

‘*Del figurare uno che parli infra più persone:*’
Towards a Cultural History of Gesture in Italian Renaissance Art

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In the *Treatise on Painting* by Leonardo da Vinci there is a place dealing with the pictorial image of a speaker addressing a wide audience, ‘del figurare uno che parli infra più persone.’¹ Leonardo recommends to an artist the following:

Userai di far quello che tu vuoi che parli fra molte persone in atto di considerare la materia ch’egli ha da trattare, e di accomodare in lui gli atti appartenenti ad essa materia . . .²

Particularly,

se è materia di dichiarazione di diverse ragioni, fa che quello che parla, pigli con i due diti della mano destra un dito della sinistra, avendone serrato i minori. . .³

These prescriptions are followed by details taken for granted: the speaker should face the audience, his mouth should be open, and so forth. In this fragment, one surely marks the unusually detailed description of the specific finger positions in the case of listing diverse arguments, *dichiarazione di diverse ragione*, that is, finger reckoning. Leonardo da Vinci communicates here a very specific tradition well known to his contemporaries, since he does not go into any further explanations. By contrast, contemporary reader needs an illustration as much as a comment.

We conceive of neither an ancient orator nor a modern speaker as reckoning on the fingers. Some special conditions were required for this gesture to characterize a Renaissance speaker. We ought therefore to consider in which subjects, of which period, and by which masters we find the gesture described in Leonardo’s treatise. We should see to what extent this gesture corresponds to its description and how important it is for the composition. But to see, with however close attention, is still too little. It is obvious in this case that Leonardo did

¹ On depicting someone who is addressing many.

² If you wish to depict someone addressing many, make sure to give consideration to the topic he is treating and to accord to it all the gestures pertinent to this topic.

³ If this topic treats various matters, make the speaker hold up two fingers of his right hand, one finger on his left, having turned down the other two fingers of the left hand. (book 3, chapter 376). See Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattato della pittura*, foreword by M. Tabarrini (Rome, 1890), 127.

not mean a gesture of pan-human importance, a gesture that is born of the speaker's own temperament; the diversity of temperaments, races, genders, ages, and social statuses notwithstanding, the effects always remain the same. Rather, Leonardo speaks here about what Wätzoldt⁴ calls *Vorstellungsgebärde*, a gesture that in the simplest cases interprets direction, measure, form, and so on, and becoming gradually differentiated as a conditioned reflex, may convey to a beholder a more or less complex concept of a certain content that corresponds to this reflex. This kind of gesture has a certain cultural and historical genesis and meaning which it loses along with the disappearance of its initial ideological prerequisites. Seen retrospectively, this gesture therefore requires deciphering. For better understanding the tradition transferred by Leonardo, one then has to unfold two parallel series: a series of respective pictorial monuments and a series of written sources that serve for the interpretation of images.

In Florence, young artists indeed should have taken Leonardo's hint, they all should have known the frescoes of the Spanish Chapel in Santa Maria Novella completed in about 1350. The pictorial history of the finger reckoning gesture begins with the frescoes depicting "The Church Militant and Triumphant." In the uppermost left corner, a dispute between two Dominicans, infidels, and heretics represents the Church militant. Just as the lower right group of the fresco is divided into two parts by the central figure of a seated pope, the crowd of infidels is also split by the standing figure of a Dominican. The latter has turned three quarters around toward the group on the far right. A second standing figure of a Dominican in profile concludes the left group. The friar in the middle points with his index finger to an open page of a codex. He must have succeeded in drawing his opponents' attention, as some of them are watching him closely, others are lost in reflection, and some are kneeling with hands stretched out toward the preacher in the manner of prayer. In the foreground a new convert is tearing into pieces the book of the old law which leads to damnation. In contrast, the argument in the left group is heating up. In the vertical row of enemies closest to the preacher, the farthestmost is wafting away discontentedly, the closest one is raising his hand against the preacher in the gesture of accusation. The person in the middle stretches his open left hand toward the friar and is busy reckoning on its fingers with his right hand. To the left of the agitated front row is a crowd of other servitors who look calmer. Imposing and calm, the Dominican standing outside this group resists the approach of the crowd with the same gesture of reckoning on the fingers of his left hand with the palm turned up. This duplicate gesture thus characterizes the scholastic dispute, the argument for the faith. Let us focus on it.

The meaning of this gesture is clear to those familiar with scholastic literature. It translates the spoken word into movement and illustrates it. This gesture also reflects a certain style and a certain way of thinking, as it is related to the custom of counting arguments and structuring every speech, sermon or treatise.

⁴ Wilhelm Wätzoldt, *Kunst des Porträts* (Leipzig, 1908).

tise in accordance with the number and order of the arguments. A product of medieval scholastics, this gesture is present in the frescoes of the Spanish Chapel created in the heyday of scholastics and Dominican learning. The symbolic dogs of the Lord, *cani Domini*, Dominicans are depicted in the lower-most register of the fresco as dogs with white (like their robes) bellies and dark (like their cowls) backs seizing wolves and foxes. The Dominicans drew their science primarily from Thomas Aquinas, the *doctor universalis*. His *Summa*, arranged in a strictly uniform manner, is divided into a series of problems, or perplexing questions. For each question a sequence of numbered counter-arguments is first proposed, followed by another sequence of numbered arguments: each “*non*” is counterbalanced by an affirmative and explanatory “*sic*.” Regardless of the subject, logical division is always contained in the formal sequence of equally important, equally weighty, arguments arranged in numerical order. It is ultimately the numbering that keeps the entire logical development together. Numbering thus acquires an overwhelming significance as a mnemonic device. What makes scholastic speech different from that of a modern speaker who occasionally reckons arguments is that nowadays reckoning has an utterly secondary role in logical development: exposition, as well as the structure of argumentation on the whole does not depend on or overlap with reckoning. In contrast, in scholasticism the quantity of arguments is transformed into the quality of proof.

