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CHARLES DAVIS:

A Künstlerbrief by Valerio Belli and the genre 'Künstlerbriefe'

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M. VALERIVS SCVLPTOR
GEMMARVM

TOBIAS STIMMER, *Woodcut Portrait of Valerio Belli*, in: NICOLAS REUSNER, *Icones sive imagines vivae literis claris virorum*, Basel: Waldkirch, 1589.

The woodcut is based on a portrait of Valerio Belli belonging to the portrait collection of Paolo Giovio at Como (inscribed: *M. Valerius Sculptor Gemmarum*). An inventory of portraits sent to Como in May 1549 lists a portrait of “*M.^{ro} Valerio dalle Corniole*”; the 1613 inventory, “*Valerio scultore di gemme*”. In 1780, Giambattista Giovio reports to Girolamo Tiraboschi the continued existence at Como of portraits of various “*uomini non nominati negli elogi*” of Paolo Giovio, among them that of “*Valerio Scultor di gemme*” (Giuseppe Campori, *Lettere artistiche inedite*, Modena 1866, p. 238). The professional qualification “*sculptor gemmarum*” of the woodcut is the same as that adapted by the artist himself in signing his letter of 1544 published here. The inscription of the portrait apparently dates from Giovio’s time. The painting on which the woodcut is based appears to record a notable likeness of Belli, made late in his life. The portrait remained in the collection of the Giovio heirs, the Rovelli family at Como (1928: Luigi Rovelli, *L’opera storica ed artistica di Paolo Giovio, Il museo dei ritratti*, Como 1928, pp. 189, 193). – See Linda Susan Klinger, *The Portrait Collection of Paolo Giovio*, Princeton University 1991, vol. 2, p. 28, cat. no. 50.

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A KÜNSTLERBRIEF BY VALERIO BELLI

For Valerio Belli, see below, 'Biography', 'Literature', and Appendix I.

The letter presented here testifies rather directly to Belli's close association with an important Florentine/Roman art patron of the sixteenth century, Cardinal Giovanni Salviati, as well as to Belli's manufacture of a metal drinking vessel, a type of object unknown among Belli's surviving works. It also reports a portrait which he has repaired for the cardinal, and this was most probably a carved gem, quite possibly an antique one, in line with Belli's reputation as a expert on small ancient *objects d'art*. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the letter is the artist's closing signature as "*El Servitor aficionato de V.^a S.^a R.^a Valerio di bellj / Scultor in gemme*". Valerio Belli's professional qualification in this signature as "*scultore in gemme*" is almost unique among the historical testimonials for the artist, in which he refers to himself and is referred to as an "*intagliatore*" most often, or infrequently as a "*zogiolerius*" (*gioielliere/orefice*; jeweller). Only one other time is he referred to as "*egregio viro Valerio quondam Antonii de Bellis cive Vincentie, excellentissimo gemmarum scultore*" (*Valerio Vicentino*, 2000, p. 418, doc. 71), when he appears as a witness in 1534. Although Belli was active in the goldsmiths's guild of Vicenza, the description '*orefice*' is one that appears to elude him. Although the word '*scultore*' may well refer to an '*intagliatore*' or '*incisore*', nevertheless the contrast between the signature "*Valerio di belli che intalia le corniole*" (letter to Michelangelo, 1521) and the present "*Valerio di Belli Scultore in gemme*" represents a striking status difference in Belli's professional self-presentation, reflecting a fairly evident aspiration to be the equal of other leading sculptors in the Veneto of the time, the equal, for example, of Jacopo Sansovino in Venice, or of the young Bartolomeo Ammannati, then active in nearby Padua, and soon in Vicenza. Belli had been visited by Vasari in Vicenza in 1542, and his artistic aspirations seem at times nearly *avant-garde* for an artist born in 1468, nearly in the middle of the Quattrocento.

The letter presented here is found in the Archivio Salviati of the Archivio Segreto Vaticano (Città del Vaticano [b. 2, fasc. II, doc. no. 9]), where it remained unnoticed until Michael Hirst saw it many years ago. (The Salviati archival *fundus* at the Vatican appears to have been subsequently reordered.) In the course of the preparations for an exhibition dedicated to Valerio Belli in Vicenza, he called the letter to the attention of Margaret Daly Davis, to whom he sent his photographic duplicate copy made in 1964, consenting to its use in the exhibition, planned for 1996, which, in the event, did not take place owing to a failure of the hoped for funding by the Banca Popolare Vicentina to materialize. The transcription presented here is that of the editor of this note, and it is followed by a version in modern Italian. A normalized transcription by Manuela Barausse is found in *Valerio Belli Vicentino*, 2000 (p. 433), where the document is presented without comment.

FULL TEXT OF THE LETTER

R.^{mo} S.^{re} mio senpre observandissimo: Io ho receputo una littera de V.^a R.^a S.^a et ho intexo como quella a comeso a m(esse)r francesco Corbolj che me dia .▼. [= scudi] cento dilche io ne ringratio quanto io so et posso V.^a R.^a S.^a de tanta cortexia a usato verso di me et senpre la usada [.]. Certo V.^a S.^a R.^a mea fato un grande aiuto ch(e) io era in grande bisogno per la Cauxa ch(e) sa V.^a S. R.^a: Circha del bocale de metalo dicho ch(e) io nefo un prexente a quela et priegola quanto io posso che se io ho cosa ch(e) piaqua a V.^a S.^a R.^a se degna comandarme ch(e) questo mesara de grandissimo favore et contento si ch'io la repriego se degna comandarmi. Io ho aconcio el ritratto et holo mandado in mano del illustre S.^{re} prior de Roma como quella mea comeso ch(e) lomandi a V.^a R.^a S.^a ala quale umilmente me ricomando[.] De vicenza ali .8. Zenaro 1544

*El S(er)vitor aficionato de V.^a S.^a R.^a Valerio dibellj
Sculor in geme/–*

Address:

° † °
*Al R.^{mo} S.^{re} El Cardinal Salviati
Signore suo sempre observandis.mo
I[n] ferara –*

[on the outside of the letter]

In another hand [on the outside of the letter]:

*Di valerio vice(n)tino co(n)fessione di
scudi ce(n)to deli viii di Genaro*

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R^{mo} s^{ve} me s^{ve} obsequiosissimo: Jo ho veduto una lettera
 de V^{ra} S^{ta} q^{ue} ho inteso como quella accorro a m^{re} francesco carbo
 che me dia & certe dilent io ne ringrazio quanto io so & passo V^{ra} S^{ta}
 de tanta cortesia a uero Vero di me q^{ue} sempre la usoda. Certo
 V^{ra} S^{ta} meo fare un grande aiuto ch^o io emingrime bisogno
 per la causa ch^e a V^{ra} S^{ta}: Cioche del bocale de metallo
 dico ch^e io nefo l'ubrigente aquela q^{ue} brigola quanto io posso
 ch^e se io ho esa ch^e piagua a V^{ra} S^{ta} se degua comandarme ch^e
 questo mesava de grandissimo fauore & contento. S^o ch^e io
 la Re priego & degua comandarme. Jo ho aconciol^e Rivato
 & hec mandado in mano del illustre s^{to} prior de Roma como
 quella meo comoro ch^e lo mand^e a V^{ra} S^{ta} da quale l'umilment
 me ricomando De vicenza ali 8^{to} Zouare 1577

El s^{ve} prior aficionado de V^{ra} S^{ta} Valerio di bellj
 scultor in gen^e 2

ILLUSTRATION OF THE LETTER

A MODERNISED VERSION OF THE LETTER

Reverendissimo Signore mio sempre osservandissimo. Io ho ricevuto una lettera di Vostra Reverendissima Signoria e ho inteso come quella ha commesso a messer Francesco Corboli che mi dia scudi cento, del che io ne ringrazio quanto io so e posso Vostra Reverendissima Signoria di tanta cortesia [che] ha usato verso di me e sempre l'ha usata. Certo Vostra Signoria Reverendissima mi ha fatto un grande aiuto che io ero in grande bisogno per la causa che sa Vostra Signoria Reverendissima. Circa del boccale di metallo dico che io ne fo un presente a quella et priegoLa quanto io posso che se io ho cosa che piaqua [= piaccia] a Vostra Signoria Reverendissima, se degna comandarmi che questo mi sarà di grandissimo favore e contento si ch' io La repriego se degna comandarmi. Io ho acconciato il ritratto et hollo mandato in mano dell'illustre Signore Priore di Roma come quella mi ha commesso che lo mandi a Vostra Reverendissima Signoria alla quale umilmente mi raccomando. Di Vicenza alli 8 Gennaio 1544

*Il Servitore affezionato di Vostra Signore Reverendissima Valerio di Belli
Scultore in gemme/–*

*Al Reverendissimo Signore Il Cardinal Salviati
Signore suo sempre osservandissimo
In Ferrara –*

In another hand:

*Di Valerio Vicentino confessione di
scudi cento delli viii di Gennaio*

ANNOTATION:

REVERENDISSIMO SIGNORE MIO SEMPRE OSSERVANDISSIMO: Formula of address (Francesco Sansovino, *Del segretario*, Venezia: Appresso Francesco Rampazetto, 1565, fol. 11v–12v).

