

Late Medieval Self-Portraiture and Patronage in Pietro da Pavia's Ambrosiana Pliny

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Abstract: In the late Trecento Fra Pietro da Pavia, a miniaturist in the court-city of the dukes of Milan, illuminated a copy of Pliny's *Natural History* for Pasquino Capelli, a famous bibliophile and one of the most powerful chancellors to Duke Giangaleazzo Visconti. In the illuminated letter M that begins book XXXV, which contains Pliny's discussion on ancient artists, Fra Pietro signs and dates the manuscript *Frater Pietro da Pavia me fecit, 1389*. Within the framing curves of the letter the illuminator further commemorates his involvement in the manuscript's creation by means of a small but exquisitely detailed self-portrait in which Pietro shows himself industriously at work.

Although created in an era in which art patrons possessed and sometimes exercised the right of refusal should a commissioned work of art not meet their standards, this self-portrait has hitherto not been interrogated for either the purpose behind its presence or how its original audience might have understood it. This essay attempts to shed light on both issues by examining the historical context surrounding the creation and format of Pietro's self-image, and by considering Pietro's signature inscription in relation to Pliny's discourse on the meaning behind the use of the word "fecit" in an artist's signature. It further considers the influence exerted by Francesco Petrarca [Petrarch] on the Milanese court in order to suggest that the presentation of Fra Pietro's self-image drew upon Petrarch's model of authorial identity in a way that the illuminator's important patron would have appreciated and perhaps encouraged.

The Biblioteca Ambrosiana of Milan possesses a handful of illuminated manuscript copies of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, the oldest of which is dated 1389. This copy is one of only two that record the identity of its illuminator, in this case Fra Pietro da Pavia, a famous monk and miniaturist of Pavia, the court-city of the Dukes of Milan. Pietro's self-commemoration within this lavishly illustrated late medieval manuscript takes the form of a signature-inscription "*Frater Petrus de Pavia me fecit, 1389*" (*Friar Pietro of Pavia made me, 1389*) in the illuminated letter "M" initiating Book xxxv.¹ Pietro illuminated this manuscript, known as the Ambrosiana Pliny, which had been copied by Armanno (also called Armannus) de Alemannia, in the Augustinian monastery of S. Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, Pavia's most important medieval scriptorium (Zuradelli 174). Pietro's patron for this manuscript was Pasquino Capelli (also spelled "Cappelli," d. 1398), an influential chancellor

¹ Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Ms. E. 24 inf., folio 332. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*. This image is not included in this essay due to a policy of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana regarding the reproduction of its holdings in an open-access web format. For a black and white image of the letter, see Tolfo <<http://www.storiadimilano.it/Arte/miniatori.htm#Fra%20Pietro%20di%20Pavia>>. Illustrations can also be found in Egbert 80 and Alexander 30.

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to Giangaleazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan (d. 1402) (Bueno de Mesquita 727). While Pietro's image is small, its placement in an illuminated letter initiating a book about ancient art immediately renders it noteworthy. Pietro's self-identified self-image is indeed the sole portrait the volume contains, and analysis of the self-image within its context of the Visconti court and its powerful commissioner's patronage sheds light on the evolving status of authors and artists in late medieval Italian culture.

This signature-inscription along with its small but exquisite self-image is described as a type of colophon for the purposes of this essay.² The evocation of a scribe or illuminator seems initially to be easy for a modern viewer to understand. Instead of being set within the illustrated narrative events of a manuscript, a colophon generally appears at the beginning or end of the text, or is appended and set apart, and so is easily distinguishable. In some pictorial colophons—sometimes in the form of small, inscribed self-images of the scribe or author—the figures appear particularly self-conscious of their professional stature: medieval scribes usually portrayed themselves writing or drawing in small images found in page margins. The majority of written and pictorial colophons are considered evocations of a scribe's or copyist's voice or presence (Robb 19). Sometimes stating a work's purpose or asserting the creation of a true copy, scriptural medieval colophons also might reveal the personal thoughts or remarks of their makers. In statistical terms, colophons were rarely added to medieval books; the majority of extant books do not contain any personal mark of the illuminator or copyist. Nevertheless, the number of manuscripts created during the medieval period was sufficiently large that hundreds of these messages survive, ranging from pious sentiments enjoining the reader's acknowledgement of a worthy effort to the more profane if equally heartfelt expressions of gratitude for a labor brought to completion (Overgaauw 81).

