FACING THE DIVINE:
BUSTS OF CHRIST IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ITALY

A thesis

submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

Art History

TUFTS UNIVERSITY

May 2011

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Abstract.

My thesis examines the early modern viewer reception of sixteenth-century Italian busts of Christ that lack attributes. I determine that the busts were recognizable to the viewer without any elements of identification because Christ's actual physiognomy was believed to be preserved in the True Likenesses. Moreover, this inquiry explores the physical bust form of the sculptures to determine if early modern viewers understood the busts of Christ to be a portrait bust or a reliquary bust. I determine that the busts of Christ have correlations to both types of busts. Thus, the function of the bust is analyzed by comparing the functions and locations of portrait and reliquary busts with the known locations of the busts of Christ. Finally, I posit possible functions for the busts of Christ to understand how early modern Italian viewers may have interacted with the busts.

To LMRL, SJL and KAL for all your love and support.
I am especially indebted to MEA
for your guidance, support, encouragement and edits.

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Facing the Divine: Busts of Christ in Sixteenth-Century Italy

Introduction

His eyes calm and head tilted slightly to the right, a man stands straight, appearing to listen to something. (figure 1) His face is beautiful and blemish free, though he is not a young man. His forehead is smooth; the lack of wrinkles hides his age. A small smile is partially hidden by his mustache. A forked beard curls beneath his chin and accentuates his strong jaw line. The curls of his beard are matched in his shoulder length hair, parted in the middle. His textured hair and beard contrast to his smooth, unblemished skin. His nose is in proportion to the rest of his face, and at the bridge gracefully defines his brow. He looks calm and serene, quietly happy. His whole face suggests wisdom and attentiveness; he appears to be completely trustworthy. His slightly sunken, yet fleshy, cheeks reveal both a strong skeletal structure and the slenderness of his body. He is dressed in an unadorned, unassuming robe that falls in pleats around his shoulders. His beauty and strength are both ideal and reassuring. Despite his slender face, his shoulders and neck are solid and straight. His body is stable and looks as if it could support extra weight without straining.

His solidity comes from his bearing, but also from the fact that he is carved out of marble. This beautiful bust of a man sits atop a wooden plinth in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), calmly waiting to interact with whomever passes by. This idealized man was carved in the form of a typical Renaissance portrait bust, circa 1500, possibly by the Lombard sculptor Cristoforo Solari.[1] The

[1] The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston currently labels the bust as “possibly” by Cristoforo Solari, though the attribution is tentative and currently the source of much scholarly debate. The actual attribution is not an issue explored by this thesis, so the current label provided by the museum is

life-sized bust is truncated directly below the shoulders in a straight line, yet the drapery of his robe gives the sense that his body continues. The illusion of lifelikeness instilled in the bust is broken by the static nature of the white marble from which it was carved. He carries no markings, inscriptions or attributes to reveal his identity; but somehow his face alone gives away his identity. This idealized, serene face belongs to Jesus Christ.

The son of God lived over 1,500 years before Solari carved this bust. Still, Solari was able to create a "portrait" of a man he had never seen, and whose image is unknowable. Not only was the sculptor able to carve an accurate likeness of someone who was not alive during Solari's lifetime, but he carved a bust that was immediately recognizable as Christ for Renaissance viewers. Art historians and museum-goers alike have taken the conventional depiction of Jesus for granted and forgotten to ask *why* he is so recognizable. How was it possible for a sixteenth-century Italian sculptor to make a portrait bust of a man, whose physical form was not definitively known, without including any identifying attributes such as a halo, a crown of thorns, or an inscription? In addition, how would the early modern viewer respond to such a bust?

The goal of this thesis is to determine the early modern viewers' response to busts of Christ that lack attributes. To this end, two avenues will be explored: that of the visual depiction of the face of Christ in the bust, and that of the physical form of the bust. I will posit a few possible functions for the busts of Christ, as well as explore the image of Christ through the "True Likenesses", the

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sufficient for my examination of the bust. (see http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/bust-of-christ-230444)

miraculous portraits of the savior. This thesis will complicate the issue of the conventional portrayal of Christ through the idea of the temporal circularity of the image. While traditionally believed to be created contemporaneously with Christ, the prototypical face used to represent Christ is actually an early Christian depiction. Throughout the Renaissance this form was copied and upheld as the real depiction of Christ. The form asserted an "authenticity" and "accuracy" for the conventional face of Christ. As stated by Robin Margaret Jensen:

> Arguably, once a claim was made that '*this* is what Christ looked like,' the task was one of faithful reproduction rather than producing work from an individual imagination. However, even though the similarity of a particular portrait to its archetype was crucial for establishing the validity of the representation, some variation did not necessarily undermine the acceptance of an image as authentic.[2]

Copies of the prototype, declared to be the accurate image of Christ, propagated more "true" images and the repetition of the conventional depiction of Christ created a retrospective authority for his face, as seen in the "True Likenesses."

In addition, the idea of circularity will help inform the discussion of the sculptural form of the bust. These busts of Christ are similar in form to both portrait busts and reliquary busts. As a result, they can be seen as a conflation of the two types. Reliquary busts are thought to be a direct influence on Renaissance portrait busts, and the religious content of the busts of Christ suggests a circuitous interchange between the two forms. It is important to examine portrait busts and reliquary busts to further our understanding of how early modern viewers interacted with the busts of Christ.

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[2] Robin Margaret Jensen, *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 139.

Review of the Literature

There is an evident lack of scholarship on the sculpted busts of Christ produced in Italy during the sixteenth century. Many art historians acknowledge the production with an example in a catalogue, a brief note in a longer text, or a short discussion of a single bust amongst the works of a particular sculptor. The lack of both primary and secondary sources is surprising as supposedly hundreds of the busts survive. Museum catalogues of collections in the United States, England, Italy, Germany elucidate the large production of the busts. The Victoria and Albert Museum in London owns six busts published between 1862 and 1964 in three different catalogues.[3] (figures 2, 3) Three of these busts are recognized as copies of the head of Christ from Andrea del Verrocchio's grouping of *Christ and Saint Thomas* commissioned by the *Tribunale di Mercanzia*, the Merchant's guild, for a niche outside *Or San Michele* produced between 1470-1483. (figure 4) John Pope-Hennessy recognizes the connection between the busts of Christ and the head of Christ in Verrocchio's bronze in his short entries for the catalogue of the Victoria and Albert collection.[4] The other three published busts were produced in the second half of the sixteenth century, which attest to the continuing popularity of the bust form for depictions of Christ.

Andrew Butterfield additionally discusses the derivation of busts of Christ from the famous Florentine statue grouping in a catalogue of the private collection

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[3]J.C. Robinson, *Italian Sculpture of the Middle Ages and Period of the Revival of Art. A Descriptive Catalogue of the Works forming the above Section of the Museum, with additional Illustrative Notices* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1862); Eric Maclagan and Margaret Longhurst, *Catalogue of Italian Sculpture*, 2 vols (London: Board of Education, 1932); and John Pope-Hennessy, *Catalogue of Italian Sculpture in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1964).

[4] John Pope-Hennessy, *Catalogue of Italian Sculpture*, 209.

of Michael Hall. Butterfield notes that "…hundreds of the busts were produced…" in imitation of Verrocchio's *Christ and Saint Thomas*, and further that roughly one hundred of these busts still survive today in various collections.[5] Scholars like Andrew Butterfield and Alan Phipps Darr have written about the production of the followers of Verrocchio, which includes copies of Christ's head created by sculptors like Agnolo di Polo and Pietro Torrigiani.[6] Darr, in particular, has examined the work of Torrigiani, primarily with the goal of attribution. In his work Darr explores the influence of Verrocchio in Torrigiani's production and on Torrigiani's work in England. The busts of Christ are examined as one part of the larger *oeuvre* of Torrigiani's work. While my thesis is indebted to the scholarship begun by Darr, it focuses on the function and meaning of the busts, rather than on attribution.

Similarly, Anne Markham Schulz and others have written on the work of Cristoforo Solari. In the process, they examined a close copy of the bust of Christ at the MFA, that is part of the collection in the Venetian church of *San Pantaleon*.[7] (figure 5) The most evident difference in the two "Solari" busts is the surface detail; whereas the MFA bust is clean and precise, the carving on the bust in *San Pantaleon* is a bit cruder. Transition areas, such as the cheek to the mustache, seem disjointed, as opposed to the smooth and integrated bust of Christ

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[5] Andrew Butterfield, *Masterpieces of Renaissance Sculpture* (New York: Salander – O'Reilly Galleries, LLC), no. 4.

[6] Alan Phipps Darr, "From Westminster Abbey to the Wallace Collection: Torrigiano's Head of Christ," *Apollo* no. 116 (November 1982): 292-298; and Alan Phipps Darr, "Verrocchio's Legacy: Observation Regarding his Influence on Pietro Torrigiani and Other Florentine Sculptors," in *Verrocchio and Late Quattrocento Italian Sculpture*, edited by Steven Bule, Alan Phipps Darr, and Fiorella Superbi Gioffredi (Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1992), 125-139.

[7] Anne Markham Schulz, "Cristoforo Solari at Venice: Facts and Suppositions," *Prospettiva 53-56*, vol. 1 (April 1988-January 1989): 309-316.

at the MFA. The lack of precision and definition of the curls in the beard suggest that the bust in *San Pantaleon* is a copy of the version in Boston. Schulz explores, and discredits, the highly contested attribution of the *San Pantaleon* bust to Solari.[8] Like Darr, Schulz's research examines attribution instead of the significance of the busts, which is the focus of this thesis.

A bust of Christ by Giambologna is the primary focus of a catalogue by Charles Avery.[9] The catalogue features an essay on the bust, relating the bust back to its predecessors (i.e. Verrocchio's example and influence) and to other works by Giambologna that depict the figure of Christ. In the same vein as Darr and Schulz, Avery's analysis of this bust, along with a few others he mentions, is concerned with attribution instead of function and meaning.

While busts of Christ typically feature in catalogues and scholarship regarding individual sculptors, Martin Wackernagel includes the genre in his work on the art production in Renaissance Florence. Wackernagel discusses the busts as equal to altarpieces and larger sculptures: "Finally there are busts of individual saints that are set up here and there, as likenesses of the church's patron, in a sacristy, or even as devotional offerings on a smaller scale in chapels and oratories, instead of paintings or statues."[10] His paragraph on busts of holy personages continues by mentioning materials and then a short discussion of the busts of the Virgin that were popular during the Renaissance. The busts of Christ

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[8] Ibid., 312.

[9] Charles Avery and Claudio Pizzorusso, *Un Busto di Cristo Redentore di Giambologna* (Florence: Giovanni Pratesi Antiquario, 2009).

[10] Martin Wackernagel, *The World of the Florentine Renaissance Artist: Projects and Patrons, Workshop and Art Market*, translated by Alison Luchs (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 77-8.

that fall into this category of saints and holy figures are mentioned in the footnote in order to give the location of a few extant examples. Scholars have yet to realize the potential of Wackernagel's research, which begins to posit possible functions for religious busts. Wackernagel provides a basis for understanding the reception of busts of holy figures in the Renaissance.

To start a new investigation into busts of Christ, it is necessary to look to other types of sources, which are not directly connected to the busts, for information. Scholars who explore the image of Christ in art, especially miraculous icons, are integral to my thesis. The literature on portraiture in Renaissance Italy, and more specifically portrait busts, as well as reliquary busts help structure this inquiry. These relevant researches inform, both with facts and methods, the questions surrounding the early modern viewers' responses to the busts of Christ. My thesis builds upon, and in some cases refutes, the arguments and methods posited by the previous scholars outlined below.

My thesis is methodologically inspired by David Freedberg and his seminal work on the power of art and the history of viewer response.[11] Freedberg develops a theory of human response to art, which he claims is universal. He declares that all people emotionally react to art despite culture or time period. He analyzes how viewers interact with art and how works of art becomes imbued with power. The analysis in my runs parallel to Freedberg's arguments, and I rely on his methods to inform my own.

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[11] David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

The literature on icons of Christ in art is extensive. The literature can be separated into two parts: art historians who focus on the "True Likeness" of Christ, and scholars who focus on images of Christ in general. Gerhard Wolf and Hans Belting use the True Likeness of Christ as the basis of their studies, in contrast to Gabriele Finaldi, Neil MacGregor, Leo Steinberg, and Robin Margaret Jensen, who explore all types of images of Christ, not just his miraculous portraits.

In their writings both Gerhard Wolf and Hans Belting utilize the "True Likenesses" of Christ as a focal point through which they ask larger questions about the nature of art and society.[12] Known as *acheiropoièton* in Greek and *non manufactum* in Latin, the True Likenesses of Christ were believed to be made by God, not by human hands.[13] Also, the True Likenesses were believed to be accurate portraits of Christ. Wolf typically focuses on the aporetic nature of the True Likenesses, questioning the nature of images and how they are produced. He explores the Veronica Veil and the Mandylion as evidence of the origins of painting and the distribution of images in medieval and Renaissance Europe. Wolf's examination of the tension inherent in images of Christ, between the

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[12] Gerhard Wolf, "From Mandylion to Veronica: Picturing the 'Disembodied' Face and Disseminating the True Image of Christ in the Latin West," in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation: Papers from a Colloquium held at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome and the Villa Spelman, Florence, 1996*, edited by Herbert Kessler and Gerhard Wolf (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1998), 153-179; and Gerhard Wolf, "Christ in His Beauty and Pain: Concepts of Body and Image in an Age of Transition (Late Middle Ages and Renaissance)," in *The Art of Interpreting*, edited by Susan C. Scott (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 164-197; and Gerhard Wolf, "The Origins of Painting," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 36, Factura (Autumn 1999): 60-78; and Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[13] Belting. *Likeness and Presence*, 49.

presumed form of Christ and the depicted form in images, is essential to the discussion of the circularity of the likeness of Christ in this thesis.

Similarly, Hans Belting analyzes the function of icons in the "era before art" through the True Likenesses of Christ. Belting uses reception theory to examine the True Likenesses and, in particular, the veneration of the portraits of Christ. He argues for a change in the universality of response as argued by David Freedberg. Belting also posits a distinction of two separate times in history, defined as before and after the "era of art." He explains that the "era of art," or the Renaissance, is a dividing line between when viewers saw images as powerful icons versus modern works of art. While I am sympathetic to Freedberg's methods, I agree with Belting's determination of the two distinct eras in art and the differentiation of the viewer's response.