VOSTRA REVERENDISSIMA SIGNORIA / VOSTRA SIGNORIA REVERENDISSIMA: Both are formulas of address: *loc. cit.*, fol. 9v.

MESSER FRANCESCO CORBOLI: probably a Florentine Merchant. Michelangelo bought property from Francesco Corboli in 1546 (*Carteggio indiretto di Michelangelo*, ed. Paola Barocchi, Kathleen Loach Bramanti, Renzo Ristori, Firenze: SPES, 1995, vol. 2, pp. 23, 25, 26, 27). A sixteenth-century Francesco Corboli is also found in Urbino.

SCUDI CENTO: a significant sum. Here probably the ‘scudi d’oro (gold scudo), the standard gold coin in the Papal States and elsewhere in the mid-16th century.

LA CAUSA: Belli thanks Cardinal Salviati for the 100 scudi he has received: “*Certo Vostra Signoria Reverendissima mi ha fatto un grande aiuto che io ero in grande bisogno per la causa che sa Vostra Signoria Reverendissima.*” The ‘causa’ may refer to the process (“*ex causa dotis*”) against Belli for the recovery of the dowry of his dead daughter, Tarsia Belli, resolved in 1538 in favour of his former son-in-law, Bernardino Terzo, the payment of which (175 scudi) may have experienced considerable delay (see *Valerio Belli Vicentino*, 2000, documents no. 74, 79, 85; cf. no. 86, 87).

BOCALE DI METALLO (BOCCALE): a drinking vessel of metal (jug, mug, tankard; *Pokal, Krug*), presumably an ornamental vessel in silver or gold.

SIGNORE PRIORE DI ROMA: Bernardo Salviati (1508-1568), the younger brother of Cardinal Giovanni Salviati, in 1544, the Priore di Roma. Jacopo Sansovino donated the “*modello di terra*” of his Madonna del Parto to the “*Priore di Roma Salviati*” (Vasari). In an inventory of the property of Bernardo Salviati are mentioned “*medaglie trenta di mano di Valerio*” (Pio Pecchiai, “Una saliera del Cellini ed altri oggetti preziosi ed antichi posseduti dal cardinale Giovanni Salviati”, in: *Archivi d’Italia e rassegna internazionale degli archivi*, ser. II, XI-XVI, 1942, p. 132). These derived from his brother’s collections. The document is also in *Valerio Belli Vicentino*, 2000, p. 444. In 1544 Bernardo appears to have been at Padua (Costamagna, *infra*, p. 230).

SERVITORE AFEZZIONATO: This is a somewhat infrequent closure for a letter, and possibly it might be taken as a genuine and not merely conventional expression of affection and familiarity on the part of Belli toward Cardinal Salviati, but it is also a standard formula of closure. See Francesco Sansovino, *cit.*, fol. 11r.

IL CARDINAL SALVIATI: Giovanni Salviati, 1490-1553; cardinal 1517; legate in Umbria: 1543-1553.

For Giovanni Salviati as a patron of the arts, see: Philippe Costamagna, “Le mécénat et la politique culturelle du cardinal Giovanni Salvati”, in: *Francesco Salviati et la bella maniera*, ed. Catherine Monbeig Goguel, Philippe Costamagna, Michel Hochmann, Roma: École Française, 2001, pp. 217-252 (with extensive citation of literature). In the early 1540s Cardinal Salviati apparently often resided at his diocese in Ferrara (p. 244).

VALERIO BELLI, BIOGRAPHICAL LITERATURE:

Julius Meyer, „Valerio Belli“, in: *Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon*, ed. Julius Meyer, Hermann Lücke, Hugo von Tschudi, vol. 3, Leipzig: Verlag Wilhelm Engelmann, 1885, pp. 379-382

Sebastiano Rumor („Notizien von“), “Valerio Belli”, in: *Thieme-Becker*, vol. 3, Leipzig 1909, pp. 249-250

Franco Barbieri, “Valerio Belli”, in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 7, Roma 1965, pp. 682-684

Giovanni Mariacher, „Valerio Belli“, in: *Saur Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon*, vol. 8, München-Leipzig: Saur, 1994, pp. 475-476

John R. Melville-Jones, „Valerio Belli“, in: *Grove-Macmillan Dictionary of Art*, vol. 3, London 1996, p. 645

Giorgio Vasari, *Die Leben der ausgezeichneten Gemmenschneider, Glas- und Miniaturmaler Valerio Belli, Guillaume de Marcillat und Giulio Clovio*, tr. Vittoria Lorini, ed. Anja Zeller, Berlin: Wagenbach, 2006, pp. 13-39, 91-153

VALERIO BELLI, BIOGRAPHY:

The goldsmith, crystal engraver, gem carver, medallist, and “sculptor” Valerio Belli, often called ‘Valerio Vicentino’, was born in Vicenza, probably around 1468, but this is not certain. He died in Vicenza in July of 1546. In the very early sixteenth century, he was active in Venice and subsequently in Rome. In the 1520s he was for a time again in Venice, and around 1530 returned definitively to Vicenza, visiting Rome again around 1540. Numerous plaquettes, bearing his name, were made from Belli’s designs.

The account given by Julius Meyer in volume three of the *Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon* (ed. Julius Meyer, Hermann Lücke, Hugo von Tschudi, Leipzig 1885, pp. 379-382; unmentioned in: *Valerio Belli Vicentino*, 2000) retains its validity as an excellent general treatment of Valerio Belli even today. This work ended with volume three. For a reference work this account of Belli is surprisingly complete in the fullness of its information and notable for its balanced evaluation of the historical sources, despite occasional details which have been subsequently revealed mistaken. Many later biographical entries compare unfavourably. Meyer’s biography of Belli is quoted below in its entirety in Appendix I.

ART HISTORICAL LITERATURE:

Although a very considerable and mostly specialist literature concerning Valerio Belli had accumulated long before the year 2000, it was only with the publication of a fully illustrated monograph of over five-hundred pages at this time – *Valerio Belli Vicentino*, ed. Howard Burns, Marco Collareta, Davide Gasparotto, Vicenza: Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura ‘Andrea Palladio’/Neri Pozza, 2000 – that the artistic figure and indeed the artistic stature of Valerio Belli came into focus and could be accurately appreciated by a larger public. This work was the result of a research *équipé* (Burns, Collareta, Gasparotto, Beltramini, Foschi, Barausse, and myself, 1994 ff.) with numerous external collaborators. Owing to the long and unaccounted delays in this project, I declined to participate in the publication. This fundamental work with its nearly complete photographic documentation will doubtless long remain the fundamental point of reference for Valerio Vicentino, although it should not be thought that it exhausts its subject or that its results should be viewed uncritically.

Among subsequent studies: Giuseppe Toderi, Fiorenza Vannel, *Le medaglie italiane del XVI secolo*, Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 2000, 3 vols., vol. 1, pp. 287-301; Philip Attwood, *Italian Medals c. 1530-1600 in British Public Collections*, London: British Museum Press, 2003, vol. 1, pp. 205-224; Charles Davis, “Ritratti di Valerio Belli, Valerio Belli ritrattista”, in: *Il ritratto nell’Europa del Cinquecento*, ed. Aldo Galli, Chiara Piccini, Massimiliano Rossi, Firenze: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento/Olschki, 2007, pp. 243-277 (with bibliographical update).

LIBRI DI LETTERE, BIBLIOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS:

The Warburg Institute website contains a very useful guide to the humanist letter: “Some Sources for Early Modern Letters” (part of the ‘Scaliger Correspondence’ Project: Anthony Grafton, Paul Botley, Dirk van Miert): <http://warburg.sas.uk/scaliger/Epistobib.htm>.

