Some Venetian Romanesque Reliefs in Nottingham

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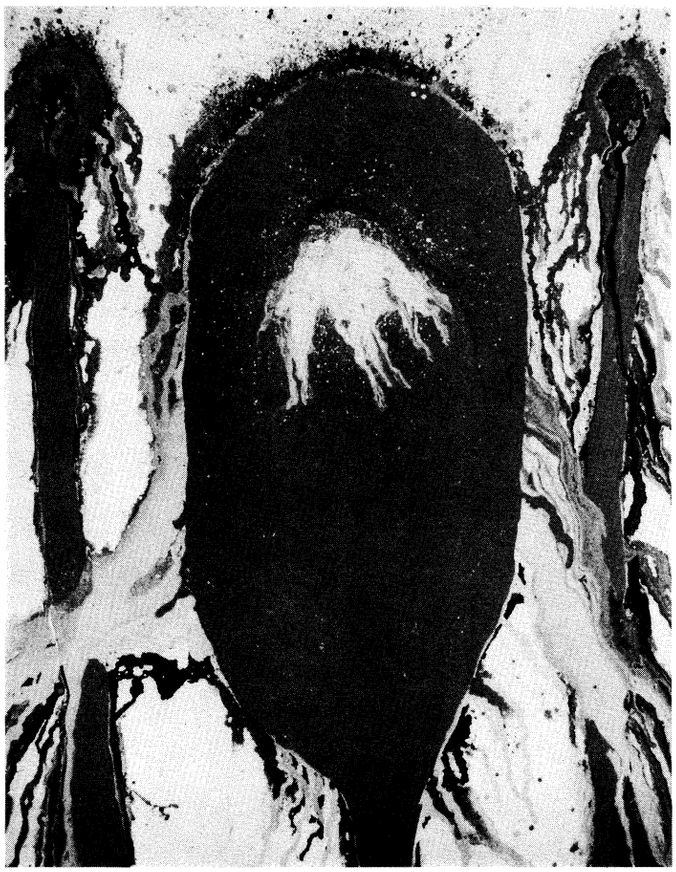


33. *Work, 1962*, by Motonaga Sadamasa. Oil and synthetic enamel on canvas. 227 by 182 cm. (Tōkyō Gallery).

be called that of artistic reciprocity seems richer at all three levels, for art works become part of a common store of references which work on and are worked on by artists in different cultures. This reciprocity could be modelled as a feedback process both in works and information about them, with leads and lags in the confirmation of stylistic models and in the adherence or deviation from them. A model which includes reciprocal communication with the outside allows description, explanation and prediction about art works, their artists, and their promoters in different cultural centres. Thus we might explain the speed with which certain New York art movements found their way into Japanese art circles in the 1960s. Information about these was most likely mediated by American art magazines, Japanese art magazines (some of which are older than their counterparts in the United States), and by Japanese artists like Motonaga Sadamasa exhibiting at galleries in both Tōkyō and New York (Fig.33). Their works became the norm for an international art style within Japanese artistic culture and, as an exemplar of it, communicated simultaneously to a cross-cultural audience through New York and the Venice and São Paolo Biennales.[24]

A model of reciprocal communication concerns itself at the secondary level of causation with laterality, that is the transient direction of and conditions for dominance, and with linkage, that is whether simultaneous changes in different cultural centres indicate autochthonous development or are inter-related. One can look for causations at centres of activity mapped by stylistic norms and not for the generic origins of a style in any one culture.

At the tertiary level a new kind of prediction is necessary. Post-1960, and even post-1950 Japan presents an artistic culture where young artists have been exposed to a broad range of primary communication through visiting exhibitions, and to an even larger range of secondary communication about other art works through the very well-informed art press. In succeeding years, the increase in the volume and quality of the latter has outstripped the former. Such secondary communication has its own technical limitations, and this to some extent allows for a continued 'Japanese' cultural reference in information. What is 'Japanese' about a Japanese art work made today may no longer be a direct attribute of the art work itself, but of the process by which information is transformed into the art work.

[24]See the catalogue *Reconstructions*, MOMA, Oxford [1985], for 1945-65. The *Mizue* issue of 11-1981, No.920 includes a good survey of international currents affecting Japanese art in the 1950s by NAKAJIMA RISHŪ.

Shorter Notices

*Some Venetian romanesque reliefs in Nottingham**

BY BRENDAN CASSIDY

IN 1891 the Castle Museum, Nottingham received as a bequest from the Dowager Viscountess Galway, 'some old stones that were found at the bottom of Reggio'.[1] These eleven stones, all circular and varying in diameter between 27.3 and 38.7 cms, have been variously catalogued as 'Byzantine ninth century' and 'done by Lombard sculptors of the Como school'.[2] All were thought to be original reliefs of the Middle Ages. Petrological analysis, however, has revealed that six of the stones are imitations, probably nineteenth-century, of medieval models.

