

Fortuna during the Renaissance

A reading of Plate 48 of Aby Warburg's *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*

Edited by Mnemosyne Seminary, co-ordinated by Giulia Bordignon, Monica Centanni, Silvia Urbini, with Alice Barale, Antonella Sbrilli, Laura Squillaro. Translation by Elizabeth Thomson

In a letter written in 1927 to Edwin Seligman, professor of Political Economy at Columbia University, Aby Warburg wrote:

I believe that, after thirty-two years since my first trip to America, the history of art has developed to the point that it would be beneficial for both sides of the Atlantic to raise awareness in America of new directions in the science of culture [...]. To this end, for example, we are aiming to interpret, in the light of a new "energetic aesthetics", the making of the figure of Fortuna, firstly as it appears in Fortuna with wheel, secondly in Fortuna with forelock, and thirdly in Fortuna with helm and sail: these three figures mirror three typical phases of man struggling for survival. [See the original text of the letter published by Barale, Squillaro 2011]

Dating back to a time when fascination for and research on *Mnemosyne* were intensifying and gradually becoming more clearly defined, these considerations were finally compressed into the Atlas, on Plate 48. The plate examines three types of personifications of *Fortuna* as "the conflicting symbol of man liberating himself (the merchant)" according to Warburg's notes for the Atlas ["Fortuna. Auseinandersetzungssymbol des sich befreienden Menschen (Kaufmann)"].

In 1907, in his essay on the merchant from Florence, Francesco Sassetti, Warburg had already faced a "problematic attempt to take a synoptic view, embracing both an attitude to life and an artistic style" (Warburg [1907] 1999, p. 249). The figure of the merchant was suggested as the *exemplum* par excellence of the prefiguration of a new method of study – *Kulturwissenschaft* – as opposed to a totally aestheticising and monolithic approach to evaluating the Renaissance: "it is possible, from the inexhaustible human riches of the Florentine archive, to reconstruct the background of the age clearly enough to supply a historical corrective to the narrowly aesthetic view so often taken of it" (Warburg [1907] 1999, p. 249).

In the structure of the Atlas, Plate 48 acts as an elucidation of Warburg's analysis of the Florence of the Medici and the art of Ghirlandaio, witnessed in the preceding plates (starting with Plate 37, and more concisely Plate 43) in which Florence is presented as the singular historical and cultural setting of an era in transition, as well as a *locus* for the irruption of forms and temperaments of antiquity. The conclusion of Plate 48 was intended by Warburg (he makes this clear at the outset of his 1907 writings) to demonstrate that that concept of modern aesthetics that "looks to Renaissance culture either for primitive naïveté or the heroic pose of an accomplished revolution" has finally been surpassed (Warburg [1907] 1999, p. 249).

The personification of *Fortuna*, considered in her various guises between the 15th and 16th centuries, is for Warburg "an iconic formula of reconciliation between the 'medieval' trust in God and the Renaissance trust in self" (Warburg [1907] 1999, p. 242); this felicitous compromise is represented, as Plate 48 shows, by the iconography of 'Fortuna with sail' which the anthropological type of the merchant in the humanist era, according to Warburg, makes his own. However, alongside this figure, at opposite ends, stand 'Fortuna with wheel' and 'Fortuna with forelock'. These three representations correspond with an equivalent number of existential positions, not unequivocally associated with different historical periods, but rather with specific mental habits that man can assume in relation to fate and the impact of fate on his life. All the images on Plate 48, with a few well-justified exceptions, are dated between the 15th and 16th centuries. Writing to Seligman, Warburg explains:

In the *Fortuna* with wheel, man is passive, placed on the wheel like a murderer in the past; in a reversal that is incomprehensible and unpredictable, he moves from the base to the summit and then falls to the bottom once again. The *Fortuna* with a forelock, which found in the Renaissance depiction of *Occasio* (see Machiavelli) [see the poems Machiavelli dedicated to Opportunity and Luck in *I Capitoli*], its portrayal, which originates from an ancient image - *Kairòs* - has the reverse meaning of man attempting to grasp fate by the forelock and to firmly take her head as booty, just as an executioner does with the head of his victim. Of the two images, *Fortuna* with a sail stands out. This image also derives from antiquity, as the Roman Goddess of Fortune was placed at the helm of ships and, as *Isis Euploia* with unfurled sails, she was the goddess of good navigation. However, the early Renaissance in its own way transformed the goddess with a sail into the symbol of man engaged in an active-passive struggle with his own destiny. *Fortuna* stands at the centre of the ship like a mast with its sail unfurled,

and is the mistress of the ship, but not entirely, because at the helm sits a man, and in the parallelogram of forces, he at least contributes to the determination of the diagonal. [see the original text of the letter published by Barale, Squillaro 2011]

Thus, if the attribute of the wheel is a sign of the goddess in accordance with a popular image of the Middle Ages, it should not be forgotten that the wheel had already accompanied *Fortuna* during Roman times, and it persisted as an attribute of *Fortuna* to the Renaissance and beyond. Likewise, *Fortuna* with a forelock is none other than a new figure of Opportunity, the ancient personification of propitious and fleeting opportunity that, with male features, came into being in Greece (*Kairòs*). Finally, ‘*Fortuna* with a sail’ – which, as Warburg also states in his essay on Sassetti, had already featured in Roman iconography (Warburg [1907] 1999, p. 258, n. 52) – stands out from the other two figures when the sail is no longer an abstract and allegorical symbol, and instead evokes a well-defined function – the sail of a ship – used on a daily basis by the Renaissance merchant in his commercial pursuits (Squillaro 2002; in general, for the iconography of *Fortuna* from antiquity to modern times see Rossi, Rossoni, Urbini 2010; in particular, for contemporary epiphanies of *Fortuna* cfr. Gordon 2010, and by the same author, see *Modern Luck and the Survivor*” by Gordon, 2011).



The three figures Warburg identifies include almost all the illustrations in the plate, and describe three different hermeneutical routes of the discourse which it generates. The images of 'Fortuna with wheel' and 'Fortuna with forelock' occupy respectively the left and the right side of the plate, while the 'Fortuna with Sail' occupies the centre.

The plate opens with three introductory images placed horizontally at top left.

The first image (1; the numbering of the images used here follows the 2002 edition of the *Bilderatlas*) is from the page of a manuscript of Christine de Pisan's *L'Epistre d'Othéa*, dated between 1405 and 1410. It portrays the first type, 'Fortuna with wheel'. *Fortuna* is in the guise of a courtly lady, with the attribute of the wheel on whose circumference are placed six characters, each one representing a step on the social pyramid, from the sovereign at the top of the wheel, to the poor wretch in the lowest position. The inclusion of the image on the plate is perhaps associated with the fact – probably known to Warburg – that Christine de Pisan, daughter of the Charles V's court astrologer, is the author of a philosophical and allegorical work entitled *Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune* in which Christine herself goes on a journey by ship, to the Kingdom of Fortune (see Griffin 2009).



1. *The Wheel of Fortune*, miniature from *L'Epistre d'Othéa* by Christine de Pisan, 1405-1410, Ms. Harley 4431, fol. 129r (London, The British Library).
2. Hans Holbein the Younger, "Stultis fortuna favet", ink drawing, first third of the 15th Century, from *Erasmi Roterodami Encomium moriae*, Basle 1515 (Basle, Kunstmuseum, Kupferstichkabinett).

The second image that appears at the top of the plate (2), is a chronological leap forward to the beginning of the 16th Century and an edition of *Praise of Folly* by Erasmus, which appeared in Basel in 1515, illustrated in the margins by Hans Holbein the Younger. Here, *Fortuna* is engaged in throwing a few golden coins into the lap of a fool. She is depicted naked, on a sphere floating in water, wearing her hair forward like a forelock as it is blown by the wind which also causes ripples on the surface of the sea. It is an image that is well suited to those who - deservedly or not - are able to grasp and master a propitious moment: a virtue that is not necessarily wedded to wisdom or morality. In fact Erasmus writes:

Fortune loves those that have least wit and most confidence and such as like that saying [...] "The die is thrown." But wisdom makes men bashful, which is the reason that those wise men have so little to do, unless it be with poverty, hunger, and chimney corners; that they live such neglected, unknown, and hated lives: whereas fools abound in money, have the chief commands in the commonwealth, and in a word, flourish every way. [*Amat Fortuna parum cordatos, amat audaciores, et quibus illud placet pas erriphthô kubos. At Sapientia timidulos reddit, ideoque vulgo videtis sapientibus istis cum paupertate, cum fame, cum fumo rem esse, neglectos, inglorios, invisos vivere: Stultos affluere nummis, admoveri reipublicæ gubernaculis, breviter, florere modis omnibus.*] Erasmus from Rotterdam, *Moriae Encomium*, LXI (translation by John Wilson, 1668)

The third introductory image leads to the heart of Plate 48. It represents the facade of Palazzo Rucellai, designed by Leon Battista Alberti and built by Bernardo Rossellino in mid 15th Century for a wealthy family of Florentine merchants who supported the Medici (9).

