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Giovanni Marchiori

Female Head

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Giovanni Marchiori
(Caviola di Falcade, Belluno, 1696 -
Treviso, 1778)

Female Head

Terracotta on its original carved wooden base;
cm 38 x 36, overall height cm 52

PROVENANCE: Sangiorgi Collection;
Private collection, Monte-Carlo.

EXHIBITIONS: "Eblouissante Venise.
Venise, les arts et l'Europe au XVIII siècle",
Paris, Grand Palais, 24 September 2018
- 21 January 2019.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: C. Loisel, ed. by, *Eblouissante
Venise. Venise, les arts et l'Europe au XVIII
siècle, Réunion des Musées Nationaux 2018,*
Cat. 81, p. 119.

This magnificent head of a woman with an elaborate wooden base in perfect harmony with the terracotta work yet subtly different from it in stylistic terms, is an autograph version of – indeed possibly even the preparatory model for – the so-called stone *Venus* or *Flora* in the Museo Civico di Treviso (Fig. 1). The statue has been quite rightly linked to a moment in the life of the sculptor Giovanni Marchiori (Caviola d'Agordo, 31 March 1696 – Treviso 2 January 1778) described by Domenico Maria Federici in his *Memorie trevigiane sulle opere di disegno* (published in Venice in 1803):

In said Marchiori's workshop a *Diana the Huntress* 3 and a half feet in marble, and two statues 7 feet *Justice*, and *Peace*, and a *Venus* 4 and a half feet life-size, very accurate design and very fine workmanship, broken into pieces by said sculptor in a fit of modesty in recent years: the Head of this very

beautiful statue may now be seen in the Palazzo of the Marquis Sugana whose praises we sang earlier.¹

The bust was purchased for the museum from the home of the Tiretta in Venice in 1885, and given that the Tiretta were the Suganas' heirs, no one has ever questioned the fact that this is in fact the piece described by Federici.² In Federici's day Palazzo Sugana had already been inherited by the Tiretta, as we discover in an earlier passage in his biography of Marchiori:

Four marble statues 3 and a half feet, which show the

¹ Domenico Maria Federici in his *Memorie trevigiane sulle opere di disegno*, Venice 1803, p. 136; Wart Arslan, *L'attività veneziana e trevigiana del Marchiori*, in "Bollettino d'arte", XX, 1926/1927, p. 128.

² Luigi Menegazzi, *Il Museo Civico di Treviso. Dipinti e sculture dal XII al XIX secolo*, Venice 1964, pp. 141-143, P.213; Mauro Lucco, entries by, in *Dipinti e sculture del Museo di Treviso*, Rome 1980, pl. LXXX.



1. Giovanni Marchiori, *Venus or Flora*. Treviso, Musei Civici

Judgment of Paris in the drawing room of the Marquis Sugana, Marchiori's great Patron at the Gesù, [in the Palazzo] now owned by the Tiretta.³

According to the book's index, the member of the Sugana family who owned the head of a woman was Giuseppe, whom we should take care to distinguish from Alessandro and Francesco, mentioned in other parts of the *Memorie*.⁴ Yet Federici's attribution for the bust does not appear to be reliable in the least because the head carved by Marchiori is adorned only with the floral garland that has

³ Federici, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

⁴ Federici, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

prompted a handful of scholars to identify it as Flora. So at this juncture we may well ask ourselves whether Federici did not in fact make up the entire anecdote regarding the statue “broken into pieces in a fit of modesty in recent years” by the sculptor in person. That this is a possibility is suggested by the fact that Domenico Maria Federici (Verona 1739 – Treviso 1808) came under fire from his own contemporaries, primarily from Giannantonio Moschini, for his unreliability as a historian allegedly caused by his determination to prove the imaginary primacy of Treviso in the history of art and culture.⁵ Even Antonio Canova complains in his letters of the inaccuracy of much of the information about him which Federici reports.⁶ Given that Federici completed his studies in his home town of Verona, studying with the Jesuits before joining the Dominican Order and subsequently gaining a degree in theology, it is entirely possible that he wished to raise Marchiori to the status of one of the heroes of the *Memorie trevigiane*, a man who shared his own moral scruples, almost an improbable 18th century Bartolomeo Ammannati from the Veneto (as everyone knows, the 16th century Florentine sculptor Ammannati was won over to the cause of the Counter-Reformation and, in his maturity, he marked his distance from the pagan nudes which he had carved in his youth). Moreover, Federici discusses not a single one of the works that 20th century scholars have labelled Marchiori's “ideal heads”, the most famous of which, a head of *Sappho* now at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art in Providence (**Fig. 2**), has recently been identified as one of pieces which Marchiori carved for Francesco Algarotti.⁷ The Museo Civico di Treviso has an old photograph (**Fig. 3**) of the *Sappho*, it too furnished (still today) with an elaborate wood-

