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# ***Gesta Innocentii III* – Autobiographical elements in medieval papal biography?**

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## **Abstract**

*Autobiography* in the Middle Ages is still a much debated concept. Several autobiographical writings of medieval secular rulers as well as biographies of high church dignitaries and prominent theologians have survived. The *Gesta Innocentii III*, written around 1209–1210, occupies a distinctive place in papal historiography. While its authorship has long been debated, the text has not been systematically studied from the perspective of autobiography. For this reason, the present study analyses the autobiographical elements in the *Gesta Innocentii III* by comparing selected passages from this text with the literary works authored by Innocent III. The analysis identifies strong thematic and lexical parallels with Innocent's genuine writings and therefore suggests Innocent's active role in shaping his biography, even if parts of the work derive from curial compilation. The *Gesta* thus emerges as a hybrid text, positioned between biography and autobiography, which reshapes our understanding of Innocent's self-representation and contributes to broader discussions of authority and subjectivity in medieval literature.

## **Keywords**

subjectivity; individualism; autobiographical elements; *Gesta Innocentii III*; medieval papacy

## Introduction

The *Gesta Innocentii III*, composed by an anonymous curial member between 1209 and 1210, remains one of the most intriguing texts of papal historiography (Johrendt 2017: p. 91). The most recent attempt to attribute its authorship was made by Giulia Barone, who argued that its author was Cardinal Presbyter John of St. Mary Cosmeda, papal chancellor from 1206 to 1213.<sup>1</sup> Barone also emphasized the text's affinities with the *Liber Pontificalis*, the long-established model for papal biography.<sup>2</sup> The present study, however, seeks to highlight not only these similarities but also the important differences in textual strategy and literary character between the two works.<sup>3</sup>

The *Gesta* is a carefully organized text that portrays both the development of the medieval papacy and its role in the Christian world under Innocent III. More than any previous papal biography, it reflects the idea of papal supremacy that crystallized during Innocent's pontificate. Unlike the formulaic, chronologically structured entries of the *Liber Pontificalis*, the *Gesta* employs a thematic organization. It emphasizes the relationship between author and pope, presenting Innocent's personality in a vivid and personal manner. This shift suggests that the *Gesta* represents a transitional form, moving away from the fixed diction of earlier papal biography toward a more dynamic and individualized narrative.

The possibility of Innocent's own involvement in the text was first raised by Hugo Elkan, who suggested that certain passages were "retold by the pope himself". Elkan, however, offered no textual evidence (Elkan 1876: p. 9). Oliver Hahne advanced this line of inquiry by proposing what he called an "autobiographical theory". He identified connections between the *Gesta* and Innocent's own writings, such as *De quadripartita specie nuptiarum* (Hahne 2014: p. 184), and analyzed the interplay of past and present in episodes such as the judicial dispute between Scozula monastery and the Archbishop of Milan, or the resolution of the divorce of King Philip Augustus of France and Princess Ingeborg Denmark (where Hahne emphasized the pope's past as a judicial auditor) (Hahne 2014: p. 177). For Hahne, these features hinted at autobiographical qualities. Nevertheless, he ultimately denied that the text could be considered an autobiography. Instead, he suggested that Innocent may have exercised only a limited role, perhaps revising or inspiring parts of the work, but not composing it (Hahne 2014: p. 231). In this sense, Hahne refined Elkan's initial observations without fully endorsing them.

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1 Barone et al. (2011: pp. 14–20).

2 The similarity between Innocent III's gesture and the literary tradition of *Liber Pontificalis* is also discussed in the study Andrews (2007); Bagliany (2012).