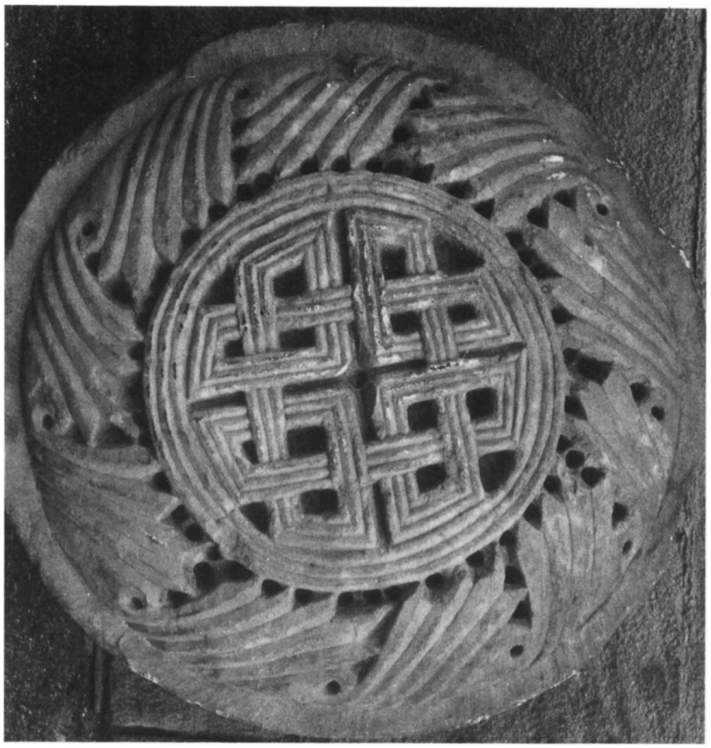
It has been assumed that the roundels were roof bosses from a church. In fact the five medieval examples (Figs.34-38) formed part of the architectural ornamentation of the façade of a Venetian palace, and belong to a large group of sculptures called *patere* which were executed by Venetian craftsmen between the early eleventh and late thirteenth century.[3] Well over half the recorded

*I should like to thank Dr Ron Firman and John Travis of the Geology department, Nottingham University for analysing the stones for me.

[1]Letter from Lord Galway read before Nottingham Town Council on 7th December 1891.

[2]Nottingham Art Gallery, Jubilee Exhibition 1878-1928, catalogue, Nottingham [1928], Nos.341-50.

[3]The most complete study of this type of sculpture is Z. SWIECHOWSKI and A. RIZZI: *Romanische Reliefs von Venezianischen Fassaden* (Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte und christlichen Archäologie, Bd.11), Wiesbaden [1982].



34.

35.

34. Venetian *patera*. Marble, diameter 38.7 cm. (Castle Museum, Nottingham).

35. Venetian *patera*. Marble, diameter 33.7 cm. (Castle Museum, Nottingham).

36. Venetian *patera*. Marble, diameter 34.3 cm. (Castle Museum, Nottingham).

36.

examples have remained in Venice.[4]

Swiechowski and Rizzi's corpus of Romanesque reliefs from Venetian façades did not include the Nottingham roundels. Although the collection is small when compared with those in Berlin, Boston, Detroit and Kreuzenstein, it is, nevertheless, the largest collection of this type of Veneto-Byzantine sculpture in Britain and three of the reliefs are particularly worthy of note for the quality of their carving (Figs.34-36).[5]

The medieval roundels are carved from the greyish Macedonian marble which was the preferred material for this kind of sculpture. The marble probably reached Venice from Greece as ballast in the holds of merchant ships.[6] Two of the stones (Figs.37 and 38) are badly weathered and although the general form of the design is clear the detail is all but obliterated. The other three, however, apart from some chipping around the edges are among the finest preserved of the thousand or so surviving examples of *patere*.

Four of the stones are flat and carved with zoomorphic subjects. The fifth is convex (Fig.34) with a ring of spiky acanthus leaves converging on a central motif of rectangular interlace. The carving is crisp and sure, with evidence of drill work between the points of the leaves. Although non-figurative designs do occur in Venetian *patere* this particular pattern is unique.[7] An analogous combination of acanthus and interlace is found on a capital in the chancel of San Marco which Buchwald and Deichmann

[4]The largest group in situ on a Venetian palace is to be found on the Fondaco dei Turchi, cf. SWIECHOWSKI and RIZZI, *op.cit.* at note 3 above, Nos.457-515, and A. RIZZI: 'Patere e Formelle al Fondaco dei Turchi', *Bollettino dei musei civici veneziani*, 23 [1978], pp.12-42. A large group survive in their original location on the thirteenth-century façade of the Ca' da Mosto; see, E. ARSLAN: *Venezia gotica. L'Architettura Civile Gotica Veneziana*, Venice [1970], pls.14-17; and SWIECHOWSKI and RIZZI, *op.cit.*, Nos.286-300.

