

From *Dots* to *Atoms*: “Light and Color” Techniques in Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries’ Painting

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ABSTRACT

The present contribution discusses the latest outcomes of a research in the history and in the criticism of Early Modern Art, with a focus on the development of colored ‘dotted’ patterns. Given that the so-called ‘Primitives’ Tuscan Masters, such as Alesso Baldovinetti and Giovanni di Paolo, were particularly skilled in the use of this peculiar technique, which is found especially embodied in tempera works produced in the course of the fifteenth Century, this research line can be also extended to artistic practices operated in the subsequent Century. In fact, it is possible to establish a ‘European paradigm’ in this regard, and to track the development of dotted techniques also in *Cinquecento* illumination, whence the presence of such details becomes also a subject in the artistic literature. Artists who have had a central role in the export, and in the development of this ‘style’ (Baldovinetti, Giovanni di Paolo, Attavante, Antonio de Hollanda) will be presented and addressed throughout the present study. Notes and historical fragments will be here discussed for the reading and the analysis of ‘punctuation’ manners, and for a future historical turn in the understanding, and the knowledge of those “raffinate technologies” used for coloring purposes.

KEYWORDS Dots, Illumination, Baldovinetti, Highlights, Attavante, Choir Books, Authorship

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1. Introduction

The custom of 'painting with dots', so the actual presence of 'dottily' techniques and patterns in the art of Early Renaissance Masters is analysed in the present contribution. The focus is placed on the possible connections, in light of this, between artists active in the execution of easel and mural painting works, and those active in miniature art works over the period and up to the first decades of the sixteenth Century. The present study invites scholars in art history with an interest into the 'science of color' to reconsider, as a consequence of the emergence of such visual elements, the tribute of authorship related to the artists and their works of art, as well as their influence and place of relief in the history of the circulation of visual models among European Countries, and trading routes.

By showing and tracking the developments of 'dotted' techniques in the fifteenth and sixteenth Centuries, this study aims to highlight the process in its own historical period of formation. The aim is that to recover, precisely, the degree of uniqueness with regard to the use of dots in *Quattrocento*, and up to *Cinquecento* art, with supporting material evidences. In *Quattrocento* painting, as this study wishes to demonstrate, the dots appear as being especially adopted to represent flickering highlights over the edges of laminate surfaces, and over fabrics and precious details covering bodies, or to give a rhythmic, 'textile-like' design to rocky landscapes.

2.1 Art Criticism, 'Pointillisme', and Early Modern Art

In order to provide a context of reference in the criticism and in the theory of art for such a captivating, yet very complex subject matter as it is the description of light and the decorative details made with pure 'stippled' color notes, it is essential to start with an article published by Roger E. Fry in 1911. His case exemplifies clearly how art historians have dealt at first with the interpretation of the use of 'dots' in earlier art. In Fry's words, the coloring technique visible in a *Profile female Portrait* made by the Tuscan Master Alesso (Alessio) Baldovinetti – further analysed in the present study – resounds as an early form of *pointillisme*, as follows: "Here the whole of the modelling of the high lights upon the flesh is effected by the use of innumerable small dots of light [...] and, so far as I am aware, neither Paolo Uccello nor Piero della Francesca ever used Baldovinetti's *pointilliste* method" (Fry 1911, Fig. 1).

Fry confirmed the *Portrait's* authorship on the basis of his own observation of a "constellation of minute dots of light [and] colour", smoothly applied on the painted surface, allegedly, likewise as in a Seurat's large Neo-impressionist

canvas, as something never seen before, nor characterizing the works made by other leading artists active alongside Baldovinetti.

Thus, at the very beginning of the twentieth Century and henceforth, the use of 'dots' in fifteenth Century painting has been interpreted as a visual device for the expression of plastic values comparable in technique to the color handling showed by Modernist Masters, and especially by the Neo-Impressionists. With regard to the legitimacy and substantiality of such a comparison, it is worthy to refer to the comments made afterwards by Ruth W. Kennedy in her monograph on Baldovinetti, where a fundamental distinction is drawn between the modernistic, and the fifteenth and sixteenth Centuries' meticulous applications of dots on the material supports: "Signac and Seurat have familiarized modern eyes with this convention of representing by dots or "points" the effect of the rays of light falling on a reflective surface, but in the Quattrocento it was unique. However representational the device was in principle, Baldovinetti, as always, handled it in a decorative way, so that the constellations of dots became patterns in themselves. The separate identity of each dot is maintained by its very distinctness and solidity of form, thus tending to prevent the fusion of images demanded by exact Pointilliste theory" (Kennedy 1938).

A great display of inventiveness and intuition had then characterized the reams of ink written by the critics in the twentieth Century to outline the fundamental connections noticed between Early 'Primitives' painters, and the modernistic ones. Though those valuable efforts have been crucial in revealing the artistry and the seriousness of contemporary Masters, this has nonetheless fostered the making of audacious associations that nowadays would need to be revised. In this literary context, also Fry's views would need to be seen and placed in their own historical background, as being part of a broader series of parallels grown-up within the academic literature, as well as within the current press, in the wake of the fortunate associations made among artists particularly in vogue [1]. It is not the main scope of this contribution to reconstruct again the events connected, for instance, to Bernard Berenson and Roberto Longhi's respective historiographical rediscoveries and readings of Piero della Francesca's feeling for nature, in line with Paul Cézanne's; in this light, it is enough to recall here that Longhi did not forget to make his references to "Seurat's dusty weighing" ("pesatura pulviscolare del Seurat") in his interpretation of the *Dream of Constantine* in Arezzo, or to celebrate the conjunction "via the atmospheric motes" of the rays of light projected onto the wall in the background with the luminous source visible in the *Senigallia Madonna* (Longhi 1927).

In twentieth Century criticism, the re-evaluation of these 'Primitives' Masters is done also on the background of the observations made about their sensibility for nature and landscape in a realistic mode, and therefore on the basis of their involvement in the development of a genre acquiring more autonomy and space, following models already established in Northern European art. Without steering off course from the subject of the present study, it might be useful to recall, for instance, that the term "*macchiaiolo*" was occasionally used to define other cases of 'dotted' luminous colorism visible in Early Master's art (Brieger et al. 1969).