3 For more on textual continuity in papal historiography of the 12th and 13th centuries, see Li (2020).

Despite these contributions, scholarship has not yet examined the *Gesta* systematically from the perspective of autobiography. The central questions therefore remain unresolved: to what extent does the text display autobiographical characteristics, and how does it reflect the personality of its protagonist? This study addresses these questions by exploring the *Gesta* in the light of recent approaches to medieval autobiography. Modern literary theory has long provided influential definitions of the genre, above all Philippe Lejeune's concept of the "autobiographical pact", which requires the unity of author, narrator, and protagonist (Lejeune 1989: p. 4). Applying such a model to medieval texts is admittedly problematic<sup>4</sup> As Jean-Claude Schmitt has argued, autobiography in the Middle Ages must be approached above all in terms of reception: not whether the work corresponds to a historical self, but how it invites readers to perceive personality and subjectivity (Schmitt 2010: pp. 49–50).

Building on this theoretical framework, the present analysis asks whether the *Gesta* can be read as reflecting Innocent's own self-understanding, or whether it should be viewed as the product of an anonymous author inspired by the pope's life and ideals. In doing so, the study situates the *Gesta* at the intersection of biography, historiography, and self-representation, offering a new interpretation of how medieval texts constructed personality and authority.

## Analysis

At first glance, the author of the *Gesta* follows the traditional procedure of creating a papal biography according to the model in the *Liber Pontificalis*. He first recorded the pope's origins and then proceeded to enumerate his characteristics:

*Pope Innocent III. was descended on his father's side from the noble family of Segni and on his mother's side from Clarina of the Roman nobility. He was a man of a quick temper and a firm memory, learned in theology and in secular doctrines, eloquent in both Italian and Latin, well versed in the chant of the Psalms. He was of middle stature and handsome in appearance, midway between vanity and avarice but very generous in his graces and in the distribution of food, more sparing in others when the situation demanded it, stern with rebels and opponents but kind to the humble and faithful, mighty and steadfast, generous and cunning, defender of the faith and conqueror of heresy, steadfast in justice but blessed in mercy, humble*

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4 For more on the theory of medieval autobiography, see: Fleming (2014), Rubenstein (2005) and Wei (2011).

*in happiness and patient in adversity, he was of such a nature that, though he was a little angry, yet easily forgave.*<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, in the catalogue of the virtues of the *Gesta*, we have noted an accumulation of virtues that have a rich biblical tradition of perceiving justice. These are above all the character of the pope, who is firm and unwavering, magnanimous and prudent (*fortis et stabilis, magnanimus et astutus, in iustitia rigidus, sed in misericordia pius*). In particular, the meaning of *in iustitia rigidus* differs markedly from tradition of the *Liber Pontificalis*, which sees the pope exclusively as a lover of justice (*amator iustitiae*). As opposed to that, the wording in the *Gesta* denotes human steadfastness in justice. It refers, in our view, to a person who could actively adjudicate lawsuits. The roman curia functioned as the supreme judicial institution in medieval society both in spiritual and in temporal matters. However, images of the pope as a judge are among the rare occurrences in the official historiography of the Roman episcopate. The *Liber Pontificalis* sought to emphasize the Popes' love of justice rather than their active role in resolving judicial disputes.

The image of idealized justice is an essential element of the theology of Innocent III. Its first form was already laid out by him in his treatise *De miseria humanae conditionis*. This moral-critical treatise was written during Innocent's time as a Cardinal between 1190 and 1194. John Moore labelled the work *De miseriae humanae conditionis* with the term *Speculum curiae*, suggesting that its contents may have served as a critical mirror of the papal curia (Moore 1981: p. 563). The first such example of idealized justice from *De miseria humanae conditionis* was presented by Innocent III in a chapter *De iniquis muneribus* which was intended to show two types of judges whose origins are earthly and heavenly. It also teaches a lesson on the perniciousness of bribes. Innocent III again lets the Bible stand out as the chief authority in forming his idealized ideas in *De miseria humanae conditionis*. In this chapter, he uses passages from the biblical Old Testament books to show examples of the harmfulness of bribes in the judicial and legislative branches of government. He says the following:

*Keep in mind the book of the prophet Isaiah: all those who love riches are eager for rewards; they will not stand up for orphans; a widow's complaint will not reach*

