Medal - Medal of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta/Rimini Castle

Object: Medal

Place of origin: Verona (Possibly, Made)

Date: 1446 (Dated)
1449-1451 (Made)

Artist/Maker: de’ Pasti, Matteo (Maker, Designer)

Materials and Techniques: Cast bronze

Museum number: A.173-1910

Gallery location: Medieval & Renaissance, Room 64, The Wolfson Gallery, case 14

Public access description

The front of this medal shows Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta (1417-1468), Lord of Rimini, a condottiere, or mercenary soldier, who in the mid-fifteenth century became the ruler of Rimini, Fano and Cesena on the east coast of Italy. Alongside political and military activities, Sigismondo was a highly cultured patron of the arts and sciences, influenced by the Humanist court in Ferrara. Under his rule, Rimini became a centre of Renaissance learning, and, like many Italian humanist rulers, Sigismondo embraced the portrait medal as propaganda.

The reverse of this medal is the first known depiction of architecture in a Renaissance portrait medal and shows his new castle at Rimini. This unapologetic proclamation of Sigismondo’s military prowess is reinforced by the armour he wears in profile on the front. Many Malatesta medals by Matteo de’Pasti, including variants of this castle design, have been found buried as foundation deposits in the buildings commissioned by Sigismondo, including in the fabric of the very castle depicted on this medal. This design exists in several variations, was cast in considerable quantities and is considered to be one of Matteo’s masterpieces. Like the best early portrait medals it is a well-proportioned and balanced hand-held sculpture of harmonious design.

Descriptive line

Medal, bronze, depicting a bust of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, by Matteo de’Pasti, Italy (Verona), 1446

Physical description

Obverse: Bust of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta facing to the left wearing plate armour over mail. Legend: SIGISMVNDVS PANDVLFVS MALATESTA PAN[dulfi] F[ilius][Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, son of Pandolfo]

Reverse: The castle of Rimini. Legend: CASTELLVM SISMVNDVM ARIMINENSE MCCCCXLVI (Castle Sigismundo at Rimini. 1446)

Dimensions

Diameter: 8.0 cm, Weight: 0.18 kg, Weight: 0.18 kg

Museum number

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Object history note

This was one of several medals executed by Matteo de’Pasti of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini and Fano. The obverse is always a profile bust, but the reverses promote a range of different leadership qualities. One such reverse shows an arm holding a palm of victory, another his personal impresa, whilst another shows an allegory of strength and fortitude. The reverse of this medal shows his new castle at Rimini and the inscribed date in Roman numerals of 1446 commemorates the date of the building’s ceremonial inauguration. As with this example, Matteo’s name does not appear on many of these medals, even where signed versions of the same design exist. Possibly Sigismondo did not want any name but his recorded for posterity, as he relied on them to perpetuate his fame after his death, as coins had done for Roman emperors: antique coins and monuments only recorded the name of the ruler. Another possibility is that Matteo did not want numerous versions being buried as foundation deposits over whose casting and finish he had less control.

Historical significance: This design exists in several variations, was cast in considerable quantities and is considered to be one of Matteo’s masterpieces, displaying the qualities of the best early portrait medals - well-proportioned and balanced hand-held sculpture of harmonious design. The Reverse, a depiction of the castle of Rimini, is the first known depiction of architecture in a Renaissance portrait medal, and an unapologetic proclamation of Sigismondo’s military prowess.

Historical context note

An Italian medalist, architect, painter and illuminator from Verona, Matteo de’ Pasti (c. 1420- c. 1467) was one of the earliest exponents of the Renaissance two sided portrait medal. He worked in Venice as painter to Piero di Cosimo de’ Medici, illustrating Petrarch's Triumphs in the early 1440s, and then as an illuminator for the Este court in Ferrara 1444-1446. By 1449 he was in Rimini and worked on the construction and decoration of two large funerary chapels, known as the Tempio Malatestiano, for Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini, and his mistress Isotta degli Atti. Agostino di Duccio and other Venetian sculptors also worked on the interior decoration. It is likely that Matteo initially supervised this project and then continued working there overseeing his interior design scheme when Leon Battista Alberti was entrusted with rebuilding the church itself c. 1450.
Matteo de’ Pasti became a valued friend and councillor to Sigismondo Malatesta, eventually entrusted with the responsibility for all artistic and architectural work within the state. His position would have ensured contact with other artists working at the Rimini court, most notably Piero della Francesca, as well as Agostino and Alberti. Matteo was also strongly influenced in his medal design by Pisanello, who had himself designed three medals for the Malatesta c. 1445, and there is evidence he was a pupil of Pisanello. The simplicity and modelling of his medals reflect this influence.

Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta (1417-1488) was the second illegitimate son of Pandolfo Malatesta, Lord of Farno, and nephew of Carlo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini and its territories. On their father’s death in 1427, the heirless Carlo adopted Sigismondo and his brothers who were then legitimised by Pope Martin V in 1428, enabling them to rule after him. However, on Carlo’s death Martin V tried to deprive them of this inheritance. Sigismondo eventually took power as Lord of Rimini aged only 15. He was famed for his military skill and had a reputation for ruthlessness. A fierce fighter, he was one of the first to exploit artillery and invented the hand grenade. As a young man Sigismondo Malatesta gained distinction as a condottiere (mercenary soldier) for the papacy, taking part in many of the important engagements on the Italian Peninsula. However, having deserted Alfonso of Aragon, then King of Naples and Sicily, in 1447 and after hostility towards the Montefeltro and Sforza families, he then aggravated his ongoing conflict with Pope Pius II by ignoring peace terms proposed in 1459. In 1460 the pope excommunicated him in absentia, accusing him of heresy, and sins including incest and homosexual activity, ensuring his notoriety for centuries to come. After this his military and political power declined, although he continued as a condottiere for the Venetians (1464-6) in their war against the Ottomans. Early gains in land and power made him ruler of Rimini, Faro and Cesena, but by the time he died he was ruler of only Rimini itself.

Sigismondo embraced the portrait medal as propaganda. Alongside his political and military activities, Sigismundo was a highly cultured patron of the arts and sciences, and under his rule Rimini became a centre of Renaissance learning. He was influenced in his commissions by the Humanist court of Leonello D’Este in Ferrara, with whom he was politically allied via his marriage to his daughter Genevre d’Este in 1434. Designed in the mid-1440s the artist Pisanello’s medals of Sigismondo and his brother, Novello Malatesta, are some of the earliest Renaissance portrait medals, and were created whilst employed by the Ferrarese court.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O126724/medal-of-sigismondo-pandolfo-malatestarimini-medal-de-pasti-matteo/