Similarly, Gabriele Finaldi and Neil MacGregor study the True Likeness of Christ, but merely as one part of the larger context of images of Christ. Their scholarship provides a historical background for images of Christ in the Renaissance, situating them in the larger production of Christian art in Europe. Both Finaldi and MacGregor approach depictions of Christ thematically. They contextualize the theological issues present in the works of art, such as the dual nature of Christ and the True Likeness as a portrait of Christ.[14] Finaldi's examination of individual works demonstrates how central issues of Christian dogma were portrayed by the artists in different places and times. MacGregor also

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[14] Gabriele Finaldi, *The Image of Christ* (London: National Gallery Company, Limited, 2000); and Neil MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation: Images of Christ in Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

explores the theological issues present in Christian imagery, and informs the possible function of the bust as tied to the belief of the dual nature of Christ.

Scholars such as Leo Steinberg and Robin Margaret Jensen continue to study portrayals of Christ in art, but focus on aspects other than the True Likeness. Steinberg concentrates on the issue of the sexuality of the body of Christ in Renaissance art.[15] According to Steinberg, the issue of Christ's sexuality is directly related to his humanity. Like Finaldi, he uses Catholic dogma to explain depictions of the baby Jesus and the crucified Christ. The artists' emphasis on Christ's genitalia exposes his humanity, which is central to his incarnation and resurrection. In the Renaissance, Christ was depicted as fully human to emphasize his dual nature as both man and God. Steinberg's emphasis on the humanity of Christ informs an interpretation of the form of the busts of Christ as "secular" portrait busts that emphasize his humanity.

Unlike Steinberg's Renaissance focus, Jensen examines early Christian portraits of Christ and his followers.[16] Jensen analyses works of art to explain how the multiple depictions of Christ in the mid fourth century quickly turned into a conventional type. Her examination of portraits of Christ demonstrates that early Christian visual imagery is primarily didactic. Therefore, as early Christian portraits of the divine were considered educational, idolatry did not become an issue in the Church until Iconoclasm.[17] Her examination of early Christian

[15] Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
[16] Jensen, *Face to Face*.
[17] Ibid., 33.

portraits of the divine is important to the discussion of the conventional type of Christ analyzed in the first chapter of this thesis.

The literature on religion and religious art in Renaissance Italy by scholars such as David Peterson, Richard Trexler, and Michael Baxandall broadens the discussion of Christian art in Europe. Both Peterson and Trexler have re-examined the issue of separation of church and state in Renaissance Italy to rediscover a complex culture that was both religious and secular.[18] In contrast to nineteenth-century scholars, (such as Jacob Burckhardt, who championed the secular humanism of the Renaissance as separate and more important than Christianity), Peterson and Trexler rewrite this history as one that is equally secular and sacred.[19] As a historian, Peterson is primarily concerned with confirming the facts and understanding the Renaissance church without modern biases. In contrast, Trexler focuses on the religious practice of the Renaissance viewer, in particular, on the viewers' interaction with specific miraculous objects. He interprets the function of religious objects to be a combination of humanist and Christian values. Peterson and Trexler caution the reader to be mindful of the actual religious and cultural setting of the Italian Renaissance. Their argument for a combination of humanist and Christian beliefs can be related to the combination of humanist and Christian values seen in physical form in the busts of Christ.

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[18] David Peterson, "Out of the Margins: Religion and the Church in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 53:3 (Autumn 2000): 835-879; and David Peterson, "Religion and the Church," in *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance: 1300-1550*, edited by John Najemy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 59-81; and Richard Trexler, "Florentine Religious Experience: The Sacred Image," *Studies in the Renaissance* 19 (1972): 7-41.

[19] Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, translated by S.G.C. Middlemore (New York: Modern Library, 2002).

Michael Baxandall also examines the religious practices of Renaissance Italy by looking at the function and production of religious art.[20] Baxandall approaches painting and sculpture through a fifteenth-century lens. He discusses the production and function of Christian images from the viewpoint of a fifteenth-century viewer, not a modern art historian. Baxandall focuses on the social history of objects and analyzes the secular and sacred nature of Renaissance Christian art. His approach of understanding art through a fifteenth-century mentality is the goal of my thesis. I question how busts of Christ would have been seen and understood by an early modern viewer.

Do Renaissance busts of Christ relate to portrait busts, to reliquary busts, or both? The depiction of Christ in bust format is very similar to portraits, or True Likenesses, of Christ. Therefore, it is essential to discuss the scholarship pertaining not only to images of Christ and the True Likenesses, but also to portraiture. John Pope-Hennessy sets the scene for a discussion of Italian Renaissance portraiture.[21] He describes the portrait as a new development of the Renaissance, influenced by humanist thought and renewed interest in the antique. Unlike Trexler and Peterson, Pope-Hennessy proscribes to the secularist view put forward by Burckhardt. According to Pope-Hennessy, the invention of the Renaissance, in regards to portraiture, is the expression of emotion and personality in the sitter. Early modern portraits commemorate a specific person who not only looks naturalistic and individualistic, but has emotion and spirit. Typically, the patron of the portrait would influence the artists depiction of

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[20] Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[21] John Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait in the Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966).

him/herself. However, portraits of Christ were created long after his life on Earth and thus were under the full control of the artist. While my thesis is indebted to Pope-Hennessy's enveloping study of the portrait in Renaissance Italy, I argue for a more complicated view of the portrait of Christ as a product of a complex culture that was both humanist and Christian.

Both Joanna Woods-Marsden and Fredrika Jacobs build on this discussion of portraiture begun by John Pope-Hennessy.[22] Woods-Marsden clarifies the idea of naturalism, demonstrating that early modern patrons wanted a naturalistic and "empirical" (to use a word from Pope-Hennessy) portrait, but only to a small extent. Patrons additionally wanted an idealized version of themselves, so that the portrait could be used as positive propaganda. Renaissance portraiture, according to Woods-Marsden, was not as scientific and exact as scholars have made it seem. In contrast, Woods-Marsden declares that idealization was a necessary part of a "lifelike" portrait. This blend of empirical and ideal is an important notion when considering the blatant idealization of the busts of Christ, who was the ultimate man.

Jacobs continues in a similar vein in her examination, considering issues of 'likeness' and 'lifelikeness' in early modern portraiture. Like Woods-Marsden, Jacobs analyzes how Renaissance viewers wrote about portraits in terms that compared art to life. Portraits did not have to be an exact likeness of a person, since lifelikeness was more important to the viewer. Many of the concepts attached with portraiture, such as *animo*, *fiato*, *spirito* identified the lifelike

[22] Joanna Woods-Marsden, "'Ritratto al naturale': Questions of Realism and Idealism in Early Renaissance Portraits," *Art Journal* 46:3 (1987): 209-16; and Fredrika Jacobs, *The Living Image in Renaissance Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

quality of the work rather than the resemblance to the sitter. It is possible that, like portraiture, the Renaissance viewer would have been concerned with both the accuracy and lifelikeness of these busts of Christ.

Maria Loh and Harry Berger further the ideas of lifelikeness and idealization, by examining how early modern artists created portraits and the ways in which early modern viewers would have understood portraiture. Loh offers a new understanding of portraiture from the viewpoint of the fifteenth-century viewer: as a place of signification in which identity and individuality were not displayed but created.[23] Loh comprehends Renaissance portraits as still tied to stereotypes and generalizations, characteristics of medieval portraiture. This differs from Pope-Hennessy's analysis of portraits as individual and empirical. The idea that a portrait is still based on a likeness, but that it is more generalized than modern art historians believe, ties into both Woods-Marsden's claim of idealization and Jacobs' claim of the importance of lifelikeness over likeness.

Moreover, Berger builds upon the idea of idealization in his claim that the portrait is a deliberate pose chosen by the sitter, and not a reflection of his/her psyche.[24] The sitter decided on a public face to display, and the portrait portrays a combination of the sitter's intentional pose and the artist's internalization of the sitter's pose. Berger gives back to the sitter some of their intentionality and control over their status as an object in the portrait. This is important to analyze in terms of the busts of Christ. As Christ was dead, the pose was completely the construction of the artist. This is exhibited in the typical idealization of Christ's

[23] Maria Loh, "Renaissance Faciality," *Oxford Art Journal* 32:3 (2009): 341-363.
[24] Harry Berger, Jr., "Fiction of the Pose: Facing the Gaze of Early Modern Portraiture," *Representations*, no. 46 (Spring 1994): 87-120.

features. Therefore the intentionality of the pose in the busts is imposed by the cultural mores and previous images of Christ.

In order to narrow the field of research down from portraiture to portrait busts, a few important scholars inform my thesis: Irving Lavin, Jane Schuyler, and Georgia Sommers-Wright. Irving Lavin's texts on portrait busts are similar to Pope-Hennessy's texts portraiture, as his discussions explore the antique and humanist influences.[25] Lavin focuses on portrait busts as a combination of antique busts and medieval reliquary busts, but he also sees new developments in early modern portrait busts. Renaissance busts are unique in their expression, emotion, and illusion of movement. They also act as a fragment of a larger whole, calling to mind the whole man rather than the antique head that was contained as its own entity. The busts of Christ at the center of this inquiry take the form of portrait busts as described by Lavin. In addition, his insistence on the connection between portrait busts and reliquaries is important for the discussion of the circularity of the form of the bust in the second chapter of my thesis.

Jane Schuyler examines a topic more specific than Lavin, by focusing on fifteenth-century Florentine portrait busts. She discusses them in terms of the origin of the busts, the attributions to specific sculptors, and the identification of the sitters.[26] Schuyler recognizes Donatello as the first Florentine sculptor to create a Renaissance portrait bust; she agrees with Lavin that reliquaries were an

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[25] Irving Lavin, "On Illusion and Allusion in Italian Sixteenth-Century Portrait Busts," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 119:5 (October 15, 1975): 353-362; and Irving Lavin, "On the Sources and Meaning of the Renaissance Portrait Bust," in *Looking at Italian Renaissance Sculpture*, edited by Sarah Blake McHam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 60-70.

[26] Jane Schuyler, *Florentine Busts: Sculpted Portraiture in the Fifteenth Century,* PhD diss., Columbia University, 1976.

integral development of the portrait bust from the antique to the early modern bust. However, she makes a clear distinction between secular and sacred portrait busts: "Portrait busts of small children, which are usually clothed as a Christ Child or Young St. John the Baptist and, therefore, difficult to distinguish from invented representations of these holy persons, have been eliminated from this study. Busts of mature saints have also been eliminated…"[27] While Schuyler recognizes the existence of portrait busts of saints and other holy personages, she sets them apart from secular portrait busts. My thesis, while reliant on many of her other assertions, will problematize this differentiation between secular and sacred portrait busts.

Georgia Sommers-Wright furthers the discussion of portrait busts by looking to the fourteenth-century for sculpted portrait likenesses.[28] She posits that the practice of making sculpted portraits continues from antiquity to the Renaissance, and not just through the intermediary of the reliquary bust. Portrait busts were not continuously produced during the middle ages, and were not a predominant sculptural type. Similar to Jacobs, Sommers-Wright makes a clear distinction between likeness and lifelikeness as most fourteenth-century heads were lifelike, but not necessarily likenesses of specific people. Moreover, she refers to Loh's argument in her claim that both generalized types and individualistic sculpted heads existed side by side, and that it can be difficult to tell them apart. Sommers-Wright offers a caution to other art historians that a lifelike bust is not necessarily a likeness, which is a point well taken in regards to

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[27] Ibid., iii.

[28] Georgia Sommers Wright, "The Reinvention of the Portrait Likeness in the Fourteenth Century," *Gesta* 39:2 (2000): 117-34.

Renaissance busts of Christ, as there is no way of authenticating lifelike busts of Christ as likenesses.

Some scholars, like Irving Lavin, have connected portrait busts and reliquary busts, which I will discuss at length in chapter two. Anita Moskowitz agrees with Lavin in her argument that Donatello's reliquary bust of St. Rossore is a transitional sculpture that combines features of reliquaries and features of portrait busts.[29] Moskowitz states that this bust by Donatello leads the way for the production of portrait busts in the Italian Renaissance. The research done by Lavin and Moskowitz is integral to the idea of the temporal circularity of the bust form and how early modern viewers would have read and understood busts of Christ.

Other scholars working on reliquaries, such as Cynthia Hahn and Scott Montgomery, are interested in their function and the responses they elicit from viewers. Hahn focuses on the need to re-examine the notion that the contents "labeled" the form of body-part reliquaries.[30] She proves that the form of the reliquary did not always correspond to the object contained within, but more often the form was related to the function of the reliquary. This is evident in arm reliquaries that were used to bless the pious, but held bones from other parts of the saint's body. Montgomery also re-evaluates the form of the reliquary and examines the slippage between the relic and the reliquary in medieval discourse.[31] He discovered that medieval viewers discussed the reliquary (container) as the

[29] Anita Moskowitz, "Donatello's Reliquary Bust of Saint Rossore," *The Art Bulletin* 63:1 (March 1981): 41-48.

[30] Cynthia Hahn, "The Voices of the Saints: Speaking Reliquaries," *Gesta* 36:1 (1997): 20-31.

[31] Scott Montgomery, "Mittite capud meum… ad matrem meam ut osculetur eum: The Form and Meaning of the Reliquary Bust of Saint Just," *Gesta* 36:1 (1997): 48-64.

relic (contained). Relics and reliquaries were conflated to the point that St. Just's image on the reliquary was taken as a true likeness.[32] The scholarship on reliquaries illuminates the slippage of significance from the relic to the reliquary. As a result, the exterior bust became the important element in viewer interaction. In terms of the busts of Christ, is it possible that an interior relic was not necessary for an early modern viewer to interact with a religious bust as if it were a reliquary?

Busts of Christ: The Problems

Most Renaissance sculptures of Christ are narrative and didactic. They illustrate a scene, tell a story and enable the Renaissance viewer to gain insight and knowledge of the son of God and the events in his life. Two of the most popular themes in the life of Christ are his birth and his death. The first describes how God became incarnate through his fully human and fully divine son. The second describes how this man and god gave his life to save all of humanity, thereby wiping sin from the world. These two events uphold the major tenets of the Catholic Church: God became incarnate in Christ and sent him into the world as its savior from sin and death. Images such as the Madonna and Child abound in both painted and sculpted form in the Renaissance, with the Nativity as a popular scene for altarpieces. Sculpted reliefs of the Madonna and Child were so common that they exist today in materials such as stucco, terracotta, wood, and marble in museums and collections all over the world. The Lamentation, Deposition and *Pietà* are also very common motifs found in Italian Renaissance

[32] Ibid., 57.

paintings and sculptures. But the sculptures discussed in my thesis, the sculpted busts of Christ as an adult male, are not in the typical form for narrative religious art. The busts do not set a scene, describe an event or location, nor do they feature attributes with which to identify the man depicted as Christ.

