

FEMININE STATUE

EGYPTIAN, PTOLEMAIC PERIOD, PROBABLY 3RD CENTURY BC
GREYWACKE
18TH CENTURY RESTORATIONS.

HEIGHT: 86 CM.

WIDTH: 26 CM.

DEPTH: 27.5 CM.

PROVENANCE:

*HADRIAN'S VILLA IN TIVOLI, NEAR
ROME.*

*THEN PRIVATE COLLECTION OF
FILIPPO VICENZO FARSETTI (1703-1774),
PALAZZO DI SAN LUCA, VENICE,
PURCHASED IN ROME BETWEEN 1766
AND 1769.*

*PASSED DOWN IN THE COLLECTION OF
HIS COUSIN DANIELE FILIPPO FARSETTI
(1725-1787), PALAZZO DI SAN LUCA,
VENICE.*

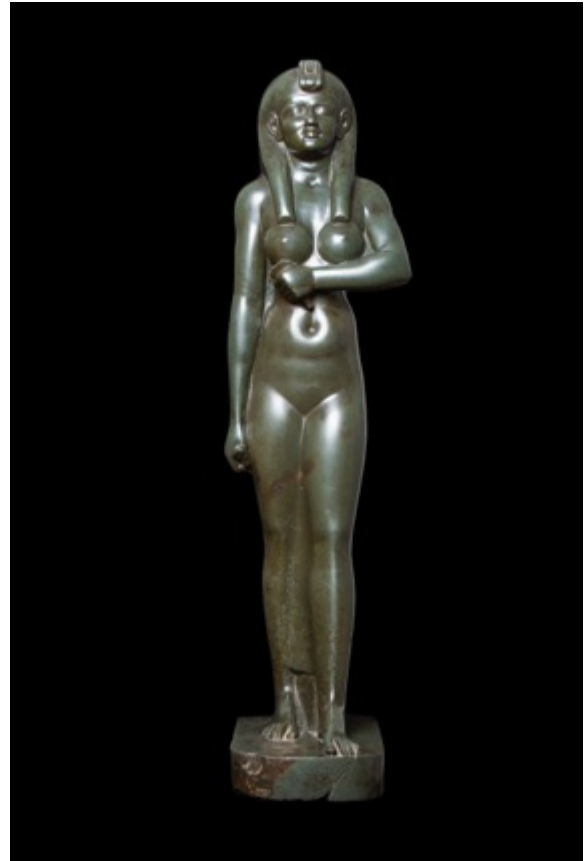
*GIVEN TO ANGELO QUERINI (1721-1795) IN
EXCHANGE FOR ANOTHER WORK,
GARDENS OF VILLA ALTICCHIERO, NEAR
PADUA, BETWEEN 1778 AND 1787.*

*PASSED DOWN IN THE COLLECTION OF
LAURO QUERINI (D. 1806), HIS NEPHEW.
MENTIONED IN THE LETTERS SENT BY
SIR JOHN STEPNEY (1743-1811)
TO CHARLES TOWNLEY (1737-1805)
IN 1804.*

*PROBABLY IN THE COLLECTION OF
THOMAS HOPE (1769-1831),
DUCHESS STREET, LONDON, IN 1824.
PIERS OAKEY'S PRIVATE COLLECTION,
HARRINGTON HOUSE,
4 CLARENDON CRESCENT,
LEAMINGTON SPA, WARWICKSHIRE,
ENGLAND, UNTIL 2000.*

*CHRISTIE'S LONDON, "[...]HARRINGTON
HOUSE, LEAMINGTON SPA",
4 MAY 2000, LOT 460.*

*THEN IN THE TOMASSO BROTHERS'
ENGLISH PRIVATE COLLECTION.
CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK, "ANTIQUITIES", 7
DECEMBER 2011, LOT 207.*



This exceptional, large, feminine statue, sculpted from magnificent green stone, probably represents the goddess Isis or a Ptolemaic queen or princess. While the lower part of the body is Ptolemaic, the upper part is an 18th century restoration.

