'The history of an expression'[1]

Julius Lange (trans. Karl Johns)

In the last few years, there has been historical interest in expressive corporeal movement, gestures. We have begun to recognize their importance for understanding art of the various periods.[2] There is a sense that it is inadequate to merely know the name of a figure depicted in the arts, and a desire to discover its character, to research and understand its actual meaning. This is also the subject of the present study, treating an expression well known to our own time, more through art works than real life, from many images of the Virgin Mary and Saints, but appearing very irregularly in the history of art. I refer to the movement directed upwards in the gaze, the face and the hands with a religious or also ceremonial context. It is very distinct from all other expressions, something like Sunday in comparison to the other days of the week. Since Sunday, although being only one, bears the weight of all the other weekdays taken together, it seems justifiable to make this Sunday-expression the subject of a special study. We shall see that this study has interesting implications both for the relationship between individual religions using this motif as well as between the visual arts, poetry and life.
I have referred to an 'expression', but it might be more apt to say a genre, or an entire class of expressions since we find an entire repertoire of nuances, even antithetical both in body and spirit. What they have in common is the direct orientation to heaven. We shall see how this diversity emerged historically. We

[1] [Originally published as 'Et Udtryks Historie', *Tilskueren: Maanedsskrift for Litteratur, Samfundsspørgsmaal og Almenfattelige Videnskabelige Skildringer*, vol. 12, August-September, 1895, pp. 565-583, 674-705. Reprinted: *Udvalgte skrifter af Julius Lange*, ed. Georg Brandes and Peter Købke, vol. 2, Copenhagen: Det nordiske forlag, 1901, pp. 89-136.] .] [Plates added from my copy of Julius Lange, *Ausgewählte Schriften (1886-1897)*, II, Strassburg: J. H. ED Heitz (Heitz & Mündel) 1912. **Click here**. ED]

[2] The earliest of the recent essays in this trend, emphasizing the historical aspect of such expression might be Konrad Lange, *Das Motiv des aufgestützten Fusses in der antiken Kunst und dessen statuarische Verwendung durch Lysippos*, Leipzig: Seemann, 1879. It pointed toward the future but was completely flawed. August Baumeister, *Denkmäler des klassischen Altertums*, Munich: Oldenbourg 1885-1888, and Karl Sittl, *Die Gebärden der Griechen und Römer*, Leipzig: Teubner, 1890 studied similar motifs. Stressing the artistic sources and not limiting the individual motifs to an individual historical period such as antiquity, I myself have published studies of the same sort, particularly Lange, 'Hænden paa Brystet', *Tilskueren*, vol. 4, June-July and August 1887, pp. 455-476, 571-588, the hand on the chest, Lange 'Et Motivs Historie', *Nordisk Tidskrift för Vetenskap, Konst och Industri*, 1888, pp. 475-494, the history of a motif, partially also Lange, 'Til Legemsstillingernes Historie (Et kunsthistorisk Brudstykke)', *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Filologi*, new ser., 7, 1885, pp. 22-49, the history of physical poses. To my knowledge, the subject we discuss presently has not been treated other than in my lectures.

should first mention the manner and effect of the most important elements of the expression. The upward directed expression essentially has two organs, the hands and the arms, also the gaze and we might add the face. The upward gaze is generally accompanied by a strong backward leaning stance even involving the upper torso. Although the feeling is often overemphasized, it occurs more among the youth than the aged, more among women than men, and more in the south than the north of Europe, all elements of the expression arise simultaneously, bringing the most forceful and sonorous expression with it. As a special example of this expression in its highest calibre we can already mention a figure we shall be discussing in greater detail further on, namely the Virgin Mary moving heavenward in Titian's large altarpiece in Venice. The vehicles of the expression do not always work in concert, and then their variety overtly influences the quality of the expression. The gaze, that is the eye itself, performs the motion quicker and more easily than the arms and hands and therefore comes first. Since its movement is so meagre in comparison to the arms, it does less to attract the attention of the beholder. This is how the gaze becomes a particularly refined organ of the spontaneous urge to turn to the heavens, and its expression is invested with the greatest psychological and subjective significance. Like all expressions, it can of course also be imitated in the service of hypocrisy and be forged. Beside this though, it must be seen as the most reliable and authentic sign of an inner inspiration. Raised arms and hands can also express an automatic, spontaneous feeling, but generally become more of an external, ritual and ceremonial sign toward the deity. It becomes purely demonstrative when the arms are raised, but not followed by the eyes. This is a gesture directed not to heaven, but rather to fellow man directing them to the heavens, as in oratory or during a sermon when the arms point upward but the eyes are fixed on the listeners. Conversely, when the gaze is raised without the arms and hands following, the expression becomes a monologue, the involuntary sign of a 'quiet prayer' not intended to be noticed by those surrounding it. The more monological the expression, the more it is limited to the eyes alone without the face and head bent backward.

Since the actual psychological aspect is of greater interest than the more extrinsic ceremonial sign language, we shall be dealing more with the face than the arms and hands. This assuming that not all of them move together.

1.

What we point out here can already be easily applied to the Homeric poems where there are numerous references to the expression directed upwards. When people are described as praying to the gods, it is often said that they direct the fingers of one hand upwards or that they turn toward the heavens.[3] Homer at times mentions both together. When Agamemnon takes his oath, Iliad 19, 254, 257, his hands are raised toward Zeus and then he also speaks facing heaven. At times,

[3] Assyrian inscriptions also refer to the hand being raised during prayer.

Homer mentions only the one of the movements, but we imagine that both occurred simultaneously.[4] In one passage, it is said expressly that the prayer is silent, and it mentions only the eyes. If the hands were raised it would attract unwanted attention. This is Iliad 7, 194, where Ajax exhorts his allies to pray to Zeus for him in his single combat with Hector, 'each quietly to themselves to prevent the Trojans from hearing'.

The people prayed there with their eyes turned heavenward. Homer is completely familiar with the heavenward gaze, but this does not mean that the visual arts of his time, that mature period of art, must have depicted it. This is particularly true of the backward turned face and upward gaze. In the connotation we are examining here, these were certainly absent from all of early Greek art until around the year 100 BC. Rarely to be sure, but it does occur that a figure bends backward to see something in the air, such as a swallow in flight for instance. That is an entirely different subject. It also occurred earlier that a figure performing a sacrifice or praying would be shown with a hand raised to shoulder height to ceremonially accompany the prayer. Such ritual or ceremonial motions did not contradict the character of the earlier art, yet the lyrical outpouring of a figure raising their eyes and face disagreed very much with the spirit of earlier Greek, as well as ancient near eastern (Persian, Assyrian Babylonian) or Egyptian art.[5] We thus have an example before us where the imagery of human life given in the art of the word, and of the visual arts are not congruent, and we shall find a similar phenomenon in medieval imagery. The art of the word is more flexible and universal, and assumes more of our actual lives, but only offers suggestions to the imagination. By giving completely finished pictures of things and being subject to more rigorous technical conditions, visual art is stiffer, less diverse and bound to

[4] August Baumeister, *Denkmäler*, 1889, vol. 1, pp. 590-592 makes a fine analysis of this passage in his article, 'Gebet'.

[5] It is remarkable how primitive American art in this regard differs from the art of the Mediterranean areas. The Berlin anthropological museums possess a small series of stone monuments from Santa Lucia in Guatemala. A deity is visible at the top shown only by a face within a gloriole, a neck and arms with branches or tendrils emanating with objects, gifts of the god, hanging from them. A profile figure stands below in adoration with its back bent sharply backward, looking up to the god with their right arm extended toward it. It holds the head of a sacrificed human being (another of the series depicts a human sacrifice). A narrow, curving tendril emanates from the mouth of the figure with double buds at regular intervals. This is presumably correctly interpreted as a prayer to the god, but since the prayer is not expressed in script, it is probably also not imagined as consisting of words. It is the breath of the human being (possibly expressed in the regular intervals along the tendril) in the abstract form of their desire. The same idea is varied in different ways on other reliefs, but they all share the same upward directed movement. These reliefs from Guatemala immediately remind us of Egyptian imagery of Amenophis IV. As we know, this king introduced a monotheistic cult of the sun for a brief period. He is depicted on his monuments as a sun worshipper, yet they do not show any clearly upward direction in the figure performing the adoration.

established schemes, conventions and school rules only to be violated with great difficulty. We see this in the pure archaic art where the technical facility for depicting human figures in free movement was less developed.

Remarkably enough, the art-historical traditions of antiquity included that point in the development when the arts, in this case, painting, where the upward gazing face came to be included. We are told that a painter around the year 500 BC, Kimon of Kleonai, introduced a greater variety in depicting the human face by having them look upward and downward.[6] We must imagine a simple extension of the technical possibilities, and read these lines strictly to mean only that the archaic stiffness of poses of the neck and back began to recede around this time. In surveying the great sculpture of the fifth century, the period of Myron, Phidias and Polyclitus, we then find evidence enough of its being sufficiently developed technically to render a face turned back and an upward gaze. If they then, to our knowledge, did not do so, the reason was that they had no interest in such a pose. But why not? Why did they prefer the placid, forward looking gaze? Why did they not allow it to emotionally rise upward? This is more easily felt than defined in words.

Our interest is more in clarifying the distinction in religiosity between the earlier and the later period which is our subject. We shall see that precisely because of its more uniform and narrower range than poetry, the visual arts provide a clearer impression of the distinct qualities of the main periods than does the more variable and flexible art of the word.

In reality it took many centuries after Homer before the arts implemented the pose in the human figure described in Homer's words where he says that a figure praying looks to the wide heavens. The only preserved work that completely expresses this is a beautiful and well known bronze in the Berlin Museums datable at the earliest to the mid-4th century. It shows a fourteen or fifteen-year-old boy completely naked standing with his arms raised forward turning his gaze to heaven as the place of the gods. We must certainly assume that his prayer is devoted to a victory in the physical competitions in the palaestra or the public games, either successfully accomplished or yet to come, probably the latter. As far as the theme is concerned, this work relates to the earlier and more naïve period of Greece when a prize in sports was the greatest conceivable gift of the gods. His innocent intimacy and the combination of sacred reverence with the childish confidence in his prayer reveal how serious the game is to him. What is new here for the history of art is the artistic expression of this prayer, specifically that of the subjective and inward quality that raises the devotion beyond mere ritual. We know that it was discovered a number of years ago that the arms of the statue with the most of the open hands directed upward do not date from antiquity, but were added in the 17th century. Yet the poise of the restored arms corresponds exactly with the expression of the head and the overall pose. Greek art more generally and earlier would show a figure in

[6] Pliny, *Natural History*, book 35, 55.

prayer with their open hands pointed forward, but this has no logical relation to the upward movement of head and gaze. The meaning of the open hands held forward was certainly originally meant to signify that the supplicant feared the god conceived as being physically before them. Mortal humanity inevitably feels awe before the celestial master, and the urge to keep them away. On the other hand, the open hands and the gaze directed upward refer to the reception of a merciful gift from above.[7]

2

Even though the boy in prayer in Berlin seems closer to the example from Homer, the arts also include imagery of the upward expression that are older.

