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Introduction

From Primeval Water to Coin. Oceans, water and men of the Modern Period**

From time immemorial the element of water has been associated with power. Whether water has been considered the origin of life, a transcendental purifying resource, or an untamable element, men have tried, not always successfully, to control water in its multiple forms. The act of subduing the seas, rivers and other water sources suggests that people who perform these attempts at control create a symbolic link between water and power.

In Greek mythology two traditions regulate the multiform aquatic element; one is the vision of Hesiod, and the other is that of Homer. In his *Theogony* (133-135) Hesiod speaks of Pontus, who was conceived solely by Gaia (earth) and is described as “fruitless sea”, characterized by his “raging swell”. In contrast, “deep-swirling” Oceanus is the product of the amorous union between Gaia and Uranus.

In Hesiodic cosmology Oceanus does not yet have a specific geographical association, which he would have later with the Atlantic and Indian oceans, but is, rather, a cosmic presence. Pontus, on the other hand, being an “internal sea” (the Mediterranean) has geographical significance; Oceanus is the boundary of the world, an immense river

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god who surrounds the world and is in an eternal flow (Rudhardt 1971, 27). Oceanus is also the husband of Tethys, and with her he produces the Oceanids, three thousand daughters who are goddesses of springs, lakes and ponds. His sons, the Potamoi, are the gods of rivers and streams. One of the Oceanids, Doris, who embodies fertility and abundance of waters, marries Nereus, son of Pontus, and conceives the Nereids. Nereus dwells in the depths of the sea, and his daughters are nymphs normally associated with the Mediterranean, specifically the Aegean Sea, and are mothers of mythical generations of gods and heroes.

Homer (*Il.* XIV, 200-201) describes another tradition in which the primordial couple are Oceanus and Tethys, who create the Oceanids and all the rest of the aquatic divinities. The couple constitutes the origin of life, and thus is invoked in the Orphic Hymns (Hymns 83 and 22) (Rudhardt 1971, 46).

The personification of Oceanus in Classical Antiquity is of two complementary natures. First, it is a cosmic principle in perpetual movement, and second, it is a powerful god-river, deep and impetuous, and somewhat frightful (Rudhardt 1971, 56). It is not surprising that in the oldest poems of humanity, the waters are portrayed as a punishment to mankind. A deluge that ravished the Earth appears already in the famous Epic of Gilgamesh (22nd century B.C), and in the epic poem of Altra-Hasis (17th century B.C.) which conception later appears in the Judeo-Christian tradition of the Bible¹.

The duality of Oceanus is translated visually in ancient art, but it is especially understood as being the encircling boundary of the known world. That is how Homer portrays this duality in the famous *ekphrasis* of Achilles' shield (*Iliad*, XVIII, 483-608), so that when he imagines the world he sees it surrounded by a great circular river, composed of all the waters of the Mediterranean Sea². There is an abundance of images relating to the cosmogonic value of Oceanus. For example, there are the mascarons, which according to Santoro-Bianchi (1988) first appear in the Roman Imperial period, and which derived from river images such as Achelous, and perhaps Tibur. To the positive ethos of fecundity, typical in the representations of rivers and of the ubiquitous sea *thiasos*, which would inhabit the imagination of Western art, that idea of *limes* or *terminus* of human existence would be added.

Roman imperial iconography gives a political interpretation to the idea of Oceanus as the boundary of the world (Santoro-Bianchi 1988). Oceanus as the frontier of the Empire appears early on in Julius Caesar who, in celebrating his victory over the Gauls, commissions a golden statue of Oceanus as a prisoner (*Florus, Epit.*, IV, 2). Latin literature of the Imperial period exploited that interpretation to glorify Roman territorial conquests (Paulian 1975, 56). The term "*ultra Oceanum*" was coined, which allowed

1 Walter Burkert (1992, 88-91) associates Greek cosmogony with Acadian, Sumerian and Babylonian myths.

2 The ancients regarded the Atlantic and the Indian oceans as exterior seas, and associated them to the god Oceanus (Rudhardt 1971, 80-82).

attention to be drawn to rulers like Alexander the Great, whose conquests extended the known world. Because Hispania is largely bordered by the ocean, that country was considered the end of the known world. Further evidence of the emphasis on oceanic influence was the motto *ad oceanum* worn by the troops stationed in Gades (Cadiz). Also significant are Hadrianic coins (ca. 119 C.E.) bearing the figure of Hercules and the image of Oceanus on a ship's prow (Paulian 1975, 122).