Franz Josef Worstbrock (ed.), *Der Brief im Zeitalter der Renaissance*, Weinheim: Verlag Chiemie, 1983 (Taschenbuch 1994)

The basic work for the study of the ‘*libri di lettere*’ is: Amedeo Quondam, *Le “carte messaggere” – Retorica e modelli di comunicazione epistolare: per un indice dei libri di lettere del Cinquecento*, Roma: Bulzoni, 1981

See further: Claudia Ortner-Buchberger, *Briefe schreiben im 16. Jahrhundert: Formen und Funktionen des epistolarischen Diskurses in den italienischen libri di lettere* (Humanistische Bibliothek 53), Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2003; Gianluca Genovese, *La lettera oltre il genere: il libro di lettere, dall’Aretino al Doni, e le origini dell’autobiografia moderna*, Padova: Antenore, 2009; Lodovica Braida, *Libri di lettere: Le raccolte epistolari del Cinquecento tra inquietudini religiose e “buon volgare”*, Bari: Laterza, 2009 (announced); Gabriella Zarri (ed.), *Per lettera. la scrittura epistolare femminile tra archivio e tipografia secoli XV-XVIII*, Roma: Viella 1999.

Robert Vellusig, “Brief”, in: *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit*, vol. 2, Stuttgart/Weimar, 2005, pp. 405-413

KÜNSTLERBRIEFE: A GENRE OF KUNSTLITERATUR ?

The *Künstlerbrief* in the modern understanding or usage of the term is nearly a new-found word, dating to the mid-nineteenth century or somewhat earlier (*Künstlerbrief*: ‚artists’s letters’; ‚lettere artistiche’/ ‚lettere pittoriche’; ‚carteggio di artisti; lettres des artistes’ / ‚correspondances d’artistes’). In its modern acceptance with the promise of insight into the artist’s secrets and intentions, the *Künstlerbrief* does not constitute *stricto sensu* a genre of the historical literature of art. Nevertheless, letters by artists were printed very early, and certainly by the mid-sixteenth century in Italy, as soon as books of *lettere volgari* appeared, printed in significant numbers, and the term ‘*lettere pittoriche*’ itself appears in a book first published in 1704, there referring to a manuscript assembled very much earlier (see *infra*), and thus the historical concept of artists’s letters, which constitutes the basis for a literary genre, must date at least to the Seicento. The oldest known *Künstlerbrief* may be that of Taddeo Gaddi (7 September 1341) – or so it seemed to Hubert Janitschek in 1880 (*Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, p. 343) – and the newest was written just yesterday. The terms ‘artists’s letters’ and ‘*Künstlerbriefe*’, when taken to include only the letters written by artists and not the letters written to them, represents a one-sided view of the artist’s correspondence – as if it were a monologue without recipients –, and the light it can shed upon the artist’s life and works.

As adumbrated in the preceding observations, this genre underwent in the course of the centuries, a transformation with respect to its *raison d’être* – its purposes and aims – but the essential subject matter remained the same: letters written by artists. Early collections of artists’s letters aimed first at the diffusion of original documents useful for reconstructing the biographies of artist and the history of art – its works and their ordering – and then to illuminate principles and precepts of the fine arts. The modern genre of the *Künstlerbrief* perhaps became popular because readers hoped in artists’s letters to find a more intimate understanding of their art and to come “closer to the master”, a promise extended by the name of a recent exhibition of drawings by Michelangelo (London 2005), with a similar suggestion that an artist’s drawings may bring the viewer into closer proximity to the creative moment, to the birth of the art work. Thus the appearance of books collecting artists’s letters for a lay audience occurred as early as the mid-nineteenth century. More recently such books have become more numerous and exhibitions dedicated to the same theme have made their appearance. In these productions there is also sometimes present an element of modern mass culture’s tendency to seek intimacy with celebrities through the media of print, sound, and image, a tendency perhaps most pronounced in the tabloid press and in some internet sites, but one also present on a *feuilleton* niveau – an interest, that is, more in the artist himself than in his works, in the works of art he made. A part of such expectations is destined to be disillusioned, if only because artists frequently do not say what readers want to hear, or read, speaking elliptically, if they say anything at all.

The art historian, Robert Goldwater, who died in 1973, published in 1945 a book entitled *Artists on Art*, where he wrote in his first sentence, “The contemporary artist, asked to write about his art, hesitates.” Goldwater doubtless had first-hand knowledge, for in 1938 he had married Louise Bourgeois, who was to become the world-renowned Surrealist artist and sculptor after her husband’s death. Goldwater continues, “The tradition of verbal shyness handed down to him by his craft has been reinforced by his own experience, and he will tell you that “explanations” rarely explain. His work, the best part of him, is there to speak for itself; those who do not understand its language will profit little from an approximate translation into the foreign tongue of words – even were this really possible.” Turner wrote that “Painting is a funny business.” And, even if the artist’s principal occupation has been the making of his art, nevertheless artists have “written and talked a great deal about it – about what painting and sculpture, painters and sculptors are and should be” (Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves, *Artists on Art from the XIV to the XX Century*, ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1947, p. 7). If Gainsborough’s letters, later judged to be beyond the limits of good taste, were largely destroyed, *Artists on Art* includes letters by Leonardo, Michelangelo, Sebastiano del Piombo, Raffaello, Dürer, Pontormo, Cellini, Ammannati, Lambert Lombard, Annibale Carracci, Reni, Sacchi, Rubens, Poussin, Watteau, De La Tour, Prud’hon, Reynolds, Lawrence, Jacques-Louis David, David D’Angers, Géricault, Van Gogh, Pissaro, and many others.

Printed books of letters appeared almost with the invention of printing. In 1492 a small book of thirty-one letters by Saint Catherine of Siena was published by Fontanesi in Bologna. Based on ancient models (Cicero, Seneca, Pliny the Younger), humanist letterbooks, collections of Latin epistles, also appeared quite early, and if they contained letters addressed to artists, I do not know. In any event the future of the artist’s letter lay not with the Latin humanist letter, but with the *lettere volgari*, a genre of printed letter books virtually invented by Pietro Aretino with the publication of his *Primo libro* published in January of 1538 (*De le lettere di m. Pietro Aretino libro primo*, Venezia: Marcolini) and followed by five more books (all published together in Paris in 1609, 6 volumes). Aretino was followed by an explosion of such printed letter collections in Italian, but he dominated the genre for nearly a decade. The artistic component in Aretino’s letters is high, as is demonstrated by his *Lettere sull’arte* in four volumes (ed. Fidenzio Pertile and Ettore Camesasca, Milano: Edizioni del Milione, 1957-1960). But even Aretino’s *Primo libro* included letters addressed to Giorgio Vasari, Leone Leoni, Sebastiano del Piombo, and other artists, including Michelangelo and Sebastiano Serlio, thus opening the door to publishing artists’s letters to Aretino. This occurred as early as 1551 with the first volume of *Lettere scritte al signor Pietro Aretino* (Venezia: Marcolini, 1551-1552, 2 vol.), which contained letters written by Vasari and other artists. Aretino’s *lettere volgari* were soon followed by letter collections edited by Nicolò Franco (*Le pistole volgari*, Venezia: Gardane, 1539) and by the very young Francesco Sansovino (*Lettere sopra le dieci Giornate del Decamerone*, Venice: 1542), containing letters to artists and letters by artists. Perhaps the first letter of Michelangelo to be printed was one written to Pietro Aretino in 1537, published in 1545 in the *Lettere volgari di diversi nobilissimi huomini, et eccellentissimi ingegni (...) libro secondo* (Venezia: Aldus, 1545, fol. 40). There soon followed that of 20 January 1542 written in Rome to the Aretino imitator Nicolò Martelli in Florence and printed in *Il primo libro delle lettere di Nicolo Martelli* (Firenze: a istanza dell’autore, 1546, fol. 8-9). Benedetto Varchi’s survey of artists concerning the priority of painting or sculpture (*paragone*) produced, if perhaps unintentionally, a first small collection of artists’s letters, eight in all: Benedetto Varchi, *Due lezioni: nella prima delle quali si dichiara un sonetto di M. Michelagnolo Buonarotti ; nella seconda si disputa quale sia piu*

nobile arte la scultura, o la pittura, con una lettera d'esso Michelagnolo (...), Firenze: Torrentino, 1549, 155 p.)