In the museum in Naples, we find a wall painting from the House of the Poet in Pompeji showing *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia*. The young woman being carried to the altar to be sacrificed raises her arms in terror of death and raises her eyes upward, imploring help from the gods. Kalchas, the sacrificial priest with insight into the future stands with a finger to his lips and looks apprehensively heavenward for a sign from there. Artemis reveals herself in the clouds and saves the young girl. Of course the painting from Pompeji is not relatively old and unfortunately not well painted, but there are solid reasons to assume that it is inspired by a famous painting done by Thimantes who lived during the time of the Peloponnesian War. That artist was gifted specifically with his expressiveness and innovative in that regard. Today of course, it remains impossible to distinguish what might derive from him and what from later examples.[8]

This painting already belongs to the sphere of tragedy. Yet the expression we see here also occurs in a series of art works far more tragic and bleak, and among the most famous of their kind. This includes above all the preserved copies of the Niobid group, made by Skopas or Praxiteles around the mid-4th century. The grand, rounded figure of the mother stands with quaking knees slightly bent in an effort to protect her youngest daughter, the small child, her favourite, who has jumped toward her in fear to survive the sudden rain of horrible arrows. The mother turns her face up toward the gods. She would so much like to take back her arrogant remark, but she knows and we see in her expression that her entreaty is fruitless and the wrath of the gods relentless.

Why are the gods so angry? Because a mortal was so bold as to compare themselves to the god. That can only be avenged by eradicating the entire lineage with all children atoning for the folly of the mother. The line between the human

[7] Alexander Conze, 'Der betende Knabe in den königlichen Museen zu Berlin' *Jahrbuch des Kaiserlich Deutschen archäologischen Instituts*, vol. 1, 1886, pp. 1-13, Adolf Furtwängler, 'Zum betenden Knaben', pp. 217-219 [Otto Puchstein, 'Zum betenden Knaben', pp. 219-223].

[8] A very similar expression to that of Kalchas can be found in the excellently painted image of the young Achilles being discovered among the daughters of King Lycomedes, from the House of the Dioscuri in Pompeji, in the figure of Lycomedes himself looking up toward Zeus with a look of foreboding.

world and the gods above is a fundamental characteristic of the world order, unshakably firm. That was the earlier faith of the Greeks, presumably of all nations, and it was only in this period that it began to be counteracted by the conception of a sort of ladder to heaven for mortals. This is the idea that also created the great divide in the history of human physiognomic expression, also bringing along with it the upward gaze which always involves the idea of flight from the earth to heaven. Then it again confronts the absolute inaccessibility of the gods and their fervour in guarding their privileges – a notion that provides the content for nearly all of the Greek legends and myths, nowhere as strictly and gruesome as with the Niobids. It is a struggle between two religions, two views of life, and the older manifestation does not allow itself to be overcome by the new with its consolation and hope, but would rather topple everything from the ladder to heaven.

The other figures of the Niobe group include expressions recalling the mother, but without adding anything new. A closely related expression occurs in a marvelous work of art made approximately two hundred years later, the Gigantomachy on the frieze of the great altar of Zeus in Pergamon, carved ca. 180-170 BC. We see the earth goddess Gaea rising half from the earth pleading for intercession in favour of her son, the giant Alkyoneus who is threatened to be dragged away and exterminated by Athena.[9] Only the upper part of Gaea's head has survived, but it is still clearly influenced by the figure of Niobe that would certainly have been familiar throughout the ancient world. The meaning of the expression is also the same. Both are the plea of a mother for their child, essentially a hopeless supplication with no faith in its effect. As typical of ancient art, the expression in the figure of Niobe is rendered discretely, essentially with no more than lowered eyebrows and the corners of the mouth to the sides without any other surfaces or lines crimped or folded, far coarser and more rugged devices are applied to the head of Gaea. Light and shadow, heights and depths are more vigorously accentuated with the lower part of the forehead protruding with a long furrow over the nose. The lines of the eyebrows are not raised only at the middle toward the nose, but also curve in sharp waves. A number of the vanquished giants on the large frieze from Pergamon have a similar tragic expression directed upward, some with yet stronger and more effective means. Formally, we could state that these facial expressions are not actually part of our present subject, since this frieze depicts a battle between two antagonists approaching one another as flesh and blood. They are not people looking toward heaven but the vanquished looking up to the victors. We might also say though that the vanquished are the children of the earth and the victors the gods of the heavens.

In terms of intentions and feeling, the Gigantomachy from Pergamon already includes something of the spirit of oppositional religiosity so strongly apparent in the last works of this series of artistic examples. The artist feels sympathy with this outrage against the Olympian gods.

[9] Pergamon frieze: Julius Lange's *Udvalgte Skrifter*, vol. 1, plate XX, fig. 35.

At the time when the Pergamon frieze was becoming known in Europe, new light was also cast on another famous art work that had already been known for a long time, the head earlier called *The Dying Alexander*, Florence, Uffizi, looking upward intensely with an expression of fright as if facing an overpowering demonic force. It has been called a youthful Laocoon. It has greater artistic excellence and is presumably slightly older than the Pergamon Gigantomachy, but otherwise it is the same sort of work. For this reason we must assume that he originally faced an opponent physically, as in the Gigantomachy. His expression includes an element of fear as we feel it with a vaguely threatening danger, a strike of lightning or a scourge being swung, something that could hit us at any moment without our knowing when or where.

Finally then, there is the *Laocoon* itself, the marble group of the three Rhodian artists now in the Vatican. While the snakes attack Laocoon and his sons, the head bends backward, torn by physical pain looking up toward the gods, apparently in accusation or reproach.[10] He himself is the man suffering though innocent, a martyr for the good cause, the friend of humanity while all the others are foolish. He makes a last attempt to save the city which nonetheless falls prey to the cold-hearted cunning, the cruelty and severity of the Olympian gods against humanity. He is a counterpart to and partisan of Prometheus, and like Prometheus the enemy of Zeus, he can count himself abhorrent to all of the gods for loving the children of the earth too much – and then to hate the gods for their injustice (in the view of Aeschylus). Small wonder then that after being unearthed, Laocoon assumed an importance for the Renaissance period in depicting the suffering Christ. We think of Titian's painting of *The Crowning of Thorns* in the Louvre, Anthony van Dyck's *Pietà* in Berlin, Guido Reni's *Ecce Homo* and others.[11] This is because the idea of Laocoon, the central figure of the Vatican group, was from the outset loosely related in its meaning to the personality of the Messiah. It is the fruit of a deep dissatisfaction with the world order under the pagan gods arriving from the marginal regions of the Greek world, and certainly not uninfluenced by the neighboring eastern cultures. It is a shame that this figure is defiled by an overly persistent appeal to the stirred emotions of the public and an inhuman begging for sympathy with him and his hard pressed family.

This religious spirit of protest in late paganism appears most intensely in the largest preserved painting from the cities around Vesuvius. It depicts the severed

[10] Illustrations available, Lange, *Die menschliche Gestalt*, Strasbourg: Heitz, 1903, fig. 26 [Some recent bibliography: Werner Fuchs in Wolfgang Helbig, *Führer durch die öffentlichen Sammlungen klassischer Altertümer in Rom*, vol. 1, Tübingen: Wasmuth, 1963, pp. 162-166].
[11] Lorentz Dietrichson, *Christusbilledet: Studier over den typiske Christusfremstillings oprindelse, udvikling og opløsning*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1880, p. 419. Dietrichson is too one-sided in deriving the influence of Laocoon on Christ-imagery from Guido Reni. The connection is older and more comprehensive.

head of Medusa and might be a sort of copy after the famed Timomachus.[12] It is in any case a brilliant work, even as a copy. It is not intended as a naturalistic study of an execution like the severed head of Medusa by Caravaggio in the Naples museum [Florence, Uffizi, Inv. 1351]. The artist has treated the subject with great poetic freedom, and what was important to him was the expression of the hateful farewell sneer sent heavenward by this declared enemy of the gods. It is a rebuke that surpasses Laocoon in terms of indignation, its profound, angry contempt for these thoroughly unjust gods.

3.

If the Olympian gods were taken seriously and believed to govern the world, it could only lead to despair with the increasing evidence of the manner in which they did so. Yet the divide we have mentioned as separating heaven and earth could also be conceived differently, less tragically, more unheedingly and defiantly.

That was the attitude conveyed by a bronze statue of Alexander the Great by Lysippos, unfortunately not preserved, but expressed only in an epigram. 'With his eyes lifted toward Zeus, this man of bronze seems to wish to say, I will subdue the earth and you can keep Olympus for yourself.'[13] In other words, Alexander had no interest in building ladders to heaven and declines to be identified as a son of Zeus or Zeus himself. That was an honour others attributed to him, such as Apelles who painted Alexander with the lightning bolt in his hand. He has enough to do in the broad expanse of the earth, chooses it as the 'better part', more solid, a place where we know what we are dealing with. Heinrich Heine says, 'we leave heaven to the angels and the sparrows' [Heine 'Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen', 1844]. The personality of Alexander the Great who was admired and imitated like no other, was certainly important for the history of the expression directed upwards. Following his moment in history, art often used the gaze directed somewhat upward with a free, inspired, aggressive expression, and not merely in portraits. Alexander is even said to have had the habit of looking to the sky with his head turned to the side. Royal portraits are preserved on coins from the Diadochs. We must not attach too much significance to any single example since it must have been a matter of fashion. Nonetheless, such a pose can be combined with an emotional ardency. A number of beautiful female heads are preserved from this period with emotional upward gazes and an incomparable expression of exhilaration and happiness.[14]

[12] Naples, Museo Nazionale, No. 8814 from Stabia. A relatively good large color reproduction is available, Wilhelm Ternite, *Wandgemälde aus Pompeji und Herculaneum*, Berlin: Reimer, 1839-1859, plate IX.

[13] [Asclepiades of Samos in Planudes, Anthology, 120.]

[14] One of these in the Museo Chiaramonti in the Vatican museums is present in a plaster cast in the storage spaces, No. 199, of the Thorvaldsen Museum. It must certainly have been a favourite of Thorvaldsen and influenced the upward-looking face of his famous figure of *Fortitudo Coelestis*.

