

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

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# ASMOSIA XI

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## 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 Pergamian 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 Arcinazzo<sup>1</sup>: 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 replicas<sup>2</sup>. 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 addressed<sup>3</sup>. 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.<sup>4</sup> 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 marble<sup>5</sup> (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

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(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



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



Fig. 10. Paris, Louvre, from Velletri

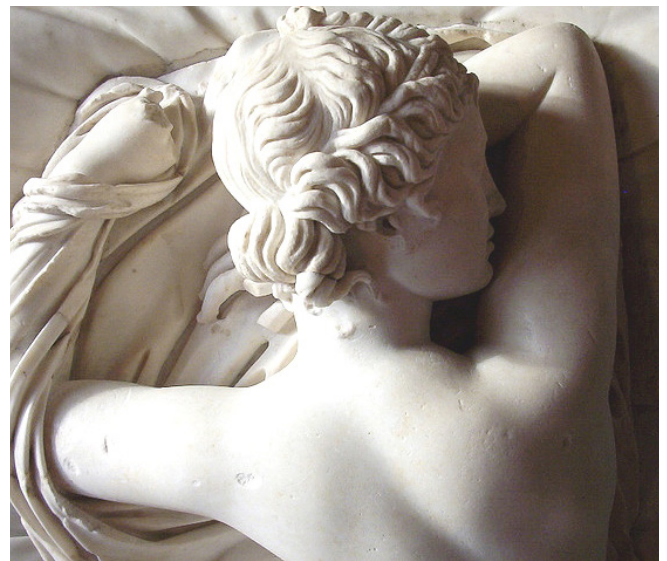


Fig. 11. Detail of fig. 10

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 Paris<sup>6</sup>, the lower

section of a body with crossed legs from the warehouse of the Museo Nazionale Romano, a late-Hellenistic statuette in the museum at Coos<sup>7</sup>.

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 affirmed<sup>8</sup> that the Palazzo Massimo and the Coos Museum copies represent the replica closest to the Hellenistic original. We can therefore believe that the original statue<sup>9</sup> 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 view<sup>10</sup>. 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 workshop<sup>11</sup>.

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 divine<sup>12</sup>. 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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