

Images and the Power of the Spoken Word

Gerhard Jaritz

In the thirties of the sixteenth century, the German reformatory author Sebastian Franck criticized the use of images in the Catholic churches: ¹

Whenever there is an important feast-day, the church is decorated with hangings and great garlands; the altarpieces are opened up and the saints dusted and prinked, especially the Patron of the feast. They set him dressed up under the church door in order to beg, and a man sits by him to say the words for him, because the statue cannot speak. He says: 'Give St George (or St Leonard, or whoever it may be) something, for God's sake ...'

We are rarely confronted with such a situation concerning image and orality. We also seldom come across actually speaking visual images; they have to be looked for in the area and competence of extraordinary miracles.²

However, the context and connection between medieval images and the spoken word occurred regularly and played a decisive role in the mediation of messages with the help of pictures. I would like to concentrate mainly on the late Middle Ages and on religious space. The examples originate particularly from the German speaking area of Europe.

The representation of oral communication was one of the main contents of medieval images. If depicted persons communicated, this could be made evident through their gestures and their position toward each other.³ That way, visual patterns of the actors' oral communication were created to be perceived and understood by the beholders of the pictures.

This creation could be continued and intensified if the spoken words were actually made present, most often in scrolls or banderoles.⁴ Through such scrolls

¹ Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 59.

² Cf. Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: a History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 194, 310, and 362.

³ Cf., e.g., François Garnier, *Le langage de l'image au Moyen Âge. Signification et symbolique* (Paris: Le Léopard d'Or, 1982); idem, *Le langage de l'image au Moyen Âge, II. La grammaire des gestes* (Paris: Le Léopard d'Or, 1989); Jean-Claude Schmitt, *La raison des gestes dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Gallimard 1990); Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, eds., *A Cultural History of Gesture. From Antiquity to the Present Day* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

⁴ Cf. Wilhelm Messerer, "Illustrationen zu Wernhers 'Drei Liedern von der Magd'," in *Deutsche Literatur im Mittelalter – Kontakte und Perspektiven. Hugo Kuhn zum Gedenken*, ed. Christoph Coimeau (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1979), pp. 448-451.

the visual was not only penetrated by the verbal,⁵ but also by the oral. This material presence of the spoken word contributed to the explicit physical presence of 'speech acts' of the depicted persons, as well as to their authenticity and importance.⁶ The word was to create or to increase the life-likeness and, by that, the efficacy and the success of the picture, its contents and its actors.⁷ In a given context, the spoken text might have been explaining, contextualizing, signifying, mediating, inviting, stimulating, or emotionalizing; and it is clear that the beholder need not have been literate to understand.

In the case of the words spoken by depicted donators, for instance, experience told everybody that the latter asked certain mediators, mainly saints, to pray for them: "ora pro me," "ora pro nobis," "bitt für mich," etc. (fig. 1).⁸ In such cases and contexts, the representation of the spoken word in pictures did not mean that the audience had to be confronted with letters or actually, written text. It was enough to depict the act of speaking and its importance by using the empty bearers of the oral statements, i.e. the text scrolls or banderoles without text, as attributes of the actors.⁹ It would have been clear that a kneeling donator holding an empty banderole was about to ask a saint to pray for him or her (fig. 2).¹⁰ Everyone would

⁵ See Alison R. Flett, "The Significance of Text Scrolls," in *Medieval Texts and Images. Studies of Manuscripts from the Middle Ages*, eds. Margaret M. Manion and Bernard J. Muir (Chur et al.: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991), p. 44. – For the different functions of inscriptions in images see Mieczysław Wallis, "Inscriptions in Paintings," *Semiotica*, 9 (1973), pp. 6–11.

⁶ For the scrolls and inscriptions in medieval pictures as 'speech acts,' see Michael Camille, "The Book of Signs: Writing and Visual Difference in Gothic Manuscript Illumination," *Word and Image*, 1 (1985), p. 143. Concerning the perceived importance of the written text or dialogue in medieval paintings, see Wallis, "Inscriptions," p. 13; Leslie Brubaker, "When pictures speak: Incorporation of Dialogue in the Ninth-century Miniatures of Paris gr. 510," *Word & Image*, 12 (1996), p. 106. In regard to the physical presence of the words, see Roger Tarr, "Visibile parlare: the Spoken Word in Fourteenth-century Central Italian Painting," *Word & Image*, 13 (1997), p. 225.

