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Professors and Holy Fathers At Work. The Iconography of Teaching in the Sepulchral Art of Trecento Bologna

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Abstract: In the late Middle Ages, the Italian art developed an iconography of teaching that served to the remembrance of the most praiseworthy professors of medieval universities in funeral art. An art of the master lecturing to his students can be encountered on sarcophagi or the so-called *arcae*, as a post-mortem *laudatio* of these renowned scholars and citizens. The article will focus solely on this iconography, as opposed to scenes of glorification or rhetorical *disputatio*, which – albeit interconnected – have their distinct place in art. The main object of the analysis are the civic tombs for scholars built in Bologna in the 14th century, and I will complement their analysis in the literature with details of cultural information and formal analysis such as the composition of space, the significance of gestures and the importance of dress codes. The last example, in lieu of conclusions, will reveal the ambivalent sacred iconography of an altarpiece *predella* from Florence inspired by the secular iconography discussed in this article.

Keywords: civic tombs, funerary art, Trecento, Italian art, medieval universities, *studium generale*, Bologna, iconography, transmission of knowledge.

Preaching and teaching in a few gestures: introductory similarities

In the 14th century the Italian art developed an iconography of teaching ("iconografia universitaria"[1]) that served to the remembrance, in the funerary art, of the most praiseworthy professors of canon law, civil law,

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[1] Roberto Bartalini, "Goro di Gregorio e la tomba del giurista Guglielmo di Ciliano", *Prospettiva*, No. 41, Aprile 1985, p. 38, note 69.

theology, or medicine of the medieval universities. Some of them were also entrusted with civic and political duties in the Italian cities, were heads of important guilds (*arte*), wrote treatises, codes of law, and even poetry. An art that presents the master lecturing to his students can be encountered independently on sarcophagi or the Italian *arcae*, but also in pictorial narratives about the life of some Church doctors such as St. Augustine or St. Thomas Aquinas, where one of the *vita* scenes reveals their sanctified authority precisely through teaching.

An art historian defined the most appropriate approach to the art of Duecento and Trecento as follows: "the key to the visual world of art history [is] history, in its events and its personalities"[2]. We can read in these words an invitation addressed to any scholar in iconography to dig into the little history of the time and foster new ideas from the material realities of such times. On the other hand, iconography in the Late Middle Ages depends to a great extent on conventions and traceable novelties. Therefore, we shall proceed to a combination of iconographic research and cultural history to reveal the underlying symbols and meanings of the Trecento art on the subject of teaching.

The roles assigned to the theologians in the Middle Ages were "reading (*lectio*), disputing (*disputatio*), and preaching (*praedicatio)*"[3]. It is a three-sequence chain in the transmission of knowledge (understood here as the holy doctrine) that involves both the individual study and the interaction with an audience. Therefore, we expect that the iconography of a theologian may reveal him in any of these acts, but the particular focus on the last sequence is of interest here. But on the other hand, the transmission of secular knowledge involved more or less the same steps in the Middle Ages. Since preaching (as well as lecturing in general) is part of the transmission of knowledge and closely related to the iconography that will make the focus of this article, we shall also look into a few connecting points of the iconography of teaching with that of preaching. In the late Middle Ages, preaching and teaching were part of the same ethos, and iconographically they are occasionally related through certain gestures defining their formal rhetoric.

The scenes of preaching usually involve Jesus Christ, a prophet or a saint depicted in front of a passive, non-interacting audience. The people listening to holy preachers are mainly non-gesturing auditors, like we see in a miniature scene from Life of the Blessed Gerard of Villamagna, ca. 1320[4],

[2] Serena Romano, "Julian Gardner", in L. Bourdua, R. Gibbs (eds.), *A Wider Trecento. Studies in 13th- and 14th-Century European Art Presented to Julian Gardner*, Brill, 2012, p. xiv.
[3] Alex J. Novikoff, *The Medieval Culture of Disputation. Pedagogy, Practice, and Performance*, Philadephia, Pennsylvania UP, 2013, p. 134.
[4] Miniature from Ms. 643, The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, in *Painting and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence, 1300-1450*, Laurence B. Kanter et al. (ed.), exhibition catalogue, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994, p. 53, fol. 35.

where the front row of the public even has the same gesture of their arms lying submissively on their knees like non-responsive puppets. It is an indication that the listeners do not have any objections or active interventions in the speech, but only absorb the substance of the holy words. Like in similar scenes on religious conversion, the underlying idea is that passive listeners are recipients of unidirectional transmission of the holy doctrine, or participants in a mystery.

In the 9th century Carolingian Bible Moutier-Grandval, a miniature showing Moses delivering the Table of the Law to the Israelites[5] (fig. 1) shows multiple figures directly gazing to the prophet, and two listeners engaged in gestures of finger to mouth or hand to the chin respectively, as signs of "concentration and thought"[6], according to Moshe Barasch. These are gestures that we also encounter in the iconography of teaching at the pupils in a class.

Fig. 1. Ms. 15046, Bible Moutier-Grandval, Moses delivering the Table of the Law to the Israelites, miniature, 9th century, British Library, London (cropped). Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

[5] Moutier-Grandval Bible, French school, ca. 834-843, Add 10546, fol. 25b, British Library, London.
[6] Moshe Barasch, *Giotto and the language of gesture*, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1990 [1987], p. 48.

