



# STUDIES IN ICONOLOGY

*Humanistic Themes  
In the Art of the Renaissance*

BY  
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## PREFACE TO THE PAPERBACK EDITION

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FACED with the problem of reissuing a book nearly forgotten and entirely out of print, an author finds himself torn between conflicting impulses: either to rewrite the whole thing from beginning to end or not to touch it at all.

Prevented by age and circumstances from adopting the first of these alternatives, yet too much afraid of the Last Judgment to acquiesce in the second, this writer has decided for a compromise. Apart from correcting some palpable errors and misprints, I have left the text unaltered even where it ought to be revised or at least reformulated; but I have tried to encourage the disbelief of the reader by listing a number of books and articles which either appeared after the publication of *Studies in Iconology* or (in two cases) were regrettably overlooked at the time; and by adding, *exigente opportunitate*, a few brief comments of my own. In this way I have both salved my conscience and given, I hope, some help to those who may wish to pursue the subject further.

### CHAPTER I (Introductory).

§I: The general validity of the 'iconological' method for the interpretation of Renaissance and Baroque art was challenged by C. Gilbert, 'On Subject and Non-Subject in Renaissance Pictures,' *Art Bulletin*, XXXIV, 1952, p. 202 ss. It is true that 'subject' must not be confused with 'story-telling' and that 'pure' landscape, still-life and genre paintings did exist in the sixteenth century (and achieved tremendous popularity in the seventeenth); but it is equally true that even apparently subjectless productions may convey more than 'meets the eye,' as has been demonstrated, for example, by the recent studies

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## I. INTRODUCTORY

### § I

**I**CONOGRAPHY is that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form. Let us, then, try to define the distinction between *subject matter* or *meaning* on the one hand, and *form* on the other.

When an acquaintance greets me on the street by removing his hat, what I see from a *formal* point of view is nothing but the change of certain details within a configuration forming part of the general pattern of colour, lines and volumes which constitutes my world of vision. When I identify, as I automatically do, this configuration as an *object* (gentleman), and the change of detail as an *event* (hat-removing), I have already overstepped the limits of purely *formal* perception and entered a first sphere of *subject matter* or *meaning*. The meaning thus perceived is of an elementary and easily understandable nature, and we shall call it the *factual meaning*; it is apprehended by simply identifying certain visible forms with certain objects known to me from practical experience, and by identifying the change in their relations with certain actions or events.

Now the objects and events thus identified will naturally produce a certain reaction within myself. From the way my acquaintance performs his action I may be able to sense whether he is in a good or bad humour, and whether his feelings towards me are indifferent, friendly or hostile. These psychological nuances will invest the gestures of my acquaintance with a further meaning which we shall call *expressional*. It differs from the *factual* one in that it is apprehended, not by simple identification, but by 'empathy.' To understand it, I need a certain sensitivity, but this sensitivity is still part

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of my practical experience, that is, of my every-day familiarity with objects and events. Therefore both the *factual* and the *expressional meaning* may be classified together: they constitute the class of *primary* or *natural* meanings.

However, my realization that the lifting of the hat stands for a greeting belongs in an altogether different realm of interpretation. This form of salute is peculiar to the western world and is a residue of mediaeval chivalry: armed men used to remove their helmets to make clear their peaceful intentions and their confidence in the peaceful intentions of others. Neither an Australian bushman nor an ancient Greek could be expected to realize that the lifting of a hat is not only a practical event with certain expressional connotations, but also a sign of politeness. To understand this significance of the gentleman's action I must not only be familiar with the practical world of objects and events, but also with the more-than-practical world of customs and cultural traditions peculiar to a certain civilization. Conversely, my acquaintance could not feel impelled to greet me by removing his hat were he not conscious of the significance of this feat. As for the expressional connotations which accompany his action, he may or may not be conscious of them. Therefore, when I interpret the removal of a hat as a polite greeting, I recognize in it a meaning which may be called *secondary* or *conventional*; it differs from the *primary* or *natural* one in that it is intelligible instead of being sensible, and in that it has been consciously imparted to the practical action by which it is conveyed.

And finally: besides constituting a natural event in space and time, besides naturally indicating moods or feelings, besides conveying a conventional greeting, the action of my acquaintance can reveal to an experienced observer all that goes to make up his 'personality.' This personality is conditioned by his being a man of the twentieth century, by his national, social and educational background, by the previous history of his life and by his present surroundings, but it is also distinguished by an individual manner of viewing things and reacting to the world which, if rationalized, would have

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to be called a philosophy. In the isolated action of a polite greeting all these factors do not manifest themselves comprehensively, but nevertheless symptomatically. We could not construct a mental portrait of the man on the basis of this single action, but only by co-ordinating a large number of similar observations and by interpreting them in connection with our general information as to the gentleman's period, nationality, class, intellectual traditions and so forth. Yet all the qualities which this mental portrait would show explicitly are implicitly inherent in every single action, so that, conversely, every single action can be interpreted in the light of those qualities.

The meaning thus discovered may be called the *intrinsic meaning* or *content*; it is essential where the two other kinds of meaning, the *primary* or *natural* and the *secondary* or *conventional*, are phenomenal. It may be defined as a unifying principle which underlies and explains both the visible event and its intelligible significance, and which determines even the form in which the visible event takes shape. This *intrinsic meaning* or *content* is, of course, as much above the sphere of conscious volitions as the *expressional meaning* is beneath this sphere.

Transferring the results of this analysis from every-day life to a work of art, we can distinguish in its subject matter or meaning the same three strata:

1—**PRIMARY OR NATURAL SUBJECT MATTER**, subdivided into **FACTUAL** and **EXPRESSATIONAL**. It is apprehended by identifying pure *forms*, that is: certain configurations of line and colour, or certain peculiarly shaped lumps of bronze or stone, as representations of natural *objects* such as human beings, animals, plants, houses, tools and so forth; by identifying their mutual relations as *events*; and by perceiving such *expressional* qualities as the mournful character of a pose or gesture, or the homelike and peaceful atmosphere of an interior. The world of pure *forms* thus recognized as carriers of *primary* or *natural meanings* may be called the world of artistic *motifs*. An enumeration of these motifs would be a *pre-iconographical* description of the work of art.

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2—**SECONDARY OR CONVENTIONAL SUBJECT MATTER.** It is apprehended by realizing that a male figure with a knife represents St. Bartholomew, that a female figure with a peach in her hand is a personification of Veracity, that a group of figures seated at a dinner table in a certain arrangement and in certain poses represents the Last Supper, or that two figures fighting each other in a certain manner represent the Combat of Vice and Virtue. In doing this we connect artistic *motifs* and combinations of artistic *motifs* (*compositions*) with *themes* or *concepts*. *Motifs* thus recognized as carriers of a *secondary* or *conventional* meaning may be called *images*, and combinations of *images* are what the ancient theorists of art called '*invenzioni*'; we are wont to call them *stories* and *allegories*.<sup>1</sup>

The identification of such *images*, *stories* and *allegories* is the domain of iconography in the narrower sense of the word. In fact, when we loosely speak of '*subject matter*' as opposed to *form*' we chiefly mean the sphere of *secondary* or *conventional* subject matter, viz. the world of specific *themes* or *concepts* manifested in *images*, *stories* and *allegories*, as opposed to the sphere of *primary* or *natural subject matter* manifested in artistic *motifs*. 'Formal analysis' in Wölfflin's sense is largely an analysis of motifs and combinations of motifs (*compositions*); for a formal analysis in the

1. *Images* conveying the idea, not of concrete and individual *persons* or *objects* (such as St. Bartholomew, Venus, Mrs. Jones, or Windsor Castle), but of abstract and general notions such as Faith, Luxury, Wisdom etc., are called either *personifications* or *symbols* (not in the Cassirian, but in the ordinary sense, e.g. the Cross, or the Tower of Chastity). Thus *allegories*, as opposed to *stories*, may be defined as combinations of *personifications* and/or *symbols*. There are, of course many intermediary possibilities. A person A. may be portrayed in the guise of the person B. (Bronzino's Andrea Doria as Neptune; Dürer's Lucas Paumgartner as St. George), or in the customary array of a personification (Joshua Reynolds's Mrs. Stanhope as 'Contemplation'); portrayals of concrete and individual *persons*, both human or mythological, may be combined with personifications, as is the case in countless representations of a eulogistic character. A story may convey, in addition, an *allegorical* idea, as is the case with the illustrations of the *Ovide Moralisé*, or may be conceived as the 'prefiguration' of another story, as in the *Biblia Pauperum* or in the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*. Such *superimposed* meanings either do not enter into the *content* of the work at all, as is the case with the *Ovide Moralisé* illustrations which are visually indistinguishable from non-allegorical miniatures illustrating the same Ovidian subjects; or they cause an ambiguity of *content*, which can, however, be overcome or even turned into an added value if the conflicting ingredients are molten in the heat of a fervent artistic temperament as in Rubens' 'Galerie de Médicis.'