While there is no overt narrative function for busts of Christ, it is a form that became very popular in the sixteenth century. This is attested to by the fact that numerous examples still exist today. The *San Pantaleon* Christ and the bust of Christ at the MFA are the only busts of Christ that have been identified as possibly carved by Cristoforo Solari. Numerous other sculptors throughout Italy have also created non-narrative busts of Christ that lack attributes and inscriptions. While Solari was working in Milan and Venice, other sculptors such as Verrocchio perfected the form in Florence, and Pietro Torrigiani even brought the format for the bust of Christ to England. Florence, in particular, became a center for production of these busts, mostly due to the popularity of Andrea del Verrocchio's *Christ and Saint Thomas*.

Most of the busts based on Verrocchio's original are painted terracotta, but other examples of busts of Christ exist in marble and other stones. A beautiful example from 1520 by Tullio Lombardo is currently in the collection of the *Bargello* in Florence. (figure 6) The idealized face of Christ carved in marble is stylistically closer to the MFA's Solari bust of Christ than to Verrocchio's head of Christ. Another bust of Christ by Giovanni della Porta carved c. 1590 (currently in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art) is unique in the use of colored stones and precious materials. (figure 7)

Verrocchio influenced the Florentine production of busts of Christ, but it was not the only type of production. Busts of Christ that lack attributes were produced outside of Verrocchio's stylistic sphere. Yet each bust, despite different materials, have similar features: long, curling hair parted in the middle, with a short, forked curling beard, and idealized facial features. All of the busts of Christ portray a beautiful adult male; the figure usually wears a draped robe in the Roman style. The large number of extant examples suggests the popularity of the busts, especially as they were created throughout the Italian peninsula during the sixteenth century. The materials of the busts imply two different costs and level of patron involvement. The highly detailed marble busts, such as the one by Tullio Lombardo, were most likely commissioned by a specific, wealthy patron. The similarly styled terracotta examples indicated mass production of the busts. The terracotta would have been less expensive than the stone versions, and therefore available for a wider audience to purchase. This evidence begs the question: what was the strong appeal? Why were so many types of busts of Christ created?

Yet another category of busts of Christ exists; busts with attributes and inscriptions. Matteo Civitale produced numerous examples of busts of Christ as the *Ecce Homo* during his passion. Pietro Torrigiani's *Salvator Mundi* is explicit in the identity of Christ not only in the carved inscription, but also in the base that features clouds and *putti*.[33] (Figure 8) Countless Renaissance busts reveal the identity of Christ through their attributes of halos or crowns of thorns. The parallel production of busts with and without attributes in sixteenth-century Italy

[33] *Il Conoscitore d'arte: Sculture dal XV al XIX secolo della collezione di Federico Zeri*, ed. Andrea Bacchi (Electa: Milan, 1989): 23. The whereabouts of this bust are currently unknown, as it was stolen from the private collection of Federico Zeri.

illustrates the interest and popularity of busts of Christ. An example of the other extreme, busts with attributes display more explicitly the connection between portrait busts and busts of Christ without attributes.

The unifying link between the busts of Christ is not style, but form. This genre crossed media, location and time; similar busts were created throughout the sixteenth century all over the Italian peninsula in different materials. [34] Yet all the busts combine the forms of a typical Renaissance portrait bust and a reliquary bust. In addition, they lack an obvious means of identification, aside from the figure depicted in the conventional form of the adult Christ.

How did the early modern viewer recognize the face of Christ? What did they perceive the form of the bust to be? To begin to comprehend how viewers interacted with these non-narrative busts of Christ in sixteenth-century Italy, it is necessary to study the form and content of the busts. The features of Christ closely resemble those in the True Likenesses of Christ, and follow the conventional form of depicting Christ. Chapter one will explore the visual depiction of Christ to clarify how early modern viewers immediately grasped that the unidentified face is of Christ. An issue of authenticity and temporal circularity will problematize the True Likeness of Christ, as the True Likenesses were conflated with other Roman models and the written description of Christ was created to reinforce the True Likenesses.

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[34] I realize that for the sixteenth century Italy as a national entity does not exist, and the different cities have their own government, but the purview of this thesis is larger than one single city or region, and encompasses most of the northern part of the peninsula. Therefore it is easiest to use the term Italy as a geographic area, the peninsula, instead of discussing the specific individual regions and separating the busts based on location.

The second chapter will explore the form of the busts to understand their function and early modern viewer's response. The busts of Christ are closely related both to the secular portrait bust and to sacred reliquaries, specifically body-part reliquaries that took the form of heads. Portrait busts and reliquaries served two distinct purposes. While both were similar in form and used to commemorate and honor individuals, the secular and religious purposes are very different. Portrait busts were memorials in the home for use by the family, while reliquaries had a wider audience as sacred objects, and were thought to work miracles. The form of the life-sized bust truncated beneath the shoulders appears in both portrait busts and reliquaries in sixteenth-century Italy. Given that the figure is of the son of God, the relation to both reliquaries and portrait busts is not clearly defined. Did the early modern viewer read these busts as portraits, relics, or a combination of the two forms of sculpture?

Chapter One: The "True Likeness" of Christ

> As to the origin of the traditional appearance (of Christ) it is now impossible to pronounce; certainly the controversy among patristic authorities was protracted and at one time animated. Tertullian and Cyril actually said that Christ's features were ugly, and perhaps they intended to suggest a mordant comparison between displeasing face and faultless character; but artists did not hesitate to strive after a type in which the virtues of Christianity could be most fully embodied. Having once determined upon a general structure of the face (a type which, on the whole, conforms to the most primitive records), they evolved a figure which is unmistakable.[35]

David Crawford notes that once formed, the figure of Christ became "unmistakable." Artists portray Christ with variances in his facial features, yet despite the small variances amongst works of art, there is a conventional type that is immediately recognizable as Christ. Even in non-narrative images or unexpected settings, the face of Christ was still familiar to Renaissance Christians. While his features were never recorded in the Bible, and a contemporary description of him does not survive, a singular type has withstood time to become the image of Jesus. Scholars agree that starting in Medieval Europe, people were familiar with the image of Christ and believed they knew what he looked like.[36] His face permeated art. The figure depicted was thought to be an accurate depiction of the historical figure of Christ.

How were the busts, which lack both attributes and inscriptions, identified as the face of Christ and not another saint or idealized figure? In this chapter I will explore the formation of the image of Christ, through the adaptation of the so-called "True Likeness" of Christ to demonstrate that the conventional type was believed to be his actual appearance. A singular coherent physiognomy took hold

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[35] David Crawford, *The Evolution of Italian Sculpture* (New York: Burt Franklin Reprints), 161.

[36] Finaldi, *The Image of Christ*, 75; see also MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation*, 93; and Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 56-7.

after the fourth century and spread across Christendom. This examination will further complicate the prototypical depiction of Christ by analyzing the circular formation of the image. The introduction of the divine face into the visual vocabulary of Renaissance Italy was reinforced by the production of images, the True Likenesses, and the letter of Lentulus, all of which were close in time, and relied on one another for authenticity and authority.

What does the conventional face of Christ look like? The most distinguishable features, portrayed by all the Renaissance sculptural busts of Christ, are his hair and beard. Christ's long hair is usually parted in the middle and curls below the ears. Both his hair and beard are curly and brown, and his beard features a fork below his chin.[37] The long hairstyle and beard differentiate him from the typical Renaissance male, who was clean shaven and wore his hair shorter. Even the part down the middle of Christ's hair separated him from the typical Renaissance man. The part in his hair referenced the "Nazarene" style of hair, and would have placed him in a specific location and time for the early modern viewer.[38]

In addition, his eyes are typically brown, his face is symmetrical, idealized, and lacks any specific distinguishing characteristics. His skin is smooth and unblemished. His nose and mouth are always idealized, but differ depending on the artist. Moreover, he is clothed in a Roman robe, a clear indicator of his place in history. In Catholic doctrine, Christ is both fully human and fully divine.

[37] The typical colors of Christ's hair and face are only present in paintings and painted sculpture, so many of the busts of Christ do not actually feature brown hair, but it is implied in the fact that it is part of the conventional face.

[38] The "Nazarene" style is mentioned in the Lentulus letter, quoted in Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 57.

Therefore, many Renaissance sculptors depicted his dual nature by portraying the son of God as the ultimate, idealized man. As is evident in the bust of Christ at the MFA, Boston, Christ appears to be both human and God as his beautiful unblemished face displays his divinity. (figure 1)

The early Christian artists who developed Christ's appearance chose to depict him in two ways: as a youth who preformed miracles and as an adult male who preached salvation. According to Jensen, "…the earliest *recognizable* iconography of Jesus presents him as a beardless and beautiful youth, although in rare instances he also appears as bearded and more mature in appearance."[39] In the late fourth century the first portraits of Christ featured long, dark, wavy hair and a beard, codifying his conventional appearance.[40] The typical face of Christ was developed by early Christian artists and later adapted by European artists, who understood his human form to be the image of God made flesh. Therefore, the face of Jesus appears as a European man, which underscored his incarnation in human form. This was the beginning of the conventional image of Christ, recognizable to Renaissance viewers even without narrative elements or attributes.

The conventional form of Christ developed by early Christian artists was handed down, with minimal changes, to Renaissance artists as the actual appearance of Christ. Early Christians borrowed qualities and styles associated with Greco-Roman deities and wise men (such as Apollo and the Hellenistic philosopher type), as the visual language of pagan art "…aligned Christ with the

[39] Jensen, *Face to Face*, 143. Emphasis in the quote original to Jensen.
[40] Ibid., 31.

qualities of wisdom, divinity and caring found in their sources."[41] Because the Bible lacks a description of the physical person of Christ, early Christians were free to create their own idealized form of their God. This became the face of Christ that took hold in Europe, and was transmitted through its depiction in the "True Likenesses."

Due to the belief that the True Likenesses (identified as the Veil of Veronica, the Mandylion of Edessa, the *Volto Santo* of Lucca and the Shroud of Turin) were contemporaneous with Christ, and consequently that they were in fact real portraits of the son of God, the conventional form developed by the early Christians spread as the only likeness of Christ. These "contemporaneous" images took the place of a written description. It is impossible to say which came first: the True Likeness or the conventional form of Christ developed by the early Christians. Modern scholars acknowledge that the True Likenesses were not created contemporaneously with the historical Christ, despite their popularity as pious fictions believed by the faithful. Rather, the images were created some time in the first few centuries after the death of Christ. It is likely that the conventional image and the True Likenesses developed simultaneously. Thus the conventional face of Christ confirmed and reinforced the belief that it was the actual depiction of the son of God. The issue for my thesis, though, isn't the accuracy or primacy of the conventional form versus the True Likeness, or chronological order, but that Italian Renaissance viewers believed the True Likeness was accurate and primary.

[41] Erik Inglis, *Faces of Power and Piety* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008), 23.

The figure of Christ in the Veronica Veil, Mandylion, Volto Santo, Shroud of Turin and the Lentulus letter all correspond to each other in appearance, and perpetuate the conventional face of Christ. While each of these images of Christ were created at a point in time between the first and fifteenth centuries, and entered into the Renaissance cultural consciousness separately, the similar features uphold the notion of the singular portrait of Christ. The images validated one another by portraying analogous faces, and therefore lent credibility to the True Likenesses of Christ. The true face of Christ, as discussed at length by Gerhard Wolf, served as a prototype for the image of Christ, yet the True Likenesses themselves were aporetic since the face of Christ was unknowable.[42] No true contemporary image or account of Christ's physical appearance survives. In addition, as God incarnate, Christ's human physiognomy would not be the same as his divine features. Therefore, the mutual reinforcement of the creation and spread of the True Likenesses gave authenticity to each depiction.

The images venerated as True Likenesses were recognized in Europe as accurate portraits of the divine. Thus the portraits spread the conventional type of Christ, which became codified as the one true form. Consequently, artists in the Renaissance utilized the same image of Christ in their work, and as a result the face of Christ was embedded in the Italian Renaissance visual language. Prototypical works such as Verrocchio's *Christ and Saint Thomas*, portray the long, curly haired Christ with a forked beard and a beautiful face. (figure 4) Similarly, Michelangelo's *Pietà* in Saint Peter's, Rome, depicted Christ in the conventional way, to mention just two of thousands of examples. (figure 9) While

[42] Wolf, "Christ in His Beauty and Pain," 173 and 174.

Verrocchio and Michelangelo vary in features, such as the nose and mouth, the general form of Christ's face remained the same. With all Renaissance artists using more or less the same type, the "true" face of Christ permeated sixteenth-century Italy. Viewers would have internalized this form as the actual appearance of Jesus, and would have been able to recognize his face even without attributes, inscriptions or a narrative. The (unknowable) face of Christ became a pious fiction, believed to be accurate because so many images copied the same form.

The True Likeness provided a prototypical face of Christ to be internalized and utilized by early modern artists and viewers. This is explicit in the busts of Christ, which all feature the same facial type. Busts in the style of Verrocchio at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, did not need an inscription or attributes for early modern viewers to identify the sitter as Christ. (figures 2,3) The knowledge of his face, via the True Likenesses and conventional form, was enough.

True Likeness in Literature

In 1421 a man named Giacomo Colonna found a letter among ancient Roman documents supposedly written by one Publius Lentulus, the purported Governor of Judea, addressing the Roman senate.[43] This letter gave a description of Christ and advised the senate of his activities. It was thought to be the only contemporary written description of Christ:

> A man of average or moderate height, and very distinguished. He has an impressive appearance, so that those who look on him love and fear him. His hair is the colour of a ripe hazel-nut. It falls straight almost to the level of his ears; from there down it curls

[43] Jensen, *Face to Face*, 134.

