Alter Apelles: Dürer's 1500 *Self-Portrait*

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The persistence of interpretations that view Dürer's 1500 Self-Portrait *as a Christlike image in spite of the issue of blasphemy it raises is due in large part to the lack of a competing historical narrative, one that accounts for the unusual aspects of the painting without recourse to religious imagery. In this article, Dürer's motivation in creating this unprecedented painting and the strategies he used in constructing it are analyzed from the perspective of his contemporaries. In this alternative view, the humanist context is crucial, with Dürer emulating the greatest artist of the ancient world by composing the 1500* Self-Portrait *in ways that accord with Apelles's art, practice, and reputation as it was transmitted through the literature of the ancient world.*

WHEN ALBRECHT DÜRER (1471–1528) is called a "second Apelles," Pieter Bruegel the Elder is likened to Timanthes, or Pieter Aertsen is identified as another Piraeicus, such statements are rarely taken at face value. Rather than being treated as a guide to the works themselves and the context within which they were created, these approbations are usually dismissed as a rhetorical flourish made by an enthusiastic admirer. In this view, Erasmus's (1466–1536) praise of Dürer as the "modern Apelles" tells us little about his art, and much "the same can be said of the testimonies by Scheurl, Hesse, and Pirckheimer, all men who likewise had first-hand knowledge of Dürer's art and theory."[1]

Although the humanist environment in which the artist worked and found an audience is familiar territory, the subject of numerous studies, and considered important for many of his paintings and prints, interpretations of Dürer's 1500 *Self-Portrait* (fig. 1) tend to emphasize its potential for generating religious associations. For Erwin Panofsky, "the effect of its hieratic arrangement is paralleled only by half-length images of Christ," a resemblance "strengthened by the position of the hand that occupies the same place as the blessing right hand of the *Salvator Mundi*" and the idealization of Dürer's own features "to make them conform to those traditionally attributed to Christ." Panofsky's conclusion is stated with conviction — it is "unquestionable that Dürer deliberately styled himself into the likeness of the Saviour" — but tempered by the troubling

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[1]Parshall, 24.

Figure 1. Albrecht Dürer. *Self-Portrait in Fur Cloak*, 1500. Oil on panel. Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, Germany / Art Resource, NY.

problem it raises. How was it possible, Panofsky asks, for "so pious and humble an artist" to produce a painting that many of his contemporaries would consider "blasphemous?" He resolved the dilemma by saying that Dürer's "modern conception of art as a matter of genius had assumed a deeply religious significance which implied a mystical identification of the artist with God." Rather than seeing the 1500 painting as a challenge to God's creative power, it was instead a "confession and a sermon."[2]

Recent studies continue to view the portrait as a Christlike image and grapple with its implications. Joseph Leo Koerner views the painting as a mixture of "piety and narcissicism" with Dürer "fashioning his own monumental likeness

[2]Panofsky, 43.

after the cultic image of the Holy Face."[3] In a study of Renaissance self-portraits Joanna Woods-Marsden agrees that in the 1500 *Self-Portrait* Dürer "took on the persona . . . of Christ, fusing the self-image with an image of the Holy Face."[4] Matthias Mende refers to the portrait as, "Christ is Dürer and Dürer is Christ,"[5] while Ernst Rebel emphasizes the "resemblance to Christ" and Dürer's use of a compositional scheme familiar in paintings of Christ.[6] In the view of Jeffrey Chipps Smith, "Dürer modeled his frontal pose, hair and beard on images of Christ as the *Salvator Mundi*, such as Schongauer's drawing" from around 1470.[7] For Rona Goffen, Dürer's painting is a self-portrait as Christ, "an image not of hubris but of *imitatio Christi* where his looking at the beholder makes his gesture of blessing an individual act of benediction."[8] In a publication by the Alte Pinakothek, *Albrecht Dürer: Die Gemälde der Alten Pinakothek*, the authors devote six pages to Dürer's Christlike appearance in the 1500 *Self-Portrait*.[9] This appraisal has had few dissenters.[10] Yet a shift is perceptible, due to the work of Dieter Wuttke and, more recently, Ulrich Pfisterer's contribution to the volume *Apelles am Fürstenhof*.[11] Athough the Christlike properties of the 1500 *Self-Portrait* are mentioned, the humanist context receives the most attention.[12]

[3]Koerner, 79. He also says that in the portrait Dürer "thematizes the unbridgeable rift between himself, in all his vanity, narcissism, and specificity, and the higher role to which he aspires": ibid., 67. See also ibid., 186.

[4]Woods-Marsden, 75.

[5]Mende, 29.

[6]Rebel, 157. Ibid., 163–64, uses the 1507 reference to the "suffering Christ" in Dürer's *Lehrbuch der Malerei* (Painter's manual), his instruction for young painters, as a key to Dürer's resemblance to Christ in the 1500 *Self-Portrait*.

[7]J. C. Smith, 2012, 144. For ibid., 146, the "prototype for the *Salvator Mundi* conveys the image's essential truth," with "Dürer's choice of Christ as a model for the portrait" consistent with such "spiritual renewal movements" as the "Devotio Moderno."

[8]Goffen, 128.

[9]Goldberg, Heimberg, and Schawe, 324–30.

[10]Pope-Hennessy, 129, says these Christlike interpretations "are relatively thin." He believes Dürer used Venetian sources for his frontal view, although he grants that the visual evidence is inconclusive.

[11]Wuttke, 1967; Pfisterer, 11–14. Wuttke, 1980, nn12, 78, notes, for example, that there is no clear instance of an artist identifying himself with Christ until Paul Gauguin's self-portrait in the nineteenth century. See also McHam, 190–96, for a detailed analysis of Dürer's use of a "Plinian signature" from 1500 to 1510.

[12]In accounting for Dürer's presentation of himself as both a "new Apelles and a Godlike image," Pfisterer, 13, cites a grave inscription that says Fra Angelico should not be praised as a second Apelles because his art is God-given. What was appropriate for a monk painting religious subjects is not necessarily applicable to Dürer, a layperson portraying himself and working in a different time and place.

The tendency among art historians to view Dürer's self-portrait in terms of Christian iconography is worth examination because, as Bialostocki observes, there is no description of the Christlike character of the 1500 *Self-Portrait* before the nineteenth century — an odd omission as the painting was kept "for a long time in the Nuremberg Town Hall where it was seen and described by Carel van Mander and several other critics."[13] In the visual arts the connection is not made until 1637, more than a century after its model, when Georg Vischer adopted Dürer's *Self-Portrait* for the figure of Christ in his painting *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*.[14] The first written analogy noting a resemblance to Christ does not appear until 1842, and it was not until 1876 that the Viennese scholar Moriz Thausing corrected this misunderstanding, as Anzelewsky expresses it, and recognized the artist's Christlike appearance.[15]

The ubiquity and staying power of a Christlike, *vera icon* (true image) view of Dürer's 1500 *Self-Portrait* in spite of the serious problems it raises is due in large part to the lack of an alternative historical narrative, one that accounts for the unusual aspects of the painting, such as its geometric framework, without having recourse to religious images like Jan Van Eyck's *Holy Face.* Maintaining a sense of historical distance is particularly challenging with the study of aesthetic objects, as Keith Moxey emphasizes, and while the later reception of the 1500 *Self-Portrait* has its own interest, it reveals little about Dürer's motivation in creating this unprecedented painting or its relation to the interests and concerns of his viewers.[16] These questions are answered more readily by adopting the perspective of those who lived closest in time to the originating moment. For his contemporaries — and they said it again and again — Dürer was "a second Apelles." In 1499 or early 1500 Conrad Celtis (1459–1508) addressed an elogium and three epigrams to Dürer — "Ad Pictorem Albertum Dürer Nurnbergensum" — in which he used the phrase *alter Apelles* when praising the painter:

[13]Bialostocki, 1986, 101.

