The conventional view is that Michael Pacher did not occupy himself in any significant way with Roman antiquity. Neither Roman history or mythology, nor the material relics of Roman life in Italy or the Alpine regions, seem to play a role in Pacher’s art. In Padua Pacher saw the frescoes of the life of St. James by Mantegna, the most erudite pictorial interpretations of Roman costumes and building styles of their day. But Mantegna’s antiquarianism left no traces in Pacher’s own work. And Pacher’s subject matters are uniformly Christian.

The one exception to this iconographical rule is the fresco portrait of Emperor Otto I over the south portal of the collegiate church of St. Candidus at Innichen in the Puster valley (ills. 2, 3). There is general agreement that the fresco was at least designed by Michael Pacher, and possibly executed by him as well. Several scholars have seen the hand of Friedrich Pacher. The painting was executed perhaps in the 1470s or even later. There is no proof that the crowned figure in the center is Otto I. Otto Pächt in 1929 called the figure simply “a prince.” There are in fact good reasons for believing that the figure does represent Otto. Still, one has to guard against the tendency to take the entire south portal at Innichen as self-explanatory. A secular prince above a church portal is no ordinary iconographical scheme. Emperors were sometimes depicted in series, as in the quatrefoil busts at Castle Runkelstein near Bozen, from the early fifteenth century. But the portrait of a single emperor in such a crucial location at the oldest monastery in all of the Tyrol is another matter. This painting advances a quite specific historical claim.

The Otto portrait also gives us an opportunity to rethink the conventional wisdom about Pacher’s non-relationship to antiquity. This view is based on a restrictive definition of the “Renaissance” as a philologically informed emulation of the institutions and forms of the ancient pagan world, undertaken in full consciousness of the irrevocable distance between modern and ancient life. It is a definition that makes room for only a few fifteenth-century painters and sculptors. It is doubtful that any artist who was not in direct contact with humanist scholars would ever have thought to approach the Roman past in such a way. The antiquarian approach was in many respects a marginal, even mannered way of thinking about the past, one that could quickly—as perhaps even in Mantegna—devolve into an ostentatious but ultimately anecdotal display of erudition. In fact there were any number of other ways to approach the past in painting. These can sometimes be hard to recognize because we are so accustomed to looking for a few standard markers of an “authentic” engagement with antiquity: historically correct representations of Roman buildings as round-arched, for instance; or reproductions of correctly stressed and serified square Roman majuscules. By focusing on such markers, significant as they are, we risk filtering out all sorts of artists and works that paid attention not to arches or capital letters, but to other dimensions of the ancient world.

There were also other ways of thinking about Roman antiquity than as a distant golden age separated from the present by the gulf of barbarian destruction and bad taste. Most Germans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, for instance, did not think of the stretch of time between Charlemagne and Charles IV as a period of ignominious decline, or in any sense as a “middle age.” On the contrary, they believed that Charlemagne had succeeded in extending the term of Roman history by “translating” the imperial crown across the Alps. The German emperors of the tenth, eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries were considered Roman emperors. This idea was shared even by many Italian scholars. The *Illustrium imaginibus* by Andrea Fulvio (Rome, 1517), an album of woodcut portraits based on coins and medals, offered a survey of famous Roman faces extending from Janus to Emperor Conrad II. The Italian antiquarian was capable of perceiving a certain numismatic continuity. But for the Germans the effect of this sequence was profound. Since the imperial crown was still in the hands of the Germans, there was no urgent need for a “renaissance.” The Roman way of life had in some senses never come to an end.