Leaving dedicatory epistles by artists, e.g., Alberti, aside, Giorgio Vasari, in his *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani* (Firenze: Lorenzo Torrentino 1550, vol. 2, p. 993), alludes to Raffaello's famous letter to Pope Leo X concerning the antiquities of Rome and the history of ancient architecture and sculpture (“*Inoltre mi sono aiutato ancora e non poco de gli scritti di Lorenzo Ghiberti, del Domenico del Ghirlandaio e di Raffaello da Urbino (...)*” = ed. Torino: Einaudi, 1986/1991, vol. 2, p. 916). And in the second edition of the *Vite* of 1568, Vasari prints a letter written to Papa Pio IV by Sofonisba Anguissola (1568, II, 562) and several letters from Michelangelo to Vasari himself, with the intention of documenting Vasari's claim to friendship with the master. In the wake of Vasari, *Kunstlerviten* became a venue for publishing letters by artists. Bellori, who publishes a letter to “*Il Signor Annibale Carracci*” from Sisto Badalocchi and Giovanni Lanfranco and several letters by Domenichino, is one example, and Baldinucci another. Carlo Ridolfi publishes a letter by Titian to the King of Spain (Ridolfi-Hadeln, II, 191). Malvasia's *Felsina Pittrice* contains letters by Raffaello, Annibale and Agostino Carracci, Ottaviano Cambi, Ventura Salimbeni, Francesco Brizio, Camillo Bolognetti, Giovanni Battista Bonconti, Giovanluigi Valesio, Francesco Albani, and Domenichino, among others, some of which belonged to the author.

The work that established the genre of the ‘*pittoriche*’ for all time was, of course, Giovanni Gaetano Bottari's *Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura scultura e da' più celebri personaggi che in dette arti fiorirono dal secolo XV al XVII*, Roma 1754-1768 in six volumes. (A seventh volume compiled by Luigi Crespi was issued in 1773.) Most often consulted is the expanded new edition issued in 1822-1825: *Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura scritte da' più celebri personaggi dei secoli XV, XVI, e XVII pubblicata da Gio. Bottari e continuata fino ai nostri giorni da Stefano Ticozzi, Nuova edizione*, Milano: Per Giovanni Silvestri. Nevertheless, Bottari cannot lay claim to having invented the genre of ‘*lettere di artisti*’. Fra Pellegrino Antonio Orlandi (Bologna, 1660–1727) was a Bolognese writer and art historian, and the author of the *Abecedario pittorico* (‘ABCs of Painting’), first printed in 1704 (*Abecedario pittorico nel quale compendiosamente sono descritte le patrie, i maestri, ed i tempi, ne' quali fiorirono circa quattro mila professori di pittura, di scultura, e d'architettura; diviso in tre parti*, Bologna: Costantino Pisarri, 1704, 436 pp.). In the second edition of this work, which I have consulted (Costantino Pisarri, 1719), Orlandi's *Abecedario* contains a notable bibliography of the earlier literature of art, including manuscript sources. In the “*Tavola II*”, “*Nella quale sono descritti i Libri, che trattano dei Pittori, degli Scultori, e della Pittura, con l'anno, e Luogo, dove stampati*”, at page 458, we read: “*Malvasia (...)* *Lettere Pittoriche, cioè un gran Volume di Lettere di Pittori diversi, raccolte dallo stesso. M.S.*” (see further: Angelo Comolli, *Bibliografia storico-critica dell'architettura civile ed arti subalterne*, vol. 2, Roma: Stamperia Vaticana, 1788, p. 185; Giovanni Fantuzzi, *Notizie degli scrittori bolognesi*, Bologna: Forni, 1966, vol. 5, p. 157; Orlandi, *Notizie degli scrittori bolognesi*, Bologna 1714, among the unpublished works of Malvasia, “*Lettere Pittoriche*”). Carlo Cesare Malvasia (1616–1693) was a Bolognese scholar and art historian, best known for his biographies of seventeenth-century artists, the *Felsina pittrice, vite de' pittori bolognesi*, published in 1678, and clearly he had assembled a volume of artist's letters in the course of his long life, perhaps in preparation for the *Felsina pittrice*, his letter collection perhaps dating even from the mid-seventeenth century. In 1714, Orlandi had published his

Notizie degli scrittori bolognesi e dell' opere loro stampate e manoscritte, and the notice of Malvasia's 'lettere pittoriche' may stem from his research for this work. In any event, the existence of Malvasia's volume of collected artists's letters anchors the genre firmly in the seventeenth-century as an established category of the literature of art. While Malvasia's collection of letters was probably Bologna-centric, the purview of Bottari's *raccolta* extended to all of Italy and beyond. The intention was largely that of historical documentation in a direction analogous to modern art historical research, and Bottari's initiative bore fruit in the publications of numerous scholars who continued his work.

The continuations of the 'Pittoriche' by Luigi Crespi (1773) and by Stefano Ticozzi (*1762- †1836: 1822-1825) have been mentioned, and a further collection was assembled by Michelangelo Gualandi (Bologna, *1795 †1865) in three volumes: *Nuova raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura, scritte da' più celebri personaggi dei secoli XV. a XIX. con note ed illustrazioni di Michelangelo Gualandi, in aggiunta a quella data in luce da mons. Bottari e dal Ticozzi*, Bologna: A spese dell'editore ed annotatore, 1844-56. Gualandi views the letters as "documenti storici".

In 1854 there began the publication of Gaetano Milanesi's *Documenti per la storia dell'arte senese* (3 vol., Siena: Porri, 1854-1898) with numerous *lettere artistiche*, and there soon followed Giuseppe Campori's, *Lettere artistiche inedite*, Modena: Erede Soliani, 1866. In his 'Avvertimento', Campori writes: "*Dappoichè Monsignor Giovanni Bottari nella metà del secolo scorso diede il primo saggio in più volumi di una raccolta di lettere sulle arti, edite e inedite, questa sorta di documenti negletti nel tempo passato incominciò ad essere ricercata e a tenersi in stima, e le pubblicazioni che ad imitazione di quella furono fatte posteriormente, ottennero il favore e la lode degli studiosi. (...) mi indussi a dar fuori una nuova raccolta di lettere artistiche, desunte da archivii, da biblioteche e nella maggior parte dalla mia Autografoteca, inedite tutte per quanto è lecito assicurare in tanto fervore di pubblicare documenti in opuscoli fuori di commercio e irreperibili, in giornali e perfino in carte sciolte, così da rendere vana la più accurata diligenza del più paziente e solerte bibliografo.*"

Thereby Campori draws attention to several aspects of this phase of documentary research in art history, which included a search for artist's letters. One was the frequent printing of letters in obscure occasional publications, e.g., *Risposta ad un amico riguardante le sei lettere anonime pubblicate ultimamente in Bologna senza data e senza indicazione di stamperia (...) intitolate lettere pittoriche* [di Francesco Alberi], Forlì: Stamperia Casali, 1819, 74 pp.; *Sei lettere pittoriche: nozze Hercolani-Angelelli*, ed. Gaetano Giordani, Bologna, 1836, 36 pp.; *Lettere inedite del secolo XV cavate dall'Archivio Gonzaga*, ed. Willemo Braghirolli, Mantova: Segna, 1878, edizione per nozze di soli 50 esemplari (with more than six artists's letters). Another aspect was publications with a local focus, e.g., Annibale Mariotti, *Lettere pittoriche perugine*, Perugia: Dalle Stampe Baduliane, 1788, 291 pp., a work which soon found a response in: Baldassarre Orsini, *Risposta alle lettere pittoriche del Signore Annibale Mariotti*, Perugia: Baduelliana, 1791.

And beyond the mania for the *'inedito'*, when Campori writes that his *lettere artistiche* came “*nella maggior parte dalla mia Autografoteca*”, he draws attention to the fact that letters as ‘autographs’ had come to be coveted by collectors, and the letters themselves a category of collectibles, a fact that has had the unfortunate result that many artists’s letters and autographs have been in the course of time subtracted from archives and libraries and taken home, not to return. The importance of the appearance of the tangible letter itself is testified to by the large quarto facsimiles in *La scrittura di artisti italiani (secoli XIV-XVII) riprodotta con la fotografia da Carlo Pini e corredata di notizie da Gaetano Milanese*, Firenze: Le Monnier 1876, in 3 volumes. See also: Carlo Morbido, *Lettere storiche ed artistiche*, 2.a ed. notevolmente accresciuta, Milano: Classici italiani, 1840 (“*Esse fanno parte delle mie collezioni di documenti storici e d’autografi d’illustri personaggi.*”). Both the collecting impulse and the authenticity of the autograph are present as motives in a much more recent work that assembles “*weit über hundert Brief-Handschriften*”: Hans-Rudolf Wiedemann, *Briefe europäischer Baumeister, Bildhauer und Maler in Handschriften mit Textabdruck und Porträts der Autoren*, Lübeck: Verlag Graphische Werkstätten, 1993, 529 pp.), here with a linkage to the artist as a person.