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strict sense of the word would even have to avoid such expressions as 'man,' 'horse,' or 'column,' let alone such evaluations as 'the ugly triangle between the legs of Michelangelo's David' or 'the admirable clarification of the joints in a human body.' It is obvious that a correct *iconographical analysis in the narrower sense* presupposes a correct identification of the *motifs*. If the knife that enables us to identify a St. Bartholomew is not a knife but a cork-screw, the figure is not a St. Bartholomew. Furthermore it is important to note that the statement 'this figure is an image of St. Bartholomew' implies the conscious intention of the artist to represent St. Bartholomew, while the expressional qualities of the figure may well be unintentional.

3—**INTRINSIC MEANING OR CONTENT.** It is apprehended by ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion—unconsciously qualified by one personality and condensed into one work. Needless to say, these principles are manifested by, and therefore throw light on, both 'compositional methods' and 'iconographical significance.' In the 14th and 15th centuries for instance (the earliest example can be dated around 1310), the traditional type of the Nativity with the Virgin Mary reclining in bed or on a couch was frequently replaced by a new one which shows the Virgin kneeling before the Child in adoration. From a compositional point of view this change means, roughly speaking, the substitution of a triangular scheme for a rectangular one; from an iconographical point of view in the narrower sense of the term, it means the introduction of a new theme textually formulated by such writers as Pseudo-Bonaventura and St. Bridget. But at the same time it reveals a new emotional attitude peculiar to the later phases of the Middle Ages. A really exhaustive interpretation of the intrinsic meaning or content might even show that the technical procedures characteristic of a certain country, period, or artist, for instance Michelangelo's preference for sculpture in stone

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instead of in bronze, or the peculiar use of hatchings in his drawings, are symptomatic of the same basic attitude that is discernible in all the other specific qualities of his style. In thus conceiving of pure forms, motifs, images, stories and allegories as manifestations of underlying principles, we interpret all these elements as what Ernst Cassirer has called '*symbolical values*'. As long as we limit ourselves to stating that Leonardo da Vinci's famous fresco shows a group of thirteen men around a dinner table, and that this group of men represents the Last Supper, we deal with the work of art as such, and we interpret its compositional and iconographical features as its own properties or qualifications. But when we try to understand it as a document of Leonardo's personality, or of the civilization of the Italian High Renaissance, or of a peculiar religious attitude, we deal with the work of art as a symptom of something else which expresses itself in a countless variety of other symptoms, and we interpret its compositional and iconographical features as more particularized evidence of this 'something else.' The discovery and interpretation of these '*symbolical values*' (which are generally unknown to the artist himself and may even emphatically differ from what he consciously intended to express) is the object of what we may call *iconography in a deeper sense*: of a method of interpretation which arises as a synthesis rather than as an analysis. And as the correct identification of the *motifs* is the prerequisite of a correct *iconographical analysis in the narrower sense*, the correct analysis of *images, stories and allegories* is the prerequisite of a correct *iconographical interpretation in a deeper sense*,—unless we deal with such works of art in which the whole sphere of secondary or conventional subject matter is eliminated, and a direct transition from *motifs* to *content* is striven for, as is the case with European landscape painting, still-life and genre; that is, on the whole, with exceptional phenomena, which mark the later, over-sophisticated phases of a long development.

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Now, how do we arrive at a correct *pre-iconographical description*, and at a correct *iconographical analysis in the narrower sense*, with the ultimate goal of penetrating into the *intrinsic meaning or content*?

In the case of a *pre-iconographical description*, which keeps within the limits of the world of *motifs*, the matter seems simple enough. The objects and events whose representation by lines, colours and volumes constitutes the world of *motifs* can be identified, as we have seen, on the basis of our practical experience. Everybody can recognize the shape and behaviour of human beings, animals and plants, and everybody can tell an angry face from a jovial one. It is, of course, possible that in a given case the range of our personal experience is not wide enough, for instance when we find ourselves confronted with the representation of an obsolete or unfamiliar tool, or with the representation of a plant or animal unknown to us. In such cases we have to widen the range of our practical experience by consulting a book or an expert, but we do not leave the sphere of practical experience as such.

Yet even in this sphere we encounter a peculiar problem. Setting aside the fact that the objects, events and expressions depicted in a work of art may be unrecognizable owing to the incompetence or malice aforethought of the artist, it is, on principle, impossible to arrive at a correct *pre-iconographical description*, or identification of primary subject matter, by indiscriminately applying our practical experience to the work of art. Our practical experience is indispensable, as well as sufficient, as material for a *pre-iconographical description*, but it does not guarantee its correctness.

A *pre-iconographical description* of Roger van der Weyden's *Three Magi* in the Museum of Berlin (fig.1) would, of course, have to avoid such terms as '*Magi*', '*Infant Jesus*' etc. But it would have to mention that the apparition of a small child is seen in the sky. How do we know that this child is meant to be an *apparition*? That it is surrounded with a halo of golden rays would not be sufficient proof of this assumption, for similar

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halos can often be observed in representations of the Nativity where the Infant Jesus is real. That the child in Roger's picture is meant to be an apparition can only be deduced from the additional fact that he hovers in mid-air. But how do we know that he hovers in mid-air? His pose would be no different were he seated on a pillow on the ground; in fact it is highly probable that Roger used for his painting a drawing from life of a child seated on a pillow. The only valid reason for our assumption that the child in the Berlin picture is meant to be an apparition is the fact that he is depicted in space with no visible means of support.

But we can adduce hundreds of representations in which human beings, animals and inanimate objects seem to hang loose in space in violation of the law of gravity, without thereby pretending to be apparitions. For instance, in a miniature in the 'Gospels of Otto III' in the Staats-Bibliothek of Munich, a whole city is represented in the centre of an empty space while the figures taking part in the action stand on solid ground (fig. 2).<sup>2</sup> An inexperienced observer may well assume that the town is meant to be suspended in mid-air by some sort of magic. Yet in this case the lack of support does not imply a miraculous invalidation of the laws of nature. The city is the real city of Nain where the resurrection of the youth took place. In a miniature of around 1000 this empty space does not count as a real three-dimensional medium, as it does in a more realistic period, but just as an abstract, unreal background. The curious semicircular shape of what should be the base line of the towers bears witness to the fact that, in the more realistic prototype of our miniature, the town had been situated on a hilly terrain, but was taken over into a representation in which space has ceased to be thought of in terms of perspective realism. The unsupported figure in the van der Weyden picture counts as an apparition, while the floating city in the Ottonian miniature has no miraculous connotation. These contrasting interpretations are suggested to us by the 'realistic' qualities of the painting and the 'unrealistic' qualities of the miniature. But

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that we grasp these qualities in the fraction of a second and almost automatically, must not induce us to believe that we could ever give a correct pre-iconographical description of a work of art without having divined, as it were, its historical 'locus.' While we believe ourselves to identify the motifs on the basis of our practical experience pure and simple, we really read 'what we see' according to the manner in which *objects* and *events* were expressed by *forms under varying historical conditions*. In doing this, we subject our practical experience to a controlling principle which can be called the *history of style*.<sup>3</sup>

*Iconographical analysis*, dealing with *images*, *stories* and *allegories* instead of with *motifs*, presupposes, of course, much more than that familiarity with objects and events which we acquire by practical experience. It presupposes a familiarity with specific *themes* or *concepts* as transmitted through literary sources, whether acquired by purposeful reading or by oral tradition. Our Australian bushman would be unable to recognize the subject of a Last Supper; to him, it would only convey the idea of an excited dinner party. To understand the iconographical meaning of the picture he would have to familiarize himself with the content of the Gospels. When it comes to representations of *themes* other than biblical stories or scenes from history and mythology which happen to be known to the average 'educated person,' all of us are Australian bushmen. In such cases we, too, must try to

3. To control the interpretation of an individual work of art by a 'history of style' which in turn can only be built up by interpreting individual works, may look like a vicious circle. It is, indeed, a circle, though not a vicious, but a methodical one (cf. E. Wind, *Bibl.* 407; *idem*, *Bibl.* 408). Whether we deal with historical or natural phenomena, the individual observation assumes the character of a 'fact' only when it can be related to other, analogous observations in such a way that the whole series 'makes sense.' This 'sense' is, therefore, fully capable of being applied, as a control, to the interpretation of a new individual observation within the same range of phenomena. If, however, this new individual observation definitely refuses to be interpreted according to the 'sense' of the series, and if an error proves to be impossible, the 'sense' of the series will have to be re-formulated to include the new individual observation. This *circulus methodicus* applies, of course, not only to the relationship between the interpretation of *motifs* and the *history of style*, but also to the relationship between the interpretation of *images*, *stories* and *allegories* and the *history of types*, and to the relationship between the interpretation of *intrinsic meanings* and the *history of cultural symptoms* in general.

