

Perseus as Alter Ego of Ferdinand I

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyses three relief sculptures that decorate spandrels of the northern façade of the Prague Belvedere, which was built by Ferdinand I between 1538 and ca. 1550. Their uniqueness consists in that it is the first series inspired by the myth of Perseus in Renaissance architectural sculpture. We find here, from left to right: Perseus freeing Andromeda, Perseus turning Atlas into a rock by showing him the head of Medusa, and Pegasus creating a source of poetical inspiration. The monogram, FA (Ferdinand I and Anna, his wife) is the only inscription on this villa and it has a crucial role in the villa decoration. We may consider Perseus as alter ego of Ferdinand I.

KEYWORDS

Ferdinand I; Perseus; Andromeda; Renaissance art; relief sculpture; allegory.

INTRODUCTION

On the northern façade of the Prague Belvedere, we find the relief sculpture of Perseus liberating Andromeda (**Fig. 1**). It was not a borrowing from Italian Renaissance Art, but the original revival of the ancient Roman pictorial type, which should not surprise us. The Belvedere is situated in the Royal Garden of Prague Castle, the residence of the Bohemian Kings, where the Holy Roman Emperors already resided in the fourteenth century (MUCHKA 2000; BAŽANT 2003a; 2003b; 2005; 2006, 118–119; BAŽANT – BAŽANTOVÁ 2014, 207–208). The uniqueness of the building and its stone relief sculptures can be explained by the exceptional political ambitions of its builder. When Ferdinand I built his villa, he was Archduke of Austria, King of Bohemia and Hungary and King of the Romans, but he wanted to become Holy Roman Emperor. In order to promote his candidature, the architecture of the villa and its rich sculptural decoration were designed to evoke Ancient Rome and thus proclaim his political programme. The sculpture created between 1538 and ca. 1550 was the work of Paolo della Stella, who came to Prague from Genoa. We do not know anything certain about his education, but there is no doubt that he was up to date in the reception of the classical tradition.

PERSEUS AND PRAGUE BELVEDERE

PERSEUS LIBERATING ANDROMEDA

Perseus, gallantly helping the Princess withdraw from the rock wall to which she had been chained, was one of the most frequent representations of this mythical hero in Ancient Rome (SCHAUENBURG 1981, nos. 67–89). In Ancient Roman Art, we find this pictorial theme in the full range of artistic genres – as a free-standing sculpture, relief sculpture, mosaic, or wall painting (**Fig. 2**). The composition is always more or less the same, which indicates that the

model of these images had been a famous work of art from classical Greece, which is now lost. The famous Greek painter, Nikias, painted Andromeda in the 4th century BC, but we know nothing about its composition (Pliny, *NH* XXXV, 132).



Fig. 1: Paolo della Stella, Perseus freeing Andromeda. Third spandrel of the northern façade of the Prague Belvedere (from left to right). Sandstone relief sculpture, 1538-1550. Plaster cast made in 2007, photo by courtesy of the Heritage Conservation Department of Prague Castle.

Medieval and Renaissance artists illustrating the story of Perseus and Andromeda exclusively used the pictorial type with a chained princess and hero struggling with a sea dragon. The Ancient Roman pictorial type of Perseus untying Andromeda was revived for the first time by Paolo della Stella and Lambert Sustris.¹ Sustris' small painting was created in Venice around 1545, which makes it contemporaneous with the Prague relief sculpture (**Fig. 3**).

In 1548, Lambert Sustris was working in Bavaria, and he could visit Prague on this occasion. But it is impossible to say who followed whom, whether Paolo della Stella or Lambert Sustris came first. Nevertheless, Paolo della Stella was closer to ancient models. In them, Andromeda is often represented as she steps down. Lucian also wrote about Andromeda, who slowly descends from the rock (Lucian, *Dialogues of the Sea-Gods* 14,3). We do not find this in Sustris' painting, but the descending princess is represented on the Prague relief. Andromeda's left leg is in a considerably lower position than her right leg that is partly visible under her cloak (**Fig. 1**). Between 1570 and 1572, Giorgio Vasari painted the scene of Perseus untying Andromeda for the *Studiolo* of Francesco I de' Medici in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence (CHENEY 2007, 189-191). In this painting, Andromeda's legs are also differentiated to evoke her descent.

In the Italian Renaissance, ancient Greek and Roman works of art with this iconographic theme are not attested.² This is not to say that Paolo della Stella or Lambert Sustris could not

1 Cf. <http://www.sphinxfineart.com/Lambert-Sustris-Amsterdam-1510-Venice-1560-Perseus-and-Andromeda-DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=6 & tabindex=5 & objectid=156393> (visited on 18/3/2016).

2 Cf. <http://www.census.de/census/home> (visited on 18/3/2016).

see an ancient work of art with this pictorial type. They could have found inspiration for their depictions, for instance, in the coins of the Roman colony of Deultum in the present-day Bulgaria (HRISTOVA 2005). They had been minted from Macrinus to Philippus Arab (**Fig. 4**).



Fig. 2: Perseus liberates Andromeda. Marble relief sculpture, 130–140 AD. Roma, Musei Capitolini, 501 (drawing by Nina Bažantová).

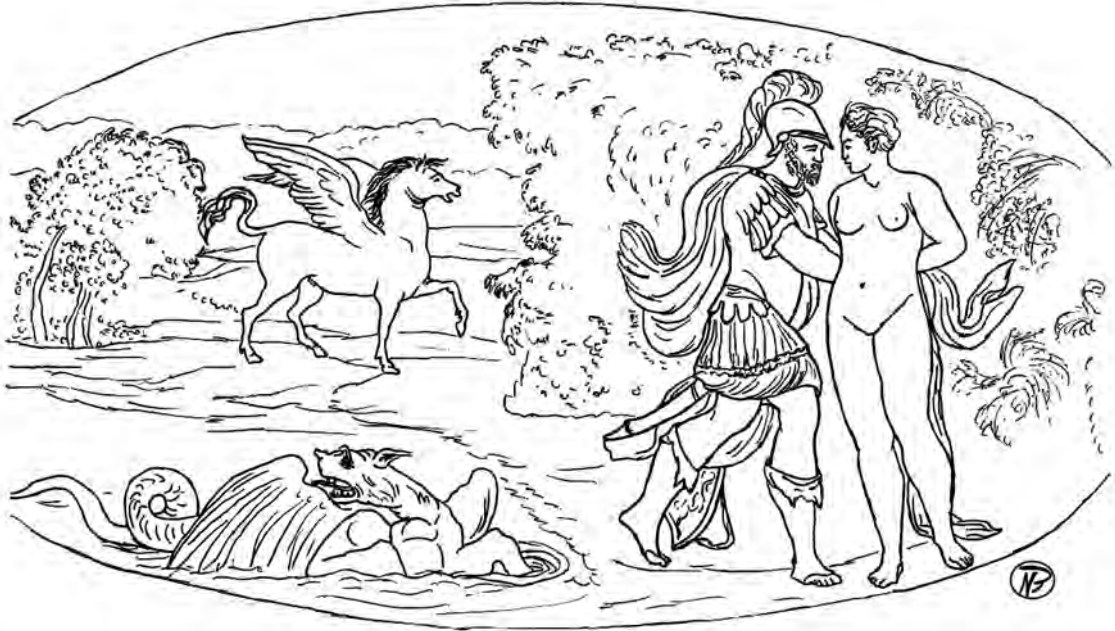


Fig. 3: Lambert Sustris, *Perseus unties Andromeda*. Oil painting on wood, ca. 1545 AD. London, Sphinx Fine Art (drawing by Nina Bažantová).



