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Giorgio Vasari's *Chariots of the Sun and the Moon*: Emblematic and Mythic Symbols of Cosmic Transit*

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In 1555, the Florentine Mannerist painter Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) created two significant oil panels, the *Chariot of the Sun* and the *Chariot of the Moon*, on the ceiling of the Hall of the Elements in the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.[1] Cosimo I de' Medici, Duke of Tuscany (1519-1574), commissioned Vasari to renovate his apartments in the Palazzo Vecchio. Vasari restructured and painted the ceiling and walls of the Hall of the Elements on the second floor, named for its depicted subjects. The walls were painted using the fresco technique, while the ceiling was executed in oil on panels. The walls depicted the elements of Fire, Earth, and Water, whereas the ceiling illustrated the element of Air, containing the panels of the *Chariots*. Vasari began his education in classical culture in Arezzo under the Latin grammarian Antonio da Saccone and the ancient historian and literary scholar Giovanni Pollio Lappoli, known as Pollastra (1465-1540). He continued his studies within the Medici household under the humanist and hieroglyphologist Pierio Valeriano (1477-1558). In 1539, he met the Milanese law professor and emblematist Andrea Alciato (1492-1550) in Bologna, from whom he learned about the moral aspects of emblems. Through their historical, philosophical, mythographic, and emblematic symbolism, Vasari skillfully synthesized knowledge to construct intellectual programs that encompass the concepts of ekphrasis and *history paintings* in his decorative cycles, as revealed in the *Chariots*. In depicting the cosmic movement of stars and time in the *Chariots*, Vasari integrated the idea of the chariot illustrated in Baccio Baldini's astrological engravings and the mythographic account of Apollo and Diana's chariots in Vincenzo Cartari's *Le Imagini degli dei degli antichi* (1547 and 1571). In the discourse regarding the physical and metaphysical movements of the cosmos, Vasari underscores the influence of Italian Neoplatonism, with particular emphasis on insights derived from Marsilio Ficino's exploration of alchemical colors in nature, as articulated in *Liber de Arte Chemica* (Books 14 and 15), while also elucidating the importance of Plato's *Chariot of the Soul* or *Allegory of the Chariot* (Jones, Litt, & Ormerod, 1918, p. 246).

Keywords: Giorgio Vasari, Chariots, Apollo, Diana, Pegasus, Aurora, alchemy, emblems, mythography, Andrea Alciato, Vincenzo Cartari, Plato, Marsilio Ficino, Italian Neoplatonism, Hall of the Elements, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence

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[1] This essay is part of a comprehensive study featured in Liana De Girolami Cheney's *Hall of the Elements in the Apartments of the Medici in Palazzo Vecchio in Florence* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2025a), forthcoming. An oral presentation was delivered at the Emblem Studies Conference, "Road to Vienna", on 30 April 2015; https://emblemstudies2025.univie.ac.at.

Introduction

In 1555, the Florentine Mannerist painter Giorgio Vasari depicted two significant oil panels, the *Chariot of the Sun* and the *Chariot of the Moon*, on the ceiling of the Hall of the Elements (Sala degli Elementi) in the Apartments of the Medici in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence (Figures 1, 2a, 2b, 3a, and 3b). This essay is structured into two components that elucidate the symbolism present in these paintings. The first component examines Vasari's visual sources, while the second component explores Vasari's literary sources concerning the significance of his imagery.

Figure 1. Giorgio Vasari and assistants, Sala degli Elementi, 1555-1557, oils, ceiling.
Apartments of the Medici. Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.
Photo credit: ©Franco Zampetti Photographer, 2010.

Figure 2a. Giorgio Vasari and assistants, *Chariot of the Sun* (*Chariot of Apollo/Phoebus*), 1555, ceiling det., oil on wood. Sala degli Elementi, Apartments of the Medici. Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.
Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.

Figure 2b. Giorgio Vasari and assistants, *Chariot of the Sun* (*Chariot of Apollo/Phoebus*), 1555, ceiling det., oil on wood. Sala degli Elementi, Apartments of the Medici. Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.
Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.

Figure 3a. Giorgio Vasari and assistants, *Chariot of the Moon* (*Chariot of Diana*), 1555, ceiling det., oil on wood. Sala degli Elementi, Apartments of the Medici. Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.
Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.

Figure 3b. Giorgio Vasari and assistants, *Chariot of the Moon (Chariot of Diana*), 1555, ceiling det., oil on wood. Sala degli Elementi, Apartments of the Medici. Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.
Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.

Cosimo I de' Medici, Duke of Tuscany (1519-1574), commissioned Vasari to renovate his apartments in the Palazzo Vecchio. Vasari restructured and painted the ceiling and walls of the Hall of the Elements on the second floor, named for its depicted subjects. The walls were painted using the fresco technique, while the ceiling was executed in oil on panels in *cassettoni* or cuboids. The walls depicted the elements of Fire, Earth, and Water. In contrast, the ceiling illustrated the element of Air in two separate cuboids, the *Chariot of the Sun* and the *Chariot of the Moon*. Giorgio Vasari received assistance from two humanists associated with the Medici court, namely Cosimo Bartoli (1503-1572) and Vincenzo Borghini (1515-1580), in developing the iconography for the program of the Sala. In 1574, Vasari incorporated various concepts from them into his work *I Ragionamenti* (*The Dialogues*), alluding to their influences.[2]

In *I Ragionamenti*, Vasari elucidated numerous images depicted in the Sala degli Elementi within the Palazzo Vecchio. Fortunately, the original Italian manuscript has been digitized and is now available online: *Giorgio Vasari, I Ragionamenti del sig. Cavaliere Giorgio Vasari pittore et architetto aretino… sopra le invenzioni da lui dipinte in Firenze nel Palazzo di loro Altezze Serenissime* (Florence: Giunti, 1588). In addition to the original, I referred to the paperback edition: *Ragionamenti del sig. Giorgio Vasari: Sopra le invenzioni da lui dipinte in Firenze nel Palazzo Vecchio*. Commentary and Ed. Eugenio Giani (Florence: Barbès, 2011).

Currently, there are no English translations available online. However, I have referenced the existing English translations from J. L. Draper's "Vasari's Decoration in the Palazzo Vecchio: The Ragionamenti, Translated With an Introduction and Notes", 2 vols., Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1973, 1982 (dissertation not available online); and Paola Tinagli (Tinagli Baxter), "Giorgio Vasari's Ragionamenti", Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Edinburgh, 1988.

Vasari Visual Sources

As a passionate student of ancient Roman art, Vasari drew inspiration from the medallions of the *Chariot of the Sun* and the *Chariot of the Moon*, carved in marble on the side of the lateral pier in the Triumphal Arch of Constantine of 313 CE in Rome. In the ancient Roman roundels, the presence of the Sun and Moon symbolizes planetary guidance and governance (Figures 4a, 4b, and 4c). The Roman chariots exhibit two distinct categories. First is the quadriga, a chariot drawn by four horses commonly used in Roman military and triumphal vehicles, typically seen in battles and ceremonial victories, exemplified by the *Chariot of the Sun* (compare Figures 4b and 2a). There's also a category known as a biga, a chariot pulled by two horses, which is featured in the *Chariot of the Moon* (compare Figures 4c and 2b). In ancient Rome, people mostly used it as a ceremonial way to get around.

[2] https://archive.org/details/delsigcavaliere00vasa/page/n5/mode/2up.

Figure 4a. Triumphal Arch of Constantine, 313 CE, marble. Rome.

Figure 4b. The *Chariot of the Sun*, 313 CE, marble tondo, det., side. Triumphal Arch of Constantine, Rome.