[14]Vischer's painting is reproduced in Goldberg, Heimberg, and Schawe, 336 (fig. 6.15); and Koerner, 71 (fig. 32). If the goal is to reconstruct the original context in which the painting was conceived and received, this seventeenth-century painting is irrelevant. Vischer could have copied it simply because he considered it beautiful, not because he assumed a connection between Dürer and Christ.

[15]Anzelewsky, 239.

[16]Moxey argues that the physicality of the aesthetic object undermines the ability to maintain historical distance, and also that the use of Dürer's art in later periods, such as "the German Renaissance in art in the 1930s and 1940s," makes its study particularly difficult: Moxey, 206–07. See also Bialostocki, 1986, and his detailed history of later reactions to Dürer's art.

To the Painter Albrecht Dürer from Nuremberg.
Albrecht, most famous painter in German lands
Where the Frankish town raises its lofty head up to the stars,
You represent to us a second Phidias, a second Apelles
And others whom ancient Greece admires for their
sovereign hand.[17]

Repetition might make the phrase lose its luster over time, but when Celtis first applied the term a "second Apelles" to Dürer its application to a German painter was as novel as the painting itself.

After Celtis and throughout the sixteenth century the name of Apelles continued to be associated with Dürer. In his *Epithoma Rerum Germanicarum* of 1505, the oldest handbook of German history, the humanist and poet Jakob Wimpheling writes that in Italy Dürer's pictures are as highly appreciated as those by Parrhasius or by Apelles. Writing in 1508 in his *Libellus de Laudibus Germaniae* (Little book in praise of Germany), Christoph Scheurl reports that Dürer was greeted as a "second Apelles" in Venice and Bologna, and he quotes Sbrulius, an Italian poet, who claimed that Dürer surpassed Apelles. Writing in 1518 Ulrich von Hutten called Dürer the "Apelles of our time."[18] In a 1522 bas-relief by Hans Daucher the emperor Maximilian is shown watching a struggle between Dürer and an opponent, with Apelles suggested as the adversary the artist is trying to outdo.[19] In a letter to Willibald Pirckheimer (1470–1530) in 1525 Erasmus says, "You are lucky to have your own Apelles, Albrecht Dürer," who is "pre-eminent" in his art;[20] and in his *De Pronunciatione* (1528), he says "Dürer is in the tradition of the ancient masters of the field like . . . Apelles," noting he has been called the "modern Apelles."[21] In 1531 Sebastian Franck says that Apelles, "Alexander the Great's court painter," could not compare with the "genius of Dürer," and in a poem written in 1553 Apelles and Dürer are imagined as collaborating on the design of a tomb.[22] Apelles's name appears even in a lighthearted and friendly exchange over Dürer's attempt to write poetry.[23] In

[17]Bialostocki, 1986, 17. He says that Celtis's poem was "was probably written in 1499 or at the latest early 1500": ibid., 16.

[18]Ibid., 17, for references to Wimpheling, Scheurl, and Ulrich von Hutten.

[19]Professor Frank Fehrenbach, Harvard University, kindly brought the bas-relief to my attention. It is reproduced in J. C. Smith, 2010, 95–96 (fig. 5.13). Smith suggests the example of Phidias's sculpture was an important influence on Dürer.

[20]Erasmus, 1994, 66.

[21]Erasmus, 1985, 398–99. Geise, 267, says this is Erasmus's "longest excursion into the field of art criticism." It remains a useful guide to the qualities a sixteenth-century viewer valued in art.

[22]Münch, 182; Bialostocki, 1986, 17.

[23]Hutchison, 120; Koerner, 170.

his *Historiae naturalis* Pliny (23–79 CE) relates how Apelles told a shoemaker who criticized his painting that he should stick to the business he knew best.[24] The anecdote about Apelles is used to make the point that Dürer is a great painter, but not a first-rate poet.

In 1500 the claim that Dürer was another Apelles was one that resonated with Dürer's own ambitions and the desire of Celtis and other like-minded men to promulgate Germany as a great center of humanist culture.[25] Dürer had recently returned from his first trip to Italy (ca. 1494–96), an extraordinary learning experience for the artist and one that clearly fueled his ambition and altered his view of his own status. The timing of Celtis's accolade and Dürer's 1500 *Self-Portrait* suggests that Wuttke is correct in his surmise that the painting was conceived as part of Conrad Celtis's program to make the year 1500 a great year for German humanism.[26] Given Celtis's objective and the artist's own ambitions it was logical for Dürer to substantiate the claim by creating a virtuoso painting in which he presents himself as Apelles's rightful heir.

For Dürer's contemporaries who saw the *Self-Portrait* in a secular setting, such as in the artist's home or workplace, and later in a civic location — locations that did not stimulate religious associations — the painting made an impressive contribution to this cultural, political, and artistic agenda. There was no doubt about the subject. Dürer is clearly identified with name, place, and the artist's age carefully recorded. On the right, "Albertus Durerus Noricus ipsum me propriis sic effingebam coloribus aetatis anno xxviii" ("Thus I, Albrecht Dürer of Nuremberg, painted myself in special colors at the age of 28 years"), and on the left, his distinctive monogram and the date 1500. The proud Latin inscription displayed prominently against the dark ground and placed level with Dürer's eyes emphasizes the painting process rather than the artist's piety. The use of *effingere* (to portray) instead of the more usual *facere* (to make) underscored the artist's role as a creator rather than simply a maker.[27] Dürer's use of the triple name in imitation of the practice of ancient poets recalls the familiar Horatian alliance of poetry and painting.[28] His choice of Latin written in *litterae antiquae* (letters in an antique style) was an equally unambiguous sign that the portrait

[24]For the anecdote about Apelles, see Pliny, 322–25 (*Nat. hist*. 35.36.84).

[25]See, for example, J. C. Smith, 1983, 39–43; Joachimsen, 162–64; Brann; Price; Spitz, 1990. Ibid., 206, uses Nuremberg as a case study of German cities "in which humanistic studies were introduced and encouraged by an elite mercantile aristocracy."

[26]Wuttke, 1980.

[27]McHam, 190, suggests *effingere* was chosen because it referred to "Dürer's illusionistic skills" and the creative process. See also Hutchinson, 67–68, including Celtis's use of *effingere* when praising Dürer's creative process.