> thickly and is rather more luxuriant, and this hangs down to his shoulders. In front his hair is parted into two, with the parting in the center in the Nazarene manner. His forehead is wide, smooth and serene, and his face is without wrinkles or any marks. It is graced by a slightly reddish tinge, a faint colour. His nose and mouth are faultless. His beard is thick and like a young man's first beard, of the same colour as his hair; it is not particularly long and is parted in the middle. His aspect is simple and mature. His eyes are brilliant, mobile, clear, splendid. He is terrible when he reprehends, quiet and kindly when he admonishes. He is quick in his movements but always keeps his dignity. No one ever saw him laugh, but he has been seen to weep. He is broad in the chest and upstanding; his hands and arms are fine. In speech he is serious, sparing and modest. He is the most beautiful among the children of men.[44]

This letter has since been proven to be a fake. Eric Inglis calls the Lentulus letter a medieval "apocryphal text," and believes it was written with knowledge of the conventional image of Christ.[45] Appearing first in manuscripts on the life of Christ, the letter soon spread across Europe in both manuscripts and art. The popularity is demonstrated by the Diptych of Christ with the Lentulus Letter from the Netherlands (1450-1550), a painted example of the letter paired with a portrait of Christ.[46] (figure 10)

The Lentulus letter adheres to the conventional image of Christ as white skinned with long, dark hair parted in the middle and that curls below the ears. The letter also describes the perfection and idealization of Christ's face, alluding to his dual nature as man and God. Additionally, the description given by Lentulus explains how his features display his personality. As Baxandall aptly states, "not many paintings contradict this pattern," and it can be added that not many sculptures contradict this pattern.[47] The description, while exacting in certain details such as the color and length of his hair, lacks other important

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[44] Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 57.

[45] Inglis, *Faces of Power and Piety*, 23.

[46] Popularity of the Lentulus letter is discussed by Finaldi, *Image of Christ*, 94-6. A similar illuminated version of the Lentulus letter was sent as a diplomatic gift from Pope Alexander VI in 1500 to the Elector of Saxony, Frederick the Wise, which shows the perceived importance of the letter throughout Europe.

[47] Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 57.

distinguishing characteristics, such as face shape or the size of his nose. It seems to reinforce the idea that Christ was so beautiful that he did not have any distinctive facial features aside from his smooth skin and faultless physiognomy.

This account leaves much up to the reader's imagination, who may question: what exactly does a "faultless" nose look like? Is it small? Is it long in the tradition of the idealized Roman face? Finaldi points out that the Lentulus letter is not particularly helpful for anyone painting or sculpting a portrait of Christ.[48] The bust of Christ by Verrocchio in the collection of Michael Hall and the bust by Tullio Lombardo in the *Bargello*, Florence both feature the curly hair and beard as described by Lentulus. In addition, there is an obvious resemblance in the busts' facial types. (figures 11, 6) Still, the Verrocchio bust has a longer, leaner face than the Lombardo bust, and Verrocchio gave Christ a larger, more bulbous nose than Tullio carved on his version. While these two busts exhibit the similar basic features, as written by "Lentulus," the distinguishing characteristics, such as face shape and nose, are different due to the conceptions of the sculptors.

Instead of supplying an exacting account of Christ's physiognomy, the Lentulus letter was written to reaffirm the conventional image of Christ and give it "historical accuracy."[49] The visual depictions of Christ that claim to be actual portraits, or True Likenesses (the topic for the remainder of this chapter), appear to be backed by a written, contemporary account of Christ's features with the revelation of the Lentulus Letter. The letter became popular all over Europe beginning in the fifteenth century as a written account of the historical Christ. As

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[48] Finaldi, *Image of Christ*, 94.
[49] Ibid.

Finaldi notes, "the popularity of the letter coincided with scholars' attempts to renew the faith by returning to other original sources, such as the Hebrew and Greek Bibles, and the writings of the Early Church Fathers."[50] Not only did the letter authenticate the historical figure of Christ, but it also entered into the written record of the Renaissance. The Lentulus letter became part of the public consciousness primarily because it was supposedly, an ancient Roman written account, which held importance for early modern Italians who rediscovered many other ancient texts.

The letter lends even further legitimacy to the *acheiropoièton* (miraculous portraits of Christ), that were believe to be created by the hand of God, and not by men. Scholars have suggested that the fifteenth-century writer of the letter was influenced by images such as the Veronica Veil in Rome and the Mandylion of Edessa.[51] In a circular manner, the letter both gave authority and accuracy to the painted and sculpted depictions of Christ, while also taking information and his description directly from these images. The visual images of Christ and the written description each informed the other. This continual propagation enhanced the Renaissance viewer's conviction that the conventional face of Christ was in fact the true image.

True Likeness in Images

The true face of Christ spread as an image, in addition to the Lentulus letter, and therefore became part of the visual culture and vocabulary of early

[50] Ibid., 94-6. Quote from 96.
[51] Ibid., 76; and Inglis, *Faces of Power and Piety*, 23.

modern Italy. There are four depictions of Christ that claim to be a True Likeness (the actual face), of the son of God. Three of these images are two dimensional, the Veil of Veronica, the Mandylion of Edessa and the Shroud of Turin, and one is a wooden sculpture, the *Volto Santo* of Lucca. All of these representations have in common the miraculous nature of their creation, and the miracles they performed over the centuries to prove both the authenticity of the image and the veracity of the face of Christ. Belting argues that the miraculous creation of the True Likenesses adds to the authenticity of the depiction of Christ, as God granted the face of his only son to be bestowed on the faithful through these objects.[52] Therefore, as a gift from God and (aside from the *Volto Santo*) an actual imprint of the face of Christ, the True Likenesses functioned both as portraits of the divine and as relics of the historical Christ. One could look at the Veil of Veronica and see not only the true face of Christ, but also be in the presence of a garment that he actually touched and held.

Veil of Veronica

The Veronica, also known as the *Sudarium*, is the handkerchief on which Christ's facial features were miraculously imprinted on the road to Calvary. It is believed that Christ imprinted his physiognomy directly onto the cloth and gave it to Veronica, the woman from whom the veil received its name. Unfortunately, the cloth was lost during the sack of Rome in 1527. It is rumored that the invading army of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V sold the relic in a tavern.[53] While the

[52] Ibid., 47.
[53] Ibid., 220.

real Veronica is lost and the exact appearance is unknown, copies of the cloth have survived.[54] The earliest copy is from 1240, however the Veronica quickly "…became the most reproduced image in Christendom and perhaps the most famous relic in Rome."[55] It is clear that the cloth portrayed only the face of Christ in the conventional form.

Prints of the Veil of Veronica, such as one by Marc Antonio Raimondi (16th century), circulated throughout Europe and gave early modern viewers a sense of what the original veil looked like. (figure 12) In the print, Christ is depicted with long, dark hair that curls below his ears and a curly, forked beard. He is beautiful and unblemished. Raimondi's print resembles the bust of Christ at the MFA, Boston. (figure 1) The faces of Jesus in the print and the bust have the same style and length of beard and hair, with similar physiognomy. They are both wide, square faces with heavy jaws and straight, unobtrusive noses. The face represented in the Raimondi print and the bust, possibly by Solari, could have easily come from the same shared source.

There are multiple stories attached to this miraculous image that explain the divine creation of the Veronica. Veronica is related to a woman in the Bible whom Christ healed from a hemorrhage, and is said to be the original owner of the shroud. In most versions, Christ gave the imprinted cloth to Veronica.[56] A popular account of the story relates the Veil of Veronica to Christ's passion, and

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[54] Wolf, "From Mandylion to Veronica," 156. See article for a full discussion of the wide dissemination of copies of the Veronica throughout Europe.

[55] Inglis, *Faces of Power and Piety*, 27; and Finaldi, *Image of Christ*, 75.

[56] See Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 215-224 for different versions of the Veronica story discussed in length. For a lengthened description of the story, also see John Oliver Hand, "*Salve sancta facies*: Some Thoughts on the Iconography of the *Head of Christ* by Petrus Christus," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 27 (1992): 10.

describes Veronica as a woman who took pity on the suffering Christ. She offered him her handkerchief to wipe the sweat and blood off his face en route to Calvary. Christ's appearance was immediately fixed on the cloth.[57] While the *Sudarium* in Rome was originally believed to be a handkerchief on which Jesus wiped the sweat off his face, it wasn't until the thirteenth century that the sweat was seen to hold an image.[58] Another version of the story claims that Veronica wanted to paint a portrait of Christ in order to have an image of the man who healed her. When she went to Christ to obtain his likeness, instead of allowing her to paint his features, he took the cloth and caused an image of his face to appear on the cloth.[59]

In some accounts the story continues to validate the cloth as a True Likeness by the miracles that it performs. The Roman Emperor Tiberius became ill and hearing of Christ's miraculous abilities, he sent an aide to find Jesus and bring Jesus back to heal him. Unfortunately, the aide arrived too late and Christ was already crucified by Pontius Pilate. However, the aide heard of the image of Christ owned by a woman named Veronica, and brought the cloth to the emperor who was instantly cured.

Gerhard Wolf, amongst others, points to the name of the veil as a visual clue when recounting the story of the Veronica.[60] Veronica is derived from the Latin phrase *vera icon*, which translates to "true image." The name of the veil may not, in fact, reflect the name of the woman whom Jesus cured of a

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[57] Giovanni Mielle, *Christ's Likeness in History and Art* (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne LTD, 1924), 2.

[58] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 209.

[59] Hand, "*Salve sancta facies*," 10.

[60] Wolf, "From Mandylion to Veronica," 156.

hemorrhage, but rather points to the function of the image as a True Likeness. Therefore, the veil is authenticated through language, as the title of the True Likeness reflects its function. Furthermore, even though the cloth had been in the possession of the Catholic Church since the eleventh century, it took two hundred years for the stains to be recognized as a portrait. The name and time lag both point to a temporal disjunction in the Veronica.

In a circular manner the veil was recognized to contain a portrait only after the Mandylion, another True Likeness, was introduced into Europe. The circuitousness of the image is suggested by the label given to the veil, which is a pronouncement of the function of the image on the cloth. Once it was adopted as a portrait, the cloth was given further importance by its link to the Passion through the belief that Veronica obtained the image on Calvary.[61] The Veronica is significant as both a true image of Christ and as a relic. Because the image miraculously appeared on the cloth after it touched his face, the Veronica is a contact relic; it contains traces of Christ's face in the cloth. Moreover, as a physical imprint of Christ's physiognomy, the Veronica gives legitimacy to the historical figure, and the bodily presence of Christ.

The Veronica acts as a bridge between humanity and the divine as a miraculous image, a portrait of the son of God, and a relic of Christ. The image was used in prayer as an intercessor on behalf of the pious faithful. The popularity of the Veronica increased throughout Europe in the Middle Ages due to Pope Innocent III's influence. In 1216, the Pope began to grant indulgences for making

[61]MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation*, 92.

a pilgrimage to see the veil and for saying a prayer in front of the cloth.[62] Specific prayers were created for the image and the indulgence was extended to included prayers said before reproductions of the Veronica. Printed reproductions became especially popular because they were inexpensive and could be easily carried. Sculpted reproductions have been noted by scholars, though they are mostly representations of the face of Christ on the veil rather than a copy of the veil itself.[63] It is likely that the busts of Christ without attributes were influenced by the masses of Veronica imagery circulating throughout Renaissance Italy.

Two prayers in particular, "Salve sancta facies (Hail holy face)" and "Ave facies praedara (Hail, splendid face)" were intended to be said in front of any image of the Veronica, either the original or a copy of the True Likeness.[64] "Salve sancta facies" described the divine splendor of Christ, and copies of the Veil of Veronica depicted Christ's face as perfect and ideal. The "Ave facies praedara" prayer conveyed the Christ who endured human suffering, the Christ of the Passion, as a result the image portrayed the tortured and wounded face of the Passion. The Veronica was the first image to be granted an indulgence when venerated, because it was not just an image of Christ, but the True Face of Christ; both a relic and an actual portrait of the Christian Savior.[65]

The popularity of the image, the prayers dedicated to the Veronica and the indulgences associated with it allowed the Veronica to become part of the

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[62] Wolf, "Christ in His Beauty and Pain," 168. See the entire article for a discussion of Pope Innocent III's campaign to decorporealize the holy body through promotion of the Veronica – just the face of Christ.

[63] Finaldi, Image of Christ, 90-1. Also see Charles T. Little, *Set in Stone: The Face in Medieval Sculpture* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art), 135-137 for an example of a reproduction of the veil of Veronica sculpted onto a capital.

[64]Finaldi, *Image of Christ*, 80.

[65] Hand, "*Salve sancta facies*," 14.

Catholic faith and visual literacy of the Italian Renaissance. Although it was the first likeness to circulate in Western Europe, and it was promoted by the Pope, the Veronica was not the first recognized True Likeness of Christ. Eastern Europe claimed a likeness called the Mandylion that was thought to be contemporaneous with Christ, and claimed to be another miraculous imprint of his physiognomy. In the twelfth century the Veronica superseded the Mandylion in importance, because "it then became in the West what its rival had long been in the East: the undisputed archetype of the sacred portrait."[66]

Mandylion of Edessa

Similar to the Veronica in both appearances and miraculous origin, the Mandylion of Edessa is another True Likeness of Christ. (figure 13) Like the Veronica the original cloth is unknown/unidentified today, the title "Mandylion" has been claimed by three different images in Paris, Genoa and Rome.[67] Originally created for King Agbar of Edessa, the Mandylion was kept in Constantinople until the sack in 1204. It has been posited that the Mandylion was brought to Western Europe as part of the booty stolen in the sack of the city by Venice.[68]

The story of the divine creation parallels the origin story of the Veronica. It begins with King Agbar of Edessa who became ill, and hearing about the

[66] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 208.
[67] Finaldi, *Image of Christ*, 77.
[68] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 208.

miracles performed by Jesus, he sent a servant to find him.[69] The servant carried a letter from the King to Christ that asked Jesus to return to Edessa with the servant so he could heal the King. At the very least, the King requested a portrait of Christ. Unable to return to Edessa, Jesus wiped his face with a cloth, and his features were miraculously imprinted on to the surface. The servant returned with the image, and upon receiving the cloth, King Agbar was immediately cured. An alternate ending to the story says that Jesus promised the servant to send an image to the King, but was unable to do so before his death. Thus he entrusted his disciple Thaddeus to bring the cloth he used to wipe his face during his night in the garden of Gethsemane to the King after the crucifixion.