This living connection with the emperors could be perceived even in the Alpine regions, an area not normally associated with the Renaissance rediscovery of antiquity. Emperor Maximilian, for example, was intensely interested in the traces that the Roman emperors had left in these regions. Maximilian brought a Roman milestone from Mittenwald in the Bavarian Alps to his provisional capital in Innsbruck. He preserved a
marble column found in the Kuntersweg near Bozen that had allegedly been erected by Emperor Maximin. In 1497 a Roman votive tablet was uncovered in the crypt of the parish church in Sterzing. The tablet had been erected by a certain Postumia Victorina to herself and to her brother-in-law Tiberius Claudius Raeticanus. Maximilian had the inscription mounted on the outside wall of the church above a larger marble tablet with an explanatory inscription (both tablets are now imbedded in the north wall of the nave). The monument was granted special attention presumably because it seemed to refer either to Emperor Tiberius or to his nephew Claudius; they were both named Tiberius Claudius.

Maximilian's aim was not to revive the ancient world, but to celebrate what he saw as an unbroken chain of historical personalities that extended from the earliest history of Europe to modern times, indeed to himself. What this means is that Maximilian approached many aspects of what we call the medieval past with the same piety he had for Roman antiquity. For example, Maximilian was an avid student of the high medieval vernacular heroic poems, both the courtly epics like Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parsifal and Titurel and the anonymous sagas like the Nibelungenlied. Maximilian drew no fundamental distinction between the chivalric heroes and the heroes of Biblical or Roman antiquity. He searched these stories for clues to ancient European history. In 1508 Maximilian commissioned Marx Reichlich, Pacher's pupil, to restore the frescoes of scenes and characters from the old heroic literature at Runkelstein. We know now that the frescoes were painted in the late fourteenth century and early fifteenth centuries, but at that time there was little capacity for dating paintings on the basis of style. It is possible that they were considered much older than they really were. Maximilian’s interest in the frescoes at Runkelstein was fully archeological and not different in kind from his interest in imperial Roman inscriptions.

Likewise, to grasp the archeological dimension of Pacher's art, we need to be looking for more than just representations of round-arched buildings or Roman military costumes. Many different aspects of medieval form and iconography carried antique connotations, and when we find them passed on from one artist to another, we should not automatically dismiss this as mere "tradition". The charged forms were often being preserved with some degree of self-consciousness, a quantity admittedly difficult to identify. For example, the acanthus and pomegranate motifs in some of Pacher's gold grounds obviously had a classical pedigree: the backgrounds behind the Evangelist symbols on the insides of the wings of the St. Thomas Becket altar (Graz, Joanneum), the Sts. Peter and Paul predella panels from Wilten (Vienna, Österreichische Galerie), the curtain held by the angels in the Gries altar, the gold cloths and panels in the shrine at St. Wolfgang. We know that Pacher did not leap over
the intervening medieval centuries in order to retrace the
acanthus and the pomegranate. Instead, the motifs came to him,
with a long transmission involving textiles and eventually
pattern books in painters' workshops. Indeed, some of these
textiles are represented in Pacher's paintings, for example the
altar cloth in the Presentation in the Temple on the St. Wolfgang
altar, with two heraldic animals against a foliated ground. Yet it
is possible that from Pacher’s point of view, such patterns con-
formed a relationship of continuity between his own works and
much older – by him perhaps only dimly understood – modes
of art-making.
One needs to be alert as well to representations of architectural
elements in fifteenth-century painting that to our eyes look
modern, but that may have been intended to look very old. Fif-
teenth-century northern painters frequently represented pre-
Gothic architectural elements, such as round arches and basket
capitals, as emblems of the ancient world or even as symbols for
the Old Testament. But we should not assume that all fifteenth-
century narrative painting respected the strictly binary symbolic
opposition between round and pointed arches, even if to our
eyes these alternatives are inescapably coded "old" and "new".
Sophisticated art historical analyses of architectural symbolism
in early Netherlandish painting have made it difficult for us to
recognize that the distinction between the "modern" pointed-
arch style and the "antiquated" round-arch style was not neces-
sarily clear to all painters. How indeed was a German painter to
know that the pointed arch was unknown to the Romans? The
binary opposition between round and pointed did provide an
iconographic matrix within a narrow painting tradition and, in-
creasingly in Pacher’s time, within the culture of script and type.
After only a generation of printing, metal types were beginning
to fall, for economic reasons, into two polarized families, roman
and gothic. But there is no reason to think that a Tyrolean
painter of the 1470s would have been thinking along these lines.
In general there was less symbolic weight attached to the round-
pointed opposition than we assume. The northwest tower of the
cathedral in Worms, for example, was constructed in 1470 to re-
place the Romanesque tower, lost in a fire in 1429, and appar-
etly imitates that lost tower, with round-arched windows and
blind arcades. It was indeed common in late medieval restora-
tions to imitate the styles of older parts of buildings. Neverthe-
less, the windows of the upper story at Worms were pointed, not
round, to our eyes ruining the imitation. In Feldkirch in the
Vorarlberg the choir of the parish church was built around
1520. The arcades with round pillars and strange round capitals
with quadratic abacuses seem to adapt themselves self-con-
ciously to Romanesque or even Renaissance style. But in the
vaulting of the choir the architect chose Gothic, pointed
ribvaults, and apparently was not disturbed by the contra-
diction. 