⁷ Cf. the story in Giorgio Vasari's *Le vite de più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori Italiani, da Cimbabue insino a' tempi nostri* (Florence, 1550) about Buonamico Buffalmacco, who told Bruno di Giovanni to paint words issuing from the mouths of the depicted figures to let them appear alive (Tarr, "Visibile parlare," p. 232). For other possibilities of bringing to life the depicted situations by using text scrolls, see Susanne Wittekind, "Vom Schriftband zum Spruchband. Zum Funktionswandel von Spruchbändern in Illustrationen biblischer Stoffe," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 30 (1996), p. 352: "Generell bedeutet die Verwendung von Spruchbändern eine Verlebendigung des historischen Ereignisses, da der Betrachter die 'verschriftlichte' Rede ja laut mitliest."

⁸ The donator Wolfgang Arndorfer praying: "O sancte Bernhardine ora pro me". Stained glass window, end of the 15th century, Neukirchen am Ostroing (Lower Austria), parish church. Photo: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit (Krems an der Donau).

⁹ Cf. Wittekind, "Vom Schriftband zum Spruchband," p. 343: "Daher genügt oft schon die unbeschriebene Rolle als Hinweis, als Sinnbild des Evangeliums, des apostolischen Lehrauftrags bzw. der Weissagung, die in Formen verschriftlichter Rede dargestellt werden."

¹⁰ St. Florian with the donator Leonhard, provost of the Austin Canon house of Saint Florian (Upper Austria), panel painting, 1487. St. Florian, collections of the monastery. Photo: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit (Krems an der Donau).

have known the existing or necessary formula in this context. The words were material, they were visible and spoken, without actually having been written down.

A similar situation could, for instance, occur on the occasion of the "Annunciation of the Virgin."¹¹ In many images, one can read that the angel said "Ave, gracia plena, dominus tecum" when approaching the Virgin;¹² the written word becomes part of the rhetoric.¹³ But some examples show that this was not indispensable, and that the banderole could stay empty (fig. 3),¹⁴ or was even missing, because everybody already knew the spoken words in the oral communication between the Angel and the Virgin on the occasion of the Annunciation. This would also have been true for the illiterates who were confronted with the written words of the Angel. The speech act and its text were so important that one simply had to be aware of the contents without necessarily being able to read, or even to see the text.

In other cases, it was just oral communication generally that was important and had to be made visible – even if the source or explicit background of the spoken words was missing. There, it did not matter what was actually said; the beholder should be able to imagine or to (re)construct herself or himself what the speech act was about. Let us, for example, take a well-known and typical satiric, and in that way, also didactic, engraving by Israhel van Meckenem († 1503): the "world-upside-down" representation of the "Subjugated Husband" (fig. 4).¹⁵ The husband is spinning, the wife has taken power; the distaff is her sword, and she

¹¹ For the role of the communicated word and its iconography in Annunciation-scenes, cf. esp. Horst Wenzel, "Die Schrift und das Heilige," in *Die Verschriftlichung der Welt. Bild, Text und Zahl in der Kultur des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*, eds. Horst Wenzel, Wilfried Seipel, and Gotthart Wunberg (Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum and Milan: Skira, 2000), pp. 19-29; idem, "Die Verkündigung an Maria. Zur Visualisierung des Wortes in der Szene, oder: Schriftgeschichte im Bild," in *Maria in der Welt. Marienverehrung im Kontext der Sozialgeschichte. 10.-18. Jahrhunderts*, eds. Claudia Opitz et al. (Zürich: Chronos, 1993), pp. 23-52; idem, *Hören und Sehen. Schrift und Bild. Kultur und Gedächtnis im Mittelalter* (München: C.H. Beck, 1995), pp. 270-291. See also Klaus Schreiner, "Marienverehrung, Lesekultur, Schriftlichkeit. Bildungs- und frömmigkeitsgeschichtliche Studien zur Auslegung und Darstellung von 'Mariä Verkündigung'," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 24 (1990), pp. 314-368.

¹² For the variations of the Annunciation scene from the point of view of the communication and time factor, see also Lucien Rudrauf, "The Annunciation: Study of a Plastic Theme and Its Variations in Painting and Sculpture," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 7 (1948/49), pp. 325-348.

¹³ See Wenzel, "Die Schrift und das Heilige," p. 27.