The isolation of artists’s letters as a separate category in documentary repositories may be a nineteenth-century phenomenon, as sometimes suggested, or it may be earlier. The State archives (*'Archivio di Stato'*) in both Florence and Modena both contain an extensive *fondo*, or section bearing the name ‘Carteggio di artisti’, although the age of these *fondi* is uncertain (Modena, “Carteggio di artisti, sec. XV-XVIII; Firenze, Carteggio di artisti, 1428-1682, 21 volumes), that in Florence apparently being formed by the 1770s (Silvia Meloni Trkulja, “Appendice sul Carteggio d’artisti nell’Archivio di Stato di Firenze”, in: *Paragone (Arte)*, no. 331, 1977, pp. 50-52). Bottari’s *Pittoriche* (ed. pr. 1754-1753) may have provided the decisive impulse.

In 1839-1840 there appeared the three volumes of the *Carteggio inedito d’artisti* of Johannes Witt Gaye (1804-1840) *alias* Giovanni Gaye: *Carteggio inedito d’artisti dei secoli XIV. XV. XVI. pubblicato ed illustrato con documenti pure inediti Dal Dott. Giovanni Gaye con Fac-simile*, Tomo I, II, III, Firenze: presso Giuseppe Molini, 1839, 1840, 1840 (*Documenti di Storia Italiana*). This enormous work of over 1700 pages was assembled in the astonishingly brief span of years between 1834 and 1838, during which Gaye collected an extensive mass of archival material relating to the history of art and artists in Italy, in particular in the Florentine state archives and in other archives and libraries in the city. The largest part of the documents are letters by and to artists. Gaye’s diaries of 1536 permit following in detail his archival discoveries in Florence during this time. Gaye’s *Carteggio* was reviewed by his friend Alfred von Reumont in numerous articles in Ludwig von Schorn’s *Kunstblatt* in 1840 and 1841 (vol. 21, Nr. 83 ff., vol. 22, Nr. 27 ff.) and by Carl Friedrich von Rumohr, in: *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, vol. 30, 1841, 1, No. 24, col. 190-192, No. 25, col. 193-198, No. 55, col. 439-440.

(GAYE: Wilhelm Schmidt, “Johann Gaye”, in: *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 8, Leipzig 1878, pp. 446-447; Alfred von Reumont, *Biographische Denkblätter nach persönlichen Erinnerungen*, Leipzig 1878 (reprint in German: Elibron Classics, New York, 450 pp.), pp. 209-230; Rudolf Bülck, “Johannes Gaye. Ein Schleswig-Holsteinischer Kunstforscher”, in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, vol. 10, 1961, pp. 95-105; Irene Heuck, „Archivforschung zu einer Geschichte der italienischen Kunst: Carl Friedrich von Rumohr, Johannes Gaye, Karl Frey“, in: *Storia dell’arte e politica culturale intorno al 1900. La fondazione dell’Istituto Germanico di Storia dell’Arte di*

Firenze, Venezia: Marsilio, 1999, pp. 119-129 (especially pp. 121-126: “Johannes Witt Gaye, 1804-1840”. *Carteggio*: see ‘Google Books’ (*vollständige Ansicht*).

1875, the year of the fourth centenary of Michelangelo’s birth, was marked, in step with the times, by the publication of the artist’s letters: *Le lettere di Michelangelo Buonarroti pubblicate coi ricordi ed i contratti artistici per cura di Gaetano Milanese* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1875), where in the preface, we read that in the letters “*noi possiamo acquistare dell’animo suo, delle qualità del suo cuore e de’ suoi sentimenti, assai migliore e più intera notizia, che dai Biografi non s’abbia*”. And this from a determined researcher of historical documentary notices, Gaetano Milanese. On the occasion of the same anniversary there appeared Aurelio Gotti’s new biography of Michelangelo: *Vita di Michelangelo Buonarroti narrata con l’aiuto di nuovi documenti*, in two volumes (Firenze: Tipografia della Gazzetta d’Italia, September 1875), again with an ample quotation from the master’s letters in the Archivio Buonarroti as biographical testimonials. Only two year later appeared the first volume of another letter-filled biography of another of the great masters of the Renaissance: *Tiziano, la sua vita e i suoi tempi con alcune notizie della sua famiglia, opera fondata principalmente su documenti inediti per G.-B. Cavacaselle e J.-A. Crowe*, 2 vol., Firenze: Le Monnier, 1877-1878. Here the letters of Titian to the grandees of the world: “Titiano Vecellio, *Devotissimo Servitore*”, “Tician Vecellio, p.”, “Ticiano Pittore”, “Ticiano V.”, “Ticiano Vecellio”, “Tiziano”, “El fidel Servitor Titiano”, etc. – *Künstlerbriefe* as the building blocks of biography and history. Less than ten year later, north of the Alps, began the monumental *Correspondance de Rubens et documents épistolaires concernant sa vie et ses œuvres publiés, traduits, annotés par Charles Reulens* (6 vol., Anvers: Veuve De Backer, 1887-1909; from vol. 2, “*par Max Rooses et feu Ch. Ruelens*”), the historical foundation for Rooses’s *L’Œuvre de P. P. Rubens* (1886-1892).

On the heels of Gaye, between 1853 and 1856 Ernst Guhl published the two volumes of his over 300-letter-large *Künstler-Briefe* (Berlin: Guttentag, 1853-1856). By the time of the second edition (Berlin: Guttentag, 1879) edited by Adolf Rosenberg, the newly established *Kunstgeschichte* in Germany was concerned to win a lay public in an effort to establish itself. In his review of the new edition of Guhl’s *Künstlerbriefe* in the *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* of 1880, Hubert Janitschek writes, “*Der Laie lässt sich gerne durch die Künstlergeschichte für die Kunstgeschichte gewinnen.*“ The *Künstlerbrief* communicates „*die Kenntniss des intimen Lebens der Künstler.*“ Rosenberg’s foreword to the collection observes the mission of *Kunstwissenschaft* to awaken „*auch im Laienpublikum das Verständnis für Kunst und Künstler.*“ Here the *Künstlerbrief* is seen as a means to see the artists not simply as an artist, but as a person (*Mensch*); the letter offers “*ein Bild von dessen Wesen und Charakter*”, “*das möglichst konkrete Bild ihres ganzen Wesens und Seins*” – “*die Kunstgeschichte musste individualisirt werden*”. The letters transmit the artist’s character: „*die Züge eines einfachen und stillen Gemüthes*“, „*die Naivetät*“, „*Sorgsamkeit und Liebe*“, „*Frömmigkeit*“. The characterological traits are also a reflection of the „*Bild einer bestimmten Zeit- und Sinnesrichtung*“. The letters testify to (1) the relations among the artists themselves, (2) artist-patron relationships, and (3) the relationships of artists with the culture figures of their times. In its concern with the artist as a person and in the belief that the artist’s personal traits were reflected in his works (“*Züge, die sich in einer, natürlich mehr oder weniger modificirten Weise auch in der künstlerischen Produktion der angeführten Person aussprechen*”), Guhl’s *Künstlerbriefe* points the way to the future of the *Künstlerbrief*.

The second part of the title of a 1926 collection of artists's letters, *Künstlerbriefe über Kunst. Bekenntnisse von Malern, Architekten und Bildhauern aus fünf Jahrhunderten*, ed. Hermann Uhde-Bernays, Dresden: Jess, 1926, continues the promise that artists will tell us what they have on their mind, revealing “*das Wesen dieser Maler, Architekten, Bildhauer, Graphiker*” (“*Briefe [...], die an Stelle des biographischen einen vorwiegend ästhetischen Inhalt haben, die über das historische Zeugnis hinaus unmittelbar von dem Verhältnis berichten, welches die einzelnen Meister zu ihrem eigen oder zu fremden Schaffen besaßen, die, hinüberdeutend auf das Allgemeine, Ewige, die inneren Vorzüge der künstlerischen Individualitäten in der speziellen literarischen Form klar und rein zum Licht emporheben.*”). Gustav R. Hocke's *Europäische Künstlerbriefe. Bekenntnisse zum Geist* (Leipzig: Karl Rauch Verlag, 1938) is „*nicht als historische Quellensammlung, sondern als Sammlung von spontanen Aussagen über die künstlerische Vitalität gedacht*“. From the same year, 1938, Hans Eckstein's *Künstler über Kunst. Briefe, Berichte, Aufzeichnungen deutscher Maler, Bildhauer, Architekten* (München: Wilhelm Langewiesche-Brandt, 1938) collects statements almost exclusively from the nineteenth century, as earlier sources offer little to tell us what artists thought about „*Kunst und bildnerisches Gestalten*“ – about art and artistic creation. Eckstein stresses the mundane character of early artists's letters.