Didactic methods of the scholastic school, as well as the learned university disputes and the vulgar sermon apparently appropriated this approach in Italy and elsewhere. Students were trained in universities by means of various kinds of disputes. In a dispute of *palestra* type, students proposed to the professor *questioni* and *problemi* to be solved. A *problema* was a thesis formulated in an interrogative form, as a question beginning with “why.” A *questione* was a thesis stated *in modo dubitativo*, so that the respondent had to prove both the negative and the positive parts of the argument, at the same time indicating which of them he considered to be correct. The highest type of a dispute was *questio de quolibeto*, in the course of which the disputant had free choice (*quod libet*) from among several questions within the discipline, posed to him by students and doctors. The question was proposed at a session and the disputant had to solve it right there, *impromptu*, with no preliminary preparation.⁵

Vita di Dante by Boccaccio, very close in time to the frescoes of the Spanish Chapel, gives an idea about a dispute *de quolibet*. Wishing to present Dante as a scholastic, the author says there:

Fu ancora questo poeta di maravigliosa capacità e di memoria fermissima e di perspicace intelletto, intanto che, essendo egli a Parigi e quivi sostenendo una disputazione *de quolibet* che nelle scuole della teologia se faceva quattordici questioni di diversi valenti uomini e diverse materie, cogli loro argomenti pro e contra fatti dagli

⁵ A. della Torre, *Storia dell'Accademia platonica* (Rocca S. Cassiano, 1902), 204-208, according to the statutes of the universities of Bologna (1401) and Florence (1431).

opponenti, senza mettere in mezzo raccolse, e ordinatamente, come poste erano stato, recito; quelle poi seguendo quello medesimo ordine, sottilmente solvendo e rispondendo agli argomenti contrari, la qual cosa quasi miracolo da tutti i circostanti fu reputata.⁶

In the scene of the Paris dispute, should we not imagine Dante acting the same way as the Dominican of the Spanish Chapel, assembling arguments by turning down fingers – *raccolse* – and resolving, also in the order of reckoning – *solvendo e rispondendo agli argomenti contrari* – the arguments of his opponents and the counter-arguments of his own?

Sequential numbering played the same role of a logical skeleton in a public sermon by Giordano da Rivolta (1302-1305) to Savonarola. However, the sermons of Bernardino da Siena delivered in his native city in 1427 are the most interesting in this respect, due to their proximity to real life; their text expressively demonstrates the mnemonic meaning of argument reckoning. In his sermons, Bernardino fearlessly and publicly touched upon all the sores of his time, both small and great: he reproved the party discords of the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, proscribed sodomy, condemned the vanity of fancy fashions, taught man and wife the obligations of a Christian marriage and the correct way of bringing up children, instructed merchants in the licit ways of trading, and demanded the elimination of witches. In a sermon dedicated to vanity, Bernardino fights against perversions of dress:

Cominceremo da' vestimenti corporali, che so' di grandissima vanità e di grande peccato mortale. Vuoi tu vedere quanto è mala cosa? Or intendolo e imparalo. Io ti vo mostrare dieci offensione di Dio, tutte per cagione de' vestimenti. Tollegli a cinque a cinque. Tolle il primo.

Primo segno ti dico, è vanità.

Secondo è varietà.

Terzo, suavità.

Quarto, preziosità.

Quinto, iniquità. Hai le prime cinque.

Piglia l'altre cinque.

La prima è superfluità.

Seconda è curiosità.

Terza, novità.

Quarta, malignità.

⁶ This poet also had marvelous capacities of perfect memory and perspicacious intellect, so much so that once in Paris when taking part in a dispute *de quolibeto*, as they used to organize in theological schools, after having listened through fourteen questions on various matters from various learned men followed by arguments and counter-arguments put forth by his opponents, he recited them one after the other without a single break and in exactly the same order as they had been posed and then, following the same order, subtly resolved them and responded to the contradicting arguments, which was reputed by all by-standers to have been a miracle of sorts. G. Boccaccio, *Vita di Dante*, ed. F. Macri-Leone (Florence, 1888).

Quinta e ultima, dannosità.⁷

So begins the sermon that develops all these ten statements in turn and then passes over to the next illustration of vanity in a similar framework. Bernardino presents his listeners with bundles or batches of arguments in threes, fives, sevens, nines, or tens, so that the audience would memorize them. He orders them to make knots on a thread or a girdle:⁸

Ma pigli questi modi delle pruove . . . che so' cinque.⁹

Ode ed impara questa pallotte e pigliale a cinque a cinque . . .¹⁰

Portane queste conclusioni nel borsello e tielle a mesi.¹¹

In the middle or in the end of a sermon Bernardino, as a good teacher, recapitulates all he said before, in the same order. For instance, in sermon 37, *Dei mercatanti e de maestri e come si den fare le mercanzie*, he says at the end:

Tu hai veduto diciotto modi di peccati sopra de le mercanzie, dove puoi avere comprese i modi da poterti esercitare senza peccato, al modo che ci amaestrano e' sacri Dottori. Tu hai intese di sette circostanze gia le tre. Prima, la persona, che debba fare la mercanzia, secondo, l'animo di chi fa la mercanzia. Hai la persona, l'animo e 'l modo. Vediamo ora il luogo e 'l tempo, etc.¹²

Finger reckoning of the fourteen questions of Dante's dispute or of Bernardino's eighteen kinds of sinful trade is, therefore, the gesture of scholastic philosophy, the scholastic school, scholastic dispute, and the scholastic sermon. The Spanish Chapel frescoes reflect this gesture iconographically. Our next task is to overview the further development of this gesture in the art of the Italian Renaissance.