Throwing the head back and particularly looking upward is also a pose frequent in the Bacchic celebrations with their frenzy and impatience. It is especially common in depictions of the Maenads approaching the sacrificial table of Dionysus with their thyrsos staves and lanterns. The spirit of the god fulfilling them instils a certain solemnity in their pose and gait, but does not allow them to hold still. They throw their heads back with a swelling pride and enthusiasm as if shaking off the dust of the earth and allow their eyes to wander emotionally among the stars. Of course, this does not address or entreaty the deity. We are all familiar with the occasional urge to get away from the manifold demands of the earth's surface by looking upward to the free, open and infinite heaven and breathe. If only we could rise up above it all! From the very beginning, the upward gaze and the upward reach of the arms are nothing other than the uncompleted effort of the spirit to raise the body along with it, if it only had the power to do so! Unfortunately, we are not able to gratify that urge, but what use are the arts to us if they cannot balance our deficits in the realm of the imagination, expand our possibilities and reveal the dreams in our hearts? This is the reason that a figure such as the *Bacchant* painted on the wall against a black ground is so appealing, holding her thyrsus staff in her one hand and the cymbals on the fingers of her other, hovering lightly in the air while earnestly looking forward. This is not an ascension and has nothing to do with religion. She is a daughter of the earth and returning to the earth. She is only a Bacchant who has had the fortune to once completely leave the prosaic qualities of our earth.

On the other hand, the religious significance of an ascension is not completely alien to antiquity. Earlier Greek culture imagined that life after death took place beneath the earth with the thoughts of the dead body or ash finding their safekeeping there with it. The soul had a dark and shadowy existence as if living in a basement which religion sought to alleviate but did not effectively change. With the distinct change in outlook on life that becomes palpable around the year 400 BC at all points, human expectations about what awaited them after death were also revised, however gradually. During the Hellenistic period, the idea of apotheosis began to proliferate, something of an acceptance into the circle of the gods. It was originally only associated with kings and great figures often with the most piteous and frivolous flattery of the powerful being honoured with temples and cults while they were still living. Particularly with the doctrines of the Stoics, the idea of the apotheosis was extended to apply to all good people and significantly contributed to paving the way for Christian ideas, not merely for the saints, but of heaven and bliss after death. From then on, it was only the afterlife of the evil that went downwards while the good went upwards, again the ladder to heaven original to the ancient world.

A century before the birth of Christ, the idea of the dead being assumed into heaven was so widespread among their survivors that Cicero, who otherwise mocked it, endorsed it completely at the death of his beloved daughter Tullia, 44 BC, had a temple constructed in her honour and on his own authority granted her a

place in heaven among the blessed gods [letters to Terentia and Titus Pomponius Atticus]. Humanity incessantly indulged in imagining a next world according to their own pleasures and tastes, guided by their wishes rather than their eyes. It would be a great mistake to believe that such arbitrariness did not also apply to the philosophers who might after all be called on for the most rigorous abnegation in their relation to reason and truth. Whether they happen to be happy or sad, the educated philosopher familiar with many systems of ideas has the luxury of being able to choose from one or the other. We should not be too strict with Cicero if we consider what happens in our own time. In any case, his eloquent pen is the source for a beautiful dictum on the subject that assumes a special place in the historical development we are here examining. He shares the philosophical doctrine that people infected by vices or crimes are in the darkness and mire of the underworld, but that the virtuous, pure, innocent and unspoiled souls trained in noble studies and arts hover upward to the gods in a mild and light flight, in other words to a nature like theirs.[15] Cicero has a woman in mind, his daughter, and the imaginary picture he describes very strikingly anticipates Renaissance paintings of the Virgin Mary rising to heaven, made some 16-17 centuries later.

In the visual arts from the time around Cicero, there is no expression of this flight to heaven comparable to the beauty of his words. There were of course apotheoses, semi-ceremonial and actually performed after the death of an emperor and the half ideal image of the other world including mythological and allegorical figures. I do not believe that these works of art, cameos and monumental reliefs, contributed anything in particular to the development of the upward gaze.

4.

Even aside from apotheosis and ascensions, the philosophers and poets of later antiquity saw the human form itself as emitting from the creator or nature, especially the erect stature as a sign of the heavenly origin and heavenly goal of humanity. In regard to this aesthetic and religious vision of human nature, Christianity then continued where paganism left off. A series of statements from famous authors provide a bridge over the gap from paganism to Christianity and lead us smoothly from the time of Socrates to the period of the Church Fathers. The continuity can be seen further still, deep into the medieval Christian period.

Today the erect stature of humanity has been studied from the evolutionary point of view, namely by Darwin and Haeckel, demonstrating that instead of living primarily in trees, the ancestors of humanity passed on to a life on the ground, developed a difference between hands and feet along with a capacity and habit of

[15] '…,castos autem animos, puros, integros, incorruptos, bonis etiam studiis atque urtibus exploits, leni quodam et facili lapsu ad deos, id est ad naturam sui simile, pervolare' Cicero, *De Consolatione* §3 [Cicéron, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 4, Fragments des ouvrages e prose et en vers, 4e partie Fragments des ouvrages philosophiques, Paris: Dubochet, 1843, pp. 620-621]. Gaston Boissier, *La Religion Romaine d'Auguste aux Antonins*, Paris: Hachette, 1884, refers to this book, but not to this passage in particular.

standing upright which brought a great advantage over the other species in the struggle for survival.[16] If we read what Xenophon says about the same subject in his memorial for Socrates (*Memorabilia*, Book 1, chap. 4, section 11), we will find that the views of our natural scientists of today are far richer and deeper, but that in his simple, popular way, the Socrates student stresses the practical advantage of the upright stature compared to leaning forward. It 'gives a wider range of vision in front and a better view of things above, and exposes him less to injury.' The only difference is that Darwin and his followers attribute something to a purely natural development which Socrates and his student derive from divine providence. The erect human gait is a peculiar gift of the gods to humanity.

Another student of Socrates, Plato (*Timaeus* 43), takes his observation much further and completely shifts the point of view in interpreting the upright, extended stature as the result of being pulled upward toward heaven. The noblest portion of the human soul is a protective spirit given to each of us by God, located in the uppermost part of our body which raises us from the earth to the relative in heaven, as plants have their source not on earth but in heaven, an idea further developed with pensive speculation that need not occupy us here. We stress only that such a view of the matter must be described as spiritualist or more aptly as romantic, and continually recurs in later antiquity. Even so rational a spirit as Aristotle who naturally does not overlook the practical significance of the upright stature of humanity, also says that this is an exclusive characteristic of humanity because our nature and essence are divine.[17] In *The Nature of the Gods*, Cicero develops Stoic doctrines, refers, like Xenophon, to the upright stature of humanity as a priceless gift of the gods, yet the significance of this gift does not strike him as exclusively practical and beneficial in protecting from harm.[18] Providence more than anything raised humanity above the earth and made its build high and erect to allow a contemplation of heaven and recognition of divinity. Humanity originates with the earth of course, but unlike its inhabitants, the contemplation of elevated and heavenly things is a privilege of humanity distinct from the other biological species. In another passage he says that the deity gave humanity a body apt to its intellect. While the other species bend down for food, humanity alone was raised to see the heavens as its original home and dwelling.[19]

From beginning to end, ancient art shows a preference for the standing pose in the human figure. It prefers to depict people standing freely on their legs than lying or resting. Yet the spirit of the pose did not remain constant throughout this development. It originally expressed a certain security and pride, a feeling of being

[16] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, vol. 1, London: Murray, 1871, pp. 140-142. Ernst Haeckel, *Natürliche Schöpfungs-Geschichte*, 8. Auflage, Berlin: Reimer, 1889, pp. 715-718.
[17] Aristotle, *De Partibus Animalium*, book 4, chap. 10. Dr. Oskar Siesbye and Professor Johan Ludvig Heiberg have found and shown me some of the passages cited here.
[18] Cicero, *De natura deorum*, book 2, 56, 140, also *De legibus*, book 1, 9, 26.
[19] Sallust states something similar at the beginning of his *Bellum Catilinae*, and Seneca, *De Otio*, book 5, 4.

born to triumph. A new element of heavenward striving arose later, the impulse toward higher things. This is also an expression of pride and the sense of human nobility and superiority to the rest of nature. It is seen in the famous verses where Ovid refers to Prometheus creating humanity. They even consider the upward direction of the face and eyes, 'os homini sublime', as that which makes us human.[20]

When we enter the period of Christianity and see how the Church Fathers dealt with the subject, and we find nothing essentially new in comparison to Plato, Cicero and Ovid. There is an increasing emphasis on heaven rather than earth. Lactantius even cites the words of Cicero and agrees.[21]

Of all creatures, only human beings are heavenly and divine. Their bodies rise from the earth, and their upward gaze strives back to its origin. While disdaining the baseness of the earth we strive upwards with the feeling that the highest good must be sought there, and mindful of the status God has given us, we look up to the artist, our creator. This is followed by a very unscientific essay in deriving the Greek word for man, 'anthropos', from words taken to mean 'the upward looking one.'

It was not beneath the great medieval saint, Bernard of Clairvaux, the brilliant preacher who shaped 12th-century religious life, to quote the pagan Ovid in a festive sermon, 'God created man upright even in the body, while the other creatures of the earth bend down toward the ground, so that in raising their eyes to the stars, they can send their sighs up to the place where such a happy, eternal home can be seen.'[22] The last words of the Christian preacher certainly go somewhat beyond Ovid, but as we have seen, not further than other ancient pagan authors.

We would be very mistaken to conclude from this that the visual arts of late antiquity and early Christianity must have shown a preference for the human figure with eyes and movements geared toward the heavens. Those remarkable works of ancient art we mentioned just before must be seen as great exceptions within the surviving tradition. In reality, depictions of the human figure from the beginning to the end of antiquity usually showed the face and eyes simply looking straight forward. We are increasingly coming to recognize that earlier ancient art, from before 400 BC, defined its development so conclusively that a few starts in other directions occurred later, but were soon abandoned in favor of the old trend. The more time passed and ancient culture lost its freshness of youth, the less change could be expected. At the end it almost appears like a rigid mummy, and went into barbarism in that form, always raw, awkward and stiff in rendering the human form. When art was placed in the service of Christianity, this could not shift things because what it required was culture and not religion.

[20] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, book 1, 83-86.
[21] Lucius Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius, *Divinarum institutionum Liber 2*, chap. 9. Also Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, 4, 25, St. Ambrose, *Hexaemeron*, book 6, 9, 54.
[22] Johannes Mabillon ed., *Sancti Bernardi abbatis Clarae-Vallensis opera omnia*, vol. 1, part 1, Paris: Gaume, 1839, p. 545 Sermo 100, col. 2550.