2.2 Giovanni di Paolo and Alesso Baldovinetti: sources for a history of the 'dotted' handling of color in *Quattrocento* Art

The Sienese Master Giovanni di Paolo, in a way intriguingly similar to that showed by Baldovinetti, is found by Cesare Brandi displaying a very original treatment in his landscape details, defined in 1941 as a "*punteggiatura*" (punctuation, dotting), "a trace of big flour-like grains." (Brandi 1941b). In a study written by Maria Luisa Gengaro (1932), with whom Brandi ideally establishes a dialogue, the author interprets Giovanni di Paolo's art as being partly derived from Lorenzetti's art, and partly from the miniature works displayed in Franco-flemish *Books of Hours*: "[...] on a stylistic basis, it is possible to say that in Giovanni di Paolo it is manifested a principle of that tendency towards the deformation through means of light that will become the basis to any creation in modern art" (Gengaro 1932). The same is also noticed by Cesare Brandi, who writes that, inspired by the knowledge of illumination technique, Giovanni di Paolo translated in vernacular Tuscan painterly language the descriptive attitude of those pastoral tales usually flourishing in '*très riches heures*' Books (Brandi 1941a).

The characteristic white pebbles visible in Giovanni di Paolo's tempera panel scenes are also present in the *Entering of St. John the Baptist into the Wilderness* (1454, London National Gallery, Fig. 2), as well as in the *Baptism of Christ* (1454), a work of art that, in his composition, reminds of the same subject represented by Alesso Baldovinetti in one of the three panel depicted by him as a pupil to Fra Angelico, for the completion of Piero de' Medici's *Silver Chest* (1448-1452). The analogies discernible between the two Tuscan Masters do not simply belong to the general configuration of these small boards, but comparisons can be also made looking at their color handling of small figurative details: it is, in fact, possible to notice that the two have made use alike of 'small spots of paint', namely minute and bright touches of pure color in order to give the relief, and to suggest the roundness of specific objects. Baldovinetti's *Baptism*, apart from the

filigree of white dots decorating the borders of Christ's garments, shows again the bright spotted technique in the reflections of the highlights upon the stones and in the water (Fig. 3). This peculiar plastic conception, and treatment of color distributed as to suggest an effect of 'punctuation', also similarly comes up in the *Portrait* made by Baldovinetti (1465), and attributed to him by Roger Fry (1911). According to the British author, having initially made use of dots to achieve tone gradation, Baldovinetti would later develop a real obsession for the use of this color technique (Fig. 4). Besides miniature painting, a possible source of inspiration for this innovative use of painting with dots can be either found in the Primitives' knowledge of mosaic art [2] (Vasari 1958; Chastel 1954/55), and of powdered gold technique. With regard to the latter, 'shell' gold has marked a first step in the transition from lamina to pure color, and towards the use of gold "like any other colour" (Ames-Lewis 1984), for the advantages provided in terms of optical and tactile values' suggestions by the thin shape given to the raw material. In view of this discourse, Baldovinetti's London *Portrait*, while presenting gold leaf applied with an orange-colored mordant in the larger dots impressed on the dress, also shows a definitive innovation in the bright jewels depicted with pure stippled color notes [3], by means of which the artist obtained effects normally achieved by others with powdered gold, as it is visible, for instance, in Gentile da Fabriano's midwife robe in the *Adoration of the Magi*, or in Domenico Veneziano's *Madonna Berenson*, and in Jacopo Bellini *Madonna of Humility*'s mantle. With regard to the use of powdered gold technique, it is documented (Kennedy 1938) that Alesso Baldovinetti and Luca della Robbia – often working side by side in the same Florentine sites like Santa Trinita, and especially in San Miniato – made use of it in the golden backgrounds of the ovals, and in the interstices between the flower bouquets designed for the sepulcher of the Bishop Benozzo Federighi in Santa Trinita, Florence (about 1454). In modern criticism (Bartalini 1990), Alessio Baldovinetti is praised for his mastery of the "science of color", a feature that – as already noticed by Roger Fry (1911) – is traced back to his apprenticeship with Domenico Veneziano, and to his young panel scenes for Fra Angelico's *Armadio degli Argenti*: "In the Wedding at Cana (Fig. 5), he was seeking for intense effects of twinkling, and of luminous refraction in the metallic shine of the jugs, such as in the glass of the small windows; but not at all different, yet totally oriented towards the examples of the Veneziano, resulted the chromatic texture: made of large divisions of thick layers of colors, precious and varied, "raised" by white highlights and unified in a diffused light." In this critical context, the artist also emerges for his ability to capture within his paintings some of the optical values belonging to the art of Flemish Masters: "The dialogue that he had taken most

into consideration was that with the Flemish artists; and the perspicuousness, the painting all made of penumbra and optical "values" in the Annunciation [...] had now followed that direction." (Bartalini 1990). In addition to this, it has to be recorded that Baldovinetti worked for influential international patrons in the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal (Florence, San Miniato al Monte) in the years 1466-1468 (Poggi 1909), an extraordinary sepulcher-Chapel to which all the leading Masters available in Florence in 1459 (year of the death of Cardinal Jaime of Lusitania) were called to contribute. In the person of the Bishop of Algarve Alvaro Alfonso, the members of the Aviz Portuguese dynasty hired Alesso Baldovinetti in 1465 for the decoration of "tutti e vani della chappella" (Hart et al. 1964). Many studies confirm that the artists employed in the *impresa* were asked by their clients to work 'alla fiamminga', that is in the 'Flemish manner' [4], according to the artistic tastes of the patrons. (Apfeltadt 2000). In the critical evaluation of the optical values performed by Baldovinetti's mural paintings in the 'Portuguese' Chapel, many analogies have been found with the art of illumination "[...] you never see broad, confident brushstrokes, a large mass of chiaroscuro, because every aspect of light and color is achieved by minute strokes, gentle dabs of the brush, as though there were nothing but miniatures everywhere." (Londi 1907).