2. G. Leidinger, *Bibl.* 100, PL. 36.

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familiarize ourselves with what the authors of those representations had read or otherwise knew. But again, while an acquaintance with specific *themes* and *concepts* transmitted through literary sources is indispensable and sufficient material for an *iconographical analysis*, it does not guarantee its correctness. It is just as impossible for us to give a correct *iconographical analysis* by indiscriminately applying our literary knowledge to the motifs, as it is for us to give a correct *pre-iconographical description* by indiscriminately applying our practical experience to the *forms*.

A picture by the Venetian seventeenth-century painter Francesco Maffei, representing a handsome young woman with a sword in her right hand, and in her left a charger on which rests the head of a beheaded man (fig. 3), has been published as a portrayal of Salome with the head of John the Baptist.<sup>4</sup> In fact the Bible states that the head of St. John the Baptist was brought to Salome on a charger. But what about the sword? Salome did not decapitate St. John the Baptist with her own hands. Now the Bible tells us about another handsome woman in connection with the decapitation of a man, namely Judith. In this case the situation is exactly reversed. The sword would be correct because Judith beheaded Holofernes with her own hand, but the charger would not agree with the Judith theme because the text explicitly states that the head of Holofernes was put into a sack. Thus we have two literary sources applicable to our picture with equal right and equal inconsistency. If we should interpret it as a portrayal of Salome the text would account for the charger, but not for the sword; if we should interpret it as a portrayal of Judith the text would account for the sword, but not for the charger. We should be entirely at a loss did we depend on the literary sources alone. Fortunately we do not. As we could correct and control our practical experience by inquiring into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, *objects* and *events* were expressed by *forms*, viz., into the history of *style*, just so can we correct and control our knowledge of literary sources by inquiring into the manner in which, under

4. G. Fiocco, *Bibl. 92*, pl. 29.

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varying historical conditions, specific *themes* or *concepts* were expressed by *objects* and *events*, viz., into the history of *types*.

In the case at hand we shall have to ask whether there were, before Francesco Maffei painted his picture, any unquestionable portrayals of Judith (unquestionable because they would include, for instance, Judith's maid) with unjustified chargers; or any unquestionable portrayals of Salome (unquestionable because they would include, for instance, Salome's parents) with unjustified swords. And lo! while we cannot adduce a single Salome with a sword, we encounter, in Germany and North Italy, several sixteenth-century paintings depicting Judith with a charger;<sup>5</sup> there was a *type* of 'Judith with a charger,' but there was no *type* of 'Salome with a sword.' From this we can safely conclude that Maffei's picture, too, represents Judith, and not, as has been assumed, Salome.

We may further ask why artists felt entitled to transfer the motif of the charger from Salome to Judith, but not the motif of the sword from Judith to Salome. This question can be answered, again by inquiring into the history of *types*, with two reasons. One reason is that the sword was an established and honorific attribute of Judith, of many martyrs, and of such Virtues as Justice, Fortitude etc.; thus it could not be transferred with propriety to a lascivious girl. The other reason is that during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the charger with the head of St. John the Baptist had become an isolated devotional image (*Andachtsbild*) especially popular in the northern countries and in North Italy (fig. 4); it had been singled out from a representation of the Salome story in much the same way as the group of St. John the Evangelist resting on the bosom of the Lord

5. One of the North Italian pictures is ascribed to Romanino, and is preserved in the Berlin Museum, where it was formerly listed as 'Salome' in spite of the maid, a sleeping soldier, and the city of Jerusalem in the background (no. 155); another is ascribed to Romanino's pupil Francesco Prato da Caravaggio (quoted in the Berlin Catalogue), and a third is by Bernardo Strozzi who was a native of Genoa, but active at Venice about the same time as Francesco Maffei. It is very possible that the type of 'Judith with a charger' originated in Germany. One of the earliest known instances (by an anonymous master of around 1530 related to Hans Baldung Grien) has recently been published by G. Poensgen, *Bibl. 270*.

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had come to be singled out from the Last Supper, or the Virgin in childbed from the Nativity. The existence of this devotional image established a fixed association between the idea of the head of a beheaded man and the idea of a charger, and thus the motif of a charger could more easily be substituted for the motif of a sack in an image of Judith, than the motif of a sword could have penetrated into an image of Salome.

The interpretation of the *intrinsic meaning or content*, dealing with what we have termed '*symbolical values*' instead of with *images, stories and allegories*, requires something more than a familiarity with specific *themes* or *concepts* as transmitted through literary sources. When we wish to get hold of those basic principles which underlie the choice and presentation of *motifs*, as well as the production and interpretation of *images, stories and allegories*, and which give meaning even to the formal arrangements and technical procedures employed, we cannot hope to find an individual text which would fit those basic principles as John xiii, 21 ss. fits the iconography of the Last Supper. To grasp these principles we need a mental faculty com-

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parable to that of a diagnostician,—a faculty which I cannot describe better than by the rather discredited term '*synthetic intuition*', and which may be better developed in a talented layman than in an erudite scholar.

However, the more subjective and irrational this source of interpretation (for every intuitive approach will be conditioned by the interpreter's psychology and '*Weltanschauung*'), the more necessary the application of those correctives and controls which proved indispensable where only an *iconographical analysis in the narrower sense*, or even a mere *pre-iconographical description* was concerned. When even our practical experience and our knowledge of literary sources may mislead us if indiscriminately applied to works of art, how much more dangerous would it be to trust our intuition pure and simple! Thus, as our practical experience had to be controlled by an insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, *objects* and *events* were expressed by *forms* (*history of style*); and as our knowledge of literary sources had to be controlled by an insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, specific *themes* and

OBJECT OF INTERPRETATION	ACT OF INTERPRETATION	EQUIPMENT FOR INTERPRETATION	CONTROLLING PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION
I—Primary or natural subject matter— (A) factual, (B) expressional—, constituting the world of artistic motifs.	<i>Pre-iconographical description</i> (and pseudo-formal analysis).	<i>Practical experience</i> (familiarity with <i>objects</i> and <i>events</i> ).	<i>History of style</i> (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, <i>objects</i> and <i>events</i> were expressed by <i>forms</i> ).
II—Secondary or conventional subject matter, constituting the world of <i>images, stories and allegories</i> .	<i>Iconographical analysis</i> in the narrower sense of the word.	<i>Knowledge of literary sources</i> (familiarity with specific <i>themes</i> and <i>concepts</i> ).	<i>History of types</i> (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, specific <i>themes</i> or <i>concepts</i> were expressed by <i>objects</i> and <i>events</i> ).
III—Intrinsic meaning or content, constituting the world of ' <i>symbolical values</i> '.	<i>Iconographical interpretation</i> in a deeper sense ( <i>Iconographical synthesis</i> ).	<i>Synthetic intuition</i> (familiarity with the <i>essential tendencies of the human mind</i> ), conditioned by personal psychology and ' <i>Weltanschauung</i> '.	<i>History of cultural symptoms</i> or ' <i>symbols</i> ' in general (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, <i>essential tendencies of the human mind</i> were expressed by specific <i>themes</i> and <i>concepts</i> ).

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*concepts* were expressed by *objects* and *events* (history of *types*); just so, or even more so, has our synthetic intuition to be controlled by an insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, the *general and essential tendencies of the human mind* were expressed by specific *themes* and *concepts*. This means what may be called a history of *cultural symptoms*—or 'symbols' in Ernst Cassirer's sense—in general. The art-historian will have to check what he thinks is the *intrinsic meaning* of the work, or group of works, to which he devotes his attention, against what he thinks is the *intrinsic meaning* of as many other documents of civilization historically related to that work or group of works, as he can master: of documents bearing witness to the political, poetical, religious, philosophical, and social tendencies of the personality, period or country under investigation. Needless to say that, conversely, the historian of political life, poetry, religion, philosophy, and social situations should make an analogous use of works of art. It is in the search for *intrinsic meanings* or *content* that the various humanistic disciplines meet on a common plane instead of serving as hand-maidens to each other.

In conclusion: when we wish to express ourselves very strictly (which is of course not always necessary in our normal talk or writing, where the general context throws light on the meaning of our words), we have to distinguish between *three strata of subject matter or meaning*, the lowest of which is commonly confused with form, and the second of which is the special province of iconography in the narrower sense. In whichever stratum we move, our identifications and interpretations will depend on our subjective equipment, and for this very reason will have to be corrected and controlled by an insight into historical processes the sum total of which may be called *tradition*.

I have summarized in a synoptical table what I have tried to make clear thus far. But we must bear in mind that the neatly differentiated categories, which in this synoptical table seem to indicate three independent spheres of meaning, refer in reality to aspects of one phenomenon, namely, the work

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of art as a whole. So that, in actual work, the methods of approach which here appear as three unrelated operations of research merge with each other into one organic and indivisible process.