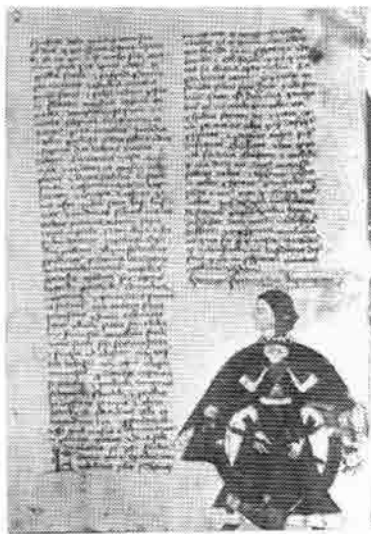


9. Bernardo Rossellino (based on a plan by Leon Battista Alberti), Facade of Palazzo Rucellai, 1446-1451 (Florence).

The photographic reproduction - as often occurs in the procedures Warburg adopts in order to demonstrate his theories - cannot be immediately linked to the iconography of Fortune. The prospect of Palazzo Rucellai introduces us - with a temporary suspension of belief in relation to the main theme of the plate - only to the environment in which arises “the symbol of man liberating himself”. In the first stringcourse of the building, visible in the photo, can be seen the emblem of the Medici, borrowed by the Rucellai either for factional or family ties: a ring with three feathers, the corpus of the emblem of the Medici “semper Diamante in penis”. The presence of the Medicean symbol is nonetheless significant and leads to one of the themes that links several figures in the montage: the theme of the Renaissance emblem - an image with the motto: “body and soul” - which as 16th century writers of treatises would declare, is a figure of an existential or professional venture.

I. *FORTUNA WITH WHEEL*

The first two rows of images from the top of the plate are taken over by various representations of ‘Fortuna with wheel’. Below the introductory image from Christine de Pisan’s manuscript, there is an illustration for a vulgarised version of *Liber de Consolatione Philosophiae* by Boethius, datable to the 13th Century. A passage in the book states:



3. *The wheel of Fortune*, miniature from *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius, XIII century, cod. 2642, fol. 11r (Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

4. *Wheel of Fortune*, miniature from *Imagines secundum diverses doctores*, 1424, Cod. Palat. 1066, fol. 239v (Rome, Vatican Library).

You entrusted yourself to the rule of *Fortuna*: you have to conform to the nature of your mistress. But you try to stop the force of the wheel she turns? You are the most foolish of all mortals! Because if the wheel stops turning, she will cease to be *Fortuna*. [*Fortunae te regendum dedisti; dominae moribus oportet obtemperes. Tu vero volventis rotae impetum retinere conaris? At, omnium mortalium stolidissime, si manere incipit, fors esse desistit*] Boet., *De cons. ph.*, II, I, 12-15

Warburg therefore acknowledges that Boethius' text, which from late antiquity to the Middle Ages was widely circulated, is the main source for the diffusion of the type of iconography of *Fortuna* with wheel during the Middle Ages "if by that we mean an old-fashioned and backward-looking attitude, as opposed to that of the egocentric superman in quasi-antique disguise" (Warburg [1907] 1999, p. 239). *Fortuna* with wheel therefore, Warburg also advises, is a medieval figure although the Middle Ages are not an era not confined in conventional historical terms, but indicate, rather an anthropological and intellectual stance which is in contrast with the anthropocentrism (which Warburg defines as "egocentrism") of Renaissance man. In Warburg's montage, the use of the ancient source has the function of substantiating man's passive subjection to fate and other-worldly powers (a theme Warburg succinctly addressed in a previous plate, Plate B; see also Plate 22 and the 'planet plates' that follow). In Boethius' text, *Fortuna* personified says:

This is our strength; this is the game we continuously play: we turn the wheel, changing its orbit, and we enjoy changing the place of what lies at the bottom with the top, and vice versa. Do rise, if you want, but on condition that whenever my sense of fun requires it, you never consider your descent an injustice. [*Haec nostra vis est, hunc continuum ludus ludimus; rotam volubili orbe versamus, infima summis, summa infimis mutare gaudemus. Ascende si placet, sed ea lege ne utique cum ludicri mei ratio poscet, descendere iniuriam putes.*] Boet., *De cons. ph.*, II, II, 7-11

The image portrays the personification of *Fortuna* sitting on a throne governing the fate of characters balanced on the circumference of the wheel.

The image that follows (4) is another variant dating back to the 15th Century of the 'Fortune with wheel' type. It comes from a folio in *Imagines secundum diversos doctores* preserved in the Vatican Library in Rome, and is dated 1424. In this case, *Fortuna* is represented with a *vultus duplex*, one benign the other malevolent, in the act of applying force to turn the wheel to which various characters, powerless, are tied (Squillaro 2002).

The text with which the image is associated – a 14th Century commentary on Boethius – emphasises the irrational fickleness of fate:

It should be noted that Boethius calls *fortuna* obscure, i.e. dark and blind: indeed, in antiquity *fortuna* was represented blind, because it comes and goes unpredictably. Alternatively, *fortuna* renders man blind, raising him up during times of prosperity, and then bringing him down in adversity. It should be noted that Boethius says that one day *Fortuna* turned her ambiguous face away from him, as in the past *Fortuna* was depicted with a double aspect: white at the front, black at the rear. White represented prosperity, black adversity. *Fortuna* therefore had changed for Boethius the deceptive face of prosperity, showing him finally the face of adversity. [Notandum quod Boethius appellat fortunam nubilam, idest obscuram sive caecam: depingebatur enim antiquitus fortuna caeca, quia ex improviso accedit et recedit. Vel quia caecum reddit hominem, extollendo eum in prosperis et reprimendo in aduersis. Notandum quod Boethius dicit fortunam olim circa se mutasse fallacem vultum, quia fortuna olim depingebatur duplici facie: anteriori alba, posteriori autem parte nigra. Per albam designabatur prosperitas, per nigram adversitas. Mutavit ergo fortuna circa Boethium fallacem vultum prosperitatis; postea ostendit ei vultum aduersitatis.] William of Wetheley, *Expositio in Boetii De consolatione philosophiae*, I, 1

The next four images are all illustrations of texts that take on the theme of an ‘allegorical vision’ of a personified *Fortuna*, a vision previously evoked in Boethius’ text. Two illustrations portray *Fortuna* with a wheel, and can be examined together in as much as they both reproduce the vision of *Fortuna* in Boccaccio’s *De casibus illustrium virorum et mulierum*, a work that also deals with the fortunes and misfortunes of famous characters from the antiquity.



5. *Wheel of Fortune*, miniature from *Des Cas des nobles hommes et femmes* by Boccaccio (Book VI), French manuscript, 1450 ca.

8. *Wheel of Fortune*, wood engraving from *De casibus virorum illustrium* by Boccaccio, Bruges 1483.

The first image (5) is from a manuscript that contains the vulgarised French translation of Boccaccio's work (*Cas des nobles hommes et femmes*), dated 1450. The second (8) is a wood-engraving from a Latin edition published in Bruges in 1483. The miniature shows a lady in courtly dress – *Fortuna* with a wheel. However, unlike the earlier images, *Fortuna* is represented keeping a distance from her wheel. She is engaged in conversation with Boccaccio himself, and is reproaching the poet for not giving her actions due consideration.

I am working so am always restless, one moment taking what lies at bottom to the level of what is at top, the next taking what is at top to the level of what lies at bottom, and I am always everywhere, sometimes merciful and sometimes menacing, so I don't only enter royal residences or the sacrosanct palaces of sovereigns of whom you write so much, but I also visit the shacks of servants and the poor, the hovels of shepherds and the huts of fisherman [*Ad opus, circa quod inquieta semper, et nunc sublimia imis et nunc ima sublimibus equando, ubique nunc blanda nunc minax, venio; et inde, non tantum regias edes aut sacra imperatorum palatia, que turmaris plurimum, in eo, sed et pauperum gurgustiola, pastorum tuguria et piscatorum mappalia perscrutor.*] Boccaccio, *De casibus*, VI, 1

In the wood-engraving, the poet is portrayed with his hand to his face in the posture of melancholia and meditation (see in ww.egramma.it the themed plate and the new plate on the *Pathosformel* of suffering and meditation), while the image of *Fortuna* corresponds more exactly with the description in the text in which the goddess appears still to have connotations of a medieval allegorical *monstrum*, described by Boccaccio as:

Oh good Lord, what a great height, what astonishing features! I was not expecting it, and I was afraid to look at her: her eyes were burning and menacing, and her face grim, and her loose hair fell across her face; she had, I believe, one hundred hands and as many arms; her garments were unusual and her voice metallic. Although she walked, I could not see her feet. And whilst I was afraid and waiting to know what she wanted, she said to me, fixing me with her glistening eyes... [*Deus bone, quam grandis illi statura, quam admirabilis forma! Non inticiabor, prospiciens timui. Nam ardentes minacesque illi erant oculi, facies torva, capillitium multiplex per ora pendulum, manus, credo, centum et brachia totidem, varia vestis et ferrea vox; quibus tamen incederet pedibus vidisse non potui Et dum quid velit pavescens expecto, hec in me defixis luminibus inquit.*] Boccaccio, *De casibus* VI, 1

These two images of *Fortuna* with wheel, in which Boccaccio gives his response to *Fortuna* and declares that fate is none other than the minister of God whose will is accepted with unconditional awe, is accompanied by another illustration from a third vulgarized translation of Boccaccio, the *Livre de la Ruyne des nobles hommes et femmes*, again published in Bruges in 1476. It portrays the struggle between Fortune and Poverty (6). This image appears to signal a deviation with regard to the total dominion of *Fortuna* over human existence. Whilst in the background, the lady - *Fortuna* - punishes a luckless character tied to a tree, it is *Fortuna* in the foreground who is thrown to the ground and beaten with a stick (in accordance with the *Pathosformel* of aggression: see Plate 5 and Plate 41 of the *Bilderatlas* on www.egramma.it). Central to the scene is a male character, perhaps the poet himself – in meditative pose – facing *Fortuna* who is still standing, attired in contemporary garments “alla franzese” (Squillaro 2002). It is here that there appears to be a payoff for cases decided by fate, vividly portrayed by the muscular revenge of man over *Fortuna*, or at least a contest on equal terms between man and fate; in addition, the very theme of struggle between Fortune and Poverty fits into the realms of commerce, in which *Fortuna* is also tantamount to wealth. This edition of Boccaccio is located in Bruges in the second half of the 15th Century, but the comparison with the 1483 wood engraving of Boccaccio’s work placed immediately above it, where *Fortuna* is represented in the guise of a monstrous dominatrix, clearly highlights both positions – active and passive – of man in relation to fate.