5 Wright (1993: p. 1): *Fuit vir perspicacis ingenii et tenacis memorie, in divinis et humanis litteris eruditus, sermone tam vulgari quam litterali disertus, exercitatus in cantilena et psalmodia, statura mediocris et decorus aspectu, medius inter prodigalitatem et avaritiam, sed in eleemosinis et victualibus magis largus et in aliis magis parcus nisi cum necessitatis articulus exigebat. Severus contra rebeles et contumaces, sed benignus erga humiles et devotos, fortis et stabilis, magnanimus et astutus, fidei defensor et heresis expugnator. In iustitia rigidus sed in misericordia pius, humilis in prosperis et patiens in adversis, nature tamen aliquantum indignantis sed facile ignoscenti.*

*them. (Is. 22:27) They do not pass by rewards, because they judge by the love of money. But they always follow a bribe, or a promise, or an expectation; therefore they will not stand up for the orphan; nothing comes to them from her, she neither promises nor expects. O treacherous princes, companions of thieves, who love riches and covet rewards. You will never wash your hand of bribes unless you first drive out the desire from your heart.<sup>6</sup>*

He also incorporated ideas about the person who is not fooled by the power of bribery into the conclusion of the next chapter of the aforementioned treatise, entitled *De ambitioso*:

*To the one who seeks to govern, he turns with supplication and says: O if he be guided by these things, let him be firm in justice, kind in affliction, neither inclined to love nor to hate, not corrupted by curses or money; let him who believes the faithful and finds comfort in supplications, let him be humble and kind, generous and gentle, steadfast, wise, patient, and constant?<sup>7</sup>*

Could he speak in the chapter *De ambitioso* how he would behave in the pope's place if he ruled in the Church? Was he not already then, through a theology of moral instruction, referring to his own ambitions, which were nevertheless to be subordinated to Christian virtue? This is, in our view, a new insight into the positive side of human ambition, which the young cardinal Lothar wanted to connect with the virtues of the Christian Church. He sought to present a pure, moral model of human ambition in which the biblical basis of human virtues is united with the image of God. He created a prefigurement of the ideal church leader as a model of conduct for the whole church.

The chapter *De ambitioso* captures some of the qualities that distinguish the catalogue of virtues from the tradition of the papal chronicle. Innocent III, in a same manner as the author of the *Gesta*, presents an ambitious man who should be humble (*humilis*) patient (*patiens*), prudent (*astutus*). He also points to his fortitude in justice and piety in mercy. The author of the *Gesta* replaced the phrase *severus in*

6 Maccarone (1955: p. 40): *Consule prophetam evangelicum Isaiam: Omnes, inquit, diligunt munera, sequuntur retributiones, pupillo non iudiant amore pecuniae. Semper enim sequuntur largitionem vel promissionem vel spem, et ideo pupillo non iudicant, a quo nihil largitur aut promittitur aut speratur. O principes infideles, socii furum, qui diligitis munera, sequimini retributiones! Nunquam excucietis manum a munere nisi prius excludatis cupiditatem a pectore.*

7 *Ibid.*, p. 59: *Ambitiosus ergo libenter agit de principatu quem ambit, et dicit: O quando principabitur ille qui severus sit in iustis, pius in misericordia, qui non declinet amore vel odio, qui non corrumpatur prece vel pretio, qui credas fidelibus et acquiescat supplicibus, qui sit humilis et benignus, largus et mansuetus, constans, sapiens, patiens, et astutus.*