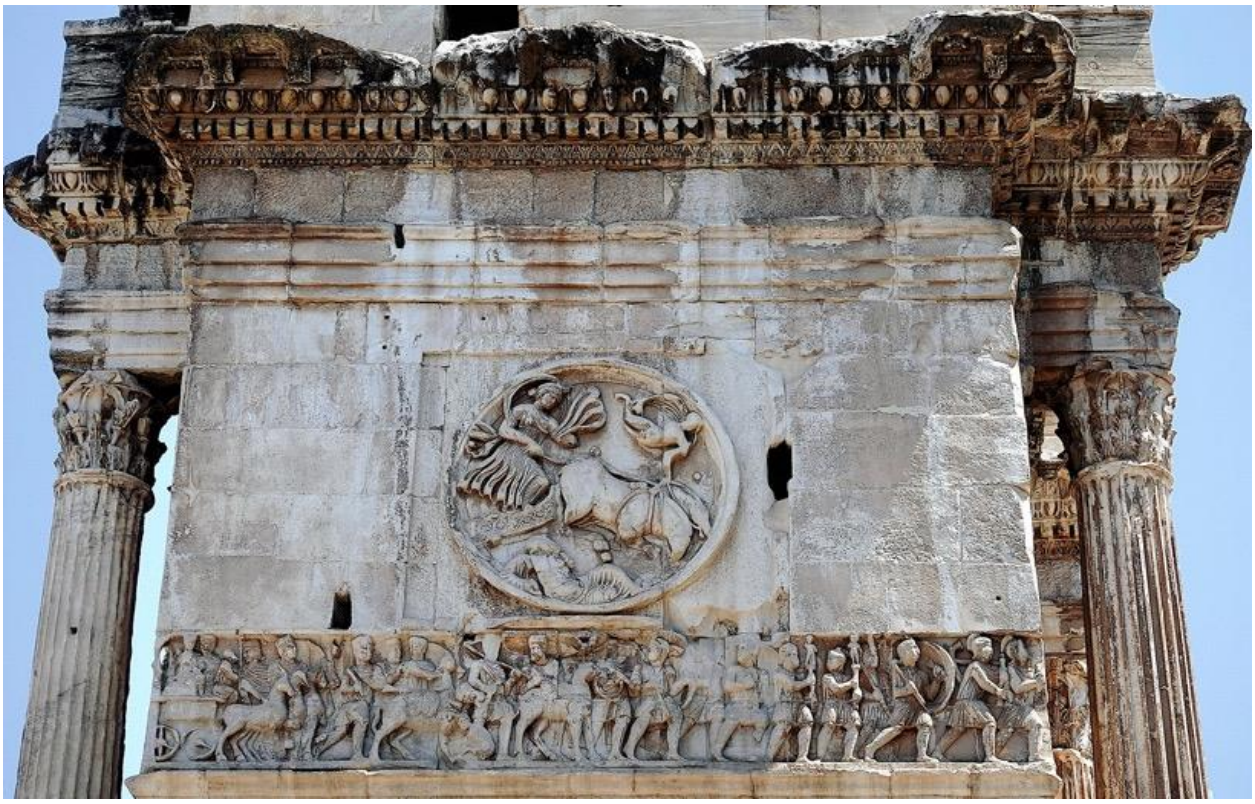

Figure 4c. The *Chariot of the Moon*, 313 CE, marble tondo, det., side. Triumphal Arch of Constantine, Rome.

In depicting the quadriga, Vasari also recalled other ancient Roman images of the chariot, such as the marble relief of *Trajan's Triumph Procession* of the 1st century CE on the inner wall of the Arch of Trajan in the Via Sacra in Rome (Figure 5). Another marble relief is the Charioteer at Circus Maximus from 95 to 110 CE, now in the Gregorian Profane Museum at the Vatican.[3] The relief scene of the Charioteer is part of a funerary relief found in Ostia Antica. While the charioteer prepares for the racing event, a spreader is in front of the Charioteer, a young boy who sprinkles water in front of the horses to keep the dust down. Another example in terracotta, attributed to the sculptor Anniae Arescusa, is *The Campana Charioteer*, a relief from the third century CE, currently housed at the British Museum in London (Figure 6). This charioteer wears a cap, leggings, and a brief tunic secured with *fasciae* (protective leather straps). The reins were tightly and securely around his waist to manage the swift movements of the horses.

Figure 5. Trajan's Triumph Procession, 81 CE, a marble relief on the inner wall of the Arch of Trajan. Via Sacra, Rome.

[3] For the image, see https://ancientrome.ru/art/artworken/img.htm?id=9469.

Figure 6. Anniae Arescusa (author), *Campana Charioteer*, third century CE, terracotta. British Museum, London. Photo credit: ©The Trustees of the British Museum.

In Vasari's *Chariot of the Sun*, Apollo rides across the sky on a fiery, golden chariot drawn by four immortal and wild horses: Aethon, Pyrois, Phlegon, and Eous. In ancient Greece, the quadriga was featured in the competitive games, especially during the Olympics. In ancient iconography, the representation of four horses of various breeds and colors symbolized specific ideas within Greek warfare and cosmology, including alchemy. For example, the four horses represented the four elements of alchemy, symbolizing the connection between the cosmos and ancient philosophical ideas, as mentioned in Plato's *Timaeus* (Stanton, 2003; Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1994).[4] Additionally, the alchemical colors held symbolic meanings, with the white horse representing divinity and victory, the red horse symbolizing bloodshed and war, and the grey or pale horse standing for death or rebirth. Interestingly, the golden horse reflected transformations, while the black horse, symbolizing judgment, was notably absent from Vasari's painting (Stanton, 2003; Nettleton, 2000).[5] The Christian tradition, combined with ancient beliefs, recorded in the Book of Revelation (6) that the Lion of Judah rides four horses: White symbolizes conquest, red signifies war, black represents pestilence, and pale represents illness and death.

[4] Linden J. Stanton, Ed., *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Chapter 2, esp. pp. 31-33, on Plato's *Timaeus*; and Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1994), pp. 525-526, regarding the association of horses with the elements of Air, Fire, Earth, and Water.
[5] I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Brendan Cole for pointing out the connection of the horse's colors with alchemy in *Alchemical Magnum Opus*: *nigredo* (black), *albedo* (white), *citrinitas* (yellow/gold), and *rubedo* (red). See Stanton, Ed., *The Alchemy Reader*, Chapter 2; and Stuart Nettleton, *The Alchemy Key: Unravelling the Single Tangible Secret in All Mysteries* (Sydney, Australia: Stuart Nettleton, 2000), pp. 6-11, 13, 131, 201-204, 219, and 245.

In Vasari's *Chariot of the Sun*, the scene unveils a rich celestial atmosphere filled with fluffy white clouds. A handsome young man, wrapped in wind-blown veils, leaps from his chariot while energetically riding a quadriga pulled by majestic and spirited horses.[6] Apollo, also known as Phoebus, the Bright One, is bathed in bright sunlight. The shining golden rays framing his face announce the presence of the Sun. With one hand, Apollo holds the reins, steering the horses toward their destination, while with the other he lifts a golden racing whip to urge them to race through the heavenly clouds, heralding the arrival of a new day.

In the iconography of the chariot, Vasari was also inspired by mythographic and emblematic traditions such as Vincenzo Cartari's *Chariot of the Sun* (Apollo) in the *Imagini* (Figure 7**)**. The youthful sun god navigates the sky in a chariot, led by his quadriga, through the clouds of heaven. The chariot's wheel is recognized as a solar symbol, characterized by its depiction as a circle intersected by a cross (spikes), which earns it the designation "wheel-cross" (Bidermann, 1989).[7] While the circular form of the wheel appears stationary, its protruding spikes signify rotation, thereby symbolizing the cyclical nature of birth and death within the continuum of time and space. Consequently, both the wheel and the cross represent the Sun's rotation around the celestial sphere (Bidermann, 1989).[8]

Figure 7. Vincenzo Cartari, *The Chariot of the Sun*, woodcut from *Imagini*…edition Venice, 1647, p. 51.

[6] In Italian Mannerist art there are several paintings and drawings on this theme, see the drawing of Perino del Vaga, https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/57584.
[7] H. Bidermann, *Dictionary of Symbolism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1989), p. 65.
[8] Bidermann, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, p. 379.

In *Imagini*, Cartari discussed classical sources in his work about the connection between the celestial siblings, Apollo, the sun god, and Diana, the moon goddess, and their transits throughout the heavenly realm. Vasari remained inspired by Cartari's chariot images, such as *Aurora Riding Pegasus* through the clouds in her chariot (Figure 8). Aurora, the goddess of the Sky, traveled ahead of the Sun, announcing its light and swiftly preparing for its arrival; she rides the magical horse Pegasus while carrying a burning torch of guidance through the night realm of the Moon, Diana. Cartari's Aurora scatters roses throughout the sky as a substitute for Diana's stars, creating a path to welcome the arrival of the sun god, Apollo (Ovid, Met. 2.111).

Figure 8. Vincenzo Cartari, *Aurora and Pegasus*, woodcut from *Imagini*…edition Venice, 1647, p. 53.

Additionally, the Milanese emblematist Andrea Alciato (1492-1550) created an emblem with the motto "Wisdom and courage defeated the strongest and deceiver" in a woodcut of *Los Emblemas* (1549) featuring Pegasus (Figure 9). This emblem underscores the strength gained from divine guidance and wisdom in the fight against deceivers like the Chimera. In this context, the emblem highlights the combative power of the winged horse rather than its celestial qualities associated with transitoriness.

Figure 9. Andrea Alciato, *Pegasus*, det., woodcut from *Los emblemas* (Lyons: Macé Bonhomme for Guillaume Rouille, 1549). Photo credit: University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections.