We might have expected the Gothic style to bring a change into this, fully developed in France in the 13th century and dominating all the lands from there. In his lectures about the main periods of style and art at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, the Greek, the Roman, the Gothic and the Renaissance, Paul Delaroche describes the Gothic as a blonde northern maiden with long youthfully unbound hair. She is holding the model of a church, and by contrast to the other figures, looking piously toward heaven. We might even take this literally since the Church dominated the medieval period, and its most unique and significant work consists in the upward moving, flying lines that unavoidably pull the gaze of the actual people, the beholders, along in their flight. In that sense, the characterization by Delaroche is apt. On the other hand it does not apply at all to the Gothic art being produced alongside its architecture. A survey of all figures produced by medieval art approximately to the year 1500 would show that the upward gazing expression is comparatively rare in the Gothic, and even more so in the Romanesque. It is another example for the fact that the various artistic genres and expressive forms illuminate one and the same historical period in very different ways and that care must be taken to avoid projecting the evidence of one onto the other. There was a certain apprehensiveness in medieval art approaching representations of the human figure. It never completely mastered its movements, and we must bear in mind that the upward looking expression involves bending back the upper torso, neck and back with difficult shifting and foreshortening. In medieval art, the human figure consistently retained something of a stiff chess piece. If it is clear that it tentatively lacked the capacity for resolving this task, it is still difficult to decide whether this might have involved an unwillingness to deal with it. The ability and the will dovetail to a certain degree.[23]

5.

It is actually not until the Renaissance that the upward gazing expression was found to be satisfying and completely adequately depicted. This is where we find the art-historical transition from the first weak attempts on to full perfection with a certainty far greater than antiquity, completely illuminated and traceable step by step. Since this development and growth struck me as interesting enough, I made numerous trips to other countries to immerse myself and collect much material for understanding the question. I would not like to apply the usual academic method of burdening the reader with those things that burdened the author, but instead to lead the reader as directly as possible to the heart of the matter, and therefore only

[23] [Lange treated the subject more broadly in a series of three books, the final one of which appeared four years after the present article. Lange, *Menneskefiguren i Kunstens Historie fra den graeske Kunsts anden Blomstringstid indtil vort Aarhundrede*, Billedkunstens Fremstilling af Menneskeskikkelsen 3, Copenhagen: Der nordiske Forlag, 1899 with summary in French, available in German translation by Mathilde Mann as *Die menschliche Gestalt in der Geschichte der Kunst von der zweiten Blütezeit der griechischen Kunst bis zum 19. Jahrhundert*, Strasbourg: Heitz 1900.]

include those elements of the collected material reflecting the main lines of the development.[24]

Rather than fumble around in the overwhelming abundance of the relevant evidence, I shall also limit myself to a distinct thread of the development which I would like to trace from deep below in early medieval art to the highest point of the Renaissance with acute attention to every advance in the process. There is a sequence of images more apt than any other for illustrating this development, depictions of *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary*. They include the most beautiful and meek blossoming of the upward expression, particularly in the great Italian Renaissance. We again mention Titian's large altarpiece in Venice, a painting that presents the highpoint of the entire development. In other subjects there can be doubts about whether the expression we are examining is in fact a necessary element or whether the artist either includes it or not as an aesthetic decision. An assumption into heaven is an upward directed expression by its very nature, or at least in the bud that might not have yet unfolded. This permits us to study not merely the art-historical development of the expression facing upward when it emerged as a fully mature artistic reality, but also backward into its embryonic states when it posed a challenge not yet possible to adequately fulfil. If our Protestant background might lead us to ask why we should not prefer images of Christ rather than *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary*, I would respond that in the Catholic Church which developed Christian art itself, *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary* was cultivated far further than the imagery of Christ. This is due to the particular significance of the theme which should become clearer as we proceed.

We find a dualism in the earliest legends we have recording the death of the Virgin Mary. It is necessary to realize this to understand its artistic images.[25]

[24] Every observer will of course recognize that a task such as this cannot possibly be based on completeness in a literal sense. Since it is impossible to know ahead of time where something relevant to the subject might occur, it would theoretically be necessary to search all sculpture and painting to avoid error. Such a possibility is not given us. Referring to the secondary literature is pointless in such a case since our question at hand is not likely to be treated in books. I must also stress that my materials suffer from a certain one-sidedness since my study-travels have not permitted me to survey great masses of medieval book illumination or much from the regions where Byzantine art flourished. Since I am myself aware of this shortcoming, I hope that I have been able to avoid the problem of leaving my analysis unreliable.

[25] It is assumed that the earliest record of the legend is preserved from the hand of Melito, Bishop of Sardes in the 2nd century AD. It is even said to derive from St. John the Evangelist. Since the narrative is strikingly long and embellished with details, critical theologians believe that it was not written before the 4th century, if not later still. It is published in Friedrich August von Lehner, *Die Marienverehrung in den ersten Jahrhunderten*, 2nd ed., Stuttgart: Cotta, 1886, p. 244. We shall be referring primarily to the shorter and more concentrated 6th century version by Gregory of Tours.

The Apostles are described as arriving from their places around the world to converge in the house of the Virgin Mary. When her life approached its end, Christ appeared with his angels, received her soul, delivered her to the Archangel Michael and disappeared. The body was naturally buried, Gregory of Tours says in the grey of morning, with the entire bed lowered into the grave and attended by the Apostles awaiting the arrival of the Lord. Christ appeared again before them and directed that the holy body raised in a cloud be led into paradise where it is reunited with the soul and rejoices in the company of the blessed and partakes of the happiness of eternity.

In another early report, from Melito, Bishop of Sardes, we are told that the body was moved to paradise and the soul to heaven in the treasury of God the Father. They actually refer to two assumptions into heaven, once the soul at the moment of death and then the body after the burial. We can probably not assume that both narratives date from the same time. The one deals essentially only with what the pious imagination believed would occur at the death of each individual Christian, namely that the soul is separated from the body. It simply appears with greater clarity and solemnity in dealing with the Virgin Mary that God shows the mother the particular grace of assembling her friends around the death bed. The other element of the story however, that the dead body buried in the ground is assumed into heaven long before the Last Judgement, seems to have probably been added later by an analogy of her assumption to the ascension of Christ. There was neither will nor ability to imagine the body of the Virgin Mary as exposed to the general transience of the flesh. On the other hand, the two sides of the report led to a difficult contradiction. Was the body of the Virgin Mary living or dead when it was transported from the sarcophagus to heaven? In art it is usually shown living, but this creates two versions of the Virgin Mary, her soul in a corporeal form and the body shown vivid and animated.

The assumption of the Virgin Mary is essentially the resurrection of her body. This was a very important image for the Catholic Church for ages, yet it was never raised to the status of dogma, but remained 'pia sententia', a pious assumption.

An individual early work of art which in our current state of knowledge stands in great isolation, we are shown the corporeal resurrection and assumption of the Virgin Mary. This is a 9th-century fresco in the church of St. Clement in Rome. We see the Virgin Mary standing upright with extended arms and hands stretching forward, or more likely upward and the head bent slightly to the side or upward. It strikes us as a rough and clumsy sketch for the figure Titian would paint five or six centuries later, and it is not impossible that the pose had models from ancient art. It after all reminds us of the passage we have cited from Cicero, *De Consolatione*. The fresco in S. Clemente has been damaged below the figure of the Virgin Mary when the wall was broken through. We might assume that the open sarcophagus had been painted there where there is now a hole in the wall, but we cannot be certain as to whether she was standing or hovering. The latter seems more likely. The Apostles

surround the sarcophagus and reverently watch the assumption. Christ is enthroned above in an oval glory surrounded by angels.

On the whole though, *The Death of the Virgin Mary* is far more common in earlier medieval art than is *The Assumption*. It survives from all over in many versions both in Byzantine as well as occidental art. In the Greek Church, these images bear the name *Kimisis*, the passing away of the Virgin Mary while the Latin Church calls them *Transitus beatae Mariae Virginis*, her returning home. They are not slavish copies, but include variations, often remarkable, which we cannot now discuss. Essentially, the great majority of these images are based on a given traditional type. We see the Virgin Mary on her death bed after she has exhausted her final breath. The Apostles stand around it having performed the last rites, holding the book, the candle, incense burner and censer. In some instances, the heavenly host is also present, and Christ behind the bed at the centre of the image, holding the soul of the Virgin Mary in his arms as a lightly enshrouded figure of a child or miniature. There are also examples where Christ is passing the soul to an angel revealing itself from above. This entire conception has a naïve and placid quality recalling ancient Athenian vase paintings showing the dead and their bier surrounded by mourning figures, 'prosthesis', but also because of the relation of Christ to the soul, something warmer and more comforting than the ancient imagery.

It emerges from this fundamental idea, the entire concept, that the figure actually depicting the Virgin Mary is conceived as the soul, indeed living but completely passive. What is pious and comforting in the idea is that the soul, as a delicate child, is transferred to the hands of God, and is treated as without any will of its own. This is by no means the only context in which medieval art depicted the soul as a separate and independent small figure distinct from the body, itself also seen in the same picture. Since this mode of representation is very significant for a correct appraisal of all medieval art, and thus for our particular subject, I beg the reader to indulge us in a slight digression.

Souls of saints and martyrs being carried to heaven by angels were sometimes also depicted as that of the Virgin Mary. We find the greatest enlightenment in the way the soul is shown in the large fresco from about the mid-14th century, *The Triumph of Death* in the Campo Santo at Pisa. We are shown how the angels and devils retrieve the souls from the dead bodies to them, flying with them to either heaven or hell. Since the seat of the soul viewed as a figure is intended to be within the body, it is naturally far smaller than the body. It is a small, naked figure with differing qualities according to the differing bodies.[26] Depictions of *The Last Judgment* also often show the souls as small, naked figures weighed in the scales of St. Michael and carried by angels to heaven in the bosom of Abraham if they are found to be just. Paternal Abraham is also usually seen as a gentle old

[26] The souls of deceased priests have tonsures and those of women the grown and developed female features.

grandfather holding all of the little souls in a pouch formed from his coat. Imagery of creation, such as the narthex mosaics at St. Mark's in Venice, shows God giving the souls, shaped as small figures, to the human being standing before him who has just previous been created.[27]

Something similar had already occurred in ancient art. The Egyptians for instance depict the soul as a bird with a human head hovering with the symbol of life above the dead body laid out on the bier as a mummy. It is the symbolic expression of what we call the resurrection of the body. Related ideas entered Greek art, such as Sirene. Early Greek vase paintings also show the souls of fallen heroes, their bodies given to the earth, as small armed figures flying through the air with wings on their back. Such a depiction of the soul as an independent human figure no longer appears in later Greek art. It is not apt for a more developed stage of art. Like antiquity, the Renaissance also turned away from such ideas. It is after all childish to imagine the soul as a second figure inside the body or beside it. A vivid childish imagination is inclined to view everything as a living figure, to 'anthropomorphize' or 'personify', and that within the human being itself, the 'inner man, 'invisible and non-sensual', does not escape this tendency. The urge to personify dominates all popular imagery and has left its traces in innumerable linguistic expressions which then affect thinking. Even the philosophers are unable to disengage themselves. In the *Gorgias*, Plato refers to the body as a hell for the soul, removed at death to expose the naked soul, and some sources of early Christian philosophy teach that the soul is actually physical in nature, bound and active within the body and therefore necessarily taking up space.[28] We can be certain that something of this idea must have survived. It is not a simple matter and will probably never be completely possible to prevent the force of the human imagination from indulging in it. Wherever the imagination approaches the concept of the soul, it will always consider the soul to be a small body or figure. Since our bodies are also figurations, our conception of humanity will always be dualist.
As long as art approaches the question in this way, it will never develop beyond a dead or mask-like conception. Great art in its developed phases depicted the soul very differently. We refer to Leonardo da Vinci or Rembrandt as great painters of the soul (*store Sjælemalere*) yet when they viewed or depicted the soul, it was anything other than as a small figure to be extracted from the mouth of a body. They

[27] The large rock carving on the early 12th century Extern stone in Westfalia must in my opinion be interpreted as the paintings of *The Death of the Virgin Mary*. Christ appears as lord of the world and saviour above the cross, receiving his own soul, the dead Christ, carried on his arm. It is difficult for us today to deal with such a string of ideas, but not inexplicable if we consider how subtle medieval dogma could be at the same time that its artistic expression might have been naïve and awkward.