*iustitia* with the more traditional phrase *in iustitia rigidus* because he wanted, in our opinion, to bring out even more the character trait of the ideal of the ambitious man which is pronounced in the *De miseria humanae conditionis*. The whole phrase *in iustitia rigidus sed in misericordia pius*, in its linguistic structure and textual construction, adopts the meaning of *iustitia* (justice) and *misericordia* (mercy) on the basis of the biblical tradition of rendering the interconnection of these two virtues in medieval moral doctrine. The author of the *Gesta* all too accurately portrays several character traits of the Pope as a kind of mirror of the ambitious man according to the *De miseria humanae conditionis*. Did he not mean to imply that Innocent III was trying to fulfill the young Cardinal Lothar of Segni's vision of the future? In addition to the image of the ambitious man, the above-mentioned phrases also occur in the image of the divine judge presented by Innocent III. We are talking about the chapters *De miseria humanae conditionis* in which the ideal of the judicial personality is formed: first of all, this topic is treated in a chapter entitled *De iniquis muneribus*, and subsequently in the chapter *De potentia, sapientia et iustitia iudicis*. The second mentioned chapter, *De potentia, sapientia et iustitia iudicis*, strives, in our opinion, to develop the model of the judge according to the Old Testament book of the prophet Isaiah and is modelled on *De iniquis muneribus*. Here, Innocent III presented a model of wisdom, power and justice, which itself looks up in the image of God. On this basis he wished to bring out the character of a very powerful, wise and just judge. He stated the following:

*Who would not fear a judge so mighty wise and just? Mighty because nothing remains hidden from him. Wise because no one can escape him. Righteous because no one can deceive or bribe him.*<sup>8</sup>

He goes on to conclude with a biblical quote:

*O God you are a righteous judge, firm and magnanimous, who never turns aside from the fountain of truth, neither to love nor to hate. but always walks in the right path. You leave no evil unpunished, and conversely no good goes unrewarded. The sinner, therefore, can be corrected, as the Psalmist says: Thou judgest according to his works.*<sup>9</sup>

8 Ibid., p. 95: *Quis non timeat Iudicem potentissimum, sapientissimum, iustissimum, potentissimum quem nemo potest effugere, sapientissimum quem nemo potest latere, iustissimum quem nemo potest corrumpere vel corripere?*

9 Ibid., p. 95.: *Ipse est iudex iustus, fortis et longanimis, qui nec prece nec pretio nec amore nec odio declinat a semita rectitudinis, sed via recta semper incedens, nullum malum preterit impunitum, nullum bonum irremuneratum relinquit. Hunc ergo potest corripere, iuxta quod ait psalmista: Tu reddes singulis secundum opera eius.*

At the same time, we see here a direct connection between man and God, which are represented in *De miseria humanae conditionis* the chapters *De ambitioso* and *De potentia, sapientia et iustitia iudicis*. Innocent III illustrated this connection with the phrase *nec amore nec odio, nec prece nec pretio*. All those who have ambitions to rule must suppress love, hatred, desires and greed within themselves to resemble God from the chapter *De potentia, sapientia and iustitia iudicis*. An identical example occurs in chapter 141, where the author of *Gesta* recorded the pope's address to the people. This is the only direct record of the pope's words in the entire biography. Innocent's speech was expressed as follows:

*Eligantur quatuor boni viri super discordia et divisione quae vertitur inter ipsos, et illos qui se nominant bonos homines de communi, et Richardum germanum meum, qui iurent nec amore, nec odio, nec prece, nec pretio, nec timore sed bona fide ac sine fraude, cognoscere et dicere super his.*<sup>10</sup>

So far, I have not found any documentary evidence that would record the Pope's speech from *Gesta* in written form. Let us focus on the specifics of the analysed text excerpt. Right at the beginning, the numerical symbol 4 is used, which the pope often used in his theology to express the moral and spiritual principles of Christian doctrine. We encounter it in his sermons and theological treatises. We do not know why he chose four judges. It may have strong biblical symbolism. The Book of Genesis describes four rivers of paradise that flow around the world. However, the number four also symbolises qualities such as devotion and service. The Bible speaks of four archangels as images of God's power. According to the Pope's speech, they are to be a symbol of the restoration of unity and harmony, which complements the aforementioned phrase (*...nec amore, nec odio, nec prece, nec pretio, nec timore sed bona fide*) from the ideal of human ambition and image of God's justice in *De miseria humanae conditionis*.

