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1

CREDULITY

Druid portraits

This project was set in motion by an intractable puzzle: the discovery, by a German scholar traveling in the wooded hill country north of Regensburg in the early 1490s, of sculpted portraits of ancient druid priests. The scholar published an eyewitness account of those portraits. Yet no such images can ever have existed, for the druids, a pagan priestly fraternity who had played a major role in ancient Celtic societies, left no material relics. The Roman conquerors of Gaul and Britain outlawed the druids in the first century A.D., and only fragments of their oral learning survived in the Irish and Welsh bardic and vatic traditions. What is more, as Julius Caesar himself explicitly said, the druids had never been in Germany at all.¹

The imaginative wanderer who fell upon these impossible portraits was Conrad Celtis (1459–1508), poet laureate of the German Empire, professor of rhetoric and poetry at the University of Ingolstadt, philologist, antiquarian, and scholarly impresario. He reported the discovery of the druid portraits in his *Norimberga*, a historical and topographical treatise on the city of Nuremberg.² Here Celtis described the Hercynian forest, invoking

1. Caesar, *Commentaries on the Gallic War* 6.21. Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II) quoted the passage in his treatise on Germany (1458), widely read and discussed north of the Alps in the last decades of the fifteenth century, published as *De situ, ritu, moribus et conditionibus Teutoniae descriptio* (Leipzig, 1496); *Deutschland, der Brieftraktat an Martin Mayer und Jakob Wimpfeling's Antworten und Einwendungen*, ed. Adolf Schmidt (Cologne: Böhlau, 1962), 3.7, pp. 131–32.

2. *De situ et moribus Norimbergae*, in Celtis, *Quattuor libri amorum* (Nuremberg, 1502), m3r–p6r. Albert Werminghoff, *Conrad Celtis und sein Buch über Nürnberg* (Freiburg: Boltze, 1921). Milestones in the modern study of the geographical preoccupations of German humanists are Paul

the classical term for the vast uncharted mountainous and forested country north and east of the Roman provinces of Raetia and Noricum, beyond the *limes* or frontier of the ancient empire.³ On his earlier travels, he said, he had found the German forest teeming with the traces of prehistoric religious practice. Along the Rhine he had seen the groves sacred to the peoples of ancient Germany and Sarmatia. He had found the place of the Tribochi, a tribe mentioned by Tacitus, and supposed that they were called after three oaks consecrated by ancient religion to the nymphs.⁴ But “nothing in this forest,” Celtis wrote, “is more famous than the monasteries of the druids.” The druids, he explained, “were a race of philosophers living in Gaul in the Greek fashion, who were named *apo druos*, that is, after the oaks. Because in ancient times it was believed that prophecies poured forth from those trees, as the oaks in Abraham and Gideon testify,⁵ interpreters of prophecies and oracular responses and the lightning bolts to which that tree is subject, convened among those oaks. Such interpreters we have recently seen when Johannes Tolhopf, a man of the highest erudition and genius, led us into his country at the foot of the *Fichtelgebirge*.⁶ Celtis’s friend Tolhopf was a cathedral canon in Regensburg, a doctor of law, an astronomer and astrologist, and a poet.⁷ Deep in the forest, Celtis reported, the two travelers had come across what appeared to be evidence of an ancient druid presence: “Here as we were wandering randomly about the monastery, we caught sight of six stone images, of the very oldest stone, inserted in the wall of the portal of the temple: each was

Joachimsmen, *Geschichtsauffassung und Geschichtsschreibung in Deutschland unter dem Einfluss des Humanismus* (Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, 1910); Gerald Strauss, *Sixteenth-Century Germany: Its Topography and Topographers* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959); and Gernot Michael Müller, *Die “Germania generalis” des Conrad Celtis: Studien mit Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001); see 294–99 on the Norimberga.

3. Kaspar Zeuss, *Die Deutschen und die Nachbarstämme* (Munich, 1837), 2–4.

4. Celtis, *Quattuor libri amorum*, m7r; *Norimberga*, ed. Werminghoff, 113–14, 119.

5. Gen. 18:8, Judges 6:19.

6. “Sed nihil in hac silva Druidum coenobiis illustrius est. Genus illud philosophorum apud Gallos Graecanice viventium erat, quos apo tou drus druos, id est a quercubus, nominavere, inter quas, ut ab illis antiquitus ut Abrahe et Gideonis quercus testis est, oracula effundi credebantur, ita illi veluti oraculorum et sortium fulminumque, quorum illa arbor obnoxia, interpretes tales consedebant, quales nudiis vidimus, dum Johannes Theophilus [Tolhopf], vir summum eruditione et ingenio, nos in patriam suam ad radices Piniferi secum adduceret.” Celtis, *Quattuor libri amorum*, m8r; *Norimberga*, ed. Werminghoff, 122.

7. See Johannes Trithemius’s comments on Tolhopf in his literary history (1494), quoted *in extenso* by Klaus Arnold, “Vates Herculeus: Beiträge zur Biographie des Humanisten Janus Tolophus,” in *Poesis et Pictura*, ed. Stephan Füssel and Joachim Knappe, Festschrift Dieter Wuttke (Baden-Baden: Koerner, 1989), 133. See also Anton Maria Kobolt, *Lexikon Baierischer Gelehrten und Schriftsteller* (Landshut, 1795), 693. Engelbert Klüpfel, *De vita et scripti Conradi Celtis Protucii*, 2 vols. (Freiburg, 1813–1827), 1: 105–6, 109.

seven feet tall, with bare feet, uncovered head, a Greek robe and hood, and a little satchel, a beard reaching all the way down to the waist and bifurcated around the nostrils, in the hands a book and a Diogenes-staff, with severe brow and solemn eyebrows, with head bent forward, eyes fixed on the ground.”⁸

It sounds very much like Celtis was describing jamb figures, three on each side of a portal, of the sort found on some German churches of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁹ The jamb figures on the *Adamspforte* at the cathedral of Bamberg, for example, modeled roughly on Reims and dating from around 1235, represented St. Peter, Adam and Eve, the Emperor Heinrich and Empress Cunigunde, and St. Stephen (fig. 1).¹⁰ The books and the bare feet that Celtis describes suggest that he was looking at images of apostles or prophets rather than kings or princes.¹¹ Bare feet were initially an attribute of apostles, but by Chartres at the latest were extended to prophets. Although prophets as jamb figures were not so common in Germany, the emphasis on the long beards and severe expressions points to prophets rather than apostles.¹² Many of the fourteen prophets