Pietro's illuminated "M" in part follows 14th-century trends. According to Lilian Armstrong, north Italian medieval scribes in the late 12th and 13th centuries developed their own cycle of illustrations for the decoration of Pliny's text, which involved using historiated initials at the beginning of each of its thirty-seven books. Rather than any attempt at a scientific classification, Lillian Armstrong asserts that the images were chosen "merely [to] indicate to the reader something about the events of the book to follow," with images inspired by the text ("Venetian Manuscripts" 97). In this light, it is not surprising that images regarding the arts are generally found in the historiated initials of Book xxxv and were also used in the initials of the last five books describing ancient art. It is interesting to note that while the earliest known medieval example of an illustrated copy of

² The definition of the term 'colophon' is here expanded beyond that used by other writers on the subject. According to Muzerelle 136, a *colophon* is a "final formula in which the scribe mentions the place or the date of the copy, either one or both." He defines a *souscription* as a "formula in which the scribe indicated his name." Overgaauw 82, n. 1, defines a 'colophon' so as to combine Muzerelle's sense of the colophon and souscription. Because the image of the scribe in the medieval text is often accompanied by some means of identification—generally the name of the individual and his or her link to the text—for lack of a better term herein the term "colophon" is intended to include images of the scribe or author when they are the same individual wherever such images appear in the text.

Pliny, a Bolognese manuscript dating to 1300, also illustrates Book xxxv, it does so in a different manner than Fra Pietro's, and instead features an abstracted design in brilliant gold, red and blue. [Fig. 1] The illuminator's self-portrait is part of a group of images from the Ambrosiana text that show activities associated with the subjects discussed as opposed to images of plants or animals (98). Armstrong describes these details as numbering amongst the most powerful compositions in the manuscript, and argues that they are probably Pietro's innovations instead of elements that he copied from an earlier model ("Manuscripts Before 1430" 26-27; Rossi 232).

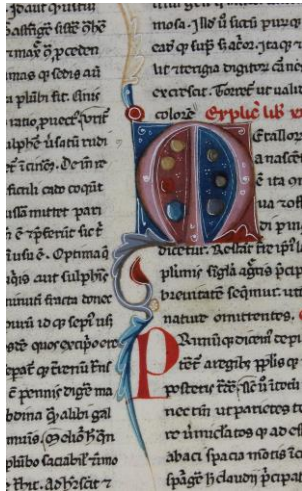


Fig. 1
Madrid. Biblioteca Real
de el Escorial, Ms.
R.I.5. Pliny the Elder,
Natural History. Initial
"M."

One might deem Pietro's self-portrait and Armanno's several signed manuscripts the exceptions that prove the rule—or at least, the exceptions to the conclusions drawn by A. E. Overgaauw, who argues that scribes of the later Middle Ages "hardly ever wrote their names in the manuscripts they wrote for the use of others" (85, 88). Pietro not only inscribes his name on the left curving staff of the letter "M," but he also figures himself at work sitting on a scriptorium bench before a desk upon which sits a cut and bound volume with two pages visible. The text is already in place, and the legible script suggests that we are looking at the volume in which Pietro himself appears, for it is a copy of Pliny's *Natural History* that Pietro decorates. Pietro, soberly garbed as an Augustinian hermit and cleanly tonsured, paints a large letter "P" on the facing recto page. He appears both framed by the letter and yet in an ambiguous space: the curving outside staves of the "M" appear

beside him, but he sets himself in front of the letter's center staff. The tiny background space is entirely filled with a floral motif finely painted in rich colors.

A few tantalizing facts are known about the Ambrosiana Pliny and its commissioner. Prior to the spectacular reversal of fortune leading to his imprisonment and death in prison (or possible execution) for treason in 1398, Pasquino Capelli was one of the most powerful officials in Giangaleazzo Visconti's court in Pavia, where he was known as the man to whom ambassadors presented themselves and foreign chancellors appealed for favor (Chamberlin 85, 185). Although not in a position of any great security, Pasquino nevertheless enjoyed considerable power during his time in office (Witt 161-162). As a court official he had been instrumental in the actions leading up to Giangaleazzo's confirmation by the Milanese Great Council of Nine Hundred that legitimized his solitary rule of the city following his seizure of power from his uncle Bernabò Visconti in 1385 (Chamberlin 79). In spite a posthumous pardon, Pasquino's property was confiscated and the finest examples from his book collection found their way into the Visconti library (Pellegrin 47; Bueno de Mesquita 729). Following their confiscation, all of the volumes that came to be part of the Visconti library from Pasquino's collection were emblazoned with the Visconti arms, and several books had their previous owner's emblems scraped away (Pellegrin 20). The full extent to which Pasquino Capelli's name or family arms might have

been visible in the manuscripts he commissioned from the Augustinian scriptorium at S. Pietro in Ciel d'Oro or bought while on diplomatic missions to Paris prior to their confiscation is difficult to ascertain. Armanno's signatures, however, recorded six times in manuscripts made for the Visconti chancellor, were allowed to remain (Pellegrin 14 and Pl. 67).

