

APHRODITE

THE SO-CALLED

VENUS GENITRIX

ROMAN, 1ST CENTURY AD
MARBLE

HEIGHT: 125 CM.

WIDTH: 38 CM.

DEPTH: 36 CM.



*PROVENANCE:
FORMERLY IN THE PAMPHILJ
COLLECTION, IN THE GARDENS OF
VILLA PAMPHILJ IN ROME, FROM AT
LEAST THE SECOND HALF OF THE 17TH
CENTURY, RESTORED AS EUTERPE.
REPORTED IN THE SAME COLLECTION
IN 1850. THEN, IN THE FRENCH PRIVATE
COLLECTION OF DR. B. AND MR. C.,
SOLD BY THE LAIR-DUBREUIL AUCTION
HOUSE, PARIS, 19 MAY 1910, LOT NO. 39;
ACQUIRED BY GEORGES
CHARBONNEAUX.
BY DESCENT IN THE SAME FAMILY
SINCE THEN.*



This splendid sculpture of a woman is striking in its sensuality and the realistic representation of her figure. Slightly smaller than life, the woman is dressed in a thin himation. Its complex array of folds, which

follow the curves of her body, reveals more than it covers. Under the delicate, transparent fabric, her voluptuous bosom, navel and sensual stomach are thus perfectly discernible.



Her legs emerge from the draped garment, separated by long, vertical folds, and their shape is underlined by an intricate set of curved folds. Her right leg is set back slightly, giving her hips a swaying motion in an elegant contrapposto. The heavier fabric of the chiton covered her shoulders, now gone, falling in vertical folds over her left arm and contrasting with the folds of the 'wet' drapery, thus creating a perfect balance in the composition. The back of the sculpture, covered by the folds of the chiton, shows less exquisite craftsmanship, which tells us that this sculpture was intended to be admired from the front. Its arms are now missing, but thanks to many replicas of the

same statuary type, we can identify Aphrodite, goddess of beauty and love. Bronze and terracotta statuettes (Ill. 1) show us that she would have raised a fold of her chiton above her right shoulder, while her left hand, extended towards the viewer, held the golden apple of discord, whereby Paris proclaimed Aphrodite to be more beautiful than the other goddesses.



In the modern era, the most famous work of this type was restored according to that same iconography (Ill. 2). As this sculpture was extremely popular in the Graeco-Roman world, it has many copies such as those conserved at the J. P. Getty Museum in Los Angeles (Ill. 3), Centrale Montemartini in Rome (Ill. 4) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Ill. 5).



The Greek original that inspired these copies is often attributed to the Athenian sculptor Callimachus and dated to about 400 BC. Opinions diverge on whether the original was made of bronze or marble. We know little of Callimachus, only that he worked in Athens around the time when the Acropolis was nearing completion. He is said to have contributed to the sculptures in the temple of Athena Nike. The sculpture of Nike adjusting her sandal, mounted on the parapet of the temple, closely resembles our sculpture, with its wet drapery effect and the rounded folds over the goddess' thighs (Ill. 6). Vitruvius credited him with the invention of Corinthian capitals and spoke of "the elegance and delicacy of his chisel" when referring to his art as a sculptor (De Architectura, Book IV, 1). Dionysius of Halicarnassus compared his style to that of the orator Lysias "because of his finesse and grace". With this sculpture of Aphrodite,

Callimachus displayed a perfect blend of the classical balance theorised by Polyclitus and the more precious and mannerist style that developed on the site of the Acropolis, that can also be found in the sculptures of Diana, Hestia and Aphrodite adorning the east pediment of the Parthenon (Ill. 7).



Callimachus' Aphrodite was extremely popular in Antiquity, as shown by the many copies that still exist today. It was so popular that Julius Caesar apparently asked the sculptor Arcesilaus to craft a terracotta copy for the temple he dedicated to Venus Genetrix, the "ancestral mother", in 46 BC. The temple and sculpture stood in his new forum in Rome (Ill. 8). Julius Caesar and the emperors who came after him claimed to descend from the Trojan hero Aeneas, son of Aphrodite, the Venus of the Latin people. They thus established a cult to her. In AD 137, coins bearing the effigy of

Sabina, wife of Hadrian, also featured a representation of Venus Genetrix, based on the same model as our sculpture (Ill. 9).