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### § II

TURNING now from the problems of iconography in general to the problems of Renaissance iconography in particular, we shall naturally be most interested in that phenomenon from which the very name of the Renaissance is derived: the rebirth of classical antiquity.

The earlier Italian writers about the history of art, such as Lorenzo Ghiberti, Leone Battista Alberti and especially Giorgio Vasari, thought that classical art was overthrown at the beginning of the Christian era, and that it did not revive until it served as the foundation of the Renaissance style. The reasons for this overthrow, as those writers saw it, were the invasions of barbarous races and the hostility of early Christian priests and scholars.

In thinking as they did the early writers were both right and wrong. They were wrong in so far as there had not been a complete break of tradition during the Middle Ages. Classical conceptions, literary, philosophical, scientific and artistic, had survived throughout the centuries, particularly after they had been deliberately revived under Charlemagne and his followers. The early writers were, however, right in so far as the general attitude towards antiquity was fundamentally changed when the Renaissance movement set in.

The Middle Ages were by no means blind to the visual values of classical art, and they were deeply interested in the intellectual and poetic values of classical literature. But it is significant that, just at the height of the mediaeval period (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), classical *motifs* were not used for the representation of classical *themes* while, conversely, classical *themes* were not expressed by classical *motifs*.

For instance, on the façade of St. Mark's in Venice can be seen two large reliefs of equal size, one a Roman work of the third century A.D., the other executed in Venice almost exactly one thousand years later (figs. 5, 6).<sup>6</sup>

6. Illustrated in *Bibl. 238*, p. 231.

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The *motifs* are so similar that we are forced to suppose that the mediaeval stone-carver deliberately copied the classical work in order to produce a counterpart of it. But while the Roman relief represents Hercules carrying the Erymanthean boar to King Euristheus, the mediaeval master, by substituting billowy drapery for the lion's skin, a dragon for the frightened king, and a stag for the boar, transformed the mythological story into an allegory of salvation. In Italian and French art of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries we find a great number of similar cases; viz., direct and deliberate borrowings of classical motifs while the pagan themes were changed into Christian ones. Suffice it to mention the most famous specimens of this so-called proto-Renaissance movement: the sculptures of St. Gilles and Arles, the celebrated Visitation group at Rheims Cathedral which for a long time was held to be a sixteenth-century work, or Nicolo Pisano's Adoration of the Magi in which the group of the Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus shows the influence of a Phaedra Sarcophagus still preserved in the Camposanto at Pisa. Even more frequent, however, than such direct copies are instances of a continuous and traditional survival of classical motifs, some of which were used in succession for quite a variety of Christian images.

As a rule such re-interpretations were facilitated or even suggested by a certain iconographical affinity, for instance when the figure of Orpheus was employed for the representation of David, or when the type of Hercules dragging Cerberus out of Hades was used to depict Christ pulling Adam out of Limbo.<sup>7</sup> But there are cases in which the relationship between the classical prototype and its Christian adaptation is a purely compositional one.

On the other hand, when a Gothic illuminator had to illustrate the story of Laocoön, Laocoón becomes a wild and bald old man in contemporary costume who attacks the sacrificial bull with what should be an ax, while the two little boys float around at the bottom of the picture, and the sea snakes appear briskly in a plot of water.<sup>8</sup> Aeneas and Dido are shown as

7. See K. Weitzmann, *Bibl. 395*.

8. Cod. Vat. lat. 2761, ill. in *Bibl. 238*, p. 259.

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a fashionable mediaeval couple playing chess, or may appear as a group resembling the Prophet Nathan before David, rather than as a classical hero before his paramour (fig.12). And Thisbe awaits Pyramus on a Gothic tombstone which bears the inscription 'Hic situs est Ninus rex,' preceded by the usual cross (fig.11).<sup>9</sup>

When we ask the reason for this curious separation between classical *motifs* invested with a non-classical meaning, and classical *themes* expressed by non-classical figures in a non-classical setting, the obvious answer seems to lie in the difference between representational and textual tradition. The artists who used the motif of a Hercules for an image of Christ, or the motif of an Atlas for the images of the Evangelists (figs. 7-10),<sup>10</sup> acted under the

9. Paris, Bibl. Nat., ms. lat. 15158, dated 1289, ill. Bibl.238, p.272.

10. C. Tolnay, *Bibl.356*, p.257ss., has made the important discovery that the impressive images of the Evangelists seated on a globe and supporting a heavenly glory (occurring for the first time in cod. Vat. Barb. lat. 711; our fig.7), combine the features of Christ in Majesty with those of a Graeco-Roman celestial divinity. However, as Tolnay himself points out, the Evangelists in cod. Barb. 711 'support with obvious effort a mass of clouds which does not in the least look like a spiritual aura but like a material weight consisting of several segments of circles, alternately blue and green, the outline of the whole forming a circle . . . It is a misunderstood representation of *heaven in the form of spheres*' (italics mine). From this we can infer that the classical prototype of these images was not Coelus who holds without effort a billowing drapery (the *Weltmantel*) but Atlas who labours under the weight of the heavens (cf. G. Thiele, *Bibl.338*, p.19ss., and Daremberg-Saglio, *Bibl.70*, s.v. 'Atlas'). The St. Matthew in cod. Barb. 711 (Tolnay, p.1, a), with his head bowed down under the weight of the sphere and his left hand still placed near his left hip, is particularly reminiscent of the classical type of Atlas, and another striking example of the characteristic Atlas pose applied to an Evangelist is found in clm. 4454, fol.86, v. (ill. in A. Goldschmidt, *Bibl.118*, vol. II, p.40). Tolnay (notes 13 and 14) has not failed to notice this similarity and quotes the representations of Atlas and Nimrod in cod. Vat. Pal. lat. 1417, fol.1 (ill. in F. Saxl, *Bibl.299*, p.20, fig.42; our fig.8); but he seems to consider the Atlas type as a mere derivative of the Coelus type. Yet even in ancient art the representations of Coelus seem to have developed from those of Atlas, and in Carolingian, Ottonian and Byzantine art (particularly in the Reichenau school) the figure of Atlas, in its genuine classical form, is infinitely more frequent than that of Coelus, both as a personification of cosmological character and as a kind of caryatid. I quote at random: Utrecht Psalter, fol.48v. (E. T. DeWald, *Bibl.74*, pl. LXXVI), fol.54v., (*ibidem*, pl. LXXXV); fol.56, (*ibidem*, pl. LXXXIX); fol.57, (*ibidem*, pl. XC), our fig.9. Aachen, Domschatz, Gospels of Otto II, fol.16 (Terra, in the posture of Atlas, supporting the throne of the Emperor who is here conceived as the ruler of the universe; see P. E. Schramm, *Bibl.307*, pp.82, 191, fig.64; our fig.10). Copenhagen, Royal Library, cod. 218, fol.25 (M. Mackeprang, *Bibl.206*, pl. LXII). Menologium of Basil II (*Bibl.289*, vol. II, pl. 74).

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impression of visual models which they had before their eyes, whether they directly copied a classical monument or imitated a more recent work derived from a classical prototype through a series of intermediary transformations. The artists who represented Medea as a mediaeval princess, or Jupiter as a mediaeval judge, translated into images a mere description found in literary sources.

This is very true, and the textual tradition through which the knowledge of classical themes, particularly of classical mythology, was transmitted to and persisted during the Middle Ages is of the utmost importance, not only for the mediaevalist but also for the student of Renaissance iconography. For even in the Italian Quattrocento, it was from this complex and often very corrupt tradition, rather than from genuine classical sources, that many people drew their notions of classical mythology and related subjects.

Limiting ourselves to classical mythology, the paths of this tradition can be outlined as follows. The later Greek philosophers had already begun to interpret the pagan gods and demi-gods as mere personifications either of natural forces or moral qualities, and some of them had gone so far as to explain them as ordinary human beings subsequently deified. In the last century of the Roman Empire these tendencies greatly increased. While the Christian Fathers endeavoured to prove that the pagan gods were either illusions or malignant demons (thereby transmitting much valuable information about them), the pagan world itself had become so estranged from its divinities that the educated public had to read them up in encyclopaedias,

From an iconographical point of view, too, the Evangelists are comparable to Atlas, rather than to Coelus. Coelus was believed to rule the heavens. Atlas was believed to support them and, in an allegorical sense, to 'know' them; he was held to have been a great astronomer who transmitted the 'scientia coeli' to Hercules (Servius, *Comm. in Aen.*, vi, 395; later on, e.g. Isidorus, *Etymologiae*, iii, 24, 1; *Mythographus* III, 13, 4, *Bibl.38*, p.248). It was therefore consistent to use the type of Coelus for the representation of God (see Tolnay, p.1, c), and it was equally consistent to use the type of Atlas for the Evangelists who, like him, 'knew' the heavens but did not rule them. While Hibernius Exul says of Atlas 'Sidera quem coeli cuncta notasse volunt' (*Monumenta Germaniae*, *Bibl.220*, vol. I, p.410), Alcuin thus apostrophizes St. John the Evangelist: 'Scribendo penetras caelum tu, mente, Iohannes' (*ibidem*, p.293).

in didactic poems or novels, in special treatises on mythology, and in commentaries on the classic poets. Important among these late antique writings in which the mythological characters were interpreted in an allegorical way, or 'moralized' to use the mediaeval expression, were Martianus Capella's *Nuptiae Mercurii et Philologiae*, Fulgentius' *Mitologiae*, and, above all, Servius' admirable Commentary on Virgil which is three or four times as long as the text and was perhaps more widely read.