Pasquino is known to have enlarged his collection by taking advantage of various diplomatic missions to Paris as a means to acquire books for himself and others (Armstrong "Manuscripts Before 1430" 29; Trapp 260). Not only did this passionate bibliophile actively seek to enlarge his impressive book collection throughout his career, he is known to have encouraged its consultation among writers and fellow humanists (Buono de Mesquita 729). The secretary and chancellor has been called the most remarkable personality in the Milanese chancellery of his day: a "lover of studies, writer of some elegance and an ardent supporter of early Lombardian humanism in rapport with the spirits of the time" (Viscardi and Vitale 592).³ When an inventory of Giangaleazzo's library was completed in 1426, of the 988 items listed, the book collections previously owned by Pasquino Capelli and Francesco I of Carrara, the ruler of Padua from 1350 until his defeat at the hands of the Milanese in 1388, were counted two of the best and largest (Sutton 91).

Among Pasquino's books, the Ambrosiana Pliny has proven to be a rich source of information for scholars interested in the relationship between Northern Italian and French illumination during the late 14th and early 15th centuries; examples of the latter would have entered Lombardy following Blanche of Savoy's marriage to Galeazzo II in 1350 (Kirsch 8). Armstrong describes Pasquino's copy of the *Natural History* "as an appealing pastiche" created at the behest of a patron with "a taste for manuscripts of classical texts, and an appreciative eye for the new naturalism of Lombard illuminations" ("Manuscripts Before 1430" 29). Nor was the Ambrosiana Pliny the only text to reflect Pasquino's classical interests: Armanno da Alemannia and Pietro da Pavia also made copies of Petrus de Abano's *Commentaries in Problemata Aristotelis* and Petrarch's *Res memorandae*, both of which found their way into the Visconti collection following Pasquino's disgrace (Sutton 90).⁴

Within its context, Pietro's self-inclusion within the Ambrosiana Pliny would seem to make a good deal of sense, and is, in fact, the illuminator's sole self-portrait in any of the extant books he is known to have decorated, whether for Pasquino or for other patrons. It figures in what seems to be an eminently sensible location, initiating Book xxxv of one of the most important classical sources of knowledge regarding ancient artists and famous works of ancient Greek and Roman art. Pietro's illuminations served as a model for other copies of Pliny created subsequently, in which a figure of an artist at work was often used to commence "On painting" (Rossi 236). Nonetheless, Pietro's own model for the image is unknown. If Armstrong is correct in her argument that Pietro's model was incomplete and

³ "[...]amante degli studi, scrittore di qualche eleganze e ardente propugnatore del primo umanesimo in Lombardia, in rapporto con gli spiriti doti del tempo[...]."

⁴ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. Latin 6541 and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. Latin 6069.

that Pietro himself was responsible for several innovations, including the image in question, then one might wonder what circumstances led to the particular choice of motif and Pietro's own self-inclusion. This is especially true as later examples of the text's illustrations, said to have been modeled after Pietro's version, do not generally figure an artist at work in the same way, much less a self-portrait (Armstrong "Manuscripts Before 1430" 27).

One can presume that Pietro turned to some other model for this and other images of artisans and laborers at work rather than creating the images from his own imagination, given the importance of the text. Very likely, other manuscripts that Pietro had access to—especially in light of the famous Visconti library housed in the palazzo at Pavia, founded by Galeazzo II (d. 1378)—would have featured an image of a scribe or painter at work in addition to other manuscript portraits, whether of the volume's author or its possessor(s). While discussions such as those by Virginia Egbert and Jonathan Alexander, due to the nature of their theses, tend to give the impression that such images were common, colophons in general were relatively rare, and thus a false picture may ensue regarding the frequency with which these images occurred. Nevertheless, such images are found in a sufficient number of manuscripts to presuppose that Pietro would have seen something similar, if not necessarily in great quantity. A brief examination of a few relevant images reveals that Pietro may have had some choice in what model to employ with regard to the typical ways in which medieval scribes, painters and illuminators revealed themselves, or a member of their profession, at work.

Two basic modes of representation were used by medieval book decorators for their self-portraits. Illuminators and scribes, identified or not, featured themselves with their tools, or they figured themselves without any implements, but identified themselves by inscription as a book's scribe/copyist, illuminator or painter. In general, the former seems to be a more specific commentary on the scribe or illuminator's relationship with the physical text read by the reader—the image is of the craftsman at work, *doing* work, and thus, perhaps, we are to appreciate the fruits of his finished labor. If this interpretation is valid, this type of self-image would parallel many existing colophons that enjoin the reader's attention to the worthiness of the work, and recommend the scribe's soul to God. The second type of portrait draws more attention to the individual personality of the artist and the goal of spiritual salvation or patronal recognition, although the artist is generally identified within his or her professional capacity.