6. Master of the Boccaccio Illustrations, *The Struggle of Fortuna against Poverty*, from the *Livre de la Ruyne des nobles hommes et femmes*, Bruges 1476.



7. Pope Pius II (*Enea Silvio Piccolomini*) in the Kingdom of Fortuna, German wood engraving, 15th Century.

Alongside the three images taken from Boccaccio, a fourth image portrays a vision of *Fortuna* personified in a 15th Century German wood engraving portraying pope Pius in the kingdom of *Fortuna* (7), which visually restores the description given by Enea Silvio Piccolomini in his *Somnium de Fortuna*. In his description of a dream, the author himself is taken into the kingdom of the Goddess *Fortuna*. In the text, which is part of a long letter dated 26 June 1444 and addressed to Procopius of Rabstein, Enea Silvio, having presented *Fortuna* as the dispenser of both wealth and poverty, and happiness and disaster, begins the description of his dream thus:

I had this dream: I had come to a green and pleasant place: there was a cultivated field in the middle of a grove, the grove of *Fortuna*, surrounded by a river and by a wall onto which two doors opened, one made of horn and the other of gleaming white ivory. The walls were very exceedingly high, built of diamonds, the river unfathomably deep. On the banks of the river which extended from the doors, a great mass of men and women was gathered together. [...] I arrived at the door made of horn, on top of which there was the following inscription in ancient characters: "I admit few, and I serve even fewer". [*Visionem hanc habui: in locos letos et amena vireta deveni, gramineus campus in medio fortunati nemoris erat, rivo cinctus et muro, due illic porte, altera cornea, altera candenti nitens elephanto. muri altissimi ex adamante constructi, rivus immense profunditatis. [...] in ripis e regione portarum existentibus ingens virorum ac feminarum turba consedebant, [...] veni ad corneam portam, in cuius summo hec litteris antiquis inscripta conspexi: paucos admitto, servo pauciores*]. Enea Silvio Piccolomini (Pius II)

Fortuna is the goddess who knows, but does not reveal, what the future holds: she is the power that governs the fate of the throng of men and women crowded at her gates. Further on in the text, Pius II, in conversation with the humanist Maffeo Vegio, witnesses amongst other things a scene of certain political and allegorical significance in which king Alphonse of Aragon attempts to grasp a fleeting *Fortuna*:

I saw a small man, dark of face with lively eyes who had put his hands in *Fortuna*'s hair, had grasped her by her locks and was telling her: "Cease, at last, oh goddess, and look at me: why have you eluded me for twelve years? Now I have seized you, whether you like it or not. And now you must look at me. You have been more hostile to me than necessary, now I think you will offer me a rather different gaze. You will either be more benevolent towards me, or I will rip all your hair away. Why, coward, do you avoid me, the Magnanimous?" Fortune, too, replied thus: "I admit you have won: I will no longer be hostile towards you", so I said: "Who

is it, Vegio, who is doing violence to Fortuna?”. “Alfonso of Aragon” he replied, “who after Ponza, after being taken captive and delivered with his brothers to Philip, Duke of Milan, threw himself into battle once again, pursuing the lady who had been hostile to him, but so much did he do by standing up to her and persevering that when she was won, he with modesty guided her to favour him. [*Video parva statura virum, nigro vultu, letis oculis, qui manus in capillos fortune conjecerat arreptaque coma, sta tandem, domina, meque respice, dicebat. quo me fugis jam annis duodecim? capta es, sive velis sive nolis, ut me respicias oportet, satis mihi adversa fuisti. nunc alium vultum prebebis reor. aut mihi blanda eris, aut omnes tibi crines evellam. cur me fugis magnanimum pusillanimesque sectaris? Fortune quoque in eum vox erat: vicisti fateor, nec me amplius experieris adversam. tum ego, quia hic est, inquam, Vegi, qui Fortune vim facit? Alfonso, refert ille, rex Aragonum, qui cum fratribus apud Ponzam captus, Philippoque duci Mediolanensium datus, dimissus denique novis se preliis immiscuit, adversamque dominam insecutus, tantum instando perseverandoque fecit, ut victam pudore Fortunam jam in suum favorem revocaverit.*] Pius II, *Somnium de Fortuna*, c. 6v

This passage, although still ‘medieval’ in the context of allegorical visions indebted to the work of Boethius, introduces a significant precursor of what will become the reappearance of the ‘Fortuna with forelock’, who can be tamed, restrained and controlled. Indeed, Warburg (acting on information given to him by Alfred Doren: see the letter from Saxl to Warburg published by Barale, Squillaro 2011) identifies in this passage by Enea Piccolomini and in particular the comment that Alfonso of Aragon makes to *Fortuna* (“sive velis sive nolis”), the source for the text of the motto ‘VELIS NOLISVE’ on the verso of the medal on the left side of the plate 48, included in the images that portray the iconographic type of the *Fortuna* with forelock (24) (Squillaro 2002; cfr. Warburg [1907] 1966, p. 259 n. 56 and Addenda, p. 452). Significantly, however, the image that accompanies the text of the humanist pope is out of place on the plate, and is in the group of images portraying ‘Fortuna with wheel’: at variance with the text, in fact, the goddess in the image is not portrayed as *Occasio* with forelock or hair blowing in the wind that man can grasp. Rather, she is shown entirely as a courtly lady. Therefore, although the conceptual evolution of *Fortuna* in the 15th Century can be said to have been fully attained with the recovery of *Kairòs/Occasio* with forelock, and then with the image of ‘sail of *Fortuna*’, the illustration in *Somnium de Fortuna* written by Enea Silvio Piccolomini is evidence of an iconographic delay: in the text, *Fortuna* is *fugiens*, and grasped by her hair, but in the image that the text is intended to illustrate, *Fortuna* is a courtly lady engaged in conversation with the humanist pope.

The inclusion of the image placed under the series drawn from Boccaccio is not easy to understand in terms of hermeneutics. The painting belongs to a Portuguese school and portrays John the Evangelist on the island of Patmos (15). The reason for its inclusion can perhaps be deduced from a passage in the essay on Francesco Sassetti in which Warburg quotes a letter sent by Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Rucellai in which a quote appears from a passage in the Gospel according to St. John, who says: “Non haberes hanc potestatem nisi data esset desuper” (John 19, 11) (Warburg [1907] 1966, p. 235, n. 2). It signifies, as Ficino maintains, that man can certainly offer resistance to the power of *Fortuna*, on condition that human energy is endowed with a superior will.

The positioning of the image of St. John appears to be dictated by notions of form and expression: like John, the characters in the earlier images – Boccaccio and Enea Silvio – are the protagonists of ecstatic visions that have as their subject a pagan goddess rather than the Woman of the Apocalypse, the symbol of *Maria-Ecclesia*; John, like Boccaccio in the wood-engraving, is represented in the posture of meditation, with his hand to his face.

II. FORTUNA WITH FORELOCK

The motto ‘VELIS NOLISVE’ (a syllabic palindrome that can be read in both directions), perhaps has as its source the *Somnium de Fortuna* by pope Pius II. It leads directly, as has already been said, to the consideration of the type of *Fortuna* with forelock. This iconographic type occupies



15. Saint John on Patmos, 15th Century, painting, Portuguese (?).

the right side of the plate, and introduces an approach to the fate of Renaissance man that is radically different to that of man and his passiveness as he is subjected to *Fortuna's* fickle wheel. If indeed, as Warburg says in his essay of Francesco Sassetti “to brave the struggle for existence, in Rucellai’s mind, meant to grasp the helm” – ‘Fortuna with sail’ is appropriate for a merchant type – “let the condottiere brag of the ease with which a strong right hand might grasp Fortune by the forelock; it was the merchant’s part to lay hold of the tiller” (Warburg [1907] 1999, 242). The true caution towards *Fortuna* - that medieval writers and Marsilio Ficino himself advice those who, like Rucellai, “aspire to a new equilibrium, a state of self-assertion that would be equally remote from monkish, unwordly ascetism and from wordly self-conceit” (Warburg [1907] 1999, p. 242), eludes those who confront fate with violence and muscular, fanciful intentions of controlling it. For people like this the passive image of ‘*Fortuna with wheel*’ is not appropriate, nor is that of the central image of ‘*Fortuna with sail*’. The ancient figure of *Kairòs/Occasio* will be the one that best gives “a stimulus to bold and decisive action”. In 1929, Warburg wrote to Doren:

I would like to ask you whether you have included in your treatment of *Kairòs*, the god of fortune in Greece, as he appears in a relief in the Cathedral of Torcello. In the relief he holds, if I am not mistaken, a razor in one hand, and he is standing on a wheel and in any case has a shaved neck. All he has is *Fortuna's* forelock that falls undulating on his forehead. The act of grasping *Fortuna's* forelock is the very act that is most vehemently opposed to a passive attitude towards fate. During the Renaissance and to the time of Machiavelli, this *Occasio* was the most vigorous rival of *Fortuna with wheel* or sail. [see the original text of the letter published by Barale, Squillaro 2011]



22. *Kairòs (Occasio)*, bas-relief marble slab from Torcello Cathedral, 11th Century, Venice, Torcello.