During the Middle Ages these writings and others of their kind were thoroughly exploited and further developed. The mythographical information thus survived, and became accessible to mediaeval poets and artists. First, in the Encyclopaedias, the development of which began with such early writers as Bede and Isidorus of Seville, was continued by Hrabanus Maurus (ninth century), and reached a climax in the enormous high-mediaeval works by Vincentius of Beauvais, Brunetto Latini, Bartholomaeus Anglicus, and so forth. Second, in the mediaeval commentaries on classical and late antique texts, especially on Martianus Capella's *Nuptiae*, which had already been annotated by Irish scholars such as Johannes Scotus Erigena and was authoritatively commented upon by Remigius of Auxerre (ninth century).<sup>11</sup> Third, in special treatises on mythology such as the so-called *Mythographi I* and *II*, which are still rather early in date and are mainly based on Fulgentius and Servius.<sup>12</sup> The most important work of this kind, the so-called *Mythographus III*, has been tentatively identified with an Englishman, the great scholastic Alexander Neckham (died 1217);<sup>13</sup> his treatise, an impressive survey of whatever information was available around 1200, deserves to be called the conclusive compendium of high mediaeval mythography, and was even used by Petrarch when he described the images of pagan gods in his poem *Africa*.

<sup>11</sup>. See H. Liebeschütz, *Fulgentius Metaforalis*, *Bibl.*194, p.15 and p.44ss. Liebeschütz' book is the most important contribution to the history of mythographical traditions during the Middle Ages; cf. also *Bibl.*238, especially p.253ss.

<sup>12</sup>. Bode, *Bibl.*38, p.1ss.

<sup>13</sup>. Bode, *ibidem*, p.152ss. As to the question of authorship, see H. Liebeschütz, *Bibl.*194, p.16s. and *passim*.

Between the times of the *Mythographus III* and Petrarch a further step in the moralization of classical divinities had been taken.<sup>14</sup> The figures of ancient mythology were not only interpreted in a general moralistic way but were quite definitely related to the Christian faith, so that, for instance Pyramus was interpreted as Christ, Thisbe as the human soul, and the lion as Evil defiling its garments; while Saturn served as an example both in a good and in a bad sense, for the behaviour of clergymen. Instances of this type of writings are the French *Ovide Moralisé*,<sup>15</sup> John Ridewall's *Fulgentius Metaforalis*,<sup>16</sup> Robert Holcott's *Moralitates*, the *Gesta Romanorum* and, above all, the *Moralized Ovid* in Latin, written around 1340 by a French theologian called Petrus Berchorius or Pierre Bersuire who was personally acquainted with Petrarch.<sup>17</sup> His work is preceded by a special chapter on the pagan gods, mainly based on the *Mythographus III*, but enriched by specifically Christian moralizations, and this introduction, with the moralizations cut out for brevity's sake, attained great popularity under the name of *Albricus, Libellus de Imaginibus Deorum*.<sup>18</sup>

A fresh and highly important start was made by Boccaccio. In his *Genealogia Deorum*<sup>19</sup> he not only gave a new survey of the material, greatly enlarged since about 1200, but also tried consciously to revert to the genuine antique sources and carefully collate them with one another. His treatise marks the beginning of a critical or scientific attitude towards classical antiquity, and may be called a forerunner of such truly scholarly Renaissance treatises as the *Historia Deorum Syntagma* by L.G. Gyraldus who, from his point of view, was fully entitled to look down upon his most popular mediaeval predecessor as a 'proletarian and unreliable writer'.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup>. Ed. by C. de Boer, *Bibl.*40.

<sup>15</sup>. Ed. H. Liebeschütz, *Bibl.*38.

<sup>16</sup>. 'Thomas Walleys' (or Valeys), *Bibl.*386.

<sup>17</sup>. Cod. Vat. Reg. 1290, ed. H. Liebeschütz, *Bibl.*194, p.117ss. with the complete set of illustrations.

<sup>18</sup>. *Bibl.*36; many other editions and Italian translation.

<sup>19</sup>. L.G. Gyraldus, *Bibl.*127, vol. I, col. 153: 'Ut scribit Albricus, qui auctor mihi proletarius est, nec fidus satis.'

It will be noticed that up to Boccaccio's *Genealogia Deorum* the focal point of mediaeval mythography was a region widely remote from direct Mediterranean tradition: Ireland, Northern France and England. This is also true of the Trojan Cycle, the most important epic theme transmitted by classical antiquity to posterity; its first authoritative mediaeval redaction, the *Roman de Troie* which was frequently abridged, summarized and translated into the other vernacular languages, is due to Benoit de Ste. More, a native of Brittany. We are in fact entitled to speak of a proto-humanistic movement; viz., an active interest in classical themes regardless of classical motifs, centred in the northern region of Europe, as opposed to the proto-Renaissance movement; viz., an active interest in classical motifs regardless of classical themes, centred in Provence and Italy. It is a memorable fact which we must bear in mind in order to understand the Renaissance movement proper, that Petrarch, when describing the gods of his Roman ancestors, had to consult a compendium written by an Englishman, and that the Italian illuminators who illustrated Virgil's *Aeneid* in the fifteenth century had to have recourse to the miniatures in manuscripts of the *Roman de Troie* and its derivatives. For these, being a favourite reading matter of noble laymen, had been amply illustrated long before the Virgil text proper, read by scholars and schoolboys; and had attracted the attention of professional illuminators.<sup>20</sup>

It is indeed easy to see that the artists who from the end of the eleventh century tried to translate into images those proto-humanistic texts could not but depict them in a manner utterly different from classical traditions. One of the earliest instances is among the most striking: a miniature of about 1100, probably executed in the school of Regensburg, depicting the classical divinities according to the descriptions in Remigius' *Commentary on Mar-*

20. Between the 'Vergilius Romanus' of the 6th century and the illustrated Virgils of the Quattrocento only two illustrated manuscripts of the *Aeneid* are known to the writer: Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, cod. olim Vienna 58 (brought to my attention by Dr. Kurt Weitzmann, to whom I am also indebted for permission to reproduce one miniature in fig.12; 10th century) and Cod. Vat. lat. 2761 (cf. R. Förster, *Bibl.95*; 14th century). The illustrations in both manuscripts are unusually crude.

*tianus Capella* (fig.13).<sup>21</sup> Apollo is seen riding in a peasant's cart and holding in his hand a kind of nose-gay with the busts of the Three Graces. Saturn looks like a Romanesque jamb-figure, rather than like the father of the Olympian gods, and the eagle of Jupiter is equipped with a tiny halo like the eagle of St. John the Evangelist or the dove of St. Gregory.

Nevertheless, the contrast between representational and textual tradition alone, important though it is, cannot account for the strange dichotomy of classical *motifs* and classical *themes* characteristic of high mediaeval art. For even when there had been a representational tradition in certain fields of classical imagery, this representational tradition was deliberately relinquished in favour of representations of an entirely non-classical character, as soon as the Middle Ages had achieved a style entirely their own.

Instances of this process are found, first, in classical images incidentally occurring in representations of Christian subjects, such as the pagan idols frequently found in scenes of martyrdom and the like, or the sun and the moon in the Crucifixion. While Carolingian ivories still show the perfectly classical types of the *Quadriga Solis* and the *Biga Lunae*,<sup>22</sup> these classical types are replaced by non-classical ones in Romanesque and Gothic representations. The idols, too, gradually lost their classical appearance in the course of the centuries, although they tended to preserve it longer than other images because they were the symbols par excellence of paganism. Secondly, what is much more important, they appear in the illustrations of such texts as had already been illustrated in late antique times, so that visual models were available to the Carolingian artists: the Comedies of Terence, the texts incorporated into Hrabanus Maurus' *De Universo*, Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, and scientific writings, particularly treatises on astronomy, where mythological images appear both among the constellations (such as Andromeda, Perseus, Cassiopea), and as planets (Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sol, Venus, Mercury, Luna).