[28]For his use of the triple name, see Koerner, 184. For *Ut pictura poesis* (a poem is like a picture), see Horace, 480–81 (*Ars poetica* 361).

should be understood as a project in which the artist was aligning himself with the latest developments in cultural life.[29]

For viewers with humanist interests, the criteria for judging a superior work of art was derived from ancient literature, with Pliny the Elder's thirty-fifth book in his *Historiae naturalis* the most familiar source. From the time of Petrarch, who praised Pliny and owned a copy,[30] the *Historiae naturalis* provided an immense amount of information about the ancient world and it occupied an essential place in humanist libraries. As Anthony Grafton has written, "No text fascinated the humanists more, from the fifteenth century onwards, than Pliny's *Natural History*."[31] The first printed edition appeared in Italy in 1469, with fifteen more in the incunabula period before 1500, including several published in Venice about the time that Dürer visited the city. There were also four translations, a boon for Italian artists as it allowed them to access Pliny without having to consult a humanist intermediary.[32] In the North Pliny was also a valued author. Charles Nauert notes that the shift in scholarly activity from Italy to the North in the years around 1500 was especially marked in Plinian studies.[33] In Germany Philipp Melanchthon claimed that Agricola had studied Pliny, and the humanists Johannes Rhagius and Johannes Caesarius studied and lectured on Pliny over a period of years, as did Melanchthon himself.[34] Knowledge of Pliny was sufficiently extensive in the North that the anecdote about Apelles criticizing another painter for being hasty and negligent is included in Sebastian Brant's popular *Das Narrenschiff* (Ship of fools, 1494). Dürer's contribution to this volume included the woodcut for chapter 48 in which the anecdote about Apelles appears.[35]

No examples of Apelles's art survived, but as an authoritative source on the art and artists of the ancient world Pliny's *Historiae naturalis* provided a substantial amount of information about the ancient world's greatest artist, and his views had an essential role in forming the aesthetic judgment of Dürer's viewers. Above all, Apelles's fame was predicated on his achievements in creating a convincing

[29]For the development of *litterae antiquae* and its significance, see Wardrop; Ullman. Also see Gilbert; and Matthew, 629, for "the growing preference for roman letters." For their relation to the 1500 *Self-Portrait*, see McHam, 190; Wuttke, 1980, 79–80. For Dürer's interest in letters *antiqua*, see his *Manual of Measurement*, where he offers methods for their construction: Dürer, 258–94; Panofsky, 258.

[30]Nauert, 305.

[31]Grafton, 214. See also Doody for the volume's organization in various editions and its use as a source of information.

[32]Nauert, 307–16.

[33]Ibid, 309–11.

[34]Ibid., 312–13.

[35]Brant, 172 (fig. 62). For Dürer's woodcuts, see Kurth, 13–14 and figs. 49–62.

illusion with his portraits cited as a particularly impressive demonstration of this ability. Pliny testifies that "incredible as it sounds" Apelles's portraits were "so absolutely lifelike that an ancient physiognomist could prophesy the future of the sitter from his countenance."[36] Verisimilitude was Dürer's goal when he wrote, "to paint is to be able to portray upon a flat surface any visible thing."[37] The 1500 *Self-Portrait* is not only an extraordinary display of illusionism, but the intelligent eyes and commanding pose lent a prophetic aspect to the painting and the promise of an illustrious future. Just as Celtis was worthy to be crowned poet laureate, Dürer presents himself as the artist deserving to be acclaimed Germany's premier painter.

The continued insistence on an *imitatio Christi* interpretation of the 1500 *Self-Portrait* when, as Koerner observes, it can only be "demonstrated circumstantially" rests in large part on the position of the artist's hand and the frontality of his head.[38] If the reactions of Dürer's viewers are taken seriously, it was not the blessing hand of a Christlike figure they associated with the 1500 *Self-Portrait*, but the creative hand of a gifted German artist, their own *alter Apelles.* Apelles's treatment of the fingers was cited as an example of his ability to create a convincing illusion. Pliny describes a painting by Apelles in which "the fingers have the appearance of projecting from the surface."[39] In Dürer's *Self-Portrait* his hand dominates the lower part of the painting and like the fingers in Apelles's painting they demonstrate his ability to create the illusion of three dimensions. In his two earlier self-portraits both hands are visible, clasped with thumbs overlapping in the 1498 painting (fig. 2) and holding a flower in the 1493 version. In the 1500 *Self-Portrait* his hand occupies a central position and is seen against his dark clothing and in a raking light that emphasizes its three-dimensionality. Rather than having two fingers upright with the others bent in the position of a blessing hand, his forefinger is isolated and points inward toward his chest, its direction emphasized by the highlight on the fingernail. The position of the forefinger is a meaningful detail, another way to suggest that Dürer resembles Apelles. Dürer includes Quintilian (ca. 35–100 CE) in the dedication to his theoretical works,[40] and in his *Institutio Oratoria* Quintilian refers to Apelles. He writes, "it is by his genius and by his grace of which he carried the source within himself, that Apelles is incomparable."[41] When Erasmus describes Dürer as the successor of Apelles in his dialogue on the

[36]Pliny, 326–27 (*Nat. hist*. 35.36.89).

[37]Conway, 181.

[38]Koerner, 72.

[39]Pliny, 328–29 (*Nat. hist*. 35.36.92).

[40]Conway, 256. For the significance of the pointing finger, see Campbell, 98–99.

[41]Reinach, 358 (no. 479) (Quintilian, *Inst. Oratorio* 12.10.6): "Ingenio et gratia, quam in se ipse maxime jactat, Apelles est praestantissimus)."

Figure 2. Albrecht Dürer. *Self-Portrait*, 1498. Oil on panel. © Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

pronunciation of Greek and Latin he is following Quintilian when he writes, "in my view Apelles, who was a man with a generous and noble heart, would if he were now alive willingly stand down to our own Albrecht and allow him first place."[42] Dürer's pointing finger suggests that, like Apelles, he possesses inner genius and a "noble heart."

The technical problem of making fingers appear to project from the surface concerned Dürer on a number of occasions. He struggled with the challenge in early drawings such as his self-portrait at age twenty-two, and he addressed it in his theoretical writings; the depiction of hands continued to occupy him throughout his life, most memorably in his 1506 painting *Christ among the Doctors*, with its multiple hands at the center of the painting that hold books, twist, gesture, and thrust forward, silhouetted against the dark robes of the

[42]Erasmus, 1985, 399.

disputants.[43] Because an accurate three-dimensional depiction of hands and fingers when verisimilitude is the goal has been accomplished so many times since the sixteenth century it is possible to underestimate what this bravado display of expertise meant to the artist and his viewers. As Dürer later wrote in his instructions to the novice artist, it is easy to go wrong when drawing the hand, "for these lines are hard to draw aright."[44]

Proponents of an *imitatio Christi* view of the *Self-Portrait* place even greater emphasis on the frontal orientation of the figure. Jane Hutchison notes the "manifesto-like" nature of the painting, with Dürer presented as a "new Christianized Apelles," but adds that it deliberately invites "comparison with the image of Christ . . . [and] the many artistic reconstructions of the Sudarium, or veil of Veronica."[45] Dürer's woodcuts of the sudarium follow tradition by isolating the head of Christ and showing it frontally against Veronica's cloth. In Dürer's engraving dated 1513 and in the pen-and-ink drawing from the *Prayer Book of Maximilian* (1515), the sudarium is surrounded by two angels and Christ wears a crown of thorns. They postdate the 1500 *Self-Portrait* by more than a decade and are the only occasion when Dürer presents Christ in a symmetrical, full-face arrangement. More typically in Dürer's art Christ's head is tilted, as in his painting *Christ among the Doctors*,[46] or his *Christ as the Man of Sorrows*, a panel painting from around 1494 where Christ leans his head on his hand. Christ is a figure of suffering rather than triumph in Dürer's *Man of Sorrows with the Virgin Mary and John the Evangelist* (1509) from the *Engraved Passion*, and again his head is bent.[47] The frontality of the 1500 *Self-Portrait* also contrasts with Dürer's *Salvator Mundi*, usually dated around 1503–04, an unfinished work listed in a 1573 inventory as "A Salvator that Albrecht Dürer did not finish."[48] Christ makes the blessing gesture with his right hand, two fingers pressed close together as he points to heaven rather than toward his heart, and his head is inclined to the side.

