE, \textit{La vie dans les campagnes} cit.
\item MALAGUZZI VALERI, \textit{La corte di Lodovico} cit., pp. 351, 668.
\item CASTENUOVO, \textit{I mesi di Trento} cit., pp. 195-213.
\end{thebibliography}
pressing in Lombard calendars, constitutes strong evidence of a shared material cultural characteristic of this space\textsuperscript{37}.

Visioli also noticed that the Offiziolo of Charles VIII particularly emphasises the activity of vintage, by dedicating it two distinct months: the harvesting in September (Fig. 1) and the making of the wine in October (f. 15r)\textsuperscript{38}. Within the corpus of Renaissance Italian calendars, only the Florentine cycles present a comparable iconographical programme. This is possibly due to the high regard in which viticulture was held in Tuscany\textsuperscript{39}. Examples include codices commissioned by Lorenzo de’ Medici, such as the Book of Hours held in Holkham Hall (41, ff. 9r-10r), the Hours of Maddalena de Medici (Waddesdon Manor, Rothschild Collection, 16, ff. 9r-10r)\textsuperscript{40}, as well as the mid sixteenth-century tapestries designed by Bachiacca for Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici\textsuperscript{41}.

The relative importance associated with viticulture in the Cini Offiziolo is further reflected in the occupation of November (pl. XV), which recalls a common practice on the lands of Vigevano. The image shows two peasants toiling the land around the vines with a hoe and spade. November was typically reserved to labours regarding the preparation for winter. French calendars usually illustrate during this month a swineherd knocking down acorns to feed the pigs\textsuperscript{42}, Flemish cycles often depict the killing of oxen\textsuperscript{43}, while Florentine calendars show the ploughing and sowing of wheat and barley, as recommended by Crescenzi for the warmer

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{37} VISIOLI, \textit{L'iconografia dei mesi} cit, p. 99.
  \item \textsuperscript{38} Ibidem
  \item \textsuperscript{41} R. G. LA FRANCE, \textit{Bachiacca: Artist of the Medici Court}, Firenze 2008, pp. 261-263.
  \item \textsuperscript{42} MANE, \textit{La vie dans les campagnes} cit., pp. 173-177.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Ibidem, pp. 179-183.
\end{itemize}
regions\textsuperscript{44}. In Lombardy, November is the month dedicated to the market, the tasting of wine, carpentry, and the breaking and scotching of flax, as seen in the Borromeo (S.P.42, f. 12r) and Torriani Hours (83-1385, f. 13v), and in the Trivulzio tapestry\textsuperscript{45}.

Within this panorama of art, the occupation of earthing up the vine during the month of November appears unprecedented (pl. XV). The practice was attested at Vigevano by Leonardo da Vinci, who, in one of his notes wrote: ‘vines of Vigevano at 20 March 1494 and in the winter, they are covered with earth’ (Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Institut de France, H, f. 38r)\textsuperscript{46}.

The earthing-up of the vine was also advised by Crescenzi in the \textit{Ruralia commoda}, in case of a harsh winter\textsuperscript{47}. The activity appears to be illuminated in one of the medallions from the long borders of the introductory page to Book IV, from the \textit{Ruralia} commissioned by Francesco II Gonzaga around the end of the fifteenth century (Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 2313, f. 53)\textsuperscript{48}. Crescenzi also recommended adding a small quantity of pigeon manure around the plant, and Birago depicted a distinctive round dovecote close to the vineyard (pl. XV)\textsuperscript{49}.

Leonardo’s note accompanied a sketch representing the vine (H, f. 38r). The technique of training described resembles that depicted in the Offiziolo of Charles VIII. The main difference consists in the fact that, instead of using the pyramid structure as support for the plant, in


\textsuperscript{46} “Vigne di Vigevine a di 20 marzo 1494 e la vernata si sotterano.”: LEONARDO DA VINCI, \textit{i manoscritti dell’Istituto di Francia}, a cura di P. Poli Carpi, VII, Roma 2000, H 38r.

\textsuperscript{47} CRESCENTI, \textit{De Agricultura} cit., IV, 16, pp. ga\textsuperscript{2}-gs.


\textsuperscript{49} On the importance of dovecotes in the Medieval and Renaissance economy: F. CAZZOLA, \textit{I lavori agricoli}, in \textit{Atlante di Schifanoia} cit., pp. 201-209: 203-204.
Birago’s calendar, the vine is grown on trees (Fig. 1, pl. XV). The practice of training vines on arboreal support was predominant in Northern Italy starting in the late fourteenth century\textsuperscript{50}, when it was represented in the Lombard Tacuinum sanitatis (Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vindobonensis, S. N. 2644, f. 54v)\textsuperscript{51}. In a recent study, Maria Antonietta Aceto analysed the iconography of the vine trained on trees, with a special focus on the region of Campania\textsuperscript{52}.

