

LA COMUNICACIÓN SOCIAL
EN LA EUROPA MEDIEVAL

MARÍA DE LA ENCARNACIÓN MARTÍN LÓPEZ
JOSÉ MARÍA DE FRANCISCO OLMOS
(editores)

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Presentación

Son muchas las cuestiones a reflexionar sobre la Edad Media que chocan frontalmente con ideas y prejuicios concebidos desde que a este largo periodo cronológico se le caracterizó como periodo oscuro. El encuentro de expertos medievalistas en campos diversos como el arte, la historia, la filología, la paleografía, la codicología y la epigrafía, ha reflexionado sobre uno de los aspectos más discutidos de este periodo: la Comunicación Social. Cuáles son los medios de comunicación que sirvieron y fueron instrumentos de difusión de ideas, dogmas, y leyes en el periodo medieval?. Es aceptable dividir los medios de comunicación social en populares y cultos? Parece necesario reflexionar sobre la importancia de la comunicación en la Edad Media, simbólica, escrita, oral y que únicamente podemos llegar a comprender desde la sociedad misma. Citando a Gerd Althoff *"no debemos olvidar que los usos, es decir, las reglas de comportamiento en la política, en el derecho y en las relaciones cotidianas, reflejan muy exactamente las condiciones fundamentales de esta sociedad. Ofrecen soluciones a los problemas críticos de la vida comunitaria, por ejemplo, el uso de la violencia; toman en cuenta el hecho de que toda comunicación debe tener en cuenta el estado y rango del interlocutor, y muchas otras cosas"*.

Es común determinar tres campos en la comunicación social de la Edad Media, la escrita, la oral o verbal y la simbólica. Pero en la realidad estas tres formas o medios no son compartimentos estancos. Estas formas se entretrejen y se superponen unas a otras creando un tejido complejo con el objeto de lograr mayor eficiencia y proyección al mensaje o idea inicial. En definitiva, todas las actividades de comunicación emplean signos y elementos diversos de los tres campos mencionados. Así el símbolo no es una forma limitativa, y la expresión verbal, por otro lado, posee una carga simbólica importante.

**Aristocracy and Empire:
the political and social language of the profane
paintings of the Northern Italy in the XIV century**

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There are many ways and methods that scholars can use to approach a painting, or, more generally, a cultural evidence of visive art*. The way we do it often depends on our previous studies and our preconceptions, that sometimes do not relate with the effective problems that should be faced and solved. The methods that we choose can also lead to different conclusions, sometimes even discordant, with different depths and perspectives of research. The aim of this essay is to analyze a problem: the way we should look at the evidences of secular paintings in the Northern part of Italy, produced along the first half of the XIV century. Art as a language of communication: to communicate what, how, from and for who.

* This essay is the result of my researches so far, that started in 2014 in occasion of my bachelor's degree in the University of Trento. I would like to express my thanks to professors Laura Cavazzini, Aldo Galli, Claudia Demattè (Università di Trento), Andrea De Marchi (Università di Firenze), Serena Romano (University of Lausanne), Stefano Ferrari (Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati), Daniele Benati and Enrica Neri Lusanna (Fondazione di Studi di Storia dell'arte di Firenze Roberto Longhi). In addition, I also want to thank Marcello Beato, Carlo Andrea Postinger and Santina Novelli. I am also very grateful to Alicia Miguez and the staff of the NOVA FSCH for the organization of the International Conference and the occasion offered.

It is necessary to limit more precisely the area and the subjects; we are referring to the few survived cases of secular theme's paintings that involved quite completely the walls of castles, private houses, town halls and, more generally, public buildings. Apart from their historical and artistic importance, in this paper I will take in consideration these paintings as a way of communication, specially investigating the relations between their patrons – feudal lords, Signori – and the destinations of these paintings, the observers.

Secular paintings

A label that I have used in the previous lines and needs to be explained is the word "secular". To define it, we can firstly consider the place in which we are and the theme represented, but with caution. One could consider that every kind of mural painting visible in a church or abbey should be considered as "sacred", while everything else that we could find in other places like castles, town halls, public palaces and private houses should be labeled as "secular". This method is not precise: we can find secular paintings in monastery in proximity of churches¹, as long as sacred paintings are visible in private houses, not only in places thought for religious use². In fact, the main difference is not due to the place but to the theme: often, but is not always so easy, we can individuate a secular painting by who or what is represented.

For example, no one could doubt that a cycle of stories about *Tristram and Isolde* has to be considered as an example of secular painting, while a representation of *Vices and Virtues*, for their moral implications, could arise some more questions and different positions. Indeed, if nowadays we could

¹ See the frescos representing the *Chanson de Otinel* in the loggia on the façade of the Abbey of Santa Maria in Sylvis, by Sesto al Reghena, north-east of the peninsula. E. COZZI, "Pittura murale di epoca romanica", in *L'abbazia di Santa Maria di Sesto. L'arte medievale e moderna*, Sesto al Reghena, 2001, pp. 11-38.

² Many castles or private buildings had private chapels, but sometimes representations like the *Holy Mary with the Child* or the *Crucifixion* took place also in rooms with different use.

find pretty unusual the juxtaposition, in the same room, of representations of paintings (the *Holy Mary*, above all) and chivalry stories, medieval people did not: it is not infrequent that, even in the same wall, secular and sacred coexisted³. So, we cannot consider these two themes as completely opposite and incommunicable.

To conclude this preamble and to give the reader a first starting point, all the scholars would agree that for *secular* we consider every kind of representation not related to the Bible.

Inside the label "secular", we can individuate at least five different typologies⁴. In the first group I collocate the paintings directly related to a written text, like a romance, a piece of poetry or a written tradition⁵. We can recall the frescoes in the Bishop Palace of Milan, patronage of Giovanni Visconti, representing scenes from the Roman history (1349-1352)⁶. Moreover, an interesting example is the cycle coming from the Castle de la Rive or Verdon-Dessous near Cruet, in the lower France: detached from the walls in the 1985-1987, after its apparition, now is in the Museum of Chambéry (fig. 2)⁷.