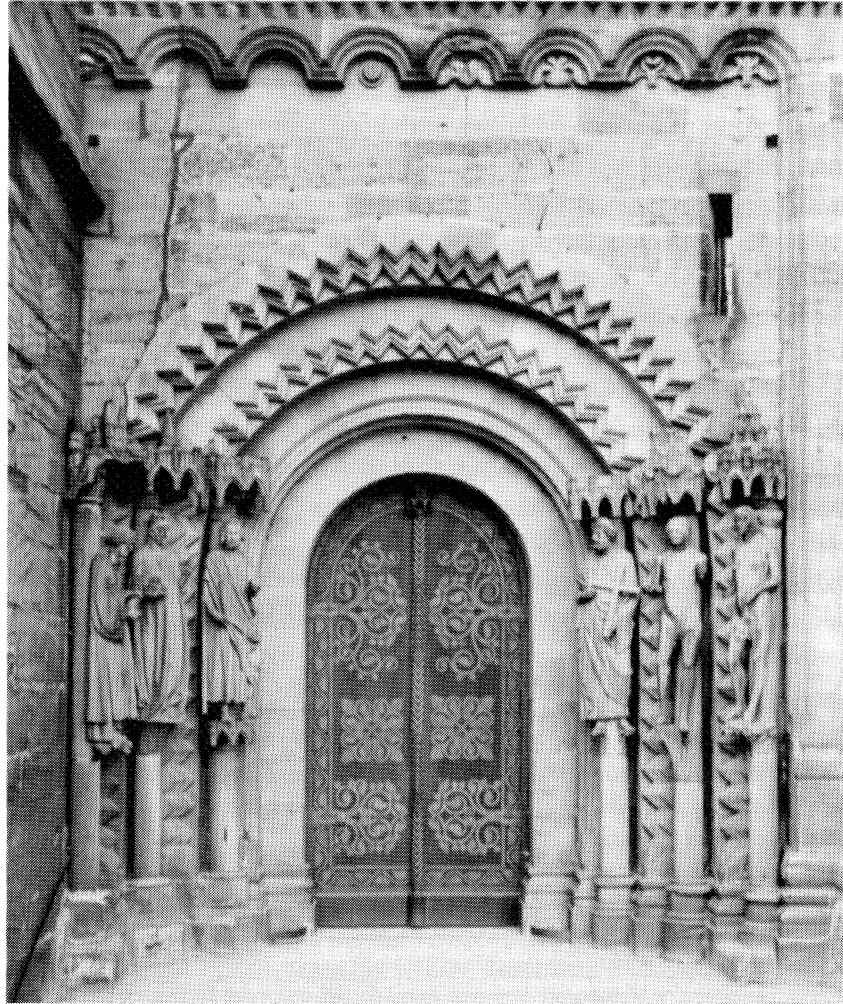
8. “Hic dum forte in coenobium divertissemus, imagines lapideas sex vetustissimo saxo ad fores templi parieti insertas conspeximus: septem pedum singulae, nudis pedibus, capita intecti, Graecanico pallio et cucullato perulaque et barba ad inguina usque promissa et circa naris fistulas bifurcata, in manibus liber et baculus Diogenicus, severa fronte et tristi supercilio, obstipo capite, figentes lumina terris.” Celtis, *Quattuor libri amorum*, m8r; *Norimberga*, ed. Werminghoff, 123–24.

9. Portals with any sculpture at all are rare in this part of Germany. Among churches built before 1350, in all of Upper Bavaria, Lower Bavaria, and the Upper Palatinate, only the cathedral at Regensburg has a portal with figural sculpture. Many thirteenth-century churches in that region have recessed portals with unadorned flanking columns, for example, Biburg, a Benedictine monastery, or Mallersdorf. However, many portals no longer survive. It is estimated that 200 portals were built in Germany between 1200 and 1250, and another 120 between 1250 and 1350. Gernot Fischer, *Figurenportale in Deutschland, 1350–1530* (PhD diss., University of Tübingen, 1987) (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989), 78, 104.

10. The sculpted figures of the *Adamspforte* are now in the Diocesan Museum, Bamberg. The oldest surviving jamb figures in the German-speaking realm are the apostles on the *Galluspforte* of the Münster in Basel, from the third quarter of the twelfth century. The *Fürstentor* at Bamberg has small apostles standing on the shoulders of prophets. The only other surviving jamb figures from before 1350 are the Wise and Foolish Virgins on the northeast portal of St. Sebald in Nuremberg. There are many more examples of jamb figures from after 1350. See Fischer, *Figurenportale in Deutschland*, 40–41. The very first jamb figures on columns were on the three portals at St. Denis begun in 1135, perhaps inspired by Moissac. Émile Mâle, *L'art religieux du XII siècle en France*, 3rd ed. (Paris: A. Colin, 1928), 391–92.

11. According to Celtis the figures were carrying *libri*, which can mean either books, appropriate to apostles, or scrolls, appropriate to prophets. On prophets, see Karl Künstle, *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst*, 2 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1926–28), 1: 303–8.

12. Gernot Fischer, *Figurenportale in Deutschland*, lists nineteen examples of prophet cycles on portals, all with at least six figures. But all of them except one are seated figures in the archivolts. The only exceptions are the animated, twisting prophets from HL. Kreuz at Schwäbisch



1. Bamberg,
Cathedral, east side,
Adamsporte, c. 1235.
Photo:Foto Marburg/
Art Resource, NY.

on the middle portal at the cathedral of Strasbourg, though shod and all but one with covered head, wear the mustaches Celtis thought so notable (fig. 2).¹³ Celtis also said that they were holding a kind of staff, *baculus Diogenicus*. The contemporary German translator of the *Norimberga*, Georg Alt, offered a parenthetical explanation: *Als der philosophicus Diogenes drug* ("like what the philosopher Diogenes used to carry").¹⁴ Presumably this

Gmünd, work of the Parler shop from the middle of the fourteenth century. These figures—only two survive—stood under baldachins. *Die Parler und der schöne Stil 1350–1400: europäische Kunst unter den Luxemburgern* (Cologne: Museen der Stadt Köln, 1978–1980), 1: 321–24.

13. These figures date from the last quarter of the thirteenth century. Although Celtis had never been to Strasbourg or to France, such works may have been reflected in lesser, now vanished, German churches.

14. Texts of Alt's translation are in Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 951, fol. 55–116 (1497–99, copy by Hartmann Schedel); and Cgm 4995, fol. 2–76 (sixteenth-century copy).

was a way of distinguishing whatever the pagan druids were holding from a Christian crosier or pastoral staff.

How is it possible that Celtis, learned and well traveled, could have believed that he was looking not at images of biblical personages, but at historical portraits of druid priests? This is the only account of a German archeological expedition from this period, the spare northern counterpart to Felice Feliciano's famous narrative of the antiquarian excursion around the Lago di Garda undertaken in 1464 together with Giovanni Marcanova, Samuele da Tradante, and Andrea Mantegna.¹⁵ And yet Celtis's strange narrative has never been addressed by art historical scholarship.¹⁶

Celtis's identification is wildly improbable, but it was cited by other historians of the time as if reliable. Hartmann Schedel (1440–1514), the Nuremberg physician and antiquarian scholar, copied Celtis's report directly into his own manuscript anthology of inscriptions and texts in 1504. The Bavarian court historian Johannes Aventinus, Celtis's most distinguished pupil, reported in his *Bavarian Chronicle* that "Conrad Celtis says he saw images of the druids carved in stone at a monastery in Bavaria, not far from the *Fichtelgebirge*."¹⁷ Possibly Aventinus de-



2. Strasbourg, Cathedral, west façade, middle portal, right side, late thirteenth century.

15. For a summary of recent scholarship on the excursion and the *lublatio*, the text that records the adventure, see Rino Avesani, "Felicianerie," in *L'antiquario Felice Feliciano Veronese*, ed. Agostino Contò and Leonardo Quaquarelli, Atti del Convegno di Studi Verona 1993 (Padua: Antenore, 1995), 10–12.

16. Celtis's early nineteenth-century biographer Klüpfel quoted the mysterious passage and asked parenthetically, after the word "monastery" (*coenobium*) in the first line: "Quale?," that is, which monastery? Klüpfel, *De vita et scriptis Conradi Celtis*, 2: 38. The passage is also cited by Jacques Ridé, *L'image du germain dans la pensée et la littérature allemandes de la redécouverte de Tacite à la fin du XVIe siècle* (Lille: Atelier Reproduction des Thèses, Université de Lille III; Paris: Champion, 1977), 1: 239, who seems to dismiss it as a fantasy, and by Müller, "*Germania generalis*," 420, without comment. The only scholar who tried to answer the question is the historian Klaus Arnold in an article of 1989 on Johannes Tolhopf. Arnold proposed the Benedictine foundation Reichenbach as the site of the discovery; as secondary possibilities he named Enseldorf, Kastl, and Michelfeldt. Arnold, "Vates Herculeus," 131–32 and n. 6.