Fig. 4: *Perseus frees Andromeda*. Coin of Emperor Macrinus (217–218 AD) minted in Deultum (drawing by Nina Bažantová).

There is also an Ancient Roman relief from Virunum with Perseus standing beside a tied Andromeda (DIEZ 1954), today it decorates the wall of a local church in Moosburg, Carinthia (Fig. 5). Ferdinand I could have had a relief sculpture of this type in his collection. We know that he initiated archaeological digs to discover ancient artefacts on the territory of his empire, above all in Carinthia (SEIPEL 2003, 201–213; HOLZSCHUH-HOFER 2014).

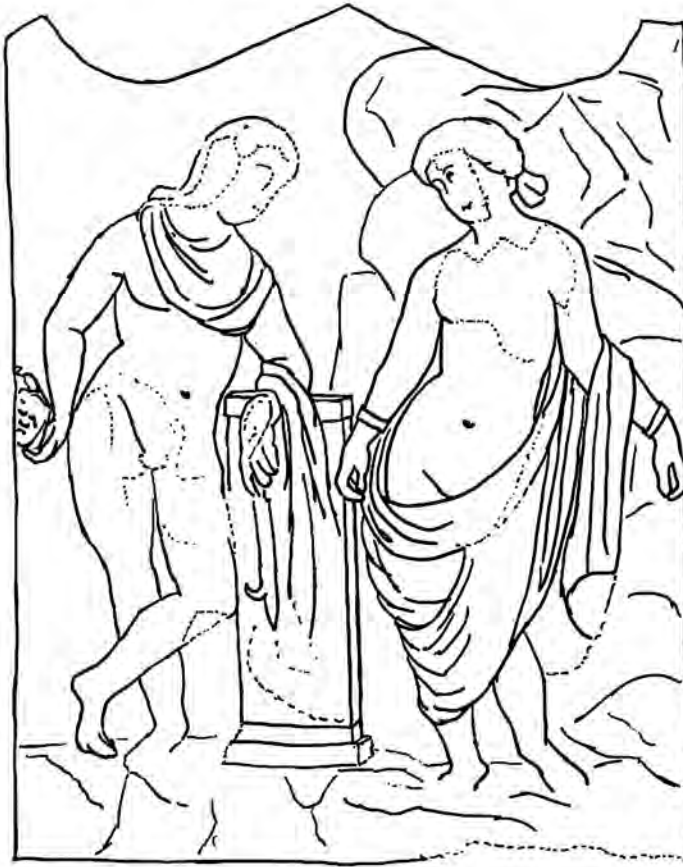


Fig. 5: Perseus and Andromeda. Marble relief from Virunum, ca. 150 AD (drawing by Nina Bažantová).

Why did Paolo della Stella include the scene of Perseus untying Andromeda in the decoration of the Belvedere? Why was it necessary to create a new iconographical theme in Prague? The unusual scene of Perseus untying Andromeda is a part of a unique series inspired by this myth, which dominates the north facade of the Prague Belvedere (1538–1550). This is the first appearance of this mythical hero in Early Modern architectural sculpture. We find here, from left to right: Perseus freeing Andromeda, Perseus turning Atlas into a rock by showing him the head of Medusa, and Pegasus creating a source of poetical inspiration. At the right follows a relief sculpture with the monogram, FA: Ferdinand I and Anna, his wife (**Fig. 23**). It is the only inscription on this villa and its position above the original entrance arcade entitles us to regard it as the crucial image in the series of relief sculptures that decorates the building. Consequently, we may consider Perseus as the alter ego of Ferdinand I.

PEGASUS

To the left of the monogram, FA, we find Pegasus (**Fig. 6**). The mythical horse has his wings erect but is standing, with his raised right front leg aimed at a rock. Pegasus has just opened the source of poetic inspiration and bows his head as if to look at the effect of his hoof's strike. The sculptor stressed the link between Pegasus' action and Ferdinand I in two details. A small shield with the Royal crown hangs from a tree, which is situated to the right of Pegasus, be-

tween the winged horse and the monogram, FA. The counterpart of the shield with the Royal crown is the eagle that has just descended to the top of the rocks above Pegasus to watch this epochal feat. This eagle might be the sacred animal of Jupiter but also the emblem of Ferdinand I, King of the Romans.



Fig. 6: Paolo della Stella, Pegasus. Fifth spandrel of the northern façade of the Prague Belvedere. Sandstone relief sculpture, 1538-1550. Plaster cast made in 2007, photo by courtesy of the Heritage Conservation Department of Prague Castle.

The opening of the source of poetic inspiration by Pegasus was a direct consequence of Perseus's action. Already around 700 BC, Hesiodos wrote that when Perseus killed Medusa, a winged horse, Pegasus, emerged from her headless body. He flew to a mountain, where the Muses settled afterwards and bathed in the "Spring of Pegasus" (Hesiod, *Theogony* 6.62-64, 280-286). The source of poetic inspiration, which Pegasus opened on Helicon was called the "Gorgonian Spring" (Propertius, *Elegies* III, 3.32). From Hesiod's time onwards, the birth of art and Perseus's killing of the Gorgon, Medusa, were inextricably linked in European tradition.

In the Italian Renaissance art, this pair appears for the first time in the illustration of *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* of 1499. In this woodcut, on the left we see Athena giving a shield to Perseus. In the centre, Perseus is decapitating Medusa, and on the right, Pegasus is creating the source of the Muses (Fig. 7). Perseus's act is thus presented as part of the divine plan in which Athena played the crucial role. Ovid, the primary source of knowledge about ancient myths in later Europe, wrote that Athena visited the mountain of the Muses in order to see the new spring created by Pegasus (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* V, 254-268). Pegasus was not only a symbol of poetic inspiration on which human culture is based but also of the high aspirations of the human soul, which give sense to our existence. In Perugino's wall painting of 1513-1521, Apollo replaces Athena (Fig. 8). The god plays *lira di braccio* and, in the background, we find Perseus decapitating Medusa on the right and Pegasus creating the spring of the Muses on a mountain on the left.