The cloth imprinted with the features of Christ is once again, like the Veronica, solely an image of the face of Christ. Known through copies and the purported versions in Genoa and Rome (the Paris Mandylion was lost during the French Revolution in the eighteenth century), the Mandylion depicts the conventional face of Christ. Compared to a bust by a follower of Verrocchio in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Mandylion depiction of Christ is very similar. (figure 3) Both feature long, dark hair parted in the middle which curls below the ears. Additionally each have a forked, curly beard and a beautiful, idealized face. Moreover, the Christs in the Mandylion and in the bust both have long, slender noses and oval faces. Each has comparable smaller mouths and broad foreheads. The physiognomy of this bust of Christ and the Mandylion are similar.

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[69] Ibid., 209-215 tells the story of the Mandylion, its origin and later miracles. Also see MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation*, 88-90 for the Mandylion story.

The cloth stayed in Edessa until 944 AD, when it was taken to Constantinople as the result of a pact between the Emir of Edessa and the Roman Emperors.[70] It performed miracles in both cities, as it defended against invaders and protected the faithful. The Mandylion was also authenticated as a True Likeness of Christ as it miraculously copied itself onto other supports.[71] The face of Christ was imprinted onto a ceramic tile that was pressed against the cloth, while it was kept in the wall surrounding Edessa.[72] The imprint of the face of Christ onto the wall tile was believed to protect Edessa. The replication of the image was seen as divine replication of the holy face, which authenticated both the image as the face of Christ and Christ as the son of God. The Mandylion was brought to Europe, widely copied and influenced the depictions of Christ as seen in the bust by a follower of Verrocchio, now in London. The influence of the Mandylion in both the East and the West confirms the universality of the conventional form of Christ and its impact on the visual language of the Renaissance.

Shroud of Turin

A third True Likeness of Christ, also defined as a contact relic, is the Shroud of Turin. (Figure 14) Found in Chambéry, France in the fourteenth century, the shroud has been surrounded by controversy from the start.[73] It was claimed to be the burial cloth of Christ, the cloth in which his body was wrapped

[70] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 213.
[71] MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation*, 90.
[72] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 211.
[73] Ibid., 99-104 for a discussion of the Shroud of Turin.

after the crucifixion, and from which his body disappeared during the Resurrection. Unlike the Veronica and Mandylion, the shroud is not directly connected to the busts of Christ that lack attributes as it depicts the full body of Christ, and not just his face.

The fourteen foot long cloth is covered in dark red stains, which represent generalized forms of the human body. The face, in particular, appears to be bearded, though not many particular details stand out. Photographed in 1898 for the first time, then again in 1931, the stains were more clearly distinguishable as a face with a distinct physiognomy in the negative image of the photograph. The shroud follows the conventional image of Christ: it shows an adult male with long hair and a forked beard; his face is symmetrical and ideal. The face recalls the Christ in the numerous busts, and similar to the busts he does not display any attributes. The shroud has been venerated by Christians since it was discovered in the fourteenth century, but the Catholic Church, as of yet, has not authenticated it as a relic or a true image of Christ.[74]

As a conventional image of Christ that is a purported True Likeness, the Shroud of Turin is related to both the Veronica and the Mandylion. Although the facial image became more comprehensible in the late nineteenth century with the advent of photography, many early prints display the stains as representations of the body of Christ. The shroud was owned by the Dukes of Savoy from 1453 onwards, and moved with them from France to Turin in 1578 where it was kept in

[74] Ibid., 103.

a reliquary chapel devoted to the shroud.[75] Guarini built the chapel adjacent to the cathedral in Turin as a pilgrimage spot to house the shroud, and the "…chapel became the focal point of the entire cathedral."[76] The shroud was significant not only for the Savoy family, but also the numerous faithful who travelled to Turin to see the holy cloth. While the shroud was kept in an altar, a copy of the image decorated the casing for all visitors of the Cathedral to see.[77] The popularity and the importance of the shroud grew in the first years of the sixteenth century when "…Pope Julius II instituted a feast day of the Holy Shroud."[78]

It is important that the image on the shroud correlates to the other True Likenesses, as well as the numerous busts of Christ as a conventional image of Christ. In 1607 Alfonso Paleotti wrote in his commentary on the Shroud that "other images were drawn from this original," and continued to declare that the image of Christ on the shroud displayed the divine hand of God, and could not have been conceived by human artists.[79] Paleotti recognized the influence of this depiction of divinity on artists and their representations of Christ.

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[75] Ibid., 101; and John Beldon Scott, "Seeing the Shroud: Guarini's Reliquary Chapel in Turin and the Ostentation of a Dynastic Relic," *The Art Bulletin* 77:4 (December 1995): 626.

[76] Scott, "Seeing the Shroud," 620.

[77] Ibid., 626.

[78] Macgregor, Seeing Salvation, 101. The shroud remained the property of the Savoy royal family, and then the Italian government when the Savoy family became the monarchical family of a united kingdom of Italy in 1861. As private and national property, the shroud was physically inaccessible to believers outside of the Savoy Duchy and Monarchy, but prints and later photographs of the shroud made its image of Christ accessible to the faithful. The shroud was only transferred to the Roman Catholic Church upon the end of the monarchy in 1983, yet it still is only visible on certain feast days and through the few photographs and prints.

[79] Scott, "Seeing the Shroud," 635.

Volto Santo

The only sculpted True Likeness of Christ is in the collection of the Cathedral in Lucca. (figure 15) The *Volto Santo*, or Holy Face, of Lucca is a life-sized sculpture in wood that depicts Christ on the Cross. He is clothed in (carved) robes, his head hangs down, and his eyes are half open. These iconographic differences in the representation of Christ make the *Volto Santo* a foil for the busts of Christ. While the *Volto Santo* is a conventional image of the son of God, the only shared element with the busts are his long, dark, curly hair that is parted in the middle, and a curly, forked beard. His face is unblemished, despite the fact that he was tortured before he was hung on the cross. Even though the *Volto Santo* is a three dimensional model of the True Likeness, the full figure and narrative elements are contrary to the form of the busts of Christ.

Along with the Veronica and Mandylion, the *Volto Santo* has a miraculous origin story, and was very popular amongst Christians as a real depiction of the Lord. According to Belting, "In the fourteenth century, the *Volto Santo* from Lucca ranked alongside images of the Virgin painted by Saint Luke and the Holy Face at St. Peter's in Rome called the Veronica as one of the most famous miraculous images of Christendom."[80] Although it identifies Christ through attributes and narrative (unlike the Veronica and Mandylion) the *Volto Santo* was a popular likeness imbedded in Italian Renaissance visual culture.

[80] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 305.

The story of the *Volto Santo* features Nicodemus, a man present during the deposition and burial of Jesus.[81] It is said that Nicodemus was so distraught over the death of Christ that he vowed to carve a statue displaying the body of Christ as it hung on the Cross, so the whole world could see what happened. After the body of Christ was buried, Nicodemus began to carve the Crucifixion from memory. After a long day of carving, Nicodemus fell asleep from exhaustion before he could complete the sculpture. While he slept, angels descended from heaven and finished the Crucifixion, thus the *Volto Santo* was completed by divine intervention and not by human hands.

Another miracle occurred in the transference of the *Volto Santo* from its resting place in the Holy Land to Lucca in Italy. According to legend:

> The statue was widely venerated, but when the Iconoclasts in the East threatened to destroy it, it set out for the safer shores of Italy, alone, in a boat without a crew, pilot or other passengers. At last, in 742, it put in on the Tuscan coast. Once ashore, the statue was taken at once, in a chariot drawn by white oxen, to the cathedral city of Lucca.[82]

Therefore, the miracle of its completion and the miracle of its arrival in Lucca authorized the *Volto Santo* as a True Likeness. The *Volto Santo* became a pilgrimage object, as it was venerated as a portrait of the Savior. During the middle ages, it was described as terrible, majestic, and awesome. The *Volto Santo* is not a kind, serene and beautiful Christ, like the Veronica or Mandylion, but instead represented the powerful Christ as judge.[83] While the physiognomy is similar to the busts of Christ, the emotion it instills in viewers is different. The bust at the MFA, Boston shows a kind and gentle Christ, whose face is serene; in

[81] See Ibid., 304-5 for a discussion of the Volto Santo. Also see MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation*, 96-7.
[82] MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation*, 96.
[83] Ibid., 97.

contrast, the *Volto Santo* is a depiction of Christ on the cross whose face is serious and stern. Many of the busts have calm faces, and none of them have stern looks. The *Volto Santo* is an example of one of the myriad ways Christ was portrayed in art.

Popularity of Christ's Portrait

The image of the True Likeness of Christ permeated Christian society in Europe. Pilgrims were granted indulgences not just for visiting the veil in Saint Peter's, but also for saying prayers in front of copies, even mass produced prints, of the Veronica.[84] Like the Lentulus letter, which spread through art and manuscripts, as seen in the Lentulus and Christ diptych, the visual depictions of the True Likeness also spread via prints and paintings. (figures 10, 12) The conventional face of Christ was part of the early modern visual vocabulary, and would have been familiar to Italian Renaissance viewers.

A copy of the Veronica is even featured in the *Portrait of a Young Man* by Petrus Christus (1450-60) as part of his domestic setting. (Figure 16) The young man sits in front of a piece of paper adhered to the back wall of the room in the painting. On the paper, both a small reproduction of the image of the face of Christ from the Veil of Veronica and a prayer to the image, the "Salve sancta facies," is printed[85] This painting from Northern Europe attests to both the rapid spread of the image from Rome to the rest of Europe via mass produced prints and drawings, as well as the popularity of the prayers and images associated with

[84] Wolf, "From Mandylion to Veronica," 168-9.
[85] Hand, "*Salve sancta facies*," 10.

the Veronica. One young man was so attached to the image and the prayer that he had it included it in his portrait, in order to describe his faith and beliefs. The painting by Petrus Christus displays how fully the Veronica, and consequently the True Likeness, became part of the visual culture of the Renaissance. The portrait of Christ appears to be a part of the everyday life of the early modern viewer. The busts of Christ attest to a similar effect in Italy, and they would have meshed smoothly into this cultural setting.

According to Neil MacGregor, the indulgences attached to the Veronica are the main reason for its popularity and dispersal throughout Europe; "this special veneration brought the image of Christ into people's homes."[86] However, the Veronica (the handkerchief kept in the Vatican), was a major pilgrimage object. Pilgrims would flock to Rome by the thousands, possibly even millions, when the Veronica was taken out for feast days.[87] The power attributed to the veil must have added to the popularity and draw of the Veronica, and the fact that it is purported to be the actual face of Christ must have had an impact on viewers. The Mandylion of Edessa, Shroud of Turin, and the *Volto Santo* of Lucca all drew large crowds and inspired mass produced reproductions that were bought by the numerous faithful.

As both the Mandylion and the Veronica feature only the face of Christ on a cloth in the conventional portrayal, many of the prints and drawings that were produced could represent either relic. Unless a print is explicitly labeled as a copy of one or the other, it can be difficult to tell which True Likeness was the original

[86] MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation*, 91.
[87] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 221.

prototype. The diffusion of generic copies of the True Likenesses confused the original sources, as one could easily mistake a copy of the Mandylion for a copy of the Veronica. This also plays into the temporal circularity of the image by creating a singular type that relates back to all of the True Likenesses, linking and correlating them to each other. It is impossible to pinpoint exact sources for each reproduction, and ultimately the reproductions became copies of each other. Moreover, the True Likeness type reinforced the conventional face of Christ, each validating the other as the actual portrait of the savior.

The True Likenesses formed the basis of all Renaissance images of Christ. People believed that they could identify Christ by his face alone. As McGregor succinctly states, "one of the startling achievements of the 'True Likeness' is that we can recognize Christ anywhere, even if we come across him in the Highlands of Scotland."[88] Context and attributions became irrelevant for the early modern Christian, as viewers could identify Christ from his physiognomy alone. The True Likenesses, as portraits of Christ from heaven itself, divinely made images of the son of God, probably acted as the basis of the conventional form of Christ. As both a relic and an image, an actual imprint of the face of Christ, the Mandylion and Veronica in particular, became the accepted ideal and form for Christ.[89]

Therefore, the busts of Christ examined in the following chapter of my thesis have a precedent in portraits of Christ, and would have been immediately recognizable to sixteenth-century viewers because the face of Christ was a known image. Even though he lived 1,500 years before these busts were created, the

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[88] MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation*, 110.
[89] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 215.

sculptors and viewers of the bust were intimately familiar with the physiognomy of Christ, with his conventional type, because they were familiar with his True Likenesses. The idea of a portrait of Christ created over a thousand years after his death does not seem outlandish, given that the Renaissance had four solid "true" icons of his face. The image of Christ was accepted because it was not made by human hands, but given to Christians from God. As a result, it was not heretical to carve a portrait of Christ since the image was not created from the imagination of the artist, but divinely bestowed upon the artist.[90] The following chapter will relate the True Likenesses to portrait busts and reliquary busts.

[90]Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 56. *Acheiropoièton* were not idols, but images given to Christians by God himself – thus not an issue of idolatry as the images were already approved by God.

Chapter Two: Form and Function

The Renaissance busts of Christ that lack attributes take their image from the True Likeness/conventional depiction of Christ. Furthermore, both the True Likenesses and the busts of Christ contain elements of portraiture and reliquaries. The sculpted form of portrait busts and reliquary busts were closely tied in early modern Italy, which complicates the form of the busts of Christ and makes it difficult to articulate the type as one or the other. This chapter will examine the form and function of the busts to determine if they are portraits of the divine, reliquary busts of Christ, or a combination of the two.

While portrait busts are typically secular and reliquary busts are inherently religious objects, they have parallel sculptural forms in early modern Italy. These forms are the closest visual match to the busts of Christ. Determining the physical form of the busts of Christ is necessary in order to understand how early modern viewers would have related to, used and interacted with, the busts of Christ. Scholarship has revealed a correlation between medieval reliquary busts and the development of Renaissance portrait busts, in which the development of one continuously informs the other.

One way to understand the physical form of busts of Christ without attributes, is to interpret the bust as a combination of the secular portrait bust, and the sacred reliquary bust. The busts lack indentifying labels or symbols, and are visually related to the portrait icons of Christ, and as a result we can describe them similarly to portrait busts. The connection to reliquary busts is more tenuous because the busts of Christ (which I examine in this chapter) are not, in fact,

reliquaries. They are not sculptural containers for holy objects connected to Christ, such as his body. The busts of Christ do not have internal cavities to contain the relics. Despite the fact that the busts do not contain relics, reliquary busts are similar in form and function.