21. Clm. 14271, ill. in *Bibl.238*, p.260.

22. A. Goldschmidt, *Bibl.117*, vol. I, pl. xx, no. 40, ill. in *Bibl.238*, p.257.

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In all these cases we can observe that the classical images were faithfully though often clumsily copied in Carolingian manuscripts and lingered on in their derivatives, but that they were abandoned and replaced by entirely different ones in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries at the latest.

In the ninth-century illustrations of an astronomical text, such mythological figures as Perseus, Hercules or Mercury are rendered in a perfectly classical fashion, and the same is true of the pagan divinities appearing in Hrabanus Maurus' *Encyclopaedia*.<sup>23</sup> With all their clumsiness, which is chiefly due to the incompetence of the poor eleventh-century copyist of the lost Carolingian manuscript, the figures in the Hrabanus illustrations are evidently not concocted from mere textual descriptions but are connected with antique prototypes by a representational tradition (figs. 40, 69).

However, some centuries later these genuine images had fallen into oblivion and were replaced by others—partly newly invented, partly derived from oriental sources—which no modern spectator would ever recognize as classical divinities. Venus is shown as a fashionable young lady playing the lute or smelling a rose, Jupiter as a judge with his gloves in his hand, and Mercury as an old scholar or even as a bishop (fig. 14).<sup>24</sup> It was not before the Renaissance proper that Jupiter reassumed the appearance of the classical Zeus, and that Mercury reacquired the youthful beauty of the classical Hermes.<sup>25</sup>

All this shows that the separation of classical *themes* from classical *motifs* took place, not only for want of a representational tradition, but even in spite of a representational tradition. Wherever a classical image, that is, a fusion of a classical *theme* with a classical *motif*, had been copied during the Carolingian period of feverish assimilation, this classical image was abandoned as soon as mediaeval civilization had reached its climax, and

23. Cf. A.M. Amelli, *Bibl. 7*.

24. Clm. 10268, (14th Cent.), ill. in *Bibl. 238*, p. 251, and the whole group of other illustrations based on the text by Michael Scotus. For the oriental sources of these new types see *ibidem*, p. 239 ss. and F. Saxl, *Bibl. 296*, p. 151 ss.

25. For the interesting preludes of this reinstatement (resumption of Carolingian and archaic Greek models) see *Bibl. 238*, p. 247 and 258.

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was not reinstated until the Italian Quattrocento. It was the privilege of the Renaissance proper to reintegrate classical *themes* with classical *motifs* after what might be called a zero hour.

For the mediaeval mind, classical antiquity was too far removed and at the same time too strongly present to be conceived as an historical phenomenon. On the one hand an unbroken continuity of tradition was felt in so far as, for example, the German Emperor was considered the direct successor of Caesar and Augustus, while the linguists looked upon Cicero and Donatus as their forefathers, and the mathematicians traced their ancestry back to Euclid. On the other hand, it was felt that an insurmountable gap existed between a pagan civilization and a Christian one.<sup>26</sup> These two tendencies could not as yet be balanced so as to permit a feeling of historical distance. In many minds the classical world assumed a distant, fairy-tale character like the contemporary pagan East, so that Villard de Honnecourt could call a Roman tomb '*la sepulture d'un sarrazin*,' while Alexander the Great and Virgil came to be thought of as oriental magicians. For others, the classical world was the ultimate source of highly appreciated knowledge and time-honoured institutions. But no mediaeval man could see the civilization of antiquity as a phenomenon complete in itself, yet belonging to the past and historically detached from the contemporary world,—as a cultural cosmos to be investigated and, if possible, to be reintegrated, instead of being a world of living wonders or a mine of information. The scholastic philosophers could use the ideas of Aristotle and merge them with their own system, and the mediaeval poets could borrow freely from the classical authors, but no mediaeval mind could think of classical philology. The artists could employ, as we have seen, the motifs of classical reliefs and classical statues, but no mediaeval mind could think of classical archaeology. Just as it was impossi-

26. A similar dualism is characteristic of the mediaeval attitude towards the *aera sub lege*: on the one hand the Synagogue was represented as blind and associated with Night, Death, the devil and impure animals; and on the other hand the Jewish prophets were considered as inspired by the Holy Ghost, and the personages of the Old Testament were venerated as the ancestors of Christ.

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ble for the Middle Ages to elaborate the modern system of perspective, which is based on the realization of a fixed distance between the eye and the object and thus enables the artist to build up comprehensive and consistent images of visible things; just as impossible was it for them to evolve the modern idea of history, which is based on the realization of an intellectual distance between the present and the past, and thus enables the scholar to build up comprehensive and consistent concepts of bygone periods.

We can easily see that a period unable and unwilling to realize that classical *motifs* and classical *themes* structurally belonged together, actually avoided preserving the union of these two. Once the Middle Ages had established their own standards of civilization and found their own methods of artistic expression, it became impossible to enjoy or even to understand any phenomenon which had no common denominator with the phenomena of the contemporary world. The high-mediaeval beholder could appreciate a beautiful classical figure when presented to him as a Virgin Mary, and he could appreciate a Thisbe depicted as a girl of the thirteenth century sitting by a Gothic tombstone. But a classical Thisbe sitting by a classical mausoleum would have been an archaeological reconstruction entirely beyond his possibilities of approach. In the thirteenth century even classical script was felt as something utterly 'foreign:' the explanatory inscriptions in the Carolingian *cod. Leydensis Voss. lat. 79*, written in a beautiful *Capitalis Rustica* were copied, for the benefit of less erudite readers, in angular High Gothic script.

However, this failure to realize the intrinsic 'oneness' of classical *themes* and classical *motifs* can be explained, not only by a lack of historical feeling, but also by the emotional disparity between the Christian Middle Ages and pagan Antiquity. Where Hellenic paganism—at least as reflected in classical art—considered man as an integral unity of body and soul, the Jewish-Christian conception of man was based on the idea of the 'clod of earth' forcibly, or even miraculously, united with an immortal soul. From this

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point of view, the admirable artistic formulae which in Greek and Roman art had expressed organic beauty and animal passions, seemed admissible only when invested with a more-than-organic and more-than-natural meaning; that is, when made subservient to Biblical or theological themes. In secular scenes, on the contrary, these formulae had to be replaced by others, conforming to the mediaeval atmosphere of courtly manners and conventionalized sentiments, so that heathen divinities and heroes mad with love or cruelty appeared as fashionable princes and damsels whose looks and behaviour were in harmony with the canons of mediaeval social life.

In a miniature from a fourteenth-century *Ovide moralisé*, the Rape of Europa is enacted by figures which certainly express little passionate agitation (fig. 15).<sup>27</sup> Europa, clad in late mediaeval costume, sits on her inoffensive little bull like a young lady taking a morning ride, and her companions, similarly attired, form a quiet little group of spectators. Of course, they are meant to be anguished and to cry out, but they don't, or at least they don't convince us that they do, because the illuminator was neither able nor inclined to visualize animal passions.

A drawing by Dürer, copied from an Italian prototype probably during his first stay in Venice, emphasizes the emotional vitality which was absent in the mediaeval representation (fig. 16). The literary source of Dürer's Rape of Europa is no longer a prosy text where the bull was compared to Christ, and Europa to the human soul, but the pagan verses of Ovid himself as revived in two delightful stanzas by Angelo Poliziano: 'You can admire Jupiter transformed into a beautiful bull by the power of love. He dashes away with his sweet, terrified load, her beautiful golden hair fluttering in the wind which blows back her gown. With one hand she grasps the horn of the bull, while the other clings to his back. She draws up her feet as if she were afraid of the sea, and thus crouching down with pain and fear, she cries for help in vain. For her sweet companions remain on the flowery shore,

<sup>27</sup> Lyons, Bibl. de la Ville, ms. 742, illustrated in *Bibl. 238*, p. 274.

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each of them crying "Europa, come back." The whole seashore resounds with "Europa, come back," and the bull looks round and kisses her feet.<sup>28</sup>

Dürer's drawing actually gives life to this sensual description. The crouching position of Europa, her fluttering hair, her clothes blown back by the wind and thus revealing her graceful body, the gestures of her hands, the furtive movement of the bull's head, the seashore scattered with the lamenting companions: all this is faithfully and vividly depicted; and, even more, the beach itself rustles with the life of *aquatici monstriculi*, to speak in the terms of another Quattrocento writer, while satyrs hail the abductor.

This comparison illustrates the fact that the reintegration of classical *themes* with classical *motifs* which seems to be characteristic of the Italian Renaissance as opposed to the numerous sporadic revivals of classical tendencies during the Middle Ages, is not only a humanistic but also a human occurrence. It is a most important element of what Burckhardt and Michelet called 'the discovery both of the world and of man.'