In the Roman basilica of St. Clement, Masolino created an image of St. Catherine of Alexandria disputing with catechists and doctors (1428-1431). At the far end of the long narrow basilica we observe the persecutor emperor seated

⁷ Let us begin with bodily garments which, as far as I know, are of the greatest vanity and a grave mortal sin. Do you wish to know what a bad thing they are? I shall now explain this to you and teach you. I wish to show you the ten offenses to God, all resulting from dressing improperly. Count in fives. Raise the first finger. The first sign I'll tell you is vanity. The second, love of variety. The third, love of sweetness. The fourth, love of the expensive. The fifth, iniquity. Here you have the first five. Now count on the other five [fingers]. The first is superfluity. The second, curiosity. The third, love of novelty. The fourth, malignity. The fifth, deficiency. [*Le prediche volgari di San Bernardino da Siena dette nella Piazza del Campo l'anno MCCCXXVII*, vol. 1 – 3, edited L. Banchi (Siena, 1880-1888), vol. 3, 186].

⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 2.

⁹ But mind also these manners of proof. . . which, as far as I know, are five. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 69.

¹⁰ Listen and learn this count and count to five. . . *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 193.

¹¹ Place these arguments in your purse and keep them for months. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 4.

¹² *On merchants and masters and how to carry out trade*: You have seen eighteen manners of sinful trade and, perhaps, understood from that how to trade without committing a sin, in the way taught to us by the sainted Doctors. Out of seven circumstances you have learnt about three. Firstly, the person who ought to trade; secondly, the intention of the one who trades. You have the person, the intention, the manner. Let us now consider also the place and the time. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 243.

at the top of three steps. The scholars, lords, and sages listening to St. Catherine, their heads up, are seated on benches along the walls. Four on each side, clad in mantles with identical fur neckpieces, they are all in one or another way turned toward Catherine. In the middle she stands upright, dressed in a plain dress reaching the ground; due to the absolute stillness of the figure from the waist to the ground, the contour of the dress is striking in its geometric rectilinearity. The hair, plainly swept back, is surrounded by a halo; the face, pretty and simple, is also immobile, spiritless. This is why the gesture of her outstretched hands, with elbows almost straight, seems to be a somnambulist's stir. Her left palm is open; Catherine turns down its third finger with the thumb and the index finger of her right hand: the three fingers thus make a half-closed triangle. Only this finger reckoning in the center of the fresco, as a representation of a series of victorious arguments being listed, symbolizes the drama of confrontation and the moral victory of the disputant.

Continuing the work of Andrea Pisano on the low marble reliefs of the Florentine Campanile in 1450, Luca della Robbia produced two variant versions of the dialectic among the images of the liberal arts of the *trivium*. In the first sexagon, is a heated argument of the two Classical philosophers Plato and Aristotle. The action takes place in antiquity, as is manifested by the classical togas and a scroll in the hands of one of the disputants; he is pointing to this scroll with his index finger, while his furious opponent is gesticulating with out-spread hands. On the other low relief the dispute develops in a more academic manner and is transferred onto a medieval ground. This dispute also starts from a script, but this script is represented by a codex. In place of the ancient philosophers, a representative of the infidel Orient – an old man with a turban – offers resistance to the Christian West personified by a man with a beret. The antagonists, equally imposing and dignified, are worthy of each other. The old man bends over the book he is holding aslant with both hands. The scholastic refutes him while attacking him: his left hand's fingers touch the book, with his right hand he is pressing down the fourth and the fifth fingers on his left hand, thus reckoning his arguments. In order for the reckoning to be seen, the right hand hovers slightly above the left one. While limiting himself to only two figures, Luca della Robbia was capable of creating a characteristic image of medieval dispute between the representatives of the hostile cultures of the Orient and the West, simultaneously linking this image to text interpretation, glossing, and the finger reckoning of arguments.

In the 1470s a Flemish painter, Justus of Ghent, was invited to Urbino to decorate the library of Prince Federico da Montefeltro. Among the knee-high portraits of the illustrious persons of antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, the scholastic Thomas Aquinas, the theologian John Scott Eriugena, and Boethius (fig. 1), the author of the *Consolatio philosophiae* and the *Arithmetica*, are depicted reckoning fingers. Thomas Aquinas with the bloated and sodden face of an old prelate turns the open palm of his raised hand towards the beholder and with the index finger of the right hand holds back the thumb of the

left hand. Eriugena, a tall and slim ascetic, holds down the open palm of the left hand and pulls back its thumb with the index finger and thumb of his right hand, while all the other fingers of his left hand are pressed down to the palm. Boethius, in the beret and a mantle of a medieval doctor, repeats Eriugena's gesture, with the only difference that he has just reckoned with three fingers on his left hand and has raised three fingers on his right. The gesture of finger reckoning should characterize scholastics and their forefather Boethius, as the gesture of drawing with a compass characterizes Euclides or a green globe characterizes Ptolomaeus the geographer.¹³ In contrast, ancient philosophers, Church fathers, and the humanists Petrarch and Vittorino da Feltre are not "aware" of this gesture, as their portraits do not show them using it. As for Boethius, his gesture may have a duplicate meaning, both the straightforwardly "professional" and the general scholastic. As a founder of the liberal arts, Boethius teaches counting;¹⁴ as a master of dispute who tried his strength against philosophy, he is thought to be putting forth a series of premises and reasons.

The ideal portraits in the Urbino library are important in the sense that they render the gesture of argument reckoning repeatedly and with perfect graphic precision. However, by depicting a speaker without an audience and its response, Justus of Ghent to a great extent removes the expression and the meaning from this gesture and strips it of its social dynamism.

