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Petrus und der Philosoph. Ein attisches Grabrelief der Hochklassik in Bari und seine mittelalterliche Umarbeitung

Abstract

This paper discusses an Attic funerary relief carved around 425 BC that was recently discovered on the premises of the nineteenth-century villa Romanazzi Carducci in Bari. The relief has been substantially reworked in a remarkable fashion. Its left side, which depicts a seated bare-chested elderly man, has been preserved in almost exactly the state in which it was carved in ancient Greece – that is, a bas-relief of exceptional quality. The right side, however, is completely altered: a standing figure has been reworked into the apostle Peter.

The authors attempt to retrace the relief's object biography and suggest possible motives and messages that could be related to the re-carving of the *spolia*. They suggest that the reworking took place in Italy in the 13th or 14th century, and argue that the process of reworking itself should be considered as a form of artistic discourse with the ancient past. By juxtaposing old and new, and by partially destroying the ancient substance and adding the figure of the apostle, the worth of the antique carving is at once highlighted and put into question. The authors argue that the primary and motivating theme of the re-carving was the idea of discourse, and as such propose an interpretation of the scene as a dispute or didactic conversation between Peter and an ancient philosopher. A comparison with the pagan philosophers on the tree of Jesse relief of Orvieto Cathedral suggests that, in the course of re-carving, the seated male figure depicted in the relief of the villa Romanazzi Carducci was reinterpreted as a pagan prognosticator of Christianity.