

# Scholars in the Picture: The Representation of Intellectuals in Emblems and Medals

BY

ARNOUD VISSER

UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM



Fig. 1: Quinten Metsys, medal of Desiderius Erasmus, 1519, with the boundary god Terminus, and the device 'I yield to no-one'. The piece caused controversy because of its identification with Erasmus. (British Museum).

Desiderius Erasmus probably never expected his portrait medal, commissioned from Quinten Metsys (1519), to arouse such a furor within the scholarly community (Fig. 1). The main problem concerned the design on the reverse of the medal that showed the inscription 'Concedo nulli' ('I Yield to No-One') in combination with an image of Terminus, the ancient god of boundaries. The critics were furious; to them it seemed sheer arrogance for a scholar to associate himself with a god who was so powerful he did not bend even to Jupiter's will. A decade later (in 1528) Erasmus still found himself having to justify the design of his portrait medal. In a letter to the Spanish humanist Alfonso de Valdés he pointed out the metrical pattern of the inscription and the name 'Terminus' inscribed on the stone base depicted in the image of

the man. This man, he argued, clearly represented an ancient god, rather than his own likeness. Yet unable to limit himself to these prosaic explanations, Erasmus subsequently could not resist the temptation to tease his adversary with a rather aggressive comparison: 'If I had pictured a lion with the inscription: "Flee if you do not want to be devoured", would they have attributed these words to me rather than to the lion? For if I am not mistaken I look more like a lion than a stone'.<sup>1</sup>

Erasmus is known as a clever manipulator of his own public image.<sup>2</sup> Through the combination of the inscriptions and the image of Terminus he playfully emphasized his identity as a humanist scholar. Erasmus's technique of investing his social persona with specific meaning through literary and symbolic imagery is typical of a mode of representation that has been termed 'the emblematic portrait'.<sup>3</sup> An exponent of the Renaissance predilection for learned symbols, this mode can also be found in genres such as the personal and elitist *impresa* or the moralising emblem.

This article seeks to explore how Renaissance humanists, the intellectuals of the Early-Modern period, used word and image to represent the identity of the scholar. With their access to arcane symbols and ancient wisdom, humanists were key figures in the creation of images. How then did they bring this knowledge to bear on representations of themselves and, secondly, what principles guided their choice? Two forms of emblematic portrait will be investigated: the emblem and the portrait medal. In representing the intellectual both forms reveal a great variety of motifs, ranging from the familiar, such as books and spectacles, to more unexpected images, such as a chicken or a grape. In this way we will be able to compare patterns of stereotypical representation to examples of individual self-presentation, which will increase our understanding of the varied image of early modern intellectual.

Purpose and function are important parameters for the interpretation of both emblems and medals. It seems evident, for example, that Erasmus would not want to surprise his friends and connections by representing himself as a chicken. Precisely what images were considered suitable depended on the context in which scholars wished

<sup>1</sup> I warmly thank Petry Kievit-Tyson for correcting my English. P. S. Allen, *Erasmii epistolae* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), nr. 2018 to the Spanish humanist Alfonso de Valdés, 1 August, 1528, vol. 7, 430-432; Erwin Panofsky, 'Erasmus and the Visual Arts', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 32 (1969), 200-227, at 214-219.

<sup>2</sup> Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters: the Construction of Charisma in Print* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), about portraits esp. 27-54.

<sup>3</sup> John Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 205-256. Here the term emblem does not signify the literary genre, but the use of literary strategies in iconography.

to present themselves. The representation of scholars can therefore provide as much new information about prevailing perceptions of the intellectual, as it can about the actual aim of a particular portrait.

#### GROUP PORTRAIT: STEREOTYPICAL SCHOLARS IN EMBLEMS

The extraordinary success of the new genre of the emblem book following the publication of the *Emblematum libellus* (Augsburg: H. Steyner, 1531) by the lawyer and humanist Andrea Alciato reveals that sophisticated Latin poetry appealed to a relatively large, international readership.<sup>4</sup> The popularity of the emblem book was facilitated by the professional skills of the publishers (who could produce print-runs of a thousand copies per edition) and an effective distribution system that reached almost every corner of the European Republic of Letters.<sup>5</sup> In other words, although the emblem book was part of an elite culture, it was by no means an intimate, personal medium in the way the *album amicorum* was. The representation of the scholar in printed emblem collections reflects this situation: emblem authors emphasize above all general characteristics, which were subsequently explained with varying moral messages.