In the 1490s the same gesture of finger reckoning recurs in the frescoes by Pinturicchio in the Borgia Apartments (the Vatican), as well as in the Venetian St. Ursula's cycle by Vittore Carpaccio. Pinturicchio returned to St. Catherine's disputation (fig. 2), turning it into a pompous and many-figured parade on a large field in front of Constantine's Arch. On the left an emperor is seated on a throne under a canopy. The young Catherine stands in front of the emperor. The retinue mills about behind the throne; a crowd of doctors with servants and valets presses in on the right and, as if there were too few of them already, hunters mounted on horses and accompanied by hounds are joining the swarm. The emperor's retinue only gives the appearance of presence, just like most of the catechists; some of the latter, however, peek into books, while in the foreground one of them energetically points to a book held in front of him by a kneeling page. Countless figures, horses, hounds, footmen, children, birds in the air, an abundance of picturesque, fantastic, and varicoloured clothes, turbans, hoods, berets, the gold of the triumphal arch, and the brocade of the throne all tumble and overload the composition to such an extent that the actual heroine is lost in the helter-skelter and turned into a mere figurant. Pinturicchio's saint is, however, as vain as her environment: the front of her red dress is embroidered with gold, fashionable sleeves are puffed at the elbows, her blue mantle has slipped grace-

¹³ The entire portrait gallery of the Urbino library is reproduced in A. Venturi, *Storia dell'arte italiana*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 136-37. The original portrait of Aquinas is now in the Louvre; Eriugena and Boethius are in the Galleria Barberini in Rome.

¹⁴ D. E. Smith, *History of mathematics* 2 (Boston, 1925), on finger reckoning and the symbolism of fingers, 195-202.

fully down the shoulder, and her long blonde frizzy hair is coquettishly let loose below her waist. Historical tradition names Lucrezia Borgia as Pinturricchio's model; the Borgia's coat of arms – a golden bull – appears in the same fresco as an ornament on the arch of Constantine. This mysterious lady is ceaselessly intriguing as either an offspring of vice or its victim,¹⁵ carrying on a debate on the faith with her own life at stake. The only sign of her being aware of this, however, is her listless finger reckoning: with three fingers of her right hand she pulls the middle finger of the left hand. So overwhelming is Lucrezia's indifference that her gesture goes unnoticed. One can have seen this figure a hundred times in detailed reproductions and still have perceived her closely held hands as a gesture of young girl's embarrassment, as if she did not know what to do with her hands, particularly because, as in Masolino's fresco, her elbows are almost straight. The gesture has lost its distinctness due to the artist's interpretation of the legendary episode as a performance, a glittering show.

Also in the 1490s, Vittore Carpaccio completed the frescoes of *The Legend of St. Ursula* (Venice, Accademia) (fig. 3). One of the frescoes in the center portrays a scene of a marriage tender by a pagan prince and the reception of the prince's ambassador by a king, the father of Ursula. As the action unfolds, in the right side of the triptych one sees a conversation between Ursula and her father in a bedchamber. As legend has it,¹⁶ Ursula pacified her father, who was frightened by the pagan's threats. Inspired by heaven, she gave conditional consent to marriage. The father and the potential husband were to give her a retinue of a thousand virgins and, besides, ten more elect virgins with retinues of thousand girls each.

In the company of eleven thousand girls she would remain for three years, until her groom converted to Christianity. The conditions that Ursula had thought up in order to scare away the groom were accepted. The daughter persuading the father in Carpaccio's image reckons on her fingers. Intellectually, the gesture is slightly lower here, since this is neither a dispute nor a sermon. It is all the more interesting to see this gesture still used, by inertia and by association, as a gesture of dialectics, argumentation, and reasoning in the intimate situation of a daughter's one-to-one conversation with her father. A naïve realist, Carpaccio charges the legend with the everyday-life details of Renaissance Venice. He must have observed this gesture in the daily routine to be able to transfer it to a monumental painting.

¹⁵ C. Zuchelli, *Lucrezia Borgia* (Mantua, 1860); G. Campora, "Una vittima della storia," *Nuova antologia* (31 Aug. 1866); F. Gregorovius, *Lucrezia Borgia; secondo documenti e carteggi del tempo*. Tr. Raffaele Mariano (Florence, 1874); A. Luzia, *Isabella d'Este e I Borgia* (Milan, 1915); N. Grimaldi, *Reggio, Lucrezia Borgia e un romanzo d'amore della duchessa di Ferrara* (Regia Emilia, 1926); De Hevesy, "Bildnisse von Lucrezia und Cesare Borgia," *Burlington Magazine* (1932).

¹⁶ Jacobi a Voragine *Legenda Aurea vulgo Historia lombardica dicta*, ed. T. Graesse (Leipzig, 1850).

Finger reckoning as a focal point of the composition in Pinturicchio's and Carpaccio's works comes back in the early sixteenth century, in Pinturicchio's frescoes in St. John's the Baptist Chapel in the Siena cathedral (fig. 4) and in Carpaccio's *St. Stephen Disputing with Catechists* (1514, Milan, Brera) (fig. 5). Pinturicchio's composition is a step forward in the sense of the expressiveness of the central theme.

