

la rivista di **en**gramma
2000

1-4

3

novembre **2000**

DIRETTORE
monica centanni

REDAZIONE
sara agnoletto, maria bergamo, lorenzo bonoldi, giulia bordignon, monica centanni, giacomo dalla pietà,
claudia daniotti, silvia fogolin, marianna gelussi, katia mazzucco, giovanna pasini, alessandra pedersoli,
daniela sacco, valentina sinico, lara squillaro, elizabeth thomson, luca tonin

COMITATO SCIENTIFICO INTERNAZIONALE
lorenzo braccesi, maria grazia ciani, georges didi-huberman, alberto ferlenga, kurt w. forster, fabrizio
lollini, paolo morachiello, lionello puppi, oliver taplin

this is a peer-reviewed journal

La Rivista di Engramma n. 3 | novembre 2000

©2016 Edizioni Engramma

SEDE LEGALE | Associazione culturale Engramma, Castello 6634 30122 Venezia, Italia

REDAZIONE | Centro studi classicA Iuav, San Polo 2468 30125 Venezia, Italia

Tel. 041 2571461

www.egramma.org

ISBN pdf 978-88-94840-02-5

L'Editore dichiara di avere posto in essere le dovute attività di ricerca delle titolarità dei diritti sui contenuti qui pubblicati e di aver impegnato ogni ragionevole sforzo per tale finalità, come richiesto dalla prassi e dalle normative di settore.

Bonoldi | Centanni | Collavo | Maiocchi | Martinuzzi | Mazzucco
Tagliaferro | Thomson

La Rivista di Engramma n. 3



SOMMARIO

- 1 | SAGGI | “Dioniso e Ade sono lo stesso”. Una proposta di interpretazione della funzione delle mascherette teatrali di Lipari
VITTORIA MAJOCCHI
- 15 | MNEMOSYNE ATLAS | Tavola 46 con didascalie
- 19 | MNEMOSYNE ATLAS | L'epifania della ninfa gradiva
A CURA DEL SEMINARIO DI TRADIZIONE CLASSICA, COORDINATO DA
MONICA CENTANNI E KATIA MAZZUCCO
- 25 | MNEMOSYNE ATLAS | Panel 46 with captions
- 29 | MNEMOSYNE ATLAS | Epiphany of the “nympha gradiva”
EDITED BY SEMINARIO MNEMOSYNE, COORDINATED BY MONICA
CENTANNI AND KATIA MAZZUCCO. TRANSLATED BY ELIZABETH
THOMSON
- 35 | MNEMOSYNE ATLAS | Letture grafiche di Tavola 46
A CURA DEL SEMINARIO MNEMOSYNE
- 43 | P&M | Casta (im)pudica. Ripresa e traduzione di posture significanti
seduzione e pudore
SEMINARIO DI TRADIZIONE CLASSICA, COORDINATO DA LORENZO
BONOLDI
- 44 | P&M | Europa trasportata da un'onda mnestica
SEMINARIO DI TRADIZIONE CLASSICA, COORDINATO DA LORENZO
BONOLDI
- 45 | EUREKA! | Eccessi di prudenza museografica. Un Dioniso
φιλοδάφνης, declassato a “Sacerdote”
MONICA CENTANNI
- 47 | NEWS | Bellini: un colore ritrovato.

GIORGIO TAGLIAFERRO

49 | NEWS | Un film, una tragedia contemporanea.
MONICA CENTANNI

51 | NEWS | Il mito racconta. Recensione a: Jean-Pierre Vernant,
L'universo, gli dèi, gli uomini. Il racconto del mito [Paris 1999]
LUCIA COLLAVO

Epiphany of the “*nympha gradiva*”. Guide to Plate 46

edited by the Seminario Mnemosyne
coordinated by Monica Centanni and Katia Mazzucco
with Sara Agnoletto, Maria Bergamo, Lorenzo Bonoldi,
Giulia Bordignon, Claudia Daniotti, Giovanna Pasini,
Alessandra Pedersoli, Linda Selmin, Daniela Sacco,
Valentina Sinico

English version by Elizabeth Thomson

The medieval images which begin the plate are stylistically and chronologically at variance with the homogeneous nature of the other works in the montage, which are all Renaissance. In addition, the closing image, the photograph of a countrywoman from Settignano taken by Warburg himself, introduces a leap forward into the contemporary era. Because of this appreciable shift, the *incipit* and *explicit* of the plate create two disjunctions in the corpus of images, and determine the structure of the plate's primary significance: the syntactical and semantic dialogue between the static figures and those in motion.