Fig. 7: Illustration of the story of Perseus, woodcut (COLONNA 1499, 168).

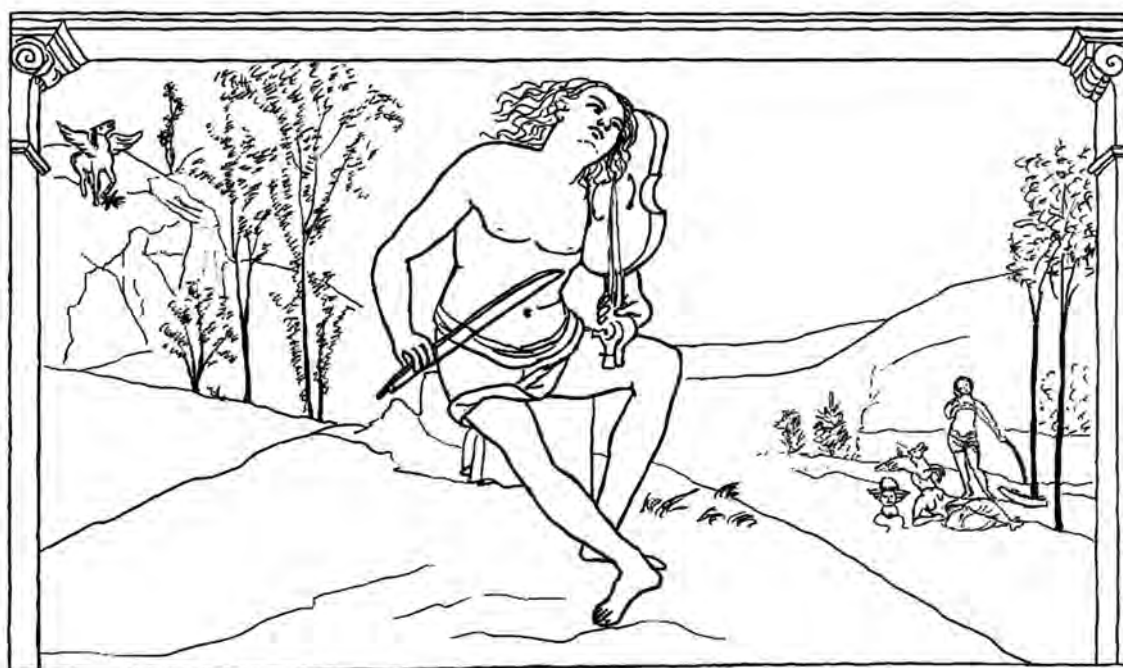


Fig. 8: Vannucci Pietro (Perugino), Apollo with the story of Pegasus in the background. Wall painting, 1513-1521 AD. Roma, Galleria Capitolina, originally Villa dei papi alla Magliana (drawing by Nina Bažantová).

ATLAS

To the left of Pegasus, the punishment of Atlas is represented on the north façade of the Prague Belvedere (**Fig. 9**). Perseus, with a winged helmet and winged sandals, turns the giant into a rock by showing him the head of Medusa. Perseus holds this severed head in his outstretched hand. In order for himself not to be turned into stone, he hides his face behind the lowered visor, but this detail is partly broken off today. The head of Medusa is the central motif of the scene. Therefore, Paolo della Stella displayed the anatomical details of the fatal cut; the severed spine and trachea are clearly distinguishable. In Medusa's face, we see an expression of extreme pain, which is a counterpart of the death agony in the face of Atlas.



Fig. 9: Paolo della Stella, Perseus and Atlas. Fourth spandrel of the northern façade of the Prague Belvedere. Sandstone relief sculpture, 1538–1550. Plaster cast made in 2007, photo by courtesy of the Heritage Conservation Department of Prague Castle.

Atlas still has a human form, but the rocks behind him indicate how he will appear in the following moment. In this, Paolo della Stella followed the relevant passage in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (IV, 653–660), suggesting the transformation of the living body into lifeless matter by confronting the round forms of the human body and the crystalline structure of the stone with sharp edges. Medusa's deadly look acts as a massive press that crushes the giant's body and inexorably pushes it towards the sharp rocks. Atlas' hair already seems to have grown into stone. In Paolo della Stella's depiction, the hair of Atlas turned into stone is an inversion of that of Medusa. It was metamorphosed into living snakes, one of which appears above Medusa's ear.

The link between the adjacent reliefs of Atlas and Pegasus is emphasised by the fact that the Atlas Mountains in the former seems to be a continuation of Helicon Mountain in the latter. When we take these two reliefs as a unit, there seems to be only one mountain divided vertically into two halves; the left one is Atlas, the right one is Helicon. Medusa brings both death (Atlas Mountain) and life (Helicon Mountain). The deadly head of Medusa in Perseus's outstretched arm is the counterpart of Pegasus's hoof that created the spring of the Muses. Helicon is not only the source of art but also of immortality; humans may overcome death and become

immortal like gods with the aid of the arts. However, we may interpret the opposition of the Mountain of Life and the Mountain of Death as a political message. Ferdinand I's rule would bring peace and prosperity, but his adversaries would promptly be punished.

PEACE, JUSTICE AND DYNASTY

ROME

In its time, Paolo della Stella's series of scenes inspired by the myth of Perseus had only a few analogies in Italy and none in Transalpine Europe. However, the Italian analogies were not stone sculptural reliefs, but wall paintings. It is equally important that something crucial is missing from the Prague series. In Prague, the Italian guests of Ferdinand I looked in vain for the first and favourite scene from the myth of Perseus, namely the beheading of Medusa. Why is this crucial scene missing in Prague?

Around 1525, Polidoro da Caravaggio decorated the façade of a *casino* in the garden of *Palazzo del Bufalo* in Rome with a series of wall paintings inspired by the myth of Perseus (**Fig. 10**). On the left side of the main façade, we find Perseus fighting a sea dragon endangering Andromeda and Phineus with his companions. On the right side, we find Perseus's sacrifice and Pegasus on Parnas surrounded by Muses. There were also paintings on side facades, Danae and the golden rain and Perseus transforming Atlas into a mountain, but the decapitation of Medusa is also not attested in this series. The Casino del Bufalo is similar to the Prague Belvedere. In both cases, it was a garden pavilion, and it was meant to represent the owner. In the centre of the façade of the Casino del Bufalo, there was the Bufalo coat of arms and the prominent bull skulls in the scene with Perseus's sacrifice alluded to it.