The woman is depicted standing, in the act of walking — a conventional form of representation in ancient Egypt. Despite the sculptor's desire to convey movement, our sculpture has a very hieratic posture, as is the case for Egyptian statuary in general. Our elegant statue rests on a rectangular base



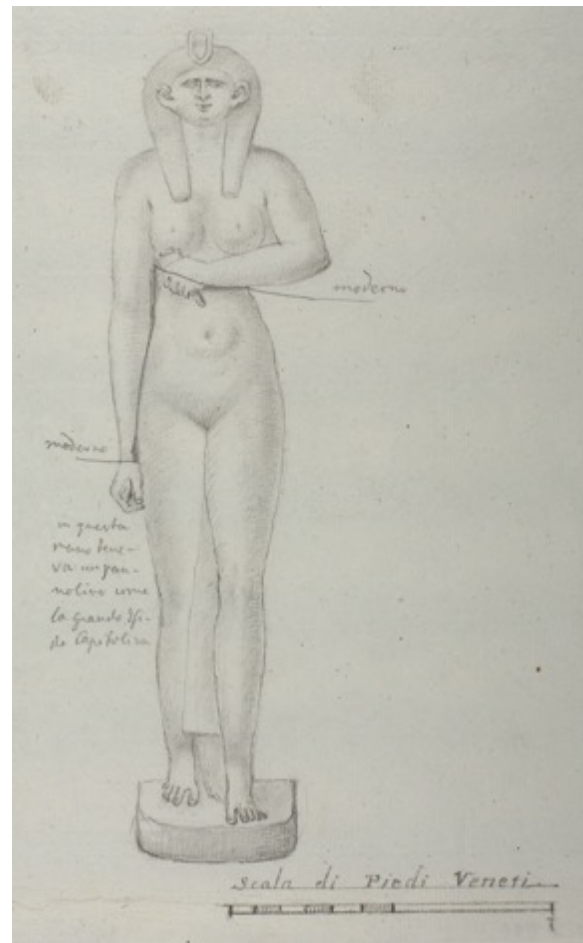
with rounded front corners. Two narrow, elegant feet are represented in a very realistic fashion. Particular care was taken to represent and individualise the long toes. Deliberately, the space between each toe is very deeply carved, reflecting the sculptor's desire for realism. The heels are straight and strong, while the ankles are lightly outlined. Between both feet, the sculptor deliberately left a bit of stone, most likely to stabilise the work.

The lower hem of the woman's garment is visible at the bottom of her leg. It is probably a sheath dress, tight and presumably translucent, which seems to cover her entirely, although its lines are only visible on the upper parts of our statue's body.

Her calves are salient and her tibias very prominent. Her knees, rather square, connect her lower legs with her round, well-proportioned thighs. Her legs are sculpted one in front of the other, the right leg in line with her body and the left leg in front.

The triangle of her pubic area is simply outlined, masked by the garment that covers it. Subtle shapes make it possible to guess at ample hips, also concealed beneath the thin fabric of the dress, giving her sensual curves. Her stomach is represented by a slight abdominal swell, with a very lifelike, deeply carved navel in the middle.

These voluptuous curves, shaped with great finesse, contrast with the upper part of the sculpture, a reinterpretation of Egyptian models based on an 18th century understanding of them. The upper restored part starts at the right wrist, follows the line of the arm along the flank and goes under the folded left arm and up to the back of the head (see ill. 1).



Ill.1. Georg Zoëga, Egyptian feminine figure in green basalt, 1789, drawing in pencil, pen and brown ink, 23,3 x 18,5 cm. Thorvaldsen's Museum, Copenhagen, inv. no. D1197.