Pinturicchio's frescoes first portray the Baptist as a young hermit in the desert, then as a preacher before an assembly. A cilice leaves bare his skinny, sinewy legs and arms, his curls fall down to his shoulders; the entire figure stands out as a black profile against the rock among the trees on the right, with the golden mosaic as an evening afterglow in the background. His lone figure at an altitude is opposed to the throng at his feet. He is preaching, just as Giordano da Rivolti, Bernardino of Siena, and Savonarola did. Numbered arguments help the speaker keep the thread; at the same time, they also aid the audience. Not only the quality of the reasons but also their number should affect the listeners. John's arms are bent at the elbows and his head is bowed, yet his gesture is full of energy and is in the center of the speaker's attention, as well as being in the center of composition. The palm of his left hand is open toward the speaker; three fingers are raised and spread wide. With the first two fingers of his right hand the Baptist is reckoning on the fingers of his left, originally pressed down to the palm. The count has reached the third finger.

In his composition Carpaccio comes near to Pinturicchio. A portico divided into three parts by a colonnade stands out against the background of a naively exotic landscape with a fantastic pyramid and a gothic multi-storey building. Stephen, clad as a deacon, sits on an elevation on the left behind the columns of the portico. Drawn in profile, inclined forward, the saint is reckoning on his fingers. Below him there is a swarm of listeners, some of them seated. Among them are several oriental sages in turbans and hoods, but many more are good Venetians in mantles with wide sleeves, so familiar from the other works by this artist. On the ground there are shut and open books, lying down and standing edgeways. However, only the first row of listeners is actually paying heed to the speaker, all the others are present there just by chance. Stephen himself is also shaded by the secondary figures and turned three quarters around towards the beholder rather than his audience. As is always the case with Carpaccio, the action is obscured by the festive "genre."

Two more works belonging to the same series appeared in the first quarter of the sixteenth century. These are the *Metamorphosis of Daphne*, a fresco (initially in Monza, Casa le Pelluca, later transferred to Brera) (fig. 6), and *Christ Among the Teachers* by Bernardino Luini, a panel painting (London, National Gallery). The latter is a type of north Italian composition made of five half-length figures subordinated to the central one. Christ, a watered-down *leonardesque*, feminine-looking, pithless, syrupy figure with wavy hair flowing down to his shoulders, is surrounded by the Pharisees of typical Semitic appearance. Two men on the far ends of the composition, drawn in profile, oppose each other as

closing coulisses, each of those in the middle faces his neighbour. In a dispute with teachers Christ also reckons on his fingers. The index of his outstretched right hand touches the extended third finger of his left hand, so that the two create a right angle which crosses askew the main axes of the portico: the slanted crossing attracts beholder's attention. Three fingers of his right hand are pressed to the palm in the same way as the fourth and the fifth fingers of his left hand. Aristocratically beautiful, Christ's hands are in the geometrical center of the portico. However, given the precision of drawing, the sluggishly mincing statu-
esque gesture lacks temperament and life. Luini is incapable of conveying drama here as well as elsewhere.

Daphne becoming a tree is also treated idyllically, even though her legs and her right hand have already grown into a trunk, while her left hand is reproachfully turned toward the guilty one. Narcissus, a blonde beauty in fantastic fancy dress, is sitting on the right opposite Daphne, on the rocky bank of a curving stream. His picturesque silhouette in profile produces a gliding wavy line of an extended left hand and the bent knee of the right leg with an elbow resting on it. He smiles perplexedly, looking at old Penaeus with a long white beard, a river god standing below in water reaching up to his waist: he is a father standing up for his daughter.¹⁷ Penaeus also rebukes Narcissus and with his right hand pulls back the thumb of his left hand, which is open toward the beholder. His hands are placed along the geometrical lengthwise axis of the composition. Similarly to Carpaccio's portrayal of Ursula's conversation with her father, here this gesture becomes familiarly intimate, enters the atmosphere of the Ovidian metamorphoses and leaves behind the scholastics, disputes, and sermons. The evolution of this gesture is marked by syncretism, much like the development of Italian Renaissance culture as a whole. Having been transferred into mythology, this gesture became a holdover.

We shall conclude this overview with Dürer. Compared to all the others, he renders this gesture with the maximal temperament. His *Christ Among the Doctors* dates precisely to 1506 (fig. 7). It was created in Italy and remains there (Rome, Galleria Barberini). Italian influence on this work is indisputable.

The adolescent Jesus, surrounded by the six characteristic musing heads of the bibliognosts and pharisees and by three weighty open volumes, is defined both intellectually and emotionally by a clear and somewhat convulsive gesture of his long-fingered nervous hands rather than by the insignificant features of his pretty face, inclined to the right. Both hands are at the geometrical center. The left one is lowered and opened toward the beholder; wide spread clutched fingers are as if readying to grasp something. The index finger of his upper, right, hand, pulls back the thumb of his left hand. An ugly old bald man wearing a coif on his head, with a grin and a projecting jaw, touches Christ's hands from the left. His own hands, big, craggy, and knobby, are no less expressive and tense. Just like Jesus' hands, he has his left hand lowered and his right hand raised.

¹⁷ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, vol. 1, 452.

The pulled-back finger of his right hand and the extended index finger of his left hand make it clear that the old man has just finished finger reckoning in the same manner in which Christ is now doing it. Dürer reinforces the motif of finger reckoning almost by duplication, by a hint at duplication, like the master of the Spanish Chapel. The plexus of these four taut hands in the geometrical center of the portico characterizes the confrontation of opinions just as does the wall-eyed thoughtful look of the old man, who strives for the truth as much as the boy. The finger reckoning gesture was best of all absorbed and expressed by the Northern master who had the spirit of the Gothic running in his blood.