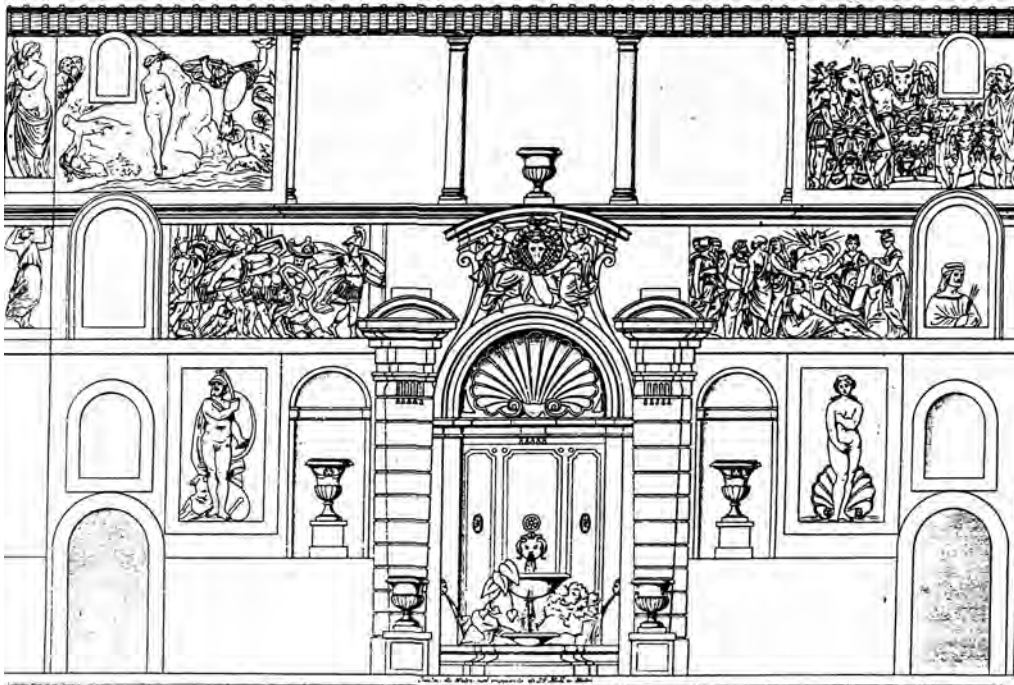


Fig. 10: Façade of the Casino del Bufalo in Rome (paintings of Polidoro da Caravaggio of 1525). Drawing 1876 (after MACCARI 1876, Pl. 3).

Probably the decapitation of Medusa was omitted in Casino del Bufalo and the Prague Belvedere because it did not accord with the function of the garden pavilion and the intended image of the builder. In 1550, the mountain of Muses was considered the main feature of the decoration of the Casino del Bufalo (KULTZEN 1960; SCOTT 1988). In Prague, the relief of Pegasus was placed right next to the shield with the initials of Ferdinand and Anna, and these two reliefs above the entrance arcade to Ferdinand I's villa summed up his policy. The essential elements of his political programme were three interrelated concepts: peace, dynasty and justice. Pegasus symbolised the vision that peace would allow the arts to flourish. The monogram, FA, emphasised that Ferdinand's dynasty would guarantee eternal peace. From among the deeds of Perseus, only those were selected which stressed the third fundamental element of Ferdinand I's policy, namely justice.

In this connection, we may recall that Perseus already embodied justice in Ovid. In his version of the Perseus myth, the Roman poet stressed that Perseus acted in accordance with the Roman laws and practices, which commentators of the 16th century emphasised (*Metamorphosis* 1517, LIr, ILr). Atlas violated the sacred law of hospitality, whose liability Perseus restored by exemplary punishment. Ovid explicitly labelled the sacrifice of Andromeda as illegal; she was an innocent victim (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* IV, 670). In the scenes of the punished Atlas and rescued Andromeda, Perseus was represented in two roles. He was the conqueror of the haughty giant and liberator of an innocent girl, who had been sentenced to death for her mother's offence. The theme of both scenes is injustice. In the first case, the wrongdoer was punished and, in the second, the unjustly suffering victim was rescued (PICINELLI 1694, symbol n. I, 305). The conception of the Perseus series was in keeping with the motto of Ferdinand I: *Let us establish justice, even if the whole world should perish*. We encounter this phrase for the first time in September 1522, when it was used by Pope Adrian VI in the same sense. At that time, he refused to stop the prosecution of a high-ranking killer and 'world' in this context meant "the world of the powerful" (SANUTO 1892, col. 436). Adriaan Florenszoon Boeyens, who became Pope Adrian VI, was the tutor of Charles V and his brother Ferdinand I.

Another Perseus cycle was painted by Perino del Vaga. In 1529–1530, he decorated with Perseus' adventures a room in the villa of the Admiral of the Imperial Fleet, Andrea Doria (STAGNO 2005, 42). In 1545, the myth of Perseus was painted by Perino del Vaga also in a frieze running on all four walls of the private office of Pope Paul III in *Castel Sant'Angelo* (GAUDIOSO – GAUDIOSO 1981, 76–86).



Fig. 11: Domenico Rietti (lo Zaga), Perseus flies to the tied-up Andromeda, a frieze in the Perseus room in the Castle of the Holy Angel in the Vatican, 1545 AD (drawing by Nina Bažantová).

In the section devoted to the liberation of Andromeda, we find the hero on the left, flying above Andromeda fastened to a rock. In the middle he negotiates with the parents of Andromeda, they promise to give her to Perseus if he manages to kill the dragon. On the right, Perseus fights the monster (**Fig. 11**). The painting in *Castel Sant'Angelo* thus captures the moment prior to what Paolo della Stella represented in Prague (GAUDIOSO – GAUDIOSO 1981, I, Fig. 78; II, 76–86). The Christian and political interpretation of the myth of Perseus was emphasised by the explicit parallel between Perseus and the Archangel Michael. In the centre of the ceiling, the Archangel Michael is depicted in the same pose as Perseus fighting the dragon (**Fig. 12**). This parallel between Perseus and the Archangel Michael indicated that the rescued Andromeda was the rescued Catholic Church, and Perseus fighting the sea dragon was the Pope fighting the Reformation.



Fig. 12: The Archangel Michael, central motif on the ceiling in the Perseus hall in the Castle of the Holy Angel in the Vatican, a wooden relief, 1545 AD (drawing by Nina Bažantová).

BOLSENA

The decoration scheme and the ideological message of the relief sculptures of Perseus in Prague have the closest analogy with the decoration of the Room of Trials in the Palace of Cardinal Tiberio Crispo in Bolsena (DE ROMANIS 2007). Also here the idea of justice dominated. The builder was probably the illegitimate son of Pope Paul III. He served as Castellan of *Castel Sant'Angelo* from 1542 to 1545. It follows from this that he supervised the decoration in the room of Perseus, whose echo we also find in Bolsena. In illustrations of the Perseus myth, stress is put on his cultural role and the administration of justice. We find here four panels arranged in a chronological sequence, which is also the principal bearer of the meaning.

