

Cultural Encounters

Cross-disciplinary studies
from the Late Middle Ages
to the Enlightenment

Edited by

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(The Warburg Institute)

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Introduction

James E. Christie, Lorenza Gay, Finn Schulze-Feldmann
The Warburg Institute

This edited collection of essays was born out of the first Postgraduate Symposium held at The Warburg Institute in London on 17 November 2016. Entitled “Cultural Encounters: Tensions and Polarities of Transmission from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment”, the conference explored the concept of cultural encounters, broadly construed, with a particular focus on their productive outcomes, that is, the discernible results of any given interaction across a cultural divide. The Symposium was multidisciplinary, and covered topics that fell into the unique classification system of the Warburg Library: Image, Word, Orientation and Action. This progression, understood to be cyclical, is an attempt to create a workable dialectic for understanding the manifestation, operation and continual renovation of cultural systems. The conference thus sought to facilitate research into the complexity and diversity of cultural transfer, as Aby Warburg himself had championed in his Schifanoia article.¹ By adopting this structure, the conference’s aim was to map, through a mosaic of case studies, the diverse and intricate forces that have driven cultural encounters in the past and which may also, therefore, be at work within and between contemporary societies.

The present volume contributes to the growing field of scholarship on the wide-ranging subject of cultural encounters within the domain of cultural studies and *Kulturgeschichte*.² Since the body of scholarship on culture as an analytical category in history is so vast—and the term “culture” blurred to the extent that reductionist attempts to define it as “works, work systems and built-up institutions”, as Thomas Nipperdey did, more obscure its meaning than resolve the dilemma—it is of crucial importance at least to circumscribe

¹ Aby Warburg, *Italiensische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoja zu Ferrara*, in: Aby Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Gertrud Bing (ed.), 2 vols, Leipzig: Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1932, II, pp. 459-481.

² For a discussion of *Kulturgeschichte*, see, for example, Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, pp. 118-26; Ute Daniel, *Kompendium Kulturgeschichte: Theorien, Praxis, Schlüsselwörter*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2001, pp. 7-25; Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004.

the area of interest.³ The approach taken by this volume is that via encounters. With an interest that exceeds the boundaries of Europe, it presents a selection of papers that examine and reflect upon the different forms of cultural encounters, as well as on their causes and consequences. Some cultural encounters have happened through conquest and invasion, such as the Crusades or the discovery of the New World, while others are the result of more peaceful processes, such as the discovery of ancient texts, trade and diplomacy. While many cultural encounters have happened across politically defined geographical borders, many others have instead taken place within one state or municipality, for example, between different religious groups that existed in the same social setting, as in Renaissance Florence.

The studies in this volume are characterised by a multi- and interdisciplinary approach, with papers on a variety of historical times, places and subjects, ranging from the reception of classical antiquity in medieval illuminations, to the Protestant attitude towards the Crusades, to literary accounts of extraterrestrial encounters. While each essay makes a valuable and original contribution to its relevant field(s), the collection as a whole is an attempt to probe more general questions and issues concerning the productive outcomes of cultural encounters throughout the Late Medieval and Early Modern periods.

The collection is divided into three sections organised thematically and with an underlying chronological progression. The first section, entitled “Encounters with the Past”, focuses on the reception of classical antiquity in medieval images and texts from France, Italy and the British Isles. The first article in this section by Lorenza Gay provides an in-depth analysis of the late medieval manuscript illuminations that decorate Christine de Pizan’s *Epistre Othea* by focusing in particular on the figure of the goddess Juno. The author argues that, far from being mere decorations, these illuminations comment on the text they are depicting. As they offer a more sympathetic approach to pagan antiquity than presented in the Christian compilations of the Middle Ages, these images can be seen to reflect the broader European interest in the ancient world.