17. Aventinus, *Bayerische Chronik*, chap. 26, in Aventinus, *Sämmtliche Werke*, 6 vols. (Munich: Kaiser, 1880–1908), 4:106. Aventinus also says that he and Celtis went looking for antiquities

clined to question the veracity of the report out of respect for his teacher, although he had been dead for years. In his incomplete *Germania illustrata* of 1531, Aventinus quoted Celtis's passage about the discovery of the druid monastery, at length and verbatim.¹⁸

One aspect of the puzzle has proved easy to solve: the actual site where Celtis saw the statues. In the text of the *Norimberga* he did not name the monastery. But Hartmann Schedel revealed the location in the margin of his antiquarian manuscript: the Premonstratensian monastery of Speinshart.¹⁹ Speinshart is located near the town of Eschenbach in a sparsely settled region of the Upper Palatinate north of Amberg and southeast of Bayreuth.²⁰ By tradition the monastery was founded in 1145 by a local nobleman, Adelfolk von Reiffenberg, and settled by eleven Premonstratensian monks from Wilten near Innsbruck. Hartmann Schedel probably learned the location directly from the two explorers, Celtis and Tolhopf. He almost surely knew the monastery itself because he worked for several years as city physician in Amberg and during those years was actively hunting for old inscriptions. Speinshart was a functioning monastery in Celtis's day, indeed it was thriving under Abbot Georg Ochs (Taurus) von Guntzen-dorf (1420?–1503, abbot from 1457).²¹ The medieval church at Speinshart,

together in Regensburg in 1502, surely not their only joint expedition. Joachimsen, *Geschichtsauffassung und Geschichtsschreibung*, 160n20, and generally 110–12, 155–62, on Celtis. Aventinus first had contact with Celtis as a student in Ingolstadt in 1496 and then followed him to Vienna in 1497. Gerald Strauss, *Historian in an Age of Crisis: The Life and Work of Johannes Aventinus, 1477–1534* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 23–24.

18. Aventinus, *Sämmtliche Werke*, 6:156–57. He also copied the passage another time. It must be noted that the humanist scholar Willibald Pirckheimer, who must have read about the discovery and ought to have taken an interest, was silent on the subject.

19. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 716. On the bottom of fol. 298r appears the heading *In Monasterio Speynsshart ordinis premonstrentensis*. At the top of the next page, 298v, begins the transcription of Celtis's passage on the druid sculptures, beginning with the phrase *imagines lapideas sex* and continuing for more than a hundred words. Schedel also wrote in the margin: "orviores philosophi apud Gallos graece viventes" (druids, philosophers living in Gaul in the Greek manner). Schedel did not attribute the passage or the discovery to Celtis; nor was it obligatory to do so in such an anthology.

Klaus Arnold and I noted the connection to Speinshart independently in 1995. Much earlier the historian of the Premonstratensian order Norbert Backmund had cited the page in Schedel on Speinshart but did not comment on the supposed portraits; *Die Chorherrenorden und ihre Stifte in Bayern* (Passau: Neue Presse, 1966), 193.

20. Speinshart is about thirty miles' journey beyond Amberg, which is itself forty miles east of Nuremberg and forty miles north of Regensburg. On the monastery, see Hermann and Anna Bauer, *Klöster in Bayern* (Munich: Beck, 1985), 270–73.

21. Speinshart had been elevated from status of priory to abbey in 1459, under Ochs. A. Eder, "Geschichte des Klosters Speinshart," *Verhandlungen des Historischen Vereins für Oberpfalz und Regensburg* 25 (1868): 34–36, 43–44. Ochs was visitor of Premonstratensian monasteries in Bavaria, Bohemia, Poland, and Hungary. He wrote a history of the abbey which is unfortunately lost; Peter Seyl, "850 Jahre Kloster Speinshart," in *850 Jahre Prämonstratenserabtei Speinshart 1145–1995* (Pressath: Bodner, 1995), 12.

together with its portal, was completely destroyed in the seventeenth century in favor of a modern church, and all we know today about the portal and its jamb figures is in the end what Celtis tells us about them.²²

Schedel and Aventinus knew exactly where Celtis had seen the images. If they copied and cited the passage, they must have found the iconographical label plausible. The fact that Celtis suppressed the name of the monastery in his published account does not mean that it was all a ruse and that he hoped no one would expose it. For Celtis habitually shrouded his discoveries in mystery. In the preface to his edition of the plays of Hrosvita, a tenth-century nun, Celtis says he found the manuscript at "a Benedictine monastery," without telling which monastery, although of course it would have been of interest to readers. This seems a violation of one of the basic principles of scholarship. The reaction of Celtis's own loyal pupil Aventinus proves that such an expectation is not anachronistic. In a text published in 1518, ten years after Celtis's death, Aventinus pointed out that Celtis had found the Hrosvita manuscript at St. Emmeram in Regensburg, and then said: "But that he was silent about this matter, I cannot marvel enough."²³

Celtis did not always quite play by the rules, even the rules of his own time. He had a gift for irritating his colleagues. At Ingolstadt he abandoned his lectures before the semester was out and was suspected by the theology professors of irreligion.²⁴ He habitually failed to return the codexes he had borrowed, including the Hrosvita manuscript and the *Ligurinus*, a much-prized and only recently discovered history of the reign of Emperor Frederick I. This was a serious offense. Lorenz Beheim, the Nuremberg antiquarian, wrote to Pirckheimer around 1506: "He does well in undertaking the publication of *Ligurinus*, for he thereby will turn his thievery to the public good. For I know someone who was with him when he received that book from the monastery of Ebrach. Although it was only lent to him, he has not returned it to this day."²⁵ Celtis's mentor Johannes von Dalberg once lent a Cicero manuscript to the printer Jakob Köbel, who then rashly passed it

22. The church Celtis and Tolhopf toured was presumably begun in the twelfth century, although there is no proof of this. Construction at Speinshart even if launched in the twelfth century very likely extended into the next. The period of most intense building activity in Bavaria was 1200 to 1250, with particular impetus from Lombard sculptors. Hans Karlinger, *Die romanische Steinplastik in Altbayern und Salzburg 1050–1260* (Augsburg: Filser, 1924). A window dated 1333, preserved by a seventeenth-century watercolor, gives us some idea of the splendors of the medieval structure; Gabriela Fritzsche, "Das Speinsharter Wurzel-Jesse Fenster," *Pantheon* 43 (1985): 5–14.

23. Aventinus, *Henrici IV. vita* (Augsburg, 1518), dedicatory preface, quoted in Karl Schottenloher, *Die Widmungsvorrede im Buch des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1953), 17n17: "Quam ob rem autem id obtinuerit, satis mirari non possum."

24. Lewis Spitz, *Conrad Celtis: The German Arch-humanist* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), 21, 33.

25. Pirckheimer, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Emil Reicke (Munich: Beck, 1940), no. 146, p. 485, cited and translated in Spitz, *Conrad Celtis*, 98.