2.3 From Alesso Baldovinetti to Attavante degli Attavanti: sources for the 'miniaturized' style in Cinquecento European Illumination

In this respect, and with regard to the influences exercised by illumination practices in the development of "dotted" details in the years here considered, it is useful to record that especially in Florence and Siena a strong tradition in miniature art had flourished among easel painters from the fourteenth Century, with Lorenzo Monaco, Pacino di Buonaguida, Fra Angelico, and other Masters especially active within the Camaldolese Monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli based in Florence. At the time, the Florentine miniature style was much influenced by the novelties of the International Gothic, divulged in Florence by Gherardo Starnina who had returned from his Spanish sojourn in 1403 (Kanter 1994). Among the series of eighteen *Antiphonaries* (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Choir Books 1-19) produced and illuminated within the same Florentine Monastery since the late fourteenth Century (about 1368) [5], worthy of reconsideration are the possible inspirational motives for the decorations made in the Choir Book Ms. *Cor. Laur. 4*. This is the ultimate finished piece of the whole series, started in 1410 but only completed by the illustrious Florentine miniaturist Attavante degli Attavanti in 1505-06; the precious and beautiful scenes illuminated by Attavante have been

generally interpreted so far only as derivations from the manner of Ghirlandaio (Levi d'Ancona 1995), who had realized the miniature in *f. 16r*, ms. Ross.1192, Vatican Apostolic Library. However, in the general scheme of the compositions, and in the details of the decorations a filiation from Alesso Baldovinetti's art of painting can be guessed and so it is here proposed; such a plausible connection has never been mentioned, nor guessed, in the major studies about the *Choir Books*. If a comparison is made, in fact, between several folios from the Ms. Choir Book 4 and Baldovinetti's larger works, these assumptions appear as to be clearly consistent, as follows: a) a first case in this regard is found in the opening full-page miniature of the folio 1v (Fig. 6), closely resembling the general composition of Baldovinetti's *Holy Trinity* (Fig. 7), especially in the design of the almond-shaped putti surrounding the Holy Trinity (Fig. 8); b) in the folios 18v (*Christ among The Apostles*), 33v (*The Call of Peter*, Fig. 9), and 43v (*The Feeding of the Multitude*, Fig. 10), a general orchestration for the depicted soils can be observed, together with the characteristic dotted pebbles, similar to that already found in the small panels made by Baldovinetti, and Giovanni di Paolo (Fig. 11); c) in the folios 7v (*The Procession*, Fig. 12), and 56v (*The Cleansing of the Temple*, Figs. 14, 16), the coloring and the treatment of the columns, and of the floor follow Baldovinetti's very personal imitation of granite and marble-like surfaces, as visible in both his *Annunciations* (Portuguese Chapel, Fig. 13; Uffizi Gallery, Fig. 15;), and in the surviving mural fragments from the decorative frescoes of the Church of St. Egidio; d) finally, the striking threadlike calligraphies of the beards in the two artists can be reasonably associated (*f. 1v. oculi with Prophets*, Fig. 17). A very captivating one, is the account of Attavante's artistic personality offered by Paolo D'Ancona, in his study of a humanistic manuscript kept at the Biblioteca Corsiniana in Rome (1910). The profile of Attavante is given relying in particular on his calligraphy, and on his personal approach and carefulness in the execution of minute details such as hair and beards. In this study, Attavante is celebrated as "the one who has made the very noble art of the miniature express its last and most ornamented word" (D'Ancona 1910). The derivation of Attavante's decorations from Ghirlandaio is maintained by Mirella Levi d'Ancona (1993-94), who describes Attavante's executions of details as a clumsy manner, in opposition to Ghirlandaio's perfection: "Attavante depicts figures that fall, deprived of any gravity and anatomy; on the contrary, Ghirlandaio's figures are solidly attached to the ground, and anatomically correct." (Levi d'Ancona 1993-94). A different source of inspiration for these miniatures, as it is supposed here, can be the reason behind the differences noted between Ghirlandaio and Attavante. In this respect, the artistic personality of

Attavante results aligned with that tradition of experimental artists taking licenses and distance from absolute perfection, more imaginative also in the conception of anatomical structure; the same is told of Paolo Uccello, for instance, by Lionello Venturi in 1930 [6]; similarly, in fact, Levi d'Ancona writes that the hands made by Attavante show a lack of bones structure. Attavante's art can therefore be seen as having a special place, and many points of contact with the artistic experimentations in techniques here outlined that, starting with Gentile da Fabriano, continued with Fra Angelico, Domenico Veneziano, Alessio Baldovinetti. In view of this, the sublime Benedictine fresco cycle of the so-called *Chiostro degli Aranci* (Florence, Badia) can be listed as another potential source for the representation and the 'literal' placement of dotted highlights in landscape details (Fig. 18). The complex reconstruction (Chiarini 1963) of the critical events linked to the attribution of this fundamental Florentine fresco cycle showed that Roberto Longhi was the first to ascribe it entirely to "Giovanni di Consalvo Portoghese" (João Gonçalves of Portugal), an artist recorded to be in Florence active alongside Fra Angelico's workshop in 1435, in his milestone account *Fatti di Masolino e Masaccio* (1940) [7].

The case of Attavante's 'miniaturized' graphic manner might not be a completely isolated trace of a figurative tradition taking inspiration from Baldovinetti's art; in fact, a case in this light it is found already in two full-page illustrations of the "*Divine*" *Comedy*, made in Florence (post-1458) for the so-called 'Pseudo-Boccaccio', the ms. Ricc. 1028 (Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana) [8]. The good reputation accorded to this manuscript, starting with Luigi Rigoli's account (1829, Warren Vernon 1846), as a precious testimony of the work of letters done on the "*Divine*" *Comedy*, is very much of high impact, especially for the consideration given to the the two full-page pen drawings made as a decoration to this *Chiose* manuscript. Marisa B. Rotiroti (2008) has reported that the two folios presenting illustrations are additions posterior to the completion of the copy of the main text. The Ms. Ricc. 1028 is included among those manuscripts (about 130 in number) written in the so-called "scrittura mercantesca" (merchant handwriting), and among those non-professional copies of the several Commentaries on the "*Divine*" *Comedy* available in circulation, and on the market, as an act of testimony to the interest showed by the "minute people" for this text (Pomaro 1990). It is possible to identify the Ms. Ricc. 1028 with the *Chiose* belonging to the "Libreria Segni" (Branca 1958, Fig. 19), and particularly to Piero Segni, a Florentine erudite and Academic of the Accademia della Crusca known as 'Agghiacciato'. [9].