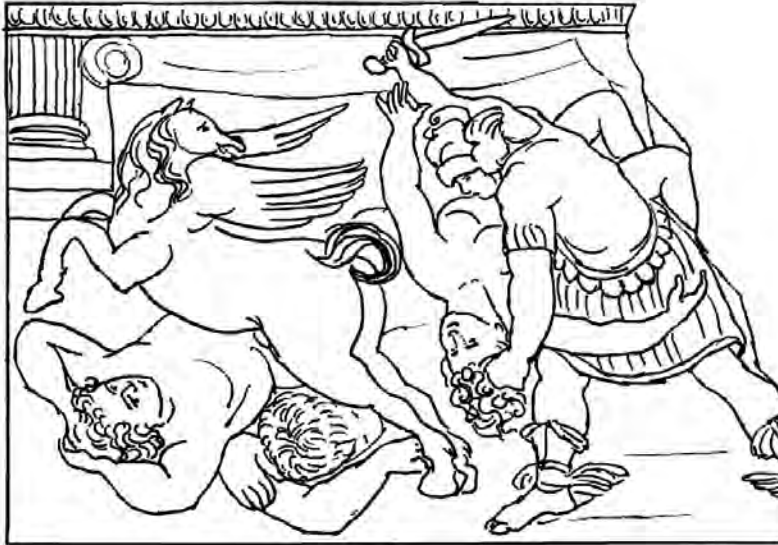


Fig. 13: Perseus killing Medusa and Pegasus jumping up to Helicon. Room of Trials in the Palace of Tiberio Crispo, Bolsena, wall painting, 1554–1561 AD (drawing by Nina Bažantová).

The series opens with the decapitation of Medusa and the birth of Pegasus (**Fig. 13**). In this scene, culture is presented as a direct consequence of justice, symbolised by a sword. Perseus raises his sword to decapitate Medusa, but before he cuts her head off, Pegasus already appears and leaps up to Helicon. Then follow two scenes evoking Perseus's justice – the killing of the dragon which had threatened Andromeda, and the killing of Perseus's enemies. The latter is badly damaged, but the former stresses the role of Perseus as fearless protector of the weak and defenceless. The hero, characterised by a sword, liberates not only Andromeda, who is represented behind him, but also a group of frightened people in which a woman embracing a child is singled out (**Fig. 14**).



Fig. 14: Perseus liberating Andromeda. Room of Trials in the Palace of Tiberio Crispo, Bolsena, wall painting, 1554–1561 AD (drawing by Nina Bažantová).



Fig. 15: Apollo with the Muses on Helicon. Room of Trials in the Palace of Tiberio Crispo, Bolsena, wall painting, 1554–1561 AD (drawing by Nina Bažantová).

The series concludes with the scene celebrating culture – Apollo plays music on the Mountain of the Muses (**Fig. 15**). The link between the adventures of Perseus and culture is stressed by the figures of the seven Muses who are inserted between episodes from the myth of Perseus. The scene of the temperance of Fabricio Lusino was identified among the scenes of the trials that gave the name to the Room of Trials. The link between justice and general efflorescence is emphasised by the figures inserted between the historical scenes. Here we find Vertumnus, Flora, Fama, Pan, Pluto, Saturn and Victoria. In the lowest register of the Room of Trials, we find Mucius Scaevola, Horatius Cocles and the escape of Clelia, exemplary stories of bravery during the war of the young Roman Republic under invasion by the Etruscan army.

In the Room of Trials, the message is conveyed by the vertical arrangement of the images. On all four walls, we find an episode from the Perseus story on top, and below, there is a large historical scene illustrating an Ancient Roman trial. At the base, we find an example of Ancient Roman bravery. The logic underlying this decorative scheme is straightforward – the State is founded on the bravery of its citizens, which is exemplified by scenes in the lowest register. Scenes in the middle register stress that the economic well-being of the State is a consequence of law and order. The upper register with the myth of Perseus and the Muses emphasises that flowering of culture is a consequence of the rule of law that must be protected, and any offenders must immediately be prosecuted.

PRAGUE

The superposition of the images on the northern facade of the Prague Belvedere is similar to that in the Room of Trials in Bolsena. In Prague, we also find examples of civic virtues in the lowest register. When we proceed from right to left, we find under the spandrel relief of Pegasus creating the spring of poetic inspiration, the column pedestal relief depicting Marcus Curtius leaping, in order to save the Roman nation, into an abyss that opened itself into the *Forum Romanum*. Under Perseus killing Atlas, there is a depiction of Mucius Scaevola. Atlas was punished for his unpardonable refusal of hospitality, and Mucius Scaevola sacrificed his hand to save his people. He put it in the flames to demonstrate the bravery of the Roman people to the Etruscan King Porsenna. Under the scene of Perseus and Andromeda, we find King Latinus

greeting Aeneas in Latium. The generosity of Perseus towards the stranger, Andromeda, has a counterpart in the generosity of Latinus towards the stranger, Aeneas.

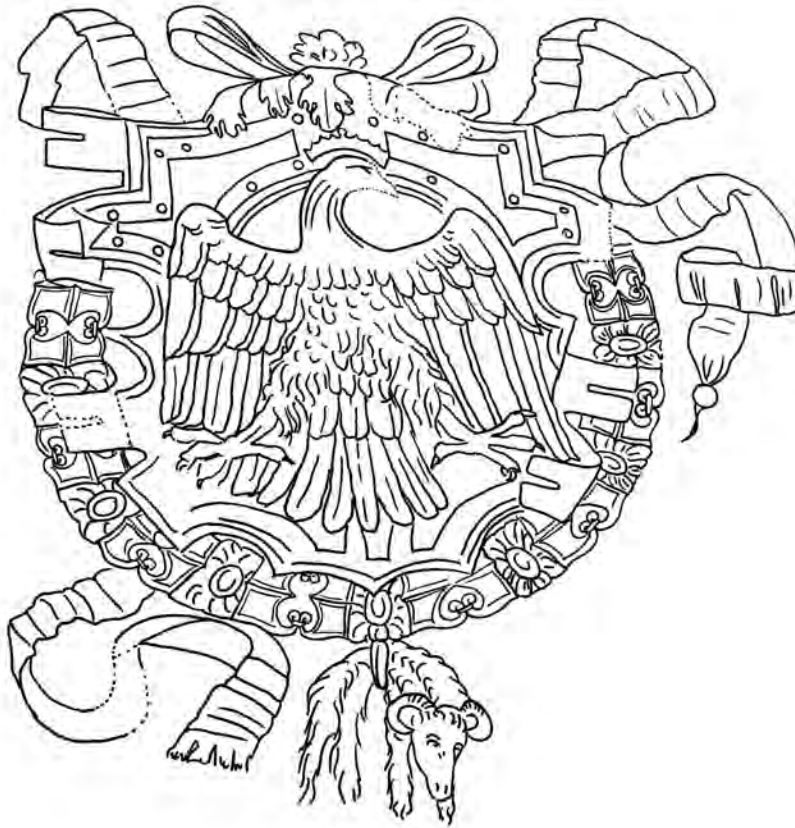


Fig. 16: Paolo della Stella, the eagle of the Roman King. First spandrel of the western façade of the Prague Belvedere, sandstone relief sculpture, 1538–1550 AD (drawing by Nina Bažantová).