The relief on the pulpit in Torcello Cathedral, dating from the 11th Century, to which Warburg refers in his letter, is in fact in a prominent position in the plate, at top right, as a primary iconographic reference from late antiquity for this type of *Fortuna* (22). However the principle source for the reinvention of *Occasio/Kairòs* in the Humanist age is perhaps literary – an epigram of Ausonius that portrays the *ekphrasis* of a work that depicted *Occasio* and *Poenitentia*, attributed to Phidias:

*Cuius opus? Phidiae, qui signum Pallados, eius,
 quique Iovem fecit, tertia palma ego sum.
 Sum dea quae rara et paucis Occasio nota.
 Quid rotulae insistis? Stare loco nequeo.
 Quid talaria habes? Volucris sum. Mercurius quae
 fortunare solet, tardo ego, cum volui.
 Crine tegis faciem? Cognosci nolo. Sed heus tu
 occipiti calvo es? Ne tenear fugiens.
 Quae tibi iuncta comes? Dicat tibi. Dic rogo quae sis.
 Sum dea, cui nomen nec Cicero ipse dedit.
 Sum dea, quae facti non factique exigo poenas,
 nempe ut paeniteat: sic Metanoea vocor.
 Tu modo dic, quid agat tecum. Quandoque volavi,
 haec manet: hanc retinent quos ego praeterii.
 Tu quoque dum rogitas, dum percontando moraris,
 elapsam dices me tibi de manibus.*

Aus., Epigr. XXXIII, In simulachrum Occasionis et Poenitentiae

[Whose work art thou? Phidias's: his who made Pallas's statue, who made Jove's. His third masterpiece am I. I am a goddess seldom found, and known to few, Opportunity my name.

Why stand'st thou on a wheel? I cannot stand still.

Why wearest thou winged sandals? I am ever flying. The gift Mercury scatters at random, I bestow when I will.

Thou coverest thy face with thy hair. I would not be recognised.

But what! – art thou bald at the back of thy head? That none may catch me as I flee.

Who is she who bears thee company? Let her tell thee. Tell me, I beg, who thou art. I am a goddess to whom not even Cicero himself gave a name.

I am a goddess who exacts penalties for what is done and what undone, to cause repentance. So, I am called Metanoea.

Do thou now tell me what does she along with thee? When I have flown away she remains, she is retained by those I have passed by. Thou also, whilst thou keepest asking, whilst thou tarriest with questioning, wilt say that I have slipped away out of thy hands.] (translated by David Rijser)

The Torcello relief shows on the right the figure of *Poenitentia*, Repentance (*Metanoia*) who, hand to her face, looks back in an attitude of affliction; *Occasio*, at the centre of the of the relief is on the one hand grasped by her hair by a character in front of her, whilst on the other escaping from an additional figure purposelessly extending an arm towards her shoulders.

The re-emergence of Antiquity in the figure of 'Fortuna with forelock' and 'Fortuna with sail' during the Renaissance is diffused especially via heraldic devices. In his essay on Sassetti, Warburg writes:

Why this particular pagan deity, *Fortuna*, was revived by the Renaissance as the stylistic embodiment of worldly energy is explained by her important function in the art of the *impresa* [...] an intermediary stage between the sign and the image, as a symbolic illustration of the inner life of the individual. (Warburg [1907] 1999, p. 240)

In the montage of Plate 48, there are many images that in various guises are used in heraldry, including medals with personal emblems (11, 23, 24, 25) and printed logotypes (27), allegorical prints with moral or amorous meanings (17, 12), and devices added to architectural ornamentation (9,18).



The main scene at the centre of the marble slab in Torcello is also replicated in the Renaissance medal-device immediately below the ancient relief: here, too, *Occasio* – with sail and therefore with connotations of *Fortuna* in a wider sense and not just as a propitious incident – is energetically held by her hair by a male character (Squillaro 2002). In the plate, this medal appears twice, in two different images although at a short distance one from the other (24a, 24b). The image with the gesso reproduction of the *verso* and *recto* (24b) is in all likelihood intended to highlight the figure of the patron, Camillo Agrippa, mathematician, engineer, architect and friend of Michelangelo, but chiefly a famous man of arms, a theoretician and innovator of the art of fencing, as the *Idealtypus* of the “active enterprising man” of the Renaissance. The repeated inclusion of the *verso* of the medal (24a) alongside a second medal with a similar subject, as well as demonstrating (as Warburg never fails to emphasise in his montages) the diffusion of the iconographic type also via the practical support of celebratory medals, also connects the mottos of the two medals. Of the medal of Camillo Agrippa, Warburg writes to Alfred Doren:

The Renaissance medal, which you should receive, and of which I have already written to you, shows with a particularly felicitous symbolism, the mentality of the Renaissance man. An armed man grasps *Fortuna* with sail by the forelock of good luck, with, written below: “velis nolisve”; therefore, using the witty play on words “velis – with sails”, or “whether you like it or not” but also “your sails serve you not”. [see the original text of the letter in Barale, Squillaro 2011].

As mentioned earlier, this is the motto taken from the *Somnium de Fortuna* by Enea Silvio Piccolomini, who had anticipated – in the text but not in the accompanying image – the appearance of ‘*Fortuna* with forelock’.



24a, 24b. Giovan Battista Bonini, medal of Camillo Agrippa, 1580 ca. (London, The British Museum), left: verso portraying Fortuna-Occasio, with the motto “Velis nolisve”; right: recto with the profile of the patron, Camillo Agrippa.

In the medal of Camillo Agrippa appears once again with her forelock, and despite having a sail she succumbs to the man who captures her. In the final pages of Machiavelli's *Prince*, appears a passage that is almost a commentary on the image on Agrippa's medal, the figure of *Fortuna fugiens* whom the prince must take and tame with fierceness and bravery, almost raping her.

Fortune, [...] shows her power where valour has not prepared to resist her [...] I consider that it is better to be adventurous than cautious, because fortune is a woman, and if you wish to keep her under it is necessary to beat and ill-use her; and it is seen that she allows herself to be mastered by the adventurous rather than by those who act more coldly. She is, therefore, always, woman-like, a lover of young men, because they are less cautious, more violent, and with more audacity command her. [*Fortuna [...] dimostra la sua potenza dove non è ordinata virtù a resisterle [...] Io iudico bene questo, che sia meglio essere impetuoso che rispettivo; perché la fortuna è donna, et è necessario, volendola tenere sotto, batterla et urtarla. E si vede che la si lascia più vincere da questi, che da quelli che freddamente procedano. E però sempre, come donna, è amica de' giovani, perché sono meno rispettivi, più feroci e con più audacia la comandano.*] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, XXV)

Total certainty of the power to control *Fortuna* expressed by Agrippa in his medal is flanked on the plate by another device belonging to the count and condottiere Pier Maria Rossi (23). The coin, minted in Parma during the second quarter of the 15th Century, has an image of a naked *Fortuna/Occasio* on the *verso* with a long forelock over her face, whilst behind a male figure with right arm extended is hurrying to grasp her. The motto on the device – “Aut te capiat aut moriar” (“Either catch you or die”) – states in fundamental terms the *aut aut* of Renaissance man who considers himself now entirely the *faber fortunae suae*, and is intent on actively controlling his own life, to the extent of end angering it in his struggle with fate.



23. Verso of the medal of count Pier Maria Rossi with the motto “Aut te capiaut moriar”, Parma, second half of the 15th century.