¹⁴ Angel of an Annunciation, panel of a winged altarpiece, Nikolaus Stuerhofer, beginning of the 16th century. Innsbruck, Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum. Photo: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit (Krems an der Donau).

¹⁵ Max Lehrs, *Geschichte und kritischer Katalog des deutschen, niederländischen und französischen Kupferstichs im XV. Jahrhunderts*, 9. Textband (Vienna: Gesellschaft für vervielfältigende Kunst, 1934; reprint New York: Collectors Editions, n.y.), pp. 368-369. Cf. Gerhard Jaritz, "Die Bruech," in *Symbole des Alltags. Alltag der Symbole. Festschrift für Harry Kühnel zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Gertrud Blaschitz et al. (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1992), pp. 395-416.

puts on male pants, meaning that she had occupied the rule. The action seems to be accompanied by an oral dispute between the two – the connotation is clear, its contents are imaginable. We need not be able to read the conversation letter by letter.

The “Churchgoers,” again an engraving by Israhel van Meckenem (fig. 5),¹⁶ are obviously more interested in themselves and their own outer appearance than in their piety – one only has to look at the pointed shoes of the lady, her headgear, the long rosary, the wealth of cloth, etc. Part of their outer appearance is certainly also the materialized and again improper oral communication, their talkativeness, represented not only by the accompanying dog but made clearer with the help of the empty but long banderoles. It again does not seem important *what* they chat about, but *that* they do. It also fits into the well-known pattern of attributes and stereotypes that the banderole of the lady is much longer than the one of her husband. Both churchgoers are improperly talkative, but she talks more than he does: this message may have reached the beholder of around 1500. It was important to see and to recognize the speech act and its negative connotations generally, not the contents of the discussion or its explicit meaning. It was the act and image of the negative conversation that counted, on which everybody – out of his or her own experience – would have been able to imagine or to construct the fitting contents.

In this way, the different possibilities for representing the spoken word in images established contexts, were parts of contexts, or of networks of the latter. They created various types of messages. The depicted speech acts offered chances for the beholder to create or add his or her own fitting texts.

The pictorial construction of conversation, i.e. the materialization of the spoken word, was clearly dependent on its importance. It may have been the word that became flesh, the “Ave, gracia plena”, or the “Vere, vere, filius Dei erat”, etc. It may, for instance, have been the spoken words that were in other ways decisive for the narration on which the contents and the meanings of the image were based. One may think of the attempt of Potiphar’s wife to seduce Joseph (Genesis 39: 7). Based on the biblical reference, it became the “Dormi mecum” in an illustration of a mid-fourteenth-century “*Concordantiae caritatis*” from the Lower Austrian Cistercian house of Lilienfeld, emotionalizing and clarifying the Bible story;¹⁷ as well as Joseph’s strict answer “Non faciam hanc rem quam nefas.” Again, explanation and emotion, presence and authenticity are explicitly provided. This is the power of the spoken word.

The recipients of text and images in the “*Concordantiae Caritatis*,” the Cistercian monks of Lilienfeld, were certainly able to read the text of the manuscript as well as the spoken words in the images. This must have been different in a small

¹⁶ Lehrs, *Geschichte und kritischer Katalog*, 9. Textband, pp. 389–390; *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 9 (formerly vol. 6, part 2): *Early German Artists. Israhel van Meckenem*, ed. Fritz Koreny (New York: Abaris Books, 1981), p. 167, n. 176 (269).

¹⁷ See the cover illustration of this volume. Concerning the “*Concordantiae Caritatis*” generally, see Hedwig Munschek, *Die Concordantiae caritatis des Ulrich von Lilienfeld. Untersuchungen zu Inhalt, Quellen und Verbreitung mit einer Paraphrasierung von Temporale, Sanktorale und Commune* (Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 2000).

rural community like, for instance, the east Tyrolean village of St. Justina, where another depicted seducer tried to be successful. The devil, masked as a woman, approaches Saint Justina and says to her "Hodie missa sum ad te a Christo vivere tecum in castitate" (fig. 6).¹⁸ Here, we are confronted with another situation: most of the beholders will not have been able to read the text that is so important for comprehending the story. They also would not have understood Latin. A mediator, the priest, must have been available to provide the audience with more information than the clear general fact to be understood by everybody that the spoken word played an important role in the legend of the church's patron saint and this confrontation between good and bad.

