

Hermaphrodites and Sleeping or Reclining Maenads: Production Centres and Quarry Marks

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CONTENT

PRESENTATION	15
NECROLOGY: NORMAN HERZ (1923-2013) by Susan Kane	17
1. APPLICATIONS TO SPECIFIC ARCHEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS – USE OF MARBLE	
Hermaphrodites and Sleeping or Reclining Maenads: Production Centres and Quarry Marks <i>Patrizio Pensabene</i>	25
First Remarks about the Pavement of the Newly Discovered Mithraeum of the Colored Marbles at Ostia and New Investigations on Roman and Late Roman White and Colored Marbles from Insula IV, IX <i>Massimiliano David, Stefano Succi and Marcello Turci</i>	33
Alabaster. Quarrying and Trade in the Roman World: Evidence from Pompeii and Herculaneum <i>Simon J. Barker and Simona Perna</i>	45
Recent Work on the Stone at the Villa Arianna and the Villa San Marco (Castellammare di Stabia) and Their Context within the Vesuvian Area <i>Simon J. Barker and J. Clayton Fant</i>	65
Marble Wall Decorations from the Imperial Mausoleum (4 th C.) and the Basilica of San Lorenzo (5 th C.) in Milan: an Update on Colored Marbles in Late Antique Milan <i>Elisabetta Neri, Roberto Bugini and Silvia Gazzoli</i>	79
Sarcophagus Lids Sawn from their Chests <i>Dorothy H. Abramitis and John J. Herrmann</i>	89
The Re-Use of Monolithic Columns in the Invention and Persistence of Roman Architecture <i>Peter D. De Staebler</i>	95
The Trade in Small-Size Statues in the Roman Mediterranean: a Case Study from Alexandria <i>Patrizio Pensabene and Eleonora Gasparini</i>	101
The Marble Dedication of Komon, Son of Asklepiades, from Egypt: Material, Provenance, and Reinforcement of Meaning <i>Patricia A. Butz</i>	109
Multiple Reuse of Imported Marble Pedestals at Caesarea Maritima in Israel <i>Barbara Burrell</i>	117
Iasos and Iasian Marble between the Late Antique and Early Byzantine Eras <i>Diego Peirano</i>	123

Thassos, Known Inscriptions with New Data <i>Tony Kozelj and Manuela Wurch-Kozelj</i>	131
The Value of Marble in Roman <i>Hispalis</i> : Contextual, Typological and Lithological Analysis of an Assemblage of Large Architectural Elements Recovered at N° 17 Goyeneta Street (Seville, Spain) <i>Ruth Taylor, Oliva Rodríguez, Esther Ontiveros, María Luisa Loza, José Beltrán and Araceli Rodríguez</i>	143
<i>Giallo Antico</i> in Context. Distribution, Use and Commercial Actors According to New Stratigraphic Data from the Western Mediterranean (2 nd C. Bc – Late 1 st C. Ad) <i>Stefan Ardeleanu</i>	155
<i>Amethystus</i> : Ancient Properties and Iconographic Selection <i>Luigi Pedroni</i>	167
2. PROVENANCE IDENTIFICATION I: (MARBLE)	
Unraveling the Carrara – Göktepe Entanglement <i>Walter Prochaska, Donato Attanasio and Matthias Bruno</i>	175
The Marble of Roman Imperial Portraits <i>Donato Attanasio, Matthias Bruno, Walter Prochaska and Ali Bahadır Yavuz</i>	185
Tracing Alabaster (Gypsum or Anhydrite) Artwork Using Trace Element Analysis and a Multi-Isotope Approach (Sr, S, O) <i>Lise Leroux, Wolfram Kloppmann, Philippe Bromblet, Catherine Guerrot, Anthony H. Cooper, Pierre-Yves Le Pogam, Dominique Vingtain and Noel Worley</i>	195
Roman Monolithic Fountains and Thasian Marble <i>Annewies van den Hoek, Donato Attanasio and John J. Herrmann</i>	207
Archaeometric Analysis of the Alabaster Thresholds of Villa A, Oplontis (Torre Annunziata, Italy) and New Sr and Pb Isotopic Data for <i>Alabastro Ghiaccione del Circeo</i> <i>Simon J. Barker, Simona Perna, J. Clayton Fant, Lorenzo Lazzarini and Igor M. Villa</i>	215
Roman Villas of Lake Garda and the Occurrence of Coloured Marbles in the Western Part of “Regio X Venetia et Histria” (Northern Italy) <i>Roberto Bugini, Luisa Folli and Elisabetta Roffia</i>	231
Calcitic Marble from Thasos in the North Adriatic Basin: Ravenna, Aquileia, and Milan <i>John J. Herrmann, Robert H. Tykot and Annewies van den Hoek</i>	239
Characterisation of White Marble Objects from the Temple of Apollo and the House of Augustus (Palatine Hill, Rome) <i>Francesca Giustini, Mauro Brilli, Enrico Gallochio and Patrizio Pensabene</i>	247
Study and Archeometric Analysis of the Marble Elements Found in the Roman Theater at Aeclanum (Mirabella Eclano, Avellino - Italy) <i>Antonio Mesisca, Lorenzo Lazzarini, Stefano Cancelliere and Monica Salvadori</i>	255

