Visual Cultures of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe

EDITED BY
Timothy McCall, Sean Roberts, and Giancarlo Fiorenza
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Henry Dietrich Fernández passed away in September 2009. The editors wish to dedicate this volume to Henry in memory of his scholarship, intellectual curiosity, and collegiality.
Introduction

Revealing Early Modern Secrecy

Timothy McCall and Sean Roberts

Secrets in all their variety permeated early modern Europe. From the whispers of ambassadors at court to the emphatically publicized books of home remedies that flew from presses and booksellers’ shops, women and men were bound in a web of arcane and privileged knowledge. Secrecy, of course, is hardly an early modern invention. The notion, most expansively construed, that knowledge must be revealed or unveiled, that signs and symbols stand at a threshold to be peeled back by probing eyes and minds, is an integral part of an intellectual tradition that stretches back at least as far as Egyptian and pre-Socratic Greek thought and encompasses medieval exegetes and humanist poets alike. This volume, however, examines characteristics of secrecy rooted in the particular intellectual, visual, and social conditions of European cultures between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. Novel forms of erudition (humanism foremost among these), a certain fluidity between conceptions of public and private spheres while rigid stratification of class and rank remained entrenched, and a rapidly changing fashioning of selves spurred by unprecedented religious upheaval all might be seen as separating an early modern culture of secrecy from its predecessors and successors. Perhaps what most characterized early modern secrets, however, was the sheer quantity and vibrancy of the material and visual culture that inspired and sustained performances of secrecy. Arcane, erudite, and sometimes perplexing images and symbols were frescoed on the walls of princely palaces, woven in the threads of lavish tapestries, and emblazoned in ink and paint on the printed and manuscript pages that filled the studioli and cabinets of scholars.

Art historians, literary scholars, and historians have long labored to decipher the hidden contents of Renaissance words and images. More recently, scholars of medieval and early modern Europe have begun the crucial work of anatomizing secrecy, of disarticulating secrets to understand how they work. They have focused increasing attention on secrecy as a driving cultural force, pointing to its centrality in milieus ranging from alchemy to statecraft, medicine to theater.¹ A broad range of disciplinary concerns has motivated these reinvestigations in fields from the history of science to anthropology and literary studies. While approaches have been as variegated as the objects of their inquiries, these reconsiderations of the clandestine have been united by a

¹ Eamon, Science and the Secrets of Nature; Cope, Secret Sharers in Italian Comedy; Lochner, Covert Operations; Rasmussen, “Introduction”; Long, Openness, Secrecy, Authorship; Engel et al., Das Geheimnis; Park, Secrets of Women; Biagioli, Galileo’s Instruments of Credit; Kavey, Books of Secrets; Snyder, Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy; Long and Rankin, Secrets and Knowledge.
commitment to look beyond the “contents” of secrets to shed light on the act and means of their disguise and revelation. In some cases, the secret itself gained meaning by the act of being hidden and excluded from certain audiences. In other cases, the very public presentation of information as having been previously occluded served to augment its significance. A unifying principle of much recent scholarship investigating secrecy is that the revelation of secrets was as significant and efficacious as their initial invisibility or hiddenness.

Among the best-known early examples, though hardly a unique starting point for Renaissance conceptions of secrecy, is Petrarch’s enigmatically named Secretum (The Secret). This text, comprised of three dialogues between the fourteenth-century Italian poet and the Latin church father Augustine, can tell us a great deal about how such secrets work. Petrarch explained the title of his work with a command directed to the text itself: “So, little book, I bid you to flee from public places. Be content to stay with me, true to the title that I have given you. For you are my secret, and thus you are titled. And when I think about profound subjects, speak to me in secret what has been in secret spoken to you.” The lessons proffered in the conversations that follow were not usefully secret in the way that battle plans, libelous rumors, or alchemical recipes might have been. Yet Petrarch’s invocation of secrecy was nonetheless tremendously significant in the clever way he emphasized moral reflection and exercised the faculty of personal judgment. The poet designated his text as a secret and thereby established a privileged community of readers, distinguished by their virtuosic erudition, their discretion, and their ability to comprehend spiritual truths best hidden from the prying eyes of the uninitiated.

The revelation and withholding of secrets, as Petrarch’s Secretum demonstrates, have often served as techniques not only of community building but, equally, of exclusion. A seventeenth-century Londoner coming home from the bookshop, eager to learn the carefully guarded secrets of fish, or a print collector in Nuremberg probing the enigmatic polygons and arcane glyphs of Albrecht Dürer’s Melencolia I (fig. 1) each could have imagined him or herself as possessing information hidden from others. If we say, “you, dear reader, we have a secret to tell you, something that no one else knows,” what information we might have for you could very well be less significant than the sense of importance you no doubt feel at being included in our intimate group, and less efficacious than the distinction and privilege granted to you at the expense of everyone else not fortunate enough to have picked up this volume. In the early modern period, no less than today, the keeping and telling of secrets were communicative acts, and the sharing, offering, and hiding of such secrets acted as a means of distinguishing between, excluding, and producing publics along an axis of criteria ranging from education and social status to gender and age.

As Karma Lochrie has shown in her groundbreaking study Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy (1999), the “act of secrecy...is a social one that draws boundaries between ‘those who

3. See, for example, Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet; Lochrie, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.”
4. Art history’s tradition of probing the Melencolia I for its secrets may be traced to Panoński, Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer. Michael Camille characterized the engraving as “almost a paradigm of the problem of meaning itself”; Camille, “Walter Benjamin and Dürer’s Melencolia I,” 59.
5. Bok, Secrets. See also de Luca, “Notion of Secretum.”
© Trustees of the British Museum.
Just as secrecy has been understood as a process of hiding or obscuring, unveiling is conventionally regarded as revelatory. That supposed opposite of secrecy is conceptualized as sometimes intrusive but always uncovering visual or allegorical knowledge, often embodied in the naked human form. It seems to be the quintessential act of penetrating to an inner secret. Time thus unveils Truth in an iconographic pattern typified by aged Father Time grasping or exposing a virginal, alluring personification in female form. Art historical scholarship has often interpreted the nude female figure as a sign for Neoplatonic, abstract truth and divine beauty, or at the opposite Aristotelian extreme, as it were, as merely sensual and material. Poetic veils are understood by the literati (of any period) as deliberate masks to hide meaning from all but themselves, that is, those construed as the initiated elite who grasp underlying principles rather than being deluded by superficial charms. So too, the lifting of veils could be a metaphor for the self-conscious perspicacity of metapainting that reveals its creator’s ingenuity and virtuosity. Notably, in such aesthetic and intellectual scenarios, access to the underlying, hidden “truth” is posited as difficult and, like many other kinds of secretive knowledge, is restricted to an echelon distinguished by factors like gender, education, and status.

