



The Greek and Asiatic marbles of the Florentine Niobids



D. Attanasio ^{a,*}, C. Boschi ^b, S. Bracci ^c, E. Cantisani ^c, F. Paolucci ^d

^a I.S.M.-C.N.R., Salaria, Km 29,300, 00016 Monterotondo Staz., Roma, Italy

^b I.G.G.-CNR, G. Moruzzi 1, 56124, Pisa, Italy

^c I.C.V.B.C.-C.N.R., Madonna Del Piano, 10, 50019, Sesto Fiorentino, Firenze, Italy

^d Gallerie degli Uffizi, della Ninna 5, 50122, Firenze, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 14 July 2015

Received in revised form

16 December 2015

Accepted 31 December 2015

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Florentine Niobids

Marble provenance

Petrography

Isotopes

Epr

ABSTRACT

The provenance of the marbles used for ten Niobids sculptures discovered at Rome in 1583 and now at the Uffizi Galleries in Florence has been determined using a well-established multi-method approach including isotopic, petrographic and EPR data. An eleventh sculpture (inv. 304) that is not part of the original group but has been long associated with it has also been investigated. The results partly confirm the belief that the marble of several Niobids is Pentelic, but also identify statues such as the Niobe group, the elder Niobid and others that were made using Asiatic marbles from Docimium and Göktepe. Sculptures still considered to be Pentelic are, in fact, Asiatic, whereas statues that were assumed to be Asiatic are Pentelic. Marble data support the opinion that different ateliers contributed to the work and group the sculptures in agreement with the results of stylistic analysis as proposed by various scholars. Provenance data in connection with archaeological and art-historical results allow to formulate possible hypotheses on the way this famous and complex group of sculptures was assembled.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

This article reports marble provenance studies carried out on the Niobids sculptures that were discovered in the Vigna Tommasini at Rome in the late 16th century and are now part of the collections of the Uffizi Galleries at Florence (Figs. 1 and 2). The work is part of a wider research program dealing with the marble of Roman sculptures, generally dating to Imperial times, that are frequently replicas of famous historical and mythological Classical or Hellenistic groups. Pertinent examples are the Sperlonga sculptures including the Pasquino Group (Bruno et al., 2015), the Ludovisi and Capitoline Gauls (Attanasio et al., 2011), the Little Barbarians of the Lesser Attalid Dedication (Attanasio et al., 2012), the Niobids of the Hadrian's Villa (Attanasio et al., 2013), the Pasquino of Palazzo Braschi and others. Besides trying to map the use of sculptural marble in Roman times, the aim, based also on the known periods of activity of the most important quarries, is that of verifying possible relationships existing between the raw material, the origin and background of the artists and the stylistic peculiarities of the works. If these connections can be verified marble studies may

become integral part of our knowledge of the artworks and may contribute to support or, in some instances, to dismiss with the help of scientific data, hypotheses based on archaeological and art-historical analysis.

In the present case initial stimulus to the work was provided by related results obtained for the Wrestlers (Lottatori), the famous group that was discovered together with the Niobids (Attanasio et al., 2015a) and is now also at the Uffizi. The Wrestlers, heavily restored and sometimes considered to be a Renaissance pastiche rather than an authentic ancient sculpture, were found to be made of Parian lychnites, that is the famous and prized marble variety produced on the Greek island of Paros. The sculpture includes restorations made using Pentelic, Docimium and Carrara marbles and even a fragment of marble of Göktepe, that is the prized variety recently discovered not far from Aphrodisias (Attanasio et al., 2009, 2015b). This result was surprising because in modern times the marble of Göktepe is not easily available as restoration material. A tentative explanation was that some of the many non recomposed fragments discovered in the Vigna Tommasini were used to restore the Wrestlers, suggesting in this way that one or more of the recovered sculptures were made using the marble of Göktepe. Following this hypothesis detailed marble analyses of the Niobids, traditionally considered to be made of Pentelic marble upon visual inspection, were undertaken. The underlying idea is that reliable

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: donato.attanasio@ism.cnr.it (D. Attanasio).



Fig. 1. The four Niobids carved using Asiatic marbles. The elder Niobid inv. 302 is marble from the Göktepe Aphrodisias quarries, whereas the other three sculptures are made of Docimium marble. The four statues range in size from 228 cm (Niobe group, inv. 294) to 124 cm (Niobid, inv. 289).

provenance data may help to support the opinion, expressed by several scholars, that the Florentine Niobids include works of considerably different quality, that can hardly be ascribed to sculptors belonging to the same workshop (Mansuelli, 1958, 107–108; Romualdi, 2009, 300).

The next two sections of the work try to place the entire question into proper perspective by summarizing briefly the existing literature on the antiquarian history of the sculptures and the main archaeological and art-historical problems that they pose. Subsequently we focus on the technical aspects of the study, presenting the analytical–statistical approach and the actual provenance results. Finally, the contribution provided by marble identification to our understanding of the Florentine group is discussed.

2. Discovery, later history, identification

The Florentine Niobids were discovered at Rome in the early 1583 outside Porta S.Giovanni along the road leading to Porta Maggiore, in a vineyard property of the Tommasini family that was part, in antiquity, of the Horti Lamiani or perhaps, the Horti Maecenatis (Diacciati, 2009, 195, n. 4). Contemporary sources, originally reviewed by Fabbri (1779) and later summarized by Mansuelli (1958, 101–102) and others, are somewhat contradictory but seem to suggest that fourteen sculptures were found including Niobids and the Wrestlers and specifying that the group of Niobe

holding her youngest daughter and the Wrestlers were counted each as two statues. Unfortunately no detailed find list was compiled upon discovery. Despite this, on the basis of the above information and counting the Niobe group as a single artifact, as it seems more reasonable, it may be concluded that eleven Niobids were discovered in 1583. This is the same conclusion reached by Geominy (1984, p. 43), if allowance is made for the different way of counting the Niobe group that has often bewildered the history of the studies. Unfortunately some confusion still persists in the fundamental work written by Geominy because, owing to a misprint, the scholar comes up with different numbers on different pages of his book (Geominy, 1984, 32, 43).

Within the year of discovery the sculptures were bought by Ferdinando I de' Medici, at that time Cardinal and later Grand Duke of Tuscany, and relocated in his Roman villa, Villa Medici, to embellish the garden. A few years later, in 1588, casts of the sculptures were sent to the Uffizi Galleries in Florence. Much later, when the Roman Medici collection was dismantled, the Niobids themselves were transferred to Florence where they arrived in 1770 to be hosted in the Niobe Hall built on purpose in 1779, Fig. 3.

Despite being the largest group ever found, the Niobids of Vigna Tommasini are incomplete with respect to the traditional iconography based on the story told by Ovid (*Met.*, 6, 146–312) and that includes, beside Niobe, seven sons, seven daughters and the pedagogue. Ferdinando, however, was eager to exhibit in his villa

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7441563>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7441563>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)