Our sculpture was located in Rome, in the gardens of Villa Pamphilj, from the second half of the 17th century. There is a print representing the sculpture, restored as Euterpe, Muse of music, holding a flute in each hand, in a book by Giovanni G. de Rossi (Ill. 10). Villa Pamphilj is a Roman palace dating back to the 16th century. It belonged to the Della Rovere family and then, at the beginning of the 17th century, the Aldobrandini family. It then passed to the Pamphiljs in 1647, when Olimpia Aldobrandini wed Camillo Pamphilj. It is unknown when the sculpture came to adorn the gardens of the palace.

In Volume 4 of his *Musée de Sculpture antique et moderne* ("Museum of antique

and modern sculpture”), the Comte de Clarac described it, in these gardens, in 1850. He recognised, in the statue of Euterpe, a Venus Genitrix, and commented that the head, the top of the bosom, the arms, the uterus, the lower part of the drapery and the feet were modern restorations (Ill. 11). Our sculpture then resurfaced in Paris in 1910, when Dr B. and Mr C.’s collection was sold by the Lair-Dubreuil auction house (Ill. 12). At that time, it was completely divested of its modern additions, except for the lower part of the drapery and the feet (Ill. 13). Sold as lot no. 39 of that sale on 19 May 1910, it was then added to another French private collection, in which it remained throughout the 20th century until the present day.

Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Terracotta and bronze statuettes representing Aphrodite of the Genitrix type. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Ill. 2. Aphrodite known as “Venus Genitrix”, Roman, late 1st century - early 2nd century AD, Parian marble, H.: 164 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. MR 367.



Ill. 3. Venus Genitrix, Roman, 2nd century AD, marble, H.: 97.7 cm. J. P. Getty Museum, Los Angeles, inv. no. 96.AA.213.

Ill. 4. Venus Genitrix, Roman, marble, found on the Esquiline Hill. Centrale Montemartini, Rome, inv. no. MC1078.

Ill. 5. Statue of Aphrodite, the so-called Venus Genitrix, Roman, 1st-2nd century AD, marble, H.: 151.1 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 32.11.3.



Ill. 6. "Nike Adjusting her Sandal", frieze that encircled the temple of Athena Nike, southern side, Greek, ca. 420-410 BC, marble. Acropolis Museum, Athens, inv. no. 973.



Ill. 7. Hestia, Diana and Aphrodite, figures K, L and M of the east pediment of the Parthenon, Greek, ca. 447-433 BC, marble, W.: 130 cm. British Museum, London.



Ill. 8. Ruins of the temple of Venus Genetrix, in Caesar's forum in Rome.



Ill. 9. Denarius with on the back, Venus Genetrix with the inscription "VENERI GENETRICI", silver, 3.46 gr.

Provenance:



Ill. 10. Our Aphrodite, restored as Euterpe, in Giovanni G. de Rossi, Villa Pamphilia [...] ("Villa Pamphilij ..."), Rome, s. a. [1650/1700], Plate 4 (Euterpe. Dulci loquis calamos Euterpe atibus urget).

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PAR M. DE CLARAC

CHARGÉ DE LA RÉDACTION DE LA REVUE
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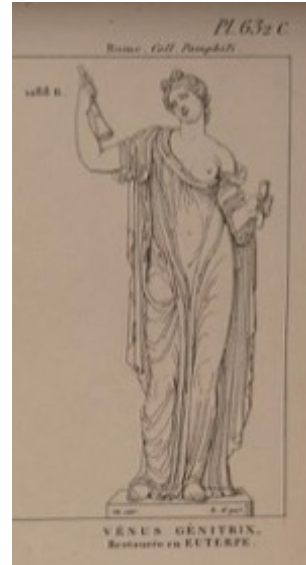
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1288 B. — VÉNUS GÉNITRIX (en Euterpe), marbre grec,
pl. 632 C. Collection Pamphili.