Let us draw conclusions: All masters rendered the gesture of finger reckoning basically identically; their visualization of this gesture stands in accordance with Leonardo da Vinci's rule. Fingers of the right hand, either the index or third finger or the thumb and the index finger together, fret the fingers of the left hand, open upwards. The gesture has the meaning of argument counting in a scholastic dispute or a sermon or serves as an attribute of a scholastic in a portrait. This gesture is thus a reflection of the scholastic way of thinking as much as it is a mnemonic device. The usual gesture is reflected in the art of the Italian Renaissance throughout two centuries, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth. We find this motif in the works of all Italian schools: the Tuscan, the Umbrian, the Lombardian, the Venetian and in the production of foreign masters, one Flemish and one German who worked in Italy.¹⁸ The symbolic meaning of this motif is first defined by its duplication and later by its tendency to occupy the central place in the composition. Finally, in Dürer's painting, the gesture of finger reckoning combines the central position with an "almost" duplication. At about 1500 the motif of finger reckoning was seen as canonical by artistic workshops; it also found an appropriate definition in a treatise by Leonardo da Vinci. Having become a daily-life phenomenon, this gesture has simultaneously become a hold-over, for it is only reproduced either by artists of the old formation, like Pinturicchio, or by naive realists such as Carpaccio. For the Quattrocento, a list of examples similar to those discussed can still be created, but in the High Renaissance such examples are no longer available. For Raphael's *Dispute* in the *Stanza della Segnatura*, this gesture, as an old-fashioned lucubration, is stylistically out of place, for the new aesthetics require a free gesture, a large scale, a picturesque amplitude and fluidity. However, the problem was not solved only within the sphere of aesthetics. The history of our gesture also ends in the history of culture, together with a steady decline of scholastics. A sarcastic requiem for scholastics was composed by Rabelais, who narrated Gargantua's studies under the doctor of theology, Master Thubal Oloferne. Beside other things, the

¹⁸ There is no doubt that this gesture was also depicted by masters of the period working outside Italy. E. Ch. Skrzhinskaya, for instance, pointed out to me a comparable woodcut that depicts a scholarly dispute regarding a plant; the print is from the title page of the *Tractatus de herbis* in the *Hortus sanitatis* (Vienna, National Library, c. 1485) The page is reproduced in F. Strunz, "Albertus Magnus," in *Menschen, Völker, Zeiten* 15 (Vienna, 1926).

master read to his student the *De modis significandi*,¹⁹ accompanied by the commentaries of numerous scholars; it took him eighteen years and eleven days to reach the end of the text. The student memorized this text so well that at a trial he recited it backwards by heart. Along with this, he proved to his mother, with the help of finger reckoning - *prouvoit sur ses doigts*, - that *de modis significandi non erat scientia*.²⁰ Thus a student of a scholastic, Gargantua, builds up a finger-reckoned argumentation which is, however, aimed against his tutor and his instruction.



Fig. 1. Justus of Ghent, Portrait of Boethius.
Library of Prince Federico da Montefeltro, Urbino.

¹⁹ On the ways of rendering the meaning (Lat.)

²⁰ That the ways of rendering the meaning are no science. F. Rabelais, *La vie de Gargantua et Pantagruel* vol.1, chap. 14.



Fig. 2. Pinturicchio, St. Catherine's Disputation. Vatican.



Fig. 3. Vittore Carpaccio, St. Ursula with her father. Venice. Accademia.