An early 16th century fresco of the Mantegna school preserved in the ducal palace in Mantova is perhaps the most famous image of *Occasio* (28). It portrays *Fortuna/Occasio* advancing quickly, wings on her feet, on a sphere; the figure is attired in a garment “all’antica”, she has the now inevitable forelock falling across her forehead while she turns her head backwards to look at a young man following her, he is held back from his chase by a third standing figure, placed on a solid plinth. The subject was known to Mario Equicola who writes of it in a letter to Francesco Gonzaga (Pisani, 2006, Kolsky 1991). It is an invitation to youth – the same fierce youth Machiavelli refers to (see his poems to *Occasio and Fortuna* in *Chapters*) – to not allow himself to be seduced by the flattery of unstable fortune, but to rather control his bravery with virtue, personified by the woman restraining him in the fresco after Mantegna. Baldassare Castiglione, who during those very years frequented the courts of the Gonzaga and the Dukes of Urbino, writes: “Fortune, always was, and still is today averse to virtue” (“La fortuna, come sempre fu, così è ancor oggidì contraria alla virtù”, *The Courtier, Dedication 1*). This warning can, however, be compared with the figure who embodies the qualities of prudence and luck: the right luck, Dürer’s *Nemesis* – equipped with bridles and bit in order restrain human action – placed on the plate directly above the painting from Mantova (26). The imposing figure of *Nemesis* controls the world and shows that *Fortuna* can also be ‘right’ when, tempered by prudence, she acknowledges and rewards virtue. With regard to the inclusion of Dürer’s work, it should be remembered that Warburg dedicated his 1905 essay *Dürer and Italian antiquity* to the relationship between Dürer and Mantegna, whose work is the subject of the plates that follow in the *Bilderatlas*: Plate 48 and Plate 50/51.



28. Workshop of Andrea Mantegna, *Occasio and Paenitentia*, 1500-1505, fresco (Mantova, Palazzo Ducale).

During the Renaissance, virtue was exercised by the active life, *vita activa*, of merchants, condottieri and princes. Misfortune, indeed, coincides with sloth, with the inability to be ready to grasp the right moment. This would appear to be the message of a drawing attributed to Cornelis Anthonisz, circa 1530 – an *Allegory of Misfortune* or *Allegory of Indolence*, and positioned as the penultimate image in the montage, bottom right. The central figure in the image holds one hand melancholically to her face, whilst in the other she holds an eel, an animal whose movements and slimy skin allude in all probability to instability and unreliability. The figure is surrounded by a landscape in ruins, burning cities, dying livestock, while a ship with lowered sails, in the background, is unable to catch the wind, which nonetheless makes the flags on the mast flutter.

The Plate concludes with a juxtaposition of the personification of Misfortune and Sloth, with an entirely positive image: the *Allegory of Fortuna* by Angelo Bronzino, preserved in the Uffizi Gallery, and dated ca. 1567 (30). Painted on the occasion of the marriage between Francesco I de' Medici and Giovanna of Austria, as the presence of the little cherub at the centre of the scene shows, the work could more correctly be called *Allegory of Public Felicity* (Geremicca 2010). The protagonist of the painting is celebrated by Glory and Fame in flight above her, whilst at her side can be see Prudence (with *vultus duplex*, a remora on her arm and a globe between her hands) and Justice (with sword and scales). The two virtues overwhelm Vices, which include Folly and Envy.



Left: Cornelis Anthonisz Thenissen (attr.), *Allegory of Misfortune and Sloth*, ink drawing, 1530 ca. (London, The British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings).

Right: 30. Agnolo Bronzino, *Allegory of Fortuna*, oil painting, 1567 ca. (Florence, Uffizi Gallery).

On his knees, even Time (with a celestial globe) and Fortuna (with forelock and wheel), are in attendance on *Felicitas publica*, featured with her caduceus and cornucopia (see Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia, Felicitas publica*). The two attributes also identify the device of *Fortuna companion of Virtue* (cfr. Alciati, *Emblemata CXVIII*), which represents the negation of the disjunction between moral qualities and the favour of fate, which was a feature of *Fortuna* beginning with Erasmus and his *In Praise of Folly*, as witnessed in the second image at the start of the plate. Even the attribute of *Fortuna* portraying her as the most unstable, unpredictable and dominating element of human affairs – the wheel – returns in this late image, as an attribute of *Occasio* with forelock: opportunity, which is transitory and propitious, can, if one is virtuous, be grasped and significantly halted; and it is portrayed, in front of Time-Eternity, as a dutiful and constant attendant on *Felicitas publica*, the promise of the Medici family. Between Time and *Fortuna-Occasio*, lies, among the vices, a young naked man with a blade in his hand. He is perhaps the ancient *Kairòs*, still fleeting and elusive, and represented here as a metaphor for unfavourable times, now overcome by the current, rock-solid *Felicitas publica*. Apart from the specific identification of the each character, however, the image that brings the plate to an end gives an account of the freedom with which the theme of the figures of *Fortuna* was handled during the late Renaissance. Its proliferation, on the strength of total iconographic license, multiplied and mixed personifications and attributes. In Bronzino's painting, the features of the pagan goddess, although derived from ancient iconography and sources, have lost their demonic and vital aura that in the early Renaissance had made them re-emerge as forceful "symbols of the conflict of man freeing himself" of his fate.

III. FORTUNA WITH SAIL

However, it is in the iconographic type of the 'Fortuna with sail,' placed at the centre of the plate, that Warburg reads the full expressive function of the symbol of freedom of man from the overbearing force of fate, the *proprium* of its true semantic significance. This type, too, borrows from ancient iconography, an 'archetype' of which is in the plate: at top, next to the third introductory image on the plate (Palazzo Rucellai), appears the drawing of a coin of Hadrian dated the 2nd century CE (10), portraying a female figure standing in a boat. Wrapped in garments blown by an imperious wind, the figure supports with both hands a sail, which is also blown by the wind. The image portrays Isis, the Egyptian divinity widely worshipped by the Greeks and, from imperial times, particularly by the Romans,

in syncretic cults that associated and merged oriental and Roman divinities with Venus. Isis was also worshipped with the epithets of *pharia*, *euploia*, *pelagia*, i.e. goddess of the sea, of tides and therefore of wind. In the montage, Hadrian's coin indicates an earlier ancient iconography, essential for understanding the diffusion in the Renaissance of the attribute of the sail in association with *Fortuna*: the iconographic scheme was directly accessible in the 15th Century via imperial coins circulating in vast numbers in the examples collected by humanists, but also through the medium of drawings from antiquity, an example of which is in the plate.

Immediately below the reproduction of the ancient medal another drawing of the verso of a medal can be seen, this time a modern version. The image, dated the second half of the 16th century represents the device of the Milanese jurist Alessandro Caimo in which the sail of the boat is supported by a naked male character. The motto engraved on the coin cites "Optanda naviatio", signifying "Navigation to be desired", or rather "Navigation is desirable", as a counterpoint to "Navigare necesse, vivere non necesse" taken from the words with which Pompey (according to Plutarch, the *Life of Pompey* 50.2) is said to have exhorted his sailors to brave the sea despite the storm. The device clearly expresses the hope that for the patron, who is master of his course through life, the desirable navigation will proceed at full sail.

Once again, within the context of medals and devices, the montage includes a 1515 painting by Bernhard Strigel, preserved in Wien portraying Maximilian of Austria with his family. In the group portrait, Charles V, the central figure in the painting, wears a beret with an emblem portraying



10. *Isis pelagia*, reproduction of a coin on Emperor Hadrian, 2nd century CE.

11. Reproduction of the verso of the medal of Alexander Caymus (1556-1570) with the motto "Optanda naviatio", Milan, second half of the 16th century.

Fortuna “all’antica”: naked, with full sail, and suspended from a sphere. (Incidentally, it should be remembered that of the devices of Charles V, the most famous is perhaps that in which the Pillars of Hercules are accompanied by the motto “Plus ultra”, in recollection of the audacious and successful explorations and conquest that gave way to the expansion of the Spanish Empire via the sea, and beyond the confines of the “old” world).

In the device of Charles V, contrary to the representations “alla francese” that illustrate proto-humanist allegorical texts, *Fortuna* has acquired her original likeness of a pagan goddess. Her antiquicising aspect is assured by her accessories in movement – garments and hair fluttering in the wind – as in the Medicean mythological allegories that Warburg examined in the previous plates of the Atlas (see in particular, Plate 39) and that can be seen in the plate, for example, in the image of a *Venus-Fortuna-Truth* that becomes a sail with her own garments, whilst governing the globe with her helm, as she is transported across the waters by a propitious *Wind-Eros-Kairòs*, in a prized engraving by Nicoletto da Modena (14).



25. Bernhard Strigel, *Maximilian I and his family*, painting, 1515 (Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum).
 14. Nicoletto da Modena, *Fortuna*, etching on copper, 1506 ca. (Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Kupferstichkabinett).
 25. Bernhard Strigel, *Maximilian and his family*, painting, 1515 (Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum), detail of the device with *Fortuna* on the beret of Charles V.

It can also be seen in the floor of Siena Cathedral in the work by Paolo Mannucci, originating from a drawing of 1504-1505 by Pinturicchio (13), in which an unstable *Fortuna* with the features of a Botticelli maiden, placed on a sphere, on a ship with a broken mast, resolutely turns her back on the upward 'path of virtue' travelled by ancient sages, whilst receiving, albeit unwittingly, the despised riches of Cratetes above her. The scene almost appears to take up the dictum of Erasmus in *In Praise of Folly* referred to in the second image at the start of the plate (referred, however, to *Fortuna* with forelock).

A special focus in Warburg arguments concerning devices is placed on the patronage of Rucellai, who – as mentioned earlier – appears as a protagonist in the third image at the start of the plate, with reference to the appearance of '*Fortuna with sail*'. In his Sasseti essay, Warburg writes:

The knight, rallying his clan to make a last stand around the family banner, receives from the Florentine Renaissance merchant, as a device for that banner, the wind-blown goddess Fortune, who presents herself so vividly to him as the personification of fate [...] We now examine how this same Fortune emerged from the mind of a contemporary of Sasseti's, Giovanni Rucellai, as a symbol of energy in the antique vein (Warburg [1907] 1999, p. 240)



13. Paolo Mannucci (from a preparatory drawing by Bernardino Pinturicchio), *Fortuna and Virtue*, 1504 (Siena, Duomo, floor).