ill. 5: Document of Otto I, Innichen, Archiv
In this light, we may find it easier to identify the historicizing dimension in Pacher’s narrative paintings. In the Presentation in the St. Wolfgang altarpiece, for instance, Pacher describes marble pillars and a free-standing base with such attentiveness that we can imagine that he understood them as features of antique architecture. In the Stoning scene he reveals the lower part of a tympanum which is clearly meant to suggest pre-Gothic sculpture. But it is even possible that the many pointed arches in Pacher’s scenes were meant to represent ancient architecture, and that they therefore cannot be dismissed as anachronistic blind spots. Pointed arches were the modern style, of course. But they were understood as a great technical achievement, and there was no reason to doubt that the ancients had not mastered the pointed arch as well. The Gothic architecture represented in Altdorfer’s St. Florian altarpiece, in scenes that otherwise are remarkably attentive to exotic and historically remote costumes and ornament, suggests that pointed arch architecture was, even in the eyes of an early sixteenth-century painter, not historically incompatible with antiquity. Certainly the best example of this paradox is the contemporary notion that Milan Cathedral, a church built by Germans, was the principal modern exemplar of Vitruvian architecture. The minor humanist Walter Rivièru illustrated his Vitruvius commentary Unterrichtung zu rechtem Verstandi der lehr Vitruvii (Nuremberg, 1547), with a woodcut of that church’s interior elevation. Rivièru cannot be accused of provinciality since he borrowed the illustration from Cesare Cesariano’s Vitruvius translation, De architectura libri dece (Como, 1521) (fol. B6r–B7r)\(^{11}\).

Our understanding of the imperial portrait at St. Candidus will also evolve if we try to look through the stylistic markers that to our eyes identify it unmistakably as a work of its own time. This was an artifact that was possibly not meant to be securely dated, or definitively associated with the moment of its physical execution. The function of the portrait was to advance a claim about the early history of St. Candidus. The portrait in effect „published“ the involvement of the emperor in the foundation of the monastery. But the painted portrait was not just a passive report on a well-documented past. It will be argued here that the portrait became one of the documents. It entered into the fabric of the building such that the seams between old and new would have very quickly become no longer detectable. The fresco looks to our art-historically trained eyes entirely characteristic of its time. But we need to question whether contemporary eyes were so sensitive to the chronological dimension of painterly style. The assertiveness of the iconography overwhelmed any skepticism about the reliability of the painting as a document. As a result, the portrait was able to assume an active, participatory relationship to the medieval past, which we recall was not conceptually distinguished from Roman antiquity. Indeed, there is even documentary evidence of such confusion. The Innichen fresco belongs to a completely different sort of „Renaissance“.