2.4 Between Italy and Portugal: luminous 'dots' and diaphanous 'atoms' in Cinquecento European Illumination

In her illuminating survey on the Florentine Miniature of the Renaissance, Annarosa Garzelli (1985) writes about the involvement of Attavante in the Medici patronage for the completion of humanistic codes. The artistic personality of Attavante is perfectly inscribed among the 'avant-gardist' of his epoch, for his works seem to recover both the tradition of the Florentine 'Flemish' fashion ('*fiamminghismo*', as showed in the Toledo, Ohio, *Madonna*), as well as that of copying and citing excerpts from contemporary grand-scale painting: "We have often [...] pointed out the ease shown by the miniaturist, and at the same time his interest in bringing occasionally on the illuminated page, though never for mere imitation purposes, not just the figurative excerpts, but entire works realized by the Florentine colleagues in the large dimensions." (Garzelli 1985). Just as Baldovinetti before him in San Miniato al Monte [10], Attavante was hired – possibly, with the favour of the Florentine merchants – to complete important artistic commissions for the Portuguese Royals. Attavante is, in fact, responsible for the decoration of the so-called *Lisbon Bible* (about 1494, Wohl 2017), made for Dom Manuel I, ruler from 1495 to 1521, and brother to Queen Eleanor of Portugal (1458-1525), in which he directly cites the Monument from the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal, Florence (Garzelli 1985, pl. 829).

Meanwhile, the miniaturist Antonio de Hollanda (about 1485 – 1557-58) is active at the court of Dom Manuel (1495-69, Bury 1984) and of his sister Eleanor, and he would have also worked later at the service of the Infante Dom Fernando, brother of João III [11]. Dom Fernando commissioned the decoration of the famous manuscript known as the *Portuguese Genealogy* for the Aviz House, initiated by Antonio in 1530, and completed by Alexander and Simon Bening. With exception for the figures, the designs made by Antonio de Hollanda have left a free hand for the display of the inventions made by Simon Bening, who has made use of golden threads in the borders (Ainsworth 2003).

Francisco de Hollanda, probably Antonio second-born son [12], in his treatise *Da Pintura Antigua* (I, 1548, XLIV- *Di tutti i generi e modi del dipingere*) and in his fourth *Roman Dialogue* (1548), describes his father's illumination as a new '*Miniaturmalerei*' – simultaneously developed in Italy by Giulio Clovio –, a very original miniature painting made of particular thin 'dots' called "atoms" ("Vi yo en las obras de iluminación de don Julio unos ciertos puntos que yo llamo atomos a manera de velos texidos, que parecen una niebla echada por encima de la pintura", de Holanda 1548-

, p. 106) that give to the parchment a certain veiled and smoky appearance, of admirable perfection and grace, worthy of praise such as the "great Tuscan manner" (Smith 1964) celebrated by Vasari and – in his view – totally accomplished with Michelangelo (Hirst 1988, Johannides 1992).

Francisco de Hollanda's account is – so far – the first written source with a critical comment, and a description of at least one among the various 'dotted' effects produced by Early, and Full Renaissance Masters, with a focus on book illumination. However, at the time it would not have been yet possible for him to elaborate a systematic approach in the distinguishing of the several 'dotted' manners put in operation in earlier art, such as those seen throughout the present study.

2.5 Conclusions

A fundamental connection between artists and their patrons active in Florence, and in Portugal – as well as in and from Flanders – is being highlighted in the present study, in order to 'map' the diffusion across Europe of dotted techniques in the decades here at issue. In light of this, a last clarification it is to be made with regard to the nature of the support for such objects as illuminated Manuscripts.

When speaking of dotted patterns in miniature painting and decoration, it is useful to distinguish whether the relief is actually effected by the *ready-made* nature of the support interacting with the figures depicted as flat, or instead by the actual visual definition and treatment of the forms represented, as it is the case with Attavante's decorations here discussed. In fact, as often in miniature art, the parchment can be "unneutral", for the background on which the illustrations are made appears as having already a "materialized" texture of its own. In some cases, so, the support is found as being articulated with a grain, and with 'points' texturizing the miniated page, showing properties that would have been later also advantageously used by Georges Seurat in his *frottage* technique paper works, made on *Michallet* sheets.

Nonetheless, what has been pursued and achieved by the Neo-Impressionists, and the Divisionists in the nineteenth century needs to be fairly distinct from the dotted pattern used and developed by fifteenth and sixteenth Century artists. The French chromoluminarists aimed at the scientific synthesis of color tones, following Chevreul's (1839), and the subsequent theories of simultaneously perceived colors, while in Early Masters' art the dots do not undergo a process of visual blending, nor serve as a pure means of coloring. They do coexist with the *disegno*, while enhancing the plastic qualities of the objects

depicted, reproducing their material interactions with the light.

To conclude, in the case of early art the colored spots do not neglect the image, nor act as its substitute. Yet, the similarities showed between the artists in the *procedimento* (method) attached to the creation of the color particles in the visual definition of an object are still fascinating. As it is pointed out in the present study, and with special regard to Baldovinetti's critical fortune, comparisons made between the visual properties of the colorism handled by early Masters, and the optical researches made in nineteenth century's luminism, have at least allowed for the rediscovery, and the general acknowledgement of the absolute degree of technical updating and experimentation occurred in early modern European art.