18. *Fortuna with sail*, decoration on the helmet on the coat of arms of Giovanni Rucellai, bas-relief, 1460 ca. (Florence, Palazzo Rucellai).

In the same essay, Warburg also emphasises the different meanings of “fortuna” in the context of the powerful merchant families of the Renaissance, such as the Rucellai family:

In Italian usage, then as now, the Latin word *fortuna* signified not only “chance” and “wealth” but also “storm wind”. To him [Giovanni Rucellai], as a merchant venturer, these three distinct meanings were the attributes of a single being: Storm-Fortune, whose uncanny ability to switch from daemon of destruction to bountiful goddess fostered the atavistic image of her single, anthropomorphic, mythical identity. (Warburg [1907] 1999, p. 241)

The Rucellai device with ‘*Fortuna* with sail’ that appears on the internal walls of the palazzo (18), is therefore a result of the intention to restoring an allegory that would express appropriately the aspirations for social and financial success of the patron who, in actual fact, dealt with sails and boats in his commercial activities. Warburg writes:

In it [*scil.* Rucellai’s crest] popular pagan feeling unite with anti-que-inspired artistic fancy and theological humanism to strip three layers of conceptual wrapping from the thoroughly pagan mental and visual image of ‘*Fortuna audax*’ (Bold Fortune). [...] The same Sail of Fortune [appeared] - suitably conjoined with the *impresa* of the Medici - on the facade of his own palace, which was built in classic vein as a monument to worldly gratitude; for Rucellai rightly regarded his Medici connection as a major gift from his “buona fortuna”. (Warburg [1907] 1999, pp. 241-242).

The decision to portray the ancient goddess standing, naked and proud of her stance, supporting a full sail, in accordance with an “Albertian sense of the grace of fluttering accessory forms” (Warburg [1907] 1999, p. 241), is the result of adopting pagan, conceptual, and formal stylistic features as opposed to the iconographic and ideological schemes of the goddess-lady who with the movement of her wheel makes superior divine will come true.

Leon Battista Alberti - who conceived the Palazzo Rucellai, and was therefore in direct contact with the wealthy families who could see their fortunes prosper and fail very quickly - attributes to men with the will and the right arms, such abilities that they can foresee and act, and receive the ‘fortune’ (also as synonym for wealth), to which they aspire (Squillaro 2002). It is precisely to this relationship between fate and fortune that Leon Battista Alberti dedicates the most serious of his texts in

the *Intercenales*, entitling it appropriately *Fatum et Fortuna* (Bacchelli, d'Ascia 2003). In this brief work, Alberti abandons almost entirely the dialogue form of the other texts in the *Intercenales*, in order to write a vision, drawing on the tradition of the philosophical dream: the author describes the behaviour of various types of souls that symbolise lives – true and proper devices – that struggle to survive in the whirling river of life. Alberti emphasises the relationship between cosmic order – *Fatum* – and human initiative – *Fortuna*, even in the sense of *Occasio*, the opportunity more or less favourable to act, in accordance with resources that are objectively available. The matter that interests Alberti and Florentine bankers of the 15th Century – as well as the bankers in Hamburg in the 20th Century who were in Warburg's milieu – is firstly practical, and is related to the relationship between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, a theme that was particularly dear to intellectuals of the time. In order to develop his reasoning on Fate and Fortune, Alberti resorts to a naval metaphor inspired by the allegory of the rivers of *Fortuna* crossed by Virtue and Mercury in *De Nuptiis* by Marziano Capella (I, 14-16). The introduction to *De Nuptiis* was also used as a source of inspiration for Botticelli's *Primavera*, and this was, perhaps, the way that in Quattrocento Florence, *Ninfa* and *Fortuna* take each other by the hand (see the immediately previous plates of the Atlas: Plate 46 and Plate 47).



Left: 12. Bernardo Rucellai and Nannina de' Medici on the ship of Fortune, etching on copper, second half of 15th century, (Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Kupferstichkabinett).

Right: 17. Fortuna, illustration from Theodor De Bry, *Emblemata Nobilitatis*, Frankfurt 1593.

The matter of the confrontation between man and fate – entirely immanent at this time, and no longer with any metaphysical references – is therefore an essential philosophical and existential issue between the 15th and 16th Centuries, and is meaningfully dealt with by Francesco Rucellai, and by Marsilio Ficino. Warburg writes:

For the answer to [Rucellai's] momentous question: "Have human reason and practical intelligence any power against the accidents of fate, against Fortune?" [...] he solicited and received an expert opinion in the form of a long epistle from Marsilio Ficino. The response to his inquiry as to how man could counteract or prevent future events, especially so-called chance ones, [...] culminated in the following advice on the battle against Fortune: "It is good to do battle with Fortune, wielding the weapons of foresight, patience, and noble ambition. It is even better to withdraw, and to shun such a combat, from which so few emerge victorious - and then after intolerable labor and effort. It is better to make peace or a truce with Fortune, bending our wishes to her will and willingly going the way that she directs, to prevent her from resorting to force. All this we shall do, if we can combine within ourselves the might, the wisdom, and the will. [*Optimo è fare col lei o pace o triega, conformando la volontà nostra colla sua, ed andare volentieri dov'ella accenna, acciocchè ella per forza non tiri. Tutto questo faremo, se s'accorda in noi potenza, sapienza et volontà.*]" (Warburg [1907] 1999, p. 241)

Man, no longer entirely subject to fate (the passivity of the Middle Ages to the subjection to the will of God that *Fortuna* made reality with her wheel), but not yet audaciously master of his fate (the high-handed grabbing of the *conquistador* is symbolised by the capture of Fortune by her forelock) – is engaged in an equal struggle with *Fortuna*. The most informed intellectuals of the humanist era explicitly assert this (so were more in agreement the thinking of antiquity), and it is precisely in contest of this confrontation that the *Idealtypus* of Renaissance Man is able to prove his golden virtue that temper the impulse to courage with the restraint of wisdom, such as "prudence, patience and magnanimity" as well as "strength, wisdom and willpower". Again, Warburg writes:

In their emblematic use of antique imagery, both Sassetti and Rucellai reveal how in the upheaval of subjective sensibility they aspired to a new balance of energies: they faced the world with a heightened assurance founded on two still-compatible forms of the cult of memory, Christian-ascetic and antique-heroic; and yet they were well aware that individual human strength was pitted against the mysterious and arbitrary decrees of fate. (Warburg [1907] 1999, p. 240)

Another etching connected with the Rucellai family represents an ‘amorous device’ (12) which according to a critical interpretation by Warburg in 1907 (which today has at least in part been revised) – Giovanni’s son, Bernardo, who personally takes on the role of *Fortuna* with sail (as does the character shown in the medal of Canino), is accompanied by a lady whose features are still courtly placed at the helm of the ship, an allegorical disguise of Nannina de’Medici, who married Bernardo in 1466. The caption on the print cites: “I[o] mj las[ci]o portare alla fortuna sperando alfin daver buona ventura” (“I allow myself to be borne by fortune hoping in the end of have good fortune”), which refers, according to Warburg, to his fortunate alliance with the Medici family, brought about by his marriage to Lorenzo’s sister.

With admirable timing, he [Francesco Rucellai] had, by marrying his son Bernardo to Piero’s daughter Nannina, “Boarded their ship of fortune”. I find allusion to this, with a witty use of the Rucellai *impresa*, in a hitherto unremarked engraving [...] On this printed token of congratulation, printed as an “impresa amorosa” in happy days of aspirations fulfilled and wealth augmented, Fortune discreetly veils her true character as an “impresa militare” [...] its tenor was as an emblem of energy, a stimulus to bold and decisive action. (Warburg [1907] 1999, p. 242)

The type of *Fortuna* with sail, in her guise of pagan goddess, soon spread beyond the Alps. Proof is the medal-device of Charles V (25), and also, decades apart, an emblem drawn from one of those works of systematisation of genres that became fashionable in the 16th century, the *Emblemata nobilitate et vulgobey* by Theodor de Bry in the first edition printed in Frankfurt in 1593 (17). The motto, reproduced below the feet of the goddess portrayed as a *Venus Euploia*, with shell and balancing on a sphere resting on the waves, states “His Fortuna parens, illis iniusta noverca est”. *Fortuna* turns to the characters on her right as a benevolent mother (“parens”), bestowing prosperity and felicitous sailing, while appearing as an unjust step-mother (“iniusta noverca”) to those on her left, making their ship sink and their city burn (Squillaro 2002).

Another truly famous portrayal of *Fortuna* comes from northern Europe: Albrecht Dürer’s *Nemesis*, a copper engraving dated 1502-1503, known as *The Great Fortune* (26). With this representation of the goddess – who with one hand promises wealth contained in a goblet, whilst with the other she imposes restraint on mankind, using her iconographic attribute of reins – instability is transfigured into the reinstatement of Justice. It is indeed correct to identify the figure as

Fortuna-Nemesis (cfr. Vincenzo Cartari, *Imagini de gli dei Antichi*, Venice 1624). Although balanced on the sphere, the goddess has ‘lost’ her attribute of sail in order to acquire her enormous wings, with which she can hover over the world, thus regaining her panoptic rule over man’s existence, which in the past had belonged to *Fortuna* with wheel.