The monastery of St. Candidus was established by Tassilo III in 769 as a Benedictine foundation. Bishop Otto of Freising transformed it into a collegiate church in the twelfth century. But from the beginning of the fourteenth century Emperor Otto the Great starts to figure in the chronicles as the founder. This confusion possibly grew out of the memories of the role played by Bishop Otto. The legend did turn out to have some basis in history, because it was Emperor Otto who in the tenth century placed the monastery under the control of the bishops of Freising and thus guaranteed its immunity from the jurisdiction of the local counts. The connection to Freising was increasingly stressed in the later middle ages. St. Corbinian, the founder of Freising, appears as a patron at Innichen at the latest in the fifteenth century. Both Propst Degenhart von Salching (1446–1453) and Propst Georg Priesinger (1453–1483), who was presumably responsible for the commission of the portal fresco, were cathedral canons in Freising. The monastery was not transferred to the jurisdiction of Brixen until the sixteenth century.

The fresco above the south portal keeps both the imperial and the archepiscopal connections in play (ill. 1). St. Corbinian appears in the fresco to the right of the emperor. The pendant figure to the left is St. Candidus himself. Behind the three figures there is a round-arched arcade. The two saints, busily writing, sit on benches that appear to rest on consoles with now illegible inscriptions on painted strips of parchment. The princely figure between and above them, sword in hands, is possibly to be understood as enthroned. It is difficult to say because the round arch of the door below seems to cut through the body of the prince and with it the entire painted architecture. A three-line inscription in gothic minuscule on a parchment to the left of the figure is illegible. The coat-of-arms with a silver double-eagle on a red ground points to the imperial identification. The coats-of-arms to the left and right are those of Görz and Carinthia. The beard and the crown also suggest imperial iconography: compare Pacher’s Church Fathers altarpiece where Trajan appears wearing basically only a beard and a crown. Pacher’s image of the bearded emperor derives not from historical portraits of medieval emperors, which were few in number, but perhaps from more recent representations of Constantine in narrative painting.

The various scholarly datings of the fresco, which range from the 1460s to the 1480s, are based entirely on style. The commission of the fresco is undocumented and has to be inferred from the building history. The church is basically a mid-twelfth-century construction. A second building campaign ended in 1284, and to this day it remains difficult to say which
parts belong to the twelfth and which to the thirteenth century. The bell-tower dates from the early fourteenth century. A fire in 1413 occasioned various improvements, including the rebuilding of the large west entrance hall in 1468 and work done on the transept in 1478. At some point a small Romanesque porch may have been relocated from the south portal to the north side. The alleged removal of the porch would have liberated a patch of wall for the fresco painting. St. Candidus remains the largest Romanesque church in the Tyrol. From the time of the Blood Miracle which followed upon the fire of 1413, the church became a pilgrimage magnet, indeed for some centuries the most important in the entire eastern Alpine region.12

What was the function of the three portraits above the south portal? They must be thought of as referential images in a strong sense. Like tomb portraits, they do not simply evoke or illustrate institutional history from a safe distance. Rather, they were understood as pictorial documents, with real connections to the historical personalities they note, in this case especially the worldly ruler. This notational operation depended on the contemporary beholders’ openness to the possibility that behind every referential image stood an unreconstructible sequence of similar images, one replacing the other; and in general on beholders’ indifference to the specific date and circumstances of execution of any given image. The hypothesis of this pattern of reception is hard to accept at Innichen, where the paintings are in close proximity to a major maser with a highly distinctive personal style. Surely anyone in the region would have known who did the paintings, and when, since Innichen was only a day’s journey east of Pacher’s base in Bruneck. Yet there are several curious circumstances at Innichen that lead me to propose that this fresco ought to be thought of as something like a „forged“ pictorial document.

First of all, the document that establishes the role of emperor Otto in the history of the monastery has been unmasked, only in the last years, as a forgery (ill. 5). It seems to be not a forgery of the eleventh or twelfth century, which one would almost expect, but of the fifteenth century. Attractive, successful forgeries of early medieval scripts are rare in the fifteenth century, or so we think.

