ABSTRACT

Le conchiglie del Ninfeo di Palazzo Sacchetti a Roma

The decorative shells of the nympheum of Palazzo Sacchetti in Rome

by Sandra Ricci, Simone Consalvi

The sixteenth century nympheum of Palazzo Sacchetti, situated on via Giulia in Rome, is a fine example of an artificial grotto, decorated with wall paintings, sculptures in stucco, mosaic panels, glass features and natural materials such as calcified deposits and mollusc shells. This paper is based on the restoration carried out by the ISCR from 2005 to 2008, and aims to further the knowledge of the shells used as decorative elements. Studies involved the various taxa of molluscs, Bivalves and Gastropods used for decorating the nympheum, summarising the morphological and ecological data for each species and, where possible, comparing them with other artistic settings in which the species has been used. Overall, the artists used 25 species of which fifteen are Bivalves and ten are Gastropods, for a total of 2390 shells. The most frequent species is *Acanthocardia tuberculata* with a wide variety of examples varying in size, colour and ornamentation, depending on the age of the shell in question. The most frequently used Gastropod is *Bolinus brandaris* with 92 examples, often quite large, followed by *Hexaplex trunculus*. The shells were generally used just as they were; there was limited use of *Pinna nobilis* and *Pecten jacobaeus* shells which had been roughly cut to obtain nearly rectangular pieces. All the species identified are typical of the Mediterranean area except for the Gastropods *Monetaria annulus* and *Monetaria moneta* which come from the Indian and Pacific oceans. It was clear that many shells were missing from the decoration of the niches as shown by the hollows left in the mortar. The opportunity to examine the decoration of the nympheum confirmed that scientific investigations of this type should be included in diagnostic surveys in order to raise the awareness of operators in the conservation sector regarding the need to study the shells more closely. These precious and fragile animal remains deserve the same attention as that given to other constituent materials, especially because of their peculiarity and the conservation problems they involve.

Le radiografie della perduta Natività di Caravaggio

The X-ray investigations of losto Caravaggio's Nativity

by Elisabetta Giani, Claudio Seccaroni

As well known, the Nativity with St. Lorenzo and St. Francesco by Caravaggio, painted for the St. Lorenzo Oratory in Palermo, was stolen in 1969 and since then never found. Subsequently it is commonly assumed that it went destroyed. In 1951 the canvas was in Milan for the "Mostra del Caravaggio e dei caravaggeschi", then it was sent to the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro in Rome for restoration. In that occasion diagnostic investigations, such as the radiography of most important iconographic areas and the faces and hands of the represented figures, were performed. The nine radiographic plates, stored by the "Archivio fotografico per la documentazione dei restauri" (Photographic archive for the documentation of the restorations) of the Superior Institute for Conservation and Restoration (ISCR) are, undoubtedly, a precious testimony of the execution technique and of the conservation conditions of the painting, before its restoration. In this paper the technical information from the radiographs of the Nativity shall be precisely referred to.

ABSTRACT

Gli impatti dei cambiamenti climatici e dell'inquinamento atmosferico sui beni culturali di Ancona

Impact of climate change and atmospheric pollution on cultural assets in Ancona

by Carlo Cacace, Annamaria Giovagnoli, Raffaela Gaddi, Mariacarmela Cusano, Patrizia Bonanni

The impact of climate change on cultural assets is a challenge that the scientific community is facing in order to work out strategies for better conservation. The present study, carried out by the ISCR and ISPRA as part of the LIFE ACT project (Adapting to Climate Change in Time), was aimed to analyse the effect of climate change at the municipal level and to work out the appropriate strategies to be recommended to the local authorities, in order to guarantee that the cultural heritage can adapt to future territorial changes. The project was co-funded by the European Commission and developed in collaboration with the municipalities of Ancona (Italy), Bullas (Spain) and Patras (Greece) with the objective of establishing a plan for adapting to climate change locally, and to draw up some guidelines on "adaptation plans for public administrations". As part of the project, the Ancona municipality is assessing the effects of climate change on coastal areas, on hydrogeological risks (landslides), on infrastructures and the historical and artistic items. The risk for Ancona's historical-artistic artefacts has been analysed in terms of two components: the conservation conditions (vulnerability) of some important limestone monuments in the city, and the potential environmental aggression (hazard) of Ancona' urban area.

La cassaforte della casa dei Vettii a Pompei. Dalla scoperta al restauro

The strongbox from the house of the Vettii in Pompeii: from discovery to restoration

by Gabriella Prisco, Bianca Fossà, Stefano Ferrari, Salvatore Federico, Angelo Giglio, Kristian Schneider, Paolo Scarpitti, Gian Franco Priori, Fabio Talarico, Igor Maria Villa

The strongbox, dating from the third quarter of the first century AD, was unearthed in 1894 inside the house of the Vettii in Pompeii. It is made with several different types of materials, and laminas in iron and bronze are attached to the box with a large number of nails. All that remains of the decorative scheme is a band depicting small palm trees with garlands, in damask steel with bronze thread. Restoration was carried out immediately after excavation in 1894, aiming to provide an image of the work that was as complete as possible; hence the original parts were mounted on a modern wooden box in approximate positions, combined with some ex-novo elements. The strongbox was then repositioned in situ on its original base, protected by a display case in plate glass; this arrangement is what has come down to the present day. The new restoration became necessary since the state of conservation was extremely precarious due to the unsuitable location, causing warping of the wooden parts with consequent deformation of the structure; the situation was aggravated by the unequal distribution of the weight on the base; in addition, the gradual decay of the iron pieces had caused detachment and loss of original parts as well as alterations in the appearance of the surfaces. Restoration proved to be a complex task not only technically but also from the aesthetic point of view. After removing the modern wood, the remains of the original material were brought to light. This, together with the cleaning of the metal items, showed how the 19th century re-composition was the result of misunderstandings and arbitrary juxtapositions, also regarding the basic dimensions. Many elements were specifically identified and correctly repositioned. Given the need to leave the internal surfaces of the original wooden box in view, panels in methacrylate were chosen for the new support; however, in order to provide a unified overview of the surviving fragments, the effect of transparency was toned down somewhat. The panels were fixed to a stainless steel frame designed to suggest the original shape and volume. These operations have made the strongbox rather different to the object imagined by our predecessors; the proportions have been corrected and the constituent elements of the metal finishing have been identified.