The small number of emblems about scholars in Alciato's collection, for example, mostly present a critical view, focusing more on the humanists' social conduct than on their scholarly characteristics. Alciato's emblems 'In Silentium' ('About Silence', nr 11) and 'In Studiosum captum amore' ('About the Scholar Taken in by Love', nr 109) are primarily concerned with the contrast between stupidity and wisdom, between Minerva and Venus. Yet in his 'Doctorum agnomina' ('Nicknames of Scholars') Alciato does give insights into the university world and his former professors in particular (Fig. 2):

It is an old custom for professors to be given nicknames. Curtius, the one who lectures only on easy and obvious passages, is called Straight and Narrow. The one who keeps going back to the same point and repeats everything too often is called Maeander, like Parisius. If he's difficult to follow and muddled, like Picus, he will be called the Labyrinth. The one

<sup>4</sup> References to Alciato are based on Peter M. Daly, Virginia W. Callahan and Simon Cuttler, eds., *Andreas Alciatus (Index Emblematicus): Vol. 1: The Latin Emblems Indexes and Lists* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1988); see also Pierre Laurens' introduction to the facsimile edition of 1551 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Yet emblems could serve as personal gifts by means of a dedication; see Arnoud Visser, *Joannes Sambucus and the Learned Image: The Use of the Emblem in Late-Renaissance Humanism* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 111-132.

*Emblemata* 171  
**Doctorum agnomina.**  
**EMBLEMA XCVI.**



**M**ORIS vetusti est, aliqua professoribus  
 Superadijci cognomina.  
 Faciles apertosq; explicans tantum locos,  
 Canon vocatur Curtius.  
 Revolvitur qui eodem, & iterat qui nimis,  
 Maeander, ut Parisius.  
 Obscurus & confusus, ut Picus fuit,  
 Labyrinthus appellabitur.  
 Nimis brevis, multa amputans, ut Claudius,  
 Mucronis agnomen feret.  
 Qui vel columnas voce erumpit, Parpalus,  
 Dicitur Truo est scholasticus.  
 Contra est vocatus, tenuis esset Albius  
 Quod voce, vesperilio.  
 At ultimas mutilans colobotes syllabas,

*Hirundo*

Fig. 2: 'Doctorum agnomina'. Andrea Alciati, *Emblemata* (Pavia, 1618), emblem 96. Alciato's stereotypical image of academics also portrays universal human characteristics. (Glasgow University Library).

who is too concise chops a lot off, like Claudius will get the name of Clippers. Parpalus, who even cracks the pillars with his voice, gets the name of Pelican from the students. On the other hand, Albius who had a squeaky voice was called the Bat. Crassus, the mutilator, who mangles the ends of all his words is called the Swallow. The one who won't listen and insists on talking himself is like the starling in the proverb. This one stammers, that one is hoarse, the third talks too fast, the other hisses like a snake. One

grimaces with mouth and nostrils running riot, another has a tongue like a drill. One breaks off to cough and clear his throat, another sputters all over you like a dripping gutter. For every fault displayed in human behaviour a name arises to match.<sup>6</sup>

This epigram clearly presents an insider's perspective on the academic world to an academic readership. Alciato's specific examples of universal human flaws would only be recognisable for those who knew the university system, and who consequently could appreciate the humour of the epigram.

A similar form of representation, produced for a particular in-group, can be found in the emblem entitled 'Doctos doctis obloqui nefas esse' ('It is a Disgrace When Scholars Speak Ill of Each Other').<sup>7</sup> Here Alciato uses the example of a swallow feeding his chicks with crickets to criticize a destructive attitude among scholars:

A whistler yourself, you harm the shrill singer; a summer visitor, you hurt another fine-weather caller; a guest, you harm a guest; a feathered bird, you hurt another winged creature.

Alciato's strong condemnation, expressed with the word 'nefas', becomes poignant through the choice of the swallow as the emblematic example. This bird, referred to by the poetic name *Progne*, alludes to the ancient myth in which Procne takes revenge on her husband Tereus for raping her sister Philomela, and tricks him into eating his own son. By means of this allusion, public conflicts among scholars are represented as a form of intellectual cannibalism.

Alciato's emblems, then, hold up a mirror to the intellectual community, presenting above all a message of how scholars should not behave. The academic perspective of these emblems reveals the world in which Alciato was located: that of the law professor at the universities of Bourges, Pavia, Bologna and Ferrara.

<sup>6</sup> Emblem 97: 'Moris vetusti est, aliqua professoribus / Superadijci cognomina. / Faciles apertosque explicans tantum locos, / Canon vocatur Curtius. / Revolvitur qui eodem, et iterat qui nimis, / Maeander, ut Parisius. / Obscurus et confusus, ut Picus fuit, / Labyrinthus appellabitur. / Nimis brevis, multa amputans, ut Claudius, / Mucronis agnomen feret. / Qui vel columnas voce erumpit, Parpalus, / Dicitur Truo est scholasticus. / Contra est vocatus, tenuis esset Albius / Quod voce, vesperilio. / At ultimas mutilans colobotes syllabas, / Hirundo Crassus dicitur. / Qui surdus aliis, solus ipse vult loqui, / Ut sturnus in proverbio est. / Hic blaesus, ille raucus, iste garriens. / Hic sibilat ceu vipera. / Tumultuatur ille rictu et naribus, / Huic lingua terebellam facit / Singultit alius, atque tussit haesitans. / At conspuat alius; ut psecas. / Quam multa rebus vitia in humanis agunt, / Tam multa surgunt nomina'.