The imagery of the Chimera particularly intrigued Vasari due to its Etruscan origins, as he was a native of Arezzo. He was familiar with the sculptural discovery in Arezzo in 1553 of the Etruscan bronze Chimera (a she-goat monster), originally from 400 BCE, now in the National Archeological Museum of Florence (compare Figures 9 and 10). *The Chimera of Arezzo*, cited in Livy's *Etruscan capitals* (28.45), was discovered on 15 November 1553 by workers building fortifications near Porta San Lorentino in Arezzo (Hillard, 2013; Cheney, 2025b).[9] The sculpture was presented as a gift to Duke Cosimo I de' Medici, an avid collector of ancient art, particularly Etruscan art, who expressed great delight upon receiving the present.

[9] Caroline Hillard, "Vasari and the Etruscan Manner", *The Sixteenth Century Journal, 44*(4) (Winter 2013), 1021-1040, https://doi.org/10.1086/SCJ24246300; Liana De Girolami Cheney, *Giorgio Vasari: The Quest of a Painter* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2025), pp. 91-92.

Figure 10. The Chimera of Arezzo, 400 BCE, bronze.
National Archeological Museum, Florence.

In the *Chariot of the Sun*, Vasari expertly created winged celestial horses stripped of all adornment. Each winged horse evokes the mythic Pegasus, representing divine inspiration and the pursuit of transcending the heavens. Horses have been revered since ancient times for their striking physique, elegant proportions, bold demeanor, swift movement, and colored manes and tails (White, 1984).[10] In the scene, the ethereal, unclothed female figures adorned with butterfly wings embody the passage of time (The Hours) as they guide the horses across the sky, breaking through the evening clouds and ushering in a breeze of golden clouds that herald the dawn and the Sun's arrival.

Opposite the panel of the *Chariot of the Sun*, Apollo's sister, Diana, as the Moon Goddess, mirrors his daily journey across the sky, depicted in the *Chariot of the Moon* (Figure 3a and 3b). A bright, silvery atmosphere surrounds the *Chariot of the Moon*, contrasting with the golden brightness displayed in the *Chariot of the Sun*. Vasari wrote: "[The biga] two horses pull the chariot: a white one for daytime and a black one for nighttime, symbolizing the Moon's journey" (1588/2011, p. 23).[11] In alchemical symbolism, the white horse represents the

[10] T. H. White, *The Book of Beasts. A Translation From Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1984), p. 87.
[11] *I Ragionamenti del sig. Cavaliere Giorgio Vasari pittore ed architetto aretino… sopra le invenzioni da lui dipinte in Firenze nel Palazzo Vecchio.* Commentary and Ed. Eugenio Giani (Florence: Barbès, 2011), p. 23.

Moon, a celestial body, whereas the black horse signifies the transition from day to night (Reid, 1993, p. 373).[12] Vasari's depiction of an atmospheric, chilly air signals her arrival; when the Moon comes, she brings dew. The Moon instructs that Dew is to carry cold air through the clouds. Dew, the personification of atmospheric cold vapor, is depicted as a bare flying figure with outstretched arms guiding the cold air through the sky.

In stark contrast, in the left corner of the scene, in front of the chariot, we find the lethargic figure of Endymion in a deep sleep (Reid, 1993, p. 373).[13] According to ancient mythology, he was a beautiful mortal shepherd with whom the Moon Goddess Diana (Selene) fell in love upon seeing him asleep in a cave on the island of Aeolia (NE of Sicily). She requested the Olympic Gods to grant him eternity so she could admire him forever. Consequently, he is shown resting among the celestial clouds, partially draped in sheepskins and clutching a shepherd's bag. In the painting, Endymion turns his drowsy head and muscular upper torso toward the Moon Goddess. Interestingly, the white horse mimics Endymion's stance, yet it remains alert with open eyes. His saddle is draped softly in a bluish veil reminiscent of the color of the shepherd's bag. Boldly, Vasari illustrated the horses' masculinity by depicting the equines standing up or rearing as they traverse the atmospheric dark and violet sky. Thus, they answer the deity's command as she pulls the reins with her right hand to forge the night ahead, while with her left hand, she holds a circular shimmering globe like a moon with a prominent crescent shape, symbolizing her divinity.

Beautiful Diana, wearing bare-breasted attire, is crowned with a moonstone of opalescent shimmer in the center. Her braided tresses are pulled back in a ponytail design, matching the white horse's curly tail. A misty, bluish nimbus surrounds her head. She rides on her silvery and golden chariot. Her planetary movement influences the cyclical appearance of celestial bodies, facilitating both material and spiritual growth, akin to how lunar phases impact the movements of water and human body cycles.

Vasari purposefully selected horses to draw the chariot of the Moon goddess, balancing the design of the chariot depicted across the wall in the image of the Chariot of the Sun. This comparative allusion highlights the artist's creativity and the significance of artistic license in creating captivating works of art.

Vasari was an advocate for the Aretine culture of the Etruscans, akin to Cosimo I de' Medici, the Duke of Tuscany. The fervor exhibited by his patron for Etruscan artifacts compelled him to select an Etruscan chariot drawn by two horses for the charioteer Diana. An example of this type of Etruscan chariot of 540 BCE, in bronze inlaid with ivory, is at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City (Figure 11a). Another source of appropriation on the part of Vasari is the Roman biga of the 3rd century CE, now placed in the rotunda of the Vatican Museum.[14] This marble chariot was initially discovered inside the Basilica of San Marco in Piazza Venezia in Rome before 1516 (Figure 11b). The main structure of the chariot, or box, served as the episcopal throne or pulpit within the church. Vasari was probably acquainted with this chariot during his numerous travels to Rome for papal commissions.

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[12] J. D. Reid, *The Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts, 1300-1990s.* 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), I, p. 373.

[13] Reid, Ed., *The Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology*, I, p. 373.

[14] In 1788, Francesco Antonio Franzoni restored and added a second horse (left) for balance under the sponsorship of Pope Clement XIV.

Figure 11a. Etruscan Chariot, 540 BCE, bronze. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Credit line: Rogers Fun, 1903.

Figure 11b. Roman two-horse chariot, 3rd century CE, marble. Vatican Museums, Vatican.
Originally in the Church of Saint Mark, Piazza Venezia, Rome.

Inside the wheel rim of the Vatican chariot, the frieze decoration contains poppies and ears of wheat. This design motif is analogous to other figurative works from the Augustan period, such as the ornaments of the *Ara Pacis*. Inside the chariot box, the surface is covered with laurel leaves, the sacred evergreen plant of Apollo. At the apex of the box is a column, an ancient symbol attributed to Apollo *Agyieus*. This connection alludes to Apollo, the sun god, as a guardian of streets and public areas, as noted by the ancient geographer and historian Pausanias (d. 180 CE) in the *Descriptions of Greece* (Pausanias, 1918; Graves, 2017).[15]

In the *Chariot of the Moon*, Diana rides enthroned as the Queen of the Night, likely a reference by Vasari to the episcopal use of the Vatican chariot as a throne. Additionally, the rims of Diana's chariot wheels and their supportive clubs (spikes) resemble the design of the Vatican chariot wheels. Vasari chose to adorn the inner circle of the wheel rim with a frieze featuring masks resembling the faces of the Moon rather than poppies, as seen on the Vatican wheel. Furthermore, Vasari's azure wheel clubs reflect the illumination from Diana's radiant celestial orb. He deviated in his wheel-club design from the Vatican's wheel-club, featuring ears of wheat covered with an acanthus leaf. Vasari did not include a lion's head as the wheel's hub in Diana's chariot since it is not an appropriate symbol for the Moon goddess (compare Figure 12 with Figures 2b and 3b). Still, he included it in Apollo's chariot because it alludes to the zodiac sign Leo, which is associated with Apollo, the sun god (Figure 2b).

Vatican's wheel Diana's wheel

Figure 12. Wheels comparison.

Vasari was deeply rooted in the Italian Renaissance's understanding of the Ptolemaic planetary system, which featured a cosmos of seven celestial deities, including the Sun and Moon, and their symbolic cycle of the spheres. In Italian Renaissance art, the tradition was to represent the journey of the planets with the personification of the planetary gods riding in chariots as an indication of their transitory nature. Hence, Vasari recalled the cycle of planets designed by Baccio Baldini in 1464. In the *Vite*, he articulated profound admiration for Baldini's exceptional physique and creative genius, as well as his appreciation for all virtues ("amatore di tutte le virtù") (Vasari, 1966-2002, III, p. 567).[16]

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[15] *Pausanias. Description of Greece*, Trans. and Ed. W. H. S. Jones, Litt D., and H. A. Ormerod, in 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1918), 1.31.3 and 2.19.7; and Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 2017), Section on Agyieus.