3. (*Facing*) Ancient gem or cameo (?) found near Olmütz, Moravia. Woodcut in Petrus Apianus and Bartholomeus Amantius, *Inscriptiones sacrosanctae vetustatis* (Ingolstadt, 1534), 451. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

on to Celtis. Dalberg actually sued Köbel for the manuscript but eventually succeeded in getting it from Celtis.²⁶ Johannes Eck, the antagonist of Luther and professor at Ingolstadt from 1510, accused him posthumously of having stolen the *Tabula Peutingeriana* as well, the famous medieval copy of a fourth-century Roman map.²⁷

In 1504 Celtis wrote to the Venetian publisher Aldus Manutius claiming that he had discovered the lost books of Ovid's *Fasti*, covering the months July to December, in a Swabian monastery. Many believed that the books had been destroyed by the church in the Middle Ages for their idolatrous treatment of the Caesars.²⁸ It is no wonder that the famous literary enigma appealed to Celtis. In his letter to Aldus Manutius, Celtis said that he had seen and transcribed the opening verses of book 7. Aldus, despite his often-professed admiration for the German scholars, was apparently not taken in and asked to see the rest before sending him a contract.²⁹ In fact the new verses had been composed by an eleventh-century monk. Celtis had come across them in a manuscript; who is to say whether he suspected the truth about them. Many scholars even into the seventeenth century were taken in by the verses and by joking rumors spread by humanists about the existence of the missing books.³⁰ Still, it is hard to imagine what Celtis had in mind when he promised Aldus that he would deliver the missing six books.

Celtis's approach to antiquarian scholarship was active and participatory. His interventions and interpretations were instantly taken up into the early archeological record, false trails for future scholars. In their sylloge or anthology of ancient European inscriptions and other antiquities, *Inscriptiones sacrosanctae vetustatis* (1534), the Ingolstadt scholars Petrus Apianus and Bartholomeus Amantius published a mysterious *trouvaille* from the province of Moravia, an "inscription found by Conrad Celtis in July 1504 on a seal embedded in a gold cross in the monastery at Ritisch [Hradisch] near Olmütz [Olomouc]" (fig. 3).³¹ The names Venus and Iocus (god of jests) are hardly perfect matches with the figures. The seated, winged figure must be a Muse rather than Venus. The putto hoisting a mask with long braids is reminiscent of the Cupid who sports with a Silenus mask, familiar from

26. Celtis, *Der Briefwechsel des Konrad Celtis*, ed. Hans Rupprich (Munich: Beck, 1934), nos. 229–30.

27. Spitz, *Konrad Celtis*, 99.

28. Angela Fritsen, *Renaissance Commentaries on Ovid's Fasti* (PhD diss., Yale University, 1995), 8–14.

29. Celtis, *Briefwechsel*, no. 315, September 3, 1504. On Aldus's relations with Celtis and other German scholars, see Martin Lowry, *The World of Aldus Manutius: Business and Scholarship in Renaissance Venice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 199–201, 264–78.

30. Fritsen, *Renaissance Commentaries on Ovid's Fasti*.

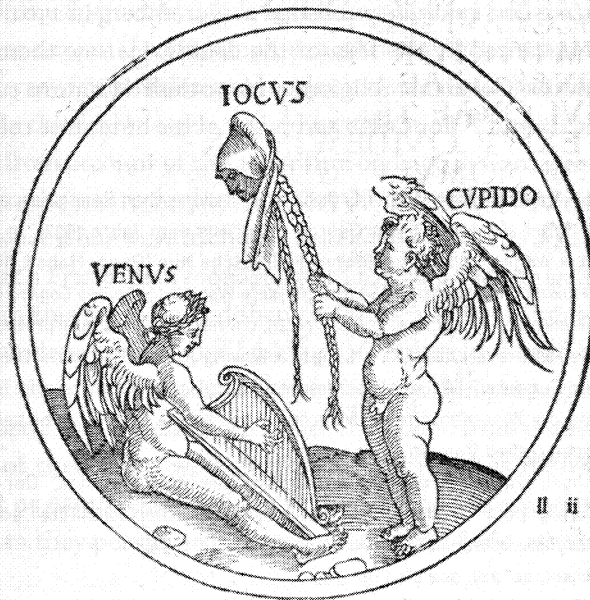
31. Apianus and Amantius, *Inscriptiones sacrosanctae vetustatis* (Ingolstadt, 1534), 451. The term *epigramma* could refer to an incised image as much as to a textual inscription.

¶ In oppido VVels in muro ecclesiæ parochialis

T. FL. CAMPESTRINVS VET. ET IVL
EXORATA IVL EXORAT. LIB.
COS FIL OB. AN. XX ET SECVN-
DINO CANDIBIANO BE. COS.
GENERO VIVI FECERVNT.

MORAVIAE PROVIN-
CIAE GERMANIAE MAG

Epigramma repertum à CONRADO
CELTE in Gemma Signatoria, aureo
cruci insitū in monasterio RITISCH
iuxta Olmuntz. Mense Iulio
Anno Domini M. D. 1111.



ancient art.³² Celtis was in Olmütz between July and September of 1504 working on a description of the city for his *Germania illustrata*.³³ A letter to Celtis written just after his departure by Martin Sinapinus, cathedral canon and member of the humanistic circle in Olmütz, the Sodalitas Maiorhoviana, describes several antique gems of the sort that Celtis and his colleagues must have been collecting and admiring during the three-month stay, allowing that Celtis had provoked him to search for antiquities in Moravia.³⁴ Celtis also received a postdeparture letter from Georgius Boorius Caetianus, another member of the circle in Olmütz, recounting a conversation with the bishop of Olmütz in which the “Marcomannic” antiquities of Hradisch were discussed. Caetianus’s letter implies that Celtis had not himself visited Hradisch, however. He says that the bishop expressed his regret that Celtis was not there to interpret some gems he had found.³⁵ Perhaps one of these colleagues sent Celtis a drawing of this gem or cameo, evidently preserved as a spolium in a liturgical cross. Harder to explain is the apparent fact that the figure of the winged, harp-playing “Venus” had already appeared as the Muse Thalia in a woodcut illustration in Celtis’s *Quattuor libri amorum*, published in Nuremberg in 1502.³⁶

Celtis was enchanted by the idea of the druids. He saw them as the sponsors of a native Germanic religion, a monotheistic nature cult with roots in ancient Greece.³⁷ For Celtis and many of his humanist colleagues

32. Hermann Maué, “Antikenrezeption oder Erfindung der italienischen Renaissance? Die Medaille des Matthes Gebel auf den Tod des George Ploed aus dem Jahre 1532,” in *Mousikos Aner*, Festschrift Max Wegner, ed. Oliver Brehm and Sascha Klie (Bonn: Habelt, 1992), 287. Peter Luh, *Kaiser Maximilian gewidmet: Die unvollendete Werkausgabe des Conrad Celtis und ihre Holzschnitte* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001), 331n25, connects Celtis’s interpretation of the composition to lines in Horace, *Odes* I, 2, 31f., here following Konrad Bursian, “Die Antikensammlung Raimund Fuggers,” *Sitzungsberichte der philologische und historische Classe der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu München* 4, vol. 1 (1874): 159–60, who believed the image must have been copied from an antique gem.

33. Celtis, *Briefwechsel*, 574n4. On Celtis’s visit to Olmütz, see Franz Machilek, “Der Olmützer Humanistenkreis,” in *Der polnische Humanismus und die europäischen Sodalitäten*, ed. Stephan Füssel and Jan Pirożyński (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), 111–35.

34. Celtis, *Briefwechsel*, no. 319; see also no. 333.

35. Celtis, *Briefwechsel*, no. 322.

36. Celtis, *Quattuor libri amorum*, a7r. This was noted by Erwin Panofsky, “Albrecht Dürer and Classical Antiquity, With an Excursus on the Illustrations of Apianus’ ‘Inscriptiones’ in Relation to Dürer” (1921/22), *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955), 290.