³ As an example, the frescoes of Casa Antonelli in Gemona del Friuli are iconic: A. RIZZI, "La casa Bertoli di Aquileia", in *Aquileia Nostra*, 27 (1957) pp. 55-63. I have recently analyzed them in: D. DE CRISTOFARO, "Pittura profana nelle case private del Nord-est italiano nella prima metà del Trecento: ricognizione di modelli ed ornate", in *Palazzo Moriller a Rovereto tra nord e sud. Nuovi studi interdisciplinari*, Rovereto, end of 2019.

⁴ I would like to underline that this division and organization is just an idea, and it is not thought to be complete. Future scholars have to be considered free to re-use it, change it or also dismantle it, if necessary. For the moment, it is just a useful way to organize the whole matter.

⁵ About this relation, see in particular the sequent publications: R. SHERMAN LOOMIS, *Arthurian legends in medieval art*, New York, 1937; M. L. MENEGHETTI, *Storie al muro*, Torino, 2015, pp. 110-246.

⁶ See the studies of Serena Romano: S. ROMANO, "Azzone Visconti: qualche idea per il programma della magna sala e una precisazione sulla *Crucifixione* di San Gottardo", in *L'artista girovago: forestieri, avventurieri, emigranti e missionari nell'arte del Trecento in Italia del Nord*, Roma, 2012, pp. 135-162; Ead., "La grande sala dipinta di Giovanni Visconti", in *Modernamente antichi: modelli, identità, tradizione nella Lombardia del Tre e Quattrocento*, Roma, 2014, pp. 119-166.

⁷ About these mural paintings, see the last contribution: T. LE DESCHAULT DE MONREDON, "La decorazione interna dei castelli fortificati e delle caseforti in Savoia e



Fig.2. Battle between Aymeri and a brigand, stories from the *Roman de Girart de Vienne*, 1295-1315 (maybe 1307), detached mural paintings, from the Castle de la Rive, now in the Museum of Chambéry.

The different scenes decorated the major room of the castle and were painted along the last years of the XIII century. They represent the events described in the *Roman de Girart de Vienne*: a story of honor, written around the 1180 and related to the conflict between Charlemagne and his vassal Girart. Thanks to the most recent studies carried by Terence Le Deschault de Monredon, every scene has been interpreted⁸. The frescoes of Cruet give us the possibility to explicit a first element, to always take in consideration: the stories painted are not exactly the equivalent transposition from text to figures. As emerged, some scenes are in the "wrong" order and others are "actualized"⁹, as long as we can see the late XIII century shields

nel Delfinato tra XIII e XIV secolo e il ciclo pittorico di Cruet", in *Carlo Magno va alla guerra. le pitture del castello di Cruet e il Medioevo cavalleresco tra Italia e Francia*, Novara, 2018, pp. 14-23.

⁸ Lastly, in the catalogue produced in occasion of the exhibition of Torino (2018), previously mentioned.

⁹ See also other evidences, M. L. MENEGHETTI, *Storie al muro...*, pp. 3-109.

and coats of arms on the warriors that lived in the IX century¹⁰. This takes us to put our attention on an important consideration: between the text and the image, even if directly referred, there is always a gap, more or less considerable. In this case, the representation of modern symbols could be read as the necessity of the house-owner/patron to actualize the story, to compare the literary events with the historical ones, i.e. the recent battles between the Savoia and the Dauphiné, along the French portion of the Alps, that involved the patron too, one of the lords of Verdon¹¹. In any other case, the filter of the painter/patron is an element rarely considered, but we need to consider that even the simple choice of the scenes to represent is a first element that detaches the painting from the text: the selection of an scene instead of another one is already an act of interpretation¹².

At the analysis of the residue, the first case is not so often: in fact, pictorial cycles doubtless related to written texts are very few. In the XIV century, the most common case is constituted by scenes not related to a single story but what now looks like a mixture of different traditions¹³.

This is the case also of many handcrafted boxes in ivory, carved in France around the XIII-XIV century and spread all over Europe¹⁴: constituted by a series of plates, they host different scenes, with various protagonists, referred to courtly themes. Here we find very often specific iconographies, like a man and a woman playing chess, a kneeling man in front of his beloved, who is posing over his head a little torse, a couple under a tree and many others. As on the ivory boxes, many are the frescoes

¹⁰ Specifically, in T. LE DESCHAULT DE MONREDON, "La decorazione...", pp. 22-23.

¹¹ The lords of Verdon were vassal of the Savoia; A. LONGHI, "Cavalieri, ufficiali e capitani: cantieri di castelli nell'età di Amedeo V di Savoia (1285-1323)", in *Carlo Magno...*, pp. 46-59.

¹² It is not possible to indicate here all the evidences of this first typology, but I would like also to remind these other paintings: G. P. MARCHI, "Storie di Davide e di Salomone in affreschi del canonico e della Torre di San Zeno di Verona", in *Arte Cristiana*, 82, 1994, pp. 169-176; E. COZZI, *Tristano e Isotta in Palazzo Ricchieri a Pordenone: gli affreschi di soggetto cavalleresco e allegorico*, Pordenone, 2006.

¹³ See M. L. MENEGHETTI, *Storie al muro...*, pp. 247-331.

¹⁴ See R. KOEHLIN, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, 2 voll., Paris, 1924; P. BARNET, *Images in ivory: precious objects of the Gothic Age*, Princeton, 1997.

that reproduce this structure: we have, among the various examples, a painted room in the Casa Finco at Bassano del Grappa¹⁵, another one in the Castle of Arco (fig. 12), Palazzo Gambara Maggi in Brescia and others in the now lost frescoes from Trescore Balneario¹⁶ (fig. 13).