What is often left out, but will be broadly reviewed here, is a consideration of the dynamics of power and privilege, chiefly in relation to reception. In terms of gender, it will be argued, not all acts of exposure can be explained as merely prurient or voyeuristic. Furthermore, acts of unveiling coexist with and imply a reciprocal covering; hence the orthographic duality of “(un)veiling” better captures the layered, allusive nature of the visual and performative history of secrecy. Many revealed secrets are touched on in this volume, and here the construction and dynamics of the

open secret is outlined. To be a meaningful participant in a community of secrecy (that is, any group that shared secrets and invested in the importance of secrets), one had to send visible signals about that advantage while simultaneously maintaining concealment. During the Renaissance, the interplay of secrecy and revelation, hiding and discovering, was presented by such means as words, images, rituals, physical framing of cultural objects, and metaphors for artistic practice, each of which is investigated here.

The hierarchy between the philosophical and the particular, cast in the form of the classically ideal opposed to the shamefully excessive, was influentially applied to the unclothed body in Kenneth Clark’s lectures on The Nude of 1953, which expanded the pronouncement of his mentor Bernard Berenson that “the nude is not the naked.” Bared human bodies can apparently be readily distinguished by way of a dichotomy that contrasts the naked with the nude, the obscene with the seductive, the embarrassed with the confident, the view that should remain private with the sight that ennobles the public realm. Almost like clothing, thought Clark, “the formula of the classical ideal had been more protective than any drapery; whereas the shape of the Gothic body, which suggested that it was normally clothed, gave it the impropriety of a secret.”

Clark’s anachronistic assumptions about shame, privacy, and indecency were common at his time but they still inform judgments made today about objects that are said to belong to what is positioned as a clandestine, illicit, and furtive culture of early modern courtesans and mistresses. The titillated, almost wistful closeting by some modern commentators of an urban subculture of sexual commerce and of the long-standing, chiefly aristocratic habit of keeping mistresses and begetting bastards neglects the degree to which such practices were open secrets, even well-known possibilities available to elite men but also some women and which often aided their political advancement or cultural reputation.

Commenting on Freud’s claim to unveil truth in dream analysis, Derrida observed, “Exhibiting, baring, stripping down, unveiling—this is an old routine: the metaphor of truth, which is as much as to say the metaphor of metaphor, the truth of truth, the truth of metaphor.” The standard metaphor of unveiling truth posits delving beyond the surface to reveal pure truth, but that too is a metaphor, one founded on privilege and insight assumed by the unveilers. My point here is to avoid the “old routine” of claims to an end point of ultimate, universal, moral, or aesthetic truth, and instead examine the entwined processes and rhetoric of secrecy and unveiling in the historical and political context of early modern Europe, primarily Italy. Pervasive and meaningful in practices and texts, the displaying of secrets accrued varying degrees of power to producer, teller, and audience alike. So too did their covering, acts that often left a residue in visual culture and the language of artistic praxis. The modern antithetical conditions of the clothed and undressed, the
overtly pictured and the ambiguously intimated, were instead constituted as layered, variously veiled states. In a semi-Derridean vein, here intertwined with sociohistorical inquiry, the diametrical opposition between the secret and the known can be collapsed or undone because the terms rely on each other and even become one another in the field of visualization, where a secret paradoxically only exists if it is seen to matter and have being.

Layers
In early modern culture, barriers between secret and explicit knowledge were permeable and interactive more than dichotomous or static. Clear separation between the public and private spheres, crucial to modern assumptions about secrecy, subjectivity, and intimacy, was in many ways a development of later centuries. Spaces tended to be porous and multipurpose, sometimes of equal measure semipublic and pseudoprivate. The Dutch soldertje (a raised platform placed near a window, seen in figure 1.8 below) or window embrasures in the Palazzo Ducale of Urbino, for example, demarcated a quieter, withdrawn space but were laminated between the street on one side and the larger, sometimes bustling room on the other. Spaces supposedly inaccessible to all but an elite few, in the pope’s Vatican Palace or Sistine Chapel or the French king’s château at Fontainebleau, were nevertheless seen more broadly through the medium of reproductive prints that were either actual or more often putative souvenirs of visits. The prints disseminated views of varying accuracy that relied precisely on the confidentiality of the original works in order to be marketable commodities while also publicizing the renown and cultivation of their owners.

Boundaries circumscribing public and private zones of the body were also strategically deployed and subtly charged. Many people bathed in special garments rather than baring their bodies, and fifteenth-century advice on marital conduct reiterated medieval church doctrine that husbands should never see their wives naked. Given these proprieties, Florentines might have been especially impressed in the last decades of that century by Botticelli’s life-sized paintings of naked women derived from his depiction of Venus at Her Birth (fig. 1.1). Variants by his hand or workshop point to the popularity of the scheme, a glowing form standing on a narrow ledge against a dark background, distinctly bereft of narrative particularities. The type engendered similar figures from other artists but also probably suffered during Savonarolan “bonfires of the vanities,” for the destroyed objects included “painted figures of women” according to an eyewitness in February 1497, and a year later the “dishonest and lust-inciting paintings and statues” explicitly included works by Botticelli.

Still recorded in the sixteenth century by Vasari and others in numerous households, the overt views of female nudes are instances of what could be called “public privacy” in that they intermingle

8. The 1483 inventory of the Sienese physician Maestro Bartolo di Tura listed “uno camiciotto da bagno”; Herald, Renaissance Dress, 248. It was instead bathing barbarians (Norterners) who hid their genitals with “brache” (breeches) according to Luigini, Il libro della bella donna, 254 (1554). On marital decorum, see Payer, Sex and the Penitentials, 61, 103, 165n56; McNeill and Garner, Medieval Handbooks of Penance, 211, 336; Viglione, “Giovanni Dominici,” 120–21 (the Regola del governo di cura familiare of ca. 1405); Barbaro, “On Wifely Duties,” 213.