Angana Moitra’s article addresses the re-emergence of the pagan god Dis/Pluto of the Greco-Roman world as the Faerie King in medieval literature. This literary transformation was one with multiple cultural implications. Beginning with a reading of this figure in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Virgil’s *Georgics*, the author charts the development of the figure of the Faerie King

³ Thomas Nipperdey, *Kulturgeschichte, Sozialgeschichte, Historische Anthropologie, Vierteljahresschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* LV, 1968, pp. 145-64.

through such texts as Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium*, and the Irish tale *Tochmarc Étain*, to its appearance in the medieval English romance *Sir Orfeo*. By focusing on such a figure and its literary transmission, the author attempts to demonstrate the protean nature of cultural change and highlight the productive implications of such transmission for subsequent literary epochs. Finally, Sophie Fuller attempts to explore what Dante may have read in terms of chivalric *romans d'antiquité*, and discusses whether they might have helped to shape his *Commedia*. She evaluates the possible influence of two Old French poems, namely the *Roman de Thèbes* and the *Roman d'Enéas*, by arguing that certain cultural, thematic and linguistic resonances can be detected in both the French and Italian poems.

The second section, "Encounters with Religion", presents a selection of instances in which political and philosophical issues arise within contexts in which different religious affiliations function as cultural markers. Ovanes Akopyan's article focuses on Maximus the Greek and his reception of the Latin sources which shaped the fifteenth-century debate on astrology in Italy, namely Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Girolamo Savonarola. By analysing Maximus' anti-astrological and anti-Catholic polemic in the context of sixteenth-century Muscovy, Akopyan sheds light on the tension between Maximus' anti-Latin stance and his adoption of the sources which constituted the same "Western" tradition he refuted. Margherita Mantovani's article is dedicated to the reception of *The Book of the Palaces* (*Sefer Hekhalot*) and the Enoch–Metatron tradition in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy. In particular, Mantovani focuses on the work of the Jewish convert Paulus Ricius and his Kabbalistic interpretation of the *Sefer Hekhalot*. Focusing on Ricius' *Isagoge*, Mantovani explores the inheritance of the *Sefer Hekhalot* in the context of biblical hermeneutics and the discussion on literal and allegorical meaning. The article also contextualises Ricius' work in light of the sources adopted by authors such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.

Finn Schulze-Feldmann's article centres on certain factors underlying the choice of terminology used to define the crusades in sixteenth-century Protestant historiography. The author draws renewed attention to a selection of historical works including the *Magdeburg Centuries* as well as the *Verulogung* by Heinrich Bullinger, tracing the way in which crusade historiography was shaped by questions of how to encounter Islam and how to incorporate it into the salvation narrative of Christianity. Finally, in her contribution Trude Dijkstra discusses the European perception of Confucius and his thought through a variety of works printed in Dutch Batavia. By comparing different seventeenth-century translations and the way in which they were presented to early modern audiences, she describes the early admiration of Chinese

philosophy in Europe and traces the slightest changes in this understanding as new editions appeared.

The third and final section, “Encounters with Humanity”, contains essays on early science fiction, political symbolism and Elizabethan drama theory, all of which deal with the conception and expression of humanity, on both the individual and societal level. James E. Christie re-examines three seventeenth-century literary accounts of encounters with extra-terrestrial beings: Johannes Kepler’s *Somnium* (1634), Francis Godwin’s *The Man in the Moone* (1638) and Cyrano de Bergerac’s *L’Autre Monde: ou les États et Empires de la Lune* (‘Comical History of the States and Empires of the Moon’, 1657). In doing so, the author attempts to identify the elements of novelty in these proto-science fiction works, and considers whether this new character type, the extraterrestrial, influenced the literal and rhetorical use of such encounters. Ivan Dimitrijević examines the semantic transformation of the wolf symbol from the Middle Ages to the contemporary period. Against the background of Reinhart Koselleck’s and Otto Brunner’s approach to conceptual history, he investigates how the medieval mind symbolically charged the wild beast with threatening otherness, a perception which was embedded into moral, political, legal, and religious constructs. With the early modern congruence of political science with the “mechanical philosophy”, the symbol of the wolf evolved—mainly thanks to Thomas Hobbes’ discussions of it—towards a more naturalistic meaning, signifying the appetite for self-preservation and the irreversible enmity between human beings. This idea helped to shape modern social and political conceptions, institutions and, partially, our behaviour. The symbol, the author concludes, still survives in our present-day moral and political language as something of a Warburgian pathemic formula. Finally, Cristiano Ragni’s article discusses the involvement of Alberico Gentili, one of the founding fathers of international law, in a controversy over the legitimacy of the dramatic arts in Elizabethan England. The question of drama is presented as crucial for understanding the emergence of secular modernity in cultural, legal and political terms. In doing so, Ragni presents Gentili’s political thought in new light.