Fig. 12. Men and women playing dices, 1328-1335, mural paintings, painted room in the Castle of Arco

¹⁵ About Casa Finco: M. E. AVAGNINA, "Un inedito affresco del secolo XIII a Bassano", in *Bollettino del Museo Civico di Bassano*, 13-15, 1992-92, pp. 75-93; G. ERICANI, "Bassano", in *La pittura nel Veneto. Le origini*, Milano, 2004, pp. 134-144. The dating of this fresco is very problematic: Avagnina states that it should be dated in connection with the passage of Frederick II (1194-1250) at Bassano del Grappa, event that happened in 1239. Ericani, more recently, has correctly questioned this hypothesis, proposing the third quarter of the XIII century and deleting the relation with the Swabian Emperor. In my opinion, this fresco should be posticipated at the end of the same century, still according to observation of the fashion.

¹⁶ About the frescoes of Arco and Trescore, I will discuss them in the next pages. About the house of Brescia, Palazzo Gambara-Maggi: R. STRADIOTTI, "Le decorazioni del palazzo", in *Brescia Romana. Materiali per un museo*, II, Brescia, 1979, pp. 139-162.



Fig. 13. Man and woman playing checkers, 1340-1345, mural paintings, now lost, coming from the Castle Alle Stanze, Trescore Balneario. This photograph comes from the Archivio Fototeca A. Morassi, Dipartimento di Filosofia e Beni Culturali, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, unità V XI, sottounità 5.b-fotografie di Trescore, n. inv. V 2809.

In all these cases, the different couples are taken in poses and gestures that follow iconographies also common in the illuminated manuscripts, like the so-called *Codex Manesse* or the *Libros de los juegos*¹⁷. Even if a specific study on the origin of every iconographical model is still missing, some scholars have revealed that some of them come from well-know traditions¹⁸.

¹⁷ On these two manuscripts, see: O. R. CONSTABLE, "Chess and courtly culture", in *Speculum*, 82, 2007, pp. 301-347; G. MALAFARINA, "La scoperta dell'amore: il Codice Manesse", in *Alumina*, 9, 2011, pp. 48-55.

¹⁸ Like, for example, the man and woman playing chess: this representation should derive from a scene of the *Tristram and Isolde*, when the two, while sailing towards King Marc, spend the time playing chess: P. BARNET, *Images in ivory: precious objects of the Gothic Age*, Princeton, 1997.

Another element still unresolved is the reception of these pictures: did the observer recognized the provenience of the different "frames" and stories or, in this period, they were read only as chivalry stories, anymore deprived of their origin and part of a new - but, for us, still unknown - meaning¹⁹?

In private houses or, more frequently, inside spaces used for the public offices, like the administration of justice²⁰, common is the presence of cycles representing the *Vices and Virtues*. In this case, the meaning is clear and easily readable: Virtues are always represented opposed to Vices, in order to show the right examples to follow for the correct use of the political and juridical power.

This idea finds a very similar interpretation in the famous *Buogoverno* of Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the Communal Palace of Siena²¹. *Virtues and Vices*, like also other cycles as the *Months*, or the *Planets*, were painted also for private spaces and houses: for example, the *Virtues* coming from the walls of a ruined house in Venezia, now in the Museo Correr²². Painted along the Twenties of the XIV century, the fragments now survived show the *Charity, Diligence, Hope and Temperance* (fig. 3).

In these cases, we completely ignore the origin of these mural paintings and the role of the spaces in which these were visible. As for *Months* and *Planets*, the personifications of *Virtues* and *Vices* were depicted according

¹⁹ About this, some hypothesis have been carried on in the study of S. SOMMERER, *Die Camera d'Amore in Avio: wahrnehmung und wirkung profaner wandmalereien des Trecento*, Zurich, 2012.

²⁰ C. L. RAGGHIANI, *Gli affreschi di Casa Minerbi a Ferrara*, Pesaro, 1970.

²¹ L. PASQUINI, "La rappresentazione del bene comune nell'iconografia medievale", in *Il bene comune: forme di governo e gerarchie sociali nel Basso Medioevo*, Spoleto, 2012, pp. 489-515.

²² R. LONGHI, *Viatico per cinque secoli di pittura veneziana*, Firenze, 1946, pp. 5 and 40; P. TOESCA, *Il Trecento*, Torino, 1951, p. 699 note 227; G. MARIACHER, *Il Museo correr di Venezia*, Venezia, 1957, pp. 159-161; E. COZZI, "Aspetti di una cultura allegorica e profana nella pittura murale trecentesca delle Venezia", in *Tomaso da Modena e il suo tempo*, Treviso, 1980, pp. 327-336; M. LUCCO, "Pittura del Trecento a Venezia", in *La pittura in Italia. Duecento e Trecento*, Milano, 1986, pp. 179; F. VELLUTI, "L'arredo domestico fisso dal gotico al Rinascimento nel territorio cenedese, trevigiano e nel basso bellunese", in *Interno veneto*, Vittorio Veneto, 2002, pp. 16-58; A. DUNLOP, *Painted palaces*, University Park Pa., 2009, pp. 89-122; D. DE CRISTOFARO, "Pittura profana...".

to specific and recurrent iconographies, that tend to remain the same along the years²³.