Two Imperial Monuments in Puteoli: Use of Proconnesian Marble in the Domitianic and Trajanic Periods in Campania <i>Irene Bald Romano, Hans Rupprecht Goette, Donato Attanasio and Walter Prochaska</i>	267
Coloured Marbles in the Neapolitan Pavements (16 th And 17 th Centuries): the Church of <i>Santi Severino e Sossio</i> <i>Roberto Bugini, Luisa Folli and Martino Solito</i>	275
Roman and Early Byzantine Sarcophagi of Calcitic Marble from Thasos in Italy: Ostia and Siracusa <i>Donato Attanasio, John J. Herrmann, Robert H. Tykot and Annewies van den Hoek</i>	281
Revisiting the Origin and Destination of the Late Antique Marzamemi 'Church Wreck' Cargo <i>Justin Leidwanger, Scott H. Pike and Andrew Donnelly</i>	291
The Marbles of the Sculptures of Felix Romuliana in Serbia <i>Walter Prochaska and Maja Živić</i>	301
Calcitic Marble from Thasos and Proconnesos in Nea Anchialos (Thessaly) and Thessaloniki (Macedonia) <i>Vincent Barbin, John J. Herrmann, Aristotle Mentzos and Annewies van den Hoek</i>	311
Architectural Decoration of the Imperial Agora's Porticoes at Iasos <i>Fulvia Bianchi, Donato Attanasio and Walter Prochaska</i>	321
The Winged Victory of Samothrace - New Data on the Different Marbles Used for the Monument from the Sanctuary of the Great Gods <i>Annie Blanc, Philippe Blanc and Ludovic Laugier</i>	331
Polychrome Marbles from the Theatre of the Sanctuary of Apollo Pythios in Gortyna (Crete) <i>Jacopo Bonetto, Nicolò Mareso and Michele Bueno</i>	337
Paul the Silentiary, Hagia Sophia, Onyx, Lydia, and Breccia Corallina <i>John J. Herrmann and Annewies van den Hoek</i>	345
Incrustations from Colonia Ulpia Traiana (Near Modern Xanten, Germany) <i>Vilma Ruppiniè and Ulrich Schüssler</i>	351
Stone Objects from Vindobona (Austria) – Petrological Characterization and Provenance of Local Stone in a Historico-Economical Setting <i>Andreas Rohatsch, Michaela Kronberger, Sophie Insulander, Martin Mosser and Barbara Hodits</i>	363
Marbles Discovered on the Site of the Forum of Vaison-la-Romaine (Vaucluse, France): Preliminary Results <i>Elsa Roux, Jean-Marc Mignon, Philippe Blanc and Annie Blanc</i>	373
Updated Characterisation of White Saint-Béat Marble. Discrimination Parameters from Classical Marbles <i>Hernando Royo Plumed, Pilar Lapeunte, José Antonio Cuchí, Mauro Brillì and Marie-Claire Savin</i>	379