Fig. 1: Alesso Baldovinetti, *Portrait of a Lady*, about 1465, tempera and oil on wood, London, National Gallery, detail, © The National Gallery, London



Fig. 2: Giovanni di Paolo, *Entering of St. John the Baptist into the Wilderness* (from the "Butler" predella), 1454, egg tempera on wood, London, National Gallery, © The National Gallery, London



Fig. 3: Alesso Baldovinetti, *The Baptism of Christ* (from Fra Angelico, *The Silver Chest*), 1450-52, tempera and gold leaf on panel, Firenze, Museo di San Marco, detail, © Photograph taken by the author

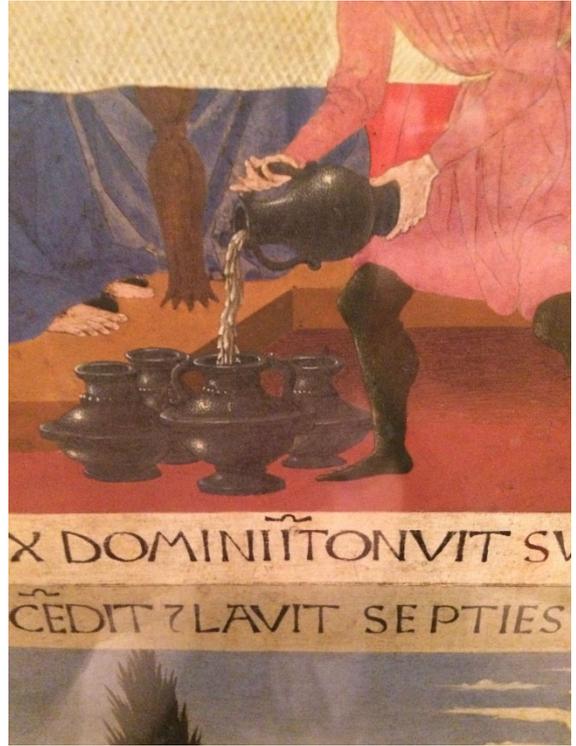


Fig. 5: Alesso Baldovinetti, *The Feast at Cana* (from Fra Angelico, *Silver Chest*), 1450-52, tempera and gold leaf on panel, Firenze, Museo di San Marco, detail, © Photograph taken by the author



Fig. 4: Alesso Baldovinetti, *The Nativity*, 1460-62, mural painting, Firenze, Cloister "dei Voti", Chiesa della Santissima Annunziata, detail, © Photograph taken by the author



Fig. 6: Attavante degli Attavanti, *The Holy Trinity*, f. 1v, Ms. Cor. Laur. 4 (mm 700x500), color on parchment, 1505-6, Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, detail, © Photograph taken by the author, with a special permission from the MiBAC. Any further reproduction by any means is strictly prohibited



Fig. 7: Alesso Baldovinetti, *The Holy Trinity and the Saints Benedetto and Giovanni Gualberto*, 1469-71, tempera on panel, Firenze, Galleria dell'Accademia, © Fototeca della Fondazione Zeri, Bologna



Fig. 9: Attavante degli Attavanti, *The Call of Peter*, f. 33v, Ms. Cor. Laur. 4 (mm 700x500), color on parchment, 1505-6, Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, detail, © Photograph taken by the author, with a special permission from the MiBAC. Any further reproduction by any means is strictly prohibited



Fig. 8: Attavante degli Attavanti, *The Holy Trinity*, f. 1v, Ms. Cor. Laur. 4 (mm 700x500), color on parchment, 1505-6, Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, detail, © Photograph taken by the author, with a special permission from the MiBAC. Any further reproduction by any means is strictly prohibited



Fig. 10: Attavante degli Attavanti, *The Feeding of the Multitude*, f. 43v, Ms. Cor. Laur. 4 (mm 700x500), color on parchment, 1505-6, Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, detail, © Photograph taken by the author, with a special permission from the MiBAC. Any further reproduction by any means is strictly prohibited



Fig. 11: Giovanni di Paolo, *The Baptism of Christ* (from the "Butler" predella), 1454, egg tempera on wood, London, National Gallery, detail, © The National Gallery, London



Fig. 13: Alesso Baldovinetti, *The Annunciation*, 1466-68, mural painting, Firenze, Cappella del Cardinale del Portogallo, Basilica di San Miniato al Monte, detail, © Fototeca della Fondazione Zeri, Bologna



Fig. 12: Attavante degli Attavanti, *The Procession*, f. 7v, Ms. Cor. Laur. 4 (mm 700x500), color on parchment, 1505-6, Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, detail, © Photograph taken by the author, with a special permission from the MiBAC. Any further reproduction by any means is strictly prohibited



Fig. 14: Attavante degli Attavanti, *The Cleansing of the Temple*, f. 56v, Ms. Cor. Laur. 4 (mm 700x500), color on parchment, 1505-6, Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, detail, © Photograph taken by the author, with a special permission from the MiBAC. Any further reproduction by any means is strictly prohibited



Fig. 15: Alessio Baldovinetti, *Annunciation*, about 1457, tempera on oak board, Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi, detail, © Photograph taken by the author



Fig. 17: Attavante degli Attavanti, *Prophet*, f. 1v, Ms. Cor. Laur. 4 (mm 700x500), color on parchment, 1505-6, Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, detail, © Photograph taken by the author, with a special permission from the MiBAC. Any further reproduction by any means is strictly prohibited



Fig. 16: Attavante degli Attavanti, *The Cleansing of the Temple*, f. 56v, Ms. Cor. Laur. 4 (mm 700x500), color on parchment, 1505-6, Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, detail, © Photograph taken by the author, with a special permission from the MiBAC. Any further reproduction by any means is strictly prohibited

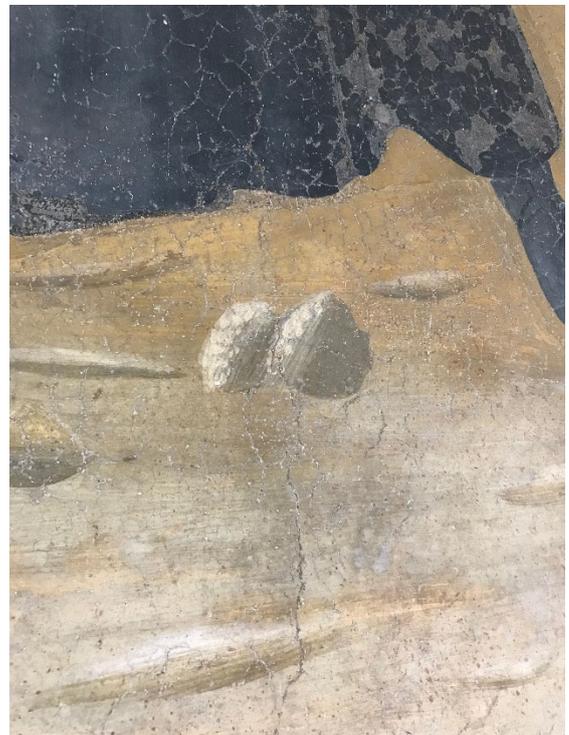


Fig. 18: João Goncalves, *Episodes from the Life of St. Benedict*, 1436-39, mural painting, Firenze, Badia Fiorentina, Chiostro "degli Aranci", detail of the western wall, © Photograph taken by the author