<sup>7</sup> Emblem 180: 'Quid rapis heu Progne vocalem saeva cicadam, / Pignoribusque tuis fercula dira paras? / Stridula stridentem, vernam verna hospita laedis / Hospitam, et aligeram penniger ales avem? / Ergo abice hanc praedam: nam musica pectora, summum est, / Alterum ab alterius dente perire, nefas'.

62

I. SAMBVCI

Vfus, non lectio prudentes facit.  
Ad Fulvium Ursinum suum.



NON doceo semper, non est cur saepe revisas,  
Lectorum memorem pagina nostra facit.  
Possidet ingentem numerum qui vendit avarus,  
Doctior at nunquam bibliopola fuit.  
Perpetuo si nos verses, relegasque severus,  
Si non utaris, contineas ue memor:  
Nunquam proficies, perit labor, atque lucerna.  
Officij hoc nostri ut te moneamus erat.  
Id quoniam recte noras doctissime Fulvi,

Impr

Fig. 3: 'Usus libri, non lectio prudentes facit'. Joannes Sambucus, *Emblemata* (Antwerp, 1566), p. 56. The representation of scholars in Sambucus's 'It is the use of the book, not merely reading which makes prudent people' voices a critical attitude towards learning for its own sake. (Glasgow University Library).

A slightly different context lay behind the influential *Emblemata* of the Hungarian polymath Joannes Sambucus, imperial historiographer at

the Habsburg court in the second half of the sixteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Here the scholar is placed in a more positive, idealised light. For Sambucus the practical relevance of knowledge comes first: *prudencia* is the aim, not erudition for its own sake. His emblem 'Usus libri, non lectio prudentes facit' ('It is the Use of the Book, Not Just the Reading which Makes Prudent People', nr. 56) makes this explicit (Fig. 3). The epigram of this emblem stresses that merely possessing books is not a virtue in itself. Consider a bookseller, Sambucus argues: although he possesses many books, this in itself does not increase his learning. Even the act of reading must never become an aim in itself, for it only brings value when the acquired knowledge is applied in real life. Sambucus concludes his argument with a personal compliment to his colleague, the antiquarian Fulvio Orsini, to whom the emblem is dedicated:

Because you know this well, most learned Orsini, above all the old books have made you wise. You keep a remarkable and rare number of these, and with your talent you recovered many books. . . . Let us be of help to those who may have less abundance of means and talent.<sup>9</sup>

Various such arguments are repeated in other emblems, for example: 'Knowledge is vain if it is not accompanied by practical experience' ('Plus quam Diomedis ac Glauci permutatio' ['More Than the Exchange between Glaucus and Diomedes'], nr 24); 'People who pass on knowledge need not be learned themselves, just as little as a whetstone is sharp itself' and finally, 'It is pointless to search for old norms and values by means of books' ('Sapientia insipiens' ['Unwise Wisdom'], nr 88). Yet, according to Sambucus, a pragmatic attitude should not lead to false modesty. The contribution of the scholar deserves recognition in public life. In his emblem 'Insignia valent' ('Signs of Honour Are Important', 242) Sambucus takes the doctor's hat as a positive example of how scholars can receive honour (Fig. 4). Without this external mark of esteem, achievement may remain unnoticed. He compares the practice of visible signs of honour for

<sup>8</sup> Joannes Sambucus, *Emblemata cum aliquot nummis [...]* (Antwerp: C. Plantin, 1564 and later); references here are based on the 1566 edition, reprinted with an introduction by Wolfgang Harms and Ulla-Britta Küchen (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2002); see also Visser, *Joannes Sambucus and the Learned Image*.

<sup>9</sup> 'Non doceo semper, non est cur saepe revisas. / Lectorum memorem pagina nostra facit. / Possidet ingentem numerum qui vendit avarus. / Doctior at nunquam bibliopola fuit. / Perpetuo si nos verses relegasque severus, / Si non utaris, contineas ue memor: / Nunquam proficies, perit labor atque lucerna. / Officij hoc nostri ut te moneamus erat. / Id quoniam recte noras, doctissime Fulvi, / Imprimis veteres te erudiere libri. / Horum tu numerum insignem rarumque tueris, / Ingenio multos restituisque libros. / Id quoque delectat Sambucum et tota vetustas: / Prosimus quibus est copia forte minor'.

242

I: SAMBVCI  
Insignia valent.

M V L T A valēt, doctiq̄, probāt, nec vulgus abhorret,  
 Accipiunt pondus sed rāmen illa notis.  
 Nam nisi sint etiā titulo insignita superbo,  
 Fulgeat & digno nomine quidq̄, latet.  
 Sic lapides olim venales arte fūere,  
 Et glyphices pretium non malē crevit ope.  
 Sic hodie magni fiunt doctoris honores,  
 Qui studijs laudem promeruerē suis.  
 Ne fugias nomen quamuis doctissimus aui:  
 Sit modō digna fides, non erit ambitio.