The history of the artists's letter does not end here. There have been further anthologies and exhibition of artists's letters – one as recent as 2007: *Künstlerbriefe: Autographe aus dem Bestand der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin*, ed. Dorothea Barfknecht, Jutta Weber, veröffentlicht von Staatsbibliothek, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, 2007, 63 pp. These publications belong to the ongoing evolution of art history and visual studies, which sometimes appear to perceive the artist as an anachronism, leaving him behind in a chase after visions of Indians and shooting stars.

The answer to our initial question, “Is the *Künstlerbrief* a genre of *Künstliteratur*?” is a, perhaps for some, disappointing “yes and no”. “Yes”, perhaps sooner than many had thought, when such letters were collected as historical testimonials by the fathers of modern art historical investigation, with, of course, the caveat of a “no”, in that early artists did not usually set out to write letters *per se* in their capacity as artists, in the sense that a Pietro Aretino from the start wrote for public consumption, to persuade, influence, plead, and enlighten. The *Künstlerbrief* as vehicle for artistic statements came later, usually much later, and is often different in kind from earlier artists's letters.

In the apparent absence of a general and systematic treatment of the topic 'Künstlerbrief', the above observations represent a rapidly assembled overview of the history and development of the genre 'Künstlerbrief' in the literature of art. This provisional treatment could doubtless be developed and amplified in greater detail. The changing understanding of the 'Künstlerbrief' reflects the ongoing evolution of the history of art.

APPENDIX I:

JULIUS MEYER'S 'VALERIO BELLI' IN THE *ALLGEMEINES KÜNSTLER-LEXIKON* (1885)

The entry 'Valerio Belli' by Julius Meyer in the short-lived Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon (1885, vol. 3) gives a rather complete picture of Belli's biography and his works as they are testified to in early sources. Meyer's view of Belli's artistic merits and significance differ at some points from the fairly recent re-evaluation of his person and artistic productions, as contained, most notably in Valerio Belli Vicentino, Vicenza 2000, a work which contains an extensive documentary appendix compiled by Manuela Barausse.

„Belli. Valerio Belli oder de' Belli, gen. Valerio Vicentino, Steinschneider und Medailleur, geboren um 1468 (nicht um 1479, wie bisweilen irrtümlich angegeben), † 1546 zu Vicenza. Der Kardinal Piero Bembo, für welchen Belli viel beschäftigt war, sagt zwar in einem seiner Briefe, der Künstler sei zu Pesaro geboren; doch bezeichnet sich Belli selbst überall als „Vicentino“, er hatte also jedenfalls in Vicenza seine eigentliche Heimat, und da schon sein Großvater dahin gezogen, sein Vater dort ansässig war, lässt sich wohl Vicenza auch als seine Geburtsstadt annehmen. Über seine Lebenszustände ist trotz des großen Ruhmes, zu dem der Meister bei Lebzeiten gelangte, wenig bekannt geworden. Er scheint sich, da er viel für Clemens VII. (1523-1534) arbeitete, ziemlich lange in Rom aufgehalten zu haben und befand sich dort jedenfalls vor 1530. Im März dieses Jahres schreibt Pietro Bembo an Clemens VII., wie später für Paul III. tätig. Der große Beifall, den seine Arbeiten fanden, trug ihm vielfache Bestellungen von den vornehmsten Gönnern zu, wie auch aus noch erhaltenen Briefen der Zeit erhellt, und verschaffte ihm ein Vermögen, so dass er seine Familie wohlhabend hinterlassen konnte. Die Herausgeber von Mariette bemerken, dass der Künstler für Franz I. von Frankreich viel beschäftigt gewesen, doch habe ich darüber in älteren Quellen nichts auffinden können. Unter welchem Meister sich der Künstler gebildet und wann er nach Rom gekommen ist, ist unbekannt. Jedenfalls sind Kompositionen Raphael's und antike Bildwerke das Hauptobjekt seiner Studien gewesen. Am 16. Juni 1546 machte er sein Testament, „in lecto infirmus corpore“, ein Codicill dazu am 6. Juli; sehr bald darauf scheint er gestorben zu sein.

„Des Künstler's Arbeiten, noch immer geschätzt und zum Theil in verschiedenen großen Museen aufbewahrt, finden doch neuerdings die unbeschränkte Bewunderung nicht mehr wie bei seinen Lebzeiten. Der Marchese Federigo von Mantua spricht einmal von dem großen Rufe Valerio's und findet in einer ihm gelieferten Arbeit desselben „das Schönste, was er seit langer Zeit gesehen habe“ (Brief an Pietro Aretino vom 23. Okt. 1529); der Meister Francesco d'Olanda aus Portugal, der sich längere Zeit in Rom aufhielt, nennt ihn neben den berühmten Stempelschneidern Benvenuto Cellini, Caradosso und Maderno [*sic* = Moderno] und fügt hinzu, dass seine, des Valerio, Arbeiten die schönsten seien. Dem wird heutzutage kein Kenner des Fachs zustimmen. Zudem hat Valerio seine eigentliche und größere Bedeutung als Edelsteinschneider, namentlich in ganzen Serien von Darstellungen in Bergkristall, deren saubere und zarte Ausführung, seine Modellierung in kleinstem Maßstab allerdings bewundernswert ist. Derartige kostbare Arbeiten in edlem Material, Schmuckgefäße mit figurenreichen Kompositionen geziert, wie auch freie Nachbildungen antiker Gemmen, waren damals bei den Großen besonders beliebt. Allein für jene Epoche, welche die höchste Blüte der Kunst schon erreicht hatte, ist Zweierlei bezeichnend: einmal, dass sie auf den Reichtum des Materials und die Schwierigkeit der Behandlung Wert legte, und zum Anderen, dass bei aller Feinheit und höchstem Geschick der Durchführung doch die Darstellung nicht mehr die ursprüngliche Frische und Kraft, den strengen Reiz der frühen Renaissance hatte. Bei Belli

kam noch ein besonderer Mangel hinzu, den schon Vasari hervorhebt. Es fehlte ihm an Erfindung, an Originalität, und fast immer fertigte er seine Arbeiten nach fremder Zeichnung, oder mit Anlehnung an antike Steinschnitte oder Medaillen. Es müssen insbesondere Entwürfe aus der Raphael'schen Schule gewesen sein, die er als Vorlagen benützte, wobei das Schlanke und Gestreckte seiner Figuren an gewisse römische Meister erinnert. Übrigens gibt uns einer seiner Briefe einen urkundlichen Beleg dafür, dass er mit Vorliebe nach den Zeichnungen großer Zeitgenossen seine Steine schnitt. Unter dem 21. April 1521 schreibt er an Michelangelo: „ich habe einen sehr schönen großen Stein, in welchem ich die Zeichnung, die Ihr mir schicken werdet, schneiden möchte, wobei ich mich bemühen werde, ein recht gelungenes Werk zu liefern“. Dass er mit Michelangelo wie auch mit Vittoria Colonna in freundschaftlichem Verkehr stand, wird in den Aufzeichnungen des Francesco d'Olanda (s. die Lit. Raczynski) berichtet und lässt uns auf das große Ansehen schließen, in welchem Valerio stand. Seiner Behandlung ist eine gewisse Eleganz nicht abzuspochen; aber auch ihr mangelt da Ursprüngliche, und so geräth sie leicht in akademische Manier.