⁵ Luisa Narducci, *Federici, Domenico Maria*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 45, Rome 1995, pp. 625-626.

⁶ Marina Magrini, “Con quella leggenda mi ha scandalizzato”: Antonio Canova e Domenico Maria Federici, in “Arte Veneta”, LXVII, 2010, pp. 218-226.

⁷ Maria Teresa De Lotto, *Novità su Giovanni Marchiori e sulla Saffo per Francesco Algarotti*, in “Arte Veneta”, LXVII, 2010, pp. 172-182.



2. Giovanni Marchiori, *Sappho*. Providence, Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art

3. Giovanni Marchiori, *Sappho*. Vintage photo

en base described in a late 19th century catalogue as being “in the style of the 15th century”⁸. The photograph is provided with notes enabling us to retrace the head’s history: it was acquired in 1888 by Bode, the then director of the Staatliche Museum in Berlin⁹, who bought it from Fr. Luigi Bailo, the very same prelate who had founded the museum in which the old photograph is now held in 1883. It had originally been donated to the museum by Filomena Perazzolo in 1882 (it was also through her that the Algarotti papers entered the museum’s collection).¹⁰ Thus even if the story of the *Sappho* is bound up with that of the Museo Civico di Treviso,

8 De Lotto, *art. cit.*, pp. 176-177.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*





4. Giovanni Marchiori, *Venus or Flora*. Treviso, Musei Civici

we are not bound to conclude from this that the Algarotti piece often described as *Venus/Flora* still in the museum today necessarily dates back to Marchiori's time in Treviso.

Federici may have been prompted to invent the anecdote of the broken statue by the highly unusual aspect of the head now in the Museo Civico di Treviso, particularly if we look at it in the context of the enormous output of classicising busts in the Veneto during the Renaissance (starting, of course, with those carved by di Alessandro Vittoria). Even more markedly than in Florence or Rome, the classical style of the half-figure bust with rounded edges echoing Roman models became popular in Venice and its hinterland as early as the mid-16th century, while Marchiori's masterpiece harks back more closely to Florentine



5. Giovanni Marchiori, *Male bust*

Early Renaissance portrait types of the 15th century inspired, in their turn, by reliquary busts cut off just below the shoulder line.¹¹ The Providence *Sappho* may also be considered to belong to the same style of bust, although it differs subtly from the others in that under no circumstances can it be called neo-15th century in style. At the same time, however, the Providence masterpiece bears no relation whatsoever to the classicising busts in the Venetian tradition, thus confirming the originality of Marchiori's approach and the fact that the head described by Federici cannot

¹¹ Among the few examples of this type from the Veneto we should point to the *Bust of Matteo de' Eletti* now in the Ca' d'Oro, by Bartolomeo Bergamasco, dated c. 1525, see Thomas Martin, *Alessandro Vittoria and the Portrait Bust in Renaissance Venice. Remodelling Antiquity*, Oxford 1998, pp. 2-5.

be considered to be a fragment of a life-size statue.