In the relief of Agilulph's helmet on the medieval plaque (fig. 1) one can observe the convergence of the gift-bearers, with their bearing of entering, compared with the fixed frontality of the king in majesty. Compared with plate 42, in this subsequent articulation on the discourse of stasis and motion, the defined and explicit polarisation between the feminine and masculine is neutralised: the figure in majesty is a king (fig. 1), but also the Virgin (fig. 2), Elizabeth giving birth (figs. 3, 6) and Mnemosyne, Mother of the Arts (fig. 23). The female figure has a pervasive presence, and is the main protagonist of the plate. She appears in her various manifestations (virgin and woman, nymph and bride, and always has a beneficent role (prophetess — fig. 5; teacher — figs. 23, 25; muse — figs. 23, 25; victory — fig. 16; maiden — figs. 2, 3, 6, 7, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22, 26; midwife — fig. 4; wet-nurse — figg. 2, 3, 6, 22; mother — figg. 2, 3, 4, 6, 19, 22; angel — fig. 9; wife — figs. 3, 19, 21).

If the *incipit* and the *explicit* signal the co-ordinates of the plate, the focus of the composition is the work by Ghirlandaio: *The birth of John the Baptist* (fig. 3). In the fresco all the female figures are present, and are connected to contexts of prophesy, nativity, care and salvation in the various variants of posture which describe the two lines which converge towards the centre of the painting: from left to right the static solemnity of the Mother who dissolves in the gestures of affection of the wet-nurses; from right to left, the seductive and unrestrained gait of the basket-carrying Nymph, highlighted by the motion of her wind-blown garment, which little by little, collects itself, via the women who have gathered together, into the composed dignity of the signora Tornabuoni, conspicuous by the heavy and unyielding folds of the garment she wears. Warburg stated:

“For example, when in one of Ghirlandaio’s paintings Tornabuoni enters the room in order to offer her formal congratulations, she holds her hands and body in a posture similar to that of the Mona Lisa, her head also similarly turned outward. However, there is no indication of a self-possessed and self-assured humanity which rises above everything because it is aware of everything. On the contrary, here one can observe the austere reserve, somewhat Philistine, of the wife of a notable who needs to emphasise her good manners and knows only those to which she has already been introduced”.

As regards the sequence which occupies the upper section of the plate, the links between one image and another are stressed. Agilulph enthroned (fig. 1) is accompanied by two standing figures on either side; Anna in the background (fig. 2) is watched over and assisted by two handmaids; in the following image (fig. 3), the wet-nurse holding John the Baptist in swaddling clothes replicates the posture of the Virgin and Child in the forefront of Lippi’s tondo. In the guide to plate 42, the ‘Theatre of death’ (*Lament over the dead Christ* by the workshop of Baccio Bandinelli, figs. 14, 42), one can witness a gradual progression towards dynamism. Even in Ghirlandaio’s *The Birth of John the Baptist* the images of the women are presented in eight postures which delineate their various female roles in this ‘Theatre of Birth’.

Anna’s delivery, a precursor of Mary’s divine motherhood, functions also as a constituent backdrop of the *Majesty*; but whereas in fig. 2 the bed in which Anna delivers her child functions as the secondary setting for the principal figure of the Virgin Mary and Child, in fig. 3 Elizabeth’s delivery bed, the focus of the composition, dominates the two wet-nurses sitting on the floor. Anna is reflected in the powerful projection of Mary (fig. 2); Elizabeth’s image is duplicated in the two weaker figures of wet-nurse, the one holding

the child (static) and the one with her hands extended offering her assistance (dynamic).

