

# Relief with Prometheus



**ONGOING RESTORATION REPORT  
OCTOBER 2023**

# Description

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The Front Sarcophagus Fragment with the Creation of Mankind probably comes from a necropolis in the ancient city of Ostia and can be dated to the 3rd century AD. It is currently preserved in the Hall of the Busts of the Pius Clementine Museum, anchored into the base supporting the statue of praying Livia and within a plaster frame. It depicts the titan Prometheus molding men, women, and animals by infusing them with the breath of life in the presence of the Fates, Kloto, Lâchesi, Atropo, and the god Mercury.



# State of Preservation

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The surface was covered with a layer of consistent deposits. Excavation concretions of calcareous-earthy origin were detected more in the central inferior zone of numerous rosin reparations (material used in the previous restoration for gluing and filling the gaps).

On the decoration of the upper margin, however, there was a thick layer of plastering, with overlapping deposits of color. On the inscriptions, there was an evident presence of black and red pigment, which the Scientific Research Laboratory analyzed in the preliminary stage of cleaning to define its type.





# Restoration Procedures

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The result of the diagnostic investigations (UV and XRF), specifically XRF, carried out before cleaning, detected cinnabar (due to the presence of mercury and sulfur), iron pigments (ochres), and lead pigments (*minium* and/or white lead), in all the letters analyzed. The color of the inscription, originally red, due to the work's exposure to weathering (sunlight), assisted the irreversible transformation and, thus, oxidation of the pigment from red to black.

After finishing an initial campaign of investigations, including the sampling of the patination superimposed on the upper decorative frame, to establish the type of pigments, such as the superimposed whitewash, restorers proceeded with 2D graphic documentation using a tablet with App Graphic (Graphic Picta Inc.).





Musei Vaticani  
Laboratorio di Restauro Materiali Lapidei

DOCUMENTAZIONE  
GRAFICA

B1 Strati Sovrapposti

concrezione

B2 Forme di Alterazione

fessurazione

fratturazione

mancanza

C Interventi Precedenti

incollaggio/integr. colofonia

scialbatura

policromia non originale

patinatura semicoprente

numero inventario

rubricatura

C1 Elementi metallici  
e di collegamento

probabili perni/grappe intonaco  
(rilevate con metal detector)