On the Skins of Goats and Sheep
(Un)masking the Secrets of Nature in Early Modern Popular Culture

William Eamon

In March 1580, a healer by the name of Bartolomeo Riccio appeared before the Venetian Provveditori alla Sanità, or Public Health Board, to apply for a license to sell his secret remedy to cure poisonous snake bites. Riccio was from Lecce, a city in the southern Italian region of Puglia, which gave rise to a host of empirical healers who fanned out across Italy in the sixteenth century, plying their trade in cities large and small. A snake handler who collected vipers to sell to pharmacists to make theriac (vipers being the active ingredient in that exotic preparation), he could catch poisonous snakes with his bare hands and could kill them barehanded without causing any danger to himself. He did this, the archival record states, “to the marvel and stupor of everyone” (fig. 2.1).

Under ordinary circumstances, obtaining permission to sell drugs in the public squares was a routine procedure. In order to sell their remedies in Venice, empirics like Riccio had to obtain a license from the Public Health Board. Usually this was a fairly simple matter of submitting the recipe for the medicament to the physicians so that they might make a judgment about whether it was safe. The Public Health Board was more concerned about whether the remedies might be harmful than with whether or not they were efficacious.

Ricció already had a license from the Public Health Board to sell his antidote. But a prior of the Venetian College of Physicians had observed him at work in the Piazza San Marco, and was so impressed by the snake charmer’s skill that he recommended him to the Sanità. With the prior’s recommendation in hand, Riccio went to the Health Board and applied to have his license turned into a ten-year privilege. In order to prove the worth of his antidotes, Riccio appeared before the committee with his box of serpents and proceeded with a “demonstration” of the drug’s effectiveness. Under the watchful eyes of the provveditori, Riccio caused himself to be bitten on the torso by his snakes. Bare-chested, he stood resolutely as the bites swelled up and turned black. The physicians began to worry, but then Riccio calmly reached into his medicine chest and took out a vial of his secret ointment and applied it to the bites. Immediately and seemingly miraculously, the

1. The relevant documents are in ASV, Provveditori alla Sanità, Reg. 734, c. 177v (1580) and Reg. 735, c. 135v (1583). Montinaro, San Paolo dei serpenti, 69–70.
2. On the regulation of medicine in sixteenth-century Venice, see Vanzan Marchini, I mali e i rimedi.
swelling subsided. The examiners were so impressed that they ruled that for ten years no one other than Riccio be allowed to mount a bank and sell the remedy.

Now let us imagine Riccio as he leaves the office of the Public Health Board, license in hand, and follow him as he walks the short distance from the Salt Office, where the Health Board met, to the Piazza San Marco, where he practiced his trade. The scene on the piazza might have looked something like the one in an image from Giacomo Franco’s famous costume book, *Habiti d’huomini et donne Venetiane* (Venice, 1609), depicting charlatans performing their theatrical routines to attract crowds in order to vend their nostrums (fig. 2.2). In performances ranging from full-length shows to theatrical displays of themselves as wonder-working healers, the charlatans flaunted their supposed therapeutic prowess. In the foreground of Franco’s picture, we see a snake handler, just like Riccio.

Riccio must have been quite a sight on the Piazza San Marco. We might imagine him appearing something like the character in an image from Giuseppe Maria Mitelli’s book of etchings, *Le arte per via* (1660), a portfolio of drawings on the humble trades (fig. 2.3). Of course, the picture

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Secrecy and the Production of Seignorial Space  
*The Coretto of Torrechiara*

Timothy McCall

Through mechanisms of secrecy, hiddenness, and revelation, the *coretto* of Torrechiara castle (fig. 3.1) conspicuously generated the impression of privilege and piety for its seignorial patron, Pier Maria Rossi of Parma.1 Displayed today in the Museo d’Arte Applicate of Milan’s Castello Sforzesco, this remarkably dynamic, even charismatic structure—dating to the 1450s or ’60s and attributed to Arduino da Baiso or, more convincingly, the brothers Lorenzo and Cristoforo Canozzi da Lendinara—seems originally to have been located in the ground floor chapel of San Nicomede within Torrechiara just south of Parma.2 The eleven-foot-tall edifice of intarsiated wood is comprised of polychrome panels bearing Rossi emblems and geometric carvings and is surmounted by a hexagonal pyramid decorated with intarsia floral designs (see figs. 3.1, 3.9, 3.11). Occupying the *coretto*, Pier Maria and perhaps others participated in masses and court rituals from an honored position. The imposing *coretto* would have drawn the immediate attention of viewers and would have

For her generosity and wisdom, I dedicate this essay to Margaret Haines.

1. The *coretto* (Castello Sforzesco, Museo d’Arte Applicate, Inv. Mobili 926) measures 360 cm x 163 cm x 164 cm. Some scholars have wondered if the *coretto* might be a pastiche: Tinti, *Il mobilio fiorentino*, 71; Colle and Zanuso, *Museo d’Arte Applicate*, 470. Recent studies have argued persuasively that the woodwork and metal fastenings date to the fifteenth century, and in the late nineteenth century Corrado Ricci thought even the polychrome to be original: Ricci, “Il Castello di Torchiara: Cappella di S. Nicomede,” 24; Bagatin, *Le pitture lignee*, 122; Salsi, *Il mobile italiano*, 34. Similarly sophisticated spaces and contraptions in Ferrara and for Torrechiara’s *studiolo* (discussed below) provide further evidence of a local, creative team of woodworkers and additional grounds to consider the *coretto* genuine. Though Colle and Zanuso (*Museo d’Arte Applicate*, 467) asserted that the *coretto* was first published by Corrado Ricci in the 1890s, a previous reference dates from the 1830s and would seem early for the art market for reconstituted furnishings, which, as Ellen Callmann has shown, first flourished in the late nineteenth century, and primarily in Florence: Molossi, *Vocabolario topografico*, 550–51; Callmann, “William Blundell Spence.” The possibility remains, however, that the *coretto* has been reconfigured or reconstructed (potentially using components of the *studiolo’s portoni*, discussed below), or that it has been repainted or heavily restored.