Having established that the Museo Civico di Treviso head was, in all likelihood, an “ideal head” along the lines of the Providence *Sappho*, we can rule out its identification with either Venus or Flora. In other words, it could well be the (possibly generic) depiction of an ancient poetess or, more simply, an “ideal head” in the fullest sense of the term. What is beyond question, in any event, is that Federici was aware of the piece’s outstanding quality, remarking on its “very accurate design and very fine workmanship”, a typical product of Marchiori’s mature style which has frequently been labelled pre-Neoclassical. Almost at odds with the rarefied, elegant beauty of the woman’s face is, as we have seen, the wooden base with stylistic traits verging on the Rococo. This is a very different affair from the far more elaborate wooden base supporting the head of *Sappho* (Fig. 4), but it was inspired by the temptation to attribute both pieces to Marchiori, or at any rate to his closest circle.¹² This, because he started his career as a wood-carver, signing an apprenticeship contract with Giuseppe Fanoli, who specialised in that field, in Venice in November 1708¹³, and even in 1741 Marchiori was first and foremost a wood-carver, receiving his most prestigious commission in that capacity, namely the choir doors for the upper room in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in Venice, in that year.¹⁴ Nor indeed did he totally abandon woodworking until at least the mid-1750s because he received a payment of 10 ducats for carving on the (now lost) organ in the church of Santa Margherita in Venice in 1755¹⁵. A wooden male bust, possibly depicting *Adonis*, signed “OP: JOAN MARCHIORI” (Fig. 5) and which has been dated to the 1720s still reveals a certain late Baroque tendency,

particularly in the capricious curls of the young man’s hair, yet in stylistic terms it may already be grouped with the later marble busts mentioned above. In fact, the very fact that it is cut off under the arms allows us to liken it to the *Flora/Venus* under discussion in this paper, and so we should perhaps assign the wooden bust to a somewhat later date. The production of such an unusual piece, a kind of gallery half-figure, that is certainly not common in woodcarvers’ output, may be interpreted as an attempt on Marchiori’s part to mould the technique to a new purpose. The artist’s proudly displayed signature in itself clearly testifies to the work’s importance. We find the motif of the hair falling softly to the shoulders again in the two heads, one in stone and the other in terracotta, under discussion here, and we may doubtless attribute any stylistic variations to the difference in the medium employed.

Clearly intended for a private collector (but then, as we shall see, several terracotta versions of other designs by Marchiori have survived and they are far too highly finished to be classifiable as “studies”), this terracotta is thus likely to have been provided from the outset, by the sculptor himself, with an elaborate wooden base similar in every detail to the one used for the version in stone. The existence of another version of this head, which is also considerably different from the marble version in Treviso, being sleeker in design with the head turning more markedly upwards, bears witness in and of itself to the success of this splendid design. This ideal female head fully justifies the praise lavished on Marchiori by Leopoldo Cicognara:

In the church of the Scalzi Giovanni Marchiori from Canale d’Agordo, one of the best artists of that age, carved the Sibyls which can be seen around the chancel, and we can easily recognise his highly individual, light style, bearing no resemblance to the manner of Bernini, in fact excessively slender and slight, with almost invariably small heads, and he handles folds in a far less conventional fashion than any other sculptor of the time, such that we can detect in him a greater wisdom than in any of his other contemporaries.¹⁶

12 The base of the *Sappho* was previously given to Marchiori, and its paintings to his friend Giambattista Crosato, see De Lotto, *art. cit.*, p. 179.

13 Massimo De Grassi, *Giovanni Marchiori, appunti per una lettura critica*, in “Saggi e memorie di storia dell’arte”, 21, 1997, pp. 126-127.

14 Massimo De Grassi, *Giovanni Marchiori tra intaglio e scultura: appunti sugli esordi*, in “Arte veneta”, LVIII, 2002, p. 161.

15 Paola Rossi, *Giovanni Marchiori alla Scuola Grande di San Rocco e le altre opere veneziane*, Venezia 2014, pp. 25 and 141.

16 Leopoldo Cicognara, *Storia della scultura in Italia dal suo risorgimento sino al secolo di Canova*, VI, Prato 1824, p. 230