The authenticity of the document, which is kept at the archive at St. Candidus, was accepted without question until the eighteenth century when the local historian Joseph Resch suggested that it was only a copy of the lost original. Resch realized that the date 925 could not be right because Otto was only thirteen years old in this year. He explained the date as a lapus calami for 965, an error committed when the document was copied in the twelfth century. Until 1988, however, no one had seriously considered a note written on the back of the document.13 This eighteenth-century note says that the document on the front was actually written in 1452 by the notary Peter Fritzlar. According to Egon Kühbacher, the information in the eighteenth-century note was grounded in the researches of Resch. Peter Fritzlar supposedly travelled all around the Tyrol helping different monasteries invent their pasts. He was especially useful in Innichen where much of the archive had been destroyed in the fire of 1413. Kühbacher accepts the attribution of the Otto document to Fritzlar, but because the seal is supposedly authentic, he persists in believing in a lost, earlier medieval model. Kühbacher proposes that Fritzlar was copying the authentic Ottonian document. However, it is even possible that he was copying a twelfth- or thirteenth-century forgery of the original. At any rate, Fritzlar had several good local models for the script at his disposal, for example, a document of Otto III dated 993, itself a forgery or copy of the high middle ages. The idea of fifteenth-century forgeries of high medieval documents is unfamiliar. But recently the paleographers Martin Steinmann and Bernhard Bischoff have collected a number of examples of good fifteenth-century imitations of pre-Gothic scripts carried out at southern German monasteries.14 The link between the historiographically self-conscious documentary experiments in the archive at Innichen in 1452 and the fresco by Pacher only some years later is obvious, and was already pointed out by Kühbacher. From this perspective, the fresco starts to look like a similarly creative anachronism, a forged pictorial document with retroactive force.

The second curious circumstance surrounding the Innichen fresco is an audacious but appealing hypothesis by the art historian Erika Doberer. She argued in 1972 that the entire south portal is a montage of the fifteenth century.15 Doberer pointed out that the rectangular Maestas Domini relief in the tympanum was probably not designed for its current location, and suggested that it had been transferred from the Romanesque interior, perhaps taken from a dismantled chancel (ill. 4). This seems quite plausible. But the next step in her argument is riskier. Doberer proposed that the entire portal, complete with archivolts and the door jambs with engaged columns and foliate capitals, is a „forgery“ of the fifteenth century, carried out at some point after the fire of 1413. Some of the capitals, she argued, are spolia, others – the flat ones at the extreme right – imitations executed in the obsolete style (ill. 6). The signature on the upper moulding of the framing pilaster on the right, LUDOVICUS PARAVIT IAM LAPI (IDEM), although in terms of content entirely possible in the thirteenth century, is done in roman majuscles, according to Doberer, characteristic of the late fifteenth century. The epigrapher Walter Koch confirmed that the letters were possible in the third quarter of the fifteenth century.16

