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A Roman Pilgrim

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A Roman Pilgrim

By Mark Hall, Perth Museum and Art Gallery

On a recent trip to Rome (on the University College Cork ‘Early Medieval Rome’ tour led by Éamonn Ó Carragain) Mark Hall spotted this splendid incised effigy-slab, in pale-cream marble. It is set between two pillars in the nave floor of the basilica of St. Prassede, a small church close to St Maria Maggiore, initially built in the late 5th century AD.



The slab commemorates one John of Montopolo, Bryan Ward-Perkins (pers. comm.) suggests that he either comes from the Sabina, near Farfa or perhaps from Montopolo in the

Arno valley. Stylistically the tomb can be dated to circa 1320 and Giovanni's effigy is depicted wearing the pilgrim's cape (in Italy known as the *sanrocchino*, the *schivina* or the *pellegrina*), the pilgrim's hat (or *petaso*), the pilgrim's bag or knapsack (the *capsella* or *pera*) and carrying an iron-tipped walking stave (variously known as a *bordone*, *burdo*, *baculus* or *fustis*). The cloak, from its style of carving appears to be a rough woollen type (its hairiness perhaps meant to suggest St John the Baptist). He wears two scallop shells, one attached to his bag, the other to his hat. There are no other souvenirs indicated. The four upper edges of the slab carry a continuous inscription with the ends of lines one and three running round onto the succeeding line:

+ : ISTVD : EST : SEPTECR
 Y : IOHIS : MORTIS : OPVL : SPEDARII : 7 : VOS : ESTIS : EGO :
 FVI : OZ : SV : VOS : ERIT
 IS : ORBITIS : PRO : ME : PECCATORE : AGITE : PENITENTIAM :

The inscription has been published in volume 13 of the Medieval Latin Inscriptions of Rome: Garms, J, Juffinger, R and Ward-Perkins, B 1981 *Die mittelalterlichen Grabmaeler in Rom und Latium vom 13. bis zum 15. Jahrhundert, Band 1: die Grabplatten und Tafeln*, Austrian Academy of Science Press, LII,3, p.264 and Abb. 58.

The inscription translates as: 'This Is The Tomb Of Giovanni of Montopolo, Spice Merchant, What You Are I Was, What I Am You Will Be, Pray For Me A Sinner, And Do Penance'. He clearly wants to be remembered as a penitent pilgrim atoning for his sins. His wearing of two scallop shells and no other souvenirs may indicate that his penance required him to undertake a particular pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella. Did he die soon afterwards or even on route? Equally we could ask if he ever undertook any pilgrimage in person: did he fulfil his penance through someone going on his behalf or did he simply want to be remembered as and seen by God as a penitent pilgrim.

I am grateful to several colleagues who responded to my short-notice requests re the inscription's translation, particularly David Ganz and Bryan Ward-Perkins.