Did the author of the *Gesta* use the aforementioned literary images of the judicial ideal along with the inclusion of biblical language as the primary source of his literary template? Based on the identical phrases of *Gesta Innocentii III* in *De miseria humanae conditionis*. I argue that the author used the aforementioned works of Innocent III as linguistic and literary inspiration for his literary work in order to convey and connect his work with the function of the main protagonist. Biblical speech could also serve as a kind of literary inspiration for his own textual creations. The biblical parallels were completed by the author's own thoughts. The author placed the first biblical passage at the end of chapter 3 of the *Gesta*, where

<sup>10</sup> Wright (1993: p. 326).

he discusses the beginnings of the future Pope's career in the Roman Curia. He said of the future pope that he stood out in age and integrity before God and all men (*Proficiebat autem sicut aetate sic etiam probitate coram Deo et omni populo*).<sup>11</sup> In the English translation of the *Gesta*, James Powell identifies the entire passage as an allusion to Luke 2:52 (*Et Jesus proficiebat sapientia, et aetate, et gratia apud Deum et homines*) (Powell 2009: p. 2). A more detailed analysis of the whole text shows a different picture. In fact, the entire passage of the text consists of quotations from two chapters of Luke's Gospel that depict different phases of the life of Jesus Christ. In the first part of the passage under analysis (*Proficiebat autem sicut aetate sic etiam probitate...*) we see an interpretation of the conclusion of chapter 2 of Luke's Gospel. However, he completes it with a direct quotation of an idea from Luke 24. This advancement of the future Pope in age and integrity was done before the face of God and all men. The phrase itself (*coram Deo et omni populo*) comes from Luke 24:21 where the disciple, who does not know Jesus, tells him about the events in Jerusalem concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in word and deed before God and all the people (*De Jesu Nazareno, qui fuit vir propheta, potens in opere et sermone coram Deo et omni populo*). The author seems to have deliberately blended the text of these chapters in order to connect the passage about the progress of young Jesus with the New Testament narrative of Jesus as a powerful prophet. By constructing the picture of Innocent III in this way, he painted a picture of a person who was worthy to follow in the footsteps of Christ. The authors of the *Gesta* appropriately set this idea in the section of the *Gesta* where he discusses the period before Innocent's pontificate.

Let me present another example of a close connection between the *Gesta* and the works of Innocent III. It is related to the application of a biblical text quoted in the *Gesta* and in the texts of Innocent III, which followed at the end of chapter 4. It is very interesting how the author of the *Gesta* portrayed integrity of the Pope during his cardinalate. He uses the verb form *excussisse*, which refers to a textual passage from a letter that Innocent III sent to cardinal Hugolino, Bishop of Ostia, in 1207.<sup>12</sup>

We can note here the apparent correspondence of ideas between the chapter *De iniqius muneribus* from the *De miseria humanae conditionis*, the above-mentioned letter of the Pope to Cardinal Hugolino, Bishop of Ostia, and the *Gesta*. All three are identical not only in terms of stylistic and citational accuracy, but also as far as their semantic context and the work with the biblical speech are concerned. This is the same way of interpreting verse 15 of chapter 33 of the Old Testament book of

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11 Ibid., p. 2.

12 Kempf (1947: p. 343): *...praesertim cum pro certo sciamus vos manus vestras ab omni turpi munere penitus excussisse.*

the prophet Isaiah (...*et excutit manus suas ab omni munere...*) between *De miseria*, *Regestum super negotio* and *Gesta*. This is evidenced by the accompanying table:

Is. 33,15:	... <i>et excutit manus suas ab omni munere...</i>
<i>De miseria humanae conditionis: De iniquis muneribus</i>	<i>Nunquam excucietis manum a munere.</i> <sup>13</sup>
<i>Regestum super negotio Romani imperii:</i>	<i>cum pro certo sciamus vos manus vestras ab omni turpi munere penitus excussisse.</i> <sup>14</sup>
<i>Gesta Innocentii III:</i>	.... <i>cum manus suas ab omni turpi munere excussisset,</i> <sup>15</sup>