In this chapter, I will focus on exploring the function of the busts of Christ through their form. I will address questions such as: since the conventional face of Christ was well known, did the Renaissance viewer believe he/she was looking at Christ's real face, or did he/she think the face was just a placeholder? What did it mean for the viewer to interact and respond to the face of Christ? How did the viewer respond to the bust? Did they read it as a portrait bust, so that Christ was depicted as human, fully man, and possibly commemorating him as an individual? Or did the viewer see the bust as a reliquary bust and connect Christ's visage to miracles and relics? Was the bust of Christ an index for the body of Christ?

Bust as Portrait

When considering the busts as portraits of Christ, another similarity between the True Likenesses and the busts arises; the language used to describe portraits in the Renaissance. Early modern patrons discussed the portraits of individuals as "ritratto al natural," or "portraits from life," and in essence, wanted to capture the "true likenesses" of the sitters.[91] This terminology was applied to both painted and sculpted portraiture. The miraculous depictions of Christ, the True Likenesses, were recognized as portraits of the divine through the use of language similar to that used to describe secular portraits.

[91] Woods-Marsden, "'Ritratto al naturale,'" 209.

Portrait busts emerged in Italy in the mid fifteenth century along with two other forms of sculpted portraiture; the equestrian monument and the medal.[92] Busts were primarily created in Florence, but spread throughout the peninsula as unique styles developed in Venice and Rome. Scholars such as John Pope-Hennessy, Irving Lavin and Jane Schuyler examined the emergence of portraiture in depth, in particular, in regards to the rise of humanism.[93] They explored the empirical nature of Renaissance portraiture and portrait busts. The discussion, in this chapter, is indebted to their work and will only cursorily discuss what has been previously written.

Italian Renaissance portrait busts follow many of the conventions of the Italian Renaissance painted portraiture. They commemorate a specific individual, either dead or alive, in a naturalistic manner. Although the images were idealized, portraits give the sense that the sitter is a real person with unique features.[94] While "…rooted in realism," the accurate portrayals of an individual's features in portraits presented a more perfect version of the sitter.[95] Additionally, the lack of personality portrayed by the portrait bust further distanced the sitter. All portrait busts portrayed a pleasant geniality, despite the possible known quirks and objectionable personality of the individual depicted.[96]

Busts were life-sized, lacked a base and cut straight through the elbows, in such a way, that the bust was comprised solely of the head and the shoulders of

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[92] Lavin, "On the Sources and Meaning," 60.
[93] Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait in the Renaissance*; and Lavin, "On the Sources and Meaning," and Lavin, "On Illusion and Allusion,"; and Schuyler, *Florentine Busts*.
[94] Schuyler, *Florentine Busts*, 1-2.
[95] Roberta Olson, Italian Renaissance Sculpture (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 103; and Woods-Marsden, "'Ritratto al naturale,'" 209.
[96] Schuyler, *Florentine Busts*, 2.

the sitter.[97] While they were carved in the round, portrait busts were meant to be seen only from the front.[98] A sense of the continuation of the figure is apparent in the flat termination and overall carving of the busts. Lavin connects busts to the idea of the *totus homo*: "by focusing on the upper part of the body but deliberately emphasizing that it is only a fragment, the Renaissance bust evokes the complete individual – that sum total of physical and psychological characteristics which make up the 'whole man'."[99] The Renaissance concept of *totus homo* defined man as the supreme being of God's creation, made in His image and allotted a spot on Earth half way between heaven and hell.[100] This corresponds to the belief that Christ was both human and divine, fully a man and fully God. The relationship between the concept of *totus homo* and portrait busts is most completely articulated in the busts of Christ.

The portrait bust of Filippo Strozzi carved by Benedetto da Maiano in 1490 is typical of portrait busts of the period. (figure 17) He has a distinctive nose and his wrinkled face shows signs of his age, though his skin is otherwise unblemished. The modeling of the clay adds to the naturalistic qualities of the bust. Like the bust of Christ, possibly by Solari in the MFA, Boston, Filippo is frontal, life-sized, and the bust terminates in a straight line below the shoulders. In addition, both the bust of Christ and the bust of Filippo exhibit motion in the slight tilt of their heads: Filippo's eyes are downcast, and Christ's head is slanted to the left. The costume and hairstyle on each figure is particular to their time.

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[97] Lavin, "On the Sources and Meaning," 60-1. Also see Schuyler, *Florentine Busts*, 1-5 for a discussion of the typical form of the Florentine portrait bust.
[98] Lavin, "On the Sources and Meaning," 61.
[99] Ibid., 68.
[100] Ibid.

Christ's long, curly locks and toga represent the Holy Land circa 0 AD, while Filippo's short, cropped hair and trimmed tunic were the style in late fifteenth-century Florence. Both busts follow the conventions for the Italian Renaissance portrait bust.

Another similarity between the busts of Christ and portrait busts is apparent in the typical materials of the busts. According to Roberta Olson, portrait busts were made primarily from marble, terracotta, wood and wax, with the use of bronze a later development.[101] The Strozzi bust, by Benedetto da Maiano, is an example of a terracotta portrait bust. The bust of Christ at the MFA, Boston, is an example of a marble bust. Many of the busts of Christ were made of terracotta, like the bust by Verrocchio in the collection of Michael Hall. (figure 11) The extant busts of Christ utilized all the typical materials for portrait busts.

Development of Form

Early modern Italian portrait busts developed out of a blend of antique portrait busts and medieval reliquary busts. Therefore, they embody a combination of humanist and Christian traditions. Scholars claim that the form of the portrait bust continues from antiquity to the Renaissance through the medieval reliquary bust. Antique portrait busts were the basis for both medieval and Renaissance busts. The influence of the classical form is evident in both types of sculpture.

Classical busts were commemorative, naturalistic and life-sized depictions of specific individuals. Furthermore, early modern humanist scholars in Italy

[101] Olson, *Italian Renaissance Sculpture*, 103.

revived many classical ideas and forms through their renewed interest in rediscovering the cultures of ancient Rome and Greece. As Schuyler notes, the Roman influences in Renaissance portrait busts are clear: "The Florentine portrait bust is ancient Roman in sentiment: it preserves the likeness of a man of achievement, so that his face as well as his fame are not forgotten. It also presents him as a personification of excellence to inspire the emulation of descendants."[102] Yet the physical form of the bust changed over time. Where Renaissance busts are truncated below the shoulders in a straight line, classical busts typically end in a U-shape below the neck. Moreover, classical busts have attached pedestals, whereas Renaissance busts rest directly on the surface of the area of display.[103] Early modern portrait busts furthered the naturalistic qualities begun in classical busts to include a sense of movement and emotion in the sitter.[104] A quality of lifelikeness not evident in antique sculpted portraits became apparent in Renaissance portrait busts.

Some of the alterations used by early modern sculptors was first developed in the middle ages. Medieval head reliquaries took the form of classical busts, turning a secular sculpture into a religious sculpture. The biggest modification introduced by medieval sculptors we see in the truncation: they lengthened the bust to below the shoulders, and terminated the form with a flat cut.[105] This practice extended into the Renaissance. Early modern sculptors

[102] Schuyler, *Florentine Busts*, 17.
[103] For a further description of the differences between antique and Renaissance portrait busts, see Lavin, "On the Sources and Meaning," 60-3.
[104] Lavin, "On Illusion and Allusion," 354.
[105] Lavin, "On the Sources and Meaning," 64.

adapted the form of the reliquary head to reintroduce portrait busts into the art production of Renaissance Italy.

The reliquary bust is a portable object and has a lipped edge around the base to differentiate the bust from its support. Renaissance sculptors removed the lipping so that the edge of the bust continued into its support and environment. The lack of lipping allowed for a continuation of the figure into the support and the appearance of fragmentation. While medieval reliquary busts commemorate a deceased holy personage, Renaissance portrait busts commemorate honored secular figures that could be either living or dead.[106] Scholars, such as Moskowitz and Lavin, consider the bust of *St. Rossore* by Donatello to be a physical manifestation of the transition from medieval reliquary busts to Renaissance portrait busts. (figure 18)

St. Rossore is a gilt-bronze reliquary bust, cast between 1422-1427, which exhibits the developments of Renaissance portrait busts. Similar to reliquary busts, the sculpture is made of precious materials to highlight the importance of the contents. *St. Rossore* terminates below the shoulders, but the edge typical of reliquary busts is nearly gone It is only noticeable in the gathering of the folds of the garment in the middle of his chest. St. Rossore's face appears to be individualized, with very specific structure and features, such as high cheek bones and a long nose. His furrowed brow and angled eyebrows also add to "…an intense psychological presence," that departs from the serenity and stoicism found

[106] Ibid.

in antique and medieval busts.[107] Donatello's *St. Rossore* is recognized as a fusion of antique and medieval models that create the new Renaissance bust form.[108]

The form of the bust of *St. Rossore* is comparable to the form of the busts of Christ produced seventy years later. A bust derived from the head of Christ in Verrocchio's group on *Or San Michele*, now in the Victoria and Albert, displays a remarkably similar physiognomy to the Donatello reliquary bust. (figure 2) Both *St. Rossore* and Christ have downcast eyes, and calm yet expressive faces. The faces are naturalistic, and exhibit similar face shapes and facial hair. While the faces are seemingly individualized, both St. Rossore and Christ are holy figures whose actual appearance was not definitively known. In addition, both are dressed in attire appropriate to their place in history, which visually separated them from early modern viewers. Most importantly, the bust types are the same. Each contain a life-sized head truncated below the shoulders in a straight line. In contrast, the function, precious material and the slight delineation of a lipped edge on the bust by Donatello connects this bust to medieval reliquaries. These subtle differences mark the bust of Christ as a part of the production of Renaissance portrait busts.

Even though classical and medieval busts both impacted the development of Renaissance portrait busts, they still maintained a unique sculptural form. One of the main distinguishing characteristics is the straight termination of the bust, that suggests a truncated full figure. Lavin links the fragmentation of the bust to

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[107] Moskowitz, "Donatello's Reliquary Bust," 44.
[108] Lavin, "On the Sources and Meaning," 66-7.

the idea of the whole man (*totus homo)*.[109] The part of a larger whole implied by the form of Renaissance portrait busts additionally refers to the fragments of classical sculpture being unearthed and rediscovered during this period in Italy.[110] Lavin describes the reference to the antique via the fragmentation of the busts as an allusion to the classical practice of the deification of the commemorated individual: "From the very moment of its revival, therefore, the classical bust type carried a heavy burden of meaning. It was a kind of visual metaphor, serving to raise the person represented to a higher plane of existence."[111] This is an interesting consideration when discussing portrait busts of Christ, who is already a deity. The sculptor, in essence, could successfully convey the holy figure of Christ through the form of the portrait bust due to the connections to medieval reliquary busts and classical busts in which the sitter was deified.

The history of the physical form of the portrait bust is not so straight forward when we consider that the busts of the divine are thrown into the mix. A circularity of the form occurs; as the classical portrait bust is turned into the medieval reliquary bust, it is developed back into a secular portrait bust, following which it is in turn used to depict a religious figure. The interplay of sacred/secular and antique/medieval/early modern complicates our understanding of the form of these busts of Christ. The continual use of the physical form of the classical portrait bust in medieval reliquary busts allowed for portrait busts to represent religious figures, as a religious subject was portrayed in a typically secular form.

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[109] Ibid., 68.
[110] Lavin, "On Illusion and Allusion," 356-7.
[111] Ibid., 358.

The reliquary developed into its prior form, the portrait bust, but was used to emulate reliquaries by representing a religious figure.

The circularity of the form of the bust is further complicated by the circularity of the conventional image of Christ. The likeness of Christ was derived from early Christian depictions of Jesus, a few of which were believed to be contemporaneous True Likenesses of the son of God. The busts of Christ utilize both an antique form in the portrait bust and an antique image in the portrayal of Christ.

Bust as Reliquary

To further explore the form and function of the busts of Christ, and the problematic circularity of both the image and the form, it is necessary to analyze reliquary busts. Thus, the form of the bust can be determined, and the early modern viewer's response to busts of Christ can be more fully understood. Reliquaries are sculptural containers for relics, in other words, objects that are physically tied to a saint or holy person, such as a body-part or a garment. Relics are typically believed to perform miracles. Reliquaries can take the form of a box, a frame or part of a body, such as an arm or a head. For the purposes of this inquiry, I will only examine head reliquaries.

Reliquaries emerged in the middle ages and body part reliquaries, in particular, gained "…prominence in the West only in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries."[112] While the container did not always represent the object contained,

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[112] Caroline Walker Bynum and Paula Gerson, "Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts in the Middle Ages," *Gesta* 36:1 (1997): 4.

heads and arms were the two most popular forms of reliquaries. A head reliquary did not necessarily encapsulate the head of the holy personage, but could hold any portion of the body. Reliquaries could even hold body parts from multiple saints and non-corporeal relics, for example cloth, used by the saint.[113] As religious sculptures that refer to specific saints and miracles, reliquaries are inherently cultic.[114] Early modern viewers would have visited a reliquary for a specific purpose, and may have utilized a particular reliquary as a personal intercessor for God. Similar to the fragmentation of Renaissance portrait busts, shaped reliquaries are (and contain) fragments of a body, that suggest a larger whole.[115]

While Reliquary heads take a form derived from classical portrait busts, they are differentiated by their materials. Reliquaries are typically constructed of precious metals and stones, which visually portray the preciousness of the relics and the holiness of the object. Reliquary busts functioned as containers, thus the outside was often a visual indicator of the contents of the interior. The busts are neither naturalistic nor do they portray an exact likeness of a holy figure, as a result, the faces depicted are non-expressive generalizations. According to Moskowitz, "medieval reliquary heads and busts almost invariably have wide-open eyes and immobile features…." that differ from both antique and Renaissance portrait busts.[116]

An example of the typical reliquary bust is the *St. Donatus* in Arezzo. (figure 19) Sculpted in 1346, the silver gilt bust is adorned with jewels and

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[113] Hahn, "The Voices of the Saints," 21.

[114] Barbara Drake-Boehm, "Body-Part Reliquaries: The State of Research," *Gesta* 36:1 (1997): 14.