[28] Heinrich Ritter, *Geschichte der christlichen Philosophie*, Göttingen: Dieterich, 1841, vol. 2, pp. 567-580, Adolf Ebert, *Geschichte der christlich-lateinischen Literatur von ihren Anfängen bis zum Zeitalter Karls des Grossen*, Allgemeine Geschichte der Literatur des Mittelalters im Abendlande Erster Band, Leipzig: Vogel, 1874, pp. 450-452.

see the soul as permeating the body in every place and not to be viewed or imagined as independent of it. For them, the soul is nothing other than the expression of the body, and the task for art is to expressively render it in its pose, movements, countenance and colours, not as dead in a coffin, but as the ever present, living and moving force. When the Egyptians depicted physical resurrection as the flying soul returning to the dead body, separate and both actually inexpressive, Rembrandt did so, particularly in his great painting with *The Raising of Lazarus* by having the head of the dead man rise from the bed, inhaling the first draft of air with a new bursting life running across of the rigid facial features like a breeze over the quiet surface of a pool.

6.

During the 12th century and later, *The Death of the Virgin Mary* was often combined with the image of her bodily resurrection and assumption into heaven. The first two subjects were depicted side by side below and the coronation far away at the top, the image of the goal to which the other two lead. The resurrection of the body is usually shown with the Virgin Mary still seen lying on a bier or in a sarcophagus. Christ then hovers or steps toward the dead body and dictates that it come to life, or directly takes her by the hand or arm to assist in standing up. We find examples in a tympanum-relief ca. 1200 on the west portal of Nôtre-Dame in Paris and an early 15th-century wall painting by Taddeo Bartoli in the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena. As in the medieval imagery of such subjects, the depiction of emotion is very subdued, and the figure of the Virgin Mary being helped up from a supine pose is completely passive, in the relief in Paris barely awakened from death.

In later medieval art, approximately since 1350 and especially in Italy, the awakening of the body of the Virgin Mary increasingly predominates over depictions of her death. A completely new pictorial type emerges showing not merely the awakening of her body, but the actual assumption into heaven. She is usually shown hovering, mostly on a throne above the sarcophagus along the way between heaven and earth. In relation to the surroundings, the figure is shown in a larger scale and emphasized more than any other figure in ecclesiastical art. She is given a place attracting all attention – on a high altar or at the end of a church interior. On smaller, portable altars, *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary* is shown in the uppermost field with a pediment shape above an entire series of images from the life of Christ and the Virgin Mary. During the Renaissance, the figure of the assumption is shown in the vault on the axis above the cross. This is because the assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven represents the goal of life, the fortunate end of all. The Virgin Mary rising to heaven, the 'Assunta', embodies the blessing of all Christian people, being invoked as the radiating gate of heaven, 'fulgida porta coeli, o mater alma Christi.'[29] In a sermon for the Feast of the Assumption from the

[29] This from the inscription on *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary* on the opulent altarpiece of 1518 in St. Mary's in Lübeck. The expression seems to have been taken from a hymn where

year 1200, we are told 'we honour her assumption by praying to be worthy of her intercession to be led to the same glory and blessedness as she enters upon this day.'[30]

While the Virgin Mary is otherwise shown in glory with the child Christ on her lap or arm, in the assumption she is naturally alone, and at that moment, the veneration is directed only to her. We regularly see the empty sarcophagus surrounded by the Apostles and God the Father or Christ above. These can be omitted though, at least the Apostles, or replaced by other holy figures with no more than a legendary connection to the narrative. There are instances when we might be left in doubt whether the Virgin Mary is being shown as an assumption or 'Virgin in Glory'. If we consider that saints are constantly included in art works witnessing any variety of holy events for personal or local reasons without being involved in any other way, we cannot doubt the status of these images as depicting *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary*. We cannot expect any such distinctions among the earlier artists themselves. There is only one single subject aside from the assumption where the Virgin Mary appears as a fully grown woman, and this is The Revelation of St. John, chap 12, 'a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars'. It is easily distinguished from the assumption by the list of attributes and is found far more seldom in medieval art, and not always uninfluenced by the assumption.

The assumption-type as it occurs in Italian art, particularly in late medieval central Italy, did as we shall see, albeit with adjustments, survive into the Renaissance with its centre in the school of Siena. It is an unusually simple composition. The Virgin Mary is seated on her throne hovering mid-air at the centre of the image. Her pose is completely symmetrical and frontal. Her hands are folded together at the centre of her breast with the fingers pointing upward, the face and gaze directed straight ahead. As simple as this seems, it is full of contradictions. Why should a figure rising through the air be seated and of all things on a heavy throne? The hovering is not expressed in the completely passive pose or placement of the figure while the chair seems to be lifting her. The throne, or more properly the almond-shaped gloriole surrounding it is borne aloft on either side by flying angels as if the edge of the gloriole were a solid material frame with the throne attached. In relief sculpture, it can appear as if the gloriole forms the edges of an elongated tub. In some instances, the angels can appear attractive and the decorative arrangement quite effective, yet the mechanical aspect of the throne together with the gloriole makes a very naïve impression. The throne makes these other causal elements necessary, so why insist on it? It seems to be that with the image of *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary* it was important not to lose sight of the fact that he was

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the Virgin Mary is understood as 'porta perpetua lux Christus.' Hermann Adalbert Daniel, *Thesaurus hymnologicus*, Leipzig: Loeschke, 1856, vol. 5, nos. 252, 496. In Lübeck, the inscription proves that the expression was applied to the theme of the assumption.

[30] Jacques-Paul Migne, *Partrologia…Latina*, vol. 211, Paris: Migne, 1855, 'Absalon abbas Sprinckirsbacensis', Sermo 43-45 *In Assumptione gloriosae Virginis*, col. 245-260.

considered to be a queen to the Christian church and community on earth, and that in heaven she should assume the place of queen beside her divine son. At this moment she is also intended to be the subject of adoration similar to the way that Hera and Demeter were enthroned within their temples. It is undeniable that for the Christian Italian populace, a memory of pagan antiquity was mixed in to the large figure of the assumption in the medieval Italian churches. This spirit is then contradicted by the folded hands signifying her as worshipping. Although she is a religious figure, she is not God, but only the human servant of God and as such the representative of the baptized. This evokes an active and spontaneous element. Yet the folded hands are merely an outward, ceremonial, a ritual sign of adoration with nothing expressive in the actual, vivid sense of the term, neither in her pose nor in her facial demeanour.

It is interesting to see that medieval art preferred to depict the movement of hovering toward heaven in other figures with an ecclesiastical rank below the Virgin Mary. While we barely find the Virgin Mary in a hovering pose before the 16th century, Giotto already depicted St. Francis as hovering in a gloriole above his death bed in the Bardi Chapel in S. Croce in Florence. The head and gaze are directed somewhat upward and the hands extended upward to the sides with the back of the hand outward. This is a great exception in medieval art, but not the only instance where Giotto shows himself a few centuries ahead of his contemporaries.

In the meantime, the medieval type of the Virgin Mary showed her more as a sort of goddess. Her grandeur found no actual expression, and her figure has nothing human to speak to us as human beings. We must look elsewhere to find her significance addressed, and this might have been achieved with the greatest beauty in a poem by Jacopone da Tochi dealing with nothing other than the assumption.[31]

In the course of time, the legend had grown further. It was a bold claim that not only her soul, but that her body had also been awakened from the grave and taken to heaven, and required some sort of further correlation. The preacher we have mentioned above asked, 'shall I say that she was raised with or without her body? I truly say with her body, because if I should be mistaken, then it is a mistake I wish to commit'. We can see that any proof was very welcome. Legend claimed that the proof came when St. Thomas, the worst doubter among the Apostles, expressed his doubt of the assumption of the Virgin Mary as he had once done of the resurrection of Christ, but was disgraced when Mary sent her belt to him from heaven. This relic was, and still is kept in the cathedral of Prato, where it is said to have arrived from Palestine in the 11th century. It is shown publicly each year at the festival of the assumption. It is there to be seen, and if permitted, to be touched, so what more irreversible proof could be required?

Depictions of *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary* in Italian art frequently include allusions to this legend from the 14th century onward, and such images are

[31] Henry Thode, *Franz von Assisi und die Anfange der Kunst der Renaissance in Italien*, Berlin: Grote, 1885, p. 226.

often referred to as Madonna della Cintola. Among the earlier, excellent examples we mention the exquisite relief dated 1359 on the rear of the altarpiece of Or San Michele by Andrea Orcagna, and the yet more appealing relief of 1417 influenced by it above the northern portal on the cathedral of Florence attributed to Nanni d'Antonio di Banco. There is also the famous but poorly preserved fresco by Filippo Lippi in the cathedral at Spoleto. At the pinnacle of the Renaissance development we have the painting by Sodoma in Siena at the Oratorio di San Bernardino and that by Titian for the cathedral of Verona, differing completely from his large altarpiece in Venice. Paintings of the Madonna della Cintola show her with the head leaning down since her attention is geared to the kneeling Apostle to whom she is handing the belt. Those are true images of the assumption, yet belong in brackets within the history of the upward looking expression since they present more of a regression than an advance. There are however also paintings where we see St. Thomas with the belt and the Virgin Mary shown in the pose we have described symmetrically enthroned with the folded hands looking straight forward. It is not particularly important if these should be identified as Madonna della Cintola or not. From our point of view however, it is essential to distinguish the completely symmetrical pose from the looser movement.

7.

Very naturally, the great Renaissance development in Italian 15th century art also affected the Virgin of the assumption. The traditional type was obviously retained, but form and draperies were studied more closely, the stiff, symmetrical pose becomes freer and more natural while the Virgin Mary is usually no longer seated on a throne but instead on clouds. It nonetheless took a certain amount of time for the motif to develop to showing the face and gaze directed upward.