[16] Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti Pittori, Scultori, et Architettori*, Eds., Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi [BB-Vasari] 6 vols. text plus 3 vols. commentaries, addenda, index (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1966-2002), III, p. 567.

At the top of Baldini's engraving page for each planet is an image of the transit of the planetary god. Below are the activities of those born under the sign of that god, referred to as the "children of that planetary deity". Beneath the images is a text explaining the scene's significance, imitating the construction of an emblem with a *motto*, the name of the planetary god, a *pictura* of the "children of that planet", and an epigram that is a text explaining the image.

Baldini's *The Sun (Apollo)* is identified as Leo and is depicted as a deity in a chariot pulled by four horses (Figure 13). A chariot wheel displays the zodiac sign Leo. Below, numerous athletes are engaged in martial activities and strength contests. The subscription of *The Sun (Leo)* refers to the planetary crossing. Curiously, the sun god, a crowned Apollo Phaeton, rides alongside a child, the son of Helios; light radiates around the medallion featuring the sign of Leo, alluding to the Sun's rays.

Figure 13. Baccio Baldini, *The Sun* (*Leo, Apollo*) from *The Planets*, 1464, engraving.
British Museum, London.
Credit line: ©The Trustees of the British Museum.

Baldini's planet Luna (*The Moon, Diana*), inscribed with Luna, rests in a chariot pulled by two women (Figure 14). The chariot wheel features a crab, symbolizing the zodiac sign of Cancer. Below it, various activities inspired by the goddess are depicted, including fishing and hunting. The subscription addresses the transit of the planet Luna (Moon). Baldini emphasized Diana's characterization as a huntress through the imagery of the arrow and bow. She is adorned with horns that evoke her sacred animal, the deer. Unlike the other planetary chariots drawn by animals, her chariot is pulled by two human figures, specifically two wooden nymphs who accompanied her in her hunting endeavors.

Figure 14. Baccio Baldini, *The Moon* (*Luna*, *Diana*) from *The Planets*, 1464, engraving.
British Museum, London.
Credit line: ©The Trustees of the British Museum.

Concerning the artistic symbolism of the chariot as depicted in planetary art, Vasari drew significant inspiration from Cinquecento art, especially from the school of Raphael. For instance, the Umbrian painter and teacher of Raphael, Pietro Perugino (1450-1523), sponsored by the professional guilds of Perugia and probably

in collaboration with Bernardino Pinturicchio (1454-1513) depicted in tempera the Seven Planets in the vault of the Sala dell'Udienza of the Collegio del Cambio in the Palazzo dei Priori. The Hall of the Audience was for the Merchants and Money Changers of the guilds in Perugia (Figures 15a, 15b, and 15c). Perugino developed the imagery of the vault under the influence of the humanist and classicist Francesco Maturanzio (1443-1518), who taught classics, poetry, and rhetoric in Ferrara and Vicenza and traveled to Rhodes to enhance his understanding of the Greek language. As a result, he was acquainted with the scholars of the Estense court in Ferrara and with Cristoforo De Predis's planetary artistic codex, *De sphaera*.[17] A delightful ornamental ceiling, ribbed vault ceiling, or a *tetto vela*, creates the illusion of depth in the ceiling. The background of the entire vault is adorned with *all'antica* motifs and grotesque decorations featuring intricate and fanciful ornaments of flying ribbons, birds, flora and fauna, griffons, horses, panthers, rams, satyrs, harpies, masks, shells, and urns. Perugino also depicted the planet Luna, the Moon, seated in her chariot, curiously drawn by two young maidens, not horses. A crescent moon or a lunar eclipse is visible in the sky. Her body and veils radiate a silvery white hue, and she holds an arrow or rod with a bow.

Figure 15a. Pietro Perugino, *Seven Planets*, 1500, tempera, ceiling. Sala dell'Udienza, College del Cambio, Palazzo dei Priori, Perugia.

[17] Probably inspired by the publication of Gaius Julius Hyginus's *Poeticon Astronomicon* (Venice, 1482), which represents each of the Seven Planets riding in a triumphal chariot drawn by attributed creatures with corresponding planetary attributes and zodiac signs. For the image, see https://patrimonioediciones.com/portfolio-item/de-sphaera.

Figure 15b. Pietro Perugino, Sun/Apollo, det., *Seven Planets*, 1500, tempera, ceiling. Sala dell'Udienza, College del Cambio, Palazzo dei Priori, Perugia.

Figure 15c. Pietro Perugino, Luna/Moon, det. *Seven Planets*, 1500, tempera, ceiling. Sala dell'Udienza, College del Cambio, Palazzo dei Priori, Perugia.

Artists of the Raphael school imaginatively conceptualized diverse representations of deities seated upon their respective thrones, chariots, each symbolizing distinct interpretations ranging from celestial transitions to celebratory festivities and the pursuit of artistic curiosities. For example, Perino del Vaga's (1501-1547) series of drawings of deities riding in their chariots dated between 1519 and 1521 (Freedberg, 1993),[18] and Giulio Romano's (1499-1546) Room of the Sun (Camera del Sole) of 1527, a fresco in the Palazzo del Te in Mantua.[19] In the center of the room's ceiling is a dramatic depiction of the transition from day to night through the artistic device of the Chariot of Apollo flying among dusk clouds, contrasting with the Chariot of Diana. The sudden and pronounced foreshortening implies a rapid velocity in traversing the celestial spheres.[20]

In this context, Vasari also illustrated the *Chariot of the Sun*, with Apollo represented as an energetic young man advancing to guide his radiant chariot, which is propelled by a quadriga of four lively horses as it emerges through the clouds and celestial expanse. Concurrently, the *Chariot of the Moon* portrays the exquisite Diana gracefully traversing the night sky with elegance and joy.

Vasari Literary Sources

In his visual quest to portray the symbolism of the chariots, Vasari continued to be influenced by literary and philosophical expressions of the Italian Renaissance. Familiar with his admired Aretine poet and humanist Francesco Petrarca, Vasari knew the *Trionfi* (*Triumphs*), a series of poems by Petrarch composed between 1450 and 1470 in the Tuscan language. These poems evoke the allegorical concept of triumph, influenced by the virtues of love, chastity, fame, and eternity, and use the symbolism of the chariot to convey the virtues' moral and intellectual journey. In *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (*The Strife of Love in a Dream*), printed in 1499 in Venice by Aldus Manutius, Francesco Colonna also employed the chariot as an allegorical representation of moral triumph, similar to Petrarch's approach (Colonna, 1499; Petrarca, 1488).[21]

Furthermore, Alciato, too, represents the transitory triumph or victory in his emblem on "Even the fiercest are tamed" ("Etiam ferocissimos domari rom") in the *Livret des emblems* (Paris: Chrestien Wechel, 1536, reprint, Figure 16). The epigram explains that the hero climbed into his chariot triumphally, "harnessing lions and making them bow their necks under the harsh yoke". In another emblem from the same book, Alciato noted that "Love, All-Powerful Emotion" ("Potentissimus affectus Amor") shows Cupid riding triumphantly in his chariot and subduing the lion's power (Figure 17).[22]

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[18] For the images, see https://www.artic.edu/artworks/82070/apollo-driving-the-chariot-of-the-sun, https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/57578; and Sydney J. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy, 1500-1600* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books (1993), pp. 254-259.

[19] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giulio_Romano_-_Chariot_of_the_Sun_-_WGA09598.jpg.

[20] For the images, see https://www.meisterdrucke.us/fine-art-prints/Giulio-Romano/305121/Apollo-Driving-the-Chariot-of-the-Sun,-Ceiling-Decoration-in-the-Camera-del-Sole.html.

[21] Francesco Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (*The Strife of Love in a Dream*) (Venice: Aldus Manutius, 1499) woodcut designs attributed to Benedetto Bordone and the workshop. Typeface designer was Francesco Griffo da Bologna. For the image and text, see https://www.gutenberg.org/files/18459/18459-h/18459-h.htm. For Francesco Petrarca, *Trionfi* (Venice: Aldus, 1488) woodcuts from *The Connoisseur* Vol. XLVIII (Otto Limited, London, 1917), see ashttps://www.gutenberg.org/files/17650/17650-h/17650-h.htm.

[22] See https://www.theculturium.com/plato-phaedrus-charioteer.

Figure 16. Andrea Alciato, Emblem on "Even the fiercest are tamed", woodcut from *Livret des emblemes* (Paris: Chrestien Wechel, 1536, rept.).
Photo credit: University of Glasgow Archives and Special Collections.

Figure 17. Andrea Alciato, Emblem on "Love, the All-Powerful Emotion", woodcut from *Livret des emblems* (Paris: Chrestien Wechel, 1536 rept.).
Photo credit: University of Glasgow Archives and Special Collections.