6. Giovanni Marchiori, *Pomona*. Treviso, Musei Civici



7. Giovanni Marchiori, *Pomona*. London, Victoria and Albert Museum

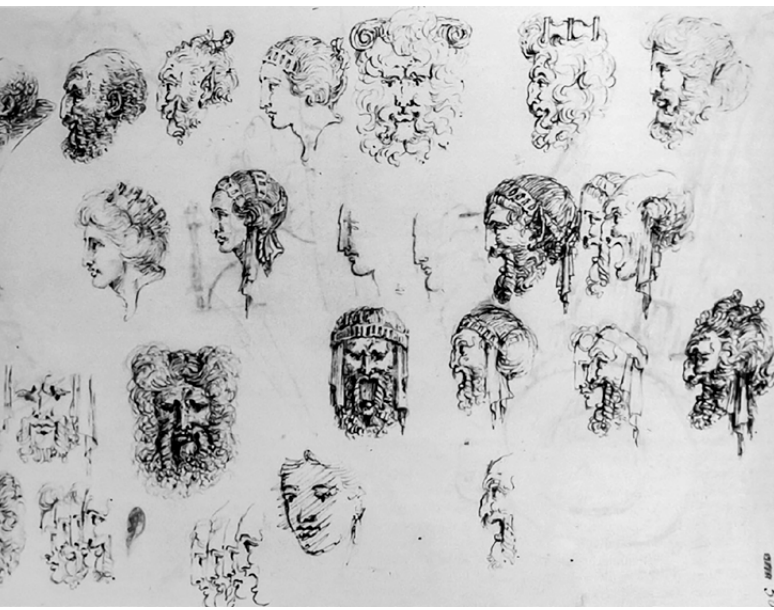
Arslan, too, the scholar who truly rediscovered Marchiori in our own day and who first published the Treviso head, wrote in 1926:

Magnificent in its modelling, almost caressed by the sculptor, vibrant and quivering, it holds its shoulders slightly forward like its ancient sister in Florence. One can feel the life and the blood flowing from the neck into the fine face with its serene gaze; two plaits fall onto the splendid shoulders and the laurel branch is gracefully enfolded in the plaits on her head. We do not know when this work was carved, but for us it continues to represent this period in every way, and indeed, from what we know about Marchioro, it seems to us to be his masterpiece.¹⁷

¹⁷ Arslan, *art. cit.*, p. 128.

It is certainly worth delving further into the question of whether or not the specifically classicising quirk in Marchiori's style – particularly unexpected in a sculptor who started out life as a woodcarver – may be a product of the close relationship which he enjoyed with Francesco Algarotti after 1740. With the backing of this versatile Venetian writer and scholar, one of the most brilliant thinkers of his age, Marchiori was commissioned to carve a *Noli Me Tangere* for the church of St. Hedwig in Berlin (now in the church of St. Mary in that city), a work paid for by Cardinal Angelo Maria Querini of Brescia.¹⁸ In con-

¹⁸ De Grassi, *art. cit.* 1997, pp. 147-148; Agnese Pudlis, *Le lettere di Francesco Algarotti al cardinale Angelo Maria Querini e la costruzione della chiesa di Sant'Edvige a Berlino*, in "Arte in Friuli, Arte a Trieste", XXXIII, 2014, pp. 83-96.



8-9. Giovanni Marchiori, *Classical heads*

nection with this important group, Algarotti wrote to Querini in 1750:

[...] with regard to the substantial group that Marchiori is to make for the Catholic church in Berlin, I urge you to ensure that it is made with all possible love and I repeat what I seem to recall having written to you in my previous letter, namely that it would be beneficial if there were some delicate work, item with feathers, if there were an angel or some other piece of light and airy drapery in the subject or something similar [...].¹⁹

If we think about it, neither that “delicate work, item with feathers” nor that “other piece of light and airy drapery” sound very much like the kind of motifs that we might associate with Neoclassical taste in its infancy. But then it is common knowledge that Algarotti’s interest in classical themes was accompanied by deep admiration for Giambattista Tiepolo’s style of painting known as “*di tocco*” (“by dabbing”).²⁰ Certainly the extremely refined hairstyle of *Sappho*,

¹⁹ De Grassi, *art. cit.* 1997, p. 148.