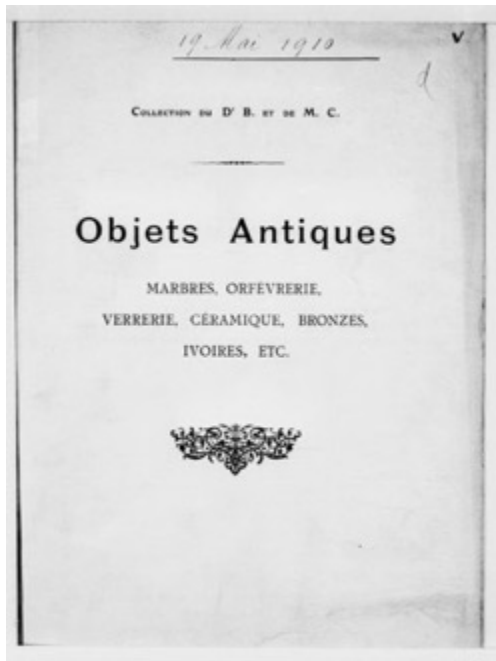
En l'état actuel, cette statue tient une flûte de chaque main, la droite est élevée et la gauche horizontale.

Le mouvement de la figure, l'agencement de la tunique et du manteau, qui ne sauraient convenir à Euterpe, font reconnaître une Vénus Génitrix. Voy. 1288.

Sont modernes : la tête, tout le nu de la poitrine avec le bord de la tunique, tout le nu des bras avec le bord des manches, les flûtes, le pied, le bout inférieur de la draperie. [Haut. 6 pal.]



Ill. 11 : Comte de Clarac, *Musée de sculpture antique et moderne*, vol. 4, Paris, 1850, p. 72, no. 1288b, pl. 632c



39 Fragment d'une magnifique réplique de la *Vénus des Jardins* d'Alcamène, en marbre de Paros (v^e siècle av. J.-C.). C'est une œuvre remarquable d'une grande délicatesse de facture et, au point de vue de la draperie, une des sculptures les plus célèbres de l'antiquité.

Planche III.

Haut. 1 m 25.

Ill. 12. Sales catalogue for the collection of Dr B. and of Mr C., Lair-Dubreuil auction house, 19 May 1910, lot 39.

Publications:

- G. G. de Rossi, *Villa Pamphilia eiusque palatium cum suis prospectibus, statuae, fontes, vivaria, theatra, areolae, plantarum, viarumque ordines* ("Villa Pamphilj and its palace with its perspectives, statues, fountains, parks, theatres and array of courtyards, plants and paths"), Rome, s. a. [1650/1700], Plate 4 ("Euterpe. Dulci loquis calamos Euterpe atibus urget").

- Comte de Clarac, *Musée de sculpture antique et moderne* ("Museum of antique and modern sculpture"), Vol. 4, Paris, 1850, p. 72, no. 1288b, Plate 632c.

- J. J. Bernoulli, *Aphrodite* ("Aphrodite") Leipzig, 1873, p. 87, no. 4. - S. Reinach, *Répertoire de la statuaire grecque et romaine* ("Catalogue of Greek and Roman Statuary"), Vol. 1, Paris, 1897, p. 342, no. 3.

- S. Reinach, *Répertoire de la statuaire grecque et romaine* ("Catalogue of Greek and Roman Statuary"), Vol. 4, Paris, 1910, p. 198, no. 4. - R. Calza, ed., *Antichità di Villa Doria Pamphilj* ("Antiques of Villa Doria Pamphilj"), Rome, 1977, p. 43, no. 10, Plate 9 (according to G. G. de Rossi). - M. Brinke, *Kopienkritische und typologische Untersuchungen zur statuarischen Überlieferung der Aphrodite Typus Louvre-Neapel* ("Critical and typological investigation of the statuary tradition of the Louvre-Naples type of Aphrodite"), Hamburg, 1991, p. 171f., no. G44, and p. 202, no. G102.



