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The New Understanding of Sculptors' Self in Early Medieval Italy and Northern Europe

This paper researches self-representations of early mediaeval sculptors in Western Europe created up to the 12th century. It offers a new view of artistic self-reference in the Middle Ages. The case is made through analysis of several three-dimensional examples, which have not received sufficient attention in previous scholarship. Produced by sculptors active in the territories of present-day Italy and Germany, I consider the case studies with self-representation as signs of devotion and self-awareness of their makers. Most of the self-representations discussed in this paper are identifiable either through inscriptions, 'signatures,' or on the basis of documentary evidence. A select number of these examples serve as main case studies in this article.

Notably, self-representations that are subjects of research in this paper are integrated with works of art produced for use in Christian practice, devotion and ceremonial. Sculptors' self-representations are regarded as their essential parts, and emphasis is placed on visual analysis and materiality of objects in question. By engaging with the case studies critically, I pursue to identify common features characteristic of the examples originating from both sides of the Alps. This includes consideration of iconographical, stylistic and technical aspects, as well as a discussion of sculptors' self-representations, their practical, devotional and cultural functions and contexts.

In early scholarship portraiture was firmly associated with the Renaissance period, when self-awareness and individuality flourished, for more details see [7]. The Middle Ages, on the contrary, were commonly labelled as the time of collective mentality [4, p. 123]. Current in-depth historical studies demonstrate that portraiture, as a genre, was equally present in antiquity, mediaeval and Renaissance periods, for more information on this concept see Dietl, Legner and Perkinson [13, 22, 29]; the concept of likeness, however, depended upon the period, the tastes and many other circumstances [39, p. 9]. Artistic naturalism, for instance, was perceived as a criterion denoting the boundaries between mediaeval and modern visual appearances; but at the same time, the impact of philosophical texts, especially the works of 'natural philosophy,' on art and development towards naturalistic images were noted by Panofsky and Camille [6, p. 149]. Recent scholarship proposes that mediaeval artists have not exclusively relied on physiognomic likeness to identify sitters and express individuality; their idea of a portrait was based on conventional visual signs, such as age and gender, occupation and kinship, heraldry and costume, and inscriptions [21, p. 73; 30, p. 121]. Mediaeval peoples' views on themselves differed significantly from those that have existed in other periods and we have at present. Focusing on early mediaeval portraiture, Dale suggests that individuals in the Middle Ages were represented not as unique personalities but as ideal types through their virtue, character and presence [10, p. 101].



Fig. 1. Carved relief signed by Ursus Magester (93×120×8 cm). Marble. The Church of Santi Pietro e Paolo in Ferentillo. Province of Terni, Umbria, Italy. Ca 740.

Available at: <https://digidownload.libero.it/valdamer/FerentilloMagisterUrsus.jpg>

In this paper, the reasons for a connection between written and pictorial components of a self-representation and the ways in which these link to other elements of an object receive thorough attention and interpretation. McKittrick discusses this issue with regards to religious texts and illuminated manuscripts, whereas three-dimensional objects remain outside of the scope and require further investigation [26, pp. 297–319]. In most cases sculptors deliberately positioned their inscriptions prominently to the viewers, and self-representations, especially in written form, were meant to indicate professional skills and status [8; 12, p. 77]. Apart from serving these practical functions noted in previous scholarship, sculptors' self-representations may also have a spiritual function. This paper explores whether the opportunity to demonstrate devotion on a permanent basis and perpetuate themselves as pious Christians were among the few reasons to encourage sculptors expressing themselves visually. By the example of case studies, I analyse the ways in which sculptors manipulated the space around their self-representations, either to make them visible or concealed from potential audience.

One of the aims of this paper is to challenge some major issues that I observed in previous scholarship while researching my topic. Namely, early mediaeval sculptors who revealed something of their personalities by visual means have generally been neglected in previous scholarship. It has been the case largely due to the insufficient knowledge or lack of primary sources and artistic evidence. This, in my opinion, may have caused another issue, such as misconceptions that sculptors had no individuality or opportunities to express themselves visually. Uninformed statements on sculptors' 'anonymity' and 'insignificancy' and assumptions that their personalities were not of interest to mediaeval minds determined the scholarship from previous decades [18, p. 72]. These stereotypes were challenged in further literature, but



Fig. 2. The Relief signed by Ursus Magester. Fragment with the sculptor's signature. The Church of Santi Pietro e Paolo in Ferentillo. Province of Terni, Umbria, Italy. Ca 740. Photo: Jois © Flickr. Available at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/63095335@N00/283779514>