Italian Renaissance artists, emblematists, and humanists—such as Petrarch, Colonna, and Alciato—along with the French emblematist Pierre Coustau, who was active in the sixteenth century, were heavily influenced by the ideas in Plato's *Phaedrus*. This influence also had a ripple effect on Vasari. As classical texts suggest, Plato's *Phaedrus*, written around 370 BCE, explores the theme of the *Allegory of the Chariot*. In the *Allegory of the Chariot*, Plato employed the metaphor of the charioteer through a dialogue between Phaedrus, an Athenian aristocrat, and his teacher, Socrates (470/69-399 BCE) (Allen, 2008).[23] In a poetic setting, Plato positions the conversation outside the Athenian city walls, beside a stream and beneath the shade of a tree. Both individuals explore the art of rhetoric and the "nature of divine madness" that inspires them from the gods.

In the *Allegory of the Chariot*, Plato explained the tripartite nature of the human soul or psyche. The soul is compared to a chariot: Human reason represents the chariot, the horses symbolize the senses or human appetites, and the mind is akin to the use of the controlling reins. To put it differently, the senses act as the paths we travel, the intellect serves as the charioteer, and our state of mind holds all the emotions that connect the threads of our

[23] *Commentaries on Plato: Phaedrus and Ion*, Trans. Michael J. B. Allen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

experiences. The goal in human life is to ascend to divine heights. In Plato's view, the charioteer's journey is an insightful allegory for the spiritual or philosophical life and the moral pursuit of the human soul striving for the divine.

Interestingly, a Greek amphora attributed to Andokides (the signed potter) has been conventionally linked to the depiction of Plato's *Allegory of the Chariot*, as it illustrates a charioteer guiding a quadriga pulled by four differently colored horses. It is now housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City (Figure 18). This red-figure vase, dated 540 BCE, is a terracotta amphora adorned with unique ivy foliage at the neck of the vessel—this evergreen plant symbolizes immortality and the eternal cycle of life (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1994, p. 46).[24] Additionally, the ivy's symbolism as a climbing, dynamic force is tied to the charioteer's journey to higher pursuits, as seen in the quadriga. With their distinct body colors, the horses represent the four classical elements in nature: Air, Earth, Fire, and Water. Their natural mane colors also refer to alchemical properties, such as *nigredo* (black), *albedo* (white), *citrinitas* (yellow or gold), and *rubedo* (red or brown), as mentioned in the *Alchemical Magnum Opus* (Stanton, 2003; Nettleton, 2000).[25]

Figure 18. Andokides (signed potter), *Charioteer*, Greek Amphora with lid, 540 BCE, terracotta, red-figure vase. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.
Credit Line: Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Christos. G. Bastis in honor of Carlos A. Picón, 1999.

[24] Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, p. 46.
[25] I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Brendan Cole for pointing out the connection of the horse's colors with alchemy. See Stanton, Ed., *The Alchemy Reader*, Chapter 2; Stuart Nettleton, *The Alchemy Key: Unravelling the Single Tangible Secret in All Mysteries* (Sydney, Australia: Stuart Nettleton, 2000), pp. 6-11, 13, 131, 201-204, 219, and 245; and https://colour-illuminated.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/explore/alchemy-and-colour.

In *Phaedrus*, Plato additionally examines the symbolism of colors within the context of the *Allegory of the Chariot*. In this allegory, the chariot represents the soul and is drawn by two horses of distinct colors: one white, signifying the spiritual soul, and the other black, denoting the material soul (Allen, 2008).[26]

Interestingly, in 1555, the French emblematist Pierre Coustau elaborated on Plato's *Phaedrus* and the symbolism of the chariot in his emblematic book *Pegma*. This text features an emblem titled *In Platonem* (On Plato) (Figure 19). The motto states: *Honor debitus viro docto* ("Honor is due to a learned man"). The *pictura* of the emblem shows an ancient scholar (Plato) riding in a chariot pulled by two horses, a biga, guarded by two coachmen. The epigram states:

> Look at Plato, resplendent in his chariot and four snowy-white horses. Making his way to the temple with hitherto unheard-of honor. See how the great prince in the lands of Syracuse has sent him (a princely gift) a boat garlanded with a fillet. Ah, how superior he is in speech and thought, that he makes absolute [lit. unbridled] rulers bow their heads before him.[27] (Coustau, 1555)

Figure 19. Pierre Coustau, *In Platonem* (On Plato), emblem, woodcut, from *Pegma* (Lyon: Macé Bonhomme, 1555). Photo credit: University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections.

[26] See https://www.theculturium.com/plato-phaedrus-charioteer; https://www.john-uebersax.com/plato/plato3.htm; and *Commentaries on Plato: Phaedrus and Ion*, Trans. Michael J. B. Allen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).
[27] Pierre Coustau, *Pegma* (Lyon: Macé Bonhomme, 1555); https://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/books.php?id=fcpb.

Vasari was well acquainted with this type of Platonic philosophical endeavor through the teachings of Florentine Neoplatonic philosopher and physician, Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), an avid translator of Plato's writings commissioned by the Medici family (Hub & Kodera, 2021; Van den Doel, 2022).[28] According to Renaissance Neoplatonism, a Christianized version of pagan ideals promoted by Ficino, the chariot symbolizes guidance in attaining heavenly blessings and serves as a temporary means of transportation from the earthly realm to the spiritual one. This concept originates from the biblical narratives involving the journeys of Elijah and Elisha (Genesis 41-43) and Ezekiel's vision of the Chariot (Exodus 33:20), which symbolize the majesty of God. Furthermore, King David's allusion to God's chariots in Psalm 68:17 emphasizes the divine nature of the Almighty.

As a Christian devotee and adherent of Neoplatonic philosophy, Vasari conceptualized and depicted the chariots of the Sun and Moon as symbols of power, glory, and divinity, thus contributing to the influence of planetary movements in the cosmos.

In depicting the *Chariots* in the ceiling of the Sala degli Elementi, Vasari showcased the Medicean family's, particularly Cosimo I and later his son Francesco, fascination with minerals and gems, as well as their interest in alchemy (Aakhus, 2008; Maresca, 2012; 2020).[29] Cosimo I had a deep interest in astrology, alchemy, and gemology, commissioning two foundries: one located in the basement of the Palazzo Vecchio and the other in the Uffizi (Berti, 1967).[30] He skillfully manipulated minerals and metals in the laboratories of these foundries, explicitly focusing on the separation, dilution, and preparation of mercury materials (Maresca, 2012; 2020; Orlandi, 1978; Slavenburg, 2012).[31] Historically, the Medici had been avid collectors of ancient texts, including alchemical texts. In 1462, Cosimo de' Medici (1389-1464), a banker and politician, founded the Platonic Academy to explore Plato's theories further. He commissioned his physician, philosopher, and astrologer, Ficino, to translate Plato's works and other ancient texts.

Furthermore, Vasari's assimilation of Ficino's Neoplatonism expanded into his fascination with alchemy. There is a claim that Ficino wrote an alchemical text in Latin, *Liber de Arte Chimica* or *De alchemia*, which was edited in Basel in 1572 by Pietro Perna and reprinted in Geneva in 1702 in the *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa* (Matton, 2014; Forshaw, 2011).[32] In Chapter 14 of this book, Ficino explored the colors in nature, particularly sulfur for its golden hue, associating it with Mercury, Sol, and Luna. He noted that white contains all colors. The

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[28] B. Hub and S. Kodera, Eds., *Iconology, Neoplatonism, and the Arts in the Renaissance* (New York: Routledge, 2021); M. J. E. Van den Doel, *Ficino and Fantasy: Imagination in Renaissance Art and Theory From Botticelli to Michelangelo* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

[29] Patricia Aakhus, "Astral Magic in the Renaissance: Gems, Poetry, and Patronage of Lorenzo de' Medici", *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft, 3*(2) (Winter 2008), 185-206; and Paola Maresca, *Alchimia, magia e Astrologia nella Firenze dei Medici* (Florence: Angelo Pontecorboli, 2012), pp. 105-130; Paola Maresca, *Lo Studiolo di Francesco I de' Medici in Palazzo Vecchio a Firenze: Simboli e segreti alchemici* (Florence: Pontecorboli, 2020), pp. 19-27, and p. 104.

[30] Luciano Berti, *Il Principe dello Studiolo: Francisco I* (Florence: Edam, 1967), pp. 43-60.

[31] Maresca, *Alchimia, magia e Astrologia nella Firenze dei Medici*, pp. 51-59 and pp. 105-130; Maresca, *Lo Studiolo di Francesco I de' Medic*, pp. 117-119; Giulio Lensi Orlandi, *Cosimo e Francesco de' Medici alchimisti* (Florence: Nardini, 1978), Jacob Slavenburg, *The Hermetic Link: From the Secret Tradition to Modern Thought* (Lake Worth, FL: Ibis Press, 2012), pp. 229-230.