Norbert Wolf believes Panofsky's emphasis on the *imitatio Christi* is too literal in its connection with the Passion and "does not fit with the ceremonial appearance of the sitter," yet he views the 1500 *Self-Portrait* in relation to "ancient icons of Christ"

[43]The painting is discussed at length in Bialostocki, 1959.

[44]Conway, 239, and 238 for Dürer's diagrams of the hand from his theoretical works.

[45]Hutchison, 67; see ibid., 189, for the "pointedly Christlike self-portrait of 1500."

[46]Dürer's painting *Christ among the Doctors* is reproduced in J. C. Smith, 2012, 177 (fig. 88).

[47]Dürer's *Christ as the Man of Sorrows* is reproduced in Koerner, 18 (fig. 8), and his *Man of Sorrows with the Virgin Mary and John the Evangelist*, 180 (fig. 94).

[48]A listing in 1588 for the same collection and sent to Emperor Rudolf II in Prague includes: "A Salvator was the last work he undertook." Nevertheless, it is "generally agreed that the painting dates from 1503/4": *Gothic and Renaissance Art in Nuremberg*, 290.

with their frontal orientation."[49] For an artist who had recently visited Italy and was anxious to compete with the Italians, these seem curious models for the artist to choose when portraying himself. Joseph Leo Koerner links Dürer's frontal position to the tradition of earlier works such as the *Holy Face* of 1440, attributed to Jan van Eyck, and Martin Schongauer's *Blessing Christ* from around 1467, although Dürer did not visit the Netherlands until 1520–21 and drawings are less accessible than paintings. Koerner also includes works that postdate Dürer's paintings, such as Hans Sebald Beham's woodcut *Holy Face* (1528).[50] The impression created by gathering these images together can be misleading. Dürer's contemporaries saw images of Christ differently, piecemeal rather than gathered in a book, and within a particular context that could vary widely, from a painting seen in the crowded chapel of a church during a religious service, to an engraving taken from a drawer by a humanist collector and discussed in the company of like-minded friends. For Dürer's audience who saw the 1500 *Self-Portrait* in a secular setting, who knew about the art and artists of the ancient world and were not yet distracted by the trauma of the religious struggles of the Reformation, there were other examples of a frontal scheme that were timely and close at hand.

In Conrad Celtis's *Quatuor Libri Amorum* (Four books of love) published at Nuremberg in 1502, both the emperor Maximilian and Saint Brigitte are shown full face. The female figure of Philosophy (fig. 3) in the same volume, a woodcut for which Dürer was responsible, is presented in the same way.[51] Philosophy faces the viewer and is surrounded with medallions that refer to Greek philosophers and Latin rhetoricians and poets. Jakob Elsner's *Posthumous Portrait of Thomas Reuss* from around 1486 is introduced by Koerner as a nonroyal, secular figure in a frontal position, although he assumes the pose was permissible only because Thomas Reuss was no longer alive. However, when he adds that the main function of the "en face arrangement" was less the accurate depiction of the sitter's individual features than "his representation as ideal type or *uomo famosi*," his use of the phrase "famous man" suggests a somewhat different perspective on Dürer's 1500 *Self-Portrait*.[52] A few years later, in a book published at Parma in 1516, Francesco Maria Grapaldi, the poet laureate, is portrayed in a similar, frontal position, wearing a laurel crown with his eyes lowered as he concentrates on the manuscript he is writing (fig. 4).[53] Dürer's eyes, by contrast, are visible, appropriate for the activities of an artist. He has not crowned himself with laurel, but his stately and poised demeanor,

[49]Wolf, 124–27. He also refers to the letter *Epistula Lentuli* (Lentulus's letter) with its reference to the "beauty of Christ": ibid., 125.

[50]Koerner, 80–109. Ibid., 103, 116, also refers to the *Epistula Lentuli* in terms of the *vera icon*.

[51]See Anzelewsky, 118–33, on "Die Philosophie."

[52]Koerner, 64. Pfisterer, 13 (fig. 3), also includes a frontal portrait with a secular subject by Wolf Hubert, although it is dated later (1544–49).

[53]J. A. Smith, 178 (fig. 13).

Figure 3. Albrecht Dürer. *Philosophy*, from Conrad Celtis, *Libre Amorum*, Nuremberg, 1502. By permission of Houghton Library, Harvard University.

sumptuous fur collar denoting success and high status, and especially his choice of a frontal view all serve to convey his claim as a famous man.

Most importantly, the frontality of the 1500 *Self-Portrait* was consistent with Apelles's example. Unless there were mitigating circumstances, the ancient sources suggest that Apelles favored a frontal pose when painting a portrait. In the *Historiae naturalis* Pliny admires Apelles for devising an original method: the clever use of a profile position to avoid showing the deformity of his subject, King Antigonus, who was blind in one eye.[54] Quintilian refers to the same story about Apelles and his portrait of the one-eyed king and says, "it is the entire figure of the face which makes the best picture."[55] Quintilian assumes that under

[54]Pliny, 326–29 (*Nat. hist*. 35.36.90).

[55]Quintilian, 1:294–95 (*Inst. Oratorio* 2.13.12).

Figure 4. Francesco Maria Grapaldi, from *De Partibus Aedium*, Parma, 1516. By permission of Houghton Library, Harvard University.

normal circumstances Apelles preferred to paint a full-face view of his sitter. By adopting a frontal view Dürer was composing the 1500 *Self-Portrait* in accordance with Apelles's practice.

A full-face view also offered Dürer the opportunity to follow Apelles's example in yet another way. Apelles's theoretical contributions to the art of painting were an important reason for his great renown, with Pliny reporting that Apelles was famous for having published "volumes containing the principles of painting."[56] According to Plutarch, Apelles was associated with a school of painting renowned for its intellectual approach. Its fame was based on progressive techniques that included the employment of fixed rules and

[56]Pliny, 318–19 (*Nat. hist.* 35.36.79).

a method determined for each subject.[57] Pliny is more specific. He says Apelles was educated by Pamphilus whose art was "accepted into the front rank of the liberal sciences," as he was "the first painter highly educated in all branches of learning, especially arithmetic and geometry."[58] As Panofsky notes, it was about 1500 that Dürer began to focus on the intellectual aspects of his art and devote himself with great seriousness to the study and explication of theories about art.[59] The ease with which a system of proportions can be overlaid on the 1500 *Self-Portrait* suggests that mathematical theories had a role in Dürer's creative process (fig. 5). It was a way to identify himself as a man of learning, like Apelles, who could develop rules and methods for picture making and, not incidentally, counter Italian artists who prided themselves on their command of perspective by demonstrating that he was also capable of using arithmetic and geometry to advantage.

Camerarius (1500–74) considered Dürer's theoretical erudition fundamental to his greatness, and the 1500 *Self-Portrait* is designed to emphasize his intellect and abilities as a theoretician.[60] The frontal arrangement emphasized Dürer's eyes. Focused and observant, they convey the concentration with which the artist studies the world. Dürer's high forehead, its height exaggerated in comparison with his earlier self-portraits, identifies him as a cultured man suited to learning. In his adages Erasmus cites Aristotle's *Physiognomonica* for the view that men with low foreheads are swinish and unteachable.[61] Dürer's hand, empty of the implements used to create the painting, draw attention to his inner resources, his knowledge and intellect, as the foundation of his art. Dürer presents himself not as a simple artisan, but as the possessor of a learned hand. In his praise for Dürer, Erasmus expresses admiration for the artist's intellectual achievements, recommending his theoretical works and describing them as "full of learning." Drawing on both Plutarch and Pliny, Erasmus makes a specific connection between Dürer's theoretical contributions and those of Apelles. Erasmus says, "Dürer is in the tradition of the ancient masters in the field, like Pamphilus of Macedonia and Apelles. Pamphilus was highly learned, as much in literature generally as in geometry and arithmetic claiming that these subjects were indispensable to him," and it was his follower, Apelles, who wrote "a book on painting in which he says many of the secrets of his art are derived from mathematics."[62]

[57]Reinach, 254nn1–2.