A relatively early example of a Renaissance assumption is the relief of 1425-27 by Donatello in the chapel of S. Angelo a Nilo in Naples on the tomb of Cardinal Brancaccio. It shows the Virgin Mary on a more modest chair surrounded by clouds and jubilant angels. It might be due to a coincidence that she is seen here not frontally, but half from the side. Nonetheless, the change is essential since the figure is now not turned to the beholder, and the relief conveys what is happening to the Virgin Mary in terms of an epic narrative. We also receive the impression that her movement is more horizontal or at an angle than vertical, but her face does not yet reveal the slightest indication of the upward looking expression. Her figure is not rendered as youthful, her expression somewhat apprehensive as if anxious about sailing through the clouds yet deeply faithful and devoted to the will of God. This has generated a spiritual expression absent from the earlier figures yet still manifesting itself in refined adjustments of the traditional type. The head is tilted slightly to the side and the fingertips of the folded hands laterally touch the chin. This is how carefully such an innovative artist approached tradition. In other places such as Siena, where the theme was at home, the development had a slower momentum. Around the mid-century there, Stefano di Giovanni, Il Sassetta painted

a marvellous large altarpiece glowing in its gilding, now in the Berlin museum no. 1122, still showing the Virgin Mary completely rigid and frontal in the medieval mode.[32] There is a single, slight yet very significant change, namely that the eyes, the gaze if not the face itself are raised in an expression of expectation. The advance consists in eliciting the subjective aspect. Although it is still completely passive, her glance is directed not merely upward, but conveys an inner awareness and feeling. This was a conquest for art but did not appear to be a victory. In the large altarpiece by Matteo di Giovanni from Siena in the National Gallery London, no. 1155, we find the characteristics of a later period and more mature phase of development, yet the eyes and face of the Assunta figure are not at all turned upward. The same is true of the large glazed terracotta relief by Andrea della Robbia now in the Pinacoteca at Città di Castello with the traditional type, the head only shifted slightly to the side. In its expression, this maternal head attends less to heaven than to her compatriots on earth though with no relation to St. Thomas or the belt.

There are many examples from this period we could cite in the Italian churches and museums. Out of consideration for the reader we mention only a very few of the best.

In Italian art, it is only toward the end of the 15th century that the upward gaze became common in its religious sense. The intellectual trends of the medieval period only now found their proper expression in the painting of facial demeanours. This appears primarily in the more sentimental trend of the central Italian schools. Of the individual artists, we might mention Pietro Perugino and Francesco Francia. It begins in a somewhat anxious spirit. We have a strong impression that dust-born humanity senses an infinite gulf between themselves and heaven, a distance not to be bridged on our own powers. The same force that raises our attention and thoughts to the heavens also presses them back. Around 1500, Perugino painted *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary* in this spirit with the saints below on his altarpiece for Vallombrosa, now in the Accademia in Florence.[33] As in the earlier examples, it shows the figure enthroned with folded hands but with the eyes and face turned sharply upwards, physically somewhat cramped and forced since God the Father, to whom she looks, is standing directly in the gloriole above her head. It also includes that slight intellectual or emotional affectation that arises in Perugino when his true and appealing feeling gives out.

During this transitional period from the early to the high Renaissance, the standing assumption-type comparatively often replaces the seated version. We see it again for instance in an altarpiece by Perugino in a side chapel in SS. Annunziata in Florence.[34] The Virgin Mary is standing with hands crossed over her breast and face directed upward. We might also recall the fresco of 1490 by Domenico Ghirlandaio in the choir at Santa Maria Novella where we see the Virgin Mary standing with

[32] This painting has alas been recently kept in storage and not exhibited.
[33] [Walter Bombe ed., *Perugino*, Klassiker der Kunst in Gesamtausgaben XXV, Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1914, p. 87.]
[34] [Walter Bombe ed., *Perugino*, 1914, p. 138.]

hands folded. The new trend of the upward gaze still alternates with the older forward looking type well into the 16th century. The perfected result original to central Italian art in the development of the standing assumption-type can probably be identified in the painting by Fra Bartolommeo in the Berlin museums, no. 249.[35] Nonetheless, the expression still seems anxious. It is clearly visible how the painter began from the traditional ritualized pose with the hands folded together. A moment earlier, the Virgin Mary had been standing with folded hands. Now in gazing upward to the glory of heaven, her hands involuntarily come slightly apart with a child-like and naively simple expression of amazement and surprise. This painting was made around 1514.

The time had generally arrived for the arts to replace the traditional ritualized poses of hands and arms, such as the folded hands or crossed arms, with looser arrangements to better express the emotions. This was the final step in the development toward liberating the figure. Oddly though and presumably due to the weight of tradition, the seated position of the Assunta figure continued to predominate in Florence and the rest of central Italy. It could be and was indeed treated completely freely and naturally, but as we shall be noting later, the standing position was more suitable to the theme. The earliest completely freely treated seated Assunta figure can probably be identified as that begun after 1515 by Andrea del Sarto and completed by Jacopo Pontormo, a painting not remarkable in other ways.[36] The Madonna is shown seated in the clouds with her eyes and face turned upward to the left with the left hand raised in the same direction, opened to the outside. In a seconding movement, the right hand descends to the side. Her expression is one of joy, a surprised marvel at the glory presenting itself to her. As do all aspects of history, the history of art also has its coincidences, one of these being the way a work is commissioned, sometimes unfavourably in relation to the talents of a given artist. Why fate never called on Raphael to paint *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary*, we can only imagine how it might have appeared, but three or four were commissioned from Andrea del Sarto in spite of the fact that Andrea's cooler feeling and lack of intellectual adventure did not ignite before the strong emotional movement and lyrical fire demanded by the subject. He reveals the phenomenon in an *Assumption of the Virgin Mary*, Galleria Pitti no. 225 [or no. 191], painted just after the Renaissance movement had reached its zenith with all of its admirable, immortal mastery of forms and colours, completely mature and freely treated bodies, which is actually nothing more than a repetition of the old medieval enthroned type with folded hands and an inexpressive straightforward gaze. After

[35] The painting was finished by Mariotto Albertinelli, but the figure of the Virgin Mary must have been painted completely by Fra Bartolommeo.

[36] J. A. Crowe and G. B. Cavalcaselle, *Geschichte der italienischen Malerei*, Leipzig: Hirzel, 1869, vol. 4, p. 563 [Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *A New History of Painting in Italy*, vol. 3, London: Murray, 1866, p. 560. Lange here apparently refers to the Passerini *Assumption*, Pitti no. 225, documented around 1526, John Shearman, 'Andrea del Sarto's Two Paintings of the *Assumption*', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 101, no. 673, April 1959, pp. 124-134].

having developed beyond his early years, he felt better approaching the theme in this placid and simple way than to attempt the upward gaze as in his other version. For him, it is a gaze with the gloomy quality of a cold moon, as if it had nothing to do with his feelings, but only done because it had become common for artists to paint the Virgin Mary looking upward.

Correggio felt a far greater inner vocation (*indre Kald*) for depicting this theme, and was commissioned to paint it in the cathedral dome in Parma at the height of his artistic career, 1526-1530. In the central Italian mode, he painted the Virgin Mary seated on clouds, indeed, her pose is nearly recumbent since she turns and bends sharply backwards in sight of the open glory of heaven and the son rushing toward her. With an enormous sense of bliss and passion, she spreads her arms far to the sides. We have mentioned that the painters of the previous generation emphasized the consciously infinite distance between heaven and earth when treating the theme of the upward gaze. By now there is a familiar feeling of direct proximity to heaven, and the imagination easily moves between the two uppermost rungs of the ladder to heaven where the cheer of beatitude drowns out all of the sounds from earth. This applies to Correggio more than to any other, and although it is apparent in many of his figures, nowhere more than in his *Assumption* in Parma. This movement, the unfettered flight into the seventh heaven appealed to him. In order to draw the beholder in to the sacred action that he has painted high above them on the surface of the dome, he depicts it as if it were actually occurring there as the congregation would see it from the floor of the church, with all figures as if from below, 'di sotto in su'. We see the face very foreshortened from the chin with the one knee protruding before the breast. This gives the impression as if the Virgin Mary could be lying on the clouds as if between the pillows of a bed. The entire image does not sustain an impression of dignity or what we might call 'composure', but it does achieve the intention the highest degree of illusionism. All of us who see this painting experience the action.

8.

In the north-eastern part of Italy, Venice and the adjacent provinces, where the medieval period had seen more influence from Byzantine art than in central Italy, the large, enthroned figure of the Virgin Mary rising to heaven was never as prominent as in Florence or Siena, although examples can be found portraying the subject in a similar way. An important stage in the development within this region is found in the fresco from the early career of Andrea Mantegna, 1450-1460. In the same church of the Eremitani in Padua, where he and his associates from the school of Francesco Squarcione painted the legends of St. James and St. Christopher, he painted *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary* on the two sides of the rear wall, a relatively narrow, vertical image between two windows, undeniably not the best

lighting.[37] The Apostles are seen standing below, following the hovering Virgin Mary with their eyes. She is standing on the clouds within the almond-shaped gloriole, surrounded by many small child-angels, fresh and convivial in the manner of the Paduan school. She stands straight, shown from the front, her gaze directed upward, the mouth slightly open and the arms extended to the sides with open hands. This pose has certain similarities to the early fresco in St. Clement's in Rome. I do not believe that it has a counterpart in earlier medieval or Renaissance art in central Italy. Apparently Mantegna adopted the motif from the early Christian tradition of figures in adoration, expressing their entreaty with raised or straight extended hands. These motifs are already known from the paintings and sarcophagus-carvings in the Roman catacombs and were common in Byzantine art. In Byzantine and Romanesque art the Virgin Mary was often shown in such poses, such as in relief-carvings and mosaics in St. Mark's in Venice. In 1380, Giusto Padovano had already painted the Virgin Mary of the assumption standing with her open hands raised to the shoulder level with her fingers extended straight. He left her standing completely straight without raising the face or gaze. The innovation in Mantegna's figure lies precisely in the upward direction of the head and gaze. Our impression is that the problem of depicting the backward turned head foreshortened from below interested Mantegna as much as the religious and poetic content of the expression. He was an artist who always shows a particular fascination for perspective and the foreshortening of figures, apparent also in other parts of this painting.

The artist does reveal a certain apprehensiveness about the pose of the Virgin Mary. Her legs are natural and correct with the figure standing primarily on the one foot, but the strict symmetry of her upper body seems measured and calculated.