Mainly in the fifteenth century, we find a modification of the message, which also occurs in religious images. The role of the vernacular increased and took over. "Ora pro nobis" became "bitt für uns;" and Saint Nicholas (fig. 7) successfully trying to save the ship in the storm could now express his command to the sea in German: "mer, ich gebiet dir dass du still stest."¹⁹ A mediator, a reader might still have been necessary, but not a translator any more. An increased closeness²⁰ of the depicted spoken word was provided to its beholders.

Such aspects of transmitting a written oral message in images or in context with images also leads us to further variants concerning oral communication and its visual presentation. If we, for instance, think of votive images from pilgrimage sites, we see that they regularly contain written texts that describe the miracles, often in a kind of summary out of longer miracle reports – as in the example (fig. 8) from the so-called Large Miracle altarpiece from the Styrian pilgrimage site of Mariazell ("Großer Mariazeller Wunderaltar") that explains in the vernacular the representation of a carpenter and his cross-bow fight with another man, miraculously reaching a good and peaceful end through the intervention of the Virgin of Mariazell.²¹ The text, i.e. caption of the image, would have been made public in

¹⁸ Temptation of St. Justina by the Devil Clad as a Woman, panel of a winged altarpiece, Pacher workshop, c. 1490. St. Justina (East Tyrol), parish church. Photo: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit (Krems an der Donau).

¹⁹ Choir fresco, workshop of Leonhard von Brixen, c. 1480. Klerant (South Tyrol), filial church St. Nicholas. Photo: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit (Krems an der Donau).

²⁰ For the closeness of late medieval images to their beholders and the methods to increase it, see Gerhard Jaritz, "Nähe und Distanz als Gebrauchsfunktion spätmittelalterlicher religiöser Bilder," in *Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter. Politisch-soziale Kontexte, visuelle Praxis, körperliche Ausdrucksformen*, ed. Klaus Schreiner (in the press), pp. 265-280.

²¹ Großer Mariazeller Wunderaltar, 1518/22. Graz (Styria), Landesmuseum Joanneum. Photo: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit (Krems an der Donau). Cf. Gottfried Biedermann, *Katalog Alte Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum* (Graz: Alte Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, 1982), pp. 162-166 (lit.); Peter Krenn, "Die Wunder von Mariazell und Steiermark," in *Die Kunst der Donauschule 1490-1540*, ed. Otto Wutzel (Linz: Oberösterreichischer Landesverlag, 1965), pp. 164-168; idem, "Der große Mariazeller Wunderaltar von 1519 und sein Meister," *Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Institutes der Universität Graz*, 2 (1966/67), pp. 31-51.

a similar way to the written, longer miracle reports themselves: they will have been read and explained to the audience.

An oral transmission of such "image descriptions" or captions particularly is to be taken for granted in all the cases where these texts are rhymed. A significant example is the South German, so-called Söflingen altarpiece from the beginning of the sixteenth century.²² It was produced for the convent of Poor Clares at Söflingen near Ulm and shows 126 scenes out of the life of Saint Francis. Each of the scenes has a rhymed description in the vernacular, which may be seen as corresponding to and typical for the needs of a female religious community of this period.

There, we also see a phenomenon that became significant for secular woodcuts at around 1500, and also later: the role of the narrator or moderator who was integrated into picture and/or text. This could happen with the help of two-part images like, for instance, in the woodcut illustrations of the first print (Bamberg, 1461) of Ulrich Boner's fables "Edelstein" (c. 1345) (fig. 9).²³ The larger part in the right half of the pictures contains the illustrations of the written text of the fables, the smaller to the left the figure of the narrator.

One finds the narrator in the text or as part of the text in a large number of broadsheets from the first half of the sixteenth century: for instance, in Barthel or Sebald Beham's "Kirchweih zu Mögelsdorf" (Church Anniversary Holiday at Mögelsdorf) (fig. 10).²⁴ The story starts with:

Eins tags ich auff ein kirchwey kam
gen Megeldorff, da ich vernam
in einem grossen wirteshaus
die pauren leben in dem sauß ...
(One day I went to a church anniversary
at Mögelsdorf, where I saw
the peasants carousing
at a large inn ...).

Then the narrator tells stories about the chaotic festival and about each dancing couple, to conclude at the end:

²² Söflinger Altar, c. 1510, Ulm, from the convent of Poor Clares, Söflingen. Füssen, Staatsgalerie. Cf. Elisabeth Vavra, "Söflinger Altar," in *Niederösterreichische Landesausstellung 800 Jahre Franz von Assisi: franziskanische Kunst und Kultur des Mittelalters* (Vienna: Amt der Niederösterreichischen Landesregierung, 1982), p. 772-775 (lit.).