[58]Pliny, 316–17 (*Nat. hist*. 35.36.76–77).

[59]Panofsky, 80.

[60]Bialostocki, 1986, 21–22.

[61]Erasmus, 1982, 89 (no. 40), in the adage, "Sus Minervam — the sow (teaches) Minerva."

[62]Erasmus, 1985, 398 ("De pronunciatione").

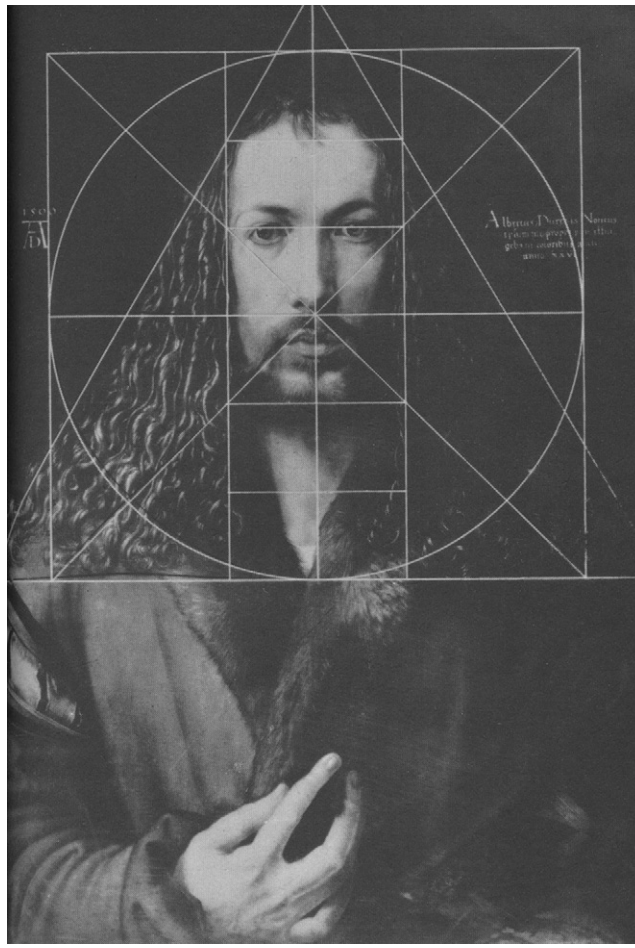

Figure 5. System of proportions, overlay of Dürer's 1500 *Self-Portrait in Fur Cloak*. © 1971 Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, Reinbek bei Hamburg.

Over time Dürer's interest in the application of mathematical principles to art making became a consuming passion that is evident in his *Manual of Measurements* (1595) and his many attempts to develop rules and methods for constructing the human figure. The dedications Dürer wrote for his theoretical studies testify to his belief that the great art of the ancients was based on such systems, and he uses the loss of these ancient treatises to justify his own efforts. Dürer says, "I certainly do not deny that, if the books of the Ancients, who wrote about the Art of Painting, still lay before our eyes, my design might be open to the false interpretation that I thought to find out something better than what was known to them. These books however have been totally lost . . . so I cannot be justly blamed for publishing my opinions and discoveries in writing, for that is

exactly what the Ancients did."[63] Pliny had credited "celebrated Apelles" with contributing more to painting than all the other artists combined with the volumes he published on the principles of painting; and it was rules and methods such as these that Dürer promulgated in his own writings as he tried to fill this lacunae for his own generation.[64]

Pliny also credits Apelles with diligent working habits. He says "it was a regular custom with Apelles never to let a day pass in which he did not practise his art by drawing a line, which has passed from him into a proverb."[65] Apelles's reputation for hard work applies with equal justice to Dürer.[66] The 1500 *Self-Portrait* is an impressive demonstration of his work ethic. The care with which each brushstroke is carefully rendered also follows Apelles by demonstrating Dürer's ability to create exceedingly fine lines. Pliny says that Apelles "asserted another claim to distinction when he expressed his admiration for the infinitely meticulous work of Protogenes," and then proceeded to outdo Protogenes by drawing "an extremely fine line," a line so minute that Protogenes was unable to match it.[67] Dürer's extraordinary ability to produce delicate lines and meticulous details is displayed to maximum effect in the 1500 *Self-Portrait* with an infinite number of fine lines creating his beard, mustache, the fur of his garment, and the mass of curly hair that falls upon his shoulders. The amount of detail Dürer incorporated in the painting when compared to his two earlier self-portraits is impressive, and the effect of such a virtuoso display on his audience was predictable. Camerarius describes the "feeling almost of awe" that one feels when gazing upon "the face of the bearded man, drawn by himself . . . with the brush on the canvas. . . . The locks of the beard are almost a cubit long, and so exquisitely and cleverly drawn, at such regular distances and in so exact a manner that the better any one understands art the more he would admire it."[68] It is an effect that Dürer accomplished without any "artificial aid," as Camerarius stresses, and in extolling the steadiness and exactitude of Dürer's hand his judgment was clearly formed by Pliny's anecdote about Apelles. Camerarius describes a similar meeting between Dürer and

[63]Conway, 230.

[64]Pliny, 318–19 (*Nat. hist*. 35.36.79).

[65]Ibid., 322–23 (*Nat. hist*. 35.36.84). The proverb is, "Non dies sine linea" ("No day without a line").

[66]Whether he was reacting to criticism from Italian artists or had become sensitive to Apelles's stricture about knowing when "to take the hand from the painting" (Pliny, 320–21 [*Nat. hist*. 35.36.80]), Dürer claims in the Latin inscription on his *Feast of the Rose Garlands*, painted in Venice in 1506, that the work took him "five months ("quinquemaestri spatio") to complete, when, as Panofsky, 110, demonstrates on the basis of a letter written by Dürer, it actually took him a month and half longer.

[67]Pliny, 318–23 (*Nat. hist*. 35.36.81–83).

[68]Bialostocki, 1986, 22.

Giovanni Bellini in which the Venetian artist was so impressed with Dürer's ability to create delicate lines that he speculated that Dürer must have special brushes "with which he could draw several lines at one stroke."[69] When Dürer responded that he used an ordinary brush and then proceeded to demonstrate, Bellini was properly amazed. Camerarius's report of this encounter between the two artists may be apocryphal, but it underlines the degree to which references to Apelles in ancient literature are evoked by the 1500 painting and influenced the reception of Dürer's art. In studies that favor the *Self-Portrait* as an *imago Dei* these passages from Pliny are frequently cited, but without emphasizing Apelles's role as exemplar or suggesting that Dürer used the 1500 painting to demonstrate his mastery of those skills for which Apelles was famous.