The emperors of the 2nd and 3rd centuries used Oceanus as a *topos* of imperial ideology, and that image of the sea as a last bastion conquered by the Roman troops has iconographic consequences, i.e. mascarons of the god are frequently found in mosaics, often with a frightening aspect, which implies cosmic divinity being dominated by Roman power.

From the carefree *thiasus*, to various personifications of Poseidon and Neptune, and the menacing image of Oceanus, Classical Antiquity produces many representations in Greek pottery, ronde-bosse sculpture, sarcophagi, and Roman mosaics, which survive in various forms into the Middle Ages, e.g. the relief sculpture that decorates the façades of cathedrals and churches as well as illuminated manuscripts that proliferate in the libraries of monasteries.

With the dawning of the Renaissance mythological themes begin to abandon secondary and marginal spaces. For example, river allegories will have a golden age since they will not only reproduce classical sculptures, but some of the actual Roman ones will also be re-purposed and given new meanings. Such is the case of the famous Marforio statue or the sculptures of rivers that decorate the Piazza del Campidoglio in Rome, which were adapted to new ways of thinking and undergo additions and reforms.

Along with the visual arts, water as a natural element also becomes an important factor in city life. Katherine Rinne states with eloquence that “water was coin in Late Renaissance Rome”. The great Church-sponsored projects of the Acqua Vergine (1560-1570), Acqua Felice (1585-1587) and Acqua Paola (1607-1612) to ensure the water supply in Rome, and reorganize and improve previous aqueducts, converting water into the true coin of its inhabitants. The management and distribution of public and private water is a measure of power, and in this case, of the pontiffs, who do not hesitate to use it to favor their followers. However, they also have an interest in providing a service to the community. To a degree this is the origin of the hygiene practices of the 18th century, and it enables us to understand a more pragmatic side of the value of water in the modern period.

Along with supplying water for use in daily life, water is a motif in great works of urban decoration, such as the famous fountains that adorn not only Rome, but all modern cities. It is also an essential element in festivities and celebrations, and in the gardens and villas of the powerful. Water as a recreational element has an important role in the Modern Period and is symbolic of the munificence of the person who offers it. Equally important is its role in maritime conquests – in the geographic expansion initiated by the Portuguese and culminating in the Spanish discovery of America and the entire epic

of the conquest of the New World. All this has repercussions in cartography, military practices, as well as literary imagination. Again, the idea of dominance and control of the oceans returns to the visual imagination, similar in a way to the ideas of Imperial Rome.

This book is intended to broaden the understanding of the connection between water and power through a series of case studies, which without being exhaustive, will provide information on the great versatility of this subject. This volume is organized in three thematic parts. The first part, with the title “Iconography and Politics”, deals with the use of aquatic iconography and the recreational use of water as an instrument of power.

In the first chapter Liana de Girolami Cheney examines, from an iconographic perspective, the pictorial program of the *Sala degli Elementi* in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence commissioned by Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici (1537-1569). The frescoes by Giorgio Vasari and Cristophoro Gherardi, represent the four elements. The author focuses on the study of “The birth of Venus” and on the special emphasis placed on the personification of the Duke as Neptune, as well as the association of the bounty of the sea with the prosperity of Florence under the Medicis. Neptune’s rule over the sea is a clear metaphor for the flourishing Tuscan republic.

Christopher Kreutchen, in the second chapter, approaches water as the main ornamental feature in the gardens of the Hellbrunn palace in Austria. Conceived as an Italianate villa, the palace belonged to the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg, Markus Sitticus, and was built between 1612 and 1615. It is a north-of-the-Alps version of an Italian garden with water works and fanciful fountains, evocative of a happy Arcadia. The author sees the construction of this interesting work of hydraulic engineering as a manifestation of the Prince-Archbishop’s ambition to have his name survive the continuous changes of power in the Holy Roman Empire.