Fig. 3. *Diligence*, part of a cycle of *Vices and Virtues*, 1315-1325, detached mural painting from a house in Venice, now in the Museo Correr

Many occurrences clarify that the major part of the rooms, if depicted, did not host figures or scenes but geometrical and aniconic decorations (fig. 6-10). The typologies are pretty different and change according to the areas: there are interesting cases in which, as we will see, the recurrence of specific patterns can be explained by the emerging role of certain

²³ About the iconography of the Vices and Virtues: A. KATZENELLENBOGEN, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Mediaeval art. From early Christian times to the thirteenth century*, London, 1939; I. P. BEJCZY, *The cardinal Virtues in the Middle Ages. A Study in Moral Thought from the Fourth to the Fourteenth Century*, Leiden, 2011; B. COSNET, *Sous le regard des Vertus. Italie, XIV siècle*, Tours, 2015.

courts/families, that worked as esthetic models and spread their influence on the nearby.

In the fifth and last category, I include the – even if more rare – representations of historical events, normally taken from the contemporary history of the Commune²⁴.

These kinds of representations find their place specially in public palaces, like in the Broletto of Brescia²⁵, the one of Milan and the other one in Cremona²⁶, or in castles, like the Castle of Angera, still in Lombardy. While in public contexts these frescoes were often destined to the exaltation of the freedom and the independence of the Commune against the external authorities or the political events that helped to find a new internal peace after years of civil war, on the other hand in private places, like for example the Castle of Angera²⁷, the stories painted are specially related to battles and military events. Here, the main room, divided into two bays, host a problematic narration of the military events taken place in the 1277, when Ottone Visconti defeated the family of Della Torre and took the control of the whole area (fig. 4).

The paintings were realized few years after the real events and they can be considered as a good example of how the pictorial setting could be fundamental to the communication of a specific message: in this case, the

²⁴ About the specific decoration of the public palaces, see: M. GARGIULO, "Programmi politici dei palazzi comunali in Italia Settentrionale", in *Medioevo: la Chiesa e il Palazzo*, Milano, 2007, pp. 350-356.

²⁵ On the Broletto of Brescia, M. FERRARI, "I Maggi A Brescia: politica e immagine di una 'signoria' (1275-1316)", in *Opera Nomina Historiae*, IV, 2001, pp. 19-65; F. DE LEONARDIS, "Signori e cittadini sul palcoscenico del potere", in *Il Broletto di Brescia*, Brescia, 2012, pp. 59-82; P. PANAZZA, "La Sala Picta del Broletto: la cacciata dei Malesardi e la Pace di Berardo Maggi", in *Brescia contesa*, I, 2013, pp. 163-171.

²⁶ For the examples of Cremona and Milan, M. GARGIULO, "Programmi politici...".

²⁷ About the paintings of Angera, see: P. TOESCA, *La pittura e la miniature nella Lombardia: dai più antichi monumenti alla metà del Quattrocento*, Torino, 1912, p. 87; G. ROMANO, "Per i maestri del Battistero di Parma e della Rocca di Angera", in *Paragone*, XXXVI (1985), 419/423, pp. 10-16; E. BELLANTONI, "Gli affreschi della Sala di Giustizia nella Rocca di Angera", in *Arte Cristiana*, 722 (1987), pp. 283-294; J. F. SONNAY, "Il programma politico e astrologico degli affreschi di Angera", in *Milennio Ambrosiano*, III, *La nuova città dal Comune alla Signoria*, Milano, 1989, pp. 164-187.

...the Viscontis gained the control of Lombardy, the expulsion of the previous dominants and the peaceful reception by the local habitants.



Fig.4. Castle of Angera, post 1277, mural paintings representing the victory of Ottone Visconti against the family Della Torre

From the wall to the observer: communication beyond the images

Apart from some exceptions²⁸, the researches over the secular painting have taken place only after the Eighties of the last century²⁹. Previously, indeed, scholars have focused on short monographic studies, without taking into consideration the problem in its real dimension. Thirty years after, many

²⁸ I am referring to: R. SHERMAN LOOMIS, *Arthurian legends...*
²⁹ The most important publications about this topic are: M. WHITAKER, *The legends of King Arthur in art*, Cambridge, 1990; E. CASTELNUOVO, *Le Stanze di Artù: gli affreschi di Frugarolo e l'immaginario cavalleresco nell'autunno del Medioevo*, Milano, 1999; E. CASTELNUOVO e F. DE GRAMATICA, *Il Gotico nelle Alpi (1350-1450)*, Trento, 2002.

have been the steps ahead, but several remain the topics still waiting to be studied. Scholars in these years have used different methods to face the problems and the key-points. Specially the Italian art-historians have preferred the stylistic analysis, focusing on monographic studies that aimed to study these frescoes one by one and facing specially problems like the authorship, the dating and the historical context³⁰. On the other hand, foreign art-historians, with different profiles and specializations, among which many literature scholars, have focused on problems like the origin of the iconographical models and the success of singular models³¹; therefore, they started to analyze the problem of the perception of those images. Both ways have led to different conclusions, but have never been used together³². The "stylistic" method has shed some light on the dating of many cycles, thanks to the analysis of the fashion and the dresses represented, but also on the cultural profile of the painter and the role of the patron. On the other hand, scholars have tried many times to reach some conclusions along the iconographical correspondences, but often leaving aside the stylistic aspects firstly mentioned. None of these two methods is definitive and, specially for the second typology of researchers, sometimes the conclusions that have been proposed seem to be disengaged from the real situations and the real problems, giving the impression that those analysis could be lead also without taking in consideration the material paintings. So, in the end, I am convinced that an appropriate study needs to have both the visions: it is fundamental to start from the practical elements, but also to contextualize the evidences, if possible, in the cultural and historical situation of the time.

A starting point could be the analysis of what is painted. Resuming quickly the categories previously created, we can briefly summarize the

³⁰ It is not necessary to include here a detailed bibliography of this casuistry as long as the reader can find them inside the previous and following notes.