Even a widespread gesture like Christ's sign of benediction may actually be polysemantic occasionally. Barasch regards it as a "teaching gesture"[7] in Giotto's *Washing of the feet of the Apostles* in the Paduan cycle of the Scrovegni Chapel (fig. 2), considering that this act of Jesus was theologically perceived as a mystery that Jesus not only performed but also explained to his disciples. We can add that in this scene Jesus symbolically performs the mystery with his left hand and gives his teaching explanation with the right.

Fig. 2. Giotto, *Washing of the feet of the Apostles* (cropped), fresco, ca. 1305, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, Italy. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

In the aforementioned cycle of the Blessed Gerard of Villamagna, the last miniature is a scene where a traditionally horned Moses preaches before an audience of Israelites[8]. The crowd in this miniature is only apparently similar to the one where the preacher was the Blessed Gerard: in this new scene one man in the public makes an addressing gesture toward Moses. With regard to the iconography of the listeners, the two resembling miniatures may allude, not only with similarities but also in contrast, to how consensual and obedient the Christians are when guided by the Blessed Gerard, as compared to the old dissensual Israelites, whom Moses had hard times to train into a new religion. Thus, before speaking of the medieval universities, certain gestures of *disputatio* pertaining to moments of teaching are to be found mainly in primary religious contexts, with prophets or sanctified theologians.

In Scenes from the Life of Gerard of Villamagna, the theological link between the two compared scenes was found by Barbara Drake Boehm to be in Acts 7:37, where Moses imperatively tells the Israelites: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him." This allusion to the birth of a new prophet should be interpreted both christologically and hagiographically, as Drake Boehm suggests[9]: either with Christ or with the Blessed Gerard of Villamagna, that time had come. We can also notice that in the two scenes only the Christian audience is depicted with similar submissive gestures, as perfectly aligned to the rule.

The size of the characters is also telling: in the aforediscussed miniatures Moses is rendered disproportionately taller than the people addressed, which is not the case in the preaching scene with the Blessed Gerard, who is more humble. In the miniature with Moses it is still preserved a symbolic hierarchy, while in Christianity it is implied that all are equal. The symbolic hierarchy of saintly importance will also operate in secular contexts in the Bolognese monuments to be further discussed, but here the *docente*, usually represented in equal size with his attenders, is in many cases raised a few steps up, so as to occupy a majestic role in cathedra.

[8] Miniature from Ms. 643, The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, in *Painting and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence, 1300-1450*, *op. cit*., p. 53, fol. 38.
[9] Barbara Drake Boehm, "Scenes from the Life of Christ and Life of the Blessed Gerard of Villamagna", in *Painting and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence, 1300-1450*, *op. cit*., p. 54.

Form and content in the iconography of teaching: an analysis of the Bolognese tombs

Universities functioned like religious confreries, with patron saints that were venerated and mutual help provided in the organization when needed[10]. For instance, Saint Nicholas of Bari was one of the cherished university saints, as we shall see in the last example included in this article. University education was also important for a cleric's career, and in the late Middle Ages the successful students came from an urban elite, too[11]. Since the content of education was rarely secular, high education usually meant consistent training in the Christian religion. Besides, when we observe similarities between the religious and the secular iconographies of teaching, we should acknowledge that, according to an exegete, the shared feature of universities and of monastic settings was simply the activity of study. With respect to the latter, we especially regard the Dominicans, who were great theologians and patrons of arts. An interpreter appreciates that what makes St. Thomas Aquinas a Dominican is precisely the importance he gave to "the value of study"[12]. He refers to the entire activity of Aquinas as a theologian scholar, who started as a brilliant student at the University of Paris and opposes him – and the Dominicans altogether – to St. Francis's disinterest in the centrality of theological study for the life of humility advocated by the rival order of the Franciscans[13]. The Dominicans were thus of the essence in the rise and consolidation of a new theological doctrine. In the iconography to be further discussed in this article, we very often see canons in monastic habits as 'students': they have tonsures, beards and monastic habits that were even identified with precision (Cistercians, Dominicans, Franciscans, etc)[14]. For instance, in the Dominican convents, which stressed the importance of study in further development of the art of preaching, the monks were called *fratres studentes*, and were taught by a teacher called a *doctor*[15].

[10] Jacques Verger, *Universitățile în Evul Mediu* [Les Universités au Moyen Âge], trans. Simona Ilieș, preface by Monica Brânzei and Alexander Bamgarten, Polirom, Iași, 2019, p. 86.
[11] Gian Maria Varanini, "Strategie familiari per la cariera ecclesiastica (Italia, sec. XIII-XIV)", in Sandro Carocci, Amedeo De Vincentiis (eds.), *La mobilità sociale nel Medioevo* italiano, Vol. 3. Il mondo ecclesiastico (secolli XII-XIV), Roma, Viella, 2017, p. 398.
[12] Brian Davies, "St. Thomas Aquinas as a Dominican", *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 60, No. 706, March 1979, p. 104.
[13] For a different opinion regarding the rise in importance of the study with the Franciscans, see Julian Gardner, "Painters, Inquisitors, and Novices", *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* , 60. Bd., H. 2 (2018), pp. 244-249.
[14] See one example of identification of monastic orders after the habit in Martina Schilling, "Celebrating the Scholar and Teacher: The Tomb of Thomas Gallus at Sant 'Andrea in Vercelli (Mid 14th Century)", in L. Bourdoua, R. Gibbs (eds.), *A Wider Trecento. Studies in 13th- and 14th-Century European Art Presented to Julian Gardner*, Brill, 2012, p. 125.
[15] Alex J. Novikoff, *The Medieval Culture of Disputation*, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