The possibility that Dürer was deliberately presenting himself as Apelles's successor is suggested even by the words he chose for the inscription. In most studies, *proprius* is translated as "eternal," "everlasting," or "imperishable."[70] If *proprius* refers to the protective function of the varnish Dürer applied to the painting it would be another instance in which he sought to emulate Apelles. Pliny says Apelles was famous for his "inventions in the art of painting" and with one exception these were useful to other artists.[71] The exception, Apelles's invention of a particular kind of dark varnish, was a special formulation that no other painter could imitate. Pliny says when a work was finished Apelles covered it with a layer of *atramentum*, some sort of liquid or substance so thin it was only visible when the painting was examined closely. The chief purpose of this translucent layer was to mute colors that might otherwise appear too brilliant and prevent "the brightness of the colors [floridis coloribus] from offending the eye."[72] The precise nature of the material is not known, but as Ernst Gombrich writes there is no question that "Apelles spread something on his finished paintings which both protected them and had certain aesthetic effects."[73] Dürer invented something similar. The original varnish no longer exists on the 1500 *Self-Portrait*, but Dürer clearly considered it a matter of importance.[74] In a letter

[69]Ibid., 21–22.

[70]Hutchison, 67, translates *proprius* as "undying"; Strieder, 53, as "everlasting"; and Koerner, 183, as "indelible." For Rebel, 157, it is, "unverganglichen (eigentumlichen) Farben" — "imperishable colors" — with the more common usage in parenthesis.

[71]Pliny, 332–33 (*Nat. hist.* 35.36.97).

[72]Ibid.

[73]Gombrich, 1962. Gombrich, 1963, notes that this passage is paraphrased in the second edition of Vasari's *Lives*: "Apelles' invention of a brown color, or rather varnish which enabled Apelles judiciously to temper his colors with more or less, as he deemed appropriate." See also Laurie, 33–34.

[74]Goldberg, Heimberg, and Schawe, 316, and 315–24 for the technical analysis of the painting.

written to Jacob Heller in 1509 he refers to "some excellent varnish" he used on the painting Heller had commissioned, and he stresses that it is a special formula "that no one else can make."[75] Dürer was claiming for himself an invention like that of Apelles, an original process that enhanced a painting and a technical advance that no other painter could imitate.

If *proprius* is translated as "special," its more usual meaning, it relates to Apelles's practice and the colors Dürer chose for the 1500 *Self-Portrait.* Apelles was famous for his view that too much is more disagreeable than too little,[76] and for ancient writers this was especially evident in Apelles's use of a limited palette. On two occasions Pliny makes the point that Apelles's greatest paintings were produced with only "four colors" ("quattuor coloribus solis").[77] In a story with particular relevance for Dürer's 1500 *Self-Portrait*, Plutarch reports that when Apelles painted Alexander the Great "he did not represent him with his natural coloring. He made him more brown and somber than he really was for it was said that Alexander had a white complexion and this whiteness was faintly tinted with rose on his chest and on his face."[78] It could be deduced from these references that Apelles's palette was limited and that in the interests of picture making Apelles had no compunctions about taking liberties with reality. In Dürer's two earlier self-portraits he portrays himself with golden-brown hair that has a reddish cast and he returns to this lighter tonality after 1500 when he includes his own image on the right side of the 1506 *The Feast of the Rose Garlands*, in the center of the 1508 *The Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand*, and in the lower corner of his 1511 *Adoration of the Trinity*. In the 1500 *Self-Portrait* Dürer drastically reduced his palette. Shades of brown and black predominate. His hair and complexion are darkened with only a faint hint of red on his lips. These alterations recall Apelles's practice and his portrait of Alexander. It was another way for Dürer to present himself as Apelles's worthy successor.

Apelles is the first painter named in Dürer's list of illustrious ancient artists,[79] and his admiration is clear when he refers to "the great painter Apelles" in the dedication to his theoretical works.[80] "Many centuries ago," Dürer writes, "the

[75]Conway, 70. Dürer warns Heller not to let anyone else varnish the painting, as "all other varnishes are yellow."

[76]Reinach, 356–57 (no. 476) (Cicero, *De Orat.* 22, 73). Cicero says this was the advice of Apelles who blamed painters when they did not have a sense of just measure.

[77]Pliny, 298–99 (*Nat. hist.* 35.36.50). See also Bruno, 53–59, for the four-color palette of the Greeks.

[78]Reinach, 348 (no. 458) (Plutarch, *Alex.* 4). See also Bruno's discussion of Pliny and Plutarch: Bruno, 61–66.

[79]Conway, 178–79. Also Bruno, 53–59.

[80]Conway, 256.

great art of painting was held in high honor by mighty kings, and they made the excellent artists rich and held them worthy,"[81] a statement that recalls Alexander the Great's famously high regard for Apelles. The 1500 *Self-Portrait* may be Dürer's boldest effort to identify himself as *alter Apelles* and lay claim to the same high status as that achieved by Apelles, but the influence of his ancient model is evident at other points in his career. Apelles was renowned for his ability to paint horses, a demanding "test of artistic skill," according to Pliny. Pliny describes a competition in which Apelles countered the intrigue of his rivals by having his entry, a "picture of a horse," shown to real horses. The horses "only began to neigh when they saw the horse painted by Apelles."[82] Dürer devoted an unusual amount of attention to accurate depictions of the horse, for example in his 1501 woodcut of *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* and the engravings *Saint Eustace* (1501?), *Small Horse* and *Large Horse* (1505), and *Knight, Death and the Devil* (1513).[83] The construction of the nude figure was another difficult technical problem in which Apelles was reported to excel. Dürer made it central to his own theoretical investigations and his interest is evident in prints such the *Four Witches* (1497), the *Men's Bath* (1497?), the *Temptation of the Doctor* (1498?), and *Adam and Eve* (1504). In book 35.95 Pliny says Apelles painted a "Hercules with face averted" as well as a heroic nude that "defied nature itself."[84] Dürer's engraving, *Hercules Defending Virtue against Vice*, usually dated around 1498, shows a nude Hercules seen from the back with his head averted.[85]

In his *Theologia Platonica*, written in 1474, Marcilio Fincino says, "When Apelles looked at a field he tried to paint it with colors on a panel. It was the whole field that showed itself in a single moment to Apelles, and aroused this desire in him. . . . First he looked at one flower, then the next and he paints it in the same way. . . . But as Apelles looks at one blade of grass and paints it, and then another, at different and successive moments of time, it is not an effect caused by the field, but by the soul of Apelles, whose nature it is to see and do different things one at a time and not simultaneously."[86] Ficino was drawing on Quintilian's statement about Apelles's inner "genius and grace" as the qualities that made the artist superior to all others. While Ficino's field is imaginary, his

[81]Ibid., 177. Dürer's statement appears in the introduction he wrote for his projected volume giving advice to young painters. It is a reliable indication of how the literature of the ancient world formed his own conception of art and the role of the artist.

[82]Pliny, 330–31 (*Nat. hist.* 35.36.95–96).

[83]For the horse in Dürer's art, see Cuneo. Cuneo does not include Pliny's reference to Apelles and the horse as a test of artistic skill.

[84]Pliny, 330–31 (*Nat. hist.* 35.36.95–96).

[85]Reproduced in Panofsky, 108.

[86]Gombrich, 1972, 77, citing Marcilio Ficino, *Opera omnis* (1576), 188. Koreny, 176, also refers to Ficino when discussing the *Large Piece of Turf*. It is reproduced in Koerner, 167.

description evokes an actual painting — Dürer's watercolor the *Great Piece of Turf* of 1503. It is one of Dürer's more unusual subjects, a painting in which each flower and blade of grass is detailed with infinite care. The well-established connections between Ficino, Celtis, and Pirckheimer[87] suggests that Ficino may have provided Dürer with another occasion for following Apelles's lead.