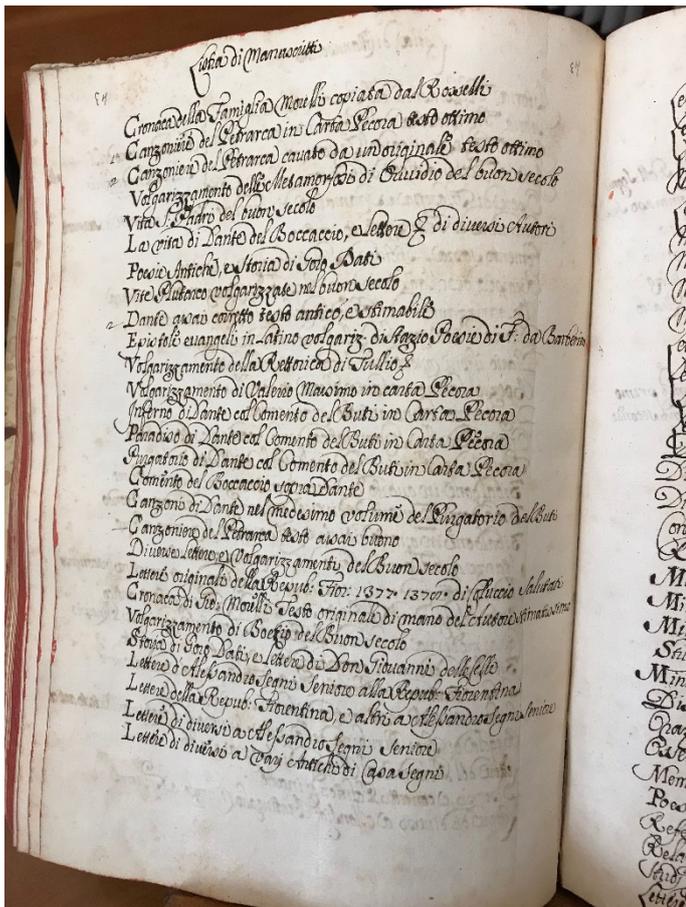


Fig. 19: Ms. Segni 7, f. 43r, Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, detail, © Photograph taken by the author, with a special permission from the MiBAC. Any further reproduction by any means is strictly prohibited

3. Conflict of interest declaration

In my capacity as the only, and the corresponding author for the present article submitted to the Color Culture and Science Journal (CCSJ), I hereby declare that no financial/personal interests have affected the objectivity of the author, and that the present publication is not subjected to any potential conflicts of interest on the part of the author and the publisher.

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5. Author Biography

Carmen Di Meo, PhD, is an Art Historian based in The Netherlands. She is currently Course Instructor and Coordinator at the Faculty of Arts, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. After her PhD (Roma 2017), she has been a Joint Post-Doc Fellow at the Department of Art History in Groningen, and a Visiting Research Fellow at the Netherlands Institute in Florence (2018-2019).

Notes

[1] A separate article is in preparation by the author of the present contribution in the proceedings from the symposium *The Skin of Things* (Amsterdam, 26-28 november, 2018), to present a detailed, and fully-developed account of the several readings of the Early Modern 'dotting' in association with a *pointilliste*-like fashion, and with different Modernist movements occurred in the course of the twentieth century. The paper draws upon the complete series of data, suggestions, and notes gathered together in order to propose an overall view, and a simultaneous interpretation of the whole fragments collected, in the art criticism, by the author in the course of her research on the topic. Hereafter, a list of major references discussing those associations is to be found: Grilli, G. (1903) 'Le Pitture Attribuite ad Alesso Baldovinetti in S. Miniato al Monte', *Rivista d'Italia, Lettere, Scienze ed Arte*, VI (1), pp. 156-165, 163; Londi 1907; Kennedy 1938; Brieger *et al.* 1969; Elam, C. (2019) *Roger Fry and Italian Art*, London: Paul Holberton Publishing, pp. 201-209. Also, the same is done about the presence of dotted patterns in the works of Flemish Art, in: Dunkerton, J. (1996/98) 'Observations on the handling properties of binding media identified in European painting from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries', *Bulletin- Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique*, 27, pp. 287-292, 287; Billinge, R. and Campbell, L. and Dunkerton, J. and Foister, S. and Kirby, J. and Pilc, J. and Roy, A. and Spring, M. and White, R. (1997) 'The Materials and Technique of Five Paintings by Rogier van der Weyden and his Workshop. National Gallery Technical Bulletin' 18, p. 82; Turner, N. K. (2006) 'The Suggestive Brush: Painting Techniques in Flemish Manuscripts from The Collections of The J. Paul Getty Museum and The Huntington Library', in *Flemish Manuscript Painting in Context* (Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, 5-6 sept. 2003, and London, The Courtauld Institute of Art, 21 feb. 2004), Los Angeles: Getty Publications, pp. 57-74; Vandivere, A. (2017) 'Surface Effects in Paintings by Jan van Eyck', in *Van Eyck Studies, Proc. Eighteenth Symposium for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting* (Brussels 2012), Paris–Leuven–Bristol: Peters, pp. 417-433.

[2] It is known that Baldovinetti was appointed as keeper and restorer for the mosaics of the Florentine Baptistery (1487-1491, Vasari 1568), as well as that between 1420 and 1430 this extraordinary and incorruptible technique was restored back in Florence (Chastel 1954/55).