37. On the authority of Julius Caesar, Celtis believed that the druids had originated in Greece. Caesar had described them as primitive natural philosophers who preserved their religion orally and used writing—in Greek characters—only for business. He mistakenly connected them with Greek inscriptions he was shown; *Commentaries on the Gallic War*, 13–14. See most recently Jörg Robert, *Konrad Celtis und das Projekt der deutschen Dichtung: Studien zur humanistischen Konstitution von Poetik, Philosophie, Nation und Ich* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003), 378–94.

the historical fable of the druids stood as a patriotic bulwark against the modern Roman church, increasingly mistrusted in these years by Germans.³⁸ In the *Norimberga* Celtis laments that monasteries of his own day have abandoned their former austerity—"shaken off the severe yoke of religion and the lowly cowl"—and instead live in wealth and even wield political power "not less than our kings and princes."³⁹ Perhaps the isolated forest monastery Speinshart seemed to Celtis to have preserved some of the original flavor of druid religion. His druids were Greeks who had come back to haunt Rome.

To a modern, scholarly way of thinking, Celtis was holding in his mind two incompatible convictions. He must have recognized the jamb figures as apostles or prophets. The learned abbot of Speinshart could have told him when the monastery had been founded and even when the church had been built and could have assured him that the portal figures were not druid priests. Celtis knew that the figures represented apostles and yet at the same time, somehow, believed that they represented druids.

One could easily set aside this riddle by construing Celtis's misidentification of the Speinshart jamb figures as a literary and patriotic conceit, a deliberate temporal confusion for rhetorical effect. Perhaps his discovery was a literary flourish designed to dramatize a textual account in the manner of the classical *enargeia*, a vivid actualization.⁴⁰ The high style of Feliciano's written account of the adventure on Lago di Garda, the *Iubilatio*, has led some scholars to doubt the reality of even this expedition.⁴¹

But what if one were to choose instead to take Celtis's discovery of druid statues at a Franconian monastery at face value? Many well-informed observers in this period had difficulty dating and identifying old portraits, statues, reliefs, tombs, and buildings. Scholars and local historians propounded their bad identifications not only within propagandistic or literary contexts, but routinely. Churches that dated from the relatively recent history of their cities were commonly described as refurbished ancient temples; or painted icons of Christ or the Virgin Mary judged to be much older than they possibly could be. Celtis's druid fable certainly had a liter-

38. A good account of Celtis's anticlericalism and taste for archaic simplicity is Ludwig Krapf, *Germanenmythus und Reichsideologie: frühhumanistische Rezeptionsweisen der taciteischen Germania* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1979), 68–99.

39. Celtis, *Norimberga*, ed. Werminghoff, 125.

40. This hypothesis is strengthened by the Senecan echoes in the phrase that Celtis used to describe the druid physiognomies, *severa fronte et tristi supercilio*; cf. *Phaedra*, 1.799, and *Ad Lucilium epistulae* 123.11.4. I owe this to a suggestion by Andrew Stewart. On *enargeia*, see Carlo Ginzburg, "Montrer et citer: La vérité de l'histoire," *Le Débat* 56 (1989): 43–54.

41. Myriam Billanovich, "Intorno alla 'Iubilatio' di Felice Feliciano," *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 32 (1989): 351–58. Charles Mitchell suggested that a letter by Ciriaco d'Ancona served as the model; see Avesani, "Felicianerie," 10–12.

ary dimension. And yet such a solution to the puzzle of the misidentified jamb figures would be incomplete. Celtis's creative labeling of the barefoot and bearded sages on the portal at Speinshart falls into a vaster, richer pattern of counterfactual interpretation of historical artifacts.

Renaissance scholars often display the same combination of severity and suggestibility that we find two centuries later in Giambattista Vico, who derided the "unclear, frivolous, inept, conceited, and ridiculous" opinions of other scholars on the origins of languages, and then went on to assert that the most ancient peoples had spoken a natural, nonarbitrary language and that this was the language of Atlantis, just as Plato had said; or who dismissed as "groundless, inappropriate, or simply false" the views of other authorities on the reasons for the monstrous stature of ancient giants, but was himself completely confident of the historical reality of giants.⁴²

The interest of this book is to understand forgeries, counterfeits, relics, spolia, and pictorial prophecies, all sites of great chronological density, not as aberrations but as moments where the deep structure of thinking about artifacts and time are revealed.

At the same time, the book tracks an epochal shift in thinking about the relationship between artifacts and time. That shift was driven by print technology. For a long time, artifacts were taken as good evidence of the most remote origins of cults, nations, institutions, even families. The statue or painting documented sacred history or the mythical eras peopled by giants or heroic founders by folding time over on itself, by physically superimposing the past on the present. Over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the emergent discipline of archeology began to parcel and collate historical time. Archeology did not aim to drain the artifact of its referential force; on the contrary. The archeologist or antiquarian was, still is, precisely the scholar who appreciates the documentary value of the material artifact.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, archeological scholarship began to exploit the replication technologies, movable type and woodcut. Print technology systematized scholarship and accelerated its dissemination. The woodcut captured the image itself, so opening for the first time an effective two-way path between scholar and artifact. Print promised to extend, with great efficiency, the relays of substitutions and replication that delivered authoritative contents to a public. The woodcut was ostensibly a literalization of the basic mythology of an automatic, impersonal handing down of meaning from work to work, artifact to artifact. Print

42. Giambattista Vico, *Scienza Nuova* (1725), §§ 430–31, 170; *New Science*, transl. David Marsh (London: Penguin, 1999), 171–72, 86.

would seem to represent an extension of the never-explained mechanisms that guaranteed the referential authority of relic or cult image. But in reality, print had a dynamic and unpredictable effect on the substitutional myth. For print shifted attention to the mediality of the transmission process, that is, to the dependence of the process on artifice, craft, materials, intention, possibly even authorship. Together print and scholarship stripped the artifact of its magical authority.

Mechanized replication created the distinction, fundamental to modern culture, between rational and irrational thinking about time. The time-bending referential rhetoric of the image was from this point on quarantined inside a new institution, the work of art. The artwork, the merely fictional image, became the new natural habitat of anachronistic thinking. Outside such fictions, the once-universal temporal confusion was carefully untangled, redistributed into the poor binarism of error and truth. Under the new regime of print, the substitution was criminalized as a forgery. Anachronism became the attribute of bad scholarship and good art.

Celtis was coming up with incorrect answers to the sorts of questions that modern scholarship asks of historical artifacts. He himself was not asking modern scholarly questions. He was asking questions grounded in completely different presuppositions about how such artifacts came to be, how they lived in time, and what they had to say in the present tense.

How to relax the paradox

As cultures recede into the past, historical behavior appears to splinter into inexplicable, irreconcilable fragments. To relax the paradoxes, historical scholarship tries to recover lost structures of thought, the deepest, often unarticulated premises. Once sorted into new cognitive paradigms, apparent incompatibilities of behavior and belief find a new logic. The cruelty and arbitrariness of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century witch hunt, to take an example, strain all modern efforts of comprehension. Tens of thousands of innocents were singled out and judged, without evidence, by a magistrature and a complicit populace, not in one place but all over Europe and on the far side of the Atlantic, over a period of several hundred years, a prosecutorial project that seemed only to increase in intensity as religion and cosmology were progressively rationalized. Some of the most convincing recent interpretations of the witch hunt interpret the violence as a symptom of profound anxiety provoked by the Protestant attack on sacramental representation.⁴³ Disoriented after the sudden loss of direct

43. Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), esp. 171–98. Other recent and noteworthy

reference to the Godhead, people hoped to reaffirm the efficacy of an alternative mode of reference, not eucharistic communion but demonic manipulation. At this deepest level, the level of shared presuppositions about the possibility of access to the invisible and to the sources of power, the witch hunt begins to yield its fearsome logic. With such a key one may even hope to decode the otherwise baffling pattern of cooperation between the prosecutors and prosecuted.