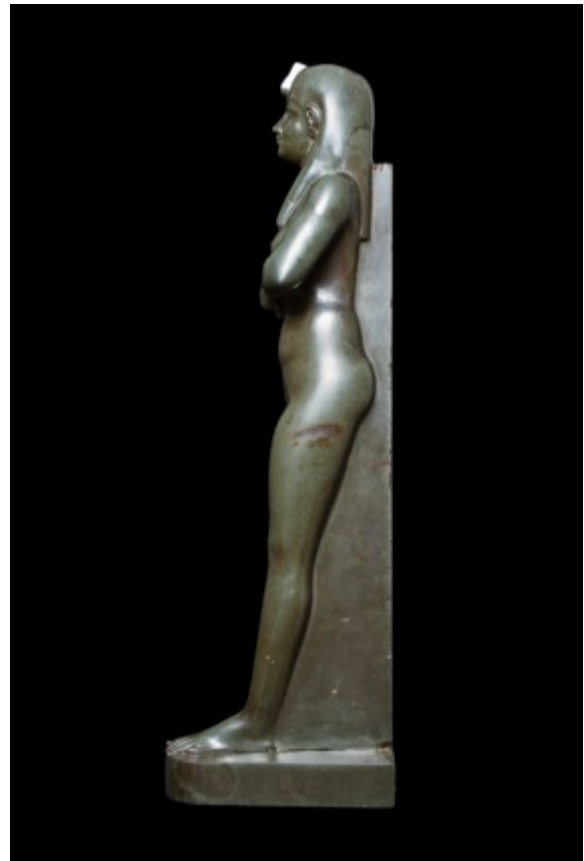
After her rather wide pelvis, her torso thus lengthens and narrows as it goes up towards her chest. At the end of her right arm, sculpted along her body, her fist is holding a piece of cloth. Her left arm is folded under her chest, the hand holding what seems to be the handle of a sistrum. Her round, spherical breasts are almost geometrised. Her shoulders are quite broad and muscular, as are her arms, which also display well shaped muscles. Her thick neck is voluminous, while a deep dimple denotes the space between her collar bones. Almond-shaped eyes, with eyelids etched through deep incisions, give character to her delicate

featured face. The lines of her brows have rather particular shapes, starting at the bridge of her nose and ending at each temple. Her straight, wide nose with large nostrils ends at a shallow dimple above her mouth. Her upper lip is wavy, while her lower lip is relatively thick. Their corners, deeply carved and thus quite visible, are slightly lifted and give the impression that the statue is smiling. These features complete a round face with full cheeks. Beneath her mouth, a small, round, recessed chin disrupts the extreme roundness of her face.



Her face is framed by large ears that stick out through her wig. She is wearing the traditional tripartite headdress, with lappets that are thinner than the norm. The top of it is adorned with a curious feature: a lotus, which juts out over her forehead. Her back, well conserved, dates back to the Ptolemaic

Period. Slightly less detailed, the sculpture displays a superb silhouette and a dorsal pillar, anchored in the base at her feet and coming to an end at her head. It constitutes a vertical support and bears neither hieroglyph nor inscription. The dorsal pillar was introduced during the New Kingdom and became a common occurrence from the Dynasty XXVI.

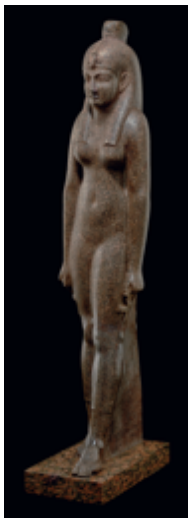


REDISCOVERY OF A PTOLEMAIC STATUE

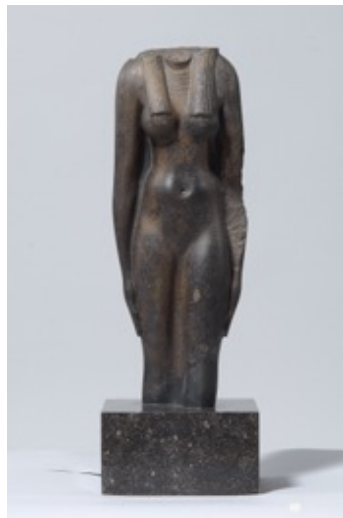
This sublime statue with its mysterious, fascinating past, forgotten for about two centuries, now yields a wealth of secrets. It reappeared before our very eyes through the recent discovery of an 18th century drawing fortunately made by the meticulous Danish researcher Georg Zoëga (ill. 1), as well as the expertise of Professor Olivier Perdu. Dated

to the Roman period until very recently, it so happens that our sculpture is an original Egyptian work from the Ptolemaic Period, the upper part of which was restored in the 18th century, as shown by the aforementioned discovered drawing.