The method depicted in the calendar of the Cini Offiziolo, called ‘piantata’, was typical of the Po Valley\textsuperscript{53}. Pliny and Columella referring to this training system as arbustum gallicum, advised on the type of trees and techniques to be employed\textsuperscript{54}. According to this method, the festoons of the vines, planted in rows, spread out from tree to tree, and often stakes were used to sustain heavy stocks. The pruning and training of the vine to the trees are exemplarily illustrated in a manuscript copy of the Georgics, decorated by a Milanese artist in the middle of the fifteenth century (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawl. G. 98, f. 26v; Fig. 6). It also appears in the woodcuts of the first Italian illustrated edition of Crescenzi, printed in Venice by Matteo Capcasa, in 1495\textsuperscript{55}.

The reappearance of the piantata after a period of absence during the Early Middle Ages was attributed by scholars, such as Francesca Finotto, to the development of hydraulic engineering projects, which, in the case of the Milanese duchy, reached a pinnacle of activity during the

\textsuperscript{50} G. ARCHETTI, Tempus vindemie: per la storia delle vigne e del vino nell’Europa medievale, Brescia 1998, pp. 360-366.
\textsuperscript{55} CRESCENTI, De Agricultura cit., IV, 12, p. g2v; XII, 3, p. L5v.
The technique of training the vine on a high support offered an appropriate solution, because the tree protected the vine from the cold and stagnant waters, at the same time rendering it resilient to drought, which often affected the area of Lomellina. It also permitted the efficient use of the land, the parcels between the rows of the trees being employed for the cultivation of crops or as pastures. The benefits of this type of plantation were highly celebrated in 1288 by Bonvesin de la Riva.

In Northern Italian calendars, piantate, such as those found in the Cini Offiziolo, are also encountered in the calendar of the Borromeo Hours, during the month of March (S.P.42, f. 4r) and September (Fig. 4), in the Mirandola Hours (London, British Library, Add. 50002, f. 9r), and later in the second half of the sixteenth century, in the cycle of the villa Margone. This demonstrates that these images can be studied as valuable historical documents, testifying to the various agricultural practices and their evolution over time.

The Zodiac Signs

In accordance with the prevailing thoughts of the time, the prosperity brought by Ludovico il Moro to the lands of Vigevano, and celebrated in the calendar of the Offiziolo, could only be possible under the auspices of the stars. Since time immemorial, peasants have observed the effects that the celestial bodies had upon their fields. Agronomists such as Crescenzi stipulated the importance of astrology in the practice of agriculture. Aside from the specialised treatises, the patrons of villas also possessed calendars, forecasts and almanacs, to guide them regarding the best time and perfect conditions for the various agricultural activities.

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57 TOMIATO – SORMANI, Il vino tra i dossi della Lomellina cit., p. 718.
58 DA LA RIVA, Le meraviglie cit., p. 29.
60 CRESCENTI, De Agricultura cit., II, 21, pp. d\textsuperscript{2}-d\textsuperscript{4}v.
Astrology played an essential role within the Renaissance courts, where it was used in both personal and political matters\textsuperscript{62}. In the case of Milan, this was discussed in depth by Monica Azzolini in \textit{The Duke and the Stars}\textsuperscript{63}. Azzolini elucidated the compulsive way in which Ludovico il Moro consulted his astrologer Varesi da Rosate, who was asked to determine the most appropriate time for events such as marriage, diplomatic trips and meetings\textsuperscript{64}. Il Moro used astrology to legitimise his power and demonstrate his good fortune and governance. In 1495, the Duke commissioned Bramante with the decoration of a planetary ceiling in Vigevano castle\textsuperscript{65}. Of these paintings, nothing remains, but the episode testifies to Ludovico’s interest in astrology, clearly reflected in the calendar of the Offiziolo of Charles VIII.