Another example: the learned of Europe pursued their studies in astrology deep into early modern times. The power of the stars over human destiny was rarely questioned. The appeal of astrology to the learned has defied modern scholarly explanation.⁴⁴ Jacob Burckhardt was appalled by the “perilous” persistence of ancient astrological superstition in the Renaissance, “a miserable feature in the life of that time.”⁴⁵ To a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century mind, however, astrology could seem consistent both with cosmology and with natural philosophy. The predictions of earthly events generated by the study of heavenly bodies were not always reliable, but then nor were the healing effects expected from herbs or the medical prognoses generated by examination of the body. Faith in astrological analysis served psychological and emotional purposes, just as did faith in predestination or salvation. The participation of pragmatic Florentine businessmen in popular religious cults in the fifteenth century poses a comparable puzzle. What could a businessman expect from a painted icon of the Madonna credited with miraculous powers? Did he imagine that a procession and a public performance of ritual devotions could protect his investments? Richard Trexler was dissatisfied with the cynical and rationalist explanation of the businessman’s behavior—the Machiavellian explanation, in fact—namely, that the practical citizen observed the customs in a perfunctory, hollow way just to preserve his position within local power structures. Instead, Trexler argued that the devotions to the icons were an aspect of a manipulative, interventionist approach to religion that was completely consistent with the merchant’s developing confidence in his capacity to control his own destiny; the ritual activation of the icon as a

contributions to the immense historical literature are Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) and Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

44. The literature on astrology in the Renaissance is also beyond summary, but a useful recent starting point is William R. Newman and Anthony Grafton, eds., *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001).

45. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Penguin, 1990), 323, 325.

rehearsal, as it were, for the full-dress mobilization of modern instrumental reason, a rehearsal for a Weberian future.⁴⁶

To recover the questions to which the witch hunt, astrology, and the cult of wonder-working images were answers, historians have had to infer backward from those answers, reading between the lines of texts, parsing decisions and decisions not taken. The questions that the modern historian tries to answer were rarely ever articulated as questions by the historical actors. To account for behavior—to save the appearances—the historian builds a hypothesis about the cognitive structures that lie behind the behavior. The hypothesis is an invented model, even a historiographical fiction, whose virtue lies in its ability to account for the unaccountable. One will need a model with comparable explanatory power to make sense of Celtis's forest discovery.

Strange temporalities of the artifact

The hypothesis developed in this book is that the reception of historical artifacts in premodern culture was shaped by a powerful presumption in favor of their mutual substitutability. One artifact was as good as another, at least within classes of artifacts that shared a purpose and pointed to a common referent. Images and buildings were understood not as the products of singular historical performances, but rather as links to an ordinary reference point. An artifact took its meaning from its membership within a chain of referential artifacts stretching back in time to a hidden origin, but not from its absolute place within that chain. Artifacts within such a chain could be substituted for one another without impairment of reference. Knowledge that one happened to possess about the particular or local circumstances of an artifact's fabrication, or its absolute position within a chain, was not allowed to interfere with the referential linkage or the presumption of substitutability. This, at least, was the model that guided the use and interpretation of things.

Modern, that is, post-Renaissance culture, by contrast, is always a little short on confidence in the whereabouts or even the reality of such ultimate origin points as gods, heroes, or nature. Modernity cultivates an interest in local, proximate, palpable origin points. The modern beholder is ready to assign the artifact no origin other than the moment of its own making. Such an artifact is the trace of a lifeworld, of a momentary constellation of circumstances, perhaps even of an author, an individual held responsible

46. Richard Trexler, "Florentine Religious Experience: The Sacred Image," *Studies in the Renaissance* 19 (1972): 7–41.

for design or execution. The notions of physical tracing and nonfungibility clustered around the newly articulated concept of the artwork. The work of art was a new category of relic, for what is a relic other than an absolutely nonfungible sample of a once concrete but now vanished reality.

The artwork, in addition to doing whatever it is that an artwork is meant to do, is therefore also a historical document. The etiology of the artwork implies from the start the possibility of the historical study of art. The artwork is an event that intervenes between an artistic past and an artistic future. An artifact is activated as art when it is assigned a place within some imagined succession of comparable events.⁴⁷ The artwork's historicity, its plotting within linear time, is the only originality it has left. Bereft of a more remote origin point, the artwork becomes an auto-original. The work of art cannot be replicated. The copied artwork, no matter how faithful, can never substitute for the original. A work of art replicated is the same but not the same, and for no other reason than that it was fabricated at a later point in the sequence.

The work of art in modern culture is both an affirmation of the surprising hypothesis of autopoiesis—creation out of nothing—and a place where the loss of the traditional, more remote, differently mysterious origins is assessed. Art in modernity exemplifies a new principle of nonsubstitutability but is never allowed to forget the lost paradigm of perfect substitutability. The perfect exchangeability of the edition, the print run, or the broadcast is the concrete image of the abstract model that had once governed all production and reception. Since the fifteenth century, the refinement and perfection of the replication technologies have proceeded strictly in tandem with the theorization of the autonomous artwork. The dialectical interplay between the handmade and the mechanically made image is the basic though usually disguised plot-structure of European art. Around 1500, engravings and woodcuts first advertised the idea of artistic authorship, associating signatures with styles. The reliability of mechanical copying, paradoxically, allowed the conception of a unique, noninterchangeable style to take hold. But at the same time, print offered itself as a literalized version, a kind of successor to, the substitutional model of production. The authored, event-like artwork could now define itself clearly against the background of the print. The concept of the original comes into

47. In Niklas Luhmann's terms, "The actions that produce the work must succeed one another in time and orient themselves recursively in relation to what has already been decided and to the possibilities opened up or eliminated by those decisions." The beholder recreates those decisions and "the perception of art gains access to its object in temporal terms . . . by actualizing step by step the work's references within a context of distinctions that shift from moment to moment." Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000), 20–21.

focus only through the lens of its opposite, the perfect replica. The painting needs the print (later, the photograph).

The binarism of original and replica is the concealed spring inside every modern artwork. The revolutions in the technologies of recording, copying, projection, and broadcasting of sound and images in the early twentieth century provoked both Walter Benjamin's prediction that the mass media would break down the bourgeois cult of art and, in virtually the same year, its theoretical antithesis, Martin Heidegger's defense of the work of art as an irreplaceable access point to Being itself. "Aura," according to Bernhard Siegert, "discloses itself as the origin of the work of art only in the age of mechanical reproduction."⁴⁸ In the twentieth century, the replica became the form of art as well as its content, in the readymades of Marcel Duchamp, in the Pop art of the late 1950s and 1960s, in the Appropriation art of the 1980s, or indeed in the infinity of citations and samplings of consumer, "popular," or television culture in even more recent art. The most original works pretend to be copies.