FIGURE 3.1. Coretto of Torrechiara, ca. 1460s, Milan, Castello Sforzesco, Civiche Raccolte d’Arte Applicata.
Photo by author, © Comune di Milano, all rights reserved.
encouraged active and determined looking within. The structure framed its occupants and magnified their status, and consequently, those located inside the coretto would have been made increasingly aware of their own privilege and of their separation from the other visitors to the chapel.

This essay situates the coretto within Torrechiara’s built and experienced environment, investigating the mechanics of the coretto’s portals—its door and window—and courtly actors’ movements in and through these spaces, to account for the ways that it facilitated both connections and exclusions. Considering potential views and sounds from and into the coretto recognizes the significance of embodied, multisensory phenomena—what Bruce Smith has recently called “historical phenomenology”—activated by the structure for the few who inhabited it and for the many who beheld it. As scholars have suggested, occupants could have listened to religious functions while hidden within. The coretto, however, animated much more energetic mechanisms of power and revelation through its spatial activations of secrecy. As my discussion of the coretto’s operations will establish, those located inside were never completely hidden, but were rather hidden to be revealed. Ultimately, this essay interprets the ways that social identities and networks were constructed through distinction and exclusion and argues that Torrechiara’s dynamic coretto amplified power, status, and piety through a rhetoric of secrecy.

The Count and His Mistress

Constructed in the 1450s, Torrechiara (fig. 3.2) was one of over thirty castles subject to the Sforza-allied Pier Maria Rossi who controlled much of the Parmense, and at times Parma itself, from the late 1440s until his death in 1482. The historiography of Rossi’s substantial art patronage has been dominated by and filtered through the prevailing interpretation of his most stunning commission, Torrechiara’s camera d’oro (golden chamber) (figs. 3.3–3.4), a lavish multimedia room with gold and azurite frescoes depicting Rossi’s aristocratic mistress, Bianca Pellegrini, wandering through her signore’s territory and performing rituals of courtly love. Corrado Ricci’s formative studies (1894) of the camera d’oro established the amorous relationship between Pier Maria and his mistress as the prevailing interpretive mode for these frescoes and indeed for the entirety of the lord’s artistic and architectural patronage.

Largely sharing Ricci’s sentimental, bourgeois notions of family and individual subjectivity, scholars have followed his lead and have idealized the imagery as reflecting Pier Maria and Bianca’s ostensibly private, authentic, and monogamous love for each other. The construction of Torrechiara, called an “eternal, ideal nest of peace and love,” has consistently been connected to a period of utopian peace—a “happy interval of peace and prosperity…dedicated exclusively to love and its diverse phenomenologies”—and Rossi’s commissions for the castle, including the coretto, have been interpreted in predominantly private and personal terms, as art solely for his mistress or

3. Smith, Key of Green, 257.
4. For the camera d’oro, see Woods-Marsden, “Pictorial Legitimation”; Roettgen, Italian Frescoes, 358–73; Coerver, “Donna/Dono”; Campbell, “Pier Maria Rossi’s Treasure”; McCall, “Networks of Power.”
Michelangelo’s infatuation with the young Roman nobleman Tommaso de’ Cavalieri, was no secret. In December of 1532, the fifty-seven-year-old artist found himself besotted with the young man, who was probably in his teens, and quite possibly as young as twelve.¹ A flurry of letters passed between them, quickly followed by the gift of a series of highly finished drawings (figs. 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3), including the *Rape of Ganymede*, in which the god Zeus, in the form of an eagle, abducts the young man whose physical beauty he cannot resist, the *Punishment of Tityus*, showing the lustful Titan eternally punished for his attempted rape of Latona, and the *Fall of Phaeton*, the tragic story of Apollo’s son who overreached—daring to drive his father’s chariot, he lost control and lost his life.² Stories of divine lust and the consequences of human hubris, the drawings are narrative reflections on the attractions and dangers of desire. They were the vivid visual expression of an attachment articulated in equally effusive terms in the letters and poems that date from the same period. The creative results of Michelangelo’s relationship with Cavalieri have long been subjects of study in art history and literature. This essay seeks to explore the mechanics of their exchange, the methods that Michelangelo employed to protect the secrecy of his infatuation from some while simultaneously advertising it to a select group of friends and confidants. It will demonstrate that Michelangelo’s methods, although motivated by practical concerns, served several functions: they defined the relationship as respectable, reinforced bonds of friendship and intimacy within Michelangelo’s own circle, and allowed Michelangelo control over his inventions and communications at a time when he himself had become a desirable commodity.

When Michelangelo met Cavalieri, he was at an exceptionally low period in his life, both professionally and personally. Between 1532 and 1534, he was not quite settled in either Florence or Rome, moving between both cities as a consequence of his professional obligations and, more significantly,

¹. For Michelangelo and Cavalieri, see Kirschenbaum, “Reflections on Michelangelo’s Drawings”; Frommel, *Michelangelo und Tommaso de’ Cavalieri;* Liebert, *Michelangelo: A Psychoanalytic Study;* and Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance,* 17–62. Precisely how young Cavalieri was when the two met is a matter of some debate, but he was surely no older than nineteen and quite possibly as young as twelve. For Cavalieri’s birthdate, see Panofsky-Soergel, “Postscriptum to Tommaso Cavalieri.”

of his political choices during the failed Florentine Republic of 1527 to 1530. His pressing artistic commitments included the unfinished tomb of Julius II in Rome, commissioned by the della Rovere pope in 1505 and practically stalled from its inception. Under pressure from Julius’s heirs, who accused him of embezzlement, and after much negotiation, he had signed a fourth contract for the project in April 1532, reducing the size and scope of the monument and moving its location from St. Peter’s to the less prominent site of San Pietro in Vincoli. His honor insulted, his ambitions for the project thwarted, Michelangelo longed to be “free of this obligation,” complaining that he had “aged twenty years and lost twenty pounds.” In Florence, he was responsible for two concurrent projects at the Medici church of San Lorenzo: the Laurentian Library and the family funerary chapel in the

3. For Michelangelo’s movements between 1532 and 1534, see Wallace, “‘Nothing Else Happening.’” For a thorough analysis of Michelangelo’s political beliefs, see Spini, “Politicità di Michelangelo.”