In the Offiziolo, the zodiac signs are represented in an ideal situation in conjunction with the planets, when their maximum potency is exerted over the sub-lunar world. Unusual insertions can be observed for each zodiac sign, such as the sickle in Capricorn (f. 19r; Fig. 2), the bust of a king in Pisces (f. 3v; Fig. 3), and the helmet and the mace in Aries (f. 5r). The recent catalogue of the Fondazione Cini does not include any reference to these attributes\textsuperscript{66}. Pietro Toesca identified a few elements as features of classical figures in the 1968 catalogue of the Cini miniatures\textsuperscript{67}. However, the iconographic programme of Birago’s zodiac remained ambiguous. When the various figures and symbols depicted within the zodiac are systematically grouped according to their appearance, as shown in Fig. 7, it becomes clearer that the calendar of the Offiziolo shows the twelve zodiac signs in conjunction with their governing planets: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Mercury, the Sun and the Moon.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibidem, pp. 167-212.
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{G. MULAZZANI, La decorazione affrescata}, in \textit{Un palazzo per una corte} cit., pp. 101-121:106-107.
\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Le miniature della Fondazione Giorgio Cini} cit., p. 443.
\textsuperscript{67} \textit{TOESCA, Miniature italiane della Fondazione Giorgio Cini} cit., pp. 56-57.
Until the late sixteenth century, the general belief was that the universe was governed according to a geocentric system. The twelve zodiac constellations formed an inclined band that encircled the Earth. This band coincided with the ecliptic orbit of the sun, as well as with the trajectories of the other six planets. Ptolemy in *Tetrabiblos* discussed the influences of the celestial bodies over the sub-lunar world, which depended on the zodiac sign in which they were situated at a certain moment in time. Each of the five planets presides over two houses: one diurnal and one nocturnal, while the sun and the moon each have one domicile.\(^{68}\)

Classical tradition often personifies the planets according to their mythological namesakes.\(^{69}\) In the Offiziolo of Charles VIII, the viewer is invited to recognise the deities by means of their attributes and to associate them with the planets and their respective houses. In such light, the sickle, a key feature of the divinity Saturn, is depicted in Capricorn (Fig. 2) and in Aquarius (f. 2r), namely the diurnal and nocturnal houses of the planet Saturn. The depiction of the planet Jupiter relates to the homonym king of Olympus, and differs in its two houses. The god is illustrated as a crowned head on Centaurus’s quiver, in its diurnal domicile in Sagittarius (17v). The quiver might also allude to Jupiter’s lightning bolt, and thus to his meteorological power as ruler of the sky. The god is represented with a quiver and a bundle of arrows in the *De Sphaera* (Modena, Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, ALFA.X.2.14 = LAT.209, f. 6v), an astrological compendium composed at the court of Francesco Sforza between 1450-1460.\(^{70}\) If this image represents a classical illustration of Jupiter, its depiction in the nocturnal house in Pisces (Fig. 3) is reminiscent of the medieval iconography. Here, Jupiter, wedged in between the two fish, is imagined as the bust of an emperor with a sceptre and a globe. His appearance

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recalls the Jupiter painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the medallion on the upper border of the frescoes representing the Effects of the Bad Government, in the Palazzo Comunale of Siena, between 1338-1339\textsuperscript{71}.

The planetary deity Venus is housed in Taurus and in Libra. Venus is represented nude while riding a bull in its diurnal house (inv. 2502/4, f. 6v), a reference to the rape of Europa by the transfigured Jupiter, and to the creation of the zodiac constellation of Taurus according to the astrological tradition (Hygini, II, 21; Manilii V, 140-156; Ovidii, \textit{Metamorphoses} II, 833, 3:1). The scene might also allude to the main domain of the ancient goddess Venus: love and procreation. On the other hand, in its nocturnal house, the planet appears as a maiden dressed in white and carrying a set of scales (f. 14v). This image evokes the description of the virgin-goddess of justice Astrea/Dike, with whom the iconographic tradition used at times to associate with the sign of Libra\textsuperscript{72}. In these cases, a similar iconographic programme is present in the Palazzo della Ragione in Padova, where the repetition of the planets allows the representation of two distinct aspects of the celestial bodies\textsuperscript{73}. However, in the Cini manuscript this scheme is not replicated in the cases of the other planets. The helmet and mace of the warrior Mars finds its house during the day in Aries (f. 5r) and at night in Scorpio (f. 16r). The sun and the moon do not exhibit any specific mythological reference, but they are represented in the form of celestial bodies: namely an anthropomorphised disc, held in the mouth of the lion in Leo (f. 11v), and a half-moon in Cancer (f. 10r).