„Das berühmteste Werk des Meisters ist die Kasette von Bergkristall im „Gabinetto delle Gemme“ der Uffizien zu Florenz, das kostbarste Stück dieser Sammlung, welches Clemens VII. dem König Franz I., zur Vermählung von dessen Sohn Heinrich mit Caterina de' Medici, im Jahre 1533 zum Geschenk machte. In den Deckel, die Wände und in den Boden der Kasette sind 20 Darstellungen (außen 19) aus der Geschichte Christi eingeschnitten, von der Geburt bis zur Himmelfahrt, sowie die vier Figuren der Evangelisten. Auf dies Werk scheint der Künstler besonders stolz gewesen zu sein. In nicht weniger als acht der Darstellungen hat er seinen Namen eingegraben: Valerius Vicentinus fec., oder nur Vale. Vi. fe. oder Valerius de Bellis Vi. fe. und einmal voll ausgeschrieben: Valerius de Bellis Vicentinus f. anno M.D.XXXII, wonach also die ganze mühsame Arbeit 1532 vollendet war, wie auch sonst bestätigt wird. Aus der schon erwähnten Briefstelle des Pietro Bembo an Clemens VII. erhellt, dass Belli an der Kasette schon 1530 arbeitete und sich nach Vicenza begab, um dort „mit Muße“ das Werk zu vollenden. Für die Arbeit („per sua fattura“, also ohne das Material) erhielt er, wie Vasari berichtet, die damals sehr beträchtliche Summe von 2000 Scudi in Gold.

„Von ähnlichen Werken des Meisters erwähnt Vasari insbesondere ein Kreuz aus Bergkristall („una croce di cristallo divina“), ebenfalls für Clemens VII. gefertigt, und zwar (nach Urkunden im Archiv von Florenz) schon im Jahre 1525 für 1111 Gold-Dukaten. Magrini bemerkt, das Kreuz sei noch erhalten und in Rom. In der That befindet sich in der Bibliothek des Vatikans ein Kreuz aus Bergkristall mit vier Darstellungen von der Hand des Künstlers (alle vier ähnlich wie oben bezeichnet): in der Mitte der Gekreuzigte, an den vier Kreuzesenden die Evangelisten, und in den drei Medaillons, welche unten an dem das Kreuz einfassenden Rahmen angebracht sind, die Kreuzabnahme, der Kuss des Judas und die Kreuztragung (diese nicht vertieft, sondern in Relief geschnitten). Allein dieses Kreuz befand sich früher im Armenhaus zu Bologna als Geschenk einer Marescotti und wurde erst 1857 von Pius IX. erworben, kann mithin schwerlich das für Clemens VII. gefertigte Kreuz sein. Auch ein für Paul III. geschnittenes, mit Darstellungen aus der Leidensgeschichte gezieres Kreuz, nebst zwei Leuchtern aus Bergkristall erwähnt Vasari: Arbeiten, welche verschollen scheinen. In der berühmten Sammlung Pourtalès zu Paris, welche 1865 unter den Hammer kam, befand sich gleichfalls eine Kasette aus Bergkristall mit Darstellungen, in denen man Valerio's Hand erkennen wollte. Im Berliner Kunstgewerbe-Museum (früher in der Kunstkammer der Museen) ein in Gold und Email gefasstes Gefäß aus Bergkristall mit fortlaufenden Darstellungen aus der Geschichte des Jason, bezeichnet Vale V. Die Fassung, früher dem Cellini zugeschrieben, ist von besonderer Schönheit; mit ihr kann sich die Arbeit Belli's keineswegs messen. Es sind uns außerdem mehrere Bronzeabgüsse (sogen. placchette) nach Darstellungen des Künstlers in Bergkristall erhalten, während diese selbst, die Originale,

verschollen scheinen: im Museum della Marciana zu Venedig Bronzereliefs mit der Darstellung im Tempel, dem Kusse des Judas und der Vertreibung der Wechsler (aus der Kirche S. Giovanni di Verdara); im Museum Correr daselbst Basrelief mit Paris und den drei Göttinnen (nach einen Bergkristall, den Belli für den Grafen Girolamo Gualdo geschnitten hatte; alle bezeichnet). Auch das Museum zu Berlin besitzt nach ihm eine Anzahl solcher plachette, zum Theil mit dem Namen bezeichnet. Einzelne in Bergkristall von seiner Hand geschnittene Darstellungen waren in der Sammlung Blacas, Opfer des Aeskulap und Triumph Neptun's (s. Trésor de Numismatique et de Glyptique. XIII).

„Zu erwähnen sind hier noch die Gemmen des Künstlers, geschnittene Darstellungen in Edelstein: Allegorie auf die Ehe in Chalcedon, in den Uffizien zu Florenz (nicht bezeichnet); Kampf zwischen Reitern und Löwen in Achat, in der Sammlung des Herzogs von Tarent (Trésor etc. XII); Opfer des Bachus in Karneol, im Museum Colonna in Rom (Trésor etc. XIII); Kopf der Faustina, Achat-Kamee, in der Sammlung Zanetti zu Venedig (Dactyliothea Zanettiana, Venet. 1750; wo jetzt?) und andere mehr (s. auch Gori, Dactylioteca Smythiana). Nach Walpole sollen sich auch in englischen Sammlungen vorzüglich geschnittene Steine des Valerio befunden haben; doch sind dieselben nicht beglaubigt, und noch weniger ist der daraus von Walpole gezogene Schluss berechtigt, das sich Valerio einige Zeit in England aufgehalten habe.

„Schon aus der Aufzählung dieser Werke erhellt die ungemeine Fruchtbarkeit des Meisters, die in der That, wie Vasari bemerkt, „so unerhört“ (tanto terribile) war, dass nie ein anderer Künstler seines Berufes mehr Arbeiten ausgeführt hat: „er schnitt eine so grosse Menge von Darstellungen in Kristall, dass alle Läden der Goldschmiede und die ganze Welt voll sind von Gips- und Schwefelabdrücken von den Bildern, Figuren und Köpfen, die er vertieft gearbeitet hat“. Aus dem großen Beifall, den seine Arbeiten fanden, erklärt sich die nicht geringe Anzahl jener kleinen Bronzereliefs oder plachette, die sich nach seinen Intaglien heute noch, wie oben bemerkt, vielfach vorfinden.

„Eine andere Thätigkeit ganz eigentümlicher Art entwickelte Valerio als Stempelschneider, worüber erst neuerdings eingehende Nachricht an den Tag gekommen ist. Wohl berichtet schon Vasari, dass Belli „die Medaillen der zwölf Kaiser nach den schönsten antiken Werken und eine große Zahl griechischer Denkmünzen schnitt“; auch liefern einige noch erhaltene von dem Künstler mit dem Kardinal Bembo gewechselte Briefe das unzweifelhafte Zeugnis, dass Belli für diesen selbst eine Denkmünze gefertigt habe. Zudem findet sich in seinem Testamente die Stelle, dass er 150 Stempel geliefert habe; dieselben sollten um 150 scudi d'oro verkauft werden, und letztere ein Legat für seinen natürlichen Sohn Marcantonio bilden. Solche Medaillen in antiker Art, von denen Vasari redet, sind eine Anzahl auf uns gekommen und seit jeher als Arbeiten Valerio's bekannt. Schon im vorigen Jahrhundert hat Roth-Scholtz deren fünfzig aufgezählt (Icones Virorum omnium Ordinum eruditione optime meritorum, Nürnberg, 1725). Neuerdings hat nun Magrini in der Ambrosiana zu Mailand eine Handschrift aufgefunden, welche unter dem Titel „Lettere cavate da cinquanta medaglie antiche di Valerio Belli“, 50 Stempel nebst den Inschriften genau beschreibt (mit den Rückseiten also 100). Hierauf fanden sich denn bald durch Umfrage und Vergleichung in den größeren Münz-Sammlungen, und namentlich in derjenigen von Berlin, eine bedeutende Anzahl der von Valerio gefertigten „antiken Denkmünzen“ zusammen, welche ihrerseits die Richtigkeit jenes Verzeichnisses bestätigten. Die 50 Denkmünzen theilen sich nach dem Gegenstande der Darstellung folgender Gestalt ein: 10 römische, darunter 6 Köpfe von Feldherrn und 4 hervorragender Männer der Wissenschaft und Kunst; 26 griechische, darunter wieder 18 Köpfe berühmter Kriegshelden und 8 bedeutsame Gestalten des Kulturlebens; endlich 14 weibliche Köpfe, gleichfalls

sämtlich aus dem Altertum, worunter 5 mythologische, 6 historische Figuren und 2 Dichterinnen. Auf den Kehrseiten Darstellungen, die zumeist dem Charakter der Person entsprechen; auch diese wahrscheinlich nach fremden Zeichnungen ausgeführt. Die Legenden sind meist passend gewählt und in trefflichen Lettern gegeben; Magrini vermutet wohl mit Recht, dass der im Griechischen wohl bewanderte Gelehrte und Numismatiker Giovanni Lascari, der auch Valerios Medaille auf Virgil in einem Distichon verherrlichte und um die Wiederherstellung schöner griechischer Majuskeln sich besonders bemühte, in dieser Hinsicht dem Künstler hilfreiche Hand geleistet habe.