The subtle duplicity of the copy was noted and even commended by Theodor Adorno, not usually classed as a friend to mechanical replication or to art that takes industrial production as its theme. Adorno observed in his *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) that many modern artworks deal in repetition. Such art appeared to raise again—so Adorno might have been expected to argue—the Benjaminian spectre of an art of replication that ends the Renaissance dialectic by discrediting once and for all the handmade artwork. Instead, Adorno dismissed the threat of mechanization, conceding it no real intellectual force. He was much more worried about the "dictatorship of the subject" which "casts a spell of self-identity" on the work. Under this scenario, the receptive individual beholder commandeers art and renders one work substitutable by another. The beholder makes him- or herself into the criterion of art, the *point* of art. In effect, Adorno was saying that the modern subject had established itself as an origin point no less mythical than the divine or heroic origin point that had dominated the premodern artifact. Like the distant but unknowable origin point of the icon or statue, the modern subject controlled a whole population of disparate artifacts. Artifacts whether ancient or modern were expected to orient themselves to origin points, in referential arrays. Under the old substitutional paradigm, one artifact had stood in for another over a given function. Under the new regime of the receptive subject, one artwork completes the subject as well as another. Adorno's model is an exact reversal of the substitutional model: "man" instead of "god" is the origin, and the artifact is asked merely

48. Siegert, "There Are No Mass Media," in *Mapping Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Digital Age*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Michael Marrinan (Stanford University Press, 2003), 30.

to point in the right direction. Adorno's antidote to the philistine tyranny of the subject was a countermove by the artwork: maintenance of radical nonsubstitutability through "sensual existence," the work's assertion of its own "here and now" quality. The modern work that deals in repetition reasserts its own sensual existence by resisting subjectivism. Adorno concedes that replication is the content of many modern artworks, but allows that this must not always amount to an "accommodation to the archaic compulsion toward repetition." On the contrary, by posing as repetition, the artwork "absorbs" its "most fatal enemy—fungibility."⁴⁹

Adorno was right that twentieth-century thematizations of the lost substitutional paradigm were always played out within a deeper, enveloping horror of the ersatz, the routine, the standardized. No work by Duchamp or Andy Warhol threatened even minimally the basic axiom of originality that still governs the idea of art in the modern West. The artwork that takes up banality and interchangeability as subject matter does not want to *be* banal and interchangeable. To represent the copy is to reassert the distinction between copy and original. The auto-original work affects insouciance about copies and substitutes. Art that stages the condition of the copy poses no real threat to the dialectics of copy and original that drives modern art production. Modern art's insistence on originality is not to be confused with insistence on the authority of the individual artist. The originality, or auto-originality, of the modern artwork is simply the principle of its noncontinuity with everything around it (the normal, the real, the functional, etc.). There may be an author behind the work; authoredness may be part of the content of the work; or not. The distinction that art insists on is the distinction between art and nonart—and never more so than when the erasure of that distinction is taken up as a theme or as a desideratum. The feedback loops may be more tangled, the ironies nested ever more deeply within ironies, the replication technologies themselves more sophisticated. But structurally little has changed since the sixteenth century. "Art" still names the protected realm where culture stages the bitter contest between original and copy, but always with the same outcome.

In the fifteenth century, by contrast, on the far horizon of the modern paradigm, things that are today considered works of art and therefore non-substitutable, like statues and paintings, were still constantly standing in for one another. Copying was the normal way to make new things. When approaching an artifact, fifteenth-century observers looked for its referential target, not for an origin point within its production history. They

49. Theodor Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), 203–4; *Aesthetic Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 135.

understood the meaning of an artifact as a fixed referential quantum preserved across a chain of mutually substitutable artifacts, rather than as a dynamic, open-ended process originating in the artifact itself. Artifacts were able to imply, with great force, a prior chain of artifacts that linked up with a distant point of origin, a historical figure, perhaps, or a moment of founding. So deeply rooted in this period was the premise of the impossibility of novelty that practically every signifying artifact, every monument, was presumed to have an ultimate source in a remote and primordial reality, even if that source was in practical terms unknowable.⁵⁰

The portrait, the tomb, the image of the god or the king succeeded in concretizing a past that was otherwise ghostly and obscure. Reference, once recognized, appeared ancient, inevitable, incontrovertible, in much the same way that texts in this period took on authority and closed off questions about real origins, simply by existing. Texts took on even more authority when they were published. It was the same with images. Once an image was *made public* by any of several means—mechanical replication, dissemination across time and space, public display—its authority was formidable. A monumental shaping of the past, no matter how spurious, had a powerful placebo effect on the imagination of the beholder.

All reception of artifacts was “poetic” in the original sense of “making” or “shaping.” The recipient participated in the activation of the artifact by completing it and then assigning it a place in a structure. When Celtis wrapped his discovery of the druid statues in a poetic discourse, he was just redoubling the already poetic character of his historical thinking. He was poeticizing the poetry, just as would the illustrated fantastic novel *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, published by Aldus Manutius in Venice only a few years later. As culture was rationalized, a separate space had to be cleared out for the poetic imagination. The placebo effect of the substitutional artifact was transferred to the painted or the sculpted artwork.

Imaginative approaches to the puzzle of archeological credulity avoid simple condemnation. One of these approaches might be called the “romantic” model, following the lead of Charles Mitchell, who in a well-

50. Cf. the model developed by Amy Powell, “‘A Point Ceaselessly Pushed Back’: The Origin of Early Netherlandish Painting,” *Art Bulletin* 88 (2006): 540–62. Powell points out that most fifteenth-century paintings did not derive their authority from singular, prestigious prototypes, for instance, a famous icon. Instead modern paintings were constantly referring to one another, weaving a self-sustaining web of citation and commentary. This is a sophisticated model, complementary, I would like to think, to the model developed here, because it accounts for the emergence of art within a system that downplayed the authority of the individual artist, whereas this book describes a system that cultivated the idea of the artist as author. I would add only that it was the very intangibility and remoteness of the painting’s referential origin point (divinity) that allowed for the proliferation of a new set of multiple and proximate origin points (other paintings).

known essay of 1960 brought out the fanciful, enthusiastic dimension of fifteenth-century erudition, showing for example how readily the Italian traveler and antiquarian Cyriacus of Ancona fell into a fervent, “goliardic”—that is, ludic and festive—worship of Mercury; or with what ingenuity the antiquarian Feliciano invented monumental frames for the inscriptions he discovered.⁵¹ Scholarship, according to Mitchell, was a matter of filling out the bare skeleton of antique remains. Imagination was inextricable from scholarship. Mitchell’s approach unfolds into the recent and even more sophisticated analyses of Leonard Barkan, who in his book *Unearthing the Past: Archeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* shows how Renaissance archeology became a framework for poetic storytelling about objects and origins, dovetailing in the first decades of the sixteenth century with the emergence of a culture of art.⁵²

The apparent credulity of the scholar was simply a hesitation about the true nature of the image or effigy. Works of art such as paintings or statues were frequently expected in late medieval and Renaissance culture to double as documents, to bear witness, for instance, to sacred truths or dynastic facts. The two identities of the image, documentary and aesthetic, clashed. From this point of view, the errors of the antiquaries were not errors at all, but rather points of friction between two models of the artifact’s temporality. By contrast, the reader of a textual artwork, a poem, was less likely to hesitate. The poem is fundamentally a time-bending machine, as Thomas Greene’s profound study of Renaissance intertextuality showed.⁵³ The poets worked with and not against anachronism—learned to make a virtue out of the condition of intertextuality, or the simple fact that every linguistic text is woven with threads ripped from other texts. The poem was seldom mistaken for a document.

Another recent approach treats scholarly error in the context of mythic thought. Credulity, in this paradigm, is an effect generated by a mismatch between scholarly and mythical thinking. Myth is a narrative coding of a

51. Charles Mitchell, “Archaeology and Romance in Renaissance Italy,” in *Italian Renaissance Studies*, ed. E. F. Jacob (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), 455–83. On invented frames, see Mitchell, “Felice Feliciano Antiquarius,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 47 (1961): 197–221, esp. 216–17, and Annegrit Schmitt, “Antikenkopien und künstlerische Selbstverwirklichung in der Frührenaissance,” in *Antikenzeichnung und Antikenstudien in Renaissance und Frühbarock*, ed. Richard Harprath and Henning Wrede (Mainz: Zabern, 1989), 1–20 (on the interplay of accuracy and freedom in the antiquarian drawings of Jacopo Bellini and Marco Zoppo).

52. Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing the Past: Archeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

53. Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). On the self-emancipation of Renaissance poetry from referential responsibility toward origins, see David Quint, *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature: Versions of the Source* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

culture's cosmology and first principles. The historian Paul Veyne in *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?* sketched out an ancient intellectual world of "plural truths," an open competition of myths that made perfect sense according to its own internal rules and even made room for what Veyne called the scholarly practice of "critical credulity."⁵⁴ Veyne's model is adaptable to Renaissance culture. As Frank Borchardt demonstrated in his book *German Antiquity in Renaissance Myth*, the critical historiography of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was often just a matter of one myth replacing another. Although Renaissance scholars were quick to condemn the errors of their predecessors, they were apt to replace those errors with more errors. Borchardt assigned to the rhetorical maneuver of switching one story for another the forgotten rhetorical term *anasceva* (from the word meaning "break camp" or "dismantle").⁵⁵ He argued that scholars were reluctant to dismantle a tradition and leave nothing in its place. That is, they were neither satisfied with Veyne's "plural truths," nor willing to face a past completely unstructured by myth.⁵⁶

Because myth and written history share the same narrative structure, they are easily knitted together into a common fabric. In chronicles or histories of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, cosmogonies or myths of national origins frequently survived as conventional preludes to the narration of more recent, better documented events. The initiated could easily detect the seam between myth and history, perhaps tacitly sanctioning the mythic prologue through a euhemeristic assumption, that is, the idea that heroic or fabulous narratives were rooted in real but forgotten events. Other readers allowed myth and history to flow into one another. "Credulity" was a way of reading.

Antiquarianism, as Ingo Herklotz points out, is curiosity about every aspect of ancient life *except* events.⁵⁷ Antiquarianism, therefore, is by its nature out of rhythm with both myth and history. Its findings, which never quite settle into their own narrative patterns, can be used either to support or to disrupt existing narratives. Objects and artifacts connect to one

54. Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 54.

55. Frank L. Borchardt, "The Topos of Critical Rejection in the Renaissance," *Modern Language Notes* 81 (1966): 476–88; and *German Antiquity in Renaissance Myth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971).

56. Riccardo Fubini, even while warning against a vogueish modern "complaisance" or even "connivance" with myth, argues that the forger Annio da Viterbo was an authentic mythmaker, capable of expressing cultural crisis and malaise by symbolic means; "Annio da Viterbo nella tradizione erudita toscana" (1981) in Fubini, *Storiografia dell'Umanesimo in Italia da Leonardo Bruni ad Annio da Viterbo* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2003), 335–42, esp. 341.

57. Herklotz, *Cassiano dal Pozzo und die Archäologie des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Hirmer, 1999), 9.

another across invisible webs, generating mysterious effects of survival, revival, and anachronism, as the imaginative early twentieth-century art historian Aby Warburg recognized.⁵⁸ Antiquarianism opens more readily onto stories about art than onto narrative historiography guided by historical reason.

Cultures deprived of the framework of meaning provided by, at one end, etiological myths and, at the other, prophecy—that is, devices that unlock the cardinal mysteries of beginnings and endings—must be prepared to take seriously the mere events of human history. Such cultures develop literature and art, fictional re-enactments of life, as compensations for the loss of its cosmogonies and eschatologies.⁵⁹ Poetry, mistaken for myth, becomes the recourse of those who are unconvinced that linear sequences of documents or artifacts can tell the whole story, or of those unwilling to adapt their existence to a historical narrative reduced to mere events. In modernity, the concept of myth names a flight from the rule of fact. The credulous early modern scholar, then, is that seeker of origins who is already beyond myth but not yet ready to surrender to art. Vico, who grasped the power of “poetic wisdom,” found himself in just that predicament, protesting the dogma of fact established by the empiricists and biblical scholars of the seventeenth century. But this also made him the first to anticipate the modern rebellion, initiated by Friedrich Nietzsche, against historical reason.

Each of these accounts of early modern credulity identifies a mixing of categories that in modernity are notionally kept distinct: in the first instance, historical scholarship is compromised by the poetical or aesthetic imagination, in the second by mythic thinking.

In presenting this thesis about the European Renaissance to various audiences, I have been struck by how often specialists in the art and architecture of other continents and periods saw parallels in the cultures they know. A wooden temple in southern India, it was explained to me, is very likely to be described by a local authority as ancient even when that same describer is well aware that the actual timbers and carvings at hand were cut and carved and assembled only recently, in living memory. The current mode of being of the building, as it were, substitutes for a predecessor structure on the same spot, which itself in turn is presumed to have substituted for a still earlier structure, and so forth. The building retains its antiquity, indeed its immemorial prestige, even if every timber is at one time

58. On Warburg and anachronism, see Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante: Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Minuit, 2002).

59. See Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (original German edition, 1991) (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 298.

or another replaced. Such parallels across cultures are risky and I will not pursue them. Still, they suggest that modern, that is, post-Renaissance, Western culture is peculiar in its insistence on the tight causal link between the physical artifact and the lifeworld—the constellation of circumstances—that generated it. The modern West is equally peculiar in its habit of investing that historically anchored artifact with an integrity and a principle of difference.

Once Celtis's face-to-face encounter with the druids is understood as a sample and not as a curiosity, a startling apparition emerges: a visual environment stocked with round-arched and centrally planned churches, sculptured reliefs and ornamental friezes, majuscule inscriptions and minuscule book hands, inscriptions and images painted and carved on church walls, all tranquilly taken for relics of the most distant antiquity.

The book tells of excavations, compilations, interpretations, and restorations of images and buildings, medieval and ancient, but equally of the modern monuments and other archeologically oriented projects—the tombs and epitaphs, portraits and medals, propaganda prints, even sacred architecture—undertaken by German cities, monastic communities, princes, councilors, scholars, and artists between the 1480s and the 1530s. People were trying to make sense of the old buildings and images they came across and they were fashioning artifacts that they hoped would help them find their own way back into history. Although the story here is exclusively a German one, the premise is that all European art at this moment was subtended by the same structures of reception and production. The German story may even bring out aspects of the relation between archeology and art in Renaissance Italy, aspects by now impossible to grasp through the dense thicket of prior scholarship on that topic. Despite the disparity in quantity and quality of relics at hand, and despite the asymmetry between province and center, the reception of old artifacts in cultures north and south of the Alps shared the same basic structure.

Portraits, effigies, tombs, and epigraphic monuments are often marginalized in conventional art historical accounts, for they cannot be located within the dominant historiographical model of the period, namely, the transformation of the Christian devotional image into the secular work of art. Tombs and inscriptions are not always easily connected to an artist. They offer the eye little delight and the mind few ideas. And yet tombs were central to the imagination of the period. Potentates and scholars and indeed everyone else approached them with awe, as does anyone who cares to pause before the certain prospect of death and the vulnerability of *fama*, reputation. The monument tries to channel and immobilize the future's retrospective gaze. The mechanisms of historical reference

underlying such nonauthored monuments are easily underrated by a history of art. The concept of substitutional credulity, or systematic misdating on the basis of a referential model of representation, reveals that there was no stranger and more complex version of temporality than that proposed by inscription, tomb, and portrait.