4. For a summary of the history of the Julius tomb project, see De Tolnay, Michelangelo, vol. 4: The Tomb of Julius II.

5. In a letter to Sebastiano, Michelangelo uses the word "disobbrigarsi" as he searches for a solution to the tomb problem; Carteggio, 3:323. For the language of enslavement and obligation in Michelangelo’s letters, especially as relates to the tomb project, see Parker, Michelangelo and the Art of Letter Writing. For “son venti anni e venti libbre invechiato e diminuito,” see Carteggio, 4:14–15, translation in Ramsden, Letters, 1:195.
New Sacristy. He had ceased his work at San Lorenzo in the wake of the Medici expulsion from Florence in 1527, incurring the ire of Pope Clement VII and his nephew Alessandro de’ Medici, who was installed as duke of Florence in 1532. Perhaps due to his political sympathies, Michelangelo never recovered his enthusiasm for this dynastic complex, returning to work reluctantly in 1532, and finally abandoning San Lorenzo altogether when he quit Florence for good in 1534. In addition to these professional challenges, Michelangelo had suffered the deaths of his beloved brother, Buonarroti, in 1528, his nephew, Buonarroti’s young son Simone, in 1529, and his father, Lodovico, in 1531. Michelangelo found himself responsible for the care of Buonarroti’s two surviving children and the maintenance of the extended Buonarroti clan as its new patriarch.

It was on a visit to Rome in the winter of 1532 that Michelangelo met Cavalieri. Despite the fame their relationship now enjoys, its origins are somewhat obscure. Michelangelo was likely introduced to Cavalieri by Pier Antonio Cecchini, a fellow Florentine sculptor who was attached to the household of Cardinal Niccolò Ridolfi. Ridolfi, the grandson of Lorenzo the Magnificent through his mother, Contessina de’ Medici, and thus a cousin of Clement VII, was a pillar of the

6. Michelangelo had won the contract for the façade of San Lorenzo in 1516, but the commission was canceled in 1520 after the untimely deaths of Giuliano de’ Medici Duke of Nemours and Lorenzo de’ Medici Duke of Urbino. From 1520, Michelangelo’s focus at San Lorenzo was the family funerary chapel in the New Sacristy and the Laurentian Library, commissioned in 1520 and 1523, respectively. For Michelangelo’s work at San Lorenzo, see Wallace, Michelangelo at San Lorenzo.

7. For Cecchini as the likely catalyst of the introduction, see Frommel, Michelangelo und Tommaso de’ Cavalieri, 14. Analyzing the admittedly sparse evidence, Frommel concludes that “Everything points to Michelangelo and Cavalieri meeting in the Ridolfi circle”; ibid., 72. In the first surviving letter between Cecchini and Michelangelo, Cecchini signs himself “Vostro minor servitore Pietrantonio, familiar di monsignor reverendissimo de’ Ridolfi”; Carteggio, 3:414. For the alternative theory that Bartolomeo Angelini introduced Michelangelo to Cavalieri, see Ramsden, Letters, 1:298–99. See also Buck, Michelangelo’s Dream, 76.
Secrecy operated on many levels within Renaissance court society. At Ferrara, the mechanisms of secrecy helped shape and define the rule of Alfonso I d’Este (1476–1534; duke from 1505). His biographer, Paolo Giovio, observed that the duke frequently retreated to a secret room (“stanza secreta”) in the Ferrarese castle, which was set up like a workshop (“bottega”), in order to create a variety of decorative and sculpted objects, activities he performed to relax his spirit and escape idleness (“per fuggire l’otio”).1 Within these private chambers—rooms not so much hidden as separated from the common areas and reserved for the duke—Alfonso combined solitude with industry, and leisure with sprezzatura, leaving his subjects to marvel at the virtuosity fueling princely performance.2 Visitors granted access to these spaces bore witness to the practice of seclusion as an agent of production and authority, an ideology that informs other works of art celebrating the duke: from the inscriptions invoking quies and solus on Antonio Lombardo’s marble reliefs (ca. 1508), once displayed in the private suite of rooms in the ducal residence known as the camerini d’alabastro (possibly near the stanza secreta mentioned above),3 to Mercury’s gesture of silence in Dosso Dossi’s Jupiter Painting Butterflies (ca. 1524; National Art Collection, Wawel Royal Castle, Kraków) (fig. 5.1), executed most likely for the Villa Belvedere, a

1. Giovio, Liber de vita, 7; Italian translation by Gelli, La Vita di Alfonso da Este, 15–16. Giovio’s observation is corroborated by a letter dated 26 November 1523, in which the duke writes to his sister Isabella d’Este of Mantua, stating that he was sending her a gift of ceramic dishes that he had made and decorated in his secret spaces (“nostri loghi secreti”); see Magnani, La ceramica ferrarese, 1:15.

2. For a study of these “secret” rooms and studioli, see Folin, “Studioli, vie coperte, gallerie,” 97–109; and Liebenwein, Studiolo. Campbell, Cosmè Tura, 29, observes, “The symbolic force of the private study in figuring the ‘contemplative life’ was not itself new; what distinguished the princely studio was its redirection of humanist ideals of privacy (otium) towards the political ends of display…. In essence the studio was a backdrop against which the prince could stage the appearance of industrious solitude, thereby affirming the humanist ideology of personal culture as an entitlement to rule.”

3. For Lombardo’s reliefs and their inscriptions, see the entries in the exhibition catalogue Il Camerino di alabastro: Sheard, “Antonio Lombardo’s Reliefs,” and Goodgal, “Camerino of Alfonso I d’Este.” The precise location of the camerini d’alabastro in the Via Coperta, a narrow stretch of residential quarters connecting the ducal castle to the palace quarters, remains unresolved. Certain rooms in the Via Coperta display Alfonso’s name (ALFONSVS.DVX.III) carved on the architrave of the marble door frames, such as the one leading into the Camera del Poggiolo; see Borella, “Lo ‘Studio de preda Marmora fina,’” 117; and Hope, “I Camerini d’alabastro.”
private estate situated just outside the walls of the city and in the middle of the river Po.4 In Dosso’s painting, Jupiter figures as an idealized image of a ruler, one who mandates privacy and silence so as not to be distracted from his tranquil but nonetheless official duties of ordering nature, a metaphor frequently aligned by Ferrarese humanists with prudent statecraft.5

Alfonso sponsored a court culture heavily invested in secrecy, dissimulation, silence, and visual and verbal ciphers, thereby perpetuating the recurring theme within Renaissance humanist thought that “noble matters” are the possession of the elite.6 Celio Calcagnini (1479–1541), who served as apostolic protonotary, Este court historian, and chair of the Faculty of Rhetoric at the University of Ferrara, appreciated the paradoxical nature of secrets. He argued in various letters and treatises that mysteries, whether verbal or visual, pagan or divine, are like treasures, being

4. For an interpretation of Dosso’s *Jupiter Painting Butterflies*, especially in relation to Lombardo’s reliefs, see Fiorenza, *Dosso Dossi*, 21–77.
6. See, more broadly, Snyder, *Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy*, who also discusses such practices at Ferrara (51).
valuable only when prudently unearthed, and not buried forever: "Mysteries are always mysteries, so long as they are not conveyed to profane ears."