²³ This image is the last woodcut in the volume and shows the author with book and banderole to the right and the narrator to the left: Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen*, p. 386 f.; Ulrich Boner, *Der Edelstein*, with an introduction by Doris Fouquet-Plümacher, facs. of the first printed edition, Bamberg, 1461. 16. 1 Eth 2 of the Herzog August Library, Wolfenbüttel (Stuttgart: Müller & Schindler, 1972).

²⁴ Barthel Beham and Erhard Schön, *Die Kirchweih zu Mögelsdorf*, with verses by Hans Sachs, woodcut, 1527/28 (detail). See Keith Moxey, *Peasants, Warriors, and Wives. Popular Imagery in the Reformation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 42-45; Hans Joachim Raupp, *Bauernsatiren. Entstehung und Entwicklung des bäuerlichen Genres in der deutschen und niederländischen Kunst, ca. 1470-1570* (Niederzier: Lukassen Verlag, 1986), pp. 139-145).

Ich dacht es wirt ind leng nicht felen,
 sie werden aneinander strelen,
 und wirt ein grosses schlahen draus,
 ich macht mich auff und geng zû haus.
 (At the end, I thought
 that they will beat each other,
 and that there will be a great fight,
 I set out and went home).

The rhymed written words of the narrator were certainly meant for an oral presentation in context with the presentation of the image. This creates an audiovisual performance to entertain and play on the emotions of the audience. The read text must have had decisive influence on the efficacy and success of this performance.

To summarize: the medieval connection of image and the depicted spoken word was an important one. From the banderoles of speech acts that neither contain any letters nor words to the various representations of narrators and their presented 'image-texts' or 'text-images,' depicted orality represented presence, authenticity, power,²⁵ and possibilities to understand – to influence, to perform, to explain, to educate, to emotionalize, etc. For the late medieval perception of images, the spoken word often had a variety of determining and dominating functions. This, at last, could lead to the images of spoken text (fig. 11), to be read, prayed, and orally communicated, like the mid-fifteenth century example from Hildesheim set up on the occasion of the visit of Cardinal Nicolaus Cusanus.²⁶ It says in the vernacular that the common people did not know the most important prayers. Therefore, the Lord's Prayer, the 'Ave Maria,' the Creed, and the Ten Commandments were written down in this image of text, which was placed in St. Lambert's Church of Hildesheim. It is text, but also image: the image of written prayers representing their oral offering.

Some years ago, Norbert Ott postulated that medieval manuscript illustrations may not only be seen as a means of decoration and accompaniment of the text, but mainly as an instance of information and an elevation of the claim to truth and identification of the illustrated text.²⁷ Similarly, the latter may also be assumed

²⁵ For other levels of the 'power of the word,' see Werner Röske, "Die Macht des Wortes. Feudale Repräsentation und christliche Verkündigung im mittelalterlichen Legendenroman," in *Höfische Repräsentation. Das Zeremoniell und die Zeichen*, eds. Hedda Ragotzky and Horst Wenzel (Tübingen: Niemeyer 1990), pp. 209-226.

²⁶ Catechism panel in St. Lambert's church, Hildesheim, 1451. H.-J. Rieckenberg, "Die Katechismus-Tafel des Nikolaus von Kues in der Lamberti-Kirche zu Hildesheim," *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 39 (1983), pp. 555-581; Hartmut Boockmann, "Über Schrifttafeln in spätmittelalterlichen deutschen Kirchen," *ibidem*, 40 (1984), pp. 210-221; *idem*, *Die Stadt im späten Mittelalter* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1986).

²⁷ Cf. Norbert H. Ott, "Mündlichkeit, Schriftlichkeit, Illustration. Einiges Grundsätzliche zur Handschriftenillustration, insbesondere in der Volkssprache," in *Buchmalerei im Bodensee-raum 13. bis 16. Jahrhundert*, ed. Eva Moser (Friedrichshafen: Verlag Robert Gessler, 1997), p. 48: "Auch in der Spätzeit der Handschriftenillustration leistet das Bildmedium mehr als die bloße Verschönerung und visuelle Begleitung des Texts. Sie ist Informationsinstanz ebenso

for the materialized speech acts in medieval images, their function and power. Pictures did not work well without the spoken word.