Grey and Greyish Banded Marbles from the Estremoz Anticline in Lusitania <i>Pilar Lapuente, Trinidad Nogales-Basarrate, Hernando Royo Plumed, Mauro Brilli and Marie-Claire Savin</i>	391
New Data on Spanish Marbles: the Case of <i>Gallaecia</i> (NW Spain) <i>Anna Gutiérrez García-M., Hernando Royo Plumed and Silvia González Soutelo</i>	401
A New Roman Imperial Relief Said to Be from Southern Spain: Problems of Style, Iconography, and Marble Type in Determining Provenance <i>John Pollini, Pilar Lapuente, Trinidad Nogales-Basarrate and Jerry Podany</i>	413
Reuse of the <i>Marmora</i> from the Late Roman Palatial Building at Carranque (Toledo, Spain) in the Visigothic Necropolis <i>Virginia García-Entero, Anna Gutiérrez García-M. and Sergio Vidal Álvarez</i>	427
Imperial Porphyry in Roman Britain <i>David F. Williams</i>	435
Recycling of Marble: Apollonia/Sozousa/Arsuf (Israel) as a Case Study <i>Moshe Fischer, Dimitris Tambakopoulos and Yannis Maniatis</i>	443
Thasian Connections Overseas: Sculpture in the Cyrene Museum (Libya) Made of Dolomitic Marble from Thasos <i>John J. Herrmann and Donato Attanasio</i>	457
Marble on Rome's Southwestern Frontier: Thamugadi and Lambaesis <i>Robert H. Tykot, Ouahiba Bouzidi, John J. Herrmann and Annewies van den Hoek</i>	467
Marble and Sculpture at Lepcis Magna (Tripolitania, Libya): a Preliminary Study Concerning Origin and Workshops <i>Luisa Musso, Laura Buccino, Matthias Bruno, Donato Attanasio and Walter Prochaska</i>	481
The Pentelic Marble in the Carnegie Museum of Art Hall of Sculpture, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania <i>Albert D. Kollar</i>	491
Analysis of Classical Marble Sculptures in the Michael C. Carlos Museum, Emory University, Atlanta <i>Robert H. Tykot, John J. Herrmann, Renée Stein, Jasper Gaunt, Susan Blevins and Anne R. Skinner</i>	501
3. PROVENANCE IDENTIFICATION II: (OTHER STONES)	
Aphrodisias and the Regional Marble Trade. The <i>Scaenae Frons</i> of the Theatre at Nysa <i>Natalia Toma</i>	513
The Stones of Felix Romuliana (Gamzigrad, Serbia) <i>Bojan Djurić, Divna Jovanović, Stefan Pop Lazić and Walter Prochaska</i>	523
Aspects of Characterisation of Stone Monuments from Southern Pannonia <i>Branka Migotti</i>	537

The Budakalász Travertine Production <i>Bojan Djurić, Sándor Kele and Igor Rižnar</i>	545
Stone Monuments from Carnuntum and Surrounding Areas (Austria) – Petrological Characterization and Quarry Location in a Historical Context <i>Gabrielle Kremer, Isabella Kitz, Beatrix Moshhammer, Maria Heinrich and Erich Draganits</i>	557
Espejón Limestone and Conglomerate (Soria, Spain): Archaeometric Characterization, Quarrying and Use in Roman Times <i>Virginia García-Entero, Anna Gutiérrez García-M, Sergio Vidal Álvarez, María J. Peréx Agorreta and Eva Zarco Martínez</i>	567
The Use of Alcover Stone in Roman Times (<i>Tarraco, Hispania Citerior</i>). Contributions to the <i>Officina Lapidaria Tarraconensis</i> <i>Diana Gorostidi Pi, Jordi López Vilar and Anna Gutiérrez García-M.</i>	577
4. ADVANCES IN PROVENANCE TECHNIQUES, METHODOLOGIES AND DATABASES	
Grainautline – a Supervised Grain Boundary Extraction Tool Supported by Image Processing and Pattern Recognition <i>Kristóf Csorba, Lilla Barancsuk, Balázs Székely and Judit Zöldföldi</i>	587
A Database and GIS Project about Quarrying, Circulation and Use of Stone During the Roman Age in <i>Regio X - Venetia et Histria</i> . The Case Study of the Euganean Trachyte <i>Caterine Previato and Arturo Zara</i>	597
5. QUARRIES AND GEOLOGY	
The Distribution of Troad Granite Columns as Evidence for Reconstructing the Management of Their Production <i>Patrizio Pensabene, Javier Á. Domingo and Isabel Rodà</i>	613
Ancient Quarries and Stonemasonry in Northern Choria Considiana <i>Hale Güney</i>	621
Polychromy in Larisaeon Quarries and its Relation to Architectural Conception <i>Gizem Mater and Ertunç Denктаş</i>	633
Euromos of Caria: the Origin of an Hitherto Unknown Grey Veined Stepped Marble of Roman Antiquity <i>Matthias Bruno, Donato Attanasio, Walter Prochaska and Ali Bahadır Yavuz</i>	639
Unknown Painted Quarry Inscriptions from Bacakale at <i>Docimium</i> (Turkey) <i>Matthias Bruno</i>	651
The Green Schist Marble Stone of Jebel El Hairech (North West of Tunisia): a Multi-Analytical Approach and its Uses in Antiquity <i>Ameur Younès, Mohamed Gaied and Wissem Gallala</i>	659
Building Materials and the Ancient Quarries at <i>Thamugadi</i> (East of Algeria), Case Study: Sandstone and Limestone <i>Younès Rezkallah and Ramdane Marmi</i>	673