Dürer's woodcut, the *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand Christians* (fig. 6), provided a particularly good opportunity for the artist to follow Apelles's example, a prospect that may account for his choice of this obscure subject.[88] Pliny says that among Apelles's famous works were "pictures of people at the point of death."[89] Dürer's woodcut of the *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand* is filled with pictures of the dying — they plummet from the cliff, are decapitated, stabbed, and flailed, with a bishop meeting his death by having a hole drilled through his eye. The woodcut is usually dated 1498, the period after Dürer's return from Venice when he was ambitious to make his reputation. When Dürer repeated this composition with its multiple figures at the point of death for a panel painting, his *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand Christians* of 1508 (fig. 7), the connection with Apelles's famous painting was underscored. Dürer and a friend, usually identified as Conrad Celtis, have replaced the group of bound captives that are being flayed near the center of the woodcut (fig. 8).[90] Their dark cloaks and prominent position in the painting draw attention to the two men while the banner held by the artist testifies to his creative role. It bears Dürer's monogram and the Latin inscription "Iste faciebat ano domini 1508 / Albertus Dürer alemanus" ("Made in the year 1508 / Albrecht Dürer German"), a bold way to advertise himself as the German artist who made the painting.[91] Dürer looks outward, his concern not with the mayhem around him but with the viewer. Celtis, the man who first compared Dürer to the greatest artist of the ancient world with the phrase *alter Apelles*, also addresses the viewer while indicating Dürer's subject by gesturing toward the dying figures in the painting. If anyone viewing the earlier woodcut had failed to recognize the relation of the *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand* to Apelles's famous painting, the insertion of Dürer and Celtis in the 1508 painting ensured that the connection would not be missed. The introduction of two well-dressed men is a strange intrusion in this religious

[87]Spitz, 1957, 12; Rupprich.

[88]For the subject as a conflation of two legends, see *Dürer Master Printmaker*, no. 26.

[89]Pliny, 328–29 (*Nat. hist*. 35.36.90).

[90]The painting was created for Celtis's patron, the elector Frederick the Wise, and completed in 1508 shortly after Celtis's death. For Celtis as the most probable candidate for Dürer's companion, see Panofsky, 122; Anzelewsky, 136; Hutchison, 99; Koerner, 67.

[91]For Dürer as the artist who "most frequently and self-consciously exploited the Plinian Signature," see McHam 90, 192–96. Dürer was honoring himself with the banner in the painting perhaps in emulation of the ancient artist "honored with an inscription in the picture . . . written in antique Latin script": Pliny, 346–47 (*Nat. hist*. 35.36.116).

Figure 6. Albrecht Dürer. *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand Christians*, woodcut, ca. 1498. Harvard Art Museums / Fogg Museum, Gift of Mr. Paul J. Sachs, M10283. Photo: Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

subject, but comprehensible if understood as another way in which Dürer was identifying himself with Apelles, this time by painting people at the point of death.

During his career Dürer introduced new subjects, new techniques, new ways of painting, and a new and elevated role for the artist. In *De lingua Latina*, Marcus Varro's text on the Latin language familiar to every humanist, Apelles is identified as an artist willing to break with tradition. Varro writes, "The painters Apelles and Protogenes and other famous artists are not to be blamed because they did not follow the ways of Micon, Diores, Arimmas, and even earlier craftsmen."[92] When Dürer writes it is a dull head that "travels along the old path, simply following others," he is again following Apelles's example. It is only by

[92]Varro, 2:448–49 (*De lingua Latina* 9.6.12).

Figure 7. Albrecht Dürer. *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand Christians*, 1508. Oil on panel, transferred to linen. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

thinking for ourselves, he argues, that "art will once again reach the perfection it achieved among the Ancients."[93] Dürer's interest in every available piece of information about ancient art, artists, and their practice is evident in his writings and in his recommendation that the young painter be taught to "read and write well, and be also instructed in Latin so far as to understand certain writings."[94] Throughout his life Dürer continued to place a high value on the information about art and artists that could be found in the literature of the ancient world,

[93]Conway, 231–32.

[94]Ibid., 172; see also 231, where he specifically mentions reading Pliny and Vitruvius.

Figure 8. Detail, *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand Christians*, 1508. Oil on panel, transferred to linen. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

learning from it and judging his own status in terms of the importance granted to artists in the ancient world.

The cumulative effect of the correspondences between the 1500 *Self-Portrait* and the information available about Apelles in ancient literature supports the view that Dürer used the occasion to fulfill the role Celtis assigned to him. Much of the information could be found in familiar sources such as Pliny's *Historiae naturalis* and Quintilian. When Dürer says, "I set to work on my own and read Vitruvius,"[95] it suggests that his knowledge of Latin might be adequate for these references. Books written in Greek were a different matter, but not inaccessible to the artist, as his friends included Conrad Celtis,[96] the erudite patrician Willibald Pirckheimer, and the municipal physician Hartmann Schedel, who amassed a library of over 600 volumes. David Cast describes Dürer's *Calumny of Apelles*, the painting commissioned by the Nuremberg City Council in 1521 to decorate the Great Hall, as a "new and unusual" subject in the North.[97] Although

[95]Conway, 165. It is usually assumed that Dürer did not not read Latin, as he did not attend the Latin school for which he was eligible and only wrote in German. Since reading is easier to master than writing, it is difficult to judge his competence.

[96]For Celtis, see Spitz, 1957; Rebel, 125–34.

[97]Cast, 108; for Dürer's drawing for the fresco, see fig. 27.

there were Italian precedents for the subject, including a drawing by Mantegna, Cast believes it was not a "tradition of images" that motivated Dürer but "the prompting of scholars and the evidence of the language of a written text."[98] The story of Apelles's painting appears in a satire by the Greek author Lucian of Samosata. Lucian received a great deal of attention from Northern humanists with a number of his satires translated into Latin by Rudolf Agricola in 1479, and by Erasmus and Thomas More in 1506.[99] Another Greek author, Marcus Cornelius Fronto, may have influenced Dürer's closely observed and carefully rendered depictions of animals. In his *Epistula ad Caesar* Fronto writes, "if Apelles painted a monkey or a fox, even with this animal he would have taken a prize for his art."[100] This is another area in which Dürer chose to excel. One of his most impressive paintings of an animal, his watercolor *Young Hare*, is dated 1502, the period when he was most motivated to stress his qualifications as Apelles's successor.

The collection of Greek epigrams, the *Anthologia Graeca*, was another rich source for references to ancient art that received attention from Dürer's humanist friends. One epigram served Conrad Celtis as the subject of a poem written in praise of Dürer. In it the poetess Nossis describes a house dog fawning on a painting of his mistress, a painting so lifelike that the dog mistakes the image for the lady herself. In Celtis's adaptation it is Dürer's dog who is deceived and the source of the deception is a self-portrait by his master. Pirckheimer was also fascinated with Greek literature. In order to acquire the latest publications in Greek, Pirckheimer even enlisted Dürer's help when the artist was in Venice, writing and asking him to inquire at the publishing houses for any new texts. Pirckheimer's translations from the Greek included Plutarch and Lucian and his library contained a number of volumes written in Greek, including Theocritus's *Idylla* published at Venice in 1495. His copy is inscribed to Dürer and contains a miniature by the artist. He also owned the first edition of Greek epigrams to be printed, the *Anthologia Graeca Planudea* published by John Lascaris at Florence in 1494. Pirckheimer's interest in the volume led him to translate two of the epigrams into Latin, one on marriage and the other on the choice of a profession.[101] It was an interest he may have shared with the artist, as there is a close relation between Dürer's engraving of *Nemesis*, usually dated 1502, and one of the epigrams from the Greek anthology. The epigram, "On a Statue of

[98]Ibid., 89.