Fig. 1: The spoken words of the donator: "O sancte Bernhardine, ora pro me."

wie auratische Überhöhung des Wahrheits- und Identifikationsanspruchs der illustrierten Literatur."



Fig. 2: The spoken words of the donator: to be known without having been written.



Fig. 3: The Angel of the Annunciation with the empty banderole as his attribute: saying what everybody knows.



Fig. 4: The "Subjugated Husband" quarrels with his wife
(Israel van Meckenem).



Fig. 5. Israhel van Meckenem: the talkative "Churchgoers."



Fig. 6: The Latin speaking devil clad as a virgin tries to seduce St. Justina in an East Tyrolian village church.



Fig. 7: St. Nicholas commands the sea in German to become calm.



Fig. 8: The summary of a miracle-report as caption of the image.



Fig. 9: The author and the narrator.



Fig. 10: The chaotic church anniversary holiday at Mögelsdorf (detail).
 Image and story told by a narrator.

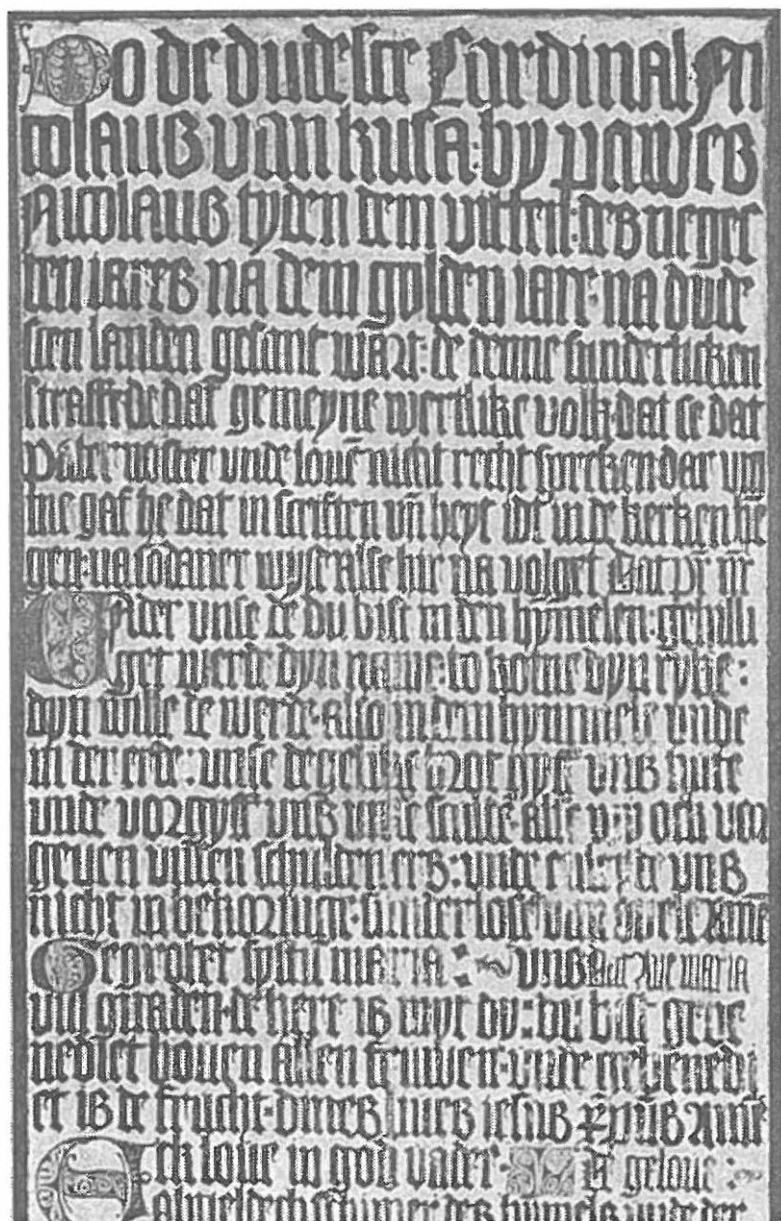


Fig. 11: The catechism panel as a picture of prayers (detail).

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Cover illustration: The wife of Potiphar covets Joseph: "... erat autem Joseph pulchra facie et decorus aspectu: post multos itaque dies iecit domina oculos suis in Ioseph et ait dormi mecum." ("... And Joseph was [a] goodly [person], and well favoured. And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me."), Gen. 39: 6-7 (KJV). Concordantiae Caritatis, c. 1350. Cistercian abbey of Lilienfeld (Lower Austria), ms 151, fol. 244v (detail). Photo: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit (Krems an der Donau).