Secrecy was not exclusively elitist, but also very practical for Este rule. By advocating solitude and silence in the making and meaning of works of art, Alfonso demonstrated his understanding of the dual nature of secrecy: that it implies its own revelation and structures identity and subjectivity through a body of knowledge. As Karma Lochrie explains, secrecy is never as solitary an activity as it purports to be. Instead, secrecy operates in distinct social contexts, configuring power relations, with reticence, prudence, and the dissimulation of effort in brilliant production lending the Este duke a special veneer to his identity. It is from the complementary perspectives of dissimulation and disclosure, of revelation and performance of what has been mystified that this essay will investigate specific examples of Este artistic patronage, specifically small-scale, personal devotional paintings, and how they served not only as instruments of piety for a Christian prince, but moreover, as exoteric rhetorical devices.

In the year 1527, the Ferrarese artist Ludovico Mazzolino (ca. 1480–after 1528) painted two works for the duke: Christ Washing the Apostles’ Feet (Philadelphia Museum of Art) (fig. 5.2) and Christ and the Money Changers (Alnwick Castle, Northumberland). While not strictly pendants owing to their different sizes, these two works present Christ as an exemplar of humility and as an enforcer of justice, kneeling modestly before his disciples in one panel and driving the defilers out of the temple of Jerusalem in the other. Christ’s deeds and actions constitute models of imitation for Alfonso, who needed to rule his subjects benignly but with uncompromised authority. The scene of the sacrifice of Isaac in the architectural roundel of the Philadelphia panel reinforces the theme of obedience, from the unquestioning compliance to God’s command to gestures of communal respect and service among Christ and his apostles.

In the Renaissance, Christ’s words were valued for their veiled wisdom. For Erasmus of Rotterdam, Christ appears as a great teacher, with scripture as the book containing hidden spiritual meaning. He explains in his adage Sileni Alcibiades (1515) that the intentional obscurity of the biblical parables and the veils of figurative language employed by Christ exercised one’s cognitive skills: "The parables of the Gospel, if you take them at face value—who would not think that they came from a simple ignorant man? And yet if you crack the nut, you find inside that profound wisdom, truly divine, a touch of something which is clearly like Christ himself.” Christ’s deeds and sayings were not only moral but at the same time practical and adaptable to personal and political contexts, witnessed, for example, by Christ’s statement of unity, “The servant is not greater than his lord” (John 13:16; KJV), spoken to his apostles after he washed their feet.

7. Calcagnini, Opera aliquot, 27, cited and translated in Wind, Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance, 11. On Calcagnini’s career, see Tiraboschi, Storia della lettura italiana, 7.3:870–73; Piana, Ricerche ed osservazioni; and Lazzari, "Un enciclopedico del sec. XVI.”
9. On the importance of “small forms” for Renaissance rhetoric, see Colie, Resources of Kind, esp. 32–75.
10. See Zamboni, Ludovico Mazzolino, 26–27, 50n51 (Christ Washing the Apostles’ Feet), and 25–26, 35n1 (Christ and the Money Changers); and Ballarin, Dosso Dossi, 1:257 (Christ Washing the Apostles’ Feet); 259—60 (Christ and the Money Changers). I agree with Zamboni (33) with regard to the patronage of these two panels and the corresponding documents cited.
11. See O’Malley, “Content and Rhetorical Forms,” 243–44, for Erasmus’s view of Christ as a great teacher and scripture as the book containing his “philosophy.”
12. Mann Phillips, “Adages” of Erasmus, 276. Erasmus goes on to say that “when it is a matter of knowledge, the real truth always lies deeply hidden, not to be understood easily or by many people.”
A Secret Space for a Secret Keeper
Cardinal Bibbiena at the Vatican Palace

Henry Dietrich Fernández

Secrecy played a key role within the apartment belonging to Cardinal Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena at the Vatican Palace, created by Raphael around 1516 at Pope Leo X’s behest to supply Bibbiena, his boyhood tutor, with living quarters of exceptional quality. Bibbiena was Leo’s segretario domestico, his confidential secretary, his “secret keeper,” as the early modern world understood segretario to mean.1 The cardinal’s rooms included the stufetta with erotic grotesques (fig. 6.1), the loggetta (fig. 6.2), and the chapel, and they were situated above the pope’s own camerae secretae, connected to the pope’s chambers by a small, secret spiral staircase. Courtly ritual at the Vatican Palace hindered private exchange, and the secret staircase thereby gave Leo and Bibbiena the means to interact undisturbed and with discretion. This essay explores the spatial operations and architecture that enabled this singular relationship between pope and secretary to function.2

Numerous sources underscore the extent to which the notion of secrecy was embedded into the role of the secretary in the Italian Renaissance. For example, the Venetian writer Francesco Sansovino, in his 1564 Del Secretario noted that “the Secretary is named from the secrecy that one presupposes must be in him, he must have eyes and mind, but not a tongue outside of counsel.”3 Forty years later, Sansovino’s words were largely echoed by the Vicentian historian Giacomo Marzari, who in 1593 wrote that “Secretaries are now called a secretis presumably because they must have a constant and solid secrecy in them, that they will never speak freely, for any reason whatsoever about the affairs of their prince, but the secretary must keep these affairs to himself, as if he were mute.”4 For John Florio, the secretario was plainly and unambiguously a “secret keeper.”5

This essay remained incomplete at the time of Dr. Fernández’s death in 2009. The notes that appear here have been added by the editors. The editors want to thank Caroline P. Murphy for her assistance and support in publishing the essay and hope that it serves as a fitting tribute to Henry, his scholarship, and the warm friendship he extended to us in Los Angeles.