The Local Quarries of the Ancient Roman City of <i>Valeria</i> (Cuenca, Spain) <i>Javier Atienza Fuente</i>	683
The Stone and Ancient Quarries of Montjuïc Mountain (Barcelona, Spain) <i>Aureli Álvarez</i>	693
<i>Notae Lapidinarum</i> : Preliminary Considerations about the Quarry Marks from the Provincial Forum of <i>Tarraco</i> <i>Maria Serena Vinci</i>	699
The Different Steps of the Rough-Hewing on a Monumental Sculpture at the Greek Archaic Period: the Unfinished Kouros of Thasos <i>Danièle Braunstein</i>	711
A Review of Copying Techniques in Greco-Roman Sculpture <i>Séverine Moureaud</i>	717
Labour Forces at Imperial Quarries <i>Ben Russell</i>	733
Social Position of Craftsmen inside the Stone and Marble Processing Trades in the Light of Diocletian's Edict on Prices <i>Krešimir Bosnić and Branko Matulić</i>	741
6. STONE PROPERTIES, WEATHERING EFFECTS AND RESTORATION, AS RELATED TO DIAGNOSIS PROBLEMS, MATCHING OF STONE FRAGMENTS AND AUTHENTICITY	
Methods of Consolidation and Protection of Pentelic Marble <i>Maria Apostolopoulou, Elissavet Drakopoulou, Maria Karoglou and Asterios Bakolas</i>	749
7. PIGMENTS AND PAINTINGS ON MARBLE	
Painting and Sculpture Conservation in Two Gallo-Roman Temples in Picardy (France): Champlieu and Pont-Sainte-Maxence <i>Véronique Brunet-Gaston and Christophe Gaston</i>	763
The Use of Colour on Roman Marble Sarcophagi <i>Eliana Siotto</i>	773
New Evidence for Ancient Gilding and Historic Restorations on a Portrait of Antinous in the San Antonio Museum of Art <i>Jessica Powers, Mark Abbe, Michelle Bushey and Scott H. Pike</i>	783
Schists and Pigments from Ancient Swat (Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Pakistan) <i>Francesco Mariottini, Gianluca Vignaroli, Maurizio Mariottini and Mauro Roma</i>	793
8. SPECIAL THEME SESSION: „THE USE OF MARBLE AND LIMESTONE IN THE ADRIATIC BASIN IN ANTIQUITY”	
Marble Sarcophagi of Roman Dalmatia Material – Provenance – Workmanship <i>Guntram Koch</i>	809