Pictorial colophons of the first type fall generally into two styles. One features the diminutive self-portrait of the illuminator in the act of painting a portion of one of the illuminations featured on the page in which he appears. This compositionally dynamic style was used by several illuminators throughout the 11th and 12th centuries in northern Europe. For example, the 12th-century Premonstratensian canon Frater Rufillus of Weissenau places his self-portrait in the open space framed by a large and fantastically

conceived letter “R” at the beginning of the *Passion of St. Martin*.⁵ He appears with many of the tools of his profession surrounding him—inkhorn, mahl stick and brush in hand, his mixed colors in four pots sitting on the table behind him while before him rests a knife and bowl for grinding colors. His horizontally held pen set against the letter’s tail serves literally to underscore his self-identification “FR RUFILUS.” Like Pietro, Ruffilus also appears dressed as a tonsured monk, although he is less formal in his appearance—for one thing, his work has hiked his robes up around his shins.

A second style featuring the scribe or illuminator with his tools might be described as the desk self-image, and appears largely based on the tradition of the author portrait, which in turn follows the style of the standard Evangelist portrait seen for centuries in numerous illuminated manuscripts. In this style, a scribe features himself at a writing desk with an open manuscript beside or before him; Pietro da Pavia’s self-portrait falls into this mode and seems to have deemed appropriate by many monk-scribes. One such self-portrait was made by Hugo, a late 11th-century Norman monk likely from Jumièges who created a well-known colophon portrait at the end of a manuscript of Jerome’s *Commentary on Isaiah*.⁶ Hugo also shows himself with implements: he dips a pen in an inkwell with one hand and holds a knife with the other while seated at a lectern set in the arch made underneath an angled stairwell. Hugo was neither the first nor the last to style himself a “pictor” and “illuminator,” perhaps in order to emphasize how activities carried out by different individuals had instead been done by his hand alone.⁷

Another source of inspiration both in general for the self-portraits of the scribe featured at a desk—and specifically for Pietro’s self-portrait—is not a self-image at all. Instead, it would seem impossible *not* to regard images of the Evangelists at work transcribing the gospels, especially St. Luke—already depicted in the act of painting the Virgin and Child during the second half of the Trecento—as a source of both style and conceptual inspiration for many pictorial colophons. Images of the Evangelists that decorated books of the Gospels acted as a guarantee of authenticity from the second century onward. In fact, one of the oldest traditional figurations pictures the saint in the act of writing the utterances dictated by his Evangelical symbol, denoting the biblical book’s divine authorship. In these images, the actual nuts and bolts of medieval manuscript production are only symbolically represented in order to highlight the concept of God’s voice coming forth from his mortal instrument’s pen so that such texts were, in fact, divinely authorized. Author portraits appear to borrow their iconography from this model (Smith 24).

⁵ Geneva, Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, Cod. 172, folio 244. Legendary. Permission to reproduce could not be obtained. For an illustration, see Alexander 17.

⁶ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Bodley 717, folio 287v, Jerome on Isaiah. For illustration see <<http://www.rsl.ox.ac.uk/imacat/in01.html>>

⁷ Examples of an individual describing himself as both “pictor” and “illuminator” prior to Hugo are known, but exactly what was intended by the distinction remains unclear. A “pictor” was a painter, while Alexander 12 suggests that “illuminare”—to light up—may have been intended to imply the application of gold or highlights.

Discerning which if any of the images or image types discussed above Pietro might have studied is impossible, but it seems likely that any self-portrait model he saw would have fallen into one of those basic styles. Like other clerical illuminators who showed themselves at writing desks, Pietro figures himself dressed as a monk of his order at work drawing a letter upon the page, and is prominently self-identified. Nevertheless, it seems probable that any illuminator who put his self-image in a commissioned manuscript for a patron as sophisticated, powerful and book-knowledgeable as Pasquino Capelli, would have done so with Pasquino's knowledge and approval. While Albert Derolez argues that Italian illuminators added colophons as a means of advertising their services, he makes this argument concerning secular rather than clerical painters (48-50, n.6). Presumably, advertising would not have been an issue for the Augustinian Pietro da Pavia, whose relationship with his bibliophilic patron may have begun as much as a decade earlier in 1374 with an illustrated Boccaccio today in the Vatican.⁸ It is worth noting in any case that whether or not one accepts the 1374 Boccaccio as coming from Pietro's scriptorium, scholars have identified his hand in a text of Petrarch's *Liber rerum memorandarum* [Paris, BN, Ms. Lat. 6069T] in the same year that Pietro signed and dated the Ambrosiana Pliny also illustrated for Pasquino and containing no self-references (Pellegrin 17).

