

BOOK REVIEWS

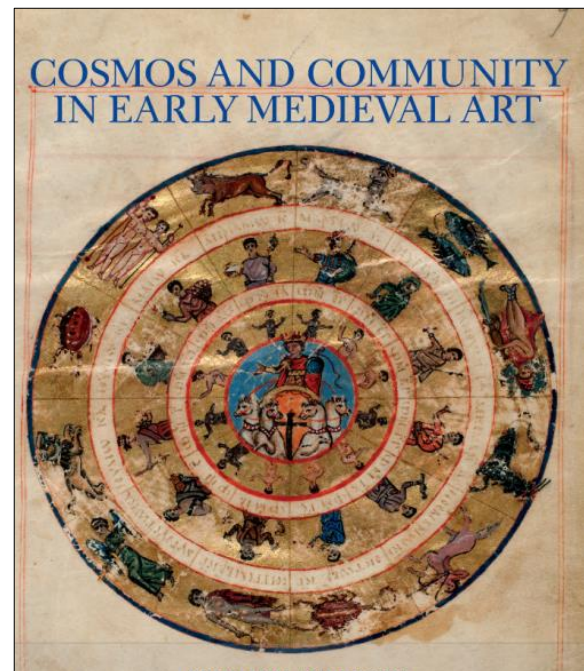
Cosmos and Community in Early Medieval Art, by Benjamin Anderson. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2017). Pp. 204. ISBN 978-0-300-21916-6 (hardback), 203 × 254 mm, US\$65.00.

Cosmos and Community in Early Medieval Art presents a thorough study of a selection of celestially-focused artworks from three distinct cultures created at the time each diverged from their shared legacy of Greco-Roman astronomy. The distinct religious backgrounds of Frankish, (mainly Carolingian), Islamic (mainly Umayyad), and Byzantine cultures maintained the implementation of cosmological iconography to reinforce the supreme position and authority of the ruler, but this examination focuses on the aspect of 'community'. Anderson conveys a new viewpoint to the study of these artworks by investigating their significance outside the royal or religious innermost circles to include courts, ambassadors, ecclesiastics and the community at large. His approach seems debatable for how many members of these early societies actually had close access to these regal treasures or valued astronomical manuscripts that are discussed. I would suggest only a privileged few in each of these varied communities had more than a quick glance from a distance, if that.

The examples of early medieval artworks discussed in the book concern mainly items decorated with zodiacal constellations, their positions and motions through the heavens. These astronomical images all derive from classical antiquity and have been utilized as symbols of power and authority. Anderson states that the objects studied display a version of the heavens that venerate "... a more neutral universe not involved with human lives or daily activities." (p. 15). The constellations and signs of the zodiac bear no astrological implications as this study concentrates mostly on objects made in the early ninth century, well before the surge of astrological treatises translated from Arabic in the twelfth century. The inclusion of the signs of the zodiac in most medieval artworks (church façade sculpture, books of hours and illustrated calendars) matches each zodiacal sign with its appropriate labor of the month but the labors are not included in these representative artworks. His examples include surviving cosmological artworks that are well-known, such as the Carolingian Cathedra Petri now in the Vatican, the silver table of Charlemagne, not extant, and the Star Mantle of Henry II in the Diözesanmuseum Bamberg, along with little-known decorated textiles, such as Mantle of Kunigunde and the Cloth of the Ewaldi.

The book's text consists of an introduction, four extensive chapters, and a brief conclusion.

Chapter 1, "Tyranny and Splendor" encompasses the tale of the Throne of Khosrow which is not depicted for it survives only in literature. This section also includes examples of how rulers evoked cosmological imagery to reinforce their authority and divine right to rule. Chapter 2, "Declaration and Transaction", expounds further on the theme of medieval rulers claiming universal rule; proof of that assertion was strengthened by images, medals and clothing that adopted images of stars, planets and heavenly constellations. Among his diverse subjects are Charlemagne's silver table, zodiacal diagrams from astronomical compendia, and the frescoed ceiling of the bathhouse at Qusayr' Amra, a Umayyad desert castle. The castle was strategically located on the important trade



route between Damascus and Mecca, a "... site where networks of political authority were formed and confirmed ..." (p. 68), under a reference to Umayyad regal power and authority.

Chapter 3, "Carolingian Consensus", concentrates mainly on medieval manuscripts produced in the first quarter of the ninth century. During that brief period the Carolingian scriptoria of cathedrals, monasteries, and royal courts created and copied a huge number of manuscripts including small monastic handbooks and various astronomical texts.