The elegance of the sculpture, crafted with finesse and a light touch, the strongly pronounced small of the back, the slight swell of the abdomen, the carefully represented navel and, especially, the long dorsal pillar and the statue's feet are all stylistic features emblematic of the Ptolemaic Period, which made it possible to date our statue. These characteristics can thus be found in a very similar work sold by Christie's in December 2010 (ill. 2) and a superb feminine statue conserved in Vienna (ill. 3).



Ill. 2. Egyptian queen, red granite, late Ptolemaic Period, ca. 1st century BC. Christie's New York, "Antiquities including property from the collection of Max Palevsky", 9 December 2010, lot 35.



Ill. 3. Feminine torso, early Ptolemaic Period, ca. 270-250 BC, diorite, H.: 65 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Ägyptische Sammlung, Vienna, inv. no. 5809.

The shapes are similar in all three statues, with prominent buttocks and voluptuous legs with knees of a protruding oblong

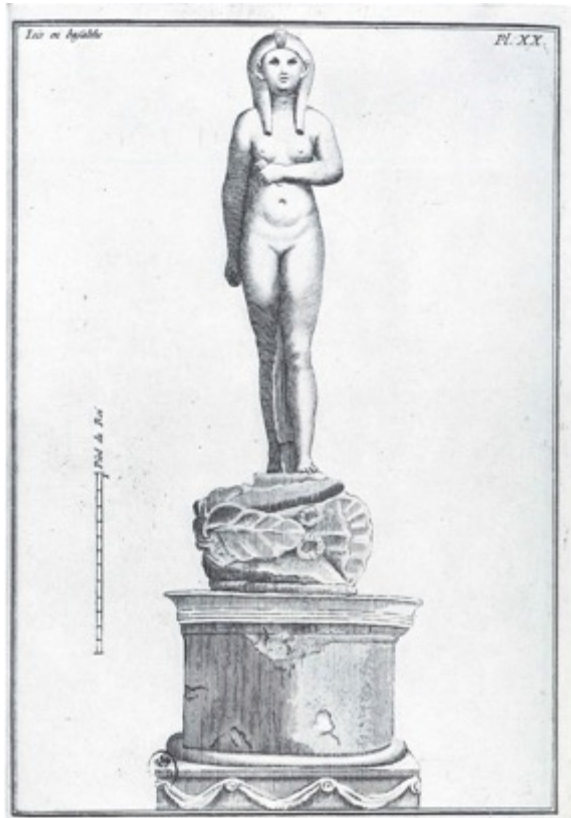
shape, rather particular and characteristic of Ptolemaic productions. Finally, the salient material between the two ankles is, yet again, a particularity of sculpture in the round in that period. These elements enable us to assert that the lower part of our statue was indisputably made in the 3rd century BC.

In parallel, the upper part of the statue, restored in the 18th century, was crafted with an Egyptianizing intent, with a view to imitating the Egyptian productions of the Roman period. However, some physical characteristics such as the shape of the face, the prominent breasts, the muscles of the arms and shoulders and the stylised lotus over the forehead are pure fantasy. That mix of styles gives it a unique and enigmatic beauty.



According to a publication and drawing from the 18th century (ill. 4), the sculpture was found in the gardens of Hadrian's Villa

among many other Egyptian works. The attribute held in the right hand of our Ptolemaic feminine figure — a bit of cloth instead of the usual sceptre — is similar to the one visible in two larger than life granite statues currently conserved at the Vatican.



Ill. 4. Giustiniana Gräfin Wynne Rosenberg-Orsini, *Altichiero*, pl. XX, 1787.

One is a Ptolemaic work of Arsinoe II (ill. 5), sister and wife of Ptolemy II, while the other is a Roman copy of Arsinoe II based on the original Ptolemaic statue (ill. 6). Both works were reportedly brought to Rome by Emperor Hadrian himself. They were found in Villa Verospini in 1710, in what was once the Egyptian pavilion of the imperial Gardens of Sallust in Rome. In the original work, the right arm was replaced by another sculpted from the same stone as that of the copy. It thus seems very likely that the same artist or workshop created the arms of the original

and the copy, and the reason the usual sceptre was replaced by a piece of cloth is rather obvious: it was undoubtedly inspired by another statue. The fact it was an attribute displayed in examples from the XVIII and XIX Dynasties, particularly for royal feminine effigies, lends itself to that hypothesis.

