

Paride de' Grassi und ein pseudo-antikes Memorial für ein Maultier (CIL VI 3443*). Zur gelehrten Rezeption eines Relikts der rinascimentalen Scherzkultur

Abstract

The article is centered on a long-lost memorial for a mule that the author has rediscovered in the center of Rome, and that, according to the evidence, most likely the papal master of ceremonies Paride de' Grassi designed as a joke in the first quarter of the Cinquecento, before burying and then 'discovering' it as an apparently ancient piece. The monument was last seen and located by learned antiquarians shortly before 1700. Nevertheless, the Latin epitaph engraved on the stone is one of the most frequently transcribed and interpreted tomb inscriptions of the early modern period – and beyond. In the present article, this exceptional prominence, as illustrated by an appendix of sources, is explained in terms of the sophistication of the allusions and linguistic jokes it contains, but also by the questionable origin and dubious authority of the pseudo-antique piece. Going beyond the reconstruction of the provenance and the concrete classification of this memorial for a mule, which as a central example of the Renaissance fabrication of fake ancient monuments has so far received little attention from researchers, the article also aims to contextualize this object within a culture of jokes cultivated in clerical circles in Rome in the early Cinquecento. On the one hand, the authorship of the master of ceremonies Paride de' Grassi, which has been suspected since the sixteenth century, is tested for plausibility, while on the other hand this article attempts to enrich the understanding of the role played by these officials in the history of art by considering a hitherto overlooked facet of their social and cultural practices.