

SUMMARY

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 A PORTRAIT OF *CLAUDE DE FRANCE*?
 ANTIQUITY AND HERALDRY IN LEONARDO'S
LADY WITH AN ERMINE

The ermine's "serpentine pose" und "heraldic dignity" (Kenneth Clark) demand and permit a closer examination of its style and meaning. It frees Leonardo's *Lady with an ermine* from her modern identification as Cecilia Gallerani and the connected dating of the painting before the year 1492. Philological arguments and technical observations explain that Bellincioni's *sonnet on Cecilia's portrait* does not refer to the Cracovian composition.

The new relative dating occurs as follows. The serpentine pose of the ermine corresponds to Leonardo's drawings and notes on the locomotion of the animals. While his vocabulary follows recent latin translations of Aristotle's treatise *Περὶ πορείας ζῴων* (*On locomotion of the animals*), the draftsman demonstrates the forces and movements by means of concave and convex outlines, coordinated with curved parallel hatching. Precisely this method emerges in Leonardo's sketches for the first time around the year 1504. He follows here Filippino Lippi's earlier reception of Antiquity, sketches after wall paintings of the early imperial period in Rome. Filippino imitates the antique brushwork and *chiaroscuro*. By mere graphic means he shows the effects of changing light on the surfaces of bodies in movement. Leonard's curved hatching is especially linked with two projects of the same period, the *St Anne with the Virgin, the Child and a Lamb* and *Leda with the Swan*. The ermine's serpentine pose belongs here.

In the Cracovian composition we find signs of its occasion or commission around the year 1507. The colours white, blue, gold and red of the animal and the lady's costume allow to recognize here a portrait of Claude de France (1499–1524) in her temporary role as designated heiress of Milan-Lombardy and Genoa-Liguria. The painting does not only manifest the Florentin-French political alliance. Further philological aspects around the year 1500, French translations and editions of Virgil's *Aeneis* and Boccaccio's *Genealogie deorum gentilium*, let discover the genealogical meaning of the three white animals, the lamb, the swan and the ermine.