In our statue, the folded left hand seems to be holding the handle of what is most likely a sistrum. That attribute is present in both of the Vatican's examples, and the original Ptolemaic work could very well have been the model for our superb greywacke statue, or, on the contrary, have been inspired by it.



Ill. 5. Colossal statue of Queen Arsinoe II, Ptolemaic Period, reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285/282-246 BC), pink granite, H.: 270 cm. Musei Vaticani, MV.22681.0.0.

Ill. 6. Colossal statue of Queen Arsinoe II, Roman Period, 40 BC, pink granite, H.: 270 cm. Musei Vaticani, MV.22683.0.0.

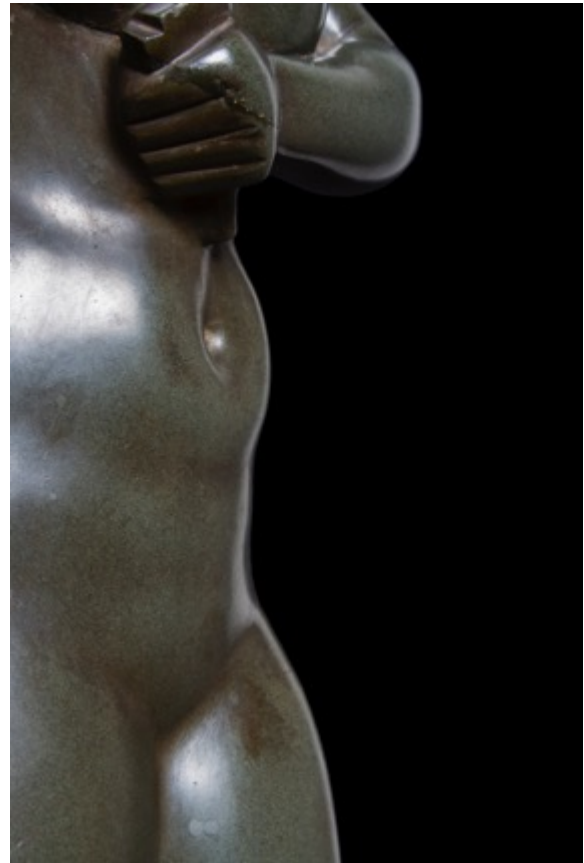
Our feminine statue is sculpted from stone that is quite typical of ancient Egyptian productions: greywacke, a smooth, strongly bonded, very fine-grained stone that allows for a perfect polish. It is mainly dark coloured. An especially common colour is grey with dark green hues, highly prized in Egypt. There was thus a sizeable deposit along Wadi Hammamat, in the vicinity of

Thebes, which was exploited from the Old Kingdom until the Roman period. The reason for the stone's popularity resides in its colour, similar to that of bronze. Moreover, Emperor Hadrian had a particular penchant for it, as several greywacke statues were found during the digs carried out at his villa, including a very lovely female sphinx head conserved at the Brooklyn Museum (ill. 7). The greywacke used to restore the statue in the 18th century is very similar to the original stone, but it is possible to differentiate the grain, which is much denser for the upper part. A very deep dark green in colour, the stone has brown marks that are characteristic of the material, while on the swathe of fabric between the legs, small, light green marks attest to the work's age and different journeys. They make up a ravishing patina that gives our Ptolemaic feminine figure an almost polychrome nature, at least in a green palette.

The polish accentuates these different hues, as well as the quality of the material itself. The masterful polish also enabled the artist who created our magnificent work to showcase their qualities as a sculptor, while simultaneously enhancing the particularly voluptuous shape of the feminine body.



Ill. 7. Head from a Female Sphinx, Middle Kingdom, Dynasty XII, ca. 1876-1842 BC, chlorite, H.: 39 cm. Brooklyn Museum, New York, inv. no. 56.85.