The message of the relief sculptures in the arcades of the northern façade of the Prague Belvedere is complemented by the relief sculptures in the adjoining arcades of the western façade facing Prague Castle. The monogram, FA, which is placed above the original entrance arcade in the northwestern corner, was a pivot of the entire decoration system of the villa. The adjoining four relief sculptures on the right and left actually create pairs. To the right of the FA monogram, we find the single-headed eagle of the Roman King (**Fig. 16**). The same emblem is also found at the southern end of the western façade. Both these eagles are decorated with the chain on which the Order of the Golden Fleece is hanging; this denotes them as Ferdinand's emblems. The FA monogram was thus flanked on both sides by the animal symbols closely related to Ferdinand I, Pegasus on the left and the eagle of the Roman King on the right. As already mentioned above, Paolo della Stella included the eagle and Royal coat of arms in the relief sculpture of Pegasus, in order to stress this complementarity.

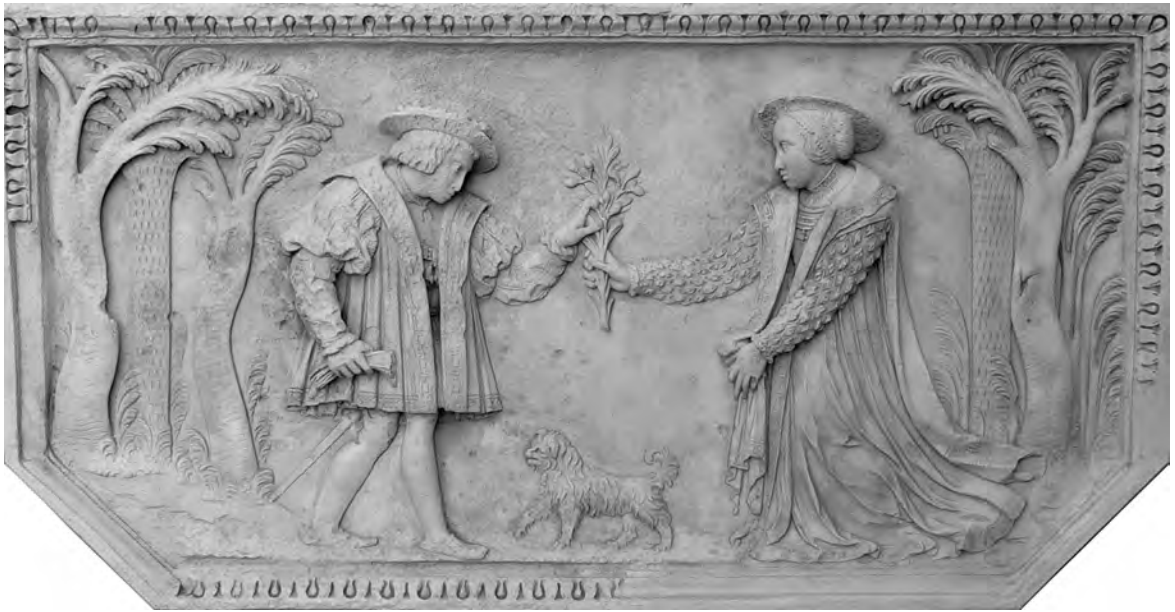


Fig. 17: Paolo della Stella, Ferdinand I and Anna. Third spandrel of the western façade of the Prague Belvedere. Sandstone relief sculpture, 1538–1550. Plaster cast made in 2007, photo by courtesy of the Heritage Conservation Department of Prague Castle.

On the third relief sculpture to the right and the left of the FA monogram, there is a male and female couple. On the left, we find Perseus and Andromeda (**Fig. 1**), on the right, Ferdinand I and Anna (**Fig. 17**). The couples are displayed in noticeably similar poses; they are facing each other, and the man is stretching out his hand to the woman. Anna is giving Ferdinand a laurel sprig, the sign of victory. Ferdinand's hand accepting the laurel sprig corresponds to that of Perseus, with which he is untying Andromeda. The identification of Ferdinand is ensured by his characteristic hairstyle and the Order of the Golden Fleece. Ferdinand's and Anna's clothing corresponds to the Central European fashion, the gloves in Ferdinand's left hand and a terrier in front of Anna characterising them as members of the elite. Due to Ferdinand I's pointed boots, the portrait is dated back to the end of the 1540s, as footwear of this type was then replacing pumps with broad toes (*Kuhmaulschuh*). Since the relief sculptures in the spandrels of the northwestern corner of the Prague Belvedere form a unit, it is probable that all were created in the years immediately preceding 1550.

The entire scene of Ferdinand I and Anna seems to have a melancholy character. Both have a serious expression on their faces, their heads tilting downwards and their mouths closed. In other depictions of couples, Paolo della Stella indicated their emotions by their open mouths. Anna died in 1547, and so this was probably a posthumous scene. It did not represent the couple as they looked in the 1540s, but at the time that Ferdinand married Anna. This feature connects this relief with the monogram, FA. In the sixteenth century, the two initials were used on the occasion of the marriage, but Ferdinand I also used it in subsequent decades to stress his status as hereditary King of Bohemia.



Fig. 18: Paolo della Stella, Jason fighting the dragon. Second spandrel of the western façade of the Prague Belvedere. Sandstone relief sculpture, 1538–1550. Plaster cast made in 2007, photo by courtesy of the Heritage Conservation Department of Prague Castle.

Between the FA monogram and the two couples' reliefs, we find a pair of fights, which emphasised in an allegorical way the enormity of the obstacles Ferdinand I had to overcome before he could fulfil his destiny. To the right of Perseus and Andromeda, we find Perseus killing Atlas. To the left of Ferdinand and Anna, we find Jason battling the dragon guarding the Golden Fleece, which is hanging on a tree (**Fig. 18**). Jason's fight also illustrated the origin of the most significant attribute of the Habsburg Royalty, the Order of the Golden Fleece. Precisely for this reason, the series of four painted scenes depicting Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece was the main theme of the no longer preserved decoration on the southern façade of Villa Doria in Genoa. The depiction of the myth of Jason in the Villa Doria was related both to the Habsburg Imperial mythology and to the builder, who had been a bearer of the Order of the Golden Fleece ever since 1531. Jason thus defined the Villa Doria's double role – as the temporary residence of the Holy Roman Emperor, as well as the residence of the Admiral of the Imperial Fleet (PARMA 1997, 281).