By incorporating such a wide range of topics and methodological approaches, this volume is intended to draw the reader’s attention to the complex layering of different heterogeneous elements that constitute any given culture. It seeks to sharpen the awareness for the different guises in which the transfer of knowledge and beliefs appear and shape existing cultures. As a reference work, it is of interest to researchers and practitioners from diverse backgrounds within the humanities who have an interest in the (cross-)cultural history of the medieval and Renaissance periods.

I. Encounters with the Past

1.

Juno in the *Epistre Othea* by Christine de Pizan: An Investigation of the Pictorial Antecedents and of the Literary Sources

Lorenza Gay
The Warburg Institute

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, artists in France began to represent pagan themes more frequently than at any other time in Western Europe since antiquity. The texts being illuminated were not only ancient poems or treatises, such as the works by Virgil, Statius and Terence,¹ but also late medieval moralising compilations, such as the *Ovide Moralisé*, the French translations of Giovanni Boccaccio's (1313–1375) *De mulieribus claris* and *De viris illustribus*, and the *Epistre Othea* by Christine de Pizan (1365–1430). The textual analysis of these works has been done in depth, but the same cannot be said about the images that decorated the illuminated manuscripts. In particular, much more needs to be said about the iconography of the pagan gods in these works and in this period; about their pictorial antecedents and the literary sources that might have influenced their depictions. When the iconographies have been studied, they have been studied mainly in the context of the isolated works they decorated and not in relation to one another, or across the cultural *milieu* in which they were produced.²

¹ Illuminated manuscripts from this period of works by these authors, or inspired by their Latin works, include: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France Ms. fr. 60 (*Le Roman d'Enéas*, *Le Roman the Thebes* and *Le Roman de Troie*, all in French); London, British Library Ms. Burney 257 (Statius, *Thebais* and *Achilleis* with *Compendium* and summary by Laurent de Premierfait); Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Ms. 664 (Comedies by Terence in Latin and French, also known as the *Térence des ducs*).

² Works of this kind, which focus on the depictions of the pagan gods in certain manuscripts, include: Patricia M. Gathercole, *Illuminations on the French manuscripts of Boccaccio's De casibus*, in: *Studi sul Boccaccio*, 2 (1964), pp. 344-356; Carla Lord, *Three*

This is due to the fact that the canonical scholarly literature, from Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl to Jean Seznec, has tended to view the medieval conception of antique deities through Renaissance spectacles. The ancient depictions of the gods were considered 'authentic', while in the Middle Ages their 'purity' was subject to 'deterioration', until they were replaced by 'exotic' 'orientalized types'. Only with the Renaissance did artists succeed in 'restoring' the 'dignity' and 'equilibrium of the classical models, allowing them to become once again 'their true selves'.³ Even in more recent art historical research into Renaissance mythological imagery—by, for example, Luba Freedman, Malcolm Bull and Claudia Cieri Via—discussions of how pagan deities were conceptualised in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries tend to stress the revival of classical forms, and to downplay the continuity of medieval conceptions and interpretations.⁴ Furthermore, what is also lacking in relation to the study of the medieval depictions of the pagan gods is a detailed analysis of the relationship between the representations of pagan deities and the texts they decorate.