Our sublime Ptolemaic statue is a rare object, in both the quality of its execution and its extraordinary history. Several sources mention our Egyptian feminine statue and its incredible past.

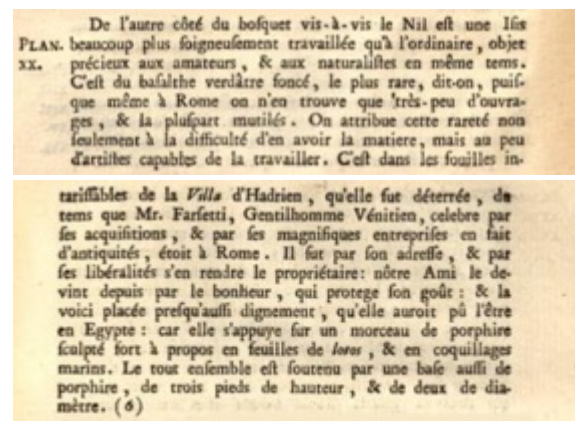
It was, thus, at Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli, near Rome. It was one of the 68 Egyptian and Egyptianizing antiquities that were found there. The link between our sculpture and Hadrian's Villa is strengthened by the existence of two other statues at the Vatican Museums. The Roman emperor developed a particular taste for Egyptian works after making two journeys to Egypt, first in AD 117 and then in AD 130-131. It was during the second trip that Antinous, his lover, mysteriously drowned in the Nile. Deeply saddened by his loss, when Hadrian returned to Rome, he set in motion the construction of the Canopus, an architectural complex built around a canal and designed to evoke the

Egyptian city of Alexandria, as well as the Serapeum, a temple dedicated to the Egyptian god Serapis. Emperor Hadrian and his wife Sabina were associated with Serapis and Isis. The emperor had many antique sculptures placed in the architectural complexes, including portraits of Antinous in Egyptian garb, a dozen figures of the goddess Isis and many more sculptures of Egyptian deities and pharaohs.

The sculpture was unearthed from the ruins of the villa in the 18th century and immediately acquired by Filippo Farsetti (1703-1774), a Venetian aristocrat and major patron and collector. He is said to have bought it between 1766 and 1769 on a trip to Rome, the purpose of which was to attentively monitor the digs taking place at Hadrian's Villa. The work was not sent to his villa, but exhibited among the multitude of precious objects he amassed in Palazzo di San Luca, his Venetian residence, open to artists and researchers and visited by Goethe, Winckelmann and Canova, just to mention a few. It was then the only sculpture of Hadrian's Villa to be privately owned. The other Tivoli works are to be found in the collections of the Vatican, Capitoline Museums, Louvre, Hermitage Museum, British Museum and Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, as well as in other significant international collections.

The work then came to Angelo Querini (1721-1796), as mentioned by Giustiniana Wynne, Countess Rosenberg Orsini, widow of the Austrian ambassador in Venice, in her 1787 publication *Alticchiero*, an inventory of the furniture in the eponymous villa located near Padua, Italy, which belonged to Angelo Querini. The latter, from one of the oldest

noble families in Venice as well as a great patron of the arts, inherited the family palace in Venice and the Alticchiero property in 1765. Querini's Alticchiero residence had a library that housed the classics as well as philosophical, agricultural and theological works. The sculpture collection was made up of ancient and modern busts of philosophers, while the ancient and classical works were mainly arranged around the garden, named "*Canopus*" in reference to Emperor Hadrian. Our sculpture, then identified as the goddess Isis, is described on pages 46-47 (ill. 8), with an accompanying drawing (Plate XX - ill. 4).



Ill. 8. Giustiniana Gräfin Wynne Rosenberg-Orsini, *Alticchiero*, 1787, pp. 46-47.