The author of *Gesta* continued the image of integrity by emphasising the non-confrontational nature of the Pope at the end of the aforementioned chapter 4 where he wrote:

*He always walked the royal path, never turning to the right or to the left, living among his brothers without quarrel, remaining impartial.*<sup>16</sup>

The phrase *via regia* was already identified by Otakar Hahne as an excerpt from the Old Testament book of Numbers.<sup>17</sup> In *Gesta*, however, the use of this phrase points to Augustine's work *Ad fratres in eremo commorantes*. From the perspective of Christ and his connection with the term *via regia*, Innocent III again drew on Augustine's ideas, when Augustine used this Old Testament term from the Book of Numbers in connection with the judges of the world who judged the people in Christ's name. Those who judge the world must walk the royal road, not turning to the right towards leniency or to the left towards excessive harshness. They walk in the footsteps of Christ:

*Regia via, qui terram judicant, incedere debent, nec declinare ad dexteram molliendo in iudicium, nec ad sinistram exasperando in supplicium. Non enim crudelitas est punire reatum, sed justitia; non tyrannicum, sed divinae rectitudinis iudicium. Non tamen volumus nec consilium damus, ut mox judicent; sed cum omni*

13 Maccarone (1955: p. 40).

14 Kempf (1947: p. 343).

15 Wright (1993: p. 2).

16 Ibid., p. 2.

17 Num. 21:22: *Obsecro ut transire mihi liceat per terram tuam: non declinabimus in agros et vineas; non bibemus aquas ex puteis: **via regia** gradiemur, donec transeamus terminos tuos.*

*maturitate incedant, et inventa discussaque rei causa in Christi nomine judicent delinquentes.*<sup>18</sup>

Innocent III himself uses this connection in a similar way in the chapters *De miseria humanae conditionis*. Moreover, it appears repeatedly in the official correspondence as a characteristic feature of cardinals and official papal envoys. It seems that the author of *Gesta* used this phrase to strengthen the connection between the pope and Christ. The author of *Gesta* also establishes the young Cardinal's position outside the vices of corruption, quarrels and power struggles. We can interpret these statements in different ways. By showing the moral opposite of Innocent III's personality, the author sought to point out, in a veiled manner, the ills of the curia, which the pope himself criticised in his *De miseria humanae conditionis*. We can only assume that, in addition to the reign of corruption, there were power struggles between the cardinals in the curia, which led to frequent disputes and thus to the division of the curia. It suggests a turbulent atmosphere in the curia under Celestine III. There was rivalry, power struggles and prestige among the cardinals. The future Pope was in the middle of the quarrelling cardinals. He had no disputes with anyone. He was in the middle of the warring parties. At the same time, this stylised text from chapter 4 of the *Gesta* can be identified with the ideal of a person who does not lean towards love or hatred and cannot be tempted by desire or possessions. He resembles Christ from *De missarum mysteriis*, where he is depicted as a mediator and unites man with God as follow:

*Inter duo candelabra in altari crux collocatur media, quoniam inter duos populos Christus in Ecclesia mediator existit, lapis angularis, qui fecit utraque unum.*<sup>19</sup>

According to the Pope, Christ is a person between two nations. We encounter again Augustine's ideas about Christ, this time from his sermon on All Saints' Day, where he perceives Jesus Christ as a mediator between the immortal God and mortal man:

*Ideo Christus mediator Dei et hominum dictus est, inter Deum immortalem et hominem mortalem Deus et homo.*<sup>20</sup>

The application of Augustine's ideas about Christ as a mediator between man and God can also be seen in Innocent III's other theological views on the human ideal, which he sees precisely in Christ. It should be a reflection of both divine and human

18 *Ad fratres in eremo commorantes*, PL 40, col. 1258.

19 *De missarum mysteriis*, PL 217, col. 811.