A final *Fortuna-Venus* that comes from northern Europe has long flowing locks and wings on her feet that rest on a sphere. It is included in the plate as the trademark of printer and publisher Andreas Cratander, used in an edition of the works of Cicero printed in Basel in 1528 (27). The features of this figure – without sail but standing on a sphere as does Dürer’s *Nemesis*, her hair blowing in the wind – are intertwined with the iconography of ‘Fortune with forelock’ (perhaps via the works of Mantegna and his circle – cfr. the adjacent image of *Occasio*, 28) that carry images of renewed antiquity towards the North (cfr. Warburg 1905).

Other images associated with ‘*Fortuna* with sail’ and the ship of Fortune are included in the plate at bottom left. In a drawing by Francesco di Giorgio Martini preserved in the Uffizi (16) (Chapman 2011, pp. 172-173), a female figure is put to flight by the sight of an enemy ship, on which a fully blown sail is fluttering audaciously in the wind: it is Hippona, the Greek heroine counted by Boccaccio himself among the *exempla castitatis* because “nullis adverse fortune tenebris lux posit obfucari virtutis” (“the clarity of virtue cannot be obscured by any adversity of fortune”, *De mulieribus claris* LIII).



26. Albrecht Dürer, *Nemesis (The Great Fortune)*, etching on copper, 1502-1503.

27. *Fortuna*, trademark of the printer Andreas Cratander from Basel, from an edition of *Ciceroni Opera*, Basel, 1528, vol. III.

The image perhaps is in this position to further emphasise the fickleness of *Fortuna* “from daemon of destruction to bountiful goddess” (Warburg [1907] 1999, p. 241), and vice versa, as the figure of “*parens/iniusta noverca*” also shows in the image placed alongside it, on the right. Metaphorically, Hippona, the ancient heroine whose virtue was threatened by pirates, is also a symbol of the Renaissance merchant who often “struck down by fortune” (“*percusso da fortuna*”) would feel rage when for example pirates inflicted considerable losses on him (Warburg [1907] 1999, p. 242).

On the lower register of the montage, the political allegory by Leonardo dated 1516, portrays an *Allegory of the relationship between the King of France and the Pope* (21), with sea, ship and full blown sail; but other factors also symbolise that they are part of the lexicon of devices and that – although the precise meaning of the allegory is not altogether clear – they probably allude to the hope that the stormy international political situation of the time will be stabilised by peace – the olive tree – as with full blown sail the ship (the papal government) resolutely sails towards the crowned eagle (the king of France).

In the two drawings – Leonardo’s and the one by Francesco di Giorgio – the presence of the iconographic attribute alone is enough to immediately recall the concept of *Fortuna*, without it being any longer necessary to represent her - in accordance with an “atavistic” and anthropomorphic



16. Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *Hippona*, drawing, 1470-1475 (Department of Drawings and Prints, Firenze, Uffizi).

way of thinking in Warburg's words ([1907] 1999, p. 241) – with the features of the ancient goddess *Euploia*.

The plate features, however, one last image of 'Fortuna with sail', in an etching from the *Triumph of Fortuna* by Sigismondo Fanti, an artist from Ferrara, printed in Venice in 1527 (20; see an excerpt from the work). In reality, four *Fortunae* are represented on the page, whose designs are inspired by the frescoes of Baldassare Peruzzi in the Hall of Perspectives in the Farnesina. In Fanti's book, each *Fortuna* is supported by a different wind (Volturnus, Argestus, Libycus and Boreas); the hair of the characters, blown by the wind forward over their faces, intersects once again with the iconography of the 'Fortuna with forelock'.

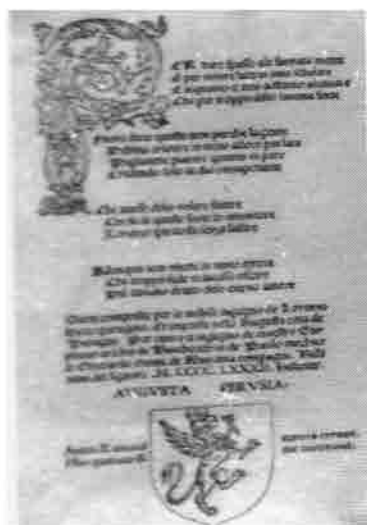
This image, together with the one to its immediate left – the frontispiece for the *Book of Fate* by Lorenzo Spirito, printed in Perugia in 1482 (19; see an extract from the *Prologue* of the work) – at the conclusion of the plate, opens a different chapter on the theme of *Fortuna* during the Renaissance: mastery of fate through *serio ludere* in the 'books of fate' (see the contributions by Silvia Urbini - by Urbini 2011 - and Antonella Sbrilli - by Sbrilli 2011), a system of 'figurative questioning' to see the future, widely diffused at the time for biblical prophecies of various kinds. By placing the *Fortuna* of Fanti's engraving and the frontispiece for Spirito's book, Warburg highlights documents that reveal an attitude typical of Renaissance mentality (the *Book of Fate* had already appeared in plate 23A: cfr. the contribution by Urbini 2011), that combines humanist astrological knowledge consisting of planetary domains and cosmic spheres, with biblical and naturalist elements, and stochastic consultations by the throwing of dice,



21. Leonardo da Vinci, *Allegory of the relationship between the King of France and the Pope*, 1516, (Windsor, Royal Collection).

in a progression of forays that lead to the ultimate objective of a prophetic response. In particular, with regard to the work of Lorenzo Spirito, Warburg writes in a note preserved at the WIA:

The work should be considered as a document on the history of publishing both for its literary content and the art form of its typography, and should be given due consideration in the history of culture. The 'Book of Fates', like the Calendar [Steffen Arndes] of 1519, belongs to the family of astrological practices. However, whilst the almanac denatures the astrological knowledge of the ancients, and transforms it, in accordance with the Arab natural sciences of the Middle ages, into simple rules on health, the Book of Fates preserves a genuinely ancient oracular technique even though the author – Lorenzo Guerrieri (sic! Vere: Gualtieri), known as Spirito, who, in Perugia, a city brimming with turmoil during the time of the Baglioni, carried out the more peaceable duties of an appreciated and cultured court poet – intended with considerable foresight that his book on pagan divination should have the character of an innocent social diversion. Only in recent years has research clearly shown that books of fate, diffused widely throughout the world during the Middle Ages, are the bearers of the legacy, albeit at times degenerated, of an ancient oriental technique of divination which to this day, with the burden of tenacious stratifications naturally associated with mysterious superstitions, influence the actions of mankind fearful of what the future holds. [see the letter published by Barale, Squillaro 2011]



19. Frontispiece for the *Libro delle Sorti* (*Book of Fate*) by Lorenzo Spirito, Perugia 1482.

20. Fortunes with sail, illustrations from the *Triumpho di Fortuna* (*Triumph of Fortune*) by Sigismondo Fanti, Venice 1527.

Once again, Warburg's attention is drawn to those liminal materials and supports that are located between scientific knowledge and superstition, between courtly games and existential quest, and between medieval and Renaissance forms of antiquity.

The final image from a chronological perspective included in the plate – a painting by Guido Reni in 1623, known by the title of *Fortuna* (29) – is still an indication of the complexity and interweaving of perspectives on which Warburg bases his themes for Plate 48 of Mnemosyne.

The image does indeed represent *Fortuna* who rules the world over which she flies, and can confer upon man glory and power, as indicated by the palm and the crown she holds in her hands; but the image is also an allegory of *Fortuna amorosa* – a naked Venus whose locks and garments are left fluttering freely in the breeze while a little winged Cherub chases her and captures her. The composure of Guido Reni's work, which at times tends to freeze into stylistic features that are precociously neo-classical, in this case is felicitously pervaded by the warm, restless breezes that one hundred and fifty years previously had begun to blast in the aesthetic and revolutionary turmoil called the Italian Renaissance. It is thus that *Fortuna*, as neither a powerful woman nor a woman to be ill-treated, appears on the plate leaving her mark as a splendid *nympha fugiens*, who can only be held in check by Eros, who takes her, gently and gracefully, by her hair.