Fig. 3. Liutpreht's capital. Stone. Freising Cathedral Crypt. Germany. Ca 1159–1205. Photo: GFreihalter © Wikimedia commons. Available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Crypt_of_Freising_Cathedral#/media/File:Freising_Dom_St._Maria_und_St._Korbinian_Krypta_325.jpg

mostly with regards to the examples from the 12th century and later [8; 12; 24]. Despite their contributions, the works of these scholars have geographical or chronological limitations and these findings need to be tested to see to what extent they apply to the period before the 12th century, which is the subject of my study. Sculptors' self-representations should be understood in context, showing their makers both as individuals, just as they aimed to be remembered, and as representatives of their periods, professionals and devoted Christians.

The relief at the church of Santi Pietro e Paolo in Ferentillo (province of Terni, Umbria, Italy) signed by Ursus Magester is the characteristic example of an image combined with a signature (Fig. 1). Currently part of the church altar, this plaque represents two men in an ornate and stylised architectural setting. Produced in the 8th century, as the inscription at the relief suggests, it includes one of the earliest signed self-representations [11, pp. 155–162; 15, pp. 15–37]. Detailed analysis of this piece reveals much about the origins of self-representations in Christian art and suggests connections with examples from other regions and periods. Early scholarship has only briefly mentioned the relief signed by Ursus along with numerous ancient monuments or religious artefacts from Umbria and local dioceses [10, p. 101; 32, pp. 149–150].

Identification of the two male figures and the scene in the relief has been the topic of speculations. Referring to a signature carved next to the male figure, early scholarship traditionally interpreted it as a self-portrait of the sculptor Ursus [11, p. 161; 20]. The second figure was considered to be his apprentice, but the absence of a signature identifying this image as such was never mentioned. Further publications repeatedly referred to the two men as the sculptor Ursus and his patron duke Hildericus of Spoleto (active 739–742), whose name appears at the top of the relief: “+ HILDERICVS DAGILEOPA + IN HONORE” (+Hildericus Dagileopa + in honour) [23]. The second portion of the inscription reads as follows: “S(AN)C(T)I PETRI ET AMORE S(AN)C(T)I LEO / ET S(AN)C(T)I GRIGORII / [P]RO REMEDIO A(NI)M(E)” (of St. Peter, and for love of St. Leo and St. Gregory, for the salvation of his [Hilderic's] soul). The third portion of the inscription is found next to one of the male figures depicted in the relief



Fig. 4. Bishop Prof. Dr. Reinhard Marx praying in front of the Sarcophagus of St. Corbinian. The column with the capital signed LIVT/PREHT. Freising Cathedral Crypt. Germany.

Available at: http://www.stiftskirche-geseke.de/Aktuelles/Aktuelles_2007/index.php?id=82

and is believed to be the author's signature: "VR//SVS / MA/GES/TER / FECIT" (Magister Ursus created it) (Fig.2).

I emphasise that as opposed to the images of saints, representations of contemporary people are uncommon in early mediaeval sculpture. Thus, a relief in the church interior depicting a sculptor with an apprentice or patron would have been rather unconventional. Neither of the hypotheses from previous publications is based on sound facts or seems convincing. Firstly, I propose a new interpretation of the controversial relief from Ferentillo and identify the two men as ascetics. This is based on a source describing the clothes and iconography of hermits in Christian art [27, pp. 650–655]. Secondly, I reinterpret the iconographical scene at the relief in the context of the legend of the foundation of the Abbey of San Pietro in Valle by the two hermits, St. Lazarus and St. John. However, as noted above, the scene in Ursus's relief has been the matter of scholarly disputes. Due to the lack of primary sources and conclusive evidence the nature of my argument remains hypothetical.

In addition to a new interpretation of the iconographical scene in the relief, this article proposes identification of a male figure with a signature of Ursus next to it. I suggest it may be one of the earliest examples demonstrating the grounds of the conception of sacred identificational portraits, which received further development in religious art at a later date. A 'sacred

identificational portrait' is a specific kind of devotional portrait, in which the author depicts himself in the guise of a Biblical character or a saint [31]. Art historians commonly applied this conception to the images of the Biblical character Nichodemus [33, pp. 195–220]. Having concentrated on late mediaeval examples, they have not questioned if there were prototypes among the earlier pieces. Early mediaeval artists mostly produced devotional self-representations to establish a connection between themselves and holy figures whose steps they aimed to follow. Thus, sacred identificational portraits may have been a feasible choice for them in building artistic identities. I approach this topic by establishing links between the periods, which makes references to later comparative material necessary. For instance, an inscription in Benedetto Antelami's (ca 1150 – ca 1230) *Deposition* relief at Parma Cathedral (1178) associates this sculptor and architect with Nicodemus. Just like in Ursus's panel, an inscription in Antelami's piece plays an important role in identifying the sculptor. In the original inscription, "ANTELAMI DICTVS SCVLPTOR FVIT HIC BENEDICTVS", the name of the author, Antelami, is carved exactly above the image of Nicodemus. It may be interpreted as "The sculptor called Antelami is this blessed one."