To the right of the depiction of Ferdinand and Anna, there is a relief sculpture representing Ferdinand I on a wild boar hunt (**Fig. 19**). We can recognise Ferdinand I, based on the Order of the Golden Fleece, the chain around his neck and the typical hairstyle he had until his death. He is on horseback, wearing the contemporary garments of a short kilt, tall riding boots, and holding a hunting horn in his hand. There were strong traditional links between virtue and the image of the mounted ruler and that of hunting a wild boar, the symbol of evil. However, the depiction on the Prague Belvedere conveys other messages as well. The relief forms a pair with the neighbouring depiction of Ferdinand and Anna, because Ferdinand is clean-shaven, which means that the relief alludes to his past. He wears a crown on his head, which refers to his coronation as Bohemian and Hungarian King in 1527 or as King of the Romans in 1531.

Behind the beardless, long-haired Ferdinand I, we see another rider, a man with short hair and a long beard. Identifying Ferdinand I's partner was evidently not necessary, what mattered was that they were galloping side by side. This image emphasised, above all, the indivisible unity of the younger and older rider. This reading is indicated by a replica of this pair that we find in the decoration of the Prague Belvedere. On the southern façade of the Prague Belvedere,

there is a similar representation of the boar hunt in a series of scenes inspired by the myth of the Calydonian hunt (**Fig. 20**). In this relief, Meleagros replaces Ferdinand I. The duplication of this pair in two different contexts emphasised its general nature. The bearded man is not part of the story of the boar hunt of Ferdinand I and Meleagros, but he symbolises the protagonists of both narratives. The harmonious relationship with the older partner characterises the virtue of Ferdinand I and Meleagros.



Fig. 19: Paolo della Stella, Ferdinand on a hunt. Fourth spandrel of the western façade of the Prague Belvedere. Sandstone relief sculpture, 1538–1550. Plaster cast made in 2007, photo by courtesy of the Heritage Conservation Department of Prague Castle.



Fig. 20: Paolo della Stella, Meleagros hunting the boar. Second spandrel of the southern façade of the Prague Belvedere. Sandstone relief sculpture, 1538–1550. Plaster cast made in 2007, photo by courtesy of the Heritage Conservation Department of Prague Castle.

Already in Ancient Rome, the ability to unite and act in unison was visualised by a formation of riders in which men and animals kept rank and file. On a coin of Philip I in 248 AD, we find two galloping Emperors in identical poses (**Fig. 21**). They represent Philip I, who was regarded as the first Christian Emperor, and his son, Philip II (MATTINGLY – SYDENHAM – SUTHERLAND 1949, 69, no. 10). The representation is symbolical because Philip II was elevated to the rank of co-emperor in 247 AD when he was not yet ten years old. The inscription *VIRTUS AUGG*, “the Virtue of Emperors”, on the reverse denoted the political message of the coin image. In 1556, Du Choul described the coin as follows: *Father and son are represented on horseback, riding swiftly and they demonstrated in this way the steady effort that they give to their quest. By this, they also showed the virtue that is necessary for successful accomplishment of expeditions bringing them immortal and continuous fame. This message is expressed by the inscription VIRTUS AUGUSTI* (DU CHOUL 1556, 40).



Fig. 15: Guillaume Du Choul, coin depicting Philip I and Philip II minted in 248 AD, graphics 1672 (DU CHOUL 1672, 35; the first edition DU CHOUL 1556, 35).

The rulers' virtues are also celebrated in a series of reliefs of Alexander the Great on the column pedestals at the northern end of the western façade of the Prague Belvedere. Under the relief of Ferdinand I on a boar hunt, we find Alexander the Great and the philosopher Diogenes. When Alexander asked Diogenes what he, as ruler of the world, could do for him, the philosopher said that he should step out of the sun because he was sunbathing. Alexander commented, that if he were not Alexander, he would like to be Diogenes (Plutarch, *Moralia* 331 F, p. 411). While this scene celebrated Alexander as a philosopher, the scene on the left column pedestal celebrated his clemency. Under the spandrel relief of Ferdinand I and Anna, we find the representation of Alexander the Great and the captured wives of the conquered Persian King Darius. Alexander not only spared them but also offered them their pick of the war booty, as much as they wanted. While this scene evoked the end of the Persian dynasty, the relief sculpture in the spandrel above it proclaimed the beginning of a new dynasty that, as Ferdinand I hoped, would rule the world. Under the spandrel relief of Jason capturing the Golden Fleece, we find Alexander the Great loosening the Gordian knot. The untying of this

knot was to indicate the arrival of the ruler of all Asia, according to a prophecy. Jason's expedition to Colchis was interpreted as a mythical prototype of Alexander's Asian conquest.

On the pedestals of the outer columns of the Prague Belvedere, the Labours of Hercules are depicted on all the façades except for the eastern one. On the northern façade, Hercules defeating the Nemean lion is represented on the column pedestal under the monogram, FA. The link between the first of the deeds of Hercules and the monogram referring to Ferdinand's marriage is obvious; by marriage to the Bohemian Princess Anna, the Austrian Archduke entered European politics. On the opposite end of the northern façade, below the coat of arms of the Bohemian Kingdom, Hercules is depicted battling the Hydra – the hero's canonical second deed. This sequence corresponds to the sequence of the spandrel figural reliefs above, which are also arranged from the right to the left. On the eastern end of the southern façade, there is the hero's seventh heroic deed, the taming of the Cretan bull. At the western end of the southern façade, the tenth deed is depicted, the herding of the cattle of Geryon on the Iberian Peninsula. These two deeds celebrated Hercules' global impact.

On the western façade, we find two episodes from the expedition that the hero undertook to perform the tenth deed. On the south side, there is the duel with Antaeus and on the north, the erecting of the Pillars of Gibraltar. In the propagandistic art of Emperor Charles V, both themes were common. The depiction of Hercules with the Pillars of Gibraltar on the column pedestal under the spandrel with the emblem of the Roman King was a clear allusion to the Habsburg motto: *Plus Ultra* (ROSENTHAL 1971). This motto accompanied the two columns of Hercules. In Ferdinand's iconography, the motto and the columns appear as a demonstration of the unity of the Habsburg house. We can find them, for example, on the Jáchymov coin minted in 1531 on the occasion of Ferdinand's coronation as German King. The half figures of Charles and Ferdinand are turned towards one another here, with the Habsburg motto and the columns between them (HILGER 1960, No. 193, Pl. 19).³ On the western façade of the Prague Belvedere, the sequence of Hercules' canonical twelve labours does not continue. The narrative stopped at Hercules' tenth deed in order to shift the interest from the mythical hero to Ferdinand I, the Habsburg brothers, and the Holy Roman Empire.

