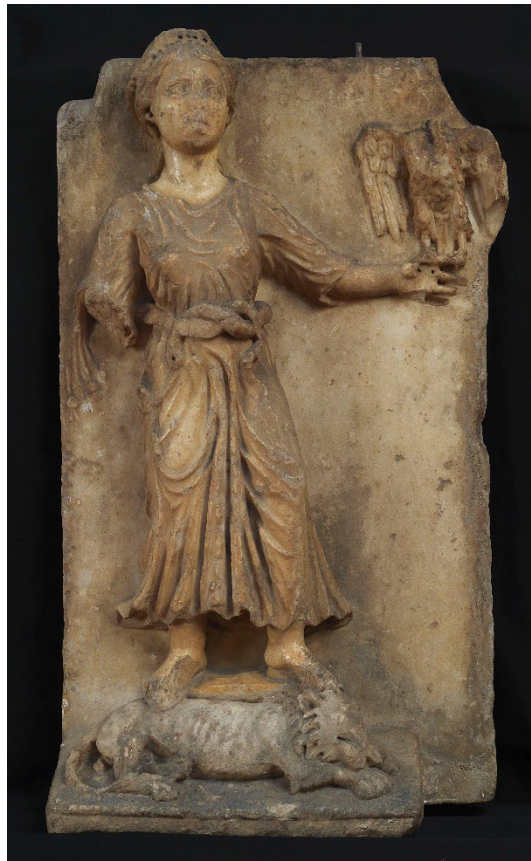


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High relief sculpture:

Symbolic figure with lion and eagle

Marble, 76 x 42 cm; 29.9 x 16.5 in

Sculpture from the age of the Emperor Frederick II.

Southern Italy, 13th century with antique elements.

Private collection, Rome

Bibliography:

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GIULIANO, A., edited by, *Studi Normanni e Federiciani*, Rome, L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2003, p. 153 fig. 41, 168;

BONA CASTELLOTTI, M., GIULIANO, A., edited by, *Exempla, La rinascita dell'antico nell'arte Italiana. Da Federico II ad Andrea Pisano*, (exhibition catalogue), Pisa, Pacini Editore Spa, 2008, pp. 114-115.

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Exhibitions:

Federico II, Immagine e potere, Bari, Castello Svevo, 1995;

Exempla, La rinascita dell'antico nell'arte Italiana. Da Federico II ad Andrea Pisano, Rimini, Castel Sismondo, 2008.



detail



detail

Extract from EXEMPLA: *La rinascita dell'antico nell'arte italiana del '200*

Formerly part of the Federico Zeri collection, this high relief presents rather unique elements, yet is of difficult interpretation due to a lack of comparable works. Depicting a female figure standing on a crouching lion, her right hand holds an object Mellini identifies as a mace (Mellini 1991); an eagle is perched on her left hand. Transparent robes fall in long, dense pleats belted at the waist by a large knotted snake. The young woman's countenance is severe, her thick locks held in place by a large diadem. The face is worn, as are the feet; part of the eagle's head and of the lion's head are missing, as is the woman's right hand and a finger of her left. This relief proposes a female image trampling the quintessential symbol of strength and courage: a lion. Considered by ancient cultures to be the most powerful animal on land, the King of Beasts is here depicted together with the eagle, Ruler of the Skies (Mazzilli Savini 2004). Owing to its incomparable eyesight and incredible speed of flight, the eagle became the symbol of omniscience and omnipresence. Indeed, in ancient Greece, the mighty bird served as Zeus' guide. Adopted as the emblem of Imperial Rome, it represented the Emperor's power. Insignia of the military, for millennia the eagle has stood for martial strength. Raised nearly to the level of a deity, its adoration finds roots in Persia and later in Egypt (Cardini 2005). The serpent that belts the gown symbolises not only *Prudence*, but also, *Eternity*, as it is presented knotted. Moreover, in virtue of the fact that a snake yearly sheds its old skin for a new one, it is seen as the image of renewal and of Life (Heinz-Mohr 1984).

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The face of the female figure has been linked to a 'Frederickian' head of a woman held at Frankfurt's Liebieghaus, stylistically similar to the sculpture group by the "Maestro di Capua" (Mellini 1978); while the diadem she wears might well find compare in that presented by Livia as Justitia on the dupondius of Tiberius, 23 A.D. (Mellini 1991) (fig 1).



Based on a resemblance with this coin, on the exegesis of the various symbols (lion, eagle, serpent), and in consideration of the attributes (the mace), the female figure has been interpreted to be an armed Imperial *Iustitia* (Mellini 1991). Mellini further hypothesises that based on content, but also due to style (characteristics proper to Campania classicism and Romanism of Germanic ancestry), this medieval relief might well be a fragment of an architrave from the ancient port of Capua.

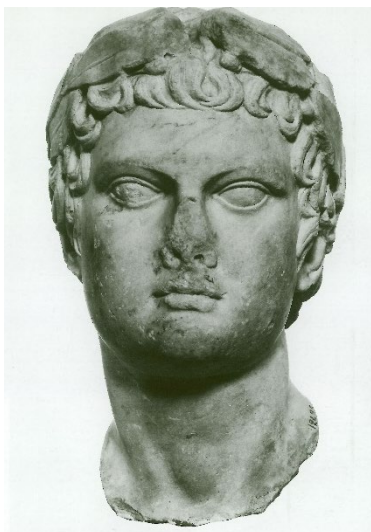


Fig. 2: Antique portrait (?), reworked as Frederick II, Geneve, Museum



Fig. 3 Sarcophagus fragment with lion, Lagopesole Castle

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However, a theory put forward by Giuliano is much more likely. He suggests – as Melilli did some years earlier (Melilli 1995) – that this sculpture is a piece from ancient times reworked within the circle of Frederick II. The author concurs with Mellini in his interpretation of the female figure as a personification of Justitia, plausible symbol of Imperial power and justice. Yet, he finds himself in strong disagreement with the interpretation of the lion as a “symbol of the Guelphs” (Giuliano 2003) placed, as it is, in ideological contrast with the eagle, symbol of the Ghibellines. It is well known that in the then reigning climate of glorification of Classical Antiquity, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II reused ancient sculptures, at times reworking them. Indeed, evidence of this is to be found in a head of Justitia, in an ancient portrait transformed in one of a laurel-crowned Frederick II (fig. 2) , and lastly, in a fragment of the Lagopesole sarcophagus (fig. 3).

Mariagiulia Burrese