Funerary Monuments and Quarry Management in Middle Dalmatia <i>Nenad Cambi</i>	827
Marble Revetments of Diocletian's Palace <i>Katja Marasović and Vinka Marinković</i>	839
The Use of Limestones as Construction Materials for the Mosaics of Diocletian's Palace <i>Branko Matulić, Domagoj Mudronja and Krešimir Bosnić</i>	855
Restoration of the Peristyle of Diocletian's Palace in Split <i>Goran Nikšić</i>	863
Marble Slabs Used at the Archaeological Site of Sorna near Poreč Istria – Croatia <i>Đeni Gobić-Bravar</i>	871
Ancient Marbles from the Villa in Verige Bay, Brijuni Island, Croatia <i>Mira Pavletić and Đeni Gobić-Bravar</i>	879
Notes on Early Christian Ambos and Altars in the Light of some Fragments from the Islands of Pag and Rab <i>Mirja Jarak</i>	887
The Marbles in the Chapel of the Blessed John of Trogir in the Cathedral of St. Lawrence at Trogir <i>Đeni Gobić-Bravar and Daniela Matetić Poljak</i>	899
The Use of Limestone in the Roman Province of Dalmatia <i>Edisa Lozić and Igor Rižnar</i>	915
The Extraction and Use of Limestone in Istria in Antiquity <i>Klara Buršić-Matijašić and Robert Matijašić</i>	925
Aurisina Limestone in the Roman Age: from Karst Quarries to the Cities of the Adriatic Basin <i>Caterina Previato</i>	933
The Remains of Infrastructural Facilities of the Ancient Quarries on Zadar Islands (Croatia) <i>Mate Parica</i>	941
The Impact of Local Geomorphological and Geological Features of the Area for the Construction of the Burnum Amphitheatre <i>Miroslav Glavičić and Uroš Stepišnik</i>	951
Roman Quarry Klis Kosa near Salona <i>Ivan Alduk</i>	957
Marmore Lavdata Brattia <i>Miona Miliša and Vinka Marinković</i>	963
Quarries of the Lumbarda Archipelago <i>Ivka Lipanović and Vinka Marinković</i>	979

Island of Korčula – Importer and Exporter of Stone in Antiquity <i>Mate Parica and Igor Borzić</i>	985
Faux Marbling Motifs in Early Christian Frescoes in Central and South Dalmatia: Preliminary Report <i>Tonči Borovac, Antonija Gluhan and Nikola Radošević</i>	995
INDEX OF AUTHORS	1009

HERMAPHRODITES AND SLEEPING OR RECLINING MAENADS: PRODUCTION CENTRES AND QUARRY MARKS

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Abstract

The recent restoration works on the *Hermaphrodite*, preserved in the Museo Nazionale Romano and found in a niche in the peristyle of a domus dug out under the Opera Theatre in 1879, have revealed the presence of a mark made on the hidden surface of the piece. The marble turned out to be most probably Afyon, less probably Parian or Carrara, on the basis of archaeometric tests. This sculpture, probably from the Antonine age, is the most faithful copy of a statue from about the mid-second century BC, attributed to an artist influenced by Pergamenean or Rhodian styles and which represents an inadvertent tossing during the sleep of a hermaphrodite rendered in a particularly sensual and provocative pose.

Keywords

Hermaphrodite, quarry marks, Urban imperial workshop

The recent restoration works on the *Hermaphrodite* kept in the Museo Nazionale Romano at Palazzo Massimo (Fig. 1 A, B) have revealed the presence of a mark made on a hidden surface of the piece, a mark that even in ancient times was not easily visible. The statue was found in a niche of the peristyle of a domus and was dug out from underneath the Opera Theatre in 1879. On the basis of archaeometric tests, its marble turned out to be more probably of Afyon type, less probably Parian or from Carrara. Carbon and oxygen isotope composition falls in between the isotopic fields of these marbles; in fact, comparing our datum with the database of Attanasio *et al.* and that of Gorgoni *et al.*, it is possible to contend that the marble from the *Hermaphrodite* is very likely from the Afyon quarries.

It is 25 cm high and 148 cm long. Its left hand and the inferior part of its left leg, now missing, were made in two different pieces and attached with an iron pin (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1.
Rome, Museo Nazionale di Palazzo Massimo, A front; B back



Fig. 2. Detail of figure 1



Fig. 4. Detail of figure 1



Fig. 3. Quarry inscription on the support of figure 1



Fig. 5. Detail of figure 1

This figure is represented sleeping, lying on a sheet or better, a large *himation* and was originally set in a support, probably a rocky surface, judging from other statues. This support had to be in a different marble, which should have suggested the color of the rock. One part of it continued the *himation*, fastened to the right side of the statue by pins, of which there are the relevant holes.