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Preface

Oral culture played an instrumental role in medieval society.¹ Due to the lack of any direct source evidence, however, research into the functions and importance of oral communication in the Middle Ages must confront a number of significant problems. Only indirect traces offer the opportunity to analyze phenomena that were based on or connected with the spoken word. The 'oral history' of the Middle Ages requires the application of different approaches than dealing with the 20th or 21st century.

For some decades Medieval Studies have been interested in questions of orality and literacy, their relationship and the substitution of the spoken by the written word.² Oral and literate culture were not exclusive and certainly not opposed to each other.³ The 'art of writing' was part of the 'ars rhetorica' and writing makes no sense without speech.⁴ Any existing written statement should also be seen as a spoken one, although, clearly, not every oral statement as a written one. Authors regularly wrote with oral delivery in mind. 'Speaking' and 'writing' are not antonyms.

It is also obvious that "the use of oral communication in medieval society should not be evaluated . . . as a function of *culture populaire* vis-à-vis *culture savante* but, rather, of the communication habits and the tendency of medieval man

¹ For the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, cf. Willem Frijhoff, "Communication et vie quotidienne à la fin du moyen âge et à l'époque moderne: réflexions de théorie et de méthode," in *Kommunikation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Helmut Hundsbichler (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), p. 24: "La plupart de gens vivait encore pour l'essentiel dans une culture orale et les procédés d'appropriation des idées passaient de préférence par la parole dite et écoutée, quand bien même on était capable d'une lecture visuelle plus ou moins rudimentaire."

² See Marco Mostert, "New Approaches to Medieval Communication?" in *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, ed. Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), pp. 15-37; Michael Richter, "Die Entdeckung der 'Oralität' der mittelalterlichen Gesellschaft durch die neuere Mediävistik," in *Die Aktualität des Mittelalters*, ed. Hans-Werner Goetz (Bochum: D. Winkler, 2000), pp. 273-287.

³ Peter Burke calls the construct of "oral versus literate" useful but at the same time dangerous: idem, "Mündliche Kultur und >Druckkultur< im spätmittelalterlichen Italien," in *Volkskultur des europäischen Spätmittelalters*, eds. Peter Dinzelbacher and Hans-Dieter Mück (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1987), p. 60.

⁴ Michael Clanchy, "Introduction," in *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, ed. Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), p. 6.

to share his intellectual experiences in the corporate framework.”⁵ Oral delivery was not “the sole prerogative of any socioeconomic class.”⁶

For all these reasons, it is important to analyze the extent of and context, in which ‘speech acts,’ auditive effects, and oral tradition occur in medieval sources.⁷ Research into the use of the spoken word or references to it in texts and images provides new insight into various, mainly social, rules and patterns of the communication system. It opens up additional approaches to the organization and complexity of different, but indispensably related, media in medieval society, and their comparative analysis.⁸

The spoken word is connected with the physical presence of its ‘sender.’ Speech may represent the authenticity of the given message in a more obvious way than written texts or images. Therefore, the use of ‘speech acts’ in written or visual evidence also has to be seen in context with the attempt to create, construct, or prove authenticity. Moreover, spoken messages contribute to and increase the life-likeness of their contents, which may influence their perception by the receiver, their efficacy and success. Being aware of such a situation will have led to the explicit and intended use and application of the spoken word in written texts and images – to increase their authenticity and importance, too.

If one operates with a model of ‘closeness’ and ‘distance’ of communication with regard to the level of relation of ‘senders’ and ‘receivers,’ then the ‘speech acts’ or their representation have to be seen as contributors to a ‘closer’ connection among the participants of the communication process.⁹ At the same time, however, speech might be evaluated as less official. One regularly comes across ‘oral space’

⁵ Sophia Menache, *The Vox Dei. Communication in the Middle Ages* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 19.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 21. Cf. also Jan-Dirk Müller, “Zwischen mündlicher Anweisung und schriftlicher Sicherung von Tradition. Zur Kommunikationsstruktur spätmittelalterlicher Fechtbücher,” in *Kommunikation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Helmut Hunsbichler (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), p. 400: “Offensichtlich sind schriftliche und nichtschriftliche Tradierung von Wissen weiterhin relativ unabhängig voneinander, nachdem die Schrift längst dazu angesetzt hat, Inseln der Mündlichkeit oder praktisch-enaktiver Wissensvermittlung zu erobern. Die Gedächtnisstütze kann die Erfahrung nicht ersetzen, sondern allenfalls reaktivieren. Sie ist sogar nur verständlich, wo sie auf anderweitig vermittelte Vorkenntnisse stößt.”