[32] Sylvain Matton, "Is Agrippa the Author of the Pseudo-Ficinian *De arte chimica*?" in *Henry Cornelius Agrippa (Attributed to), De Arte Chimica (On Alchemy), A Critical Edition of the Latin Text With a Seventeenth-Century English Translation* (Paris: SÉHA 2014), pp. 1-109; Justin von Boudjoss, Trans., Item 7, *An Unknown Concerning the Chymical Art. But Lucerna Salis Affirms Him to Be Marcilius Ficinus, an Italian of the Dukedome of Florence or Tuscany, in the Year 1518*, from Ms. Sloane 3638 in *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa* Vol. 2 as part of the *Theatrum Chemicum* (Geneva, 1702), pp. 172-183. It is assumed that this text was written by Ficino. See for text, https://www.alchemywebsite.com/ficino.html. See also Peter J. Forshaw, "Marsilio Ficino and the Chemical Art", in *Laus Platonici Philosophi*, Eds. Stephen Clucas, Peter J. Forshaw, and Valery Reese (Leiden: BRILL, 2011), pp. 249-271, https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004188976.i-384.47.

others appear colored in comparison, such as whiteness as the white stone, the white sun, the full moon, and calcined Luna. Ficino further noted that Nature presents white and black as the primary colors; we believe the various mixtures and proportions give rise to intermediate colors like redness (Forshaw, 2011).[33] In Chapter 15 of the *Liber de Arte Chimica*, Ficino explained further that the Sun provides golden illumination while the Moon offers a cooling effect; conversely, the Moon brings a sense of chill while the Sun generates warmth. Just as the Moon is recognized, the Sun must also shed light. The relationship between the Sun and the Moon is paramount, emphasizing the connection between Heaven and Earth, thereby invoking the citrine Aurora. Vasari conceptualized these colors intentionally within the Sala's chariots of the Sun and the Moon.

By combining artistic, emblematic, mythographic, and philosophical symbols, Vasari skillfully merged ideas to create intellectual frameworks that explored the concept of ekphrasis in his decorative cycles, as represented in the celestial symbols of the chariot's spheres.

Coda

This essay primarily focuses on the chariot formations of the quadriga and biga as depicted in Vasari's *Chariot of the Sun* and *Chariot of the Moon*, located in the Sala dei Elementi (Hall of the Elements) within the Medici Apartments at Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. The chariots symbolize a planetary transit within the celestial spheres, representing a cosmic journey associated with the patron's name, Cosimo, which alludes to the cosmos—the universe. The configuration of the chariot, characterized as a two-wheeled vehicle—a biga or quadriga—drawn by two or more animals, typically horses positioned side by side, signifies both planetary and terrestrial movements. The rotation of the wheels, affixed to the chariot, metaphorically represents the rotation of the spheres in the cosmos as well as the cyclical nature of human existence.

In contrast, the representation of a single wheel rotating in horizontal or vertical motion alludes to other symbolic associations. Typically, the imagery of a solitary wheel features a lone figure precariously positioned upon a rotating wheel within a terrestrial domain. Thus, the wheel's rotation is self-propelled, without a chariot or pulling device. The solitary wheel in motion may be interpreted as a representation of the vicissitudes experienced in the world.

This particular imagery, often known as the wheel of fortune, is illustrated in the emblematic and mythographic tradition found in Paolo Giovio's impresa. "Without exiting the rut" ("Sans point sortir hors de l'orniere") in the *Dialogo dell'imprese militare et amorose* (Lyon: Guglielmo Roviglio, 1559, p. 83). The image of the impresa depicts a solitary, substantial wheel adorned with spikes, rotating vertically. This wheel is situated in an expansive landscape and features a ribbon at the apex inscribed with a Latin motto: "Sans point sortir hors del'oniere" (Figure 20). According to the message presented by Giovio in this impresa, the steady wheel symbolizes a "royal subject [who] intends to serve his King directly without being swayed by personal interests" (Giovio, 1559, p. 83).[34]

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[33] See on colors, https://www.alchemywebsite.com/ficino.html; and https://archive.org/details/MarsilioFicinoOnTheAlchemicalArt. See also, Peter J. Forshaw, "Marsilio Ficino and the Chemical Art", in *Laus Platonici Philosophi*, Eds. Stephen Clucas, Peter J. Forshaw, and Valery Reese (Leiden: BRILL, 2011), pp. 249-271, https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004188976.i-384.47.

[34] Paolo Giovio, *Dialogo dell'imprese militare et amorose* (Lyon: Guglielmo Roviglio, 1559), p. 83.

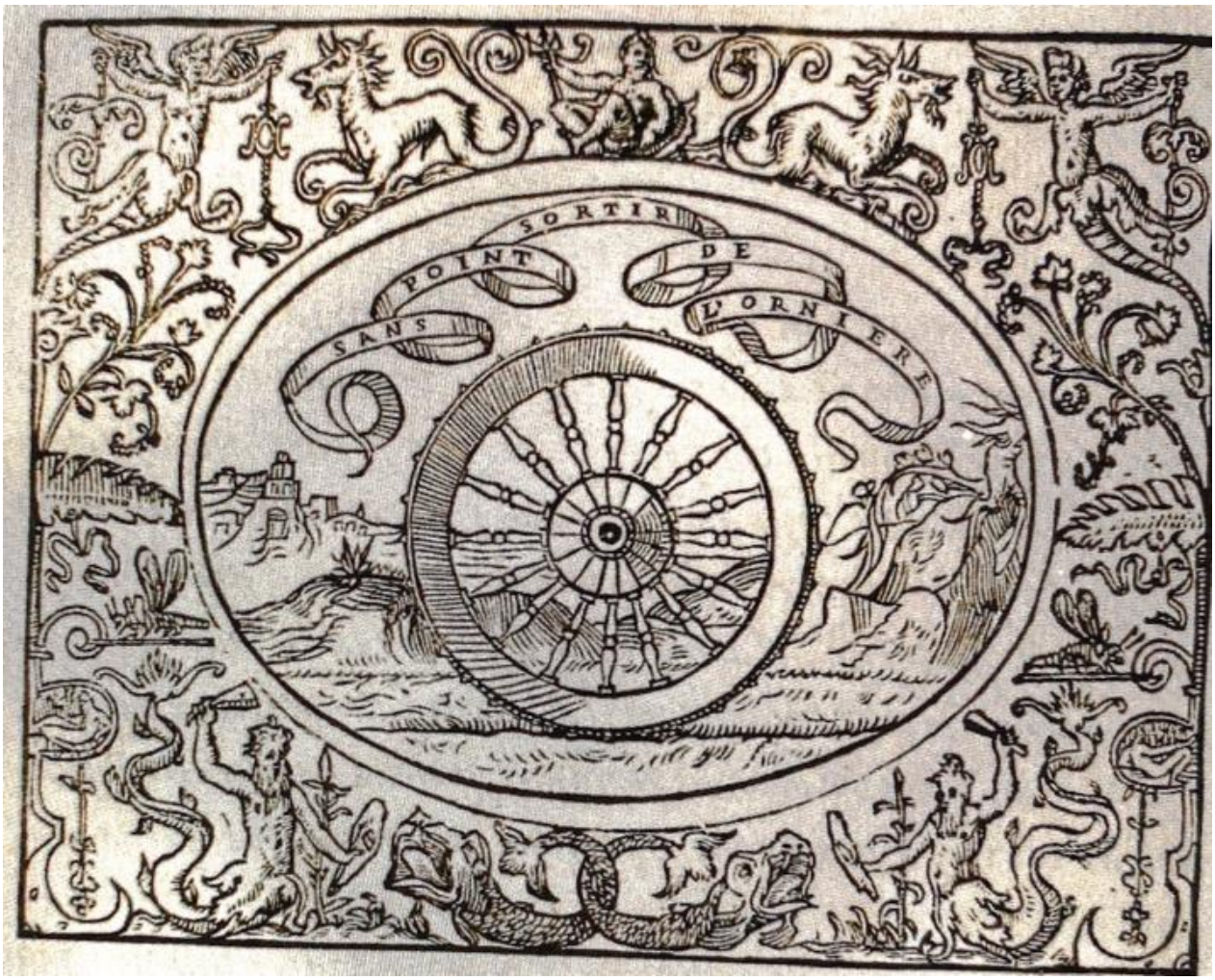

Figure 20. Paolo Giovio, Impresa, "Without exiting the rut", woodcut from *Dialogo dell'imprese militare et amorose* (Lyon: Guglielmo Roviglio, 1559), p. 83.
Photo credit: University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections.