Jacques Verger states that the European universities change dramatically after mid-15th century[16], which makes an artistic comparison between the medieval and the Renaissance iconographies of teaching too distant in our case. For instance, in the Quattrocento most universities managed to build their own premises, as compared to before, when the classes could take place in improvised environments like rented spaces, convents, and sometimes even in the professors' residential places[17]. For instance, Bologna built proper headquarters for the university only in the 15th century[18]. In all the Bolognese Trecentesque sarcophagi, we can only deduce the simplicity of some improvised settings in the university scenes, or notice the absence of any architectural clues. A little difference is made in the tomb of Bonifacio Galluzzi (fig. 3), where we can notice two biforate trefoil windows in the background, which might suggest the gothic openings of a convent or medieval palazzo. Similar suggestions of a biforate blind arcade are given on the right in the teaching scene on the monument of Cino da Pistoia. These are rare cases of the ones analyzed in the following when the composition includes architectural clues regarding the place where the students learn. In the first one the students are also depicted bending over their codices, their eyes excessively strained on the scripts like not having enough light. We retain this detail because it suggests a place quite dark and not very appropriate for study, despite the architectonic elegance implied.

The focus of this article, as already announced, resides in the iconography of the tombs dedicated to multifaceted scholars and professors in Bologna in the Italian Trecento. A few other connections are meant to complete the picture of these spectacular funerary monuments. For the first half of the 14th century, we have the tomb of Bonifacio Galluzzi (d. 1346) by Bettino da Bologna, the tomb of Pietro Cerniti by Roso da Parma (1338), the tomb of Matteo Gandoni (d. 1330), sculpted by the workshop of Agostino di Giovanni and Agnolo Ventura from Siena or Bologna. The tomb of Lorenzo Pini (d. 1397) by Paolo di Bonaiuto is dated at the end of the 14th century. Most of these sepulchral monuments were removed from their original placement in churches and displayed at Museo Civico Medievale di Bologna. The museum also contains well-preserved figurative parts from other tombs of unidentified lecturers.

[16] Jacques Verger, *Universităţile în Evul Mediu*, *op. cit*., p. 227.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 202.
[18] *Ibid.*

Fig. 3. Bettino da Bologna, Tomb of Bonifacio Galluzzi (main scene), first half of the 14th century, Museo Civico Medievale di Bologna. Photo: Wikimedia Commons (reproduced by permission of the Museum).

The connections with Siena are particularly clear in the case of this type of Bolognese art: the *Studio* of Bologna (in Latin, *studium generale*), as the medieval university was named, was transferred to Siena in 1321[19], which makes the iconography of these professoral tombs to be identified in Siena, too. See, for instance, the funerary monument of Niccolò Aringhieri, a jurisconsult at the *Studio* of Siena, deceased in 1374, or the university scenes by Goro di Gregorio dedicated to Guglielmo da Ciliano, professor of law and even rector of the Sienese *studio*, also transferred from Bologna[20]. The monument dedicated to Guglielmo is a suspended *arca*, and presents the sepulchral image of the defunct in the registre above and a teaching scene lower. Also, the arca of Giovanni di Andrea (first half of the 14th century) is attributed to Jacopo Lanfrani, a follower of Sienese artists. For similar sepulchral iconography in Verona, also a city in north Italy like Bologna, we notice a teaching scene on the funerary monument of the philosopher and professor Antonio Pelacani and his wife (ca. 1327, Church San Fermo Maggiore). Again, like in the relations Bologna-Siena, although Antonio Pelacani was buried in Verona, we find that he had lectured in medicine at the medieval university of Bologna[21].

In Bologna, the inscriptions on the funerary monuments of the doctors, and their dates, can also provide a useful chronology. In the

[19] Roberto Bartalini, "Goro di Gregorio e la tomba del giurista Guglielmo di Ciliano", *op. cit.*, p. 26.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] Tiziana Franco, "Tombe di uomini eccellenti (dalla fine del XIII alla prima metà del XV secolo)", in Paolo Golinelli, Caterina Gemma Brenzoni (eds.), *I santi Fermo e Rustico. Un culto e una chiesa in Verona. Per il XVII centenario del loro martirio (304-2004)*, Parocchia di San Fermo Maggiore in Verona, pp. 251, 254.

following we shall indicate the chronology of a few of them after the names of their recipients: Bartoluzzo de' Preti (1318), Matteo Gandoni (1330), Pietro Cerniti (1338), Giovanni di Andrea (1348), Giovanni da Legnano (1386)[22], etc.

Fig. 4. Tomb of Thomas Gallus, 14th century, Basilica di Sant'Andrea in Vercelli, Piedmont, Italy. Photo: Wikipedia.

