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BAS-RELIEFS

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PEDIMENT WITH THE HOLY FACE OF JESUS

ITALY, VENETO

LATE 14th CENTURY

Height : 61 cm

Length : 113 cm

Thickness : 8 cm

Verona stone (nodulated limestone)

The pediment is carved in a beautiful Verona stone. Moulded on two of its sides the pediment is centred with a low-relief depicting the Holy Face of Jesus framed with two open-worked crosses pattées. The Holy Face of Jesus is treated in a very delicate relief slightly emerging from the surface.

The theme of the Holy Face of Jesus finds its origins in the Byzantine relic of the Mandylion, mentioned as early as the 6th century. From the 13th century onwards, its Christian iconography asserts itself with the story of Saint Veronica. Two stories of *acheiropoieta* images. Indeed the term Holy Face of Jesus names the depiction of the features of Christ not drawn by human hands. In the story of Saint Veronica (*Vera Icon* : the true image) the face of Christ is miraculously printed on a piece of cloth the woman used to wipe the sweat off of Jesus.

This supernatural portrait of the son of God grows in Western Christian iconography especially during Middle-Ages and again during the 17th century. The face is depicted frontally, the eyes usually open and wearing the crown of thorns. This theme is also a way for the painters to express their virtuosity in delivering a fabric *trompe-l'œil*.

On our piece the cloth is not depicted and the Holy Face of Jesus is completely isolated in a very elegant composition. The face is gracefully suspended in mid-air. The hair and beard are treated in parallel wavy strands floating around the face and bearing the crown of thorns. The eyes are characteristically treated following the style of the 14th century while the face of Christ being depicted isolated is mostly found in 15th century productions (*Museo Bardini, inv. Depositi comunali 28*). Hence we can date the realisation of this stone pediment around the late 14th and early 15th century. The treatment of the halo shows an extraordinarily modern perspective leading to Italian origins.



Differentiating itself from the two other sides, the pediment's base is not moulded suggesting that it used to top a more important structure. It could be the finial of a monumental chair like a cathedra or the pediment of a portal or a bay. The effect of the Holy face of Jesus crowning the chair of a prelate would procure a certain sense of majesty and would draw a very strong vertical symbolic with the face of Jesus and the face of the prelate in a same axis. An expression of its Christian mission as well as of his authority.

The pediment could also top the portal of a chapel or even a bay as implied by the two openings shaped as crosses pattées framing the Holy Face of Jesus. Whatever the original function of this sobre and elegant piece we can not deny its architectural dimension and the undeniable prestige of its commission. Although the cross pattée has been used as a symbol of the Teutonic knights as soon as the 12th century nothing indicates the commission of the pediment is related to the order. The use of this typology of cross is much too common across periods and spaces to take it as a valuable indication of origin.



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***ITALIAN MARBLE BAS-RELIEF OF THE
LION OF SAINT-MARK***

NORTHERN ITALY, VENETO

16th CENTURY

Height : 51 cm

Width : 107 cm

Depth : 16 cm

Nembro marble

Low-relief on Nembro marble stone depicting a lion *leone marciano andante* type facing left, his right anterior paw on an open book, the tail is shaped as a reversed C. Exceptional modelling of the body.

With the seizing of the body of Saint Mark by Venice the city acquired with it its iconography, the winged lion from the Tetramorph. However the lion soon loses its religious association, wiped out by its new political dimension. During the Renaissance period the *leone marciano* is a widespread motif within the city of Venice and its inland dominions. As detached statuary inside churches or standing on columns, on palaces or lodges frescoes or as low-relief on bridges and street façades. Sometime apotropaic the winged lion acts mainly as the expression of an insular community proudly claiming its power and identity through the beast's figure.

The latin inscription *Pax Tibi Marce Evangelista Meus* means « May the peace be with you Mark, my evangelist ». Ostentatiously shown it reminds the Republic of Venice of a certain quiety guarantee given by God to a land he chose for the body of the saint.



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This low-relief probably took place upon the façade of rich venetian house. The artist's craftsmanship is remarkable with the modelling of the lion, progressively emerging out of the plate. Its paws appears solidly attached to the stone while the top of his head and wings come forward out of the plate. It gives an impressive yet measured overhang effect for the streetwalkers. The craftman achieved a noteworthy modelling work giving the lion a realistic flesh and muscle with bulging ribs.



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The lion physiognomy is very close to 16th century models with the realistic muzzle, the wings design and the fur line on his anterior paws.

The lack of erosion traces on the stone yet characteristics of the Venetian climate lead us to think the relief comes from an inland dominion as Cremona (Lombardia) for instance, conquered by Venice in 1499 and not far from Nembro marble quarry.

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