The signatures of Ursus and Benedetto Antelami indicate authorship and convey devotional messages. Moreover, I consider that in their works both sculptors followed the idea of sacred identification with saints, which in the mediaeval period was regarded as one of the possibilities to manifest identity. Just like in the case of Antelami, Ursus's signature is carved next to the male figure. However, it may not refer to it directly. Ursus's signature may be associated with the figure of the proposed St. Lazarus and sculptor's working tools in his hands allow a suggestion that the master sculptor meant to identify himself with the ascetic decorating the newly built church.

Essentially, by placing his signature next to the figure who is assumed to be St. Lazarus, Ursus acknowledges that he sees the hermit's deeds and personality as examples of imitation. This intention reflects humility and piety, and would not have been interpreted by the sculptor's contemporaries as blasphemy. In fact, by working as a sculptor at the church of Santi Pietro e Paolo, Ursus continued the deed of St. Lazarus, who, according to the previously discussed legend, had built the oratory in Ferentillo many centuries ago. Ursus may have perceived his work as a way to express devotion and as a possibility to follow the steps of the hermit, similar to the Benedictines 'copying' or imitating St. Gregory the Great. Thus, the relief at Ferentillo may contain one of the earliest portraits of sacred identification. Popular in late mediaeval Europe, the devotional gesture of sacred identification may, in fact, have been introduced in Italy in the Lombard period by sculptors of Germanic origin. It denotes the long-standing roots of cultural and artistic exchange between Italy and Germany that have been enriching both regions.

Conclusive arguments on Ursus's relief may not be made due to the lack of archival evidence, but I propose several hypotheses and use the inscription as a valuable source on the history of the piece. Currently an altar frontal, the relief may originally have been a partition element in the interior of the ancient Lombard church. Considering that most Lombard reliefs are preserved in fragments, it is problematic to judge whether sculptors' self-representations were common at that period. However, the case of Ursus illustrates that Lombard master sculptors produced self-representations in written and pictorial forms and reflected on the ways in which they may express their professional identity and devotion.

The self-representation of Ursus and the next case study are divided by time and geogra-

phy. However, the connection between these two objects produced for ecclesiastical use lies primarily in the combination of an author's signature and a self-image. A capital in the Crypt of Saint Corbinian at Freising Cathedral in Germany has an inscription carved in Roman majuscule, it reads "LIVT // PREHT", which is a male name found in Christian tradition [35, p. 66; 40, p. 423]. The name is positioned at the abacus and appears exactly above the representation of a bearded man (Fig. 3). This paper interprets it as a sculptor's name. Seufert's survey on inscriptions from Freising (2010) was the first to discuss this signature. However, apart from suggesting a dating after 1159, when reconstruction works began in Freising Cathedral and its crypt after the great fire, this book has not expressed independent ideas and referred to previous scholarship [34, pp. 8–9]. In early literature, "LIVT // PREHT" was commonly interpreted as a signature of a professional, who was involved in producing sculptural decoration for the crypt. However, authorities have not agreed on his rank and role in the religious community, some suggesting he was a stonemason, others arguing that he was a master sculptor [37, p. 354]. Generally covering a wide range of objects and sites, most early publications failed to refer to archival sources and discuss Liutpreht and his capital in detail. Often the authors of these early publications were not professional art historians, which explains their superficial knowledge of mediaeval sculpture and their incoherent methodologies. For example, some authors blindly relied on common views that it was unusual for the names of mediaeval sculptors to be revealed, as many of them were churchmen [36, pp. 153, 185]. However, not all authors followed this misconception, a few noted that twelfth-century chronicles and annals mention laymen artists, including Liutpreht [14, p. 51; 28, p. 636].