Aside from a supposed awareness of the tradition of the pictorial colophon, one source of inspiration for Pietro's self-portrait would appear to come from an increased interest in the arts in Italian literature, and by extension, the creators of those works of art. While the pictorial colophon may have been more common north of the Alps (or at least more studied by modern scholars with more examples known), it is rarer that we know the names of individual craftsmen—by their own remarks or otherwise—and even less common that we know anything of their other works or circumstances through their own efforts at accumulating fame.⁹ In Italy, however, the situation may have been different and illuminators were better known, or at least there must have been some reason why Dante used the manuscript miniaturist Oderisi da Gubbio as a symbol of pride punished in Canto IX of the *Purgatorio*. The same often-quoted passage that notes the transfer of fame from the painter Cimabue to Giotto has a parallel: the contemporary renown of the illuminator Franco da Bologna had once been Oderisi's.¹⁰ Benvenuto da Imola's commentary on the text written during the 1370s speaks dismissively of a 1333 author's expression of surprise that Dante would give honor and fame to "rude mechanicals" (*bassae artis*). The later author notes that "the appetite for glory is found indifferently among all so that even small

⁸ *De Montibus, silvis, fontibus, lacubus, fluminibus* [Vatican, Reg. Lat. 1477]. This text, although not indubitably assigned to Pietro, bear Pasquino's arms. Pellegrin 18 notes that the style appears to be that of Pietro.

⁹ While some illuminators were especially sought by discerning patrons for their talents, even many of these remain anonymous. See for example Allen Farber 32-39.

¹⁰ At the beginning of the famous passage (see Dante 176-177), the poet records his address to Oderisi's shade: "'Oh,' I said to him, 'are you not Oderisi, the honor of Gubbio and the honor of the art which in Paris they call 'alluminare'? 'Brother,' he replied, 'the pages worked by Franco of Bologna shine more brightly. It is his now, all the honor, and mine in part.'" The miniaturist is also mentioned by Giorgio Vasari (II: 105) who quotes Dante's verse in his brief discussion of Oderisi and Franco da Bologna.

craftsmen have been eager to acquire it.” To cap his argument, Benvenuto draws upon history: “So we see that painters attach their names to works, as Valerius points out in his *De pictore nobili*” (310).¹¹ While the late 14th-century author did not assure the reader that artists both generally and specifically were themselves worthy of discussion and praise, we do find an acknowledgement that it was natural for artists to seek fame and to claim it with their signatures. The existence of the passage indicates a commissioner’s recognition and acceptance of the justice of an artist’s goal of glory.

For Pasquino and other readers of the handsomely decorated book who viewed Pietro’s tiny but lush signed self-portrait there was likely a pre-existing way of viewing artists’ signatures of the type Pietro presents. As an educated man, Pasquino would have been familiar with historical and contemporary discussions of mankind’s hunger for fame and recognition, and on the opposite side of the coin, the need for a semblance, at least, of humility. One instance expounding both concepts that Pasquino and Pietro could not help but have known comes from the very volume that Pasquino commissioned and Pietro illuminated, appearing at the beginning of the manuscript.¹² Pliny’s preface addressed to the emperor Vespasian commences Pasquino’s manuscript even before the index, giving this section considerable prominence. Here, Pliny interjects a disclaimer of his volume’s “incompleteness,” commenting that his was a provisional signature after the practice of artists who signed their work “*faciebat*” (“was working on for a long time”) rather than “*fecit*” (“completed”). Pliny records that he knew of no more than three ancient artists who had inscribed their works as actually “*fecit*,” but claims that artists normally used a signature form that indicated that the work was still somehow in progress and might be returned to and improved, and implied humility in the maker.¹³ In the volume that Pietro

¹¹ Citation and translation from Lerner 271-272: “[...]cum potuisset dignius facere mentionem de viris excellentissimis qui pulcra et nobilia opera fecerunt avidissimi gloriae? [...]sicut videmus quod pictores apponunt nomina operibus, sicut scribit Valerius de pictore nobili.”

¹² Ms. Ambrosiana E 24 Inf, folio 1r – 2v.