CONCLUSION

The theme of this paper is the introduction of the myth of Perseus to Transalpine Europe, where it appeared for the first time in the decoration of Ferdinand I's Prague Belvedere (built 1538–1550). In the arcade spandrels of the northern façade, we find three scenes inspired by the myth of Perseus. The paper analyses them in their original context, that is, as an integral part of the decoration of the entire northern façade and adjoining three arcades at the northern end of the western façade (**Fig. 22**). In this section of the villa, the reliefs in the spandrels and column pedestals form a unit. On the western façade, a division line is the fourth arcade (when counted from the north). After this arcade, a new series inspired by Vergil's *Aeneid* begins in the spandrels and column pedestals alike.

3 On the wooden plaque of 1537 (Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe 1891/280), based on the model by Hans Kels the Elder, both brothers are with their wives and, above them, are also the columns with the Habsburg motto (HILGER 1960, No. 145, Pl. 34).

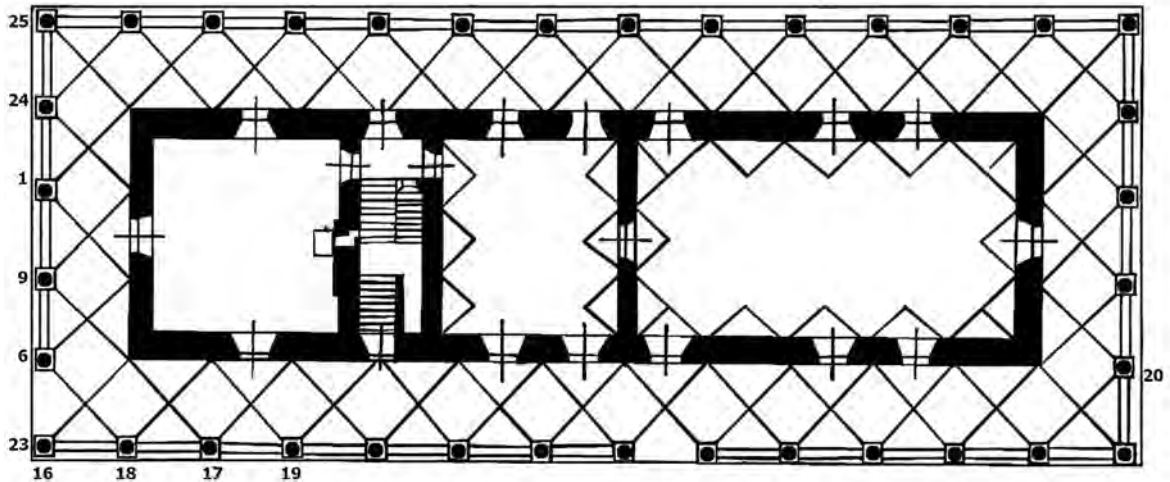


Fig. 22: The ground floor of the Prague Belvedere in its original form of 1538-1550 AD, the numbers refer to the Figures in this paper.

All the reliefs in the spandrels at the northwestern corner of the Prague Belvedere refer in some way to Ferdinand I. This specialisation corresponded to the original functional division of the villa interior. Initially, the interior was divided into two uneven halves by a stairway corridor leading to the upper terrace. North of the stairway, there was an isolated room on the ground floor. It was equipped with a fireplace, indicating that it was intended for the personal use of Ferdinand I. The two bigger rooms without fireplaces, situated to the south of the stairway corridor, were designed for social gatherings.

In sixteenth century Italy, Perseus was seen primarily as a virtuous warrior who fought injustice and evil so that he could bring order, prosperity, and cultural flowering to his people. Paolo della Stella followed this concept in the Prague Belvedere, but omitted the decapitation of Medusa, which was not in keeping with Ferdinand I's image as a bringer of peace. The western end of the northern façade of the Belvedere was personalised by placing the monogram of the builder and his wife, Anna of Jagiellon, over the original entrance arcade. In the arcade spandrels around the monogram, FA (Fig. 23), we find the key relief sculptures of the Prague Belvedere. In them, the myth of Perseus is interwoven with the dynastic idea. Perseus overcame seemingly invincible enemies, and his descendant, Perses, founded the glorious dynasty of the Persian Kings. Like Perseus, Ferdinand I also did not accept his initial disadvantage and became a mighty ruler.

The FA monogram is flanked by the symbols of Ferdinand I - Pegasus on the left and the eagle of the Roman King on the right side. On the northern façade, a series of illustrations of the myth of Perseus continues, and each of these scenes has its counterpart in a corresponding site on the western façade. Perseus killing Atlas is paired with Jason killing the dragon, Ladon. In these two martial scenes, the mythical heroes are fighting the monstrous enemies. To the left of Perseus fighting Atlas, we find Perseus and Andromeda, an allegory of the Czech and Hungarian Kingdom, which Perseus (Ferdinand I) saved by founding a new dynasty. The scene of Perseus liberating Andromeda is paired with the depiction of Ferdinand I and his wife, Anna of Jagiellon, on the western façade. In this pair of scenes, the foundation of a dynasty was celebrated.



Fig. 23: Paolo della Stella, shield with monogram FA (Ferdinand and Anna). Sixth spandrel on the northern façade of the Prague Belvedere. Sandstone relief sculpture, 1538–1550 (photo the author).



Fig. 24: Paolo della Stella, Allegory of dynastic succession, second spandrel of the northern façade of the Prague Belvedere. Sandstone relief sculpture, 1538–1550. Plaster cast made in 2007, photo by courtesy of the Heritage Conservation Department of Prague Castle.



Fig. 25: Paolo della Stella, the crowned and double tailed lion of the Bohemian King, first spandrel of the northern façade of the Prague Belvedere. Sandstone relief sculpture, 1538-1550 (photo by the author).

To the left of Perseus liberating Andromeda, there is a scene celebrating the dynastic succession (BAŽANT forthcoming), the old Emperor on horseback is handing over to his younger successor a globe, the symbol of world rule (Fig. 24). To the left is the emblem of the Kingdom of Bohemia (Fig. 25). The glorification of dynastic succession also has a counterpart on the western façade, where we find, in the corresponding position, the depiction of Ferdinand I hunting boar together with an old man. This pair of scenes celebrated the harmonious relations between old and young rulers, a precondition for the smooth transfer of power. The reliefs at the northwestern corner of the Prague Belvedere thus referred to Ferdinand I and the current political situation.

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