[22] Serena Ammirati (ed.), "Indice delle testimonianze scritte", in *Scripta. An International Journal of Codicology and Palaeography*, Vol. 9, 2016, p. 150.

The tomb of Rolandino dei Passaggeri, a reputed notary public and law scholar, was built in Bologna in 1300-1306 in the old form of an *arca*. It was the first funerary monument to include a secular scene with a *doctor* giving a lesson to his class. In the Italian historiography these scenes are simply called *Docente che tiene lezione*, or *Docente in cattedra*. They gave rise to an iconography that covers areas with blurred or extended frontiers by the time; and sometimes these areas may suppose local relations with universities, cultures and theologians outside Italy. For instance, a similar iconography of teaching can be found in the mid-14th century tomb of the French theologian Thomas Gallus in Vercelli, Piedmont (fig. 4). Just like St. Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Gallus was a distinguished scholar at the University of Paris in the 13th century. He came to run a Victorine abbey in the north of Italy and was the master of St. Anthony of Padua[23], which indicates the importance of spiritual and intellectual genealogies for this period, especially in Italy's relations with France.

The idea of this type of iconography was referred in the literature to older origins: in 1267 Nicola Pisano had completed Arca di San Domenico in Bologna, which was a pyramidal, finely adorned sepulchral monument for Saint Dominic, the very founder of the Dominican Order. With this arca, Bologna intended to present itself as a city most favoured by God[24]. This arca is said to have also emulated in 1339 the building of Arca di San Pietro Martire by Giovanni di Balduccio, a Pisan himself like his predecessor Nicola Pisano[25]. We notice here that these first prototypes were dedicatory monuments to saints, not scholars. In all their complexity, both monuments are free standing and contain a historiated sarcophagus with scenes from the life of the deceased, similar to how historiated *predellas* complete the lowest part of a wooden panel with scenes from the life of the patron saint of a panel. As a matter of fact, narratives about the life of the deceased had been very scarce until the Arca di San Domenico, and none to such extent as in this particular monument, which makes Nicola Pisano's option to depict the biography of the deceased in an extensive way to be regarded as "a major innovation"[26]. Therefore, like in the painted altarpieces the sepulchral image of the defunct (in architecture, usually a *gisant* of French inspiration) is in the registre above, and a narrative scene about his acts is presented in the lower registre.

[23] Martina Schilling, "Celebrating the Scholar and Teacher...", *op. cit.*, p. 134.
[24] Randi Klebanoff, „Sacred magnificence: civic intervention and the arca of San Domenico in Bologna", *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 4, December 1999, p. 418.
[25] Anita Moskowitz, "Giovanni di Balduccio's Arca di San Pietro Martire: Form and Function", *Arte Lombarda*, Nuova serie, No. 96/97 (1-2), 1991, pp. 7, 9.
[26] *Ibid*, p. 16, note 16. For the influence of Arca of St. Dominic on the narrativity of other tombs of saints until the early Cinquecento in various Italian cities, see a few examples in Rebekah Carson, "The quintessential Christian tomb: saints, professors, and Riccio's tomb design", *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, February 2014, pp. 100-101.

Fig. 5. Arca of Rolandino dei Passaggeri, early 14th century, Square San Domenico, Bologna. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

The arca of Rolandino dei Passaggeri (1234-1300), professor of law at the Bolognese *Studio* and the celebrated head of the guild of notaries public, was the first dedicated to a lay scholar (fig. 5). It roughly sketches the lecturer in profile on the right of the image and four defaced students in front of him. The professor occupies the same position also in the tomb of Matteo Gandoni (d. 1330), also a jurist (fig. 6). Inspired by a brief suggestion of Keith Christiansen[27], we could say that, given the left-to-right usual reading of an image, placing the lecturer on the right puts less focus on him: a superficial reading of the scene could remain incomplete, and thus miss him. This form of representation is therefore better reversed in the funerary monument of Cino da Pistoia (1270-1336), where the professor is rendered also in profile, but on the left side of the image, theoretically the first to be seen (fig. 7).

[27] Keith Christiansen, "Early Renaissance Narrative Painting in Italy", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, Vol. 41, No. 2, Autumn, 1983, pp. 6-7.

Fig. 6. Workshop of Agostino di Giovanni and Agnolo Ventura, Tomb of Matteo Gandoni (main scene), Siena or Bologna, 1330, Museo Civico Medievale di Bologna. Photo: Simona Drăgan (reproduced by permission of the Museum).

The complex funerary monument of Cino da Pistoia (jurisconsult and poet, judge of civil cases in the Pistoiese government) by Agostino di Giovanni, dated 1338-1339, was a commemorative monument built in a decade when the Commune of Pistoia ran a campaign of civic patronage for the emancipation of the city from the Florentine hegemony[28]. In the teaching scene the students are disposed in three-quarter view in three groups at their desks. The oblique line of each desk suggests perspective: it is implied that the students are actually sitting at desks placed one behind another. This spatial disposition is better resolved in the tomb of Matteo Gandoni (fig. 6): here the students are explicitly sitting one behind another, each at his own desk, and the lines of their inclined chairs create a plastic rhythmicity of the composition. It was probably this tomb that one century later inspired the monument of Pietro Canonici (fig. 8), professor of civil law, deceased in 1502 in Bologna. Attributed to Vincenzo Onofri, this Renaissance tomb already dates in the early 16th century and is a tardive reaffirmation of old medieval prototypes. It reminds of the medieval tomb of Matteo Gandoni in the detail of the decorative flowers, now re-elaborated in a sophisticated embellishment of the parietal walls.