On the other hand, it is self-evident that this reintegration could not be a simple reversion to the classical past. The intervening period had changed the minds of men, so that they could not turn into pagans again; and it had changed their tastes and productive tendencies, so that their art could not

<sup>28</sup> F. Lippmann, *Bibl.* 196, nr. 456, also ill. in *Bibl.* 238, p. 275. Angelo Poliziano's stanzas (*Giostra* 1, 105, 106) read as follows:

*'Nell'altra in un formoso e bianco tauro  
Si vede Giove per amor converso  
Portarne il dolce suo ricco tesoro,  
E lei volgere il viso al lito perso  
In atto parentoso: e i be' crin d'auro  
Scherzon nel petto per lo vento avverso:  
La ueste ondeggia e in drieto fa ritorno:  
L'una man tien al dorso, e l'altra al corno.*

*Le ignude piante a se ristrette accoglie  
Quasi temendo il mar che lei non bagne:  
Tale atteggiata di paura e doglie  
Par chiami in van le sue dolci compagnie;  
Le qual rinnase tra fioretti e foglie  
Dolenti 'Europa' ciascheduna piagne  
"Europa", sona il lito, "Europa, riedi"-  
E'l tor nota, e talor gli bacia i piedi.'*

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simply renew the art of the Greeks and Romans. They had to strive for a new form of expression, stylistically and iconographically different from the classical, as well as from the mediaeval, yet related and indebted to both. To illustrate this process of creative interpenetration will be the aim of the following chapters.

PLATE I

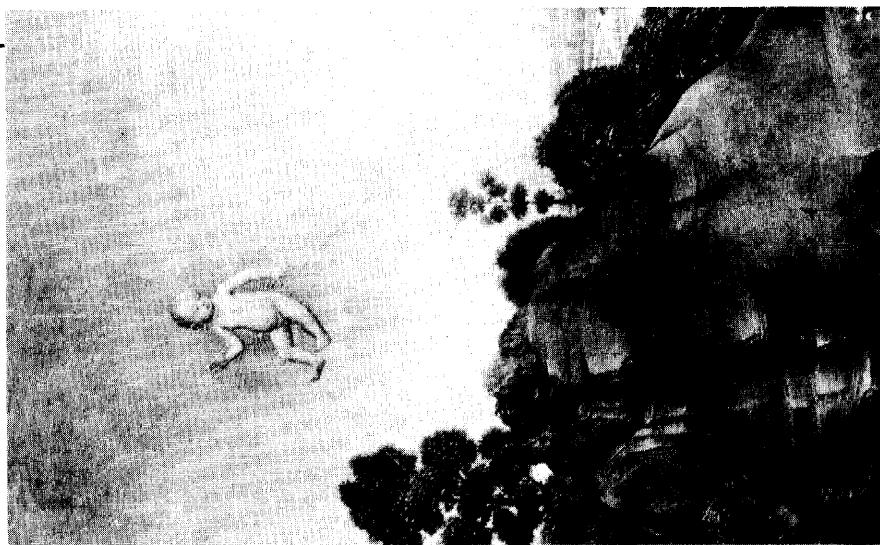
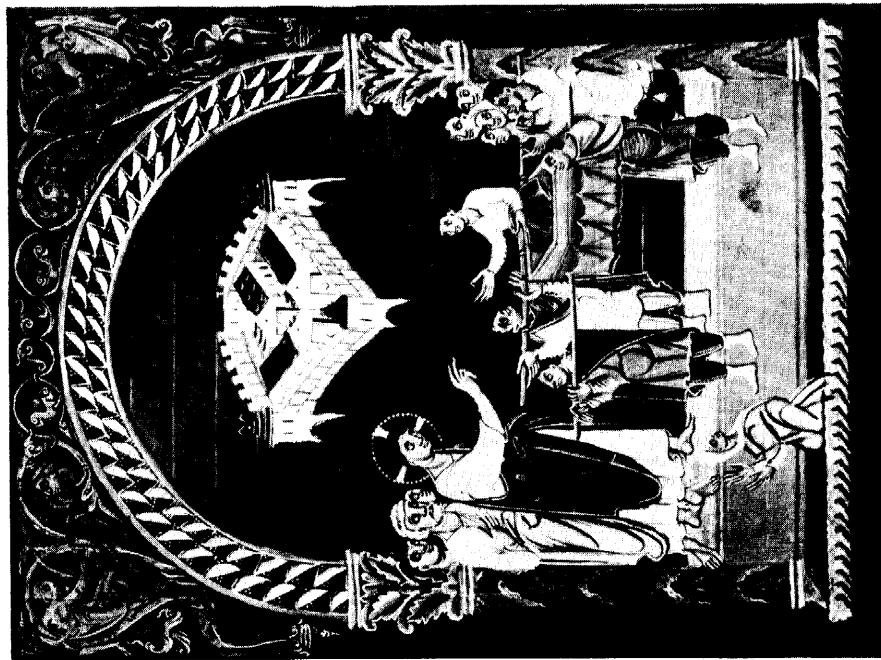
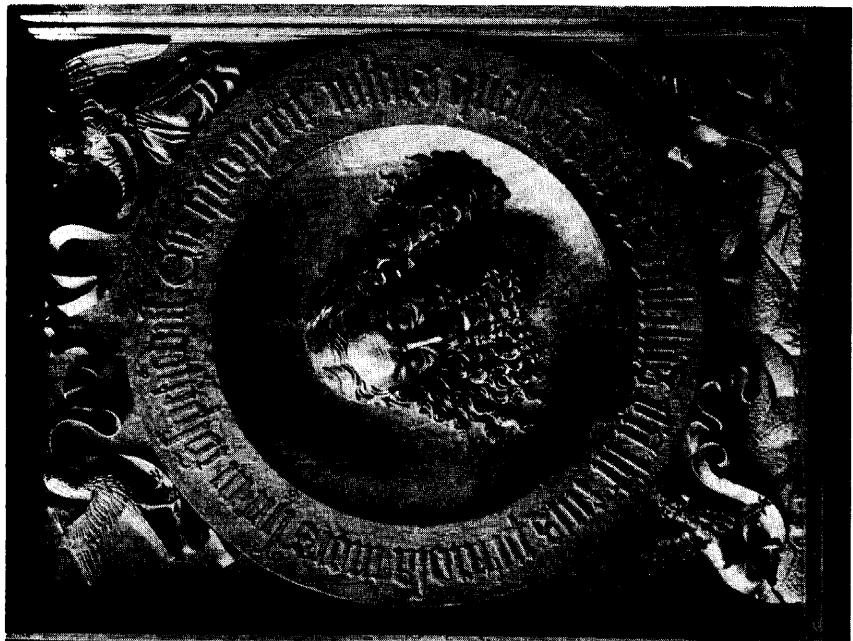
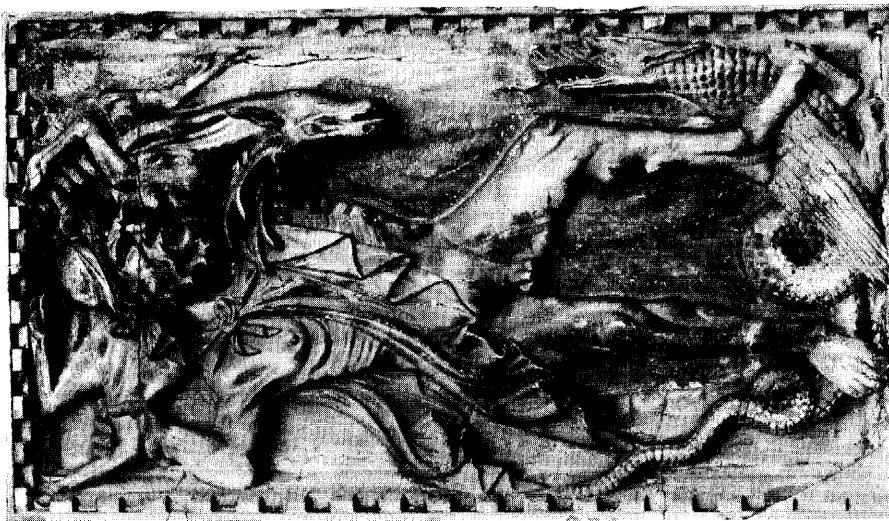