Oggetto: Frammento di fronte di sarcofago con la creazione del genere umano

Numero inv.: MV683

Materiale: marmo bianco

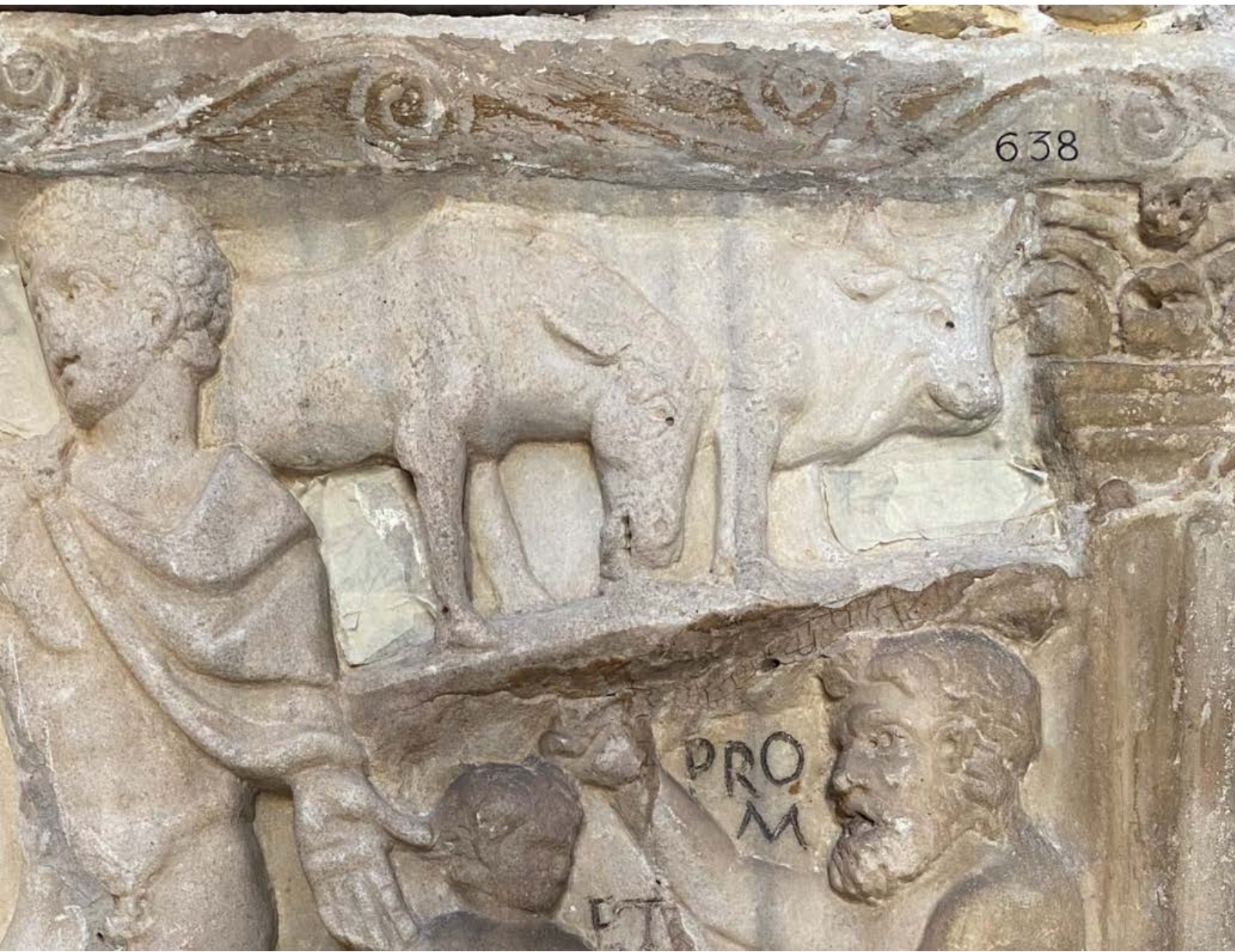
Collocazione: Museo Pio Clementino  
Galleria dei Busti

Secolo: fine III sec. d.C.

Misure: cm 68 x 98



Following an initial diagnostic intervention, restorers proceeded with cleaning tests, first with a brush dusting, through the use of soft brushes for the removal of the dust deposits accumulated in most parts of the relief; subsequently, after testing for the choice of solutions and suitable application times, we turned to methodologies and products with lower environmental impact respecting the work, the operator, and the environment, with Agar-Agar gel suitable for the removal of coherent deposits, greasy dust, probable patination used in previous conservation work, and substances of various kinds. Restorers protected all areas of the inscriptions in advance with cyclododecane and covered them with special tape during the Agar-Agar application. For more effective cleaning, we have, in agreement with the D.L., added to the Agar Agar gel a low percentage of Triammonium Citrate Salts (0.4%) and Tween 20 to make the gel foamable, achieving greater wettability on the surface, better solubilization of the substances to be removed, less adhesion to the substrate and easier removal of residues. After a gel setting time of about 20 minutes, the deposits were easily removed with latex sponges soaked in lukewarm water and, where necessary, reapplied foamed Agar-Agar for a reduced time of 15 minutes.











To be able to achieve greater compactness and homogeneity of the cleaning, considering that in the lower zone, the deposits appear to be more cohesive due to concretions, we decided together with the construction management and the Scientific Research Laboratory to use the Eos Laser in QS mode, following the removal of foamed Agar-Agar gel.

As can be seen from the images, the best removal results of the more cohesive deposit are achieved with the Laser, giving the surface better legibility; since the marble is of the *proconnesian* type, we determined to use the out-of-focus spot to avoid mottling on the veins of the marble.

Following the Laser cleaning, the restorers applied a layer of Agar-Agar to remove the particulate produced by the Laser and extract any soluble salts released from the application of foamed Agar with added triammonium citrate: contact time of 8/10 minutes. During the cleaning along the perimeter of the fragment, the restorers mechanically removed plaster overlays to improve the aesthetic enjoyment of the work. It was determined to lower the plaster level adjacent to the frame, thus removing a layer of 5/7 mm. While cleaning the surface, the restorers lowered the stuccoes in colophony that were overflowing on the original, using scalpels and small chisels.





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