Modulo

Fig. 4: 'Insignia valent'. Joannes Sambucus, *Emblemata* (Antwerp, 1566), p. 242. Sambucus's emblem 'Marks of honour are important' argues that the scholar should be proud of his merits. (Glasgow University Library).

achievements to the facet on a gem: skilful cutting adds great value to the rough stone. A virtuous scholar, therefore, need not be afraid of such decorations: 'If you are worth it, there is no question of vain-glorious ambition'. In the emblem 'Celata virtus ignavia' ('Concealed Virtue is Cowardice', nr 215) he encourages the scholar, by means of a mixture of Christian and Horatian language, not to hide his lamp under

a bushel.<sup>10</sup> People with 'a brilliant mind and excellent qualities' should display these openly so that they can harvest well-deserved acclaim.

Sambucus's emblems, with their emphasis on the value of the intellectual, reveal that the Republic of Letters could not afford to isolate itself: social status and honour were important in order to survive. Sambucus, for one, earned a living as a travelling tutor, accompanying young noblemen or patricians, such as two brothers from the powerful Fugger banking family. In this setting, pleading the practical relevance of learning was clearly more appropriate than a plea for a reclusive life of studious contemplation.

In comparison to Sambucus's learned work aimed at courtly amusement, the Nuremberg humanist and physician Joachim Camerarius offers a more systematic, even encyclopaedic version with his *Symbola et emblemata*, where he explores the natural world and its allegorical potential by means of 400 emblems.<sup>11</sup> The medal-shaped engravings depicting plants, mammals, birds, insects, fish and reptiles are interpreted emblematically in a short epigram (usually one distich) and a more extensive prose commentary, which frequently refers to other collections of *imprese* and emblems.<sup>12</sup> Occasionally the scholar appears on the stage of this symbolic theatre of nature. In one example Camerarius emphasizes the need for intellectuals to provide service. The *pictura* of 'Sic vos, non vobis' ('So You, Not For Yourself', I, 37) depicts a grape growing around a laurel. The motto refers to an anecdote about Virgil and the contemporary poet Bathyllus (related by the late-Antique grammarian Donatus), who had presented some of Virgil's verses as his own. Virgil took revenge by writing down these words at the beginning of four verses. When Bathyllus was asked to complete the poem, he was unable to do so. Camerarius' accompanying epigram places this theme in the context of the relationship between the scholar and his patron. The grape, as a symbol of wealth, is supported by a laurel, Apollo's tree, a symbol of literary fame and epic poetry. In the commentary, Camerarius calls upon the scholar 'in every thought and

<sup>10</sup> See Horace's ode to Lollius, 4, 9, in Visser, *Joannes Sambucus and the Learned Image*, pp. 170-173.

<sup>11</sup> *Symbolorum et emblematum centuriae quatuor* (Nuremberg: G. Vogel, 1590-1604); reprinted with an introduction by Wolfgang Harms and Ulla-Britta Küchen, *Symbola et emblemata* (Graz: Akademische Druck-Verlagsanstalt, 1986-1988); Jan Papy, 'Joachim Camerarius's *Symbolorum et emblematum centuriae quatuor*: From Natural Sciences to Moral Contemplation', in Karl Ehenkel and Arnoud Visser, eds., *Mundus Emblematicus. Studies in Neo-Latin Emblem Books* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 201-234.

<sup>12</sup> Throughout the work there are references to previous use of the imagery concerned, e.g. as emblems (Alciato, Bocchi, Capaccio, Giovinetti, Faerno and Sambucus), or as personal devices (e.g. Titian's *impresa* of the mother bear licking her cub into shape II, 21 'Natura potentior ars').

L I. 51  
**P I N G V E S C I T**  
**D V M E R V I T.**



*Rimatur vigili Sophiae secreta labore,  
 Qui cupit Aoniae frondis honore tegi.*

N 3 VETE-

Fig. 5: 'Pinguescit dum eruit'. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex volatilibus et insectis...* (Nuremberg, 1596), no. 51. The scholar as a rummaging chicken in Camerarius's 'Rummaging Beefs Up'. (Glasgow University Library).

action not only to help himself, but also others.<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere, in 'Nil inexplorato' ('Nothing Without Prior Investigation', II, 12) Camerarius stresses the purging effect of study using the image of the unicorn. In the same way that this creature scours a polluted water source with its horn, so can a man use the blessings of wisdom and knowledge to 'clear all problems and obstacles that lead him astray from the path of virtue and honour, and separate good from evil'.<sup>14</sup>

In another example, Camerarius presents the scholar as a chicken, diligently pecking away in search of food. In 'Pinguescit dum eruit' ('Rummaging Beefs Up') (Fig. 5),<sup>15</sup> Camerarius argues that 'vigilantly labouring for the secrets of wisdom' is a vital precondition for receiving the 'honour of the laurel of the Muses'. Diligence and hard work are the qualities that will earn a scholar appreciation. He emphasises, however, that a scholar should devote himself to pure, strictly useful knowledge. The danger of vain-glorious curiosity should be avoided. With reference to Plutarch he therefore highlights the risk of 'curiositas', exemplifying this by referring to the wicked inclination of chickens to hide their food and keep it to themselves. Camerarius's true chicken represents the scholar in the service of the common good. His own emblematic encyclopaedia can be seen as an exponent of this idea; not only because of its many indices and wealth of references to other sources but also because of its practical, down-to-earth portrayal of scholarship.