From Padua to Venice is no more than a very short trip! Since Titian had already painted three frescoes in the Scuola del Santo in Padua in 1511, requiring an extended stay, there can be no doubt that he was familiar with Mantegna's *Assumption of the Virgin Mary* in the Eremitani when he painted his large and powerful *Assumption* in the Frari in Venice. I cannot tell whether there might be other historical intermediaries between this painting by Titian and Mantegna who was nearly sixty years older, examples that might have fed Titian's imagination. In any case, the relation between the *Assunta* by Mantegna and that by Titian is unusually instructive for the development of the expression we are tracing. Their pose is essentially the same, standing with extended arms and the head bent upward. With Titian, nothing remains of the apprehensive calculation and symmetry, nothing to draw attention to the artistic challenges. His sensitivity and imagination were able to make the leap into the pure and perfect female, shown

[37] It is not unanimously accepted as fact that Mantegna was the Squarcione student to have painted *The Assumption* in the chapel. I do believe however that both his treatment of it and the unique perspective of the figures of the Apostles are easily recognizable.

standing here like the Virgin Mary just a short flight and a few moments from the anticipated blessings of heaven, her figure in all of its elements down to the smallest finger. In doing so, he knocked the spark out of the traditional ritual image and took complete control of the illusion.

Indeed, the pose is completely natural. The Virgin Mary is not hovering here as Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* for instance. She is standing on the cloud moving her upwards as securely as if it were a marble pedestal. The miracle does not reside in her pose, but in the cloud that functions in this way. There is also a momentary quality in her movements. An anticipation of what she will experience next seems to draw her face and gaze upward, she sees God and the glory of heaven above, stepping quickly forward for the heel of the rear foot to rise away from the surface of the cloud, tempestuously spreading her arms and opening her hands with a sense of passion. Of course there is a sense of surprise and marvel at what she sees, exactly as with Fra Bartolommeo in Berlin, yet Titian conceived the theme more profoundly and in its crucial factors. What he depicts above all is the powerful desire of the female spirit and its instinctive urge to embrace. Unlike the archaically stiff figure by Mantegna, Titian introduces a light and completely natural spiralling movement into the pose with the turning motion underscored by that of the draperies.

It was very fortunate for the painting by Titian that in keeping with the tradition of his native area, he was to paint the Virgin Mary standing and not seated as in the central Italian manner. When seated, a certain part of the body remains completely passive and the lower half does not partake in the same expression as the upper body. The standing pose brings out more energy, sends a stronger stream of emotion through the whole of the figure to yield a more cohesive and collected impression. We can sense this in the comparison of the standing figure by Titian to the seated figure by Correggio. The sudden outburst of joy is exactly as strong in Correggio, yet Titian's figure exudes a far more distinctive active and personal will. This is what makes Titian's painting the most splendid efflorescence in the art-historical development of this theme, its perfection after centuries of preparation. As we have seen, the medieval assumption-figures were completely passive. It was up to the beholder to realize that God had shown them the grace of bringing them to heaven while the figure itself did not express this. Even the folded hands were nothing more than a very extrinsic sign of the adoration in their heart. They were vacant (*De vare udtryksløse*) – since the expression is only generated by the visible play of mutually antagonistic forces, passivity and activity. The passive aspect arises of its own accord and in its own way in each human figure, even those by Titian. He was after all the great painter of bodily substance, the flesh and those things subject to gravity. We can even feel this in *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary*, where the figure has more earthly corporeality, more 'flesh and blood' than the earlier examples. All of this nonetheless succumbs to the overwhelming upward movement. This figure of the Virgin Mary is not satisfied to be pulled by an invisible force, but it is her own will, and we see it.

It is obvious and incontestable that the Renaissance here fulfilled the artistic idea and goal of the medieval Christian examples, that it gave full expression to what was intended but not achieved by its predecessors. Since we are dealing here with the greatest works by Titian and Correggio that cannot possibly be omitted for any interpretation of the Renaissance, it should be instructive to those who consider the Renaissance to have been antique and pagan in its essence. If it is in any way possible to attach religious qualities to a painted figure, then the *Assunta* by Titian would be described as including more personal religion than the medieval versions. While the earlier paintings only have meaning for the beholder familiar with the dogma of the assumption, the painting by Titian tears them along with it without a prompter, perhaps even turning them into a proselyte. This is true of the painted figure. It is another question of course whether the artist who created it or the period depicting it was in any way more pious than the medieval predecessor, and if such a perfect expression allows us to assume a difference on the part of the artist. We might even ask if a slight trace of something alien has not crept in, something that had not occurred to the medieval period which it did not wish to express even if it could, namely this activity, this self-will which is only fulfilled in the expression. There can be no doubt that medieval art also wished to do so, but it did not accentuate it since it was not appropriate to its religiosity. In comparison to earlier versions, Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin Mary* has a quality recalling the Titans storming Mount Olympus, although of course the specifically Christian element is not lost, her spirit is love just as her upward surging movement is similar to a flame. While Donatello or Andrea della Robbia had more of the maternal love in relation to the community in mind, the feeling in Titian's figure has more of an erotic flair. She is beloved of heaven.

This is where the development reaches its climax, which as we have seen, occurred approximately simultaneously both in Venice and central Italy. In the chronological moment we now reach, the upward gazing expression also triumphed in a number of other themes, most marvellously the *St. Cecilia* by Raphael, dated 1514, now in Bologna, forgetting the earthly music as she hears that from the heavens. Art-historically though, another painting by Raphael is more instructive in this context, and this is *The Transfiguration* now in the Pinacoteca Vaticana. Other painters such as Fra Angelico and Giovanni Bellini had depicted the moment of Transfiguration on the mountain top in a standing pose gazing straight forward with arms extended. In 1519 however, Raphael composed his version with Christ extending his arms with raised, open hands, eyes and faced looking upward while hovering behind the mountain.[38] It cannot be claimed that the upward movement is

[38] Raphael also treated the theme of *The Transfiguration* far earlier in some ways anticipating the large version now in the Vatican. This is a small painting, remarkably enough associated with Giotto, including the imprint of Giotto though not by him. It is in the Accademia in Florence, one of a series of small paintings of the Life of Christ in clover-shaped frames. Christ rises his hands upwards with the palms half forward and half outward. By contrast though, the gaze is only slightly raised, It also seems to have been the artist's intention for

a necessary element for this theme. It is not called for as in *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary*. It instead satisfied the emotional trend of the time, its heightened predilection for subjective movement, for seeing Christ in this context as with an internal impulse both spiritual and physical, leading him upwards, disconnected from the earth. Rising phenomena, both physical and spiritual, became very popular themes during the following period.

Now that we have reached the peak of the mountain in terms of the historical development, we can return downhill, and to simplify matters fill in certain interesting episodes in greater detail, chosen freely from my studies of the subject. I have nothing further to add about Italian art itself. The Italian museums and churches include a large number of 16th and 17th century paintings of *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary* all of them with the expression of the raised gaze. Once the flame took hold, we can see how it spread, but the flame is faint in comparison to Titian and Correggio. It is as if the fuel were exhausted with only a glint continuing over the ashes. No other artist arose in Italy who could measure up to the old masters, at least with such a theme. Everything has its day. After Homer there were other poems written on the subject of the Iliad, but they were not written as well. In the Alte Pinakothek in Munich [Inv. 446], *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary* by Guido Reni is unusually dull. Her pose is still approximately the same as with Titian, but completely lacking in will or energy. Particularly in the 17th century, we find other themes that inspired intimacy and truth in the expression of the upward gaze. We think of *St. Francis in Prayer* by Cigoli in the Uffizi [Inv. P419] in Florence or Daniele Crespi's *Madonna with the Dead Christ* in the Prado [no. 128].

9.

Just as in Italy, the death and assumption of the Virgin Mary had been a common subject for late medieval art. In the course of time, even before the Reformation, nearly every element with a supernatural association had been removed from scenes of *The Death of the Virgin Mary*, and all that remained was the image of a pious aging Christian woman on her death bed surrounded by her beloved and abiders, apt to something like a hospital surrounded by all the accoutrements of domestic life, making a believable and homelike impression. This is one example of the goal of eliminating exaggerated religious notions and internalization of a true piety, the actual essence of the Reformation, but by no means original to the Reformation, in fact quietly at work long before its arrival.

The Assumption of the Virgin Mary was also shown frequently elsewhere, but with no comparable significance to Italy in terms of size, place and outward effect. The earlier independent, national arts of northern Europe did not cultivate the trend toward an aesthetic-religious adulation of the monumental human figure that Italy had inherited from or at least shared with antiquity.

Christ to be hovering, the pose shows too little balance to suggest he is standing, but that much is clear.

Outside of Italy, the standing assumption-type was the common one, and the artistic treatment of the Virgin Mary experienced a development similar to Italy. In the 13th and 14th centuries, the pose was still archaically stiff, but later on during the development of naturalism, after about 1400, certain details tended to be done after nature. However, the northern countries do not show the slightest tendency toward the pose with upward gaze. In spite of the fact that it would seem to be an almost necessary corollary to the idea inherent in the theme, the northern nations did not follow it. We mention only a few examples made during the time that the gothic style dominated all of northern Europe concurrent with the High Renaissance in Italy. First the excellent carved altarpiece in the Briefkapelle of St. Mary's in Lübeck, inscribed 1518, the same year as Titian's *Assunta*, then the famous oak choir stalls in the cathedral of Amiens carved by Jean Turpin 1508-1522. Both depict *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary* as a relatively small figure among many others while Italian art preferred monumentality of the individual. She folds her hands completely passively, laid together, on her breast, looking straight forward, not in the least upward but even rather lowered. This reveals most clearly something confirmed in a hundred other ways, namely how little northern European art was able to discover on its own what we might call the magnetic attraction of one figure by another figure or force. Particularly in the Germanic countries, but northern Europe in general had no good eye for this effect. Indeed, that would probably never have changed if Italian art had not brought northern Europe under its strong intellectual and emotional influence.

Forceful Italian models arrived, known in the northern countries as the Renaissance. As an example for one of the earliest depictions of *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary* in northern European renaissance art we mention a small marble relief in the Louvre in Paris from a French church, dated to the first third of the 16th century. The Virgin Mary is seen below and again above rising toward heaven as a naked female figure clothed only by a thin wafting drapery. She lightly treads on the clouds with her folded hands held forward. The head is damaged, but we can still discern the fact that she was looking upward. In passing, this is the only image of the Virgin Mary I have seen as a grown woman naked or lightly draped. The traditional conception of the soul as a naked or lightly covered child seems to have merged here with the modern, emancipated predilection for the female nude coming from Italy.

The French were more easily able to adopt the sense of the new movement from Italy. Within the Netherlands, the free, intense and expressive Italian sculpture brought a superficial and derivative quality. When rendered there, it was awkward and often forced in a pointless way. Rubens became the first to completely appropriate the secrets of the magnetic expression in the 17th century, under the strong and manifold Italian influence to be sure, but with a very Flemish and distinctly Rubensian individuality. For the high altars of large churches, he even painted *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary* many times in the Italian manner, including for the colossal gothic cathedral of Antwerp. Of all 17th century paintings

of this theme, his versions are certainly the most superb. In terms of force and power of expression, Rubens is second to none. In painting this theme however, he does not approach the earlier Italians Correggio and Titian. Possibly with an influence from Correggio or Andrea del Sarto, the altarpiece in Antwerp shows the Virgin Mary seated on the clouds, lowering with her left hand opened in a gesture of adoring devotion and touching her chest with the right. Her gaze and the direction of her entire body moves laterally upward at an angle. It is magnificent, splendorous and festive but not with intimate or deep feeling.