¹³ Ms. Ambrosiana E 24 Inf, folio 2r. The passage is worth quoting more or less in its entirety (text and translation from Pliny and Rackham: I, 17-19): “[...]ex illis nos velim intellegi pingendi fingendique conditoribus quos in libellis his invenies absoluta opera, et illa quoque quae mirando non satiamur, pendenti titulo inscripsisse, ut Apelles faciebat aut Polyclitus, tanquam inchoate semper arte et imperfecta, ut contra iudiciorum varietates superesset artifice regressus ad veniam, velut emendaturo quicquid desideraretur si non esset interceptus, quare plenum verecundiae illud est quod omnia opera tamquam novissima inscribere et tamquam singulis fato adempti, tria non amplius, ut opinor, absoluta traduntur inscripta; Ille fecit (quae suis locis reddam); quo apparuit summam artis securitatem auctori placuisse, et ob id magna invidia fuere omnia ea.” “[...]I should like to be accepted on the lines of those founders of painting and sculpture who, as you will find in these volumes, used to inscribe their finished works, even the masterpieces which we can never be tired of admiring, with a provisional title such as *Worked on by Apelles* or *Polyclitus*, as though art was always in process and not completed, so that when faced by the vagaries of criticism the artist might have left him a line of retreat to indulgence, by implying that he intended, if not interrupted, to correct any defect noted. Hence it is exceedingly modest of them to have inscribed all their works in a manner suggesting that they were their latest, and as though they had been snatched away from each of them by fate. Not more than three, I fancy, are recorded as having an inscription denoting completion—*Made by so-and-so* (these I will bring in at their proper places); this made the artist appear to have assumed a supreme confidence in his art, and consequently all these works were very unpopular.”

illuminated, however, the book tells us that it (or at least the self-image) was “made” or “finished” by Pietro – “*Frater Petrus de Papia me fecit.*”

It should be acknowledged that Pietro’s signature format mirrored one used by some contemporary panel painters. Although known contemporary signatures take multiple forms, a fairly common wording stated in Latin, incidentally a language few panel painters knew, that an artist made an object (*fecit*) or painted it (*pinxit*). On other occasions, the panel itself would appear itself to speak, informing the viewer that its painter had “made me” – (*me fecit*). Such signatures were often added to frames during the Trecento, a fact that makes enumerating them and their various formats impossible, as so few original frames survive. Further, many contemporary signatures used no verb at all; instead, a panel or sculpture might be the “work” (*opus*) of the artist whose name is given (Vannucci 119-138). Contemporary artists had a choice of signature formats, and why a particular format was chosen is not a question to which scholars have turned sufficient attention.

Fra Pietro is not unique in the signature format he adopts, and indeed one must surmise from existing scribal self-portraits and colophons that other illuminators and scribes, whether monastic or lay, were equally able to commemorate their involvement in the creation of a manuscript. It should be acknowledged, however, that so few Italian colophons are known that Pietro’s stands out as an extraordinary example of artistic self-consciousness. We will likely never know enough about Pietro’s motivations to regard him as fame-hungry or its opposite; nevertheless, the explanation for his signature and its format was present for his patron in the very volume in which the signature is found, and in a location that would not only have been impossible to ignore, but on the contrary was quite likely to have been appreciated. At the very least, it must be presumed that both patron and illuminator were aware of Pliny’s discussion of the matter. It seems plausible to suggest that the use of “fecit” here was intended to imply the heights to which artists had increased since Pliny’s day, and simultaneously cast a favorably light on the astuteness of Pasquino’s patronage. Neither Fra Pietro’s peers nor painters of panels signed their works “fecit” in the context of a famous classical discussion of the term’s signification. Instead, within this context the use of the word implies that artists of Pasquino’s time, and above all the one he had selected to illuminate several of his manuscripts, were worthy of being able to claim their works completed.

Another influence on Trecento culture and the arts, and a factor that cannot be taken lightly since it probably conditioned the way in which the image was perceived, is that of Petrarch. The writings of the poet and humanist were themselves likely an indirect source of inspiration for the image’s presence in the Ambrosiana Pliny. Although Petrarch’s influence probably did not enter through any particular image of the poet or even necessarily through his comments on specific works of arts, these episodes are worthy of the numerous studies made of them. Scholars have explored relations between Petrarch’s texts and pictorial imagery; his *Triumphs*, especially, would become a source of inspiration and textual reference for painters of the 15th and 16th centuries (Wollesen). Nevertheless, for the most part, the phrases he used to discuss and praise works of art fell well within

what Michael Baxandall described as “a narrow range of commonplaces” (32). Petrarch’s importance to humanist art criticism comes from his “re-establishment” of a “characteristic sort of generalized reference” to painting and sculpture (53). Or, as John Richards put it, “[Petrarch’s] observations on art were sporadic and usually marginal, but they are crucially important for the understanding of the development of a critical vocabulary for art, and for revealing the way in which an appreciation of the visual arts began to be absorbed into the concerns of literary humanism” (559). The longest discussion of art from a Trecento humanist, *De remediis utriusque fortunae*, was written between 1354 and 1366 as a dialogue between *Gaudium* and *Ratio*; the text makes it clear where Petrarch’s appreciation of the arts falls in the greater scheme of things. The arts, like a good game of chess or one’s friends, were to be enjoyed in proper moderation.