Questions on Liutpreht remaining without a certain answer in the scholarship to date are the central issue for my investigation. Historical documents, including those on sculpture at Freising Cathedral, are of limited availability as most archives were lost in the fire of 1159. A broader search in related sources eventually resulted in identifying Liutpreht as a lay brother. A mediaeval obituary of the Benedictine Abbey of St. Lambrecht in Styria (the territory of present-day Austria, relatively close to Freising), listed him among the members of the religious community [1, pp. 22, 128]. Specialised literature on lay brothers is limited, but some sources, although fragmentary, contain evidence on them, their activities, and garb [9; 19, p. 462; 25, p. 246]. Recent scholarship indicated that both monks and lay brothers worked for monasteries with which they were affiliated as architects and engineers, masons and sculptors [5, p. 255]. However, none of these sources focused on lay brothers as individuals or discussed whether they expressed themselves visually.

Historical material on Freising Cathedral and its crypt allows deepening contextualisation of the case study and permits narrowing down the chronological frame for Liutpreht's capital to the period between 1159 and 1205 [3; 17]. It also tells more about artistic connections between mediaeval Bavaria, Rhine-Meuse Valley, Italy and other European regions. The crypt of Freising Cathedral was designed to house a great number of relics. Since the mediaeval period, it has been a centrepiece for the Bavarian religious community. After the great fire of 1159, powerful patrons gathered funds to reconstruct Freising Cathedral and its crypt. Among them were Frederick Barbarossa (1120–1190) and his wife Beatrice of Burgundy (1143–1184). This royal couple is prominently perpetuated at the Cathedral portal, and their images are easily identifiable through inscriptions and iconographic features. A promising suggestion is that the signature "LIVT // PREHT" perpetuates the name of a sculptor, who wished to express piety and underline his contribution to the work on the Cathedral and its crypt.

The building of the new Freising Cathedral crypt started after the fire of 1159 and was partially completed, in a fairly short time span, by 1161. Apparently, this was determined by the necessity to accommodate the relics of St. Nonnosus, St. Lantbert of Freising and St. Corbinian that survived the great fire. Columns of the crypt with carved capitals, including the one with Liutpreht's signature, may have been produced after 1159, during the reconstruction. The sculptural ensemble of the crypt develops the metaphorical idea of spiritual rebirth. According to the Bible, Christ was visited by Nicodemus, who would later be considered the patron of sculptors, at night. In a conversation, Jesus told him that even an old man may be born again through Christian sacraments (John 3:3-4). This reference to the transformation of the soul of an older man evokes parallels with lay brothers. Unlike monks, these faithful were mostly involved in manual labour, including sculpting, and were 'converted' to the service of God at monasteries at a mature age [38, pp. 480–481].

The idea of a metamorphosis in order to obtain salvation finds its logical culmination in Liutpreht's capital. The floral stems at this capital transform from bonds to gracefully curved vines with a bunch of grapes, which allude to Eucharist. The column with Liutpreht's capital is in the closest proximity to the sarcophagus of St. Corbinian, which indicates votive intentions. Presumably, the bearded man personifies an individual who reached a certain state of spiritual transformation and endeavours to accept God. The individualised face and thoughtful expression of the figure allow suggesting that it may be an image of a real person, who definitely stands out among the fantastic creatures on the other carved capitals. The Christian male name Liutpreht is carved directly above this image and makes firm associations with the figurative representation. The name "LIVT // PREHT" is broken into two syllables. It recalls the carved signatures "VR // SVS" at San Pietro in Valle and "WE // ZIL" at Petershausen Abbey. Notably, these two Christian centres and Freising Cathedral were associated with the Benedictines. A gesture of self-abasement of the bearers of these names occurring in these signatures consists of breaking the names in syllables to make them illegible. The degrees of humility described in the Rule of St. Benedict instruct about being humble. The 6th and the 7th degrees of humility, for instance, suggest that in order to become closer to the divine, monks should think of themselves as bad and unworthy workmen, people of less account than others [2, p. 45]. Following this spiritual idea, Ursus, Wezilo and Liutpreht may have purposely positioned their devotional self-representations in direct relation to the images of holy figures.

However, the signature at Liutpreht's capital also demonstrates an architectonic feature. Split in half by the angle of the abacus, it follows the structure of the capital. This establishes a closer connection between the signature and the male figure, who is also placed at the corner of the capital. Remarkably enough, the column with Liutpreht's signature is located next to the sacred object in the crypt, the sarcophagus of St. Corbinian. More precisely, when facing the sarcophagus, viewers would see the column to their right, at an angle making Liutpreht's face and signature clearly visible (Fig. 4). The height of the column is not too high and would allow this. Thus, Liutpreht had purposely selected a very specific audience to see his name. Apparently, it was done for priests or pilgrims making petitions in front of the sarcophagus and altar of St. Corbinian. This guaranteed that Liutpreht would be remembered, and that his devotion to St. Corbinian would be on view permanently, to secure a place in Heaven. Conversely, people randomly wandering in the crypt would rather notice fragments of his name "LIVT" or "PREHT", depending upon the direction from which they approached the column. This attempt to conceal the name from a wider audience may be regarded as a gesture

of humility. This was common in Christian epigraphy and visual culture already since the 4th century, when abbreviated names or monograms were used as asking for divine assistance [16, p. 9]. The consideration of all these factors reveals artistic intelligence and spirituality of the author of this idea.