1. For the etymological association with secret keeping, see Simonetta, Rinascimento Segreto, 127. See the book more generally for the Italian Renaissance secretary/segretario and 230–32 for Bibbiena in particular.
2. On Bibbiena’s apartment, see most recently Pediconi, “Cardinal Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena.”
3. Sansovino, Del secretario, 2v.
5. Florio, World of Words.
Of equal importance to this essay on Cardinal Bibbiena’s Vatican apartments are source materials that demonstrate that “secret keepers” should work within a “spazio segreto,” meaning secret, segregated, and apart. For example, in 1594, Angelo Ingegneri, secretary to Cardinal Aldobrandini, stipulated in his Del buon segretario that the secretary should have a room of his own within his master’s palace, “separated but luminous and airy...where he could avoid having to let certain inappropriate people enter.” The cardinal and segretario domestico Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena was to secure much more than just a “separate” room of his own in the palace occupied by his master, Pope Leo X (1513–21), on the Vatican Hill. But Bibbiena was no ordinary “secret keeper.” He had been tutor to Leo when he was the boy cardinal Giovanni de’ Medici and had even accompanied his pupil into exile when the Medici were banished from Florence in 1494. On Leo X’s election to the papacy in 1513, Bibbiena received the title of cardinal deacon and became the chief administrator and writer of papal correspondence. More importantly, until about 1517, Cardinal Bibbiena enjoyed the special position of segretario domestico (confidential secretary) that elevated him above the pope’s own family member Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici. Consequently, as the pope’s

6. Ingegneri, Del buon segretario, 106. These “secret” rooms facilitated the privacy of secretaries and princes alike, for which see Folin, “Studioli.”
A n essay on engravings and secrets might be expected to start from a print like Albrecht Dürer’s Melencolia I (1514) (see fig. 1 in “Introduction”), representative of a new class of objects produced for often solitary, if not wholly private, contemplation, enjoyment, and even deciphering. Indeed, the very foundations of the iconological hermeneutic might be traced through precisely such an image, in which symbols and ciphers yield their meanings through the painstaking and deliberate work of scholarly decoding. This essay, however, treats the technical secrets of engraving and will begin instead with another of Dürer’s prints from the previous year, the Sudarium with Two Angels (fig. 8.1). The legend of the veronica, or sudarium, a miraculous imprint of Christ’s visage on cloth, served as the inspiration for countless devotional paintings and prints throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The sacrality of this relic was tied not only, or even principally, to the fact that it preserved a record of Christ’s features, but rather to the miraculous means by which that image was transferred to cloth without the intermediary of a human craftsperson. Joseph Koerner has provocatively connected the miraculous record of the holy face on the veil to the processes of Renaissance printmaking, observing that “Dürer thus fashions the Christian non manufactum to mythicize the process and the product of printing.”

Though Koerner’s likening of the angels in Dürer’s later etched Sudarium (fig. 8.2) to printmakers hanging their fresh pages to dry has aroused skepticism, the comparison is hardly inapt. Like the veronica, engravings were themselves composed of marks imprinted without the direct intervention of human hands. Indeed it is a commonplace of scholarship on early modern printing to observe that the first products of the press (both texts and images) were sometimes seen as miraculous. Engraving, like the sudarium, could be understood as having unknown, mysterious, and for some even “mythic” origins.

1. See esp. Emison, “Prolegomena to the Study of Renaissance Prints.”
2. On this image see Talbot, Dürer in America, 142–43.
5. Emison, review of Moment of Self-Portraiture, by Koerner.
It could be argued that the mysterious nature of engraving was an inevitable response to the introduction of new and unfamiliar technologies and processes. A lack of familiarity with the workings of this labor-saving technology gave the impression of a supernatural force at work for viewers and readers steeped in a scribal culture. This is a common narrative of the introduction of technology and a familiar one for historians of science. Surely the burgeoning early modern obsession with marvels, wonders, and curiosities also suggested such rubrics as frameworks for understanding technical novelty. Further, as Pamela Smith has shown, artisanal forms of knowledge were often de facto secrets to the uninitiated and uninterested alike. Within the history of printing, a sense of mystery was frequently included as one of a handful of emergent properties inherent to print culture, most influentially by Elizabeth Eisenstein in her landmark study *The Printing Press as an Agent of Cultural Change* (1978). Over the past two decades, however, historians of printing, following the lead of Adrian Johns, have launched a sustained reevaluation of Eisenstein’s paradigm. These revisionist scholars have argued that qualities long associated with print culture—the authority of print foremost—were, at least in part, built slowly through the

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7. See esp. Marr and Evans, *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*.

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Early modern anatomical flap sheets have a special kind of status in the history of science and print culture. Both figuratively and literally they embody the intertwining of secret knowledge with the newly penetrating gaze of Renaissance and baroque medicine. With their tactile invitation to peel back paper layers and peek inside, flap sheets trade on the ludic possibilities embedded in the act of dissection and emphasize the idea that the physical body harbors hidden revelations. These revelations are frequently shrouded in the academic language of anatomy (Latin rather than the vernacular) and often hinge on the authority of various university physicians and surgeons who invented and augmented early modern practices of dissection. However, while authors of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century flap sheets borrowed extensively from academic sources, the hybrid visual objects they produced often circulated in and appealed to a nebulous realm of popular tastes and appetites. With few exceptions, flap sheets neither drove forward nor contributed to the anatomical corpus. The knowledge they presented to the viewer was frequently meant to appear abstruse and available only to those with a requisite vision and understanding. That is, they appeared to fashion an exclusive community of secret holders of the sort alluded to in Tim McCall and Sean Robert’s introduction to this volume. But flap sheets were also meant to appeal to a wide cross section of consumers and readers. Straddling a line between high learning and folk wisdom, flap sheets translated the difficult and puzzling aspects of anatomy into a set of images that were both enticingly talismanic and deceivingly accessible. In short, anatomical flap sheets embodied a peculiar form of secret sharing, one that was at once social in the sense of defining an exclusive public, and scientific, in the sense of defining an arcane, yet seemingly universal body of knowledge.