Undoubtedly, these texts and the concepts they contain would have been known by both illuminator and commissioner given the fact that humanism in Milan and its territories first emerged during Giangaleazzo’s reign. Courts and courtly activities generally took their cue from the reigning figures, and significantly Milanese humanism was especially associated with the court chancery at Pavia at the end of the Trecento/early Quattrocento (Rabil “Humanism in Milan” 236). Thus, that Giangaleazzo would be immortalized within Paolo Giovio’s homage to the Lombardian family, *Vite duodecim Vicecomitum Mediolani Principum* (later, *Le vite dei dodici Visconti, prencipi di Milano*, 1549), with the author’s customary superlatives for the ruler’s scholarly zeal almost two centuries after the fact, can likely be taken as an indication of the general tenor of a court that recognized—or wished to be seen as recognizing—the importance of intellectual pursuits. There was, of course, no more famous a scholar in living memory than Petrarch for Trecento humanists. Directly linked with two Visconti courts, Petrarch’s influence within the humanist circles frequented by Pasquino is well known and has seen much study (Rabil “Petrarch, Cicero” 80-81), and moreover, Pasquino may have in fact met Petrarch during the poet’s last visit to Pavia (Bueno de Mesquita 729). Although the Visconti may have been in part responsible for the emergence of humanism in Milan and its early thematic interests, the cultural foundations of Milanese humanism have been said to rest upon Florentine humanism and the works of Petrarch (Rabil “Humanism in Milan” 236).

Further, Pasquino Capelli almost undoubtedly knew of the famous fresco cycle of the *Virorum Illustrium* based on Petrarch’s text and dedicated to Francesco I da Carrara (d. 1393), a famous patron of the arts who was defeated by the Milanese, formerly his allies, and subsequently imprisoned, located in the Trecento ruler’s palace in Padua. Today the original cycle painted probably between c. 1367 and 1379 in the room named for the cycle—the *Sala Virorum Illustrium* (known today as the *Sala dei Giganti*)—is all but gone, but it is known that one of the earliest images of Petrarch was painted there. Theodor Mommsen dates Petrarch’s portrait in the *Sala*, painted after the original cycle’s completion, to a point after Petrarch’s death but before Francesco’s imprisonment by Giangaleazzo in 1388. [Fig. 2] Although the fourteenth-century image was repainted during

both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was noted during the 1928 restoration of the hall to have been the only remaining original work within the hall (Mommsen 102).

Even extensively retouched, the portrayal more or less follows the typical format of the author portrait, and portrays Petrarch in a roughly similar fashion to Pietro's concurrent image. Both men are portrayed at writing desks, although, interestingly, instead of showing Petrarch at work writing, the Paduan image figures Petrarch looking up from the act of reading or study. Three fingers of one hand lift and mark the page while the other hand indicates a passage on the facing page. The direction of his gaze is difficult to discern; he may be looking out the window to the distant mountain landscape beyond, to the lectern to his left with its open books, or to his own internal thoughts. It could be said that both portrayals are in roughly typical forms, but are rendered extraordinary by their placements in a ruler's palazzo and an important humanist's manuscript. This cycle was known outside of Padua after 1370 (Mommsen 98).

As the site of the Visconti court, the city of Pavia enjoyed a great deal of ducal and noble patronage which included notable examples at the Certosa da Pavia and Pietro's own church of S. Pietro in Ciel d'Oro. The city certainly could have supported more than one scriptorium, as it was also the location of the *Studium* or University of Pavia re-founded in 1361 by Galeazzo II until 1396 when most of its activities were moved to Pistoia (Welch 28). Unfortunately, relatively little is known about the scriptorium in which Pietro is believed to have labored (Zuradelli 172-174). Nevertheless, we know that Petrarch had closely associated himself with the church to which it was attached, having stated in his will that if he died in Pavia, he wished to be buried in S. Pietro in Ciel d'Oro (Kirsch 75 n.19).

It seems clear that the medieval book could serve as a means of focusing attention on the social, cultural and religious merits of the individuals responsible for their creation. In this case, Fra Pietro's self-portrait gives us a sure indication of one personality to which one must assign a portion of that merit. The Capelli arms throughout the text, since removed, would have of course indicated another, more visible destination for acknowledgement.