Notwithstanding geographical distance and a considerable time span, religious and cultural factors determined similarities between the self-representations of Ursus and Liutpreht, the main case studies of this paper. Both sculptors affiliated with the Benedictine monasteries in their regions and represented themselves according to the statuses they possessed. In these two case studies sculptors' signatures are considered in relation to the pictorial elements and serve as valuable sources about the authors. These examples equally ensured the sculptors' permanent presence at church, and served as manifestations of their authorship and skill. The progressiveness of their visual thinking consisted in a masterly ability to combine figurative and written components in their self-representations and integrate these in religious settings.

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Title. The New Understanding of Sculptors' Self in Early Medieval Italy and Northern Europe

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Abstract. The phenomena of medieval artists' identity and self-representation remain among the most complex, intriguing and promising topics for research. This paper challenges the stereotype of an anonymous medieval artist and offers a new view of artistic self-reference in the Middle Ages.

The case is made through analysis of a series of three-dimensional examples, which have not received sufficient attention in previous scholarship. Produced by sculptors, bronze casters and goldsmiths active in the territories of present-day Italy and Germany, I consider the case studies with self-representation as signs of devotion and self-awareness of their makers.

Most of the self-representations discussed in this thesis are identifiable either through inscriptions, 'signatures' or on the basis of documentary evidence. A select number of these examples serve as main case studies in this paper. By analysing a number of artists' self-representations, this paper offers an alternative view on lives and work of early mediaeval sculptors and suggests overcoming the stereotype of the anonymous artist in the Middle Ages. At

the same time, this paper cautiously avoids projecting another stereotypical misconception, namely a post-medieval view of an artist as an intellectual individual gifted with outstanding creativity.

Notably, self-representations that are subjects of research in this paper are integrated within works of art produced for use in Christian practice, devotion and ceremonial. The case studies produced in the territories of Italia and Germania are not presented as isolated from other pieces with artists' self-representations created in various media and in different European regions.

Keywords: mediaeval sculpture, sculptor, self-portrait, self-representation, Middle Ages, iconography

Название статьи. Новое понимание личности скульптора в раннесредневековой Италии и Северной Европе

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Аннотация. Исследование посвящено феномену идентичности и саморепрезентации средневековых скульпторов и бросает вызов давним стереотипам об анонимности средневекового художника. Основой для анализа служит ряд произведений, выполненных скульпторами, мастерами, работавшими с бронзой и драгоценными металлами на территориях современной Италии и Германии. Этой теме не уделялось достаточного внимания в искусствоведении. Большинство автопортретов, обсуждаемых в этом исследовании, можно идентифицировать либо по надписям, «подписям», либо на основе документальных свидетельств и архивных данных. Отдельные примеры саморепрезентации мастеров трактуются как формы выражения набожности и молитвенных обращений к богу, а также желания заявить о себе и своем авторстве.

Анализируя ряд произведений с подписями и изображениями скульпторов, данное исследование предлагает альтернативный взгляд на жизнь и творчество раннесредневековых мастеров и преодолевает стереотипы об анонимности художников в Средние века. Саморепрезентации скульпторов, являющиеся предметом данного исследования, интегрированы в произведения искусства, созданные для использования в христианской практике богослужения и рассматриваются как неотъемлемая часть этих произведений искусства или интерьеров соборов, и акцент делается на визуальном анализе и материальности рассматриваемых объектов.

Произведения с автопортретами скульпторов, созданные на территории Италии и Германии в раннесредневековый период, необходимо рассматривать в контексте подобных примеров саморепрезентации, созданных в других регионах Европы. Общие идейные, иконографические и религиозно-философские аспекты в саморепрезентации скульпторов зачастую были связаны с тем, что они много путешествовали как по работе, особенно в XI и XII вв., когда процесс строительства новых церквей шел особенно активно по всей Европе.

Ключевые слова: средневековая скульптура, скульптор, автопортрет, саморепрезентация, Средние века, иконография