One of the most avidly sought-after flap sheet compilations was produced at the very end of the period in which they were most prevalent. This is Johann Remmelin’s elaborate, multiflap, multipage work, *Catoptrum microcosmicum* (Microcosmic Mirror). Lavishly illustrated by Lucas Kilian, a German engraver who probably designed as well as cut the plates, the *Catoptrum* presents anatomical information that was already out of date when it was printed. Nevertheless, the folio
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engravings are not only unusually complex due to the sheer number and elaborateness of flaps (some images can be superimposed with up to nine consecutive flaps, many of them double-sided), but they are also distinguished from other flap sheets for the way they fabricate recondite associations between dissection and alchemy, and for their multiple inscriptions in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek.1

The eccentric nature of Remmelin's *Catoptrum* and its presumed costliness would seem to have relegated it to a highly select and elite audience, and yet its print history reveals prodigious editions in many languages. Published initially in Latin, it was quickly translated into German, Dutch, French, and English.2 Each edition was probably limited because of the size and intricacy of the work, factors that also make it all the more surprising that the demand for translations and reproductions continued well into the eighteenth century. However, the *Catoptrum* also has a strange and convoluted print history involving early, possibly unauthorized editions in 1613, 1614, and 1615. The first edition that can be associated directly with Remmelin was printed in Augsburg in 1619.3 The title page of this edition identifies Remmelin as the author, Kilian as the artist, and Stephan Michelspacher as the printer, and it is dedicated to Philipp Hainhofer, duke of Parnerania (fig. 9.1). Both the earlier 1613 and the later 1619 editions were subsequently used as the basis for most translations and reprints.4 In almost all editions, the *Catoptrum* contains four to five printed plates: a title page, an author portrait (in some editions), and then three large plates referred to as...

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1. Remmelin took credit as the “inventor” of the images, but given Kilian’s talents and comparisons to his other work, it seems likely that he was the source of the design as well as execution of the plates. See Cazort et al., *Ingenious Machine of Nature*, 171.  
2. Each edition varies, due to the vagaries of how it was put together. But the sheer accumulation of flaps makes the sheets unprecedented in the history of fugitive flap prints; ibid., 173.  
3. Latin editions were published in 1613, 1614, 1615, 1619, 1639, 1660, and 1754; German editions in 1632, 1661, 1727, 1720, and 1744; Dutch editions in 1634 (with Latin), 1645, and 1667; French edition in 1630s (undated); and English editions in 1670, 1675, 1691, 1695, 1702, and 1738. See Russell, *Bibliography of Johann Remmelin the Anatomist*, 55–90, for description of editions. Ludwig Choulant says that while the work seems intended for a lay audience, it contains too much specific information on anatomy for nonspecialists, even though it is also clearly out of date and therefore not of great efficacy for anatomists; Choulant, *History and Bibliography of Anatomic Illustration*, 232.  
4. This edition was preceded by three others printed by Stephan Michelspacher, an Augsburg printer and physician, who also produced the 1619 version. In 1613, Michelspacher printed three plates with flaps under the title *Catoptrum microcosmicum* without any explanatory text or elucidation of the lettering on the figures. On the *Visio Prima* or first printed page, there were two sets of initials, “I. R. Inventor” and “L. K. Sculptor” and “Stephan Michelspacher Excudit.” The initials are now understood to refer to Johannes Remmelin and Lucas Kilian, but they played a secondary role to Michelspacher's more prominent name. The text was published separately in two subsequent editions also featuring Michelspacher’s name, the *Elucidarius* of 1614 and the *Pinax microcosmographicus* of 1615. In the nineteenth century, scholars suggested that Michelspacher had proceeded without Remmelin’s consent, going so far as to steal the plates Remmelin had prepared with Kilian. Remmelin’s introduction to the 1619 edition seems to underscore this point by stating that the earlier edition had been printed without his knowledge and that he tried himself to suppress it. However, this version of the story was challenged convincingly by W. B. McDaniel who showed that Michelspacher and Remmelin continued a fruitful working relationship during the period between the 1613 printing and the 1619 printing. See McDaniel “Affair of the ’1613’ Printing of Johannes Rümelin’s *Catoptron*,” 60–72. It seems more likely that Remmelin provided the plates to the printer, but for unknown reasons decided not to have his name attached to the earlier editions. However, he does appear to have contributed to the epilogue of the *Pinax microcosmographicus*, identifying the devil’s head that appears as a flap in the *Visio Prima*. See Cazort et al., *Ingenious Machine of Nature*, 171. In any case, by 1619 Remmelin authorized an edition under his name, stating in an apologia on the verso of the title page, that there were “intolerable errors committed in the engraving and printing” of the earlier publication, and thus he has taken on the task of seeing the 1619 edition through to print in order to correct the infelicity of the earlier work; Russell, *Bibliography of Johann Remmelin the Anatomist*, 1–4.  
5. For a detailed account of the fortunes of the original plates and an analysis of the 1754 uncut plates attributed to Arcangelo Piccolomini that exist in several libraries, see Schmidt, “Printed Bodies and the Materiality of Early Modern Prints.” Schmidt also suggests that the prints were preassembled for buyers, rather than bought and then assembled at home.
FIGURE 9.1. Title page from Johann Remmelin, *Catoptrum microcosmicum*... (Augustae Vindelicorum: Typis Davidis Francki, 1619), engraving. Galter Health Sciences Library: Rare Books (Medical) 611 R28 1619.

Courtesy of the Galter Health Sciences Library Special Collections, Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University, Chicago.
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Secrets in all their variety permeated early modern Europe, from the whispers of ambassadors at court to the emphatically publicized books of home remedies that flew from presses and booksellers’ shops. This interdisciplinary volume draws on approaches from art history and cultural studies to investigate the manifestations of secrecy in printed books and drawings, staircases and narrative paintings, ecclesiastical furnishings and engravers’ tools. Topics include how patrons of art and architecture deployed secrets to construct meanings and distinguish audiences, and how artists and patrons manipulated the content and display of the subject matter of artworks to create an aura of exclusive access and privilege. Essays examine the ways in which popes and princes skillfully deployed secrets in works of art to maximize social control, and how artists, printers, and folk healers promoted their wares through the impression of valuable, mysterious knowledge.

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— JON R. SNYDER, University of California, Santa Barbara