20 Weihrich (1904: p. 60).

nature, which is why in Innocent III's theology of the idealisation of the human personality, the characteristics of a truly ambitious person overlap with the image of God as the perfect judge. In our opinion, the author of *Gesta* also applied this principle when creating the story of Innocent III's life, which was very similar to the main protagonist's thinking about the connection between man and Christ.

Another example of the connection between biblical language and the ideas of Innocent III in the stylisation of his deeds in the *Gesta* is a short excerpt from chapter 41 in the section *Actus Spirituales* where Innocent III expelled the money changers from the Lateran Palace. The author of the *Gesta* portrayed Innocent III in accordance with the image of Christ in Matthew's Gospel (Mt 21:24). There, Christ overturned the tables of the money changers and expelled them from the Temple in Jerusalem. In the following passage, however, he showed the Pope's exceptional justice. In connection with the description of the Pope's inflexibility and harshness in justice (*iustitia rigidus*), the author states the following:

*Moreover, he was so just in deciding cases that he never accepted appeals, never deviated from the royal path, and made decisions with great maturity after due consideration.*<sup>21</sup>

We see here a similarity with the idea of Christ as God's judge from *De miseria humanae conditionis*. The pope presented the motif of the transmission of the function of the sole judge of the world from father to son using a biblical quotation from the Gospel of John, which he discusses in the chapter *De divino iudicio*:

*No one can resist his judgement, appeal against it or judge it. For the Father has given all judgement on the world to the Son. What he closes, no one can open, and what he opens, no one dares to close.*<sup>22</sup>

As we can see, the image of Christ as judge is reworked in *De miseria humanae conditionis* according to the Gospel of John. We see the connection between the old and the new. It is the perception of Christ as the embodiment of God's justice, who judges against whose decision there is no appeal. Innocent III. sees Christ as the leader, the king of the earth, who stands above the people but falls before God. The Pope adapts biblical quotations to his thinking and theology. In the preceding text I tried to show that the thoughts in *De miseria humanae conditionis* are closely

21 Wright (1993: p. 61).

22 Maccarone (1955: p. 37): *Ab illa enim sententia nunquam poterit provocari vel revocari vel appellari. Quia Pater omne iudicium dedit Filio suo. Qui claudit et nemo aperit, aperit et nemo claudit. Os enim Domini locutum est.*

connected with the *Gesta*'s catalogue of virtues and concrete actions of Innocent III. The divine element was also inserted by the author in the individual judicial cases. He tries to show a God-like person who reveals even what has been hidden from others. No one can escape from God's judgments or deceive him. Thus, the author of the *Gesta* has brought together ideas from several chapters of *De miseria* to interpret the relationship between the pope, Christ and God in the image of justice. He does not use literal quotations. He wants to emphasize that the pope is similar to both and fulfills the role of Christ's representative as God's judge.

The author of *Gesta* also conveyed the pope's connection with Christ in the final part of Innocent III's biography. In chapter 143 of *Gesta*, the Pope called for poverty and almsgiving among the rich and powerful Romans.

*Et sic famelicum populum ab imminente periculo liberavit, exhortans divites et potentes verbis pariter et exemplis ad eleemosynas largiendas.*<sup>23</sup>

It is as if the author indirectly refers to the words of Innocent III from his sermon *Date eleemosynam*, which was likely established in 1203. We cannot say with complete certainty whether it was ever delivered publicly.<sup>24</sup> However, the content of the sermon shows that its ideas were directed towards practical teaching on the spiritual basis of almsgiving, which has greater merit in heaven than the accumulation of wealth on earth. Innocent III used Christ's words from the eleventh chapter of Luke's Gospel in the introduction: *Date eleemosynam et omnia munda sunt vobis* (Lk 11:41).<sup>25</sup> Another example is the inclusion of a passage from the twelfth chapter of Mark's Gospel (Mk 12:43–44), where Christ teaches his disciples about the importance of almsgiving through the person of a poor widow,<sup>26</sup> because the Pope wanted to inspire he wanted to inspire in people, especially wealthy nobles, a desire for modesty and eternal salvation, which surpasses the riches of earthly existence. In response to the Pope's call in *Gesta* to the rich to do good deeds and give alms, the author of the text used the phrase *novit ille qui nihil ignorat*. The author included the aforementioned phrase at the end of the *Gesta*. In *De missarum mysteriis*, the Pope speaks of Christ's second coming, linking it to an excerpt from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, in which Paul called on the Roman people to practise moderation. He linked this call with a reflection on Christ's second coming and thus the end of earthly existence:

23 Wright (1993: p. 343).

24 Maurer (2022: pp. 28–29).

25 *Date eleemosynam*, PL 217, col. 745.

26 *Date eleemosynam*, PL 217, col. 745.

*Ego nescio quomodo Christus accedit, sed et quomodo recedit ignoro, novit ille qui nihil ignorat.*<sup>27</sup>

We have not found an identical or very similar interpretation of the omniscient Christ in any work prior to the creation of *De missarum mysteriis* (1196). The inclusion of the motif of the omniscient Christ in the final part of the *Gesta* is consistent with the idea of Innocent III in *De missarum mysteriis*. In our opinion, the author wanted to suggest that life in Christ's example of words and deeds does not end with death, but that a person will achieve the perfect form of their life ideal.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the *Gesta Innocentii III* has shown that many of its images of Innocent – whether literal or symbolic – echo the theological patterns of his own writings. Their placement within the text (chapters 3, 4, 41, 141, and 143) and their thematic function (introduction, spiritual acts, and conclusion) suggest that the pope is portrayed as walking in Christ's footsteps, both in word and deed. In this characterization Innocent is not only modeled on Christ but also depicted as the wisest and most prudent of judges, a portrayal that recalls his own presentation of Christ as *imago iustitiae Dei* in the *De miseria humanae conditionis*. The use of numerical symbolism – particularly the numbers three and four – further reflects Innocent's characteristic theological framework, which he developed consistently in his works on marriage, almsgiving, and the liturgy.

The parallels extend beyond themes to language itself. The *Gesta* employs many of the same biblical quotations found in Innocent's sermons and treatises, while its lexical echoes of *De miseria* reinforce the impression that Innocent's voice is present within the narrative. The textual stylization of Innocent as both ambitious man and Christ-like figure, as demonstrated here, is otherwise found only in the texts attributed to Innocent without doubt. Taken together, these features strongly suggest that the concept of imitation of Christ in the *Gesta* reflects Innocent's own theological imagination rather than the invention of an anonymous author. By contrast, the middle portion of the work (chapters 60–120), which largely reproduces papal letters, contains fewer autobiographical elements. This unevenness points to collaboration: an anonymous compiler may have shaped the text, but Innocent's active participation – whether through revision, direction, or direct authorship of key passages – appears highly plausible.

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<sup>27</sup> *De missarum mysteriis*, PL 217, col. 868.

These findings respond directly to the questions raised at the outset. If autobiography, as Philippe Lejeune argued, depends on the coincidence of author, narrator, and protagonist, the *Gesta* does not fit neatly within that modern category. Yet, as Jean-Claude Schmitt emphasized, autobiography in the Middle Ages must be understood in terms of reception – through the *belief* it elicits in readers that the text reflects a personality. In this sense, the *Gesta* can indeed be read as autobiographical: it constructs Innocent's persona in ways consistent with his own writings and invites readers to perceive his life as a Christ-like model of authority.

The study therefore positions the *Gesta Innocentii III* at the boundary between papal biography and autobiography. It demonstrates that the work cannot be understood solely as the product of an anonymous curial author, nor as the solitary composition of Innocent III, but rather as a hybrid text in which papal self-representation and curial compilation converge. Recognizing this hybrid character not only reshapes our view of Innocent's role in the creation of his own biography but also contributes to broader discussions of how medieval texts constructed subjectivity, authority, and the imitation of Christ. This conclusion invites further inquiry into authorship, genre, and the place of the *Gesta* within the evolving landscape of medieval autobiography.

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