The emblem as a form, then, was clearly a flexible instrument to portray the many aspects of scholars. The overall image results, however, in a group portrait, in which stereotypical and caricatural traits are used to serve varied, moral arguments. How do these stereotypes relate to the way in which individual scholars wanted to portray themselves? To answer this question we will zoom in on the presentation of a number of scholars on medals.

<sup>13</sup> Camerarius, *Symbolorum* [...] I, 37: 'Quapropter nos quoque quibus proprie humanitatis virtus competit, cuncta nostra consilia, ac universas actiones eo semper dirigere debemus, ut non solum nobis sed aliis quoque prodesse possimus'. For dependence on patronage and the topos of the unreliability of court society see also 'Ad Motum lunae', IV, 51, where in the commentary Camerarius explicitly signals the use of this theme for scholars.

<sup>14</sup> 'Qua similitudine docemur, beneficio sapientiae atque laudabilis doctrinae, in rebus dubiis ac periculosus posse nos omnes difficultates et remoras quae a virtutis et honestatis via avocant, removere et mala a bonis segregare'.

<sup>15</sup> Camerarius, *Symbolorum*, III, 51: 'Rimatur vigili Sophiae secreta labore, / qui cupit Aoniae frondis honore tegi'.

## CLOSE-UP: PORTRAIT MEDALS

In the period that Erasmus found himself having to justify his Terminus device, the portrait medal was just starting to become popular north of the Alps. Italian medal makers were employed by the heads of several courts, such as Benvenuto Cellini by François I and Leone Leoni by Charles V and Philip II.<sup>16</sup> The success of the portrait medal among scholars is not difficult to understand either. Portraits were attractive and useful gifts, whether in the form of a painting, a print, or a medal. For the humanists of the late Renaissance presenting such gifts was part of a social culture in which friendship went hand-in-hand with more pragmatic forms of patronage. The medal was an excellent instrument for this purpose.<sup>17</sup> Made from expensive material (gold, silver, bronze), medals could express the value of friendship in a material way. Moreover, their portable size made them highly effective in spreading the reputation of the givers. The recipients could either collect these medals, as coin collectors, or return the favour by wearing the medal in public as a sign of loyalty to the person portrayed. This specific option was usually reserved for relations with strong hierarchical overtones. 'I only wear the Emperor's medal', the Habsburg court-physician Joannes Crato wrote, for example, in 1575 to Abraham Ortelius. Crato was concerned that his portrait by Philip Galle for Galle's *Imagines L. doctorum virorum* showed a medal of unclear provenance. He was keen to avoid any suspicion of misplaced vanity and insisted that his medal would be clearly recognizable: 'I would never have represented myself in this foolish way if it was not a present of a benevolent emperor'.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> For the history of the portrait medal see Stephen K. Scher, *The Currency of Fame: Portrait Medals of the Renaissance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 13-28; Philip Attwood, *Italian Medals c. 1530-1600 in British Collections*, 2 vols. (London: British Museum Publications, 2003), pp. 11-38.

<sup>17</sup> About gift-giving see Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); for the social function of early modern portraits in prints and medals see the themed issue of *Word and Image* 19.1-2 (2003); especially Peter Parshall, 'Portrait Prints and Codes of Identity in the Renaissance: Hendrik Goltzius, Justus Lipsius and Michel de Montaigne', 22-37 and Arne R. Flaten, 'Identity and the Display of Medaglie in Renaissance and Baroque Europe', 59-73; see also Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 416-419.

<sup>18</sup> J. H. Hessels, ed., *Abrahami Ortelii [...] epistulae* (Cambridge: n.p., 1887, reprint Osnabrück: n.p., 1969), pp. 131-133, nr. 58, 5 June 1575: 'Recentissimum ea est tua ad me epistola in quas Icones conieceras. Respondi huic statim, et si recte memini, hoc saltem in typo mutandum volui, ut imago ea quae de torque pendet, magis Imp. Maximiliani effigiem repraesentet. [...] Nullum ego nummum gero, nisi Caesaris. Nec isto modo inepte me conspicui paterer, nisi munus benignitatis Caesariae esset'. For Galle's portraits see Milan Pelc, *Illustrium Imagines: Das Porträtbuch der Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), nrs. 61-64; and Manfred Stefan Sellink, *Philips Galle (1537-*

There was more to the medal, however, than the head alone. The reverse side could be used to characterize the personality of the scholar through learned, allegorical imagery of the kind used in emblematic *picturae*. The precise relationship between portrait and symbol would depend on the designer's creative *inventio*. It could present a pun on the sitter's name; depict visualizations of values shared within a specific milieu, or hint at the sitter's honour through descent or professional merit.



Fig. 6: Medal of Paolo Giovio. Bishop Paolo Giovio was a historian and keen collector of portraits. The reverse of the medal symbolises the power of the historian to bring immortal fame. (British Museum, George III Illustrious Persons 514).