Unlike Giovio, Alciato's emblems of *Occasio* and *Nemesis*, along with Cartari's mythography of *Fortune* and *Occasio* (Figures 21 and 22 compared to Figures 23 and 24), represent the single wheel but now with a figure (Alciato, 1549; Acciarino, 2021; Pierguidi, 2004).[35] In Alciato's *Occasio* (*La occasion*), the *pictura* of the emblem presents a nude figure precariously positioned upon a solitary wheel, floating in a turbulent sea. The forces of the winds are portrayed as instilling fear in both the avian creatures soaring in the sky and the mariners at sea, who struggle to navigate their boats through the surrounding waters. Alciato envisions *Occasio* navigating the storm thanks to her winged feet, enabling her to take off whenever she stops resting them on the surface wheel. The figure is also depicted attempting to achieve balance on the moving wheel at sea by holding onto her

[35] Andrea Alciato, *Los emblemas* (Lyon: Macé Bonhomme, 1549), p. 36; Damiano Acciarino, "Renaissance Iconology of Fate", in *Fate and Fortune in European Thought, ca. 1500-1650*, Ed. Ovanes Akopyan (Leiden: BRILL, 2021), pp. 183-214; and Stefano Pierguidi, "'Gigantomachia' and the Wheel of Fortune in Works of Giulio Romano, Vincenzo Cartari, and Anton Francesco Doni and the Authorship of the Asinesca Gloria", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 67* (2004), 275-284, for the images, see: https://nihilnovum.wordpress.com/2011/03/14/sed-plerumque-sequitur-occasio-calvata-ix; https://archive.org/details/leimaginideglide01cart/page/340/mode/1up?view=theater; and https://archive.org/details/leimaginideglide01cart/page/n4/mode/1up?view=theater.

surrounding veil. Metaphorically, the veil functions like an anchor or a sail caught in the wind, similar to how a sailor uses the sails on a ship to maintain equilibrium during a stormy sea. Thus, these irregular oscillations and precarious actions by *Occasio* symbolically reflect the ups and downs of human life. Alciato's *Occasio* personifies Fortune as a symbol of Opportunity (Figure 21). The elaborate epigram conveys a fictitious dialogue between the personification of Fortune and the observing reader:

> My feet are constantly spinning. I wear winged sandals so I can take off like the wind. My sharp razor represents my sharp wit. I'm a wild spirit, but I can also be clever - My forelock is like a handle - it lets you grab on if you want to follow me or release me if I'm available.[36] (Alciato, 1549, p. 36)

Figure 21. Andrea Alciato, *Occasio* (*La occasion*), emblem, woodcut from *Los emblemas* (Lyon: Macé Bonhomme, 1549), p. 36. Photo credit: University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections.

In this emblem, Alciato encourages the viewer to contemplate the individual's choices in a terrestrial realm while addressing the dilemma of their behavior and its moral implications, alluding to the consequences in an ethical and metaphysical realm.

Tradition claims that Alciato's imagery is based on a Greek sculpture created by Lysippos (active 370-300 BCE) of the school of Árgos during the time of Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE), son of King Philip of Macedonia (382-336 BCE) (Sebastían, 1993).[37] There are no visual records of this sculpture. According to Roman art historian and scientist Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* (Book 34), Lysippos, a highly renowned sculptor of Hellenistic art, worked not only in bronze and marble, like the sculptors of his time, but also in brass (McHam, 2013).[38]

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[36] Alciato, *Los emblemas*, p. 36.

[37] *Alciato. Emblemas*, Ed. Santiago Sebastían (Madrid: AKAL, 1993), pp. 160-162, discussing the various meanings of the emblem as well.

[38] Sarah Blake McHam, *Pliny and the Artistic Culture of the Italian Renaissance: The Legacy of the Natural History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), passim.

In *Imagini*, Cartari also crafted a mythographic theme centered on Fortuna. He amalgamated two concepts (conceits)[39] and images from Alciato's emblems, *Occasio* and *Nemesis* (Figures 21 and 22). However, he subsequently alluded to an alternative interpretation of this mythological personification (Figure 23) (Cartari, 1571; Volpi, 1996; Mulryan, 2012).[40]

Figure 22. Andrea Alciato, Emblem on "Injure no 0ne, either by word or deed", woodcut from *Emblematum liber* (Augsburg: Heinrich Steyner, 1531).
Photo credit: University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections.

[39] The term "conceit" in the context of art history denotes a complex metaphor, specifically an intricate comparison between two ostensibly dissimilar entities. When juxtaposition is employed, this device serves as an artistic tool to invoke a deeper understanding of the art form. Artistic conceits are designed to provoke a surprising and pleasurable effect on the viewer's intellect and senses.

[40] Vincenzo Cartari, *Le imagini dei I Dei degli Antichi*, Ed. Ginetta Auzzas et al. (Vicenza: Neri Pozza), based on Cartari's *Imagini* published in Venice by Vincenzo Valgrisi in 1571, pp. 403-431, on *Occasio*; Caterina Volpi, Ed., *Le immagini degli dei di Vincenzo Cartari* (Rome: De Luca, 1996), pp. 511-544, pp. 421-422, on *Occasi*o. For an English translation, see John Mulryan, *Vincenzo Cartari's Images of the Gods of the Ancients: First Italian Mythographer* (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2012), pp. 357-380, for Fortune as *Occasio*, pp. 373-374.

Figure 23. Vincenzo Cartari, *Fortuna*, woodcut from *Imagini*…edition Venice: Evangelista Deuchino, 1571, p. 340.

Figure 24. Vincenzo Cartari, *Occasio*, woodcut from *Imagini*…edition Venice: Evangelista Deuchino, 1571, p. 420.

Notably, within the cultural context of the Italian Renaissance, the ancient Roman amalgamation of the concepts of Fortuna and virtus persisted. However, the notion of Fortune was not solely associated with chance and prosperity but also with tumultuous events personified by water, such as sea storms, as demonstrated by Alciato (Figure 21) (Pitkin, 1987, pp. 141-142).[41] Fortune was also personified as a river, the waters of which were thought to be subject to change yet could be navigated successfully by a skilled swimmer; hence, the power of the individual can control Fortune's challenges, as noted by the artist, philosopher, and theoretician Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) (Pitkin, 1987, p. 143).[42]

[41] Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 141-142.
[42] Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman*, p. 143.

Subsequently, the artists and humanists Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), influenced by Renaissance Neoplatonism, regarded Fortune as a mythical Goddess whose celestial powers exist within the individual (Pitkin, 1987, p. 143).[43] Therefore, an individual's fate is self-determined, rendering fortune a product of personal agency. The diplomat, historian, and philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) introduced two significant innovations concerning the symbolism of Fortune. The first innovation posits that the personification of Fortune does not remain on a singular wheel, but may traverse between multiple wheels, indicating a complex transitory nature movement. He stated: "A [individual] man could leap from wheel to wheel would always be happy and fortunate" (Pitkin, 1987, p. 146, n. 52).[44] Consequently, an individual exhibiting wise and prudent behavior can navigate these transitions from wheel to wheel and effectively surmount the challenges posed by Fortune. Machiavelli also emphasized the feminine nature of the personification of Fortune (Pitkin, 1987, p. 146).[45] This perspective contrasted with the ancient Greeks, who regarded Fortune as male and associated Fortuna with *Occasio* within the context of Opportune Time, known as Kairos (Mulryan, 2012, p. 373).[46]

Similar to the Italian Renaissance humanists, the Italian emblematists and mythographers perceived Fortuna as a feminine entity and conceptualized her metaphorically traversing upon a wheel, symbolizing her universal journey (Figures 21-23). For example, Cartari's winged and clothed Fortune stands precariously on the rim of a turning wheel. She is a female figure who holds a baton, symbolizing power, and a horse's bridle, representing control. This object is often linked to the key virtue of Temperance. Before Fortune is personified, a barefoot figure stands on the ground, unlike Fortune riding on a wheel, with a figure representing Wealth or Richness. The figure is elegantly dressed, featuring a top with a military cuirass and decorated pad shoulders with a lion's head—a symbol of royalty, strength (*Fortitude*), and valor. She wears a crown featuring zodiac signs, a cosmic nod to the world, and carries a luxurious vase, symbolizing abundance, along with a large olive branch, representing immortality and plenty. Interestingly, Cartari showed a small mask as a decorative pin to secure Fortuna's windblown dress, exposing her bare leg.