From the central section of the plate, taken up by pages from the Codex of Lucrezia Tornabuoni and her portraits (figs. 8-14), emerges evidence of the guiding figure: the Nymph. Clearly predominant compared with the dialectics of the static Majesty, they become the advancing figures, further evidence of the variants detailed in the vertical sequence on the right (figs. 7, 15, 20, 26). The manifestations of the Nymph describe specific *Pathosformen*, emotive formulas, expressions of her beneficent nature (basket-bearing, handmaid, virgin, heroine, and angel). Warburg writes:

“In the Tornabuoni chapel one can see on two sides attempts to neutralise the demonic element of life in motion. On the one hand one can observe fables for Lucrezia Tornabuoni’s children which neutralise the dark side of the human figures running, marching, or bearing something, despite their tragic provenance; like the Victory portrayed on the Triumphal arch in Rome, it needs gratifyingly to become part of every day Florentine existence like a housewife’s benefactress”.

The nymph who breaks in on the scene of *The Birth of John the Baptist* comes from a dimension, which is foreign, both to the protagonists of the story from the gospels and to the collection of visitors. “What origins does that figure have? What wind moves her, without touching the others? Why the speed of her step so out of time with the other figures?” (Massimo Cacciari). She comes from elsewhere, from another temporal and semantic dimension, a phantasm of antiquity that bursts into the Renaissance, an image of uninhibited female seduction contrasted with the glacial demeanour of the older women; she is the representation of the iconographic reduction that anticipates the fatal and necessary dance of Salome and its prefiguration of John the Baptist’s death.

Even a subject matter which is seemingly discordant like that of the Sybil gains a sophisticated significance in this syntax of prophetic themes: like the early *interpretatio cristiana* of Virgil’s *IV Eclogue*, the Cuman prophetess announces the birth of the Child and the new era which is about to come, and will come to an end with the Incarnation.

The only contemporary component of the plate (1900 circa) is the photograph of the countrywoman from Settignano (fig. 24). Its powerful placement as the closing image would appear to contrast with the actual seman-

tic language of the image. In itself, the image represents nothing more than a woman in motion against a rural background, and it is difficult to see in it a particular emotive formula: walking is just walking. However, the photograph, placed by Warburg in that very position, acquires the valence of a hermeneutic sign not solely for the composition of this particular plate, but for the functioning of the Atlas-of-the-Memory machine. Its semanticisation is entirely contextual: what counts in this case is not posture, but the technical support which refers to the contemporary age. What counts here is the intention to signal, precisely because of its immediacy, the impression of an engram. The phantasm of a nymph is captured in the form of the countrywoman, and a comparison with the other more eloquent images in the plate unleashes the daemon of the imagination.

The idea of pathos overwhelms the sensibility of the observer — Warburg — and the culmination of a concatenation of significant images, registers as though it were an “extremely sensitive seismograph” (this definition was in fact attributed to Nietzsche by Warburg).

Once again, a glance at neighbouring plates helps to illuminate the themes that are introduced in plate 46. In particular, the guiding image — Ghirlandaiò's *The Birth of John the Baptist* is already present in a smaller variant and in a secondary position, on plate 45. It is from there, therefore, that the window opens on the theme of the incoming Nymph.

The motif of the Tornabuoni commission had already found ample space in plate 45, as almost all the frescoes carried out by Ghirlandaiò for the family chapel in Santa Maria Novella in Florence were included, especially in the vertical sequence on the left. The wind-blown garment is worn by a young girl witnessing the *Presentation of the Virgin* (45.1); by Salome dancing for Herod (45.4); by the basket-carrier in *The Birth of John the Baptist* (45.8); and by the angel of St. Zacharias (45.12, 45.14). In 1893, Warburg had already stressed a formal similarity in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and his *Primavera* between the apparition of the angel and the nymph emphasised by the movement of their delicate, wind-blown garments. He cites a passage from Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting*:

But you will only be able to reveal the true form of a Nymph's limbs, or an angel's, who should be portrayed dressed in delicate garments which are

blown or flattened by the winds; with these and similar it will be perfectly possible to reveal the form of their limbs.