In comparison to the representation of scholars in emblem books, portrait medals of sixteenth-century humanists provide surprisingly (and disappointingly) little information about the scholarly identity of the sitter.<sup>19</sup> The two persons who, after a first examination, come closest are Paolo Giovio and Giovanni Pierio Valeriano. From Giovio one could expect a special medal: he was not only a historian of fame, but also a designer and theoriser of *impresa* who, moreover, had amassed a spectacular collection of portraits himself. His medal displays him primarily as a poised historian, his portrait showing the profile of a bearded man with a scholar's cap and a coat lined with a fur collar

1612): *Engraver and Print Publisher in Haarlem and Antwerp* (dissertation, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, 1997), especially pp. 41-67.

<sup>19</sup> Based on the examples supplied by Attwood, *Italian Medals*, and P. A. Gaetani, *Museum Mazzuchellianum, seu numismata virorum doctrina praestantium quae apud Jo. Marianum Comitem Mazzuchellium Brixiae servantur*, 2 vols. (Venice: typis Antonii Zatta, 1761-1773); references concern vol. 1.

(Fig. 6).<sup>20</sup> The reverse displays the inscription 'Nunc denique vives' ('Now At Last You Will Live') beneath which is shown a man holding a book in his left hand and with the other hand he raises a naked man.<sup>21</sup> The message is clear: through his books the writer can give immortality to historical persons.

Valeriano's medal combines his portrait with an allusion to his knowledge of hieroglyphs. We see an obelisk on the left with the figure of Mercury. The inscription 'Instaurator' ('Renewer') expresses the humanist ideal of recovering classical knowledge and culture (Fig. 7). He is probably referring to his own encyclopaedic work on the interpretation of hieroglyphs, *Hieroglyphica* (1556), a work in which he follows in the footsteps of the late-Antique writer Horapollon, who was believed to have deciphered the Egyptian hieroglyphics. In fact Horapollon mostly read the script allegorically from a Neo-Platonist, hermetic perspective.<sup>22</sup>



Fig. 7. Medal of Giovanni Pierio Valeriano. In his *Hieroglyphica* (Basel, 1556) Valeriano gave an encyclopaedic overview of the mystical meanings of Egyptian hieroglyphs. The symbolical representation on his portrait medal alludes to Valeriano's expertise in recovering ancient knowledge. (British Museum, George III Illustrious Persons 1098).

<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the most direct example of this is the collection of medals turned into emblems by Ottavio da Strada, Jacobus Typotius and Aegidius Sadeler, *Symbola divina et humana pontificum imperatorum regum [...]* (Prague: n.p., 1600 and later); see M. E. H. N. Mout, 'A Useful Servant of Princes: The Netherlands Humanist Jacobus Typotius at the Prague Imperial Court Around 1600', *Acta Comeniana*, 13 (1999), 27-49, esp. 37-47.

<sup>21</sup> Giovio: Attwood, nr. 795; Valeriano: Attwood, nr. 300.

<sup>22</sup> See the introductions of Boas and Grafton in George Boas, ed., *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollon: With a New Foreword by Anthony Grafton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Today these medals are recognized as being portraits of scholars but it is questionable whether Giovio and Valeriano would have done so. Even though the representations clearly allude to erudition and study, this iconographic language was not exclusively reserved for humanist scholars. A case in point is the medal of Ippolita Gonzaga (1535-1563), member of a prominent family from Mantua and wife of Fabrizio Colonna, the Duke of Mondragone, Antonio Caraffa.<sup>23</sup> Her portrait shows the profile of an exceptionally wealthy lady: her neck is decorated with a double string of pearls, with more pearls in her hair (Fig. 8). Moreover, the reverse shows her as a Muse holding a book in her hands, surrounded by attributes representing the arts and sciences. The inscription 'Nec tempus nec aetas' ('Neither Time Nor Age') refers to the capacity of art to transcend time. However, this cannot be classified as a scholar's portrait: Gonzaga was a maecenas, not a humanist.



Fig. 8. Medal of Ippolita Gonzaga. The representation of the arts in the attributes to Ippolita Gonzaga's portrait alludes to her role as a mecenat rather than a humanist scholar. (British Museum, George III Mantua M 26).

So precisely when can we speak of a scholar's portrait? One problem in answering this question is the unclear relationship between the intellectual culture of Renaissance humanism and particular professional occupations: the category 'humanist' does not correspond to one specific occupation. This is why Tommaso Garzoni, in the preface to his impressive atlas of professions, *La Piazza universale di tutte le professione del mondo* (1587) classifies humanists partly under 'grammar teachers', and partly under 'orators', 'historians' or 'poets'.<sup>24</sup> These concrete professions and occupations most frequently accompany the

<sup>23</sup> Attwood, nr. 70.