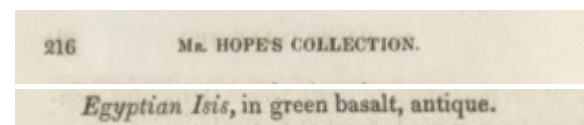
The accurate drawing of the statue is accompanied by a scale which proves that the size of the sculpture matches with our statue. It was mentioned in two unpublished inventories of the Farsetti collection. The first, compiled before 1778, catalogued the object under the title "marble figures" and describes it as a "Egyptian figure of a woman, in basalt stone". The second inventory, dated 1778, describes it in exactly the same way and has an annotation that completes the description, indicating that the work was "given to His Eminence Angelo Querini in exchange for a marble bust of Pietro

Aretino". It thus seems clear that the statue became the property of the cousin and heir of Filippo Farsetti, Daniele Farsetti, and that, between the second inventory in 1778 and the publication of *Alticchiero* in 1787, he gave the Roman statue to Angelo Querini for a marble bust of Aretino.

During the summer of 1789, a Danish researcher, Georg Zoëga, visited Angelo Querini's Villa Alticchiero and produced quite a few notes and drawings, currently conserved at the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen. They were published by Daniela Picchi in 2010. In the transcript of one of Zoëga's writings in which he describes four Egyptian objects he was able to see at Villa Alticchiero, object no. 4 is described as an "Egyptian feminine figure made of green basalt". He also gives the height of the statue, specifies that it was found at Hadrian's Villa and gives the reference of plate XX in Rosenberg Orsini's publication. Again, there is absolutely no question that the statue described is our Ptolemaic queen. Zoëga even added that "the upper part has been restored" and paired his note with a drawing (ill. 1). The drawing, similar to the 1787 engraving, shows the statue without its two porphyry bases, but with an essential detail: a line that divides the work in two, thus specifying that the upper part is "modern" while the lower part is ancient. According to Zoëga, it dated back to the Ptolemaic Period. It is this very document that enables us to state that the sculpture was actually misread from the time of its rediscovery, as it was actually Ptolemaic, with the upper part restored in the 18th century at the latest, or at least before 1787, the year of the drawing. Maybe the restoration was done before that time?

We have only scarce information regarding the sculpture's ownership in the 19th and 20th centuries. The English antique dealer and collector Charles Townley (1737-1805) wrote to Querini about his collection in the 1780s. In 1804, Sir John Stepney wrote to Townley regarding the collection and praised the statue of a queen, which he deemed vastly superior to all the other Egyptian antiquities. Ultimately, Townley did not purchase the Querini collection, which was thus dispersed soon after 1804. Some pieces were bought by a museum in Berlin in 1823.

The statue was probably acquired by the art collector and enthusiast Thomas Hope (1769- 1831), who was known to possess "an Egyptian Isis in green basalt, antique". It was very likely exhibited in the Egyptian Room of his London residence in Duchess Street in 1824 (ill. 9).



Ill. 9. C. M. Westmacott, *British galleries of painting and sculpture*, 1824, p. 216.

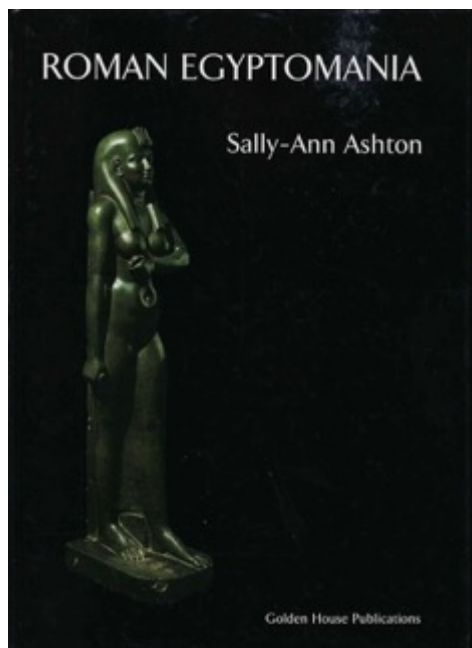
More recently, it belonged to an English private collector residing at Harrington House, 4 Clarendon Crescent, Leamington Spa in Warwickshire, England. In May 2000, the contents of the house were sold at auction by Christie's (ill. 10). The sales catalogue described our statue (no. 460) as being from the end of the 19th or beginning of the 20th century - a copy of an original dating back to the 3rd century BC.