In a series of highly imaginative articles since 1959 Erika Doberer has proposed several cases of the reuse of Romanesque
sculpture in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Gal-
suspense in Basel, to take one striking example, emerges in
Doberer’s analysis as a Renaissance montage. Doberer’s
claim that the south portal at Innichen might be neo-Ro-
manesque actually grew out of a suggestion by Nicolò Raso.
Rasmo once introduced evidence of archaicism carried out by
the so-called Maestri Comacini – Lombard stonemasons – in
the South Tyrol in the fifteenth century. The portal of
Sanzeno in the Val di Non, securely dated to the late 1480s or
early 1490s, has neo-Romanesque engaged columns in the
jambs similar to those at Innichen (ill. 7). Another nearby ex-
ample of a late fifteenth-century simulation of Romanesque
style is the porch, and possibly parts of the round-arched portal
as well, on the west façade of the cathedral at Bolzano (1499).
But Rasmo was not convinced by Doberer’s extension of his
thesis to Innichen. It is true that there is no clear trace of the
fifteenth century as there is at Sanzeno. Renate Vergeiner, in
her Salzburg dissertation of 1990, accounted for the physical
discontinuities in the jambs and the archivolts with the argu-
ment that the thirteenth-century building campaign involved
an expansion and reassembly of the portal. She dates the jambs
and the archivolts to the twelfth century, but assigns the tym-
panon, the door-posts, and the foliated frieze of capitals to the
next century. She believes the tympanon relief was imported
directly from Lombardy and inserted into the portal in the
thirteenth century. Vereiner does speak confusingly of „later“
work on the acanthus leaves in the capitals of the jambs, but it
is not clear what she means by this. She does not seem to al-
low for a fifteenth-century contribution to the portal, and does
not mention Doberer’s hypotheses at all. Kühbacher, in his
monograph on the church of 1993, also does not mention
Doberer.
Doberer overstated her case by proposing a radical revision of
the building history. She argued, for example, that the original
Romanesque nave had a flat roof and was only vaulted in the
fifteenth century. She went on to claim that the side aisles with
their exterior buttresses were constructed only in the fifteenth
century. The old portal would then have had to be moved
outward to fit between the new buttresses. This is an unlikely
theory.
Yet Doberer was surely right to worry about the structural dis-
junctions in the portal. The trimmed wings of the eagle and the
angel show that the rectangular tympanon relief was taken
from elsewhere and inserted into the semi-circular space. It is
not clear why most historians of the building resist the idea
that the relief might have been inserted as late as the fifteenth
century, or that the portal might have been partially recon-
structed and retouched in this period. In order to make the
case about the documentary, retrospective character of the
fresco, one does not need to accept Doberer’s full-blown thesis
of fifteenth-century side aisles, with a neo-Romanesque portal completely reconstructed out of bits and pieces of the predecessor portal. One only has to imagine that the Romanesque portal was damaged in the fire of 1413. It is not hard to believe that a ruined relief or fresco in the tympanum had to be replaced by a new relief, perhaps seized from the chancel or rood-screen inside, and that the damaged archivolts and capitals had to be reassembled and restored. If the old porch was removed, this would have left the outermost pillars of the jambs without anything to support, and exposed the wall above the portal. All this could have happened at any point after the fire. The reconstruction of the whole church lasted for decades and included the new west entrance hall in 1468 and the work on the transept in 1478. Eventually a fresco was commissioned for the space above the portal. In effect, the new painting assumed the role of architectural sculpture. The conceit of painted sculpture was not unfamiliar to Pacher, as we know from the Church Fathers altarpiece.

The result at Innichen was a new display-wall which not only represented the great antiquity of the foundation but also attested to it. Important although not indispensable to this argument is the premise that wall painting in this region and in this period was not automatically seen as a modern medium, but rather as a timeless medium, a medium without any particular chronological associations. Fresco painting was certainly a modern medium, but it was also an old medium. One could see painted images from the fourteenth, thirteenth, even twelfth centuries on the walls of every church, none of them of course datable with any accuracy at all. Another possibility is that contemporary beholders took for granted that old, worn out images could be replaced by newer images, and would still retain their original force. That is to say, even a patently modern fresco could function as a legitimate substitution for a prior image. An example of such a substitution from the orbit of Pacher was the fresco by Master Leonhard in the tower chapel at Neustift, which around 1465 replaced a wall painting of a Crucifixion from the early thirteenth century. In the event, there was practically no capacity for monumental stone carving in this region around 1470. The fifteenth-century rebuilders of the church could not have simulated a Romanesque relief even if they had wanted to. Local talent was restricted to wood sculpture and painting. This is why spolia from other parts of buildings were so crucial.

A famous example of deliberate emulation of an older pictorial model is Michael Pacher’s interpretation of the Coronation of the Virgin by Hans von Judenberg in Bozen. The community in Gries explicitly stated in the contract of 1471 that they wanted a Coronation that resembled in aller der masen that of Bozen. This is one of the main examples in Theodo Müller’s important essay „Retrospektive in der deutschen Plastik“.

From our point of view the older Coronation bears the unmistakable marks of its stylistic moment, the „Weicher Stil“ of around 1420. But in 1471 the date of execution of the older work was perhaps already not so clear. It may have been seen as simply an older work worthy of imitation.