The lower border of the slab, cut together with the statue on its top, presents a reversed quarry mark, in Latin lettering (Fig. 3), where perhaps the name of Traianus with T R an NT in a link can be distinguished. It was probably part of a destination mark, as we can presume on the basis of similar marks on blocks of Carrara Quarries, from the Foro Traiano and of Eastern marble from the *Villa of Traiano* at Arcinazzo¹: perhaps it was a white marble

quarry block, special for its quality and very apt to be sculpted for prestigious statues. Only if it were of Parian marble could we suggest interpreting it as consular date, which we find frequently on Parian blocks of Porto.

It was marked on the block before it was sculpted: for this reason the letters appear reversed, insofar as an already marked block turned upside down before it was crafted was used for the sculpture. Usually, the marble blocks, when inscribed with this kind of mark, were sent from the quarries directly to Rome for the needs of the imperial household: this is the evidence of administrative procedure characterizing all the marbles dispatched to Rome for public buildings and the imperial palaces. So, we are confronted with the fact that the hermaphrodite of Palazzo Massimo was made in Rome. This datum has led us to study once again the statue together with others of the same subject and form, to identify the place where the activity of the workshops was carried

1 PENSABENE 2013; MARI 2015.

out, whether it coincided with, or might have been different from, the place of the origin and the formations of the workshop. To this end it will be important to place more attention on the details of the various copies and also to evaluate why in Athens alone the motif of the hermaphrodite was changed into that of the Maenad, while the same composition and many similar formal aspects were maintained.

That body, naked with the exception of its left arm and its right leg partially covered by strips of the *himation* (or drape) is lying on its left side with its legs crossed so as to point, on one side, to its buttocks (Fig. 4) and on the other, to its erect penis. Its torso is mainly lying on the sheet leaving only its back visible whilst its head, turned to the right, is leaning on its folded arms as if on a cushion. The face, with a thin nose and full cheeks, and a semi-open well-shaped mouth, in the act of sleeping, shows a serene expression. The rather complex coiffure shows long wavy wisps of hair pulled up along the face and tied up by a thin plait: on the top of the head they form one crosswise and two parallel locks held in place by a round clasp set with a now missing gem of a different stone, probably glued, as its setting still presents traces of a point. Finally on its nape presents a chignon from which other locks issue (Fig. 5).

This sculpture, probably from the Hadrian or Antonine age, is one of the most faithful copies of a statue from about the mid-second century BC, attributed to an artist influenced by the Pergamenian or Rhodian styles and which represents a hermaphrodite tossing and turning while sleeping, rendered in a particularly sensual and provocative pose. Pliny (NH XXXIV,80) remembers the sculptor Polykles who sculpted a "*hermaphroditus nobilis*", whom some scholars have identified as an Athenian sculptor living in the second century BC and suggest as the probable author of the original. So we should discard the hypothesis of a link of this Polykles with a sculptor of bronze statues quoted in another passage by Pliny (NH, XXXIV,50) active between 372 and 368 (CII Olympics) to whom Becatti would attribute the standing hermaphrodite of Praxitelean school and known from a number of replicas². The attribution to an artist from the second and not fourth century BC is also confirmed by the elaborate rhythm of the figure lacking volumetric and spatial unity to such an extent that the lively surfaces of the feminine, lean limbs, do not correspond to the inside structure. We can also add an evident quality of psychological insight, which goes with the symbolic meanings, to excite emotions in the on-lookers to whom the dialogue is addressed³. All these

elements put the date of the original in an advanced Hellenistic period and it has also been claimed that these sculptures, enhancing the external erotic aspect by means of elaborate poses of the body, correspond to the late Hellenistic sculptures from a Pergamenian setting where the state of mind is expressed not only by facial features but also by complex and often agitated body movements. Along this line of thinking, the original of our hermaphrodite has been recognized as belonging to a rococo current of Asian Hellenism. Of this trend we want to cite also two copies of the crouching Aphrodites by the Bithynian sculptor Doidalsas active in the second half of the third century BC, from Hadrian's Villa and from the excavations in Via Palermo at Rome. In both of them there is the same attempt to stir up sexual attraction by means of the soft and full forms of the body together with corporeal torsion. In the Hadrian's Villa example we should like to consider the treatment of the hair, gathered in big locks by a band from which three locks escape in picturesque disorder and descend on the neck whilst the short locks fall on the left temple.⁴ The analogies with the Palazzo Massimo hermaphrodite's head are very clear.