It then found its way to the private collection of the Tomasso brothers in the north of

England (or English private collection?). It was presented to the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge for its “Roman Egyptomania” exhibition from 2004 to 2005 (ill. 11).



Ill. 10. Christie's London, “The contents of Harrington House, Leamington Spa”, 4 May 2000, lot 460.



Ill. 11. Sally-Ann Ashton, *Roman Egyptomania* (cat. The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, September 2004 – May 2005), 2004, Golden House Publications, pp. 180-182.

It is very captivating to see the new discovery that can be made from the singular revelation of a drawing that hereby challenged previous dating and attribution of a sculpture. As researchers and historians, we are pleased to have been able to rightfully restore a sculpture's original identity.



Exhibition:

Roman Egyptomania, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, 24 September 2004 - 8 May 2005.

Publications:

- G. G. W. Rosenberg Orsini, *Alticchiero*, 1787, Padua, p. 46.
- L. Lanzi, *Viaggio del 1793 per lo stato Veneto e Venezia stessa* (“1793 travels through Veneto and Venice itself”), 1793, Florence.

- C. A. Marini, *Della verità dei fatti di cui si è conservata memoria nell'iscrizione a S. Giovanni di Salvo presso a Pirano. Dissertazione apologetica con annotazioni* ("On the truth of the facts recorded in the inscription to S. Giovanni di Salvo in Pirano"), 1794, Venice.
- C. Molloy Westmacott, *British galleries of Painting and Sculpture*, 1824, London, p. 216.
- C. Dolzani, "Cimeli egiziani del Museo Civico di Padova I" ("Egyptian antiquities at Museo Civico di Padova I"), Bollettino del Museo Civico di Padova, LVII, 1968, p. 9.
- A. Roulet, *The Egyptian and Egyptianizing monuments of imperial Rome*, 1972, Leiden, Brill.
- C. Dolzani, "Presenze di origine egiziana nell'ambiente aquileiese e nell'alto adriatico" ("Egyptian vestiges in the vicinity of Aquileia and the northern Adriatic") in *Aquileia e l'Oriente Mediterraneo [...]*, 24 aprile - 1 maggio 1976, 1977, Udine, p. 131.
- E. D'Amicone, "Itinerario nelle collezioni egizie del Veneto" ("Itinerary through the Egyptian collections in Veneto") in S. Curto and A. Roccati, *Tesori dei Faraoni*, 1984, Milan, p. 84.
- E. D'Amicone, "Antico Egitto e Collezionismo veneto e veneziano" ("Ancient Egypt and Venetian and Venetian collecting") in *Venezia e l'archeologia*, 1990, Rome, p. 24.
- E. Varin, "Notes sur la dispersion de quelques objets égyptiens provenant de la villa Quirini à Alticchiéro" ("Notes on the dispersion of some Egyptian objects from Quirini Villa in Alticchiéro") in *Revue d'égyptologie*, 2002, 53, pp. 220-221, Pl. XXVIII.
- J.-M. Humbert, Michael Pantazzi and Christiane Ziegler (ed.), *Égyptomania : l'Égypte dans l'art occidental* ("Egyptomania: Egypt in western art"), 1994, Paris, gathering of national museums.
- S.-A. Ashton, *Roman Egyptomania* (cat. The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, September 2004 - May 2005), 2004, Golden House, pp. 180-182.
- L. Vedovato, *Villa Farsetti nella Storia* ("Villa Farsetti through history"), II, Venice, 2004, pp. 24, 65, 142 n. 153.
- *Con gli occhi di Canova: la Collezione Farsetti del Museo Ermitage* ("With the eyes of Canova: the Hermitage Museum's Farsetti Collection" - Cat. Massa, Doge's Palace, 30 April - 21 August 2005), 2005, Pontedera, pp. 31, 42.
- D. Picchi, *Alle origini dell'Egittologia : le antichità egiziane di Bologna e di Venezia da un inedito di Georg Zoëga* ("Retracing the origins of Egyptology: the Egyptian antiquities of Bologna and Venice from unpublished works by Georg Zoëga"), 2010, Editrice la Mandragora, p. 103.