Manuscripts of the *Ovide moralisé*, in: *Art Bulletin* 57.2 (1975), pp. 161-175; Scot McKendrick, *Classical Mythology and Ancient History in Works of Art at the Courts of France, Burgundy and England 1364-1500*, PhD Thesis, The Courtauld Institute of Art, 1988; Marylène Possamai Perez, Les Dieux d'Ovide 'moralisés' dans un poème du commencement du XIV^e siècle, in: *Bien dire et bien apprendre* 12 (1994), pp. 203-214; Brigitte Buettner, *Boccaccio's "Des cleres et nobles femmes". Systems of Signification in an Illuminated Manuscript*, Seattle: College Art Association in association with University of Washington Press, 1996; Anne-Marie Barbier, Dessein avoué et intentions voilées dans les représentations allégoriques de l'Épître Othea de Christine de Pizan, in: C. Heck (ed.), *L'allégorie dans l'art du Moyen âge. Formes et fonctions. héritages, créations, mutations*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2011, pp. 289-303; Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Illustrations et interprétations dans un manuscrit de l'Ovide moralisé (Arsenal 5069), in: *Cahiers de recherches médiévales* 9 (2002), pp. 71-82.

³ Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl, *Classical Mythology in Mediaeval Art*, in: *Metropolitan Museum studies* 4.2 (1933), pp. 228-280; Jean Adhémar, *Influences antiques dans l'art du Moyen Âge français: recherches sur les sources et les thèmes d'inspiration*, London: Warburg Institute, 1939; Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods. The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981, pp. 184-6; Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Resuscitations in Western Art*, New York, NY; Hagerstown, MD; San Francisco, CA; London: Icon editions, Harper Row, 1972.

⁴ Claudia Cieri Via, *L'arte delle Metamorfosi. Decorazioni mitologiche nel Cinquecento*, Rome: Lithos, 2003; Luba Freedman, *The Revival of the Olympian Gods in Renaissance art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003; Malcolm Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods. Classical Mythology in Renaissance Art*, London: Allen Lane, 2005; Luba Freedman, *Classical Myths in Italian Renaissance Painting*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

A work that perfectly exemplifies the medieval interpretation(s) and depiction(s) of the pagan gods in the Late Middle Ages is the *Epistre Othea* by Christine de Pizan. In particular, the visual material that decorates the manuscripts of the *Epistre Othea* provides us with invaluable information concerning the way in which the pagan religion was perceived and therefore depicted in fifteenth-century France. Christine de Pizan was the first woman in Europe known to earn her living as a writer and publisher. She was born in Venice to Tommaso da Pizzano, who, shortly after her birth, became physician, alchemist and astrologer at the court of the French king Charles V. While growing up Christine was clearly encouraged to pursue her intellectual interests, studying languages and the classics. However, it was only after the death of her husband, when she was 25, that she turned to writing full time in order to support her family.⁵ Her life and works have been widely commented upon by textual scholars and by art historians who have focused on her poetic production, on her patronage, on her role as a publisher and on the workshops of illuminators that illustrated her works.⁶ However, there has not been a systematic in-depth study of the many illuminations that decorate her works, chiefly on the iconography of the pagan gods that appear in the decorative cycle of the *Epistre Othea*.⁷

⁵ Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan. Her Life and Works*, New York: Persea Books, 1984.

⁶ Given the impossibility to cite here the incredibly vast bibliography on Christine de Pizan, see Angus J. Kennedy, *Christine de Pizan. A Bibliographical Guide*, London: Grant and Cutler, 1984; Angus J. Kennedy, *Christine de Pizan. A Bibliographical Guide. Supplement 1*, London: Grant and Cutler, 1994; Angus J. Kennedy, *Christine de Pizan. A Bibliographical Guide. Supplement 2*, Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2004. On Christine de Pizan and her cultural context, see: Panofsky and Saxl, *Classical Mythology in: Mediaeval Art*, pp. 245-7; Millard Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry. The Limbourgs and their Contemporaries*, 2 vols, London: Thames and Hudson, 1974, I, pp. 7-41; Sandra Hindman, *Christine de Pizan's "Epistre Othéa". Painting and Politics at the Court of Charles VI*, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986, pp. 1-19; James Laidlaw, *The Date of the Queen's MS (London, British Library, Harley MS 4431)*, 2005, (<http://www.pizan.lib.ed.ac.uk/harley4431date.pdf>) (accessed 20 Oct. 2017); Gilbert Ouy et al., *Album Christine de Pizan*, O. Delsaux, T. Van Hemelryck (eds), Turnhout: Brepols, 2012, pp. 91-168; Jane Chance, *Medieval Mythography. Vol. 3, The Emergence of Italian Humanism, 1321-1475*, Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2015, pp. 206-362.