Cartari's depiction of *Fortune*, adorned with wings and garments, stands upon a rotating wheel, wielding a baton and accompanied by horse reins. This imagery echoes Alciato's emblem of *Nemesis* with the motto "Nec verbo nec facto" ("Harm no one, either by word or deed") (compare Figures 22 and 23). Alciato's epigram derives from the *Greek Anthology* (16.223-4), which states:

> Nemesis follows closely and tracks the footsteps of [individuals] men. In her hand, she holds a measuring stick and harsh reins. She warns you to do no wrong, to speak no evil words, and demands that moderation be present in all things.[47] (Alciato, 1531/1534; Sebastián, 1993, p. 61; Peter, 1973/1981)

The *pictura* of the emblem depicts a winged and clothed figure precariously standing on a rotating wheel, raising one hand (a stick is not visible) while holding the horse bridle in the other. Her hairstyle is particularly captivating, with her hair piled high atop her head, resembling the shape of a navigational device. She lifts her head in response to a celestial signal (Figure 21). Both figures by Alciato and Cartari—*Nemesis* and *Fortuna*—

[43] Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman*, p. 143.
[44] Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman*, p. 146, n. 52.
[45] Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman*, p. 146.
[46] Mulryan, *Vincenzo Cartari's Images of the Gods of the Ancients*, p. 373.
[47] Andrea Alciato, *Emblematum liber* (Augsburg: Heinrich Steyner, 1531 and 1534). See also Santiago Sebastián, *Alciato. Emblemas* (Madrid: AKAL, 1993), p. 61; and Jay Peter, *The Greek Anthology and Other Ancient Greek Epigrams* (London: Allen Lane, 1973; reprinted in Penguin Classics, 1981).

balance on a wheel that rotates vertically on solid ground, unlike Alciato's figure of *Occasio*, whose wheel floats horizontally through the sea waves. While the rotations in these instances exist within the terrestrial realm, the mutations or oscillations in nature vary significantly concerning the elements and their influence on an individual's life journey.

Cartari's *Occasio* is a most intriguing interpretation of this goddess of Opportunity (Figure 23). Although inspired by Alciatio's emblem of *Occasio*, Cartari presents a partially nude human figure with indeterminate gender, obscured by a veil over the genitalia. The hair is elegantly arranged around the forehead. The figure holds a razor in one hand while adorned with wings on the feet. She maintains her posture atop a sphere set against a natural landscape.

Adjacent to Occasio, positioned on the rocks, exists an emblematic vignette that conveys playful significations regarding material wealth, intellectual prowess, and eloquent expression: two cornucopias filled with fruits and vegetables, whose ends of their horns are interwoven to support a pole that springs from this union. The pole is a caduceus, with entwined snakes, crowned at the top with a helmet with wings. With this vignette, Cartari recalled another of Alciato's emblems, "Good fortune accompanies Virtue" ("Virtuti fortuna comes") (Figure 24) (Alciato, 1550, p. 130; Sebastián, 1993, pp. 156-157).[48] By placing this vignette of good fortune next to *Occasio*, Cartari suggested that Fortune or Opportunity is powerless without the backing or presence of Virtue. Alciato's epigram clearly explains the significance of the imagery: The rod of Mercury is adorned with four wings and two serpents, positioned between the horns of the famous goat Amalthea, which the eloquent men of equity chose to illustrate how Fortune flourishes (Sebastián, 1993, p. 157).[49]

Humanists of the Italian Renaissance frequently utilized this emblem, merging the symbols of abundance and eloquence in both physical and metaphysical dimensions. Mythographers, including Pierio Valeriano and Paolo Giovio, delved into the symbolic associations of Mercury, the Messenger of the Gods, who embodies both abundance and rhetoric, alongside serpents that signify a creative life force and knowledge (Valeriano, 1615, p. 514; Giovio, 1559, p. 136).[50] Their analyses of these associations elucidate the influence of eloquence, prudence, and wisdom on individuals. Well-educated persons employed such symbols to pursue intellectual endeavors and attain success. Concurrently, the goat Amalthea engaged in altruistic actions by nurturing and rearing Jupiter, utilizing her horns to provide sustenance for him. As a result, her horns became emblematic of joy, abundance, and good fortune.

Under the influence of Alciatio's emblem of "Good Fortune accompanies Virtue", Giovio appropriates the same impresa but adding a different adage: "Prudence is less than Fate" ("Fato prudentia minor"), a woodcut from *Dialogo dell'imprese militare et amorose* (Lyon: Guglielmo Roviglio, 1559, p. 136) (compare Figures 25 and 26). While Alciato suggests that good fortune constitutes a form of virtue, leading to favorable outcomes for individuals, Giovio posits that prudent behavior, like good fortune, can mitigate the adverse elements of destiny.

In sum, Vasari's *Chariot of the Sun* and *Chariot of the Moon* elucidate various layers of conceits pertaining to the political role of Cosimo I de' Medici as Duke of Florence, subsequently Siena, and ultimately Tuscany. Furthermore, it highlights the significance of his name, Cosimo, which is derived from the term meaning the cosmos. Consequently, these conceits serve as metaphors for the duke as a cosmic figure ruler (Rousseau, 1983,

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[48] Andrea Alciato, *Emblemata* (Lyon: Macé Bonhomme, 1550), p. 130; Sebastián, *Alciato. Emblemas*, pp. 156-157.
[49] Sebastián, *Alciato. Emblemas*, p. 157.
[50] Pierio Valeriano, *Les hiéroglyphiques*, French edition (Lyon: Paul Frellon, 1615), p. 514, Fortune as a symbol of felicity; Paolo Giovio's impresa 36 in *Dialogo dell'imprese militare e amorose* (Lyon: Gugliemo Roviglio, 1559), p. 136.

p. 124).[51] The numerous symbolic levels are intricately associated with literary and philosophical works, as well as the *all'antica* and Italian Renaissance imagery. Both expressions illustrate Vasari's stylistic approach and the Mannerists' tendency to intertwine emblematic traditions with mythology and metaphysical conceits, aiming to pursue political power and artistic excellence.

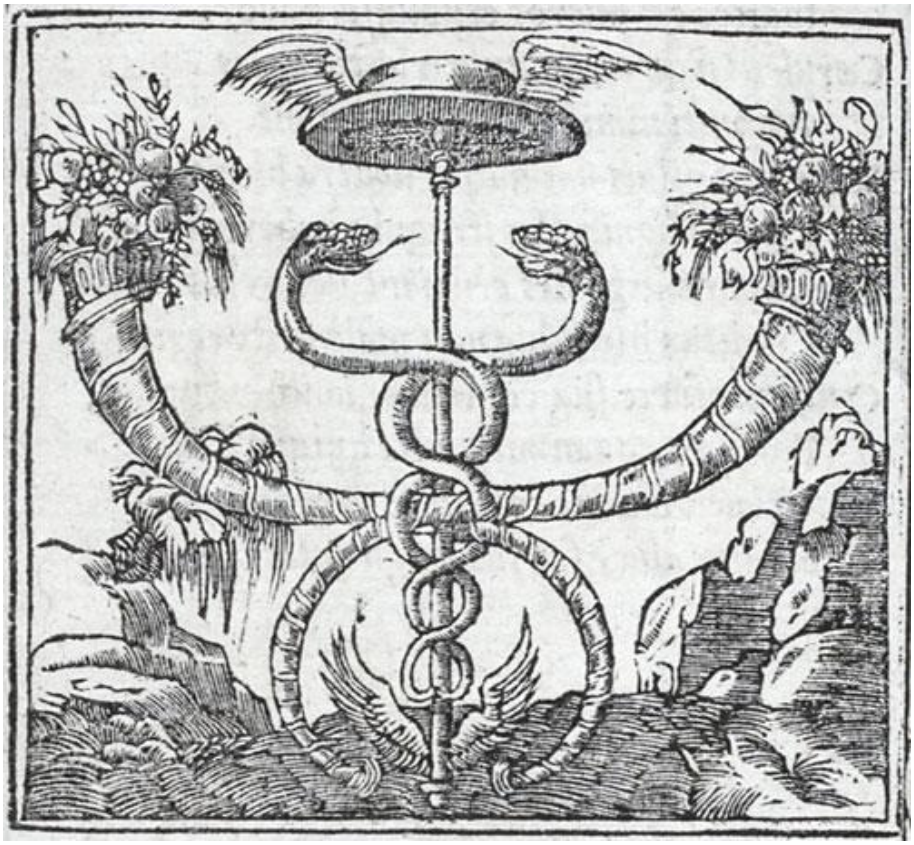

Figure 25. Andrea Alciato, "Good fortune attendant on virtue", emblem, woodcut from *Emblemata* (Lyon: Macé Bonhomme, 1550), p. 130.
Photo credit: University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections.

[51] Claudia Rousseau, *Cosimo I de' Medici and Astrology* (Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1983), p. 124.

Figure 26. Paolo Giovio, Impresa, "Prudence is less than fate", woodcut from *Dialogo dell'imprese militare et amorose* (Lyon: Guglielmo Roviglio, 1559), p. 136.
Photo credit: University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections.

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