Mercury’s caduceus is placed in its two houses, Gemini (f. 8v) during the day and Virgo (f. 13r) at night. The figure of Virgo holds a caduceus with two dragons wrapped around it, rather

\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Ibidem}, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{72} For example, in the Book of Hours attributed to Venturino Mercati, c1470-1480 (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, G.14, f. 13v).
than the customary serpents. This image resembles the device of il Moro, as represented on the capitals of the Rocchetta, at the Castello Sforzesco, in Milan\textsuperscript{74}. It also bears a similarity to the decorated initial ‘L’, on the frontispiece of the \textit{Litterae ducales}, the act of donation to the Dominicans of Santa Maria delle Grazie, attributed to Master B.F, c.1499 (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 434, f. 1r)\textsuperscript{75}. Since Ludovico’s marriage was consummated under the sign of Mercury, the use of this device has a personal astrological significance for the duke, further underlining the customisation of the Cini calendar.

The combination of zodiac signs and planets, as it appears in the Cini manuscript, clearly results from the key principle of astrology that the celestial bodies influence the human world. In Western art, this topic originating from Middle Eastern astrology, developed during the fifteenth century into an iconography called ‘the children of the planets’. The popularisation of this theme occurred in the German area, coinciding with the advent of the printing press\textsuperscript{76}. In Italy, at the Milanese court of Francesco Sforza, this subject was transcribed into the precious medium of a manuscript in \textit{De Sphaera} (LAT.209, ff. 5v-12). In this example, the seven personified planets are depicted with their specific domiciles. The zodiac signs are enclosed into distinct circular areas at the feet of the planetary divinity. On the lower section of the image as well as on the following respective page, humans are represented while receiving the influences of the astral entities under which power they were born, and which determined their character and professions.

The topic of the seven planets and their domiciles is rarely represented in calendars. Two further examples are known to me. The first is the astrological cycle in the Palazzo della

\textsuperscript{74} On Ludovico’s device of the caduceus: GIORDANO, \textit{Politica, tradizione e propaganda} cit., pp. 106-110.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{The Painted Page} cit., pp. 74-75 (W. M. Voelkle).
Ragione, in Padua, first frescoed by Giotto between 1309 and 1312, and repainted after a devastating fire in 1420. This complex iconographic programme was studied by Giordana Mariani Canova who underlined the focus of the cycle on the properties of the planets and their influence on the citizens of Padua. Here, each zodiac sign is placed in relation to its dominant planet, the occupation of the month, and the respective figure of an apostle.

The second example is the calendar of the Mirandola Hours (London, British Library, Add. 50002, ff. 1r-12v), commissioned by Galeotto I Pico della Mirandola, Lord of Mirandola and brother of the philosopher Giovanni, between 1490 and 1499. The calendar opening this book of hours is decorated with the labours of the months and the characteristic zodiac signs. In addition to these, the first seven months of the calendar include illustrations of planets as mythological figures, each featuring their attributes, here Saturn (Fig. 8). The planets are identified by scrolls bearing their names and are depicted within rectangular frames against a blue starred background that qualifies them as heavenly bodies. They sit on triumphal chariots drawn by beasts distinctive of each deity; two dragons for Saturn (Fig. 8), eagles for Jupiter (f. 2r), swans for Venus (f. 4r) etc. The domiciles of the planets are inscribed on the wheels of the corresponding chariots.

The triumphal planets depicted in the calendar of the Mirandola Hours closely resemble those represented in the Florentine series of engravings on the subject of the ‘Children of the Planets’.

attributed to Baccio Baldini, c.1464\textsuperscript{79}. Baldini’s images of planets achieved remarkable success and were taken as a model for the edition of the *Poeticon Astronomicon* by Hyginus, published by Erhard Ratdolt in Venice, in 1482\textsuperscript{80}. It is in fact from the latter that Giovanni Francesco Mainieri, artist of the Mirandola Hours, appears to have taken inspiration in the elaboration of both the planets and the zodiac signs.

The topic of the triumphal chariots appears in the astrological cycle of the Palazzo Schifanoia. At Schifanoia, however, the chariots illustrate the twelve Olympic divinities according to the *Astronomica* of Marcus Manilius (II, 434-447), who assigned a tutelary god to each zodiac sign. As Dieter Blume noticed, the focus of the Schifanoia cycle is not on the planets, but rather the zodiac signs and their astrological powers\textsuperscript{81}.

The calendar of the Offiziolo does not follow the iconographic traditions mentioned above when depicting the celestial bodies. Instead, Birago chose to merge the zodiac signs and planets into a single hybrid image: Venus rides the Taurus, the Scorpio holds with his claws the mace of Mars and the sickle of Saturn pierces the body of the Capricorn (Fig. 2). On one hand, this might be an ingenious solution found by the artist, faced with the limited dimensions of the Offiziolo. However, this hybrid closely recalls the planets from the sculpted capitals of the Palazzo Ducale, in Venice (1340-1355). Here the seven planets, re-presented in the optic of Medieval personifications, ride or hold the zodiac signs corresponding to their houses (Fig. 9).