⁷ Cf. W.F.H. Nicolaisen, ed., *Oral Tradition in the Middle Ages* (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1995).

⁸ See, esp., Horst Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen, Schrift und Bild. Kultur und Gedächtnis im Mittelalter* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1995), passim.

⁹ See also Stefan Sonderegger, “>Gesprochen oder nur geschrieben?< Mündlichkeit in mittelalterlichen Texten als direkter Zugang zum Menschen,” in *Homo Medietas. Aufsätze zu Religiosität, Literatur und Denkformen des Menschen vom Mittelalter bis in die Neuzeit. Festschrift für Alois Maria Haas zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Claudia Brinker-von der Heyde and Niklaus Largier (Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 1999), p. 665: “Jedenfalls darf man sich bewußt bleiben, daß auch in den Texten des deutschen Mittelalters die Reflexe gesprochener Sprache eine bedeutende Schicht ausmachen, die besonders dann immer wieder hervortritt, wenn es um einen direkten Zugang zum Menschen geht, um ein Verstehen aus unmittelbarer Partnerschaft heraus ...”

that has become institutionalized or more official by the application of 'written space'.¹⁰ Simultaneous employment of such different levels and qualities of messages must often have had considerable influence on their efficacy.¹¹

The papers in this volume are the outcome of an international workshop that was held in February, 2001, at the Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest. Participants concentrated on problems of the occurrence, usage, and patterns of the spoken word in written and visual sources of the Middle Ages. They dealt with the role and contents of direct and indirect speech in textual evidence or in relation to it, such as chronicles, travel descriptions, court and canonization protocols, sermons, testaments, law-books, literary sources, drama, etc. They also tried to analyze the function of oral expression in connection with late medieval images.

The audiovisuality of medieval communication processes¹² has proved to be evident and, thus, important for any kind of further comparative analysis of the various levels of the 'oral-visual-literate,' i.e. multimedia culture of the Middle Ages. Particular emphasis has to be put on methodological problems, such as the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches,¹³ or the question of the extent to which we are, generally, able to comprehend and to decode the communication systems of the past.¹⁴ Moreover, the medievalist does not come across any types of sources in which oral communication represents the main concern.¹⁵ Instead, she or he is confronted, at first glance, with a great variety of 'casual' and 'marginal' evidence.

We would like to thank all the contributors to the workshop and to this volume. Their cooperation made it possible to publish the results of the meeting in the same year in which it took place. This can be seen as a rare exception, at least in the world of the historical disciplines. The head, faculty, staff, and students of the Department of Medieval Studies of Central European University offered various help and support. Special thanks go to Judith Rasson, the copy editor of

¹⁰ This, e.g., could be well shown in a case study on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela: Friederike Hassauer, "Schriftlichkeit und Mündlichkeit im Alltag des Pilgers am Beispiel der Wallfahrt nach Santiago de Compostela," in *Wallfahrt und Alltag in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, eds. Gerhard Jaritz and Barbara Schuh (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), pp. 277-316.

¹¹ Cf. Bob Scribner, "Mündliche Kommunikation und Strategien der Macht in Deutschland im 16. Jahrhundert," in *Kommunikation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Helmut Hundsbieler (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), pp. 183-197.

¹² Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen*, p. 292.

¹³ Cf. Ursula Schaefer, "Zum Problem der Mündlichkeit," in *Modernes Mittelalter. Neue Bilder einer populären Epoche*, ed. Joachim Heinze (Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1994), pp. 374 f.

¹⁴ Frijhoff, "Communication et vie quotidienne," p. 25: "Sommes-nous encore en mesure de communiquer avec la communication de jadis?"

¹⁵ Michael Richter, *Sprache und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter. Untersuchungen zur mündlichen Kommunikation in England von der Mitte des elften bis zu Beginn des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1979), p. 22.

this volume, who took particular care with the texts of the many non-native speakers fighting with the pitfalls of the English language.

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Gerhard Jaritz and Michael Richter