Aside from *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary*, Rubens was among the most remarkable and excellent admirers of the upward gazing expression. If we were to decide which period in the entire history of art was most gratified by the expression of gazing heavenward, it would clearly be the 17th century. The age of Rubens and Bernini revelled in this sort of effusiveness. With the Jesuit order setting the tone, later polemical Catholicism cultivated such constant turns toward heaven and inundation of emotion both with a serious, glowing devotion as well as in terms of soft, female sentimentality. During the 17th century, the Netherlandish and Spanish artists were superior to the Italians.

We can pick a few heavenly roses planted by him in every museum with numerous paintings by Rubens. In Berlin for instance, we see *St. Cecilia* seated at her organ [Inv. 781]. She is as heavy and fat as all women by Rubens, but the rapture eats her internally like a secret worm with her cheeks aflame with frenzy, and her blank, glassy gaze gushing through all seven heavens as if she were greeting the angels above with her smile. The pagan female figure of Andromeda [Inv. 785] in the same museum appears healthier and more beautiful in her pose chained naked to the rock, exposed to all frights but now looking upward toward her liberation with the attractive expression of fresh hope in her teary eyes. Is it not remarkable that Rubens should have painted this pagan beauty radiating a greater expression of hope than St. Sebastian [Inv. 798H], the Christian martyr tied to a tree and suffering death from the arrows of the Roman soldiers? Can we believe our own eyes? Here on Christian soil, we confront something of the sombre indictment of the heavenly forces we had seen in the sculpture and paintings of late antiquity. Our thoughts are led especially to the so-called 'Head of the Dying Alexander' in Florence which we have mentioned already and could have been known to Rubens from his Italian sojourn. If similar phenomena did not occur in his other works, we might assume that Rubens, being very interested in and aware of ancient culture, was being careless in transferring a distinctly pagan expression to a Christian martyr. In his famous painting in the Antwerp museum, 'Le Christ à la paille' [Inv. 300], he shows the Virgin Mary beside the dead body of Christ, just removed from the cross. The mother is removing the cloth from the bloody and distorted face of Christ, raising her face with every muscle beating with pain, and eyes toward heaven as if to ask whether all of this torment and horror was necessary. This head is not only the finest in the entire painting, obviously of the greatest interest to the artist, it is among the most inspiring and superb works of painting to be seen anywhere,

marvellous and deeply moving in its expression of the emotions. Yet this expression does not involve much Christian devotion to God. The Virgin Mary here clearly objects to heaven for the deep wound to her maternal heart. In this sense, it is far more emancipated and indignant than the ancient head of Niobe, which is related in also depicting a mother robbed of her child by the gods. Yet the Virgin Mary by Rubens is not influenced in this way. Rubens was quite intelligent and psychologically insightful for his time and cannot be assumed to have erred in painting this expression. He is also considered to have been a particularly observant and orthodox Catholic, but how then could he paint the suffering mother of God with such an un-Christian expression?

Like all of its art, the 17th century invested the upward gaze primarily with pathos. It is the soul surging upward toward the light from deep and sombre depths of mourning or suffering. During that period, the expression was the domain of penitent sinners or suffering martyrs, above all Christ on the cross, examples of which we have already noted, or of the Virgin Mary mourning the death of Christ. Previously, in the 15th and still in the early 16th century, neither Christ on the cross nor the suffering Virgin Mary were shown in this way. The Rubens student Anthony van Dyck became an extraordinary master for paintings with such subjects. He had less the blood of Rubens but more sensitive nerves, and his deep as well as soft mellifluous sentiment might have satisfied his contemporaries more than any other artist and contributed to the character of the period. We can convince ourselves of this with a number of paintings in the Antwerp museum where we had last stopped for a painting by Rubens, particularly the large *Entombment* for the high altar of the Antwerp Beguines [Inv. 403].

The Virgin Mary has the character of a northern European noblewoman. She turns the refined and sharply chiselled features of her face up to the heavens, gesturing with her left hand as if to show the martyred and dead son to God. Her deep and swollen eyes send a glance (*Blik*) like a silvery white pulsing ray of moonlight, with a wistful emotion and faith as if the spirit had disengaged from the body and rose upward alone. It is beautiful and sublime, but so intense as to be extravagant. The bow is ready to snap but then itself goes limp. Following this time, in the second half of the century, the religion became soft and sentimental, bathing in sweet and blissful raptures after a complete immersion in the divine essence (*Guds Vaesen*).

As we know, Holland, the northern Netherlands, had embraced the reformed faith and in many ways parted ways with the older artistic traditions. In their art, the bourgeois aspect predominated with less space allocated to ecclesiastical or more properly, biblical subjects, and our expression appeared less frequently. Even here though, the general intellectual trend of the 17th century left its traces. Among the compositions of Rembrandt, we must primarily note his *Ascension of Christ* in the Alte Pinakothek Munich [Inv. 398(328)], one of his few New Testament subjects commissioned 1663 from Frederick Hendrick, Prince of Orange. This ascending Christ standing on a cloud could be described with

something of the same words as the figure of the assumption by Titian in Venice. The similarity is striking enough to conjecture that Rembrandt might have known of the Titian composition in one way or another. This of course cannot suggest any dependent imitation, and the difference between the two figures is no less remarkable than their similarity. This is partly due to the fact that the Dutch painter has nothing of the sculptural sense of beauty like the Italian. His Christ is as much a Dutchman as he himself in his heavy and ungainly build with no attractions in the contours and movements. Yet Rembrandt was also pursuing a different goal than the Venetian, and in terms of the upward directed expression, the small figure still holds its own beside the large one by Titian. The son of God spreads his arms in an impressively certain and solemn way, greeting heaven again with his eyes, his native place, with the victorious sense of having fulfilled his mission on the earth.

German and English 17th century art are nearly completely irrelevant in our connection, and that most remarkable and independent of the French, we speak of religious art and the new rational classicism of Nicolas Poussin, was in no way amenable to the expression we are tracing. Spanish painting and sculpture by contrast is very important to this history. The native area of Loyola, Saint Theresa and Miguel Molinos was the primary boiling plate for the ecstatic and fanatical or sentimental religiosity, something to which 17th century Spanish art adequately testifies. It is striking that the greatest of all Spanish artists, Diego Velázquez, who painted more than a little religious imagery never actually used this expression.[39] This is particularly telling for such a proud and yet prosaic artist compared to his entire period. He went through life wearing a victor's cloak of intellectual sobriety and truth that remained impenetrable to all of the sulphurous fire and smoke surrounding him. Other than that though, who counted the stars in the heavens and counted the examples of an upward gaze in Spanish art? In the works of the hot, dry and brittle Ribera or the honest and devout Zurbarán or in the poetic and amiable Murillo, to say nothing of the others. The upward expression in Spanish art is primarily effective because of the concentration of its gloomy depths rather than its bright side. There is a terrible and grand seriousness in a figure such as the kneeling, praying monk by Zurbarán, London National Gallery [no. 230], with his face deeply shaded by his hood, calling to the lord out of the depths, 'de profundis clamari' as in Psalm 130. Why is it that the breath of the spirit, if we can call it that, is rarely completely pure in Spanish art? In a well-known carved wooden figure by Alonso Cano *St. Francis* stands as stiff as a beam, his hands stuck into the sleeves of his robe, rigidly fixing his eyes to heaven, almost as if spiritually broken like a failing light. That breath can also be expressed in a cosier way, more like the fine whiff of incense in the beautiful emotional imaginations of Murillo, but it is almost never completely free, healthy and good to inhale.

[39] The only figure by Velázquez to possibly be considered in this regard is the aged hermit Paul, the hoary hermit in the desert looking up toward the raven bringing the bread with the touching purity and innocence of age returned to a state of childhood, Madrid, Prado [no. 1169]. This is not heaven, but rather the raven, but spiritually he is looking further.

Once when I was contemplating the selected masterpieces of painting in the Salon Carré of the Louvre together with a witty friend, including the so-called Madonna du Maréchal Soult by Murillo [Inv. 927], the famous painting of the Virgin Mary standing on the crescent of the moon among the nightly clouds, hands crossed on her chest and the innocent eyes raised upward, herself a heavenly vision yet filled with passion for something more elevated, my friend said upon leaving the room that it is actually like what we would find on a chocolate wrapper.[40] It would need to be excellent chocolate to be wrapped in a paper such as this. Being older than my friend and not as acclimatized to modernism, I could never indulge in such an association. At our place in history I do not believe that his feeling is terribly unusual, and believe that I can actually understand it. Although it is indeed not his best work and in fact a bit saccharine, this is not only due to the great Spanish artist, but to the busy sinners decorating chocolate wrappers, match boxes and cigarette containers with female beauties who also like to look heavenward, a characteristic that has devolved to a sort of sugar or chocolate of female attractions. If we were to collect them all, it would be a large number, and not all of them belong to this lower category of expression. However many examples of later art we might know, it will always be no more than a selection. I do fear not to exaggerate however if I claim that no expression of the upward gaze in the last two hundred years can compare to the greatest examples such as the Titian *Assunta*, Raphael's *St. Cecilia* or the *Mater dolorsa* by Rubens or Van Dyck. What should those who are reminded of advertising by Murillo's Madonna think of *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary* by Pierre-Paul Prud'hon in the Louvre [Inv. 7339]? Prud'hon who must indeed be counted among the most brilliant artists of the last two centuries.

The history of art is clear. This expression had its time and past periods do not return. The truth though is that the expressive upward gaze always includes a mythological element whether it appears in a pagan or a Christian context. It is based on the idea that in a purely physical sense, the deity, perfection or beatitude exists above. There is no doubt that this conception is deeply rooted in humanity and has solid psychological reasons. There is therefore also no doubt that it consistently affects our emotions with an unusual force, and that the art that built on it will never be obsolete. It is an idea that is nonetheless not exclusively religious, but also partly mythological. Therefore, the upward directed gaze expresses not so much religion as what we might call impatient human idealism. We are possessed by an ideal urge, hopeful and faithful, that ultimately everything will improve and brighten. This is the idealism of reality, work, time and will. Visual arts on the other hand see everything within the moment and provide the perfect translation for the impatient idealism wishing to see the goal achieved. This even if it is only an illusionary anticipation needing to rest along the way to allow a sigh to rise to the heavens and allow the eyes to follow toward that great, bright and open playground

[40] This painting is interpreted as *The Immaculate Conception* in light of the Revelation of St. John.

of the imagination. It remains effective as long as the steam is still working within its container. When it escapes and becomes audible and visible it no longer has its effect.

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