29. Guido Reni, *Fortuna*, painting, 1623 (Rome, Vatican Art Gallery).

RIFERIMENTI BIBLIOGRAFICI

Bacchelli, D'Ascia 2003

Leon Battista Alberti, Intercenales, ed. F. Bacchelli and L. D'Ascia, Bologna 2003

Barale, Squillaro 2001

A. Barale, L. Squillaro, Regesto di testi inediti e rari dal Warburg Institute Archive sul tema della Fortuna, "La rivista di Engramma", n. 92 (agosto 2011)

Chapman 2011

H. Chapman, catalogue entry Ippona (drawing by Francesco di Giorgio Martini), in Figure, memorie, spazio: disegni da fra' Angelico a Leonardo exhibition catalogue, ed. H. Chapman and M. Faietti, Firenze 2011

Geremicca 2010

A. Geremicca, scheda di catalogo Allegoria della Felicità Pubblica, in Bronzino: pittore e poeta alla corte dei Medici, catalogo della mostra, a c. di C. Falciani e A. Natali, Firenze 2010

Gordon 2010

R. S. C. Gordon, Sfacciata fortuna: la Shoah e il caso, Torino 2010

Gordon 2011

R. S. C. Gordon, Modern Luck and the Survivor, "La rivista di Engramma", n. 92 (agosto 2011)

Griffin 2009

Miranda Griffin, Transforming Fortune: Reading and Chance in Christine de Pizan's Mutacion de Fortune and Chemin de long estude, in "The Modern Language Review", January 2009

Kolsky 1991

S. Kolsky, Mario Equicola: the real courtier, Genève 1991

Pisani 2006

C. Pisani, catalogue entry Occasio et Poenitentia (school of Andrea Mantegna, Mantova, Palazzo San Sebastiano), in Mantegna a Mantova. 1460-1506, exhibition catalogue, ed. M. Lucco, Milano 2006, 116-117

Rossi, Rossoni, Urbini 2010

Dea Fortuna, iconografia di un mito, exhibition catalogue, ed. M. Rossi, E. Rossoni, S. Urbini, Carpi, 17 September 2010 - 9 January 2011, Carpi 2010

Sbrilli, 2011

A. Sbrilli, Tre puntate su Fortuna, "La rivista di Engramma", n. 92 (agosto 2011)

Squillaro 2002

L. Squillaro, Dall'allegoria antica all'impresa rinascimentale. Il viaggio di Fortuna, secondo la rotta di Aby Warburg (Atlante della Memoria, tavola 48), MA dissertation, supervisor Prof. M. Centanni, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, a.a. 2001/2002

Urbini

S. Urbini, Abracadabra, una lettura di tavola 23a di Mnemosyne, "La rivista di Engramma", n. 92 (agosto 2011)

Warburg 1905

A. Warburg, *Dürer und die italienische Antike*, in "Verhandlungen der 48. Versammlung deutscher Philologen und Schulmänner in Hamburg, Oktober 1905", Leipzig 1906; later in A. Warburg, *Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike. Kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Geschichte der europäischen Renaissance*, ed. G. Bing with F. Rougemont, Teubner, Leipzig-Berlin 1932 (new publication ed. H. Bredekamp, M. Diers, Berlin 1998) 443-449, 623-625; English translation: *Dürer and Italian Antiquity in The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the Renaissance*, ed. Kurt W. Forster, trans. David Britt, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999, pp. 553-558

Warburg 1907

A. Warburg, *Francesco Sassetti's letzwillige Verfügung*, in *Kunstwissenschaftliche Beiträge August Schmarsow gewidmet*, in *Kunstwissenschaftliche Beiträge August Schmarsow gewidmet zum 50. Semester seiner akademischen Lehrtätigkeit*, Leipzig 1907, 129-152; later in A. Warburg, *Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike. Kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Geschichte der europäischen Renaissance*, ed. G. Bing with F. Rougemont, Teubner, Leipzig-Berlin 1932 (new publication ed. H. Bredekamp, M. Diers, Berlin 1998) 127-158, 353-365; English translation: *Francesco Sassetti's Last Injunction to His Sons*, in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the Renaissance*, ed. Kurt W. Forster, trans. David Britt, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999, pp. 223-62

SOURCES

BOCCACCIO, *DE MULIERIBUS CLARIS*

LIII. DE HYPPONE GRECA MULIERE

Hyppo greca fuit mulier, ut ex codicibus veterum satis percipitur; quam vix credam unico tantum optimo valuisse opere, cum ad altiora conscendamus gradibus, eo quod nemo summus repente fiat. Sed postquam vetustatis malignitate et genus et patria ac cetera eius facinora sublata sunt, quod ad nos usque venit ne pereat, aut illi meritum subtrahatur decus, in medium deducere mens est.

Accepimus igitur Hypponem hanc casu a nautis hostibus captam. Que cum forte forma valeret sentiretque predonum in se pudicitiamque suam teneri consilium, tanti castitatis decus existimavit, ut cum, nisi per mortem servari posse cerneret, non expectata violentia, in undas se dedit precipitem; a quibus sublata vita et pudicitia servata est.

Quis tam severum mulieris consilium non laudet? Paucis quidem annis, quibus forsan vita protendi poterat, castitatem redemit et immatura morte sibi perenne decus quesivit. Quod virtutis opus procellosum nequivit mare contegere nec desertum auferre litus quin literarum perpetuis monumentis suo cum honore servaretur in luce. Corpus autem postquam ab undis aliquandiu ludibrii more volutatum est, ab eisdem in eritreum litus impulsus, a litoranis naufragi ritu sepultum est. Tandem cum ferret ab hostibus exorta fama quemam foret et mortis causam, ab Eritis summa cum veneratione sepulcri locus in litore ingenti tumulo atque diu mansuro, in servati decoris testimonium, exornatus est, ut noscamus quoniam nullis adverse fortune tenebris lux possit obfuscaris virtutis.

EXTRACT FROM THE PROLOGUE

[Dio] havendogli [scil. all'uomo] anchora dato il libero arbitrio, et la conoscenza delle cose con la perfettione dell'intelletto lo quale il buon calle dal rio chiaramente potesse discernere, acciocchè, egli l'uno de gli dui qual più gli fosse in grado prendere, addotollo alla chiarezza di diversi mali accidenti et casi che ogni giorno vediamo intervenire, i quali sono innumerabili, come il libro presente detto TRIOMPHO DI FORTUNA, apertamente manifesterà, et per le virtudi di quelle et conoscimento potessero venire a laudabile frutto et perfettione, si come le grandi, et altre scritte meravigliosamente parlano, Io Sigismondo Fante (Beatissimo Padre) [...] indegno mathematico in quanto che nostro sapere nulla veramente essere istime in rispetto et in comparatione dello intendere gli alti et profundissimi secreti della natura [...] proposi, Deo concedente, di comporre multi volumi li quali di diverse scienze lucidissimamente attrattare havessino [...], et fra gli detti volumi compilare proponesemo questa presente opera intitulata non senza cagione TRIOMPHO DI FORTUNA, imperho che tal nome messo a studio, si come anchora l'opera e fatta ad arte, della quale nella primiera faccia, vostra BEATTITUDINE non puoco si prendera di maraviglia, conciosia cosa che quella essa leggendo non altro vedere che la verita col falso mescolata: et questo feci, considerando che ciascuna cosa tiene il suo opposito, cosa in questo secolo forse più che in alcun'altro sopra noi stato bisognevole da sapere, il che leggiadramente il nostro LIBRO dimostra". "Perciò che egli sarà Triompho chiarissimo a dimostrare agli tenebrosi animi di qua giuso che fuggire et seguire per loro si debbe, concio sia cosa che lui [...] governato da dodici fortune del mondo appropriate a dodici diverse vesti [...] con la discretione, et natura de tutti gli animali, così terrestri come acquatici, et così aerei come del Sovrano elemento insieme con tutte l'immagini celesti fisse del firmamento, et insieme con le vaganti stelle, egli duo gran lumi che la notte et il giorno della lor vita adornano, et appreso con la natura, et significatione delle mille e venti due stelle fisse degli Astrologhi antichi diligentemente nottate. [...] Le quai cose mostrano diversi casi, et accidenti di questo secolo attribuite, et appropriate, secondo le diverse materie delle quali diversamente molti alti e sottilissimi ingegni hanno favellato, le quali cose che a questo inferiore mondo s'appartengono, come la Tavola del detto Triompho di Fortuna apertamente manifesto, per la lettione del quale trovera ciascuno intelletto, quel tanto che da la natura desiderar si puote, con varie interrogazioni, altrimenti, Domande, et Elettioni, et Nativitadi con altre innumerabili questioni tutte per ragioni naturali, e accidentali et per arte calculatorie e diligentemente ritrovate, con le sue celesti figure a variare passioni appropriate, come più apieno qua la Tavola vedere si puo lucidamente. [...] Volendo adunque alchuno quesito et domanda ritrovare la quale fosse a te stata proposta, overo da te considerata et per accidente accaduta, prima entrerai nella Tavola del Triompho di Fortuna cercando fra le domande del quesito che sapere desideri et di sotto da quella domanda atoverai imediate il scritto che ad una delle dodici Fortune ti manderà alla lettera rossa per Alphabeto designato, la quale posta da manu destra indiretto de la quale il scritto troverai il quale a una delle dodici case ti manderà della bella et Vittoriosa Italia: alla lettera rossa per Alphabeto discritto indireto di la quale el scritto vederai il quale ti manderà a una delle Rote del mondo al tale animate, o rationale, o vero bruta a carte tante per numero assignate. Di soto di la quale imediate entrerai nella Sphera di l'Horologio trovando l'hora e il tempo de lo dimandato. Quesito sopra al quale atoverai il scritto che ti manderà a una delle sphere del mondo a una diputata terra overo Citate; cercherai a punto quella che nelle Rote trovasti, di sotto della quale il scritto assumerai che ti manderà ad uno de gli Settanta doi Astrologhi e una delle ventidua figure al Oroscopo con gli suoi seguenti domicilia, con la collocatione delli Pianeti et suoi aspetti con altre varie passioni. [c. 2v, c. 3v]