[3] The London *Portrait* was examined by Dr. Rachel Billinge (London, National Gallery of Art) with a stereomicroscope in 2008, and with the aid of photomicrographs and macro-photographs. In the yellow parts there are what look like tiny bubbles in the paint which may well be agglomerates of lead soaps formed by reaction of the binder with the pigment. While these are usually associated with oil paint, recent studies show that it is possible to encounter them in egg tempera paintings as well, for the free fatty acids in egg tempera also form metal soaps. For more information on the topic, see the abstract of the paper by Hale, C. and Arslanoglu, J. and Centeno, S. and Granacci, A. (2011) 'The Metropolitan Museum of Art: aspects of evolving workshop practice', Spring, M. and Howard H. (eds.), in *Studying old master paintings: technology and practice, Proceeding of The National Gallery Technical Bulletin 30th Anniversary Conference* (London 2011),

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/media/15375/conference_abstracts_studying-old-master-paintings.pdf>, p. 17. As noticed also during the restoration works done on Fra Angelico's *Tabernacolo dei Linaioli*, it could be often possible at the time that the binder used to apply the gold leaf was yellow-tinged, to act as a yellow varnish simulating the appearance of gold. Bracco, P. and Ciappi, O. and Hilling, A.M. and Landi, L. (2011) 'La pittura del Tabernacolo dei Linaioli di Beato Angelico: osservazioni tecniche ed intervento di restauro', in Ciatti, M., and Scudieri, M. (eds.), *Il Tabernacolo dei Linaioli del Beato Angelico restaurato: restituzioni 2011 e A.R.P.A.I. per un capolavoro*, catalogue of the exhibition (Florence, Museo di San Marco, 22 march – 12 June 2011) Firenze: Edifir, pp. 101-142, p. 122. On a technical basis, tiny dots are also similarly visible in the works by Giovanni di Paolo.

[4] Among the Portuguese patrons involved in the San Miniato Florentine Chapel, it is found the Duchess Isabella of Burgundy (1397-1471), aunt of the young Cardinal and sister to the Infante Pedro, who had married Philip the Good in 1430, and had paid the sum of 600 florins for the Chapel between 1461 and the subsequent years (Apfelfadt 2000). Archival documents found in the records of the Cambini bank reported that the Pollajoli and Baldovinetti did not work on poplar panels – as of common usage in Florentine practice – but on 16 oak boards specifically brought from Flanders. (Hartt *et al.* 1964). A new launching of miniature art has occurred under the influence of Philip the Good (ruling from 1419 to 1467). Works of miniature art realized starting from 1445 for the Duke of Burgundy are, in fact, to be mainly ascribed to Rogier van der Weyden and to Jan van Eyck, with whom – and especially in the *Chroniques de Hainaut* – a new sense of perspective and of the landscape is perceived (Delaissé 1956).

[5] A thorough perusal of the Choir Books series from Santa Maria degli Angeli collected in the Laurenziana Library of Florence has been made by the author of the present study, for the purpose of this research, and as part of a NIKI Fellowship Program. A full detailed account of the story and the contents of the Choir Books from S.ta Maria degli Angeli and S.ta Maria Nuova is made in the ground-breaking studies by Kanter (1994), and by Levi d'Ancona (1993-94).

[6] Lionello Venturi writes, in fact, that "The female profiles made by Paolo [Uccello] are never made to reveal the bones structure. A modelling of the planes, where the anatomy is seen, is not a preference to the artist.". While discussing his reasons for eliminating the attribution of the London *Female Portrait* from the catalogue of Paolo Uccello's paintings, and viceversa in order to ascribing this to Domenico Veneziano, Venturi describes the (Baldovinetti) painting as such: "It is the work of an artist similar to Paolo, less imaginative and absolute, more delicate and raffinate [...]. The fable-air has disappeared, and it is already appearing a radiant reality". The two quotes have been translated by the author of the present study. (Venturi 1930, pp. 64-69).

[7] More about this fascinating cycle can be found in: Galassi, M. C. (2018) 'Osservazioni sulle tecniche di rappresentazione volumetrica: luci e ombre nella pittura fiorentina dei primi decenni del Quattrocento. Da Masaccio e Masolino agli esordi di Filippo Lippi', in: Lumen – Imago – Pictura, La luce nella storia dell'ottica e nella rappresentazione visiva da Giotto a Caravaggio, *Proc. International Conference* (Roma 2010), Ebert-Schiffner, S. and Roccasecca, P. and Thielemann, A. (Eds.), pp. 149 – 172, 158-159, De Luca Editori d'Arte, Roma; Bonavoglia, S. (1998) 'Ricordi Precoci del Luminismo di Jan van Eyck a Firenze: Alcuni Documenti per João Gonçalves e il Chiostro degli Aranci', *Arte documento*, 12, pp. 62 – 71, 66-67; Baldini, U. and Berti, L. (1958) *Mostra di Affreschi Staccati*. Catalogo della mostra, Firenze (Forte di Belvedere, 1958), pp. 41-44, Tipografia Giuntina, Firenze.

[8] In the Biblioteca Riccardiana of Florence, two copies of the text here examined survive, in the Manuscripts known as Ms. Ricc. 1028, and Ricc. 1037. This second version, signed as S.C., namely 'Secondo Codice' to be distinguished from the (first) 'Codice' (Ms. Ricc. 1028), has been