<sup>24</sup> Cited by Douglas Biow, *Doctors, Ambassadors, Secretaries: Humanism and Professions in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), p. 6.



brief personal data on medals. To place a person in her/his proper context, learning alone was not enough: specific information was necessary to reveal the sitter's social status. Giovio's medal, for example, shows not just his personal lineage but also his status as bishop of Nocera; Crato advertises his position as imperial physician and adviser at the Habsburg court. In contrast to the portrait collections of scholars, which sought to emphasize a collective identity, the medal need not have highlighted scholarly identity. In some cases Early-Modern status and the modern category of 'scholar' more or less coincide. The Swiss polymath Conrad Gesner, for example, uses his medal to present himself as a Zurich physician and professor.<sup>25</sup> Andrea Alciato and Achille Bocchi, both also known as emblematists, introduce themselves as a legal scholar and city historian of Bologna respectively.<sup>26</sup>

In many cases, therefore, medals do not provide sufficient information to distinguish a portrait of a scholar from a learned portrait. Modern viewers may find this confusing, but it must have been a logical result for those who commissioned the objects. These commissioners were clearly part of a social elite that had enjoyed a rigorous humanist training and shared the same intellectual and aesthetic values. The portrait medal was embedded at the heart of this culture in terms of form, language, imagery and the mode of distribution. Learning alone was not the discerning factor in distinguishing scholars from their patrons. The most important thing was to convey one's status and social credit appropriately. For this purpose, lineage and professional background were important instruments. The medals of Giovio and Valeriano illustrate this focused and functional application of the concept of learning. In both cases, the scholar can be seen as an agent who offers useful services, whether it concern immortal fame or recovering ancient wisdom.

This pattern of representation is further corroborated if we pursue another approach and turn from portrait medals with learned imagery to specific humanists and their portrait medals. Here again one frequently finds that the image on the reverse side does not seek to symbolise the scholarly identity. For instance, Achille Bocchi designed a medal for Giovanni Battista Pigna, a historian at the court of Alfonso II, Duke of Ferrara, using a scene based on a learned etymology of the sitter's last name. The association of Pigna with *pinus* (pine tree) led Bocchi playfully to use the metamorphosis of the nymph Pitys into a pine tree. In the version used by Bocchi, both Pan and Boreas, the god of the

<sup>25</sup> Gesner: Gaetani, tab. 66, nr. 4; Crato: Attwood, nr. 1124 (a second medal of Crato is found in Gaetani, tab. 95, nr. 4).

<sup>26</sup> Alciato: Gaetani, tab. 50, nr. 8; Bocchi: Attwood, nr. 1186.

North wind fell in love with Pitys. However, when the nymph chose Pan, Boreas became so angry that he blew and smashed the girl against a rock. Earth took up the mortally wounded nymph and out of compassion changed her into a pine tree.

In Bocchi's *Symbolicarum quaestiones*, the medal is transformed into an emblem, explaining the mythical story in spiritual terms: Pitys is the 'soul itself', which can only find happiness through piety.<sup>27</sup> This interpretation is no longer about representing a particular humanist scholar. In fact, the pious message confirms more generally shared values, and this was precisely what made the symbol also useful for the social contexts in which the medal was used, not just the world of professional scholars.



Fig. 9. Medal of Achille Bocchi. With the general political message on the reverse of his portrait medal, Bocchi presents himself above all as a historian of his birth place of Bologna. (British Museum, George III Illustrious Persons 194).

The same holds true for the portrait of Bocchi himself. The reverse of his medal shows three men in ancient dress holding various attributes. On the left a man is sitting on a senatorial chair, placed on a stage; he holds a sceptre in his left hand. In the foreground there is a man holding

<sup>27</sup> Bocchi, *Symbolum* 150.

CLXVIII LIB. TERT.  
 NEC NIL, NEC NIMIUM.  
 ΠΑΝΤΑ ΑΝΑΒΑΛΛΟΜΕΝΟΣ.  
 SYMB. LXXX.



Fig 10: 'Nec nil, nec nimium'. Achille Bocchi, *Symbolicarum quaestionum libri quinque* (Bologna, 1555), symbola 80. From Personal Portrait to Universal Lesson. (Glasgow University Library).

a bit and bridle in his right hand, while in the background the third man has a cornucopia in his hands. The bit could be seen to signify the theme of restraint and this is even clearer in the motto of the emblem: 'Matura celeritas' ('Timely Quickness'; Fig. 9). All the elements working together put forward the political message: moderate and reasoned government is the best guarantee for prosperity. Yet Achille Bocchi was not a governor, but a professor of Greek and rhetoric in Bologna.<sup>28</sup> His activities were mainly intellectual: he established his own *academia* and worked on a history of the town. It seems as if his symbolical programme was meant to underscore the immediate relevance of his expertise, by drawing political lessons from ancient symbols and historical examples.