[28] Flavio Boggi, "The Maestà of the Palazzo Comunale in Pistoia: Civic Art and Marian Devotion in the Pistoiese Commune of the Fourteenth Century", *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 51. Bd., H. 1/2, 2007, p. 260.

Fig. 7. Sienese master, Monument of Cino da Pistoia (teaching scene), 1338-1339, Cathedral of Pistoia. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

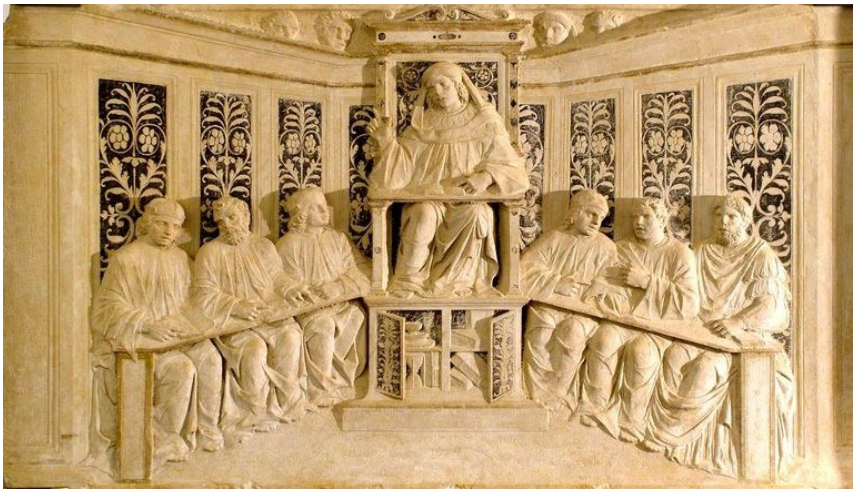

Fig. 8. Vincenzo Onofri (attr.), Tomb of Pietro Canonici (main scene), early 16th century, Museo Civico Medievale di Bologna. Photo: Wikimedia Commons (reproduced by permission of the Museum).

The spatial solution with the class displayed all in a row with the lecturer on one side was, at some point, probably felt as not sufficiently expressive. Similar difficulties may have been felt with the students rendered in quasi-profiles. In later similar scenes the students will be placed frontally, facing the looker instead of the lecturer, but the perspective is still suggested through the obliquity in the line of their desks on the sepulchre of Bonifacio Galuzzi by Bettino da Bologna (fig. 3). On this tomb the lecturer is rendered in frontal position and the students flank him on both sides. A similar solution is given on the tomb of Giovanni di Andrea (fig. 9), master in canon law and professor at the universities of Padua, Pisa and Bologna, where the tripartite composition enhances the importance of the lecturer by advancing him to occupy one third of the entire space. Thus, the majestic professor sits frontally on a large elegant bench behind a small pupitre, while the audients are crowded at their own desks in great number. Besides, their number is increased by a continuation on the side walls of the sarcophagus, which add

two attenders placed frontally on one side and two in profile on the other. The tombs of Pietro Cerniti (fig. 10), Lorenzo Pini and some slabs from the tomb of an unidentified lecturer from the second half of the 14th century[29] prefer the disposition of the students frontally behind pupitres that are perfectly paralleled to the bottom plan. The suggestions of perspective are absent in these tombs. The Renaissance tomb of Pietro Canonici (fig. 8) preserves the setting of the lecturer frontally in the centre of the composition but resolves with obvious dexterity the problems of space volume: the students on the flanks are displayed triangularly like in a pyramid taking to the lecturer placed on top in cathedra.

Roberto Bartalini notices that the artist Agostino di Giovanni used to repeat the physiognomies of the sculpted figures in various monuments, at comfortable distance from each other[30]. Such repetitions are not necessarily at distance in other monuments. See, for instance, the tomb of Pietro Cerniti (fig. 10), where the physiognomies of the pupils are simplified and very repetitive. It is a sign that such works could, more or less, be conventional and limitative, and that not all the faces were, if any, portraits.

Fig. 9. Arca of Giovanni di Andrea (main scene), first half of the 14th century, Museo Civico Medievale di Bologna. Photo: Wikipedia (reproduced by permission of the Museum).

As regards the rhetoric of gestures, in the tomb of Giovanni di Andrea (fig. 9), the closest to the lecturer are two students, one on each side, with distinctively reflective gestures. In the second line of interest the other students are engaged in reading or *disputatio* with a colleague. As noticed in

[29] See the slabs with inv. nos. 1634, 1635 in Museo Civico Medievale di Bologna (*Parti del sepolcro di un lettore*).
[30] Roberto Bartalini, "Per la scultura senese del Trecento: Agostino di Giovanni", *Prospettiva*, No. 108, Ottobre 2002, pp. 14-15.

the literature, the practice of disputation in the Middle Ages relates to the rise of universities[31], which included this practice in the teaching. On the tomb of Pietro Cerniti (fig. 10) the students have distinct gestures and the same vestments. They all wear a *cappuccio*, except for the pupil in the far right corner, bare-headed, who could be a junior or a novice: "At the medieval university, going bare-headed could indicate a lesser academic degree"[32], writes Martina Schilling. The gesture of explanation of the student close to him may indicate a telescopic transmission of knowledge: the lecturer explains to everyone, but the more learned among the students help the less learned with their own teaching. Again, like in the arca of Giovanni di Andrea the most proximal students to the lecturer have the all-absorbed gestures or mimic, probably as an indication of hierarchy among the followers. We know that such hierarchies existed: the medieval professors – and Giovanni di Andrea was one – had teaching assistants or senior students assisting them with the lecture and helping the others[33].