[99]Mack, 37; Thompson. For interest in Lucian in Germany, see Holzberg; and Cast, 89–92. See also Cast, 111–12, for the significance of "humanist imagery" in the Rathaus.

[100]Reinach, 358–59 (no. 483) (Fronto, *Epist. Ad Caes*. 2,3.1,7).

[101]Rupprich, 388, and 390 for Pirckheimer and his great enthusiasm for "Greek studies."

Nemesis," says, "she warns us by her cubit-rule and bridle neither to do anything without measure and not to be unbridled in speech."[102]

Pirckheimer's possession of the *Anthologia Graeca Planudea* and enthusiasm for the epigrams also raises the possibility that another reference to Apelles provided the rationale for Dürer's 1500 *Self-Portrait.* The epigram reads: "On a Picture of Apelles / Noble Apelles painted himself in the picture."[103] If Pirckheimer, Celtis, or another German humanist discovered this epigram it would be a crucial piece of information about the greatest artist of the ancient world, one they would be certain to share with the artist.[104] To have it on ancient authority that Apelles painted himself would more than justify Dürer's own status-conscious self-portrayal.

The waning years of the fifteenth century and first decade of the sixteenth were the time when Dürer's engagement with the art and literature of the classical world is most in evidence. Behaim's wish, expressed in 1507, to have "only a drawing which tastes a little of Antiquity as I described it to [Dürer] in my last letter" is a testament to the value Dürer's compatriots placed on his efforts to draw on the past for use in the present.[105] If Dürer's goal in the 1500 *Self-Portrait* was to present himself as the Apelles of his time, an artist worthy of the laurel wreath, there were obvious reasons for composing the painting in ways that would evoke his great predecessor. When the various references to Apelles are compared with Dürer's painting — the frontal position, geometric construction, regal attitude, hand pointing inward, complex and delicate lines, adoption of a limited palette, intense realism, and the novelty of an artist portraying himself in a large and impressive painting — the 1500 *Self-Portrait* is consistent with Apelles's art, practice, and reputation as transmitted through the literature of the ancient world.[106] The

[102] *The Greek Anthology*, 5:292–93 (epigram 223). Dürer's print of *Nemesis* is reproduced in *Dürer Master Printmaker*, 76 (no. 37), where it is suggested that Dürer's source was a poem by Angelo Poliziano first published in 1482. *The Greek Anthology* seems more likely given the date, especially as "Nemesis was credited with transferring Greek knowledge to Rome": *Dürer Master Printmaker*, 76. This would make the print especially appropriate considering Pirckheimer's activities in this period.

[103] *The Greek Anthology*, 3:330–31 (epigram 595); Land, 2006a, 1–2, believes the self-portrait appeared in a painting in which other people were included, although there is nothing in the epigram to indicate it.

[104] Pfisterer, 11, says the epigram was not known in 1500. Given the loss of sixteenth-century books and manuscripts, Pfisterer's view is difficult to verify.

[105] Bialostocki, 1986, 27.

[106] It is unlikely that Dürer was alone in using Apelles's art as a guide for his own practice. The unusual aspects of Giotto's art may reflect Giotto's knowledge of Pliny: Land, 2005. For Leonardo da Vinci's debt to Apelles, see Land, 2006b. In the North the art of Jan van Eyck also suggests knowledge of Pliny's *Naturalis historiae*: Preimesberger. Van Eyck was obviously erudite, engaged in diplomatic missions, and even used quasi-Greek inscriptions on one of his frames.

similarities suggest that far from being an accidental combination of characteristics, they resulted from a deliberate strategy on Dürer's part, a way to demonstrate his mastery of those skills that had made Apelles preeminent. Seen from this perspective, the appellation *alter Apelles* given Dürer by his contemporaries is no longer gratuitous, a mere stereotype that tells us nothing about the work itself or what his contemporaries found truly fascinating about the painting.

When Apelles is seen as Dürer's model it resolves the problem at the center of interpretations that continue to view the 1500 *Self-Portrait* as a Christlike image — how to account for Dürer's lack of humility. Dürer presents himself as a proud, ambitious artist and he uses Latin words written in *litterae antiquae* that draw attention to the humanist context in which the painting was to be seen. Dürer's self-portraits painted in 1493 and 1498 were designed to celebrate the artist and his ability. The 1500 *Self-Portrait* has the same objective. By adjusting the earlier images in ways that accorded with Apelles's practice, Dürer could advance the cause of German humanism and elevate his own status in the process. To base this self-aggrandizing self-portrait on images of the Holy Face would have placed Dürer in an overbearing, transgressive relation to the deity; but if he was identifying himself as *alter Apelles* blasphemy was not an issue. It would not violate the concept of the *imatatio Christi* as his contemporaries understood it. To carry "the cross on your shoulders,"[107] to show oneself imitating Christ in your own life by sharing his sufferings and humanity, was admirable, but to present oneself as a proud and regal figure and claim this kind of self-identification with the Savior was arrogant and unprecedented. Later, when Dürer drew himself as a *Man of Sorrows* (fig. 9), they could recognize the analogy between his physical sufferings and the sufferings of Christ; but Dürer does not portray himself as a figure of humility and suffering in the 1500 *Self-Portrait*. On the contrary: he is a commanding, powerful presence.

Whether Dürer deliberately patterned his 1500 *Self-Portrait* on icons and images of the Holy Face, or whether the Christlike similarity is an unintended, perhaps subliminal, consequence of his effort to appear as *alter Apelles*, is a question that cannot be resolved definitively. Artists' intentions are always elusive. How they are assessed depends on the original context, in this case the political, religious, and cultural situation in 1500, the state of Dürer's career at the time, the options available to him (written as well as visual), and the concerns and interests of those he was trying to impress. Dürer's 1500 *Self-Portrait* was created during a time of hope and ambition for the artist and the German humanists. Twenty years later the 1500 *Self-Portrait* would be inconceivable. By then Dürer's own hopes were fading as he suffered from ill health and overwork,[108] the halcyon days

[107]Bialostocki, 1986, 99.

[108]See Conway, 131–32, for Dürer's letter to the Nuremberg Town Council written in 1524. When Dürer says, I grow daily "older, feebler, and more helpless," he may have exaggerated somewhat as he was requesting money, but his troubles were real.

Figure 9. Albrecht Dürer. *Self-Portrait as the Man of Sorrows*, 1522. Kunsthalle Bremen – Der Kunstverein in Bremen, Department of Prints and Drawings.

of humanism were a thing of the past, and the dream of a great German Renaissance had been overtaken by the upheavals of the religious controversies and outbreak of the Reformation. David Price sees the tendency to view Dürer's "early work from the vantage point of his post-Reformation statements about the church" as a "recurring problem in Dürer studies." It is, he says, as though the "Reformation began in 1498 with Dürer's *Apocalypse*."[109] Later in life religious issues gained importance for Dürer, but in the early years of his career his principal concern was to establish himself as Germany's preeminent artist and prove he could compete with the Italians. In the years to come he received important

[109]Price, 4.

commissions, painted royal portraits, and was "painter laureate" in fact if not title when the emperor put him in charge of various projects, including the great *Large Triumphal Chariot of Maximilian* (1518–22).[110] But in 1500 this was in the future and Dürer was still in the process of staking his claim to be recognized as *alter Apelles*.

[110]J. C. Smith, 2012, 275–77.

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