The first part of this book closes with the contribution of Mar García Arenas, based on a print by André Basset (1765) depicting an epic Franco-Spanish naval victory that never took place. The author analyzes the use of the print as a form of political propaganda by French Secretary of State, War and Navy, the Duke of Choiseul, to exalt the patriotism of the French people and to validate the Third Pacte de Famille with Spain. This interesting case study takes us back to the instrumental use of images, a true modern naumachia that paradoxically contrasts with the outcome of the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763) of which that imaginary battle was a part, in which France lost its overseas possessions and its fleet was practically destroyed.

The second part of this volume is entitled “Beyond the Western”, and encompasses three studies that explore the concept and the control of water from America to the Philippines. From a literary perspective, Fernando Morato considers a poetic version of the Atlantic expanse. He focuses his thinking on some poems from XVII and XVIII centuries that he considers to be the symbolic space to address in depth the subject of the ocean in the Portuguese literary imagination. In reference to the Atlantic Ocean he uses

the theoretical framework of the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin to characterize the ocean as a new space which replaces the Indian Ocean, and which embodies the new reality of the Portuguese Empire in the dawn of its American adventure.

Looking at America from the perspective of urban and social planning, Marjolaine Carles analyzes the crucial importance of managing water supply in the city of Vila Rica in Brazil. This city was the captaincy general of the mining region of Minas Gerais and presents a remarkable model for understanding the interests of the *metropolis* (mother country) as opposed to those of the local inhabitants. The author describes how the control and management of water shaped social and urban landscapes in the new American reality.

In the last chapter of this section Diego Sola directs his attention to the other side of the globe and examines the impact of the conquest of the Philippines and the Spanish empire's first direct contact with China. His study, from a historical perspective, is based on the cartography produced in that period, particularly regarding the South China Sea, as well as ethnographic and missionary publications mostly produced by members of the religious orders. Here, more than ever, we see the idea of the sea as being the confines of the Spanish Empire, similar, in a way, to the *limes* of Roman Antiquity. The Spanish king, in this case, is the lord of the oceans who has reached the end of the world.

The book's third and final part deals with "Celebrations and Music" and compiles studies from an artistic, musicological, and even of marine biology points of view. The first chapter is the result of the symbiosis of history and biology and offers a unique reading of the wedding celebration of the Infanta Beatriz in Lisbon in 1521. Carla Alferes Pinto and Cristina Brito consider the betrothal of the young Portuguese princess to Charles III of Savoy based on the play by Gil Vicente *Cortes de Júpiter*. In this satire human behavior is likened to that of certain marine species, and the conception of a court of the river Tagus is presented combining both mythology and actual nature. The daughter of king Manuel I leaves Lisbon accompanied by a marine *thiasos* that is described with exceptional zoological knowledge, and which represents symbolically the power of Portugal under the Avis dynasty.

Based on *repraesentatio maiestatis*, Filipa Araujo analyzes the tradition of 17th century Portuguese Baroque celebrations. The author traces the use and importance of marine iconography in ephemeral decorations, and how Spanish and Portuguese tradition fused during the Iberian Union (1580-1640) to create a repertoire of images that would be the source of inspiration for the Braganza dynasty. In this chapter she selects the most relevant festive manifestations and assesses the impact of trans-oceanic conquests on ephemeral iconography, as well as its more poetic facet, in descriptions of the celebrations that circulated in the European courts.

In the last chapter of the volume Diana Andrea Blichmann examines, from the point of view of historical musicology, the role of Neptune as a recurring character in Baroque opera. To this effect she analyzes Rome and Venice, where that god's presence

was particularly notable compared to other operatic capitals. The author provides a specific geographical interpretation of the importance of Neptune and the aquatic themes in each of the cities, taking into account the special individual characteristics of both Roman and Venetian opera styles.

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