Collections of available astronomical texts were bound together as compendia which usually contained celestial maps, cosmological diagrams, computus charts with techniques needed for computations, and the cycle of constellation images passed down from Late Antique exemplars. Many of the 41 to 46 con-

stellation illustrations include brief descriptions of the stars' number and their location within the formations. They also have texts of Isidore of Seville (CE 560–636) in the earlier manuscripts and of Bede (CE 672–735) on heavenly motions and computus in the later copies.

The texts and images range in quality from sketchy, amateurish productions to outstanding royal treasures like the Leiden Aratea of CE 814 credited to 'The Astronomer'. An aspect of these cosmological compendia that still surprises is that, despite their creation by scribal monks, priests and religious figures, the illuminations retain their 'pagan' planetary gods, myths and iconography. The only concession to Christianity can be found in one miniature of the Leiden Aratea, Gemini, who display small Christian crosses on their caps.

The theme of Chapter 4, "Byzantine Dissensus", centers on Greek astronomical manuscripts in the Byzantine world where very few surviving manuscripts with cosmological texts are illustrated. The Vatican Ptolemy, eighth or ninth century, survives along with three other early copies of the Handy Tables and is the only copy with illustrations. It contains five colorful full-page diagrams and painted lunettes over the tables. Anderson claims the miniatures give the impression of a well-ordered cosmos ruled by a well-ruled empire. The study presents evidence that shows Byzantium's Emperor held abundant astronomical knowledge that enabled him to rule his Empire wisely and confidently. While in the Frankish and early Islamic Empires, the rulers were sufficiently educated in astronomical knowledge but proficiency in exact details was left to experts in the field. The cosmological imagery in Byzantine manuscripts established and promoted the idea that the ruler alone had the necessary skills and authority to rule. In contrast the Frankish and Islamic rulers were promoted as using the stellar imagery to establish a more communal sharing of knowledge with the audience who observed these artworks.

The book brings to the forefront some religious and secular manuscripts and regal paraphernalia that has had little previous exposure in Western research. The book and its sixty-seven color illustrations are of high-quality and well produced. There is one minor error on page 55 where Anderson names Charlemagne as the son of Charles Martel; of course, he was his grandson. In this study he does not discuss extensive details of the art historical aspects or the astronomical meanings, or techniques. Rather than discussing an item's contemporary acceptance or usefulness, he presents the social functions, the intentions and significance of each for the patrons, artists and viewers.

Anderson's original approach of invoking the concept of community is appealing for the social functions and significance of these cosmological illustrations and decorated artifacts. My main difficulty stands with the outreaching concept of 'community'. How many individuals in a Frankish, Byzantine or Islamic community would have had visual access to Charlemagne's Silver Table, Charles the Bald's Ivory Throne, Henry II's Star Mantle (some doubt he ever wore it), or the frescoed dome of a caliph's bathhouse at Qusayr' Amra, or Ptolemy's Handy Tables? Manuscripts in monastic, cathedral or regal libraries too could be accessed by very limited audiences as only the elite and clergy were literate. How many would ever see the miniatures or could understand the Vatican Ptolemy? That these luxury items illustrated with cosmological images had the ability "... to mediate between an individual and a community ..." (p. 147) seems quite limited, exceedingly rare, or even doubtful.

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Selene's Two Faces: From 17th Century Drawings to Spacecraft Imaging, edited by Carmen Pérez González. (Leiden, Brill, 2018). Pp. xvi + 310. ISBN 978-90-04-29886-6 (hardback), 160 × 240 mm, US\$132.00.

This is an interesting book that mixes art and science, and as such it has authors from professional and amateur astronomy, from academia and from museums, inspired by editor Carmen Pérez González who has a Masters degree in astrophysics and a PhD in Art History.

Carmen sets the scene for the whole book in the first chapter:

If any scientific object has over the course of human history aroused the fascination of both scientists and artists worldwide, it is beyond doubt the moon. (p. 1).

This book spans the time-range from the seventeenth century to the astronaut era of the twentieth century, and is

... intermedial, intercultural and interdisciplinary ... [bringing] together various media (photography, maps, engravings, lithographs, globes, texts), cultures and theoretical perspectives ... (p. 2).

This catholic approach is reflected in the eight following chapters, which discuss the history of selenography; the Moon in Persian and Japanese astronomy; nineteenth century lunar photography; "The Digital Sky of Hamburg Observatory: Bringing Astro-photographic Plates from the 20th into the 21st Century", and finally a chapter with the subtitle "Close-up Detailed