[5]The only other recorded example in Britain is the *patera* in the Victoria and Albert Museum; see J. POPE-HENNESSY: *Catalogue of Italian Sculpture in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London [1964], Vol.I, p.25, and Vol.III, pl.39; and now P. WILLIAMSON: *Catalogue of Romanesque Sculpture*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London [1983], pp.64-65, No.29.

[6]SWIECHOWSKI and RIZZI, *op.cit.* at note 3 above, p.21.

[7]For other non-figurative *patere* see *ibid.*, Nos.16, 42, 131, 256-57, 395, 453, 488, 714.

37. Venetian *patera*. Marble, diameter 31.1 cm. (Castle Museum, Nottingham).

38. Venetian *patera*. Marble, diameter 27.3 cm. (Castle Museum, Nottingham).

both date to the late eleventh century.[8] The style of the roundel is sufficiently close to that of the capital to support a comparable late eleventh- or early twelfth-century date for the Nottingham *patera*.

The zoomorphic reliefs with representations of paired beasts reproduce some of the inhabitants of the medieval bestiary: lions, eagles, oxen and hares. Heraldically posed, the carnivores prey on the weaker herbivores. The theme of fighting animals was a favourite subject in Byzantine art from the seventh century onwards, and it was from Byzantium that the imagery of the *patere* reached Venice, probably in the eleventh century.[9] Like eastern scenes of animal conflict, the function of the *patera* on the Venetian palace would seem to have been apotropaic. Placing decorative roundels on the outside of buildings was again an eastern practice which reached the west in a variety of forms.[10]

Two of the Nottingham roundels (Figs.37 and 38) represent what is the most common subject in the whole corpus; an eagle seen in profile pecking at the head of a hare on which it stands. These reliefs may have been carved as pendants like the very similar pair in the castle at Kreuzenstein.[11] A third roundel (Fig.35) represents a profile eagle striking at the head of what may be a calf. A calf too seems to be the victim of the peculiarly stylised lion (Fig.36) the mane of which is drawn out into horn-like points to accentuate its diabolic appearance. Unusual is its long tail which crosses over the body of the calf. The incised ornament and the lines which emphasise the contours of the limbs relate this roundel to the previous one, suggesting for both a common origin in the same workshop. Another *patera* identical in style to these two, and equally well preserved, survives in the Museo dell'Estuario, Torcello.[12]

Patere in general can be dated between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries.[13] More precise dates for individual pieces, however, are more difficult to determine because of the very few securely datable points of reference and the essentially conservative nature of this type of sculpture. The particular detail of anatomical stylisation in which the limbs are defined by incisions running parallel to their outlines, is a convention employed in *patere* throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The two best-preserved animal roundels in Nottingham (Figs.35 and 36) exhibit a careful elaboration of surface pattern (e.g. in the scale-like feathers) and an attempt to render more plastically the zoomorphic forms which relate them to the reliefs on the balustrades of the Tribunes in San Marco. These must date from shortly after the reconstruction of the church under the Doge Contarini and his immediate successors between 1063 and 1094.[14] A date in the early twelfth century, therefore, seems most probable for at least the two unweathered animal reliefs as well as for the roundel with the interlace design (Figs.34-36).

[8] H. BUCHWALD: 'The Carved Stone Ornament of the High Middle Ages in San Marco, Venice', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft*, XIII [1964], pp.137-38 and Fig.19. F.W. DEICHMANN, with J. KRAMER and U. PESCHLOW: *Corpus der Kapitelle der Kirche von San Marco zu Venedig* (Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte und christlichen Archäologie, Bd.12), Wiesbaden [1981], No.15, see also, Nos.10, 16.

[9] T. TALBOT RICE: 'Animal Combat Scenes in Byzantine Art', in *Studies in Memory of David Talbot Rice*, ed. G. ROBERTSON and G. HENDERSON, Edinburgh [1975], pp.17-23.

[10] See H.G. FRANZ: 'Das Medaillon als architektonisches Schmuckmotiv in der italienischen Romanik', *Forschungen und Fortschritte*, 31 [1957], pp.118-25; and *idem:* 'Das Schmuckmedaillon in der Baukunst des Mittelalters in Italien, Byzanz und dem Islamischen Orient', *Zeitschrift für Kunstwissenschaft*, XIII [1959], pp.111-38. Comparable to the *patere* of Venice are the ceramic bowls with oriental designs that are occasionally set into the exterior of Romanesque churches in Italy; see A. LANE: *Early Islamic Pottery*, London [1947], p.22 and pl.27a.

[11] SWIECHOWSKI and RIZZI, *op.cit.* at note 3 above, Nos.923-24; see also, Nos.449, 451.

[12] *Ibid.*, No.657.

[13] *Ibid.*, pp.23-24, on dating reliefs.

[14] A. GRABAR: *Sculptures byzantines du moyen-age* (XIe-XIVe siècle), Paris [1976], No.73 and pl.L.