³¹ L. ANDERGASSER, "Cavaliere in torneo, cavaliere in battaglia", in *I cavalieri dell'imperatore*, Trento, 2012, pp. 91-105; M. L. MENEGHETTI, *Storie...*

³² An exception is the running project directed by Claudia Demattè, University of Trento: C. DEMATTÈ - J. M. L. MEGIAS, "Immagini di dame e cavalieri: affreschi cavallereschi ed arturiani in Trentino Alto Adige (presentazione di un progetto internazionale)", in *Il mondo cavalleresco tra immagine e testo*, Trento, 2010, pp. 13-44.

themes painted in two main and very frequent topics: love and war. These two elements coexisted inside many romances and pieces of literature: as we can see them in paintings related to specific romances, so we do even in those directly linked to them but in the more general "courtly scenes", as we described them in the second group. However, sometimes it is possible to state that there were some rooms specifically dedicated to one of these two themes. To give an example, let's look at the case of the Castle of Avio. Inside the large portion enclosed by high walls, we have two sections. An upper part, occupied by the Baronal Palace and the high keep, and a lower part, that host the House of the Captain³³. In the Palace and in the last floor of the keep (the Chamber of love, we will discuss about it later) we have the remains of - at least - two pictorial cycles representing lovers, hunting and, in general, courtly scenes. In the House of the Captain, on the other hand, one of the two rooms is completely full of scenes representing battles: a siege at the Castle of Avio and groups of peasants and knights fighting each other (fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Soldiers fighting, 1350-1360, mural paintings, Casa del Capitano, Castle of Avio.

³³ About the architecture of the Castle of Avio: E. CASTELNUOVO, *Castellum Ava: il castello di Avio e la sua decorazione pittorica*, Trento, 1987; R. BAZZONI, *Il castello di Babanara d'Avio*, Milano, 1996; E. NAPIONE, "Appunti per una storia medievale di Avio: il castello e le chiese al tempo dei Castelbarco", in *Una dinastia allo specchio*, Rovereto, 2005, pp. 18-51.

Inside the chaotic representation of the different battles, what seems to be common is the exaltation of the coat of arms of the Castelbarco, the owner family of this castle: shields owned, obviously, by the winning soldiers. The three cycles were painted in different moments, to be dated along the 1340-60 thanks to the study on the fashion and on the warriors' armors³⁴. Even if chronologically close, their style, proportions and spatiality speak such different languages.

This separation gives me the perfect chance to expose a concept that I consider central: in my opinion, the selection of the subject of the rooms was due to the patron and was related to the intended use. For the case of Avio, we are talking about spaces destined to serve as representative rooms, but for different publics or for different moments: in the first case, the court or important allies, for which it was a tactical choice to demonstrate the cultural interest and profile of the house owner; in the second case, the battles painted had to demonstrate the military experience of the Castelbarco's family. We should keep in mind, therefore, that what the house-owner wanted to demonstrate was not necessarily his real abilities, but what he wanted to show to the external observers.

As long as these walls were depicted, we should imagine that there was someone who could live between them and could enjoy the spectacle. But, we can also easily state that these frescoes were painted also to be seen from someone *outside*. The use of the painted rooms is an issue long to be solved. We should start from a very important aspect, sometimes ignored by the critics: not all the painted rooms could have had the same function when they were designed and they may have seen their role inside the building changing in the centuries.

What scholars agree on is that the majority of those rooms had a *semi-public* function: this means that even if we find ourselves in the room of a private building, this area may have been used to receive important guests,

³⁴ On this building, its frescoes and the armors painted, see: L. BOCCIA, *I guerrieri di Avio*, Milano, 1991; L. CAMERLENGO, "Battaglie e armamenti nell'arte trentina dal 1350 al 1550", in *I cavalieri dell'Imperatore...*, pp. 277-297.

to accomplish political functions or to perform the house-owner's job³⁵. The painting of these rooms was carefully organized and the house-owner expected to communicate something to his guests: the importance of his family, his/her nobility, the military ability, the political stature or the cultural profile. The consideration that there was only a small and restricted circle that could have the chance to enjoy those decorations should worry the scholars to be less confident about thinking that the spreading of single motifs was a consequence of their vision by other painters and artisans.

The role of the patrons

The link between the paintings and the function of the rooms in which they are is an element that I consider fundamental. Recent studies have revealed interesting relationships between some decorations, located in the buildings of the members of the most powerful Signorie of the Northern Italy, and others, the ones still visible inside the buildings owned by their allies and the less important families. To cite an example, in the area surrounding the river Adige, in the northern part of the country, five historical occurrences dated along the XIV century conserve traces of a recurrent geometric decoration (fig. 6-10). We are referring to a pattern called *lozangue*, diamond shapes of different colors, painted connected or isolated, emerging from a white background³⁶. We find those decorations in the city of Verona, but also in some places sited on the way from Verona to the Alps, even in castles and buildings once inside the borders of the Principato Vescovile of Trento.

³⁵ This eventuality has been proposed by Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti in 1970, referring to the Casa Minerbi in Ferrara. He noticed that in the bigger room, the one occupied by a public dedicated to *Vices and Virtues*, there are many inscriptions on the walls, carrying dates of the last XIV century-beginning XV, with names and comments, hardly readable: C. L. RAGGHIANI, *Gli affreschi...*. These frescoes are actually the topic of my PhD by the University of Firenze.

³⁶ About the origin of this pattern, coming from the XI-century Syria, P. FRATTAROLI, "Le decorazioni di interni in Castelvecchio", in *Gli Scaligeri. 1277-1387*, Verona, 1988, pp. 230-243.

In Verona we have the frescoes of Castelvecchio, erected in the 1354 (fig. 6), and the ones of Palazzo Emilei-Forti³⁷ (fig. 7). Moving northward, we find Ca'Montagna in San Zeno³⁸ (fig. 8), the second room of the House of the Captain of the Castle of Avio³⁹ (fig. 9) and, finally, in Trento, the first floor of the Torre Massarelli⁴⁰ (fig. 10).