In his emblem book Bocchi again grasps the opportunity to elaborate on the device in an emblem, entitled 'Nec nil, nec nimium' ('Neither Nothing, Nor Too Much', nr. 80) (Fig. 10). The epigram of the emblem offered him the opportunity to explain the picture extensively. Here he stresses the importance of a balance between action and consideration:

With curled nails the famous Elk holds a device stating 'Postponing Nothing'; conversely another person advises with impressive reasons and examples to postpone everything. Yet I think that neither 'Never' nor 'Always' is adequate, but that which is in between: namely to avoid too much wavering or rushing. Nothing is better than well-timed, quick talent. This man here is a ruler, next to him stands a young man with a rich horn, the wealth that the former aged man directs. The third man, however, who is showing the spurs and the hard bit, thus, assumes the middle position between the two.<sup>29</sup>

Bocchi's explanation transforms his own personal medal into a general lesson for a broader audience. Thus, the example also shows how by transforming a medal into an emblem we lose sight of the personality of the individual portrayed. Another example of this is Alciato's emblem about Erasmus's device, which is accompanied by the following epigram (Fig. 11):

<sup>28</sup> See Anne Rolet, 'Achille Bocchi's *Symbolicarum quaestionum libri quinque*', in Enenkel and Visser, eds., *Mundus emblematicus*, pp. 101-130; See also Elizabeth Watson, *Achille Bocchi and the Emblem Book as Symbolic Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>29</sup> 'Inclya falcatis insignia sustinet Alce / Unguibus et meden fert anaballomenos / Contra alius suadet magnis rationibus atque / Exemplis semper pant'anabollomenos / Ast ego nec meden neque semper panta, sed inter / Haec duo quod positum est, id satis esse puto, / Ut neque cunctandum nimis est, ita nec properandum. / Mature celeri nil prius est genio. / Hic regnat, iuvenis praesto est huic divite cornu, / Copia, grandaevus quam regit ille senex. / Tertius at duris calcaria iuncta lupatis / Sic medium ostendens inter utrumque tenet'. For the image of the elk, see also Alciato's 'Nunquam procrastinandum', where the elk serves as a device for the Alciato family.

*Emblemata.*

281

## Terminus.

## EMBLEMA CLVII.



**Q**VADRATVM infoditur firmissima tessera saxum;  
 Stat cirrhata super pectore imago tenus.  
 Vt sese nulli profitetur cedere; talis  
 Terminus est, homines qui scopus unus agit.  
 Est immota dies, praefixaque tempora fati,  
 Deique ferunt primis ultima iudicium.

EXPLICAT. CLAVD. MIN.

**H**AEC Termini pictura nihil vlli concedentis, mor-  
 tem significat, quae inevitabilem habet in res om-  
 nes, nedum homines, necessitatem: ad quam cum perueni-  
 mus, tum solent hominum, qui sunt superstitēs, liberare  
 nobis mortuis esse opiniones atque iudicia.

Qua

Fig. 11: 'Terminus'. Andrea Alciato, *Emblemata* (Pavia, 1618), p. 281, emblem 158. Alciato's emblem is not immediately concerned with Erasmus and his previous use of the same image on his medal. (Glasgow University Library).

## Terminus

A squared stone is set in the ground, an unshakable cube, and on it stands a curly-headed image, fashioned down to the chest. This declares that it yields to none. Such is Terminus, the one and only goal that governs men. There is

an immovable day, times predetermined by fate, and the last times pronounce judgement on the first.<sup>30</sup>

This general *memento mori* does not assume any knowledge about Erasmus's earlier appropriation of the Terminus image. At most, Erasmus was a ready association for Alciato's readers.<sup>31</sup>

\* \* \*

In both portrait medals and emblems, humanists used text and image to infuse the portrait of the scholar with more meaning, retouching or enlarging reality according to their moral perspective or practical aims. Yet, paradoxically, individual portraits on medals generally provide a less informative picture of the intellectual. One explanation for this is that these medals were not necessarily meant to portray the sitter as a scholar, even if they employed typically humanist symbols and attributes. Indeed, the language of the emblematic portrait was not only used by scholars but was also adopted by the wider elite.

In contrast, extracts from humanist emblem books provide a clear, if at times caricatural image of scholars. Recurring virtues are practicality, service, and diligence. These qualities may appear clichéd, but read in the light of their specific local contexts they provide interesting details about how scholars wanted to represent themselves. One sees the scholar here through the lens of a law professor, or an aspiring courtier, or a moralising natural scientist. Yet together the varied representation of intellectuals in medals and emblems presents above all a dynamic portrait of the world in which scholars had to legitimise themselves.

<sup>30</sup> Alciato, emblem 158: 'Quadratum infoditur firmissima tessera saxum, / Stat cirrata super pectore imago tenus / Et sese nulli profitetur cedere, talis / Terminus est, homines qui scopus unus agit. / Est immota dies praefixaque tempora fati / Deque ferunt primis ultima iudicium'.

<sup>31</sup> Claude Mignault's commentary (1573 and later), suggests that *some* readers may have read Alciato's epigram as a critique of Erasmus's immodest use of Terminus: 'Quidam suspicantur his verbis Erasmi (ut loquantur) immodestiam modeste carpi (quod coniectaneum an probare debeam nondum scio) [...]'; cited according to the Tozzi edition (Padua: P. Tozzi, 1618), pp. 671-672.