²⁰ Alberto Craievich, *Giambattista Tiepolo e Francesco Algarotti*, in *Giambattista Tiepolo, “il miglior pittore di Venezia”*, exhibition catalogue (Codroipo, Villa Manin di Passariano) ed. Giuseppe Bergamini, Alberto Craievich and Filippo Pedrocchi, Codroipo, Villa Manin, 2012, pp. 51-62

a head carved expressly for Algarotti, can be compared with the hairstyle of the figure of *Pomona* carved for Consul Joseph Smith, now lost but known from a very fine terracotta in the Museo di Treviso (Fig. 6; the Victoria and Albert Museum in London has another version; Fig. 7) and from a drawing in an album depicting other classicising statues by Marchiori, which shows several interesting points of contact with Antonio Maria Zanetti’s engravings of *Antiche statue Greche e Romane* di (published in Venice in 1740).²¹ We also have a number of autographs drawings by Algarotti himself depicting classical heads which clearly have a great deal in common with the Rhode Island *Sappho* (Figs. 8-9).²²

By comparison with that “ideal head”, the head under discussion here (in both its terracotta and stone versions) reveals a different approach to the classicism of the middle of the century, displaying a softness not found in the *Sappho*. This masterpiece is likely to have been carved precisely in c. 1750 or, at the latest, in the last few years of Marchiori’s career.

²¹ Luigi Menegazzi, *Disegni di Giovanni Marchiori*, in “Arte veneta”, XIII/XIV, 1959/1960, pp. 151-152.

²² Alberto Craievich, “*Avendo l’arte sua per fine principalissimo il diletto*”: note su alcuni disegni di Francesco Algarotti, in “Arte Veneta”, LX, 2003, pp. 171-172.







10. Giovanni Marchiori, *St Cecilia*. Venice, church of San Rocco (whole and detail)

First of all, the sculptor's ties both with Algarotti and with classical statuary (which we know of from Zanetti's engravings) point to c. 1750 as the *terminus post quem*; and secondly, even though the sculptor's biography is not yet known in any great detail, we do know that he is described as a "sculptor from Treviso" only after 1757 and that in 1776 he was said to have been a resident of that city for twenty years. His presence in the hinterland is recorded with certainty in 1764 (the year in which he despatched two statues

to Bavaria from his new home town), and this terracotta must have been modelled in Treviso.²³ The closest comparison in the sculptor's marble output is offered by his *St. Cecilia* in San Rocco in Venice dated 1744 (Fig. 10)²⁴. While, on the one hand, the saint

23 Andrea Bacchi, *Marchiori, Giuseppe*, in *La scultura a Venezia da Sansovino a Canova*, ed. Andrea Bacchi, with the assistance of Susanna Zanuso, Milan 2000, p. 746; see also Massimo de Grassi, *Federici, Domenico Maria*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 69, Rome 2007, p. 710.

24 Rossi, *op. cit.*, p. 116, cat. 36.



11. Antonio Canova, *Sappho*. Bassano, Museo Civico

bears a greater resemblance to the *Sappho* in the abstract frostiness of her facial features, on the other, the curls falling onto and almost carressing her left shoulder instantly call to mind the Treviso head. In short, this terracotta masterpiece, both in its treatment of hair and in the elongated proportions of the neck that appears to echo the Mannerism of Parmigianino, continue to partake of an 18th century style which is almost Rococo in flavour, but the extreme purity of the overall design unmistakably heralds Canova's "ideal heads", a genre which was to prove immensely popular and which was inaugurated by a *Head of Helen* carved in 1811 (signed and dated; Venice, Baron Alessandro Rubini de



12. Alessandro Vittoria, *A Gentleman of the Zorzi Family*. Washington, National Gallery of Art

Cervin Albrizzi; a plaster cast is in the Museo Civico di Bassano, **Fig. 11**) and replicated on more than one occasion in the course of the second decade of the century (see, for example, the version in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, dated 1819).²⁵ Later on, Canova was often to resort to the solution of a herm-style bust, a totally different and even more austere "genuine" style compared to the typical 16th century busts such as those of Vittoria (**Fig. 12**). These designs were much praised by Cicognara,²⁶ who may not have omitted to acknowledge a kind of debt to Marchiori's heads, so splendidly balanced between the full 18th century style and a mature Neoclassicism.

Andrea Bacchi

²⁵ Antonio Canova, exhibition catalogue (Venice, Museo Correr), Venice 1992, pp. 316-319, cats. 141-142.

²⁶ Giuseppe Pavanello, entry in *Venezia nell'età di Canova*, exhibition catalogue (Venice, Museo Correr), Venice 1978, p. 103, cat. 139; on this topic see also *Canova – Ideal Heads*, Oxford 1997.



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