Fig. 10. Roso da Parma, Tomb of Pietro Cerniti (main scene), 1338, Museo Civico Medievale di Bologna. Photo: Simona Drăgan (reproduced by permission of the Museum).

The fact that in all these monuments we see groups or pairs of students engaged in different gestures instead of simply listening should be understood as presenting sequences of one and the same lecture (or the complexity of lecturing), and not signs of carelessness or indiscipline. As dedicatory monuments to a revered professor and citizen, they would not include any sign of irreverence. Therefore, the different types of gestures are intended to cover all parts of a medieval lesson.

In a few examples of this funeral iconography we see behind the canons from the first row several listeners that seem to create a different audience. Would the lecturing be addressed to more people than to the

[31] Alex J. Novikoff, *The Medieval Culture of Disputation*, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
[32] Martina Schilling, "Celebrating the Scholar and Teacher...", *op. cit*., p. 132.
[33] Alex J. Novikoff, *The Medieval Culture of Disputation*…, *op. cit*., pp. 159, 165.

regular canons? This kind of non-engaged audience can be seen, for instance, in the arca of Lorenzo Pini (fig. 11), and also guessed in other cases in the second row of audients, marked by a different hairstyle or secular headgear. A good comparison is the painted tomb of Thomas Gallus in Vercelli, Piedmont (fig. 4). It is "a hanging wall tomb on corbels – an Italian peculiarity that developed in the second half of the thirteenth century"[34], reiterates Martina Schilling, who acrimoniously describes every attending person in the iconography of the theologian surrounded by his canons, but also by representatives of the secular clergy and outstanding citizens of the city. The conclusion is that "this diversity in Thomas' classroom does not appear to express opposition or rivalry, but to underline the great unifying purpose, namely the relevance of Thomas' scholarship to all the groups represented, a universal claim across the borders of disciplines and society"[35]. Schilling considers it a "quite rare iconography"[36], and clearly relates it to the Bolognese university tombs, mostly resembling, in this case, the arca of Giovanni di Andrea (fig. 9) (and further inspirational, in turn, to the murals of the church Saint Augustine in Bergamo)[37].

Fig. 11. Paolo di Bonaiuto, Tomb of Lorenzo Pini (main scene), end of the 14th century, Museo Civico Medievale di Bologna. Photo: Simona Drăgan (reproduced by permission of the Museum).

Nevertheless, we do not find this iconography rare if we compare it to the sculpted reliefs on the sepulchral monuments discussed above. It is actually a painted transposition of the same ideas, and fortunately a good confirmation of the fact that some of the reliefs discussed in this article

[34] H. Körner, *Grabmonumente des Mittelalters*, Darmstadt, 1997, pp. 72–75, apud Martina Schilling, "Celebrating the Scholar and Teacher...", *op. cit*., p. 138, note 50.
[35] Martina Schilling, "Celebrating the Scholar and Teacher...", *op. cit*., p. 134.
[36] Carla Travi, Maria Grazia Recanati, "Lombardia, Piemonte, Liguria", in Mina Gregori (ed.), *Pittura murale in Italia. Dal tardo Duecento ai primi del Quattrocento*, Edizioni Bolis, Bergamo, 1995, p. 144.
[37] *Ibid*., p. 144, p. 144, n. 41.

intended to express the same meaning as stressed by Schilling (the universality of teaching contents that are cherished and praised). On the aforediscussed tombs we can occasionally notice the same variety of attenders, of whom ones were the regulars, and others were visibly external. If not easily discernible on the Trecento tombs, the Renaissance monument of Pietro Canonici (fig. 8), which resumes the old iconography with more clear means, indicates the secular beneficiaries of the lecturer's wisdom as a distinct tribune placed outside the frontstage of the regulars.

The next century, for apparently no reason other than to reenforce the dignity shown to great *signori* of the cities through well-tested iconographies, we find the perfect university scene displayed frontally on the tomb of Anton Galeazzo Bentivoglio[38], sculpted by Jacopo della Quercia in Bologna in 1435. In this case the deceased had been a former *condottiere*, and then a political man, without any roots or activities in the academic or literary life of the time; such old iconography may have only been meant to ennoble him and his line of descendants.