For these five circumstances, we know that in at least four cases these buildings were inhabited by members of the family of Della Scala of Verona⁴¹, by their allies or members of the same court⁴². This singularity needs to be explained, specially because this pattern does not have any similar occurrence in other areas in these years⁴³.

³⁷ About Castelvecchio and Palazzo Emilei Forti: F. DOGLIONI, *Ambienti di dimore medievali a Verona*, Venezia, 1987; P. FRATTAROLI, "Le decorazioni di interni in Castelvecchio", in *Gli Scaligeri...* pp. 237-243.; Ead., "Decorazioni affrescate e strutture decorative tessili nel '300 veronese", in *lo spazio nelle città venete (1348-1509)*, Roma, 1995, pp. 179-189; F. VELLUTI, "L'arredo..."; P. FRATTAROLI, "Le decorazioni dipinte nell'ala medievale di Palazzo Forti", in *Palazzo Forti. la galleria d'arte moderna di Verona*, Venezia, 2007, pp. 343-345.

³⁸ Ca'Montagna was the house of the Montagna family: D. ZUMIANI, *Ca'Montagna: una dimora signorile fra Medioevo e primo Rinascimento*, Verona, 1997; E. NAPIONE, "Gli affreschi trecenteschi della torre del Capitano e la pittura di corte nei palazzi scaligeri: le storie dal *Ab urbe condita* di Tito Livio", in *La torre del Capitano*, Treviso, 2009, pp. 36-69; T. FRANCO, "Pregare in casa. Conclusioni", in *Pregare in casa. Oggetti e documenti della pratica religiosa tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, Roma, 2018, pp. 295-314.

³⁹ E. CASTELNUOVO, *Castellum Ava...*; C. HOENIGER, "Le stoffe nella pittura veneziana del Trecento", in *Pittura nel Veneto. Il Trecento*, II, Milano, 1992, pp. 442-462; P. FRATTAROLI, "Decorazioni affrescate..."; Ead., "Affreschi ornamentali: Trento, Castello di Avio, Castello di Stenico, Rocca di Riva del Garda", in *Le vie del Gotico. Il trentino tra Trecento e Quattrocento*, Trento, 2002, pp. 183-207.

⁴⁰ Torre Massarelli, now part of a restaurant in the middle of the city of Trento: P. FRATTAROLI, "Le decorazioni...".

⁴¹ City and area that they controlled from the 1262 to the 1387: A. CASTAGNETTI, "Formazione e vicende della signoria scaligera", in *Gli Scaligeri 1277-1387*, Verona, 1988, pp. 3-18.

⁴² The family of Montagna (Ca'Montagna was their dominion) was vassal of the Della Scala, just as the Castelbarco, that owned the Castle of Avio and the Palazzo Emilei Forti in Verona. The only exception is the Torre Massarelli in Trento, whose owner is still unknown.

⁴³ It is different from the external decoration of the Palazzo Ducale of Venice, whose decoration follows the geometric collocation of the bricks. In our cases, the geometrical model has gained an independent language. H. DELLWING, "L'architettura gotica nel Veneto", in *Storia dell'architettura nel Veneto. Il Gotico*, Venezia, 2010, pp. 50-187.



Fig. 6-7-8. Losanghe, post 1354, mural paintings, room number 11, Castelvecchio, Verona. Losanghe, first half of the XIV c., mural paintings, Palazzo Emilei-Forti, Verona. Losanghe, half XIV c., mural paintings, Ca' Montagna, San Zeno in Montagna



Fig. 9 Losanghe, 1350-1360, mural paintings, House of the Captain, Castle of Avio.



Fig.10. Losanghe, first half of the XIV century, mural paintings, Torre Massarelli, Trento.

Some scholars have proposed⁴⁴, and I totally agree with them, that this relation should be analyzed in terms of political and cultural influence. According to the few evidences that have survived, we can propose as hypothesis that the use of this pattern has been replied in the allies' houses and representative rooms as a status symbol, a manifest of affiliation, a demonstration of the influence of the Della Scala on the nearby families. This demonstrates, so, how politics could influence also the spreading of visive arts and culture⁴⁵.

I would like to give a similar interpretation to a series of coincidences that join three cycles, realized between the 1330 and 1345, still according to the fashion's studies. These are located in a very close area to the one previously analyzed: the already mentioned Chamber of Love in the Castle

⁴⁴ T. FRANCO, "Cortesia e nobiltà negli affreschi del Tre e Quattrocento", in *Verona, Cittadella*, 2007, pp. 109-120; T. FRANCO, "Dentro e fuori la corte: note sulla pittura a Padova e sulla committenza della famiglia Dotti", in *Arte di corte in Italia del Nord: programmi, modelli, artisti (1330-1402)*, Roma, 2013, pp. 123-146; F. PICCOLI, "Dentro e fuori la corte: note sulle pitture trecentesche nel palazzo di Cangrande della Scala a Verona", *ivi*, pp. 147-170; T. FRANCO, "Pregare in casa...".

⁴⁵ M. SEIDEL, *Potere delle immagini. Immagini del potere*, Venezia, 2007.

of Avio, the paintings of the Castle of Arco and the now lost decoration of the bigger room of the Castle "Alle Stanze" of Trescore Balneario⁴⁶. Three castles, located between the rivers Adige and Adda, in an area that - including Verona - is now split in three regions (Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto and Lombardy). In the XIV century this land constituted the border between the areas dominated by the Della Scala of Verona (east side) and the Visconti of Milan (west side).



Fig.1. Map of the area between Lombardy (west), Veneto (south-east) and Trentino (north-east); from Google Maps.