The expedient of reproducing ancient forms in grisaille reliefs on the architecture that frames the principal scene (in plate 46 it can be seen in the *Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple*, 46.17) was already revealed by Warburg in plate 45, and was more clearly introduced as one of the central themes of that composition in two other works by Ghirlandaio: *The slaughter of the Innocents* (45.9) and *The Sacrifice of Zacharias* (45.12). That the incoming Nymph is Salome (and viceversa) can be confirmed by the ingenious juxtaposition of the images of the girl in *Herod's Banquet* (45.4) and the basket-carrier in *The Birth of John the Baptist* (45.8). Judith who appears in plate 46 in the guise of the “good heroine” of the family stories on the Lucrezia Tornabuoni codex, reacquires her powerful role as “head-hunter” in the figures of the following plate 47. The young girl, whether she is Judith (47.16, 47.17, 47.20, 47.21, 47.22, 47.25, 47.26) or Salome (46.8, 46.9, 46.10, 46.11), carries in the basket on her head, or on a tray, not offerings of fruit but a man's head.

The angel, considered from a purely formal aspect free of moral judgments, remains a counterpart of the Nymph both in terms of role and posture. The angels, concentrated on the left, and the “head-hunters”, on the right, animate table 47 with their wind-blown garments. Warburg states:

“This is how winged Victories were shown on Roman triumphal arches, or those dancing Maenads that, wittingly emulated, appeared for the first time in the works of Donatello or Fra Filippo and reawoke the ancient style which expressed greater vitality, the vitality that animates Judith or Raphael accompanying Tobias, or the dancing Salome, winged figures which flew out of the workshops of Verrocchio, Botticelli and Ghirlandaio, the products of a felicitous grafting of the evergreen branch of pagan antiquity on to the withered tree of bourgeois Flanders-like painting”.

Moreover, the image of Tobias and the angel — shown on plate 46 between the illuminations from Lucrezia Tornabuoni's codex (46.9) — returns on plate 47 (47.17, 47.18, 47.19), but in this case a particular detail undoes the apparent contrast between decorous ritual and the pathetic state of agitation of certain figures shown in the two preceding plates: the clutching of hands and the gesture of indication and offering. These exchanges of gestures express care, guidance and solicitude, and they create themes that relate to the protagonists of the biblical and gospel scenes (for example the angel holding Tobias by the hand and the Virgin holding Jesus by the hand

47.5, 47.13, 47.15). The silent eloquence of gestures, so important in plate 47, explains and emphasises eloquent gestures merely alluded to in table 46 (the angel holding Tobias by the hand, 46.9; the Virgin holding Elizabeth's hand, 46.19; the noble lady holding her hands out to the Muses, 46.25).

The synoptical reading of these three sequential plates (45, 46, 47) which are tightly linked together makes us aware of a problem which was already perceptible in the reading of plate 42. There emerges a difference in semantic intensity and level of communication between the emotive formula — an imprinted and reemergent symbol of the cultural tradition of the western world, and as such, if not instinctive, is always easy to read — and what we would define as the 'eloquent gesture' — an *actio pro verbo* which has a contingent communicative legacy, and can be desemanticised to the extent of being unintelligible. The fact that the pathos stirs the entire body giving life to out and out 'postural formulas' should also be noted; the 'eloquent gesture' on the other hand (whether allegorical, ritualistic, ceremonial or conventional) is concentrated on the movements of the hands.



pdf realizzato da Associazione Engramma
e da Centro studi classicA Iuav
Venezia • settembre 2018



la rivista di **engramma**
anno **2000**
numeri **1-4**

Raccolta della rivista di engramma del Centro studi classicA | luav, laboratorio di ricerche costituito da studiosi di diversa formazione e da giovani ricercatori, coordinato da Monica Centanni. Al centro delle ricerche della rivista è la tradizione classica nella cultura occidentale: persistenze, riprese, nuove interpretazioni di forme, temi e motivi dell'arte, dell'architettura e della letteratura antica, nell'età medievale, rinascimentale, moderna e contemporanea.