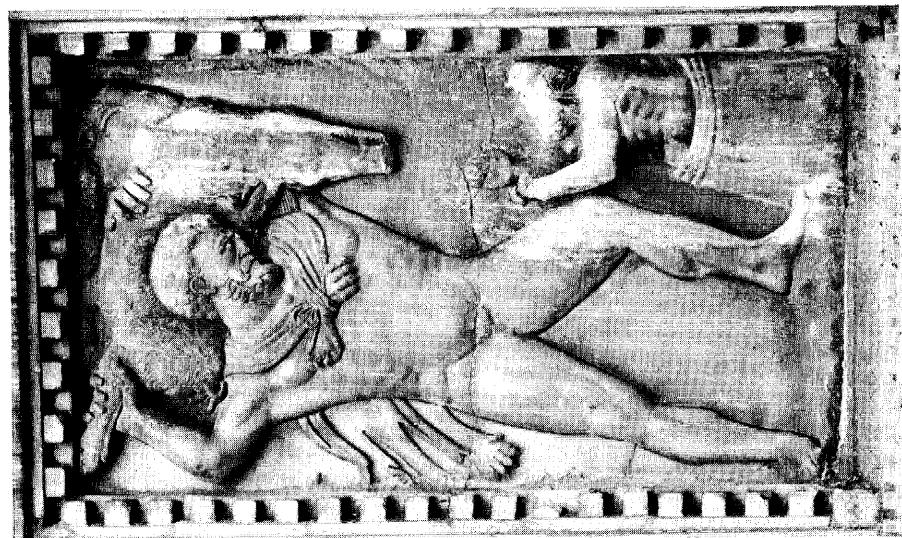
PLATE II



## PLATE III



6



5

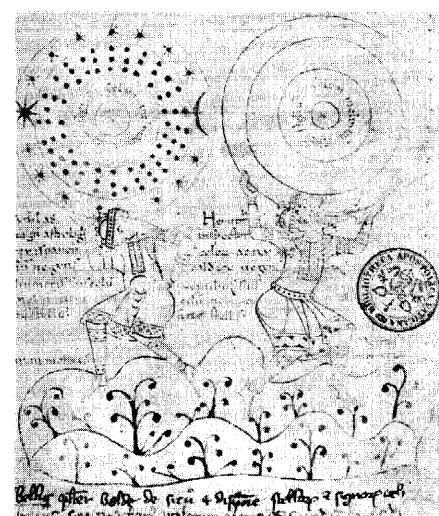
## PLATE IV



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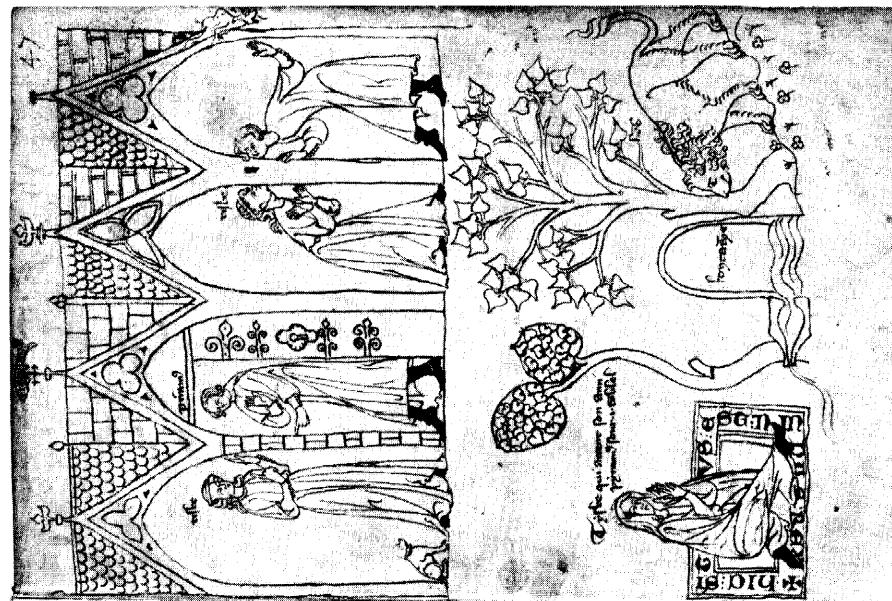
8



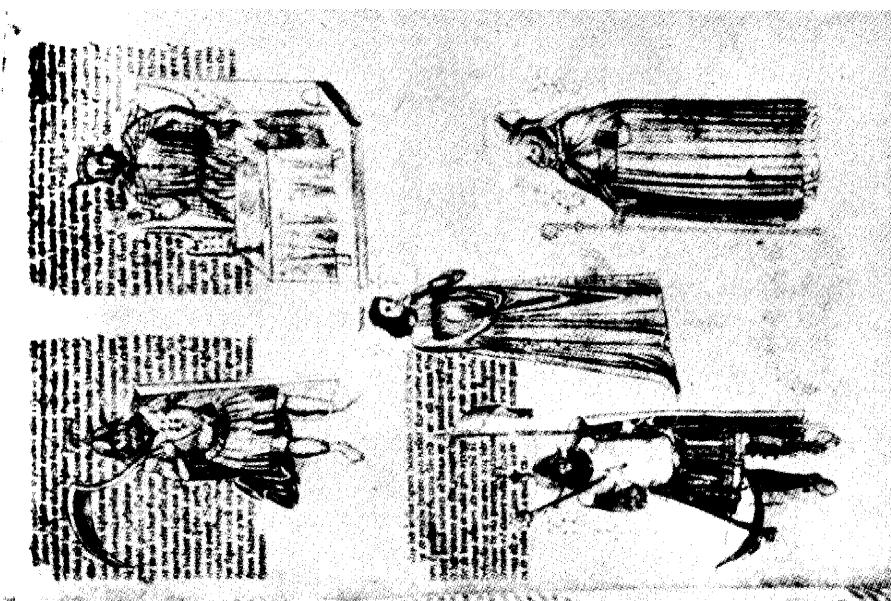
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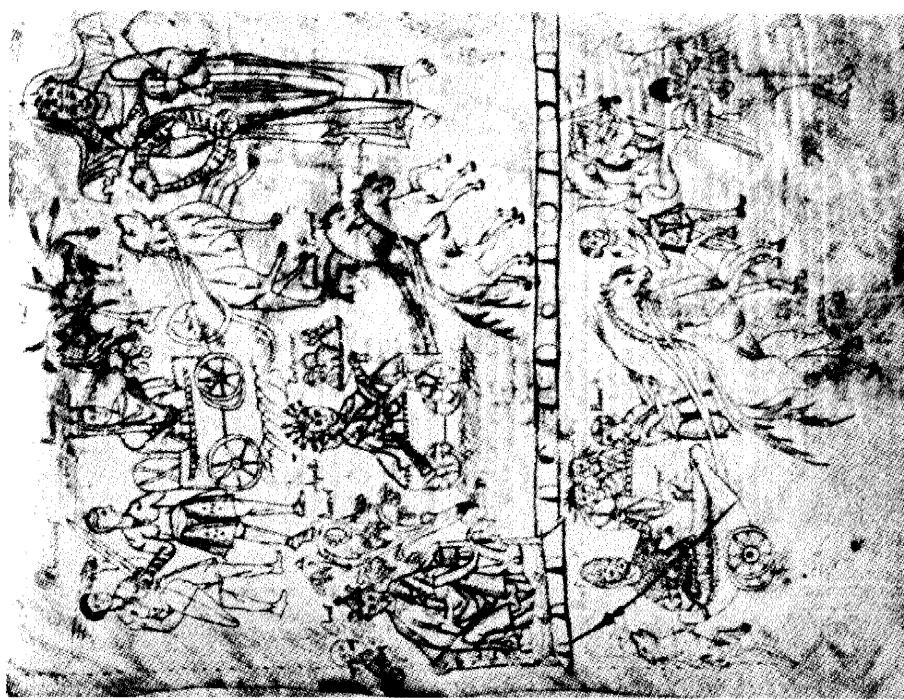
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## II. THE EARLY HISTORY OF MAN IN TWO CYCLES OF PAINTINGS BY PIERO DI COSIMO

PIERO DI COSIMO (1461-1521) was not a 'great' master, but a most charming and interesting one. Except for a trip to Rome where he participated in the decoration of the Sistine Chapel under his master Cosimo Rosselli, he seems to have spent his whole life in Florence; and, setting aside the influence of Signorelli which is discernible in his earlier works, his style is rooted in the Florentine tradition.

Yet he stands very much alone within the Florentine school of painting. The most imaginative of inventors, he was as an observer a stupendous realist. While his boldly entangled groups of nudes anticipate the tendencies of later Mannerists and made a lasting impression even on Michelangelo, his 'empathic' interest in what may be called the 'souls' of plants and animals, and his delicate sense of luminary and atmospheric values, lend a definitely Northern flavour to his pictures. Unlike most other Florentine painters of his period—particularly Botticelli who may be considered his antipode—he was essentially a painter, not a designer. He felt the tangible epidermis of things, rather than their abstract form, and based his art on colouristic 'valeurs,' rather than on linear patterns. Light profiles set out against a background of dark, gray clouds; fantastic trees reaching far and high into the sky; the dim twilight of impenetrable forests; the bluish haze above tepid waters; and the strong sunlight suffusing open landscapes: these were the phenomena that fascinated him. To capture them, he developed an amazingly flexible technique, sometimes as delicately luminous as that of his Flemish and Venetian contemporaries, sometimes as broad, succulent and somewhat rough as that of seventeenth-century Baroque painters or even nineteenth-century impressionists.