To understand the meaning and the high quality of the Hermaphrodite in the Palazzo Massimo, is necessary a new reappraisal of the various copies of the sleeping type (at least six of them of real size) known with variations in the Florentine Uffizi Gallery seemingly in Parian marble⁵ (Fig. 6), in the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg (Fig. 7), in the Galleria Borghese in Rome (Fig. 8), and in the Louvre where two statues from the Borghese collection are kept, one found in Rome near Diocletian's Baths (Fig. 9) and a second one, heavily restored, from Velletri (Fig. 10). However, it is the three statues of the Borghese Collection that are the most similar to the Palazzo Massimo one, as revealed by the very likely disordered treatment of their coiffure in its mixture of the characteristics of the hair of members, both male and female of a Dionysiac thiasos. This, despite the fact that in the Louvre statues – and particularly in the one found near Diocletian's Baths, the central hair bun is not present and the rendering of the hair is rougher and mainly

(probably inspired by the callipygian Aphrodites) of a sleeping girl which urges the onlooker to go around the statue to discover the unexpected ithyphallic virility). The effect is similar to the discovery of Arianna's nudity at Naxos which probably was the model for Pompeian paintings with the Hermaphrodite as one can see in the Casa dei Vettii at Pompeii where Pan discovers the Hermaphrodite.

2 BECATTI 1940, n.33.

3 CADARIO 2011, 238. In the Borghese type Hermaphrodite, kept at Palazzo Massimo is the twisted position

4 VASORI 1979, 141-147.

5 MANSUELLI 1961, 82, n. 53.



Fig. 6. Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi



Fig. 7. Saint Petersburg, Hermitage



Fig. 8. Rome, Galleria Borghese

entrusted to the chiaroscuro of the rather deep grooves dividing the curls (Fig. 11).

Besides these examples wholly preserved (though with restored sections) we should take into consideration also further fragments of statues of the same type: an example in the Aix museum, preserved only to knee height, a torso from the Canessa collection at Paris⁶, the lower



Fig. 9. Paris, Louvre, from Diocletian's Bath



Fig. 10. Paris, Louvre, from Velletri



Fig. 11. Detail of fig. 10

section of a body with crossed legs from the warehouse of the Museo Nazionale Romano, a late-Hellenistic statuette in the museum at Coos⁷.

All the above quoted examples of hermaphrodite share with ours in the Palazzo Massimo the pose of the body, the facial features and the general aspect. However they present differences: the plinth, more or less raised

6 DE LACHENAL 1979, 124.

7 LAURENZI 1955-56, 116, n. 104.



Fig. 12.
Paris, Louvre,
from Collezione
Borghese

in correspondence with the head, is not always rocky, sometimes rocky and covered by a panther skin and in other instances it consists of a soft mattress. In the Uffizi statue, the folds of the himation (cape) are more rigid and do not wrap around the right arm and the position of the sleeping body appears less restless and voluptuous to the extent of appearing so tranquil that there is no need to show an erection which is always present in all the other examples. Moreover, in the Palazzo Massimo example, the sexual tension is very evident and finds a parallel mainly in the statuette of the Coos Museum which features an equally complex hair coiffure, not present, instead in the replicas of Florence and Saint Petersburg. It has been affirmed⁸ that the Palazzo Massimo and the Coos Museum copies represent the replica closest to the Hellenistic original. We can therefore believe that the original statue⁹ already appeared immersed in

8 DE LACHENAL 1979, 125.

9 Cfr. LAURENZI 1955-56, regarding his comments on the Coos hermaphrodite statuette as the manifestation of some pre-Mannerism and of stylistic affectation: for instance the flaps of the *dyploidion* with a small *nebris* leave part of the naked statue uncovered. However the disposition of the folds is so complicated that it gives the opportunity to ascribe this statue to the rococo-baroque:

a voluptuous sleep, with semi-opened lips and stressed dimples in the kidney area as well as being ithyphallic .

