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The Cycle of Seven Planets –Iconography and Applications

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The paper will discuss the cycle of seven planetary deities, popular in 15th and 16th century prints. Iconographic variants of the motif represent different conventions, e.g. in orientalising, antikizing, modernising the appearance of planets. They are accompanied by a specific set of attributes, including signs of the zodiac or elements known from mythology. There are certain trends visible, depending on the specific period, but also some general, gradually changing trends in Renaissance culture. Both selected and all planets appear in various cultural texts, obviously, most often linked to astrology. These include self-contained graphic series, medical works, calendars, prognostications, astrology manuals, treatises on iconography, but also accounts of allegoric spectacles to celebrate a ruler or a carnival. These examples show the specificity of the presence of astrology in Early Modern culture: it permeated various spheres of life: entertainment, scholarly exploration of the mysteries of the world, everyday life, politics and power propaganda. However, the cycle of seven planets is not only a source for learning about astrological culture. It also points to the wide potential uses of mythological allegorical motifs, in this case linked to cosmic thought, but also deeply rooted in erudite humanist culture.

Short Biography

Agata Starownik graduated in Polish Philology (2016) and Art History (2017) and earned her PhD in literary studies from the University of Warsaw (2023). She works at the Artes Liberales Faculty (University of Warsaw). Her research interests include astronomical and cosmic motifs in literature and art, as well as reception of the Bible in Early Modern culture.

GRANTS

- 2024 –contractor in project at The Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences by National Humanities Development Program (the PI: prof. dr hab. Andrzej Dąbrówka): Dokończenie wydania sejmowego Dzieł wszystkich Jana Kochanowskiego [Completion of the Seym edition of the Complete Works of Jan Kochanowski]
- 2022–2026 –the PI of research project by National Science Centre: The Warsaw pageant of planets (1580) described by Martin Gruneweg –organization, genre and iconography of an Early Modern spectacle.

PUBLICATIONS (selected)

Monographs

- Między nauką a mitem. Poetycka astronomia w twórczości Edwarda Stachury [Between Science and Myth. Poetic Astronomy in Edward Stachura's Works], Wydawnictwa UW: Warszawa 2021.

Articles

- Astronomy for the public. The 1580 Warsaw parade of planets in Martin Gruneweg's relation, in: Writing the Heavens. Celestial Observation in Medieval and Early Modern Literature, ed. Aura Heydenreich et al., de Gruyter: Berlin/Boston 2025.
- Dlaczego „z morza wszystkie gwiazdy żyją”? O pewnym motywie astronomicznym u Jana Kochanowskiego, in: Obraz natury w kulturze intelektualnej, literackiej i artystycznej doby staropolskiej [Why Do “All the Stars from the Sea Live”? The Sources, Meanings and Functions of the Sea Drinking Stars in Kochanowski's

Poetry], ed. E. Buszewicz, J. Dąbkowska-Kujko, A. Jakóbczyk-Gola, A. Nowicka-Jeżowa, Wydawnictwa UW: Warszawa 2020.

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