[115] Ibid., 20.

[116] Moskowitz, "Donatello's Reliquary Bust," 43.

enamel decorations. Low relief silver medallions depict both narrative scenes, such as the annunciation (front, center), and decorative motifs. *St. Donatus* wears a lavishly embellished cope and miter to indicate his status as a bishop. The bust is life-sized, truncated below the shoulders in a straight line, and terminates in an edge reminiscent of a quatrefoil. Even though the garments are detailed and accurate, they lack drapery and other naturalistic elements. The face of *St. Donatus* is unrealistic in its simplification. The features are not distinctive and do not contain anything other than the necessary physiognomic elements. No extraneous features, such as wrinkles or eyelashes, are portrayed on the saint. His expression is neutral, and the bust does not give either a sense of lifelikeness or the likeness of a particular person.

The generic and idealized features of the *St. Donatus* reliquary bust are similar to the idealized and(typically) non-descriptive features on the busts of Christ. In particular, a bust in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, created by a follower of Verrocchio, has a similar oblong face and long nose. (figure 3) The articulation of the eyes is comparable, as both use blunt incised lines underneath the eyes in order to define the lower lid. Christ is draped in a Roman robe to indicate his historical setting, and the cope and miter worn by St. Donatus reveal his status in the Church. The garments worn by both figures help in their identification. While each bust portrays the life-sized head and shoulders of the sitter, the *St. Donatus* terminates closer to the shoulders so that more of the body is revealed in the bust of Christ. The emotion in the face of Christ, exhibited in his furrowed brow, lined cheeks and downcast eyes, demonstrate another

departure from the stoic reliquary figure. The naturalism of Christ's face adds to the lifelikeness of the bust, as opposed to the smooth flatness of St. Donatus' visage. Although the busts of Christ were not created as reliquaries, there is a clear visual resemblance between the two forms of sculpture.

Moreover, the busts of Christ can be related to reliquary busts not only in form, but also in religious content. Bynum and Gerson have noted that "…the period that saw the emergence of body-part reliquaries produced, as well, an intense exploration of the issue of likeness in spirituality, predicated on the assumption that spiritual progress was possible because human beings were created in the 'image' of God."[117] Reliquary heads were a means to explore the image of man as a copy of the image of God, an idea also present in the busts of Christ. Another theological notion inherent in both the reliquary busts and the busts of Christ pertains to the relics, or the literal limbs of the saints. While reliquaries physically hold portions of the saints' body, busts of Christ can be understood as a literal representation of his head. The busts are a visual metaphor for the structure of the Church according to "II Corinthians 12:12 (where) (t)he saints are the limbs; (and) the head of the body of the Church is Christ."[118] If reliquaries in the form of body parts (such as arms and feet) refer to the role of the corporeal parts of the saints contained within as the "limbs" of the Church; then it is also possible for the busts of Christ, which portray his head, to refer to his role as the "head of the body of the Church."[119] Therefore, the busts of Christ have a similar role as reliquaries, even if they do not actually contain relics. The religious

[117] Bynum and Gerson, "Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts," 4.
[118] Hahn, "The Voices of the Saints," 28. See bibliographic note 22 on page 29.
[119] Ibid.

and cult nature of both reliquary busts and the busts of Christ, as well as the similar form, connect the two types of sculpture. Even though they did not actually hold relics (because bodily relics of Christ do not exist), do busts of Christ also act as reliquaries, since they are portraits of a miraculous divinity/human and follow the tradition of body-part reliquaries?

Function and Location of Portrait Busts

While the precise function of secular portrait busts in Renaissance Italy is still undetermined, many scholars have connected them to the rise of humanism. Most scholars agree that portraits and portrait busts were "….intended to preserve the *virtù* of famous men… (and were) prized symbols of individuality in humanist culture."[120] Lavin argues that portrait busts "…served an essentially documentary purpose, as family records."[121] Portrait busts in the Renaissance commemorated both living and deceased individuals, and typically were kept in the home. Therefore, they were not something that most early modern viewers would have seen, since the portraits were displayed in private spaces used by the family. Busts were not (as in antiquity) public and "civic monuments," but rather, primarily stayed within the private sphere.[122]

Some portrait busts, such as those of rulers and political figures, left the house and entered into a more public arena. These were used as propaganda to project an idealized image of a benevolent, moral ruler to both his subjects and his foreign counterparts. Most portraits of rulers were portable, such as medals and

[120] Olson, *Italian Renaissance Sculpture*, 103.
[121] Lavin, "On Illusion and Allusion," 355.
[122] Ibid., 355.

painted portraits, so that they could be used as diplomatic gifts, and thus circulated throughout Europe. Many busts however, were created in order to present depictions of a ruler throughout his city, primarily on civic buildings and other architectural projects he commissioned.[123] Political portrait busts in public spaces would have acted as exempla for the general populace, providing the citizens with a model of status, class, and values to emulate.[124] As Berger writes,

> The signifiers of objectivity in Early Modern portraiture produce a different effect: they serve to make the face the index of exemplary value, the transparent embodiment of 'ideals of public virtue' presenting itself for the observer's admiration, veneration, and edification. Since it does the work of holy icons, classical statues, and ancestral masks, the exemplary portrait doesn't want to neutralize the observer.[125]

Berger compares the secular, moral values present in idealized portraits busts of wealthy and prominent personages in Renaissance Italian society to holy icons, as both provide exempla for good and proper behavior.

Schuyler discusses the phenomenon of the portrait bust as an ego-ideal in relation to early modern man's new desire for fame and immortality, expressed through physical objects. Poets, humanists and other famous men were treated in ways similar to saints and holy figures. Cults grew up around the celebrities and their birthplaces became sites of pilgrimages. Towns vied for prominence via a secular form of *furta sacra*, as the ownership of the remains of famous men imbued the town with distinction. According to Schuyler, "poets and scholars were the new heroes, obtaining a place among those who had achieved distinction through holiness."[126] Part of the new cultic followings of famous laymen included

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[123] See Woods-Marsden, "'Ritratto al naturale'," especially p. 213, for a discussion of the political implications of Italian Renaissance portraiture.
[124] Berger, "Fiction of the Pose," 94.
[125] Ibid., 103-4.
[126] Schuyler, *Florentine Busts*, 12-13.

commissioning portrait busts for commemorative monuments. Even as visual exempla, secular portrait busts have a strong tie to the commemoration of individuals, both alive and dead in early modern Italy.

As the function of objects is closely tied to their original setting, it is possible to infer the purposes of busts based on their environment. Portrait busts were typically private commissions, displayed on private property and set into architectural recesses in homes.[127] In the sixteenth century portrait busts developed into free standing sculptures, and moved outside of the wall niches.[128] Giorgio Vasari provides the main primary source of information regarding the placement of busts. In the life of Andrea del Verrocchio, Vasari discusses the creation of wax death masks in relation to naturalism in portrait busts, and then describes the subsequent placement of those busts. While Vasari's description only mentions Florence, it is most likely relevant to other cities at this time:

> Artists afterwards – but in his time – began to make casts of the heads of those who died, a thing they could by this means do at but little cost; whence it is that one sees in every house in Florence vast numbers of these likenesses, over the chimneys, doors, windows, and cornices, many of them so well done and so natural that they seem alive; and from that time forward this custom prevailed, nay continues to do so…[129]

Vasari verifies that portrait busts were commemorative and mostly a private, familial object through his examination of the locations of portrait busts of family members in the Florentine houses.

Other locations for portrait busts (still within architectural settings) were on civic or other public buildings. The patron, usually a ruler or political figure, would commission a portrait bust to demonstrate their benevolence and

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[127] Lavin, "On the Sources and Meaning," 60-1.
[128] Ibid., 61.
[129] Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, vol. II, translated by Mrs. Jonathan Foster (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1855), 259.

generosity. A portrait of Cosimo II de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany (r. 1609-1621) is centered on the front of the *Ospedale degli Innocenti* in Florence, above Brunelleschi's arcade. (figure 20) Made in 1612, the bust portrays Cosimo II as a strong, attractive leader. He is idealized, wears armor, and the Grand Ducal crown of Tuscany is held above his head by a pair of *putti*. By literally attaching himself to a charitable organization founded and built by his beloved Medici ancestors, Cosimo II most likely used this bust to reinforce his authority in a time of political instability.

Another public location for portrait busts was inside churches, both on tombs and as *ex votos*. These usually came in the form of "wax effigies and death-masks," and later developed into the practice of placing stone or terracotta portrait busts of the deceased on the sepulchral monument.[130] The tomb of Michelangelo Buonarroti in the church of *Santa Croce* in Florence prominently displays a portrait bust of the artist directly over the sculpted sarcophagus. (figure 21) The bust allowed the numerous followers of Michelangelo to preserve his memory and to display his visage for the edification of future generations. The bust of Michelangelo is an example of the emerging cults surrounding famous early modern Italians, and the new importance placed on memory, achievement, and individuality.

Function and Location of Reliquaries

Like portrait busts, the location and function of reliquary busts are closely related. Located in churches, primarily on altars, the function of reliquaries was

[130] Olson, *Italian Renaissance Sculpture*, 105.

multifold. Reliquaries were didactic, miraculous, liturgical, and acted as intercessors between the faithful and the divine. As sacred objects that contained portions of saints and holy figures, reliquaries became part of the Christian liturgy and dogma as "by the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, relics were required for the consecration of altars."[131] Relics and reliquaries were not only necessary to consecrate an altar, but were active objects, "…specifically conceived as a stage prop for the liturgy."[132] Hahn describes a particular reliquary in the shape of an arm that contained a relic of the burial shroud of Christ, which was used to bestow an Episcopal blessing on the congregation by the bishop.[133] Reliquaries functioned as physical remnants of the saints whose relics they contained, and therefore, became an integral part of the medieval liturgy.

Reliquaries bestowed upon saints a continual, active role even past death, by allowing saints to produce miracles through the relics. The medieval and early modern viewers believed that the relics contained within the reliquaries were still connected to the life of the saint, and thus had the ability to create miracles. The relic and reliquary became conflated in the viewers mind, and a slippage occurred between the container and contained:

> As the relic was publicly presented within the reliquary image, the reliquary bust served visually as a relic itself. The physical presence of the saint, implicit in the relic, was presented by the reliquary image; the image served as a surrogate visage with which the faithful could more readily interact. Thus the kissing of the reliquary was a form of kissing the relic itself, by way of its metallic epidermis.[134]

Medieval Christians thought the reliquary had the same power and holiness of the relic contained within, so that it became difficult to differentiate between the relic

[131] Bynum and Gerson, "Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts," 3-4.
[132] Hahn, "The Voices of the Saints," 22.
[133] Ibid., 27.
[134] Montgomery, "Mittite capud meum…," 52.

and reliquary. Due to the conflation of relic and reliquary, scholars have recently questioned the function of the reliquary. As stated by Bynum and Gerson, "…to pose the more audacious question – perhaps they are not containers at all? For, as we have seen, they were also liturgical props; they were treasures to be stored in cathedrals alongside narwhale horns and ostrich eggs; they were revered as the saint."[135] It is possible that reliquaries were of such important to the liturgy, and so treasured by the faithful, it did not matter if they contained relics of saintly persons, but only that they functioned as intercessors in miraculous ways.

Function and Location of Busts of Christ

As the physical form of the busts of Christ relates to both portrait busts and reliquary busts, it is necessary to determine if their function relates to portraits or reliquaries. Would the Renaissance viewer have understood the bust to be a portrait bust? Would they have equated it with a reliquary bust? What does the location of the busts tell us about their form and function? In the section that follows, I will outline the few known original locations for the busts of Christ to better understand the possible purposes, since the utility values can be inferred from the locations. The known settings for busts of Christ relate to the settings of both portrait busts and reliquary busts, which complicates our understanding of the early modern viewers' possible responses.

While they are now mostly found in churches, the busts of Christ were originally displayed in churches, public areas, and in secular buildings such as houses. In Venice, the bust of Christ by Cristoforo Solari is currently part of the

[135] Bynum and Gerson, "Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts," 6.

decorative cycle in the church of *San Pantaleon*, however it is unknown if this was the original intended location. (figure 5) The bust by Tullio Lombardo now in the *Bargello* was originally commissioned in Venice, and is believed to have been part of a funerary monument.[136] (figure 6) In Florence, the locations of two busts by Giovanni Caccini are well recorded. The first is still in a street tabernacle on the corner of Via de'Cerretani and Via Ferdinando Zannetti.[137] (figure 22) The second bust by Caccini was part of the collection of the church of *Santa Maria Novella*, but currently is in the collection of the *Rijksmuseum* in Amsterdam. (figure 23) The bust of Christ was displayed in a tabernacle in the nave, and was paired with a Madonna bust located across the nave in a similar tabernacle.[138] It is also known that a bust of Christ by Pietro Torrigiani was first documented in the 1940s in the treasury of the Church of *Santa Trinità* in Florence.[139] (figure 24) Later in the twentieth century the bust was transferred to a wall niche in the crypt of the church.