It is renowned that representations of a hermaphrodite are documented at least since the very fourth century BC and can be divided into two groups from an iconographic point of view¹⁰. In the first group the young person is represented alone, standing and often *anasyromenos* but otherwise with a lifted up cloak showing an evident virility (Fig. 12): here the image is linked to cult circles where the hermaphrodite was worshipped together with other gods such as Venus, Pan and the Nymphs, with a scope which can lead to the fertility sphere and the protection of the sexual development of the youth. The early insertion of the youth in the Dionysian world can be added to this trend, causing a progressive accentuation of the effeminacy.

In the second group, which appears alien to cult and votive aspects, the hermaphrodite is gradually transformed into an object of curiosity and desire that passively participates in erotic scenes: to this group belong the Roman images from the imperial age, where the body is represented as more and more female and seductive. Representations of this type appear in sculptures, paintings and the sculpted furnishings of both public buildings - baths and theatres - and private residences. To this latter group belong the images of the sleeping hermaphrodite according to the prototype created in the late Hellenistic age, probably due to Polycles as we said above, for which bear evidence the small Coos statue and late Hellenistic statuettes among which we can quote the resting statuette in the Delos Museum . They point out that what in a somewhat dramatic or theatrical way must be represented is the discovery of the hermaphrodite's sexual identity. Besides this group there is that of the sexual aggression by Pan, represented by the renowned Dresden type. In this second group the context is mainly bucolic, sensual and Dionysian where the revelation of the hermaphrodite's virility was entrusted to the observation of the onlookers all around the sculpture although there is always a viewpoint from which one can discover both female and male attributes.

One ought now to mention also the replica, with female variations, represented by the Maenad of the National Museum of Athens, in Pentelic marble (Fig. 13). This latter could be considered a copy of the Hermaphrodite but only apparently, for not only is a penis missing but there is also a major simplification in the rendering of the body and a less sophisticated coiffure. Besides the statue is shorter and was crafted in one piece together with the rocky support. The drape on which the Maenad

a definition the more appropriate if one thinks that the sculpture was painted. Cfr. also LAURENZI 1965.

10 CADARIO 2009; *idem*, 2011.



Fig. 13. Athens, National Museum



Fig. 14. Detail of fig. 13

lies can be identified as an animal skin as with her left hand she is leaning on a panther head. This statue is considered a product of an Attic workshop of eclectic style trend where Hellenistic patterns still show classical influences visible for example in the way the locks on the head are bent forming a circle (Fig. 14). It is dated to the age of Hadrian and considered an expression of a classicizing trend of an Attic workshop¹¹.

It should immediately be noted that the replica-female type sleeper appears only in Athens, while in Rome and nearby, from which the other statues come, there appears only the subject of the hermaphrodite. This fact would lead us to think that the production of replicas of a sleeping hermaphrodite of the imperial period must have been concentrated in Rome. The quality of the statue of Palazzo Massimo is far superior to other replicas. This fact, together with the use of a block of marble signed with an imperial destination mark, if our

hypothesis is correct, leads us to believe that it was the work of a workshop near the imperial area and at the service of customers of a very high level. In addition, the plasticity, the softness of the complexion and the call for Hellenistic replicas made in an Asian environment, suggest an eclectic formation of the sculptors. As we saw that only in Athens is a replica known, also female, we could suppose an Attic presence in the workshop where this statue was produced, but we have to put it within a koine of strong interest in sensual representations of human bodies that we know also in the Aphrodisian or Dokimeion area. Perhaps we could think of an imperial workshop in which different influences coexist but with a strong interest for the Hellenistic micro-Asiatic sculptural traditions. Also the probable use of Dokimeion marble seems to point out the same direction.

But would be reductive to think of this statue only as a decorative piece with sexual appeal. In fact, this appeal does not prevent a link with the philosophical and religious movement of the second sophistry. The story of the Hermaphrodite partook part fully in the revaluation of the Greek myths and alludes to the metamorphosis of the soul in contact with the divine¹². But we will discuss this problem later, in a larger context.

11 KALTSAS 2002, 348, n. 737.

12 OEHMKE 2004; CADARIO 2012.

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