„Diese Medaillen zeigen wieder die gleichen Vorzüge und Schwächen des Künstlers: große Gewandtheit und Leichtigkeit der Darstellung, allein Mangel an Erfindung und an jener Schärfe und Energie der Formgebung, welche die Meister des Quattrocento auszeichnete. Was Valerio mit diesen Denkmünzen eigentlich bezweckte, ist nicht recht ersichtlich. Der Gedanke an täuschende Nachbildung antiker Münzen oder gar an Fälschung ist von vornherein ausgeschlossen, obwohl Einige geglaubt haben, die Medaillen Valerio's hätten den Fälschern griechischer Münzen, die später in Padua blühten, als Vorbild gedient. Auf wirkliche Nachahmung konnte Belli es schon deshalb nicht abgesehen haben, weil unter den Köpfen viele frei erfundene sind, für welche uns die Antike gar nicht überliefert hat, zudem mehrere kaum bekannte Persönlichkeiten; doch zeigt auch die ganze Art der Behandlung, dass es dem Künstler um Nachbildung antiker Münzen gar nicht zu thun war. Vielmehr sind diese Medaillen wohl nur ein Zeugnis des damals weit verbreiteten antiken Sinnes und jener Vorliebe für das Altertum, die um jene Zeit in Rom unter Raphael's Einfluss neue Nahrung erhalten hatte. Im Grunde ein müßiges, eigentlich zweckloses Spiel mit antiken Formen, das in solcher willkürlicher und doch unselbständiger Nachbildung sich wesentlich von allen Denkmünzen des Quattrocento unterscheidet und schon den beginnenden Verfall der Kunst anzeigt. Valerio's Medaillen konnten höchstens das Interesse bieten, ikonographisch eine Anzahl von griechischen und römischen Hauptfiguren in einer bequemen, der weitesten Verbreitung fähigen Form zu vergegenwärtigen.

„Denkmünzen auf Personen seines eigenen Zeitalters scheint Belli wenige gefertigt zu haben; diejenigen auf Clemens VII. („con rovesci bellissimi“), welche Vasari erwähnt, haben sich bis jetzt nicht bestimmen lassen. Dagegen ist Valerio's Medaille auf den Kardinal Pietro Bembo, auf welche schon oben hingewiesen worden, noch vorhanden (z.B. im Museum della Marciana zu Venedig), mit einer nackten liegenden weiblichen Figur auf der Rückseite (Stempel vom Jahr 1532). Ob die Medaille mit des Künstlers eigenem Bildnis – schöner bärtiger Männerkopf – und der Umschrift Valerius Bellus Vicentinus, auf der Rückseite Jupiter das Viergespann lenkend, vom Künstler selber herrührt, wie Magrini meint, ist fraglich. – Auch eine Tochter des Meisters, welche trefflich in Stein geschnitten habe, findet sich von neueren Autoren erwähnt; allein der von Cabianca veröffentlichte Stammbaum der Familie weist nur Söhne des Valerio auf. Über seinen Sohn Elio de' Belli siehe den nächsten Artikel.

„Sein Bildnis:

„1) Holzschnitt in Vasari's Opere, Florenz 1568. III.1.

„2) Gürtelbild. G. Vasari del. C. Colombini sc. 4. In: Serie degli uomini i più illustri nella pittura etc. Florenz 1769-76. V.

„Abbildungen von neuen Darstellungen der Kassetten in Florenz in: Cicognara, Storia della Scultura. II. Taf. 87.

„s. Jac. Cabianca, Di Valerio Vicentino. 1865 (aus den Atti dell'Accademia di Belle Arti in Venezia). – Magrini, Sopra cinquanta Medaglie di Valerio Belli. Venezia 1871. – Descrizione della Croce e Candelabri di cristallo di monte, opera di Valerio Belli. Vicenza 1820. – Menzione di alcuni intagli in Quarzo operati da Valerio Vicentino. Bologna 1869.

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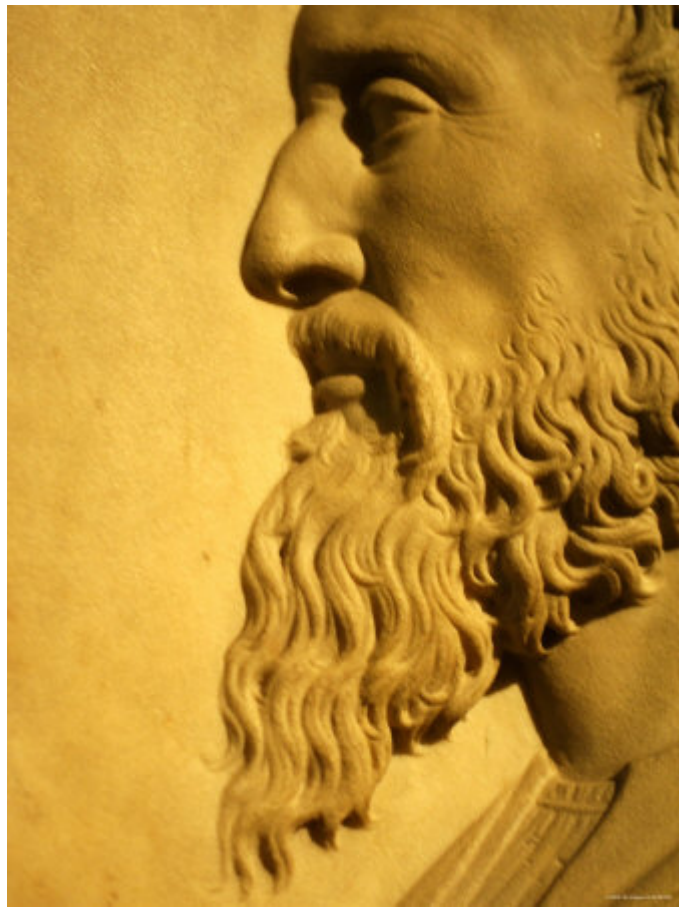
FROM:

Julius Meyer, „Valerio Belli“, in: *Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon unter Mitwirkung der namhaftesten Fachgelehrten des In-und Auslandes*, ed. Julius Meyer, Hermann Lücke, Hugo von Tschudi (2. gänzlich Neubearb. Aufl. von Nagler's Künstler-Lexikon), Leipzig: Verlag Wilhelm Engelmann, 3 vol., 1872-1885, vol. 3, pp. 379-382

JULIUS MEYER: Wilhelm von Bode „Julius Meyer (Nachruf)“, in: *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, 17.1894, p. 87-89

ILLUSTRATIONS:

- (1) VALERIO BELLI, „*scultore di gemme*“, Self-Portrait (detail).
- (2) LETTER OF VALERIO BELLI TO MICHELANGELO; signed:
“*a di 10 Zenaro 1521 / Valerio che intalia le corniole / Servitor vostro*”.



VALERIO BELLI, „*scultore di gemme*“, Self-portrait.

Michelangelo mio maior honorando saluoye Auxouy
 Como Jo son tornato auicenna panto uibrogo quanto se g'poio
 Volgiate et conuenio de dire aucto deo pmo me uita p'prio
 al p'prio de questa p'ch lui me lo mandaua subito a Michel
 anciolo sapian et bono uespio ingeno et seruitor nuno et
 li ama quanto mi ch' et ubino a suo et vna et ho p'no
 Vno p'no et me suo honore et no p'no Vno p'no et ho p'no
 Vno p'no et me a f'chero quanto p'no p'no p'no p'no
 Conuenio de mandarme lo isceda p'no p'no et omnia et
 non alio p'no p'no Cosa alcuna p'no p'no me committio
 solo aspetta uenire molti et mi p'no p'no p'no p'no
 me d'no p'no p'no et me lo mandaua mi basta et lo mandaua
 qui no alio d'no p'no p'no ad i. 10 Zenaro 1521

Valerio che intalia le corniole
 Seruitor vostro

Letter of Valerio Belli to Michelangelo; signed:
 "a di 10 Zenaro 1521 / Valerio che intalia le corniole / Seruitor vostro".