Two other busts of Christ by Torrigiani are also located in churches, but outside of Italy in London. Alan Phipps Darr has proven that a tondo containing a bust of Christ by Torrigiani was originally mounted in the wall of the nave in Westminster Abbey. It has since been removed and is now part of the Wallace collection.[140] (figure 25) Torrigiani worked in London for the second half of his

[136] Mario Scalini and Angelo Tartuferi, *Un Tesoro Rivelato: Capolavori dalla Collezione Carlo De Carlo* (Florence: Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, 2001), 67.
[137] Avery and Pizzorusso, *Un Busto di Cristo Redentore*, 6. The street corner is listed as Via de'Cerretani and Via della Forca in the catalogue, but current maps of Florence list Via della Forca as Via Ferdinando Zannetti.
[138] H. Keutner, "Giovanni Caccini and the Rediscovered Bust of Christ," *Art and Auctions*, Rotterdam (1989): 332-339.
[139] Boucher, *Earth and Fire*, 150.
[140] Darr, "From Westminster Abbey to the Wallace Collection."

career, and brought with him the naturalistic style of the Italian Renaissance he learned in his native Florence. He imported the sculptural type of the bust of Christ to England, and it appears in both the Wallace tondo and a sepulchral monument he created. The Tomb of Dr. John Yong contains a bust of Christ in the lunette that is very similar in format to Torrigiani's other busts of Christ in Italy and London. (figure 26)

While many of the busts were located in churches, the placement within the church differs. The multiple examples by Torrigiani alone illustrate that a bust of Christ could be located in the wall in the nave, part of the decoration on a tomb or placed in the treasury of the church. Furthermore, busts of Christ were placed in secular architectural settings. The street tabernacle bust in Florence by Caccini enters the realm of the secular. According to Robinson, busts of Christ were a common occurrence in Florentine houses. In 1528 the Florentine state declared Christ the King of the city, and in response "…every proprietor of a house hastened to procure a bust or image of our Saviour, which he placed over the door or in some other conspicuous position."[141] Robinson's declaration reveals that busts of Christ may have been used in ways very similar to portrait busts of rulers above buildings; as political propaganda. Similar to the Cosimo II de' Medici bust that adorns the *Ospedale degli Innocenti*, busts of Christ over doorways were meant to mark the house as part of the Florentine state, under the rule of Christ. (figure 20)

It is probable that busts of Christ over doorways had a significance similar to that of secular portrait busts over the entrance to a house, as a visual marker of

[141] Robinson, *Italian Sculpture of the Middle Ages,* 97.

the head of the household. Mentioned by Vasari, honored and respected members of the family were commemorated with portrait busts that were typically displayed over doorways or in other architectural niches in a house. The corresponding placement of busts of honored members of the family and busts of Christ suggest that Florentines wanted to display a portrait bust of Christ as a part of their kin. Therefore, the image of Christ would make reference to the humility, morality and Christianity of the household.

Portrait busts of citizens were commemorative, and used as moral and civic exempla. Christ was the ideal man, and Christians were encouraged to act like Christ, to become more perfect like the son of God. Freedberg mentions the writings of Giovanni Dominici from 1403 in which Dominici urges parents to bring up their children "for God."[142] To achieve this result, Dominici proscribes visual exempla, such as painted or sculpted representations of the baby Jesus for boys to contemplate, empathize with, and eventually emulate. Arnold Victor Coonin connects Dominici's writings to busts of the young Christ and the young Saint John the Baptist that emerge in Florence in the fifteenth century.[143] The busts of the young Christ, for Coonin, are meant as visual exempla. They preformed exactly the task of allowing a young boy to self-identify with the image of Christ, and desire to become like the bust. Both busts of the boy Christ and busts of honored men functioned as ego-ideals, for the early modern viewer to emulate. While busts of the adult Christ portray a different subject than busts of

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[142] Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 4.
[143] Arnold Victor Coonin, "Portrait Busts of Children in Quattrocento Florence," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 30 (1995): 66-7.

the boy Christ, it is likely that they served a comparable purpose, to act as a visual exemplar for Christian men to follow.

The form of the portrait bust underscores Christ's humanity and his similarity to the early modern man. The busts of Christ were appropriate ego-ideals for Renaissance Christian men because they could relate to the depiction of Jesus as human. The emphasis on Christ's dual nature was a recurrent theme in Renaissance religious art, as noted by Wolf, "in Renaissance images, then, Christ became more and more a man, or better, was more and more exclusively defined as a man."[144] Therefore, these busts functioned as visual manifestations of Christian dogma. They display the human side of Christ in a sculptural genre used to portray contemporary laymen.

In addition to acting as a moral exemplar, busts of Christ were utilized, like portrait busts, as parts of sepulchral monuments. Famous men in the Renaissance, such as Michelangelo, were remembered and commemorated via portrait busts displayed on their tombs. (figure 21) A bust of Christ on a tomb, such as the tomb of Dr. Yong in London, had a different purpose. (figure 26) Christ is not remembered through another person's sepulchral monument, but instead is compared to the deceased as an example of righteousness and good deeds. The representation of Christ looking down on and protecting his faithful follower transfers His good qualities to the deceased. The bust of Christ is not only further justification of the faith and honor of the deceased, but also holds a sacred function on the tomb. The figure of Christ represents the resurrection, and thus confirmation of the continuing life after death for the soul of the deceased.

[144] Wolf, "Christ in his Beauty and Pain," 174.

Connected to portrait busts that adorn tombs and located within a church, busts of Christ, (e.g. the Torrigiani in London) occupy a liminal space that is both secular and sacred.

Another example of a bust of Christ, displayed in a transitional area between the secular and sacred, is the bust by Giovanni Caccini in a street tabernacle in Florence. (figure 22) Street tabernacles are specific sites for holy figures to enter into the world outside of the church, and similar to busts over doorways, marks the area as protected by the watchful gaze of Christ. Here the bust of Christ could serve as an exemplar for the whole populace, not just the family living in a house with a bust of Christ. As discussed by Muir, street corner tabernacles were not usually commissioned by the Church, but by individuals or neighborhoods.[145] Due to a personal desire for the presence of the figure, holy personages entered into the public lives of the neighborhood residents. It is unknown how many niches held busts of Christ, but the extant example in Florence demonstrates that it was an occurring practice. Were the busts of Christ attributed with miraculous powers to protect the neighborhood similar to many of the examples of tabernacles containing the Virgin Mary? Or were the busts seen more as a statement of the political and religious allegiances of the state? As Christ was declared King of Florence, the busts in street corners allowed Christ a prominent place for citizens to see the face of their ruler, as well as a good vantage point from which He could observe the happenings in His city. When placed in a church, the religious and sacred elements of the bust are emphasized,

[145] Edward Muir, "The Virgin on the Street Corner: The Place of the Sacred in Italian Cities," in *The Italian Renaissance*, edited by Paula Findlen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 151.

but when placed in the street or on the face of a secular building, the busts of Christ acquire a more secularized connotation.

The exact placement of busts of Christ within churches is not clear, since over the centuries it is likely the busts have moved from their original locations. It is just as likely that the original locations were not all the same and depended on the individual needs and wishes of the parish. The Torrigiani bust in *Santa Trinità* has been displayed in two separate locations in the church in the twentieth century alone. (figure 24) In the Choir of the Angels in the church of *Santa Maria degli Angeli* in Florence, a bust of God the Father sits above a doorway. (figure 27) This suggests another placement, aside from on tombs, in the nave or in the crypt for the busts of Christ inside a church. However, the placement of the busts in a church does not much matter because the sacred location itself lends several meanings or interpretations to the busts of Christ. Again, it could be an ego-ideal, as a goal of early modern Christians was to emulate Christ. In addition, the bust format allows only the head and shoulders of Christ to be represented, which visually conveys his role as the head of the Church. Busts of Christ could have been didactic tools used by the priests to visually present the dogma of the Church, and to represent to the faithful what was believed to be the actual face of Christ. It is certain that within a church the early modern viewer would have been a Christian, and would have thought that he/she was interacting with a representation of his/her Lord.

Essentially, similar to reliquary busts, the busts of Christ would have been a visual focus of prayer, an intercessor between God and humanity. The bust

provided the faithful with a figure with which to speak, interact, and act as a placeholder for Christ Himself. Did the Renaissance viewer interact with the busts as if they were truly Christ himself? Would the early modern Christian that the bust was more than a mere representation of Christ?

In other words, can the busts of Christ be considered indexes of Christ? The True Likenesses were believed to be contact relics because the face of Christ was directly imprinted onto the cloths. Therefore, they are also indexes of Christ's face due to the physical relationship inherent in the process of transference of the image from Christ's body to the cloth.[146] The depictions of Christ in the busts are copies of the True Likenesses, so that they are copies of an index of Christ.

In addition, scholars such as Loh and Berger state that portraits are an index of the sitter. According to Berger, "the portrait is an index in that it represents the act of portrayal that produced it. Indeed, it is an indexical icon."[147] The busts of Christ are derived from what were believed to be accurate portraits, so the "act of portrayal" in the True Likenesses that produced the portrait of Christ was the direct reproduction of his physiognomy onto a cloth. Thus, the busts of Christ, as portraits, could be understood as indexes for the portrayal of the True Likeness, or further, Christ's actual face. Therefore, it is possible that the busts of Christ acted as an index for Christ, and signified his real features. It could be that early modern viewers believed they were interacting with Christ.

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[146] An index is a semiotic relationship defined by Pierce as a sign that is directly connected (either physically or causally) to the signified. An example of a physical index is a photograph: light physically touches and connects both the object being captured (the signified) and the film, which is turned into a photograph (the sign).

[147] Berger, "Fictions of the Pose," 99.

If the busts act as indexes of Christ's physiognomy, then they also act as relics. While the busts do not contain portions of Christ's body as indexes or physical signs for his face, they are the next best thing. As it is impossible to have a bodily relic of Christ, according to Christian doctrine (during the ascension the corporeal Christ ascended to heaven), contact relics and indexes are the only physical form of Christ's body left on Earth. In the very least, these busts of Christ are representations of the index (his portrait), and thus representations of a relic.

While it is impossible to know how early modern viewers interacted with and understood the busts of Christ, it is clear that the relationship was complex and the created meanings multifold. Busts of Christ are a combination of the forms of the portrait bust and the reliquary bust, which imbued the depictions of Christ with both secular and sacred significances.

Conclusion

My thesis examines early modern viewer reception of sixteenth-century busts of Christ that lack attributes. I determine that the busts were recognizable to the viewer without any elements of identification because Christ's actual physiognomy was believed to be preserved in the True Likenesses. Therefore, a conventional face of Christ entered into the visual vocabulary of Renaissance Europe, and allowed artists to portray Christ without attributes, inscriptions or narrative. Moreover, this inquiry explores the physical bust form of the sculptures to determine if early modern viewers understood the busts of Christ to be a portrait bust or a reliquary bust. I determine that the busts of Christ have correlations to both types of busts. Thus, the function of the bust is analyzed by comparing the functions and locations of portrait and reliquary busts with the known locations of the busts of Christ. Finally, I posit possible functions for the busts of Christ to understand how early modern viewers may have interacted with the busts.

The busts of Christ that lack attributes created throughout the sixteenth century in Italy allow us to explore the culture and religion through the viewer's perspective. The busts shed light on the use of sculpture in a religious context, and how that sculpture was also able to enter into the secular sphere. Christianity entered into all aspects of life, which is displayed in the fact that the busts entered into domestic spaces. In addition, a secular form of sculpture, the portrait bust, was appropriated to represent a religious figure.

The image of Christ and the form of the bust are both complicated by issues of temporal circularity. The busts recall antiquity in their form and the use of an early Christian image of Christ. Even so, the form of the bust departs from classical precedents with new developments introduced in the Renaissance. The busts inhabit a grey area where neither the image, nor the form, nor the function is straightforward or precise. The busts of Christ are both religious and secular in form and in function. They are not easy to define and remind us that sixteenth-century Italy was not an easily defined time or place. The culture was Christian, but also pagan and humanist. The complications inherent in the busts were also inherent in the culture. Analyzing the viewer interaction with the busts of Christ allows us to more fully understand the culture in which they were created.

Appendix A: Figures

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

Figure 3.

Figure 4.

Figure 5.

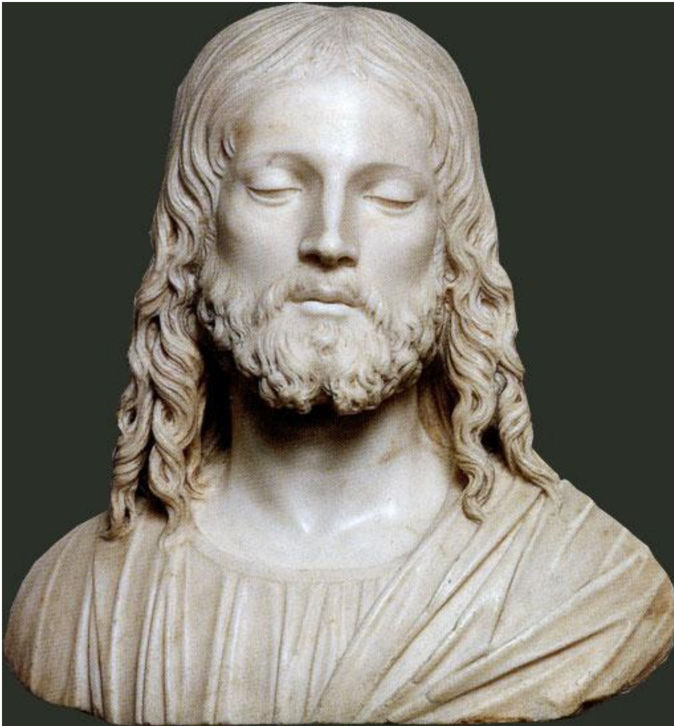
Figure 6.

Figure 7.

Figure 8.

Figure 9.

Figure 10.

Figure 11.

Figure 12.

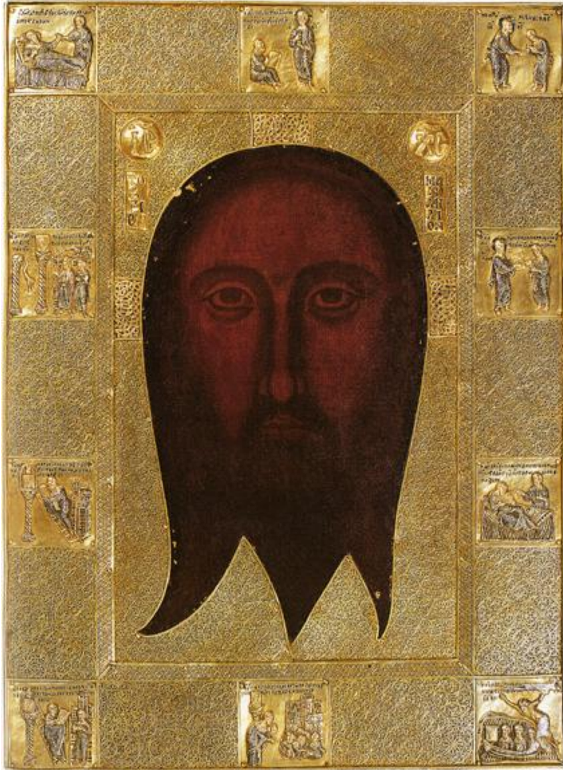
Figure 13.

Figure 14.

Figure 15a.

Figure 15b.

Figure 16.

Figure 17.

Figure 18.

Figure 19.

Figure 20.

Figure 21.

Figure 22.

Figure 23.

Figure 24.

Figure 25.

Figure 26.

Figure 27.

Appendix B: Bibliography

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