THE LARGE MASK, TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION

Agneta Freccero

Register n.9; SAR n. 36.
Material: White marble with grey veins. Small crystals. 4 fragments.
Location: Courtyard, west wall, first floor above the arched doorway, set in the wall in an oval stucco niche.
Measures, cm. Height (max) 52. Width (max) 44.
Provenance: Unknown.
Bibliography: Unpublished.

Above the arched doorway at the west wall is a large mask in an oval stucco niche. It was registered in the Lancellotti inventory of 1640, as the central piece in a symmetrical composition, flanked by two busts in niches, two large reliefs and, on the ground, two over life sized statues on pedestals. The inventory from 1759 is less specific; four marble masks were registered on the walls. Matz and von Duhn mention some of the works of art displayed at the courtyard of Palazzo Lancellotti in their inventory of antique art in private collections in Rome. The mask was not registered.

The mask consists of two main fragments, one showing the upper part of the face: the eyes, the front, and the hair locks. The inferior fragment, broken andreassembled on the left side, shows the cheek, lips and the chin. The nose is missing. Iron pins in the area of the missing nose on the upper and lower fragments indicate a previous restoration. On the right side there is a lacuna into which a piece of sculpted marble has been inserted.

Both halves of the mask were made of the same kind of fine-grained white marble with a few grey veins. There is a great difference in their states of preservation. The upper fragment is weathered and the hair locks at the top are loosing crystals at the touch, i.e. sugaring. Black crusts appear on very small areas at the eyes and at the lower pair of hair locks. The lower fragment has large areas of black crust, and limited areas that are extremely eroded and sugaring. A layer of yellowish stucco, still partially intact and well fixed to the surface, applied at an earlier restoration of the chin and lips.

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1 Nota di tutte le statue, teste, bassirilievi, pezzi di marmo et alter robbe, esistenti nell palazzo dell Ill.mo Sig. Scipione Lancellotti, consegnate all Ill.mi SS. Ministri der ser.mo Sig. Principe Card.le di Savoia da me Gio. Capua Guardarobba di d.o Ill’mo Sig. Scipio one sotto il 15 ottobre 1640 in prima, in Cavazzini 1998, 197-199. “… due teste di consoli dentro due nicchione ovati sotto le finestre n. 2, e per una testa senza collo sopra l’arco n. 1.”
2 ASR, 30 Notai Capitolini, ufficio 6, 8 Gennaio 1759. “Nel cortile … Quattro maschere al muro di marmo…”.
3 Matz, von Duhn 1881.
indicates that the mask was severely decayed already in an earlier period. A thick, black crust had formed upon the stucco (fig. 2). In addition, a thin crust had developed on large areas at the cheek but the surface is still in good condition. Conservation interventions are noted in the conservation report of 2004.\(^4\)

![Black crusts and sugaring marble. Photo: A. Freccero](image)

Discussion

Seen from a distance, this head initially seemed to consist of fragments from different masks, which was due to the great differences in their state of preservation. Similarity between the blocks appeared during cleaning: the grey veins in the marble coincide at the left side. Areas around the fragments’ edges and the sculpting of fine parts such as the eyes and the root of the nose did fit well enough to suggest that this might be one mask, broken and recomposed.\(^5\) It is not possible to verify a single origin for both pieces, however, due to the re-workings that they have undergone. Chemical-technical analyses of the marble might be conclusive. According to the conservators, this could not be two parts of a single mask because of differences in dimensions.\(^6\) The earliest stucco in the niche covers the upper part of the mask; it adheres to the edges of the marble head. At least four layers of lime-wash/lime-paint covered the original plaster layer. The last layer in the niche corresponds to the last layer applied on the wall. Therefore, one can deduce that the mask was set in the wall at the time of the first construction of the wall, and that it is the mask described in the inventory of 1634.

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Bibliography


\(^5\) See the contribution of Marina Prusac on the mask in this publication.

\(^6\) Alessandro Danesi, personal comment, March 2005.