At the end of the Middle Ages statutes described with details the costumes of the professors: they included silk, precious fur, long leather gauntlets/gloves[39]. The lifestyle of a university professor tended to imitate the life of nobility and developed its own ceremonials[40]. "The most constant of the colours was scarlet for Canon Law"[41], reads the literature, and this was certainly the case in Paris, where doctors in canon law adopted the red colour in the fourteenth century following an enactment of Pope Benedict XII in 1336. However, in Bologna the scarlet robe was worn by civil lawyers and physicians, while doctors in canon law are documented to have worn a blue *cappa manicata*[42], as we can notice at two doctors depicted on the tomb of Bonifacio Galluzzi (fig. 3). The fact that on this monument the blue vestment worn by doctors is attributed to some people attending the lecturer's class is another proof of the high prestige shown to the deceased: he was revered not only by junior disciples but also by his quasi-peers, as in a shared effort to overcome the difficulties of knowledge.

From Carolingian times to the 15th century, Michel Pastoureau finds that the churches were "massively polychrome", true "temples of the colour",

[38] For other tombs of Italian *signori*, their programmes and the personalities of the deceased, see Marco Folin, "Sepolture signorili nell'Italia centro-settentrionale: un tentativo di comparazione (secoli XIV-XV)", in S. Albonico, S. Romano (eds.), *Court and Courtly Cultures in Early Modern Italy and Europe. Models and Languages*, Roma, 2016, pp. 161-187.
[39] Jacques Verger, *Universitățile în Evul Mediu*, *op. cit*., p. 200.
[40] *Ibid*., pp. 200-201.
[41] Martina Schilling, "Celebrating the Scholar and Teacher...", *op. cit*., p. 133, note 38.
[42] W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *A History of Academic Dress in Europe until the end of the Eighteenth century*, Oxford, 1963, p. 14, apud Martina Schilling, "Celebrating the Scholar and Teacher...", *op. cit*., p. 133, note 38.

"the only true chromatic sanctuaries"[43], especially in the 12th and 13th centuries, which makes the tomb of Bonifacio Galluzzi (early 14th century) even more precious with its traces of polychromy left. However, we also find the information that, save for some rare exceptions, in the Middle Ages sarcophagi were left blank[44], which raises the question if, after all, some of the Bolognese tombs might as well originally have been as monochrome as today.

In order to test the conclusions about the dress codes adopted, the different colours and the unifying purpose of the lecturer's wisdom, we can also look into some other instances of the art of the day. For example, the so-called Master of the Dominican Effigies painted a *Glorification of Saint Thomas Aquinas* dated ca. 1325 (fig. 12). Laurence B. Kanter writes that this scene of glorification proposes a novel iconography at the time and serves as a prototype until late, for instance to a follower of Fra Angelico for a similar scene in San Marco church, Florence[45]. Kanter also states the probable existence of a patron who had designed the new iconography to the artist. It is a case when a pictorial invention is attributed to an iconographer distinct from the artist, like in many cases on which no clear evidence can be given. We could support Kanter's idea if we remark the distinct habits and headgear of the men in the audience. It is of a particular variety that most artists will imitate until late, either in painting or in sculpture: it definitely implies the idea of unification of all theological orders under one holy doctrine, which in this case comes from the radiant book of the speaker. In the picture Aquinas holds a book that literally sprays rays of light (that is, knowledge and faith) to the listeners. Last but not least, the distinctive habits of the auditors may come from details dictated with precision and clear intentions to the artist by a scholar theologian. An even better example is a manuscript page with the miniature *Saint Thomas Aquinas teaching six men from an open book (vellum),* by Niccolò di Giacomo (da Bologna), also from the 14th century[46]. It has a similar iconography, but also vibrant colors and is even more distinctive for the differentiation of the attenders' vestments. Besides, the detail of Averroes lying down at the feet of St. Thomas Aquinas is absent in the said miniature.

[43] Michel Pastoureau, *Une histoire symbolique du Moyen Âge occidental*, Éditions du Seuil, 2004, pp. 144, 165, 408 n. 18, my translation / S.D.
[44] Anita Moskowitz, "Giovanni di Balduccio's Arca di San Pietro Martire..." *op. cit.*, p. 16, n. 16.
[45] Laurence B. Kanter, "Master of the Dominican Effigies. 5. The Last Judgment, etc.; the Glorification of Saint Thomas Aquinas, etc.", in *Painting and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence*, *op. cit*., p. 83.
[46] Niccolò di Giacomo (da Bologna), *Saint Thomas Aquinas teaching six men from an open book (vellum),* manuscript miniature, 14th century, MS 278b, 38x26.5 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, UK.

Fig. 12. Master of the Dominican Effigies, *The Last Judgment, etc.; the Glorification of Saint Thomas Aquinas, etc*. (cropped), ca. 1325, tempera on panel, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection, Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

These two examples of painting prove that in the first half of the 14th century the same ideas as for the tomb reliefs of Bologna circulated on different art media: the holy fathers and the esteemed professors in the medieval *Studios* (who sometimes were also citizens in high administrative ranks, law makers and poets) were treasurers of prestigious knowledge to be transmitted to all levels of the society.

In lieu of conclusions. Sacred vs. profane in a panel with *Cristo docente*

An altarpiece of the Virgin and Child from Florence, dated 1391, has a unique *predella* painted in tempera on wood. The unknown artist, a certain 'Francesco', was even named, after this "singolare scena"[47], "Master of *Cristo docente*" (fig. 13). *Christ among the doctors* is a sequence that can also be related to the iconography of secular teaching. It was sometimes

[47] Cecilia Scalella, "*Francesco*", in Miklós Boskovits, Daniela Parenti (eds.), *Dipinti.* Vol. II. *Il tardo Trecento*, Firenze, Giunti, 2010, p. 31.

explicitly indicated as a scene of *disputatio*[48], which makes it akin to the iconography of teaching discussed in this article.