It appears that a confluence of factors best accounts for Pietro da Pavia's self-portrait within the Ambrosiana Pliny. The Italian illuminator's historical situation was ripe for the visual confirmation of Petrarchan-stimulated notions of fame and individualism. Although extant manuscripts suggest that Italian illuminators included their portraits less frequently than did their counterparts across the Alps, it is difficult to ascertain whether this is



Fig. 2
Attributed to Atichiero and
Ottaviano Prandino, *Petrarch in
His Study*, c. 1374-79,
extensively repainted fresco,
west wall of the Sala dei Giganti,
formerly Sala Vivorum

actually the case, or is instead evidence only of a lack of study. Nevertheless, one of the few known Trecento Italian manuscript self-portraits can be confirmed as the commission of the most important patron of manuscripts of the humanist Milanese court that had long felt the influence of Petrarch on its humanist studies.

Moreover, it appears tenable that the authorial model Petrarch presented of extraordinary familiarity with revered ancient writers, notably his “friend” Cicero whom he by turns praises and criticizes, might have influenced the creation of Pietro’s self-portrait. Petrarch’s approach to authorship was notably less reverential than many of his peers who commented on the orator’s work.¹⁴ Rather, Petrarch writes to Cicero as himself someone of sufficient sympathy and familiarity with the ancient author and his context as to have the right to point out the other man’s failings, and in so doing projects himself into the ancient Roman world, “regardless of the ages which separated us” (Cosenza x).¹⁵ Although not a writer, the illuminator Fra Pietro da Pavia likewise enters into the ancient past, portraying himself as a model of the artist at the beginning of the book discussing ancient artists, and by means of his signature may be seen as entering into a type of discourse with the ancient Roman author.

While no more direct a link can be traced, it would seem that more than simple coincidence led to Pietro’s self-portrait. Instead, it seems possible that a patron of Pasquino’s sophistication, and one with his knowledge of French and Italian manuscript traditions, might have suggested the inclusion himself. Even were this not the case, he was undoubtedly aware of a tradition of such self-inclusions of illuminators and scribes in the northern tradition, and must have seen Pietro’s inclusion in this specific text and location as appropriate and fitting.

Another possible explanation for the inclusion from Pasquino’s point of view might have been an opinion of himself as a connoisseur and expert patron of manuscripts. As was mentioned, the Ambrosiana Pliny was not the first time Pietro had illuminated a manuscript for Pasquino: in fact, it is likely that Pasquino Capelli commissioned four manuscripts from Pietro before his death in 1398, contributing to a large personal library.¹⁶ Moreover, we know that one of Giangaleazzo Visconti’s rare manuscript commissions was that of an elaborately decorated prayerbook containing prayers attributed to saints Ambrose and Augustine illuminated by Pietro. It is possible that Pietro’s reputation alone in late Trecento Pavia won him the Visconti commission (Sutton 93). Nevertheless, it would seem dubious that Pasquino, whose aid and expertise had been

¹⁴ For example, see Cosenza 3 for the medieval author’s sad commiseration with Cicero for whose “many, great shortcomings” he has compassion. For further discussion, see Minnis 211-217.

¹⁵ It is possible that Petrarch paid for his over familiarity when later a volume of Cicero’s that he had copied himself wounded him, leading to an infection. See Cosenza 5-7.

¹⁶ Manuscripts Pietro illuminated for Pasquino are thought to be a copy of *De Montibus, silvis, fontibus, lacubus, fluminibus* by Bocaccio [Boccaccio, Vaticano, Reg. lat. 1477]; Pliny’s *Natural History* under discussion dated 1389, Petrarch’s *Liber rerum memorandarium / Res memorandae* [Paris, BN, Ms. Lat. 6069T], and a copy of Pietro d’Abanao’s *Commentarius in Problemata Aristotelis* [Paris, BN, Ms. Lat. 6541], completed sometime before 1398.

requested by foreign chancellors such as Coluccio Salutati and from whom other Visconti family members has requested aid in procuring manuscripts, was *not* consulted in the matter of the best choice of local manuscript illuminators. Although Giangaleazzo's prayerbook was likely made after the completion of the Ambrosiana Pliny, nevertheless it seems reasonable that Pasquino would have seen himself as a highly discerning and practiced manuscript collector and patron. Pliny remarked that those artists who had had the temerity to sign their works as fully completed "assumed supreme confidence" in their art, and as a consequence, all of their art was unpopular, indicating that their signature formats had implied an unacceptable level of hubris (Pliny 19). Nevertheless, it seems likely that Pasquino would have appreciated and perhaps even encouraged Pietro's self-portrait and its signature inscription in this specific context for what it implied regarding both artist and patron. There can be no better compliment to the influential and important patron than to suggest, with an exquisite lack of subtlety, that his good taste in illuminators made it possible for such a magnificent manuscript to be, as few ancient works were claimed by their makers to have been, *fecit*.

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