The Chamber of Love of the Castle of Avio⁴⁷ is a small room of circular shape, situated at the top of the keep, that host, in the bottom part, a long

⁴⁶ This area became the point of interest of Bernabò Visconti and Regina Della Scala, after their marriage in 1350: S. ROMANO, "Visconti painting at Pandino Castle: antique and modern in fourteenth-century Lombardy", in *The antique memory and the Middle Ages*, Roma, 2015, pp. 125-147.

⁴⁷ The name "Chamber of Love" was firstly given by Antonio Morassi in 1927: A. MORASSI, "Una Camera d'Amore nel castello di Avio", in *Festschrift für Julius Kluncker zum 60. Geburtstag*, Zurich, pp. 99-103; J. WEINGARTNER, "Die profane Wandmalerei Tirols im Mittelalter", in *Munchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, 5, 1928, pp. 1-63; A. MORASSI, *Storia della pittura nella Venezia Tridentina*, Roma, 1934, pp. 212-230; G. DEGLI AVANCINI, "Il Trentino e la pittura profana nel Trecento", in *Il Trentino nelle Alpi*, Trento, 2002, pp. 289-321; A. DUNLOP, *Painted palaces...*, pp. 43-88.

cloth represented as leaning on the wall, opened in at least four points, where different characters emerge (fig. 11).



Fig.11. Camera d'Amore, 1338-1340, mural paintings, last floor of the keep, Castle of Avio.

We have the personification of *Love*⁴⁸, riding a running horse, intent on shooting arrows. Following an anti-clockwise order, we have a *Woman*, holding a lapdog on the right arm and denying the Love's arrow with a simple gesture of the opposite hand. Despite, a *Man*, represented few meters distant, has been hit by the God and is now kneeling on the ground (in a pose very similar to the one of *S. Francis receiving the Stigmas*⁴⁹),

S. SOMMERER, *Die Camera...*; D. DE CRISTOFARO, "Nuove osservazioni sulla Camera d'Amore nel castello di Sabbionara d'Avio", in *Studi Trentini. Arte*, 2, 94, 2015, pp. 179-189.

⁴⁸ Even Erwin Panofsky wrote about this iconography, even if with wrong conclusions: E. PANOFSKY, *Studies in Iconology*, New York, 1962, pp. 135-183.

⁴⁹ Taking in consideration the iconography invented by Giotto, firstly appeared in the Basilica Superiore of Assisi, and spread all over the country in few years. I proposed this parallel in D. DE CRISTOFARO, "Nuove osservazioni...".

...received for the unrequited love. A huge part of the frescoes is now lost, on the opposite part of the room is still visible the last (?) scene: the man leaning upon his horse and the two protagonists are giving each other a kiss.

These scenes were part of a single story, so a cycle of the first typology. They were accompanied by some writings and sentences, surely taken from a literary source, now quite completely faded and illegible. In the case of Trescore⁵⁰ (fig. 12) and Trescore⁵¹ (fig. 13), we have paintings of the second category: different scenes taken from various sources and mixed together, with different characters, involved in activities like playing chess, catching flowers and playing instruments.

These three evidences have some elements in common. The first one, is the date of execution: according to the analysis of the fashion, that I cannot discuss in this occasion⁵², around 1333-35 for the Castle of Arco⁵³, 1338-40 for the Chamber of Love and 1340-45 for Trescore. In the second point, the theme: in these three cases, the house-owner has decided to support a

The painted room of Arco has received different datings by the scholars, but the right one has been firstly proposed by Alessandro Rovetta: G. DEGLI AVANCINI, "Il Trentino...", P. FRANCO, "Cortesia e nobiltà..."; A. ROVETTA, "Il ciclo di giochi e cavalleria del castello di Arco", in *Il Castello di Arco*, Trento, 2006, pp. 161-186; F. DE GRAMATICA, *Maniera cortese e cavalleresca a Trento: il Torneo nei Mesi di Torre Aquila*, in *I cavalieri dell'Imperatore...*, pp. 63-82; A. DE MARCHI, "La percezione panottica delle camere come profane di età gotica in Italia superiore", in *Arte di corte...*, Roma, 2013, pp. 437-464.

The frescoes once in Trescore Balneario are one lost: they have been published only by Ottavio Morassi in 1934. My recent study on these paintings will be soon published in "Proporzioni". A. MORASSI, *Storia della pittura...*, pp. 223-230.

About the analysis on fashion, I recall the studies of L. BELLOSI, *Buffalmacco e il ciclo della Morte*, Torino, 1974, pp. 50-64; S. BEVILACQUA, "Abbigliamento e tessuti medievali", in *Interno veneto...*, pp. 121-146; M. B. BERTONE, "Abbigliamento, tessuti e costumi in Friuli (secoli XIII-XV)", in *Splendori del gotico nel patriarcato di Aquileia*, Udine, 2009, pp. 132-150.

As it will be discussed in the next lines, the patron, Niccolò d'Arco, is not documented in the castle in the 1329-1333. So, the correct dating should be *ante* 1329 or *post* 1333. In my opinion, thanks to the fashion, I would prefer the second proposal: the pretty long sleeves and the cut of the cloak seem to be too modern for the last years of the Twenties. B. WILHELMSTEIN-WARTENBERG, *Storia dei conti d'Arco nel Medioevo*, Roma, 1979, pp. 23-261.

decoration that represents courtly themes of a dimension and a typology that, for this time, we do not find similar in other areas of the country. Lastly, the three house-owner/patrons were allies and members of the same political spectrum, the Ghibelline's.

Before approaching the profiles of our protagonists, let's recall the historical context of the area. Here, in the years 1331-1333, took place the unsuccessful Italian experience of John of Bohemia of the Luxemburg family (also known as John the Blind, 1296-1346), that, while Luis IV the Bavarian was emperor (1282-1347, he became emperor in 1328), in 1331 was called from the Commune of Brescia to defend the city from the attempts made by Mastino Della Scala of Verona to conquer it⁵⁴. John arrived in Brescia, warding off the enemies attacks: the Commune decided, in order to put an end to the local civil war between Guelfi and Ghibellini and to finally find an internal peace, to concede him the total power over the city and its land, recognizing him as *Signore*. In few weeks and months, the decision taken by this Commune was followed by many others that shared the same need of internal peace, like Bergamo, Milan, Parma, Lucca and many others.