⁷ Excluding the articles by Eliana Carrara on the iconography of the planetary deities and of Bacchus and Neptune in BnF Fr. 606 and BL Harley 4431, the iconographic studies by Anne Marie Barbier on the manuscripts today in Beauvais, BM 9 and in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 421, and Lucie Schaefer's work on the illuminations of the planetary deities. See Eliana Carrara, *Mitologia antica in un trattato didattico-allegorico*

The *Epistre Othea* was written between 1399 and 1400, and is presented as a letter, written by the goddess of Prudence, Othéa, and addressed to the fifteen-year-old Hector of Troy. It is formed of one hundred chapters, each featuring a pagan god or character from classical mythology. The work has a moralising and didactic intent, with the mythological figures presented as *exempla*, both positive and negative, to the young prince.⁸ Two of the oldest surviving manuscripts of the *Epistre Othea*, BnF Fr. 606 and BL Harley 4431, which were produced under the directions of Christine herself,⁹ are illuminated with 101 illuminations that accompany the 100 chapters.¹⁰ Both manuscripts were produced in Paris between 1405 and 1410 for illustrious patrons. BnF Fr. 606 belonged to Jean, Duke of Berry (1340–1416), while BL Harley 4431 was produced for Queen Isabeau of Bavaria (c. 1370–1435), the wife of King

della fine del Medioevo. L'Épistre d'Othéa di Christine de Pizan, in: *Prospettiva* 66 (1992), pp. 67-86; Eliana Carrara, Bacco e Nettuno nell'Épistre Othea' di Christine de Pizan. Scene di vita quotidiana e figurazioni religiose in temi mitologici, in: *Ricerche di storia dell'arte* 55 (1995), pp. 83-89; Anne-Marie Barbier, Le cycle iconographique perdu de l'Épistre Othea de Christine de Pizan: le cas des manuscrits Beauvais, BM 9 et Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 421, in: *Cahiers de recherches médiévales* 16 (2008), p. 279-299; Lucie Schaefer, Die Illustrationen zu den Handschriften der Christine de Pizan, in: *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 10 (1937), pp. 119-208.

⁸ Seminal works on the *Epistre Othea* include: Meyer Schapiro, *Words and Pictures. On the Literal and the Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text*, The Hague; Paris: Mouton, 1973; Mary Ann Ignatius, Manuscript Format and Text Structure. Christine de Pizan's *Epistre Othéa*, in: *Studies in Medieval Culture* 12 (1978), pp. 121-124; Mary Ann Ignatius, Christine de Pizan's *Epistre Othéa*. An Experiment in Literary Form, in: *Medievalia et Humanistica* 9 (1979), pp. 127-142; Sandra L. Hindman, *Christine de Pizan's "Epistre Othea". Painting and Politics at the Court of Charles VI*, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986; Gabriella Parussa, Instruire les chevaliers et conseiller les princes. L'Épistre Othea de Christine de Pizan, in: *Studi di storia della civiltà letteraria francese. Mélanges offerts à Lionello Sozzi*, 2 vols, Paris: Champion, 1996, I, pp. 129-155; Marilyn Desmond, Pamela Sheingorn, *Myth, Montage, and Visuality in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture. Christine de Pizan's "Epistre Othea"*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003.

⁹ BnF fr. 606 contains elements of Christine's hand, while BL Harley 4431 does to an even greater extent. See Ouy et al, *Album Christine de Pizan*, pp. 25-38, 243, 325-326 and 340.

¹⁰ ¹⁰ The earliest extant manuscript of the *Epistre Othea* is believed to be Ms. Fr. 848, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. This extant exemplar is only decorated with six drawings. See Gianni Mombello, *La tradizione manoscritta dell' "Epistre Othea" di Christine de Pizan. Prolegomeni all'edizione del testo*, Turin: Accademia delle scienze, 1967, pp. 23-31.

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