Fig. 13. 'Francesco' (Master of *Cristo docente*), *Cristo docente*, inv. 1890 n. 6154, tempera on panel (predella), 1391, Galleria dell'Academia, Florence. Photo: Galleria dell'Academia. Reproduced by permission of the Ministry of Culture of Italy.

Here, the Florentine *Cristo docente* shows Jesus Christ seated at cathedra with two groups of people at their desks on both sides. The image alludes to a scholarly environment similar to those in the medieval universities: Jesus and the 'students' are bent over unscrolled scripts like in the middle of a lesson, with all the iconographic characteristics in their position and gestures. The listeners wear secular clothes, and are engaged differently in the lesson: they either read the text carefully, or listen to their master with interest, or one of them seems to engage in a subsidiary matter with a colleague. On the right, a boy brings a book. A similar boy in the same position and also holding a book in his hands appears in the iconography of the tomb of Matteo Gandoni (fig. 6). Here the boy, in Italian a *bidello*, is also figured last on the left of the image. In both cases, this extra character added to the lesson illustrates the person who in medieval universities would bring a new book to the class from a remote library.

The entire scene was given different interpretations, but the most plausible one reads it as figuring the ancient *studio florentino*, established in 1320 in Florence, and assimilated to the rank of a medieval university only in 1348. As an argument, a *Cristo docente* in a sepulchral context was also found in a medieval miniature by Jacopino da Bologna, but the composition there is entirely different. With the Florentine *predella*, the allusion to the old iconography of university teaching and *disputatio* in this scene was sustained by Cecilia Scalella not only from the clear resemblance between the two, but

[48] Maestro di Tolentino, *Disputa con i dottori*, in Cappellone di San Nicola, Tolentino. See Carlo Volpe, *La pittura riminese del '300*, Mario Spagnol Editore, Milano, 1965, fig. 248, page not numbered. The scene *Christ among the doctors* is sometimes also named *Christ disputing in the temple*, and has a long tradition of interpretation as a disputation scene. See, for example, J. Gardner, "Painters, Inquisitors, and Novices", *op. cit*., pp. 246-249, or Ivana Čapeta Rakić, Giuseppe Capriotti, "An Inquiry into the Image of Jews in 15th-Century Istria The Iconography of the Jewish-Christian Dispute", in *IKON. Journal of Iconographuc Studies*, Vol. 15, 2022, pp. 48-52.

also in relation to the presence of Saint Nicholas of Bari in the central scene of the altarpiece (fig. 14).

Fig. 14. 'Francesco' (Master of *Cristo docente*), *Madonna col Bambino fra i santi Giovanni Battista e Nicola e due angeli reggicortina*, inv. 1890 n. 6154, tempera on panel, 1391, Galleria dell'Academia, Florence. Photo: Galleria dell'Academia. Reproduced by permission of the Ministry of Culture of Italy.

At the time, Saint Nicholas of Bari, placed here on the right of the panel, was also considered a patron of the young students, which makes the

predella more relevant in alluding to a scholarly environment than to an allegory of the Florentine Government, as suggested by another interpreter[49]. In the Middle Ages, one of the popular miracles of Saint Nicholas was the resurrection of three students murdered by a wicked innkeeper and his wife. It was a sordid story of horror that may have alluded to the vulnerability of young people travelling in insecure times. In art the iconography of this miracle variably depicts the victims as young men or even childlike boys[50]. Their identity as students is obviously not deducible from such images, but variations of this legend were actually staged in schools in northern Europe on winter holidays as a miracle play[51]. The connection of this miracle with scholarly environments was therefore clear at the time.

Last but not least, in the comparison of the *Cristo docente* scene with secular learning, an analogy was found in the lines of Matthew: "And do not be called masters either, because you have one Master, the Messiah"[52]. Here the double meaning of the word "master" is played upon: the school had masters, but Jesus Christ himself had been – and still was – a Master, the one and only to the believers. As a brief conclusion to this paper, the rare iconography of this Florentine scene makes an extraordinary parallel between the secular and the sacred and, secondly, warns that the secular *doctors*' wisdom should be subordinated to that of the Church; in particular, it also seems to make a hint to the medieval doctors' inflated vanity.

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[49] Cecilia Scalella, "*Francesco*", *op. cit*., p. 34.
[50] Agnolo Gaddi depicts the resurrection of three young men in 1393 (*Storie di San Nicola*). So does Gentile da Fabriano in the Quaratesi Polyptych, 1425, Pinacoteca of Vatican Museums. Much later, some details of the legend were probably forgotten. In 1796, Antonio Pennisi paints the miracle with three infants instead of teenagers.
[51] Michele Bacci, apud Cecilia Scalella, "*Francesco*", *op. cit*., p. 34.
[52] Matthew, 23: 10, in *The Bible* (Holman Christian Standard Bible), URL: https://biblehub.com/hcsb/matthew/23.htm (accessed 23/10/2025).

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