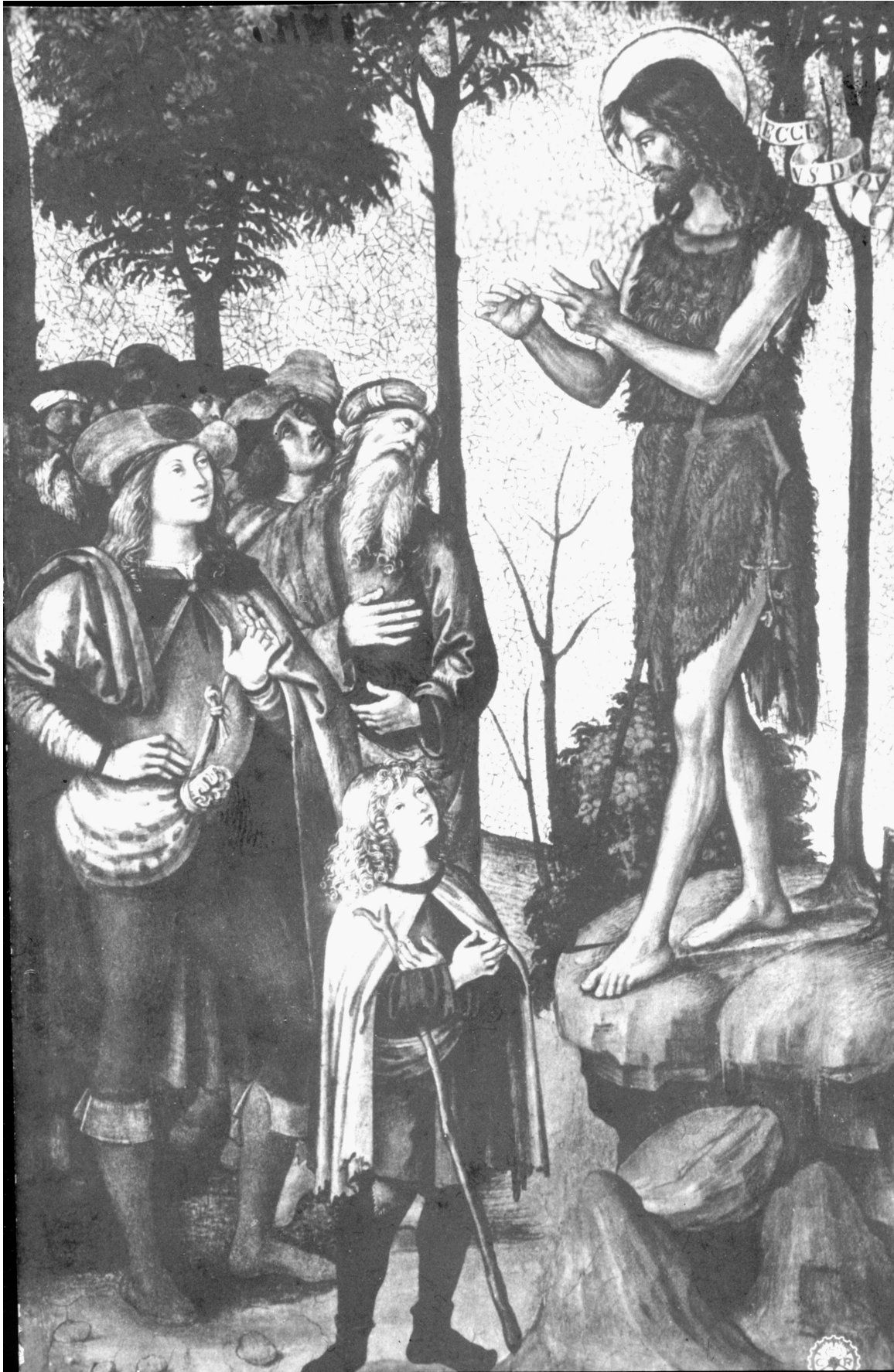


Fig. 4. Pinturicchio, The Preaching of St. John the Baptist.
Chapel of St. John the Baptist in Siena cathedral. Siena.



Fig. 5. Vittore Carpaccio, St. Stephen Disputing. Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera.



Fig. 6. Bernardino Luini. Metamorphosis of Daphne. Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera.

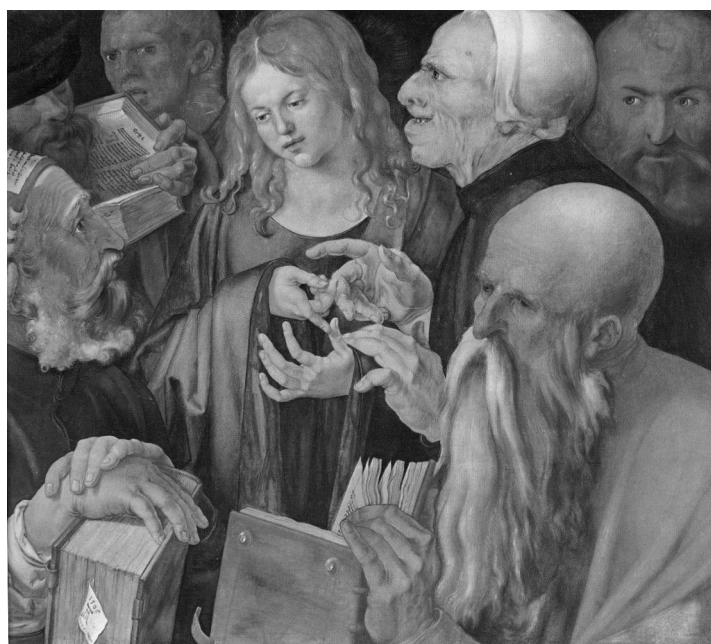


Fig. 7. A. Dürer. Christ Among the Doctors. Rome. Galleria Barberini.

Appendix: A. I. Khomentovskaya

The author of the article published here, Anna Ilyinichna Khomentovskaya (1881-1942), born Shestakova, lived a hard and heroic life.¹ She was born to a family of a gunnery officer, eventually a general, but in her youth she entered the democratic and revolutionary circles and broke off with her family. Khomentovskaya first studied mathematics in Germany and in St.-Petersburg but later realized that her vocation was history and transferred to the historico-philological faculty of the Bestouzev courses, where she studied under I. M. Grevs, E. D. Grimm, O. A. Dobiash-Rozhdestvenskaya, and E. V. Tarle. In 1916, Khomentovskaya graduated from the courses, and I. M. Grevs offered her a position in the Universal History department. From the very beginning of her career, Khomentovskaya was most interested in the Italian Renaissance and soon became one of the best Russian specialists in this field. She composed such works as *Castiglione, Raphael's Friend* (1923), *Stendhal: Images of Post-Revolutionary France* (1923), *Italian Humanism in Modern Historiography* (1923), *Lucca at the Time of the Merchant Dynasty of Guinigi* (1925), and *Modern Approach Toward the Study of Sources* (1927).² In the Soviet period, Khomentovskaya had almost no opportunity to do research. In 1923, during M. N. Pokrovsky's attack on "bourgeois historiography," Khomentovskaya was banned from teaching at the university and from that time on, as she herself put it, she studied history as a *Privatgelehrte*. For more than ten years Khomentovskaya was in charge of the library of the Main Geophysical Observatory. She published a number of works in Italy in the French language (One of these, on the Veronese humanist Felice Feliciano as an author of the *Dreams of Polyphil*, was recommended for publication by Benedetto Croce.)

In 1935 Khomentovskaya was denounced and exiled from Leningrad and for two years worked in Saratov university library. There she completed the book she considered to be the highest point of her life – a monograph *The Italian Humanist Epitaph: Its Fate and Problems (1300 - 1550)*³ – that was finally published almost 60 years later. On the basis of the epitaph material she brilliantly analyzed the attitude of Renaissance people towards death and, accordingly, towards life. Thus she in many ways anticipated the "history of emotions" and the "history of death" that have gained such esteem in the second half of the twentieth century.

In 1937 Khomentovskaya was arrested and spent three years in jail and camps. Freed in 1940 due to illness but banned from living in large cities,

¹ For details see B. S. Kaganovich, "Anna Ilyinichna Khomentovskaya," *Srednie veka/The Middle Ages* 52 (1989): 294-306.