entirely copied and published in Florence, 1846, by Lord George John Warren Vernon. The Ricc. 1028 was cited by Giovanni Lami in his index as P. I num. XIX, and also registered in his 'Novelle Letterarie' of the year 1752 (Lami 1752). In the collection edited by Colomb de Batines (de Batines 1845, 1, pp. 231-232), an extensive study for this manuscript is to be found, in the second volume; here, also attention to the drawings is paid, although only for descriptive purposes (de Batines 1845, 2, p. 640-641, n735). A clear reference is made here to the presence of a lost third drawing also placed before the first 'Cantica' (Inferno), confirming so the information given by Salomone Morpurgo (Morpurgo 1900, p. 21). The manuscript is listed again in the two volumes by Vittore Branca, devoted to the 'Tradizione delle opere di Giovanni Boccaccio'. In the first volume is to be found the most interesting description of the codex, indicated as belonging – according to what was reported by de Batines (1845, 2, p. 640-641, n735) – to the "Libreria di Pier Segni", though mentioned in the section devoted to codes "out of reach" (Branca 1958). Other fundamental publications in this respect are: Kent, D. (2000) *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance: the patron's oeuvre*. New Haven-London: Yale University Press, p. 420; De Robertis, T. and Miriello R. (eds., 1999) *I manoscritti datati della Biblioteca Riccardiana di Firenze*, II, Mss. 1001-1400. Tavarnuzze, Impruneta: SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, p. 7; Branca, V. (1991) *Tradizione delle opere di Giovanni Boccaccio 2: Un secondo elenco di manoscritti e studi sul testo del "Decameron" con due appendici*. Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, p. 12; Biagi, G. (ed. 1888) *Giunte e correzioni inedite alla bibliografia dantesca*, Colomb de Batines... Firenze: Sansoni, pp. 165, 230; VV. AA. (1865), *Esposizione dantesca in Firenze: Cataloghi*. Firenze: Le Monnier, p.27; Morpurgo, S. (ed., 1929) *Le opere volgari a stampa dei secoli 13. e 14. Supplemento con gli indici generali dei capoversi, dei manoscritti, dei nomi e dei soggetti*. Bologna: Zanichelli, p. 270. A very comprehensive enumeration of all the twenty codes available, containing the text of the so-called 'Falso Boccaccio' (dated back to 1375), is to be found in the study related to the first transcription and presentation of a text called *Memoria* (ms. Naz. II I 47, cc. 184r-189v), often added to the several copies of the *Chiose*, but excluded from the Ms. Ricc. 1028 (Mazzanti 2003). For a systematic study and an overall view of the production, and the forms of vernacular books in *Quattrocento* Italy see also Petrucci (2017). Finally, it was noticed by Salmi (1962) that "In Florence, Ghirlandajo's tendency which had a lasting influence over the etchings in printed books, stays totally excluded, in the miniatures and in the incunabula, from the tradition of the illustration of the Comedy [...]".

[9] This literary heritage belonged to the Segni family, a noble and ancient family of Florentine merchants, now part of the Collection of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence. The Ms. Segni 7 contains a list of the Manuscripts possessed by the Segni (cc. 45v to 42r), the so-called *Index Manuscriptorum Codicum existentium in Bibliotheca familiae Segniae* (Bandini 1792); in the f. 43r is cited the 'Comento del Boccaccio sopra Dante'. The historical figure of Sir Piero Segni, member of the Crusca Academy since the 16th of August 1588, needs to be investigated further, since no relevant biographical information upon him are available up to date (Branca 1958; Benucci 2018). It is known that he has collaborated to the first editing of the Vocabulary of Italian language (1612), though he died years in advance, in 1605.

[10] For a complete account of Baldovinetti's involvement in this international commission, see the ground-breaking studies and documents here listed: Vasari, G. (1568) *Le vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti*, da Andrea Orcagna ad Andrea del Sarto, 4, (ed. 2014). Bagno a Ripoli (FI): Passigli, 4, p. 101; Zanobi, B. (1855) 'Alcuni documenti artistici non mai stampati: 1454 – 1565', Firenze: Le Monnier; Horne, H. P. (1903) 'A Newly Discovered 'Libro di Ricordi' of Alesso Baldovinetti', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 2 (4), pp. 22-25+27-29+31-32; Horne, H. P. (1903) 'A Newly Discovered 'Libro di Ricordi' of Alesso Baldovinetti. Part II', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*. 2 (5), pp. 167-171+173-174; Horne, H. P. (1903) 'Appendix: Documents Referred to in Mr. Herbert Horne's Articles on a Newly Discovered 'Libro di Ricordi' of Alesso Baldovinetti', *The Burlington*

Magazine for Connoisseurs, 2 (6), pp. 377-390. In order to framing here the several connections between Portuguese Aviz patrons, and the Tuscan artists, it can also be mentioned that the King John I called in Portugal Antonio Fiorentino, painter, who was still living in Portugal in 1438, as well as John II has later done with the Sansovino (Ruggieri Scudieri 1940, p. 94).

[11] It is plausible that a group of Flemish artists, coordinated by a follower of Gerard David, was active at the beginning of the sixteenth century in Évora, Portugal, in order to work at the twelve panels of the majestic retable with Episodes from the *Life of the Virgin* for the choir of the Cathedral (Ainsworth and Metzger 2009). More on this fascinating subject is to be found in: Goehring, M. L. (2007) 'The Representation and Meaning of Luxurious Textiles in Franco-Flemish Manuscript Illumination', in Rudy, K. M. and Baert, B. (eds.), *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing: Textiles and Their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages*, pp. 121-155; *Ead.* (2006) 'Taking Borders Seriously: The Significance of Cloth-of-Gold Textile Borders in Burgundian and post-Burgundian Manuscript Illumination in the Low Countries', *Oud Holland*, 119, 1, pp. 22-40.

[12] Francisco was born in Lisbon perhaps in 1518, and thanks to the renowned profession of his father, he inhabited the house of the Infant Don Louis, lover and patron of the arts, brother to the king João III, who succeeded to Don Manuel in 1521 (Battelli 1954). In 1537, Francisco de Hollanda leaves Portugal to live a few years in Rome, where he encountered Giulio Clovio (1538), Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna, thanks to his personal commitment with the humanist Lattanzio Tolomei, his patron, legate of the Republic of Siena at the Papal Court, and friend to the Portuguese poet Francisco Sà de Miranda. After having visited other Italian cities such as Naples and Venice, around 1540-41 Francisco returned to Portugal, and in 1547, contemporaneously to the appearance of the first Italian translation of Alberti's *De Pictura* (Venice 1547), he wrote the first volume of his treatise *Da Pintura Antigua*. More about the commissions assigned to Antonio de Hollanda can be found in J. G. Alexander, J (ed.) (2009) *Il Lezionario Farnese*. Towneley Lectionary Manoscritto 91, New York, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox e Tilden Foundations. Modena: Panini, p. 11.

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