The analogy between the Venetian capital and Islamic iconography has been noticed by


\textsuperscript{80} On the fortune of Baldini’s engravings: BLUME, *Picturing the Stars* cit., pp. 392-397.

\textsuperscript{81} *Ibidem*, pp. 343-345. See also nt. 22.
Antonio Manno who particularly mentioned the *Traité des Nativités* attributed to Abu Ma’shar, c.1300 (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Arabe 2583)\textsuperscript{82}.

When compared to the zodiac depicted in the Paris manuscript (Arabe 2583), or in the *Kitab al-bulhanda*, dated late fourteenth century (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodl. Or. 133, ff. 2v-25r)\textsuperscript{83}, the Cini zodiac appears almost as a humanistic re-elaboration of the Arabo-Persian iconographic scheme. In the *Kitab al-bulhanda*, each of the twelve zodiac signs is associated with the planet in the domicile and represented within a single image. The planetary deities are transformed according to the Arabo-Persian imagery. For instance, Cancer is represented as a crab with the disk of the moon in its pincers (Bodl. Or. 133, f. 7v), Capricorn is illustrated as a goat ridden by a bearded figure holding a type of hoe (Bodl. Or. 133, f. 19v; Fig. 10) and a figure is sitting cross-legged on a large fish in Pisces (Bodl. Or. 133, f. 22v).

The issue of the reception of Islamic astrology in the West has been at the core of the Warburg Institute\textsuperscript{84}. More recently, Anna Caiozzo analysed the Islamic model of the zodiac in conjunction with planets\textsuperscript{85}. In contrast to the iconography of constellations of Hellenistic origin, the topic of the zodiac in conjunction with planets was borne at the crossroad of the Middle Eastern civilisations and was developed in the local metalwork production of the twelfth century\textsuperscript{86}.

\textsuperscript{86} *Ibidem*, pp. 199-206.
It is surprising that the Offiziolo of Charles VIII adopted for its zodiac an iconographic programme which closely recalls a typical Arabo-Persian scheme. This influence might have come from Venice\textsuperscript{87}, not forgetting that the library of the Sforza contained a great number of astrological works, and that classic and Arabic authors were studied at the local University of Pavia\textsuperscript{88}. However, none of the books which survived after the dispersion of the library in 1500 presents the exact prototype.

The calendar of the Offiziolo should be considered in the general context of the Milanese court where astrology played a crucial role. One of the features of the calendars originating from this area is the search for models which correspond to the new knowledge and iconography, both in the subject of astrology and agriculture. An example is the book of hours decorated probably in Milan by Venturino Mercati, between 1470-1480 (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, G.14, ff. 1v-18r)\textsuperscript{89}. Here, the zodiac signs illustrated on full-page illuminations, are clearly drawn from the constellations depicted in the manuscript copy of \textit{Il Dittamondo}, created at Milan, in 1447 (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Italien 81, ff. 171v-179r)\textsuperscript{90}. Later, the Trivulzio Tapestries used, as an iconographic source for its zodiac signs, the woodcuts of the 1482 edition of Hyginus\textsuperscript{91}.

The calendar of the Offiziolo of Charles VIII is a real status-symbol. Ludovico il Moro presented Charles VIII with a diplomatic gift which, apart from its flattering aim, showed to the king of France that he held the fortune of the stars. The calendar, mirror of a utopian farm, presents an ideal cosmic and sub-lunar situation, in which every activity is carried out at the

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\textsuperscript{88} AZZOLINI, \textit{The Duke and the Stars} cit., pp. 22-64.
\textsuperscript{89} Time in the Medieval World cit., lxi, 20.
\textsuperscript{91} AGOSTI – STOPPA, \textit{I Mesi} cit., p. 16.
appropriate moment of the year, the fruits and crops are ripened in time and the harvest is abundant. This is due to the attentive eye and care of Ludovico, who, as declared in his epigraphs, brought peace and fertility to the lands of Vigevano. The ideal character of the calendar does not exclude the observation of the real nature, habits and costumes. In this sense, the Offiziolo is part of a Lombardy tradition which stems from the Tacuinum sanitatis until the tapestries designed by Bramantino at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

All the aspects analysed here demonstrate how the calendar of the Offiziolo of Charles VIII can be considered as a visual document of late fifteenth-century Milan. It attests to two intermingling features relevant for Lombardy’s economy, culture, and political practices: the importance of astrology and agriculture.

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