Similarly, it can be argued that contemporary recipients of the fresco in Innichen would have been very soon ready to believe in its great antiquity and its documentary reliability. And even if these beholders remembered or had learned that the painting had in fact been painted by a living or recently living Pustertaler master, even then they would have assumed that the newer painting was a substitution, a „new instance“, of an older image. The concept that such a referential image might have an „author“ would have been completely alien to most beholders. The Innichen fresco in fact belongs to a long tradition of undated, practically undatable „retrospective“ monuments, beginning with the tombs and founder portraits of the high middle ages – at Naumburg, for instance – and extending to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Examples of sculptural tombs of long-dead founders which carried documentary force comparable to the Otto portrait at Innichen are the tomb of St. Simpertus from Sts. Ulrich and Afra at Augsburg, now in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich (1492, but undated), and the tomb of Bishop Aurelius at Hirsau (1498, but dated 830).

At Innichen the incentive to fabricate an imperial document was all the greater, since authentic portraits of Otto I were so rare, amounting to a handful of coins and seals which anyway the clerics of St. Candidus would not have known. The now-famous retrospective portraits of Otto were all far to the north: the engraved image in the cathedral cloister at Magdeburg from the 1240s; the seated portraits of Otto and Edith in Magdeburg; the statues of Otto and Adelheid in the cathedral at Meissen from the late thirteenth century; the equestrian statue at Magdeburg, also late thirteenth century.

For Innichen we have a historical voice who lends plausibility to this reading of the Pacher fresco, and none other than that of Paracelsus, the physician and natural philosopher. Paracelsus described St. Candidus in his Carinthian Chronicle of around 1538. He reports, however, on unspecified authority, that the church was built by Emperor Frederick I, and that Barbarossa himself had adorned the building mit einigen in Stein gehauenen Bildern. Unter diesen Bildern, Paracelsus continues, ist ein Bild in der Gestalt eines Mönches mit Gürtel und bloßem Kopfe, wie die Mönche zu sein pflegen, gehauen worden. That can be none other than the small head on the right jamb of the south portal, just below the badly-weathered word LUD(OVICUS), the beginning of the artist’s signature LUD(OVICUS) PARAVIT ISTAM LAPIDEM (ill. 8). This is either a self-portrait of a thirteenth-century sculptor or just a grotesque head. But Paracelsus goes on to explain: Über seinem Haupte ist mit
großen Buchstaben auf dieser Weise LUTERUS geschrieben worden. Zum Teil wird dies wegen des Wetters und des Alters nicht leicht erkannt, es sei denn, dass man es genau ansieht. In other words, Paracelsus reads „Ludovicus“ as „Luther“. He then comments: *Was das für ein Vorzeichen ist, kann jeder bei sich gut ermessen*. He saw the word and the tiny „monk“ as mysterious twelfth-century predictions of the Protestant Reformation. (Paracelsus seems to have ignored the remainder of the signature on the other face of the capital. Perhaps he was unwilling to read LAP … as lapidem, which after all should not take the feminine pronoun istam)²⁹.

When Paracelsus speaks of „images cut in stone“ by Frederick Barbarossa, he may well be referring to the Pacher frescoes. It does not seem likely that he meant the animal and grotesque ornamental sculpture found in various places around the church. If so, then we must conclude that Paracelsus falsely remembered the Pacher fresco as carved reliefs. This is interesting because it means that distinctions between media which seem crucial to us, and which help us make judgments about date and meaning, were perhaps not so important for contemporary beholders. But even if Paracelsus was not numbering the Pacher fresco among Frederick’s original sculptural commissions, he still seems to have taken the image for a reliable document of imperial participation in the building’s history. For some reason he thought the image of the prince in the center was a portrait of Frederick Barbarossa. Either he thought that the painting was very old, or that it was relatively new but replaced some older documentary image. The point is that even for a learned traveller who was altogether in a position to gather intelligence from the local clerics, the Pacher fresco only two generations after its execution was already iconographically indeterminate and very possibly undatable as well.