This unexpected and pretty large success risked to constitute a new kingship inside the already overcrowded political situation of the Italian peninsula. The Pope, the Emperor and the local Signorie, like Della Scala and Visconti, but also the Guelfs, like Roberto d'Angiò, reached an agreement and formed a unique Guelfs-Ghibelline alliance, that opposed to the "foreigners" King and his son Charles⁵⁵: their armies were defeated and so both were obliged to overpass again the Alps, dismantling their dominion.

During these events, the three patrons of the cycles here analyzed had an important political role. Niccolò d'Arco, owner of the castle that brings

⁵⁴ This is just a resume of the event, that has been deeply described in the autobiography of Charles and by the recent historians: T. Menotti, *Vita Caroli*, Milano, 2016; C. CAPAZZO, "La signoria di Giovanni di Boemia a Bergamo", in *Bergomum*, 1, 2, XX, 1926, pp. 43-96

⁵⁵ That reached him soon after the success in Brescia; in 1345 he became Emperor as Charles IV.

the same name, is not recorded there for the years 1329 - 1333⁵⁶; he appears as a witness in the peace act signed in the 1333 between Roberto d'Angiò and Charles of Luxemburg, a document that states his being involved as a member of the travelling court of the Luxemburg's family in their prosperous experience previously narrated. Also Guglielmo III of Castelbarco was a very important person: owner of the Castle of Avio, in 1319 he firstly married Tommasina Gonzaga and in 1328 he joined the army of the Gonzaga's family when they took the city of Mantua. He was so familiar with the bohemian kings that in 1331, when John of Bohemia took control over the city of Brescia, he was designed by the king as *Vicario imperiale*⁵⁷.

This relationship remained strong in the following years: in 1333, when Charles of Luxemburg was coming back to Bohemia, Guglielmo hosted him in the Castle of Avio⁵⁸, an event that re-proposed in 1346. The third and most protagonist is the patron of the frescoes of Trescore, that, according to recent studies⁵⁹, has to be identified in Guiscardo Lanzi: we do not know any document that certifies his taking part in the John's Italian experience, but we certainly know that in 1327 he hosted Luis the Bavarian in his way to Milan, so just before the crowning as King of Italy⁶⁰.

After his decease (1352), in 1355 his sons hosted Charles IV (already emperor at the time) in the castle⁶¹. Guiscardo had a long experience as politician, serving as a podestà in cities like Genova, Piacenza, Cremona,

B. WALDSTEIN-WARTENBERG, *Storia dei conti d'Arco nel Medioevo*, Roma, 1979, pp. 282-281.

C. CAPAZZO, "La signoria...".

This event is described in the *Chronicon Veronense*, written by Paride da Cerea (1115-1140) and others anonymous writers. G. M. VARANINI, "I Castelbarco dal Duecento al Quattrocento: punti fermi e problemi aperti", in *Castellum Ava*, Trento, 1987, pp. 17-39; E. CAPONE, "Appunti per una...".

See note 51.

G. GEROLA, "L'itinerario di Ludovico il Bavaro da Trento a Milano", in *Tridentum*, 1, 1936, pp. 18-36.

About Guiscardo Lanzi and the events occurred in Trescore: A. TIRABOSCHI, "Guiscardo Lanzi", in *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, 8, 1881, pp. 459-461; L. ANGELINI, "I castelli medievali di Trescore", in *Bergomum*, 3, 1944, pp. 12-13.

Brescia and Milan, where, as written on his epitaph⁶², became familiar with the archbishop Giovanni Visconti.

No doubts about his political spectrum arise from the analysis of his coat of arms, that has on the top an Imperial crowned black eagle⁶³.

Now it is the time to reach the conclusion and to analyze what could these similarities mean. These three frescoes have some stylistic parallels, specially in the shape of the hands and in the male and female models, notwithstanding this they have to be considered as a production of three different painters and their workshops. My opinion is that these few occurrences, situated in this area, have to be considered as the few remaining evidences of the spreading of the same culture, in very similar ways. A culture that was common between three political men that maybe did never met, but they all felt the need to communicate a sensibility to similar themes. A culture that, maybe, was specifically common between those kinds of families and referred to iconographic and artistic models that we do not have anymore.

Conclusions: starting points for a future evolution of the researches

Apart from the hypothesis that I have proposed, that at the status of the researches should be considered with prudence, what I would like to demonstrate and underline, is that the frescoes I have discussed need different approaches. Indeed, the traditional monographic studies over these different pictorial cycles have never led to such a wide analysis. These occurrences have to be studied together, joined, but, and that is the other important point, the future researches need to start from the real and

⁶² The original is now lost, but since the XVII century it has been transcribed different times.

⁶³ Stemmario Camozzi, XVII-XVIII century, Biblioteca Civica Angelo Mai of Bergamo. Finally reorganized in the XVIII century, it consists in a compilation of all the coat of arms of the important families of Bergamo through the centuries. The manuscript has been digitalized by the Società Storica Lombarda and is now accessible at the following web page: http://servizi.ct2.it/ssl/wiki/index.php?title=Stemmario_Camozzi. The coat of arms of the Lanzi's family is the one with number 1101.

methodological problems: only a correct and complete interpretation of these frescoes will enable the future scholars to conduct detailed and methodologically correct analysis.

As the stylistic observations over the single frescoes are important, so it is the understanding of the cultural models, the literary sources, the reconstruction of the context, the people directly involved and the way of communication that these frescoes were though to follow.

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