² See the list of publications in A. I. Khomentovskaya, *Italianskaya gumanisticheskaya epitafiya: yeyo sudyba i problematika (The Italian Humanist Epitaph: Its Fate and Problems)*, comp. N. L. Korsakova and B. S. Kaganovich, ed. A. N. Nemilov and A. H. Gorfunkel (St. Petersburg, 1995), 263-64.

³ *Ibid.*

Khomentovskaya settled in Vyshniy Volochok and almost immediately resumed her scholarly activity. There, she wrote a book on Lorenzo Valla that was only published in 1964.⁴ In the last months of her life “in an almost desolate little town, in a house with nailed-up windows, again separated from all her dear ones, under the German airplanes,” Khomentovskaya wrote her memoirs entitled *The Trodden Way* – a memorial of unbroken spirit and a remarkable historical document.⁵

Khomentovskaya died on October 3, 1942, in the village of Ostrovno (Udomlya district of the Kalinin region) where she had been taken not long before her death by a niece who worked there as an agronomist. As a scholar, Khomentovskaya kept growing till the very end. Her works, often written under pressing living conditions, were a part of international scholarship: not only did they remain up-to-date, but they also presaged modern tendencies in historical thought.

Khomentovskaya’s article “Toward the Cultural History of Gesture in the Art of the Italian Renaissance” was written in the 1930s. It is needless to justify its significance for the present day. The history of gesture is one of the most popular subjects in contemporary medieval studies; the Annales school leads in this field of research. The works by J. Le Goff and J.-C. Schmitt have stirred particular scholarly interest. Medieval mnemonic techniques have also attracted medievalists’ attention; in Italy, specific works are dedicated to the discussion of methods of memorizing the vices and virtues as propagated by medieval preachers.

Khomentovskaya’s article is published on the basis of a manuscript presently kept in the archive of St. Petersburg branch of the Institute for Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Western European section, F. 19. Op. I. D. 35. L. 1-17). The Academy of Sciences received this manuscript, along with Khomentovskaya’s entire scholarly legacy, from her nieces I. V. Arnold and the late T. V. Dostoyevskaya, who had carefully preserved it for more than half a century after Khomentovskaya’s death. Just as was case with the *Italian Humanist Epitaph*, along with the Russian text Khomentovskaya also prepared a French version of the paper, for she wished to make it available to the Western scholars.⁶

The editors have corrected the bibliographical references for this publication. They would like to express their deepest gratitude to Archive research fellow A. N. Vasilyev, who made a full description of the Khomentovskaya collection and called their attention to a work that was believed to have been lost.

S. Kaganovich, N. L. Korsakova

⁴ A. I. Khomentovskaya, *Lorenzo Valla – velikij italianskij gumanist* (Lorenzo Valla – The Great Italian Humanist), ed. V. I. Rutenburg (Moscow, 1964).

⁵ Khomentovskaya, “The Trodden Way,” in *The Italian Humanist Epitaph*, 221-57.

⁶ This has not been edited (translator’s note).

Images in Medieval and Early Modern Culture

(Approaches in Russian Historical Research)

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SONDERBAND XIII

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(Approaches in Russian Historical Research)

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Preface

In recent years, many historians have recognized their special interest in visual sources. The ‘iconic turn’ has also become vital for the historical disciplines.¹

Images were a constitutive part of medieval and early modern daily life – with regard to their function and usage as well as their contents, ‘language’ and perception. Communication with the help of and via pictures played an important role for all strata of society. Therefore, research into the visual system and culture of these periods has become a basic constituent of (social) historical research.²

We would like to thank the authors of this volume, Svetlana I. Luchitskaya and Aron Ya. Gurevich in particular, for their interest and readiness to have their approaches towards images, which they had presented at a Moscow conference and in the 2002 special volume of the journal *Одиссей. Человек в истории*: “Слово и образ в средневековой культуре” (“Mot et image dans la culture médiévale”), translated into English and published as a ‘Sonderband’ of *Medium Aevum Quotidianum*. These investigations of the visual culture of the past by Russian historical researchers are an important contribution to the international trends and efforts to include images as parts of medieval and early modern culture and sources for today’s (social) historians. The articles offer a wide spectrum: from the history of gestures to various aspects and functions of images in *memoria*, political and religious life. The relevant roles that visual

¹ Concerning the ‘iconic’ or ‘pictorial turn’ see, e. g., W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago, 1994); *idem.*, “Der Pictorial Turn,” in *Privileg Blick. Kritik der visuellen Kultur*, ed. Christian Kravagna (Berlin, 1997), 15-40; Jan Baetens, “Reading Vision? What Contexts for the Pictorial Turn?”, *Semiotica* 126 (1999), 203-218.

² See, e. g., Francis Haskell, *History and Its Images. Art and the Representation of the Past* (New Haven and London, 1993); Jérôme Baschet and Jean-Claude Schmitt (ed.), *L’image. Fonctions et usages des images dans l’Occident médiéval* (Paris, 1996); Gerhard Jaritz (ed.), *Pictura quasi fictura. Die Rolle des Bildes in der Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* (Vienna, 1996); Otto Gerhard Oexle (ed.), *Der Blick auf die Bilder. Kunstgeschichte und Geschichte im Gespräch* (Göttingen, 1997); Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca, 2001); Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le corps des images. Essais sur la culture visuelle au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 2002); Andrea von Hülsen-Esch and Jean-Claude Schmitt (ed.), *Die Methodik der Bildinterpretation. Les méthodes de l’interprétation de l’image. Deutsch-französische Kolloquien 1998-2000*, 2 vols. (Göttingen, 2002); Axel Bolvig and Phillip Lindley (ed.), *History and Images. Towards a New Iconology* (Turnhout, 2003).